

FROM THE GARDEN

OF THE DEAD:

JOHANNES CLIMACUS ON RELIGIOUS AND IRRELIGIOUS INWARDNESS¹

*What is the essence of night,
if not lack, need, and longing?*

-- Schelling²

Climacus reports a scene overheard, seen in a fugitive glance through leaves as he sat on a bench at twilight in ‘the garden of the dead’, a cemetery, most likely Copenhagen’s *Assistens Kirkegård*. The scene is the grief of a grandfather mourning at the grave of his son, and speaking tearfully of the meaning of that death to a ten-year-old boy, his grandson, now fatherless. The ‘garden of the dead’, as it is called, is not at the city’s center, but at some remove, not out in the wooded parklands, but nevertheless sufficiently alive with nature’s leafy shadows and open skies that Climacus can exalt in a kind of minor ecstasy over the coming of night -- as if night were an invitation for a “nocturnal tryst”, a beautiful prelude to the more tearful tableau ahead, where a grandfather’s grief will spill over as an anguished admonition to his barely understanding grandson. But what can the night tell us of mood, yearning, and heartache? Night beckons with promise of a

tryst . . . with the infinite, persuaded by the night’s breeze as in a

monotone it repeats itself, breathing through forest and meadow, and

¹ This essay is to appear in a collection published by Cambridge University Press, edited by Rick Furtak, to accompany Alastair Hannay’s new translation of Kierkegaard’s *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs: a Mimic, Pathetic, Dialectic Compilation: an Existential Contribution*, by Johannes Climacus, Cambridge 2010.

² *The Deities of Samothrace*, (*Über die Gottheiten von Samothrake*, 1815), trans. and intro. R.F. Brown, Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977, p. 18.

sighing as though in search of something, urged by the distant echo in oneself of the stillness as if intimating something, urged by the sublime calm of the heavens, as if this something had been found, persuaded by the palpable silence of the dew as if this were the explanation and infinitude's refreshment, like the fecundity of a quiet night, only half understood like the night's semi-diaphanous mist. (197)³

The coming of night is only half-understood. Kant takes the sublime to be present in the power of ocean storms or present in the vast wonder of starry heavens, both beyond straightforward representation. Climacus gives us a downscaled but still tremulous gentle sublime, far from *Sturm und Drang*. He gives the half-understood "semi-diaphanous mist" of the night, the breathing, sighing, of a breeze, the "palpable silence of the dew."

PART ONE: SETTING

THE GENTLE SUBLIME OF THE NIGHT

The Kantian sublime is an awesome occasion. One feels an initial humility, even fear and powerlessness, and then a recuperative sense of uplift – *How vast my consciousness*, to be viewing such energy and expanse!⁴ This uplift before great storms or vast skies reminds us, as Kant has it, of our expansive rational dignity. Climacus sketches a more gentle and intimate sublime, and one is left not with a sense of rational dignity but of restless repose. "What is the essence of night", Schelling asks, "if not lack, need, and longing?"⁵ If an invitation to a

³ *Postscript* quotes give the page reference to Hannay's Cambridge translation.

⁴ See my critique of Kant's position in *Lost Intimacy in American Thought: Recovering Personal Philosophy from Thoreau to Cavell*, London, Continuum, 2009, Ch 4 "Death and the Sublime."

⁵ "The Dieties of Samothrace," op. cit.

nocturnal tryst foretells refreshment, troubles stilled, it is equally night's "sighing as though in search of something". We sense yearning, perhaps unquenchable thirst.

This is Kierkegaard's anxious sublime.⁶ A twilight tryst is alluring, but no tryst is without anxiety – it might misfire or fail. The still breeze is "sighing as though in search of something" even as we sigh, anxious should the night provide nothing. The coming of dark in the garden of the dead is the coming of death, intimating, at best, "refreshment" half-seen. We yearn for the infinite repose of night, relief from self-torment and wounds. Replenishment is not promised as a savior seen through a glass darkly, as in a Christian salvation, but it speaks as a comfort felt in the "silence of the dew", sensed in a "semi-diaphanous mist."

"The sublime calm of the heavens" opens to "infinitude's refreshment." If this has a religious ring, it is mainly romantic. We know independently that the writer, one Johannes Climacus, is a self-described humorist, not quite a Christian. This lyrical evocation of dusk is sandwiched near the center of an eccentric tome whose short title is *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, a satire of false Christianity by less than a Christian.⁷ His evocations of the night breeze and dew nevertheless bear comparison with the Christian evocations Kierkegaard provides in his elegy to the lilies of the fields and the birds of the air (in the discourses of 1849).⁸ Here, as George Pattison notes, nature "signals a kind of transcendence" that evokes "the anxiety of self-relation".⁹ The repose of a lily or bird signals the contentment humans yearn for but lack.

⁶ See George Pattison "Kierkegaard and the Sublime," Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Herman Deuser, eds, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook, 1998*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998.

⁷ The complete title, in Hanny's rendition, is *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs: a Mimic, Pathetic, Dialectic Compilation: an Existential Contribution*. Sometimes I prefer *Unscholarly* (or "Unacademic") *Postscript*.

⁸ *Christian Discourses: and The Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air*, Princeton, 1971.

⁹ See "Poor Paris!" *Kierkegaard's Critique of the Spectacular City*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999, 128f. Marcia Robinson reports that the 4th century Ephram the Syrian sings of God as a luminous darkness.

The “anxious sublime” is an anxious, restless, relation of myself to myself brought out (in this case) by the night breeze and mist. They only half-tell a story to a self that only half knows its incompletions and needs. This incompleteness means that Kierkegaard and Climacus avoid any “naïve pastoralism”, Pattison’s word for untroubled expectations that a “lost plenitude of immediacy” will be restored. We are thrown into homelessness with no promise of intimacy without alienation. This yearning instills “luminous [and] dark expressions of anxiety”.¹⁰ The cemetery’s “luminous dark anxiety” marks a restless night propelled (“urged”) by a restless soul, and an “echo” in the soul, as if the *night* were the source of unease. The anxious dark of the night and the dark of the soul implicate each other in mutual resonance.

LYRIC AND DIALECTIC

Our *mise en scène* is barely half-a-dozen pages, a condensed and powerful meditation on death and inwardness held in an atmosphere set by sky above and fresh grave below.¹¹ A poet-philosopher on a cemetery bench considers his life and surrounds. Serene yet restless breezes offset noisy city bustle and frantic distraction. The lyricism is more than decorative.

As in *Fear and Trembling* (subtitled “a dialectical lyric”), the lyricism of Climacus plays among recurrent philosophical abstractions. Stepping beyond the terror of an impending sacrifice on Mt. Moriah, we might consider dispassionately what’s meant by a suspension of ethics. Stepping beyond the garden of death and a grief-filled outpouring, we might consider what’s meant by “truth is subjectivity”, or by “indirect communication.” Abstractions gain life from their mobile settings and things that speak. Dialectical disquisitions are at least one step

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The scene appears almost accidentally, with little fanfare or warning, (197-203) “*Stimmung*” in Danish, would be equally a matter of “atmosphere”, “mood” or “attunement”; Heidegger famously makes such moods or attunements basic to our being in the world.

removed. In the present case, the essential tableau contains an old man and a grandson, Climacus and a fresh grave, an anxious night and a screen of leafy boughs. We might call for a little night music, wafting from an invisible orchestral pit, to accompany this tryst with the infinite. In any case, the dark uncertainties of a romantic, proto-Christian faith are rendered as night's yearning and invitation and as Climacus' reciprocal response.¹² For contrast, in *Sickness Unto Death*, a soul- or self-relation arrives in austere abstraction, "a relation to a relation that relates to itself",¹³ and in *Postscript* faith is figured as "objective uncertainty" held in "the most passionate inwardness."¹⁴ The graveyard intimates this restless inwardness:

the night's breeze . . . repeats itself, breathing through forest and meadow, and sighing as though in search of something, urged by the distant echo in oneself of the stillness as if intimating something. (197)

The sighing of night reflects a sighing soul, and a sighing soul reflects the night breeze, both yearning for a rest signaled by silent dew. It's not as though the physiology of anxiety *caused* the skies to spin, or the spin of the sky *caused* the brain to spin. It's a matter of poetic fit, as lightning portends shock to the heart, and shock to the heart portends lightning.

TAKING UP AND BEING TAKEN

Climacus lingers for the dead to *speak*, awaits whatever death speaks *to him*. He overhears a graveside address: death disrupts the living, puts the dead under judgment, and warns the living to heed their lives. A warning sounds through shadows and leaves. Though not meant for him

¹² I take *Postscript*'s subtitle "mimic, pathetic, dialectic compilation", to encompass the lyric within mime and also the deep tragic feelings within "pathos" or the 'pathetic'.

¹³ The passage begins with human being defined as spirit, and spirit, as self. I prefer thinking of spirit and self as best rendered "soul" – mainly because "self" has become a term strongly associated with secular self-realization. See *Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Alastair Hannay, Penguin, 1989.

¹⁴ CUP, 171.

by the speaker, he comes to *take* these words to be addressed intimately to him. Climacus is *taken* by them, and takes them up as his *own*.

Here we have what becomes a familiar existentialist term of art. “Appropriation” names his *taking up* with these words. They float more or less anonymously from a graveside, but he *takes them in*, making them his *own*. For good reason we can balk at “appropriation”. An English dictionary will tell us that “appropriation” is forceful and illicit seizure, as in the appropriation (or stealing) of land or funds. Climacus wants a moment of *being taken* by something of moral or religious consequence, and *then* taking up with it. A love or beauty or truth, for instance, *grasps* or *overwhelms* me. *I take something urgent to heart*. But I take to heart what *steals* my heart (not what I steal). What has *captured* my soul, I make my own. No single English word conveys this double-movement, but if we retain “appropriation”, then we should say that *I appropriate what appropriates me*.

The old man grieves for his just-buried son, fears for his son’s peace, for he was caught up in the illusions of philosophy, believing like others of the intelligentsia that philosophical or historical speculation *about* faith could be a *substitute* for faith. Thus is his son blocked from salvation. Let grandsons beware! Intellectual debate *about* Christianity is not a work of faith but of objectivity. Erudite engagement with Christianity may exhibit dialectical or analytical finesse, but is no advance over simple, untutored Christian faith. Someone lacking an analysis of faith can be of faith, and someone with a perfect analysis can be an atheist, a humorist, say, who understands the available cure but won’t take it. The old man grieves at lacking learning enough to have warned his son that his soul was at risk. Climacus grieves that the old man is denied a restful old age, so anxious he is that his son faces punishing Judgment.

Why does the old man unburden himself in this way, at this time? What of his duty to console the boy, help him through the trauma of his father's death, especially now that the child has neither parents nor other family to care for him, only an old man, with limited years? In his anguish over his son's perdition and the need to deliver a chilling warning, the grandfather becomes insensitive to the grandchild's pain. In his evident distress, he even demands a solemn oath. The child must vow to resist his father's waywardness. The old man failed his son; perhaps he can save the boy.

CALL AND RESPONSE

This scene of inadvertent spying opens disarmingly: "What happened is quite simple. It was four years ago . . ." (197), we're told. Is it simple to learn from the dead? A disarming beginning prepares us to accept that something "quite simple" can prefigure the extraordinary. The writer simply sat on a bench, becoming inadvertently privy to a conversation. Yet that moment triggers vocation. Climacus finds a "decisive summons to come on a definite track." (202). He reflects to himself, "You are after all tired of life's diversions, you are tired of girls that you love only in passing, you must have something that fully occupies your time. Here it is." (Ibid.) But this is perversely inept. A vocational summons that arrives just to fill time as flirtation loses its charm is no summons at all. Yet Climacus is right to set death next to vocation, even though he gets this comically out of focus.

Graveside weeping awakens a need for direction, but the earnestness of death doesn't fully prompt him to take life seriously. He takes the voice overheard as posing a *detective's* puzzle. He finds "something like an intricate criminal case in which the very complex circumstances [make] pursuit of the truth difficult". (202) But this *can't* be right. "How should

I live?” is an existential question, not a question of fact in a detective “who done it?”. The mystery of finding my path is not solving an objective puzzle. Nevertheless, Climacus stumbles on important truths.

He’s flooded with emotion overhearing this graveside lament, and becomes neither a voyeur taking in someone else’s problems, nor a detective out to solve them. Pressed by death to show that his life has not been meaningless, he’s struck by a “summons”. Having “a definite track” will be a partial answer to the challenge of death. But the mood of life-and-death urgency descends swiftly into comedy. Climacus drops the urgent mystery of his future into a police file. He sloughs off the anxious “whence-and-whither” of a call by switching his circumstance: it is now a matter of factual deficit, to be rectified by clues lit by a flashlight. Yet no bag of tricks, keen observations, or savvy detective’s deductions, can erase this barren existential desert: *you are tired of girls that you love only in passing*. Luckily, he leaves this absurd detective analogy to turn to the man’s heartfelt lament. And gets a bright idea! He’ll fill the time of his life by exposing the fraud of abstract philosophy. A calling seems halfway between a *summons to do something* (to begin anew), and a particular *response and resolve* (the path lies *here* rather than *there*).

HUMOR

There’s more to say about the enigmas underlying the yearning of night, and behind words from the grave. But a prior issue looms. Before Climacus sketches much of the graveyard scene, he seems to disown *in advance* the possibility that he will be given a “call” that answers the night and the words from the grave. Here is the apparently self-shackling remark: “Even if a call was issued, in following it I myself, however, am without any call”. (196) Is he saying

that even if he knows that the grandfather's admonition applies to him, he won't take it as a genuine "call"?

Perhaps he means this: "Even if a call was issued [*to the child*], in following [*the child's call*] I myself, however, am without any call". This would be to insist on a philosophical point. A path genuinely my own is one to which I have been called, one that lifts me up, that *embraces me*. I might follow exactly in the footsteps of someone else who has received a genuine call. Acting in accord with *their* calling (however worthy my actions may be), is nevertheless not to have been called *myself*. Calls can't be delivered by proxy (and they arrive by something like grace). It's good if Climacus takes up a cudgel to expose academic philosophy, and better if *that is his calling*.

Here is another possibility. As we've mentioned, Climacus styles himself a humorist. He maps humor as a life-stage, or a border between life-stages. It stays just shy of religious faith, and so is more serious than a taste for jokes and good cheer. From its vantage, you see "the problem of life" accurately, and see what commitments are required in answer. But for all his insight, the humorist fails to make a requisite response. Climacus could see that for all who take themselves to be Christian, thus-and-so commitments are required. He could be wiser than an ethicist, for example, who sees Christian life as requiring only commitments to the morally conventional. Yet Climacus fails to commit as a Christian. Even taking up a polemical vocation will be merely heeding the grandfather's admonition, merely doing another's bidding. And polemicizing may be merely a new way to pass time. To my ear, this annoying vagueness about what he does and doesn't have by way of a call is a pre-emptive self-mocking that a humorist employs to disguise his dilatory wandering. A humorist might open a polemical attack, but that might not stand as good enough answer to a "decisive summons". (202)

Climacus is skittish about commitment.¹⁵ He's most comfortable as an amused outsider even as he hints he might be otherwise – say as he's moved by the scene he encounters. Could he be summoned to the vocation of *humorist* -- called to announce the illness of the age and of oneself, and called *not to do much about it*? He'd engineer an exposé but still stay shy of accepting a Christian cure. He'd expose the illusion that philosophy goes beyond Christianity. Perhaps he is indeed “called”, even lacking a commitment to live better (as he knows he ought). He's called to expose fraud but not to mend his ways – and he doesn't.¹⁶

SUBJECTIVE SPACE SHARED

“*What happened was quite simple*”. No Heavens rained fire, nor Whirlwinds spoke, nor Ghosts rose from their graves. Yet by relating “the most affecting scene I have ever witnessed”, Climacus positions himself, at least for the moment, as a subjective thinker, affected by grief and death, moved by their lyrical expression.¹⁷ As author of a 600 page “postscript”, Climacus appears mainly as an objective thinker, defending the truth of subjectivity. But ever and again, as in this graveside scene, he slips into a confessional mood. This places him *within* subjective space -- not just describing it from without.

Climacus is subject to intimations of night mist, and to sudden earnestness about the direction his life should take. Hidden by trees, afraid to move lest he disturb the pair, Climacus takes in this moving effusion as if the words addressed *him*. Subjectivity includes the capacity to feel from the standpoint of other subjectivities. He is sequentially the old man who sees the

¹⁵ Note the parallel with Climacus' revocation of *Postscript* as a whole, enacted at the end of the book; here the ‘revocation’ (of his being open to calling, if that what it is) occurs before the story gets started.

¹⁶ See Hannay's discussion of revocation and humorist in his contribution to this volume, XXX. There is another reason Climacus might downplay the commitment we'd expect if he's been summoned to vocation. It's that he doesn't want to report that *here and now, objectively* (as it were) -- and *directly imparted* – we have an easily and straightforwardly identifiable “conversion” or “call”.

¹⁷ See Hannay's essay in this volume, p. XXX.

ruse of philosophy, the child subjected to a grandfather's insistence that he disavow his father's life, and the haunting corpse, testament to a life squandered. (200)

The old man, hair chalked with age, engages a social space linking three generations and an invisible listener. This social field is made active by a dead son who prompts the inwardness, true or false, of the old man, who then seeks to prompt a faithful inwardness in the child, this concatenation of affect then prompting inwardness (or its shadow) in Climacus. This ensemble of listening, speaking, and being moved shows that the space of inwardness and subjectivity (in their varieties of authenticity) is at first blush solitary but ultimately social. Inwardness corrects what Climacus calls an "unnatural form of interpersonal association."¹⁸ (203) First an onlooker at some remove, that distance shrinks: he's taken in by the scene. He never steps back from the events he overhears. He's not a voyeur or objective note taker (as one gathering material for a play or a novel might be). Only subjectivity gives him the poetic tones he so lyrically conveys. Inwardness pervades this social space.

Climacus is wrapped in portents and persuasions of dew, in search of an animating meaning for his life. This is no place for observational stares that objectify the other, for the "masculine" glare that freezes, for dispassionate reports. His is a place of subjective yearning – a place open to calling. Only a person well free from the seductions of an indifferent, third-personal objectivity could find this place so promising. He waits "womanlike" for the infinite to enter, half-appear in "the night's semi-diaphanous mist."

Much of the graveyard tableau with its gentle enigmas is familiar now, less obdurate. Let's move in for a closer look.

¹⁸ I return to this enigma in Part Three, "Inwardness Interpersonal", below.

PART TWO: TANGLED ENIGMAS

RIDDLES IN SPEECH

What is the riddle of twilight – or is it two or three riddles?

Evening's leave-taking of the day, and of the one who has lived that day, is a speech in a riddle. Its reminder is like the solicitous mother's admonition to the child to be home in good time. But its invitation [the evening's welcome as it takes leave of the day], even if the leave-taking is innocent in thus being misunderstood, is an inexplicable beckoning, as though repose were to be found only by staying out for the nocturnal tryst, not with a woman but womanlike, with the infinite . . . (197)

As evening says goodbye to the day, it speaks a riddle, something uncanny, incongruous. Climacus has more than one riddle in mind, but at the least we have the enigma that night speaks yet is silent, that “the palpable silence of the dew [is] the explanation and infinitude's refreshment” (ibid). This is a riddle known to the Psalmist:

The heavens tell God's glory
and His handiwork sky declares.
Day to day breathes utterance
And night to night pronounces knowledge.
There is no utterance and there are no words,
their voice is never heard.

Ps. 19:2-4

There is neither voice, nor hearing, nor words -- yet heavens tell, sky declares, day utters, night pronounces. His readers will remember this Biblical verse as riddling speech. The heavens have inwardness, the capacity to speak expressively from the heart -- and yet do not have

inwardness or expression.¹⁹ Then there is a convoluted enigma of farewells.

For evening to say anything is worry enough, but to say *farewell to the day* doubles the worry, for Climacus assimilates it to the farewell of a mother who bids her child goodbye. She releases the child even as she warns her not to stay out too late, to come home in good time. As in a fairytale, she might say, “Beware the woods, where darkness comes early”. Why are these admonitions, mother to child, night to day, liable “to be misunderstood”, and why “innocent”?

A child needs the assurance of a safe return, and also needs the bravery to venture into the dark. The riddling discordance is that the mother both hides and reveals the risk of no return. In any case, for mortals there is always one final *cancellation* of safe return. The child ventures out, *must* venture out, with a mother’s blessing, but not without a mother’s fears and reservations. The world of the night welcomes and repels. The mother releases and holds. Night offers adventure and delight no child should be denied, and terror and danger no child should suffer. A mother says “farewell, return in good time”; she delivers innocent good cheer, confidence that the child can set out on its own. Yet a mother is also in dread, and delivers a half-heard admonition: *beware*, return in good time.

Night says good-bye to the day -- says “take care” and “come hither” to all who have lived through the day, as if death said “take care” and “come hither”. Is a tryst with night a tryst with death? Answering the “come hither” of night (or death) is to gamble one’s vulnerability, as if a vulnerable woman were to answer the beckoning night, alone. One answers night’s invitation “womanlike”. To anticipate a tryst is not to prepare for battle but to yield to an invitation as one would yield to love.

¹⁹ This is Robert Alter’s translation, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2007, p. 60. He comments, “The heavens speak, but it is a wordless language.” *The New American Standard*: “There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard.” *The King James Version* (unhappily) reworks the text: “There is no speech nor language where their voice is *not* heard” (my emphasis). I’m grateful to Marcia Robinson who heard the resonance between Psalm 19 and Climacus’ riddle.

Themes of leaving and coming home, of coming into existence and perishing, preoccupy the Climacus of *Philosophical Crumbs*, as well as in *Repetition* and *Fear and Trembling*. Sarah might bid Isaac to “return in good time” even imagining the danger that awaits. Haunting riddles cloak Abraham’s farewell as he sets toward the mountain. The young man in *Repetition* breaks off from his beloved yet yearns for her return. The child sets out yet we fear that this move into dark will bring evil or accident. Night bids adieu to the day. Job bids happiness adieu. A mother bids her child good night, assuaging her fear (night is also a place for good dreams). This is night bidding farewell to the day.

FINAL FAREWELLS

Farewells are exchanged in the confidence that the sun will rise, that we will awake, that the world will return, that our friends will *not* enter the grave in the night – all this as we know that a *final* farewell awaits when there will be *no* tomorrow, when we *won't* awake, when the beloved will *not* return. Jonathan Lear remarks that a therapist must have a lively sense of death.²⁰ In keeping with Climacus’ disquieting riddle of a mother fearfully holding yet bravely letting go in bidding her child farewell, the analyst knows that termination, and a respect for it, hangs over developing therapeutic attachments. To “hold” a child’s (or analysand’s) anxieties is always also to anticipate the day when the child (or analysand) will depart to live in freedom. Good mothering, good mentoring, good therapy thus embodies what Heidegger calls a being toward death, an eye on termination that colors all action and thought prior to it. Climacus offers the unending riddle of foreboding final farewells and irrepressible hopes of return.

He avers that the mother is innocent in bidding her child goodbye with thoughts for her

²⁰Jonathan Lear, *Therapeutic Action: An Earnest Plea for Irony*, New York, Other Press, 2003, 54-7.

safe return, just as a weather reporter is ‘innocent’ in saying ‘til tomorrow’, and the night, ‘innocent’ in bidding day goodbye. The night welcomes Climacus to a nocturnal tryst, to be remembered happily on the morrow, yet no such innocent tryst is offered the old man. He lives under an anxious sky, knowing he must die, that his son has just died, that his grandson must live under the cloud of his father’s death and under the cloud of his grandfather’s impending death: he must live soon enough alone and lonely, still only a child.

The man has no one to bid *him* to return in good time. It’s *false* that “the sun also rises” (as the sun now sets, and night bids day adieu); *false* that each farewell is a passing separation before the morrow’s safe return. Only faith helps him abide the enigmas of farewell.

Evening’s leave-taking of the day, and of the one who has lived that day, is a speech in a riddle. Its reminder [of danger] is like the solicitous mother’s admonition to the child to be home in good time.

Faith brings hope amidst abiding uncertainties, living through the half-innocent riddles of taking leave of the day, bidding adieu, hearing an invitation to a nocturnal tryst.²¹ A “tryst with the infinite” brings love and death in tow, a grandfather’s graveside love for a grandson unfolding under the infinite night sky, a mother bidding her child to return in good time yet knowing her child will one day *not* return. She keeps faith through uncertainty (or doesn’t).

THE DEAD SPEAK

In opening his passage to the gentle sublime, Climacus takes in this place where people seek *solitary* communion with the dead. There is no “see and be seen” of city streets, carriage paths

²¹ Climacus had asked earlier in *Postscript: What is it to die, or to marry, or to pray?* xxx

or church interiors on a social Sunday morn.²² “[A]n individual vanish[es] among the trees, not happy to meet and avoiding contact, since he sought the dead and not the living.” (197) But Climacus breaks this communion for a dialectical foray into the abyss of farewells. Visitors to *Assistens Kirkegård* come to say goodbye to their dead. Climacus has no particular grave to visit. Perhaps he takes himself to be somewhat dead, however, and so *does* have a grave close by. Can he commune with himself as one communes with the dead?²³

There is always in this garden, among the visitors, a beautiful understanding that one does not come out here to see and to be seen, the one visitor avoids the other. Nor does one need company, least of all that of a talkative friend, here where all is eloquence, where the dead greets one with the brief word placed on his grave, not like a clergyman who gives sermons on that word far and wide, but as a silent man does who says no more than this yet says it with a passion as though the dead would burst open the tomb – or is it not strange to have on his grave “we shall meet again’ and to remain down there? (197)

The night speaks without words, now the dead speak yet “remain down there” – and are ready to burst eloquently from the grave. Knowing the dark, the mother pleads, “Return in good time”, half-hiding the thought that there may be no return. Voicing that thought, the grave declares, “we shall meet again!” In the garden, “the visitor’s leave-taking is again made doubly

²² A recent (2008) visitor’s guide describes *Assistens Kirkegård* as “. . . a popular place for people to take a stroll, look at the old graves and monuments, and to have a picnic. A flea market operates along its walls every Saturday from May to October. The yellow walls of the cemetery . . . have in recent years become the target of many graffiti painters.” Regine Olsen, Poul Martin Moller, Hans Christian Anderson, Niels Bohr, and the African-American jazz musicians Kenny Drew and Richard Boone are buried there.

²³ I discuss the enigma of looking at one’s life from the position of having already died in “Transfigurations: The Intimate Agency of Death”, *Kierkegaard and Death*, ed. Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben, forthcoming.

difficult.” (Ibid) The dead say to the living “we shall meet again!” and the living agree. But will the visitor stand graveside, or will they meet in the grave?

Climacus writes, “it is meaningless to say ‘another time’ because the last time is already past and there is no reason to stop taking leave when the beginning is made after the last time has passed.” Is it meaningless for those underground to say ‘another time’ and mean it because for them ‘the last time has passed’ -- they are buried? Yet if a “beginning is made *after* the last time has passed” we thereby refuse to “stop taking leave”. We resume visits despite the departure of the visited, and resuming visits, resume taking leave, the living of the dead and the dead of the living, renewing ever again night’s invitation to a tryst with the infinite. Perhaps all is parting and rebirth, farewell and “we shall meet again”, loss and repetition (“repetition” taken as a revaluing revelation refiguring the past, bringing it alive in new ways, and reanimating the present).²⁴ Visitors speak with their *risen* dead.

Each abyssal enigma marks an anomalous moment to be read in opposing ways. Each disrupts stability of expected frames of reference, showing disturbing possibilities. Our most ordinary linguistic intelligibility frames, whether they be poetic or non-poetic, become unexpectedly fluid and elusive, full of wonder and anxiety. Take the duck-rabbit reversible figure. A duck-world shifts incongruously to a rabbit-world. The riddle is that we know both somehow exist simultaneously. The world aspects rabbit, and then aspects duck, and we know it can aspect or reveal itself in each of these incompatible ways. The breeze aspects whisperingly, then as pure motion with no voice at all. My dead speak and don’t speak, warn me to heed my life and retreat, voiceless as dust and bones.

²⁴ See my introduction, *Kierkegaard’s Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, Oxford World Classics, 2009, and *On Søren Kierkegaard: Dialogue, Polemics, Lost Intimacy and Time*, Burlington, Ashgate, 2007, Ch. 9.

IRONIES

A riddle creates two-mindedness that resembles irony.²⁵ Kierkegaardian irony is a tension in our “existentially essential concepts”, those that pick out what should most matter to us. Our objective social status or routine behaviors, for example, may be in tension with our aspirations or hopes. Irony says two things at once, for instance, “I’m a Christian (or Jew)”, which might translate, “I go to church (or temple)”, and also “but I’m *not yet* a Christian (or Jew)”, that is, I’m haunted by failed aspirations. Being Christian is a public status and also a set of daunting ideals. Irony expresses this doubleness. I might say “I’m *not yet* a teacher” (my aspirations are far from fulfilled) -- yet know that by “objective” accounts I am undeniably a teacher. Kierkegaard says there is not a Christian in Christendom. The mind reels. By convention, Denmark is packed with Christians. Yet if a Christian must be true to a most demanding ideal, then perhaps no one puts out sufficient heart to merit the accolade. We are creatures of aspiration, and so always subject to irony in spelling out identities. We may or may not hear it in our self-characterizations. I say I’m a teacher, meaning that’s how I earn a living (yet if Socrates is listening, he’ll hear irony). I might say, “I’m a loving person” (or *not* a loving person), and another will hear irony. For a spiritually alert audience, (and I am often *my own* audience), whatever I say about who I am, there will usually, and *should* be, some irony afoot.²⁶

Irony attaches to identity avowals and also to broad evaluations of “the world” as we characterize particular happenings and our wide attunements. Something might be “not evil *enough* to be evil”, or “*too* evil to be evil”, thus evincing gaps in which irony can play. I might say “that doesn’t matter *enough* to matter”, or “that matters *so* much that its mattering is beyond

²⁵ Charles Larmore defines irony as two-mindedness in *The Romantic Legacy*, Columbia University Press, 1996. Jonathan Lear refines this, describing Kierkegaardian irony as accentuating the gap between a commonplace status and an ideal never really achieved. I find this revision helpful. See his *Therapeutic Action*.

²⁶ The big exception here will be reporting my ‘file identity’: say at tax-time, or in border crossings, where I report most impersonally my job or status. Then my identity has no personal, existential, or spiritual valence.

words”. In subjective life, shot through with evaluation, irony is ineluctable. The two-mindedness of irony, manifest in attestations and aspirations of identity, worth, and attunement, has striking parallels in the fluid many-sidedness of riddles.

NESTING RIDDLES

A bevy of inter-animating and intertwined riddles will reveal ever-deepening labyrinths of revelation and opacity. One’s inwardness is fundamentally a disruption and unsettling of riddles. In the passage at hand, the first stratum strikes as heavens speak or breezes whisper -- this, the other side of an evident *silence* of heaven and breeze. One lives this two-mindedness, just as one lives the Wittgenstein duck-and-not-duck, rabbit-not-rabbit. Intertwined with silent-heavens-speaking is a second unsettling, a riddle of *farewells*, issued from nights, mothers, or the dead, boding promise of return and fear of death, renewal of good cheer and suffering of loss. Emily Dickinson begins a poem, “My life closed twice before it closed” and concisely evokes this doubleness:

Parting is all we know of Heaven
And all we need of Hell²⁷

A third strand of riddle and inwardness appears as *address from and to the dead*. Farewells or partings include the dead. They speak and listen, note our visits, and simultaneously are the epitome of silence, the mute nullity of dust.

Intertwined with others, a fourth enigma emerges in the *sociality-isolation* of inwardness. Deepening of spirit seems the paradigm of my solitude, my “hidden inwardness”, as Climacus calls it. Yet inwardness is both a self’s relation to itself and also its outward

²⁷ “My Life Closed Twice . . .”, # 1732, Dickinson’s *Collected Works*, many editions.

relation to others. To lose inwardness, he says, is to enter “an unnatural form of interpersonal association.”(203)²⁸ Inwardness ties into my deepest passions even as it reaches outward as the “natural form of interpersonal association.” A last riddle: teaching is *contact-and-withdrawal*. Each spinning enigma is a tangle we can explore but not completely stop or straighten. Irony and riddle pervade our happy-unhappy fates.

Part Three: Inwardness

INWARDNESS INTERPERSONAL

Alastair Hannay gives a welcome rendition of Kierkegaard’s existential compilation, marvelously true to its lively twists and turns. His introduction notes the perils of translating the Danish *Inderlighed* as “inwardness”. As he puts it,

“Inwardness” is by no means a perfect translation of “Inderlighed”. As with Hegel’s Innerlichkeit, the sense is not that of inward-directedness [but of] an inner warmth, sincerity, seriousness and wholeheartedness in one’s concern for what matters, a “heartfeltness” not applied to something but which comes *from* within. However, since “inwardness” has become a standard translation for Kierkegaard’s “Inderlighed” and in this sense even finds a place in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it has been retained here. (XXXIX-X)

What springs from the heart in expressive saying, feeling, or doing, cannot be *pro forma*.

Heartfeltness, wholeheartedness, escapes shallow conventionality or perfunctory mimesis.

²⁸ Climacus asserts that a teacher wanting to impart objective results, and nothing more, assumes an “unnatural form of interpersonal association”. The true goal of imparting truths that matter is to impart to the learner a deepening of inwardness, exemplifying a *natural* form of interpersonal association. I return to this below.

Adopting what is “typically said or done” by others of my class, city, or family can pervade my relations to others, the world, or myself. Yet if I respond *only* as would “one in my situation”, how can I be a person with heart in what I do, say or undergo? I remain but a mimic.²⁹

Letting “inwardness” translate wholeheartedness or heartfeltness brings psychologists to introspection or inner-direction, and philosophers, to Cartesian divides between private consciousness and public world (with its linguistic and conventional practices).³⁰ Yet in his graveyard meditations, Climacus sidesteps all this as he gives human ways we do and do not convey who we are to each other, expressing ourselves interpersonally and from the heart, say, under the burden of death. Nor does he concede a Cartesian split as he evokes worlds that intimate unutterable wonder, as in whisper of night or serenity of dew.

A most true “me” does not live in an isolated steel box. Subjectivity is not cut off from the world.³¹ What might seem like a divide is instead porous: Climacus is engaged in the whisper of night breeze and the muffled tears of a neighbor. Night infiltrates him and he responds. He all but enters the souls of a grandfather, a dead son, an abandoned child -- as they enter him. Shrieking or weeping, when not mimicry or done for effect, also defy a barrier between Cartesian inside and outside.³² Climacus is rightly suspicious of “outward bawling”, not because pain is inescapably inner, and vocalizations, outer. He is suspicious because “bawling” by adults in the public square is typically hackneyed hysterics covering over an *absence* of heartfelt suffering, -- a wholeheartedness flowing toward others. (220)

²⁹ For Heidegger, “inauthenticity” is a mindless saying or doing that mimics what “*they*”, or “*one*” says or does; thus it is an abdication of one’s personhood (though the latter is not his term of art).

³⁰ Hannay remarks that Climacus uses “*Indvorteshed*” for inner-directedness (as opposed to heartfeltness’s outer-directedness, “*Inderlighed*”). (CUP XXXVIII). Also, see his comments in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard: A Philosophical Engagement*, ed. Edward F. Mooney, Indiana University Press, 2008, p. 152.

³¹ A Hegelian inner-outer contrast fails, too, but in rather different ways. See my “Whatever happened to ordinary subjectivity,” *Spring Journal*, Spring, 2007.

³² Climacus hints that *Fear and Trembling* indulges too much “bawling out” of the Moriah event. (220)

Earnestness, courage, or truthfulness reach toward “objects”. We are earnest *about* something, heartfelt *with regard to* something. Inwardness, as the locus of passion, is a mode of *interpersonal* relations – not at all an isolated something hidden within. It underscores reciprocity, a give and take of affect and emotion. The heavens offer heartfelt invitation, accepted or refused with heart. A grandfather’s deep grief completes itself in concern for another -- who responds with heartfelt gratitude. Climacus awakens (“inwardly”) to vocation as he takes in a scene in a cemetery. The night air and another’s voice transform him, realigning his affects and commitments. The world pores into him; he parcels out a response that pores into the world. Taking in and parceling out presupposes “interpersonal association”. “Inwardness” is not metaphysically inner.

LEARNING, INWARDNESS

Night and grief frame a setting of instruction. The teacher of truth-that-matters, of essential truth, teaches to my “self-relation” and to my relation to others and the world. This teacher teaches by withdrawal and reservation. Far from a skills trainer or drill instructor, he or she will impart inwardness, heart. A student senses Socrates approach and then disappear, hint at answers, then disown any. Socrates draws Alcibiades into his net, and then leaves him hanging. At the end of *Postscript*, Climacus teaches by taking back what he has said. The grandfather teaches without talking to Climacus at all. The riddle is a tension between two truths: a teacher intervenes, coming face to face with her student; a teacher teaches by absence, by disappearing behind a curtain.

There’s something quixotic about this. When it comes to loves or affections, death or marriage, “essential truth,” then direct address is ruled out. But why?

Direct address, as Climacus sees it, is too invasive and liable to overpower a student's vulnerable "self-activities", showing insufficient respect for them. (203) An awakening soul is awakening from within (even as it opens outwardly). Wisdom, as Socrates laments, can't be poured into another's skull.³³ The man pours nothing into *Climacus*' skull. He is awakened *unintentionally*. Key to imparting wisdom is withdrawal or absence. The old man is 'reserved' or absent with regard to Climacus. He is decidedly *not* reserved with his grandson. If we are to gain a revelation here, the man's bearing toward the child is a false lead. We must attend to *Climacus* as the beneficiary of wisdom, indirectly imparted. He grasps the *content* of a plea -- addressed elsewhere. Don't waste your life on philosophical systems: change your life! Climacus takes up an existential "*how*" linked to an appropriate objective "*what*." Of course this is wildly startling. How in the world can *accidentally* overhearing a sentimental address to an innocent, uncomprehending boy deliver *me* to a life-altering revelation?

The teacher's inwardness, Climacus reports, "is a respect for the learner precisely as one having inwardness in himself." (203) To have respect for the inwardness of another is to have reservations about tampering with it. One's own soul is one's own business. A teacher who meddles assumes an "unnatural form of interpersonal association." (ibid.) Helping another is *approaching and backing off*, and knowing when to do either. Something profound is in the air. Grandfather addresses grandson, but the real teaching happens in Climacus' overhearing. He confesses he has never heard such a moving scene. He learns from it, even as he worries about meddling in *their* business. But apart from his meddling or not, how do we learn from *things in the air*? And what are we to make of the ill-mannered attempt of the grandfather to instill vocation in his grandson? Doesn't respect dictate that he step back, forego tampering with the

³³ Socrates laments that wisdom can't be poured into a head that way in xxx.

inward “self-activity” of the child? Alas, his address is less like wisdom from Socratic reserve, and more like an upsurge of suffering -- not teaching, but a cry of pain.

Why expect this to be intergenerational teaching? The old man is overcome by grief and hardly fit to be *temperate* or *wise*. The child is assimilating primal mourning. That is a necessity as one absorbs the ways of a culture, but it's not here that essential truth is imparted. This unrehearsed drama initiates the child into mourning. It is not, by the way, a practice Socrates, who belittles weeping, would ever recommend, but inheritors of a biblical culture will hardly object to the idea a child must be led to ways to weep over the deaths of fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, friends and neighbors, kings and great leaders. If we grant further that a young child may have no natural *desire* to be led to this practice, then heavy-handed tampering may be partially excused.

Furthermore, urgency may trump the value of temperate reserve. The grandfather's overwrought plea is colored by his awareness that he is old, running out of time, and addresses a *child*, who will soon be left without familial counsel. Flooding another with pathos would be inexcusable if not for this exceptional circumstance. There can be a suspension of protocols of respect, meant for adults in normal times. More alarming is the man's demanding an oath. Can the child possibly *understand* the nature of the oath -- or the words he utters in compliance? He is to mourn a father and swear to forsake him. Oppositions between fathers and sons are the stuff of life, but here the demand amidst grief and devastation requires the child to gather himself and solemnly swear to *disown* the father he mourns.³⁴

³⁴ We often ask children to promise (or apologize) long before they can have any real idea of what they're asked to do. We initiate children into cultural forms in rather wooden ways, trusting that refinement, and 'inner' understanding will come later. Meanwhile, we can be content with more or less rote compliance. The art comes much later -- in degrees for most, and for some, never.

Most likely the grandfather is inexcusably tampering, but *Climacus* is not tampered with. He finds his soul awakened by “words in the air”, indirectly. Is this an instance of a ‘natural interpersonal association’ between the man and Climacus? But Climacus does not even *exist* for the grandfather. How can he *respect* the inwardness of someone he does not know? Well, he doesn’t tamper with Climacus. A student I don’t know may lurk in the back of my class, listening as if behind screen. Perhaps Climacus lurks that way. Learners are often invisible to their teachers, and after all, that’s how we learn from authors long departed, or those we know only through books. We could say Kierkegaard respects my “self-activity” despite our lacking face-to-face contact.³⁵ He constructed distance between teacher and learner, as evidenced in the involutions and indirections of his texts. If I were to meet him face-to-face, in a comic attempt to diminish indirection, I would surely stay learning-impaired.

TRUE OR FALSE

We are cultural creatures. Families, neighborhoods, schools, places of worship, offer modes of expression, patterns we inherit. Kierkegaard learns the etiquette of the playground or street, of class relations, filial piety, and dissertation presentation. He inherits endless variations of what Climacus calls modes of “interpersonal association”. Even the cultivation of solitude can be framed as a mode of interpersonal association: I learn when such association is best suspended, or when it’s best to take oneself as one’s sole companion.

Inheritance can be used or misused, owned or disowned. It is not just thrust on us *en bloc* as a necessity or burden. I can shape or refuse it, piecemeal or in wide swaths. One becomes less Danish if one leaves the country at age five and is raised in Paris speaking French,

³⁵ In *On Soren Kierkegaard*, I interpret pseudonyms as devices to effect reserve and proper distance between writer and reader. The “revocation” at the finish of *Postscript* also functions to preserve a reader’s freedom.

or if one loudly withdraws from participation in the Danish state church, or mocks the King. Being Danish is a matter of degree and dispute in which I can tilt the balance. Being a Christian or a professor is also a matter of degree, and is deeply evaluative. A real or true professor will be a good professor, and we can argue about what that means. Strong differences may emerge. Being inward, too, has an evaluative dimension, and can occur in degrees. We display the inherited outward signs of inwardness yet not be truly inward, just as we can display the outward signs of membership in the professoriate yet not be truly a professor.

In the garden, Climacus talks out the difference between false grieving, “just going through the motions”, and true. To mimic outward forms of grief is to be untrue to grief: “inwardness [will be] untrue to the same degree as the outward expression, in mien and countenance, in words and assurance, is there, ready to hand for instant use.” (198) Whatever is *there*, “*ready to hand*” (one hears Heidegger) gives the mimic ample material. But to be true to grief or inwardness will be true to something beneath “outward expression, in mien and countenance”. Good mimes don’t express their *own* subjectivity but only an inherited shadow. “Ready to hand” expressions give only “everyday understanding of inwardness.”³⁶ (Ibid.)

Commonplace weeping, gesticulations, and words of deep loss are not always or completely untrue. A quick shriek of disgust can be perfectly true, and if not, betrayed by telltale clues that we learn to detect: it might be theater, for instance, or a calculated diversion. Climacus concedes this but has other worries. He wants to steer us from taking momentary gushing as *sufficient on the face of it* to be taken as true grief (or inwardness). Deep grief is

³⁶ Heidegger’s terms of art in *Being and Time* are largely borrowed from Kierkegaard. We have in English translation the “every day” and “ready to hand”, “being toward death” and the “they”, “chatter” and “repetition”, living authentically (or in the truth), mood and attunement, individual resolve, and so forth. Climacus’ exploration of living-toward-death in the passage at hand is especially resonant of Heidegger’s discussion.

more than a momentary burst of gushing, weeping, and gesticulating.³⁷ It is preserved, “not as an instant’s excitement and a woman’s infatuation, but as the eternal which has been won through death.” (198). How does an ‘eternal’ inwardness become ‘won through death’? To win the eternal through death is to die to its ephemerality. A changeable love, a changeable grief, are ‘less true’, we might say, than their eternal counterparts. We grieve a dead child beyond immediate outbursts, grieve for a (relative) “eternity”. Flashes of pathos are “feminine”. He invokes the stereotype to name a tendency toward immediate emotional outbursts. But males are not always stoically controlled (they’ll burst out in anger), and women can be struck dumb for years, stoically hiding their shame, anger, or humiliation.

“[I]t is not unlovely that a woman gushes over in momentary inwardness”, Climacus tells us, “nor is it unlovely for her soon to forget it again.” (198) Momentary inwardness is linked to forgetfulness of it, and deep inwardness is linked to memory. We can approve the immediate expression of grief and then its sequel, “soon to forget it” -- “move on”, as we say, for a range of hurt. But clearly deep grief at the loss of a son is not something to “get over” or “put behind us” as we “get on with our lives.”

RESERVE

How does one preserve inwardness past moments of evident weeping or gesticulating? It must go underground, as it were, become buried. “Praise be to the one living who relates as a dead man to his inwardness,” Climacus says. The dead do not well-up or gesticulate. I am impassive, as if dead, to my grief, rather than continually reanimating it for show. But burying grief (or another affect) does not mean an emotional tumult is eradicated.

³⁷ From a recent novel: “*Although John did not show his emotions, his melancholy was evident.*”

Relating impassively to a hidden grief, as a man dead to it might, could be a Stoic tactic to become *free* of troubling emotion. But this is not Climacus. A Stoic aim is to *eradicate* excessive emotion, while Climacus aims to *preserve* essential emotions like love and grief – but erasing all superficial fuss and bother. We might grieve outwardly for a day, a week, or a month, but the time for public demonstration will pass, and we then enter the time when the most is at stake. Having lost a love, we don't want to “get over” our grief. Even after the span for conventional mourning is past, we will want that love-fueled grief to linger on powerfully, despite loss of ready at hand modes of expression. Weeping all day or each night may taper off. Yet who would want grief over the loss of a child to cease with the cessation of overt weeping? Grief's outward expression can subside while an inner river remains.

Preserving felt-pain can be desirable, say as a refusal, out of deep love, to erase grief for one departed. Attachment to suffering goes counter to a Stoic ideal.³⁸ But showy expressions of conveniently “momentary” inwardness or devotion, welling up with tears each Sunday in church, on call, are well beyond the pale. But Climacus hardly downgrades heartfelt emotion or the aim of sustaining it (think of hope or love). The timelessness of an emotion like love (and its relative divorce from ‘ready at hand expression), a love that belongs to one's deep past and future as well as to one's present, for instance, might be the “eternity” of a mother's grief that remains decades after the death of a child, a pain so entrenched as to have become a very mark of her identity, there unto death, before God. We can imagine it sustained actively even as she allows its outward marks to fade. As Climacus puts it

³⁸ But perhaps it counters the “Stoic ideal” only as it is popularly (mis)understood. Rick Furtak argues that the Stoics in fact reject emotion as an unwanted disturbance on the grounds that what emotions reveal to us is *not true* (see his "*Wisdom in Love: Kierkegaard and the Ancient Quest for Emotional Integrity*," Notre Dame, 2005, 18-19). This means that a Stoic might be convinced that there are truths revealed to us in moments of emotion, of passionate inwardness, and that accordingly such emotions ought to be embraced by the true Stoic as giving access to truths (“Your child is worthy of deep love”), and among those truths, the “meta-truth” that emotions do not just cloud or cover over truth but display it.

It has always stung my shame to witness another person's expression of feeling when he abandons himself to it as one does only in the belief that one is unobserved; for there is an inwardness of emotion which is befittingly hidden and only revealed to God, just as a woman's beauty would be concealed from all and revealed only to the beloved . . . (198)

If deep emotion can be "befittingly hidden and only revealed to God", then once again, whatever 'outward reserve' one exhibits in restraining expression of long-term love or grief, this is quite other than treating emotion as an unwanted intruder to be evicted.

Avoiding public demonstration leaves room for expressing inwardness in intimate settings: the old man weeps as he speaks alone to his grandson. Some few, the grandson, and now Climacus, know the feelings he harbors, the true depth of his inwardness, so he is not utterly mute before mortals. And otherwise hidden grief can become unhidden in revelation to God. Once again, inwardness is interpersonal association. Daily prayers or meditations can be expressions to another of restful inwardness. The limiting case of the truth that inwardness is interpersonal is the occasion when where perduring affect arises outwardly for only one other, the other who is God. Inwardness moves outward, though the recipient of one's revelations need not be one's neighbor, priest, spouse, or one's friend.

FINAL NOTE

ART AS SHIELD, LABYRINTH, AND REVELATION

In a book of battles, riddles, and death, Homer pauses mid-stride to describe the making of the marvelous Shield of Achilles on which a god engraves the many wonders and worlds of the book. In *The Iliad* (Book 18), art is shield and revelation.

In a book of dialectical battles and comic asides, Climacus-Kierkegaard pauses midway in a garden of death to engrave the many wondrous worlds of the book in a marvelous, miniature, lyrical and dialectical. We have the strolling critic of Copenhagen, the false-heaven of intellectualistic disputation, the true hells and redemptions of stricken fathers, and the worlds of only briefly innocent sons – the worlds of diaphanous mists and nocturnal trysts, and of the many tensed layers of the heart. Barely half-a-dozen pages, this miniature provides a vivid proof text for all that Climacus tells us elsewhere of truth and subjectivity, double reflection and indirect communication, confession of faith and its revocation, the inward recesses of the heart and its outward expression, the easy chatter of the classroom and the mystery of inheritance from star-crossed fathers, of farewells from anxious mothers, of receiving word from the risen dead and knowing the costs of a soul's self-betrayal.

Here in the span of a hand we have the worlds of the *Postscript* engraved. Or, as in Hamlet's *Mousetrap*, have a play within a play to catch our conscience by surprise, and return us to the dark sufferings and smiles that are the wonder of life.

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