

Hidden Inwardness as Interpersonal<sup>1</sup>

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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 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 semidiaphanous mist (197).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Twenty-five years ago, Bob Perkins graciously accepted my first Kierkegaard effort. He was putting together a single volume on *Fear and Trembling* that turned out to be a trial run for his extended International Kierkegaard Commentary, a project that was to occupy so much of his boundless spirit through the succeeding years. Now as that series comes to its end, it’s appropriate to remember his efforts with another gift for a collection just for him. This is an honor.

<sup>2</sup>Page numbers throughout are keyed to *Kierkegaard: Concluding Unscientific*

Like the coming of night, as Climacus has it, the sublime, for Kant, is only half-understood; but the coming of night would not be Kant's preferred example. For him the sublime is a towering, awesome occasion: the violence of ocean storms, the wonder of starry heavens. In the *Postscript* passage from the garden of the dead, the sublime is a natural but downscaled scene of allure and fear. Death haunts, but the surround is the half-understood breathing, sighing, of a breeze, the "semidiaphanous mist" of the night, the "palpable silence of the dew."

Climacus has us feel an intimate sublime that leaves us in a tremulous, restless repose. "The essence of night", he might say, with Schelling, is "lack, need, and longing?"<sup>3</sup> If an invitation to a nocturnal tryst foretells refreshment, but also anxiety, for this anticipated tryst is not without danger. 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 a beckoning night, as a Christian might yearn for the infinite repose of a savior, seen through a glass darkly. But Climacus is a romantic, not a Christian, and he yearns for the comfort not of a savior but a comfort sensed in the "silence of the dew", in a "semidiaphanous mist." His evocations of night breeze and dew nevertheless bear comparison with the elegies to the lilies of the fields and the birds of the air (in Kierkegaard's discourses of 1849). Here, as George Pattison notes, nature "signals a kind of transcendence" that evokes "the anxiety of self-relation".<sup>4</sup> The repose of a lily or bird signals the contentment humans yearn for but lack. The anxious dark of the night and the anxious dark of the soul implicate each other in mutual resonance.

Our *mise-en-scène* is barely half-a-dozen pages, a condensed and powerful meditation on death and the inwardness of grief, held by sky above and fresh grave below. Stepping beyond the garden of

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*Postscript*, trans. Alastair Hannay (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup>"The Deities of Samothrace," (*Über die Gottheiten von Samothrake*, 1815), trans. and intro. R. F. Brown (Missoula MT: Scholars Press, 1977) 18.

<sup>4</sup>See "Poor Paris!" *Kierkegaard's Critique of the Spectacular City* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999) 128-29.

death and this grief-filled outpouring, we might consider what's meant by "truth is subjectivity", or "true inwardness" but such disquisitions would be at least one step removed from atmospheric settings from which things and persons speak, one step removed from a man broken in grief, a frightened grandson, a fresh grave, an anxious night, a screen of leafy boughs behind which Climacus hides and listens. This tryst with the infinite realizes what *Postscript* figures as an "objective uncertainty" held in "the most passionate inwardness." It intimates 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 lightening portends shock to the heart, and shock to the heart portends lightening.

Death disrupts the living, puts the dead under judgment, and warns the living to take heed. Death speaks indirectly through a night breeze and also through words overheard. The grief-wrought old man does not intend his words for the eavesdropping Climacus. But Climacus is taken by them, and takes them up as his own, as they float by more or less anonymously from a graveside. To call his taking up with these words "appropriation" means silencing that term's primary sense of forceful or illicit seizure (as in an illicit appropriation of land or funds). Climacus is overcome by a demand in the grief overheard in the way a love or beauty or truth might overcome him. He does not steal a grief overheard but lets a grief, and its lessons of death and life, steal into his heart, where he makes his own what has captured his soul. Perhaps we should say that the subjective thinker appropriates what first appropriates him.

The old man grieves at the fresh grave of his son, and fears for his soul, for his son was caught up in a cultural illusion, the illusion that philosophical or historical speculation or debate about faith could be a substitute for being of faith. Let grandsons beware!

Erudite scholarly engagement with a religion is not a work of faith but of objectivity. I can lack an analysis of faith yet be of faith; I can have a perfect analysis and be an atheist, or a humorist. Climacus, as humorist, understands the available Christian cure but won't take it. He can upset would-be Christians with a diagnosis of their ills, and know his own ills, and yet be uninterested in the cure of becoming Christian himself. Climacus grieves that the old man is denied a restful old age, so anxious he is that his son faces harsh Judgment. Climacus decides he will do more to unseat the complacency of those who persist in the son's illusion. But that is not to take up with the truth that accosts a Christian and that a Christian must hold.

This scene of inadvertent spying opens disarmingly: "What happened is quite simple. It was four years ago . . ." (197), we are told. The writer simply sat on a bench, becoming inadvertently privy to a conversation. Yet that moment triggers vocation, for Climacus hears a "decisive summons [for him] to come on a definite track" (202). Why? He reflects, "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" (202). But this is a farce. A summons is no summons that is welcome only because flirtation has lost its charm.

Graveside weeping awakens Climacus to a need for direction, but his approach is comically inept. A search for vocation, he confides, will be "something like an intricate criminal case in which the very complex circumstances [make] pursuit of the truth difficult" (202). So he confronts a detective's puzzle. But "How should I live?" is an existential question, not a question of fact in a detective "Who done it?" This is not an objective puzzle. Nevertheless, in spite of himself, Climacus stumbles on important truths – for us, if not for him. Pressure from a sharp awareness of death can open the soul to a "summons." Having "a definite track" will partially answer the challenge of death. But the substance of life-and-death urgency eludes him as he frames the anxious "whence-and-whither" of his life as a police matter for gumshoes with flashlights, an answer to boredom as he reflects, you are tired of girls that you love only in passing. And then his flashlight hits on the answer. He'll fill the time of his life by exposing the fraud of abstract philosophy. He has a calling: the summons to do something, is answered by a particular response and resolve (the path is here not there).

Nature, death, and other persons interweave as a concerted open sphere of subjectivity that awakens Climacus to his own self-relations or subjectivity. So we might offer, surprisingly, that subjectivity is a shared natural, embodied, and interpersonal space.

“What happened was quite simple”. The author of a 600-page “postscript” is mainly an objective thinker, defending the truth that truth is subjectivity.<sup>5</sup> But ever and again, as in this graveside scene, he slips into a confessional mood that places him within subjective space. He does not just describe it from without. He is subject to intimations of night mist, to sudden earnestness about his life’s orientation, taken by effusions from a gravesite that address him. Subjectivity includes capacity to feel from the standpoint of other subjectivities. Climacus is the old man who sees the ruse of philosophy, the child subjected to an insistence that he disavow his father’s life, the fearsome corpse, testament to a life squandered (200).

Chalked with age, the old man, anchors a social space linking three generations and an invisible listener. This space is made active by a dead son who prompts inwardness, true or false, in all attending, and by a surrounding night, this concatenation of affect then prompting inwardness (or its shadow) in Climacus. This listening

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<sup>5</sup>In the early 1960s Stanley Cavell noted that there was something quixotic in what appears to be Climacus’s attempt to *defend* subjectivity. Philosophical defense by definition is an objective project. Yet on second thoughts, that sort of quixotic project is not very foreign to philosophy. Kant, after all, uses reason to limit reason. And, in any case, Climacus is not really *interested* in offering a philosophical defense. He’s conducting a kind of thought-experiment, trying out sketches that exemplify features of what must be wrapped up in a way of life, or in a way of living into a life—not trying to *justify* that life. Nevertheless, it can surely *seem* at times that Climacus is doing something academic and philosophical—objective. Later in the 1960s Henry Allison argued that the arguments Climacus delivers are so *patently* flawed that Climacus must be talking tongue-in-cheek. If he *knows* it’s bad philosophy, perhaps it’s a good mimic or parody. The point might be to parody his rival, Hegel—a kind of hoax at the expense of Hegelians or academics generally. The *Postscript*, like the “Hegelian System” that it mocks, collapses on itself like a house of cards—to our great amusement. We shouldn’t laugh at Climacus for the foolishness of the *Postscript*. He knows what he’s doing, and does it very well. So well, in fact, that ever so many professors think he’s producing bona fide philosophy. The joke’s on Hegel and anyone else who thinks he’s serious about his “mimic-pathetic-dialectic,” that most *unscholarly* anti-systematic postscript to some unassuming philosophical crumbs.

and speaking, passive and active ensemble, is at first blush a lonely and solitary affair, but it is ultimately social. If we have true inwardness and subjectivity here, we have what Climacus calls a “natural form of interpersonal association”<sup>6</sup> (203). Inwardness pervades a social space. Only a person well free from the seductions of an indifferent, third-person objectivity could find this place so promising. He waits “womanlike” for the infinite to enter, half-appear, in “the night’s semidiaphanous mist.”

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 clouds first of his father’s death and then under his grandfather’s impending demise. Soon enough he must live alone, only a child. Only faith helps the old man 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 (197).

Farewells, leave-takings, are exchanged in the confidence that the sun will rise, 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.<sup>7</sup> In keeping with Climacus’s 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

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<sup>6</sup>More accurately, proper inwardness corrects an “unnatural form of interpersonal association.”

<sup>7</sup>Jonathan Lear, *Therapeutic Action: An Earnest Plea for Irony* (New York: Other Press, 2003) 54-57.

thought prior to it. Climacus offers the unending riddle of foreboding final farewells and irrepressible hopes of return.

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. 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).

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?

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. . . . Nor does one need company, here where all is eloquence, where the dead greet 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. The grave declares, “we shall meet again!” The dead say to the living “we shall meet again!” and the living agree. They will meet in the grave and also with the visitor standing graveside. Visitors speak with their risen dead.

Inwardness permeates our speech with the dead. Of course, inwardness is the wrong English word here, for it concerns, in this case, a manner of speaking with another, a manner of interpersonal address. As Alastair Hannay 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 "heartfulness" not applied to something but which comes from within.<sup>8</sup>

Letting "inwardness" replace wholeheartedness or heartfulness brings psychologists to picture introspection or inner direction, and philosophers to picture Cartesian divides between private consciousness and public world (with its linguistic and conventional practices). 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, and 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.

Subjectivity is not cut off from the world. What might seem like a steel wall is instead porous: Climacus is engaged in the whisper of night breeze and the muffled tears of a neighbor. Night infiltrates and he responds. He all but enters souls of a grandfather, a dead son, an abandoned child — as they enter him. Emotions and passions also refute purported barriers between inside and outside. But, what, then can Climacus mean by "hidden inwardness"? He prizes it as a counterweight to "outward bawling" (as he puts it). Hackneyed hysterics cover over an absence of heartfelt suffering — wholeheartedness flowing toward others (220).

Earnestness, heartfulness, courage, or truthfulness are passions that reach out toward others and things. We are earnest about something, heartfelt with regard to something. So-called "inwardness" is a passionate reciprocal mode of interpersonal relations: the heavens offer heartfelt invitation, accepted or refused; a grandfather's grief is a concern for another, who returns a concern. Heavens invite, an old man pleads, and Climacus responds ears open to vocation. The world pours into him; he parcels a response that pours into the world. Taking in and parceling out presuppose "interpersonal association."

There will be false passion and true. "Inwardness [will be] untrue to the same degree as the outward expression . . . in words and assurance, is there, ready to hand for instant use" (198). Whatever is there "ready to hand" gives the mimic ample material.

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<sup>8</sup>*Postscript*, Hannay note on translation, p. XXXVIII.

But to be true to grief or inwardness will be true to something beyond “outward expression.” Good mimes don’t express their own subjectivity but only an inherited shadow. “Ready-to-hand” expressions give only “everyday understanding of inwardness” (198).<sup>9</sup>

Commonplace weeping, gesticulations, and words of deep loss can be true. A recoil in disgust can be perfectly true to one’s affect and circumstance. (Of course, it might be theater, or a calculated diversion.) Yet a deep grief will be more than a momentary burst of weeping or gesticulating. True grief is preserved, Climacus observes, “not as an instant’s excitement, but as the eternal which has been won through death” (198). A passion like grief will veer away from excitement toward the eternal, and this veering is won insofar as one dies to a passion’s outward ephemerality. In short, changeable love, changeable grief, are “less true” than their eternal counterparts. We grieve a dead child beyond immediate outbursts. Momentary passion is linked to forgetfulness; deep inwardness is linked to long memory. Some momentary outbursts are fine in their place. “[I]t is not unlovely that a woman gushes over in momentary inwardness nor is it unlovely for her soon to forget it again” (198). The sniff of sexism aside, the point is that lasting grief, eternal grief, is not an outburst from which we move on. Climacus puts it this way: “Praise be to the one living who relates as a dead man to his inwardness.” The dead do not burst with public gesticulation. To all the world I might seem as if dead to my grief, never allowing it animation – but buried grief may still live.

A Stoic aim is to diminish or eradicate false emotion, an aim Climacus would endorse. He believes, against the Stoic grain, that love or grief can be true, and so, worth preserving. It’s the false fuss and bother around these powerful emotions that must be monitored and erased. We might display grief for a week, or a month, or on an anniversary of a death, but the time for public displays will pass, we suppose. Then we enter a twilight zone where most is at stake. Who would want grief over the loss of a child to cease with the cessation of weeping?

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<sup>9</sup>This is one of many places where we hear Heidegger, or where Heidegger lifts Kierkegaard’s formulations and insights without attribution.

As a refusal, out of deep love, to erase grief for one departed, we can admire the preservation of suffering. A mother's grief extending timelessly after the death of a child might be a pain so entrenched as to have become a very mark of her identity – not to be scorned or eradicated, and not on public display. As Climacus puts 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.

(198)

If emotion can be “befittingly hidden and only revealed to God”, then reserve in expression of lasting love or grief is only to be expected. It's not treating emotion as an unwanted intruder.

Shunning public demonstration allows inwardness an expression in intimate settings: the old man weeps as he speaks alone to his grandson. He is not utterly mute for the boy and Climacus know the feelings he harbors. And otherwise hidden grief can become unhidden in revelation to God. Daily prayers or meditations can be interpersonal expressions of restful or anxious passion. The limiting case of the truth that inwardness is interpersonal is the occasion when lasting affect arises for God only, bypassing one's neighbor, priest, spouse, or friend.

*What is living in Kierkegaard?* With sensitive calibration, a dialectical lens gives us a lively interweave of nature and subjectivity and sociality as these are animated by vocation, anxiety, and death. A less dialectical, more lyrical Kierkegaard also sings in the text. Attention to image, setting, and scripts, in the case at hand, gives a poetic narrative of a garden's luminous dark. Midway in his monstrous book of satire and dialectical battle, Climacus sketches a garden of the dead as a lyrical-dialectical miniature of the larger effort. 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 their 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 sufferings and smiles that are the wonder of life.