THE TEMPTATION OF SYMMETRY:

HAMANN, HERDER, KIERKEGAARD, AND HENRY JAMES

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Center Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

2012

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This manuscript has been read and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the Dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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The texts that *The Temptation of Symmetry: Hamann, Herder, Kierkegaard and Henry James* treats, by J. G. Hamann (*Aesthetica in nuce*), J. G. Herder (*Zerstreute Blätter*), Søren Kierkegaard (*Fear and Trembling* and *Stages on Life's Way*), and Henry James (*The Sacred Fount*), are united by a shared skepticism toward systematic thought and by a quirk of writing that pairs truncated figures of symbolic speech with broken bodies. These preoccupations seem at first to have little relation to each other. But in the works under examination in this project, they coalesce around an emblematic structural trope: symmetry. This study examines how and why symmetry is such a loaded issue in these texts. Symmetry, after all, would seem to be an inherently desirable principle, eternally beautiful and valid across disciplines and centuries, able to unite opposition and create a unified whole out of miscellany and fragmentation. I propose that each of these writers explodes symmetry as a temptation and a false ideal.

Symmetry, an inherently structural concept, is suspect as a willful external imposition, but it has the virtue of also being a concept that can be examined *as* narrative content. That is, these authors seize the spatial design of symmetry (which would normally direct and control a text as a kind of unseen hand), thematize it, and allow the texts to engulf, digest, dissect, and dismember the abstraction. The questioning of symmetry is an explicit core preoccupation in their texts.

The peculiar intensity of the interest in symmetry common to the texts in this study lies in the sharp twist that the hallmark combination of syncopated figural language and fragmented physical bodies gives to their rejection of symmetry's urge to completeness. And, while ruined bodily figures and truncated figurative language are individually obvious choices for keeping symmetry at bay—and the term *figure* creates a deeper-than-merely-homonymic connection between the two—the interweaving of the two is particularly powerful as it strikes at the level of form and content and forces reader and author alike to confront questions of genre and discipline, word and physical body.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my advisers, Joshua Wilner, Nickolas Pappas, and Vincent Crapanzano, who have read my work with singular care, rigor, and kindness—I hope this project is a credit to them. Too many students and faculty from the Department of Comparative Literature at the Graduate Center have helped this project along to name all of them. But I would like to single out Paolo Fasoli, who has been tremendously encouraging throughout my time in the program, and Felicia Bonaparte, who first thought I might find special pleasure in reading Kierkegaard. I also thank Barbara Pospisil for ushering me through the program. I owe an additional debt of gratitude to the faculty and students of the Department of Comparative Literature at Queens College, particularly Clare Carroll, Charles Martin, Ali Jimale Ahmed, and Christopher Winks, who encouraged me to teach these difficult texts in undergraduate courses.

My Danish teacher, Dorte Tulet, who helped me unravel many a Danish-language knot, and Lisa Marie Anderson, who put together a wonderful two days of Hamanniana in New York, made clear imprints on this project. I am most grateful to John Barber and Sharon Furgason who generously contributed artists' perspectives in countless conversations about the notions of structure and form. I thank, too, the entire Leung household for hosting many productive work sessions, supplying delightful companionship, comfortable computing, and unlimited coffee. My friend and colleague Anastassiya Andrianova bestowed upon my work her ample intelligence and humor, and was a patient sounding board for ideas, worries, and complaints alike. Finally, I cannot begin to thank my family—human and lapine, biological as well as conjugally gained. My parents especially contributed uncomplainingly in material and intangible ways to my education. I only wish my father might have seen this stack of pages; I dedicate this study to his memory. And my last and greatest thanks are reserved for David Schur, whose personal encouragement and professional dedication to the art of reading sustained this project to an almost inconceivable degree.

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Preface[i]

The texts that this study treats, by J. G. Hamann (*Aesthetica in nuce*), J. G. Herder (*Zerstreute Blätter*), Søren Kierkegaard (*Fear and Trembling* and *Stages on Life's Way*), and Henry James (*The Sacred Fount*), are united by a shared skepticism toward systematic thought and by a quirk of writing that pairs truncated figures of symbolic speech and broken bodies. These preoccupations seem at first to have little relation to each other. But in the works under examination in this project, they coalesce around an emblematic structural trope: symmetry. This study examines how and why symmetry is such a peculiarly loaded issue in these texts. Symmetry, after all, would seem to be an inherently desirable principle, eternally beautiful and valid across disciplines and centuries. Symmetry may be most simply described as the relationship between parts that make up a whole, positioned to create a sense of ideal balance. Its appeal rests, at least in part, in its ability to unite opposition, in creating a unified whole out of miscellany and fragmentation. I propose that each of these writers explodes symmetry as a temptation, a false ideal, a guiding force for theoretical systems that undermine themselves.

Resistance to systematic thought is a clear and much-traversed point of entry into the work of these difficult authors.[ii] Their dislike of systematic thought is most often considered from the perspective of intellectual history, in the form of their reactions against movements promulgated in or around their respective periods (Enlightenment scientism, Hegelianism, Romanticism, etc.), but the resistance of these authors goes deeper. From the widest perspective,

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[i] Prefaces, as will become clear in the study that follows (particularly in Kierkegaard and James), are a tricky thing.
[ii] See, for example, Bayer, Berlin, and Knodt for reasonably straightforward analyses of Hamann and Herder's roles as Enlightenment critics. For Kierkegaard, see esp. Ricoeur, Adorno, and Fenves for interesting acknowledgment and complication of the idea of Kierkegaard as anti-system (particularly as an anti-Hegelian). Rimmon-Kenan, Samuels, and Blackall stress "ambiguity" as a major aspect of James's production. See also Raeth and Goetz for discussions of Henry James contra Henry James in the case of *The Sacred Fount*.

each is suspicious of general principles of categorization and organization that make specific content secondary to general structures. As such, an all-purpose methodology for reaching truth through agreement such as dialectic is a particularly exposed target for criticism here.[iii] Likewise, on the level of language itself, oxymorons, inapposite appositions, and contranyms abound in these texts, showing the fragility and immanent fragmentation of ideas that are too loosely and facilely bound.[iv] If we view this topic through a narrower lens, these authors maintain a complicated tension between opposition to outside movements (closing the texts in on themselves) and acknowledgement that the text is not a closed system, that it is deliberately allusive and open.

Considered from another angle familiar to literary theory and philosophy, that of form versus content, the authors I examine aggressively question the value of creating (or "discovering" or imposing) a structure to organize content. On a simple level, in these texts, idiosyncratic content resists the strict organizing principles of structures imposed upon it—precisely by virtue of its idiosyncrasy. Symmetry, as an inherently structural concept—an ideal arrangements of parts—presents a special case study for these authors. Symmetry is suspect as a willful external imposition, but it has the virtue of also being a concept that can be examined *as* narrative content. That is, these authors seize the spatial design of symmetry (which would normally direct and control a text as a kind of unseen hand), thematize it, and allow the texts to engulf, digest, dissect, and dismember the abstraction—almost, but not quite, as one would a

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[iii] Kierkegaard, most explicitly of the authors considered in this study, famously cripples the systematizing, unifying drive of dialectic. The subtitle of *Fear and Trembling*, "Dialektisk Lyrik," becomes an elaborate joke that subordinates the monolithic dialectic as modifying adjective to the radically opposed noun "lyric," in its association with literature and its literal single-mindedness (or at least, single-voicedness). The movement of a concept such as the Hegelian *Aufhebung* toward the construction of a philosophical history or system is likewise challenged by these authors.

[iv] Contranyms (words which mean both one thing and its opposite) will be examined at greater length in chapter 3 of this thesis as case studies in symmetry's internal collapse -- the perfect symmetry of the unification of opposites is also the negation of that symmetry.

quasi-tangible character or thing. Their questioning of symmetry is thereby an explicit, core preoccupation in their texts.

The peculiar intensity of the interest in symmetry common to the texts in this study lies in the sharp twist that the hallmark combination of syncopated figural language and fragmented physical bodies gives to their rejection of symmetry's urge to completeness. The authors examined in this study are concerned that overreliance on categorization leads to a fetishism for easy unities, and symmetry provides them with an idea to experiment on in examining the impatient preference for a "perfect" system over a greater, as-yet-unintelligible unity. And, while ruined bodily figures and truncated figurative language are individually obvious choices for keeping symmetry at bay—and the term *figure* creates what I would say is a deeper-than-merely-homonymic connection between the two—the interweaving of the two is particularly powerful as it strikes at the level of form and content and forces reader and author alike to confront questions of form and content, genre and discipline, word and life.

Hobbled Bodies, Dismembered and in Motion[v]

These authors are uncommonly interested in using metaphors related to the human body (e.g.: splitting and dismembering as dominant metaphors in Hamann and Herder; Kierkegaard's Frater Taciturnus' overarching talk of genres as "legs"; James's narrator's obsessive need to find patterns in the movements of human beings). Such a focus on bodily symmetry takes the discussion out of the realm of simple rejection of systematic thought or fallacious formal

[v] Paul de Man ("Autobiography as De-Facement," "Shelly Disfigured," "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," and elsewhere) and Neil Hertz (reading de Man in "Lurid Figures" and "More Lurid Figures") anticipate my project by calling attention to the intersection of genre and images of bodies (often mutilated bodies). Hertz makes clear the intriguing fact that de Man's own metaphors of despoiled bodies bleed into his deconstructive prose *about* the devastated figures in Romantic works he is examining.

categories.[vi] These authors first, and most basically, gesture at a world beyond theoretical systems, to a physical reality. But they simultaneously acknowledge that word and flesh are peculiarly disconnected areas—or that the connection between realms is a mysterious and not easily defined one. Allusion to the physical world shows continuity between text and world as much as it shows the gulf between them: the metaphorical image allows a range of analogy, but can never be concrete.

Hamann and Herder set up a model of questioning symmetry that establishes a relationship between the crippled bodies in these texts and the permeability of the texts themselves, both in terms of openness to extra-textual realms (for example, the physical world) and in terms of the fragmentary make-up of the texts themselves. Hamann's and Herder's models echo in Kierkegaard and James when the broken bodies are set into peculiar motion: for Kierkegaard, halting motion; for James, a relocation of physical motion to a mental space.

Fractured Figurative Language and Genre

The other half of the figural strategy that these authors embrace lies in the way that the texts resect and reexamine rhetorical figures and symbolic genres: metaphor, riddle, and fable. A long tradition of uneasiness with figurative speech holds that as analogical, associative rhetoric that conveys meaning indirectly, such rhetoric has—alongside the potential for unexpected revelations and poetic beauty—the potential for misdirection, if not outright deception. The authors examined in this study use this tradition, and intensify their attention to how texts work by fragmenting (excerpting, decontextualizing, breaking up, reconstituting) these figures. It is of

[vi] Note the distance between the inner-outer divisions in Leonardo's Vitruvian Man (though, given the mirror writing of his text that surrounds it, this is not so simple) and Wittgenstein's "The human body is the best picture of the human soul" (*Philosophical Investigations*).

special interest to this study that the authors work on the borderline between poetry and philosophy in their generic and rhetorical choices, jolting an awareness of the literary level of philosophical discourse and the philosophical level of literary discourse. Naturally, the texts explored in this study raise uneasy questions about the extent to which language is capable of communicating clearly what is meant by what it says.

A Word on Fables

Fables, with their complicated roots (as *muthoi, logoi, fabulae,* and especially *ainoi*) provide an interesting glimpse into the workings and failures of symmetrical systems, especially since the fable's myriad provocations and ambiguities lie paradoxically hidden within a deliberately straightforward kind of prose. The eighteenth century, where this study begins with Hamann and Herder, saw a peculiar interest in the fable as an important literary genre. The fable, precariously perched between philosophy and literature, sacred and profane, sophistical manipulation and wisdom, and didactic tool and whimsical entertainment, involved thinkers in public debates about how to define and use this equivocal genre. This equivocality, this claim to a gray area between dualities and definitions, creates a natural space for the authors in this study to question the imposition of systematic categories through the proliferation and splitting of meaning within the fable.

Fables are particularly relevant to this study because of the way these authors use them to blur the line between content and form. There are a few ready-made tropes referred to by these authors that deal *in content* with symmetry: Paul's account of first seeing "Through [or in] a glass darkly," then seeing "face to face" (I Corinthians); Aristophanes' story about the division of original humans in Plato's *Symposium*; the Sphinx's riddle to Oedipus about human motion. But

because these authors' use of fables depends on the fables' preexistence as a kind of ready-made and easily identifiable drop-in, these authors exploit the fact of their allusiveness on a structural level as well. Fables, therefore, occupy a strange place in these texts—neither born wholly of the stories themselves, nor completely external to the texts. Furthermore, because these are such familiar fables, they are often treated elliptically in the primary texts under consideration here. In fact, in my primary texts, what we get are not the fables themselves, but *allusions* to the fables—pulling the original fable in potentially unexpected directions by calling attention to part rather than whole.[vii] All allusion imports a part (rather than the whole) of something external to the text. But the allusive fables in these texts are a special case. They create a mise en abîme of fabling fragments that act as microscopic mirrors calling attention to the fragmentary nature of the texts that surround them. In so doing, the fable fragments become odd, underlying enigmas (*ainigmata*, from *ainoi*, the most puzzling of the fabling terms). The fables employed are not only *about* symmetry (or rather, the fracturing of symmetry), but they themselves are ground up and made asymmetrical. Hamann, Herder, Kierkegaard, and James encourage these intruding fables to break open the closed world of their own texts, allowing external associations to interrupt and disrupt the stories themselves.

A Note on the Methodology of this Study

The confusion or breaching of system by the complications of content in these authors has often resulted in negative criticism or dismissal on suspicion of willful obscurity. A further complaint is that, even if the dismantling of systems is intelligible, these authors do not create

[vii] To take up a more "concrete" – or at least visual – analogy, the off-center positioning of portraiture in visual art may be of (imperfect) use: not only is there a pleasing aesthetic mystery in what is not seen head-on, but also an intimation that art is *allusively* suggesting its contiguity with something beyond its own realm, by virtue of its incompleteness (what cannot be seen in the picture forces the contemplation of that which is not in the art itself). This, of course, raises the question of symmetry's inherent value.

alternate systems. But in questioning (as opposed to indicting or rejecting) systems—moreover, in refusing merely to set a different system in place of the first—we find a major strategy and a commonality in these authors. Further, there is surprisingly little *literary* criticism on the authors who are primarily considered philosophers, even though their work is so literary in nature. This is particularly true in the case of Hamann and Herder, but also in the case of Kierkegaard.[viii] Accordingly, this study, largely through close readings of the texts under consideration, concerns *how* these authors criticize symmetry. That is, this study will explore the peculiar manner in which Hamann, Herder, Kierkegaard, and Henry James meditate on the relationship between the story told and its structure.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One (Fragmented Fables and Broken Bodies in Hamann and Herder). This study begins with close readings of Hamann's *Aesthetica in nuce* (*Aesthetics in a Nutshell*) and Herder's translations and commentaries of the Rosicrucian writer J. V. Andreä in *Zerstreute Blätter (Fünfste und Sechste Sammlungen)* and *Andreä Dichtungen, zur Beherzigung unsers Zeitalters*. Largely through the influential scholarship of Isaiah Berlin, Hamann and, to a perhaps lesser extent, Herder are generally associated with counter-Enlightenment currents that strove against ideals of systems and categories and in favor of a kind of proto-Romantic mysticism. In their literary production, both evince an interest in fragmentary, allusive, asymmetrical structures as vehicles for literary and philosophical thought. Most intriguingly for my study, Hamann and Herder intertwine images of dismemberment—that is, disrupted symmetry—of physical bodies with allusive fragments of fables and other symbolic genres of literature favored by their

[viii] For a notable (and extreme) exception, see Henry Sussman's juxtaposition of Hegel and Kierkegaard as novelists alongside Proust and James (*The Hegelian Aftermath*).

eighteenth-century contemporaries. This mixing of the symbolic genres (fable, parable, emblem, figures of speech) with anatomical imagery influences Kierkegaard fairly directly, and sets the stage for the way that the later writers examined here use broken bodies to comment on the communicative limits of language.

Chapter Two (The Broken Languages of Fear and Trembling). This chapter begins with Kierkegaard's vacillation between epigraphs from Hamann and Herder for *Fear and Trembling* (*Frygt og Bæven*). This dilemma, I argue, sets a pattern of hesitation and delay for a book that is uncommonly resistant to reaching what is generally thought of as its main point, a reading of God's order to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Instead, the book is structurally overwhelmed by its paratextual materials (epigraphs, multiple prefaces, epilogues) and thematically overrun by analogies to the Abraham story that are self-consciously labeled as failures and abandoned. And mirroring the intertwining of structural fragmentation and thematic dismemberment that accompany the epigraphs from Hamann (published) and Herder (abandoned), Kierkegaard's text expands on Hamann and Herder's examination of the push-pull of allusive fables to question structural symmetry and textual integrity. *Fear and Trembling* starts with Hamann and the fable, but moves outward to examine further categories of indirect speech (metaphor, gesture, puns), all the while trafficking in broken and sacrificial bodies, to reveal Kierkegaard's concern with the slipperiness of even biblical language.

Chapter Three (Limping Motion in Stages on Life's Way*)*. The intractable *Fear and Trembling*, its complications announced immediately in its epigraphs and its pseudonymous author, Johannes de Silentio, gestures crosstextually to de Silentio's pseudonym-synonym twin, Frater

Taciturnus of *Stages on Life's Way*. This text employs Kierkegaard's most complicated dissection of bodies (bodies of literature as well as physical imagery of bodies)—and, in fact, sets these crippled body into limping motion.

The major concern of this chapter is a significant gesture made in an initially straightforward-sounding essay, "Letter to the Reader (*Skrivelse til Læseren*)," in *Stages*. This section is ostensibly an examination of the preceding section of *Stages*, "'Guilty'/'Not Guilty' (*'Skyldig?'–'Ikke-Skyldig?'*)," a diary of a recollected love affair. But "Letter to the Reader" also incompletely overwrites the erotic pretext of "'Guilty'/'Not Guilty'" in a very specific manner. Kierkegaard again brings in the physical metaphor of the human body with unexpected consequences in order to show the limbo of incomplete success and incomplete failure of the imagery. The grounding of philosophical abstractions in a more concrete facsimile of life succeeds to a point, and yet shows the way that bringing in a physical body exposes cracks in systemic abstractions and false parallels. But what is so peculiar to this Kierkegaard text is that the body imagery is extremely specific and concrete: he wants to talk about legs. And on these specific and concrete and readily visualized members of the human body, Kierkegaard piles sets of peculiar oppositions and complements. These legs are extremely allusive legs, existing both as Kierkegaard's own image and—as fragmentary fables—in Plato's take on Socrates' shackled legs in the *Phaedo* and Aristophanes' tale of the dismembered double human in the *Symposium* as well as in the Sphinx's riddle of the Oedipus myths. These legs are also asked to fulfill the function of symbolizing the literary genres of comedy and tragedy, each of which requires the other (as do legs for walking). But what is most interesting for this study is Kierkegaard's suggestion that a limp—an asymmetry marking an imperfect bodily system—has a connection to the proverbial "leap of faith."

Coda (Henry James and the Temptation of Symmetry). This final chapter takes a turn to the more traditionally literary, focusing on Henry James's least characteristic late novel, *The Sacred Fount*, with attention to James's prefaces in general. Although James seems like the odd man out (though they're all rather odd men), this study's topoi are most explicit in James. First, this novel's special reputation in James's oeuvre stems largely from remarks James makes in his preface to a different novel, *The Ambassadors*, suggesting that *The Sacred Fount* stands in opposition both to the rest of James's work (it is his only large-scale work to be written in the first person, it is the only mature novel not to be included in the New York Edition) and to the genre of the "romance."

The thematic material of this novel explicitly raises problems of symmetry. James's narrator illustrates the failure of single-minded devotion (and devotion to single-mindedness) by creating neat (as many critics point out), artistic parallels and pairings. The narrator is tempted into reducing the notion of erotic relations to a system of symmetry: "These opposed couples balanced like bronze groups at the two ends of a chimney-piece, and the most I could say to myself in lucid deprecation of my thought was that I mustn't take them equally for granted merely *because* they balanced. Things in the real had a way of not balancing; it was all an affair, this fine symmetry, of artificial proportion" (130).

Further, the novel, as an odd species of detective story, functions less on the plot level, despite the narrator's desire to figure out who the unknown partner of one character is, than on a rhetorical level. The novel is suffused with shards of proverbial and other figurative language—some alluding to specific sources, some only apparently so—creating a strangely patchwork form. This is the crux of what ties this novel—despite its deviation from the historical lineage

and general disciplinary kinship of the texts earlier considered in this study—so peculiarly to the other texts to be considered in this study. That this novel is an experiment in form is a comment common to most criticism of *The Sacred Fount*. But the novel is not simply an experiment in form; it takes as its form and as its central concern the fragile shape of a thought experiment. And one that, like the other texts examined in this study, involves deliberately crippled bodies. Further, James, like Kierkegaard, also brings in images of movement, especially halting, limping movement into the novel. While an allegorical reading is impossible, the novel prompts a reading as a fable-cum-enigma to account for the barely there (structurally) yet strangely monstrous, depleted, or crippled (explicitly) human characters within the novel.

Chapter 1: Fragmented Fables and Broken Bodies in Hamann and Herder

In their often deliberately enigmatic, self-aware texts, Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), two Enlightenment-era thinkers and critics,[1] question the period's mania for "scientific" categorization in ways that might appear to anticipate the later romantic fascination with fragment and ruin as much as to critique the current trends and thoughts of their period. Even the titles that these authors give various published collections of their work express an interest in fragmentary, allusive, asymmetrical structures as vehicles for literary and philosophical thought: *Zerstreute Blätter* (Scattered Papers), *Vermischte Anmerkungen* (Miscellaneous Remarks), *Chimärische Einfälle* (Chimerical Ideas), and so on. The fragmentation that paradoxically generates, animates, and informs the critical writings of these two authors is not the lovely obsolescence or gothic sublimity of the romance; instead, through examination of broken and chimerical texts, Hamann and Herder are concerned with exposing edges and cracks in literary and philosophical systems.

I will be particularly concerned in this chapter with the way these writers wield the fable as an unlikely weapon to explode Enlightenment ideals of systems and categories, as well as

[1] Isaiah Berlin gives the two special status, along with Vico, as "three critics of the Enlightenment" in a collection of essays of the same name (which follows after separate publication of the essays, itself following a long history of planning various permutations that included these key players—see the introduction to Berlin's book for details). Because Berlin's studies of the two have long been the closest thing to a "popularizing" force for these somewhat obscure thinkers, there has been a sense—perhaps particularly in the English speaking world—that the two are especially closely linked. It is worth considering this lumping together with a critical eye. Certainly, the two had an a complicated and important relationship that ran the gamut of Herder's early devotion and consistent financial assistance to Hamann, to Hamann's violently satirical attack on Herder's *Preisschrift* ("On the Origin of Language"), but, in truth, there were many other thinkers in correspondence with either or both of the two—Mendelssohn, Jacobi, and Goethe, to name three—that could be picked out as intriguing critics of the period. My argument in this study is not that the two thinkers share a *necessary* position as the twin pillars of counter-Enlightenment thought, but that the two use a few peculiarly important strategies for accomplishing their particular brands of criticism—notably, fable fragments and images of dismemberment as disruptive structures within their texts. As the following chapter suggests, Kierkegaard, too, interchanges the two thinkers at times. I will suggest that Kierkegaard is responding to the particular strategies that are outlined in this chapter.

notions of structurally integral texts. The eighteenth century saw a special interest in the fable as an important literary genre. The fable, precariously perched between philosophy and literature, sacred and profane, sophistic manipulation and wisdom, and didactic tool and whimsical entertainment, involved thinkers in public debates about how to define and use this equivocal genre. Hamann and Herder take as a starting point the complexities of the genre, and use it to show the ways in which the nature of this favored form exposes breaks in notions of rationalistic progress and systematization that are recognized as central to Enlightenment ideals.

The fable debates are also of particular interest to this study because they introduce the problem—in large part, I would suggest, a disciplinary problem—of how to approach a Hamann or Herder piece critically. That these two writers appreciate and incorporate in their own work chimerical forms such as fables highlights the ways in which both authors are *themselves* writers of texts that are not easily placed in a particular disciplinary category. The original ambiguity that attends the genres and figures they appropriate bleeds over into Hamann and Herder's individual texts, which do not easily fit into a single category—and this extends to the problem of language, which undergirds the fable debates generally and Hamann and Herder's parts in them particularly. This "problem" of language, I suggest, is something that these writers (and I will in the coming chapters of this study extend this remark to include Kierkegaard and James as well) equally worry about and celebrate. But this does mean that their texts are not easily distilled into a single, clear point; I will argue in the pages that follow that they are, in fact, often explicitly resistant to such reduction.

Critics have sought to find a consistent underlying philosophical or theological perspective that threads through each author's oeuvre in order to make of each author's idiosyncratic work something of a coherent whole. The case of Hamann, the less reader-friendly

of the two writers, may be instructive in this respect. The major studies on Hamann, particularly those that have sought to introduce Hamann to the English-speaking world, have naturally been those that propose to deal with the whole of Hamann's production as well as the historical fact of Hamann's importance as a thinker. Partly driven by the external demands of such a comprehensive project, and partly driven by the internal desire of the critical mind to find an underlying coherence in this difficult writer, Hamann criticism has often had something of a biographical bent: the search for a common thread in the disparate texts becomes a pursuit of Hamann's intent as an author, as is consistent with his personal feelings and ideas. This is largely encouraged by Hamann's own working methods. That Hamann was as likely to rehearse his ideas in letters as much as in published treatises—though the letters are often no less impenetrable than the published works—makes it tempting to blur the line between the historical person of J. G. Hamann and the published author who was more likely to defer authority through the construction of authorial personas and complex acts of intertextual appropriation than to express himself directly.[2] For example, in his excellent *After Enlightenment: the Post-Secular Vision of J. G. Hamann* the English-language critic John Betz takes a chronological approach to Hamann, explicitly and implicitly tying Hamann's essays as well as the letters to Hamann's development as a thinker. As such, Hamann's *development* as a Christian thinker who created an alternative system to Enlightenment rationalism becomes the major arc and explanation of Betz's exploration of Hamann's texts. Gwen Griffith-Dickson, another major English-language critic, writes detailed "expositions" and "analyses" of some of Hamann's major works that admirably do not shy away from the extreme allusiveness and fragmentation in Hamann's writing. But her project, too, subsumes the emphasis on *strange* language in each piece of Hamann's writing to

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[2] Hamann's pseudonyms include Aristobulus; a Highly Learned German-Frenchman; the hierophant's acolyte; the Magus of the North; H. S. Schoolmaster; and—perhaps most wonderfully—the letter "h."

the larger project of finding a hermeneutic key: what Griffith-Dickson defines as Hamann's system of "relational metacriticism." To create this inclusive theory, Griffith-Dickson takes as a starting point Hamann's own title for a projected collection of his works "*Metakritische Wannchen* (Metacritical Little Tub)"[3] and conjoins it to her own view that

> The key to understanding Hamann's approach to [his concerns] can be found in the idea of relationship. In the order of being, the first and foundational relationship is to be found in the human-divine relationship that for Hamann grounds all being, knowledge, and language; but the relations of one human being to another are no less crucial for an adequate understanding of the phenomenon in question (speaking, knowing, reasoning). The same instinct to look for the relationships rather than the essences or substances of things continues in his examinations of each of these phenomena in turn. (24)

Griffith-Dickson proposes that the deferral of a final interpretation through criticism of criticism (metacriticism) is in fact a different kind of criticism, that of relationship rather than conclusion. This theory allows Griffith-Dickson to explain why Hamann avoids defining the titular term *aesthetics* in one of his most recognizable texts, *Aesthetica in nuce*. The relational aspect appears in Griffith-Dickson's contention that

> the text mediates between the author and the interpreter and is the only way the creator can be perceived and appreciated. The Creator, however, does not vanish behind the text; the text is an invitation to dialogue, not a self-sufficient entity that can be cut loose from its author and examined in this anti-human fashion without a serious loss of meaning and significance. (129)

[3] Griffith-Dickson notes that *Wannchen* is related to Hamann's father's profession as a "'bather' or 'quack,' one who administered healing baths and performed minor surgery and other doctoring acts" (21n61).

Griffith-Dickson is here speaking of Hamann's understanding of God-as-author, but the emphasis on the author's actual, nearly tangible presence in the text applies to her understanding of Hamann as well. By the same token, Hamann's texts cannot be understood as separate entities, cut off from their author.

While I am deeply indebted to the scholarship that has been carried out in this general vein, the methodology of this study is more literary and even philological in its scope.[4] I argue that Hamann and Herder's embrace of the fragmentary allows for a complementary interpretation that more strongly emphasizes the ways that the writers' texts strongly push against being subsumed into even a personal system. Through the use of the fable genre and the figure of the body (of work, of a human being, of an author), the completeness of analogy or relationship and even the notion of a possible system of aesthetics are held up for examination and the cracks—as much as the relations—are exposed. Again, that a title like *Aesthetica in nuce* is meant ironically (the term *aesthetics* is never defined in the essay, and certainly never encapsulated as a neat nut) is obvious and generally acknowledged, yet the urge to find an overarching *something* to hold together Hamann's output remains. For my part, with the luxury of a study that seeks to treat part rather than the whole of Hamann's work, I will focus on the way that two of Haman's texts, a treatment of a story in his letters and the *Aesthetica in nuce*, and a handful of Herder's commentaries and translations of the Rosicrucian writer Andreä work to destabilize readings as an end (though perhaps one of many) in itself. That is, my study first takes at its word the emphasis on the fragmentary within the individual texts under examination. This study also takes the clear interest that the authors have in language itself to heart. One particular implication of

[4] As discussed above, Gwen Griffith-Dickson and John Betz (and I would add Oswald Bayer, the leading German-language Hamann scholar) are exemplary as deeply thoughtful critics whose focus subordinates examination of the language of the texts to a larger, more monolithic project. For a significant exception to this type of scholarship, see Carol Jacobs's essay "Hamann is a Nomadic Writer"—notably perhaps, not a large-scale work on Hamann.

this emphasis on language must be made clear here: while my readings may strike the reader as perhaps overly ascribing meaning to the language itself in the text, I am not suggesting that the deliberately ambiguous language of these texts is either arbitrary or in the service of the authors' life-mission. Instead, I am interested in the way that these authors encourage language itself to play—I am pointing to demonstrable significant patterns in the structures of Hamann and Herder's language.

The Fable Debates of the Eighteenth Century

With its populist legibility, instructive potential, and ties to clean, non-occult classicism, the fable was—at least superficially—something of a model genre for the Enlightenment.[5] The fable itself, however, as shown in the introduction to this study, has surprisingly complicated roots, coming from and reaching back to the naming of the genre as the Greek *ainos* (which, importantly for the two authors treated in this chapter, gives us the English word *enigma*), *logos*, *muthos*, and the Latin *for*, *fabulor*, and *fabula*.[6] While most of the critics and practitioners of the fable genre of the eighteenth century do not engage directly with this complicated terminology, this background reflects the anxiety about Enlightenment-era ideals of progress inherent in the

[5] Thomas Noel collects a variety of statistics which provide evidence of the popularity of the genre in Europe: G. Saillard's estimate in his *Essai sur la fable en France au dix-huitième siècle* of more than one hundred fabulists who "thrived" in France, Erwin Leibfried's estimate of "upwards of fifty German fabulists plying their art between 1740 and 1800" in his *Fabel*; and Noel lists numerous publications devoted to fables from the period (3-4). Thomas Noel's 1975 book *Theories of the Fable in the Eighteenth Century* remains a valuable overview of the major practitioners of fable writing and fable criticism. See also Max Staege, *Die Geschichte der deutschen Fabeltheorie*, for a thorough survey of the German fable tradition.

[6] A full examination of each of these terms would require its own study; for the purposes of this brief excursion into the context of Hamann and Herder's—and Kierkegaard and James's to come in the chapters ahead—engagement with the fable genre, I would propose the following admitted oversimplifications. *Logos* for the purposes of fable theory is most often associated with Aristotle's listing of the Socratic *parabole* and the Aesopian fable, which he calls *logos*, as two types of invented parallels used in rhetorical argument (1393b-1394a). Carl Jung's famous contrast between *logos* and *mythos* may cloud the issue a bit for modern readers, but all the same *muthos* for the eighteenth century reader would have distinctly literary and folkloric resonances that would stand in contrast to the use of fable as a rhetorical tool that comes from the Aristotelian use of *logos* as the generic term. The Latin terms *for*, *fabulor*, and *fabula* bring to the genre overtones of orality, fictionality, and untruth and nonsense.

era's ambivalent embrace of neoclassicism. As such, the term's etymological history informs the definitional dilemmas that are the basis of debates about the genre that took place in the eighteenth century. Similarly, the humanistic and rationalist trends that fed into the era's first steps toward the development of the field of archeology accounts for the largely folkloric (rather than more religious and/or mystical) direction that Hamann and Herder will react against, and it accounts for the peculiar anxiety about the temporal connections between present and past that inform the frictions between the advocates for a reinvention of the fable form and those who wish to hew to a more purely Aesopian model.[7] Unsurprisingly, given the long history of the genre and the perennial debate about what to make anew and what to preserve faithfully, the thinkers of the era engaged in both public and private conversations—both descriptive and proscriptive—about the fable. The underlying tensions in the Ancients-Moderns controversy enter into the fable debates in several ways, driving oppositions between styles (minimalist, action-driven and more expansive, character-driven), literary genres (Aesopian prose and La Fontaine-style poetry), nationalistic categories (French neo-classicism and Germanic proto-Romanticism), and placement within a discipline (poetry and philosophy). Responding to the renewed popularity of Aesop and Phaedrus and the more recent collections of La Fontaine, Dryden, Fénelon, and others—and the lack of uniform generic markers and "purposes" among

[7] Susan Stewart, in her article "Notes on Distressed Genres," sees a propensity toward the creation of the "new antique" that cuts across the genres of interest in the eighteenth century; she construes it as "an attempt to bypass the contingencies of time: by creating new antiques, the author hopes to author a context as well as an artifact….Thus the desire to produce speaking objects, objects both in and out of time, seems an inevitable outgrowth of this development. And perhaps more important, the endurance of archaeological, or found, objects emphasizes representation's stake in the dichotomy between language and action" (6).

these influential works—writers and thinkers across France, England, Germany, and Spain began to produce fables and texts that theorized about the fable itself.[8]

Because of his stature as an intellectual, critic, and artist among his contemporaries and beyond, Lessing's fables and, more importantly, the five essays of fable theory appended to his 1759 collection of three books of fables (*Fabeln. Drei Bücher*. *Nebst Abhundlungen mit dieser Dichtungsart verwandten Inhalts*) were hugely influential among other practitioners and theorists of the fable genre.[9] In the five essays in this collection Lessing surveys and critiques the fable theories advanced by predecessors and contemporaries (La Motte, Richter, Breitinger, and Batteaux) and develops his own theories encompassing the major questions germane to the revitalization of the ancient genre: What is the fable ("*Von dem Wesen der Fabel*")? What is the affinity between animal characters and fable ("*Von dem Gebrauch der Tiere in der Fabel*")? Are there different types of fable ("*Von der Einteilung der Fabeln*")? What form, style, and disciplinary category are most suitable to fables ("*Von dem Vortrage der Fabeln*")? And what special applications does the fable have in education ("*Von einem besondern Nutzen der Fabeln in den Schulen*")?

Naturally, at the heart of the fable debates stood questions of definition and what we might now call discipline. Lessing, like his predecessors, wrestles with the formulation of a simple definition for the fable; he does so by examining variations on and critiques of La Motte's seminal definition, "the fable is an instruction disguised under the allegory of an action (*l'allégorie d'une action*)" (13), which had been put forth by other fable theorists of the eighteenth century. Lessing influentially takes particular umbrage at the notion of allegory,

[8] The list of these grew to include Locke, Rousseau, John Gay, Marmontel, Batteaux, Goldsmith, Iriarte, and Goethe, among others. For an introduction to the fable writers who are not in the direct line of Herder and Hamann, please see Noel.

[9] Noel speculates that "Much of [his] influence undoubtedly derived from Lessing's overall stature as author and critic, *rather than* exceptional brilliance in his treatment of the fable" (122, emphasis mine).

which is central to the definitions advanced by all of the authors he appraises. The fable for Lessing is what it says, not merely a symbolic gesture. Lessing argues first that the fable is "not merely an allegorical action (*allegorische Handlung*), but the narrative (*Erzählung*) of such an action" (3:391).[10] Lessing's pressure on the narrative aspect of the fable shows him to be attentive to an obvious but often elided distinction between the realms of word and action, text and physical life. (As I will show below, Lessing's example of what an allegorical action without narrative is, the story of Tarquinius Superbus, will be of interest to Hamann—and through Hamann, Kierkegaard.) Simultaneously, however, Lessing offers a critique of the notion of allegory itself that adds a strange dimension to his concern with distinctions between action and word. Allegory is a problem for Lessing precisely because allegorical language appears to point away from itself to an other that the words do not directly designate.[11] To this end, Lessing directly confronts the fable's relation to allegory—"the action (*Handlung*) of a fable, if it is allegorical, must not say (*sagen*) what it appears to say (*sagen scheinet*), but rather only something similar? We shall see!" (3:392)—and later adamantly declares that "the fable as a simple Fable cannot possibly be allegorical"[12] (3:394).[13] The strangeness of this proposition reflects the general struggle in the fable debates about whether the fable, even as something of a fictional genre, might fulfill the purpose of "instruction" (*instruction* in La Motte's French;

[10] Lessing citations refer to the Witowski edition (*Lessings Werke*) unless otherwise noted.
[11] Lessing quotes Quintilian: "Allegoria, quam inversionem interpretamur, aliud verbis, aliud sensu ostendit, ac etiam interim contrarium" and puts special pressure on the counterintuitive and ironic "ac etiam interim contrarium" that allegory permits (3:392).
[12] Lessing somewhat grudgingly allows that there might be a category of fable, which he calls "complex (*zusammengesetzte*)," that could be more allegorical, but Lessing far prefers the simple Aesopian fable.
[13] As I will point out below in my discussion of Hamann's indirect response to Lessing's claims here (including Lessing's use of the Tarquinius Superbus story), Lessing seems to blur the distinction between speech and action—the action itself is a speaker—at this point in way that seems counter to his nuanced suggestion that the fable is a narration of an action.

Lehre for the German critics, including Lessing)—to explain the instructive value of the fable was, for the eighteenth-century critics, to wrestle with the "truth" value of the fable.

Lessing's attempts to locate the fable's disciplinary home are also interestingly dependent on his notions of allegory and truth. From the very beginning of Lessing's first fable essay in the 1759 collection, "On the Nature of the Fable," Lessing is concerned with "truth." As we have seen, at the same time, Lessing is acutely conscious of the narrative aspect of the fable—and the fact of the fable's participation in the discipline of poetry leads Lessing to some rather uncomfortable pretzling of his theory, from his notion of allegory to his thoughts on the use of animal characters. While most fable theorists could agree that the fable contained both an aesthetic side (which is captured in Breitinger's "wonder") and a didactic, philosophical side, the proportions and the importance of each were up for debate. Having disavowed his earlier verse fables, the Lessing of 1759 places himself in contrast to La Fontaine who "succeeded in making the fable into a charming poetic mechanical toy (*Spielwerk*)" (3:445). Citing Aristotle's placement of the fable in the *Rhetoric* rather than the *Poetics*, Lessing claims to follow the ancients, for whom the fable belongs to the domain of philosophy, and asserts that the work of the fable is in the awakening of "intuitive knowledge (*anschauende Erkentnis*)" rather than in delight in the narrative workings of the story.[14] (That the use of the fable in Aristotle is significantly more pragmatic—as a persuasive tool in argument and speech—is ironically largely ignored by Lessing and other fable theorists in favor of a more elevated treatment of the genre, even as they frequently and paradoxically argued the fable's *usefulness* over its value in itself.)

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[14] Lessing takes the term *anschauende Erkentnis* from Christian Wolff's *Philosophia practica universalis* (vol 2, §§ 302-322), but the term also echoes Kant and Plato. For a fuller treatment of Lessing's adoption of this term, see Barner, Grimm, Kiesel, and Kramer (228-229).

This placement of the fable so definitively in the philosophic realm is a sticking point for Hamann and Herder in ways both explicit and implicit. Hamann calls Lessing's essays "more boring than philosophical and witty to the end of agreeable instruction," and matches Lessing's critique of La Fontaine as a maker of "mechanical toys" by calling Lessing a "painter of miniatures (*miniatur Mahler*)."[15] Herder's ambivalence about symbolic texts (which will be readily apparent below) also can be seen in his placement of the fable on the border of philosophy and poetry, or, if pushed, in the domain of poetry in his essay "Aesop and Lessing" (2:188-200). Lessing himself, Herder says, is a poet rather than a philosopher in his fables.

In fact, one of the dominant strains of criticism levied against Lessing by his contemporaries (though often delivered in less complimentary terms than Herder's) is that he did not adhere to his own rather stern system, even in the fables that were collected with the *Abhandlungen*. Lessing's forward to the three books of fables including the essays makes explicit a split between practice and theory. He asks that his original fables and his essays be read together, but also casually notes that "should [the reader]…discover that my rules do not always agree with my practice, what difference does it make (*was ist es mehr*)?" The fable debates, then, and particularly Lessing's part in them, admitted and perhaps even created gaps between systematic theory and practice and blurred lines between disciplines—gaps which Hamann and Herder explore. Further, as will become apparent in the ways that all four major authors of this thesis play with the fable, the debates, while seeking to pin down a univocal definition for the genre, open up the idea of the fable as polysemic to the point of natural fragmentation and riddling, and as a kind of mental game—as La Motte remarks, "The mind has a certain activity which must be satisfied. It loves to see several things at once and to distinguish

[15] Quoted in Noel (125), but with a different date for the letter than what is found in Henkel and Ziesemer's edition of the *Briefwechsel* (where the letter is seems to be dated 2 April 1760 rather than 12 April 1760).

the relationships between them; it delights in this adroit penetration, which knows how to discover more than it was shown; and in perceiving what was hidden by a veil, it believes in some manner that it has created what was concealed" (14).

Hamann and Herder's contributions to the fable debates are notable for being uncommonly interested in what might be considered a deconstruction of the genre, in so far as they are more interested in showing the mismatches, intrusions, and gaps in the literary form than they are in unifying, classifying, and proscribing. Most intriguingly for my study, Hamann and Herder intertwine images of disfiguration—that is, disrupted bodily symmetry—of physical bodies with allusive fragments of fables.[16] As briefly considered in my introduction, the authors treated in this study make frequent use of anatomical metaphor (especially the trope of mutilated bodies—crippled, lame, dismembered and scattered) as a kind of test case for the ability of literary or philosophical discourse to organize "reality." The use of extremely graphic imagery in these texts also, as an intertwined concern, enters obliquely—or, on the rare occasion, even explicitly—into the aesthetic discussions that Lessing's *Laokoon* famously develops about the relationship between visual arts and poetry. The intersection between metaphorical (rhetorical) figure and physical (corporeal) figure has remained of interest to critics; Hamann and Herder, in their role as critics of texts, prefigure the deconstructionist turn.[17] The various issues that mixing of the fable genre with anatomical imagery brings up will be especially influential for Kierkegaard, as will be discussed in the next chapters.

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[16] The dismemberment that occurs in the texts in this study is consistently and purposefully messy. The intersection of the breaking of bodies and the severing of the illusory connection between word and action is served only by a notable and visible loss of symmetry. The writers here do not use forms of dismemberment that preserve symmetry such as drawing and quartering.

[17] See, for example, Paul de Man, particularly in the essays collected in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*; Neil Hertz, reading de Man, is particularly alive to both the imagery that de Man discovers in the particular authors he examines as well as the critic's turn and temptation to further isolate figures from their context and put peculiar pressure on the rhetorical conflation of language and body

Hamann's Fables

Of the two thinkers treated in this chapter, Hamann is generally seen as the thornier while Herder could at least occasionally be counted on for a less contrarian view of Enlightenment preoccupations (developing popular and canonical texts such as "On the Origin of Language"). Hegel, a qualified admirer, himself no stranger to charges of obfuscation, fills his review of Hamann's writings with increasingly strong assertions that Hamann is impenetrable.[18] Hamann encouraged the mythologizing of his particular brand of obscurity in accepting the title "The Magus of the North." But Hamann's obscurity is generally not that of the leader of a mystery cult with the attendant claims to knowledge; Hamann's concern lies precisely in the gaps that human reason creates by atomizing the unity of Creator and created. He reads Paul's dictum in I Corinthians that we see through a glass darkly as a reference not merely to human existence or the faculty of sight, but as an indictment of rational thought: "Our thoughts are nothing but fragments. Indeed, we know in part" (Nadler 1:299). This sense of fragmentation as a kind of tragic condition lends a certain poignancy to his destructive bent in his various attacks on the Enlightenment mania for proscriptive and descriptive systems.[19]

Given his own preoccupations and propensities that run counter to Enlightenment enthusiasms—a tendency to create prolix texts favoring ambiguity over order, glancing obliquely

[18] A comment very early on in Hegel's first article on Hamann puts the point nicely: "One feels the dire need for these [new] commentaries when reading Hamann's works; but the hope of receiving elucidation from the promised volume is in any case greatly diminished when one reads…that it was the impossibility, acknowledged by Hamann himself, of elucidating all which is dark in his writings, that prevented him from organizing their publication" (*Hegel on Hamann* 3). The swipes get more caustic from there.

[19] What is particularly interesting in Hegel's criticism is precisely the notion that fragmentation might actually help with understanding Hamann: "Thus in Hamann's writings, there can only be particular passages which have any content….A sampling of them would probably yield a lovely collection and would perhaps appear to be the most purposeful thing that could happen to them, in order to grant the public access to that which is truly of worth within them. But it would always be difficult to lift out passages in a manner that would purify them from the nasty elements with which Hamann's writing style is everywhere afflicted" (34-35).

at the major questions of the day rather than approaching them directly, full of animal messiness in equal measure with learned discourse, composed more often for private missives rather than for public intellectual discussion—Hamann's attention to the fable genre, especially as the questions the fable provoke lie paradoxically hidden within a deliberately straightforward kind of prose, would seem to be a foregone conclusion. Yet Hamann's contributions to the fable debates of the eighteenth century are largely allusive and themselves enigmatic. Unlike writers such as Lessing, Herder, and Rousseau, who made the fable question central to large-scale works, Hamann's comments on fables tend to come as digressions, passing remarks, and metacommentaries on the debates that are more directly engaging his contemporaries. Hamann does not propose a system for defining the genre, nor does he even spend much verbiage explicating any particular fable.[20] Rather, Hamann elliptically wields fragments of fables, and the use of these sharply cut-out shards often comes across as implicit criticism of proposed theories of the genre. Hamann's is a pointedly savage rhetorical use of the fable, a commentary on the potency of the genre. As such it is also a protest against the idea of the systematic categorization of the open-ended and primal fable, the neutering into usable rhetoric, of something originally much more vital. Further, when looking at the *content* of Hamann's fable comments, a parallel to the *form* of his commentary becomes apparent: the fables that he takes up are often about dismemberment and/or occur within the context of Hamann's own metaphors of dismemberment. I propose that far from the comfortingly civilizing uses (whether didactic or virtuosically literary) for the fable that his contemporaries were proposing, Hamann hints at a different understanding of the fable genre, one that is bound up in Hamann's own use of rhapsody as a

[20] See Noel for a more comprehensive overview of Hamann's contributions to the fable debates.

means for (partially) reassembling "all that we have left in nature for our use…jumbled verses and *disjecti membra poetae*."[21]

The example of Tarquinius Superbus. As a prelude to examining this disquieting phrase from the major work *Aesthetica in nuce*, I will consider some key strategies at work in the representatively compressed form of a private letter. Written to Friedrich Nicolai, Hamann's letter contains his account of the Tarquinius Superbus legend, a version of which would gain a broader audience as the epigraph for Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*.[22] Briefly, the legend is this: Tarquinius Superbus' son Sextus sends a messenger to his father to ask how to deliver the city of Gabii into Tarquinius Superbus' hands. Without saying a word, Tarquinius Superbus goes about the garden, cutting off the heads of the tallest poppies. The son understands the cutting of poppies as a symbolic gesture to convey that he should kill or banish the most prominent citizens.[23] Lessing, in his 1759 comments on the fable, uses this legend more or less in full as a case study for determining what differentiates mere symbolic action from fable proper; the story is for Lessing an example of a "hidden lesson (*versteckte Lehre*)" transmitted by an "allegorical action (*allegorische Handlung*)" that is not a fable.[24] Lessing, we should note, makes the rather peculiar move of drawing this distinction by treating the legendary Tarquinius Superbus as the potential fable composer, not as the subject of the legend; Lessing focuses on the action (the physical

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[21] Translations of *Aesthetica in nuce* are by Kenneth Haynes. Other translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
[22] "An den Buchhändler Nicolai, Berlin," March 4, 1763. (*Briefwechsel*, 194-197).
[23] See Valerius Maximus, *Factorum et Dictorum Memorabilium Libri Novem* (7.4.2), and following Lessing's citation, Florus, *Epitomae de Tito Livio Bellorum Omnium Annorum DCC Libri Duo* (1.1.7).
[24] Lessing, *Abhandlungen über die Fabel*, in *Werke* 3:391.

cutting of the poppies) as a means of conveying a lesson, not on what we might call the *narrative* about Tarquinius Superbus and the poppies.[25]

Hamann, on the other hand, focuses on the story itself.[26] He finds so much in this legend that not only does a truncated version of it appear in his letter to Nicolai, but he repeats it in a second letter to Lindner (which quotes, with small alterations, much of the Nicolai letter.)[27] When Hamann takes up the Tarquinius Superbus story, he makes a couple of characteristic motions that I would like to call attention to here. First off, he brings back the literary flavor of the story. He treats it *as a story* as opposed to considering Tarquinius Superbus as an inadequate storyteller. (Actually, Hamann outdoes Lessing in insistence on the fable's narrative aspect by not only treating the story as story, but also marking Tarquinius Superbus' "allegorical action" as speech rather than as a physical activity.)[28] By doing so, Hamann implicitly reconsiders the legend as a fable in the fable debates. Typically, however, this is done in a roundabout way. Hamann does not, first of all, actually tell the story. Hamann substitutes an allusion to the story for the story itself: "What Tarquinius Superbus said in his garden out of boredom (*für die*

[25] In fact, Lessing contrasts the non-genre of the allegorical action with the fabling of a hypothetical father who transmits the same message to his son by means of an actual story.

[26] The history of Tarquinius Superbus is familiar to Hamann from Livy (whom Hamann calls an "author full of action (*handlungsvoller Schriftsteller*)" in *Hamburgische Nachricht* (2:255)), but also from Lessing's 1759 *Abhandlungen* (3:391). Rousseau's extremely brief mention of Tarquinius Superbus (the story is alluded to in a list of examples of non-verbal communication) in his *Essay on the Origin of Languages* may also have been a source for Hamann (7).

[27] "An J. G. Lindner, nach Riga," March 29, 1763 (*Briefwechsel*, 201-204). Kierkegaard's epigraph to *Fear and Trembling* is taken from the Lindner letter rather than the Nicolai letter.

[28] For a fuller discussion of Hamann's linkage of action with language, see Bayer, "Reason is Language" in *A Contemporary in Dissent: Johann Georg Hamann as a Radical Enlightener*. This essay, in glossing Hamann's characterization of Livy as an "author filled with action," suggests that "Hamann's concept of 'action'…contains a fundamental anthropological understanding of reality as an ambivalent process of communication. It can be briefly explained as Hamann does by merely drawing out the meanings of a single Greek word, the verb *hypokrinesthai*. With the gift of freedom the person responds to a question containing a challenge by judging and interpreting the address that is heard. This representative *action* of the person as speaker is at the same time a mimic representation, the action of an actor, a thespian who plays a role, with which the person must not be identical but can be distanced and for this reason 'feigns' it" (164).

Langeweile) by means of the poppies, the son understood but the messenger did not."[29] Tarquinius Superbus' action is minimized in three ways: first, by its placement in the subordinate clause of the sentence; second, by calling his action speech rather than action; and third, by the incidental nature of communication made "out of boredom." This allusiveness pulls the Tarquinius Superbus story in opposing directions. Hamann's story, because it makes Tarquinius Superbus' symbolic speech so casual as to be almost accidental, and because its structure places emphasis on the outcome of the story, can be read in two ways—either as a triumphant statement of the clear receipt of the message (the message was interpreted by the proper recipient, the son), or as a statement of the possibility of misunderstanding (the messenger cannot interpret the statement).

Then, despite the riddling, subordinate, and fragmentary nature of the story as given, Hamann appends something that looks like a moral to a fable: "Therefore, a notion before which the ministering angels lower their eyes, might perhaps tickle children." This is a "therefore" that is not easily reconciled with the story. One might see a universalization of the son of the story into the more general term children, certainly, but other parallels stretch nearly to the breaking point; and as I will suggest below, Hamann poses the content of the Tarquinius Superbus story as a deliberate stumbling block between the fable and the moral. The "therefore" is then given an analogy that looks like it should somehow gloss the first moral: "and from the crumbs which the children drop, dog and cat miraculously live harmoniously in my little household." And then Hamann hints that a further and more mysterious lesson is to be taken from this, "according to which, in the absence of a better standard, I must judge my public."

[29] The phrase "*für die Langeweile*" is omitted from the later letter to Lindner and, therefore, from Kierkegaard's epigraph. Note the resemblance to the earlier dedication to Hamann's *Socratic Memorabilia* (1759) "Collected for the Boredom of the Public by a Lover of Boredom (*für die lange Weile des Publicums zusammengetragen von einem Liebhaber der langen Weile*)." As Haynes notes, "for boredom" has the force of "a specific against boredom, 'for whiling away the time'" (3).

This whole seemingly interminable unwinding of interpretations of interpretations is preceded by yet another story in the Nicolai letter (it is omitted from the Lindner letter). That is, the Tarquinius Superbus story is itself somehow a gloss on (in the dual senses of a "gloss" being both explanation and covering over) a quotation from a book on labyrinths, about the way that crusaders built labyrinths into the Prussian hills where they could pretend to be defending Jerusalem from the Saracens.[30]

Setting aside the dizzying analogies in the content of this multiplied act of interpreting the story, I will focus on the strategies by which Hamann uses this story in an act of implicit fable theorizing. Hamann enters the fray of the fable debates by modeling the use of the fable in a peculiarly pure sense. Traditionally, the fable "proper"—that is, the story itself in the Aesopian fable—preexisted the moral, which could be altered for various rhetorical purposes.[31] This is not to say that the ancient Aesopian fables or those of the eighteenth century were unconcerned with intelligibility. Whether the argument about the fable genre leaned toward the value of the fable for children (as for Locke, Fénelon, and Rousseau, to name a few), or regarded the fable as a reminder of a pre-Lapsarian unity of humans and nature (as for Herder), one might argue that the fable debates were largely predicated on a kind of consensual analogic comprehension.[32] There

[30] See Griffith-Dickson for a fuller discussion of the importance of this part of the Nicolai letter in interpreting the title of the longer work that contains *Aesthetica in nuce*, *Crusades of a Philologian*. She follows Hoffmann in pointing out that Hamann's reading of the report on the Prussian labyrinths "underline[s] the playful aspects of the establishment so that it is not surprising that Hamann characterizes his use of the title [*Crusades of a Philologian*] as a 'provincial joke'" (77).

[31] See, for example, Robert Temple's introduction to *Aesop: the Complete Fables* for a particularly condescending commentary on the peripheral value of the moral in fable scholarship: "We probably owe the preservation of the fables to their utilitarian use by orators and rhetoricians, so we must not begrudge them their morals. In fact, as long as one realizes the nature and origin of the morals, they develop a kind of kitsch fascination in themselves, like taking an interest in ornamental teapots" (xvi).

[32] Betz suggests that analogy is the "guiding thread….which weaves all of Hamann's reflections together…: an analogy between the interpretation of Scripture and the interpretation of creation; an analogy between the poetic language of creation and the poetic language of human beings; an analogy, furthermore between the poetry of Scripture and the poetries of world literature; and, finally, an analogy between divine and human criticism" (115-116).

must be a rough equivalence between the story and the lesson. At the extreme end of its logic, the fable as an appropriated or universal genre then presents serious questions about authorship as distinguished from the authority of interpretation. Hamann's allusive fable takes up this problem, throwing into question the authority and intelligibility of an interpretive moral. But it also pointedly serves as an enigma (the term *ainos*, a Greek term used for fables, gives us *enigma*), and as an enigma about which one could continually revolve and allow interpretations to proliferate.[33] The story reattains its place of priority and integrity, and interpretation is not fixed. Hamann's story, in short, and in its brevity (and Hamann, we recall, makes it even briefer than others do), acts in a similar manner to Hamann's *nuce*—a neat little package, but also something that is supposed to sprout.[34]

One thing that is hidden in plain sight in this pileup of interpretation is the violence and grotesqueness in Hamann's stories. And it is hidden by the utmost casualness and playfulness—both in Hamann's own rhetorical game and even within the stories themselves. The story of the labyrinths makes clear that the crusaders are *making a game* of the bloody conquest of Jerusalem. Tarquinius Superbus' story is chilling precisely because of the contrast between the innocuous act of cutting flowers in his garden (made even more incidental by the offhandedness of Hamann's note that the act is done "out of boredom") and the message that will lead to death and exile. On closer inspection, Hamann encourages a particularly violent reading of the story by

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[33] Cf. Lessing's "*Die Erscheinung*" from the first book of *Fabeln* (1759), published contemporaneously with Hamann's *Aesthetica* (3:347). While Lessing, in his concluding moral to the story (3:347), puts the message of the story in the reader's court ("I told a mere fable, out of which you yourself draw the lesson [*Lehre*]"), Hamann goes further in setting up not an open-ended fable with multiple possible readings than an individual might settle on, but rather a fable that has built-in impediments to any single decisive reading.

[34] See, for example, Hamilton on the notion of proliferation in Hamann, particularly in the *Socratic Memorabilia* ("Poetica Obscura," 100). He quotes Hamann's letter to Jacobi of November 13, 1785, "The title is not simply a sign to hang out, but the *nucleus in nuce*, the mustard seed of the whole growth," and remarks that Hamann's strategy of "proliferation, which defies expectation, will correlate with the contents of the essay itself, a text which playfully struggles with nothing less than the presentation of the non-presentable."

allusively collapsing the image of floral decapitation into the fates of the citizens of Gabii. The shocking casualness of the juxtaposition of violence and innocence occurs further in Hamann's own charming story of the harmony between cats and dogs dependent on the table scraps of those benevolent household dictators, the children, who would laugh at Tarquinius Superbus' escapades. The violence of the story, in fact, spreads outward: the flowers (and heads) fall, the "ministering angels lower their eyes," the children drop crumbs.[35]

With these Hamannian strategies in mind—glossing that suggests constant revision of meaning even as the visible record of the adjustments graphically stretches the potential text out to infinity, the casual use of violent imagery, and the use of the fable genre as both promising and denying interpretation—I will now to turn to *Aesthetica in nuce*.

The dismembered poet of Aesthetica in nuce. In the title and subtitle, "Rhapsody in Cabbalistic Prose," of *Aesthetica in nuce*, one of Hamann's more familiar texts (though "familiar" is a relative term), we immediately see some of the strategies and gestures at work that functioned in his much smaller-scale epistolary entry into the fable debates. The "*nuce*," translated as nut or nutshell, suggests encapsulation as well as promising—or threatening—potentially uncontrollable germination. Here, too, is the mild bidirectional pull of the poetic mode (rhapsody) alongside prose. And here is the term *cabbalistic*, which both pins the project to a particular religious framework and promises mysticism and mystification.[36] Even "aesthetics," already the problematic supposed-topic of the essay, is further unsettled when it turns up in the interior of the essay: it occurs seldom in the essay, twice as an adjective, modifying the beauty of

[35] I owe this idea to Joshua Wilner's comments on an early draft of this chapter.
[36] Betz sees this term as "perfectly suited to Hamann's sense of humor, evoking such notions, so antithetical to his 'enlightened' contemporaries, as 'hermeticism,' 'esotericism,' 'cryptography,' and, above all, 'darkness'" (101).

"Aesop the younger," Lessing, and the "nut" of the title before making a final substantive appearance in the very last paragraph of the text. Hamann's oblique comments on the aesthetics of the tiny, compressed, proliferating genre of the fable (through use of Lessing's non-fabling example of violent "allegorical action") are reflected explicitly and implicitly in *Aesthetica in nuce*, where Hamann is found to be theorizing about the fable through his use thereof.

To this title and prefatory material, and the correspondingly enigmatic text that follows, Hamann appends a concluding section. This *Apostille*, as has been noted by other scholars, promises by its title either a gloss on the preceding text or, alternatively perhaps, merely a certification:[37]

> As the oldest reader of this rhapsody in cabbalistic prose, I find myself obliged by the right of primogeniture to bequeath to you my young brethren who will come after me one more example of a merciful judgment, as follows:
>
> Everything in this aesthetic nutshell tastes of vanity!—of vanity!—The rhapsodist has read, observed, reflected, sought and found agreeable words, quoted faithfully, and like a merchant ship fetched and brought his food from afar. He has added up sentence and sentence as arrows are counted on a battle-field; and circumscribed his figures as stakes measure off a tent. Instead of stakes and arrows, he has, with the petit-maîtres and sophomores of his time written ******** and --------- obelisks and asterisks.

[37] See Haynes's note to the term *apostille*: "The official credentials given in a postscript to a document (*Meyers Lexicon*)" (94). Jacobs also follows Sven-Aage Jørgensen's edition of Hamann for the translation as "gloss, or critical marginalia" (202n35).

> Let us now hear the conclusion of his newest aesthetic, which is the oldest:
>
> > Fear GOD, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters! (94–95)

Although the *Apostille* claims and speaks judgment on the text that precedes it, the half-promise of a gloss that this concise little afterword offers remains a tease. The *Apostille*, in fact, contains further deferrals of wrapping up; by condemning the "aesthetic nutshell" for the sin "of vanity!—of vanity! (*nach Eitelkeit*)," this commentary performs a characteristic contradiction: it contains multiple footnotes that allusively lead outward away from the vain emptiness of the vain text, even as it suggests the potentially interior-looking, self-reflective centripetal force of the term *vanity*. The term *rhapsodist* gets a footnote leading to Plato's *Ion*: "Rhapsodes—interpreters of interpreters." There is, then, no end to the potential for proliferation of interpretation, even if the text remains hermetically static.

Further, the whole notion of footnoting and marginalia gets dragged out of the borders of the page and into the argument proper in Hamann's enigmatic statement that the narrator of this piece has written "******** and --------- obelisks and asterisks." And beyond this initial disruption of the conventional system that orders a text (which would assure a kind of cohesiveness to the text by keeping the marginalia marginal), these denoters of footnotes get a footnote of their own.[38] Hamann adapts Jerome's preface to the Pentateuch: "an asterisk makes a light shine, the obelisk cuts and pierces." Leaving aside the rest of Hamann's long note on

[38] Nadler's edition gives this a numbered footnote. Jacobs points out that the first German edition contains a further play (or confusion) of what is a footnote and what is a main text—the word *Asterisken* was followed by an asterisk, denoting Hamann's footnote (202n38).

asterisks and obelisks,[39] it would seem that this is fairly clear—the "little star" of the asterisk adds by way of explanation; the "little dagger" of the obelisk cuts. Analogously, Hamann's symbols look like little multipliers and subtraction marks.

Further, I would like to call attention to the *form* of the little symbolic equation: "******** and -------- - obelisks and asterisks." (I have here moved one of the obelisks to show its additional function as a dash. More on the nature of dashes below.) The form of the equation posits a symmetry, a neat equivalence between the symbols (* and -) and their names. Revealingly, however, Hamann inverts the order of the symbols (********* and ---------) and the names for the symbols (obelisks and asterisks) in his sentence. This brings into high relief Hamann's comment that "to speak is to translate (*Reden ist übersetzen*)—from an angelic language into a human language, that is, to translate thoughts into words,—things into names—images into signs….This kind of translation (that is, speech) resembles more than anything else the wrong side of a tapestry" (66). If the words for the symbols are on the backside of the tapestry, they would read backwards. In some ways, this is not an unexpected paradox: translation is always the same and different simultaneously. But Hamann pushes it to an extreme in asserting a conflation of opposites.

Since this is the *Apostille* to a rhapsody, we might think a little more about the little dagger in particular as a way of approaching Hamann's apparent confusion of the seemingly opposed tasks for the two symbols. That the rhapsody is made of fragments is a given from its

[39] Hamann's footnote in full: "Astericus illuscere facit; obeliscus iugulat et confodit (Jerome in his preface to the Pentateuch; cf. Diogenes Laertius on Plato). A skillful use of these masoretic signs could serve just as well to rejuvenate the writings of Solomon as to interpret two letters of Paul, as one of the most recent commentators has done through the method of §§ and tables." In an interesting corollary, Kenneth Haynes ("Tradition, Testimony, and Hamann") has remarked on Kierkegaard's use of the subsection symbol to describe Hamann's fate in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* ("poor Hamann, you have been reduced to a paragraph [*reduceret paa en* §] by Michelet").

derivation from the Greek *rhaptein*, to stitch together.[40] And that the poet's job is to arrange the fragments in the correct order is an explicit part of *Aesthetica in nuce* (which will be addressed below). This presents many of the same questions of authority and interpretive authority that the fable does—to stitch together is to create a new text as much as it is a stubborn deferral of authority.[41] Note that while Hamann follows the practice of representing the obelisk as a straight horizontal stroke (-), the obelisk is frequently represented graphically as a little dagger (†).[42] A needle is a little dagger, the rhapsode's job is to stitch together, and Hamann's string of obelisks resembles nothing so much as a row of stitches. The little dagger functions as much to add as to subtract or divide in Hamann's text, as Hamann's own chiasmic reordering of terms suggests.

Moreover, Hamann's use of the straight horizontal stroke to represent the obelisk obliterates a clear graphic distinction between the obelisk and the dash. In German the long dash is a *Gedankenstrich*, a thought stroke.[43] A dash might signal a breaking of thought (cutting), or it

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[40] This stitching together is taken up by scholars such as Griffith-Dickson, Jørgensen, and Jacobs who further allude to the "cento" style of Hamann's texts—a type of writing whose name comes from the word for a "patched garment." See Jacobs for a more extensive derivation of the term (115, 200n19). See Griffith-Dickson for a discussion of this characteristic style of Hamann's as arising in *Aesthetica in nuce* (25).

[41] Jacobs looks into the abyss towards which an examination of the cento/rhapsody form of Hamann's text tends: "The question the cento raises, of course, is the question of authority, who is speaking. It is at once the voice of the original texts as well as that of the gatherer of textual fragments. One might think of the cento as gathering and preserving a multiplicity of voices. Still, Proba Falconia, in his Cento Vergilianus, told Bible stories by citing lines of Virgil: this suggests that the cento might also be thought as shredding the intentions of the authors it cites. Let us remember that if Virgil can be made to speak in the voice of the Bible, the Bible, as Hamann cites it, might yet be made to say…we are not yet sure what" (200n19). Betz, following Oswald Bayer, reads a hermeneutics that does not concern itself with this problem: "one is thus presented with a hermeneutics that is squarely opposed to the interpretive practices of the modern subject, indeed, a hermeneutics that fundamentally overturns modern accounts of subjectivity altogether….For it is no longer a question of how can I (viewed as a complete, self-present, pre-textual identity) understand the text, but rather a question of *the text* understands and constitutes *me*….Accordingly, priority shifts from the modern subject…to the text, which *represents* the subject to itself in a new light, metaschematically constituting (or reconstituting its identity by means of the figures and parables in the story that is told" (41).

[42] That the symbol resembles a little cross as much as a little dagger brings its own confusions.

[43] Novalis, for one, would later pay great tribute to the decentralization of authority that the *Gedankenstrich* might imply: "Dashes—heavily emphasized words—isolated passages—all this belongs in the sphere of the reader." This is number 247 in Novalis's *Fragmente vermischten Inhalts*. As Manfred Frank points out, Novalis' fragments, too, are gathered from various sources in a patchwork fashion (156). Kierkegaard, too, in various places throughout both the pseudonymous and signed authorship (most extensively in *Works of Love*) meditates on the nature of the dash (*Tankestreg*). Robert Gibbs's essay, "I or You: The Dash of Ethics" focuses on the relevant passages in *Works of*

might be seen as stitching together two thoughts, or it might function as emphatic parentheses, isolating an interpolation. Or it could, as it does here, function as a strange kind of colon—at once positing an equivalence between what comes before and after the dash and flaunting the difference. Hamann's authorship is littered with these punctuation marks. But because of Hamann's focus on stitching and dismemberment, I would like to focus on one specific dash-heavy spot in *Aesthetica in nuce*:

> ——The fault may lie where it will (outside or in us): all we have left in nature for our use are jumbled verses [*Turbatverse*] and *disjecti membra poetae*. To gather these together is the scholar's modest part; to interpret them, the philosopher's; to imitate them—or bolder still—bring them into right order, the poet's. (65)

With particular appropriateness, Hamann spreads across the body of his own oeuvre a phrase from Horace,[44] "*disjecti membra poetae*," the scattered limbs of the poet. It occurs in *Aesthetica in nuce* (from 1760, early in Hamann's authorship), and in the last, unpublished work *Disrobing and Transfiguration* (*Entkleidung und Verklärung. Ein Fliegender Brief*, 1786).

In the *Aesthetica in nuce* the notion of only having "left in nature for our use…jumbled verses and *disjecti membra poetae*" clearly does not share a perversely casual tone with Hamann's retelling of the Tarquinius Superbus story. Instead of hiding (albeit in plain sight) the violence of the image under a virtuosic unwinding of interpretation on interpretation, Hamann takes what seems like the opposite approach: Hamann takes a commonplace expression and

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Love (Jegstrup, 141-160), and the dash will be important for my discussion of both Kierkegaard and James in the chapters that follows.

[44] Nadler indexes Horace as Hamann's favorite poet (*Lieblingsdichter*), ostensibly following a complicated comment in the third letter of the *Hierophantische Briefe* which speaks of an "avid appetite (*ämsig Geschmack*)" for the study of "relics" or "remnants (*Überbleibsel*)" of Horace. Note the sense of fragmentation and loss even here. (3:151; 6:182)

emphasizes the macabre aspect of the phrase. Used colloquially, *disjecti membra poetae* is merely a fairly vivid expression for scattered quotations, scattered words. The falling away of the force of the image in common usage actually goes further than this: the idiomatic phrase is *disjecta membra*. Ordinarily, the owner of those scattered members is left unmentioned. If the *poeta* still clings to the phrase, it is largely in the role of delimiting the "scattered fragments" to the field of literature.

It is Horace's original that conflates torn-apart *poetry* and the dismembered *poet* and encourages a kind of forgetfulness of the image's grotesquerie:

> his, ego quae nunc,
> olim quae scripsit Lucilius, eripias si
> tempora certa modosque, et quod prius ordine verbum est,
> posterius facias, praeponens ultima primis,
> **non**, ut si solvas "postquam Discordia taetra
> Belli ferratos postis portasque refregit,"
> invenias **etiam** <u>disjecti membra poetae</u>**.** (*Satires* 1.4.56–62; emphasis mine)

The main thrust of this passage (translations below), taking cues from earlier literary theorists such as Aristotle, focuses on the destruction that metathesis wreaks on a poem.[45] It is only at the end of the passage that the gruesome remains of the poet appear, almost buried under analogy and quotation. The sudden substitution of poet for poetry slips in without comment in the passage and is not taken up again. In fact, Horace slyly and decisively closes the door to further explicit examination of this curious conflation; the next line has been translated as "Of this, enough (*Hactenus haec*)."

[45] Metathesis is here understood in the broader sense of rearrangement of a verbal sequence.

Hamann addresses the confusion of terms. His first move is to make clear the distinction between poetry and poet: he speaks of "jumbled verses and *disjecti membra poetae.*" Hamann's conjunction "and" serves, paradoxically, as a *dis*junction between the terms. Poet and poetry are no longer allowed to slide into near-catachrestic metaphorical unity. The violence of the image is recaptured through the removal of the temptation to read it as mere metaphor.

Second, Hamann recalls the ambiguity of Horace's original. The structure of the passage, formally mirroring its contents, plays on the problem of metathesis. While Latin's inflected grammar usually allows for various arrangements of the components of the sentence with no harm to sense, the passage hinges on two non-inflected Latin words, the orphaned negative particle *non* and the adverb *etiam*, allowing two very different, nearly mutually exclusive readings.[46] Compare two readings of the lines:

> (A) Now concerning the verses I now write, which Lucilius wrote at one time, if you should take away their fixed rhythms and meters, making the word earlier in the line later and putting the last things before the first, **you would not discover the limbs even of a poet** as you would by breaking down "once foul Discord had broken back the brazen posts and gates of war." (Freudenburg trans., emphasis mine)
>
> (B) …it would **not** be like breaking up:
>
> When foul Discord's din
>
> War's posts and gates of bronze had broken in,

[46] The lack of a clear place for these floating words would have been even more pronounced in Horace's time, before the advent of modern punctuation.

where, **even when he is dismembered, you would find the limbs of a poet**. (Fairclough trans., emphasis mine)

While the prosaic content of the lines (“rearranging my poem destroys it, unlike rearranging these other lines”) remains the same in both readings, the emphasis is crucially different in each. In the first translation, you would still *not* find even the scattered limbs of a poet; the latter allows a strangely triumphant persistence of the poet.[47] Hamann explicitly refers to the latter—there *are* at least these limbs in existence for the modern poet to "to imitate…—or bolder still—bring…into right order"—but retains the ghost of the former. Reordering and imitating "jumbled verses (*Turbatverse*)” could be a perfectly practicable task, even one with an admirable didactic purpose.[48] But limbs, generally speaking, cannot even now simply be put back into their correct places, stitched up, and made whole again (and certainly could not have been in the eighteenth century). The point (if one can boil these texts down to a point) of both Hamann's and Horace's passages is precisely about the loss of something important, whether in the realm of poetry or nature. But Hamann's emphasis on the human origin of these limbs pushes the loss to an extreme. Given the sheer physicality of the image in Hamann, even if the focus of the whole of the *Aesthetica in nuce* is on a successful graphic stitching-together of fragments of other texts by means of its dashes, instead of on the dismemberment of the original texts by means of its obelisks, one might question the usefulness of the poet's task of "bringing these scattered limbs into the right order." The poet's job stops short of the rhapsodist's stitching, after all, bringing into question whether Hamann's rhapsodist is himself a poet or not. And this monstrous

[47] In fact, in Freudenberg’s particular reading (A) of the phrase “you would not discover the limbs *even* of a poet,” the placement of *even* (*etiam*) suggests a further diminishing of the poet—the poet’s limbs are just one type of limb one might discover.

[48] See Haynes's note about *Turbatverse*, which explains that these "were used to teach students to write Latin verse. The words of a single verse would be re-arranged to produce a grammatical but unmetrical line. Students would attempt to turn the jumbled words back into the metrical form which scanned correctly" (65n21).

assemblage is itself still infinitely far away from the possibility of resurrection available only to God.

In the midst of all this ambivalence, in gesturing at the proliferation of mutually exclusive interpretations, Hamann paradoxically also brings the image of the mutilated body back into the fold. As with the nut of the title of the essay, a disembodied *membrum* (recalling genitalia covered by fig-leaves) is not simply a neutered and isolated image, but also holds within itself the procreative potential for proliferation. Further, Hamann brings the problem of (rhetorical) metathesis back into question. He gives a version of Genesis 1:27: "He created man in God's image;—in the image of God created he him" (64). Metathesis, it would seem, is a natural function in biblical language; at the moment of creation, scrambling of the verse is not *necessarily* a violent disfiguration or dismemberment. Perhaps even the rhapsodist's stitching together of the dismembered poet does here begin to echo something life-giving. But the violence of the image makes this equivocal at best, and Hamann's German translation equivocates even further. The original Hebrew word rendered in English as *image* is *tselem*; the Lutheran bible translates *image* in both cases as *Bild*.[49] Hamann's line reads slightly differently: "He created man in God's image (*Göttlicher Gestalt*)—in God's image (*Bilde Gottes*) created he him." While both *Gestalt* and *Bild* can refer to the *form* that God creates for humanity, the different shadings of each are at least suggestive of Hamann's awareness of the impossibility of a

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[49] Joshua Wilner has drawn my attention to the fact that Hamann's German does not follow Luther's translation. Hamann engages with biblical Hebrew throughout the text, explicitly in the use of untranslated Hebrew epigraphs (Judges5:30 and Job 32:19-22) and in the opening salvo attacking Johann David Michaelis and Michaelis's commentary on biblical Hebrew: "Not a lyre!—nor a painter's brush!—a winnowing-fan for my Muse, to purge the threshing –floor of holy literature.—Hail to the Archangel [a pun on the archangel Michael and Michaelis] over the relics of Canaan's language—on white asses he is victorious in the contest;—but the wise idiot of Greece borrows Euthyphro's proud stallions for the philological exchange of words" (62). Hamann takes exception to Michaelis's philological, academic (rather than faith-driven) contention that Hebrew is a dead (*ausgestorben*) language rather than the living word of God. Intriguingly, while the Lutheran bible would have generally been familiar to Hamann, Timothy Beech notes that a letter to Herder (April 12, 1780) shows Hamann to have spoken of studying the seven-volume Jena edition of Luther during the composition of the *Metacritik über den Purismus der Vernunft* , significantly later than during the composition of *Aesthetica in nuce* (Beech, 90).)

perfect equivalence between the two sides of the dash.[50] The movement across the dash is also marked by a transformation from a more physical form (*Gestalt*) to something less tangible.

With Hamann's intermingling of physical dismemberment and verbal scrambling in mind, the paragraphs that lead up to the appearance of those *disjecti membra poetae*, ostensibly about the separation between body and spirit, take on a more complex hue. Hamann presents a seemingly direct analogy about the body first: "The veiled figure of the body (*verhüllte Figur des Leibes*), the countenance of the head, and the extremities of the arms are the visible schema in which we move along; yet in truth they are nothing but a finger pointing (*Zeigefinger*) to the hidden man within us" (64). This takes place in the framework of clarification-cum-obfuscation characteristic of Hamann's rhapsodic use of literature, fable, and analogy throughout the text and his own body of literature: we are immediately given a line of Latin from Manilius' *Astronomica* directly pointing to the presence of analogy as explanation, "Each one is an instance of God in miniature." The "each one" refers to the "hidden man within us," who is presumably a miracle of perfect, intact, symmetrical wholeness. But the line also allows for a more troubling synecdoche: the body, even in the non-dismembered form that it appears in here, becomes itself a disembodied part—a finger. The prospect of reassembly by way of rhapsodic stitching makes an appearance immediately after ("man's first apparel was a rhapsody of fig-leaves [*eine Rhapsodie von Feigenblättern*]"), but several difficulties attend.

The rhapsody, first and most obviously, does not reconstitute the body itself, but rather seems to reconstitute the "veil" that covers the body.[51] Hamann's rhapsodist and cento-maker is

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[50] It is significant that both Luther's *Bild* and the Hebrew *tselem* do not escape ambiguity. *Bild* may be (mere) image as well as something more constructive (as in the verb form *bilden*, to educate, to form, to shape). *Tselem* has the double valence of being used in the Old Testament in both the positive sense in Genesis and the prohibition against making a graven *image* of Exodus 20:4.

[51] Hamann also alludes to the tradition that conflates veil and body (e.g. "visible schema" versus "hidden man" above and "*Röcke von Fellen*" discussed in the paragraph that follows). Compare, too, Hebrews 10:20: "By a new

presumably associated with the "prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil" of the epigraph from Judges 5:30 (60).[52] This would appear to be a more modest proposal than the reassembling of a human body, yet it places the rhapsodist quite close to the God of Genesis who "made coats of skins and put them on—unto our ancestors, whom the knowledge of good and evil had taught shame" (65). Hamann's poet, too, is at once singular in his pursuit, seeking to put together one integral body of the Horatian poet, and set up for a Herculean task if the integrity of the single body is illusory and every body is "in truth" just a part.

But this, too, is complicated by the nature of the textile that the rhapsody produces, a covering of "*Feigenblättern*." Through wordplay, the shame of nudity to be covered over by fig leaves is etymologically escalated into cowardice (*Feigheit*, the adjectival form being *feige*) and writing (a *Blatt* is also a page). When Hamann turns to God's creation of skin-suits ("*Röcke von Fellen*"—itself a somewhat ambiguous proposition: whose skin?[53]), he asks:

> May I venture a conjecture that strikes me as at least ingenious?—I set the origin of this costume within the universal persistence of animal characters (*allgemeinen Bestandheit thierischer Charaktere*), which became known to Adam though his association with the ancient poet (called Abaddon in the language of Canaan but Apollyon in the Hellenistic language)—This moved the first man under his

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and living way, which he hath concentrated for us, through the veil (*katapetasmatos*), that is to say, his flesh (*sarkos*)" (King James Version).

[52] In her essay "Hamann Is a Nomadic Writer," Jacobs lays out a convincing argument that Judges V is the key text that—if it does not resolve the strange conflicts in the *Apostille*—at least brings the problems raised into a coherent focus. The asterisks and obelisks, which are themselves compared with pegs and arrows, are brought together in the story of Jael's (tent-dwelling woman) murder of Sisera. With the idea that the story of this murder (which itself lies behind the death of Christ, raising questions of righteousness and ethics—Jacobs's core idea is that Hamann's act of ethical writing lies in this constant vacillation) lies in the background of Hamann's text, Jacobs emphasizes the violence that informs Hamann's nut, even hinting that commentators have stopped in horror from taking this step of identifying Hamann's text with the taunt-song of Deborah because of its violence and its strangeness in bringing together such extremes of righteousness and crime.

[53] Hamann does go on to speak of animal skins (*Tierhäuten*), but the ambiguity is deliberate.

borrowed pelt to transmit an intuitive knowledge of past and future event to posterity — — — . (65)

What is even more striking is an allusive condemnation of Lessing's entries into the fable debates. Lessing devotes an essay, "On the Use (*Gebrauch*) of Animals in Fable" to the topic, asking, for example, "why the Fabulist often finds animals more to his purpose than humans" and concludes that it is because of the "universally known consistency/persistence of their characters (*die allgemein bekannte Bestandheit der Charaktere*)" (3:424). The echo is unmistakable, but Hamann substitutes Abaddon, the angel of the bottomless pit, for Lessing. The rhapsody and the fable are cast in a rather extreme light. The movement from nudity to plant-based clothing to animal skins is one of increasing violence. The fable underscores this by making animals actors; the animal "skin" which covers the human traits is a still-living body rather than mere object.

Judgment, conclusion, and use in the Apostille *to* Aesthetica in nuce. I return now to the *Apostille*, particularly the last words of *Aesthetica in nuce*, which explicitly make up the "conclusion (*Hauptsumme*) of his newest aesthetic" (95). This "conclusion" is a source of frustration for critics (sympathetic and otherwise), since it is marked by a decisive resistance to wrapping up, a spectrum of shifting views on the notion of aesthetics itself, extending even to a refusal to commit to a single identity for the rhapsodist-narrator of *Aesthetica in nuce*. The *Apostille* begins by offering a "judgment (*Urtheil*)" of the text ("Everything in this aesthetic nutshell tastes of vanity! —of vanity!"), but the distance between initial judgment and the last words of conclusion in the *Apostille* provides something of a riddle to end Hamann's text. The distinction between judgment and conclusion is that of parting (*Urtheil* derives from the verb

teilen, to divide) and summation (*Hauptsumme* contains a cognate to the English *sum*); that is, the concern with part versus whole continues to play out in the *Apostille* as it does throughout the text. Hamann widens this gap by introducing in the *Apostille* a fragmentation of the narrative integrity of *Aesthetica in nuce*: the narrator, who was once presumably assimilable with the "rhapsodists" and poets mentioned within the text, has broken away slightly from the rhapsodist who quotes the conclusion of this piece; in fact, the narrator starts the *Apostille* by claiming for himself the title of "oldest *reader*" before assessing the piece in the third person voice.[54] The final words of the essay are neither the rhapsodist's own nor those of this potential interloping reader, but a quote from Revelation: "Fear GOD, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters!" This creating God is explicitly the god of nature, not of human beings, and this is a fierce and fearsome conclusion. In the light of this very hands-off finale, it becomes clear that the shocking savagery of Hamann's earlier statement about looking for what is "left in nature for our use (*Gebrauch*)" and finding not only "jumbled verses" but also a dismembered poet is precisely a commentary on the idea of our "use" of texts, from the Bible on to Hamann's own text—the ultimate play on words in the title of the piece *Nuce* - *Nuss* - *Nutz* (benefit). The fable, like Hamann's nut, and like the human body, is not something that can be dismembered and stitched up for and by mere rhetorical usage. The text as a fundamentally fragmentary and broken object creates a paradoxical—and fragile—integrity that emphasizes the rift between practical use and the intellectual exercise of elusive reanimation.

[54] Cf., again, Betz's comments on the reader and author (note 41 above) as well as Novalis's notion that the reader constitutes the text (note 43 above).

Herder and the Use of Symbolic Rhetoric: Translations of Andreä

When J. G. Herder takes up questions about the use of rhetoric (and, more to the point, particular genres), he approaches them as obliquely as did his much admired and much criticized colleague Hamann. And like Hamann, he finds a sticking point in a type of writing that uneasily appropriates (mutilated) body imagery for discussion of literary form. Like Hamann, too, Herder's discussion avoids head-on confrontation by means of allusion and deferral of authorship: Herder couches his ideas in the form of translation and commentary.

For Herder, the emblem and fable tradition in Spanish and Italian literature is a point of entry. In his zeal to revitalize interest in the Baroque, sometime-Rosicrucian writer J. V. Andreä (1586-1654) as a moral and artistic paragon for his late-eighteenth-century contemporaries, Herder finds himself returning to this historical-artistic context repeatedly. In his introduction to *Andreä Dichtungen, zur Beherzigung unsers Zeitalters* (*Andreä Writings: For the Attention of Our Era*),[55] a 1786 collection of anonymous translations of Andreä's work, Herder characterizes the taste for the Spanish and Italian works of the time as for "sweet froth (*süssen Schaum*)…that should remain peculiar to that century alone" (vii). By the time he publishes his own signed translations of Andreä texts, he has tempered his criticism enough to concede a certain continuity of art over time:

> Andreä lived (as far as art and poetic art are concerned) in times when people loved emblems greatly. The period of great poets was over in Italy and Spain; on the other hand—partly from these great poets' works and partly from the paintings (*Gemählden*) of many great artists—there arose a passion for symbols, significant attributes, allegories, and so forth, even in the field of letters and ideas.

[55] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own with help from David Schur.

> To tell the truth, although this did enrich the human spirit, it narrowed art. A great quantity of symbolic-emblematic books and catalogues appeared at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries.—Why? The history of this time and this taste (*Geschmack*) remains largely in the dark. (*Zerstreute Blätter* in *Herders sämmtliche Werke* 16:160-161)

Criticism of the taste for emblematic art is inextricable from an evaluation of a historical period; despite his near dismissal of his own question, Herder is as acutely concerned with history (both that of Andreä's times and Herder's own) as he is uncomfortable with Andreä's debt to the emblem tradition. In part, Herder's concern is that of a translator who must bridge gaps more significant than language in making Andreä intelligible, or even useful, to his contemporaries.[56] Herder (quite fairly, at least in the cases of the Andreä texts examined in this chapter), barely credits the notion that emblems, parables, and fables are undesirable because they have roots in a didactic, primarily illustrative tradition meant to be legible on some level to all. Conspicuously subordinated to historical considerations,[57] this didactic, illustrative element is merely alluded to in Herder's antithetical pairing: enriched spirit / narrowed art. Nor is Herder exactly worried about the legibility of Andreä's texts in the conventional way that some branches of emblem theory worry about emblematic literature: that the genre has *become* unreadable not only because it is largely enigmatic, but because it is essentially dependent on cultural norms no longer

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[56] "To translate Valentin Andreä is truly no small thing, and I know of almost no old writers who make harder work here and there for the translator. His way of writing is a fine fabric of allusions, sometimes from books that he read, sometimes from business that he saw and carried out, sometimes from personalities and the mysterious spirit of his time which he knew inside out." (*Beherzigung*, iv-v)

[57] The original German sentence reads: "In Italien und Spanien war die Periode der grossen Dichter vorüber; dagegen war theils aus ihren Werken, theils aus den Gemählden mancher grossen Künstler eine Liebhaberei an Symbolen, bedeutenden Attributen, Allegorien, u.s. auch in das Gebiet der Buchstaben und Gedanken gekommen, die, um die Wahrheit zu gestehen, den meschlichen Geist zwar erweiterte, aber die Kunst verengte." I have elected to break it up for clarity, but in doing so, we lose sight of the way that the considerations about what the emblematic tradition accomplishes is nearly lost at the end of a very long, complex, multi-clause sentence.

current.[58] (On the other hand, this consideration does gently intrude in his suggestion that the selection of Andreä's writing included in Herder's 1793 collection of *Zerstreute Blätter* (*Scattered Papers*) differs from the 1786 translations, which he notes were "very well chosen, vivid, and effortlessly translated…and certainly deserving of the notice that the translator wished for them," in that the 1786 translations were "often changed for the needs of our time" (16:131).) Instead, Herder's historical considerations are more nebulous and more personal. For his translations, Herder claims "my goal was not to change the old Andreä," and then runs up against his anxiety about his own era:

> I selected from my papers only that which was not yet translated, apart from a few pieces which I wanted to show in their old form; but I noticed something peculiar about this selection. Poems and dialogues which could have appeared in 1770 and 1780 without risk, I found it better to hold back in 1793, even though they were composed in 1617 or 1620; there were among these excellent parables and dialogues. (16:132)

These texts, he says, remain accurate mirrors of Andreä's times, and he has done no updating to make them more relevant to his contemporaries. In fact, the relevance of leaving Andreä's works intact lies precisely in their obvious oldness; they can act as a point from which Herder can measure the distance his native German late-eighteenth-century culture has traveled from the sensibilities recorded in Andreä's original texts. What might the "risk" be of translating these texts for the audience of 1793, then? The very first words of Herder's foreword to this book are "other times, other thoughts" (16:131), and he asks "Why shouldn't our time be happy that many vices and bad habits that [Andreä] depicted with hard, dark colors don't rule anymore?"

[58] For general summaries of emblem debates see Daly and Bath.

(16:163). Herder is at pains to point out that these hard, dark colors are a mirror of an older time. But Herder concedes in the midst of proclaiming that he has left Andreä's writing in its original form that "[p]erhaps much is now as it was then, except it is more refined or better hidden by us" (16:163). Moreover, when he returns to the painting metaphor to describe his work on Andreä, Herder claims that it is "entirely outside of my purpose and place to give to a Rembrandtian head Titianesque…colors" (16:165). Herder's choice of painters is intriguing, as it reflects two preoccupations that he will develop further in his discussion of Andreä. First, while Rembrandt and Titian are separated by geographical distance, they were born a mere twenty-five years apart, suggesting Herder's ambivalence about the effects distance in time have on his (and his contemporaries') capacity for distancing and identifying with Andreä's older texts, older ideas. Second, the notion of painting as an emblematic art with a peculiar relationship to poetry is also a major preoccupation of Herder's as he elides Andreä's concerns with his own.

Herder and Andreä on fables, parables, emblems, and Witz. But the reflections and non-reflections begin to blur when we notice that this insistence on a difference between a current time and the bad old days is what Andreä himself questions in a short dialogue on fables that Herder translates in his volume:[59]

> A: I am often angry with the historians (*Geschichtschreiber*) because they tell the most fantastic (*fabelhaftsten*) things as truth, quite as if posterity were to have no judgment at all.

[59] "*Fabulae*" in Andreä, "*Die Fabeln*" in Herder (16:149); Herder's German may be found in the appendix to this study. In this volume Herder often consciously chooses not to distinguish linguistically the various subgenres of symbolic or allegorical texts. Other than in this dialogue which translates Andreä very closely, he does not call these little texts fables or apologues, as their original author does. He calls them emblems (*Embleme*), or he calls them *Sinnbildern* (symbols) and *Denkbildern* (thought images).

B: As great as their guilt may sometimes be, I still think that we consider much as fable that formerly was the strictest truth. For whoever considers even a little precisely how dark many times were, how immoral and horrible others were, and furthermore compares such times with happier centuries—he can almost not be astonished enough.

A: But who will believe that the power of reason of the whole human race could have gone so wholly astray that there would have been no one to find the truth, that everywhere the most inconsistent (*ungereimtesten*) opinions took its place and people felt content under the most shameful domination of errors.

B: In this regard, just look at the Papacy. It was founded on some tricks and inconsistencies, and without attention it increased to a hugeness, to an almost insuperable power so great that even now, after having been sufficiently illuminated, it does not leave off damaging and accumulating.

A: Numa, Mahomed and others have taught us how a religion, even a false one, can have great power; but nobody could persuade me that even in those times there was no one who himself resisted these swindlers and discovered their false schemes—so that at least the more sensible people did not let themselves be swindled. Meanwhile the historians (*Geschichtschreiber*) were silent about this, as if they had been hired to convey only false things to posterity, and to befuddle the simpleminded with the illusion of antiquity.

B: You are mistaken if you believe this of all of them. For even if there were some such propagators of error, nevertheless the unending weakness of human nature is everywhere so visible that many of them not only did not hide this

weakness, but even openly showed it. This would be enough to convince us, were we not far greedier for absurdities than for reason.

A: Then may we not hope that we all, as if assembled in the castle of truth, would unanimously choose only that which is the best always and throw out what here, there, and everywhere is inconsistent (*ungereimt*) and a monstrosity (*eine Misgeburt*).

B: We ought to leave that to God. To me every age appears to lie sick from its vices and errors, which then of course seem inconsistent (*ungereimt*) to the succeeding age; however, the silliness is never gotten out of the world, but only changed.

A: Oh, human monstrosity (*menschlichen Ungeheuer*) that fills the history books (*Geschichtbücher*)!

B: For my part, whenever I enter a library, I can barely control my laughter and astonishment when I perceive so many shapes and forms of monstrosities.

A: What if someone should now possess the history and deeds of the whole earth?

B: Oh, be silent! Our single, current century does things that no posterity will believe or grasp.

Andreä's original collection of dialogues which contains this dialogue is subtitled "mirror of our native inanity" (*Menippus*, title page). While Andreä's Latin title, "*Fabulae*," contains multiple meanings—the genre of fable, as well as fictitious narrative generally—Herder's German translation, informed as it is by his interest and participation in the fable debates, puts greater pressure on the genre. This has the effect of creating a gulf between the original and translation. Andreä's use of *fabula* suggests that the text fairly directly elaborates on its collection's subtitle,

"mirror of our native inanity," by perhaps playing on the adage "*de te fabula narratur* (the story is told about you)" excerpted from Horace's *Satires* (1.1.69-70).[60] Especially as the dialogue is excerpted from its original collection and stands without *Menippus*'s subtitle, Herder's title "*Die Fabeln*," suggests greater (ironic) distance between the text and the reader; Herder's German translation of the title capitalizes on the fable genre's simultaneous embrace of allegorical mirroring and fictional distance from reality. Briefly, in both versions of the dialogue two voices, an A and a B, which Herder says might be the voices in everyone's head or heart, wrestle with their dismay that historians "tell the most fantastic [*fabulossisimo* in Andreä's Latin*, fabelhafste* in Herder's German[61]] things as truth, just as if posterity were to have no judgment at all" and the voices consider that the histories found in a library might not be intentionally fable-like: "As great as [the historians'] guilt may be sometimes, I think, however, that we consider much as fable that formerly was the strictest truth. For whoever considers even a little precisely how dark many times were, how immoral and horrible others were, and furthermore compares such times with happier centuries, he can almost not be astonished enough" (16:186). Not only are our interlocutors not illustrative animals (neither are they even characters), these disembodied voices are not even talking about fables as we traditionally think of them. The fable writers are historians who are theoretically attempting to record objective truth; the idea of voluntarily *poetic* fables is missing from the dialogue. If these things that take on a fable-like hue are imaginative or creative, it is only in the sense that they're superstitious or erroneous. They are, if anything, too real. Voice A exclaims: "Oh, human monstrosity that fills history books!"

[60] See chapter 3 for a discussion of Kierkegaard's use of this phrase in *Stages on Life's Way*.

[61] Both the Latin and the German terms can mean fabulous or merely fictional, but, again, Herder's German resonates with the current debates about the fable genre more than Andreä's Latin does.

(16:187). The fable, then, is relocated from the realm of poetry to life, and in the transition, humanity is deformed until it reads as a monster.

A further anxiety-inducing problem for Herder is that his own translation is presumably a mirror of the original. For the Herder who wonders whether an improvement of the world is possible, the question is no longer of looking with relief at Andreä. In his commentary "*Ueber die vorstehenden Parabeln und die nachfolgenden Gespräche*" Herder even goes so far as to frame the question not as "how far have we come," but rather "how far have we gotten away." But the dialogue ends with the gloomy suggestion that "our singular, current century does things that no posterity will believe or grasp" (16:187). Looking at this kind of fable-as-history is to fall into the abyss of a mise en abîme. Something must be done to move away from this trap. The fable, whether looked at from the Aesopian or Aristotelian tradition of persuasion and immortal, perpetual usefulness, is essentially static in the eternal present. If it teaches anything, it teaches the same lesson now that it did then. For Herder this trap of conflating past and present is frightening: the constant reflection between past and present mocks the Enlightenment ideal of positive progress and mires the present in the errors of the past, and it presents the eerie image of self as an uncanny, simultaneously familiar and alien monster. Herder searches for a way to solidify or freeze the fable as something clearly in the past. He wants something solid that *can* be used as a point to measure distance *from*.

Just as the desire to account for Andreä's questionable literary roots appears as a cover story for Herder's own concerns, questions of history also become avenues for worrying about definitions of genre. In particular, Herder's conflation of poetic and historical terms is wrapped up in the fable debates of the period. Even partially veiled by Andreä, Herder engages in his German colleagues' wrestling match with each other and their antecedents more directly than

Hamann, wrangling over a definition of fables (and other symbolic forms of writing): What is allowed in the cast of characters? How should the requirements of narrative delight relate to the didactic purpose? How transparent should the fable's embodied ideas be?

But what seems startling in this strangest of Herder's contributions to the fable debates is Herder's implicit criticism of the hermetic nature of the aesthetic debate. This parallels Hamann's worries about aesthetics in general and Herder's anxiety about Andreä's roots: a concern about usefulness. Herder turns to Andreä's dialogue because "*Die Fabeln*" forces the issue of the limits of definition. The "passion for symbols, significant attributes, allegories, and so forth" of Andreä's era that extends, "even in[to] the field of letters and ideas" (16:161, as above)—that is, erases boundaries between literary debate and historical and moral-philosophical inquiry as well—allows Herder to problematize a question of genre. For Herder, Andreä is a good test case because his *Fabeln* are not fables. When Herder turns his attention to Andreä's cryptic stories in this volume of *Zerstreute Blätter*, his discussion centers on the extra-textual function of symbolic literature, and describes a fantasy of the death of a genre as much as a desire to define it: "Perhaps, in our world parables are nothing but the metaphorical-talk that Andreä made out of and for his time, and that may and will appear to our time only as old parables. I think I already hear and read: 'Praise God that all that no longer describes our time! How far ahead we are!' And I am happy about this and also say 'Praise God!'" (16:164).

It must, of course, be noted that Herder has introduced another term into the debate: parable, fable's near neighbor. This further blurring of the already blurry lines delineating the different subsets of symbolic literature first has the effect of simultaneously vivifying and negating the fable debates. But here, again, the introduction of this new term has the additional effect of introducing ideas that would seem antithetical to Herder's dream that, by seeing the

genre as antiquated and cut off from the present age, his contemporaries might be comforted. Instead, when Herder justifies his use of the term "parable," he does not simply allow that the parable might be a mixed genre; he alludes here to an idea of parable (as he will to poetry in his translation of Andreä's "Symbols (*Symbole*)") as a vital and even ravenous entity: "the words poetry and fables seemed too imprecise to me; the name emblem (*Denkbilder*) was too narrow…apologue, fairy tale…were totally unusable…. A parable is a metaphorical utterance, a story out of common life more to disguise and hide a lesson than to reveal it; it has thus something emblematic *in it*. Moreover, it goes in the vein of fable, and claims for itself very free steps in this vein, in which it often hides several lessons and *doesn't content itself with* the same one as does an Aesopian fable" (16:164, emphasis mine).

Herder, in the texts considered in this study, frequently comes close to personifying symbolic genres, often in terms of their eating habits. G. E. Lessing's epigraph to his "*Eine Parabel*" provides a near-contemporary antecedent for Herder's linkage of the generic term parable with notions of consumption. Lessing's epigraph—"*quae facilem ori paret bolum*"—is a quotation of an old etymologist (*Etymologista vetus*) who derives the word *parable* from "making it easy to swallow something" (7:179).[62] Herder, as we have seen above and will see more clearly below, will invert the image of the genre from something easy to swallow into something that is itself hungry. But, dealing more generally with what Herder takes from Lessing first, it is clear that the fact that Lessing's is a patently false etymology for the word has several major consequences for Herder's understanding of Baroque symbolic literature. This false etymology can be read as a somewhat conventional understanding of parable, a clever analog or

[62] Lessing, like Herder, is an Andreä enthusiast in addition to being a fable theorist; in a health-complaint-filled round of letters only a month before Lessing's death, Herder asks for help in locating some rare Andreä manuscripts ("Von J.G. Herder, 15. Januar 1781," "An J.G. Herder, 26.Januar 1781," and "Von J.G. Herder, 9. Februar 1781" in in Lachmann, 21:321, 18:365, and 21:323 respectively).

intensification of the "real" etymology—the parable is thrown next to one, making it easy to see or swallow. First, however, for both Herder and Lessing, no matter how easily one swallows the parable or what it consumes, the fact that this is a false etymology confers a kind of generic instability. The very cleverness of the false analogy holds forth a temptation to pick and choose as one pleases among various conceptions of the genre, thereby working against systematization of genres. (At the same time, the fact that the origins of the generic term are subject to speculation generally plays into Herder's anxiety that the current era is unmoored from a time when, presumably, the actual definition of the genre could be located and understood). And then, too, Lessing's etymology hints at another striking instability in that the neat parallel tracks of story and (real) life that the traditional understanding of parable posits are no longer running alongside each other; the parable, this etymology suggests, runs off its tracks, entirely bypasses the brain, and is thrown into the viscera. By emphasizing notions of consumption, the literary device of anthropomorphism moves beyond being a paintbrush in the literary toolbox and becomes a kind of tool for criticism of mere aestheticism or the drive to create a system of aesthetics.

Even leaving aside for the moment the issue of anthropomorphism, it is unclear just how transparent the parable should be and who should benefit from it: "[Andreä] gave truth…this robe of fable, not in order to idly or luxuriantly decorate truth, but much more to withdraw it from the eyes of the coarse multitude, and to protect truth from their blows" (16:162). Of course, this notion of parable as something that hides as easily as it reveals goes back to the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus explains to the disciples that the reason he speaks in parables is "because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not

been given…. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” (Matt 13:11, 13:13).

Casual notions of parable seem to promise either some sort of transcendence or some kind of sugar coating for a difficult lesson. Especially since Herder has chosen to translate a religious thinker in a clearly Judeo-Christian era, it is tempting to look to the heavens for transcendence. But despite Herder’s “Praise God,” if Herder is allowing for transcendence in the parable form, it is not the casual usage of “transcendence.” When Herder inverts the usual understanding of who does the consuming, he intimates that what is useful in the parable does not lie in a full embrace of its generic kin; what is useful lies in the apparent carnage involved in the consumption and melding: parables (Andreä’s and others) are useful if the teacher “of good taste…make[s] noticeable to his students some errors in Andreä’s texts….What is lacking, for example, in this apologue so that it isn’t a genuine fable; what is lacking in this emblem so that it isn’t a perfected symbol? How is this allegory spoiled?” (16:162). Yet again, too, we see that Herder can’t get away (and perhaps doesn’t want to get away) from his mirroring of Andreä—this mixed form of text which gathers together fragments of different genres is akin to Herder’s own project in collecting the *Zerstreute Blätter* which form and title his book.

Another consequence of Herder’s (and Lessing’s) use of etymological word play is more closely related to generic conventions. It is significant that both Herder’s and Lessing’s word play provide a visual image, turning a genre of symbolic literature into something of a symbol itself, with all of metaphorical-allegorical speech’s attendant questions of “truth value.” It builds a framework for defining genres of symbolic literature, even as it undermines its own framework with pointed clumsiness—separating “*paret bolum*” from the rest of the phrase in Lessing’s etymology, for instance, turns the notion of what a *parable* is into nonsense. More specifically,

etymological word play is for Herder a kind of *Witz*, a conceit he links to the Andreä's Baroque. *Witz* is generally a somewhat ambiguously prized quality in that the notion of cleverness in art is often morally and aesthetically suspect. But Herder takes this ambivalence towards *Witz* and binds together his ongoing concerns about the relationship between art and lived life in a strange passage in the middle of his commentary on the Andreä parables he selects for this volume. As an examination of the vogue for emblems of Andreä's era, the passage in Herder recapitulates Andreä's characteristic gesture of speaking about symbolic literature metaphorically; it appears nearly as a freestanding origin story in its own right:[63]

> *Witz* is a light, fugitive steed (*Ross*); art cannot and does not want to follow it everywhere. Witz thinks it is never able to say enough, especially where it is not allowed to speak out purely, as in political matters. Therefore, it tended to hint, to render visible the nearly incorporeal idea (*den Gedanken fast ohne Körper*), and, in turn, with this barely sketched body (*kaum angedeuteten Körper*), to paint (*hinzumalen*) new ideas in words. The great, open Poetry was therefore overcome by wit and politics, and by mysterious signs, projected images, unexplained and self-contradictory traits; art hid in emblems. (16:161)

Herder first pushes this symbolic vision of generic terms further, nearly into the realm of personification. That *Witz*, art, and even ideas have physicality is underlined in this passage. Further, *Witz*, art, and poetry have independent movement (they flee, they pursue, they hide, etc.); what might be taken at first for a fairly simple, if possibly lamentable, twist on a conventional metaphor of horse and rider (art the master and rider of the vehicle *Witz*) comes apart with Herder's insistence that not only have circumstances parted the two, but art "does not

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[63] Whether the so-called origin story should be considered a fable was a debated topic in the eighteenth century fable debates. See Lessing's *Abhandlung über die Fabel*, for example.

want to" follow *Witz*. The runaway horse starts by merely trying to usurp the role of leader and then takes on the distinctly human ability of political speech. Instead of a fable animal that symbolizes human attributes, Herder creates an animal symbol for an abstract notion that then *becomes* a thinker and a painter.

Leaving aside the specific generic considerations (of species of symbolic literature) for the moment, had Herder continued in this vein of clearly separating his contemporary age from Andreä's less fortunate age, he might be taken as shoring up his (uncertain) argument that things have been corrected and the improper priorities and unnecessary breaks have been corrected, that in Herder's contemporary era, poetry triumphs and art no longer hides. However, he sets these first two sentences in the present tense; that art *is* left behind and *Witz* is a going concern. Then Herder switches into the past tense and this sense of a divorce between art and *Witz* is itself undone by Herder's characterization of *Witz* as having been not merely a thinker and speaker, but also a painter. Moreover, it was a painter that painted with words. That it accomplished this cross-disciplinary feat (the mixing of genres—to paint with words—already points to something suspect in *Witz*'s methods, in line with *Witz*'s ability to move across species lines) seems to imply that it has consumed art's role. Significantly, the term "art" itself is momentarily replaced by "poetry," a formerly "open" form whose role has been made obsolete by *Witz*'s desire to take on all roles. When the term "art" returns, it is in a parallel clause connected by a semicolon to the clause containing "poetry." As a result of poetry's suppression, art hid in the mixed genre of emblems. The passage forces an uneasy linkage of two pairs: *Witz*-emblem and art-poetry. At the same time, the text forms a chiasmus that implies that these pairs are neither stable within themselves nor exactly opposed to each other. While the passage's initial claim is that art cannot

and does not pursue *Witz*, poetry is not only caught by emblem, but having been overcome, art elects (the verb *sich verbergen* is active and reflexive) to hide itself within the emblem.

This interplay of past and present, of ambivalence about the role of emblem and *Witz*, is itself an act of simultaneous consumption of sources and a distancing from them.

Herder's destructive Poetry. Most notably, it seems to be a response to a small "parable" that Herder translates as "Symbols." Because its wordplay is so complex and dense, I include Herder's version of the short text in its entirety here. (Herder's German text can be found in the appendix to this study.):

> Painted (*gemahlte*) Poetry was for the most part tolerated in former times (*ehe**mals***) in Christendom, and her acuity was half praised, but she suddenly had to—I don't know why—wander among the Scythians. There she was in great danger.
>
> As is well known, she loves salt and only the purest salt. The Scythians, however, need no salt, and were by nature the archenemy of Painting (*mahlenden*) Poetry.
>
> If Poetry wanted to paint (*mahlen*) an eclipse of the sun or moon, or to paint foggy stars, or at least paint something: toothless lions, lazy bears, aimless plow animals, lame horses, emaciated deer, mangy wolves, stupid foxes, eagles without feathers, peacocks without tails, hoarse roosters, winged turtles, rusty crowns, withered wreaths, stained lilies, rotten fruit, hacked-down tree trunks, crumbling beams, crumbling crosses, decaying towers, dull swords, ripped banners, extinguished

> torches, moldy bread, purses full of holes—all were incriminating and suspicious.
>
> "Thank heavens," shouted Painting (*mahlende*) Poetry in a rage at last, "that the freedom of men was secured in One Way, through *thoughts* (*Gedanken*). Even among the Scythians, it is at least permitted to think (*Denken*) what one is not allowed to do, or tell, or picture (*bilden*), or paint (*mahlen*)."

Herder's commentary on symbolic literature can be read as a kind of gloss on this parable. Herder's translation of "Symbols" shares common terrain with his short narrative about *Witz* and art discussed above: Poetry appears as a character in exile; fable conventions appear strangely altered; the atmosphere of the texts, despite what we might call plot-level references to motion, is static and uselessly emblematic.

As such, Andreä's text occupies an odd place in the context of Herder's thought: that the text anticipates Herder's (and his contemporaries') concerns allows Herder to hold Andreä up as an overlooked talent who somehow overcame the (artistic) limitations of his own age; meanwhile, that it is such a direct reflection of Herder's thoughts makes doubtful the hope for progress. While the project of translation is to present the "old Andreä" without alteration and as precisely that—old—Herder is caught in a tacit acknowledgment that it might still be, as Andreä explicitly subtitled his dialogue on fables and Herder refused to do in his translation, a "mirror of our native inanity." In the interrelation between Herder's reflections *on* the symbolic literature and the reflections *in* this text called "Symbols," Herder's struggle to make the double movement of claiming and disclaiming this Baroque author comes into focus. Most clearly, this occurs

through the back-door entrance of the term that is prominent in Herder but does not explicitly occur in “Symbols”: *Witz*.

Witz is extremely prominent here, just not as an autonomous character. It is in the wordplay that links art, destruction, eating, and time. In eighteenth-century German, the words for painting (*mahlen*, now spelled *malen*), grinding (*mahlen*), a meal (*Mahl*), and time (*mal*) could be linked even more closely by orthography than they would be now; what are now just homophones could then be homographs as well, creating stronger (if just as ambiguous) ties between Herder’s terms. Even taking the first two *mahl*-terms without their context (although they are the most obviously featured meanings in the text), the created contranym encapsulates the simultaneously constructive (painting and *poesis*—poetry) and destructive (grinding) impulses that Herder struggles with throughout his reflections on Andreä.[64] Here are the “mysterious signs, projected images, unexplained and self-contradictory traits” that Herder says overcame poetry (16:161, quoted above).

Certainly, the first *mahl*-word of “Symbols” is clearly about an art form: it is “painted poetry (*die gemahlte Poesie*)” who wanders among the Scythians. This, of course, recalls Lessing’s long meditation on the relationship between visual art and poetry, and I would like to take a short detour to consider some issues that Herder responds to from Lessing's *Laokoon*. In this work, the dictum *ut pictura poesis* is a matter of central concern. But the problem is not an audit of whether or not it is sensible to conflate visual and poetic arts; Lessing admits both the simple fact of shared familial traits across the arts as well as, more intriguingly for this study, a certain bleeding from the visual arts into poetry within particularly image- and metaphor-rich literary works. Instead, the worry is that such a truism too easily blurs the distinction between the

[64] The term *contranym* refers to a word that has opposite definitions simultaneously.

two art forms and, consequently, doesn't encourage a thoughtful or careful accounting of the aesthetic value of either. Herder's text clearly engages these issues, but his approach to these Lessing-inspired concerns is doubly oblique. First, in defining his text as translation, he allows for a particularly disorienting type of incomplete ventriloquism: is he merely the mouthpiece for the older author, or is it Andreä who is in fact that puppet. (As is quite apparent already, it seems quite convenient that Herder's translation can engage in such German wordplay.) Second, by virtue of the project's allegorical format, Herder adds another dimension to the debate about the relative merits of visual and literary arts by bringing in a disturbing physicality. Assigned anthropomorphic properties, here poetry (or Poetry) is not the benign (and even victorious) presence it was in Lessing. She is given a body of a sort that (whether or not allegorically) functions in the sometimes unpleasant ways that "real" bodies function.

And for Lessing, the body has a particular place in the visual-art-versus-poetry debate. As laid out in the introduction to this study, beauty as a supreme value in visual art shares definitional aspects with symmetry, particularly in its consideration of the ratio of parts to whole: "Bodily beauty (*körperliche Schönheit*) arises from the predominant effect of many parts which are seen at once" (4:148, §XX). What is striking here is the emphasis on bodily beauty through the apprehension of a cohesive, presumably symmetrical, whole instead of the potentially fragmentary heterogeneity of component parts. Herder, through Andreä, responds to this principle of unity out of multiplicity by deforming bodies. Simultaneously with the trope of disfigurement, like Hamann, he blurs disciplinary lines—here between poetry and painting—that Lessing draws. Lessing creates an opposition between bodies (*Körper*), which are the "real objects (*Gegenstände*) of painting (*Malerey*)" (4.94, §XVI), and actions (*Handlungen*), which are the domain of poetry; Herder, again, makes poetry a (maimed and maiming) painter. Further, as

does Hamann's, Herder's act of giving abstract concepts physical bodies pushes towards *and* pulls the story away from its supposed function of symbolic representation.

Herder riffs on Lessing's questions of artistic primacy while linking these questions to his larger interest in Andreä by packing a great deal of German wordplay into his translation, emphasizing the unstable position that symbolic literature occupies between disciplines (and even levels of reality). I would like to start here with the word *mahlen*, which appears in the very first phrase of the text with the meaning of *to paint* ("Painted poetry (*Die gemahlte Poesie*)." Certainly, the text does metaphorically "paint" the strange fable or emblem images; there is, after all, something very painterly in the heaping of adjectives and descriptors: "toothless lions, lazy bears, aimless plow animals, lame horses, emaciated deer, mangy wolves, stupid foxes, eagles without feathers, peacocks without tails, hoarse roosters, winged turtles, rusty crowns, withered wreaths, stained lilies, rotten fruit, hacked-down tree trunks, crumbling beams, crumbling crosses, decaying towers, dull swords, ripped banners, extinguished torches, moldy bread, purses full of holes" (16:144). But poetry, imagined as a character within the text rather than the transparent act that creates the text, gains an active body and loses the authority of speech. She *wants* to paint, and in so doing, the act of painting, as opposed to the act of writing, becomes the metaphor for artistic creation.[65] But the emblematic status of the imagery creates complications. Not only are these grotesque renderings of traditional emblematic images, they are missing an essential component: an emblem requires both picture and poetry. On the one hand, it is as if the poetic component of an emblem (i.e., *subscriptio* and motto) were attempting to exceed its boundaries and also take over the *pictura* portion of the emblem. But, oddly, what is missing is poetry's traditional interpretive role in the emblem. To be sure, enigma is a part of the baroque

[65] This is particularly striking in that it is poetry rather than painting whose etymological roots (poesis) point to a more generalized notion of creation.

emblem, but Poetry's refusal to *speak* in addition to painting creates emblems with no easily legible meaning. This back and forth about the properties and value of poetry and painting in Herder and Andreä's text are made apparent by the experiment of embodying poetry. Because of the metaleptic collapse of poetry as an act into Poetry as a character, the art form is made concrete enough to dissect. And the results of mapping the expectations of a body's functioning onto an art form suggest Herder's particular concerns about the limitations of art. Discomfitingly, Poetry decomposes as much as it composes when poetry takes on bodily form.

But there is an additional complication: in this first instance of *mahlen*, art is not (actively) painting; rather it is (passively) painted. In the four short paragraphs that make up the whole of Andreä's short parable, there is a kind of progression from passivity to activeness in the painting verbs in the text, moving from the most perverse and alien ("painted poetry") to more familiar ground ("painting poetry (*die mahlende Dichtkunst*)"). But the points along the way are discontinuous in a manner that speaks to Herder's reading of Andreä's parable. The movement between the first paragraph and second at first seems to jump from one end of the spectrum to the other; the salt-loving Poetry of the second paragraph goes immediately from painted to painting. But then the text retreats. When the text does move on to more familiar ground with the pileup of potentially paintable symbolic imagery in the third paragraph, poetry's painting is presented with a double dose of equivocation: "Poetry wanted to paint an eclipse of the sun or moon, wanted to paint foggy stars, or at least paint something" (*Mochte sie eine Sonnen- oder Mondfinsterniss, mochte sie Nebelsterne, oder irgen sonst etwas mahlen*). The action of painting is paired with a modal verb, *mögen*—here, to want to do something—that, in its modality, serves to highlight the fact that poetry is not doing the painting. And, before the text launches into the

emblem/fable images, the initial things poetry wants to paint (eclipses, foggy stars) are of darkness (or at least indistinctness) covering sources of light, the absence of clear images.

The final paragraph of the text completes the transformation of a "painted poetry," through a poetry that wanted to paint, to a "painting poetry." Significantly, this final paragraph of the text is the only point at which the formerly mute figure of Poetry speaks: "Thank heavens," shouted Painting Poetry (*mahlende Dichtkunst*) in a rage at last, "that the freedom of men was secured in One Way, through *thoughts* (*Gedanken*). Even among the Scythians, it is at least permitted to think (*Denken*) what one is not allowed to do, or tell (*reden*), or picture (*bilden*), or paint (*mahlen*)." However, when poetry does speak, it is to deny the possibility of both verbal and pictorial creation. By the final paragraph, too, the name of poetry has changed from *Poesie* to *Dichtkunst*. There is an apparent correlation to the increasing inability of poetry to do some kind of artistic job, but as in Herder's ambiguously motivated movement from term to term (*Witz* to emblem, art to poetry as above), the nature of the correlation is not obvious. Insofar as it can be defined, the movement between terms in Herder's origin story is from the more general (*Witz*, art) to the more specific (emblem, poetry). On the etymological level here, too, the movement might be described as going from the more generalized creative act (*poesis*) to a narrower reading of composition (*dichten*). But this movement might just as well be described as a going from a more "universal" term to a more specifically German term. In inverse relation to Herder's decision not to translate Andreä's subtitle for his collection of dialogues containing the fable dialogue—"mirror for our native inanity"—when literally making the dialogue legible for what would then be "our native" German reading public, Herder here linguistically brings the mirror

of poetic impossibility closer to his compatriots.[66] But there are other ways of reading this name change in the light of Herder's interest in wordplay. Separating the German compound into the component parts "*dicht*" and "*Kunst*" might afford a sense of a heavy, dense, closed, or (slightly more hopefully) imminent (*dicht*) form of art (*Kunst*). This, in Herder's parallel narrative is what happens to the (formerly) "open Poetry" once overcome by *Witz*, politics, and symbols. The criticism implicit in Herder's reading of Andreä requires a full accounting of details; it goes further than Lessing's theories of aesthetics in this insistence on avoiding both too easy conflation into generalized categories, but—as is the direction of all the authors my study—is honest enough to stop short of a new proposed system.

Then, how to conceive of the more emblematic or fable images? Given the ever-decreasing likelihood that these images are physically representable, it would seem that these are thought-images, literally "*Denk-bilder*."[67] The term seems acceptable, except that it is unbearably circular: in his commentary on his selection of Andreä's parables and dialogues, when Herder introduces the term "*Denkbilder*" to characterize Andreä's writing, he parenthetically appends "*Embleme*" to the term (160). As in the uneasy replacement of terminology so prevalent in Herder, the terms both are and are not synonyms.

The contranymic *mahlen*-constellation of painting, grinding, and eating does a similar shifting dance. On a very literal level, the (mostly—see below for discussion of the exception) ravaged adjectives applied to the images, beginning with the obscured light of the heavenly bodies through the decrepit or contrary-to-character animals (e.g., "stupid foxes," "peacocks without tails") to the damaged objects (e.g.,"withered wreaths," "purses full of holes"), poetry is

[66] Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Herder calls his selection of Andreä's dialogues in this volume of *Zerstreute Blätter* "*Einige vaterländische Gespräche*"—"Some patriotic Dialogues"
[67] The last two chapters of this study contain discussions of the analogous term *thought experiment* (*Gedankenexperiment* in German, popularized by Ernst Mach; *Tankeexperiment* in Danish) in the works of Kierkegaard and Henry James.

as much a grinder as a creator of images. This is, as noted above, the characteristic that Herder claims to value in Andreä: Andreä (as is Poetry) is best used as a subject for dissection; the texts are useful as examples of degenerate literature. The teacher "of good taste…make[s] noticeable to his students some errors in Andreä's texts….What is lacking, for example, in this apologue so that it isn't a genuine fable; what is lacking in this emblem so that it isn't a perfected symbol? How is this allegory spoiled?" (162). But this is not the whole story; Herder adds a third, potentially mediating term. The act of destruction is paired with consumption even within the narrow framework of the place of *mahl-* words in this text. If destruction and creation are polar opposites within the homographic wordplay in "Symbols," the concept of consumption might be seen as occupying some kind of intermediate step between the two, leaving open the possibility that the *dicht* of *Dichtkunst* could suggest imminence.

If the possibility is left open that Poetry's painting/grinding of images provides a kind of nourishment (*Mahl*, meal) for it, we run up against a few difficulties. One is simply that this looks rather unpleasantly like autoconsumption. The other is that Poetry lacks something it loves, namely salt. Salt has long been metaphorically associated with irony (in German "*das Salz der Ironie*"), and, as such, extends to the notion of *Witz.* But, again Herder's ambivalence toward the form of Andreä's text asserts itself. Herder's origin story for the emblem posits an opposition between *Witz* and art-poetry. First art neither can nor wants to follow *Witz* (in its metaphorical-emblematic animal guise as a horse), then *Witz* appears as the conquering enemy. In "Symbols," Poetry desires precisely that which Herder will say forces art into hiding within the degenerate emblem. In other words, Poetry desires what injures it. Salt is, in its own right, simultaneously a preservative and enlivener of nourishment and a destructive element. Even as it adds ironic spice and distance to the parable, it further corrodes and destroys that which is already wounded. This

applies not only to the broken images within "Symbols" (salt's presence could be as responsible for the "rusty crowns" as lack of it could contribute to the "moldy bread"), but also to Poetry (whose consumption of emblem images is already a dubious good for Herder). And, as Herder suggests in another appreciation of Andreä's work, salt's destructive-nutritive reach extends further, to touch the author as well:[68] "Perhaps it is for various readers as it is for me, that they are saddened by many of [Andreä's] finely shaped and spice-rich conversations. Why did heaven give us such a tragic gift—to feel so vividly and heartily the evil of our time, as did our author—only for experience to teach Andreä to nearly despair of all progress….[H]is salt…simply opened his own wounds anew" ("*Nachwort*" to *Zerstreute Blätter* vol 6, 16:298). Herder makes his Andreä a secular-artistic stand-in for a Christ figure, parallel to the art-poetry of his own emblem origin story, martyred by *Witz* and history. Given this conflation of the secular and religious here, it is worth noting that salt, via the story of Lot's wife, also has something to say about the destructive power of looking back. When, in Genesis, Lot's wife looks back at the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah, she loses her human form and becomes a mere salt pillar which, being grindable and dissolvable, cannot even act as a physical warning and a monument to folly, except perhaps as a parodic version of a monument.

Yet, what seems peculiarly optimistic about the funerary ambition that Herder has for Andreä is in a particular grinding that underlies, occupies, and supersedes the text of "Symbols." In the final paragraph of the text, Poetry holds out the insuperability of *Gedanken/Denken* (thoughts/thinking) as an attenuated gesture of hopefulness: "the freedom of men was secured in One Way, through *thoughts* (*Gedanken*). Even among the Scythians, it is at least permitted to think (*Denken*) what one is not allowed to do, or tell, or picture (*bilden*), or paint (*mahlen*)."

[68] Note that Andreä's sometime pseudonym was "Der Mürbe" (the Rotten One), which would suggest a decline beyond redemption.

(Thought even takes on a mild spiritual dimension as the "*dank*" of "*Gedanken*" echoes Poetry's initial utterance, "*Dank dem Himmel* (Thank heaven!)" earlier in the paragraph.) It is here that *Denken* and *mahlen* implicitly elide. While in Herder's own origin story for the emblem, *Witz*'s concession to politics (and, by extension, history) of rendering a formerly tangible idea (*Gedanke*) "nearly incorporeal (*fast ohne Körper*)" reads fairly straightforwardly as a decline, the wordplay of Andreä's text implicitly builds through the grinding process. With the destruction of the physical fable or emblem images—*Denkbilder*—through *mahlen*, thought (*Denken*) endures and the *Bilder* (associated with metaphor as well as education) fall away. A monument, a *Denkmal*, a memorial is formed. This monument, too, wavers between its conventional presence (as a physical object) and the fact that the physical marker is significant only because it functions as a *vehicle* for thoughts or ideas.

The winged turtle of "Symbols": a metaphorical figure in excess. This complex and equivocal optimism, accessible only if one searches for it, is also found buried in the midst of the degenerate images poetry would like to paint. Just as in Herder's own emblem story, art-poetry is just hiding within the emblem form rather than dead, here is hidden an image of a creature who is *more* than what it should be rather than less: "winged turtles."[69] The image, taken by itself, ties together various self-contradictory "translations." One refers to a fairly common emblem image taken from Plutarch's *Moralia* and other classical sources:[70]

[69] I am grateful to an audience member at the MLA panel on fable literature where I presented an early version of this paper for pointing this out to me. Discussion of this point during the post-panel discussion, particularly the contributions of David Richter, was extremely helpful for this study.

[70] The image and text reproduced here are taken from Jean LeFevre's 1536 French edition of Alciato's *Emblematum Liber* (translated as *Livret des Emblemes*), available on the internet through the Glasgow University Emblem Website.

The bulk of the image is fairly standard in the mythological vocabulary: Venus stands naked with the doves (commonly perceived as particularly lusty birds) that are sacred to her. A simple statement of the enigma of the emblem might be: what ties together the sexually charged image and the diametrically opposed motto ("A woman's reputation, not her beauty, should be known to the world")? The *subscriptio* asks an even more specific question, picking out as peculiar the part of the image that is not iconographically associated with Venus: "Kindly Venus, what form is this, what does that tortoise mean, on which, o goddess, your soft feet rest?"[71] The turtle is the key. Venus answers that the turtle, which is silent and is always at home (in its shell) is a warning that "Girls should stay at home and keep silence, and so he [Phidias] put such symbols (*signa*) under my feet." Read in this light, Andreä's turtles fit into his list of damaged beasts despite the fact that their deformation is by way of addition instead of subtraction: by taking on an uncharacteristic body part native to Venus' doves, they are neither bird nor reptile, and—as

[71] Translations are taken from the French Emblems at the Glasgow University website. The Latin motto is: *Mulieris famam non formam vulgatam esse oportere*. The *subcriptio* in full reads: "Alma Venus quae nam haec facies, quid denotat illa / Testudo, molli quam pede diva premis? / Me sic effinxit Phidias, sexumque referri / Foemineum, nostra iussit ab effigie, / Quodque manere doni, & tacitas decet esse puellas, / Supposuit pedibus talia signa meis"

potentially flying, cooing beasts—can no longer fulfill their symbolic function of reminding the reader of the emblem to "stay at home and keep silence."

But the possibility that these winged turtles get their wings from proximity to Venus' birds also points to a contrary interpretation. The conflation of turtles and doves makes for a "turtledove." The turtledove, often referred to by the contraction "turtle," is a favorite symbol of constancy in love of the Renaissance and beyond; see, for example, Shakespeare's "The Phoenix and the Turtle." Read in this light, the turtle hidden in the pileup of damaged emblems is not an unholy compound at all, but a description of a perfectly whole animal. It is perfect, too, in that as a dove, it cannot get away from the Christian mythological symbolism that links it to the Holy Spirit: "I could not and wished not to remove the honest Christian heart from the good Andreä" (16:165).

Reading this emblem through Andreä—in fact, applying the emblem to Andreä—Herder adds a further level. The turtle which is trod upon underfoot is given wings to fly. In a characteristic double movement, Herder holds Andreä up as an example in order to use him as a stepping stone for the present age; or, he disparages the emblem in order to allow parables to consume it. Or, with characteristic ambiguity about priority, this emblem becomes a parable about art and Andreä. If *Witz* and history force art into hiding, it has as much a portion of the force of Christ's illusory death—as a portion of Herder's Enlightenment-era suspicion of a too-literal reading of that which is metaphorical. Herder chooses a quasi-natural image to describe his hope and his patience: "If a child wants to awaken the ensconced worm too early from its cocoon (*Grabe*, literally "grave"), before the spring sun, it harms it and makes its return to life difficult or impossible. Thus we lie, thus we ripen in the lap of time" (16:167). Herder may substitute his own literary-secular metaphors for Andreä's less ambiguously Christian interests

(sometimes using Andreä himself as a metaphor), but it remains that for Herder, Andreä's symbolic literature offers a kind of redemptive equivocation. In its clear flaws and internal contradictions, in the way that it reflects and does not reflect—in the way that it can both be bound securely to the past (and an ostensibly dead author) and refuses to do so—that which is hidden is preserved. What is immediately read as puzzlement about the value of work that is merely derived "partly from…great poets' works and partly from the paintings (*Gemählden*) of many great artists" and a perfunctory dismissal of the question of the value of emblems—"Why? The history of this time and this taste (*Geschmack*) remains largely in the dark"—is also revealed to be its opposite.

Hamann and Herder's Winged Words

Herder's suggestive, though thoroughly ambivalent, allusion to the redemptive possibilities afforded by Andreä's turtles recalls a passage that appears early in Hamann's *Aesthetica in Nuce*:

> Poetry is the mother-tongue of the human race, as the garden is older than the ploughed field; painting, than writing; song, than declamation; parables, than logical deduction (*Gleichnisse,—als Schlüsse*); barter, than commerce. A deeper sleep was the repose of our most distant ancestors, and their movement was a frenzied dance. Seven days they would sit in the silence of thought or wonder;—and would open their mouths—to winged sentences (*geflügelten Sprüche*).[72]

[72] This passage, in Hamann's original, is considerably more dash-heavy than the Haynes translation given here.

As does Herder's complicated ventriloquism through Andreä, Hamann's gloss on Horace ties together and cuts apart monumental categories of creation and destruction in the same breath as disciplinary divisions. In particular, I would like to concentrate on the finale of the quoted paragraph above in concluding this chapter. Hamann's allusion to "winged sentences" works through the metaleptic conflation of word and physical image. Hamann, as Herder does with his "turtles with wings,"[73] deploys the phrase as a stealth image of excess within the context (discussed above) of the dismemberment of the natural symmetry of the poetic body and poetic text. What is it about wings that is particularly conducive to this sort of self-undermining grafting of the physical and the abstract?

The phrase *winged words* (generally rendered as *geflügelte Worte* in German) is an idiom that dates back to archaic Greek (*epea pteroenta*) and is quite prevalent in Homer.[74] Although there is some debate as to whether the phrase is evocative of the flight of birds or that of arrows, much of the classics literature (Parry, etc.) considers the oft-repeated phrase "winged words" a frozen metaphor indicative of aspects of the oral tradition rather than an evocative image in and of itself.[75] For Parry and his followers, the phrase "winged words" is a set phrase that comes to mean "and he said"; it is related to direct speech—speech that escapes like a bird through the "barrier of the teeth" *or* hits its mark as would an arrow. The phrase was known both through Voβ's translation of Homer, but also through Klopstock's use of the phrase in his *Der Messias*

[73] I am told by Joshua Wilner that a flying turtles appears in the *Love Hina* manga series. Perhaps this image also recalls the seemingly jet-powered monster, Gamera, who was created as a rival for Godzilla. Windows 7 has, as a possible wallpaper, an image of a flying turtle (without additional wings) carrying a fantasy world on its back.
[74] John Miles Foley (*Traditional Oral Epic*) cites 121 incidences in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.
[75] See, for instance, Parry's essay, "About Winged Words" (Parry, 414-418). Steve Reece recently makes the tantalizing suggestion that this phrase and a phrase that looks to be its opposite, *apteros muthos*, no longer carry contrary meaning, but have become synonymous in their evocation of speech in Homer.

(which predates Voβ).[76] This history has intriguing consequences that underpin this discussion of Hamann's apparently casual use of the phrase as well as Herder and Andreä's emphasis-by-anomaly on a winged metaphor. The first is the aspect of orality: the set, repeated phrase *winged words* (*epea pteroenta*) plays the neutral role of quotation marks rather than acting as more specific description of the manner of speech.[77] Given that the acts of allusion and appropriation common to Herder and Hamann's text are somewhat uncertainly marked as neither full quotation/translation, nor wholly original coinage, the set phrase gains a further dimension in this context. Quotation and translation have a peculiar power in Hamann and Herder—the two authors' patchwork, rhapsodic style implicitly and explicitly requires and elevates the dismemberment of systems beyond the creative/constructive/categorizing impulse.

However, for Hamann, the phrase is not merely a formulaic expression; it is as strange and vital as is Herder's winged turtles. In discussing the common trope of the Divine (first) Word (directly following on Hamann's "winged words" reference), Hamann places special emphasis on the relationship between words and images: "The senses and passions speak and understand nothing but images" (63). Hamann's sense here places metaphor in a particular light—not only do inarticulate or passive faculties ("senses and passions") have the capacity for understanding, they *speak* images. Imagery does not follow the causal chain of logical association that is usually taken for granted. For Hamann, this speech of the "most distant ancestors" is distinctly physical in its nature. "Speak that I may see you," he goes on (in another act of appropriation).[78] The frozen metaphor of "winged words" is thawed and reexamined as something beyond metaphor, as an active, nearly literal, almost physical presence.

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[76] See Büchmann, *Geflügelte Worte*. See also Christoph Gutknecht: *Lauter spitze Zungen: geflügelte Worte und ihre Geschichte* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1996).

[77] Orality here refers only to the characters' direct speech; Hamann and Herder and their contemporaries would not have had the benefit of modern scholarship in conceiving of the poetry of antiquity as orally transmitted.

[78] Erasmus, *Apophthegmata* 3.70.

But just as interestingly, Hamann's phrasing is not the more common formulation "geflügelte Worte." For Hamann, it is "Sprüche" that are winged. *Sprüche*, which has been variously translated as *oracles* or *sentences* (Haynes) in English language editions of *Aesthetica in nuce*, is itself slightly "off." It is in the ghostly residue of the "real" dead metaphor that Hamann's text arises. Only by alluding to what has been lost does Hamann's imagery simultaneously gain power and suggest its impossibility.

Chapter 2: The Broken Languages of *Fear and Trembling*

This chapter takes as its starting point Kierkegaard's elaboration on specific images of bodily mutilation from Hamann and Herder. Examination of the content of these images and their placement in Kierkegaard's text will allow entrance into some often overlooked aspects of one of Kierkegaard's most famous works, *Fear and Trembling*. The particulars of Kierkegaard's ambiguous metaphors and analogies—moreover, his use of metaphors and analogies to delineate issues of literary/philosophical ambiguity—will also serve as an introduction to the examination of figures of bodily asymmetry in the chapter that follows.

From one perspective, the main thrust of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* is quite easy to summarize: as even the most casual reader might determine, it is about Abraham and faith. Or, a bit more specifically, it is centered on the impossibility of articulating an understanding of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac at God's command. However, one of the stranger things about reading Kierkegaard's book, as evidenced by much of the criticism that has followed it, is that the text itself makes it uncommonly difficult to comment on what is actually in it. The difficulty is immediately signaled by the structure of the text. It is so buffered and bookended by paratextual materials (title, subtitle, pseudonymous author, epigraph, numerous prefaces, epilogue) that the proportions of the text become quite peculiar: the Princeton edition has 53 pages of paratext to 65 pages of the three main *problemata* that (more) directly address the book’s core questions. And the surprisingly equal weight of paratext to main text throws into question the notion of what is "main" and what is either not in the text or peripheral to the text.

To refine the traditional encapsulation of *Fear and Trembling* further, it is a meditation on the ways that writing *cannot* talk about faith. On the one hand, while this description might

easily serve to summarize any number of Kierkegaard's texts, to say such a thing about *Fear and Trembling* in particular is neither overly simplistic nor thuddingly obvious; in ways unique to this text, Kierkegaard makes his interest in showing where intellectual, philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic inquiry into faith falls short an explicitly stated, main point sustained through form and content of the book.[79] Certainly, Kierkegaard's text is structured to lead a thoughtful reader to what is not in the text proper. Beyond the hesitation to enter into the main *problemata* that the superabundance of paratext suggests, the text warns against its own contents from the beginning—and frequently—by riffing on the ambiguous name "de Silentio" (of or down from silence—more on this below) of its pseudonymous author and narrator,[80] a narrator who says—at the end of the text, no less—that the previous discussion is meant as "an obstacle (*at støde an*),[81] not as if Abraham could thereby become more comprehensible, but in order that the incomprehensibility could become more salient (*desultorisk*)"[82] (112). The narrator's argument is

[79] The clash within *Fear and Trembling* is traditionally defined as the ethical vs. the religious. Because the ethical seems often to correspond to the universal or general within the text, a correspondence between the articulable and the ethical and the inexpressible/the religious follows. This is a point clearly defined in much Kierkegaard scholarship, most starkly in the writings of critics who approach Kierkegaard from a distinctly religious perspective. See, for example, the work of the prolific Kierkegaard scholar C. Stephen Evans. In his *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations*, Evans's chapter on *Fear and Trembling* is largely exclusively defined in terms of the ethical and religious: "It is not primarily a book about ethics but a book about faith" (32), "*Fear and Trembling* is not primarily about ethics at all; it is about faith" (44), "It is a book about religious faith, not ethics" (60), and so on. While this has long been a productive line of thought, I am concerned that this dichotomous, polarizing reading of ethics and faith largely ignores the important role that aesthetics—which is often quite explicitly literary—plays in the text. I follow critics such as Peter Fenves, who is interested in the text itself and how Kierkegaard's writing itself functions as a commentary on the importance of the aesthetic and the literary, both in the ethics/religious conflict, and as its own category of meaning.
[80] For this discussion I will be using the terms "pseudonymous author" and "narrator" interchangeably. That an author—even a pseudonymous one—and narrator may be distinct creations is an important theoretical possibility, but not one that will be explored in depth in this chapter. For work on the pseudonyms, the forthcoming vol. 17 of the Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms* will likely be an invaluable resource. Most Kierkegaard scholars necessarily have something to say about the pseudonyms. Among those who have written more extensively on the subject, see Jolita Pons, *Stealing a Gift: Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms and the Bible*; John W. Elrod, "The Self in Kierkegaard's Pseudonyms"; and Alasdair McKinnon, "Kierkegaard and His Pseudonyms: A Preliminary Report."
[81] *An støde an* is more literally "to give offense."
[82] *Desultorisk* is a loan word, cognate with *desultory*, jumping from one point to another, which I would argue plays into Kierkegaard's strategy of fragmenting understanding within the text. Howard Hong and Edna Hong's translation, *salient*, also comes from the verb *salire*, and also has the sense of jumping (out), but I would argue that

that Abraham's determination to sacrifice Isaac eludes not only the narrator's own understanding, but ethical understanding in general, and as such, can only be approached indirectly and unsatisfactorily through analogy to ethical and/or aesthetic situations. The *real* goal of the text, therefore, lies outside the purview of the text.

But, while the text's concern with what cannot be said is a complex, much explored, and very important problem, I argue that a reading of the text that prioritizes what is *not* said over what *is* said is a trifle perverse. As I say above, Kierkegaard's prose makes it easy (perhaps too easy) to forget the other side of the coin: that this text is also interested in what *can* be said, or what it *is* saying. The very notion of interpreting the biblical story is the project of the text. In other words, one need not read the text only negatively, as a negation of itself. Reading it as an exploration of the limits of a text is also necessarily an exploration of textual—especially literary—interpretation. The examination of the invisible, unspeakable in faith is also an examination of the visible and articulable in interpretive methodology.

Kierkegaard’s strategy of alternately emphasizing and denying its aesthetic and literary bent creates a text full of vacillation, contradiction, and doubleness. *Fear and Trembling* is, as it is subtitled, a "Dialectical Lyric"—a genre marker that marries (and even slightly subordinates) philosophy to literary form—a eulogy for Abraham, who "did not need a eulogy" (22), written by a pseudonym who alternately claims to be and denies being both poet and philosopher. The text enacts the struggle between the desire for a definitive, logical, systematic philosophy of faith, and a celebration of the fragmentation and proliferation such an attempt creates.

The methodology of the text can seem like trickery at its farthest extreme if one is looking for a univocal, straightforward reading. Not only is it interested in divine temptation

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the sense of *salient* as prominent, noticeable, important loses some of the force of the deferral of clarifying the “incomprehensibility” that is in Kierkegaard’s choice of *desultorisk*.

(*fristelse*), it acts as a bait and switch operation in its structural strategy—albeit, again, one in which there is deliberate confusion built in as to what is promised and what is mere lure. Its narrator/author ostensibly seeks to understand (or find a way to bear, which may be a different thing) the story of God's temptation of Abraham, which begins with the inhumanly long period of waiting for a child and culminates in the demanded sacrifice on Mount Moriah. At the same time, despite this singular and clearly stated central preoccupation, the text, like the God depicted in the peculiar *language* of its central story (the moment of sacrifice), consistently engages in delay and substitution. Again, to take *Fear and Trembling* to its logical conclusion as a book that does not do what it presumably sets out to do (to explain Abraham in a satisfactory—understandable—way), would be to mark the whole of the text as a failure. On one level, this holds true: it would be as perverse to deny the common understanding that Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms hold faith to be higher than aesthetics or ethics. But on the other hand, to deny the whole of the text makes little sense. In reading this tricky text, one must constantly perform a characteristically Kierkegaardian double movement: one must take the text at its word (as a failure) and look beyond it, while also heeding its constant appeal to slow down and pay attention.[83] The reader must be on his or her guard against what Kierkegaard's narrator laments as the peculiar illness of the modern age, the urge to "go further (*gaaer videre*)", while simultaneously acknowledging that getting mired in the narrator's incomprehension expressed through aesthetic-literary story-spinning is also a temptation. In fact, this peculiar and repeated expression *gaae videre* is a kind of self-contained Danish-Latin pun: it translates in Danish as to go (*gaae*) further (*videre*), but also to go see (*video, videre*). The pun puts Kierkegaard's readers

[83] Nickolas Pappas has drawn my attention to a parallel in Kierkegaard's strategy and Wittgenstein's ladder: "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them - as steps - to climb beyond them. He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it" (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 6.54).

on the alert. It demands of its reader both attentiveness to the polysemy of the text as a whole (and, in fact, I will argue that a particularly shocking piece of wordplay undergirds the whole of Kierkegaard's text), and equally demands that the reader see that such polysemy points beyond itself and outside of the text. In fact, Kierkegaard originally had an epigraph taken from a Hamann letter appended to the main (*Problemata*) section of the text that quite clearly stood as a warning about the kind of reading required for this text:[84]

> A layman and unbeliever can explain my manner of writing in no other way than as nonsense (*Unsinn*), since I express myself in various tongues (*mancherley Zungen*) and speak the language of sophists, of puns (*Wortspiele*), of Cretans and Arabians, of whites and Moors and Creoles, and babble (*schwatze*) a confusion of criticism, mythology, rebus, and axioms, and argue now in a human way (*kat' anthrōpon*) and now in an extraordinary way (*kat' exokhēn*). (249-50)

The Epigraphs of *Fear and Trembling*

This is, in a sense, a text that is haunted by stories and parts of stories not told. This pile up begins in the epigraph. An epigraph, even a "normative" one not associated with Kierkegaard's idiosyncrasies, is a fragmentary and ambiguous part of the text it is appended to. As an allographic quotation—one borrowed from an author other than the writer of the current text—it exists as an excerpt, cut off from its original context. If an original context for the epigraphic fragment exists (that is, the epigraph is not invented by the current author) and known

[84] The letter is to J.G. Lindner, dated 18 August 1759. The epigraph is quoted in Hamann's German (rather than translated into Danish), playing on the *mancherley Zungen* in Hamann and echoing the narrator's concern with language (and languages) that occurs throughout *Fear and Trembling*.

(or knowable) it carries with it the parts of the text that are not used as the epigraph in phantom form. The actual epigraph may be, in this way, a kind of synecdoche for the complete text it belongs to. Furthermore, the epigraph occupies a fundamentally uncertain place in the current text. It comes after the title page—and might reasonably be regarded as being *in* the book—but it comes before the text proper.[85] Necessarily, too, as a text taken from an external source, without quotation marks, and usually without direct commentary (more on that shortly), it is neither of the text nor entirely outside of it. The situation, as I will discuss below, is that much more complicated when the current author alters or wholly makes up the quotation, as is the case with one of the Kierkegaard epigraphs to *Fear and Trembling*.

Then, too, if we take the epigraph to be an integral part of the text as a whole, where does it stand *thematically* in relation to the text proper? It would seem to stand in the same place conceptually as Genette places it physically: at the edge. The epigraph is, particularly appropriately for the Kierkegaard epigraphs to be examined in this chapter, as Genette has it, a "mute gesture" (156). While it would seem to hold some kind of "key" to the text that follows, the connections between the epigraph and text are not necessarily made explicit; the reader's "hermeneutic capacity is often put to the test," in Genette's formulation (158). The game of the epigraph, then, is to force a consideration of the connections and disconnections between epigraph, title, and text;[86] as well as between the entirety of the original epigraphic text and the later work. And, in effect, to draw these connections is arguably to go beyond the text as much as to interpret the given text.

If we assume a meaningful connection between the epigraph and text proper, the lines of commentary between the two are also somewhat surprisingly reciprocal, albeit in a particularly

[85] In Genette's terms, it is "at the *edge* of the work, generally closest to the text" (144).
[86] Genette considers as distinct functions of the epigraph a gloss on 1) the title, or 2) the text.

imbalanced way. Even in the least idiosyncratic relationship between epigraph and text, the determination of which is subordinate to the other can be difficult to make. And there is often an inherent "unfairness" in the coopting of the epigraphic text. While the epigraph's primary function might seem to be that of a gloss on a fundamental idea (or ideas) in the new text, the epigraph's "muteness" is particularly troubling in that it is being taken out of temporal sequence to comment on a book that did not exist at the time of its publication. Similarly, even if we take it in the opposite direction and view the new book as a commentary on the idea(s) encapsulated in the epigraph, we run into a twin difficulty with the epigraph's silence: it cannot speak back to its glosser, nor (especially as a fragment of a larger work) does it have the volume of verbiage of the text that comments on it. It is, to some extent, overwhelmed and overwritten by the new text. So, to what extent (and to what end), does the epigraph exist independently of the later text? Is the epigraph merely a kind of summary of a major idea in the new text? Are the two reflections on each other—both in the sense of being meditations on each other and in the sense of mirroring a fundamental theme or concept back at each other? In the case of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous work, with its play with authorship and patterns of deliberate incompleteness, the relationship between epigraph and text conspicuously indulges in and stands as a particular interpretive challenge.

The original Herder epigraph. In the published version of *Fear and Trembling,* the epigraph is a slightly abridged version of J.G. Hamann's enigmatic account of the Tarquinius Superbus decapitation-via-gestural-language story considered in chapter one of this study.[87] But the

[87] More on Kierkegaard's use of the quotation below.

epigraph has a more complicated history. Originally, an epigraph taken from Herder was to have appeared:[88]

> "Write."—"For Whom?"—"Write for the dead, for those in the past whom you love."—"Will they read me?"—"Yes, for they come back as posterity."
>
> An old saying.
>
> ""Write."—"For whom?"—"Write for the dead, for those in the past whom you love."—"Will they read me?"—"No!"
>
> An old saying slightly altered.

This abandoned epigraph has drawn brief critical commentary for Kierkegaard's alteration of the Herder text, but there has perhaps not been enough attention to the particular processes lie behind Kierkegaard's changes to the epigraph, particularly as this methodology sheds light on the way that the entire text engages in games of bait and switch through its characteristic promises of symmetry and its delivery of deliberately flagrant asymmetries.[89] The several movements involved in Kierkegaard's treatment of this Herder text fall into two interrelated categories: making visible the action of altering the text, and effacement of the original. The first, showing the process of change, is most obviously exemplified by the doubled writing of the text, which highlights differences between the "old saying" and the new alteration (the change in the final utterance, the attribution of the quotation).

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[88] Punctuation is as is given in the Princeton edition.

[89] See, for instance, Chris Danta's interest in the attitude toward the dead expressed in this doubling ("Poetics of Distance: Kierkegaard's Abraham"). The Hongs' Princeton notes and supplementary materials for *Fear and Trembling* do not say much about the Herder text, but do present the version above from Kierkegaard's drafts and journal entry (in which Kierkegaard translates Herder into Danish) and do not quote (though they do cite) another journal entry that quotes the entirety of the Herder passage in German.

The second, effacement, superficially overwrites the original, substituting Kierkegaard's newer version without explicitly hearkening back to the original.[90] Most obviously in this second category, Kierkegaard omits acknowledgment of Herder's authorship, instead labeling Herder's tiny narrative proverbial ("an old saying"). This conceit creates an illusory grounding in folk wisdom, giving it the historical heft of long-held belief. At the same time, excising Herder's name also has the effect of obscuring Kierkegaard's sources, tampering with the integrity of history and authorship. But this strategy of effacement is also significantly extant in several smaller maneuvers that move Kierkegaard's iteration away from Herder's: the translation into Danish from the Herder's German,[91] a move that resonates with *Fear and Trembling*'s concern with language and translation; and more importantly, the action of excerpting Herder's passage out of its original context, and the excision of the characters who appear in Herder's original. Finally, too, there is the eclipsing of the Herder passage altogether in dropping it from the published text, an omission that haunts Kierkegaard in his journals—the epigraph "should first have been (*skulde først have staaet*)" Herder's.[92] That Kierkegaard mixes a performance of the process of alteration, straightforward overwriting, and lingering regret over the effacement creates irregular currents between Kierkegaard's text and the Herder text—and, by extension, suggests the anxiety that characterizes *Fear and Trembling*'s appropriation of source materials explored both implicitly and explicitly in Kierkegaard's book. Although Kierkegaard successively proposes and discards multiple models or trains of thought, these are never completely overwritten or effaced. As an approach, such incomplete appropriation allows even

[90] Genette proposes as one of four major functions of the epigraph (the others being commentary on title, commentary on text, and genre/time period marking) a kind of credentialism-by-proximity to another major author. Kierkegaard both does and does not appeal to such authority here.
[91] Kierkegaard uses German elsewhere in the text; the translation of Herder here is the more unusual gesture.
[92] Pap.IVA126Til Motto paa »Frygt og Bæven« skulde først have staaet »Skriv«—»for hvem«—»Skriv for de Døde, for dem Du elsker i en Fortid«—»ville de da læse mig?«—»Nei!« (1843, n.d.) (http://www.sks.dk/JJ/txt.xml).

abandoned texts to haunt the current project. And this, in turn, produces unstable readings of the text which extend even to the most apparently clear-cut tenets of the primacy of faith.

To that end, I would like to consider some of these strategies, particularly the effacements, in greater detail here. The original Herder text is as follows:

> "Write!" said that voice, and the prophet answered: "for whom?" The voice said: "Write for the dead! For those in the past (*in der Vorwelt*) whom you love."— "Will they read me?"—"Yes: for they come back as posterity (*als Nachwelt*)."[93]

Herder's original is certainly no less enigmatic than Kierkegaard's use of it. The whole of Herder's original text both does and does not provide something like context for this little dialogue, which appears as a mini-narrative appended to the "Seventh Fragment" in Herder's eighth collection of *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität (Letters for the Betterment of Humanity)*. That Herder's original is already self-consciously fragmentary is, of course, significant and a huge area for exploration. For the purposes of this study, suffice it to say that the labeling of the text as fragment is a comment on the impossibility of the completion of the enormous task (bettering humanity), but it does not negate the process of the project. The bulk of the fragment is a relatively straightforward consideration of the history and consequences of a transition from oral to written narrative. But, even as the first part of Herder's brief text is a melancholy consideration of the intangible losses that published text brings to the spiritual life of poetry and the society that creates it—"The more written texts there were, the more the characteristic, free thinking [of humankind] was diminished; finally, the human spirit was

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[93] "Schreibe!," sprach jene Stimme, und der Prophet antwortete: "Für wen?" Die Stimme sprach: "Schreibe für die Toten! für die, die du in der Vorwelt lieb hast."—"Werden sie mich lessen?"—"Ja; den sie kommen zurück, als Nachwelt."

clothed wholly in rags" (413)[94]—this little dialogue brings in a quasi-oracular mysticism that is largely stylistically independent of the preceding text. In some ways, it seeks both to perform and to escape the traps of a written text—instead of simple discourse about writing, we are given a paradoxical (written) approximation of an oral exchange (about writing). And in order to identify the oral narrative's ambivalent status as both escaping and being trapped within a written matrix, Herder—at least at first—labels (characterizes) the two interlocutors specifically *as* speakers: there is a voice (*die Stimme*) and a prophet (*der Prophet*, the etymology of which is related to interpretation, the Greek loan word being based on *pro-*, before or in front of, and *phanai*, to speak).[95] The passage here is thematically tied to the preceding examination by way of its play on befores and afters; orality is linked to the past (die *Vor*welt, literally the before world) and literacy corresponds with the future (die *Nach*welt, the after world). But it is particularly important that the stakes here are raised in that the text dramatically speaks of a transition from individual life in the past (one writes for persons loved *in* the past, *in der Vorwelt*) to a collective, generalized, abstract afterlife (they will come back *as* posterity, *als Nachwelt*).

The notion of quasi-pagan metempsychosis, however unorthodox, that occurs in Herder's original gives way in the not-so "slightly altered" version in Kierkegaard to Christian linearity, in which the dead do not return. This movement from pagan religion to Christianity is, of course, of crucial import for *Fear and Trembling*, since it is pagan (mostly Greek) morality that is equated with a universal ethical sense, and is contrasted with Christian religiosity.[96] However, the movement towards Christianity in the process of altering Herder's text occurs simultaneously with the loss of the potentially religious identities of Herder's voices. The loss of a locatable

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[94] Je mehr sich Schriften vermehrten, desto mehr verminderten sich ganz eigenthümliche, freie Gedanken; endlich ward der menschliche Geist ganz in Lumpen gekleidet
[95] *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Ed. C.T. Onions), 1966.
[96] I am grateful to Nickolas Pappas for raising this idea in comments to an early draft of this chapter.

identity for the speakers—a crucial aspect of the intelligibility and interpretability of speech (that Abraham has absolute faith that it is God speaking to him, asking for the unthinkable act, and not a demonic force or a delusion is a stumbling block for de Silentio)—seems in some ways to be the cost of the transition from one system to the other. The sacrifices (and Kierkegaard is interested in the metaphorical value of exchange, as will be discussed throughout this chapter) in clarity that occur in faith are a source of worry in *Fear and Trembling*.

Even in Herder's original the clear individuality of the voices is gradually lost, and Kierkegaard's revision intensifies this loss. Herder's passage begins by naming its speakers (*jene Stimme*, *der Prophet*), but these hints of individuality (admittedly already minimal shadows of oracular types) subside into a dialogue marked only with dashes to differentiate speakers. Especially considering the attention given to this punctuation by 18th century writers such Hamann and Novalis, the dashes gain further significance both in Herder's text and in Kierkegaard's adaptation of it. I have already noted the paradoxical way that dashes (*Gedankenstriche*) function both to strike through text and connect text in Hamann (see chapter one above). When Novalis celebrates the dash (in a demonstratively dash-heavy passage), "Dashes—capitalized words—emphasized passages—all of these belong to the domain of the reader (*Gedankenstriche—großgedruckte Worte—herausgehobne Stellen—alles dies gehört in das Gebiet des Lesers*),"[97] he makes clear that it is a punctuation mark up for interpretation by a source, the reader, who necessarily lies outside of the text. Further, it is a piece of punctuation that is open to interpretation precisely because of its ambiguity: does it stitch together ideas within the sentence, or does it primarily serve to hint at broken connections? In Herder already, the dashes signal the kind of loss of the human element (replacing the voices as they do here)

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[97] *Fragmente vermischten Inhalts*, number 247.

that Herder's larger text bemoans more directly. Kierkegaard is acutely conscious of the functions of the dash (*Tankestreg*); commentary on this piece of punctuation appears numerous times in his writings.[98] Socrates, for example, is "like a dash (*Tankestreg*) in world history, and the ignorance about him, due to the lack of opportunity for direct observation, is an invitation not so much to bypass him as to conjure him forth with the aid of the idea, to make him become visible in his ideal form—in other words, to become conscious of the idea that is the meaning of the existence in the world, of the phase in the development of the world spirit that is symbolically indicated (*symbolisk betegnet*) by the singularity of his existence in history" (*On the Concept of Irony*, 198).[99] For the unpublished fragment of a play from his student days, *The Battle between the Old and the New Soap-Cellars*, Kierkegaard proposes a "frontispiece showing Luther sitting in a hazel tree cutting switches for people who ask useless questions. Some of them are to be seen lying on the ground others will be found scattered around in the book. The inexperienced will perhaps mistake them for dashes (*Tankestreger*)" (*Early Polemical Writings* 105). The dash is a symbol that calls attention to what the text itself cannot or will not say. The dash is a fortunate absence that allows for ideality of the best (ethical) pagan, and it is an ambiguous symbol that punishes even as it allows for misinterpretation. The presence of a dash in Kierkegaard gives fair warning, then, about the form of the text and the complications of thought and interpretation.[100]

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[98] Robert Gibbs discusses various incidences of the dash in Kierkegaard in "I or You: The Dash of Ethics" in Elsebet Jegstrup's collection *The New Kierkegaard.*

[99] The Hongs have added a dash (the symbol, not the word) in their translation, presumably to clarify the very long Danish sentence. Unfortunately, the dash is not in the original Danish.

[100] On a more lighthearted note, there is a well-known journal entry from 1836: "I have just come back from a party where I was the life and soul. Witticisms flowed from my lips. Everyone laughed and admired me—but, I left, yes, that dash should be as long as the radii of the earth's orbit ——— and I wanted to shoot myself" (I A 161). Appropriately, this entry is written on loose sheets rather than in a notebook proper.

So, Kierkegaard's proposed epigraph both further fragments what is already called a fragment and thwarts Herder's peculiar quasi-historical narrative thrust (which charts the evolution of humans into literature) by the double movement of riffing on/changing what is already there and by overwriting the original. While in Herder the speakers begin with a specific characterization before lapsing into uncredited speech (again, preceded by dashes to differentiate the voices), there is no identifying trace of these voices in either of Kierkegaard's iterations of the Herder passage. While the dashes would be most conventionally understood to mark the different voices, they function as much to deny the singularity of the speaker as to act as a reminder of such an omission. In Kierkegaard's text, voices are entirely disembodied, including that of the text's author. Certainly, to an extent, all authors experienced through books are disembodied voices, but Kierkegaard's text takes it to another level: the would-be-author in the narrative loses his designation as prophet, and even the external author, Herder, is assimilated to a universal pool of speech rather than being credited as the specific idiosyncratic author of the excerpted passage that appears in Kierkegaard's writings.[101]

This is intensified in the second iteration of the passage, credited as "an old saying slightly altered." The authorial voice, already muted by the omission of his name, is further desanctified by the ease with which the saying may be altered in print. Neither, just as troublingly, does the author of the "new" maxim get credited, despite the radical shift of meaning that the alterations (hardly "slight"!) present: posterity here is no longer a possibility; to write is literally a dead end ("Will they read me?" No!").[102] This is an equal mixture of startling and expected in that this odd species of ventriloquism (one that vexingly has neither actual nor

[101] Compare W.H. Auden on Kierkegaard: "a planetary visitor might read through the whole of his voluminous works without discovering that human beings are not ghosts but have bodies of flesh and blood" (in *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims* 42).
[102] See again Danta's emphasis on the idea of Kierkegaard's elegies to the dead.

illusory point of origin in an author) takes on what might be the voice of the divine. After all, the new anonymity of the author, appealing to the notion of established truth through common wisdom, usurps the voice that talks to a prophet. Certainly, authorial questioning is hardly unique to this piece of Kierkegaard's oeuvre, but the interpretation of the voice of the divine is of particular importance for *Fear and Trembling.* As such, it is not perhaps so strange to see that to be an author (of the written text) of a new maxim does not allow one to rise above the generality of a "saying" any more than authorship allows a complete overwriting of what has come before. The act of appropriation, as opposed to creation of new text, becomes a literalized illustration of the impossibility of the "going further" than actions/speech that have already occurred (which Kierkegaard will rail against throughout the text).

The published Hamann epigraph. I would like to stress again, before forging ahead into the deeper complexities of the epigraphs of Kierkegaard's book, that the form and content of these epigraphs matter for two main interconnected reasons: for Kierkegaard's interest in rhetoric itself, and for the way that the epigraphs spill over into, influence, and suggest concerns with the main Abraham story. Even before the text proper, then, Kierkegaard presents a series of ways of mutilating and muting a speaking body. The only epigraph in the published version of *Fear and Trembling*, Hamann's allusive story of Tarquinius Superbus and the poppies (see chapter one), replaces the disembodiment of the transmuted Herder, but carries over and allows its particular concerns (silence, speech, and the written word; history and progress; overwriting and substitution; and so on) to proliferate.[103] Kierkegaard again excises an enigmatic fragment from a

[103] There is further the matter of a possible choice that Kierkegaard makes in quoting the already truncated Hamann quotation. Hamann writes his version of the Tarquinius Superbus story twice. The second version (from a letter to J.G. Lindner, which quotes a previous letter that Hamann had written to Friedrich Nicolai) is the one found in *Fear*

larger context (or several overlapping contexts, actually, given that the Tarquinius Superbus story has both a history in the fable debates of the 18th century—see chapter one above—and a specific history in Hamann's letters as a passage quoted twice) and makes very characteristic, subtle changes. Here, too, we have a story of an attempt to get around language that is staged within a narrative of dismemberment. The version found in *Fear and Trembling* is as follows: "What Tarquinius Superbus said in the garden by means of the poppies, the son understood but the messenger did not (*Was Tarquinius Superbus in seinem Garten mit den Mohnköpfen sprach, verstand der Sohn, aber nicht der Bote*)."[104]

While the story is ostensibly about Tarquinius Superbus' communication of the desire to decapitate those who resisted his rule, it is also a story of Tarquinius Superbus' own sword to the vocal chords. In order to communicate a message to the son *in secret*, Tarquinius Superbus must not reveal it in words. The language must be a gestural representation that takes place in silence. One might assume that a gestural language, because it is physical and performative, would have a more direct relationship with "meaning" than would the abstraction of verbal (or even more distantly, written) language.[105]

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and Trembling. The first version is as follows: "What Tarquinius Superbus said in his garden *out of boredom (für die Langeweile)* by means of the poppies, the son understood but the messenger did not." It is perhaps impossible to determine why one version of the Hamann letter rather than the other appears here (both letters would have appeared in the edition of Hamann's writings), but given Kierkegaard's deliberate alteration of the Herder epigraph, omission of the clause about boredom is fertile ground for speculation. Both letters appear in the *Briefwechsel* (194-197 and 201-204).

[104] The word the Hongs translate as *poppies* is *Mohnköpfen*. This is more strictly translated *poppy-heads* (*Mohn* = poppy, *Kopf* = head). This distinction is perhaps small, but the son's actions in response to his father's message (cutting off human heads) is brought closer to Tarquinius Superbus' gestural message (cutting off poppy-heads) through this designation—that is to say, the (written) language describing the story makes the job of interpretation of the symbolic gesture easier for the reader than it would have been for the messenger (who only had the visual image) and the son (who only had an oral transmission of his father's actions).

[105] Studies of eighteenth-century gestures equate the function of gestural language with poetic language: "In descriptions and narrations…the aim of the actor as well as of the poet was to depict the objects and events so vividly that the spectators would be made to feel that they were seeing them with their own eyes (see, for example…Francius's repeated use of the phrase '*to bring before the eyes*' when describing the use of gestures)" (Barnett, 19). Barnett elaborates: "The apt phrase *to bring before the eyes* was used repeatedly by Petrus Francius, when he specified indicative or imitative gestures in his text books on oratory. Because humans react more vividly

However, the case of Tarquinius Superbus' manner of transmitting his message adds a particular shading to Kierkegaard's well-known method of indirect communication;[106] the epigraph reveals a peculiar species of metaphorical communication (decapitation of tall flowers = decapitation of heads of state).[107] It is worth pausing over this for a moment, since this concern with metaphor, particularly those that use physical imagery, implicitly shadows the explicit content of Kierkegaard's book. This special case of metaphorical language shares traits with "common" literary metaphor, gestural accompaniment to speech, and performative language, but is distinct from each and, as such, indirectly defines certain limits of language that Kierkegaard is particularly interested in.

Physical, Verbal, and Written Figurative Language

It may be useful to look at a couple of examples of what this Tarquinius Superbus example is *not* in order to better understand what problems it exposes. Especially given

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to the concrete than to the abstract, this depictive use of gestures to give an almost physical substance to the images in the elevated words of classical tragedy was especially powerful. Such depictive gestures were also used a great deal in the declamation of poetry in the salon, and of speeches in the pulpit, in the courtroom and on the battlefield" (215). Petrus Francius (1645-1704), a professor at the Gymnasium of Amsterdam, wrote two books on oratory. Interestingly, he believed that grounding Latin in the body, by means of declamation with gestures, was the way to teach the ancient language.

[106] Indirect communication is a virtually inescapable term in Kierkegaard scholarship, standing in for everything from pseudonymity in general to proto-deconstructive deferral of meaning, to emulation of the Socratic method, to a religious response to the ineffable—to the point where it has become a bit meaningless as a description of Kierkegaard's communicative strategies. For the purposes of this study, one of the more intriguing recent books is Roger Poole's *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication*. Poole enlarges upon a journal entry (March 9, 1846) written in the midst of the *Corsair* affair in which Kierkegaard says that he has finished with (pseudonymous) authorship. Poole's contention is that the attacks on his (actual, apparently ungainly) person in the wake of his public feud with the editors of the *Corsair* force him to reevaluate his communicative strategies: "[Thorvaldsen's] statues could well have appeared to him to be the physical instantiations of the very category of embodiment that he needed in order to replace, in his own indirect communication, the body that had been taken from him by *The Corsair*" (22-23).

[107] Peter Fenves picks up on and plays with language of cutting in his chapter of *Fear and Trembling* in *"Chatter": Language and History in Kierkegaard*: "Messenger and medium exclude each other. This mutual exclusion means that a particular language has emerged in which no maxims can be articulated, for the reason that this language…*minimizes*; it reduces words to gestures until only a breach, a cut or a scission is communicable. Johannes de Silentio…everywhere reduces the articulation of concepts to decisive, incisive, and mute gesticulation" (164-165).

Tarquinius Superbus' status as the legendarily cruel king of Rome, an order to kill the heads of state accomplishes the deed; it is an implicit performative speech act.[108] But Tarquinius Superbus' command here contains a middle step, one that is performative in another sense. We might then consider the gestural aspect of Tarquinius Superbus' communication since it is striking that Tarquinius Superbus evades the messenger's understanding by an unexpected use of the physical register (rather than a verbal one). In its physical nature, Tarquinius Superbus communicates in a type of mime, in a gestural language. When Rousseau alludes to the story of Tarquinius Superbus in his *Essay on the Origin of Languages* he cites it as an example of a "vigorous language" in which "everything is said symbolically, before one actually speaks….what verbal circumlocution would express the same idea as well?" (7). [109] Gestural language has, especially in proto-Romantic and Romantic considerations of it, been equated with primal nature. Rousseau, for example, suggests that "need dictated the first gestures, while the passions stimulated the first words" (11).The gesture, arising from primitive need, retains an of aura of innocence that is not automatically associated with language. The gesture is, like mime, a kind of enactment of an event.

But, while certainly immediate in its visual mode, the pictorial image of cutting down the flowers is not imitative in the way that we might expect a gestural language to be. Even in Rousseau this notion of innocence and exuberance is a peculiar one, particularly given the

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[108] When Austin addresses this type of implicit speech acts in *How to Do Things with Words*, he uses it as an opportunity to return to the idea of misunderstanding: "it is both obvious and important that we can on occasion use the utterance 'go' to achieve practically the same as we achieve by the utterance 'I order you to go'" and we should say cheerfully in either case, describing subsequently what someone did, that he ordered me to go. It may, however be uncertain in fact, and, so far as the mere utterance is concerned, is always left uncertain when we use so inexplicit a formula as the mere imperative 'go', whether the utterer is ordering (or is purporting to order) me to go, or merely advising, entreating, or what not me to go" (32-33).

[109] Joshua Wilner has pointed out that Rousseau's essay was published in 1781, and may have been a source for Hamann's treatment of the Tarquinius Superbus legend. It is also interesting for the purposes of this study to note that Rousseau places Tarquinius Superbus' gesture in the company of Diogenes' refutation of Zeno's theories of motion, among others. See the next chapter for a discussion of Kierkegaard's interest in the physical refutation of a thought experiment.

violence of Tarquinius Superbus' action. To take a case that would seem to counter this claim of primitive honesty, one could certainly easily imagine a scenario in which someone rushes into a room and asks "Where did he go?" and receives as an answer a finger pointed in the wrong direction. Wittgenstein addresses just such a case in the *Blue Book*: "We give someone an order to walk in a certain direction by pointing or by drawing an arrow which points in the direction. Suppose drawing arrows is the language in which generally we give such an order. Couldn't such an order be interpreted to mean that the man who gets it is to walk in the direction opposite to that of the arrow?" When he addresses the natural objection that such a gesture has "meaning," he counters that "this process of meaning, of whatever kind it may be, can be represented by another arrow (pointing in the same or the opposite sense to the first). In this picture which we make of 'meaning and saying' it is essential that we should imagine the processes of saying and meaning to take place in two different spheres" (33). While Kierkegaard comes out of a different tradition than Wittgenstein, it is important to note that this separation between understandable meaning and speech in the case of an order (Tarquinius Superbus' order, but more importantly God's order to sacrifice Isaac) is precisely what is at stake in Kierkegaard's text, and the cases he chooses to explore this gulf involve symbolic language—both in gesture and in metaphor.

The metaphorical angle, piled upon the primary ambiguity of gesture, adds another wrinkle, of course, to the case of Tarquinius Superbus' message to his son. Tarquinius Superbus' message is not strictly imitative (as mime would be) on two levels. First, instead of acting out something, he actually completes an action: he cuts the flowers. His message is misleading in its directness rather than transparent—or transparently metaphorical—to the messenger.[110] The

[110] Lennard Davis, who has written much about deafness and writing, is particularly critical of this model: "the model presumes crude gestures arose first leading to that articulated language—the aural/oral form of

cutting of the flowers is innocuous as a completed action and ambiguous in its interpretation. (And, as I will explore in greater depth below, it is ambiguous because it is paradoxically not marked as ambiguous.)

Second, Kierkegaard's version of the Hamann story stresses the purposiveness of using an allegorical action, to use Lessing's phrase, rather than miming the desired action. Here, too, the Kierkegaardian amendment to Hamann's original serves to underline the intended evasion of the messenger's understanding through a specifically chosen medium. While Hamann's first letter says that Tarquinius Superbus acts casually—he speaks by means of the poppies "out of boredom (*für die Langeweile*)"—the omission of this clause makes the action deliberate and puts specific pressure on the choice of *sprach* as the verb for Tarquinius Superbus' action. The physical language is a complete performance in itself, rather than a clear complement to the verbal message to be communicated.[111] In many common metaphorical utterances, the literary figure takes its imagery from the physical world in the service of underlining or explicating or otherwise generating understanding of the non-physical idea in the text. The metaphor in the Tarquinius Superbus story is not, in fact, rhetoric or a figure of speech. The example of Tarquinius Superbus, however, becomes a special case for Kierkegaard precisely because it inhabits the physical world completely.

The fact that the act (any act—verbal or physical) of substitution gets in the way of interpreting Tarquinius Superbus' order is of importance most simply because it parallels the obsessive object of *Fear and Trembling*'s attention: the inability to understand Abraham (and

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communication—seen as natural, common and universal. But why may we not construct another originary myth?" (*Enforcing Normalcy:disability, deafness, and the body*, 17)

[111] A gesture, whether unconsciously or consciously made, might underline the physical basis of metaphorical understanding. For example, consider raising the height of one's hand when speaking of someone attaining a higher status. The connection between a kind of physical experience of the world and metaphor is the argument of much of Lakoff and Johnson's work. See, for example, *Metaphors We Live By* and Johnson's solo book *The Body in the Mind*.

maybe even God). But the act of substitution within the story also resonates with the larger concern with analogy within Kierkegaard's text. Analogy is de Silentio’s only tool for getting close to understanding Abraham, but the act of creating an analogy (the temporary substitution of a similar-but-different story), cannot help but emphasize differences as well as commonalities between stories. It is obvious that the analogies that surround the Abraham story early on in *Fear and Trembling*—Tarquinius Superbus, the mother weaning the child—differ greatly in thematic material (murder, not sacrifice), in surface detail (mother, not father), as well as in means of communication (Tarquinius Superbus and the mother speak silently in gestures; Abraham and God speak in audible words). De Silentio and *Fear and Trembling* triangulate between the two, juxtaposing means of communication (speaking silently in words) and perhaps, too, in the meaning of the stories.

What is intriguing about this is that the simultaneous acts of analogizing and triangulation are not neutral. Analogy is, of course, comparison, and comparison invites judgment: is the comparison intelligible and apt? In the case of *Fear and Trembling*’s early analogues for Abraham, judgment of the legibility of the analogy (can I understand how these things are comparable?) shades into judgment of the moral content of the analogy. Judgment—God’s judgment, certainly, since a major issue that arises with Abraham is whether one is able to fulfill the task of absolute duty to God, but also human moral and ethical discernment—is an omnipresent but often overshadowed concern in *Fear and Trembling*. The example of Tarquinius Superbus’ message is laid out as a problem of interpretation, both within its content (it is about who can understand Tarquinius Superbus and who cannot) and in its physical presentation in the text as an epigraph (it is not contextualized and is never explicitly brought into the discussion in the main text). But surely Kierkegaard’s selection of Tarquinius Superbus implicitly requires

judgment. The curious neutrality of Hamann and Kierkegaard's (and Lessing and Rousseau's) treatment of the Tarquinius Superbus legend has a bizarre effect. Not only does it leave the clear distinction between Tarquinius Superbus' call to murder and God's call for sacrifice implicit, it can seem that judgment is deferred *because* the interpretive challenges posed by God and Abraham, and even in the case of Tarquinius Superbus, whose intentions *are* murderous, are so great. However the content of Tarquinius Superbus' order might be judged from the standpoint of morality or human justice (and we cannot forget that he is ordering murder, the demonic equivalent of God's message to Abraham), he both can and cannot be charged with lying,[112] and he can and cannot be charged with murder. Tarquinius Superbus' action is observed, but its intent is not specified by its actor—one of Hamann's versions of the story suggests that Tarquinius Superbus acts "out of boredom" rather than malice, Livy's version says that the king is "as if deep in thought (*velut deliberabundus*)" and the messenger (who, granted, "seemed to be of dubious trustworthiness"), sees only that Tarquinius Superbus does not speak "whether through temper or personal aversion or the arrogance which was natural to him (*seu ira seu odio seu superbia insita ingenio*)" (1.54.6-7). The action's completeness gives its denotative meaning greater heft than an action (or speech) that is marked as connotative. Interpretation is all, and Kierkegaard's text hangs fire on judgment. And, as we have seen above, this physical aspect is a way to evade a kind of true-false, and by extension generally moral, valuation of Tarquinius Superbus' order.

[112] Coded figures meant for a specific audience (but audible to a larger group) are quite common in the bible, of course—Matthew 13:13 ("This is why I speak to them in parables: 'Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.') is a famous example. The problem of interpreting this kind of speech is a central concern in Kermode's *The Genesis of Secrecy*. However, the distance between biblical "speaking in parables" and deception with malicious intent is reduced in Kierkegaard through the juxtaposition of Abraham's opacity (and God's strange transparency) alongside Tarquinius Superbus and the mother and child.

This kind of physical overwriting of a (verbal?) message is at the heart of the exordium to *Fear and Trembling*, which continues to set up the book's methodology of trying out variants on a story. Famously, this section contains four versions of the Abraham story, each imagining Abraham's or Isaac's perspective on the journey to Moriah. But the section also pairs each Abraham story with a meditation on the weaning of a child from his mother's breast. Between the stories of weaning and the overarching epigraphs lies a way of thinking about what Kierkegaard is up to in his Abraham stories. One notable aspect of the weaning story is that each version (the mother blackens the breast so that the breast appears alien to the child; the mother "virginally conceals her breast" so that the child "no longer has a mother," the mother and child grieve together the loss of closeness, the mother gives the child sustenance other than the breast) contains a kind of substitution. And, in the first two versions, a substitution that is known to one party (the mother) and understood differently by the other (the infant). In the first and second versions, the mother engages in outright deception, and *Fear and Trembling* imagines the child's understanding to be a literal reading of a metaphorical gesture—in the first, the child sees a breast that is unfamiliar while the rest of the mother looks the same, and the child sees a virgin instead of a mother in the second. This type of metaphorical deception is, if not mother's milk, then the stage directly following it. Gestural-metaphorical language is not innocent here as it had been romantically imagined; even at a (metaphorical?) point as close to originary as the weaning of the child, it already involves deliberate manipulation of perception. However, curiously, the mood in these little vignettes is elegiac and melancholy rather than judgmental. [113] In fact, the common refrain that ends each of the mother-and-child stories, "How fortunate the one…",

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[113] I am grateful to Joshua Wilner for pointing out to me the psychoanalytic dimension of the first two weaning narratives: that the substitutions for the mother's breast within the stories of weaning promote a "proper" transfer of cathexis (whether from the mother's breast to external sources of nourishment or from one's earthly father to the heavenly father).

bypasses judgment of the mother's strategies of deception. Certainly, the idea of weaning itself—whether child from mother or, at least in the first version given in *Fear and* Trembling, Isaac from Abraham—is natural and bittersweet, but the deceit in the first two versions is in stark contrast to the more reciprocal understandings reached between mother and child in the last two. From the contrast in the communicative methods of the first and last pairs of vignettes, the text seems to hint at the question of whether deception is a lamentable but necessary methodology as it applies to the Abraham and Isaac stories that the weaning stories presumably elucidate. Perhaps then, God's temptation of Abraham (especially the substitution of Isaac for the lamb—and the other way around—that will be discussed below) is also to be elegized and eulogized because of its necessity and naturalness. But I would suggest that this level of intended deception is in large part what makes us uncomfortable about Kierkegaard's illustrations of the physical, gestural language examined here, and I would argue that it is this that fascinates and worries Kierkegaard, too, and his method of oblique commentary on analogy *through* analogy is a large part of *Fear and Trembling*'s project.

The slippage between what is authored and what is communicated and what is read is extreme in *Fear and Trembling* because the methodology at work is one of unstable, incomplete (or too complete) substitution. “Normal” metaphors are already in a class of substitution that never allows one to see only one term or the other—one always sees both. Metaphors have long been viewed with suspicion as an impediment to direct understanding because of this; as Walker Percy rather poetically puts it, the feature of metaphor that has "troubled" philosophers is "that it is 'wrong'—it asserts of one thing that it is something else—and further, that its beauty often

seems proportionate to its wrongness or outlandishness" ("Metaphor as Mistake," 82).[114] By combining this with a register change between verbal and physical communication, Kierkegaard's chosen stories increase the possibility of misapprehension in communication *and* simultaneously doubly evade ethical judgment. But what is equally interesting is that this is largely hidden (if hidden in plain sight) in the text itself. Now that these stories of metaphorical comprehension have entered the world of writing, peculiarly, we do not as easily perceive the distance between registers or the gaps between analogies. If Tarquinius Superbus' message is lost on the messenger, how does it become intelligible to the son? One tantalizing possibility is that the son receives the message *as an oral narrative of Tarquinius Superbus' actions*. The nature of the messenger's recounting makes the pantomime into a story,[115] and because of this transformation, what was once a metaphor in action becomes a figure of speech.

The difference between allegorical *action* and figure of *speech* (and, in Kierkegaard's text, level of plot and level of language) becomes clearer with the consideration that the gestural language the actor Tarquinius Superbus employs is presumably meant to be "read" as a straight code rather than as metaphor. Code and metaphor share the quality of being interpretable without being labeled as in need of interpretation or building a prompt for interpretation into them (as a

[114] Johnson, in his survey of writings on metaphor, catalogues various famous disparagements of metaphor. For his section on "modern philosophy," he calls particular attention to Hobbes ("For though it be lawful to say, for example in common speech, *the way goeth, or leadeth hither or thither; the proverb says this or that*, whereas ways cannot go, nor proverbs speak; yet in reckoning, and seeing of truth, such speeches are not to be admitted" (*Leviathan*, pt. I, chap. 5)) and Locke ("But yet if we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness; all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheats: and therefore, however laudable or allowable oratory may render them in harangues and popular addresses, they are certainly, in all discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided; and where truth and knowledge are concerned, cannot but be thought a great fault, either of the language or the person that makes use of them" (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, bk. III, chap. X, 34)). (Johnson, *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor*, 12-13).

[115] This is, as discussed above, in some ways the inverse of Kierkegaard's treatment of the abandoned Herder epigraph. In that case, many of the expressly literary elements—characters, quotation marks—are removed. Here, a literary aspect is added in the narration of an event.

simile might by its use of "as" or "like"). Instead, to a greater or lesser extent, both announce themselves by their disjunction from context. They depend on a kind of surprise; to bring back Percy's formulation, metaphor's "beauty often seems proportionate to its wrongness or outlandishness." That is, if it is particularly successful—and to be successful it should be identifiable—it shows itself to be "wrong" or "outlandish." What is troubling in Kierkegaard's text is that the wrongness goes somehow unperceived when it is enacted. The child does not identify the strangeness of the mother's changed condition and assimilate it (metaphorically) to reality, for example, presumably because of its innocence; the reader (doubling the author), on the other hand, is privy to the overlay of language. The case of Tarquinius Superbus in the garden presents a particularly difficult case for the interpretation of metaphor and the deciphering of code. His actions in the garden (walking around, cutting off flowers) would not seem terribly out of place for a (violent!) man in his garden. This unexceptional quality to his actions is emphasized in Hamann's original when Hamann writes that Tarquinius Superbus acts "out of boredom." Kierkegaard goes some distance to show the status of Tarquinius Superbus' actions to be marked as a special kind of communication by removing this clause. But, significantly, Tarquinius Superbus' actions are still not out of place in the garden. God's words are exceptionally clear to Abraham—not only does God make sure that he has the correct addressee's ears ("Abraham!" "Here I am"), he then gives increasingly precise information to designate the object of the sacrifice (your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love")—and Abraham is presumably rewarded for taking God at his word. By the same token, neither Abraham's actions (the presence of wood and fire signal a sacrifice) nor Abraham's words (that God will provide a lamb for sacrifice) are unintelligible to Isaac.

The problem that Kierkegaard sets up in *Fear and Trembling* is two-fold: first, that these allegorical actions, before they are transformed into a narrative, which can emphasize the out-of-place-ness of the actions, are *too* intelligible in and of themselves, which does not signal the need for an extra-contextual interpretation. And second, that the polysemantic nature of metaphor or code within a text leaves residues (both by marking itself as rhetoric, which signals its potential for misunderstanding or deception, and in its individual content) that contribute an uncomfortable ambiguity to the text as a whole. The discomfort is particularly acute when the text invites ethical judgment of the story it tells. Tarquinius Superbus of the story thinks he can avoid the second of these problems: once he uses the flowers, they cease to signify for him. He has no use for the metaphorical crossover from the figurative gesture to the literal intended meaning—connotations associated with poppies (beauty, femininity, narcotics, etc.) are not meant to pertain to the suggestion that the son kill the heads of state. For Kierkegaard, however, there is no possibility of effacing the metaphor with the underlying meaning. What was meant to be discarded cannot be. That the message was conveyed using this particular means becomes essential to the understanding of the message. So, Kierkegaard does not use Tarquinius Superbus as code; for Kierkegaard, the use of Tarquinius Superbus obliquely delineates his concerns with metaphor generally, and the story of this particular use of figurative language bleeds over into the main argument of *Fear and Trembling*.

In the Tarquinius Superbus epigraph, Kierkegaard brings together these different registers of communication: gestural, oral, and written. Seen another, slightly different way, the epigraphs present an inquiry into the function of (particularly written) language.

Having now surveyed these two threshold texts, which stand before the consideration of Abraham that makes up the main part of Kierkegaard's text, we now turn to the hermeneutic

game of deciphering the relationship between the epigraphs and the main argument. I argue that two parallel but divergent stories emerge in the gap between the two: one glances wistfully outward to a pagan-historical myth of language and loss, and the other leads inward into the heart of the Abraham story while trying desperately to overwrite the language that actually exists in the Bible.

Tarquinius Superbus and the Sibyl

After the fragmentary allusiveness of the epigraph(s), *Fear and Trembling* simultaneously splinters and expands to delay the consideration of Abraham's faith that will make up what is ostensibly the core argument of the text. The introductory materials are drawn out greatly. A map of the text follows:[116]

1. Title page (including title, subtitle, and pseudonym)
2. Epigraph
3. Preface (*Forord*)
4. Exordium (*Stemning*)
5. Eulogy on Abraham (*Lovtale over Abraham*)
6. Problemata[117]
    a. Preliminary Expectoration (*Foreløbig Expectoration*)

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[116] I have subordinated ~~of~~ the three problemata questions by placing them under the general heading "Problemata" to emphasize the outsized role of the paratexts in *Fear and Trembling*. This may downplay their importance in the text a bit too much, but it is worth remembering again how much of the book is taken up by epigraphs. As I mention early in the chapter, the Princeton edition has 53 pages of paratext and 65 pages of problemata.

[117] This section has three interesting changes that are of note. First, the problemata were originally to be a signed work. Second, Kierkegaard—confusingly --refers to the exordium versions of the Abraham story as the "four Problemata" elsewhere in his papers (Princeton edition, 376n20). Also, an epigraph from Hamann was deleted: "A layman and unbeliever can explain my manner of writing in no other way than as nonsense (*Unsinn*), since I express myself in various tongues (*Zungen*) and speak the language of sophists, of puns, of Cretans and Arabians, of whites and Moors and Creoles, and babble a confusion of criticism, mythology, rebus, and axioms, and argue now in a human way and now in an extraordinary way" (from a letter to Lindner, dated 18. Aug. 1759; *Briefwechsel*, 467).

b. Problema I: Is there a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical? (*Gives der en teleologisk Suspension af det Ethiske?*)

c. Problema II: Is there an absolute Duty to God? (*Gives der en absolut Pligt mod Gud?*)

d. Problema III: Was it Ethically Defensible for Abraham to Conceal His Undertaking from Sarah, from Eliezer, and from Isaac? (*Var det ethisk forsvarligt af Abraham, at han fortiede sit Forehavende for Sara, for Elieser, for Isaak?*)

7. Epilogue (*Epilog*)

As we can see, in addition to the epigraph and the puzzles of the title page (which will be discussed further below), there is a preface, an exordium (*Stemning*, perhaps more directly translated as "Mood" or "Tuning," which corresponds to the subtitle, "Dialectical Lyric"),[118] and a eulogy on Abraham—and the text even further overwhelms its *problemata* by delaying them by means of another introduction (*Foreløbig Expectoration*). This accumulation of paratexts, each of which seems to have its own agenda and expansive set of associations, creates the sense of disjointedness in *Fear and Trembling*; connections between the disparate sections of text can seem opaque. The preface breaks away entirely from the heady meta-consideration of language staged in the epigraph(s), and speaks instead of commerce: "Not only in the business world but also in the world of ideas, our age stages *ein wirklicher Ausverkauf*" (5). It is initially unclear not

[118] Howard and Edna Hong of the Princeton edition (1983) use the term "exordium" (beginning, from *ex-* + *ordiri*), generally used for the beginning of a treatise or discourse (*New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*). Notable other editions use "Prelude" (Walter Lowrie, Princeton, 1941), "Tuning up" (Sylvia Walsh, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, 2006), and "Attunement" (Alastair Hannay, Penguin, 1985). The Hongs' translation thus seems to suggest a stronger emphasis on the academic/philosophical aspect of the text than the more musical translations of these other edition. Presumably they are influenced by Kierkegaard's final draft version which also gives the Greek "*prooimia*," which, interestingly, may split the difference between the musical (*oime*, song) and directive (*oimos*, way).

only how this unexpectedly mundane discourse stems from the consideration of language in the epigraph, but how this lays the groundwork for the inquiry into faith expected of the text. Even casual readers of Kierkegaard may immediately see this as another iteration of Kierkegaard's frequent juxtaposition of faith and the everyday, which he says exist simultaneously for the knight of faith. But this concern with commerce is especially vulgar and persists in the text, bookending the central discussion of faith with an echo in the epilogue: "Once when the price (*Priserne*) of spices in Holland fell, the merchants had a few cargoes sunk in the sea in order to jack up the price. This was an excusable, perhaps even necessary, deception" (121). With this, the connections begin to emerge. The idea of monetary exchange (symbolic currency for actual goods), which is clear in the sentence's equation of business and ideas as well as in its explicit talk of a "real sale," coupled with the potentially essential nature of trickery, becomes a worldly counterpart to the questions of metaphorical equivalence and communication put forth in the epigraphs.[119] Moreover, this paratextual (that is to say, almost extra-textual) approach to these different angles on exchange (of words in metaphor, of things in a sale) will coalesce and add a frightening nuance to the central question of God's command to sacrifice Isaac—and, more particularly, Abraham's inability to communicate this command.

But before coming to the nearly overwritten anxiety about Abraham and God that the text circles around (and that these paratextual materials obliquely set up and comment on), I would like first to examine the enveloping stories that the paratextual materials together tell. There is another aspect added to the concern with exchange to link the preface and epilogue, a repeated formulation. The preface follows its first statement about commerce and poverty of thought by

[119] I am grateful to Joshua Wilner for the observation that the question of exchange (economic or linguistic) may be connected to Kierkegaard’s notion of the “absurd.” The absurd, having a mathematical association with a “surd”(a root of a number that can only be approximately figured, an irrational number), stands in contrast to that which is commensurable with human understanding.

harping on philosophy's (current, Hegelian) hunger for systems and progress: "Every speculative (*spekulativ*)[120] monitor who conscientiously signals the important trends in modern philosophy, every assistant professor, tutor, and student, every rural outsider and tenant incumbent in philosophy is unwilling to stop with doubting everything but goes further (*gaaer videre*)" (5), and the text ends with the cautionary tale of Heraclitus' late disciple (maybe akin to the "late lover (*sildig Elsker*)" that Abraham perhaps rightly lacks in Kierkegaard's formulation (23)), Cratylus, who "went further (*gik videre*)" by amending the famous maxim that one cannot step in the same river twice to now state that "one cannot do it even once" (123).[121] This implicit self-criticism of the process of altering and effacing the original Herder epigraph (Kierkegaard—or the voice of his pseudonymous author—rewrites the Herder passage to exceed the original's skepticism of the continuance of the prophet's words) hints at the complicated ways that this text folds in on itself. This instance is particularly vexing because not only does the Heraclitus passage look back to an epigraph that has been effaced (even if retained in Kierkegaard's drafts and a mildly regretful journal entry)—we now have the phantom symmetry of a mirror image to an “original” that is no longer there—but it creates a strong link between the epi-materials (epigraph and epilogue) that almost seems to bypass the main material between them. That these paratextual parts of the book are so tightly interwoven, especially in comparison to the looser links between the paratexts and main text, creates the disquieting sense that the "outside" sections of the text may be separable from the "inside" *problemata*. And this in turn suggests that the material that exists outside of the consideration of Abraham’s sacrifice may form a competing counterweight to the meditation on faith. I argue that this sense of separation does

[120] *Spekulativ*: a Latin loan word, derived from a verb of seeing: *speculari*, to spy out or watch

[121] The story about Cratylus' criticism of Heraclitus comes from Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1010a, but it is tantalizing to note that Kierkegaard also cites Plato's dialogue *Cratylus*, which is full of the kind of wordplay and etymologizing that informs Kierkegaard's text.

create a diversion, a distraction from a hard-to-face problem in the Abraham story—not, however, to avoid dealing with the insoluble problem of interpreting Abraham, but rather to enact a performance of the problems of language that are built into the Abraham and Isaac story as Kierkegaard and his Danish-speaking narrator read it in the Bible.

In fact, these two semi-detached epi-materials do cohere in a peculiar manner and together admit the ghost of a legend. I propose that when read together, epigraph and epilogue reveal an underlying story that is never explicitly addressed: that of Tarquinius Superbus' price-hiking deal for the Cumaean Sibyl's books. Offered nine books of prophecies, Tarquinius Superbus refuses the high price. The seller burns three books and offers the remaining six at the original price. Tarquinius Superbus again refuses and three more books are destroyed. Tarquinius Superbus agrees to pay the original price for the last three books (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 4.62).

As such, *Fear and Trembling* becomes a book that both is and is not about loss through language. On the one hand, the text suggests a parallel, existing sphere of faith; on the other, it is a text that is resistant to forward movement (going further) and looks backward at a kind of knowledge that has been irrevocably lost. Faith and knowledge are generally set up as incompatible—as noted before, the text is arguably a demonstration of intellect's limits in the face of faith. But the stories that haunt the more explicit separation of faith and knowledge muddy the waters considerably. Oddly and touchingly, this is immediately apparent even in Johannes de Silentio's innocent hedging early in the text about "this man (*hiin Mand*)," who does not try to go beyond faith and who only wants to arrive at an understanding of Abraham (the third person pretense will fall away and de Silentio will begin to speak of this quest in first person): "This man was not an exegetical scholar (*lærd Exeget*). He did not know Hebrew; if he

had known Hebrew, he perhaps would easily have understood the story and Abraham" (9). What seems strangest here is that the barrier of language is set up to be *the* obstacle to understanding. In being an exegetical scholar, in knowing *original language*, as opposed to the translated (exchanged) Danish text, one might find a connection between knowledge and faith. But, this is still a characteristically tentative formulation with the "perhaps (*maaskee*)" as a wry qualification. And of course, why should one not *learn* a language?[122] This is particularly vexing when one reads later: "Venerable Father Abraham! Centuries have passed since those days, but you have no need of a late lover to snatch your memory from the power of oblivion, for every language (*ethvert Tungemaal*) calls you to mind" (23). In the apparent contradiction between the first, hesitant venture of vanishingly small possibility of understanding the Abraham story through language and the second, exuberant assertion of Abraham's universality,[123] Kierkegaard develops a tension that will inform the entire project of the text. The exegetical scholar focuses on written language; the languages—all languages—that call Abraham to mind are verbal (the "*Tunge*" of "*Tungemaal*" is cognate with the English word "tongue"). Access to written language—and further, scholarship—might "perhaps" aid in the understanding of the Abraham story, but only in the case of the original. (The problem with the *Danish*-language translation will be developed below.) As we have seen, too, the text's fear of the temptations of following, imitating, and developing an original (thinker, text), enter into this particular tension. But the ostensible celebration of verbal language is one that will remain in question throughout. When, for example, de Silentio revisits the universal adoration of Abraham in every language at the end

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[122] See, strictly for fun, a Kierkegaard page of pen exercises and doodles that features an officer whose mouth is made of Hebrew letters and is surrounded by the word "systems (*Systemer*)" (Cappelørn, 47).

[123] Danta: "According to this claim, at once lyrical and dialectical, Abraham is not merely an historical figure subject to the possibility of becoming lost to oblivion but somehow contiguous and co-terminus with the act of language itself. Abraham is not simply a heroic figure to be commemorated *in* language (by the poet) but is rather a figure that is recalled by the action of language itself" (166). See also Kevin Newmark, "Between Hegel and Kierkegaard: the Space of Translation" in Bloom (also quoted by Danta).

of the problemata, Abraham is unintelligible because "even if he understood all the languages (*Tungemaal*) of the world, even if those he loved also understood them, he still could not speak—he speaks in a divine language (*guddommeligt Tungemaal*), he speaks in tongues (*i Tunger*)" (114). Speaking and meaning (as in Wittgenstein), speaking and understanding are related but not entirely connected realms. And, yet, it is crucial to note that this later iteration in the problemata of the impossibility of understanding Abraham through language does not completely overwrite de Silentio's original exuberance in the "Eulogy on Abraham"[124]—the text stubbornly requires one to perform a double-movement in relation to it: to see the text's interest in examining (even celebrating) language in its own right and own sphere, even as it asks that we see language as insufficient to the task of explicating faith.

Language and loss have a peculiar relationship in this text. On the one hand, the elegant structure of the text rests on implied stories and implicit rhetorical devices—as in the example of the logic of the epi-materials. On the other hand, written language in particular becomes an obstacle to understanding. One need look no further than the wordplay that Kierkegaard indulges in to see both sides of the coin. Wordplay creates the dismay and confusion that haunts the Abraham story just as much as it is an enjoyable aesthetic that Kierkegaard seemingly cannot help but promote throughout the text. I would like to examine briefly two particular instances of the ambiguity of language that, in a microcosmic echo of the larger themes of the text, hold the text together in an illusory symmetry and showcase the problems with the temptation to interpretation (exegesis). To return to the rhetorical glue that connects the epi-materials, a reader might initially be taken aback at the discontinuities that abound. While the story of Tarquinius

[124] Again, see the closing address to Abraham in the "Eulogy on Abraham": "Venerable Father Abraham! Centuries have passed since your days, but you have no need of a late lover to snatch your memory from the power of oblivion, for every language calls you to mind" (23).

Superbus and the Cumaean Sibyl arises from a kind of triangulation of the epigraph and epilogue, its connection to the story of Abraham seems tenuous at best. Certainly, as I intimate above (and will continue to develop throughout this chapter), both are stories that look to the impotence—or worse, deception—of ordinary language, but that is a somewhat glib and general connecting thread. And, while to discover the story of Tarquinius Superbus and the Sibyl is certainly to appreciate Kierkegaard's wit and rhetorical power, it does not resolve the fundamental question of how one reconciles the elements that lead to the discovery of this hidden story with the explicit concern of the book. That is, the delight in finding the story momentarily hides the question of what commerce (the opening of the preface: "Not only in the business world…"; the opening sentence of the epigraph: "Once when the price of spices in Holland fell…") has to do with an exploration of faith. Kierkegaard's Danish provides a further intensification of this question. In those opening sentences of the preface, the narrator says that everything has been cheapened to bargains ("*en saadan Spot-Priis*"—literally, a mocking price), while the closing sentences of the prefatory materials (the "Eulogy on Abraham") calls upon Abraham to forgive the one "who would speak your praise (*din Priis*) if he has not done it correctly." "Price" and "praise" are homographs in Danish,[125] sharing a linguistic tie related to valuation.[126] Kierkegaard emphasizes the opposing forces of the linguistic tie and the visceral sense that the two cannot coexist in such different contexts. Further, faith (*Troen*) is often synonymous with the tern "the highest" in this text and elsewhere ("*den høieste Lidenskab i et*

[125] The modern spelling has been simplified for both to *pris*.
[126] Of the Germanic languages, only English differentiates the forms of *price* and *praise*.

Menneske er Troen" and inverted in the next paragraph as "*Troen er den høieste Lidenskab i et Menneske*" (122)),[127] and both price and praise are equally modified with such an adjective.

Second, as discussed above, the text is frequently critical of those who would "go further (*gaaer videre*)." While the phrase certainly signals a distaste for current philosophical (Danish Hegelian) mania, this very specific phrasing functions on a second level: it is a cross-linguistic pun, resting on the conflation of going *further* (Danish: videre) and going *to see* (Latin: videre) noted above. I will return to the consequences of this conflation, but I would first note the fact that it is of particular import for Kierkegaard's text that this linguistic play only works for the written form of the two words.[128]

Confronted with the monstrous success of Tarquinius Superbus in consolidating power through his manipulation of language and concerned about the very language used to talk about Abraham (which also includes a fear of the language in the Danish Bible), Kierkegaard's narrator seeks another model: the Cumaean Sibyl who hovers about the outskirts of Kierkegaard's text. The narratives concerning this legendary character are, as one might expect, stories of prophecy. What is intriguing about them, however, is how focused they are on the *means* of delivering prophecy. Still, the uncertain role of the prophet in this text is already apparent from the changes made to, and ultimate deletion of, the Herder epigraph. The role of the prophet as interpreter—even more so (at the risk of going too far), as translator—is, as we shall see, particularly of concern to Kierkegaard's book. We also must consider all of the words related to sight (in the

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[127] See also *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, part I: “Poor, misunderstood, supreme Passion (*høieste Lidenskab*): Faith (*Tro*)—that you have to be content with such a defender; poor preacher-fellow, that you do not know what the question is (*hvorom Talen er*)!” (31) and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, part II: "Behold, faith is indeed the highest passion of subjectivity (*See, Troen er jo Subjektivitetens høieste Lidens*)" (132).

[128] The Danish is given as/vidərə/, [ˈviðɐɐ] in the International Phonetic Alphabet, as opposed to the Latin /wi.ˈdeː.re/. (There is also a second, non-writing-dependent peculiarity to this phrase that will be more thoroughly examined in the next chapter: a particular commentary on motion. The Danish *gaae* (or, in the modern spelling, *gå*) is cognate with the English *go*, but has an additional emphasis on walking.)

etymology of prophecy,[129] in philosophical "speculation," in going further) that Kierkegaard's text places in proximity to this problem of language and the problem of exchange (and the combined problem of metaphorical—exchanged—language).

The Cumaean Sibyl becomes the most well-known of the Roman sibyls in part because of her codification as the most important sibyl in Virgil. The prophecy of Virgil's fourth eclogue, commonly read as messianic by Christian interpreters of the tradition popularized by St. Augustine, in which the narrator sings of the "last age of Cumaean song (*ultima Cumaei…carminis aetas*)" (IV.4) and of the birth of a child who will inaugurate the coming age in a prophetic voice, situates the Cumaean sibyl on the same knife's edge of ethical-aesthetic understanding and faith that Kierkegaard's narrator holds in *Fear and Trembling*. It is here, too, that the poet-narrator speaks of him- or herself not merely as prophet, but specifically as poet, outsinging Orpheus should she be given the time and task of singing of this new child (*non me carminibus vincet…Thracius Orpheus*, IV.55).[130]

But most famously perhaps, and more importantly for my study, the Cumaean sibyl figures in the *Aeneid*, where she stands at the mouth of the underworld. In this poem, she is asked to help Aeneas in his quest to speak with his father in the underworld. Interestingly, the episode is prefigured by the prophet Helenus' advice to Aeneas before the scene plays out in its entirety later in the poem. The prophet describes the sibyl:

> And when, thither borne, you draw near to the town of Cumae, the haunted lakes, and Avernus with its rustling woods, you will see an inspired prophets, who deep

[129] See about for discussion of Kierkegaard's excision of "the Prophet" from Herder's text for the original epigraph for *Fear and Trembling*. Both Herder's German text and the Danish word for *prophet* are derived from the Greek roots *pro-*, *phanai*.
[130] John van Sickle has remarked on the extreme symmetry of this poem: "The structure of the fourth *Eclogue* is a function of the single number seven, a more exclusive principle than in other pastoral. It has seven sections, disposed symmetrically and corresponding to units of sense" ("The Unity of the *Eclogues*: Arcadian Forest, Theocritean Trees," 494).

> in a rocky cave sings the Fates and entrusts to leaves signs and symbols (*foliisque notas et nomina mandat*). Whatever verses the maid has traced on leaves (*in foliis descripsit carmina*) she arranges in order (*digerit in numerum*) and stores away in the cave. These remain unmoved in their places and do not quit their rank; but when at the turn of a hinge a light breeze has stirred them, and the open door has scattered the tender foliage (*turbavit ianua frondes*), never thereafter does she recover their places and unite the verses (*nec revocare situs aut iungere carmina curat*); inquirers depart no wiser than they came, and loathe the Sibyl's seat. (3.441-452)[131]

She is pictured here as not just a singer of prophecy, but precisely as one who writes: "and commits to leaves marks and names (*foliisque notas et nomina mandat*)" (444).[132] The leaves are left—in order—in her cave, but should the leaves be blown out of order, the sibyl "does not care to place the leaves in order again or recall the song (*nec revocare situs aut iungere carmina curat*)" (452, slight alterations from Fairclough mine). As such, Aeneas is told specifically to ask for an *oral* transmission of the sibyl's prophecy: "and with prayers plead that she herself chant the oracles, and graciously open her lips in speech (*quin adeas vatem precibusque oracula*

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[131]Translation by Fairclough here and elsewhere, unless otherwise noted. The Latin is as follows:
Huc ubi delatus Cumaeam accesseris urbem,
divinosque lacus, et Averna sonantia silvis,
insanam vatem aspicies, quae rupe sub ima
fata canit, foliisque notas et nomina mandat.
Quaecumque in foliis descripsit carmina virgo,
digerit in numerum, atque antro seclusa relinquit.
Illa manent immota locis, neque ab ordine cedunt;
verum eadem, verso tenuis cum cardine ventus
impulit et teneras turbavit ianua frondes,
numquam deinde cavo volitantia prendere saxo,
nec revocare situs aut iungere carmina curat:
inconsulti abeunt, sedemque odere Sibyllae.

[132] German and Danish retain a connection between leaf and page (*Blatt* and *blad*, respectively). See, for example, Herder's *Zerstreute Blätter* (*Scattered Papers*).

poscas /ipsa canat, vocemque volens atque ora resolvat)" (3.456-457).[133] When Aeneas does meet the priestess, he recapitulates and encapsulates Helenus' warning: "Only trust not your verses to leaves, lest they fly in disorder, the sport of rushing winds; chant them yourself (*sing them by mouth*, I pray. (*Foliis tantum ne carmina manda, / ne turbata volent rapidis ludibria ventis; /* ipsa canas oro)" (6.74-76, emphasis mine).[134] Virgil then caps the request by emphasizing Aeneas' own orality: "His lips ceased speaking (*Finem dedit ore loquendi*—he gave the end of speaking by means of the mouth)" (6.76). In the opposite direction, Ovid's melancholy account of the sibyl in *Metamorphoses* emphasizes the lingering of her voice, repeating the noun *vocamen*, even as her body dies away: "Though shrunk past recognition of the eye, still by my voice shall I be known, for the fates will leave me my voice (*usque adeo mutata ferar, nullique videnda, / voce tamen noscar; vocem mihi fata relinquent*)" (14.152-153).[135] The oral tradition, here, is the "safe" one for transmission of prophecy; writing is disordered (or at least disorderable), and physical presence may go unrecognized by sight. Kierkegaard's concerns with the limits and celebration of language come to an uneasy pause in the sibyl, just as they do in the effaced Herder epigraph. The desire for the immediacy of the voice is a temptation, in the form of Herder's speakers and the sibyl, a temptation that *Fear and Trembling* ultimately rejects. And, in fact, the rejection of these figures is stronger than that of the narratives (Sarah and Tobias, Agnes and the Merman, Agamemnon, Faust, etc.) that are told within the *problemata*: these figures are only alluded to in Kierkegaard's text, never mentioned directly. But this lack of direct acknowledgment is exactly what makes these figures haunt the text so strongly. Each of these figures presents another dimension of anxiety about the role of an author, which is made

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[133] John Dryden's translation goes even further in emphasizing the desirability of oral transmission: "But beg the sacred priestess to relate / With willing words, and not to write thy fate."

[134] I owe Nickolas Pappas the suggestion that the sibyl's flying leaves parallels the falling flowers of the Tarquinius Superbus legend. Both cases involve difficulty in determining the meaning invested in the plant matter.

[135] English translation by Frank Justus Miller (Loeb edition).

especially dramatic through Kierkegaard's choice of a pseudonymous narrator (who, being a pseudonym, a fictional narrator, necessarily lacks a physical voice and physical body with which to communicate), and more specifically *this* pseudonymous narrator whose name signifies a further level of discomfort with the older models' apparent preference for oral communication. The rejection of the primarily oral figure is taken up more explicitly through the figure of Orpheus, another shadowy character whose half-presence in the text obliquely both distracts from and hints at the temptations of language.

Orpheus and de Silentio

Given the text's elusive use of these two legendary singer-figures, the Sibyl and Orpheus, it may be worth making a brief detour to consider slightly more fully the nature of this particular pseudonymous author, Johannes de Silentio, who invents the genre of *Fear and Trembling*: the "dialectical lyric." The name *de Silentio* is, of course, associated with silence. There is a certain irony that of a man "of silence" is made into an author. However, the prepositional *de* is more ambiguous; it need not necessarily be a simple *of*. The *de* may also speak to a movement "down from," that is, a movement away from silence rather than of it.[136] This ambiguity of the pseudonymous author's name destabilizes the already shaky status of this phantom narrator, and further suggests that silence itself (since the narrator is the one leading us down these failed paths to understanding), with which Abraham is intimately associated, is a cruel temptation and a deliberately unsatisfactory kind of language.

[136] Fenves is one of the few critics to make this interpretation of the *de* primary (most read *de* as *of*). His argument has much to do with movements up and down (the physical journey up and down the mountain, more conceptually and etymologically of maxims and minimization—high points and low points) and in and out: "The movement from homeland to alien domain is moreover the very topic of the text" (165).

As to the genre marking, perhaps what is most peculiar about the term *dialectical lyric* is the grammar of the phrase. The adjectival form of the philosophical term would seem to be subordinate to the poetic noun. The book seems to fall so clearly on the side of philosophy, however, that the word order gives some pause. It may be worthwhile to consider the task of the poet, then, as it is laid out in the text. Not only is the relationship between hero and poet dialectical, it turns out to involve a dialectic of silence and speech. The hero is silent (he acts, presumably) and the poet does all of the talking. In fact, in a sense, in de Silentio's description, if they have a dialogue, it is a silent one. In relation to the hero, the poet is characterized in passive, even feminine, terms[137] and, significantly, almost as a shadow figure:[138]

> [J]ust as God created man and woman, so he created the hero (*Helten*) and poet or orator (*Digteren eller Taleren*). The poet or orator can do nothing that the hero does; he can only admire, love, and delight in him…. He follows his heart's desire, but when he has found the object of his search, he roams about to every man's door with his song and speech (*med sin Sang og med sin Tale*) so that all may admire the hero as he does, may be proud of the hero as he is. (15-16)

Yet the only suggestion that this poet (who is equivalent to a speaker (*Taler*) here[139]) is a *lyric* poet is the fact that he shows up with his song (but also with his speech).

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[137] Compare also Kierkegaard's discussion of the legal relationship between himself and the pseudonyms in "A First and Last Explanation" (*Conc. Unscientific Postscript*, 627).

[138] See discussion of Orpheus story, below. This poet is apparently the right type (in contrast to Orpheus). However, one may be reminded of Maurice Blanchot's interesting conflation/reversal of the Orpheus-Eurydice pair in his characterization of *Orpheus* as "he who always dies" (Blanchot, 142).

[139] *Taleren*, which the Hongs translate as *orator*, is cognate with the English *teller*. The sense of *orator* is reasonable, but the word itself is somewhat neutral (literally, a speaker, a talker) and—with proper context or modifiers—is used to speak of sophists (for example, in *The Concept of Irony*, 208) and religious speakers (for example, in *Stages on Life's Way*, 464) equally. The neutrality of the word, I argue, subtracts a bit from the specificity and high value of poets and poetry. As such the word is of a piece with *Fear and Trembling*'s ambivalence about language and communication.

The lyric, for all of its prominence as the noun in the subtitular phrase "Dialectical Lyric," is rarely named in *Fear and Trembling*. The noun appears only on the title page. Even the adjective "lyrical" appears only twice.[140] First in that God is love has "primal lyrical validity (*oprindelig lyrisk Gyldighed*)" (34). And second, in reference to Luke 14:26 ("If any one 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") as one of Christian teaching's "most lyrical outpourings (*mest lyriske Udbrud*)." Most significantly, we "seldom hear [this lyrical outpouring, Luke 14:26]. But this silence (*Taushed*) is only an escape that is of no avail," and when we do encounter this difficult passage it is covered over with meaningless analogies by a "pious and accommodating exegete" (72). The force of hearing, then, is not just that of encountering the passage, but also that of taking it literally, not analogizing it into tameness.[141] That which is most lyrical, at least in this instance, is that which is literal. And, being set against analogy and the exegetical impulse, this use of the word *lyric* places the notion of poetry and poets in a rather untenable position. The poet and orator, interchangeable before, seem now to be opposed, and the poet himself, if we take poetry in its conventional sense as being made up of analogies in a high degree, is set against himself.[142]

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[140] References to the lyric appear in constellations related to those discussed in *Fear and Trembling* in other works, however, most notably in *Repetition*, which was published simultaneously with *Fear and Trembling* (October 16, 1843). The pseudonym "Inter et Inter" links it very closely to the period of youth in "The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress." Readers of *Fear and Trembling* may find it interesting to read this alongside Johannes de Silentio's linkage of youth and faith: "Abraham had faith, and therefore he was young, for he who always hopes for the best grows old and is deceived by life, and he who is always prepared for the worst grows old prematurely, but he who has faith—he preserves an eternal youth!" (18).

[141] In the first retelling of the Abraham story in the "Exordium," Isaac's misunderstanding is cast in similar terms. Not understanding, like not hearing, may have little to do with actually hearing words (whether or not they are metaphorical or more straightforward). See note 71 below.

[142] See, for example, Robert Frost, "The Constant Symbol": "There are many other things I have found myself saying about poetry, but the chiefest of these is that it is metaphor, saying one thing and meaning another, saying one thing in terms of another, the pleasure of ulteriority" (446).

In some ways, this may not seem so surprising: at its best, as in the God-created and sanctioned form above, poetry stops with infinite resignation, it cannot be resolved into (and by) faith. Elsewhere the notion of poetry is laid out much more straightforwardly as merely different from (with a hint of lesser than) the hero it celebrates. Poetry and the poet admire, but do not seek to emulate. Poetic production in general, including, as de Silentio and Kierkegaard are at pains to emphasize, de Silentio himself, may be aesthetic and/or ethical, but cannot go beyond and make the movement of faith. In de Silentio's formulation, ethical poetic production (the tragic hero) demands disclosure, explanation, speech. In exemplary cases such as those of Agamemnon or Brutus where the individual must sacrifice his child for the good of the state (the universal), the hero is understandable to all (he *can* speak) and he can take comfort in this:

> If he remains silent, it may be because he believes he thereby makes it easier for others, but it may also be because he thereby makes it easier for himself…. If he remains silent, he takes a responsibility upon himself as the single individual, inasmuch as he disregards any argument that may come from outside. As the tragic hero he cannot do this, because ethics loves him for the very reason that he always expresses the universal. (87)

Aesthetics wants its hero to maintain silence, but it finds a way out—someone, some other character or the poet, will reveal the secret and all will be resolved. "Pure" poetry (as opposed, perhaps, to a possibility of a lyrical philosophy, or philosophical lyric) is by etymological definition (poetry from *poesis*) productive and, in its productiveness, perhaps in its self-reflectiveness, does not allow for the kind of silence that makes room for the movement of the absurd. Ovid, who is never named in *Fear and Trembling*, could take comfort in his own sorrow by aesthetic memorialization in a way that Abraham could not:

> There was also in the world one [i.e., Ovid] who lived in exile from the native land he loved. He is not forgotten, nor are his dirges of lamentation when he sorrowfully sought and found what was lost. There is no dirge by Abraham….he did not soothingly sing his mournful lay for Sarah. (17-18)

But, once again, where does this leave the lyric in relation to dialectic? An answer is suggested by a blip of metonymy, and then silence. Orpheus, generally held to be the exemplar of the lyric genre, appears for a moment and then is dismissed out of hand:

> He who will not work does not get bread but is deceived (*bliver bedragen*) just as the gods deceived Orpheus with an ethereal phantom (*luftig Skikkelse*) instead of the beloved, deceived (*bedrog*) him because he was soft, not boldly brave, deceived him because he was a zither player and not a man. (27)

To be sure, there is a precedent for this in Plato (Phaedrus speaks):

> In this manner even the gods give special honour to zeal and courage in concerns of love. But Orpheus…they sent back with failure from Hades, showing him only a wraith (*phasma*) of the woman for whom he came; her real self they would not bestow, for he was accounted to have gone upon a coward's quest, too like the minstrel that he was, and to have lacked the spirit to die as Alcestis did for the sake of love, when he contrived the means of entering Hades alive. (*Symposium* 179d)

Two details in de Silentio's retelling suggest that he reads a set of complications in the Orpheus myth. Firstly, the gods deceived (*bedrog*) Orpheus, and they did so with an ethereal phantom (*luftig Skikkelse*). The word *bedrage* indeed means *deceive*, but it also carries the sense of *unfaithfulness* or *betrayal*. This would seem to relate directly to the difference between the God-

created poet that de Silentio describes and Orpheus. (Kierkegaard's Danish Bible makes the notion of faith and deception in Abraham's story more fraught than it might originally appear, however. This will be discussed below.) As de Silentio seems to read Orpheus through Plato, Orpheus is unfaithful to Eurydice by virtue of his cowardice (in contrast to Alcestis). And, perhaps more importantly, through his self-centeredness and his selfishness (cf. Ovid's emphasis on Orpheus' bitter songs after his failure) he is unfaithful to the task that God has set him.

The *luftig Skikkelse* (literally "airy shape") is telling because it speaks much of de Silentio's terror that he is being deceived by the forms he sees, that the divine is the demonic. In addition to being a "shape" or "form," *Skikkelse* is also a term for a literary character. In Danish, the fictional *Skikkelse* could, in fact, be loosely opposed to a (faithful) married man, the *Ægtemand*: Kierkegaard frequently plays on this compound word, noting that an *ægte* man (*mand*) is an authentic, real, actual man. Elsewhere in the text (*Skikkelse* appears six times in *Fear and Trembling*), it most immediately refers to physical bodies. For example, de Silentio examines the knight of faith's "figure (*Skikkelse*) from top to toe to see if there may not be a crack through which the infinite would peek. No! He is solid all the way through (*heelt igjennem solid*)" (39). The fear that the knight of faith may be merely fictional appears in the literary resonances of *Skikkelse* and echoes in the assertion that it is "solid" and not "*luftig*."

We return to de Silentio's description of the poet he presumably wishes to be (when he admits to being a poet):

> If a vast never appeased emptiness (*en bundløsTomhed, aldrig mættet*) hid beneath everything, what would life be then but despair?…If one generation emerged after another like forest foliage, if one generation succeeded another like the singing of birds in the forest (*som Fuglesangen i Skoven*), as wind through the

> desert…how empty and devoid of consolation life would be! Just as God created man and woman, so he created the hero and the poet or orator (15-16).

In its resonances with the ominous ephemera of the first part of this passage, the Orpheus lyric finds a deeper, demonic silence in de Silentio's cryptic praeteritio: there is the "never appeased emptiness" that hides in the "ethereal phantom (*luftig Skikkelse*)," and there is the "singing of the birds in the forest (*Fugelsangen i Skoven*)" that is a central metaphor in Virgil's telling of the Orpheus story. This metaphor picks up so much force in de Silentio's anxiety about the demonic that he turns away from direct retelling of the Orpheus story as a negative model. Orpheus, practically by virtue of his variously reported parentage, and certainly by virtue of his journey to the underworld, is a daimon. As a Kierkegaardian student of Plato, de Silentio would have been especially sensitive to the potential slippage between daimon (spirit) and demon (evil spirit). In the fourth poem of the *Georgics*, Virgil compares Orpheus to a nightingale, singing the loss of her nestlings. This would already suggest something both effeminately weak and subhuman about Orpheus[143]—he sings, but sings nonsense—but Virgil names the nightingale: she is Philomela (line 511).[144] In very broad terms, the Philomela myth, with its imposed silence and the sacrifice of a son, may be seen as a demonic counterpart to Abraham's.[145]

The Orpheus lyric is notable on two main levels for de Silentio's purposes. On the literal level, like the modern Hegelians, Orpheus thinks that he can "*gaa videre*." Without making the

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[143] Cf. *Fear and Trembling*'s parallel stories of the mother weaning her child juxtaposed against the Abraham stories in the exordium. The analogy of male to female is always clearly marked as puzzling or obviously incommensurable in the text, and yet such analogies either explicitly appear or are alluded to with surprising frequency throughout the text. See, for example, the story of Sarah and Tobias placed alongside Agamemnon, Faust, and the Merman of (Agnes and the Merman). See also the doubling of Johannes de Silentio and the sibyl.

[144] Anderson: "Orpheus' grief is certainly pathetic, but somehow an inadequate response to the *human* situation, as the simile suggests" (32).

[145] Philomela is raped and has her tongue cut out by her sister Procne's husband, Tereus. She compensates for her silence by weaving a message into a tapestry for her sister. After Procne rescues Philomela, they kill Procne's son Itys and serve him to Tereus. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book 6, lines 412-674. It could also be instructive to compare the Grimms' tale "Der Schneider im Himmel" to Orpheus.

first movement of infinite resignation, he literally goes further (*videre*), goes to see (*videre*) the gods. For this he fails and he provides the model for what a dialectical lyric must not be. But at the level of the true cause for Johannes de Silentio's fear and trembling, that the demonic and divine may be confused, Orpheus is the danger of the demonic dialectical lyric.

However, if we return to the corner that poetry is backed into by *Fear and Trembling*'s exploration of Luke 14:26 as one of Christian teaching's "most lyrical outpourings (*mest lyriske Udbrud*)," we have to note that straightforwardness of meaning and poetic lyricism are now simultaneously opposed and superimposed upon one another. Poetry becomes something of a countervailing paradox to that of faith.

De Silentio as a Conflicted Speaker

Through the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of Orpheus and the Cumaean Sibyl the text sneaks in its doubts about speaking and its concerns about its own poetic (lyrical, metaphor-rich) language's competing claims. "Is it possible to speak unreservedly about Abraham without running the risk that some individual will become unbalanced (*gaaer hen i Forvildelse*) and do the same thing?" De Silentio asks (31). The danger might be that an act of imitation will occur, either a reflection without the original's meaning or a "going further." But de Silentio himself goes further, answering his question with a qualified yes: "It is permissible, then, to speak (*Tale*) about Abraham, for whatever is great can never do damage when it is understood in its greatness; it is like a two-edged sword that kills and saves." This passage teems with equivocation, starting with a further qualification of who might understand Abraham that the text begins to explore in the previous sections (just pages before). Oral language (this text makes clear that the narrator gives himself permission to "speak" rather than to "write") may still call forth Abraham, but a

condition is added (in a similar manner to the assertion that Hebrew might assist in understanding): speaking of Abraham is only free from danger ("can never do damage") if "understood in its greatness." But the even greater ambiguity is loaded onto the explicit image of ambiguity: the "two-edged sword (*tveægget Sværd*)." The imagery of the double-edged blade is biblical and, as in Kierkegaard, directly connected to language. Two biblical passages that employ the image bring up very different aspects of language. In Hebrews, it is the word of god that is "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (4:12). God's sword dismembers (not merely metaphorically, apparently) in order to divide and discern the good and bad. But Proverbs presents a very different two-edged sword: "My son, pay attention to my wisdom; lend your ear to my understanding, / That you may preserve discretion, And your lips may keep knowledge. / For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, And her mouth is smoother than oil; / But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword" (5:1-4). The explicit caution here is against adultery, but the seduction of the "immoral woman" is intimately associated with language; instead of tasting the honey of the immoral woman's lips and being cut by her, the listener is asked to "lend your ear…[so that] your lips may keep knowledge" (Proverbs 5:7). How, then, is one to approach de Silentio's examination of Abraham? The word of God and the words of an adulteress both cling to Kierkegaard's image; the image contains both sacred and profane, masculine and feminine forms of potential dismemberment, just as *Fear and Trembling* has both Abraham and the Cumaean Sibyl's knowledge to contend with.

De Silentio continues to hedge his speech with copious conditionals and modal verbs as a preface to the bulk of *Fear and Trembling*: “If it fell to my lot (*Hvis Loddet faldt paa mig*) to

speak about him, I *would (vilde)* begin by….Next I *would (vilde)* describe how Abraham loved Isaac. For that purpose I *would (vilde)* call upon all the good spirits to stand by me so that what I said would have the glow (*maatte blive gløđende*) of fatherly love. I hope *(jeg haaber)* to describe it in such a way that there would not be many a father in the realms and lands of the kind who would dare to maintain that he loved in this way." As the final prefatory act of the rather long line of paratextual materials (title, subtitle, pseudonym, epigraph(s), preface, exordium, eulogy on Abraham, and "preliminary expectoration") for the book that follows, the text announces its status as particularly conditional.

Abraham in Problema III

This finds special expression in the third and final problem of the text. As critics have noted (and some have lamented), little critical attention has been devoted to this last problem.[146] One reason given is that it is a restatement of the problems that come before. But its retelling employs the strategies that we have seen Kierkegaard using above to spectacular ends. After two Problemata that have more general questions as their titular subjects ("Is there a Teleological Suspension of the Ethical?" and "Is there an Absolute Duty to God?), problema III presents a very specific question: "Was It Ethically Defensible for Abraham to Conceal His Undertaking from Sarah, from Eliezer, and from Isaac?" and we are primed to approach Abraham more directly. But the section announces its lack of movement at the head of its second paragraph: "Once again we stand at the same point" (82) and failed analogies from the sphere of aesthetics—of Agnes and the Merman (in several iterations), of Sarah and Tobias, of Faust (these

[146] Louise Carroll Keeley in her essay, "The Parables of Problem III in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*" *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Fear and Trembling and Repetition*, 127n1), and Robert L. Perkins in "Abraham's Silence Aesthetically Conceived" (*IKC*, 156) both take issue with this lack of critical interest in Problema III and give examples of criticism that exemplify and buck this trend.

three are often called "parables" by critics, seeing them as explicitly parabolic and analogical rather than poised to fail)—once again find their way into the text and overwhelm the chapter. After these stories, some thirty pages into a thirty-eight-page chapter, de Silentio poses the Abraham question anew: "But what of Abraham?" But this renewed attention to Abraham is also immediately followed by failed analogies to the Abraham narrative, this time from the sphere of the ethical (most notably Agamemnon and Socrates). Finally, after numerous delays and hedges, when the text does circle back to Abraham's final words, it only mentions them in a fairly hasty manner, in the last few pages of the text proper.

In order to consider the troubling conclusion of Kierkegaard's text proper (though, as we have seen, it is not the actual close of the text, since it is immediately followed by the epilogue), we must go back to the text it intends to revisit and overwrite: the prefatory writings and rewritings of the Abraham story. There, the concerns with the registers of language that come out of the paratexts —gestural, spoken, written—are echoed and inverted: "Once upon a time there was a man who as a child had *heard* the beautiful story of how God tempted Abraham…when he grew older he *read* the same story with even greater admiration….Finally…his soul had but one wish, to *see* Abraham" (9, emphasis mine). The oral narrative becomes the written and understanding is lessened; the regression to the desire for the most immediate physical language is completed in the return to the primacy of witnessing Abraham's movements.[147] What is striking about Kierkegaard's consideration of the three (both as they cause confusion and as they so easily slide into each other) is that it is essentially an ethical consideration of the aesthetics of rhetorical/literary figures. As we have seen, the concern with the clash between the ethical and

[147] In Fenves' elegant terms: "As the written text replaces the spoken story, the complexity of fractured life replaces simplicity. And the text appears on all counts to be the locus of the fracture; its comprehension, the argument runs, would restore wholeness in fragmentation….But this is not the case" (167).

faith in Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac is not the only problem that is under examination in *Fear and Trembling*. Communicability of the physical being is also in question. The narrator wants to see Abraham, and the text comes out and says that part of the reason that sight is here given any priority is less out of a convincing hope that Abraham's movements will communicate his experience of faith and more out of despair in the possibility of Abraham's language and of biblical language. We see now the shuffling of priority from orality to gesture to writing as well as the introduction of the demonic (or monstrous) analogies for what they are: they serve to hold off what is truly fearsome in the Abraham story (that is, that the story contains simultaneous incomprehensibility and all-too-understandability) by the substitution of lesser, more easily dismissed horrors, even as they revel in the power in language and storytelling.

The four Abraham stories that are told in the exordium (the second, more lyrical preface) of *Fear and Trembling* are striking in many ways for the kinds of elisions and substitutions that Kierkegaard's narrator practices. Famously, Kierkegaard's brother complained that *Fear and Trembling* does not have a "strong statement and a clear assertion of the fact that Abraham's life of faith was longer than three days" (Kirmmse, 261).[148] Equally famously, the four stories attempt to substitute an interior life (making the biblical figures into literary characters) for the inscrutable actors that they are in the Bible. A focal point for Kierkegaard is the famous substitution of the lamb for Isaac—or, more to the point, Kierkegaard is interested in the way that Abraham tells his son of this substitution:

> And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

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[148] Fenves plays with the near homography of the binding of Isaac (*relligo*) as the ultimate in "re-ligio" (156).

> And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.
>
> (Genesis 22:7-8)

The metaphor returns. Significantly, when Abraham answers his son, he speaks in a metaphor. Understood pragmatically, the promise of a lamb for the sacrifice is almost shocking: it is figuratively true, but again, understood humanly, it sounds suspiciously close to a lie, or at least a hedge. And, it must be noted, it turns out to be a bit further from the literal truth than anticipated. While God does provide an alternative animal for the sacrifice, it is a ram, not a lamb. The animal remains constant (lamb and ram are, of course, both sheep), but the change in age is striking, particularly as the metaphorical nature of the substitution encourages a metaphorical reading of the older male animal as well. In this series of metaphorical and physical substitutions, we can more clearly see why Kierkegaard's examination of the intersection of (literary) metaphor and faith circles around this troubling moment in the Abraham story.

This part of the Abraham story is so integral to the tale that it is easy to forget that it is not explicitly included in any of the versions of the journey to Moriah in the exordium. The text leaves an explicit examination of what Kierkegaard calls Abraham's "last words" for the last pages of Problema III, the last discussion of the main text. As I have discussed above, *Fear and Trembling*'s abundant prefatory materials, with their underlying commentary on the nature of metaphor, deal only indirectly with the last-minute substitution of an animal for Isaac; Isaac's questioning of his father and Abraham's metaphorical slight of hand is conspicuously absent from the prologue.

In fact, the closest these initial reimaginings of the Abraham stories come to admitting this dialogue between father and son is in the first of the exordium versions in which Abraham decides that “I will not hide from Isaac where this walk is taking him” and Isaac continues to the Mount Moriah with Abraham in confusion and fear (10); in the other three versions, the question is elided completely. Because of this, the physical-metaphorical substitution of Isaac for the lamb is minimized to the point of nullification. I argue that this absence, in its ostensible attempt to efface by overwriting this important moment in the story, suggests its troublesome nature.

In the first version, after Abraham's resolution to tell Isaac where they are going, Abraham tries to comfort Isaac by physical gesture and by verbal means: "Abraham's face epitomized fatherliness; his gaze was gentle, his words admonishing." Neither seems to work; "Isaac could not understand him." In the end of this story, Abraham takes recourse in a lie, telling Isaac that Abraham wants to kill Isaac of his own volition. In the absence of a direct statement of Abraham's words to Isaac that more closely follows the biblical account, we are given two possibilities for understanding what it is that Abraham says to his son. The first is that Isaac cannot understand the meaning behind a literal account of the physical journey ("where this walk is taking him").[149] The second, more intriguingly, is to reinstate "god will provide the lamb" into the hole in the story. This gives the distinct sense that Abraham's substitution is unsatisfactory on some level, that the metaphor does not suffice for Isaac. Abraham's hedging does not work because this is an extreme case of the metaphorical paradox of being simultaneously true and false; in its ambiguity it is unintelligible.

[149] In this first attempt at the Abraham story in the “Exordium,” Isaac’s misunderstanding is amplified. “Isaac could not understand him (*Isaak kunde ikke forstaae ham*)” is repeated twice and the variant, “Isaac did not understand him (*Isaak forstod ham ikke*)” appears once. With each repetition, the misunderstanding is more ambiguous. A literal misunderstanding of Abraham’s metaphorical words is possible (though we are not given Abraham’s words, only his thought that he “will not hide from Isaac where this walk is taking him”), but a lack of understanding that goes beyond language (that “his soul could not be uplifted”) is also made possible since Isaac knows enough to “beg for his young life.”

Problema III seems to offer a more (than elsewhere in the text, anyway) straightforward and explicit explanation of Abraham: that he cannot speak. Abraham is speaking a "strange tongue (*fremmed Tungemaal*)" (119), or even more strongly, that "he speaks in a divine language (*guddommeligt Tungemaal*), he speaks in tongues (*i Tunger*)" (114). When he says to Isaac that "God will provide the lamb for the sacrifice," he speaks a brand of truth that is incomprehensible because it is in a different register that cannot be understood without (impossible) translation. Abraham is a prophet, an interpreter,[150] but he cannot translate God's command (knowing Hebrew apparently does not help here) into an intelligible language to even the people closest to him, much less explicate himself for de Silentio. But Kierkegaard's hesitancy and the way he frames these words also speak simultaneously of celebration (of wordplay) and of doubt (in faith). Kierkegaard finally, in the last few pages of the final problem of the text, quotes Abraham's words: "*Gud skal see sig om Lammet for Brændtoffer min Søn*!" This would be rendered as it is in English, that God will "see to" the lamb for the sacrifice. But the expression *see sig om* in this context has a shadow translation. Elsewhere in Kierkegaard, as in general usage, it would be translated as *to look around*.[151] The biblical line can be as easily read, "God will look around him for the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." This is clearly unacceptable in religious terms because it replaces God's active authority to "see to" something with hints of God's own irresolution. This goes beyond even the standard-issue anxieties that spring from this story, that God's word is itself a less reliable thing than one might hope, if in the two-step punch of the story God first promises a child and then takes him back, and then demands a sacrifice and changes his mind.

[150] See Genesis 20:7, in which God tells Abimelech (who wanted to take Sarah) that Abraham is a prophet.
[151] The phrase occurs at least 15 times in Kierkegaard's collected works, in both the pseudonymous and signed works, including four times in *Either/Or* and once in the nearly simultaneously published *Repetition*. With the exception of its use in *Fear and Trembling*, it has the sense of looking around for something or more generally seeing.

Then, too, much of this text is consumed with language relating to sight, and depending too much on sight, as discussed above. Tarquinius Superbus' gestural-visual language becomes a dangerous code, the child's first weaning is coded by the blackened breast of the mother, “going further (*gaaer videre*)" is equated in Kierkegaard's Danish/Latin wordplay with "going to see," and so on. This is especially true of "Problema III," in which seeing to a lamb is only the other side of looking around. Looking around becomes its own kind of strange temptation; in equating it with even the possibility of God's faltering vision, the narrator's desire to witness Abraham's ordeal as a substitute for understanding through reading is made that much more foolhardy.

Paralysis. The way that Kierkegaard's treatment of language plays against, and even tells a different story than, the analysis of faith's difference from ethics suggests precisely Kierkegaard's concerns about reading and analogizing. Even if the wish to see Abraham's ordeal were not a dead-end temptation, one has access to Abraham and Christianity through reading and exegesis. And a Christian has access to the older biblical stories as precursors of the Christ story. To allegorize is to bring together and smooth over the conflicting parts of the Bible; to examine metaphor and allegory, to examine the limits of its ability to bring together disparate elements, is inevitably to show points of discontinuity and a failure of comparison, even as it is to revel in the poetic imagination. To read *for* faith and to read *as* rhetoric and literature would seem to be mutually exclusive in the limit case of reading Abraham. Again, though, while *Fear and Trembling* often seems loudly and explicitly to encourage the uncrossable gaps between two or more opposed ideas (aesthetics, ethics, faith; success, failure; interior, exterior, etc.), it is simultaneously—if more quietly—making the opposite gesture, namely, it is asking for the double movement of accepting a paradox. To be sure, the pseudonymous narrator de Silentio is

clear that looking to triangulate an understanding of faith through literary analogy is doomed to failure, but it is important to note that the analogies are only failures in that they cannot promote the understanding of faith. But it is too easy to elide the difference between the exploration of failures of communication that de Silentio carries out within the text with a failure of Kierkegaard's book. *Fear and Trembling* is too often read as an exemplary failure. What if, for Kierkegaard, reading and writing have—at least occasionally—a suitability for something other than pure explication? Then Kierkegaard's text accomplishes something quite different. The obstacles in reading that seem to hinder understanding are, in fact, the purpose of the text: Kierkegaard explores rather than resolves. This can be a deeply unsettling aspect of reading Kierkegaard, in general, and is particularly problematic in the case of *Fear and Trembling*, when so much—the Abrahamic basis of religion, the reliability of God's own words—is at stake. To bring these issues together with an exploration of language is unexpected and problematic exactly because these realms are incommensurable. But that, too, is a major point in Kierkegaard, they are not in comparison; rather they are somewhat unhappily, somewhat comically conjoined by the very fact that communication, even of faith, must have a linguistic element.

So, the metaphorical substitution practiced by Abraham and God becomes a crisis point around which Kierkegaard's examination of language and faith can revolve. As I mention above, de Silentio alludes directly to the lack of movement in *Fear and Trembling* when he says at the start of Problema III that "once again we stand at the same point" (82). Honest examination cannot look away and cannot move beyond this point. The text circles around and around, it circumlocutes in various languages in various registers; its declared contempt for those who would "go further" becomes a kind of subtle critique of its own lack of movement.

But this impossibility of movement has an even stranger grounding in its biblical concern with Abraham. When Abraham declares in our alternate Danish translation that "God will look around him (*see sig om*) for the lamb (*Lammet*)," he also remarks on God's own state. *Lammet*, if we ignore the written capitalization that marks the word as a noun in nineteenth-century Danish—and we would not *hear* the capitalization in Abraham's speech—may be translated as *paralyzed*: God will look around paralyzed. The notion that God might be paralyzed in the face of Abraham's action, in the face of his own order, is unthinkable, paradoxically perhaps in part because it makes the temptation so *humanly* understandable: Abraham has called God's bluff, the order was not meaningful. That the Danish language translation of the Hebrew admits even a whiff of this misunderstanding (or worse, truth) is terrifying. But the text's covert identification of *lammet* as a homonymic crossroads, goes deeper in the text. In the prefatory "Eulogy on Abraham"—just after the multiple versions of Abraham and the mother and child, just before the main *problemata*— de Silentio formulates the fate of a witness to Abraham's action with another complicated use of *lammet*: "Anyone who sees it is paralyzed (*Den, der seer derpaa, han bliver lammet*)" (22).[152] As with the use of the term above, the sentence lends itself to a subtle double reading. On the one hand, the hypothetical witness is terrified by the sight of Abraham's strength and becomes "paralyzed (*lammet*)." This conventional understanding of Kierkegaard's line makes explicit the impossibility that even direct experience, without the mediation of a text, could allow for clarity. Read in the context of Abraham's sacrifice, however, the line is arguably even more frightening: "The one who sees it, he becomes the lamb." The witness is placed in the animal's, or at best in Isaac's, potentially uncomprehending place; the doubleness of the

[152] The Danish might be more properly translated "The one who looks upon it becomes paralyzed."

linguistic metaphor bleeds into a homonymic crisis in which the reader himself or herself is rent asunder.

Chapter 3: Limping Motion in *Stages on Life's Way*

In a provocative notebook entry on *kinesis* (movement, change), by way of notes on his reading of Tennemann's *Geschichte der Philosophie*, Kierkegaard muses on the peculiarities of the Greek concept. Kinesis, he writes, is "difficult to define (*bestemme*); for it belongs neither to possibility (*Mulighed*) nor to actuality (*Vanskelighed*); it is more than possibility and less than actuality" (*Notbog* 13.27).[153] In a marginal note to this entry, Kierkegaard alludes to the "way the skeptics denied (*nægtede*) movement," referring to Diogenes Laertius' explanation of one of Zeno's paradoxes: "Furthermore there is no motion; for that which moves moves either in the place where it is or in a place where it is not. But it cannot move in the place where it is, still less in any places where it is not. Therefore there is no such thing as motion" (Diogenes Laertius 9.11.99). We recall, too, the famous story of Diogenes the Cynic's response to Zeno's paradoxes: he answers Zeno's mathematical/philosophical narrative wordlessly, simply getting up and walking away, proving that movement, in pragmatic terms, is possible. Movement, then, has a history as a shadowy kind of homonym, a word and concept that can work quite differently in the abstract and in the concrete. Kierkegaard, characteristically, does not "take sides," allowing theory to override (or overwrite) lived experience, nor does he allow Diogenes' facile physical-visual response to trump Zeno's account of the thought experiment. Instead, Kierkegaard's elliptical and allusive notes suggest a more complex and harder-to-categorize consideration of movement that can neither be contained within categories (possible, actual; thought, reality; narrative, silent gesture) nor entirely transcend them.

Given the break between thought experiment and consensual reality implied by the positions of Zeno and Diogenes—and which receives extended consideration in Kierkegaard's

[153] Translations of the notebook entries referred to here are mine.

text *Stages on Life's Way*—I would add a third account which adds a further twist to the connections between concepts of movement, paradox, and thought experiment. Ernst Mach, the twentieth-century thinker widely considered to be the coiner of the term "thought experiment (*Gedankenexperiment*)" as it is used by philosophers and scientists today (as opposed to Kierkegaard's earlier, more obscure use of the term *Tankeexperiment*), sees paradox in general to be productive of thought experiments—interestingly, because paradoxes encourage *thoughts* to remain kinetic: "Not only does one learn by means of a paradox to best perceive the nature of a problem in which, indeed even the paradoxical content is problematic, but conflicting elements of a paradox permit thoughts no longer to come to rest" (455-6). Movement becomes quasi-metaphoric here, in the same way that readerly and writerly movement through a narrative is both metaphoric (movements of thought) and literal (movement of the eyes, movement through the pages). The motion of thought may be as much at stake as thought *about* motion. For Kierkegaard, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, narratives of movement such as Abraham's journey to Mount Moriah are already suffused with figurative values that complicate the very stories that they are supposed to be explicating: in *Fear and Trembling*, the sacrificial lamb (*Lammet*) becomes a homograph for God's paralysis (*lammet*).

The placement of movement in an ambiguous position is a central question, both structurally and thematically, in the final section of *Stages on Life's Way* (*Stadier paa Livets Vej*), "Letter to the Reader (*Skrivelse til Læseren*)." In this chapter, I will examine the ways Kierkegaard takes this trope to an experimental extreme, allowing me to consider further some of the questions I explored in my previous two chapters. This part of *Stages on Life's Way*, attributed to the pseudonym Frater Taciturnus, is a radically decentered and distorted reflection and reflector of various other texts—those in the *Stages* volume authored by other pseudonyms,

various books from the corpus of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous and signed works, and other works that are incorporated into and denatured by the "Letter to the Reader." As such, the "Letter to the Reader" stands in this study as a further development in Kierkegaard's flirtation with the creation of a symmetrical, coherent system, even as it largely serves to undermine the creation of such a system. On the level of its language, the "Letter to the Reader" expands Kierkegaard's interrogation of figurative language's status as a simultaneously truer *and* falser poetic/rhetorical mirror to actuality and to abstract thought. As with the texts by Hamann and Herder examined in chapter 1 and Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* (chapter 2), the "Letter to the Reader" is rife with figurative language about the body. If the half-playful, half-horrifying linguistic pun on paralysis and sacrifice (in the Danish word "*lammet*") is central (but obscurely so) to the peculiar halting progress of the argument of *Fear and Trembling*, the "Letter to the Reader" from *Stages* explores the trope of crippled movement explicitly. The "Letter to the Reader" also, like *Fear and Trembling* (which has a similarly named narrator), turns the usual expectation of systematic progress from beginning to end of a book on its head: tellingly, its relationship to the text that comes before it in *Stages* is that of an interpretation and overwriting rather than a linear development of its ideas. It frames the entire analytical hall of mirrors that forms its structure as a "thought experiment (*Tankeexperiment*)" and a fable, thereby stretching and reflecting on the form of its own philosophical-fictional discourse in a way that may be helpful in approaching some of the ideas that will be examined in this study's final chapter on Henry James's *Sacred Fount*. While the thought experiment and the image of motion are intertwined in Kierkegaard's text (as they are by Zeno before Kierkegaard and by Mach after him), I will be temporarily disentangling these two strands of the "Letter to the Reader," and starting with the image of motion.

In Kierkegaard's "Letter to the Reader" in *Stages on Life's Way*, the pseudonymous narrator, Frater Taciturnus, says that he is standing on two legs, one tragedy and the other comedy, while the hero of the narrator's own "psychological experiment" (variously termed *det psychologiske Experiment*, *Experimentet*, and *Tankeexperimentet*), another narrator created by Taciturnus, who tends toward the religious, is able to "choose" the tragedy leg. The first image, of standing, is one of stability, and seems at first to be a helpful anchor, tethering Kierkegaard's abstractions to earth. Dualities, duplexities, and double-movements—all disconcertingly omnipresent problems in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous texts—are embodied in a familiar shape, that of human legs, an image recognizable as part of a whole body/system. Yet the reassuringly fundamental metaphor of standing on two legs that describes Frater Taciturnus' equilibrium (*ligevægt*) is constantly undermined by the text's seemingly absurd preference for having only one leg to stand on. Primary among the disorienting effects produced by kicking one leg out from under both character and reader, this destabilization of the image emphasizes just how complex the presence of the physical is in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous texts and what a peculiar gap there is between figurative speech and its objects.

More generally, the overloading of various abstract and intangible ideas onto a superficially simple image exemplifies a deliberate strategy of creating subtly mismatched juxtapositions of ideas that seem less and less obviously tenable with each iteration. As I began to consider in the previous chapter on *Fear and Trembling*, figurative speech, particularly that concerning the metaphorical embodiment of abstract ideas, is often both the medium for investigation and the subject of Kierkegaard's attention. *Stages on Life's Way*, perhaps even more than most of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous output, is an exploration of the limits of language,

narrative, and narrative authority. Paradoxically, these limits are suggested in large part by retreading ground that has appeared in other texts, often in other Kierkegaard texts. The book is similar in structure to the first volume of *Either/Or*. Various titles from other texts could be labels for dominant themes in this text: repetition, the concept of anxiety, sickness unto death, fear and trembling, and so on. As in other texts, we even have a familiar episode from Kierkegaard's biography—his broken engagement to Regine Olsen—as a thematic template. Far from being a lullingly nostalgic greatest-hits package, however, *Stages* revisits initially familiar territory only to create a disorienting double or triple vision; and this strategy of overlapping or overwriting creates questions not only about the relation of parts to the whole of the entire corpus, but also, given that any one sentence may seem to refer back to entire books, about how we can even go from one word to the next in each sentence. We see, too, that much of Taciturnus' work is done by *not* saying what he means; his name is a clue to a strategy of emphasis by way of silence. As in *Fear and Trembling*, with its similarly named narrator Johannes de Silentio, Kierkegaard seems to be interested in how simultaneously sophistic and resonant an *argumentum ex silentio* can be. The *argumentum ex silentio*, after all, creates an intriguingly tentative and provisional foundation in the search for a philosophical truth, since it is necessarily based on a kind of absence rather than positive statement.

Given the extreme complexity of the letter's position within the book as a whole, a basic outline is in order here. The volume *Stages on Life's Way* is subtitled "Studies by Various Persons Compiled, Forwarded to the Press, and Published by Hilarious Bookbinder"—it contains three major studies composed by three different pseudonyms which are introduced by another pseudonym. The "Letter to the Reader," authored by Frater Taciturnus, is the second part of the two-part final section of the book: "'Guilty?'/'Not Guilty?'" (a diary by an unnamed narrator, later

named by Taciturnus as Quidam, a form of an indefinite pronoun in Latin) and the "Letter." All of the sections of *Stages* might generally be said to have love, the "erotic" in Kierkegaard's terminology, as a basic conveyance for even more abstract ideas. Quidam's diary is a retrospective account of a broken marital engagement and Frater Taciturnus' "Letter" is an interpretation of this diary, which, more than two hundred pages later, Taciturnus tells us he wrote himself.

The organization of *Stages* refuses to remain stable; there is continuous movement between sections and constant questioning of authorship. The text alternates between heaping up naturalistic detail and backstory and declaring the text neither wholly realistic in a fictional mode, nor transparently universal in a philosophic mode. As the name of the pseudonym (Hilarius Bookbinder) who gathers together these sections suggests, we have, on the one hand, an almost arbitrary binding together of these seemingly discrete sections, and on the other hand, a prankster perspective to be reckoned with in the midst of serious explorations of complex issues.[154] In an extreme example of the tension between such centripetal and centrifugal forces in the volume,[155] its first major section, "In Vino Veritas," points outward toward Plato's

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[154] The title page of the volume is particularly keen to avoid mention of authorship: the subtitle in the Princeton edition is given as "Studies by Various Persons (*Studier af Forskellige*)"—though the Danish is even vaguer: while the expectation might be that the "various (*forskellige*)" must refer to "persons" who can perform the roles of authorship, the Danish substantive does not specify personhood for the authorship—and the role of the editor is spelled out as "Compiled, forwarded to the press and published by Hilarius Bookbinder." Hilarius Bookbinder, as the editor of the volume, takes the notion of disclaiming authority to a comically extreme level. He takes possession of the manuscripts that make up *Stages* when his client dies, and makes clear that he only publishes the volume when his son's tutor convinces him that the publication will be profitable. More significantly, for this study, he concludes his introduction to the volume with a defense of his action: "That a bookbinder would aspire to be an author could only arouse understandable resentment in the literary world and be instrumental in making people turn up their noses at the book, but that a bookbinder stitches together, guides through the press, and publishes a book so that he 'might be able to benefit his fellowmen in some other way than a bookbinder,' no fair-minded reader will take amiss" (6). Not only does this clearly suggest both the constrictions of defined roles (which is significant in that pseudonyms, characters, and authors are continuously crossing and blurring the lines that would seem to separate them), but also suggests the transgressions that will be a hallmark of the essays to come.

[155] Interestingly, Kierkegaard's rival P. L. Møller critiques *Stages* on the basis of the "centrifugal" and "centripetal" forces: "Feeling, understanding, will, resolution, action, backbone, nerve, and muscle power—all are dissolved in dialectic, in a barren dialectic that swirls around an indefinite center, uncertain as to whether it proceeds as a result

Symposium and earlier Kierkegaard, while also bringing many of Kierkegaard's far-flung pseudonymous narrators together at a party. In this process, these narrators lose authorial autonomy and are treated as characters. The "Letter to the Reader" initially seems more straightforward, with its strong narrator that, far from ceding autonomy, claims authority for creating Quidam and therefore claims possession of the "truth" of what Quidam's narrative is really about. But even here, Taciturnus' narrative serves more to overwrite the Quidam narrative than to explain it. As prefigured by "In Vino Veritas," we have a proliferation of pseudonyms that blur the line between characters and authors. The supposed author of both "Letter to the Reader" and the section that precedes it, "'Guilty?'/'Not Guilty?'" (the two sets of quotation and question marks of the title are in themselves an indication of the complexity of authorship), is Frater Taciturnus, but after a title page for the section that clearly marks Quidam's story as "an Imaginary Psychological Construction (*Psychologisk Experiment*) by Frater Taciturnus" (185),[156] Taciturnus initially disclaims authorship of the diary, making up an elaborate backstory about finding the narrative locked in a chest in the middle of a disappearing lake.

This brings in a secondary dislocation: the discovery of the hidden text lies uncomfortably between traditional philosophy and a metaphor-based fictional narrative. Amid a host of physical details that encourage a physical, sensual experience of narrative (the way the silence "rested over the lake," the denseness of the reed growth "as if I were in the lush fecundity in India"), Taciturnus "wrests" a box containing Quidam's diary from the lake as a "sigh from below, a sigh *de profundis*" (188-189). Already, even before Taciturnus acknowledges Quidam's story to be a thought experiment and the finding of the story a fiction, the text keeps vacillating

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of centrifugal or centripetal force, until it eventually, slowly vanishes" ("A Visit in Sorø," *Gæa*, quoted in Hong and Hong, *The Corsair Affair*, 101.)

[156] This echoes the subtitle of *Repetition*: "A Venture in Experimenting Psychology (*En forsøg i den experimenterende Psychologi*)." I will discuss Kierkegaard's idiosyncratic use of the term "experiment" in the final section of this chapter.

between a quasi-physical reality and something as ephemeral as a sigh, and a metaphorical and scriptural sigh at that. Distinctions between categories slip away: the lake is in the process of being transformed into a "fertile meadow," the body of water is anthropomorphized into a sentient sigher, and the sigh itself takes the visible form of the bubbles that arise as Taciturnus pulls the box from the lake. By the time we find ourselves halfway through Taciturnus' letter, where he asserts that "a word is a word and a man is a man (*et Ord er et Ord og en Mand er en Mand*)" (448), this distinction is comical in its lack of applicability to the "Letter" itself. In some ways this is Kierkegaard's most clearly postlapsarian portrait of language and narrative—Kierkegaard shows that there is a point of origin (often etymological, sometimes mythical or biblical) where an image or word was closer to the truth, and then he proceeds to demonstrate just how far we have moved away from this and how effortful it is to trace a route back to it, even when we are actually sitting where the nexus of all that wants to fly apart should be.

This immovability, the ironic status of the narrator of the text as a stable central point, is a major preoccupation of the text. Frater Taciturnus begins the "Letter" by "pronounc[ing] the matchless prophecy that two-thirds of the book's few readers will quit before they are halfway through" and placing his creation, Quidam, alone and immobile, "standing on (*staaer paa*) a dialectical pinnacle." And he winds up his letter in the "Concluding Word" with an inversion of the ballad of "Queen Dagmar’s Death (*Dronning Dagmars Død*)" (in which the king leaves behind his retinue as he speeds to his dying wife's side): Taciturnus’ version becomes a story of mass abandonment by his readership. He imagines his audience fleeing while he "did not move from the spot…I was left behind alone; a nonequestrian or a Sunday rider whom everybody

outrides" (485).[157] Aside from the emphatic contrast to the constant leap of faith of ideal religiosity, if we take Taciturnus at his word for a moment (and not just as a wry exposition of writerly anxiety), the reader faces the intriguing proposition that he or she is rather less real than one might like to assume. At the same time, the stillness of the narrator places him at odds with the crippled motion that the text explicates.

In order to better understand the images of centripetal-centrifugal tension, the workings of the legs in *Stages*, it may be helpful to look at Kierkegaard's analogous metaphors concerned with double movements and reflection that are found throughout his works. "Double movement" is a notoriously slippery term, itself a juxtaposition of an easily imagined physical noun and a modifier that introduces a physical improbability. I am here most concerned with the meaning of "double" as existing in or vacillating between two (or more) realms at once. This may be seen in the simultaneity of the truly religious person's "cheerful" existence in dangerous immediate reality (immediacy, *Umiddelbarhed*, as a negation of the root word perhaps paradoxically suggests the existence of a fixed, middle point) and in faith, which is consistently a source of awe in Kierkegaard's work. This doubleness also reflects Kierkegaard's linguistic shuttling between images and concepts. Reflection must itself be considered as a specific kind of double movement as well. In a colloquial sense of utmost importance for Kierkegaard, reflection is a kind of inwardness, a pause in outward movement to meditate, a necessary condition for understanding, interpreting, creating. But this sense of the word is a cover for the instability of term and concept. There are at least three important kinds of reflection in Kierkegaard. One kind involves a bouncing away from: for example, light reflecting off water—that is, repulsion. The text constantly denies its own coherence and pushes away the reader. Another is the sort of

[157] The narrator of *Fear and Trembling* also notes at the end of the book that "Once again we stand at the same point" (82).

identity that occurs through mirroring: near the conclusion of the "Letter," Taciturnus suggests the Latin expression of a text as a mirror of the reader, *de te narratur fabula* (478). It describes a constant bringing together and flying apart. Kierkegaard's third use of the term often creates a sense of dislocation—partly by this sense of expansion and condensation, partly because what seems so difficult to understand has a surprisingly simple linguistic aspect that seems hidden in plain sight. Kierkegaard seems to forge an unlikely synthesis between the opposed definitions of reflection; the second shock is that this synthesis reveals itself to be a literal reading of the mechanics of reflection that then assumes an almost allegorical significance: a mirror image is created by the deflection of light—illumination as a moment of creation as well as a turning back away from the image. This mechanical strategy appears again and again in the way that individual conceptual terms (reflection, understanding, and so on) are used—they are broken down, gaps are revealed between definitions that have evolved over time, and yet we are also pointed toward the often archaic sources from which competing definitions began. Through exploration of such points of connection in heterogeneity (here and elsewhere), Kierkegaard seems engaged in an enigmatic attempt to wed precision to the essential ambiguity of doubleness.

A glance at the form of the title of Taciturnus' *psychologisk Experiment* (which he then comments upon in the "Letter to the Reader") may serve to further delineate the nature of Kierkegaard's paradoxical and volatile project: "'Guilty?'/'Not Guilty?'." The structure (including the slash) and the oppositional nature of the terms on either side of the slash recall the title of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*. In the second volume of that earlier text, the narrator, B, explicitly addresses the nature of such a construction in the essay, "The Balance (*Ligevægt*) Between the Esthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality." He rails against A's refusal of

choice in the form of the life view "I simply say Either/Or." "You yourself are a non-entity, an enigmatical (*gaadefuld*—lit., riddle-full) figure on whose brow stands Either/Or. 'This is my motto, and these words are not, as grammarians think, disjunctive conjunctions; no, they belong inseparably together and therefore ought to be written together in one word (*et Ord*), since in union they form an interjection that I shout at mankind'" (159). The imagined desire of the character A to conjoin the opposing terms of either/or into a single (riddling) word clearly anticipates the coupling of tragedy and comedy in Taciturnus' text in a single body. What is of interest for my study is threefold. First that this choice is censured; the unity A claims in "either/or" is illusory and perverse. This is fine as a piece of practical advice for everyday use, but the complication arises when we note that the concept of either/or under discussion in the essay carries over to the title of the book *Either/Or*, which is (as its subtitle posits) already a "Fragment of Life" comprised of collected papers and split into two parts. The unity of the text is announced as questionable on its title page, but this is, in large part, a conceit. Second, the mark "either/or" on A's forehead marks him as enigmatic, full of riddles. The riddle as well as the thought experiment, which will be discussed below, are forms that (at least provisionally) can contain and even encourage paradox. These forms depend on, as much as they are troubled by, a gap between pragmatic application and the world of thought and narrative. Third, the gap is orthographically ambiguous in the constructions "Either/Or" and "'Guilty?'/'Not Guilty?'." We encounter the familiar dash (the English "/" is rendered as a dash in the Danish). The dash (*Tankestreg*, lit. a thought stroke, in Danish), as I have explored earlier in the current study, is an equivocal piece of punctuation which can be read as stitching together as easily as breaking apart the terms on either side of it.[158]

[158] See chapter 2 above for discussion of Kierkegaard's attention to the dash..

This is how Taciturnus' overwriting of Quidam's narrative works: rather than giving a clear picture of the issues at stake in either part of the work, the interpretive imposition of "real" meaning onto the narrative largely demonstrates differences and gaps that seemingly ask to be bridged (but may not be). In this process that I am calling "overwriting," texts are neither effaced nor synthesized; instead, versions are stacked in an unstable palimpsest. The movement between identity and repulsion may create a sense of symmetry (of continuous movement between two poles), but may mire a reader in the dialectic, in a motionless state that is dizzying and potentially wounding. The interest of the "Letter to the Reader" lies in the way that the prevalent images of legs and locomotion push to an extreme the physical aspect of the unity of opposites, and in so doing, illuminates the limits of metaphorical imagery's ability to maintain heterogeneity.

Even though a metaphor based on human two-leggedness at first seems like a conveniently visual and visceral way to conceptualize aspects of double or dialectical movement, this text stubbornly refuses to allow its legs to retain integrity—not only are the legs merely a contrived image, but the image is meant to refer to suspect linguistic and narrative forms: the human being has two legs (extremities) (*to Been* (*Extremiteterne*)); similarly, the comic and the tragic are necessary extremities of movement (*Bevægelses-Extremiteter*)" (422).[159] The legs, after all, are likened to literary genres, which can only take us so far toward describing or

[159] The use of the word "*extremitet* (extremity)" is somewhat unusual in Kierkegaard, referring either to body parts or to far-flung points. The only other place I have found this term is in a note in Kierkegaard's dissertation, *The Concept of Irony*, in which the relationship of irony and dialectic in Plato is discussed: "but dialectic as such is a much too impersonal (*upersonlig*) category to encompass a figure (*Figur*) such as Socrates; on the other hand, whereas dialectic infinitely expands and emanates into the extremities (*Extremiteterne*), irony leads it back into personality (*Personlighed*), rounds it off in personality (*Personlighed*)" (122). It is interesting to note that here, too, the term is somewhat ambiguous in its metaphorical quality, since Kierkegaard is discussing the actuality (which may also include the *physical* aspect) of Socrates' personhood. In any case, it is important to note that this text, as a *Tankeexperiment* is meant to carry an idea to its furthest point. As Taciturnus puts it in the opening advertisement for "'Guilty?'"/"'Not Guilty?'," "in actual life the case is that passions, psychical states, etc. are found only to a certain degree. This, too, delights the psychology but it has another kind of delight in seeing passion carried to its extreme limit (*yderste Grændse*)" (191).

suggesting what lies beyond the point where the narrator must stop. But the question remains why the text is so concerned with questions of genre at all: why these legs? On a simple level, the entry of the question of genre into this "letter" has to do with the fashioning of narrative and its dangers. Constructed narrative in general, Taciturnus will assert at the end of the "Letter," somehow separates language from its rooting in human experience: "One does not let oneself be deceived by books, as if human nature (*det Menneskelige*) is so rarely found; one does not read about it in newspapers; the best part of the expression, the most endearing (*elskeligste*), the little psychological trait (*det psychologiske lille Træk*), is not often preserved" (489). And too, Taciturnus seems to move even further beyond narrative and on to secondary derivations from narrative; he seems to play with nonliterary uses of the adjectives “comic” and “tragic.” As always, though, even though a more fluid sense of comedy and tragedy has been overwritten into this letter, the original genre-based meanings continue to persist and reassert themselves in the background to the story that is explicitly told in the “Letter.” How, too, do these legs point upward to the body or system that includes them? In this chapter, I will discuss how Kierkegaard's allusions to texts by Plato and Sophocles illuminate a quasi-physical (rather than, perhaps, metaphysical) linkage of narrative and movement that is based largely on renunciation. One way to interpret Kierkegaard’s reference to legs of tragedy and comedy is through examination of the treatment of locomotion or legwork (standing—that is, not moving from the spot; limping—hampered, asymmetrical movement; leaping—moving two legs at once, double movement) in the letter. With the disjunction between these physical and metaphorical representations Kierkegaard leads us to consider where we might go after “running aground” on poetic description.

The states of movement discussed in the "Letter" flow out in several directions at once. On one level, they describe accelerating outward movement: standing, limping, leaping. But in Kierkegaard's sense, they paradoxically describe a textual movement inward; for example: from Taciturnus' (the narrator's) non-movement, to Quidam's (the subject's) halting movement, to the religious man's (the unseen ideal's) leap. These correspond to increasing levels of ideality and religiosity. They also correspond to decreasing levels of explicit reference in the text. I start with standing because it is the basis for all movement in the "Letter" and it is the position from which Taciturnus observes all other movement.

Position: Standing

Frater Taciturnus is at pains to stress that upright movement is a basic mark of humanity: "An animal creation, the human being has two legs (extremities) (*to Been* (*Extremiteterne*)); similarly, the comic and the tragic are necessary extremities of movement (*Bevægelses-Extremiteter*) for the person who wishes to exist by virtue of spirit and after having abandoned immediacy" (422—we will return to this quotation again below). However, Taciturnus immediately admits that the carnal needs and physical existence of "animal creation" are not what he is ultimately interested in. What we might think of as the plot of the Quidam narrative, "the erotic and the erotic relationship . . . are of minor concern to me. I use it mainly for orientation in the religious" (399). The conceit here is that the erotic realm, or the erotic relationship, is mere pretext, and that the actual text is about something altogether different, the religious. In the same way that the Kierkegaardian spheres (aesthetic, ethical, and religious) often appear to be discontinuous, the Taciturnus section of *Stages* plays up the notion of discontinuity by creating characters that cannot connect. Still, there must be something essential in a broken

erotic relationship that either carries over to the religious or is reflected in (and/or deflected by) the religious.

Accordingly, the reader experiences Taciturnus' assertion of interpretive authority as an overwriting of the Quidam narrative; the "I" of Quidam's narrative has a firm basis in the erotic. There are several basic ideas at work in this overwriting. For one, a strategy of misdirection is in play: Taciturnus makes a narrative that purposefully, if we take the "Letter" as the new, authoritative interpretation, misleads the reader by backgrounding what the author wants to convey. This overwriting also brings uncertainty about where the overwriting occurs: what is original and what is revisionist history? Does Taciturnus' "intention" to discuss the religious constitute the "original" writing, and does Quidam's narrative overwrite this? Or is it that Taciturnus' writing seeks to erase the presence of the carnal, human realm in favor of a more transcendent ideal? More to the point, in Taciturnus' claim that what the character Quidam says is not what Taciturnus means to say, we have the sense that there *must* be an overwriting, that the erotic and the religious are in some way not compatible.

We could therefore say that Kierkegaard wishes to emphasize a fundamental inability to speak what is important. As usual, however, Kierkegaard also moves to stress that there is a point of connection between the Quidam narrative as it stands on its own and the Taciturnus overwriting. This connection is either glimpsed telescopically—by way of triangulation, as it were—through an implicit reference to an older text, or spied microscopically (discovered hidden in plain sight) in the "Letter" itself. We are given misdirection *as* direction to connect large ideas in the surprising (and surprisingly small) medium of words.

This is precisely the kind of tautological paradox—often taking the form of a superficially obvious etymological connection—that this text traffics in, beginning with the

epigraph from Hamann for the Quidam diary: "periissem nisi periissem" (I would have perished had I not perished; 194). The epigraph introduces us to one of the peculiar difficulties of reading Kierkegaard: the author's felt preference for going higher or deeper than the words on the page. The "Letter," with its interest in earthbound movement, asks that we also consider the surface terrain of the words on the page as a reflection of the profound or transcendent concepts they are meant to evoke. Leaving aside for now the meaning of the epigraph, we see the particular maneuver that occurs again and again in the "Letter." In the doubling of a word (here, "periissem") separated by a negating term (here, "nisi"), we are shown that there is a gulf of difference between the first iteration and the second, but are also asked to hold in mind the obvious fact that the word remains the same. That is, we have a word-image that persists even as we shuttle between the first iteration and the now-changed second iteration. We could look at this as an overwriting of conceptual difference *by* writing.

In fact, Taciturnus defends his use of the apparently inapt erotic for considering the religious by proposing to tackle the *concept* of misrelation (*Misforhold*). Already, we can see that misrelation is a happily chosen term that can be used in various spheres and between various levels of meaning. "Misrelation" for Quidam is a most often a description of his erotic relationship with Quaedam, which forms the surface level of the text.[160] When Taciturnus inquires into what this misrelation can reveal about the bigger concerns of his analysis, he pulls in various heterogeneities: male-female, God-human, reflection-external action, author-character, actuality-possibility, and so on.[161] But at the same time that he presents a proliferation of contrasts, Kierkegaard is at pains to remind us that apparent opposites like "misrelation" and

[160] Quidam and Quaedam are also essentially the same word—something or somebody, one, a certain one—in its masculine and feminine forms. Here, too, we have difference and identity simultaneously.
[161] Perhaps it is the nature of analytical narrative—simultaneously creative and a dissection—that naturally creates a situation in which newly juxtaposed terms are constantly trying to pull apart from each other.

"relationship" have a connection that is obvious when we are attentive to the shape of the words themselves; there is a kind of absolute value of a root (here, relation) in which negation or mitigation is somewhat incidental.

Tellingly, when Taciturnus narrows down what a misrelation essentially is, he chooses a more nuanced term. For Taciturnus the important conceptual problem to be addressed is "misunderstanding" (*misforstaaelse*), as in the early section title "Misunderstanding (*Misforstaaelse*) as the Tragic and Comic-Tragic Principle Utilized in the Imaginary Construction" (416). As with the discussion of relation/misrelation, the principle of a necessary linguistic and conceptual connection between understanding and misunderstanding is required: "There is misunderstanding wherever the heterogeneous are brought together, a heterogeneity, please note, of such a kind that there is a possibility of a relation, for otherwise the misunderstanding *is* not—therefore it can be said that as the basis of the misunderstanding there lies an understanding, that is the possibility of an understanding" (416).

But there is an even deeper connection between misunderstanding and understanding: standing. Standing is an extremely basic concept with myriad metaphorical associations. Etymologically, it is also a very basic word. The Indo-European **sthə*- and **sthā*- are represented in all linguistic branches but Armenian and Albanian, giving rise to the Danish *staa* (*stå*) as well as the German *stehen*, Greek *histanai*, and Latin *stare*.[162] Standing also gives us the term epistemology from the Greek *epistanai*. For the "Letter," standing is the root of not only understanding and misunderstanding but also knowledge (epistemology) and, by extension, the limiting or negation of knowledge.

[162] *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, 863.

In this way, Kierkegaard establishes a linguistic bond both within and among pairs of opposites (understanding/misunderstanding, knowledge/nonknowledge, and even standing/movement). We can now start to see both linguistic clarity and conceptual ambiguity simultaneously, when Taciturnus claims to have the spiritual equilibrium (*Ligevaegten*) of a great Sophist; "for this balance is an offense against the holy passion of the religious. But this balance is the unity of the comic and the tragic" (486–487). In this text, Taciturnus acknowledges that to claim to understand misunderstanding (the subject of Quidam's first-person narration) is suspect because there is such fluidity between understanding and misunderstanding. And when we shift back to the usual meaning of balanced standing, we are confronted with the troubling notion that in some basic way, to stand is to stop, negating or ignoring this doubtful movement. To claim to know is sophistry, lacking philosophical (and certainly bereft of religious) truth. At any point, one may be comically, tragically wrong. Taken in a religious context, too, standing is being still at the point where the religious person would risk a leap or a fall.

There is a secondary wrinkle to this linguistic link: the analogy of humanity's two legs to comedy and tragedy. In analogy we have another kind of double movement and reflection. The form of reasoning in such a structure assumes that there is an equivalence and a symmetry between the first term, legs, and the second, dramatic genres. But we also have a very literal and, given the readily acknowledged difficulties with using language, troubling overwriting here. We are again faced with the question of what this particular overwriting says about symmetry and reflection.

Movement: Limping

In looking at the legwork involved in Taciturnus' pose, we see standing as a point at which movement and stillness exist in balance. But in the "Letter" Kierkegaard ultimately seems most interested in investigating how this idea of equilibrium breaks down; he is interested in the way that overwriting creates a kind of crippled symmetry, to borrow a phrase from the contemporary composer Morton Feldman.[163] (This crippled symmetry will then itself serve as a dark reflection of a religious wounding.) One of the peculiarities of Taciturnus' overwriting, in fact, is that he seeks to distinguish himself from his imaginary psychological construction by *crippling* Quidam, by giving him only one leg to stand on. In a journal entry Quidam specifically points to a stillness that would seem to parallel Taciturnus' reflective standing: "Nothing happens visibly and externally, and all my efforts go to keep me from acting and yet keep me personally acting. . . . The nothing I am doing still does provide a little meaning" (253). Further, he compares himself to the pillar saint Simon Stylites: "I am doing this nothing and this everything because it is the highest passion of my freedom and the deepest necessity of my being. If Simon Stylites in any way was able to relate the idea of God to standing on a tall pillar and bending himself into the most difficult positions and frightening away sleep and searching for terror in the crises of balance, then in my opinion he did well to do that. . . . I certainly am doing as he did" (253–254). Clearly, the balance that Quidam and the saint have in mind is a precarious one (and one that has an obvious relationship to images of leaping and floating, which are further discussed in the next section below), but it is balance nevertheless. When Taciturnus makes use of this earlier terminology and describes Quidam's "passion," it is in terms of his collapse of

[163] Feldman, too, is interested in the way that we listen and look as much for pattern as for variation in pattern to create meaning. In both the essay and musical composition "Crippled Symmetry" Feldman makes clear that two dominant interests are in silence and handiwork. There may be an interesting comparison to Kierkegaard's interests in taciturnity and legwork.

(under)standing and Quidam’s choice of a leg: “He sees the comic, but with passion so that out of that he chooses the tragic (this is the religious and something that I, who see these both elements in equilibrium, cannot understand)” (434).

Before turning to the particular overwriting of these legs and considering specific symmetries that are promised or negated in the "Letter," it is important to note that the reader's own movement from standing to limping is not smooth, nor does it necessarily correspond to lived experience of such movement. To get from Taciturnus' balance to Quidam's supposed (and more desired) halting movement, we proceed in fits and starts through somewhat discontinuous spheres and texts. Yet we encounter the disorienting feeling that we have not actually moved, that we are surveying a single point of textual territory and experiencing difference as ephemeral and ghostly, as if through an extremely long camera exposure. Kierkegaard has Taciturnus himself speak of the stasis of the text at the end of the "Letter":

> Probably the same thing has happened to me in reverse as happened to that noble kind whom a sorrowful message (*Sorgens Budskab*) taught to hurry (*lærte at haste*), whose precipitous ride to his dying beloved has been made unforgettable by the unforgettable ballad in its celebration of the hundred young men who accompanied him from Skanderbord, the fifteen who rode with him over Randbøl Heath, but when he crossed the bridge at Ribe the noble lord was alone. The same in reverse, to be sure, and for opposite reasons, happened to me, who, captivated by one idea (*een Tanke*), did not move from the spot—all have ridden away from me." (485)[164]

[164] Cf. *Fear and Trembling* in Problema III, nearing the conclusion of the text: "Once again we stand at the same point" (82).

In some ways this is a typically Kierkegaardian joke: a somewhat longwinded explanation for not getting anywhere, a story about non-movement filled with movement. But the fraught and equivocal connection between movement and idea is also at stake. On the one hand, communication of news (presumably in narrative form), *Sorgens Budskab*, is grammatically made into the actor who teaches movement (*at lære at haste*); on the other hand, a thought or idea (*een Tanke*) prevents movement.[165]

Something of the dubiousness of movement is reflected in the ambiguity of the Danish term for limping: *at halte*. The movement of limping, halting, is defined by stopping; the act of limping turns out to be a contranymic activity. This type of movement has a connection in Kierkegaard to a couple of concepts that are also under examination in this study: the doubled use of the Danish term *lammet* (a pivotal point in *Fear and Trembling*, discussed above in chapter 2), and in Kierkegaard's adoption of the Latin allusion "*disjecti membra*" (which was a crucial locution in my reading of Hamann's *Aesthetica in Nuce* in chapter 1).

Lammet. The extreme case of Kierkegaard's use of *lammet* in *Fear and Trembling* as a word whose doubled meanings signaled the difficulties in interpreting and, more importantly, following as an example (that is, bringing into present reality) a sacred text must be recalled in a reading of the "Letter to the Reader." As I stated in the previous chapter of this study, this word (or perhaps I should say "this combination of letters"—its homographic quality is the key point that I wish to emphasize here) is used a few times in *Fear and Trembling*. A brief recapitulation: It occurs in one of the many prefatory deferrals of the main text (the "Eulogy on Abraham") as an expression of the consequence of actually witnessing Abraham's near sacrifice of his son: "Who strengthened Abraham's arm, who braced up his right arm so that it did not sink down

[165] See chapter 2 above for a wider discussion of the hierarchy of communicated messages.

powerless! Anyone who looks upon this scene is paralyzed (*lammet*)" (22), and in de Silentio's final revelation of Abraham's words to Isaac (after pages and pages of insistence that Abraham does not speak): "God will provide (*see sig om*—which can also mean "to look around) the lamb (*Lammet*) for the burnt offering, my son" (*Fear and Trembling* 116). At first glance the two instances of the word "*lammet*" appear to be homographs: in the first instance as the participle form of the verb "to paralyze (*at lamme*)," in the second as the definite form of the noun "lamb (*et lam*)." The reciprocal reading of the two (with a little help from the double meaning of the phrase "*see sig om*") leads to a much more frightening reading of both statements, with the possibility that the one who seeks to follow Abraham may be more than "paralyzed"—that he or she may in fact be "the lamb" who is sacrificed, and the idea that God himself may not "see to" the lamb, but may "look around paralyzed" at the sight of Abraham's sacrifice. What is importance to this chapter is that, in part by virtue of the twinning of de Silentio's and Taciturnus' names, the warning about this doubling carries over. And, what is perhaps even more significant is the emphasis on negations of motion (paralysis) in the context of an imaginative construction of the religious.

Disjecta membra. In the first section of *Stages on Life's Way*, "In Vino Veritas," Victor Eremita (whose name is generally "translated" as "Victorious Hermit," and who is elsewhere the pseudonymous editor of *Either/Or*) brings together a constellation of terminology that is developed later in Frater Taciturnus' section of *Stages*. In his speech, Eremita speaks of marriage, *Ægteskab*, which etymologically derives from (and is subject to a great deal of word play in Kierkegaard) the terms *ægte*, or actual; and *skabe*, to make or create.[166] Thus, the erotic

[166] Cf. Middle Low German "*echtschop*." The wordplay centered on *ægteskab* is most notably found in the second essay in *Stages*, "Reflections on Marriage in Answer to Objections (*Adskillet om Ægteskabet mod Indsigelser*)" (93), and in *Either/Or* (Vol. 2, 125).

relationship is announced as a semi-allegorical venture in *Stages*. What is most intriguing for the purposes of this study is Eremita's contention that the usual practice of this state of marriage (and realness) is done in ignorance of a "unifying idea (*Tanke-Eenhed*) that holds these most heterogeneous *disjecta membra* of life-views together" (64). Thought (*tanke*) and pragmatic life experience are at odds; to look at the reality of how marriage works is to risk crumbling into *disjecta membra*, torn apart limbs or body parts—that is, to be crippled. It is worth noting that while the Hongs, in the standard English edition of Kierkegaard, suggest that Kierkegaard's Latin phrase is traced back to Horace's poem, as was Hamann's usage. The most recent Danish edition of *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* has a commentary that suggests Seneca's retelling of the Greek tragedy *Phaedra* is the source of the phrase.[167] Horace's verse, ambiguous though it may be, is about the metonymic dismemberment of the poet when the poetic verse is taken out of order; the verse from Seneca is far less ambiguous. In Seneca's play, the phrase is the Chorus's description of Hippolytus' body after it is destroyed by his horses as they fled from the sea beast summoned by his father. Reading these two versions together mirrors the question that destabilizes Eremita's speech, persists throughout all of *Stages*, was critical in my reading of *Fear and Trembling*, and is of special import for the "Letter to the Reader": how do the figurative and physical dimensions of Kierkegaard's language play off of each other?[168]

At halte. The idea of limping is the main concern of this section of the essay, so I would like to outline a few general ideas about it as a category of movement that belongs in the literal and metaphorical family of "*lammet*" and "*disjecta membra*" before returning to its function within the "Letter to the Reader." As of now, I know of no extended study (and very few passing

[167] The full list of contributors to the new edition may be found at http://www.sks.dk/red/medarb.asp
[168] Broadly speaking, in the few other places where the phrase "disjecta membra" appears in Kierkegaard's works, mostly in his journals and notes, he seems to use the phrase in a fairly casual sense: to mean "fragments." See, for example, journal entries for "1842. Mai. Disjecta Membra…" and "1850 Jernbane-Manien er aldeles…" (www.sks.dk).

remarks) that has been devoted to Kierkegaard's particular interest in the limping figure. Several texts, particularly from (though not limited to) earlier generations of Kierkegaard critics, have seized upon the biographical angle of Kierkegaard's supposed deformity (he was likely a hunchback) as a "key" to his output.[169] More generally, Peter L. Hays's 1971 study, *The Limping Hero* (reedited and re-subtitled subsequently to "The Archetype of the Maimed Figure in Literature" from "Grotesques in Literature") is an seminal early survey of this specific disability. His study tends to approach limping from a psychoanalytical perspective, most frequently reading the limp as a mark of castration, which is of less importance to my reading of Kierkegaard than the intersections between the maimed figure within the text and the structure of the text. Hays's forays into the religious limper (largely biblical)—while limited by the breadth of his survey—gather together some of the foundational myths/fables that are of importance to my work and will be touched on in this study.[170]

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[169] Rikard Magnussen's *Søren Kierkegaard seen from Outside* and *The Special Cross* (1942)and Theodor Haecker's posthumously published *Kierkegaard—the Cripple* (1945, original German title: *Der Buckel Kierkegaards* (*Kierkegaard's Back*)) are exemplary in this respect in that they explicitly link the literary production with Kierkegaard's physical deformity. In the introduction to the English language edition of *Kierkegaard—The Cripple* A. Dru summarizes Haeker's project as suggesting that "It is not merely the influence of Kierkegaard's physical constitution upon his psychological constitution which is in question but the influence of his hump in the question which occupies his whole work, his faith. How far was his religion or its formulation influenced by his deformity?" (x). Later scholars and biographers are more circumspect about making this sort of direct connection, but find it necessary to at least recapitulate the question of Kierkegaard's deformity. Alistair Hannay, for instance, quotes Hans Brøchner at length in his 2001 biography, *Kierkegaard: a Biography*: "Because of the irregularity of his movements, which must have been related to his lop-sidedness, it was never possible to keep in a straight line while walking with him; one was always being pushed, successively, either in towards the houses and the cellar stairwells, or out towards the gutter. When in addition, he also gesticulated with his arm and his rattan cane, it became even more of an obstacle course" (71). Joakim Garff's exceedingly thorough new biography goes into even more detail, in an analysis of a Kierkegaard journal entry labeled "The Squint-Eyed Hunchback." Garff questions whether this "atypical" journal entry is a self-portrait, a portrait of Kierkegaard's rival Meir Goldschmidt: "Of the two figures, the hunchback can only be Goldschmidt, while [character in the entry] Pierrot, who is not hunchbacked at all but only plays a hunchback, must be Kierkegaard whose presumptuousness is punished by abuse in 'the paper.' But if anyone was *actually* a hunchback, it was not Goldschmidt, it was Kierkegaard! The ill-starred hump thus changes places and, so to speak, possesses the wrong man; thus Kierkegaard transferred his own infirmity to Goldschmidt. The point in this lonely document is the phenomenon of *transference* itself, and the hump is not some sort of actual, physical growth, but is another name for the infirmities and failings one attributes to others because one refuses to acknowledge them in oneself" (410).

[170] More specific studies of limping, centered on periods and authors not central to this study, may provide further insights into a tradition of limpers in literature. Of these, Alan Frank Keele most tantalizingly starts his book, *The*

That is to say that earlier explorations of limping, in Kierkegaard and elsewhere, reveal it to be an abundantly overdetermined characteristic (anthropologically, biographically, psychologically, etc.). While all texts are in some way allusive and/or intertextual, I have been arguing so far in this study that the specific symbolic possibilities of a crippling or dismemberment of the body within the text create a kind of permeability in the structure of the texts themselves. Further, the writers I examine exploit the ways that these bodily asymmetries open fissures in the text in a deliberate fashion.

Legs and fables in Plato's Phaedo. Turning back to the specific case of the "Letter to the Reader," Frater Taciturnus links legwork and narrative first, and most explicitly, through overwriting Plato's *Phaedo*. Taciturnus calls attention to an early section of Plato's dialogue that goes as follows:

> Socrates sat up on the bed and drew up his leg and massaged it, saying as he did so, What a queer thing it is, my friends, this sensation which is popularly called pleasure! It is remarkable how closely it is connected with its conventional opposite, pain. They will never come to a man both at once, but if you pursue one of them and catch it, you are nearly always compelled to have the other as well; they are like two bodies attached to the same head (*koruphê*). I am sure that if Aesop had thought of it he would have made up a fable about them, something

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Apocalyptic Vision: A Thematic Exploration of Postwar German Literature, with two chapters, one on blindness, and the next on limping. But connections between the two are quite sketchy. However, John Freccero's treatment in "The Firm Foot on a Journey Without a Guide" of the odd interface of the physical metaphor of travel and life in the initial cantos of Dante's *Inferno* speaks to a tradition that Kierkegaard fits into: Freccero suggests that for Dante the physical intrusion of the foot image is simultaneously a reminder both of the weakness of the flesh and a reaching out to the (physical) reader. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet's essay, "The Lame Tyrant: From Oedipus to Periander," a study of parallels made between mythological and historical limpers likewise suggest ways to consider Kierkegaard's limper.

> like this—God wanted to stop their continual quarreling, and when he found that it was impossible, he fastened their heads together. (60b–c)

When Taciturnus summarizes the dialogue, his account is largely but not entirely faithful to the Greek. Through various forms of overwriting (condensing, eliding, even subtly rewriting), he makes Socrates' wry association between leg pain and Aesop's fables do double, triple, or even quadruple duty.

First, Taciturnus' use of the text depends on his interpretation of the dramatic situation of Plato's dialogue. Taciturnus calls attention to the peculiar atmosphere of this enlarged moment before Socrates' death that prevents this text from falling squarely into the camp of comedy or tragedy, or as a corollary, poetry:

> Socrates specifically posits a duplexity that poetry cannot express. If poetry wants to use the pathos of tragedy to depict Socrates' suffering as a martyr, it had better look where it is going for he does not suffer at all, he has already considered how droll it is that such an *atopos tis* [out-of-place person] comes to his end by way of being executed. Poetry cannot comprehend him. . . . The tragic death of a hero is something simple, and poetry loves that, but if it simultaneously gets a hint that the man himself assumes that the situation could also be comic, then poetry must declare bankruptcy. (419)

This is in many ways a fairly straightforward application of a reasonably Socratic suspicion of poetry's limits to Phaedo's initial observation in the dialogue that he feels a "curious blend of pleasure and pain combined . . . between laughing and crying" (59a). In fact, it would seem to reveal a real sense that "comic" and "tragic" as labels for experience have their roots in the poetic genres from which they derive their names; these adjectives have the weight of

rigorous generic definitions behind their promiscuous casual usage. At this moment in the "Letter," the distance between the way that words are used and what they mean seems bridgeable, contradictions seem resolvable. However, when Taciturnus reflects on the *Phaedo*, he introduces elements of poetic theory from other dialogues by Plato. In a sense, this is a way of standing in one place, using one dialogue as the centripetal center for all of Plato. But in so doing, he is technically inaccurate, writing over what occurs in *this* dialogue. To be sure, Plato does allude to poetic production in the *Phaedo*, but in a way unique to this particular dialogue. Because Taciturnus dwells on Platonic commonplaces about poetry rather than the more ambiguous discussion of poetry in the *Phaedo*, which might make us all the more curious about what Taciturnus is keeping silent. Kierkegaard thus causes these ambiguities to reappear in the "Letter." In the dialogue, Socrates casually relates a new interpretation of a recurring dream in which he has been told, "Socrates, practice and cultivate the arts":

> In the past I used to think that it was impelling and exhorting me to do what I was actually doing; I mean that the dream . . . was urging me on to do what I was doing already . . . because philosophy is the greatest of the arts, and I was practicing it. But ever since my trial . . . I have felt that perhaps it might be this popular form of art that the dream intended me to practice. . . . I thought it would be safer not to take my departure before I had cleared my conscience by writing poetry and so obeying my dream. (61a–b)

Explicit as well as implicit moments of doubt about the priority of philosophy over artistic representation are of course fundamental to Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works, but the accentuation-by-omission of this discussion of poetry that occurs in the *Phaedo* considerably raises the stakes. The *Phaedo* places a moment of doubt about poetic art on a virtual deathbed

and, in so doing, makes Socrates' decision to be a poet into an act that would look to a Christian thinker very much like repentance. Certainly, this is not quite the Christian repentance that Kierkegaard is so concerned with, but it is not unconnected.

This scene of Socrates' repentance causes us to reconsider what Taciturnus means when he says that Socrates "doesn't suffer at all." For the sympathetic reader (which Taciturnus and Kierkegaard certainly are), the picture of Socrates finding himself to be "not good at" this art of composition is at least as painful an image as a comic one, despite Socrates' cheerful self-deprecation. But this gets even more complicated by Socrates' decision, after failing to create successful stories himself, to "avail myself of some of Aesop's fables which were ready to hand and familiar to me, and I versified the first of them that suggested themselves" (61b). Generally, far from being simplistic moralizing tales (related primarily to the ethical sphere), Aesopian fables constitute a genre of overwriting, traditionally used to the speaker's own advantage as a rhetorical tool. But specifically, Plato gives us the tantalizing image of Socrates "versifying" a particular Aesopian fable, without our getting to see what Socrates wrote. Yet it is Socrates' invention of a (prose) Aesopian fable, in order to generalize from his physical experience of pain and pleasure to a more philosophical discussion, that provides the impetus for Socrates' discussion of poetry in the first place. Read through Taciturnus' filters, we notice a discombobulation in the temporal timeline that forces us to read backwards as well as forwards at once.

Thematically, the backstory of the *Phaedo* that is hidden (again, in plain sight) in the "Letter" informs much of what Taciturnus will say about legs and narrative in two major ways: poetic production is not divorced from the ethical or the religious spheres, and it comes out of pain or punishment. More specifically, Taciturnus' overwriting starts with Socrates' pain, piling

layer upon layer of meaning on that injured leg. We have seen Taciturnus conflate the physical location of pain and pleasure in the *Phaedo*, Socrates' leg, with (comic or tragic) categories for reading the Socratic life and narrative. He also conflates this leg with the location of the linkage of the opposites in Socrates' Aesopian fable; in Taciturnus' version the Aesopian fable tells "how the gods, when they could not unite these opposing powers [pleasure and pain] in any other way, joined them at their extremities (*Endepunkterne*)" (418). Soon after, Taciturnus will further synthesize all of these strands and declare the condition of the nonreligious, reflective person to be embodied in these legs: "An animal creation, the human being has two legs (extremities) (*to Been* (*Extremiteterne*)); similarly, the comic and the tragic are necessary extremities of movement (*Bevægelses-Extremiteter*) for the person who wishes to exist by virtue of spirit and after having abandoned immediacy" (422). But all of these connections depend on a small but telling overwriting of Plato.

Socrates' story connects warring opposites at the head (*koruphê*); Kierkegaard's narrator links heterogeneities at the legs. Chiefly, this transferred linkage at the legs is a direct evocation of the sense of movement that Socrates describes in the *Phaedo* (pleasure and pain "will never come to a man both at once, but if you pursue one of them and catch it, you are nearly always compelled to have the other as well"); one of Taciturnus' points is that while poetry cannot conceive of comedy and tragedy as part of a unified whole, it can suggest a tenuous link in succession of discrete elements, "in the form of contrast and at most in a negative unity of a life-view not given in poetry but rising out of it . . . as a presentiment" (417–418). The promise of presentiment recalls, too, the image of reflection from Corinthians: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I am also known"

(1 Cor 13:12).[171] In moving the connection of heterogeneities from the head to the legs, Kierkegaard points to the biblical deferral of direct revelation.

But since Taciturnus is so insistent about preserving this physical image of legs, we must note that legs naturally connect at the pelvis. In this way, the connection to the critical event in Quidam's life that prompts Taciturnus' analysis, the broken *erotic* relationship, is recalled and preserved. Again, however, we encounter a paradoxical, centripetal-centrifugal use of the same terms for contradictory purposes: Taciturnus valorizes Quidam's avoidance of the actual sexual union even as Taciturnus relies on erotic imagery to discuss what this avoidance means.

Locomotion in Plato's Symposium. This surprising reinforcement of erotic imagery points us toward yet another Platonic dialogue ostensibly about love that ends in a question of genre sparked (at least in part) by a prominent and strange story of locomotion. The obvious parallels between the first essay of *Stages on Life's Way* and Plato's dialogue about eros, the *Symposium*, have often been remarked, but the "Letter to the Reader" also takes this dialogue as a model.[172] The series of multiple, doubtful, biased, and/or inebriated narrators that form the indirect structure of the *Symposium* itself is a model for the baroque structure of pseudonymity and doubtfulness that provides at least one definition of being crippled in the "Letter."[173] But what is

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[171] There are three fragmentary journal entries grouped together that explore this verse in relation to movement: Aug. 3, 1836: "Does not I Corinthians 13:12…imply a recognition of the necessity of allegory for our present condition?" and "The relation of allegory to the romantic?"
No date: "since the whole idea cannot rest and be contained in the actual expression.--metaphor—"
(3.768, I A 214)

[172] The first essay of the book, "In Vino Veritas" is explicitly modeled on the *Symposium*, but Kierkegaard himself has called attention to the connection between the idea of "stages" with Diotima-Socrates' ladder of love and has gone so far as to draw parallels between each pseudonym or character in Kierkegaard with the characters of the *Symposium*.

[173] Our outermost frame narrator was not at the party itself and quotes, after many intervening years, the incomplete account of a narrator who was so biased toward Socrates that he went about barefoot in imitation. And while Socrates' monologue is the longest of the dialogue, it is largely a quotation of what another speaker, Diotima, supposedly told Socrates about love. Likewise, we have Taciturnus' initial denial of authority for the Quidam diary,

most striking about the way the "Letter" draws on the *Symposium* (as much as on the *Phaedo*) is that a constellation of seemingly unrelated ideas and images (love, legs, genre, narrative vs. philosophical discourse) coalesce around moments of doubt about authority. The expectation is that Plato's works clearly hold Socrates in highest esteem and that Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works venerate Socrates as the height of pre-Christian achievement, but as we've seen in Taciturnus' use of the *Phaedo*, the "Letter" seems to be fueled by moments where this expectation is frustrated. The *Symposium* first challenges Socrates' authority explicitly when Socrates calls his wisdom a "shadowy thing at best, as equivocal as a dream" in comparison to the publicly acclaimed wisdom of Agathon, the professional tragedian of the group. Agathon suggests that the rest of the dialogue may be read as a competition between their respective types of wisdom, creative versification versus philosophical discourse: "I shall take up this question of wisdom with you later on and let Bacchus judge between us" (175e). This question would seem to be decided by the end of the dialogue, when, as promised, Socrates is the last man standing, everyone else having been conquered by wine, Bacchus presiding only in symbolic form instead of appearing as a theatrical deus ex machina.

Yet we also see that the final moments of the Platonic symposium (hazily remembered by the narrator) and dialogue are spent arguing that the same writer should be able to write both tragedy and comedy. Given Kierkegaard's attention to this dialogue in *Stages*, we should look next at how Taciturnus' overwriting, his initial mockery of "hermaphrodites of tragicomic writers (*Hermaphroditer af tragi-comiske Digtere*) who are not sure whether they want to be writers of tragedy or comedy and therefore are neither" (409), informs the "Letter." The qualification of self-ignorance is an obvious (and perfectly Socratic) way of understanding

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the binding of the whole of *Stages* by a bookbinder who disclaims authorship and knowledge of the interior authors, etc.

Taciturnus' objection—knowingly seeing the world as both comic and tragic is mostly good—but it is hard to escape the feeling that this disparagement is a bit at odds with Taciturnus' exposure of a natural "animal condition" of standing on legs of comedy and tragedy.

One major function of Taciturnus' overwriting is to recall the importance of the comedian, Aristophanes, for the *Symposium*. Despite the early intimation that the competition at the party will be between Agathon and Socrates, Agathon proves too easy an adversary for Socrates. Socrates easily demolishes Agathon's argument in dialogue with him. It is Aristophanes' account of love that is indirectly attacked in Socrates' speech; Aristophanes is the only participant who wishes to argue with Socrates.[174] Plato also arguably makes Aristophanes the most poignant and memorable storyteller in the dialogue. Versification's champion in the competition to elegize Eros would seem to be Aristophanes. And it is not so clear that Socrates "wins" the competition. Moreover, it seems plausible that it is from Aristophanes' repeated protestations that comedy not be too strictly defined and too easily dismissed—"Not that I mind if what I'm going to say is funny—all the better if it is. . . . I'm only afraid of being utterly absurd"—that the dialogue's concluding discussion about comedy and tragedy likely arises. From this too comes some of Taciturnus' anxiety about language and imagery.

As a result, Taciturnus' overwriting of Aristophanes' story seems most clearly designed to bring into clearer focus the veiled and ambiguous notion of punishment in Kierkegaard's "Letter." This too will manifest itself in legs and point us toward more overwritten texts. In Aristophanes' tale, we have the complement of Socrates' Aesopian story of unnatural linkage: Aristophanes tells a story of division. Originally, at our happiest and strongest, he says, humans existed as composite couples (linked everywhere, interestingly, except for the arms and legs) that

[174] He does not get the chance to do so because Alcibiades interrupts the party (212c).

moved in a perpetual head-over-heels manner and were too preoccupied with their delight in each other to demonstrate proper devotion to the gods. In punishment, the gods "cut them all in half, thus killing two birds with one stone, for each one will be only half as strong, and there'll be twice as many of them, which will suit us very nicely. They can walk about, upright, on their two legs, and if, said Zeus, I have any more trouble with them, I shall split them up again, and they'll have to hop about on one" (190d). In this division, the nature of reproduction changes from asexual—"like the grasshoppers" (191c)—to sexual; bisection creates the erotic linkage at the top of the legs. Here, finally, is the third layer of Taciturnus' relocation of the *Phaedo*'s Aesopian fable to the legs.

Just as the "Letter" allows the *Phaedo* to prefigure Christian repentance so too does its treatment of the *Symposium* highlight and shy away from what sometimes looks much like the Fall. For Kierkegaard, there are at least two coincident falls involved here. The first fall might be thought of as the fall of narrative by way of this new walking motion. Where once these legs of comedy and tragedy could function together in the originary individual that Socrates argues for at the end of the *Symposium*, legs now regularly follow each other, one at a time, at best in a "negative unity."

The other fall is the more complicated double of the Christian fall. Aristophanes' story, after all, specifically compares early human "strength and energy [and] arrogance" to the hubris of the giants Ephialtes and Otus who tried to "scale the heights of heaven" (190b). Unsurprisingly, Kierkegaard's text consistently betrays some skittishness where these look-alikes are found. However great Plato or Socrates or Aristophanes might be, they were not Christians and could therefore go only so far. Socrates' understanding can take him as far as resignation, but it cannot take him to the Christian categories of repentance or beyond. To go so far is

undeniably great, and Taciturnus takes some pride in understanding and inhabiting Greek *Heiterkeit*, but it is no longer the highest. However similar in theme or even language Plato's stories may be to the Bible, these are discontinuous worlds. Especially as Kierkegaard is engaged in a delicate balancing act—seeking to reveal something about the religious through narrative approximation while showing that both Quidam and Taciturnus fail to fully grasp the religious through their investigative narrative—Kierkegaard needs us to see how the earlier texts are both illustrations of principles in the "Letter" and are their deformed, demonic doubles as well. These ancient texts contain approximations—complicated Kierkegaardian reflections—of religious concerns; this is the push and pull of Taciturnus' simultaneous flight from and dependence on these texts.

This perhaps helps us start to understand both Taciturnus' apparent mockery of Aristophanes and the proliferation of combinations of comedy and tragedy Taciturnus names.[175] However much amusement Plato might hope Aristophanes' story contains, the "Letter" is more interested in the pathos of irreparable, and perhaps deserved, loss. At the same time, Taciturnus is most concerned about how much passion exists in Aristophanes' story, and worried about the proper proportions of tragedy and comedy in the story. Further, is this story to be condemned for its ethical lapses, in its sympathy for immediate eroticism over quasi-religious obedience?

What is perhaps most telling for Taciturnus' use of the leg image is the threat of future punishment in Aristophanes' story. Taciturnus marks the *choice* of one leg (the tragedy leg) as the move toward higher religiousness. In a darker, doubt-inducing vein, so does Aristophanes' Zeus—if humankind continues to choose not to be attentive enough to the gods, Zeus will simply

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[175] This reading of the Aristophanes story as a fall also creates a minor centripetal-centrifugal tension around its two competing versions of hermaphrodites, half-betraying Taciturnus' concerns about using this story. In the myth bisection separates original hermaphrodites, Aristophanes' third sex. Taciturnus argues that this fallen state accounts for the creation of "hermaphrodites of tragicomic writers."

cut us in half again. As punishment/forced religiosity, we will hop on one leg (*skelos*). But Plato's language gives us an odd picture of this punishment: more literally, the fallen mode of locomotion would resemble dancing, as practiced at the *askolia*, literally, the festival of second day of the Rural Dionysia which recapitulates the elements (such as theater) of the City Dionysia.[176] This is not a picture of suffering or passion. Aristophanes' story goes far beyond Socrates' general attitude of amused resignation in the *Phaedo* (which, as we have seen, Taciturnus regards with sympathy as a cover-up for real pain) and is almost a picture of joy, and in that joy, almost a picture of defiance of the gods' punishment. We encounter here Taciturnus' precedent for a theatrical link to legs, but in approaching Christian religiosity, Taciturnus must overwrite Plato's story.

In so doing, he recalls the speech of the Young Man in "In Vino Veritas," the first essay of *Stages on Life's Way*. The Young Man comments on Aristophanes' speech and proposes that:

> [T]he ludicrousness in bisection (*Halvering*) lies in the contradiction, which Aristophanes did not adequately emphasize. When one looks at a human being, one should still believe him to be a complete entity in himself, and one believes that—until one sees that in the obsession of love he is only a half running around after his other half. There is nothing comic (*comisk*) in half an apple; the comic would become apparent only if a whole apple were half an apple. In the former case there is no contradiction, but certainly in the latter case….[T]he man who has enjoyed social esteem as a whole man becomes comic when he suddenly begins to run around (*at løbe om*) and thereby betrays that he is but half a person. (43)

[176] See "askoliasmos" in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, which does not consider the traditional connection with Dionysus historically accurate.

The comic is related here to its revelation in movement, running (*at løbe*). (Note, too, that this "running around," as in English, is not necessarily a literal movement, but something perhaps as much related to a kind of provable presence in consensual reality.) Very shortly after this, the Young Man speaks of "gratified love" as a *Stilstand*, literally a standing still. He then ventures further into the territory of contradiction and metathesized causality: "even if *tristitia* [sloth, dejection, moroseness—Hongs' translation] sets in, suggesting that all desire is comic, such *tristitia* will be a simple consequence, even if no *tristitia* is such strong evidence of a prior element of the comic as is the *tristitia* of erotic love" (44). The erotic state, and particularly that of its satisfied variant (presumably alluding to marriage, *Aegteskab*, which as I have endeavored to show in my brief analysis of Victor Eremita's speech above, allows a further step in the direction of allegory) is the comic and the tragic, and movement and stillness.

By indirectly calling attention to the language of movement in Aristophanes' myth, Kierkegaard emphasizes an important difference in the way that Taciturnus uses the metaphor of legwork. It is important to note that Aristophanes' story actually creates whole beings by symmetrical division. Given the pattern established by Zeus' threat of future division, it is conceivable that infinite division is possible. The punishment of being halved is countered by several positives: there are more people to be religious, people learn a new kind of eroticism, and they learn to move in a wholly new manner that is largely unhindered by the loss; in the case of the future one-legged people, they even dance. Not so in Taciturnus' account: "Anyone who has only one leg and yet wants to be spirit by virtue of spirit is ludicrous, be he ever so great a genius. In the balance between the comic and the tragic lies the condition for proper walking. Hence the misrelation may also be described as limping, being bowlegged, club-footed (*at halte, at være hjulbenet, klumpfodet*), etc." (422). One may choose a leg, but one is not free of the

unchosen leg; the choice breaks human symmetry without producing a new symmetry. The choice of the tragedy leg may be (or may not be, depending on how the choice is made—more below) a movement toward the religious, but it is also a deformity. The "higher passion (*høiere Lidenskab*, cognate with the German *Leidenschaft*), which chooses the tragic part of this unity [between comic and tragic, where] religiousness begins" (422) is precisely a passion—one suffers, in this case physically.[177]

As we have seen, this nexus and point of disjunction of erotic and religious passion in Quidam's deformed movement is tied back to literary antecedents, namely to the genre of tragedy. But as usual, Taciturnus' gestures toward classical tragedies that bring together his complex of ideas are cryptic and allusive.[178] When he packs allusions to tragedy into his discussion of suffering, he throws the names Oedipus and Philoctetes into the discussion quickly before moving on. There is, however, an arc from the hidden backstories of Plato through these suppressed Sophoclean dramas.

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[177] Even in the religious, one is always yoked to the physical world. Elsewhere, Kierkegaard (and pseudonyms) describes a truly religious movement as constant leaping; in this text Taciturnus describes it as lying out on 70,000 fathoms of water.

[178] He offers "a Side-glance at Shakespeare's *Hamlet*" (452–454) that neatly fits into the questions he explicitly offers about what a Christian drama might look like. But despite Kierkegaard's abiding interest in Shakespeare, this section is a true side-glance, an explicit and self-contained digression.

The limping Oedipus and Philoctetes. Oedipus would perhaps be Taciturnus' more obvious choice of tragedy. There are simple structural connections to Kierkegaard's projects that can be made here, primary among them that Oedipus' story approximates the oft-identified Kierkegaardian spheres[179] (aesthetic: riddle solving as literary interpretation; ethical: as in the title of Quidam's narrative, "'Guilty?'/'Not Guilty?'"; and religious: the inexplicable end of Oedipus), but more importantly, in Oedipus we have a tragic hero who may illustrate the particular limit case that Taciturnus wants to make of Quidam both in terms of becoming religious and in describing the religious. Faced with an actual tragedy containing Taciturnus' constellation of terms, images, and ideas, we may see what choosing the tragic leg consists of.

But first, before we assume that the Oedipus Taciturnus enlists in his discussion is the familiar Oedipus of Sophocles, we must come to terms with the amorphous nature of the Oedipus name. In the Oedipus story we have an original linkage of physical affliction with sexual transgression and epistemological concerns through homographic punning—it is Oedipus whose "swollen foot" is also his "knowing foot."[180] We also have a prototype for the way that a name—and the meaning of a name—opens up a text to something beyond itself. This is staged within any given version of story on mythological-familial grounds, depending on authorial and audience familiarity with the salient feature of the etymology of Oedipus' name being passed down from the lame Labdacus to Laius, the "asymmetrical, clumsy one, the left-hander" in Vernant and Vidal-Naquet's formulation (208), through Oedipus, and even tentatively on into Antigone, whose -*gone* acquires the near homonymic relationship to knees as well as her womb. But, put into the form of a text, it is a necessarily allusive experience.

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[179] It is, furthermore, a discontinuous trilogy!

[180] The name Oedipus is explicitly taken to mean something like "swollen foot" in *Oedipus Tyrannus* (1036); the name may also be derived from *oida*, "I know." R. D. Dawe notes in his commentary on the play that "Greek, from Homer onward, seems to our taste oddly preoccupied with knees and feet" (p. 140).

Moreover, Taciturnus' use of Oedipus is again a double refraction. Not only does Taciturnus overwrite three Sophoclean tragedies (themselves already revisionary retellings of the familiar myth); Oedipus has in fact appeared before, in *Either/Or*. Oedipus' appearance in that pseudonymous work as a supporting player is, tellingly, in "The Tragic in Ancient Drama Reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama." Kierkegaard's "modern" Oedipus is a very different character from the ancient hero. Most notably, the incest is never openly discovered; Oedipus lives out a happy, honored life; Antigone's knowledge of her family history might be regarded as no more than a suspicion; and Oedipus himself may not suspect his situation. The "modern" Oedipus is merely, almost incidentally, deformed. Or, perhaps more suggestively, the modernity of this Oedipus lies precisely in the fact that he has been separated from the leg. Oedipus almost comically drags around his name *and* his leg without knowing what they mean. Rather than the literal blindness that the mythological Oedipus inflicts upon himself, this sighted Oedipus is metaphorically blind about his foot. Taciturnus might catalogue this with the other situations he cites that make one unsure whether to laugh or cry.[181]

With either Oedipus, objective understanding of locomotion is the mirror image of subjective misunderstanding, and from this slippage between the two, passion (Oedipus' own suffering in Sophocles, Antigone's in *Either/Or*) arises. *Oedipus Tyrannus* constantly plays with the already overdetermined nature of Oedipus' name and affliction, but it is the riddle of the Sphinx—Apollodorus' version: "What is that which has one voice and yet becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?"—which is not in the play itself that haunts this idea of knowing-and-yet-not-knowing that Taciturnus is interested in. Oedipus solves the riddle of the

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[181] Taciturnus' main example of the nearly tragic-comic jest concerns another physical disability. He tells the story of a deaf man who tries to quietly open a creaky door, but in his ignorance of the actual, physical, sound world, his good-intentioned slow opening of the door produces a great deal of noise (420).

feet by relating it to human life, Taciturnus' "animal creation." That is, he can *describe* the life cycle but he does not necessarily translate this literary analysis to life.

The Riddle. Taciturnus, the self-described Sophist, indirectly imports another question about the limits of a created text (both Quidam and his own fictionality) through Oedipus. The riddle itself is a genre that is worth a brief detour here since it should shed some light on Kierkegaard's involuted methodology of the thought experiment. Drawing on the seminal works of the early western tradition, riddle scholarship has long been interested in the figurative dimension of riddles.[182] Aristotle, in the *Rhetoric*, suggests that "from good riddling it is generally possible to derive appropriate metaphors; for metaphors are made like riddles; thus, clearly [a metaphor from a good riddle] is an apt transference of words" (1405b). This character is connected to both obfuscation and wisdom as in the Book of Proverbs: "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: / To understand a proverb (Latin: *parabolam*; Danish: *Ordsprog*), and the interpretation (Latin: *allegoriam*; Danish: *Billeder*); the words of the wise, and their dark sayings (Latin: *aenigmata*; Danish: *Gåder*)." (KJV, 1:5-1:6). And Plato, at the end of book V of the *Republic*, in the discussion of opinion has Socrates suggest a series of questions about intermediacy in perception (including—notably for this study—doubles and halves: "What about the many doubles? Do they appear any the less halves than doubles?" (479b)), concluding with a comparison of these things to "the ambiguities one is entertained with at dinner parties or like the children's riddle about the eunuch who threw something at a bat—the one about what he threw it at and what it was in, for they are ambiguous,

[182] I will only undertake the briefest of surveys here. For a fuller treatment, please see, for instance, Brian Tucker's recent book *Reading Riddles: Rhetorics of Obscurity from Romanticism to Freud*. Tucker claims that for the German Romantics, "riddle becomes a key figure for entire works of aft, for a particular mode of reading, and for the self" (14).

and one cannot understand them as fixedly being or fixedly not being or as both or as neither" (479c).

Riddles, like fables and metaphors, function by analogy (the juxtaposition of two unlike things in a context that forces reconciliation), but have the special distinction of hinging on the dissonances that surround the likeness implied by its metaphorical or allegorical content. Furthermore, riddles of the type the Sphinx asks are special in that they mix figurative and literal speech to create both confusion and solution. Standard, simpler riddles of this type that may be familiar to most of us from childhood include: What has eyes but cannot see? (A potato); What has legs but cannot walk? (A table or chair); What has teeth and cannot bite? (A comb). Robert A. Georges and Alan Dundes classify this type of riddle as a "privational contradictive oppositional riddle."[183] Archer Taylor, who did seminal work in riddle theory in the 1930s and 1940s, goes so far as to suggest that this type is the true riddle: "The true riddle or the riddle in the strict sense compares an object to another entirely different object….In other words, a true riddle consists of two descriptions of an object, one figurative and one literal, and confuses the hearer who endeavors to identify an object described in conflicting ways."[184] This mixing of the figurative and the literal, I would argue, presents a complex mirroring of the methodology and concerns of Kierkegaard's text, especially as the Oedipus riddle, which belongs to this species of riddle, is both so integral to and so outside of the "Letter to the Reader." Georges and Dundes tantalizingly note that "Most of the privational contradictive oppositions in English riddles

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[183] "Toward a Structural Definition of the Riddle," *The Journal of American Folklore* Vol. 76, No. 300 (1963), pp. 111-118. See particularly: "The privational contradictive opposition results when the second of a pair of descriptive elements is a denial of a logical or natural attribute of the first. Very often it is the principle function of an object which is denied" (115).
[184] "The Riddle," *California Folklore Quarterly*, II (1843), 129-130. Quoted in Georges and Dundes, 111-112.

involve comparisons with the human body" (115).[185] It would seem that the frisson that comes from solving this type of riddle derives from the simultaneous identification with the human body and the realization of the otherness of the answer. In the Sphinx's riddle, as in Kierkegaard's use of the leg imagery, the uncanniness is doubled since the unexpected element turns out to be human after all.

The missing Oedipus and the blind Philoctetes. The Kierkegaard texts are notably silent about the Oedipus of *Oedipus at Colonus*. The Antigone story of *Either/Or* preserves and compacts at least the premise of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the discovery of the incest (even if the discovery and consequences are transferred to Antigone), and the misrelation between Antigone and Haemon of *Antigone*. Taciturnus' brief mention of Oedipus in the "Letter" leads one to recall Kierkegaard's perversion of Sophocles' Oedipus in *Either/Or*: Kierkegaard's Oedipus continues to limp through his days without knowing of his crime. What is missing in Kierkegaard is the Oedipus who sits, who decides not to limp any further.[186] The Oedipus of *Colonus* further chooses to avoid all motion, including standing. At his end he negates questions of knowledge, his much lauded understanding of the world, and his much reviled misunderstanding of the Delphic riddle of his own life. This point of rest already might represent a demonic double for the continuous work and fear involved in the religious.

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[185] Cf. the theory of embodied mind. From major proponent George Lakoff: We are neural beings. Our brains take their input from the rest of our bodies. What our bodies are like and how they function in the world thus structures the very concepts we can use to think. We cannot think just anything—only what our embodied brains permit" (Brockman, John. "'Philosophy in the Flesh': A Talk with George Lakoff." *Edge*. March 9, 1999. http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/lakoff/lakoff_p1.html. Accessed October 6, 2011.)

[186] *Oedipus at Colonus* begins with Oedipus' request for a place to sit: "But come, my child, if you see any seat…stop me and let me sit there" (413). Oedipus' life also ends seated: "But when he came to the threshold that plunges down…he took his stand, and sat down" (579).

When Taciturnus does explicitly speak of an *Oedipus*, it is apparently only to set another hobbled tragic hero over him. Early on, Taciturnus claims that one of the limitations of the aesthetic sphere is that it can only use complications external to the hero, who must be beautiful and healthy (he cites F. Schlegel's formulation: "Nur die Gesundheit ist liebenswürdig" (458)) in order to preserve the essential relation in the misrelation that prevents a hero's happiness and success—aesthetic tragedy's pathos lies in the possibility of everything turning out alright. Taciturnus' dialectics and the infinite mercy of the religious, however, can take into account a more internal mismatch—the reader sees the leitmotif of the *Sickness Unto Death*. Taciturnus thereby questions whether sickness is appropriate to tragic drama and recalls a debate in which "one party cited Greeks and Greek esthetics against a play in which blindness had been used as a tragic motif. The other party responded by citing *Oedipus* by Sophocles. Perhaps he could better have cited *Philoctetes*, which in a way is an exception to the universal esthetic concept but yet such that the exception by no means can invalidate it but rather itself lapses" (458). What is most interesting about Taciturnus' privileging of Philoctetes is that there is some ambiguity in what he considers Philoctetes' handicap. That Philoctetes, whose "foot . . . dripping from a malady that was eating it away" (6), a foot whose stench prompts Odysseus leave him ashore at Lemnos while everyone else continues on to Troy, is much the less palatable hero and makes a more extreme case for the use of sickness or deformity is certain. But Taciturnus seems to read the initial debate about Greek aesthetics as turning on the use of blindness (presumably in its form as an externalized metaphor), not the more obvious point of comparison between Oedipus and Philoctetes (the injured leg). The question then becomes what Taciturnus sees of blindness in Philoctetes that makes him particularly interesting for this question of aesthetics and injury.

Philoctetes' blindness, unlike that of Sophocles' Oedipus (but like the Oedipus of *Either/Or*), is not literal. If he is blind, it is in his inability to decode the speech of Neoptolemus and Odysseus. Philoctetes is needed to end the war at Troy, but the play is mainly a debate about whether the use of verbal trickery is just. Odysseus' pragmatism is contrasted with Neoptolemus' discomfort with telling a fiction. Philoctetes is basically the prize at stake. Neoptolemus is almost the winner, fending off Odysseus and promising to take Philoctetes home, but at the last moment, Heracles intervenes (from the dead) and orders Philoctetes to go to Troy. Odysseus' essential correctness is victorious, but the status of fiction as a means of accomplishing good is unresolved.

Taciturnus' juxtaposition of *Philoctetes* next to his Oedipuses plays up the fact that the affliction in Philoctetes leg is not an essential part of him. Philoctetes talks to it, separates himself verbally from it: "O foot, foot, what shall I do with you in my remaining life, poor wretch?" (373). He asks that Neoptolemus literally cut off the foot; he would be a more whole being without it, dancing on one leg as in Aristophanes' story. The allusion to this Sophocles text pulls us back to the demonic reflection of the religious hinted at in the *Symposium*—Philoctetes' affliction and temporary fall come from a snake, but this superficial similarity to the Christian fall only emphasizes the extreme gulf between the two stories. Philoctetes' story, then, seems to break up the leg-knowledge layering that has been so carefully established throughout the "Letter." *Philoctetes* helps Taciturnus to establish a recoiling line of demarcation between the religious itself and the classical texts that he brings up as analogues of the religious. When Taciturnus calls attention to Philoctetes' blindness to rhetoric, he collapses it into his own anxiety about the connections that he has been establishing—and breaking down—all along.

Tragedy as the dominant leg. How can we account for the notion of tragedy as the dominant leg, then, given the peculiar nature of the classical tragedies that Taciturnus obliquely points at? Taciturnus turns to the Aristotelian ideas of catharsis by way of fear and compassion (*eleos*, *Medlidenhed*). The importance of tragedy, he suggests, turns on our apprehension that the goal of tragedy is achieved through straddling twin poles of repulsion (fear) and identity (compassion). Taciturnus claims that classical catharsis is a simultaneous experience, not fear separated from or sequentially ordered after compassion; and it purifies the "egotism in the affected spectator in such a way that he loses himself in the hero's suffering, forgetting himself in him" (460). This straddling seems to be, in miniature form, an echo of the highest achievement of the classical world: "Paganism culminates in the mental fortitude to see the comic and tragic simultaneously in the same thing" (422). It begins to look like the tragic leg itself has its own little legs on which it stands—infinite reflection, or even more precisely in this case, a mise en abîme, internal narrative mirroring or reproductive involution.[187] (It is perhaps this in-growingness that makes Oedipus such an attractive and demonic double. The essential paradoxical misrelation in his relationships with Jocasta and with Antigone lies in too much homogeneity, perhaps hearkening back to Aristophanes' composite people.)[188] Unsurprisingly, given the inward nature that reflection takes on here, these poles of fear and compassion seem strangely turned back upon the reading of the tragic genre, and perhaps much of classical literature itself.

This inward movement toward the essential, silent, slightly dangerous reflection of the religious seems, again, to spring from an absolute value of a word: passion (or, in Danish, *at lide*) out of compassion (*Medlidenhed*). When Taciturnus speaks of an ideal loss of egotism in the hero's suffering in the experience of tragedy, he is already hinting at a choice between the

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[187] This recalls Kierkegaard's favored term: "inclosing reserve" (*Indesluttedhed*)
[188] N. Pappas suggests that Aristophanes' composite people recall pregnancy.

little legs inside the larger leg of tragedy: compassion. But while the religious is compassionate toward even illness and gangrenous legs, the religious person's fear should be *of* compassion: "What you must fear is guilt, and your compassion must be for the person who falls in this way, for the danger is first here. Yet your compassion must not go astray so that you forget yourself over some other person" (462). There are twin dangers in the choice of compassion-as-self-forgetting: one is a sort of first-degree loss of self, absorption in another's fate or life, common to erotic attachment as pop psychology would have it. Quidam's downfall lies partly in this, his great guilt is in taking tragically-literally Quaedam's stray, metaphorical remark that he has killed his beloved by leaving. But this is almost a cover for the dominant danger of becoming "lost in contemplation"—self-forgetting as too reflective and, by extension, dialectical. Passion becomes self-torment and removed from actuality. This is also Quidam's trouble, and what keeps him in the demonic: "As soon as she is gone, he will simply have only himself to deal with. . . . It is not the dialectical that makes a person demonic—far from it, but it is remaining in the dialectical" (436–437). This is the image of inclosing reserve (*Indesluttedhed*) that Taciturnus gives in his cover story about finding Quidam's diary; the text as "a sigh *de profundis* . . . a sigh from an inclosed soul from which I wrested its secret . . . . The box was locked, and when I forced it open the key was inside: inclosing reserve is always turned inward in that way" (189). But this image of the key locked in the chest works nicely as an echo of the structure and strategy of the whole Taciturnus part of *Stages* (Taciturnus is the box or frame for Quidam, words are boxes for their own root meanings). Moreover, because Taciturnus refuses to attempt to describe more than the dialectical legs of his "animal creation," he too is involved in this dialectical trap: "To complete an individuality and put down a summary answer, that is for the great systematic thinkers, who have so much to traverse; to allow it to come into being in all its

possibility is what interest one who composes imaginary constructions" (436). Even more puzzlingly, in one of Taciturnus' clearer linkages of limping, aesthetics, and the religious, Taciturnus refuses to describe a choice of limping as incontrovertibly positive or the idea of inwardness as dangerous:

> This is how I have understood the religious in composing the imaginary construction. But what is the idea-relationship that could be to the point here? It is, of course, a relationship with God. The suffering is within the individual himself; he is no aesthetic hero, and the relationship is with god. But once again, restraint must be exercised, for otherwise the religious becomes so high-spirited that it goes to the very opposite extreme and says, "The lame, the crippled, (*Halte, Krøblinge*), the poor are my heroes—not the privileged"—which would be unmerciful of the religious, which is indeed mercifulness itself. (460)

It may be useful to touch on the obvious biblical antecedent for a limping character here. Genesis 32:29-30 and Hosea 12:2-4 tell the story of Jacob's wrestling match with an angel (or man, depending on the source), which leaves him with a new name and a limp. While scholars and artists have read the story as an allegory of everything from a struggle between the nations of Israel and Rome to the sexual reconciliation of body and spirit, what is of particular import for this study is Kierkegaard's leaning on the ambiguity of the story. Jacob, the son of Isaac (and perhaps, then, the recipient of the complex of ambiguities embodied by his grandfather's near sacrifice of his father) is another character designated in such a way that his name announces his role(s). Jacob's name derives from the action of grabbing his brother's heel in the womb in an attempt to keep his brother from being the first born by, in a sense, crippling him. When he is injured by the angel, he is renamed "Israel," usually translated along the lines of "the one who

wrestled with God." The acts of crippling and naming in the biblical story itself are as inextricable as they are ambiguous.

Jacob does not appear in Kierkegaard's works with great frequency, and when he does, the allusion is seldom direct and—curiously, given the biblical nature of this particular limping story—is consumed as much with language itself as it is with exposition and explanation. I will briefly discuss two of the more explicit references here, since these two instances may shed some light on Kierkegaard's linkage of language and limping, as well as perhaps suggesting something about Kierkegaard's reticence about a biblical limper and preference for the pagan models. In the preface to one of his earliest works, *From the Papers of One Still Living*, Kierkegaard (or, actually "Kjerkegaard," an accepted variant of the Kierkegaard name, but one that perhaps puts this text in a gray area between the signed and pseudonymous works) alludes to the Jacob story in terms of authorship. The preface begins by punning on the rather enigmatic Danish proverb "*Forord bryder ingen trætte*," which Julia Watkin notes in the Princeton edition as having "developed out of different sayings and means here that a word given in advance—an agreement—prevents a quarrel later," though a literal reading of the sentence might seem to say the opposite (55, 248n1).[189] While this piece of juvenilia would require a longer discussion to do it justice than can be devoted here, there are three aspects of this introductory sentence that I would like to call attention to: first, the break between received meaning and literal meaning in the expression, especially placed alongside the slightly dubious authorial attribution, forms a basis for the kind of skepticism about the role of the author as an authority that informs this very early work, and will inform all of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous texts. Second, the expression

[189] The proverb is so enigmatic that Torben Brostrøm, in a recent popular Danish article about a new Danish translation of the dadaist French painter and poet Francis Picabia, uses the expression as an example of an expression that has lost its meaning, "winged words (*bevingede ord*)." (See the end of chapter 1 in this study for a brief discussion of winged words.) ("Dadaistisk avantgarde." http://www.information.dk/186885 1. April 2009. Accessed October 10, 2011.)

also smuggles in the term "*bryder*" which here means "breaks up" but also sets the stage for the wrestling match (a wrester is a *bryder*) to come in the reference to Jacob. And finally, within this context, the word *"trætte*," quarrel or dispute, is significant as a verbal substitute for the physical wrestling match between Jacob and the angel. As I hope to show, the analogical use of Jacob to talk about language and authorship is a common feature of Kierkegaard's Jacob story in both this example and the Jacob reference in *Works of Love*. The preface goes on to develop the notion of a split between author and publisher, in the person of Kjerkegaard, and speaks of the author's tormented attempts to hold onto an idea: "Although he [the author] succeeds now and again in seizing one or another of the fleeing ideas, he must also, as he says himself, struggle and strive with it. And although he forgets in the moment of blessing that he is limping (*at han halter*), he feels it only the more strongly when the idea departs from him" (*Early Polemical Writings* 56). The quasi-physical nature of the limp (a physical symptom used symbolically in the bible and taken to a second degree of metaphoricity in this case) is here (as in the biblical version) tempered by or even supplanted by the ecstasy of blessing, but it remains even as the idea (analogically, God's representative) flees. The limp then is marks a widening of the gap between lived experience and linguistic expression conjoined with a more general unease about the nature of "proof" of sensual evidence of a divine encounter.

In *Works of Love* (which appeared two years after *Stages*), the story of Jacob and the Angel appears by way of exploration of the concept to "love thy neighbor (*din Næste*) as thyself"—a commandment that is doubly rife with homonymic danger since the proper self-love commanded by God has little to do with the selfishness the term seems to encompass, and the collapse of what is close to one (but still differentiated—*Din Næste*, your closest, your neighbor) with one self (*Dig selv*—yourself) in the opposite direction requires a forced equivalence:

> But this *as yourself*—yes, no wrestler (*Bryder*) can wrap himself around his opponent (*hvem han skal brydes*) as this command (*Bud*) wraps itself about self-love (*Selvkjerligheden*), which cannot move from the spot (*ikke kan røre sig af Stedet*). Truly, when self-love has struggled with this phrase (*Ord*), which nevertheless is so easy to understand that no one needs to rack his brain over it, then will it realize that it has struggled with one that is stronger. As Jacob limped (*haltede*) after having struggled with God, so shall self-love be broken (*brudt*—past participle of *bryde*) if it has struggled with this phrase (*Ord*), which nevertheless does not seek to teach a man not to love himself but in fact rather seeks to teach him proper self-love. (35)

The wordplay in this passage is complex. The wrestler (who, in the Jacob story, becomes the limper) is, then, less able to hold onto the angel in the way that the command (the Danish word, *Bud* also means "messenger," which has its Greek equivalent in the word *angelos*, from which we get the English word "angel") encompasses (which, in the previous clause, is a wrestling move—the word itself wrestles!) self-love, which is motionless. Something of this motionlessness both communicates itself and does not communicate itself as well: self-love struggles with "this word" just as Jacob fights with God. The result for Jacob is to limp, *at halte*, a motion of stopping; when self-love (the concept, the command) fights with the word for itself, it is broken and in its limping, the "right (*ret*) self-love is taught.

Given the ambiguities within the physical reality of doubleness in the image legs, we must return to the question of what a choice of a leg means for understanding the religious.

Movement: Leaping (and/or Lying)

A logical assumption—based in physical reality, at least—might have been that if Quidam is celebrated for choosing a leg, it ought to have been the good leg, not the crippled one. But Taciturnus raises multiple doubts about this, largely by fleetingly alluding to tragedies of injured legs. Further, in his use of the permutations of the words “tragic” and “comic” (tragicomic, tragic-comic, comic-tragic), Taciturnus offers a subtle distinction in word-shapes between which foot comes first and which one drags behind. We have already seen that Taciturnus associates the tragicomic (*Tragi-Comiske*) with a lack of distinction, or with a lack of self-knowledge. Of the tragic-comic (*Tragi-Comiske*)[190] and the comic-tragic (*Comi-Tragiske*), the former (with the tragic leg pulling the comic by the hyphen) is the inferior of the two "since no essential passion is posited; neither the comic nor the tragic is essentially present.” On the other hand, “in the comic-tragic both are posited and the dialectically infinitized spirit simultaneously sees both elements in the same situation" (420). Surprisingly, it is the latter, with the tragic leg being pulled along, that is preferred. The absurd splitting of hairs may well be an example of comedy or an illustration of Taciturnus’ sophistry, but Taciturnus has gone out of his way to associate the tragic leg with texts related to leg injury. The health of this leg for the famous Kierkegaardian concept of the religious “leap” would seem to be in jeopardy.

In an 1847 journal entry, Kierkegaard directly talks about walking wounded:

> With a thorn in my flesh, my life is pointed toward achieving something I never dreamed of. But the question I have to ask myself now and then is whether I

[190] The Hongs seem to differentiate between “tragicomic” (409) and “tragic-comic” (420). The Danish does not, except in that the first instance is in adjective form and not capitalized, and the second is a substantive and capitalized. I have followed the English translation, but note that there are only two permutations, not three.

> should concentrate my attention on getting the thorn out of the flesh, if possible. That would make me happier in the finite sense, but I would be lost in the infinite sense. . . . The thorn in the flesh has shattered me finitely once and for all—but infinitely I leap all the more lightly. Perhaps this is the way it should be. Perhaps God would rather have a man who is unwell and licks his thorn and is neither healed nor infinitely helped. But there is a kind of pietism, a tragic spiritual asceticism, which believes that the thorn in the flesh is given to a man merely so that he may sit and whimper and look at the thorn instead of using the thorn to rise higher; for that is how it is, however odd it is in certain sense: with the help of the thorn in my foot I leap higher than anyone with feet in the best condition. (2.123)

The most obvious biblical reference for the "thorn in my flesh" does have to do with a kind of movement upward: "And lest I should be *exalted* above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be *exalted* above measure" (2 Cor 12:7, emphasis mine). The oscillation between literal and metaphorical senses—the physical meaning of "to exalt" (Greek *huperairô*) had been forgotten—is also an intensification of the physical by context, a tactic that Kierkegaard repeatedly pursues through Taciturnus. But, of course, we have a difficulty here: Paul was given the thorn so that he would not lift himself up too high; Kierkegaard wishes to use the thorn "to rise higher." It may be instructive to look at Kierkegaard's emendation of the familiar reference: the migration of the thorn to the foot. Here, too, highly visible "background" texts are stacked to suit Kierkegaard's thinking. Behind Paul's letter, there stands another famous biblical reference to thorns: Adam and Eve's punishment for eating of the tree of knowledge:

"cursed is the ground for thy sake. . . . Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee" (Gen 3:17–18). Movement would seem to be painful, necessary, and tied to the idea of punishment for wanting to know more than is possible. An 1850 journal entry pushes the idea of the necessity of woundedness even further:

> To be involved with God, actually to be religious, without bearing the marks of being wounded—well, I do not understand how such a thing could be possible. In the relationship to God to be able to say: To a certain extent I will get involved with you, I will concede you a place in my feelings, but no more; I will not be a spectacle in the world as the religious man must be because by his relationship to you he has become heterogeneous with this life; I will live healthy and strong in this earthly life, become a complete man in the worldly sense—and then have a feeling in my innermost being. One who in truth has become involved with God is instantaneously recognizable by his limp, as they say, or he knows suffering heterogeneity in this life. (2.123)

Again we are faced with a strange uncertainty about what is actually physical and what is "merely" metaphorical. The last "or" clause would seem to allow the possibility of an invisible suffering, but the rest of the entry specifically suggests that the "suffering heterogeneity" of religious life is manifested visibly.

Biographical correlation with the pseudonymous works is slippery, at best, and the journals and papers should certainly not be used as a "key" to cryptic passages in the pseudonymous works. What these journal entries related to legwork and wounds (all dated some years after *Stages*) do clearly show is how inverted and yet fluid the related notions of healthy physicality and healthy religiosity are. This centripetal-centrifugal relationship occurs both

generally and in specific cases of overwriting such as the journal entry dealing with the Pauline thorn.

A final overwriting: in the "Letter," the religious is not generally characterized by leaping. Instead, it is characterized by lying down: "the believer continually lies out on the deep, has 70,000 fathoms of water beneath him" (444). The point of connection with the leap is the unfinished, solitary, silent nature of this posture. One cannot, as a glib preacher does, tell a story and append a moral; instead, all of one's energies are taken up in remaining cheerful in the face of the danger. The religious person, if asked if he could be taken as an example to be read and followed would do well to answer "My dear fellow, are you making fun of me? I do not even dare vouch for my wife—indeed, not even for myself, for I am lying out on 70,000 fathoms of water" (445). The erotic (the wife) and the legwork of the text have been jettisoned in an ambiguous posture of rest. In this new image we see that Quidam and Taciturnus are dark reflections of the religious: instead of the limping, inclosing reserve that starts Quidam's story as a "sigh *de profundus*," we have the religious person lying, motionless, on the water. Despite the stated danger of lying out far from shore, for Kierkegaard and especially for the "Letter to the Reader," this is a strangely static image. The metaphors of effortful religious movement have been turned inward; the image has been stripped of its physicality. It is a movement of inward reflection. In the introduction to Quidam's diary Taciturnus speaks of his sense of fear and anxiety on the lake: "the lake lay before us, clear as a mirror. . . . the ear grasped in vain for a support in the infinite" (188).

Text as Thought Experiment

This turn inward by way of the juxtaposition between external stillness and internal movement is an image of reflection on top of reflection, a paronomastic tour de force: the lake, depicted as a still mirror, gives the narrator, himself reduced to *disjectum membrum* (an ear), the motionless impetus to reflect internally. This is the complex system that sets the stage for the Quidam story,"'Guilty?'/'Not Guilty?'," which Kierkegaard's Frater Taciturnus characterizes variously as a psychological experiment (*et psychologiske Experiment*) and a thought experiment (*et Tankeexperiment*).[191] As we have seen, it is characteristic of Kierkegaard's text to vacillate between what might be termed physical reality and the figurative realm. While that oscillation is extremely interesting to observe (and, I hope, has been shown to be suggestive of Kierkegaard's perspective on dangers of reading severe enough to commend crippling), the obvious question might be what this strategy does. Kierkegaard's text, as ever, does not produce easy answers, but his use of experiment terminology may be of interest to us.

The thought experiment as we know it, particularly from the disciplines of physics and philosophy, is surprisingly immune to definition.[192] A characteristic attempt falls along the lines of James Robert Brown's wry definition: "Thought experiments are performed in the laboratory of the mind. Beyond that bit of metaphor it's hard to say just what they are. We recognize them

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[191] These terms are not limited to this text; *Repetition* which has the subtitle "A Venture in Experimenting Psychology (*Et Forsøg i den experimenterende Psychologi*)" is most commonly cited as the sibling work of "'Guilty?'/'Not Guilty?'" and "Letter to the Reader" in this respect, but the term shows up elsewhere in Kierkegaard's output, most notably for my study in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and in the essay, "The Activity of a Traveling Esthetician and How He Still Happened to Pay for the Dinner" (the *Corsair Affair* in the Princeton edition). The Hongs' standard English edition translates these terms as, respectively, "An Imaginary Psychological Construction" and an "imaginary construction in thought." (Howard V. Hong, "*Tanke-Experiment* in Kierkegaard," and Robert L. Perkins, "Comment on Hong's '*Tanke'Experiment* in Kierkegaard'," in *Kierkegaard: Resources and Results*, ed. Alastair McKinnon (Montreal: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982).

[192] Johannes Witt-Hansen establishes the first modern use of the term "*Gedankenexperiment*" in Hans Christian Ørsted's *Prolegomenon to the General Theory of Nature* in 1811, tracing the concept of the thought experiment back to Kant. (*Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries: The Culture of Golden Age Denmark* 62). Ørsted is the father of electromagnetism and was on Kierkegaard's dissertation committee.

when we see them: they are visualizable; they involve mental manipulations; they are not the mere consequence of a theory-based calculation; they are often (but not always) impossible to implement as real experiments, either because we lack the relevant technology or because they are simply impossible in principle" ("Thought Experiments: A Platonic Account," in Horowitz and Massey 122).[193] Or, from the science end of the spectrum, John Norton's definition: " Thought experiments are arguments which: (i) posit hypothetical or counterfactual states of affairs, and (ii) invoke particulars irrelevant to the generality of the conclusion" ("Thought Experiments in Einstein's Work," in Horowitz and Massey 122). Ernst Mach, commonly (though perhaps erroneously) thought to be the father of the term "thought experiment" as it is used today, takes a fairly inclusive view in a seminal essay: "The dreamer, the builder of castles in the air, the poet of social or technological utopias all experiment in thought. Even the respectable merchant as well as the devoted inventor or researcher does the same thing. Each of them conceives circumstances and associates with these the idea, expectation or supposition of certain results; they create a thought experience" (Mach, 451). Because I will be focusing on Kierkegaard's idiosyncratic use of the term, I will limit myself to a triangulation of a few salient features from these divergent definitions relevant to this study. Thought experiments are image and symbol rich. This is because they are a product of indirect communication (as a non-physical demonstration that must be imagined). An important corollary to this indirectness is that thought experiments are usually (though not always) narrative in their design. The introduction of language into the picture creates Norton's invocation of "particulars irrelevant to the generality of the conclusion" and, as a secondary result, encourage a metaphoricity in even the *definition* of a

[193] For a more technical definition, see Ronald Laymon's definition in Horowitz and Massey (168). Sorensen, another recent theorist of the thought experiment, in many ways uses the "obscure" notion of the thought experiment to illuminate facets of the idea of experimentation generally.

thought experiment. What a thought experiment is *not*, however, is a literary work of fiction. Narrative theorists define the thought experiment against other types of narrative discourse: "a thought experiment is an experimental device of a logical nature, a suppositional or counterfactual propositional universe intended to help resolve a philosophical problem; a narrative fiction, by contrast, invites mental or perceptual immersion in an invented universe, engaging the reader or the spectator on an affective level with the persons and events that are depicted or described" (Schaeffer, 102).[194]

That Kierkegaard does as little in *Stages* to define the term *Tankeexperiment* as our more recent scholars do should come as no surprise. [195] The term, in fact, was apparently a source of great concern for the translators of the Princeton edition. So, before returning to my attempt to describe Kierkegaard's use of the term, I would like to sketch the outlines of this peculiar problem in order to illuminate some of the issues that I am dealing with here. As he was preparing *Repetition* for publication, Howard V. Hong, the late director of the Howard and Edna Hong Kierkegaard Library at St. Olaf College and tireless translator of Kierkegaard, presented a

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[194] For a contrary view, see, for example, Swirski: "The basic premise behind *Of Literature and Knowledge* is that the capacity of literary fictions for generating nonfictional knowledge owes to their capacity for doing what philosophy and science do—generating though experiments" (4). Swirski's contention is that literature crosses lines from unreal to real, enabling readers to "learn" real things from fictions.

[195] Nickolas Pappas has drawn my attention to an intriguing punning connection between the terms *tempt* and *experiment*. Nietzsche deliberately puns on this in *Beyond Good and Evil*: A new species of philosophers is coming up…these philosophers of the future might require in justice…to be called *attempters* [*Versucher*]. This name is…only an attempt and if one prefers, a temptation [*Versuchung*]" (§42; Kaufmann cites the pun in *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 86, 116). The same morphological connection between the terms exists in English (attempt, tempt). Kierkegaard's Danish is a special case in which terms meaning *to try* or *to test* (*prøve*, *Prøvelse*, *forsøg*), which can be used for trying persons or things, are often used interchangeably with the more particular *Fristelse* which is the term for *temptation* in Kierkegaard's bible. This is especially true in *Fear and Trembling*, but occurs elsewhere in Kierkegaard as well. For example, the following passage appears early on in the "Letter to the Reader": "When Don Quixote had been healed of his sickness and the licentiate is already beginning to hope he as recovered his mind, he wants to test (*prøve*) him a little" (402). The Hongs' translation leans toward the *try* end of the spectrum, but, given that the doctor tests Quixote by provoking his desire as a knight-errant to save Spain from the Moors, one might read the clause equally well as "he wants to tempt him a little." It is perhaps not too far of a jump, given the immediate context of a medical examination and the larger context of Taciturnus' admission that he has created a thought experiment, to extend the reading to say here that the doctor "wants to experiment on him a little." These connections bear further consideration.

paper called "*Tanke-Experiment* in Kierkegaard" at the "Kierkegaard: Resources and Results Conference" in 1980, which was collected in a book of the proceedings two years later. In this essay, Hong cites "*experiment*" as a particular challenge for a translator of Kierkegaard. He worries that Kierkegaard's idiosyncratic use of the term, particularly as a transitive verb ("experiment a figure (*experimentere en Figur*)") had historically led and would continue to lead to two misunderstandings: first, that the texts were factual and autobiographical (and not poetic-philosophical), and second, that "particularly 'the Seducer' (*Either/Or*) and Quidam (*Stages*) in Baconian fashion vexed or tortured their subjects experimentally in the practice of a kind of vivisection" (49). For Hong, the term is troubling both in Danish and in English:

> On the Danish side, the misunderstanding of *Experiment* was the result of an entrapment in a specialized, reductive meaning of a term that Kierkegaard used in its elemental fullness and rootedness. In the English translation, the easy entrapment in the familiar English word is again reductionist and is inadequate to the depth and range of Kierkegaard's use of the term for the poet-philosopher's indirect method. (50-51)

Hong's Princeton texts use the somewhat tortured expression "imaginary construction" for *Experiment* and "imaginary construction in thought" for *Tankeexperiment*.

So, what are we to make of Hong's special worry, the transitive verbal form? This form (along with most other possible forms) occurs in its greatest density in a long footnote in "The Activity of a Traveling Esthetician," Frater Taciturnus' rebuttal to P.L. Møller's needling review of *Stages* (of which I only quote the first third):

> An imaginative constructor (*Experimentator*) says: in order to become properly aware of what is decisive in the religious existence categories, since religiousness

> is very often confused with all sorts of things and with apathy, I shall imaginatively construct (*experimentere*) a character who lives in a final and extreme (*yderste*) approximation of madness but tends toward the religious. The imaginative constructor (*Experimentatoren*) himself says that the point of view of the imaginatively constructed character (*Experimenteredes Standpunkt*) is a deviation but adds that he is doing the whole imaginary construction (*Experiment*) in order to study normality by means of the passion of deviation. He himself declares that it is a very strenuous task to hold the imaginatively constructed character (*Experimenterede*) at this extremity (*Yderspidse*) while he himself supervises imaginatively constructively (*experimenterende seer efter*). (39)

Notably, Robert L. Perkins suggests that Hong's choice of translation "would emphasize the poetic and the imaginative and serves further to isolate Kierkegaard from philosophy" (55).[196] It seems to me that Perkins concern is quite valid, though I would argue that the problem has less to do with loading the dice in a choice between reading Kierkegaard's text as poetry or as philosophy, and more that Hong's "choice" of poetic imagination ignores the way the structure of the text (as a whole) is set up to comment on itself as a type and methodology of writing. The repeated use of the word "extreme"/"extremity"/"extremity" (*yderste*/*yderspidse*) in conjunction with the point of view of the *subject* of the thought experiment (*Experimenteredes Standpunkt*) underlines this; the idea here is not just a poetic production for which the "author's" role is key, but is a consistent expression of an internal standpoint which the author literally looks after (*seer efter*) while experimenting (*experimenterende*—present progressive form of the verb).

[196] Perkins questioning of Hong's coinage is exceptionally gentle throughout his short "Comment on Hong."

Hong's phrasing may do much to erase the distinction between the pseudonym as a consistent view point and an author of fiction or a character created as a fictional author. Before continuing, I would like to remind us that for reading Kierkegaard, we must keep in mind the distinctions that the texts themselves often seem designed to blur: namely, that this is a multilayered text. Starting from the inside, there is the construction itself, furnished with an authorial point of view—Quidam's. Then there is Quidam's constructor, Frater Taciturnus, who has been given the conceit of authorial intentions with respect to Quidam. And then there is Kierkegaard. Just what a Kierkegaardian pseudonymous author is may be difficult to define, but even a cursory glance at the names Kierkegaard chooses clearly shows that they were never meant to be taken at face value as actually existing authors ("aiming at *existing*," as the pseudonym Climacus suggests in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, perhaps, but the tentative, incomplete quality is intact even here (264)). There is a consistency and parallelism in making Taciturnus an experimentor rather than an author; he can construct something hypothetical, but not actual.

That he is also not a literary character who creates a book within a book (a la Scheherazade or Charlie Kaufman's Caden Cotard in *Synecdoche, New York*) is also crucially important; Taciturnus hovers between fictionality and non-fictionality, but is not a character proper. We are primed for this distinction earlier in *Stages on Life's Way*, in "In Vino Veritas," when some of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms (who stand in the liminal area between author and literary construct) are used as characters within another pseudonym's text.[197] Taciturnus' own status as something of a thought experiment—a name through which a certain type of world

[197] However, as another example of Kierkegaard's complicating of the pseudonym-character divide, the pseudonymous narrator of "In Vino Veritas" proclaims himself "Pure being and thus almost less than nothing. I am the pure being that is everywhere present but not yet noticeable, for I am continually being annulled" (86); Frater Taciturnus says *of his character* Quidam that he is "pure negation" (494). One might argue that the difference between the two slips away if we take these pseudonymous narrators at face value.

view might be played out—requires that the internal thought experiment be reasonably legibly set out as a commentary on the limitations and attitudes of the thought experiment form that Kierkegaard chooses.[198] (The rather different case of a fictional character creating a type of thought experiment will be explored in the next chapter on Henry James' *Sacred Fount*.)

For, in Kierkegaard, thought experiment, like metaphor or allegory, is a type of strangely situated type of text. It both seeks to say something about the world outside of the text (in that its explicit aim is to show something about that world) and cannot help but recognize its alienation from the world outside and comment on the act of writing itself. On the one hand, Taciturnus establishes the separateness of the thought experiment: "Fortunately my hero does not exist outside my imaginary construction in thought (*Tankeexperiment*). In actuality he cannot be the butt of laughter. This is fortunate enough but it is even more fortunate for me that my task cannot be that of having to argue with him or dialecticize him out of his dialectical difficulty." The thought experiment is a fully realized world unto itself; different rules apply ("in actuality he cannot be the butt of laughter"), and the narrator does not interact with it. After these first three sentences, statements of fact about the lines drawn between the experiment and the

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[198] Oddly enough, when Kierkegaard's mentor Poul Martin Møller uses the term "*Tankeeksperiment*" in "Some Reflections on the Development of Popular Ideas (*Nogle Betragtninger over Populære Ideas Udvikling*)"—which the Hongs cite as a possible source for the term in Kierkegaard (*Stages* xi n22)—Møller uses the term in contrast to the narrative form. In the Møller essay, the "*fantastisk Tankeeksperiment*" is associated with a "verbal fresh fellow (*mundtlig Friskfyr*)" and not authors (*Forfattere*) who make sure that their claims are substantiated by critical or popular consensus. Because of its orality and because of its lack of what we might term popular support, the thought experiment may "immediately vanish into air and oblivion" (http://www.adl.dk/adl_pub/pg/cv/ShowPgText.xsql?nnoc=adl_pub&p_udg_id=49&p_sidenr=124; translation mine). Although he is now most often seen as a kind of footnote to Kierkegaard's life and work, Poul Martin Møller's work is worth further study in its own right. Very little has been written about his work—and not much has been translated—as of this writing. Peter Thielst's essay, "Poul Martin Møller: Scattered Thoughts, Analysis of Affectation, Struggle with Nihilism" is a good point of entry, though even here, given that it is in a volume of Kierkegaard studies, he plays second fiddle to Kierkegaard (*Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries: The Culture of Golden Age Denmark* 45-61). Møller's take on aphorisms, or what he calls "scattered thoughts (*Strøtanker*)," could be as valuably read alongside Hamann, Herder, Schlegel, or Nietzsche as they are with Kierkegaard's thought. Note that Poul M. Møller is not the same person as Peder Ludvig Møller, Kierkegaard's rival, who wrote a scathing review of *Stages on Life's Way* which then led to something of a literary brawl. (The major documents involved in this fracas are collected by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong in *The* Corsair *Affair*.)

experimentor, when Taciturnus tries to imagine the hero of the thought experiment in reality, the text is filled with modal verb forms ("would") and qualified with adverbial dodges ("probably," "presumably): "Such a person, as an actually existing individual (*virkelig existerende*) would be able to provide enough to do for a *Doctor Seraphicus* combined with a *Magister Contradictionum*, and when all is said and done, they perhaps would not be able to do a thing. To whatever they would come up with, he would presumably answer: I thought of that myself; now, you just listen" (403). All of the text's gymnastic double or triple movements among levels of referentiality—the abstract creation of a fictional character hypothetically/contrafactually reinserted into real life—work together to amplify the essential otherness of the thought-experiment form.

On the other hand, Taciturnus subscribes to a parabolic schema in intimating that his story be read in a personal illustrative vein, *de te fabula narratur* (478). The allusion to Horace's first Satire—*de te fabula narratur*—seems to suggest several things for Kierkegaard's thought experiment beyond a direct relationship between writer and audience. It is notably a mise en abîme. Kierkegaard's Taciturnus illustrates a key concept in his original Quidam story (repentance), by means of another story (about a gambler), which in turn alludes to Horace's poem, in which a story is begun to illustrate the fate of the avaricious interlocutor.

Secondly, the term *fabula* points to the distinct genre as well as the general category of figurative narrative. The repentant gambler of the passage above "is no modern fool who believes that everyone should court the colossal objective (*objetive*) task of being able to rattle off (*ramse…op*) something that applies to the whole human race but not to himself….this *de te* is for him the most sacred law of life, because it is the covenant of humanity" (478). The objectivity that is the hallmark of the "modern fool" is not merely detachment, but is here

explicitly related to storytelling. The verb phrase "*ramse* (now spelled *remse*) *op*" is a form of the noun meaning a long string of words, a screed or litany. In other words, it is not a narrative. And so Taciturnus puts a finer point on it by scoffing at statistics (*tabullariske Oversigter*) being read as "a priceless invention…a glorious fruit of culture…a characteristic counterpart to the *de te narratur fabula* of antiquity" (497). The fable's interest is renewed in light of the thought experiment because it is a sister category, one that is also restlessly shuttling between the literary and the philosophical, the self-referential world of fiction and the didactic world of the take-away message. And, given the specific statement that the fable is of the hearer, it is only the smallest interpretive hop to the riddle of Oedipus who both did and did not understand that the Sphinx spoke of him in particular as well as of humanity in general. Riddles, too, after all, are in the same family as a thought experiment. But, having established the links between these genres that all thread through and structure Kierkegaard's text, we cannot of course forget that, read together, the fable and the riddle would seem to be irreconcilable in their aims: the fable in its use of figural language as the thinnest of veils for moral and/or rhetorical purposes versus the riddle's tendency toward exploitation of language in order to be enigmatic. As a kind of figurative speech, the thought experiment is equivocal.[199]

[199] Jamie Lorentzen subsumes the thought experiment under the general category of Kierkegaard's metaphorical production: "Kierkegaard's literary voice strives to disappear in metaphor by imaginatively constructing situations to which anyone may approach or resist on their own terms and without overt, direct interpretation by the originator. This particular form of indirect method ultimately leaves the reader – and the author – to contend freely with issues invoked by metaphor" (*Kierkegaard's Metaphors* 15). Lorentzen's point that the imaginary construction/thought experiment is related to metaphor and that Kierkegaard's take on such figuration is as much to question the form as to establish content is a good one, and Lorentzen's project in his book is precisely to establish the *pattern* of metaphorical thought that suffuses Kierkegaard's oeuvre. However, I argue that the thought experiment is a special case of figurative thought.

In fact, Kierkegaard expresses the wish that "people would only learn how to read and to insist on thought (*Tanke*) in every word (*Ord*)" in a commentary on Taciturnus' writing style in a 1846 notebook entry:[200]

> To construct rhetorically upon a conditional clause (*Forsætningerne*—protases) and then have the main clause (*Eftersætningen*—apodosis) amount to nothing, an abyss, from which the reader once again shrinks back, as it were (*ligesom*), into the antecedents (*Forsætningerne*); to plunge into a tentative effort (*Tilløb*—lit., both attempt and running start for a jump) as if this wealth were inexhaustible and then in the very same second discontinue it (*afbryde*—break off), which is like the trick (*Kunststykke*—also artwork) of pulling up short at a full gallop (most riders fall off—usually, one first breaks into a gallop and then into a trot); to be at the head of a cavalry of predicates (*Prædikater*), the one more gallant and dashing than the other, to charge in, and then swerve; the leap (*Springet*) in modulation; the turning to the concept in a single word (*Begrebets Omslaaen i et eneste Ord*—I would translate this as "the reversal of the concept in a single word"); the unexpected stop (*Standsning*) etc.

While we might initially expect "'Guilty?'/'Not Guilty?'" to be a scenario created with a certain inner consistency in order to tease out the results of the intersection of specific and controlled variables, that is, a hypothesis, as Kierkegaard's use of grammatical terms for conditional sentences (protasis/apodosis—*Forsætning*/*Eftersætning*) early in this passage

[200] http://www.sks.dk/NB/txt.xml, #39 "1846 Af de Bog om Adler," 5.345, #5939 in the English edition. In this entry, Kierkegaard says that Taciturnus makes Quidam speak in a style similar to Adler while using a different style for his "own" writing.

suggests, the thought experiment form is hypothetical in such a way that the subordinate "if" clause is emphasized.[201] It might even be characterized as *all* "if"; the sentence (*sætningen*) itself is incomplete, amputated. But the interplay between the hypothetical and the absent concluding main clause does not cause a paralytic full stop at the end of the "if." Instead, this interplay becomes an impetus to movement, both on the part of the timid imagined reader (who turns back), and that of the author/ideal reader who can perform the "trick" of simultaneous stopping and racing forth. A word itself even contains its own reversal.

And, too, we must note that grammar is made to be a metaphor in the passage (the conditionality of the sentence is transferred onto the conditionality of the whole text, which then passes into the conditionality of the meaning of the text) as well as being used on a very literal level to force a consideration of words instead of a simple act of decoding. (Kierkegaard's term "*Kunststykke*" is important in this respect since it reflects both "genuine" art (*kunst*) and trickery.) The reader might "as it were (*ligesom*)" place him- or herself in the text as a physical plane in which he or she can move between clauses, but the distinction between the text and the reality of the reader's physical being is made clear.

This desire that that "people would only learn to read," which even an author who builds such resistance into his texts must want, is a peculiar thing. Reading, as we have seen, must be approached with a certain trepidation, lest words play tricks on us. Demanding

[201] The terms *forsætning* and *eftersætning* are also musical terms. The *forsætning*, the antecedent phrase, is incomplete (ends on a half-cadence) and is followed by the *eftersætning*, which ends with a cadence that provides resolution. Kierkegaard shuttles among the musical, linguistic, and metaphorical application of these terms in his discussion of *Don Giovanni* in "The Immediate Erotic Stages or the Musical-Erotic": "The Commendatore is the vigorous antecedent clause (*den kraftfulde Forsætning*) and the outspoken consequent clause (*den djærve Eftersætning*), between which lies Don Giovanni's intermediate clause (*Mellemsætning*), but the rich content of this intermediate clause (*Mellemsætning*) is the substance of the opera" (*Either/Or I* 124). In this part of the essay, the narrator, A, is concerned about the possible futility of using language to talk about music. The term *mellemsætning* is usually used for subordinate clauses inserted in main clauses or for the act of putting one thing between two others. The technique here is to use terminology that could be either literal or analogical to speak about music, the potential ineffable, and then to use a third term that does not belong to music, disrupting the equilibrium between the figurative and literal levels and calling attention to language itself.

"thought in each word" creates a way of reading that produces peculiarities of movement through the text. When Kierkegaard—or rather, Johannes Climacus—revisits the thought experiment form in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, giving the fullest published commentary on the nature of a "psychological Experiment" in the pseudonymous writings, the intended hampering of the flow of text from author to reader is insisted on:

> On the title page, the book *Repetition* was called "an imaginary psychological construction (*psychologisk Experiment*)." That this was a doubly reflected communication form (*dobbelt reflekteret Meddelelses-Form*) soon became clear to me. By taking place in the form of an imaginary construction (*Experiments Form*), the communication creates for itself an opposition, and the imaginary construction (*Experimentet*) establishes a chasmic gap (*svælgende Dyb*) between reader and author and fixes the separation (*Skilsmisse*) of inwardness between them, so that a direct understanding is made impossible. The imaginary construction (*Experimentet*) is the conscious teasing revocation of the communication, which is always of importance to an existing person who writes for existing persons, lest the relation be changed to that of a rote reciter who writes for rote reciters. (263-264)

The chasmic gap (*svælgende Dyb*), or yawning abyss—*et svælge*—is of particular interest to us, since Taciturnus' thought experiment, the Quidam narrative, arises "from the depths (*fra Dybet*)" like a "sigh *de profundis*" (188-189).[202] Read in the light of Climacus' commentary, the disembodied metonymical ear that Taciturnus becomes takes in the message from the bodiless metaphorical throat in a condition of reflection on top of

[202] See Tucker: "When nineteenth-century writers describe a work of art or a symbol as a riddle, they point up a caesura between representation and meaning, work and reader" (15).

a mirror. The experiment contains the depths and is the depths. The image of inwardness is contained within the box that Taciturnus retrieves from the depths with Quidam's papers, and inwardness is the "turning away from each other in earnestness" that the "being-in-between (*Mellemværende*) of the imaginary construction" encourages between writer and reader. The Kierkegaardian thought experiment, like Schrodinger's cat, posits a paradoxical equivalence—leaping and falling look very much alike. In between lies the limp.

Coda: Henry James and the Temptation of Symmetry

> These opposed couples balanced like bronze groups at the two ends of a chimney-piece, and the most I could say to myself in lucid deprecation of my thought was that I mustn't take them equally for granted merely *because* they balanced. Things in the real had a way of not balancing; it was all an affair, this fine symmetry, of artificial proportion. (*The Sacred Fount*, 130)

Although it may seem like the odd work out—a literary period, genre, or discipline or two removed from the works of Hamann, Herder, and Kierkegaard—Henry James's late novel *The Sacred Fount* was the impetus to this study. Symmetry, as seen in the passage quoted above, is thematized and explicitly questioned within the novel, even as the silences and commentaries that surround the novel (in the form of readings by critics and James himself) challenge implicit assumptions about authorial and linguistic systems. James's novel couches problems with symmetry in the (often fragmentary) figurative rhetorical devices and narrative subgenres that this study has been exploring—the metaphor, the fable and parable, the riddle, the thought experiment— *The Sacred Fount* wrestles with questions about the desirability and expectations of symmetrical relations that this study has examined.[203]

James's comparatively little-loved, almost-disowned late novel *The Sacred Fount* is an oddity: the only novel with a first person narrator and one of the few mature works that James chose not to include in the *New York Edition*. It is, perhaps not incidentally, an incredibly static

[203203] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's study of *The Sacred Fount* in *The Concept of Ambiguity: The Case of James* is unparalleled in its careful attention to the symmetries that abound in James's novel.

work, with the field of action largely confined to the mind of an unnamed narrator at an English country-house party full of gossip and idleness. *The Sacred Fount* begins with two observations, connected tenuously by physical context (a railway station, on the way to a party) and the mental setting (in the mind of the unnamed narrator of the novel) of their occurrence: that an older woman (Grace Brissenden) has become young while her younger husband has aged, and that a stupid man has become witty. These observations lead the narrator to discern a system, a rule: he assumes that in a deeply involved couple, one partner may "tap the sacred fount" and gain what is missing or lost at the expense of the other. And from the initial observation and the system comes the narrator's quest to find the missing party to complete—to create— a symmetrical pair of couples. In contrast to the narrator's self-conscious fixation on the symmetry between the two couples, the novel itself shows the pairings to be nowhere near as neat or static as the narrator's image of "bronze groups at the two ends of a chimney piece." Groups of people form and disperse, webs of connections rather than exclusively reciprocal dyads become apparent. Even the narrator, who sees himself as an "expert observer," unmoved and unmoving, external to the action, is drawn into the story, worrying that he has fallen in love with the suspected victim of Guy Long's improvement, May Server. And further, he finds himself potentially in May Server's position: "You've *made* me sublime. You found me dense. You've affected me quite as much as Mrs. Server has affected Mr. Long" (67).

More intriguingly, on all levels of the novel—plot, structure, and language—the effect of the uncontrollable couplings is to call attention to one particular abstract pairing, that of physicality and mind. As early as February 1894, six years before the publication of the novel, James, in ruminating on a central idea of the novel, considers the symbolic value of the pairing: "The two things—the two elements—beauty and 'mind,' might be correspondingly,

concomitantly exhibited as in the history of two related couples—with the opposition, in each case, that would help the thing to be dramatic" (*Notebooks*, 88). But James carries this pairing far beyond the "dramatic" level of plot in the text. Further, variations on the word "reflect" appear more than thirty times in the text; and, not unlike Kierkegaard's use of the term, it connects within its world of connotations and applications the world of mental imaging and the physical world.

The novel takes the form of a (failed?) thought experiment inside of a narrative experiment: James's experiment with a first person narrator bleeds into and is reflected by the narrator's experiment in deducing the nature of relationships in the absence of physical evidence. Nothing much happens, and it was accordingly much maligned by critics in its early days. But it has also, particularly in the last fifty years or so, been championed for its unwavering attention not to what *happens* but to the thought process and the gap between perception and "reality." For the current study, it is of particular import that James ties his examination of the "psychologic glow" of his narrator's attempt to extract universal significance about nothing less than the "sacred fount" to concerns about the human mind's desire for patterns that are universally beautiful and valid. Moreover, the text extends this inquiry by constantly questioning the foundational metaphor of its title: in its vaguely familiar appearance, the text examines the way that the mind fills in a truncated, perhaps stitched-together figure like "the sacred fount" in order to create an overarching meaning. James creates a story in which narrating and reading subjects attempt through thought experiment the embodiment of a parabolic, metaphorical turn. It is as though the text were proposing, "If there were such a thing as a sacred fount, it might function in this way" as well as "If a person were to have as a defining characteristic the need to make

symmetrical order of the world, then…" And all are forced instead to confront broken symmetries.

James famously calls *The Sacred Fount* a "remarkably accidental [novel], and the merest of *jeux d'esprit*," and again in similar terms writes, "That *jeu d'esprit* was an accident" (*Letters*, IV:185-186, 198). These comments, addressed to Mrs. Humphry Ward and to William Dean Howells, have historically been taken either at face value as a dismissal of the work, or as mere self-deprecation. But I would like to argue for also taking James's assessment of the text more literally, as "accidental" in its sense of subjunctive, metaphysical possibility and as a methodological play of mind. That is, *The Sacred Fount* verges on being a thought experiment, as distinguished straightforwardly fictional. The thought experiment, as we have seen in considering Kierkegaard's use of the term in the last chapter, is a complicated and somewhat controversial tool and genre, usually and uneasily sharing the narrative attributes of fiction, but unwilling to relinquish the priority of reality. Because of the slippage between the imaginative and experiential realms, it can only occupy the stage of (more or less strong) hypothesis, since it is often resistant to the type of external testing that would bring it out of the realm of thought and into concrete proof; it attracts suspicion because it often cannot help but be strongly dependent on narrative in all of its specificity for its dissemination rather than being more obviously universally applicable. And yet, it is precisely this ambiguous, untestable status that is of such interest to writers such as Kierkegaard and, as I will detail in this chapter, Henry James. While, at first glance, the text is in the standard form of literary fiction, completely different from the constructs of Kierkegaard, Hamann, and Herder examined earlier in this study, operating on a structure that assumes the existence of the fictional world, the text (as we will see below) is marked with parabolic and analogic features that keep it unsteadily on the border of the

hypothetical.[204] The double vision of the novel as a piece to be taken as its own fictional world and as something more translucently related to the real world creates some of the discomfort that is visible in James's remarks as well as those of critics and readers throughout the novel's existence.

The Four Mysteries of the Sacred Fount

There are four main questions that dog the novel. Two are internal questions of plot or assumptions about the world that the narrator inhabits, and two are external, critical questions about this decidedly odd novel. It is important to disentangle them because, as I will show, one of the tendencies of many readings of *The Sacred Fount* has been to conflate and confuse them. Inside the story there is what readers have called the "detective story" of the narrator's (as well as Ford Obert's and Grace Brissenden's) attempts to figure out the source of Gilbert Long's newfound intelligence. We also have the question—never really voiced in the story, but certainly of interest to us—of just what "the sacred fount" is. Externally, there is now the somewhat ossified critical gesture of calling the essential question of "what is this novel about" the "riddle" of the novel. (This takes the form of purely baffled criticism as well as the form of an attempt to grapple with the central assumption of the narrator's theory, the absence of a clear explanation of the titular fount). And lastly, the great mystery that critics have been more or less explicitly working on is why this novel is excluded from the New York Edition.

[204] The opening salvo of Cohn's *The Distinction of Fiction* identifies various non-literary uses of the word "fiction" which bleed into the literary landscape. Among them, she distinguishes the literary fiction – here, prose fiction – from the use of the term in philosophical discourse as an abstract concept or idea. That use, I think, of the term would include the narrative thought experiment (see Cohn, 6). Fiction , as Käte Hamburger and Dorrit Cohn would have it, is based on an "as-structure" as opposed to Vaihinger's "as if" structure, which would apply to the thought experiment.

The Rejection of the Novel

When writing about *The Sacred Fount*, one inescapable fact must be acknowledged: James's rejection of the novel in the New York Edition. This rejection has led to two basic categories of criticism of the novel: an evaluation of the "faults" of the novel (including a negative portrait of what James saw as proper narrative technique),[205] or a more-or-less implicit defense of the work. Even as it has gathered more attention in recent years, the categories still hold.[206] I do not propose to step particularly far outside of these categories in this chapter, but the simple facts of the novel's abnormality in the James canon and banishment need a bit of attention.

Since its initial publication (1907-1909), James and his critics have singled out the notion (or figure) of form to declaim their hopes and praise for what we now call the New York Edition: the *Times Literary Supplement* features Percy Lubbock's claim that the edition reveals James's "gradual solution of the problem" of form, Leon Edel's "The Architecture of Henry James's 'New York Edition'" picks up James's claim that the edition was "really a monument…which has never had the least intelligent critical justice done it" and expands the figure of architectural form to become the overriding metaphor of the achievement of the edition.[207] As a novel that James himself deemed not to fit into the established edition to be handed down to posterity as

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[205] See, for example, Raeth, "Henry James's Rejection of the Sacred Fount" for an early example dating to back to 1949.

[206] Martha Banta, for example, speculates about how the inclusion of "the excluded seven" (the title of her essay) might have changed our understanding of James into a "quite different figure" (249). Writing specifically about the effect that *The Sacred Fount* might have had, she makes a connection between the James of the prefaces and the narrator of the novel: Would James want to be associated with the dominant voice of *The Sacred Fount*?....Precisely what the James whom we find in the prefaces *does do* is to take the risk of being viewed as a bore and of spoiling the readers' unconsciousness to the point that they may inflict upon him the talent for cruelty to which he has introduced him. But he limits the extent of this risk – by excluding those fictive records that explicitly inscribe the satirist's role; by insuring that the despot of the prefaces is benevolent in manner, not mordant of wit; and by finding the right style for the words and deeds of the Master imaged therein" (254).

[207] The *Times Literary Supplement* was an early assessment of the Edition (8 July 1909); Edel's article is from 1951. Both are quoted by David McWhirter in *Henry James's New York Edition: The Construction of Authorship* (1-2).

authoritative (along with prefaces by the author), and also as simply a rather odd little novel, *The Sacred Fount* is perhaps the asymmetrical piece in James's corpus. Further, James expresses in his preface to *The Golden Bowl* the "hope that…I shouldn't have breathed upon the old catastrophes and accidents, *the old wounds and mutilations and disfigurements*, wholly in vain…. I have prayed that the finer air of the better form may sufficiently seem to hang about them and gild them over" in "re-dreaming" his works for the New York Edition (344-345, emphasis mine). The New York Edition, then, takes up the metaphor of a body of work, and the author of this new composite text seeks to heal or cover the injuries of that body—by revision, certainly, but also by excision. However, as in Kierkegaard and Hamann, the disfigured, the mutilated holds a certain fascination: the excised text continues both to haunt the New York Edition itself, in prefatory remarks about other novels, and to intrigue the critical imagination at large.

Prefaces Revisited

Whatever the individual take on the New York Edition may be, critics from James on down seem to agree that the intent (if not the achievement) of the edition, as the retrospective project of an old man, was the creation of a kind of monumental statement of James's writing life, in which the old writer looks back at the trajectory of his career and the formation of the author as an author. In short, it is seen as an attempt by the author to explain himself. And the prefaces shoulder the burden of that responsibility. As I have outlined earlier in this study, drawing on Genette's work on the paratext, prefaces, generally, are regarded as providing explanation; their relation to the text is usually seen as expository rather than purely literary, and prone to be taken at face value. Even if James's prefaces are, in a word, Jamesian, with all of the attendant richness and strangeness of James's later prose, much of the assumption that prefaces

unriddle as well as illuminate still clings to the prefaces of the New York Edition. In his introduction to *The Art of the Novel*, which collects the prefaces from the New York Edition, Blackmur, mind-bogglingly, casually says that "it may be useful to point out what kind of thing, as a type by itself, a James Preface is, and what kind of exercise the reader may expect a sample to go through. The key-fact is simple. A Preface is the story of a story, or in those volumes which collect a group of shorter tales the story of a group of stories cognate in theme or treatment. The Prefaces collocate, juxtapose, and separate the different kinds of stories. They also, by cross-reference and development from one Preface to another, inform the whole series with a unity of being" (ix). For Blackmur, the prefaces provide a "simple" overview and index of the bulk of James's life work. Even when Blackmur acknowledges that "the 'story of a story' is not simple in the telling," he is calling attention to the variety of tasks that the preface accomplishes (explaining the genesis of the idea, discussing the thematic coherence of the text or texts, evaluating the text in relation to society, and so on) rather than suggesting that the notion of the authorship that the prefaces individually and collectively present is itself complex (x). More recent criticism has had the salutary effect of working to remedy the fact that "surprisingly little attention has been paid to the Edition itself *as a text*, and to the extraordinary, deeply ambiguous act of self-presentation that it embodies," as David McWhirter describes the collected essays in *Henry James's New York Edition: The Construction of Authorship* (1). But even within this volume, even while the consistency of the Jamesian model of authorship that Blackmur praises in the assembled prefaces is exposed as considerably more complicated, the impulse to assume what we might term "good faith" on James's part remains strong; that is, critics tend to assume that whatever oddness might attend to the prefaces is still in the service of James's didactic point. Paul B. Armstrong, for example, claims, "A case can be made, I think, that the strangeness of

these introductions is useful, justifiable, and perhaps even intentional. James is aware throughout the prefaces of the need to educate readers to the ideal of criticism he finds lacking in his world. I will argue that some of the peculiar features of the prefaces as introductory texts help provide the reader with a hermeneutic education that simulates modes of understating appropriate for construing his fiction" (126).[208] Armstrong's essay is typical of more recent criticism in that, even as it quite rightly comes around to the quasi-conclusion that the "hermeneutic key" Armstrong refers to is precisely the famous Jamesian ambiguity, the idea is that this ambiguity should be taken *as* a key.[209] What is particularly interesting to me is the way that many of these critical texts follow Blackmur's underlying assumption that the prefaces can be taken as a discrete body of explanatory theory. While I do not disagree wholly with this assumption—the prefaces that I examine in this chapter, to *The Ambassadors* and to *The Golden Bowl*, have long passages that are clearly meant to be general alongside those that are marked as specific rereadings of the later works, and I will be suggesting that particular passages refer to *The Sacred Fount*, a book that is not the one explicitly being prefaced—I have some concerns about the idea that "the usefulness of these theoretical notions [that James lays out in the prefaces] lies precisely in their generality, their lack of specificity. They are not inextricably tied to a single text or commentary, and their broad range of possible reference leaves it to the reader to figure out how best to apply them as instruments for understanding and appreciation" (Armstrong, in

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[208] Armstrong argues explicitly ("slightly but significantly") against J. Hillis Miller's celebration of misreading; for Armstrong, James's prefaces are to be taken at face value (in McWhirter, 301).

[209] One way that Armstrong uses the prefaces as a "key" to reading the fiction is in suggesting that "the need to read against his perspective to arrive at the truth requires a healthy sense of the fallibility of a central intelligence, a fallibility that any reader of *The Ambassadors* would find familiar" (129). This has implications for the idea of the autobiographical intrusion of the author into the text that will be important for my consideration of James's problem with first person narration in the next section.

The Construction of Authorship, 136).[210] It is one (already questionable) thing to take the prefaces at face value as stories of the works they introduce, another to apply the complicated suggestions of the prefaces to texts that are not included in the New York Edition—in a convoluted path toward explaining just that exclusion.

The “I” in the Preface to *The Ambassadors* and in *The Sacred Fount*

Most notably, critical attention to *The Sacred Fount* has focused on James’s denunciation of the “romantic privilege of the ‘first person’—the darkest abyss of romance” that appears in the preface to *The Ambassadors* (320). In this preface, James, most simply, discusses his reasoning for not having the character of Lambert Strether narrate *The Ambassadors*, but the attitude of the extended critique of the first person suggests a concern more comprehensive (or perhaps more pointed) than an explanation of an authorial choice just for the novel at hand. Following in the footsteps of almost every critic who contends with James’s rejection of *The Sacred Fount*, I, too, will pause here. But I would also like to keep in mind that while James’s exclusion of the first person has at its core some clear-ish principles that allow us to speculate about James’s apparent disappointment in *The Sacred Fount*, I draw a firm line between the *suggestion* the James continues to think about *The Sacred Fount* and the (I think) fallacious assumption that remarks James makes about the first person point of view in the preface to *The Ambassadors* and elsewhere constitute a key to why the novel is a failure—or even more saliently, as a clear, exhaustive statement of how the “I” functions in *The Sacred Fount*.

[210] See Blackall’s fair and gentle admonition: “Because his critical statements in the *Notebooks* and the prefaces are so consistently helpful in elucidating his fiction, one is sometimes disposed to treat them as dicta or as ‘whole truths,’ but James’s completed texts often reflect emphases and preoccupations other than those treated in his analytic comments” (17).

Beyond the simple reason that the "I" of *The Sacred Fount* stands out as meaningful because it is an anomaly in the Jamesian corpus, an examination of the "I" is important here for two main reasons: first, more generally, the assumption of a kind of correspondence (of a more or less direct degree) between a narrating "I" and an authorial "I," especially when coupled with the absence of an appended (and opposing) James-authored preface, has resulted in a firmer determination that the novel is "about" novel writing or art criticism than is supported by the actual novel.[211] Second, and of more concern to this study, is the provocative suggestion that employing first-person narration results in a very different kind of narrative than a piece of third-person fiction. Narratologists such as Käte Hamburger go as far as to exclude first-person narrative from the category of fiction; for Hamburger a first-person narrative is a "feigned reality statement" (313). Hamburger's position is controversial, and would seem to stand in stark contrast to James's characterization of the first person as "the darkest abyss of the romance," but it seems to me that it is suggestive for examining the kind of narrative experiment into fragmentation and asymmetry that James is making with this novel. The conceit of the "feigned reality statement" is that because a first person narrative is structurally hard to distinguish from an autobiography (a real reality statement), it is a mimesis not of a reality (fiction), but a mimesis of a reality statement. The implication that is most important for this study is that as a feigned reality statement, an "as if" as opposed to an "as," the first-person narrative stands in relation to reality in a way that a third-person fictional narrative does not; the fiction cannot be taken as its own world, but is always (at least implicitly) being *compared* to reality. On the one hand, this allows for a bleed from the author's reality into the narrator's non-real world. On the other, more

[211] This is a pervasive reading of the novel. One might begin with Blackmur's championing of the novel in 1942 (the novel is a "parable of life and the artist rather than a slice of life as was then conventional in the sandwich of the novel") (*Kenyon Review*, 330).

intriguingly, the sense that the world of the first-person narrative proclaims a kind of reality (but an untrue, feigned one) allows that the text presents a hypothetical world. In both cases, the issue of correspondence is raised.

Again, James's famous proclamation that the first person is "the darkest abyss of the romance this, inveterately, when enjoyed on the grand scale" would seem to stand in stark opposition to Hamburger's contention that the problem with the I-narrator is its proximity to reality statements. James's difficulties with first person narration are generally understood in terms of a lack of rigor in composition; such a method of narration, which James equates with "looseness" and "terrible fluidity" are opposed to the central intelligence and reflector methods that critics have mined from the prefaces and taken to be keystones of James's overarching theory of the novel. Blackmur's introduction to *The Art of the Novel* sets up the tradition of seeing James's novelistic innovation in these terms: the novel alone has "the possibility…of setting up a fine central intelligence in terms of which everything in it might be unified and upon which everything might be made to depend….It made a compositional centre for art such as life never saw" (xviii). The problem for critics working on *The Sacred Fount* has, then, been the problem of speculating as to what is not reflective or centrally intelligent about the first person narrator in this story, given that the form (for a longer work) is excoriated so resoundingly in the preface to *The Ambassadors*. I would follow Goetz's contention that a problem with the narrator of *The Sacred Fount* may well be that the first person form creates less of a reflection than a potential "masking." The text is not, as Blackmur celebrates in the rest of James's corpus, "nothing but the story of what that [central] intelligence felt about what happened" (xviii).

Instead, it is "a projection of [the narrator's] own character and obsessions" (Goetz 113).[212] But I am not sure that this distinction is the whole story, especially in regard to *The Sacred Fount*.

James's remarks about the first person in his preface to *The Ambassadors* are quite strange in their depiction of the distinction between character and narrator in relation to the author's role:

> The "first person" then, so employed, is addressed by the author directly to ourselves, his possible readers, whom he has to reckon with, at the best by our English tradition, so loosely and vaguely after all, so little respectfully, on so scant a presumption of exposure to criticism. Strether, on the other hand, encaged and provided for as "The Ambassadors" encages and provides, has to keep in view proprieties much stiffer and more salutary than any our straight and credulous gape are likely to bring home to him, has exhibitional conditions to meet, in a word, that forbid the terrible *fluidity* of self-revelation. (321)

Again, most attention has been focused on the notion of the "terrible *fluidity* of self-revelation" as the point of contention in this passage. In particular, the notion of "self-revelation" is viewed in light of James's supposed artistic distaste for pure autobiography in the stories; critics, naturally most interested in James's artistry, point to James's acknowledgement of the genesis of his works as a mere starting point throughout the prefaces.[213] But the self-revelation here is not

[212] Goetz's distinction leads him to Shlomith Rimmon Kenan's ambiguity: for texts like *The Sacred Fount* and "The Turn of the Screw" (which he pairs), the unresolvable ambiguity in the text is that "the story may be oriented toward either of two quite distinct levels: in Benveniste's terms, the level of the story (the actions represented in the narrative) or the level of the discourse (the act of narration as it is identified with the narrator in his here and now)" (113). The question for Goetz is whether the story is about the theory of the sacred fount or whether it is about the narrator himself.

[213] Blackmur: "There is the feature of autobiography, as a rule held to a minimum….There is the feature of the germ in incubation and the story of how it took root and grew, invariably developing into something quite different from

identified with the author. The self-revelation at stake here is Strether's, and the author's accomplishment has been to "forbid" this literary construct the means to self-revelation. Further, while looseness and fluidity are often associated in this case with subjectivity run amok, they are also generally related to the compositional principle as something James "hated contemptuously" (*Art of the Novel* xvi).[214] Looseness is opposed in this preface to "composition, because composition alone is a positive beauty," and "positive beauty might have to be sweated for and paid for!" (*Art of the Novel* 319-320). But, I think, James's comments about authorial sweating and paying suggest a more complex issue: composition, in the case of *The Ambassadors*, is likened to the construction of a cage: "Strether, on the other hand [as opposed to a first person narrator], *encaged* and provided for as 'The Ambassadors' *encages* and provides, has to keep in view proprieties much stiffer and more salutary than any our straight and credulous gape are likely to bring home to him" (emphasis mine). Composition, as a quasi-physical event enacted by the author on the characters of a novel, forces the character to act well. This takes on even more force when we observe that here, in the longer passage quoted above, looseness characterizes authorial relations with the audience: "The 'first person' then…is addressed by the author directly to ourselves, his possible readers, whom he has to reckon with…so *loosely* and vaguely after all." The author and the first person narrator are conflated, conspiring in their indifferent responsibility to the audience, and then the audience (including the authorial "I" of the preface, now casting himself as a reader) cannot control the hypothetical first-person Strether with a "credulous gape." Even allowing for James's customary wry tone,

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its immediate promise. Then there is the account – frequently the most interesting feature – of how the author built up his theme as a consistent piece of dramatization. Usually there are two aspects to this feature…the aspect of the theme in relation to itself as a balanced and consistent whole, the flesh upon the articulated plot; and the aspect of the theme in relation to society, which is the moral and evaluating aspect" (*Art of the Novel* x).

[214] Blackmur goes so far in his introduction to call an aversion to "looseness" a major recurring theme in the prefaces.

this passage reveals an odd sense of an uncanny reality in the character that would overrun its boundaries if given enough space. James is no stranger to dramatizing the coming into being of alternate realities (see, for example, “The Beast in the Jungle” and “The Jolly Corner”), but James’s comments on the problem of the first person narrator give this intersection of levels of actuality a peculiar twist. The question I turn to now is how this functions within the realm of James’s *Sacred Fount*.

Newmarch and Walking

As noted above, metaphors of the elegant structure of the newly formed New York Edition stand juxtaposed against the more ill-matched, even mutilated, forms of the uncollected corpus of James work, forming the general impression that the *Sacred Fount*, for James, needed to be surgically removed and the cavity from the excision hidden. Looking at the prefaces to the novels that follow *The Sacred Fount*, which form his so-called “major phase”—*The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl*—shows the disavowed novel to be uncommonly present in its absence. The discussion of the “I” present in the preface to the *Ambassadors* shows the text to remain a lingering, conspicuous, literal concern. But the missing novel also reasserts itself in another way that sits strangely between the metaphorical and the literal as well. In the preface to *The Golden Bowl*, the last of the major novels, comprising the last two volumes of the Edition published in James’s lifetime, and consequently, containing the last authorial preface,[215] James speaks at greater length about the process of revisiting the early novels. I quote a passage from the preface at length to show the extent of the metaphor of movement that wends through the passage:

[215] The unfinished novels *The Ivory Tower* and *The Sense of the Past* were included posthumously in 1918.

To re-read in their order my final things, all of comparatively recent date, has been…to become aware…that the *march* of my present attention coincides sufficiently with the *march* of my original expression….As the historian of the matter sees and speaks, so my intelligence of it, as a reader, meets him halfway, passive, receptive, appreciative, often even grateful; unconscious, quite blissfully, of any bar to intercourse, any disparity of sense between us. Into his very *footprints* the responsive, the imaginative *steps* of the docile reader that I consentingly become for him all comfortably sink; his vision, superimposed on my own as an image in cut paper is applied to a sharp shadow on a wall, matches, at every point, without excess or deficiency….Nothing in my whole renewal of attention to these things, to almost any instance of my work previous to some dozen years ago, was more evident than that no such active appreciative process could take place on the mere palpable lines of expression—thanks to the so frequent lapse of harmony between my present *mode of motion* and that to which the existing *footprints* were due. It was, all sensibly, as if the clear matter being still there, even as a shining expanse of snow spread over a plain, my exploring tread, for application to it, had quite unlearned the *old pace* and found itself naturally falling into another, which might sometimes indeed more or less agree with the *original tracks*, but might most often, or very nearly, break the surface in other places….*No march*, accordingly, I was soon enough aware, could possibly be more confident and free than this infinitely interesting and amusing act of re-

> appropriation; shaking off all shackles of theory, unattended as was speedily to appear, with humiliating uncertainties, and almost as enlivening, or at least as momentous as, to a philosophic mind, a sudden large apprehension of the Absolute. (335-336, emphases mine)

That James maps the physical act of visiting old places onto the figurative act of re-seeing his more recently published novels is not surprising—it is a common enough trope, one that even appears as a major category (The Event Structure Metaphor) in Lakoff's list of post-*Metaphors We Live By* illustrations for his theory that "such concepts are at the very center of our conceptual systems, the fact that they are conceptualized metaphorically shows that metaphor is central to ordinary abstract thought" (*Metaphor and Thought*, 222).

What is even more striking, however, is the prevalence of the specific word "march," which James brings forth in the beginning of the passage to characterize both his "attention" as a current reader and his "original expression" as a writer. By the end of the passage, the two roles combine and James asserts that "*no march*…could possibly be more confident and free than this infinitely interesting and amusing *act* of re-appropriation." The conflation of reading and writing is complex, especially since they are characterized, to use James's emphasized term, as "acts." It is significant that as acts, they have one foot in physical reality while still existing as largely mental actions.[216] James's writing of thought itself as a quasi-physical activity is central to the thematic and structural levels of *The Sacred Fount*, and I believe, this concern carries over into

[216] J. Hillis Miller, reading the same passage, more strongly connects reading and writing to actions with ethical consequences in *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James, and Benjamin*. Miller says that James's words in this passage are, "the things I, for the moment, most respect," reading James's notion of life – and, for Miller, writing – as "doing not knowing, and not passively appreciating. Praxis, ethics, here takes precedence over both epistemology and aesthetics, as indeed I think in the end it always does for James" (102).

James's later rereadings for the New York Edition. It resonates even in the way that the name of *The Sacred Fount*'s setting, Newmarch, echoes in James's preface to *The Golden Bowl*.[217] The excised novel continues to haunt James's oeuvre and this haunting suggests that the movement within the novel may be of greater importance than has been critically attended to as yet. There is something about movement—and, particularly for James, walking, marching—that allows for slippage between levels of metaphoricity, fictionality, and hypotheticality: Returning for a moment to James's construction of this elaborate motion-centered metaphorical string in the preface to *The Golden Bowl* above, James begins with a "becoming aware" of an actual condition (that of the fitting of the current to previous conditions, of reader of the old material to the writer of the old material), slips into an "as…so" construction while introducing a third character who complicates the already multifarious "I"s at work—"*as* the historian of matter sees and speaks, *so* my intelligence of it, as a reader meets him halfway"—and then into an "as if."

Given the general reception of the novel as a purely intellectual or aesthetic exercise on the part of author and narrator alike, it is perhaps surprising that the name of the estate, Newmarch, is not an anomaly it its associations with movement: a lot of walking takes place within the novel. The relationship between mental reflection and physical movement has a longstanding literary-philosophical tradition, from the legends about Aristotle's supposed walking lectures to the narratives by self-professed walking philosophers Rousseau and Thoreau, as well as an integral place in the ancient art of memory.[218] The physical motion of walking acts

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[217] "March" as well as "May" return in the form of John Marcher and May Bartram in James's "The Beast in the Jungle" (1903). I owe David Schur the suggestion that the return of "May" shows James to be coupling words of movement with words signaling modality again in "The Beast in the Jungle," another story that explores the intersection of the hypothetical and the real. This may well be worth further exploration.

[218] See, for example, Montiglio, *Wandering in Ancient Greek Culture*; Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in its Cultural Context*; O'Sullivan, "Mind in Motion: Walking and Metaphorical Travel

as a spur to the figurative gyrations in the mind: "my memory associates with the rest of the long afternoon many renewals of acquaintance and much sitting and strolling, for snatches of talk, in the long shade of the great trees and through the straight walks of old gardens….I recover…a full sequence of impressions, each of which, I afterwards saw, had been appointed to help all the others" (*The Sacred Fount*, 24). As a walker, the unnamed narrator is certainly less a participant in the party than he is a voyeur, but, significantly, one who calls his somewhat lurid hypothesis about the relations between the guests a "theory" (the word is used some twenty six times in the novel). That he is a theorist is frequently remarked upon, but not much critical attention has focused on James's emphasis on walking within the novel.[219] Theory, in its derivation from the ancient civic and/or private institution of the *theoria*, is, as Andrea Nightingale defines it in her study of *theoria*, the practice of journeying "away from home to see some sort of spectacle or to learn something about the outside world" (Nightingale, 9). Further, theoria's long-debated etymology—whether it derives from *theos* (god) or *thea* (sight or spectacle)—suggests a slide into a middle ground between the secular and the sacred; the physical journey is for the purpose of "sacred spectating" or "sacred tourism."[220] The narrator of James's novel engages in a form of *theoria*, literally "witnessing a spectacle" even as he seeks insight into the nature of the sacred fount, and is, as such, a theorist.

But as a theorist who is abstracted from the proceedings—indeed as a largely disembodied walker (we know nothing of the narrator's physical person)—the narrator's detached experience in determining the presumably robustly physical relations between other

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in the Roman Villa"; Thompson, *Walking and the French Romantics*; Wallace, *Walking, Literature and English Culture: The Origins and Uses of Peripatetic in the Nineteenth Century*; as well as Yates, *The Art of Memory*

[219] Marcus Klein's article "Henry James's *Sacred Fount*: The Theory, The Theorist, and The Lady" points out that the narrator is "an inventor and wielder of 'theory' (the word is constantly at his lips) and is himself, like his author (but he is not the author), at once terrifically rigorous and marvelously subtle," but does not connect the narrator's predisposition to theory with his perambulations.

[220] The first term is Nightingale's, the second, quoted in her book, is Ian Rutherford's (Nightingale, 45n16).

guests is a failure; even as walking presents a kind of metaphorical representation of mental journeying in narrative, it is often oddly disconnected from mere representation of physical activity in literature perhaps in part *because* it is freighted with such metaphorical value. One need only glance at *Pilgrim's Progress*, or Dante's journey "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita." Rousseau's *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* subordinates the act of walking to the reveries it produces in its title and gives the essays it contains, many of which contain little in the way of actual walking, the title of walks. Similarly, while Thoreau's "Walking" does detail the routes and mechanics of walking, Thoreau begins his essay with an extended etymological riff on the word "sauntering," associating it with the holy land (Saint Terre) and a kind of transcendent vagrancy (to be *sans terre*). But, importantly, this is where the difference between thought experiments of movement and metaphor both coalesce and distinguish themselves from each other. The literary—metaphorical—trope of walking occurs in James's book, but so does the idea of walking as a physical event translated into a text. In fact, there are several levels of figuration involved in the walking in this novel. The narrator walks as a part of the action that takes place *and* the narrator faces it retrospectively, as part of the mental process that he is going through; the authored text takes the walking metaphorically as the working out of a problem and as memory. The narrator of *The Sacred Fount*, similarly, engages in the creation of a hypothetical argument in order to deduce information about the intimate lives of the guests at Newmarch even as the authored text renders the narrator's thought experiment non-hypothetically as a plot point.

The celebrated elaborations of the theory take place peripatetically. But the walking involved leads to a strange sense of constant dislocation: the physical world of Newmarch is constantly shifting and blurred. As John Lyon remarks, "Newmarch is a place lacking in

stability, and lacking, in the most basic senses, any sustained physicality or corporeal reality on which readers' minds and imaginations can gain consistent purchase….the house's rooms and corridors, and its garden's pathways are of an intricacy which makes this country estate symbolic of the novel as a whole. At Newmarch characters are forever disappearing—down corridors, round corners, behind trees. And just as suddenly they reappear again" (xiv). The text thus places at odds physical reality and the narrative of the piece. Of course, it is not uncommon to have an unreliable (usually first person) narrator's impressions displace a sense of physical reality in fiction, but James's novel puts special pressure on the conflict between abstraction—which includes thought as well as figurative language (which pulls away from specificity)—and what that abstraction is taken to refer to. Similarly, the initial meeting with Guy Long and Grace Brissenden takes place at the start of the physical journey, on the train platform on the way to Newmarch, but the story frequently questions its own beginnings: "If my anecdote, as I have mentioned, had begun, at Paddington, at a particular moment, it gathered substance step by step and without missing a link. The links, in fact, should I count them all, would make too long a chain. They formed, nevertheless, the happiest little chapter of accidents through a series of which I can scarce give more than the general effect" (24). As always with James's long, clause-rich sentences, the passage thwarts a completely straightforward reading by building complex associative relations. The passage seems to begin with an "if" clause, but one that is ambiguous in its meaning. The "if" would most easily be read as concessive, as a kind of dismissal of the originary conditions for the story to come: although the story may have begun at a specific moment and place, the specifics are not so important. But, given the way that the narrator questions the beginning of the narrative (the novel begins at the train station, the anecdote begins there as well; the "tolerably tight, tense little drama, a little drama of which our remaining hours

at Newmarch were the all too ample stage" begins in chapter IV (46)), this "if" takes on a more tentative cast: *if* the thing had begun at this point, *then* it took on substance as time went on. This early passage, and with it, the laying out of the rules of the game in this novel, teeters between counterfactual and indicative modes of storytelling. The second sentence is interrupted by a "should" clause, which plays the inevitability of the chain against the dismissal of the subjunctive possibility of accounting for the links, glossing over the methodical "step by step" of the first sentence. This is a particularly complicated statement because these links are, after all, the story that is to come. And the final sentence goes further by introducing the story as a "chapter of accidents." In this context, the notion of a "chapter of accidents" takes on a valence beyond the merely arbitrary; it moves the novel from a (fictional) narrative of what did happen to a narrative of what might have happened. And it does so as a narrative that is self-conscious about its own conditional and fragmentary nature. The passage positions the story between the private nature of the "anecdote" (from the Greek for *unpublished*) and the written chapter, and—even within the description of the story as an "anecdote"—between that which is a revelation of secrets and mere amusing storytelling. The uneasy conflation of that which is possible and actual, public and private, sacred and profane, is linked here to the story itself, and to the unsettling synecdoche of a chapter for the whole of the novel.

The Sacred Fount as a Linguistic Object

So, given the complexities in the set-up for the story, what is the theory of the sacred fount? The novel creates its sacred fount as that mysterious fund peculiar to each individual, containing physical as well as intellectual qualities such as the appearance of age and wit. The conceit is that one can gain access to the portion of the sacred fount allotted to another if the two

are strongly linked in a love affair. But the sacred fount is also formally described as a parable or fable by the narrator—and critics have followed suit and called the novel itself a fable.[221] While I would argue against a too-easy conflation between the narrator's observation and the novel's structure or genre, the fable or parable has a pronounced presence throughout the novel. The titular formulation, like the titles of James's next novels *The Golden Bowl* and *The Wings of the Dove*, has the ring of the proverbial that goes beyond the merely metaphorical in its imagery. The combination of a religious adjective with an archaic noun makes "the sacred fount" sound like the extracted metaphorical center of a proverb. In fact, the sense that the title is only a part of a longer proverbial expression gives it a certain air of authority, of pre-existence.[222] But unlike *The Golden Bowl* and *The Wings of the Dove*, which draw their titles from identifiable biblical sources (Ecclesiastes and Psalms, respectively), *The Sacred Fount* merely sounds like it takes its title from a specific folk or religious text.[223] But that sense of the proverbial is precisely what James's novel is built on.[224] The text depends on assumptions of the authority of a textual precursor at the same time that it asks for recognition that these implicit claims are illusory.

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[221] Robert Perlongo titles his 1960 essay, "*The Sacred Fount*: Labyrinth or Parable?" He takes the "parable" (including a lesson to be taken from the story) to be that of "the frantically observant artist too busy looking at life and recording it and theorizing about it to really be a compassionate, operative part of it. Art, we must conclude from the narrator's downfall, should be a way of understanding life, but it should never dominate or replace it" (647). Blackmur, too, below takes for granted the form of the novel as a "fable."

[222] Neal Norrick terms this "one crucial recognizable phrase" which "serves to call forth the entire proverb" the "kernel." He notes that "for common proverbs the first half or the bare two or three word kernel suffices for a complete conversational turn….A speaker can call forth a particular proverb for his hearer with a brief allusion to its kernel. This makes it difficult to disfigure a proverb beyond recognizability by normal means at all" (45). I would argue that Norrick is essentially right about the meaning of a proverb remaining intact despite truncations, additions, errors, and witty alterations, but I would say that such changes are meaningful, especially within a *literary* text.

[223] Joshua Wilner has alerted me to the fact that the term "sacred fount" appears in Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "The Witch of Atlas." While there are undoubtedly points of connection between James's novel and Shelley's poem, I would argue that the use of "sacred fount" differs significantly in each work. In comparison to the abstract principle of James's novel, the fount in Shelley's poem is specific to a character and physical in nature: animals "drank before her at her sacred fount."

[224] Judith Munat's fascinating study includes an appendix which lists 75 examples of "Idiomatic expressions, quotations, similes, commonplaces and dead metaphors identified as phraseological units in *The Sacred Fount*."

As critical attention has turned toward the use of figurative language and form in James's novel, its focus has been fairly straightforward. The novel is seen both *as* a fable (generally a fable about writing) and as exceptionally full of decontextualized fragments of metaphors, proverbs, and fables. The pseudo-proverbial title's similarity to those of *The Golden Bowl* and *The Wings of the Dove*, I think, helps Blackmur to make the case (and backhanded compliment) in his afterword to *The Sacred Fount* that James's book is "the final preparation for his great later work precisely by merging…the external form of the fable (the kind of significance that may be formulated in a few sentences), the mediate or psychological form of the plot...and the substantive or poetic form which belongs especially to the novel" (228). More intriguingly, John Lyon's introduction notes that the book is suffused with clichés, commonplaces, truisms, and proverbs: "not [as] a superficial feature of style" but as necessary for a novel whose title and main concept stand for "the most sophisticated metaphorical expression of a way of thinking and feeling" (xix). What these two attitudes—Blackmur's focused mostly on the form of the novel, Lyon's acknowledging the connection between content and form—have in common is a strong emphasis on an allegorical function of James's novel, conveyed through the use of these figurative and proverbial forms. Judith Munat, coming at the problem of the figurative language found in James's novel from the starting point of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic terms,[225] remarks in "Iconic Functions of Phraseological Units and Metaphor" that linguistic idioms are so much a familiar part of language that they evoke an individual reader's highly subjective associations with prior experiences with the set phrase, rather than recall the meaning of the

[225] As the title of her essay suggests, Munat is particularly interested in the Peircian "icon." Although the terms are a little slippery, of the triad of "representamens" or signs —icon, index, and symbol—Peirce identifies, the icon is the most immediate: "An icon is a representamen of what it represents and for the mind that interprets it as such, by virtue of its being an immediate image, that is to say by virtue of characters which belong to it in itself as a sensible object, and which it would possess just the same were there no object in nature that it resembled, and though it never were interpreted as a sign" (§447).

idiom. It follows, perhaps, that a text that borrows heavily from the store of linguistic commonplaces is less intertextual than parabolic in its relation to the world outside of its fictional universe. At the same time, Munat suggests the opposite in the case of James's extreme use of commonplaces: "in a refined or formal textual environment, such as a novel by Henry James, idioms in particular may have the additional effect of startling the reader into *new linguistic awareness* through the clash of registers" (401). In this case, Munat arrives at the same conclusion that many literary critics have: that the text is essentially hermetic, that it deals with language and refers only to itself. It seems to me, though, that James's novel plays on these expectations of extreme allegorism and extreme hermeticism rather than merely indulging in them.

Meanwhile, as noted above in the discussion of the title of the text, James's appropriation of linguistic commonplaces includes a number of invented examples. James's coinages masquerade as preexisting units of meaning—proverbs from an alternate universe. The commonplace-that-isn't creates a subtly different kind of fiction that lies between the referential and the non-referential.

The first time that the phrase "the sacred fount" appears in the novel (it only appears five times within the body of the novel) occurs soon after the narrator has arrived at Newmarch. In a conversation with Ford Obert, a painter, the narrator explains his theory using the example of the Brissendens' inverted ages:

> If Brissenden had been of his wife's age and his wife of Brissenden's, it would thus be he who must have redescended the hill, it would be she who would have been pushed over the brow. There was really a touching truth in it, the stuff of—what did people call such things?—an apologue or a parable. "One

> of the pair," I said, "has to pay for the other. What ensues is a miracle, and miracles are expensive. What's a greater one than to have your youth twice over? It's a second wind, another 'go'—which isn't the sort of thing life mostly treats us to. Mrs. Briss had to get her new blood, her extra allowance of time and bloom, somewhere; and from whom could she so conveniently extract them as from Guy himself? She HAS, by an extraordinary feat of legerdemain, extracted them; and he, on his side, to supply her, has had to tap the sacred fount. But the sacred fount is like the greedy man's description of the turkey as an 'awkward' dinner dish. It may be sometimes too much for a single share, but it's not enough to go round." (34)

Among the commonplaces within the passage (the hill of age, the second wind, and so on) is the narrator's notion that the sacred fount itself is "the stuff of…an apologue or a parable" (34). It is then wrapped into an apparent commonplace, the greedy man and the turkey dinner. Given that narrator and critics alike respond to the sacred fount (and *The Sacred Fount*) as an apologue or fable, it may be worth revisiting the forms of fable and parable briefly before turning to the particular analogy that James constructs.

As I have outlined in the earlier chapters of this study, fables and parables have a complicated, often multi-stranded history, and occupy a peculiar place in the spectrum of philosophical and literary genres. They are both didactic in proposing an analogical method of reading and yet potentially manipulative in their use as a rhetorical tool. They are also, as we have seen, commonplaces, preexisting and easily identifiable. As such, they are often wielded elliptically with the assumption that a reader will fill in the missing parts and make the expected connections with the story at hand. But as I have argued, the authors in this

study are extremely interested in the way that these fragmentary figurative units are inserted into their texts, the way their status as half alien and half familiar exposes gaps between the world of the text and the world outside of it. With James, whose concocted apologues are embedded alongside "real" commonplaces in *The Sacred Fount*, the nature of the fable or parable is doubly perplexing. When James's narrator compares the sacred fount to the story of the turkey dinner, we might assume that the comparison is meant to elucidate the situation at hand, that is, what is happening to Grace and Guy Brissenden. Instead, we are given two apparently proverbial expressions, which do not exist as formulae outside of the novel. And, in fact, the two invented expressions feel so familiar in their formulations that their strangeness does not immediately register. As I have noted above, the combination of the religious and the archaic helps the title feel familiar. The homespun nature of the turkey dinner and the moralizing judgment of the description "greedy man" fit the story of the turkey dinner into the folkloric tradition of sayings, and the added interpretative moral allows us to gloss over doubts about the strange premise without deliberation. Both "*the* sacred fount" and "*the* greedy man's description" are cued as recognizable by the definite article, which introduces each element as if it were the only one that we might think of. On a simpler level, Obert's reaction models for the reader acceptance rather than confusion, and, given the vague sense of familiarity we feel when faced with these expressions, we are pre-disposed to go along with Obert's apparent familiarity with these turns of phrase. When the strangeness does register, it is all the more disorienting because it is uncanny in its quiet assumption that the reader is a part of an alternate reality in which sacred founts and stories about greedy men and turkey dinners are idiomatic, recurrent linguistic units.

So the text seems at first to resist, then to insist on an examination of just what the sacred fount is, if it is like the story of a turkey dinner. The moral "it may be sometimes too much for a single share, but it's not enough to go round" is, on the face of it, one of insufficiency. But, given the weighty subject of the sacred fount, why the levity in the description of the turkey dinner? That uncanny hominess is, I think, the point.[226] The abstraction of the sacred fount is juxtaposed with the most prosaic of all quasi-parables. The abstraction is made out to be explainable, provable by an example out of physical reality. But the alien nature of the context of this physical reality yanks the rug out from under the proposition that the correspondence between theory and real life be symmetrical.

Walking, Thought, and Embodiment: A Case Study

Weaving together the "abyss of romance," the trope of walking, and the peculiar treatment of a familiar expression, one of the more unusual passages in the novel, the prelude to the narrator's encounter with May Server in chapter VIII, may serve as a final case study of the

[226] The image is often glossed over, even by critics who are interested in the use of figurative language and fables in James's novel. R. W. Short examines images of food and eating in the novel, suggesting that "meals unobtrusively tether his fictions to chronological reality" (952). To a list of examples from the novel in which time is marked by its relationship to tea or dinner, Short adds three "metaphorical allusions to meals," including the turkey dinner. He accounts for these non- (or at least indirectly) temporal uses of meal imagery as giving "the sense of fleshy weakness echoed in the spirit" (953). A handful of critics have recently become interested in James's relationship to food – Carol Holly's essay in *Henry James's New York Edition: The Construction of Authorship* details the James family illnesses, focusing on Henry James's lifelong digestive distress and enthusiasm for Fletcherizing; Jennifer Fleissner uses James's Fletcherizing as a model for reading, "an attitude that might be encapsulated by the word 'savoring'" (51) – but largely ignore this image. In a related vein, James B. Twitchell, who is primarily interested in the ways in which James uses the "vampire theme" as a critique of the critic, looks at the turkey dinner image with some disgust: "Surely nothing can be more homely than seeing artistic creation as a turkey dinner; even the vampire analogy seems elegant in comparison" (143). (It should be noted, since it is still used fairly uncritically, that the vampire theme is an extratextual addition rather than anything that James himself writes within the story.) Jean Frantz Blackall's interpretation is the only major interpretation that I have encountered that makes the "ridiculous turkey metaphor" a major part of her interpretation. She looks squarely at the strangeness of the image and sees in it a key to James's characterization of the narrator: "If this narrator is seriously contemplating a relationship involving life and death, how can he do so in terms so inadequate without our ascribing to James – who was ever mindful of the right word – either an egregious lapse in diction or a bad joke? If we then turn to the metaphorical language of the novel generally, we find that the narrator's gravity is constantly undercut by compromising metaphors, all the more deliciously ironic because James has made the first-person narrator inadvertently testify against himself" (27).

particular complexities that this novel presents.[227] What marks this short passage as unique in the novel is precisely that its tone is drastically different from the rest of the work—it presents something that feels more like a created world with physical and emotional dimensions (rather than the largely abstract world of the narrator's theory). This is, to my mind, the only time in the novel that the narrator's description of the landscape and its effects on him even momentarily takes precedence over the ruminations about the sacred fount theory:

> There was a general shade in all the lower reaches—a fine clear dusk in garden and grove, a thin suffusion of twilight out of which the greater things, the high tree-tops and pinnacles, the long crests of motionless wood and chimnied roof, rose into the golden air. The last calls of birds sounded extraordinarily loud; they were like the timed, serious splashes, in wide, still waters, of divers not expecting to rise again. I scarce now what odd consciousness I had of roaming at close of day in the grounds of some castle of enchantment. I had positively encountered nothing to compare with this since the days of fairy-tales and of childish imagination of the impossible. *Then* I used to circle round enchanted castles, for then I moved in a world in which the strange "came true." (96-97)

It is notable that this looks, with the superimposed hindsight of James's denunciation of first person narration as the "darkest abyss of the romance," very much like the moment that the narrator's "I" does indulge in the *genre* of the romance with its fairy-tales and its enchantment, its figures of twilight and the sensual experience of birdcalls. What, then, happens when the text

[227] Goetz notes a curious crossing of the figurative literal divide in the final confrontation between the narrator and Mrs. Brissenden. The narrator questions Mrs. Brissenden about having dropped the quest: "And as even at this she didn't light I gave her something of a jog. 'You haven't with the force of your revulsion, I hope, literally lost our thread'" (178). Goetz suggests that this use of "literally" exposes the narrator's "habit of mixing his figures for reality"(144). He goes on to cite Samuels on this habit.

disappears into that void? Curiously, the thing that happens here is that the narrator's notion of the thought experiment—all cerebral evidence gathering and deduction—folds in on itself. The line between lucid observation and romance is blurred. It is striking that the terms that the narrator uses to describe the superimposed "grounds of some *castle* of enchantment" on the grounds of Newmarch anticipate what the narrator will call in his final confrontation with Grace Brissenden his "*palace* of thought" (214, emphasis mine). At the same time, the description is of a more sensual and physical nature than most of what occurs in this highly cerebral novel. Here, too, though, the narrator speaks of "the romantic stroke of all" as "the fruit of one's own wizardry," only to then speak of the "haunting principle…of my thought" (97). Thought is both mastered by the narrator and the master of the narrator, just as the physical world can be turned into (lowercase) romance, especially for the infatuated narrator when the "haunting principle" turns out to be (ambiguously) embodied in the person of May Server.

This episode also stands apart from the rest of the novel in that it is strongly bookended by the cawing that opens and closes it. The call of the birds is a strangely liminal thing: the naturalistic intrusion of birds has the effect of giving greater presence to the *events* at Newmarch by granting a kind of physical existence to Newmarch.[228] Yet, the birds themselves do not appear—they are at first and last only sound, and this sound is likened to the portentous imagery of divers submerging for eternity. When the bird imagery is embodied, it—like the narrator's "haunting" thoughts—is embodied only incompletely, in the form of May Server, or rather, May Server's figuratively disembodied grimace: "She fixed me with it as she had fixed during the day forty persons, but it fluttered like a bird with a broken wing" (99). Wings, of course, belong to a

[228] The other main sonic event of the novel beyond dialogue occurs earlier when the guests gather to listen to a visiting musician. Here, though, the piano merely provides a backdrop for the narrator's thoughts – in fact, this is the occasion for the narrator's thoughts about symmetry quoted in the epigraph to this chapter.

literary and proverbial tradition (that certainly includes *The Wings of the Dove*). Within *The Sacred Fount*, thoughts arrive on wings ("A new possibility as [Mrs. Brissenden] spoke, came to me with a whirr of wings" (64)), imagination itself has wings ("imagination, in her [Lady John's] presence, was but the weak wing of the insect that bumps against the glass" (26); "Her [May Server's] imagination had, for the time, rested its wing. At present it's ready for flight" (28)); and even the house at Newmarch has wings. Further, as discussed in the first chapter of this study, "winged words" have a very complex relation to metaphor itself—particularly dead or frozen metaphor that has lost its meaning. The link between the dismembered parts of disembodied grimace—or, by synecdoche, the depleted May Server herself—and a broken wing is matched by a strange halting lull in the novel. Theory-thought is momentarily at rest as the narrator and May Server (who is otherwise described as someone who "can't keep still" and is "all over the place") stop in one place. In fact, as May Server appears on the scene, not only is she already almost a thing of the past rather than the present, her very locomotion is characterized by its reluctance, its inertia: "She came slowly and a little wearily down the vista, and her sad, shy advance…was like the reminiscence of a picture or the refrain of a ballad….She had folded up her manner in her flounced parasol, which she seemed to drag after her as a sorry soldier his musket" (98). The image ties together in the pivotal person of May Server the death-laden bird calls (in the depiction of her nearly illusory, strangely sonic presence) and the broken carriage of an injured soldier, just as May Server figures as the point on which thought is questioned.

What is more, the passage takes another intricate turn in its bookending return to the bird song just before the dialogue and the narrator's speculation reassert themselves: "the passage of a flight of rooks made a clamour" (99). That the birds are revealed to be crow-like black birds is

surprising in its contrast with May Server's ethereal loveliness in her "clear dress" (97), but the birds have already been associated with the traces of a last dive. The vacillation between dark and light, symbolically death and life, has already made an appearance in the famous scene in which a group of the guests debate the meaning of a painting in which either the mask or the face of the subject resembles death—and the mask in the portrait is revealed to resemble May Server. But the peculiar thing about the rooks here is that their figurative and symbolic nature circles back and takes on yet another, familiar meaning: the rook as the *castle* in chess. This is a striking inversion: while the narrator strolls the grounds of New*march*, mentally retreading old walks in which he would "circle round enchanted castles, for then I moved in a world in which the strange 'came true'," the castles themselves fly above, and narratively encircle the passage itself. The "palace of thought" finds itself equated literally-figuratively with castles in the air.

Given the complex way that the imagery of the narrator's thought and perambulation are woven together into the fabric of James's story and of its structure, perhaps it is not surprising that the final confrontation of the novel—in which the narrator admits defeat (to an extent)—is introduced by a fruitless wandering: "I went from one room to the other, but to find only, at first, as on my previous circuit, a desert on which the sun had still not set. Mrs. Brissenden was nowhere, but the whole place waited as we had left it, with seats displaced and flowers dispetalled, a fan forgotten on a table, a book laid down upon a chair" (165). The chaos of the narrator's system is reflected in the way that orderly nature of the house's system is disrupted, the landscape of the narrator's walk becomes a desert in contrast to the scene of the narrator's encounter with Mrs. Server, and his surroundings are characterized by the off-kilter arrangement

of the chairs and the mutilation of the bodies of flowers. The act of readying himself to defend his theory results in the recognition of a disordered theoria.

And, in the novel's final utterance, the narrator examines his quasi-failure: "I *should* certainly never again, on the spot, quite hang together, even though it wasn't really that I hadn't three times her method. What I too fatally lacked was her tone" (219). Tone, as a characteristic or attitude, would generally be read here as something like her "supreme assurance, the *presentation* of her own *now finished system*" (218, emphasis mine). Associated with the appearance of a complete new system, Mrs. Brissenden's tone is related to the bravado of offering up a system, and the recognition of both system and presentation forces the narrator, or the reader in any case, to confront the problem of systematization in general. But Grace Brissenden's tone is also her health, her elasticity—in short, the vigor of her physical being. In the face of this vigor, the narrator himself (rather than his theory) falls apart; he himself will "never again…quite hang together." The weakness of the narrator's thought, the self-conscious meditation on the structure of the novel, are undone in the presence of a too-vital physicality; and yet, this undoing, the dishevelment of the narrator's system, is not characterized as failure, exactly.[229] The novel ends with the narrator weakened, his nearly disembodied voice nudged toward a physical coming-apart, but the connection between this physical, apparent falling-apart and the persistence of "method" remains. It is this meditation on the narrator's weakness, the

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[229] Rimmon-Kenan calls this a "classical example of a 'conclusion in which nothing is concluded'" and runs through the possible readings of this scene: that it is an admission of defeat or that it is an "ironic comment," which further branches the interpretation into two mutually exclusive readings: that the narrator is ignorant, but the reader is not, or that the narrator and reader know that Mrs. Brissenden's victory is "a cheap use of underhand techniques" (188). Throughout her book, Rimmon-Kenan puts pressure on retrospective effect of the realization that James's work presents various forking, mutually exclusive possibilities (or, in Rimmon-Kenan's term of choice, "disjunctive ambiguities"). While I agree with Rimmon-Kenan's rigorous explication of ambiguity, in the case of *The Sacred Fount*, I would argue that the ambiguous possibilities of the ending "settles" into the overarching concern with the reaction to systems and symmetries rather than provoking a perpetual reevaluation of the novel.

peculiar recognition that the hampered method is not defeated but reconsidered, that gives the novel its oddly haunting quality.

Appendix: Herder's German Translations of „Die Fabeln" and „Symbole"

Die Fabeln
(from *Zerstreute Blätter* 16:149)

A: Oft pflege ich mit den Geschichtschreibern zu zürnen, dass sie die fabelhaftsten Dinge wie wahre erzählen, gleich als ob die Nachwelt gar kein Urtheil haben würde.

B: So gross manchmal ihre Schuld seyn mag, so glaube ich doch, dass wir vieles für Fabel halten, das ehedem die strengste Wahrheit war. Denn wer nur etwas genau erwägt, wie dunkel manche Zeiten, wie Sittenlos und grausam andere waren, und solche sodann mit glücklichern Jahrhunderten vergleicht, der kann beinahe nicht gnug erstaunen.

A: Wer indessen wird glauben, dass die Vernunft des ganzen menschlichen Geschlechts irgend je so ganz und gar auf Abwege habe gerathen können, dass die Wahrheit nirgend zu finden gewesen wäre, dass allenthalben die ungereimtesten Meinungen ihren Platz einnahmen und man sich unter der schändlichsten Herrschaft der Irrthümer beruhigt fand.

B: Darüber siehe nur das Papstthum an. Auf welche Possen und Ungereimtheiten war es gegründet, und demohngeachtet stieg es zu einer Grösse, zu einer so hohen fast unüberwindlichen Macht, dass es auch jetzt noch, nachdem es gnugsam beleuchtet worden, zu schaden und an sich zu ziehen nicht nachlässt.

A: Was eine Religion, auch eine falsche, für Macht habe, das haben mich Numa, Mahomed, und andre gelehrt; dessen aber soll mich niemand überreden, dass auch in jenen Zeiten gar niemand gewesen wäre, der sich diesen Betrügern entgegengestellt, und ihre falschen Ränke dergestalt entdeckt hätte, dass die Gescheuteren wenigstens sich nicht betrügen lassen konnten. Davon schweigen indess die Geschichtschreiber, als ob sie gedungen wären, nur Falsches auf die Nachwelt zu bringen, und die Einfältigen mit dem Wahn des Alterthums zu benebeln.

B: Du irrst, wenn du das von allen glaubest. Denn, mögen einige solche Fortpflanzer des Irrthums gewesen seyn: so ist doch allenthalben die undendliche Schwachheit der menschlichen Natur so sichtbar, dass viele von ihnen sie nicht nur nicht verheelt, sondern offenbar gezeigt haben. Dies könnte uns zur Sicherheit gnug seyn, wenn wir nicht weit begieriger auf Absurditäten, als auf Vernunft wären.

A: Dörfen wir denn nich hoffen, dass wir alle einmal, wie in das Schloss der Wahrheit versammlet, einmüthig nur das erwählen, was überall das beste, und verwerfen, was hier, dort und da ungereimt und eine Misgeburt ist?

B: Das wollen wir Gott überlassen. Mir scheint jedes Zeitalter an seinen Lastern und Irrthümern krank zu liegen, die dann freilich dem folgenden Zeitalter ungereimt scheinen; indessen wird die Albernheit nie aus der Welt geschaft, sondern nur verändert.

A: O der menschlichen Ungeheuer, von denen die Geschichtbücher voll sind!

B: Ich für mein Theil, so oft ich in eine Bibliothek trete, kann ich mein Lachen und meine Verwunderung kaum halten, wenn ich so viele Gestalten und Schemata von Misgeburten wahrnehme.

A: Wie? wenn nun jemand die Geschichte und Acta der ganzen Erde besässe?

B: Ach schweige! Unser einziges, jetztiges Jahrhundert thut Dinge, die keine Nachwelt glauben oder begreifen wird.

Symbole
(from *Zersteute Blätter* 16:164)

Die gemahlte Poesie was in der Christenheit ehemals wohl gelitten gewesen und ihres Scharfsinns halben gelobt worden; sie musste aber, ich weiss nicht wesshalb? einmal plötzlich unter die Scythen wandern. Da war sie in grosser Gefahr.

Sie liebt bekanntermaassen Salz und nur das reinste Salz; die Scythen aber brauchen kein Salz, und waren der mahlenden Poesie von Natur erzfeind.

Mochte sie eine Sonnen- oder Mondfinsterniss, mochte sie Nebelsterne, oder irgen sonst etwas mahlen, Zahnlose Löwen, faule Bären, lässige Pflugstiere, lahme Pferde, magre Hirsche, räudige Wölfe, dumme Füchse, Adler ohne Federn, Pfauen ohne Schweise, heisere Hähne, geflügelte Schildkröten, rostige Kronen, welke Kränze, welkende Rosen, befleckte Lilien, faules Obst, angehauene Stämme, morsche Balken, morsche Kreuze, zerfallende Thürme, stumpfe Degen, zerrissne Fahnen, ausgelöschte Fackeln, verschimmeltes Brot, durchlöscherte Beutel – alles war verfänglich und verdächtig.

"Dank dem Himmel, rief endlich die mahlende Dichtkunst im Zorn aus, dass er die Freiheit der Menschen doch noch auf Eine Weise gesichert hat, durch *Gedanken*. Denken darf man doch auch bei den Scythen, was man bei ihnen weder thun, noch reden, weder bilden, noch mahlen darf."

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