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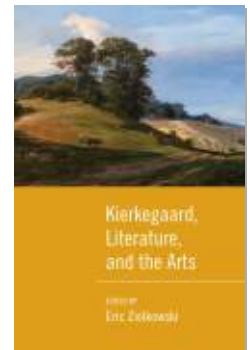
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Part II



Performing Arts

Beyond the Mask

Kierkegaard's *Postscript* as Antitheatrical, Anti-Hegelian Drama

Howard Pickett

Several problems take center stage as a reader enters the thick of Søren Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846). Perhaps none is as daunting or as decisive for the rest of the work as the one Johannes Climacus, pseudonymous author of this follow-up to *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), announces near the start of an early section entitled "The Subjective Issue": "The difference between subjective and objective thinking must . . . manifest itself in the form of communication" (*SKS* 7:74 / *CUP* 1:73). This problem of form—how can one communicate outwardly a subjective existence characterized by "the isolation of inwardness"?—animates *Postscript* from beginning to end (*SKS* 7:74 / *CUP* 1:73). It also animates the present essay, which asks: What exactly is the form of *Postscript*, and how well does that form manifest the difference between subjective and objective thought? Alternatively, how well does the form of *Postscript* avoid the problems that arise when describing outwardly and abstractly (that is, *objectively*) the inward and particular existence of a *subjective* individual?

Taking my cue from "A First and Last Explanation" (Kierkegaard's signed addendum to *Postscript*)—in particular, Kierkegaard's comparison of himself to both a dramatic poet and a stage prompter (*SKS* 7:569 / *CUP* 1:625)—I argue that *Postscript* is essentially theatrical in form, a point sometimes intuited but rarely tied to the text's own explicit theatricality.¹ Yet *Postscript* is also *antitheatrical*, at least in content. Tellingly, Climacus condemns abstract, speculative thought ("Hegelianism") as a mere *Schattenspiel*, or "shadow play" (*SKS* 7:323 / *CUP* 1:353). Consequently, a theatrical approach is the last thing *Postscript* ought to adopt in its quest to take seriously actual, subjective individuals. Nevertheless, by Kierkegaard's own admission, a thoroughly theatrical method is precisely what one finds on display not only in Hegel's works but also in pseudonymous works like *Postscript*.

As I will argue, *Postscript*'s ambivalence toward the theatrical is neither carelessly inconsistent nor naively self-contradictory. For one thing, a reader might observe that Climacus rejects only certain aspects of theatricality while

affirming other aspects. As I show, Climacus rejects a Hegelian “philosophy of the spectacle” focused on detached spectators and mere external appearances in exchange for an inward, subjective “philosophy of the actor,” with its defining emphasis on action and internal effort. In short, Climacus adopts a form of theatricality (and a theatrical view of the subject with it) purged of Hegelian detachment and deception. For another, Kierkegaard’s use of an antitheatrical theatrical persona (Climacus) suits a treatment of the subject especially well, since it dramatizes the inexpressibility of the essentially inward subject, while also highlighting its inevitable theatricality and insincerity. In effect, Johannes Climacus’s reader learns that the subject is not amenable to direct external communication; subjective existence is not an outward spectacle to contemplate and display but an inward performance to enact. Yet, from “S. Kierkegaard,” signed “editor” of *Postscript* and spokesman of its final epilogue (“A First and Last Explanation”), the reader learns that the theatrical is inescapable for a philosophy of the subject. The best a published work like *Postscript* can do, then, is not to unmask itself but rather to draw attention to its mask *as* mask, exposing and confessing (metatheatrically, as it were) its own inadequacy and hypocrisy.

Hegel’s Philosophy of the Spectacle

While debate continues over Kierkegaard’s precise relationship to Hegel, *Postscript*’s attack on systems, on the identity of thought and being, and on a preoccupation with the world-historical poses a substantial challenge to ideas found in the writings of both Hegel and Danish Hegelians (e.g., N. F. S. Grundtvig, J. L. Heiberg, and H. L. Martensen).² Climacus’s repeated use of theatrical (more accurately, *antitheatrical*) metaphors not only offers a persistent critique of Hegelianism but also borrows the terms of that critique from Hegel’s own mouth, in particular, his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, posthumously published in 1837, nine years before *Postscript*.³ There, theatrical terminology serves to describe Hegel’s central concept, the self-manifestation of Spirit in history: “On the *stage* [*auf dem Theater*] on which we are observing it,—Universal History—Spirit displays itself in its most concrete reality.”⁴ So central is this metaphor, the so-called *theatrum mundi* (theater of the world) topos, that it appears repeatedly throughout the lectures, in references to “Spirit; which has the History of the World for its theatre [*Schauplatze*, literally ‘scenes,’ ‘theaters’],” “the real theatre [*Theater*] of History,” and “the theatre [*Theater*] which was on the point of becoming the centre of History”—that is, Europe.⁵ Hegel also uses related metaphors from the theater to describe the human observation of Spirit’s self-exhibition. Prior to his religiously inflected “slaughter-bench [or altar] of history” analogy, Hegel imagines himself, the Spirit-contemplating philosopher, in theatrical terms, as one who “stands on the quiet shore, and thence enjoys in

safety the distant spectacle [*Anblicks*] of ‘wrecks confusedly hurled.’”⁶ The philosopher is, as Hegel says in the same passage, the one who studies the “actions of men . . . in this scene [*Schauspiel*] of activity.”⁷

For Johannes Climacus, however, both the outward visibility (even hypocrisy) of a theatrical spectacle and the detached, inactive orientation of its spectator are ill-suited to the inwardly engaged, subjective ethical agent. In effect, Hegel’s theatrical descriptions of his own philosophy quietly confess the superficiality and irresponsibility his thought fosters.

Theater’s Illusion

What Climacus wants is a philosophy of actual, subjective existence. Consequently, what he condemns in Hegelian thought is the artificiality and illusoriness of objective thought, which bear too strong a resemblance to the theatrical arts. In part 2 of *Postscript*, he complains, “The dubiousness of ‘the method’ is already apparent in Hegel’s relation to Kant. . . . To reply to Kant within the fantastical *Schattenspiel* of pure thinking is precisely not to reply to him.—The only *an sich* that cannot be thought is existing, with which thinking has nothing at all to do” (SKS 7:299–300 / CUP 1:328). While Climacus emphasizes the actuality of the existing subject, Hegel, in contrast, emphasizes the phantasm of pure thinking, compared here not only to the fictitious illusions of the stage (themselves, in some sense, unreal) but also to the insubstantial shadows cast by the mere puppets of a *Schattenspiel*. Moreover, with that analogy, Climacus links Hegelian speculation not only with shadow theater’s thoroughly insubstantial illusions but also, because his analogy recalls Plato’s allegory of the cave (*Republic* 7.514a–520e, CDP 747–52), with the West’s archetypal image of illusory, erroneous thought.⁸ As Climacus later observes, the centerpiece of a philosophy of the subject is not “humanity in general, subjectivity in general, and other such things, whereby everything becomes easy inasmuch as the difficulty is removed and the whole matter is shifted over into the *Schattenspiel* of abstraction” (SKS 7:323 / CUP 1:353). Rather, what matters is the particular lived reality of the existing individual: “The difficulty is to exist in them, not abstractly to think oneself out of them and abstractly to think about, for example, an eternal divine becoming” (SKS 7:323 / CUP 1:354). Simply put, a particular, lived existence is real; abstract thought is not.

More to the point, ethical engagement is real; the object of detached contemplation, a theatrical illusion. In Climacus’s words, “Only in the ethical is there immortality and eternal life; understood otherwise, world history is perhaps a play, a show [*Skuespil*]” (SKS 7:143 / CUP 1:154). This antitheatrical distinction between actuality (the ethical) and theatricality (the aesthetic) also appears in Kierkegaard’s journals, which highlight “the tension of actuality: that here—unlike the theater—actual hum. beings are playing” (SKS 23:106, NB16:18, n.d. 1850 / KJN 7:106). Accordingly, Climacus seems

unlikely to adopt a theatrical approach to his own subjective, existential philosophical project. His is, after all, a philosophy of real existence, not the walking shadows of the stage.

Theater's Detached Spectator

The Hegelian spectacle's unreality also rests in no small part on the disengaged or detached relationship one has with it. The posture of a spectator is wholly unsuitable to the ethical-existential. Again, the ethical has to do with the "tension of actuality," that *actual* human beings are playing here, not as in the theater." Yet, as already mentioned, the Hegelian philosopher of history stands back and observes, as would a spectator at the playhouse, the spectacle of Spirit's self-manifestation. Climacus voices his ethical objections to the objective and the aesthetic by noting, "Esthetically it is altogether appropriate that I as a spectator [*Tilskuer*] am enchanted by the stage scenery, the theatrical moonlight, and go home after having spent a very pleasant evening, but ethically it holds true that there is no change other than my own" (*SKS* 7:358 / *CUP* 1:393). Whether fair to Hegel or not, Climacus condemns the Hegelian for obsessing over the outwardly observable events taking place at a distance from oneself and from one's own inmost, passionately engaged decisions.

No matter how powerful onstage examples may be, observable others (in their superficial visibility and externality) serve for spectators as mere possibilities. Yet those spectators, insofar as they are living, breathing agents, remain ethically obligated to engage not in possibilities alone but in actuality—not to spectate but to act.⁹ In contrast to Aristotle's (alleged) view that "possibility, poetic and intellectual, is superior to actuality" (*SKS* 7:290 / *CUP* 1:318), Climacus contends that actuality is superior. As a result, Aristotle's notion, found influentially in the *Poetics* (9.1451a, *CWA* 2:2322–23) and repeated here by Climacus—namely, that theater deals in possibility—urges Climacus's ready rejection of dramatic metaphors for the ethical (at least, initially). In short, the genre of the possible seems altogether unsuitable for the task of the actual and the ethical.

Kierkegaard's journals second that complaint. Specifically, Kierkegaard reiterates St. Augustine's disgust with theater, complaining, in an echo of *Confessions* 3.2.2, that "tragedy is supposed to awaken compassion, 'but what sort of compassion is it in which the spectator is not called upon to rush to provide assistance, but is only invited to enjoy the pain [?]' " (*SKS* 24:282, NB23:156, n.d. 1851 / *KJN* 8:282).¹⁰ Like modern-day psychologists who worry that TV violence might desensitize spectators to the suffering of others, Augustine condemns the fundamentally unethical, irresponsible habits encouraged by the theater. Kierkegaard shares Augustine's fears both here and in a separate, but no less Augustinian, journal entry from 1848: "To want to spectate [*betragte*] and to spectate . . . is essentially sinful and

culpable lasciviousness, just as any other lasciviousness—to be uplifted as a spectator instead of coming out into the tension of true actuality, spectating upon suffering as a good thing instead of suffering, etc. . . . In spectating one wants the enjoyment and bids goodbye to earnestness” (SKS 21:13, NB6:4 / JP 1:1051; compare KJN 5:9).¹¹ What makes spectatorship so bad is its passivity, its aesthetic side, its failure to take seriously the actuality (the “earnestness”) of lived experience, in which subjects ought to be engaged. What is wrong with Hegelian speculation is that it is, in effect, Hegelian “spectaculation.”¹² Because the human is called not simply to know certain things about the world but to participate fully and ethically in that world, the adoption of an aesthetic view denies our ethical calling. It also denies our true humanity, since it focuses us on an image (mental or theatrical) rather than on the thing itself: “One thing continually evaded Hegel: what it is to live; he knew only how to *reproduce a copy of life*” (SKS 20:44, NB42, n.d. 1846 / KJN 4:42).

Theater’s Outwardness and Hypocrisy

The theater is not only ill-suited to Climacus’s interest in actuality and ethics—“the very home of existence,” as he says (SKS 7:116 / CUP 1:121)—because it involves both shadowy illusions and inactive, disengaged spectators. It is also unsuitable as a paradigm for the ethical-existential insofar as it fetishizes the visible. Because, in Climacus’s view, subjectivity, ethics, and inwardness all align with one another, outward spectacles are, at best, morally irrelevant. Even if “Governance [i.e., Providence] arranges things so that a person’s inner striving is reflected magically in the shadow play of world history [*verden-shistoriske Skyggespil*],” there would be no “merit” in that externality (SKS 7:130 / CUP 1:139–40). What matters is the inward decision, not its outward appearance. Worse, this Hegelian emphasis on the external spectacle is not just morally indifferent; it risks being morally illicit as well, since it smacks of *hypocrisy* (not incidentally, from the Greek for “stage actor”). In effect, the contagion of theater’s hypocritical side bleeds over into the Hegelian philosopher, who, like an actor, also hypocritically pretends to be something he or she is not. Making that criticism explicit, Kierkegaard’s journals regularly associate Hegel with the “hypocrisy of the understanding” (SKS 24:443, NB25:7, n.d. 1851 / KJN 8:449). Kierkegaard complains, in particular, of the “frightful hypocrisy that has been promoted” by Hegelians, namely “that the objective . . . is everything—the subject is a matter of indifference” (SKS 24:260, NB23:109, n.d. 1851 / KJN 8:259).

As that passage implies, Hegelian philosophers pretend to be something they are not when they obsess over the objects out there rather than the subjects they are within. The Hegelian is, then, most hypocritical when pretending to be a mere spectator in the theater of the world rather than its actor. Therefore, one might say, the Hegelian is most actor-like when being least *actor*-like. By Climacus’s estimation, the Hegelian philosopher is not just

theatrical and hypocritical, but also comical: “Now, all in all, there are two ways for an existing individual: either he can do everything to forget that he is existing and thereby manage to become comic (the comic contradiction of wanting to be what one is not . . .), because existence possesses the remarkable quality that an existing person exists whether he wants to or not; or he can direct all his attention to his existing” (SKS 7:116 / CUP 1:120). In wanting to see existence from a vantage point outside of existence, the Hegelian forgets who (even *what*) he is, a forgetting that makes him both a hypocrite and a fool (both classic figures for the actor). At best, the Hegelian philosopher is the proverbial absent-minded professor: “Modern speculative thought . . . has not a false presupposition but a comic presupposition, occasioned by its having forgotten in a kind of world-historical absent-mindedness what it means to be a human being” (SKS 7:116 / CUP 1:120).

At his worst, the Hegelian philosopher is, as already suggested, a hypocrite—a blasphemous one at that. The world-historical point of view is a perspective for God alone, not the human: “But who, then, is this systematic thinker? Well, it is he who himself is outside existence and yet in existence. . . . It is God” (SKS 7:115 / CUP 1:119). The Hegelian who pretends to see things from the God’s-eye view commits—indeed, becomes—a lie. He is, as Climacus later suggests, like a hypocrite who “follows his inclination to put on an act [*skabe sig*] and first transforms himself [*skabe sig om*] into a superrational something, just as alchemists and sorcerers bedizen themselves fantastically” (SKS 7:175 / CUP 1:191). As a result of his costumed quackery and blasphemy, Hegel, according to whom “truth is the continuous world-historical process,” makes himself guilty of hypocrisy—both “charlatantry [*Charlatanerie*]” and “deceptive [*svigefuld*]” appearances (SKS 7:39–40 / CUP 1:33). To the point here, the Hegelian hypocrite also makes herself theatrically “comic [*Comiske*]” (SKS 7:40 / CUP 1:34).

Theater’s Conclusiveness

Finally, Climacus also uses theatrical metaphors to expose the naïveté of the Hegelian system’s pretense toward closure. What makes Hegelian philosophers theatrical—and, more than that, hypocritical—is not just their tendency to pretend to see things from God’s spectatorial point of view. They also have a related tendency to act as if they can see things in their fullness and completion. On the contrary, they ought to admit that their view of existence is limited to their own finite perspective and their own finite existence, which is ongoing—at least, as long as they live to consider it. In opposition to this Hegelian tendency, Climacus remarks, “In the system and in the fifth act of the drama, one has a positive conclusiveness speculatively-fantastically and esthetically-fantastically, but such a conclusiveness is only for fantastic beings” (SKS 7:117 / CUP 1:121). According to Climacus, the Hegelian system, like the classic five-act play, has a certain order, predictability, and (most

damningly) a certain totality about it. Yet, just as the classic five-act play is a fiction, incapable of doing (perfect) justice to the depth, the complexity, the chaos, and the reality of our actual lives, so too, the Hegelian system is also fictional and deficient. Such theatrical fictions are fitting, Climacus says, “only for fantastic beings” (*SKS* 7:117 / *CUP* 1:121). They are fitting, one is tempted to add, for liars and hypocrites.

In place of this unrealistic conclusiveness (seen in the simplistic resolutions of the *deus ex machina* of classical drama or, closer to Kierkegaard’s own day, in the finale to Eugène Scribe’s “well-made play”), “continued striving is the expression of the existing subject’s life-view” (*SKS* 7:117 / *CUP* 1:121–22).¹³ Climacus applies this antitheatrical inconclusiveness to the religious, specifically Christian domain when he writes, “Suppose that Christianity was and wants to be a mystery, an utter mystery, not a theatrical [*theatralisk*] mystery that is revealed in the fifth act, although the clever spectator [*Tilskuer*] already sees through [*genmemskue*] it in the course of the exposition” (*SKS* 7:195 / *CUP* 1:213). The appeal of Christianity to the paradox of the God-man is, for Climacus, the surest sign that it “does not at all want to be understood” but instead wants to require from its passionate adherent a never-ending—and, so, in some sense, a thoroughly *un*theatrical—striving (*SKS* 7:196 / *CUP* 1:214). Ours is not a life from which one can step back and observe how things worked out. There is no conclusion, no well-worked-out final denouement to be observed—at least, not on this side of the grave. Yet, Climacus insinuates, that pretentious, blasphemous grasping at the whole is precisely what systematic, Hegelian philosophy characteristically attempts.

Consequently, Hegelian objective philosophy bears more than a little resemblance to the theater: (1) Unlike Climacus’s subjective thinker, the Hegelian focuses on illusions rather than the lived reality of actual existence. (2) What’s worse, he relates to those illusions in a spectatorial way by examining existence aesthetically as if it did not require his own actual, ethical involvement. (3) By failing to recognize his own existence as an actual, finite, ethically responsible individual, the Hegelian resembles the actor or, worse, the hypocrite, who pretends to be what he is not. (4) In the most hypocritical move of all, the objective Hegelian plays God and presumes to construct a conclusive system though even her own life is not yet concluded. In effect, Hegel’s thought is essentially theatrical. In terms provided by Eric Bentley’s famous definition of theater—“The theatrical situation, reduced to a minimum, is that A impersonates B while C looks on”—Climacus insinuates that the Hegelian hypocritically and comically impersonates God, while the reader looks on.¹⁴

With this thoroughgoing rejection of theater in mind, one would expect Climacus to adopt anything but a theatrical approach to his own thought. Yet, as the next section demonstrates, Climacus does just that, employing a subtler, admittedly different, but thoroughly theatrical paradigm for his own philosophy.

Climacus's Philosophy of the Actor

Theater's Action Orientation

Having denounced the theatrical Hegelian subject, Climacus introduces, however surprisingly, his own theatrical metaphor for “becoming subjective” (SKS 7:121 / CUP 1:129). “Permit me by way of metaphor,” he notes, “to call to mind more graphically the difference between the ethical and the world-historical, the difference between the ethical relation of the individual to God and the relation of the world-historical to God” (SKS 7:146 / CUP 1:157). Teasing out that metaphor, Climacus compares the ethical life to a private performance: “A king sometimes has a royal theater [*kongeligt Theater*] solely for himself, but this difference, which excludes the ordinary citizens, is accidental. Not so when we speak of God and the royal theater he has for himself. Accordingly, the individual's ethical development is the little private theater [*Privat-Theater*] where God certainly is the spectator [*Tilskuer*], but where on occasion the individual also is himself a spectator, although essentially he is supposed to be an actor [*Skuespilleren*], not, however, one who deceives [*bedrager*] but one who discloses” (SKS 7:146 / CUP 1:157). Again, however surprisingly, Hegelian objectivity is not distinguished from ethical-existential subjectivity by contrasting Hegelian theatricality with Climacean *nontheatricality*. Rather, Climacus offers his readers a remarkably different kind of theater, but a *theater* nonetheless.

Unlike Hegel's world-historical spectacle, Climacus's “little private theater” of ethical development is not open to the onlooking gaze of (other) human spectators. Strange as it may sound, ethical development and the related internal effort constitute an insistent invisible performance, viewed by God certainly, and by oneself occasionally. However, the individual agent does not primarily relate to that performance as a detached spectator might, but instead as its actor would—“essentially he is supposed to be an actor.” In the theater of the ethical-existential, the human moral agent is just that: an *agent*, one who *acts* (albeit inwardly), not one who merely watches or contemplates. Just as important, this inward theatrical performance has been (largely) purified of theater's hypocrisy, since the self, acting here, is decidedly not “one who deceives, but one who discloses” (SKS 7:146 / CUP 1:157).

True, the Hegelian world-historical stage remains. In stark opposition to the Hegelian formulation, however, Climacus insists that God is its only true spectator: “But to God, world history is the royal stage where he, not accidentally but essentially, is the only spectator [*Tilskuer*]” (SKS 7:146 / CUP 1:158). Consequently, “admission to this theater is not open to any existing spirit” (SKS 7:146 / CUP 1:158). The “existing” individual (including the would-be “objective” philosopher) is, therefore, out of line when pretending to be a spectator in the *theatrum mundi*. An individual, “if he fancies himself a spectator there . . . is simply forgetting that he himself is supposed

to be the actor in that little theater and is to leave it to that royal spectator and poet [*Tilskuer og Digter*] how he wants to use him in that royal drama” (SKS 7:146 / CUP 1:158). While God remains both spectator and providential playwright of the world-historical spectacle, the ethical individual should concentrate instead on his or her own private performance and leave it to God to decide what to do with the “Drama Dramatum” (or “drama of dramas”; SKS 7:146 / CUP 1:158).

Theater's Strenuousness and Inconclusiveness

This de-emphasis on the visible spectacle and the corresponding emphasis on the internal effort of the actor find Climacus's additional support just a few pages later when, in a consideration of the act of praying and the difficulty of “becoming subjective,” Climacus compares the subject to a constantly striving actor: “So one could almost think that to pray is just as difficult as to play the role of Hamlet [*spille Hamlet*], of which the greatest actor [*Skuespiller*] is supposed to have said that only once had he been close to playing it well [*spille den godt*]; nevertheless he would devote all his ability and his entire life to the continued study of this role. Should not praying be almost as important and significant?” (SKS 7:151 / CUP 1:163). While theatricality is typically synonymous with external, public performance, the internal, private efforts of the actor (either in private rehearsal or in the internal, subjective struggle to learn one's part) are all-important to that theatricality. What matters is not the onstage external show but the offstage (or, at least, internal) striving.

Climacus's particular theatrical allusion here seems especially apt, since Hamlet's part is not only a difficult one; it is also one of a subject desperately trying to figure out how to play his own life. Thus, the “To be or not to be” speech provides Climacus the opportunity to reflect on his own philosophy of subjective existence. Hamlet's passionate struggle indicates, at its core, that “existence and nonexistence have only subjective significance,” a view contrary to “the way of objective reflection” and “abstract thinking” (SKS 7:177 / CUP 1:193). Hamlet is, by that account, as anti-Hegelian as Climacus himself. The Hegelian philosopher promotes a totalizing objectivity that denies the contrasts at the heart of the ethical. In contrast, real “personality,” as Kierkegaard notes in his journal, “will for all eternity protest against the idea that absolute contradictions are susceptible of mediation . . . [and] it will for all eternity repeat its *immortal* dilemma: to be or not to be, that is the question. (Hamlet.)” (SKS 18:35, EE:93, June 14, 1839 / KJN 2:30). In other words, the Kierkegaardian subject who plays his part well, as something other than a mere aesthetic part, has more than a little in common with Shakespeare's prince of Denmark; both confront the life-and-death decisions of existence.

Suffice it to say that, if Hegel's theatricality was rejected not for its theatricality per se but rather for its emphasis on the spectacular and its

corresponding “mask,” then an alternative theatricality recommends itself here because of its emphasis on what lies behind the mask—namely, the truer, unobservable actor who acts inwardly. Consequently, though Climacus’s denigration of Hegelianism invites a nonspectatorial philosophical form, it need not preclude theatrical forms altogether. In lieu of a philosophy of masks and spectators, one finds an inward philosophy of the actor, an approach reinforced by what Climacus says in his concluding appendix, “An Understanding with the Reader.”

In this postscript to *Postscript*, Climacus imagines the whole work as a private, internal performance free of spectators. It is, as he says, both a “private enterprise” and “one of life’s . . . quiet joys” (SKS 7:562 / CUP 1:619–20). It does not “in the remotest manner make an attempt or a gesture of wanting to oblige one single actual person to be the reader” (SKS 7:562 / CUP 1:620). Instead, Climacus claims to indulge in the “secret fiction,” the “private enjoyment” of writing for an “imagined reader” (SKS 7:563 / CUP 1:621). Indeed, because having an imagined reader is only “permissible” for “the author who has no *actual* reader” (SKS 7:563 / CUP 1:620), the text poses as an utterly neglected, wholly private meditation on the inwardness of subjectivity. Consequently, Climacus’s performance lacks the unattractive externality, the potential hypocrisy, and the aesthetic, unethical spectators of Hegelianism. In fact, because it has always already been revoked—“the understanding with him [the imagined reader] as the sole reader is indeed the revocation of the book” (SKS 7:563 / CUP 1:621)—*Postscript* also avoids the hypocritical conclusiveness of the pretentious Hegelian system. Insofar as it is revoked, Climacus’s work is anything but a *concluding* postscript. By that light, Climacus’s work bears little resemblance to the Hegelian philosophy of the spectacle and poses instead as the Climacian private performance before God and self.

To state the obvious, though, Climacus’s work is no private performance. And *Postscript* is no drama. Unlike Kierkegaard’s earliest attempt at anti-Hegelian satire, his play from his university days, “The Conflict between the Old and New Soap-Cellar” (SKS 17:280–97, DD:208, n.d. 1837 / KJN 1:273–89), *Postscript* lacks the usual markers of a stage-play (acts, scenes, stage directions, dialogue, and a history of public performance). It is hard to imagine how one could ever perform such a monumental work (over five hundred pages in most editions). Consequently, one might protest that Climacus’s work is a unique, unprecedented formal innovation—one whose formal peculiarity suits the “single individual” it considers. Nevertheless, *Postscript* repeatedly signals its theatricality. Long before the private theater metaphor for the subject, Climacus hints at *Postscript*’s theatrical side in the subtitle to the work: “A Mimical-Pathetical-Dialectical Combination: An Existential Contribution.” With that self-description, the work announces its affinities with three separate genres or, more to the point, with three separate forms of drama: (1) ancient mime (e.g., those of Sophron),¹⁵ (2) Platonic

dialogue (influenced by Sophron's mimes),¹⁶ and (3) tragedy (characterized, in Aristotle's famous analysis, by its focus on *pathos*; *Poetics* 11.1452b, CWA 2:2324). To anyone familiar with Kierkegaard's earlier anti-Hegelian drama, *Postscript's* subtitle also bears some resemblance to the hyper-hyphenated subtitle to "The Conflict between the Old and New Soap-Cellar: A Heroic-Patriotic-Cosmopolitan-Philanthropic-Fatalistic Drama in Several Scenes." To anyone familiar with Shakespeare's dramatic work about another enigmatic, philosophical Dane (himself responsible for another influential treatise on existence and nonexistence),¹⁷ both hyphenated subtitles recall something Polonius says to Hamlet about the form of drama to be performed by a group of itinerant players on their way to court. They are, in Polonius's words, "the best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited" (*Hamlet* 2.2.391–94).¹⁸

One way or another, *Postscript* implies, an individual will play a part in the theater of the world. Moreover, one way or another, a philosophy of the subject will take on a theatrical form. The crucial decision comes when one chooses between the options available: on the one hand, the hypocritical spectacle of Hegelian philosophy; on the other, the Climacian private, inner performance before God and self.

Kierkegaard's Philosophy of the Mask

To be fair, the most theatrical feature of *Postscript* is not the work's subtitle or Climacus's theatrical allusions. *Postscript's* most theatrical feature is Climacus himself. The work is, after all, a dramatic monologue, a soliloquy (not unlike Hamlet's better-known aside on existence and nonexistence), or, in light of the subtitle, a philosophical mime, ventriloquized through a pseudonymous persona.¹⁹ Recalling this fact gives Climacus's anti-Hegelian philosophy of the actor an unexpected twist. As it turns out, this lengthy diatribe against hypocritical spectacle has been, not a private inward performance of an actual existing subject (as "An Understanding with the Reader" insinuates) but, instead, a hypocritical (or, at least, thoroughly theatrical) spectacle before a public audience, a fact S. Kierkegaard's own postscript to *Postscript* makes explicit. In "A First and Last Explanation" (which follows Climacus's "Understanding"), Kierkegaard describes his pseudonymous philosophical works, including *Postscript*, in markedly theatrical terms—no surprise, perhaps, from a writer who spent much of his time (and much of his money) frequenting the Royal Theater of Denmark.²⁰

In this final addendum to *Postscript*, "S. Kierkegaard" acknowledges that his literary-philosophical technique has a hypertheatrical side: "What has been written [in the pseudonymous works], then, is mine, but only insofar as

I, by means of audible lines, have placed the life-view of the creating, poetically actual individuality in his mouth, for my relation is even more remote than that of a poet [*Digtters*], who *poetizes* [*digter*] characters [*Personer*] and yet in the preface is *himself* the *author*" (SKS 7:569 / CUP 1:625). Because the noun *Digter*, the verb *digter*, and the plural noun *Personer* might just as easily read "dramatist," "dramatizes," and "dramatic personae," respectively (a consequence of the longstanding prominence of verse drama), Kierkegaard's analogy is not simply artistic or poetic but *theatrical*. Thus, this passage admits a parallel between *Postscript* and Hegel's own philosophy of the spectacle. Kierkegaard's pseudonymous work may even outdo Hegel's by embodying a more overtly theatrical philosophy of the mask, a term evoked here (for Kierkegaard and his classically educated audience, at least) by the Danish *Personer* (from the Latin *persona*, "mask").

Even more explicitly theatrical is something Kierkegaard says a line later, when he characterizes himself as a *souffleur*, or dramatic prompter who "whispers" forgotten lines to the onstage actor (SKS 7:569 / CUP 1:625).²¹ If Climacus, the pseudonymous persona, is the onstage masked actor before *Postscript's* audience, then Kierkegaard himself is the stage manager feeding him his lines and cues from the wings. By that account, Kierkegaard's work is, again, perhaps more theatrical and more "spectacular" than that of Hegel himself. Whereas Hegel's work (e.g., *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*) imagines its content (the world-historical) in theatrical terms, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous work adopts a theatrical form for treating its subject (the single individual). Notwithstanding any pretensions Hegel might have to speak for Spirit or "Mind" itself (e.g., in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, sometimes known as *The Phenomenology of Mind*), the "mind" on display in Hegel's works is more or less Hegel's own.²² In contrast, if we take this final postscript to *Postscript* at its word, "in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by" Kierkegaard himself (SKS 7:570 / CUP 1:626).

What's more, *Postscript* may be even more theatrical than actual dramatic works composed by playwrights for the stage. In contrast to Shakespeare (or Denmark's Johan Ludvig Heiberg), who remains himself in preface and title page, Kierkegaard dramatizes a persona who speaks every line, including those on the title page itself. He explains, "My relation is even more remote than that of a poet [playwright], who *poetizes* characters and yet in the preface is *himself* the *author*" (SKS 7:569 / CUP 1:625). Kierkegaard's work is as thoroughly theatrical as Shakespeare's would have been had Shakespeare claimed *Hamlet* was written by Hamlet himself—or, at least, by the friend who survives him, Horatio.

The main problem for the present essay, however, is that Kierkegaard's theatrical technique (apparently) conflicts with Climacus's antitheatrical sentiments. *Postscript* employs a mask in its discussion about the problems with (philosophical) masks. What I now conclude, though, is that this seeming contradiction suits the work's treatment of subjectivity especially well. While

Climacus's deep and persistent criticisms of the Hegelian philosophy of the spectator might incline us to think that *Postscript* would need an alternative form for writing a philosophy of the subject, that inclination makes a notable mistake; it wrongly assumes that philosophy has access to nonspectacular forms of communication. In short, it assumes that a philosophy of subjectivity can be written without slipping into objectivity. On the contrary, insofar as a philosophical publication always entails a more or less external communication of abstract thoughts for a detached group of onlookers, a philosophy of subjectivity (including this one by Johannes Climacus) is bound to resemble the Hegelian spectacle.

Nevertheless, the Kierkegaardian spectacle differs from its Hegelian counterpart in at least one crucial respect: *Postscript* admits its own theatricality. As a result, *Postscript* is not just antitheatrical or pro-theatrical; it is, more importantly, *metatheatrical*. What makes Hegelianism so offensive—indeed, what makes it a philosophy of the *hypocrite* as well as the spectacle—is its *unconfessed* theatricality. In other words, what makes the Hegelian account of the subject so disturbing is the fact that it pretends to involve no pretense at all. As Climacus repeatedly complains, it pretends to offer a fundamentally transparent, aesthetic view of the subject, even though actual subjects defy easy externalization. What Hegel offers readers, then, is not just a masked performance (what all philosophies of the subject must offer) but a masked performance that pretends to be mask-less. In yet another attack on “The [Hegelian] System,” Kierkegaard complains in one of his journals, “This was the swindle. It was just as if an actor wanted to say: It is I who am speaking, these are my words—and then, the second the prompter [*Souffleuren*] falls silent, he does not have one single word to say” (SKS 24:192, NB22:161, n.d. 1851 / KJN 8:191). Like an actor who pretends he is no actor at all, the Hegelian philosopher and hypocrite pretends to be something he is not. More, like the actor who denies the animating role of the offstage prompter, the Hegelian thinker also denies that which remains offstage and hidden from view—namely, the actuality and inwardness of the self, which are (somewhat) incommensurable with appearance, thought, and language.

Postscript, on the other hand, is guilty of no such denial. In his final confession and curtain call (originally meant to be his last as an author), Kierkegaard steps from behind the curtain to highlight his role as prompter and playwright. In doing so, he reminds the reader that his has been no transparent revelation of the subject either. Rather, the subject on display here, Johannes Climacus, has always been more shadow than self. In pointing out that fact, however, *Postscript* adopts a form of communication especially apt for handling the subject. Specifically, the metatheatrical conclusion to *Postscript* comes as close as any text can to externalizing the unexternalizable: the inexpressibly inward subject. Through its metatheatricality, *Postscript* acknowledges that the best a published philosophy of the subject can do is

to point beyond itself, toward the ever-elusive subject.²³ If pointing toward the subject seems still too much to ask, a work like *Postscript* can, at least, confess its own inadequacy as a representation of that subject.

Little could be both more *and* less theatrical than the moment an onstage actor admits to being, in fact, an actor on the stage; accordingly, Kierkegaard's final metatheatrical confession is both the height of *Postscript's* theatricality and also the closest it ever comes to genuine sincerity. By pointing out the theatricality within its own treatment of the subject, *Postscript* both confesses and atones for that theatricality. Kierkegaard makes clear in another journal entry, "In the theater, if one notices the prompter [*Souffleuren*], the illusion is disturbed" (SKS 24:252, NB23:88, n.d. 1851 / KJN 8:251). Thus, by uncovering its own reliance on persona and prompter, *Postscript* both acknowledges its own similarity to a hypocritical Hegelian illusion and simultaneously protects itself against that similarity. Like a self-effacing, metatheatrical Brechtian drama, *Postscript* exposes its own theatricality, drawing attention to the wires and masks that might otherwise deceive us. In doing so, however, it cautions the reader against mistaking Climacus's lengthy account of the subject for the fully transparent subject itself. In effect, it alerts the reader to the theatricality and potential hypocrisy that necessarily attach themselves to all external and public accounts of the essentially inward subject (including this one). More than that, by anticipating the metatheatrical Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect), *Postscript* awakens its readers to the challenges posed by their own inward subjectivity. By reminding its readers that Climacus's lengthy portrayal of the subject has been more drama than reality, *Postscript* directs each of us through the exit at the back of the playhouse, back home to the central, inward task of becoming actual, and active, individuals. Through its ambivalent theatricality and, even more so, through its metatheatricality, *Postscript* ultimately directs its readers to a performance not so much before or behind but, better yet, beyond the mask.

Notes

1. See Edward F. Mooney, "Postscript Ethics: Putting Personality on Stage," in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard*, ed. Edward F. Mooney (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 39–47. My present essay aims, in part, to tie Mooney's insights to *Postscript's* own theatrical rhetoric.

2. Jon Stewart argues explicitly for Kierkegaard's favorable appreciation of Hegel. Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For contrary views, see Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, trans. George L. Stengren (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980); and, more recently, Merold Westphal, "Climacus on Subjectivity and the System," in *Kierkegaard's "Concluding Unscientific Postscript": A Critical Guide*, ed. Rick Furtak (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 132.

3. Kierkegaard makes repeated use of Hegel's *Philosophy of History* in his dissertation on irony, also alluding to it on occasion in *Postscript* (SKS 17:124 / CUP 1:133).

4. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, in GWFHW 9, ed. Eduard Gans (1837): 20; *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1857), 17, my emphasis. Sibree's translation is uncommonly good at capturing Hegel's theatrical motifs.

5. GWFHW 9:52, 97, 323; *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 57, 103–4, 324.

6. GWFHW 9:25; *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 22.

7. GWFHW 9:24; *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 21.

8. For a discussion of the analogy of theatricality, see Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 3–10; Asli Gocer, "The Puppet Theater in Plato's Parable of the Cave," *Classical Journal* 95, no. 2 (1999): 119–29.

9. Kierkegaard's *Repetition* (1843) acknowledges a positive side to this aesthetic contemplation of possibilities (SKS 4:30–31 / R 154–55). See Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 216–17. Weber also argues that the particular dramatic form influencing much of Kierkegaard's discussion of theatricality is the so-called *Posse*, or vaudevillian burlesque, a hodgepodge of musical theater. For another discussion of the *Posse* (itself as genre-bending as *Postscript*), see Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*, trans. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 235.

10. As Kierkegaard's own citation admits, the quotation is not directly from *Confessions* but rather from a secondary source on Augustine: Friedrich Böhringer, *Die Kirche Christi und ihre Zeugen*, 9 vols. in 7 (Zurich: Meyer und Zeller, 1852–58; ASKB 173–77), Band 1, Abt. 3, p. 110.

11. JP's "spectate" better captures *betragte's* connotations than KJN's "observe" (KJN 5:9).

12. The connections between spectating and speculating derive in part from their shared root, *specere* (Latin for "to view"), as do the connections between theater and theory, from a Greek word meaning "a view."

13. Kierkegaard's works make regular reference to the well-made plays of both A. Eugène Scribe and the Danish Hegelian Johan Ludvig Heiberg, whose translation of Scribe's *The First Love* receives thorough attention in *Either/Or* (1843).

14. Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama* (New York: First Applause, 1991), 150.

15. For a related acknowledgment of the mime's theatrical connotations, see Mooney, "Postscript Ethics," 40. Although Sophron's mimes are unmentioned in Kierkegaard's works, Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (which connects Sophron's mimes and Plato's dialogues) is regularly cited (e.g., SKS 7:298 / CUP 1:327). For a description of the ancient mime, see James H. Hordern, *Sophron's Mimes: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

16. As the previous note indicates, Diogenes Laertius reports the legend that Plato's dialogues were inspired by the mimes of Sophron (*Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 3.18). Aristotle also highlights their formal similarities to one another (*Poetics* 1.1447b, CWA 2:2316).

17. For Climacus's own appreciation of Hamlet's thoughts on subjective existence (i.e., his "To be or not to be" soliloquy), see *SKS 7:177 / CUP 1:193*. For another Kierkegaardian analysis of *Hamlet*, see *Stages on Life's Way* (1846).

18. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 224. For a recent discussion of Kierkegaard's views on *Hamlet*, see Eric Ziolkowski, *The Literary Kierkegaard* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 183–212.

19. Although mimes (like Platonic dialogues) presented dialogues rather than monologues, good reasons can be given for *Postscript's* lack of an interlocutor or dialogue partner. Climacus may think it appropriate for a philosophy of the inward, private subject to be correspondingly inward and private. Then again, the work may presume its ongoing dialogue with the reader, whether implied or actual.

20. Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard*, 102.

21. In essence, both subtitle and finale alike underscore, in Martin Thust's phrase, Kierkegaard's role as "dramatist of the religious." Quoted in George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious. From the Magic Theatre to the Crucifixion of the Image* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 120.

22. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in *GWFW 2*, ed. Johann Schultz (1832); *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie (New York: Macmillan, 1910).

23. It comes as no surprise, perhaps, that Kierkegaard's metatheatricity has implications for our understanding of the self. As one critic notes (in a discussion of Ibsen and Kierkegaard, no less), metatheater has always been "not just theatrical self-awareness but also how a play's *story* makes us aware of the realities of performance in life." Larry D. Bouchard, *Theater and Integrity: Emptying Selves in Drama, Ethics, and Religion* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 130.