

Christodrama:  
towards a new Christian theory of drama as ‘salvific  
humiliation’

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## Abstract

I investigate critically 'theo-dramatic' theologies that rely on a nexus of performativity, narrativity and ethical hermeneutics to derive metaphors for speaking of the action of God in history. Foremost amongst these is Balthasar's image of a divine drama which moves towards us in love and sweeps us up into its performance. I argue that Balthasar, Quash and others instrumentalize drama rather than respecting it as a spectacle of the humiliation of human will in which human desire to be 'more' is thrown into question by a process of impediment and inhibition through an action which discloses a 'salvific effect' upon its audience.

Rather than vanishing the audience in the manner of Theodrama, I derive from Brecht the idea of 'complex seeing' to say how the audience, sitting above the flow, is confronted with the contradictions of its own position, and from Bonhoeffer the figure of Christ the Humiliated One which I correlate with dramatic processes to say how the audience moves from 'complex' to 'salvific' seeing. I develop 'Christodrama' as a Christian dramatic theory which describes how drama is in itself christological, disclosing 'the new' as the grace which liberates us from the ontological burden of being 'too much'.

## Dedication & Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of the directors, writers, actors, designers, musicians and technical staff with whom I have worked and shared much joy over a career of thirty or so years in theatre, opera and broadcasting. They have contributed more than I could ever say to the processes by which this work has taken shape. To one stage manager in particular I dedicate the thesis, in grateful thanks for a lifetime's support, understanding and love.

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Note:

All Biblical references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, Anglicized Edition, unless otherwise stated.

All references to Shakespeare are taken from the Folio Text of 1623 published in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (Eds.), *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, unless otherwise stated.

“Does the audience at these secular stage amusements know that a play is an apprenticeship and that, in those amusing, moving, or disconcerting hours, they learn, passively, to die?”<sup>1</sup>

Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Questions Volume 1*

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<sup>1</sup> Jabès, E. (1976) *The Book of Questions*, Waldrop, R. (trans.), Hanover: Wesleyan University Press

# PROLOGUE

“Why would Truth use the tools of fiction?”<sup>1</sup>

In Peter Brook’s 1994 production of *The Man Who*,<sup>2</sup> a man sits on stage in front of a mirror, attempting to shave. He is afflicted with a neurological condition which means he does not recognize that he has a left side to his face. Flanked by two doctors, slowly, painstakingly, he shaves the right side of his face. The scene unfolds in silence. When he has finished, the doctors move the mirror to show him that the other half of his face is unshaven. The revelation that he is radically different from the way he perceives himself produces a passage of fleeting expressions across his face: shock, humiliation and eventually wonder and a moment of joy. The audience is transfixed, drawn into the revelatory moment. We share the mystery of his deficit, and his pain and astonishment at its transcendence.

If my thesis has its genesis in a particular theatrical moment it is this one - the combination of shock and astonishment, humiliation and wonder which takes us beyond the materials from which the moment is formed. Peter Brook is therefore the living presiding theatrical genius of what follows - joining Sophocles, Shakespeare, Artaud, Brecht and Beckett as the key figures I look to for an understanding of what it is that drama does to us and for us. Whilst *The Empty Space*<sup>3</sup> has been widely

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<sup>1</sup> Martel, Y. (2016) *The High Mountains of Portugal*, Edinburgh: Canongate Books, p 152

<sup>2</sup> First performed, in English, at the Theaterhaus Gessnerallee, Zurich, on 18th February 1994. The production I saw was in Manchester at Contact Theatre, in August 1994. Yoshi Oida played ‘The Shaving Man’. Published as: Brook, P. & Estienne, M-H., (2002) *The Man Who*, London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama

<sup>3</sup> Brook, P. 1968, *The Empty Space*, London: Penguin Books

featured in theological discourse, Brook's later published reflections, including *There Are No Secrets*<sup>4</sup> and *The Quality of Mercy*<sup>5</sup>, have received less attention.

My central aim in this thesis is to say something about how and why we may understand drama in and of itself as being more than an entertainment. In attempting to outline a new and specifically *Christian* theory of drama, I want to examine how drama is understood as being theological in its very essence, and indeed, not only theological, but also christological. Central to this concern will be a link between a Pauline kenotic christology as outlined in Philippians 2 and the incarnational theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer expressed through the figure of the Humiliated One.<sup>6</sup> This will be a key image throughout the constructive part of my thesis and will lead me to an examination of Luther's concept of *humilitas* as the basis for my theory of 'salvific humiliation'. At the same time, I will also want to say that the christology that emerges from drama is properly dramatic, and this will inevitably arouse questions about how suffering and loss are to be understood within my framework. Does a kenotic approach imply that God himself suffers?

Whilst it is not within my scope to offer a systematic treatment of the debate concerning divine passibility, I will develop a perspective,<sup>7</sup> with reference to the work of Jurgen Moltmann and his critics, which explores what difference *dramatic* logic makes to the argument. The problem can be framed in this way: drama works by putting impediments in the way of a character's achievement of a desire - an

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<sup>4</sup> Brook, P. (1993) *There Are No Secrets*, London: Methuen Drama

<sup>5</sup> Brook, P. (2014) *The Quality of Mercy - Reflections on Shakespeare*, London: Nick Hern Books

<sup>6</sup> See Bonhoeffer, D. (1971) *Ethics*, (sixth German edition, 2nd impression) Horton Smith, N., (trans.), London: SCM Press

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 7.2, p. 132

‘objective’ in theatrical terms - and thereby throwing that character’s desires into question. Every character is ‘at risk’ within the action, otherwise there is no tension, no uncertainty about the outcome, as will be demonstrated by a ‘thought experiment’ at the beginning of Section 2.<sup>8</sup> If, however, we want to say that drama is a way of thinking God in Christ, then are we committed to saying that God is a character within the action and therefore subject to impediment? And if so, how can we make sense of such a claim? In Chapter 7 I will try to unpick this problem in order to clarify how I think drama is christological and indeed trinitarian.

Nor is it within the scope of my thesis to offer a full theological or philosophical treatment of the problem of trauma and suffering more generally. Nevertheless any treatment of drama has to take account of the challenges posed by the reality of human suffering and loss. Indeed, in my account, for drama to take place at all, the portrayal of some form of suffering and loss which leads to humiliation must inevitably be involved. I undertake case studies of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* and Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex* to develop the significance of humiliation to what I name as ‘salvific seeing’. The important point, as one of my principal contemporary interlocutors, Ben Quash, would say,<sup>9</sup> is that such suffering is ‘unframeable’ in so far as it resists generalization “as part of a formal system of world-explanation.”<sup>10</sup> My concern, as is that of Quash (in his analysis of Hopkins’ poem *The Wreck of the Deutschland*) is to try to articulate how the portrayal of human suffering keys us into a way of talking about, or making “a new reading of”<sup>11</sup> salvation and our interior

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 7.3, p. 144

<sup>9</sup> See Quash, B. (2005) *Theology and the Drama of History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Ch. 6, pp. 196 - 218

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* pp. 209 - 210

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* p. 211



apprehension of it. I should say too, at the outset, that I am not attempting to objectify and valorize 'humiliation' as a desirable human condition, such that those who find themselves oppressed and humiliated, marginalized and excluded are to be congratulated. Just as I would not interpret Luke 6.17-23 to mean that we should all strive to maximize others' material poverty, hunger and sorrow in order to ensure they are 'blessed', so I do not offer 'humiliation' as an excuse to ignore the plight of those who are made to suffer by the actions of others (including ourselves). The point, again, is to try to say what contribution this very act of portrayal makes to our understanding.

Of course, theologians have long made use of the idea that the ancient business of play-acting, of marking out territory as a stage, of putting on a performance and of inviting an audience to watch is about more than these actions in themselves.

Whether buried within the story, or in the performance of the story or in the affect of the performance within those who watch, the phenomena of drama have become a source of metaphors for speaking about the transcendent, and amongst theologians, for speaking about the relations between the transcendent divine and the immanent world and framing them in terms of God's revelation of himself.

In particular Hans Urs von Balthasar regards drama, of all the forms of fiction, as most suitable for the purpose. In Balthasar's hands, the Christian revelation of God is characterized as an all-encompassing divine performance which sweeps up and includes all human performance within itself. In contemporary theological

discourse,<sup>12</sup> the nexus of performativity, narrativity and ethics which we find in Balthasar's work becomes a 'space' in which to articulate a doctrine of God and to recast ecclesiology, missiology and soteriology in dramatic language, encompassed under Balthasar's term 'Theodrama'.

In subjecting Balthasar's Theodrama to critical investigation, I will engage with some of the theologians who make use of, criticise and extend his work, notably Ben Quash, Kevin Vanhoozer and Graham Ward. What these theologians have in common with Balthasar is a commitment to an 'ethical hermeneutic': a way of seeing in drama a meaning (or range of meanings) which, taken together with the 'affect' of performance, determines or at least shapes how the audience should respond with ethical commitments of its own. Balthasar writes that the ethical is "beauty's inner co-ordinate axis."<sup>13</sup>

This ethical hermeneutic goes hand in hand with a version of narrativity which we may call, along with Galen Strawson, the 'ethical narrativity' thesis.<sup>14</sup> This takes seriously the idea that human beings are, in the words of Ben Quash, "irreducibly diachronic"<sup>15</sup> in so far as they have a tendency to see the passage of time as narratable in terms of an interior feeling of a shape which has a purpose.

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<sup>12</sup> See the *Introduction* in Lugt, W.V & Hart, T., (eds.) (2014) *Theatrical Theology: Explorations in Performing the Faith*, Cambridge: Lutterworth Press. Lugt & Hart make a distinction between 'drama' as pertaining to the horizon of the 'script' and 'theatre' as pertaining to the horizon of the performance. Such a distinction is, I believe, hard to justify as the terms in practice are highly fluid. One does not go to drama school just to study a script. I ignore such a distinction in my own work. Instead I take 'theatre' as being one incarnation of what the whole business of drama entails. With one exception (Beckett's *Film*) all the examples I give when discussing drama are drawn from plays originally written for performance in a theatre.

<sup>13</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. (1982) *The Glory of the Lord*, Vol. 1, Leiva-Merikakis, E. (trans.), Edinburgh: T&T Clark pp. 22-23

<sup>14</sup> See Strawson, G. (2007) *Episodic Ethics*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement, 60, pp. 85-116

<sup>15</sup> Quash, B. (2005) *Theology and the Drama of History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

In investigating the question of whether, and how, the pretence of dramatic fiction can speak of God, I will subject the nexus of performativity, narrativity and ethics to critical examination. My thesis will suggest that we do violence to the nature of drama if we demand that it yield up ethical commitments. I will pose a challenge to Theodrama on methodological grounds, suggesting that it relies upon an untenable view of *mimesis* by embedding within itself an absent historicity. I will argue that its reliance upon narrativity makes generalizing assumptions about human psychology which invade its conclusions about the role of the church and its orientation to a future horizon - the “practice of hope”<sup>16</sup> - and renders them undynamic and static.

My principal research question therefore is *the extent to which drama may be said to be theological, in and of itself*. Secondary and tertiary questions are: *what does drama do for us* and *why is it significant?* In the course of my investigation of Theodrama and its prominent appearances in the work of contemporary theologians, such as Ben Quash, I will try to show how *de-instrumentalizing* drama releases it from work it is not intended to do and instead opens up the possibility of glimpsing ways in which it is salvific: I hope to show how audiences may come to understand a sense in which salvation is being offered to them. Taking seriously categories of ‘momentariness’ and ‘liveliness’, I will seek to erase the term ‘Theodrama’, proposing instead a novel perspective I call ‘Christodrama’ which gives an ‘episodic salvific’ account of drama. Christodrama pays due respect to the phenomena<sup>17</sup> of drama and

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<sup>16</sup> Ward, G. (2006) *Narratives and Ethics: The Structures of Believing and the Practices of Hope*, Literature and Theology, 20, (4) pp. 438-461

<sup>17</sup> Broadly speaking I take a phenomenological approach to drama because it includes naturally within its arena those areas - perception, emotion, intention, desire, embodiment, amongst other things outlined by Husserl and his successors - which constitute the forms and structures of experience which phenomenology as a philosophical tradition seeks to analyse. However, drama is a special case of these existential structures, and nothing that follows is an argument in favour of one particular school or flavour of phenomenology. See Smith, D. W. (2018) *Phenomenology*, in Zalta, E.N. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Summer 2018 Edition), accessed via <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology/>>

their potential to play a role in revelation. Rather than abstracting from drama a series of images which are then suffused with theological concepts derived from elsewhere, I seek to find Christ in the particularities of the drama.

This inevitably situates me within a tradition of scepticism towards metaphysics and ways of knowing that are dependent on abstractions from the presentations of phenomena to consciousness. However, my primary methodological concern is not to frame an argument about the structure of such phenomena and their relationship to consciousness, restating thereby how we ‘know’ things, but to try to show how drama is in itself a way of arranging - or staging - the disjunctions within our knowledge; indeed it is a way of looking at ‘what we *don’t* know’. That is not to declare at the outset a commitment to an apophatic approach to either drama or theology. It is instead to commit to the primacy of the *question* - and to suggest that part of what we mean by drama - and expect of it - is that it should make *uncertain* that which might have appeared certain.

I am treading here in the footsteps of those theologians and philosophers, such as Jean-Luc Marion, who stress the ‘destitution’ of metaphysics whilst wishing to give content to theological language. Whilst I do not offer a study of Marion, nor a specific critique of any of his ideas, I do acknowledge some ‘shaping effects’ of his work on what follows. For example his study of the Crucifixion in *La croisée du visible*<sup>18</sup> has some parallels with my own study of it in relation to my concept of ‘complex seeing’, derived from Bertolt Brecht. I note in Brecht’s work<sup>19</sup> a set of embedded contradictions which gives rise to a reversal of polarities of self and world, revealing

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<sup>18</sup> See Marion, J.L. (1996) *La Croisée du Visible*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France

<sup>19</sup> Especially in *Mother Courage and her Children*. See: Brecht, B. (1980) *Mother Courage and her Children*, Willett, J., (trans.) London: Methuen

the objective conditions against which the self 'becomes'. This reversal of polarity matches Marion's 'reverse intentionality'<sup>20</sup> by which the self becomes or "is constituted by the look of the other, through the icon".<sup>21</sup> Just as Marion uses certain motifs throughout his work - distance, icon, love, gift - to name the interruptions to thought which resist their presentation, or re-presentation, as knowledge, so I also use certain images - space, attention, downward curve, strangeness, uncoiling, complex seeing - to express the 'disjunctive' theological work that drama does.

I take the anti-metaphysical tradition to include also the work of Jurgen Moltmann and his development of a doctrine of God which is firmly located in antithesis to the Platonic tradition found in the work of the mediaeval Scholastics. Moltmann's great concern is to give an account of the tri-une God revealed above all in the Cross of Christ,<sup>22</sup> an account which leads him to his 'revolution' in the doctrine of the Trinity through an insistence on the experience within God of the suffering of the Son *and* the Father. His strong focus on the Cross and the history of salvation as the locus of the revelation of the nature of God shapes my own investigation of humiliation within drama and its actual process - the way it works to achieve its 'salvific' effect. Of course it might be countered that in investigating the phenomena of drama I am employing precisely the approaches of which Moltmann complains. However, at the core of my argument is the 'Humiliated One' and hence the Cross and all that follows is as much at the heart of my project as it is at Moltmann's. This is not to say at the outset that I arrive at precisely the same conclusions, nor indeed that I have a specific interest in precisely the same questions as he raises.

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<sup>20</sup> See Robyn Horner's discussion in: Horner, R. (2005) *Jean-Luc Marion: a theo-logical introduction*, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, p. 7

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> See Moltmann, J. (1974) *The Crucified God*, Wilson, R.A. & Bowden, J. (trans.), London: SCM Press

A focus on the “irreducibly particular”<sup>23</sup> also locates me within a post-structuralist tradition that resists any notion of determinism that resides in systems of thought which emphasize universal structures of meaning.<sup>24</sup> However, any work which takes drama seriously will have to engage with concepts of necessity and will, irony and fate. My investigation makes clear use of the different horizons of the text, its performance and its audience. I do not try to make a false equivalence between one horizon and another. Nevertheless, as Hans-Georg Gadamer emphasizes,<sup>25</sup> a fusion of horizons is also needed for understanding to take place. Particularly when I reach the constructive parts of my thesis, in sections 2 and 3, I do ask questions about what makes drama ‘work’ - that makes it compelling and engages our attention. This inevitably leads to a question about whether drama has an ‘essence’.

I suggest that within the phenomena of drama is discerned a deconstruction of the will which places all human desires and actions ‘in question’ and exposes them to a humiliating ‘downward curve’ which is christological in shape. The burden I thereby place upon myself is to justify the claim that ‘drama-as-humiliation’ can be called christological. In maintaining this claim I do not want to suggest that christology is limited to a view which emphasizes only its ‘downwardness’ with an inevitable focus

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<sup>23</sup> Horner, R., 2005, p. 7

<sup>24</sup> I refer here to Structuralist approaches influenced particularly by Lévi-Strauss. See Lévi-Strauss, C. (1969) *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, revised edition, Needham, R. (ed.), Bell, J.H., von Sturmer, J.R., Needham, R. (trans.), London: Eyre & Spottiswoode. In terms of contrary views, most pertinent to my thesis is Paul Ricoeur’s resistance to such determinism in the development of his own theory of interpretation. Ricoeur suggests that whilst structuralism has much to teach in terms of how structures generate surface-level meaning, they inadequately account for how one sort of structure changes into another. Ricoeur famously suggested that Structuralism was a “transcendental philosophy without a transcendental subject.” See Ricoeur, P. (1974) *The Conflict of Interpretations*, Hide, D. (ed.) McLaughlin, K. et al. (trans.), Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

<sup>25</sup> Gadamer, H-G, (1965) *Wahreit und Methode*, 2nd edition, Tübingen: Mohr

on the crucifixion, though I do want to say that without such a shape, it cannot be accounted a christology at all.

In my constructive thesis I attempt to justify my claim first of all by recasting *logos* christology as the embodiment of question rather than assertion. I suggest that this is a matter of reception rather than of metaphysical essence. My argument goes on to consider the nature of this reception by the audience, a reception which involves the overwhelming of what it thinks it knows. I seek to recover from Luther, Bonhoeffer and Brecht a means of 'seeing complexly' the necessity for 'making strange' our own sense of self, a strangeness we receive as 'grace'. Finally I claim that 'complex seeing' becomes 'salvific seeing' once we become open to the drama of humiliation and that this discloses how 'salvation' may be understood as 'universal'.

This 'making strange' lies at the heart of the claim that drama is *sacramental* in the sense that it gives us back to ourselves made new. It returns us to our origins in God.

# SECTION ONE

“All he knew was that this was the worst time of all.”<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM OF ‘THEO(RE-)DRAMATIZING’

### 1.1 *Throwing into question: the approach*

“Everything said here is tentative and would require more thorough substantiation.”<sup>2</sup> For all the length and grandeur of the theological *oeuvre* of Hans Urs von Balthasar, there is in places a notable diffidence and touching humility in his attempts to do what Ben Quash summarizes as *re-dramatizing* “the traditions and practices of modernity.”<sup>3</sup> In what follows I hope always to apply in my own analysis that same spirit of open-ended exploration, and to a proper extent, hesitancy in reaching conclusions. Any honest discussion of drama can do nothing less, since the essence of what it means to ‘dramatize’ is, it seems to me, always to *throw into question* any assertion from a particular perspective.

The primacy of the *question* over the *assertion* might be considered an odd way to begin viewing the intensifications of emotion, the heightening and widening of experience, that we expect to gain from watching drama. We might think that drama depends precisely upon the assertion by each character of their own will over others; the ‘will’ here being understood as the utterances and actions which signal a character’s desires. At the beginning of Section 24 I conduct a thought experiment

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<sup>1</sup> Barnes, J. (2017) *The Noise of Time*, London: Vintage, p. 61

<sup>2</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. (1988) *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* Vol. 1, Harrison, G. (trans.), San Francisco: Ignatius Press

<sup>3</sup> Quash, B. (1999) *Drama and the Ends of Modernity* in Gardner, L., Moss, D., Quash, B., Ward, G. (eds.), *Balthasar at the End of Modernity*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, pp. 139-171, p. 141

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 7.3, pp. 144ff



designed to show that a character without desires and the will to impose them would not engage us as an audience. Nevertheless I follow Gadamer<sup>5</sup> in giving priority to the *question* over the *assertion* because it emphasizes the dialogic, partial, playful nature of drama, in which concealment - of identity, of motive, of what might happen next - is a means of revealing the truth of a situation. Furthermore this gives a more prominent role to irony - an important working method for dramatists by which an audience comes to understand more than the characters in the drama. I will give space to the study of irony and the notion of ‘uncoiling’ in Section 2.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.2 *Intersubjectivity in the mirror*

The throwing into question of the situated utterances of characters on a stage implies first of all the problem of intersubjectivity, or what Bettina Bergo refers to as “lived immediacy”<sup>7</sup>; that is, the problem of how we describe the self in community with other selves: the knowing of other minds and the acting in response to others; the ‘rules’ of association. This is the root of those approaches to drama which emphasize its ethical nature and employ an ‘ethical hermeneutic’ when studying it.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Gadamer, H-G. (1989) *Truth and Method* (2nd revised edition), Weinsheimer, J. & Marshall, D.G. (trans.) New York: Crossroad. Particularly important for drama is Gadamer’s insistence that understanding demands that one’s own self is brought into question alongside the matter one is trying to understand.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 8.3, pp. 158ff & Chapter 9, pp. 163ff

<sup>7</sup> In her article on Emmanuel Levinas: Bergo, B., (2017) *Emmanuel Levinas*, in Zalta, E.N. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Summer 2018 Edition), accessed via <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/levinas/>>

<sup>8</sup> See Faber, B. (2006) *Ethical Hermeneutics and the Theater* in Benson, B.E., Smith, J.K.A., Vanhoozer, K.J. (eds.) *Hermeneutics at the Crossroads*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 211-223. Faber wants us to read ‘theater’ as a “reflection of the obligation that one owes to the representation of the other” (p. 213) invoking the ethical philosophy of Levinas. Faber wishes to retrieve a version of essentialist views of character - he analyses Shylock in the Merchant of Venice - but in essentializing Shylock as ‘neighbour’ he misses the complexity of possible responses to Shylock’s own lack of neighbourliness. I analyse this further in Chapter 13.6, p. 274ff.

Ever since Shakespeare used the phrase “hold a mirror up to nature”<sup>9</sup> there has been an assumption that acting a character on stage is in some sense performing an imitation of the ‘real’ world of human intersubjectivity and that plays, or in the context of the scene from *Hamlet*, ‘playing’, show “virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.” That image of ‘pressure’ is important for our purposes: it speaks of the forces at play on each of the characters within their interactions. I will investigate more closely the nature of mimesis at work in drama in chapter 4.<sup>10</sup>

We can agree with Shakespeare that to act well on stage does depend on the audience believing that an actor does “not o’er step the modesty of nature,”<sup>11</sup> and that what is ‘natural’ and recognizably human should be reflected in an actor’s performance. However we should be careful not to assume a straightforward symmetry between a play in performance and the world. The ‘problem’ of intersubjectivity in life is not quite the same thing as intersubjectivity on the stage. The asymmetry between stage and world occurs because the play is shaped so as to create a hierarchy of attention as certain actions, utterances and desires have pressure brought to bear on them by the actions and utterances of others. Playwrights, directors and actors shape the intersubjectivity of their characters in ways that do not reflect the interactions that take place in the world. We are given privileges as members of an audience that are removed from us once we step outside the auditorium. The interactions on stage are selected to show us as audience *where to look* in order to follow the story. They establish the respective status of each character and the power relations between

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<sup>9</sup> *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 2, l. 22 in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (eds.), *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 671

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 4.8, p. 84ff

<sup>11</sup> *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 2 l. 19 in (Eds.) Wells, S. & Taylor, G. 1988, p. 671

them. They establish whose story is to be given prominence and who is there to throw complications into the path of others. There is always something ‘at stake’ for the characters - or at least, for those who demand our attention most prominently. There is an element of risk that gives the drama its edge. The audience gives these interactions its special attention precisely because of the way they throw into question the achievement of a given aim.

### 1.3 ‘Thrownness’ and ‘Christodrama’

I use the word ‘throw’ advisedly, since drama, dealing as it does with persons, albeit fictional ones, has at its core implied questions about being (or Being<sup>12</sup>) and about relations between the kinds of things that have being and their apprehensions of being. Finding oneself in a world that matters to oneself,<sup>13</sup> called ‘thrownness’ (*Geworfenheit*) by Martin Heidegger<sup>14</sup>, is a concept which enables us to think about how characters in dramas find themselves in a particular world, expressing moods, desires and plans as they work their way towards the solution to whatever problem besets them at the outset; and to use the concept to articulate what such existential apprehensions may tell us about how to do theology ‘dramatically’. Because one always has ‘perspective’ - what the world looks like ‘from here’ - one always in some sense finds one’s perspective challenged or obscured, and it is this sense of challenge, the difficulty of ‘going forward’ without obstruction, which gives us the idea that drama, in its presentation of multiple perspectives, involves a fundamental questioning. I think that this is of primary importance to

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<sup>12</sup> If we are to use Heidegger’s capitalization to distinguish between entities that ‘have’ being and ‘Being itself’

<sup>13</sup> See: Wheeler, M. 2016, *Martin Heidegger*, in Zalta, E.N. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Winter 2016 Edition), accessed via <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/heidegger/>>

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger, M, (1962) *Being and Time*, Macquarrie, J. & Robinson, E. (trans.), Oxford: Basil Blackwell

theology, and indeed I will go on in Section 2 to try to make a retrieval of *Logos Christology* in terms of this process of ‘throwing into question’. The term I use to refer to this retrieval is ‘Christodrama’.

#### 1.4 *Life and Art*

Whilst I am not offering an extended critical study of Heidegger’s thought, I will use an approach which draws on phenomenology in order to examine what we might call the ‘drama of faith’. This must inevitably emphasize the dynamics of relationality - the ‘feeling and thinking’ life of those who find themselves in a relation with what is outside them - a world, another person, a divine being.

Of course this immediately raises our question about why one should use ‘fiction’ to talk about the real world and its phenomena. Why interpose a level of unreality between the world as we find it and what we want to say about God? Why not simply study, in the ‘scientific’ manner of Ninian Smart<sup>15</sup>, the phenomena of religious experience and practice? Part of the answer to this is the technical point that a Husserlian perspective (which Smart acknowledges) in which phenomena, though contextualized, are discrete objects given in consciousness, is itself a perspective<sup>16</sup>. Such a perspective may mask important assumptions - for example that one is standing on ‘neutral ground’ when examining and classifying phenomena.

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<sup>15</sup> Smart, N. (1973) *The Phenomenon of Religion*, London: The Macmillan Press

<sup>16</sup> Heidegger indeed makes this type of criticism of his teacher and mentor Husserl: “As early as a 1919 lecture course, for example, we find Heidegger arguing that Husserl’s view (developed in the *Logical Investigations*) that philosophy should renounce theory and concentrate on the things given directly in consciousness, is flawed because such givenness is itself a theoretical construct.” Wheeler, M., 2016. Nevertheless, at the level of an individual drama, it is arguable that each play is itself a theory of drama. See the discussion of Lyotard in Chapter 2, p. 32ff.

### 1.5 *Telling a story*

A more nuanced answer however might come from the territory of ‘narrativity’. First of all we would want to ask why it should be assumed that there is some sort of barrier between so-called ‘religious’ phenomena and those to be described in other contexts. In other words, why should the phenomena of drama not *in se* be considered for the religious insights they may yield? Why should drama not be a site of theological enquiry? Both ‘religion’ and ‘drama’ happen in the world amongst people who reflect upon their inner experiences, think about the world as it appears outside of themselves, engage with text and performance in various guises, use language and imagery to create metaphor, and, crucially, seek to have impact upon others.

In both contexts the phenomena to be described are in some sense presented as ‘story’. We are story-telling animals and we use ‘fictional characters’ to help us tell our stories. Drama is a specialized case of such ‘unreality’ but its participants and spectators know that what is being presented is ‘not real’. As Samuel Johnson remarked: “The truth is, that the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players. They came to hear a certain number of lines recited with just gesture and elegant modulation.”<sup>17</sup> However, Johnson does not really capture the whole of the case, for the power and mystery of drama’s capacity to overwhelm an audience’s resistance to unreality cannot be reduced to a mere recitation of lines, however justly and elegantly done. Perhaps what the phenomena of theatre does capture for us is the sense that the *felt experience* of the representations (in the form of characters)

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<sup>17</sup> Johnson, S. (1825) *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, Oxford: W. Pickering quoted in: States, B.O. (1985) *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms - On The Phenomenology of Theater*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 9

discloses more to us than the surface meanings of the words used. There is an *ironic distance* between word and action with which the audience is entrusted and which opens up connections to uncertainties and disjunctions within the audience's own sphere. Drama is never only a case of words - plot, physical action, lighting, scenery, costume and sound are just as much constitutive elements of the world into which the audience is 'thrown' along with the characters whose destinies engage it.

#### 1.6 *Theodrama, objective experience and the problem of 'challenge'*

Narrativity will be the subject of Chapter 3 but 'felt experience' brings us back to Balthasar and the 'Theodramatic' project. If there were any doubt that 'feeling' and 'experience'<sup>18</sup> - existence from the inside - are central to Balthasar's theology, the two hundred or so pages he devotes to the subject in Volume 1 of *The Glory of the Lord* serve to remind us that theology can never be satisfied with a static, coldly propositional set of statements about a divine being who forms the object of a set of 'beliefs'. For Balthasar, however, the experience of faith always includes the 'objective' side of believing, which secures our experience from randomness and subjectivity and also from a mere conflation of the divine with human experience. Balthasar emphasizes the concept of 'distance', an idea, however, which while properly preserving God's otherness, permits him also to frame, or better perhaps, 'stage' the action of God in movement towards his creation, a movement intended to evoke a creaturely response. Such an understanding of 'experience', combining objective and subjective strands, forms the basis of Balthasar's later adoption and explication, in volume II of *Theo-Drama*, of the categories of 'epic' and 'lyric' which in isolation fall short of doing justice to the divine movement towards the creation

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<sup>18</sup> And therefore a phenomenology

but in the proper combination, which takes account of the “dramatic dimension of revelation”<sup>19</sup> creates a truly ‘dramatic’ whole.

Balthasar’s emphasis on the ‘action of God’ moving towards his creation as the key to understanding Theodrama opens up a divergence from my claim that drama derives its power to compel our attention through its sense of challenge to our desires and the putting of obstructions in the way of the movement towards a goal. If God is God, how can there be meaningful obstructions to his will and desire?

The answer must come in the form of a claim about human involvement in the drama. For Balthasar, humans cannot be mere spectators but are called upon to join in. “The good which God does to us can only be experienced as the truth if we share in performing it.”<sup>20</sup> Human sin of course then provides the obstruction and challenge. However, a challenge from such a source does not quite capture the role that Balthasar wishes to give to this human involvement, which is closer to a process of sanctification: “For each Christian, God has an Idea which fixes his place within the membership of the church; this idea is unique and personal, embodying for each his appropriate sanctity.”<sup>21</sup> This also raises the question of freedom and necessity. If God has written in the roles for us to play, and that is what is meant by drama, then why would we want to characterize human interactions as ‘dramatic’? Do we not want to think of ourselves as free to respond? Inevitably Theodrama wishes to preserve human freedom. Whether or not Balthasar succeeds in holding together both sides of this dramatic dimension - the objective and the subjective - whilst

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<sup>19</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. (1990) *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* Vol. 2, Harrison, G. (trans.), San Francisco: Ignatius Press, p. 57

<sup>20</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p 36

<sup>21</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. (1953) *Thérèse of Lisieux: The Story of a Mission*, London: Sheed & Ward, p. 12

maintaining a view of human freedom will be discussed in Chapter 4, when we subject Theodrama in Balthasar's hands, and also in those of some of his successors, to deeper critical examination. At this stage, I will content myself with sketching in the outline of his main attempt to hold the objective and subjective in tension through his use of genres, and some of the problems associated with such an approach.

### 1.7 Genre: 'Lyric', 'Epic' and the 'Dramatic'

It is one of Balthasar's distinctive contributions to theology to take over the three genres, 'lyric', 'epic', and 'dramatic', offered by Hegel in his work on aesthetics<sup>22</sup> and re-purpose them. Quash lays out the use that Balthasar makes of these categories and unpicks Hegel's influence in a number of essays and book chapters.<sup>23</sup>

As Quash reminds us, Hegel spoke of drama as the form of poetry that "brings us nearer [...] to 'the spirit in its wholeness' because it does justice to the 'objectivity which proceeds from the subject' as well as to 'subjectivity which gains portrayal in its objective realization and validity'."<sup>24</sup> For Balthasar, each of the categories can in their own way be used to characterize God's action towards the world and to people, though drama remains the most central. Hegel's "broad flow of events"<sup>25</sup> in which individual agents are 'conciliated' with the 'general world situation' is reflected in Balthasar's sense of 'epic-narrative' theology in which God's action is understood as

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<sup>22</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. (1975) *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, 2 vols., Knox, T.M. (trans.), Oxford: Oxford University Press

<sup>23</sup> See Quash, B. 2005 and Quash, B. (1997) *Between the Brutely Given and the Brutally, Banally Free*, *Modern Theology* 13 (3), pp. 293-318

<sup>24</sup> Quash, B. 1999, p. 149. Quash cites Hegel, G.W.F. 1975, p. 1037

<sup>25</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 41



past event, and which also understands individual action as the direct expression of a “broader teleology.”<sup>26</sup>

The ‘lyric’ on the other hand is for Balthasar the state of the “self-contemplating mind”<sup>27</sup> which instead of acting “remains alone with itself as inwardness.”<sup>28</sup> Each of the three categories stand, in Quash’s words, for “entire ways of looking at things.”<sup>29</sup> It is in their unity, as the ‘dramatic’, however that, for Balthasar, Christian revelation finds its true mode of expression. A lyric persuasiveness which “coaxes an audience into at least a partial or temporary emotional submission”<sup>30</sup> is part of a drama’s effect on an audience, but is in tension with the audience’s “desire for an independent and critical stance in relation to the sequence of events.”<sup>31</sup> We will subject this view to further examination when we come in Chapter 5<sup>32</sup> to discuss Bertolt Brecht and the concept of ‘complex seeing’, which will help us to see more clearly what sort of work the audience is doing on its side of the auditorium.

However the characterization of drama in terms of the combination of ‘epic’ and ‘lyric’ categories creates some potentially strange effects when extended across the whole field of theological enquiry.

Firstly, however much Quash, and indeed Balthasar, may wish to preserve the particularity of individual dramas and their effects upon an audience, there is a

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p. 42

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* p. 43

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Quash, B. 1999, p. 142 footnote 8

<sup>30</sup> Quash, B. 1997, p. 295

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> p. 104ff

danger of smoothing out the horizon of the drama's performance and the horizon of the audience's reception of it. We will see with regard to a discussion of 'hope' and 'hopefulness' that the preservation of these two horizons is essential.<sup>33</sup>

Secondly, at the level of our reception, with regard to the question of the ways in which 'lyric' and 'epic' genres are combined, Balthasar does not find it sufficient to characterize human response to the divine movement under the simple term 'grace' as if the consciousness of having received it is the only criterion of true experience.<sup>34</sup> Instead Christian experience has a "structured, composite character... [which]... can never be fastened onto a single content or state, a sensual or spiritual perception, a feeling or a particular experience; Christian experience, rather, implies a progressive entrance of the believing person into the total reality of faith and the progressive 'realisation' of this reality."<sup>35</sup>

The question arises however, as to how the 'believing person' comes to be characterized as 'believing'. Is it a role assigned in advance, as if one were being 'cast' (an intriguing association with the concept of being 'thrown') as a believer? Is the drama only a drama by virtue of certain kinds of persons (believing ones) entering into it?<sup>36</sup> As we have already discussed, the progress of the drama, the movement forward, also requires challenge and impediment if it is to be recognized as drama. The stately march of God's movement towards his creation, met by the entry of a

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<sup>33</sup> See p. 89f

<sup>34</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. 1982, p. 238

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.* p. 238-9

<sup>36</sup> The playwright Jean Anouilh frequently makes use of this idea. See the Chorus's prologue to *Antigone*: Anouilh, J. (1946) *Antigone*, Paris: La Table Ronde

chorus joyfully acclaiming allegiance to the cause, will not detain our attention as audience for long.

Balthasar appears to be proposing a kind of integrative drama in which Christian experience is understood as “the fruit of a faith lived in obedience to God.”<sup>37</sup> The integrative process is one in which the whole of life’s experiences in all their “irreconcilable aspects”<sup>38</sup> are worked through with perseverance in order to release a “precious stone [...] from the rough block of our existence.”<sup>39</sup> This will always be done in the context of others - ‘the communion of saints’ - which, continuing our integrative analogy, may be thought of as providing an ordered, structured and observed ‘space’ in which the action takes place. Drama, in the end, is a question of *character* development.<sup>40</sup>

This, however, does not do anything like justice to the interplay of motive, volition and impediment which throws into question the destiny of any particular character. Instead it seems to smooth out the ‘form and pressure of the time’ under which characters are placed by virtue of finding themselves thrown or cast into a given ‘plot’ - a pressure that should threaten obliteration and loss of being; a pressure which should threaten ‘unknowing’. As we will see in chapter 4, and later in Section 2, the concept of ‘unknowing’ is of primary concern to drama. It is also, with reference to

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<sup>37</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. 1982, p. 239

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> The critic A.C. Bradley was the proponent of an ‘essentialist’ dramatic theory of character based on questions of how (for example) Hamlet might behave under certain conditions. See Bradley, A.C. (1905) *Shakespearean Tragedy*, London: Macmillan. Later critics however have scorned this approach: see Styan, J.L. (1977) *The Shakespeare Revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. A version of Bradley’s essentialist approach is revised by Ben Faber. See Faber, B. 2006.

Karl Barth<sup>41</sup>, of considerable concern to theology. We will have to enquire how, if at all, Theodrama approaches the threat of obliteration and unknowing within what I have termed its 'integrative dramatic' approach.

### 1.8 *Sacred and secular*

I am not proposing to take on an examination of Balthasar's ecclesial and missional implications within the scope of this study. However the concept of the emergence of something 'precious' will concern me very much, stripped as it will have to be of any residual vestige of Platonism in favour of a thoroughgoing incarnational aspect. What emerges is for Balthasar a form of "the really beautiful... [which]... "shines from the place where the real has itself acquired form, where the seductive opposition between illusion and disillusion has been transcended. The totality of existence remains a mystery, but one whose appearance is not a strange enigma for the experienced person who has been tested by existence; for him it is a luminous space which he has embraced. By having experienced existence the person who has thus become wise now understands something of the mystery of Being."<sup>42</sup> I would want to concur that the stripping away of illusion is the stuff of drama and indeed the 'drama' of our own lives. What I want to suggest however, is that within drama and its processes there is something which does not necessarily have to be translated into a schema of the 'Christian life' in order to have value as theology, and even Christian theology. It does I think have a more universal role to play as a cultural form which discloses 'salvation' for all. It is a way of making what we think of as the 'Christian' narrative available to all, regardless of their situation in time and place. In that sense I approach drama as something secular which has the capacity to become sacred.

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<sup>41</sup> See for example: Barth, K. (1961) *Church Dogmatics* I, 2, Bromiley, G.W., (trans.), Edinburgh: T&T Clark

<sup>42</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. 1982, p. 239

It is important to acknowledge this divergence of perspective at the start. I intend to write from *within* drama as much as from within theology, in order to avoid the pitfall of trying to abstract from it a poetics which yields metaphors into which theology can be ‘read back’.

### 1.9 *Good performances? Critiques of the literature of performativity*

Drama is nothing without performers, without ‘doers’. It can only have ‘life’ if it is in some sense shown or presented. The minimal conditions for this are debatable - might a script-reading without movement or action suffice? (That is essentially what *radio* drama is). Does it need to be read aloud or does a person reading a script to themselves count? At some level, presence is required.

Balthasar emphasizes the necessarily performative aspect to the emergence of the ‘real’ - it happens because of what we do, not just because of the state of feeling we happen to be in. “God does not play the world drama all on his own; he makes room for man to join in the acting.”<sup>43</sup> The implication is that it could not happen unless we do certain things in obedience to God. I will however take issue in chapter 4 with the domination of the ‘performative’ use of drama over other elements of dramaturgy. Ben Quash in particular takes up the theme of performance in explicating Balthasar, speaking of a person’s entrance into the “movement of Christ’s mission” as entering the “acting area.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. 1990, p. 91. Balthasar and his followers tend to elide ‘performance’ in the sense of ‘doing’ with ‘performance in the pretensive sense of ‘acting’. This elision however imports into the theological use of the concept an overlooking of the necessary split between an actor and her role.

<sup>44</sup> Quash, B. (2004) *The Theo-drama* in Oakes, E.T & Moss, D. (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 143-157

### 1.10 Kevin Vanhoozer and the Canonical-Linguistic approach

Kevin Vanhoozer also heavily emphasizes the ‘performative’ and demonstrates a dependency on ‘Theodrama’. Vanhoozer is concerned to construct a ‘canonical-linguistic theology’ together with a ‘directive theory of doctrine’ which guides the church in performing properly its role in the world.<sup>45</sup> In assigning roles to elements of theology in accordance with dramatic metaphors - theology itself is dramaturgy, Scripture is script, theological understanding is performance - Vanhoozer’s canonical-linguistic theory owes a very large debt to Balthasar, taking up the themes of *Theo-drama* as “the best way to do justice to Scripture.”<sup>46</sup> Vanhoozer’s work is conceived as an attempted retrieval of the principle of *Sola Scriptura* which underpins this performance and provides a key to understanding the relationship between the twin themes of divine and human freedom. This key is patterned on the basis that Scripture is ‘dialogic’ - it seeks a response from a character within the action - and ‘illocutionary’ - its utterances are ‘speech-acts’<sup>47</sup> which not only state the intentions of the speaker but also perform them. Hence utterances which constitute promises, threats, questions, and so on, are not only propositions, but constitute the *action* of promising, questioning, threatening etc.

Perhaps more than anyone Vanhoozer depends on the idea that ‘faithful performance’ is both theology’s central task and the primary image for understanding why theology is *dramatic*: “...life is divine-human interactive theater,

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<sup>45</sup> See Vanhoozer, K.J. (2005) *The Drama of Doctrine*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* p. 49

<sup>47</sup> The concept of ‘Speech-act’ derives from the work of the philosopher J.L. Austin, elaborated by J. Searle. See Austin, J.L. (1962), *How To Do Things With Words*, Oxford: Oxford University Press & Searle, J. (1969) *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. For critical responses to Searle’s theory of language and mind, see Tsohatzidis, S.L. (ed.) (2007) *John Searle’s philosophy of Language: Force, Meaning and Mind*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

and theology involves both what God has said and done for the world and what we *must*<sup>48</sup> say and do in grateful response.”<sup>49</sup>

This has several implications. The first is that the ‘script’ must be logically prior to the ‘performance’ and must govern what is meant by a faithful performance. This of course raises the question of ‘re-writes’ as well as ‘cuts’ and ‘edits’. Is not a script more than a set of instructions or guidelines for performance? May it not also be a memory of performance? The difference between the *quarto* editions of Shakespeare’s plays and the 1623 *Folio* edition is considerable in many plays<sup>50</sup> and can be attributed not only to second thoughts by Shakespeare before his death in 1616 but to the memories of actors and company managers. To that extent, Vanhoozer can be said to be a prisoner of a particular kind of biblical exegesis. In his introduction to *The Drama of Doctrine* Vanhoozer dismisses “forms of exegesis that treat the biblical texts as data rather than as bearers of divine discourse” as “distinctly *undramatic*.”<sup>51</sup> Yet that may be the point of such exegeses - that theology may not be dramatic in the way Vanhoozer suggests if the script is either unreliable or unknowable or evades the kind of interpretative net which he seek to place round it.

Secondly we will have to ask what happens to the audience in this scheme. I devote space in chapter 4<sup>52</sup> to a consideration of this point, since, as I will argue, the

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<sup>48</sup> My italics

<sup>49</sup> Vanhoozer, K.J. 2005, p. 37-8

<sup>50</sup> See especially the quarto ‘*Historie of King Lear*’ and Folio ‘*Tragedy of King Lear*’. See the discussion of the issues in the General Introduction to Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (eds.), p. xxxiiff

<sup>51</sup> Vanhoozer, K.J. 2005, p. 20

<sup>52</sup> See Chapter 4.14, p. 89

audience does indeed have a fundamental role to play in drama, but one that must not, for important reasons, be confused or assimilated with the roles of *performers*.

That leads to the third implication - that drama is *mimetic*. Again, I will give space to an analysis of Aristotle's concept of *mimesis*<sup>53</sup> and will take issue with traditional understandings of the term, suggesting that theology is in danger of embedding an inadequate account of mimesis within its use of drama.

Finally, Vanhoozer's theodramatics require a particular way of seeing the conflicts within drama and on which it is often said to depend: "Conflict arises only when human beings refuse to play their parts."<sup>54</sup> The suspicion must be that the metaphor of 'performance' is being used to try to bring the particular story (or drama) of God's dealings with humanity, a story of 'Fall and Redemption' into focus as the template for 'drama' itself, which results in a smoothing out of the particularities of dramas and their performances. There might well be a good drama to be had in the story of a group of humans refusing to play their parts but not all dramas (and their inherent conflicts) are 'about' that. It goes without saying, of course, that if the 'drama' of salvation depended on humans *not* refusing to play their parts, it is unlikely to come to a conclusion any time soon. Conversely if humans do successfully play their parts, does that make the drama inherently undramatic? It seems that Vanhoozer may be suspected of forcing metaphors together which in fact need to exist in two different planes - the question of what the story is - and the question of how it is 'performed'.

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<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 4.8, p. 80

<sup>54</sup> Vanhoozer, K.J. 2005, p. 49



The explicitly ‘performative’ nature of Vanhoozer’s theology with regard to the schematics of Christian life is in fact shared with Quash who aims to show, in his own development of Theodrama<sup>55</sup>, how a properly theodramatic understanding of history can help to guide the church through the difficult terrain between, in John Milbank’s phrase, “the brutally given and the brutally, banally free.”<sup>56</sup> We shall see how they also share some assumptions about the nature of the ‘drama’ on which their theodramatics are based, assumptions which may prove to show up certain weaknesses at the heart of their arguments.

### 1.11 *Drama, dramaturgy and ‘theo-dramaturgy’*

We must therefore keep in view the differences between the content and the practice of drama on the one hand and generalizing theories about drama on the other. Some theoreticians of drama, including Aristotle, show a scant regard for the material of plays, except in so far as they support the thesis they seek to establish. Balthasar, however, treats<sup>57</sup> of a wide range of playwrights, encompassing Greek tragedy, Shakespeare, the German Idealist theatre and moderns from Ibsen through Brecht, Ionesco and Pirandello to Harold Pinter. A notable absence is Samuel Beckett, who will feature in later sections of this study, though Balthasar does consider the work of other Irish writers, including Brendan Behan and Sean O’Casey.

In one sense, however, any practitioner of drama, whether scriptwriter, director, actor or designer, is also a theorizer about drama, offering a particular set of solutions to the problem of how to make a play ‘work’ in front of an audience. This

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<sup>55</sup> See particularly Quash, B. 2005

<sup>56</sup> Milbank, J. (1994) *Magisterial...and Shoddy?* Studies in Christian Ethics, 7 (2), pp. 29-34, p. 31

<sup>57</sup> The second part of Theodrama vol. I, ‘*Dramatic Resources*’ amounts to some 330 pages of detailed textual examination of plays and the elements of production

dual level of text and theory neatly mirrors the argument between Husserl and Heidegger alluded to earlier<sup>58</sup>.

It is indeed the audience which creates the ‘problem’ of drama, in the sense that it is towards the audience that all of drama’s efforts at solutions are addressed. The phenomenon of the audience must therefore be properly accounted for in our subsequent discussions.

Rather than using drama as a sourcebook of metaphors with which to articulate or refresh a theology which otherwise never glances back in its direction because its attention is really elsewhere, our task requires us to examine in some detail significant plays - I have chosen *King Lear* and *Oedipus the King* as principal works, alongside works by Samuel Beckett and a less detailed review of other works by Shakespeare, Corneille and Racine - in order to reach an understanding of dramaturgy - which we may define as the study of the processes of composition and representation of the elements of drama. Only in the light of such study can we consider properly how we may move from dramaturgy to ‘theo-dramaturgy’.

From the audience’s perspective however, could we say that in speaking of God drama’s very unreality limits it to an analogy of structure - of the structure of relationships, perhaps? Or does that unreality itself open up in us direct and immediate apprehensions beyond the ethical which may be accounted revelatory? Giving oneself up to the surprise and mystery of drama may perhaps be a way of ‘losing one’s own life’ as Matthew’s Gospel puts it: “For those who want to save their

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<sup>58</sup> See p. 11

life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”<sup>59</sup> If we are able to say that in losing oneself in response to drama one is in some sense handing oneself over to God, then we can make the claim that such an understanding is thoroughly Christian, whether or not it is at the same time anti-metaphysical.

Ben Quash gives a hint as to which side he believes Theodrama belongs when he says “Theodrama is a Christian theology and not a dramatic theory (which refuses the idea of divine empowerment).”<sup>60</sup> However, we should beware of assuming that a dramatic theory (which may itself be a drama) necessarily refuses the idea of ‘divine empowerment’. Indeed there are grounds for thinking that drama’s origins lie in that very idea itself.<sup>61</sup>

### 1.12 *Signs, wonders and the ontology of drama*

We can combine the question of origins with Balthasar’s description of the ‘form of the real’ that emerges from drama in the following, I hope fruitful, way. In his essay, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger considers an ancient temple and its sculpture of a god: “The temple, in its standing there, first gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves. This view remains open as long as the work is a work, as long as the god has not fled from it. It is the same with the sculpture of the god, votive offering of the victor in the athletic games. It is not a portrait whose purpose is to make it easier to realize how the god looks; rather it is a work that lets the god himself be present and thus *is* the god himself. The same holds for the linguistic work. In the tragedy nothing is staged or displayed theatrically, but the

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<sup>59</sup> Matthew 16.25 cf. Matthew 10.39

<sup>60</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 7

<sup>61</sup> See: Nietzsche, F. (1872) *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, Leipzig: Verlag von E.W. Fritsch

battle of the new gods against the old is being fought. The linguistic work, originating in the speech of the people, does not refer to this battle; it transforms the people's saying so that now every living word fights the battle and puts up for decision what is holy and what unholy..."<sup>62</sup>

The drama theorist and phenomenologist Bert States suggests that Heidegger is speaking here of the notion of a "presence that makes it unnecessary to refer elsewhere *for* the god. It is the *truth* of the god that arrives on the stage and not the stage that refers to a *real* god beyond it, existing in some unavailable form."<sup>63</sup> What I take from this is the idea that drama has its own ontology which is not derived from something 'going on' somewhere else, and that categories which relate to 'the now' and 'immediacy' are most suitable as a starting point for considering in what this 'truth of the god' might consist. Inevitably this will have a further impact on my discussion of mimesis below.

The second point I take from Heidegger is that the 'linguistic work' as a system of signs is not to be understood as representational, such that language stands in for some state of affairs outside itself which can be 'understood' within language by wrestling with it until it yields it up as its 'meaning'. Rather, I would want to think in terms of the questioning - the 'battling' as Heidegger puts it - being a kind of 'deconstruction' that takes place within language, within the hearing of its audience. This deconstruction is of utterance itself - of the 'performances' of utterance, and in particular that of 'desire' and 'desiring'. A simple thought experiment which I conduct at the opening of Section Two will help us to realize why this category -

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<sup>62</sup> Heidegger, M. (1975) *Poetry, Language, Thought*, New York: Harper & Row

<sup>63</sup> States, B.O. (1985) *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms - On The Phenomenology of Theater*, Berkeley: University of California Press

desiring utterances - above all is fundamental to the nature of drama. I take it that what Heidegger refers to as the “battle [which] puts up for decision what is holy and what is unholy”<sup>64</sup> is the conflicts between these ‘desirings’ which in their obliterating actions clear the space for something new to emerge. This “battle’ will preoccupy us for the major part of Section Two.

### 1.13 *The ‘new thing’*

“I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?”<sup>65</sup>

Heidegger, Balthasar and - as we will touch upon, Hegel - all start to converge around this question of the ‘emergence of the new’ and how it is to be characterized. There are of course divergences which will also become apparent when we start to consider whether what ‘emerges’ can also in any sense be ‘applied’.

In Chapter 2 we will unfold an argument for how each work of art itself participates in the emergence of the new, an argument which at the same time requires us to give up all hope of characterizing the ‘new’ as in some way metaphysical. Notwithstanding such a ‘destitution’, my thesis seeks to elaborate how dramas disclose to us ‘the new’ as a gift of ‘grace’.

### 1.14 *Themes and objectives summarized*

Having posed the question why theology should concern itself with fiction, and especially with drama, in this first chapter I have suggested that drama’s main business is concerned with throwing into question a given state of affairs and that this process amounts to a form of deconstruction of the desirings and motivations of

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<sup>64</sup> Heidegger, M. 1971

<sup>65</sup> Isaiah 43.19

its characters which has the potential, within its relationship to its audience, to disclose more than a set of recommended ethical actions. In asserting the primacy of question over assertion I adopt an approach which shapes all consequent discussions of freedom and necessity, intersubjectivity, narrativity and performativity.

I have picked out some of the main themes of Theodrama in Balthasar's own attempt to describe how theology is dramatic in character, and have suggested that my own approach will, by contrast, investigate how drama is theological. I have termed my approach 'Christodrama' because I wish to show how it opens up a specifically Christian way of understanding drama without the trappings of a grand, but ungrounded, metaphysics, to which, I suggest, Theodrama falls victim. I have made some initial criticisms of what may be called the 'Theodramatic project' in terms of Balthasar's adoption of genre as a way to understand the interactions of humans with the divine and have questioned whether his schematization of divine movement and Christian responsiveness - understood as sanctification - can be truly accepted as dramatic in so far as it does not give sufficient attention to the necessary obstructions and impediments to that movement which turn an action from being a stately spectacle into a drama.

Furthermore, there is a question mark as to whether Theodrama takes seriously enough the potential for the 'unknowing' of the 'knowing subject' and the threat of obliteration and nothingness posed by those challenges and obstructions.

I have also examined Kevin Vanhoozer's work as an example of the nexus of narrativity, performativity and ethics which lies at the heart of Theodrama and have suggested that in the search for a 'dramatic' theology he closes down ways of reading

text which point to the possibility that drama itself might resist being instrumentalized by theology. I acknowledge that *mimesis* is held by Theodrama to be fundamental to understanding drama and I criticize Vanhoozer and Theodrama for employing what I claim is a distorted view of *mimesis* as imitation and which looks elsewhere for the source of the action in front of us. Drawing on Heidegger I suggest that drama has its own ontology which is not derived from things which have existence elsewhere. With this insight in mind I note that we can expect something ‘new’ to emerge from the conflicts which rage in front of us as human desiring is deconstructed in front of us. Since Balthasar and Heidegger both speak of ‘emergence’ as a theme, I devote considerable space in Section Two to the question of what this emergence of the ‘new’ might signify.

In spite of my divergence from Balthasar in the important respects noted above, I can agree with him that in his quest to ‘redramatize modernity’ he is *throwing into question* modernity’s settled norms - of logic and of the foundations of its knowledge. Since we are all situated within a time and place that has its own ‘form and pressure’ it is imperative that we understand what claims theology has to function within the forms and pressures of the contemporary world. As Quash endeavours to do in *Theology and the Drama of History*<sup>66</sup>, we must be able to say why theology can lay claim to our attention in a world which appears to be governed by certain epistemological norms.

One way of doing so is to challenge the basis of the norms themselves - to question the legitimacy of such norms and to ask where the authority as ‘grounds’ comes from

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<sup>66</sup> See the Introduction: “Theology does not look in general at a different history from other academic disciplines; it looks at the same history in a different way. It allows different people into the conversation: people for whom a different framework for the description of historical reality is not *a priori* inadmissible.” Quash, B. 2005, p. 2

- and in so far as Balthasar's attempts at re-dramatizing modernity points us in that endeavour towards the 'unknowing' of what we think we know, we must now turn to examine how drama relates to the questioning of the wider world of thought and the conflicts and crises which have arisen within it. To do so we will use Lyotard's '*Report on Knowledge*'<sup>67</sup> as our entry point, since it most helpfully raises issues of narrativity, performativity and the 'emergence of the new' at the same time.

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<sup>67</sup> Lyotard, J-F. (1984) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Bennington, G. & Massumi, B. (trans.), Manchester: Manchester University Press



## CHAPTER 2: KNOWLEDGE DRAMATICALLY IN QUESTION

### 2.1 *Modernity and Post-modernity*

Let us take the historical period referred to as ‘the modern’ to encompass the time during which a ‘scientific’ methodology was established and adumbrated by which knowledge of the natural world might be obtained through observation and measurement, in contrast to a view of the world derived from *a priori* principles. As Ben Quash remarks in a footnote<sup>1</sup> there are multiple views on when such a period began. Some suggest the advent of the printing press, or Luther’s protests against the authority of the Church, or Galileo’s planetary observations or the development of Newtonian physics. For our purposes, the salient factor is the inclusion of religion within the compass of the scientific method - in other words, the attempt to ‘ground’ religion was now to come under the auspices of rational, scientific methods.

Alongside the development of empirical scientific observation went the elevation of the power of reason as the decider of what constitutes knowledge. The aim of the rationalists, and in particular those of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, has been summarized by Isaiah Berlin as the belief that “...all the sciences and all the faiths, the most fanatical superstitions and the most savage customs, when ‘cleansed’ of their irrational elements by the advance of civilization, can be harmonized in the

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<sup>1</sup> Quash, B. 1999, p. 141 note 7

final true philosophy which could solve all theoretical and practical problems for all men everywhere for all time.”<sup>2</sup>

Such a totalizing vision is expressed in Hegel’s view that “Reason is the certainty of consciousness that it is all reality.”<sup>3</sup> Reason here is a wider concept than that of a single individual’s capacity to reason, although the capacity of an individual to reason derives from the wider sense of reason as a total system containing everything within itself required both to explain and also to create. In that sense Reason as a system stands in relation to the individual in the same way that Hegel characterizes the individual’s relationship to history: as a process of accommodation of the subjective to the teleology of the historically-realized absolute.<sup>4</sup>

This gives us the picture of a ‘knowing subject’ as a consciousness struggling to bring to birth in itself an instantiation of the purposes of the absolute. We saw at the beginning of Chapter 1 that Quash summarizes Balthasar’s work as a form of ‘re-dramatizing of modernity’. Let us say that this struggle characterizes how modernity has ‘dramatized’ itself. Hegel argues in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*<sup>5</sup> that consciousness requires intersubjectivity as well as self-consciousness in order to

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<sup>2</sup> Berlin, I. (1979) *The Age of Enlightenment*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 28. In our time, Stephen Hawking has suggested that science has now fulfilled this destiny, making both theology and philosophy redundant. See Hawking, S.W. & Mlodinow, L. (2010) *The Grand Design*, New York: Bantam. For the classic refutation of such a view, see Kuhn, T.S. (2012) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Kuhn argues that science does not proceed by slowly converging on ‘the truth’ but by replacing one ‘paradigm’ with a different and incommensurable one, making it impossible to view either from a neutral standpoint in order to decide what is ‘true’.

<sup>3</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. (1977) *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Miller, A.V. (trans.), Oxford: Oxford University Press

<sup>4</sup> I realize that I am taking great risks in performing an act of extreme compression on Hegel’s philosophy of history. However, the complexities of Hegel are not my point here, which is to establish that rationalism, including Hegelian rationalism, refers to the means of deciding what is admissible to the category of ‘knowledge’. That is to say, that rationalists are concerned to find a methodology that guarantees the authority of its procedures. There are however important debates about whether Hegel, as someone concerned with dialectical method, is mis-characterized as a ‘totalizer’. See Adams, N. (2013) *The Eclipse of Grace*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell

<sup>5</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. 1977, ch.4

know that objects of consciousness, including other minds, are distinct from it. To know the world, and to be *certain* of knowing it, one must be aware of oneself as someone for whom the distinct object is presented. Not only that but one must be aware of other people's similar self-consciousness with regard to *their* being subjects for whom distinct objects are presented, including oneself. That is, there is need of a mutual recognition that one is presented as a distinct object to another's consciousness.

The move from a single consciousness to objective consciousness (or Spirit, in Hegelian terms) is one which emphasizes the shaping effects (the 'pressure') of interaction between subjects. It is easy to see why drama is thought to capture this process of mutual 'becoming'. It appears to be a way of looking at the struggle to know, the struggle to overcome the darkness of our ignorance.

The ground on which modernity stands is predicated upon the attempt to give validity to the idea of a community of 'knowing subjects' and the terms on which its knowledge may be said to be unassailably established - its 'truth conditions'. Such a community is understood by Hegel to be expressed immanently in concrete cultural institutions or "institutionalized forms of mutual recognition"<sup>6</sup> in which the rules of the game for deciding on whether the truth conditions are met are themselves decided.

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<sup>6</sup> Redding, P., (2017) *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel*, in Zalta, E.N. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Summer 2017 Edition), accessed via <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/hegel/>>

## 2.2 *The Crisis of Legitimation*

These conditions correspond to what we may call a ‘metalanguage’ - in classical terms, ‘logic’, a system of axioms which determine what statements are acceptable within a language. Aristotle’s collection of logical theory, the *Organon* (containing the *Prior* and *Posterior* Analytics) is the first developed example in the western canon, and its influence was sustained across millennia to the onset of ‘modernity’ and the time of Descartes, Hume and Kant until finally undergoing reversal in the work of Russell<sup>7</sup> and Frege<sup>8</sup>. The relationship between empirical observation (implying an observing subject) and ‘reason’, which in Aristotelean terms was conceived as an ‘instrument’ and in Kantian terms re-conceived as a cognitive faculty necessarily limited with regard to knowledge of the world, forms the basis of much of the philosophical argument in the ‘western’ tradition.<sup>9</sup>

The problem of course lies in the legitimation of these axioms, which themselves require to be expressed in terms derived from the language for which they are the ‘ground’. As Lyotard remarks in *The Postmodern Condition*, “By what criteria does the logician define the properties required of an axiomatic? Is there a model for scientific languages? If so, is there just one? Is it verifiable?”<sup>10</sup> Lyotard’s question references the crisis of legitimation which besets empiricists in general and logical

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<sup>7</sup> Russell, B. (1903) *The Principles of Mathematics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and also Russell, B. & Whitehead, A.N. (1910-13) *Mathematica Principia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

<sup>8</sup> For example, Frege, (1980) *On Sense and Reference*, 3rd edition, Geach, P. & Black, M. (Eds. & Trans.), Oxford: Blackwell. Russell and Frege’s overturning of Aristotelean logic is based on an argument about the ‘ambiguity of “is”’, which, applied to Aristotle, suggests he failed to distinguish between different senses of the words in natural languages for being - distinctions between predication, existence and identity. However, for a defence of Aristotle against Frege and Russell’s ‘Ambiguity’ thesis, see Hintikka, J. (1981) *The Unambiguity of Aristotelian Being*, The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter, 238, accessed via <https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp/238>.

<sup>9</sup> The ‘Western’ tradition of course diverges. In the 20th and 21st Century, the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ tradition dominates the debate in Britain and the USA.

<sup>10</sup> Lyotard, J-F. 1979, p. 42

positivists in particular. Ayer's 'Verification Principle'<sup>11</sup> for example, aimed to give an account of how to validate propositions concerning empirical matters of fact - i.e. observations about the world - by reference to the occurrence or otherwise of the sense experience to which a 'proposition' refers and thereby to have established the nature of 'truth'. However, even allowing for his adjustments to the principle of verification in the second edition,<sup>12</sup> the task of expressing the verification principle in language which itself is neither 'analytic' (and thereby having nothing to say about the world) nor, in his terms, 'meaningless' (failing to pass the verification test) eluded him.

There are, as Lyotard enumerates,<sup>13</sup> four generally accepted properties of a metalanguage, or formal system of logic - consistency, completeness, decidability, and independence of each axiom. However, as Godel has shown, an arithmetic system may contain a proposition which is neither demonstrable nor refutable within the system, therefore failing to satisfy the condition of completeness.<sup>14</sup> Generalizing from there, Lyotard asks us to accept that "all formal systems have internal limitations."<sup>15</sup>

For Lyotard, the project is not to reject modernism amidst the crisis of legitimation, but to produce a "reformulation"<sup>16</sup> within epistemology which recasts the rules by which scientific statements are accepted as 'true' as akin to a game in which

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<sup>11</sup> Ayer, A.J. (1936) *Language, Truth and Logic*, London: Victor Gollancz

<sup>12</sup> Published 1946

<sup>13</sup> Lyotard, J-F. 1979, p. 42 following Martin, R., (1964) *Logique Contemporaine et Formalisation*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France pp. 33-41 & 122ff

<sup>14</sup> Godel, K. (1962), *On Formally Undecidable Propositions of Principia Mathematica and Related Systems*, Bletzer, B. (trans.), New York: Basic Books

<sup>15</sup> Lyotard, J-F. 1979, p. 43

<sup>16</sup> Lyotard, J-F. 1979, p. 43

challenges or “requests” are constantly made to other players or partners in the game: “The argumentation required for a scientific statement to be accepted is thus subordinated to a ‘first’ acceptance [...] of the rules defining the allowable means of argumentation. Two noteworthy properties of scientific knowledge result from this: the flexibility of its means, that is, the plurality of its languages; and its character as a pragmatic game - the acceptability of the ‘moves’ (*new propositions*)<sup>17</sup> made in it depends on a contract drawn between the partners. Another result is that there are two kinds of ‘progress’ in knowledge: one corresponds to a new move within the established rules; the other, to the invention of new rules, in other words, a change to a new game.”<sup>18</sup>

There are two significant points to take from this. The first is that *performativity* is critical to the enterprise. The challenges and requests within the system are conducted between players in an essentially adversarial game in which “the taking of tricks”<sup>19</sup> - the communicative trumping of one’s challenger - produces forward momentum. The emergence of the “new” is thus a primary theme of this reformulation. As Frederic Jameson remarks, the justification of scientific research is “not to produce an adequate model or replication of some outside reality, but rather simply to produce *more* work, to generate new and fresh scientific *énoncés* or statements, to make you have ‘new ideas’...”<sup>20</sup> In other words, from the drama of the game, something ‘new’ is under pressure to emerge, by virtue of the fact that the game is in existence precisely to produce that pressure.

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<sup>17</sup> My italics

<sup>18</sup> Lyotard, J-F. 1979, p. 43

<sup>19</sup> Jameson, F. in Foreword to Lyotard, J-F. 1979, p. xi Jameson claims that this phrase is one of Lyotard’s favourites

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

### 2.3 *Salvation is linguistic - narrative and meaning*

The second point is that the turn to linguistics is intended as a salvation of the scientific endeavour. Lyotard introduces Wittgenstein and language games alongside Austin's speech-act theory to the level of all human endeavour and progress. In doing so, he also seeks to affirm narrativity as what Jameson calls a "central instance of the human mind and a mode of thinking fully as legitimate as that of abstract logic."<sup>21</sup> This move appears to 'allow' various kinds of discourse to reassert their legitimacy, including of course, 'religious' discourse.

This condition of plurality may invite the idea that the 'modern', conceived as the terms on which a statement about the world can be allowed as 'true', must now give way to the 'postmodern', conceived as the evolution of the terms on which meaningfulness is generated within a narrative. Lyotard, as we have said, does not see this as the replacement of one era by another, but rather as a series of disruptions within the modern. A way to think of the 'postmodern' therefore, is as a constant cycle within the 'modern' which makes it possible for the modern to 'look forward' towards the new. "A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant."<sup>22</sup>

However, the localization of legitimacy within certain kinds of story-telling raises further questions about the nature of 'legitimacy' itself. The turn away from realism as a way of thinking about how to refer to 'things' outside of oneself in accordance with pre-determined rules forces a redirection of attention towards 'absence' - the

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<sup>21</sup>Jameson, F. in Foreword to Lyotard, J-F. 1979, p. xi

<sup>22</sup>Lyotard, J-F. 1979, p. 79

‘unpresentability’ not only of the ‘real’ but also of the terms on which any kind of determination can take place at all. Taking ‘works of art’ as a dimension of narrativity, Lyotard thinks that “rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of *what will have been done*.”<sup>23</sup> The rules (or the ‘postmodern’) are a *way of positioning oneself in relation to the unknown*. This has the effect of erasing ‘legitimacy’ altogether, or, perhaps we could say, of reducing it to the level of each single new production, which then has the effect of making it un-universalizable and therefore unable to say anything about the legitimacy of any subsequent production.

This problem should give us pause in thinking that ‘religious discourse’ can now be smuggled back in to modernity’s systems under the guise of a post-modern ‘disruption’ if we then want to insist on narrativity as a way of speaking about a connection between our past, present and ‘purposive’<sup>24</sup> future. Are we not marooned in a localized, singular ‘now’ which does not understand what it is doing until it has done it?

#### 2.4 *Themes and objectives summarized*

We find ourselves back with a different form of the argument between Husserl and Heidegger and the relationship between the contents given in consciousness and the rules for speaking about such contents.

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<sup>23</sup> Lyotard, J-F. 1979, p. 81

<sup>24</sup> See the discussion of Graham Ward and ethical narrativity in the next chapter.



We can begin to see the shape of an argument between an Hegelian ‘system’ which aims to describe how to arrive at a point of being able to see ‘how to know’ and a ‘post-modern’ disruption which denies that such a point could ever be recognized. As we have seen, narrativity is suggested by Lyotard as a way to navigate between these positions, in order to answer the question “why do research?” or, as we might say, “why try to know?”

Drama - a particular form of narrativity - has been adopted by Hegel, and to an extent by Balthasar and his successors, as a way of picturing the drama of ‘knowing’ as *overcoming* the limits of subjectivity through the phenomena given to consciousness. This particular drama does not confine itself to the abstract world of philosophy, but pushes on into ethics and politics. We must therefore look more closely at narrativity and its relationship to ethics in order to understand the use made of it by Theodrama. We must try to say whether drama-as-narrativity is adequate to the task set for it.

## CHAPTER 3: THEODRAMA, NARRATIVITY AND THE EPISODIC CHALLENGE

### 3.1 *Irreducible diachronicity?*

Graham Ward writes: “Narrative is the characteristic form of our awareness of ourselves as historical beings who must give an account of the purposive relation between temporarily discreet realities.”<sup>1</sup> He raises here a neat formulation of the relationship between several elements: a story requires a story-teller; this story-teller has a particular kind of consciousness - one that is both self-aware and historically conditioned; events or ‘realities’ are related to each other through time; the relationship is capable of being apprehended and thus narrated; the relationship is ‘purposive’ in so far as the narrative reveals a teleological pattern connecting the events; the story-teller is under an obligation to tell this story. All of these elements taken together have a characteristic form - that of narrative. Ben Quash adds that “Drama teaches both theology and history to evaluate actions and events in their constitutively, irreducibly ‘diachronic’ character.”<sup>2</sup>

The interesting thing about these statements is the way they appear to hold out a neutral overview of a ‘structure’ and yet import ethical terms as if they were somehow already written in to the nature of the structure: “must give”, “purposive”, “evaluate”. Furthermore, they subtly disguise a set of relationships between past, present and future and the particularity of the situated role of the narrator.

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<sup>1</sup> Ward, G. (2006) *Narrative and Ethics: the Structures of Believing and the Practices of Hope*, Literature & Theology, vol. 20, 4, pp 438-461, p. 448, quoting Hauerwas, S. (1983) *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame. For a critique of the turn to ethical narrativity prior to Ward, see Anderson, V. (1998) *The Narrative Turn in Christian Ethics: a Critical Appraisal*, American Journal of Theology & Philosophy, 19 (3) pp. 293-312

<sup>2</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 7

Ward's particular interest is in how narrative discloses the transcendent, in so far as all narratives structure emotions, desires and hopes and such structuring "opens up a transcendental horizon."<sup>3</sup> In particular, Ward aims to show how an understanding of narrativity awakens the mind's attention to the advent of a 'gospel' and is thus 'salvific'. This looks like an attractive answer to the question posed at the beginning of my thesis - why use fiction to talk about the truth? Before we consider Ward's claims in detail, however, we must take into account a major challenge to such a view.

### 3.2 *Diachronics versus Episodics - establishing the foundations of Episodic logic*

Galen Strawson's article *Against Narrativity*<sup>4</sup> makes the case for a non-diachronic (or a non-exclusively diachronic) reading of human experience and suggests that people who perceive themselves in terms of a narrative frequently ally that perception to an ethical obligation to find a form or shape in their lives such that to be constituted as an identity *requires* that "an individual conceive of her life as having the form and the logic of a story."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Marya Schechtman goes so far as to claim that we must be in possession of a "full and explicit narrative to develop fully as a person."<sup>6</sup> Strawson notes that many people who put forward a Narrativity argument have religious commitments: "They are wrapped up in forms of religious belief that are - like almost all religious beliefs - really all about self."<sup>7</sup> For Strawson religious beliefs both appear to give prominence and, by implication, importance, to

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<sup>3</sup> Ward, G. 2006, p. 438

<sup>4</sup> Strawson, G. (2004) *Against Narrativity*, Ratio, 17, pp. 428–452

<sup>5</sup> Strawson, G. 2004, p. 446

<sup>6</sup> Schechtman, M. (1997) *The Constitution of Selves*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 436

<sup>7</sup> Strawson, G. 2004, p. 437

a person's sense of themselves; and also, because religious beliefs are false beliefs they can *only* be about the self and not the self in relation to anything encompassed by religious language in reference to God, 'the good' and to ways of understanding the self as having some relationship to the loving purposes of God - understandings that Quash in particular would wish to emphasize. Strawson further complains that people who hold to the narrativity thesis "generalize from their own case with that special, fabulously misplaced confidence that people feel when, considering elements of their own experience that are existentially fundamental for them, they take it that they must be fundamental for everyone else."<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of his views about the falsity of religious beliefs and the self-delusion of those who hold them, the challenge from Strawson is the question of whether human beings are indeed 'irreducibly diachronic'. The further challenge is whether Strawson's thesis damages theological method in general, or only methods that depend on Narrativity. We may ask whether, as Strawson suggests, there are in fact two kinds of people - those who experience themselves diachronically, and those who, like Strawson, experience themselves 'episodically'. These are not, in Strawson's terms, simple oppositions, although they do represent two sides of what he calls "deep individual difference variables."<sup>9</sup> He recognises that not all 'Diachronics' subscribe to an ethical narrativity thesis - he cites Sartre as holding that people think 'narratively' and that this is not a good thing.<sup>10</sup> He also recognizes the reverse of this position - i.e. that we are not in fact diachronic but that we should be - represented in the writings of Plutarch. Although there are different species of Diachronic, there is

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* p. 439

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* p. 431

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 435

only one sort of Episodic - someone who has “absolutely no sense”<sup>11</sup> of their life being a narrative with form. Such a person lacks any sense that the self that experiences or apprehends itself as a self in the present is concerned with its past or its future. Strawson thinks that this is no failure or want of feeling but “a fact about what I am - about what the thing that is currently considering this question is.”<sup>12</sup> He calls this ‘thing’ “I\*” - the self that is here and now having experiences - and sees it as logically distinct from the self that may have had past experiences, even though the “I\*” self may have recall of such experiences. Whether or not the recall has emotion attached to it, and whether or not the present self has a “from-the-inside character” that may have relevance to it in the present, it is a “metaphysical fact”<sup>13</sup> that the present self was not there in the past. This lack of concern applies equally to the self’s prospects for the future. Matthew 6.34, “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof”<sup>14</sup> is a foundational text for living in the present - against Heidegger, Strawson argues that being a human being and finding therefore that one’s being is an ‘issue’ for one does not commit one to having a Narrative outlook. “Determining oneself as someone by pressing ahead into a possible way to be,”<sup>15</sup> - an apparently strong combination of diachronicity and ethical Narrativity with regard to the ‘becoming’ (or indeed the ‘full development’) of a person - does not require logically that ‘I\* at  $t$ ’ and ‘I\* at  $t^2$ ’ are identical. Thinking that one ought to regard them as narratively linked in order to achieve proper self-understanding is simply a false claim, as far as Strawson is concerned.

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* p. 433

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p. 433

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 6.34, King James Version

<sup>15</sup> Strawson, G. 2004, p. 449

### 3.3 *Ditching claims to universality*

Is Strawson's argument directed only at the level of psychological claims about universal human experience? Is his argument concerned only with what can be said about one's own interiority and the limits on theorizing from that basis? Or is his complaint that Diachronics make a category-mistake, in so far as they confuse what can be said about the nature of the content of a self's 'self-experience' with what can be said about the history of such a self, whether by the self reflecting on the self or by a third party? Here we can start to see the lines of the debate about characterizing experience in terms of certain literary categories - 'lyric', 'epic' and 'dramatic' - that Quash will develop in response to Hegel's and Balthasar's use of them. Before we return to them, however, we need to press Strawson a little on the nature of his criticisms.

Strawson's complaint is not that many people characterize themselves as Diachronic but that such people make a universal claim - that all human beings are diachronic - on the basis of this characterization, and that many of them further claim that we ought to understand ourselves 'narratively' if we are to understand what it means to lead a 'good life'. Objections to Strawson's complaint might say that although 'I\*' might be logically distinct from past selves who are connected to 'me\*' <sup>16</sup> or from future selves whose experiences and memories 'I\*' might go on to acquire, nevertheless there are persistence conditions such as embodiment over time that connect 'me\*' to a past self, if not a future one. Even if one feels oneself to be an Episodic, how does 'one\*' <sup>17</sup> speak about this connection to one's past selves except in narrative terms? Strawson anticipates this objection by referring to the notion of

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p. 433

<sup>17</sup> Adapting Strawson's typology

“construal”: that Diachronics “put some sort of construction - a unifying or *form-finding* construction - on the events of one’s life.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, this ‘form-finding’ tendency amounts to more than simply having the feeling of being diachronic. ‘Form-finding’ is a way of “actively conceiving of one’s life, consciously or unconsciously, as some sort of ethical-historical-characterological-developmental unity.”<sup>19</sup> Strawson thinks it is possible to be a Diachronic without subscribing to Narrativity, but that having a ‘form-finding tendency’ is necessary and (minimally) sufficient for Narrativity. Furthermore, Strawson thinks that the possession of a ‘story-telling tendency’ is also necessary for Narrativity: “One must be disposed to apprehend or think of oneself and one’s life as fitting the form of some recognized narrative genre.”<sup>20</sup> Story-telling entails form-finding but is not entailed by it. Story-telling here is not ‘fabulation’ or ‘fabrication’ and in this ‘non-falsifying’ mode allows one “to detect... developmental coherencies in the manifold of one’s life. It is one way in which one may be able to apprehend the deep personal constancies that do in fact exist in the life of every human being...”<sup>21</sup> So having a ‘story-telling tendency’ is not in itself disapproved of by Strawson, if one limits its scope to the examination of one’s own ‘developmental coherencies’ without extending it to making universal ethical claims.

### 3.4 *Objections to Strawson*

It seems to me there are two important things to say about this. Firstly, it looks as if Strawson’s notion of construal does nothing to remove the objection that an Episodic ‘Narrativity-denier’ is required to use narrative terms in order to refer to past selves

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<sup>18</sup> Strawson, G. 2004, p. 440

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* p. 441

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* p. 442

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p. 443

and the content of past experiences. If I say, “A few years ago I used to suffer from crippling anxiety attacks which meant never leaving the house but after going to the doctor a few times and taking some pills I feel much happier and find I enjoy having new experiences and indeed look forward to having them,” then it seems I have created a simple narrative - a ‘construal’ - about myself that provides a unity of past, present and future which is neutral with regard to whether I feel myself to be Episodic or Diachronic. I could quite properly give this account of myself to an enquirer after my health without necessarily feeling that the events in the past are of any great concern to ‘me\*’, now, here in the present. Indeed that is precisely the point about them - I’m not concerned about them any more because I take pills in order not to be concerned about them. We might then say that to characterize oneself as an Episodic is no less to engage in a form of self-schematizing if not form-finding, and that the distinction therefore collapses.

Secondly, in complaining of the connection between Narrativity and ethics, Strawson expresses puzzlement about some words of Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur is quoted as saying “How, indeed, could a subject of action give an ethical character to his or her own life taken as a whole if this life were not gathered together in some way, and how could this occur if not, precisely, in the form of a narrative?”<sup>22</sup> The puzzlement consists in not knowing what giving an “ethical character to [one’s] own life taken as a whole” might mean, and also in not knowing why this should be considered important. The (pretended?) puzzlement seems to be connected to Strawson’s dislike of a perceived self-indulgence imputed to Narrativists. In his essay *Episodic Ethics*<sup>23</sup> Strawson defends the idea that Episodics live “a richly moral and emotional life”<sup>24</sup> as much as

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<sup>22</sup> Ricoeur, P. quoted in Strawson, G. 2004, p. 436

<sup>23</sup> Strawson, G. (2007) *Episodic Ethics*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement, 60, pp. 85-116

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p. 90



Diachronics and ethical Narrativists. He makes a distinction between the self that might have been the agent of an action which has caused harm to another and the feeling of contrition that ‘one\*’ might have now about such an action in the past:

“We should also bear in mind that contrition, appropriate and attractive as it can be, is the more attractive the more fully it involves grasp of and sorrow about the harm done, and the less it involves focus on the fact that it was oneself who did it. This last element cannot disappear altogether if the feeling is to count as contrition, but the focus on self grows suspect if the emotion persists too long, and even contrition can easily become entangled with elements of self-indulgence.”<sup>25</sup>

Bearing in mind that he thinks human selves, if they exist at all, do so for no more than two or three seconds at a time,<sup>26</sup> it is hard to see why the persistence over time could reasonably be characterized as self-indulgent. There may well be a considerable remove between performing an action and realizing its consequence, and it may also be that once the harm does become realized, a persistence of the feeling of contrition is required as a minimum condition to make possible the repair of the harm. This might be true of a harm committed against a lover or a friend, for example. There may well be morbid states of certain feelings which, if persisting, might have a detrimental effect on the moral life of the possessor of such feelings, but that would simply mean that the *narrative* of such a person’s life would be different in kind from someone who possessed “a contrite heart.” Therefore the suspicion of self-indulgence on the part of people who choose to express contrite feelings is

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* p. 93

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p. 89

misplaced. The problem lies not with Narrativity *per se* but with the states of mind and feeling to which a narrative might refer.

### 3.5 *Recovering Episodicity via the Emotional Priority Thesis*

Strawson's account of the ethical life depends upon the view that we do not need to be susceptible to 'negative' emotions - guilt, remorse, contrition, for example - to live a good life, and that even if such feelings in moderation have an instrumental value, they have no more such value than any positive emotions someone might feel in doing good.<sup>27</sup> He argues that an apparent concern with one's past actions, however tagged with emotion, is not constitutive of what it means to be good:

“There is a powerful, phylogenetically ancient psychological mechanism by which many of us learn vividly about morality from our own actions, and the attendant sanctions of others, but learning of the lesson does not depend on any marked or sustained self-concern, or any persisting sense of oneself\* as having been the agent of those actions. The operation of the mechanism may be accompanied by such forms of self-concern in Diachronics and may seem to depend on them, but it does not.”<sup>28</sup>

There is nothing about the feelings attached to actions which logically entails a diachronic outlook on life. Indeed, according to Strawson's Emotional Priority Thesis, moral feelings atavistically precede but do not presuppose a diachronic view of life. “It is because the independently and phylogenetically grounded feeling of responsibility is so salient and vivid among the many things that nourish and

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* pp. 91-92

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* p. 97

structure the Diachronic outlook, in those who have it, that the former comes to seem to depend on the latter.”<sup>29</sup> He notes a parallel between the Emotional Priority Thesis and his father’s argument in *Freedom and Resentment*<sup>30</sup> that our ordinary belief in free will gives rise to ‘moral-reactive’ and ‘personal-reactive’ attitudes such as gratitude or resentment and that such attitudes would be inappropriate and mistaken if human beings do not in fact have free will. Strawson Senior argues that even in the face of good arguments why free will (of the strong type referenced here) is incoherent and logically impossible, we find it impossible to give up such attitudes. This is explained by considering that even though the ‘reactive attitudes’ appear to depend on free will, “it does not follow that they depend causally on this belief in such a way that it must in some sense precede them and give rise to them and sustain them.”<sup>31</sup> This is because the reactive attitudes are in fact causally prior to a belief in free will. “They are the true foundation of the typically wholly unexamined [...] belief in strong free will.”<sup>32</sup>

In just the same way, Strawson Junior suggests that the diachronic outlook is not the ground of moral feelings but is instead grounded in them, in cases where it exists at all. The detachment of my interiority - the particular way I experience myself now, whether or not I feel that I am the same person as I was in the past or will be in the future - from a causal relationship with my moral feelings seems counter-intuitive, but perhaps only to someone who has a diachronic outlook. It certainly does seem possible to deny that a person who lacks a sense of themselves existing in the past is necessarily incapable of behaving ethically, or at least, *fully* ethically.

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p. 98

<sup>30</sup> Strawson, P. F. (1974) *Freedom and Resentment*, London: Methuen

<sup>31</sup> Strawson, G. 2007, p. 99

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

The essential point, I think, is that ‘episodic ethics’ do not allow a person to avoid responsibility for past actions by virtue of any feeling that a person may have that they are not now the same person as they were at the time of the action. Strawson’s argument is that my experience of myself ‘now’ is sufficient to house such feelings as may be necessary to living a fully moral life.

We can conclude therefore that being ‘diachronic’ is not a necessary condition for self-understanding or for the understanding and recognition of ‘others’ or ‘the other’.

### 3.6 *Being Episodic and the category of ‘momentariness’*

This discussion is important to my purpose for two reasons. Firstly, the question of ‘momentariness’ or ‘the episodic’ is central to the position I take regarding drama and its ontology. Secondly there is a strong bias towards an ‘ethical hermeneutic’ as regards the interpretation of drama on the part of modern theological method, a bias which I believe ought to be resisted.

Let us take the first issue - momentariness or ‘nowness’ - and speak here of its relationship to drama’s ontology. The theatre director Peter Brook writes about the centrality of ‘the present moment’ in his essay-lecture *The Golden Fish*: “Theatre is not to do with buildings, nor with texts, actors, styles or forms. The essence of theatre is within a mystery called ‘the present moment’.”<sup>33</sup> His exposition notably parallels that of Strawson in some fertile ways, with the addition of some important concepts specific to drama. It is worth quoting Brook at some length:

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<sup>33</sup> Brook, P. 1993, *The Golden Fish* in *There Are No Secrets*, London: Methuen Drama p. 81

“As I write these words, the author - ‘myself, number one’ - is sitting in the south of France on a hot summer’s day, trying to imagine the unknown: a Japanese audience in Kyoto [...] Now, for you at this moment, ‘myself, number one’, the author, has disappeared; he has been replaced by ‘myself, number two’, the speaker. If the speaker reads these words, his head bent over his paper, delivering the contents in a monotonous, pedantic tone of voice, the very words that seem lively as I put them down on paper, will sink down into unbearable monotony [...] So ‘myself, number one’ is like a playwright who has to have confidence that ‘myself, number two’ will bring a new energy and a new detail into the text and the event. [...] It is the changes in the sound of the voice, the sudden changes of pitch, the crescendos, the fortissimos, the piano-pianos, the pauses, the silence - the immediate vocal music that carries with it the human dimension that can make you wish to listen, and this human dimension is just what we [...] least understand in a precise, scientific way. It is feeling, feeling leading to passion, passion carrying conviction, conviction being the only spiritual instrument that makes one man connected with another... You [...] are not isolated from a certain energy that begins gradually to link our attentions, for this energy reaches out into the room through sound and also through gesture; every movement the speaker makes, with the hand, with the body, whether conscious or unconscious, is a form of transmission - like an actor, I have to be aware of this, it’s my responsibility - and you too play an active part, for within your silence is hidden an intensifier that sends your own private emotion back across our space, subtly encouraging me, amending my way of speech. What has all this to do with theatre? Everything.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* p. 79ff

The ontology of drama, on this view, is to do with energy, in the form of movement and sound, and with the transmission of energy from one body to another: an actor who moves and speaks to an audience who gives (if the flow of energy is powerful) its attention, thereby modulating the transmission. The energy flows within a space shared by actor and audience. Language is a part of that movement and sound, but is not in itself the principle medium. The principle medium is the energy flow as it is capable of producing an effect upon an observer. We are not so much talking here about a ‘moment’ as a measurement of time, but of its quality. “A performance is a flow, which has a rising and falling curve. To reach a moment of deep meaning, we need a chain of moments which start on a simple, natural level, lead us towards intensity, then carry us away again.. Time, which is so often an enemy in life, can also become our ally if we see how a pale moment can lead to a glowing moment, and then in turn to a moment of perfect transparency, before dropping again to a moment of everyday simplicity.”<sup>35</sup>

Moments of “perfect transparency” are the ‘golden fish’ of Brook’s title, moments of clarity in which truth is revealed in such a way that an audience feels itself to be present at an “instant of deep insight into the fabric of reality.”<sup>36</sup>

The question of course is what the content of such an insight might be. Brook is at pains to say that theatre is not in itself a “spiritual discipline”<sup>37</sup> but an “external ally of the spiritual way.” What he means by this is that theatre is a different kind of activity from an intentional spiritual practice which draws us towards the invisible, spiritual world by withdrawing from “the world of impressions into stillness and

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid.* p. 83

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.* p. 87

silence.”<sup>38</sup> As we have said, drama arises completely from movement and sound and its particularities from moment to moment. However it does, Brook says, exist “to offer glimpses, inevitably of short duration, of an invisible world that interpenetrates the daily world and is normally ignored by our senses.”<sup>39</sup>

However, we can go further than this and correlate such moments of insight with what Tillich calls “ultimate concern.”<sup>40</sup> Tillich writes: “Ultimate concern is manifest in the aesthetic function of the human spirit as the infinite desire to express ultimate meaning.”<sup>41</sup> If we compare this with what Brook says about the task of theatre - “The theatre is a machine which enables all its participants to taste an aspect of truth within a moment; theatre is a machine for climbing and descending the scales of meaning”<sup>42</sup> - we can say that theatre is a means of bringing us into contact with our ‘infinite desire’ and that out of the play and interplay of its unfolding moments, an ‘ultimate’ vista is opened up for us. Tillich wants us to understand ‘ultimate meaning’ in this context as the overcoming of an estrangement between our spiritual life - that is, the aspect of our lives which is open to the ‘ultimate’ - and the ‘ground and depth’ of that spiritual life.

In this way we can now see the double aspect of drama - it opens us up to that estrangement in ways that we will explore in Section Two when we come to consider ‘drama-as-humiliation’ and the ‘downward curve’ of dramatic action, and at the same

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Tillich, P. (1959) *Theology of Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 8

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Brook, P. 1993, p. 86

time it offers the prospect of momentary clarity - the 'golden fish' - when we catch a glimpse of what it is that grounds us.

I said earlier that drama's ontology is dynamic - it is never a settled collection of 'things' in static relation. However, if that is so, how is it that we can speak of energy and flow without falling back into diachronicity? Brook answers this question by referring to the "ever-unfolding chain" of moments, each of which, however, contains "the whole of all possible moments."<sup>43</sup> We will come to explore this notion in greater depth in Section Two when we examine the role of irony and necessity in drama and speak of the 'uncoiling' of what is contained in the moment by moment pressure of interaction. For now it is enough to say, with Strawson, that we do not need to apprehend ourselves as being part of a 'story' - to indulge our 'form-finding' tendencies - in order to understand what it is to witness a succession or 'chain' of moments. Indeed, it is the sense of flow which makes the drama lively rather than static or 'deadly', to use Brook's image.<sup>44</sup>

However if we adopt Tillich's image of 'ground' we might be tempted to think of the moments of transparency as glimpses into something which is itself solid and unmoving. Brook reinforces this impression when he says that "If we could penetrate to the very core of a moment, we would find that there is no motion [...] and what we call time will have disappeared."<sup>45</sup> I suggest that we do not have to accept that the ground of our being is itself static in order to *be* our ground. Of course it needs to be outside of the flow of moments, but it may have its own flow within

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid.* p. 83

<sup>44</sup> 'Deadly Theatre' is the title of the first chapter of *The Empty Space*

<sup>45</sup> Brook, P. 1993, p. 83



itself. The Cappadocian Fathers' notion of *perichoresis*<sup>46</sup>, for example, expresses the movement within the fellowship of the three persons of the Trinity.

To sum up this first point, while 'flow' should be considered as part of drama's ontology, we, either as performers or as audience, do not need to consider ourselves as diachronic in order to give it our proper attention.

### 3.7 *The bias towards ethical narrativity*

The second issue requires examination in some depth. I think that some of the principles on which such theologians rely are based on the sort of views against which Strawson argues. Graham Ward, for example is particularly concerned to recruit 'narrative' to the task of shaping good people. At the heart of this bias, I think, is von Balthasar's axiom that the ethical is "beauty's inner co-ordinate axis."<sup>47</sup> I turn therefore to Ward's exposition of narrativity, and in particular the future and eschatological dimensions of his thinking, as this also will be of critical importance in arguments about the function of drama in theological method.

### 3.8 *Ward's structuring of the transcendent horizon*

Ward offers<sup>48</sup> a phenomenological account of modern fictions and the role imagination plays in the production of beliefs. According to Ward, all narratives structure emotions, desires and hopes, and this structuring process continually

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<sup>46</sup> The word is first used by Gregory of Nazianus. For a discussion of the Cappadocian Father's use of movement and relationality in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity, see Pinnock, C. (1996) *Flame of Love, A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press. In more recent debate, 'divine passibility' emerged in the late 19th Century amongst British theologians and was systematically developed by Jurgen Moltmann. See particularly Moltmann, J. (1974) *The Crucified God*, Wilson, R.A. & Bowden, J. (trans.), London: SCM Press. For a review of the background to the debate, see Bauckham, R. (1984) 'Only the Suffering God Can Help': *Divine Passibility in Modern Theology*, *Themelios* 9 (3), pp. 6-12

<sup>47</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. 1982

<sup>48</sup> Ward, G. 2006

opens up a transcendental horizon. The intersection between this view and the argument about ethical narrativity and diachronicity occurs at the point where Ward moves us from being readers of narrative to being participators in narrative and to understanding ourselves in terms of that participation. Reading (and let us include being members of an audience in that category) is a form of *poieisis*, a transformative existential act that actualizes, creates, makes real: “That which reading performs *creates*.”<sup>49</sup> Taking “our awareness of ourselves as historical beings”<sup>50</sup> (which I assume refers to the claim that we are all Diachronics) as a philosophical and anthropological *a priori* together with a theological understanding of “the narrative character of God’s activity,”<sup>51</sup> allows for a reader to engage with the biblical narrative and with the narratives of Christian tradition “such that one’s self-identity is continually re-negotiated.”<sup>52</sup> This re-negotiation takes place to the extent that humans as ‘narrative-determined’ creatures “learn to locate our lives in God’s life.”<sup>53</sup> The core of Ward’s argument, however, is not just that reading the Bible and stories of the lives of the saints has an ethical effect upon us - for him, reading itself, insofar as it involves an act of imagination, points us towards the transcendent, prepares us indeed for the affect that comes from exposure to the transcendent. For Ward, *any* narrative points us beyond the particularity of its themes. There is always the disclosure of hiddenness - of that which is not present to us as the reader - through the exercise of the imagination which seizes upon or projects onto the images with which it is provided and is thereby transformed. In fictions we make present what is

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid.* p. 449

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.* p. 448

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.* quoting Hauerwas, S. 1983

fundamentally absent and the degree of our absorption into them is an “index of the intensity of these experiences.”<sup>54</sup>

Being absorbed into acts of imaginative projection through reading points us towards a “providence beyond the projections and anticipations”<sup>55</sup> of readers and listeners, authors and storytellers, a providence which guides as it unfolds: “We are being led rather than determining the road for ourselves.”<sup>56</sup> Ward cites John 3.8: “The wind blows where it chooses and you hear the sound of it but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” This submission to providential guiding is “the first fundamental axiom of the ethics I am pursuing here.”<sup>57</sup> The second of Ward’s axioms is the one I am particularly concerned with - the commitment to act, to respond to the call to submission. This takes the form of a “capitulation to the future, and to those future-looking drives, desire and belief.”<sup>58</sup> Drawing on the work of Paul Ricoeur<sup>59</sup> Ward relates the act of capitulation to an act of freedom. The projective functions of the imagination are related to “the very dynamics of acting.”<sup>60</sup> Imagination always opens up the possibilities for alternative courses of action. We might criticize this as a recipe for stasis and bewilderment - so many different possibilities, to what or to whom are we to submit? It is hard to avoid an impression of fatalism in this analysis. Ward is not wanting to make a Kierkegaardian ‘leap of faith’ but to try to suggest that the transcendent

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<sup>54</sup> *ibid.* p 447

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* p 451

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Ward has in mind Ricoeur, P. (1991) *Imagination in Discourse and Action* in Blamey, K. & Thompson, J. (eds.), *From Text to Action*, Blamey, K. (trans.), Evanston: Northwestern University Press

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.* quoted in Ward, G. 2006

horizon opened up by the exercise of our imaginative projections is somehow writing its way towards us as we read our way towards it, drawing us in to itself as we capitulate to it. This strikes me as an interesting recasting of Levinas in its suggestion of a submission to a future 'other'. The face-to-face encounters of lived experience are tilted towards an imaginative or poetic encounter with a future messiah who demands our submission.<sup>61</sup>

However, we can criticize Ward here for somewhat distorting the doctrine of salvation through his emphasis on a messianism of the future. How can we be reliant, in the here and now, on a future face-to-face encounter for our salvation? Christians are urged by the Apostle Paul to rely on what Christ has already done to effect our salvation: "For by grace you *have been saved* by faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast."<sup>62</sup> The early church's lived experience, as given voice in the Epistle to the Hebrews, insists that "...when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption."<sup>63</sup>

Whilst we can keep open a space for differing interpretations of the role of faith and its orientation towards a future as well as a past horizon, we cannot easily allow the horizon of the future to eclipse that of the past without damage to the exercise of that faith in the here and now.

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<sup>61</sup> We should note, however that the transcendence of which Levinas speaks is thoroughly immanent. See Levinas, E. (1978) *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Lingis, A. (trans.), Dordrecht and Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers

<sup>62</sup> Ephesians 2.8

<sup>63</sup> Epistle to the Hebrews 9.11 - 12

### 3.9 Derrida, *différance* and the indeterminacy of hope

Because reading arouses our desires and modifies our beliefs, Ward thinks that the kind of imagining we do when we read “has the same structure as a practice of hope.”<sup>64</sup> Embedded within this structure is the notion of *promise*, which he explores in relation to Derrida’s conception of *différance*. In Derrida, however, it is the ‘impossible’ that is inscribed as promise, the “messianic without messianism”<sup>65</sup> an apocalyptic which may be a “transcendental condition of all discourse, of all experience even, of every mark or of every trace,”<sup>66</sup> but which has no “horizon of expectation”<sup>67</sup> nor “prophetic pre-figuration.”<sup>68</sup> As Robin Horner says, this promise “impassions and motivates us but remains part of an absolute future that cannot be presented as such.”<sup>69</sup>

Such an absolute future cannot be anticipated in concrete terms but is always undetermined and impossible. It is without content, in other words, so that we cannot point towards it and say, “Here it comes.” There is a substantial debate however as to whether Derrida’s messianism is in fact purely structural or, as Ward and also John Caputo would say, this absolute future, this impossibility, is in some sense realizable within thought. For Caputo, Derrida’s messianic thought cannot be

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<sup>64</sup> Ward, G. 2006, p. 452

<sup>65</sup> Derrida, J. (1994) *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, Kamuf, P. (trans.), London: Routledge, quoted in Horner, R. (2013) *Theology after Derrida*, *Modern Theology* 29 (3), pp. 230-247

<sup>66</sup> Derrida, J. (1983), *D’un ton apocalyptique adopté naguere en philosophie*, Paris: Galilee translated by and quoted in Ward, G. 2006, p. 453

<sup>67</sup> Derrida, J. (1998) *Faith and Knowledge* in Derrida, J. & Vattimo, G. (eds.) *Religion*, Stanford: Stanford University Press. The phrase is strongly associated with the Reception Theory of Hans Jauss which suggests that readers bring to a text the knowledge and experience gained from engagement with other texts. See Jauss, H.R. & Benzinger, E. (1970) *Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory*, *New Literary History*, 2 (1), pp. 7-37

<sup>68</sup> Derrida, J. 1998, p. 17

<sup>69</sup> Horner, R. 2013

merely structural since the whole point of deconstruction is to disturb the hard and fast distinctions between pairs of opposites - ‘universal’ and ‘singular’, for example - and is therefore not to be thought of as ‘messianism’, an empty schema, but as *a* messianism, (the fifth after Marx’s version and the Religions of the Book, according to Caputo) and “the very structure of urgency and engagement.”<sup>70</sup>

Deconstruction on this reading is a preparation for an urgent, passionate breaking down of hard-and-fast polarities in order for something which is not attached to the particularities of either pole to emerge. This is very close to the sense in which I think drama is *a* deconstruction. Within the binaries of individual desire and counter-desire, there is a breaking down so that something new is revealed. This ‘new’, this invention, this ‘other’, is, according to deconstruction, “Not the possible. So it would be necessary to say that the only possible invention would be the invention of the impossible. But an invention of the impossible is impossible, the other would say. Indeed. But it is the only possible invention: an invention has to declare itself to be the invention of that which did not appear to be possible; otherwise, it only makes explicit a program of possibilities within the economy of the same.”<sup>71</sup> The sense in which the ‘new’ that emerges from a drama can be understood as ‘grace’ - as the unknown and unlooked for gift that saves us - and not as a manifestation of the possible and its programs is the main subject of Section Two.

### 3.10 *Ward and the problem of secret knowledge*

We could perhaps defend Ward’s alignment of deconstruction and promise by saying that it is not therefore the messianic content but its shaping effects on us in the here

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<sup>70</sup> Caputo, J.D. (1997) *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press

<sup>71</sup> Derrida, J. (2007) *Psyche: Invention of the Other* in Kamuf, P. & Rottenberg, E. (eds.) *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, Stanford: Stanford University Press

and now with which he is concerned. However, his particular use of the concept leads him to the idea that it is not we ourselves who can fulfil this promise: “This promise that arrives with hope is not ours to fulfil. It is only given to us to await this promised coming.”<sup>72</sup> I suggest that this is not quite what Derrida has in mind in his own sense of the apocalyptic. What would it mean to spend this time waiting for the impossible? Do we await historically or only imaginatively? Do we await an historical or imagined coming? According to Derrida, the arrival of the ‘other’ - that which gives rise to the ethical in us - “can only emerge as a singular event when no anticipation sees it coming, when the other and death - and radical evil - can come as a surprise at any moment.”<sup>73</sup> Ward’s ethical narrativity, it seems, would have us both blindfolded and looking the other way. Whilst this very possibly does justice to the biblical idea that the Son of Man will come “like a thief in the night”<sup>74</sup> it suggests also that being in a state of anticipation and ‘waiting’ is not adequate to the task, since to anticipate is to keep forever at arms length that which is anticipated. How could this state have ethical content in fact? Otherwise, if it were thought to have content, it could be said that those who ‘await’ or are ‘watchful’, in biblical terminology, have access to some secret knowledge. It may seem surprising to conclude that there is a kind of gnosticism implicit within Ward’s structuralist approach to narrativity but it is hard to avoid such a view once some connection is made between his idea of responsiveness as an ethical position and a messianic promise that is the ground for such a response.

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<sup>72</sup> Ward, G. 2006, p. 454

<sup>73</sup> Derrida, J. 1998, p. 17

<sup>74</sup> cf Matthew 24.44

### 3.11 *Ward, Strawson and narrativity without ethics*

Does 'being possessed by' (as Ward adapts Sartre) "the object of one's thought, the thing one desires"<sup>75</sup> survive Strawson's argument against narrativity? In one sense, of course, it must do, since I am being 'taken possession of' in the here and now and the effects of this possession are manifest to others in the here and now. Yet it is difficult to see exactly how such effects can be spoken of as having content unless one constructs oneself as part of a narrative with a future dimension which one accepts as constitutive for shaping one's life in the present. Such a future dimension, unlike past dimensions, can only exist in the imagination although we would have to say that the desires which are projected forwards can function as 'reactive attitudes' on the Emotional Priority thesis: if I see someone placed in danger, I can act protectively without having any sense of past obligation simply because I can imagine the consequences of not acting and feel pain as a result.

If the narrative structure is dispensed with then my projective imagination has a short term function - I can use inductive moral reasoning with some degree of success, bearing in mind the limitations of induction as a guide to the future.<sup>76</sup>

Dispensing with a future narrative disconnects me from acting out of an orientation towards a regime of promised reward and punishment - of apocalyptic judgement, perhaps - which could be said to constrain my freedom to act morally. It seems therefore that we are right to be cautious of Ward's version of ethical narrativity on the grounds that the 'promise' and its correlation with the 'practice of hope' is simply too weak to undertake the task set for it: "immersion in this affective dialectic that can affect the structures of sensibility, modifying belief, desire and hope."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ward, G. 2006, p. 454

<sup>76</sup> See Russell, B. (1959) *The Problems of Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 33ff

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*



### 3.12 Caputo and Horner: affective dialectic after Derrida

Some theological attempts have been made to give content to this 'affective dialectic' in a post-Derrida context. John Caputo gives a thoroughly immanent account of God as '(impossible) event' whereby an event takes place in which we encounter "a word or a thing, a proposition or a state of affairs, a belief or a practice, a discourse or an institution that cannot contain what it contains."<sup>78</sup> Within the encounter is what Robyn Horner characterizes as an "inner stirring of the event - as promise"<sup>79</sup> which relates to the receiver of the event as what Caputo calls "anticipated grace."<sup>80</sup> The receiver or host of this event can be any "node of the impossible"<sup>81</sup> such as 'democracy' or 'the name of God'. The point is that such nodes are "the least bad word we have at present."<sup>82</sup> Caputo goes on to say, "the name of God is very simply the most famous and richest name we have to signify both an open-ended excess and an inaccessible mystery."<sup>83</sup> Horner points out that in calling to us in the name of God, and eliciting in us desire for the impossible, we are left with no more than the name of God as a call without causality. "In this way Caputo brings us to the door of faith and holds open the possibility of God, but carefully re-limits that possibility to the event calling in the name of God."<sup>84</sup> The shortcoming then, is that in Caputo we have no way to think of the content of revelation but only the "weak force" of the call

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<sup>78</sup> Caputo, J.D. (2007) *Spectral Hermeneutics: On the Weakness of God and the Theology of the Event* in Robbins, J.W. (ed.), *After the Death of God*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 47-88, p. 52

<sup>79</sup> Horner, R. 2013, p. 240

<sup>80</sup> Caputo, J.D. 2007

<sup>81</sup> Horner, R. 2013, p. 240

<sup>82</sup> Caputo, J.D. 2007, p. 52

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.* p. 53

<sup>84</sup> Horner, R. 2013, p. 241

presenting “itself from itself.” As Horner says, “a theology such as this does not so much tell us about God as tell us about human limits and the life of immanence.”<sup>85</sup>

Horner herself attempts the task of saying something ‘positive’ about God in a post-Derrida context. “If we take seriously such early analyses as *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*, theology [...] exemplifies the appeal to the transcendental signified par excellence.”<sup>86</sup> This appeal appears to be rendered illegitimate by the constraints placed upon language by Derrida’s insistence that we cannot call on something ‘beyond language’ to put an end to the endless self-referral of language since such a move can only be done using the language one is seeking to transcend. Hence the thought of God can only in fact be thought of as the impossibility of God. Horner argues that taking seriously the impossible God need not lead inexorably to atheism, nor to simply leaving one’s discourse at the door of negative theology. She proposes instead what might be called an empirical theory of revelation which depends on two strands of Derrida’s thought: firstly *différance* understood as ‘what enables the circle to turn but remains exterior to it without being simply transcendent to the circle’;<sup>87</sup> secondly an attention to Derrida’s thoughts about time, not only the ‘absolute future’ as the realm of the impossible God, but the ‘immemorial past’<sup>88</sup> - a ‘future anterior’<sup>89</sup> which enables us to refer to a ‘past that opens the absolute future.’<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Horner, R. 2013, p. 241

<sup>86</sup> Horner, R. 2013, p. 230

<sup>87</sup> Horner, R. 2013, p. 244

<sup>88</sup> Horner, R. 2013, p. 245

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*

Such a reading of Derrida appears to fill the absence we found in Ward's scheme.

Horner thinks that in trying to think of revelation as removed from the world of experience, as "something other than the unveiling of a truth or the revelation of a truth, as something that has effects but makes no reference to light, no reference to vision, no reference to unveiling,"<sup>91</sup> Derrida offers a clue as to how revelation might be said to have content: "We might be able to say that the impossible is not only the never attainable goal of our desire, but that it has effects, that it always and already affects us and is made evident only in its effects."<sup>92</sup>

Horner's analysis extends to an examination of this way of thinking of revelation in terms of Christian experience. This experience is shaped with reference to a founding testimony embodied in scripture and tradition, a testimony that "witnesses to interruptive events of revelation by way of their effects but cannot present revelation as such."<sup>93</sup> Christian experience is also shaped by further 'interruptive events' for which the founding testimony provides a hermeneutic key - that is, the ability to see events as 'interruptive' - but which also put in question the limits of that testimony. "The relationship between founding testimony and interruptive event is again mediated by way of the effects of revelation."<sup>94</sup> Horner reminds us that this mediatory test is foundational for Christianity, as Matthew 7.20 suggests: "Thus you will know them by their fruits," or as the first epistle of John has it, "Whoever says, 'I am in the light' while hating a brother or sister is still in darkness." Horner notes that there is a fundamental circularity here - what is witnessed to and therefore what is

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<sup>91</sup> Caputo, J.D., Hart, K. & Sherwood, Y. (2004) *Epoché and Faith: An Interview with Jacques Derrida*, in Hart, K., & Sherwood, Y. (eds.), *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*, London: Routledge, pp. 27-50, at pp 37-38

<sup>92</sup> Horner, R. 2013, p. 245

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.* p. 246

<sup>94</sup> *ibid* p. 247

part of the limits of the narrative, serves as the test for further critical testimony - but denies this is self-contradictory: "It serves only to underline the particularity of Christian revelation, provided it is recognized that its basis is the leap of faith."<sup>95</sup>

The difference I think we can see here between Horner and Ward is that now our responses are unlocked from narrativity in this important sense - there is no revelatory content writing its way ineluctably towards us, inscribed in the narrative, as it were. There is no presentation of an event apart from its effects.

And so we might ask, what if the response we give to the 'calling' in the name of God just is the way the 'impossible God' chooses to act in the world? Perhaps we could characterize this not as 'natural acting', determined at the level of chaotic inter-particle collisions, but as 'holy acting', understood as the reception of the call as 'grace'. Now we might ask - how does theatre prepare us to receive this call? Can it deconstruct our 'natural acting' and manifest to us the 'call' of grace upon us?

### *3.13 Themes and objectives summarized*

In this discussion I have examined the question of whether as humans we are 'irreducibly diachronic' leading me to express deep caution about the possibilities of 'ethical narrativity' as a theological method.

I have introduced Derrida as the instigator of some problems in using speech phenomenologically to speak of God and his action in history, and examined Graham Ward's version of narrativity and found it to contain an absence at the point where it most wishes to speak of 'presence.'

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<sup>95</sup> Horner, R. 2013, p. 247

The projective imagination which engages with text is required by Ward's methodology to submit itself to a messianic future which escapes the bounds of its 'impossibility' and writes its way towards the reader. Ward's alignment of such a structural future with the structure of 'hope' appears to want to give content to that hope on the basis of the experiences of the reader. This means that the content is to that extent determined and cannot therefore function properly as 'salvific' in the way that Ward intends. Although Ward sets out to write about modernist fictions and their structure without specific reference to a 'Christic narrative'<sup>96</sup> his concern for "the relationship between narration and character-formation, story and story-telling and the ethical practices they teach"<sup>97</sup> appears to cut across his analysis and imbue his version of a salvific messianic future with the particularity of Christian scriptural interpretation. What Ward lacks, however, is in fact a Christology of reading. In Section Two I will attempt to replace the structure of 'narrative' with the structure of drama and to suggest how the structure of drama might be thought of as Christological and salvific, shorn of the burden of 'ethical narrativity'.

In the next chapter, however, armed with our analysis of the problems of 'ethical narrativity', we will return to a more detailed study of Theodrama and how the theme of narrativity plays out when approached from the point of view of a living, breathing dramatic performance on the part of the Godhead. Within the performance we will encounter themes of human history, will and freedom and we will discuss how and whether giving these a 'dramatic' perspective contributes to our theological understanding.

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<sup>96</sup> Ward, G. 2006, p. 439

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*

## CHAPTER 4: WHAT IS DRAMATIC ABOUT THEODRAMA?

### 4.1 *Drama and History*

If Balthasar, in attempting the ‘re-dramatization of modernity’ is speaking into a ‘moment’ within modernity, he is also speaking into a ‘moment’ within theology itself. Lyotard, as we have seen, raised the themes of *narrativity* and *performativity* to the level of the whole of human society and affairs. Theology itself has been under constant threat from the move within modernity to bracket it with a scientific method that requires it to show the evidence for its claim to explanatory power.

Balthasar, and his primary interpreter in English, Ben Quash, also make use of narrativity and performativity at the level of the whole of human affairs, including the whole of ‘history’. They, however, want to push beyond the level of the merely human, and encompass the whole of the human story within the story of the divine, such that divine and human relations are encompassed within the idea of a cosmic drama. The dramatizing of ‘history’ is thus also the dramatizing of theology, or in Quash’s terms, the development of a ‘dramatic’ theology which uses the categories of performance, encounter, liveliness and lived experience to animate a view of a God who initiates a movement towards his creation in love and calls for a faithful response. Quash has sought not only to clarify and critique Balthasar’s systematization of Theodrama, but also to develop a dramatic theology for more recent times which, in addressing the “re-reading”<sup>1</sup> of suffering, seeks to rescue Balthasar from his own worst moments.

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<sup>1</sup> See Quash’s discussion of ‘reading’ suffering in G.M. Hopkins’s poem, *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, Quash B. 2005, pp. 196 - 210

#### 4.2 Quash and 'Emplotment'

Let us start by looking at Quash's analysis of drama as a 'category' which in his view is most adequate to illuminate a theological understanding of history. In *Theology and the Drama of History*<sup>2</sup> Quash asks why history as a discipline should be of concern to theologians at all, and begins his answer by asking for room in the conversation for "people prepared... to see the dense, historical world as having an origin and an end in the creative purposing of God, a God who can relate personally to his creatures."<sup>3</sup> In other words Quash wants to open the way not only to the question of whether or not history has a 'plot' but also of how contingent events, their temporal extension and successiveness, their narratability, can be understood in relationship to a transcendent order and given "*ultimate* meaning."<sup>4</sup>

#### 4.3 Quash and Eschatology

This unity of history with Christian eschatology, a belief in a final judgement that makes apparent the "real value of historical phenomena"<sup>5</sup> in terms of their relationship to God's "ordering, intention and love"<sup>6</sup> is, according to Quash, constitutive of what it *means* to speak of an historical event. Quash ties this framework to an idea of revelation as a "prevenient ground for our knowledge and perception that is not itself the product of our knowledge and perception."<sup>7</sup> This debt to Karl Barth for such a view of revelation and history is acknowledged by Quash through his inclusion of Barth as a primary 'conversation partner' and raises two of

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<sup>2</sup> Quash, B. 2005

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p. 2

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. 3

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* p. 2

our key themes: the question of human knowing and *unknowing*, and the question of how to characterize the ‘new’ of revelation, how to recognize it and give it content. Quash sees the whole ‘historical realm’ as having this revelatory and eschatological character - “Christian theology is directed to pay attention to finite actions and interactions in time as the medium of God’s speech.”<sup>8</sup> Quash does not elaborate on whether this includes other natural events and interactions or only human ones. Presumably we should include natural history on both the cosmological and the evolutionary scale, at least in terms of what Quash calls ‘context’ for action, but the suspicion must be that he is really only interested in events in which human action, intention and desire are at play. This omission relieves him of the pressure to provide an account of what James Smith calls a “creational hermeneutic”<sup>9</sup> - that is, how we come to speak of the goodness of creation as a primordial condition for trust and therefore for communication; for how we come to speak of ourselves as being *addressed by God’s* speech in a world of multiple meanings where such diversity is understood as a positive characteristic of creation rather than a post-lapsarian rupture of the possibility of communication. However, as part of his arguments about the context of historical interactions, Quash does touch on questions of God’s providence in the context of a discussion of Barth, as we shall see.

#### 4.4 *Quash and Soteriology*

We may also ask whether finite actions and interactions all serve equivalently as the medium of God’s speech or whether certain events are more significant than others? Is God’s speech consistent from one event to another? Inevitably Quash wants to say that “the divine Son assumed the condition of sinful humanity in order to make

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<sup>8</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 3

<sup>9</sup> Smith, J.K. (2012) *The Fall of Interpretation - Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic*, 2nd edition, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic



divine light and action savingly legible there.”<sup>10</sup> This soteriological action, expressed or *legible* in the particular history of Jesus of Nazareth, is therefore for Quash both part of the ‘finite actions and interactions’ of history *and* the key to interpreting all such actions and events.

In principle it seems perfectly reasonable to interpret one historical event in terms of another, to assess the significance of events in terms of that which came before and after a given period. It is a moot point however whether events can have an *ultimate* meaning, for even if it is the case that the meanings of events are to be judged at some future point when “all shall be revealed,”<sup>11</sup> all facts in the case available for judgement, it is not clear that the meanings of such events are thereby exhausted, for the only point of having such a scheme of judgement is that there may be some presumably *supra*historical post-eschaton future which would stand in relation to the meaning of any given event. In other words, if the concept of judgement in accordance with divine justice and mercy is to have any meaning, there must be some ‘space’ or context in which the consequences of judgement are realized, and played out, which itself undermines any concept of ultimacy. If judgement were not to be so construed, we would be forced to conclude that some principle like Calvin’s doctrine of pre-destination is essentially correct and that there is nothing anyone can do to alter their divinely pre-determined destiny, including of course God himself. If on the other hand an eschatological judgement event ‘closes the show’ without any recourse to a post-judgement history, then we may be tempted to ask how events can have any meaning at all, let alone an ‘ultimate’ meaning in the sense in which Quash applies the term ‘ultimate’.

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<sup>10</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 3

<sup>11</sup> cf Luke 8.17: “For nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed...” & Luke 12.2: “...nothing is secret that will not become known.”

It is not the case however that he wishes to present a particular methodology for understanding particular historical events *apart* from a theological understanding of *all* historical events. He does indeed wish to steer a course between a ‘systematizing’ view of history, with its biomechanical ‘explanations’ on the one hand, and a ‘private histories’ view, where separate ‘temporalities’ belong to “separate human communities or individuals ... with no possible contact between them,”<sup>12</sup> on the other. Yet he needs to avoid the criticism that this thoroughgoing theological view of history is itself ‘totalizing’ and it is for this reason that Quash presents and refines a *theodramatic* conception of history in the belief that drama as a ‘category’ can steer the ship between these two extremes while holding to a view that human actions, temporal events and their specific contexts can be understood in relation to God’s purpose.

#### 4.5 *Quash, divine purpose and human freedom*

As Quash himself notes, theodramatic conceptions of history inevitably raise questions of freedom - of divine freedom on the one hand and of what it means to speak of humans as being both ‘free’ and ‘purposed’ on the other: “One of the key challenges to which a theodramatics is required to respond, therefore, is balancing the claims of personal freedom against the narrated unfolding of a greater historical ‘action’.”<sup>13</sup> Can this challenge in fact be met?

Traditionally the philosophical as well as theological discussion is framed in terms of the ‘will of God’ - providence - and whether or not this is compatible with notions of

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<sup>12</sup> Quash, B. 2005, pp. 4-5, footnote 4 with reference to Ricoeur, P. (1988) *Time and Narrative* vol. 3 McLaughlin, K. & Pellauer, D. (trans.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press

<sup>13</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 5

human 'free will'. Some conceptions of the 'divine will' appear to eradicate all prospect of a human acting freely - if every action in the world is divinely determined, how could a human being act other than in accordance with divine determination? Following Aquinas, however, Thomists tend to argue that 'divine determinism' is not only compatible with human freedom, it in fact *enables* it. Humans have free will if their actions are not necessitated by antecedent events and the laws of nature. So-called 'natural determinism' states<sup>14</sup> that every event is in fact necessitated by antecedent events taken together with the laws of nature. Natural determinism is therefore incompatible with the idea of humans having free will. However, it is argued, divine determinism, the view that all events are caused by God's providential action, is not incompatible with human free will because God is not one cause in the world amongst others acting upon human beings. Thus Herbert McCabe says that "...a free action is one which I cause and which is not caused by anything else. It is caused by God. This is not the paradox that it seems at first sight because God is not *anything else*."<sup>15</sup> God's causation is not of the same kind as natural causation and should not be conflated with it. God has caused a world in which at least some of my actions are under my own control and can be considered properly free.

This is the outworking of the ontological argument that God's being is not just one thing amongst other things that have or possess being (so-called 'common being' or *ens*) but is 'Being itself' or 'esse'. Just as the Thomists make a distinction between 'esse' and 'ens', so they make a distinction between divine cause and natural cause. Leigh Vicens questions whether such a distinction is valid: "The apparent problem is

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the issues and an example of a compatibilist argument, see Hoefer, C. (2002) *Freedom from the Inside Out*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements, Vol. 50, pp. 201 - 222

<sup>15</sup> McCabe, H. (1987) *God Matters*, London: Geoffrey Chapman

not resolved by a move from natural to divine determinism - because although the latter thesis allows for human action that is undetermined by any natural cause external to the agent, it does not allow for human action that is undetermined *by any cause whatsoever*.<sup>16</sup> The question then is - when is a cause not a cause? Kathryn Tanner seeks to show that there are sufficient conditions for making properly free choices: “The determination of choice and its specifications end with the human agent in the sense that none of the following factors constrains or necessitates a particular choice: a) the natural and situationally determined constitution of a human agent [...] b) the objects of choice that a situation presents [...] c) the rational assessment of the greater good in a particular situation.”<sup>17</sup> Divine causation is simply irrelevant to the question of whether the conditions for free will have been met within the world, since God is not acting in the world in such a way as to provide an “otherwise missing factor or impetus that takes away the indifference of the human will and brings about a choice in a particular direction.”<sup>18</sup> Instead God creates a world “in which human choices occur without any sufficient causes for them within the happenings of the world.”<sup>19</sup> We need not be concerned too closely with the precise analysis of the particular conditions supplied by Tanner and others. The important question for the discussion of Theodrama is whether there is a valid distinction to be made between ‘divine’ causation and ‘natural’ causation.

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<sup>16</sup> Vicens, L.C. (2012) *Divine Determinism, Human Freedom, and the Consequence Argument*, International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion, 71, pp. 145-155, p. 146

<sup>17</sup> Tanner, K. (1994) *Human Freedom, Human Sin, and God the Creator* In Tracy, T. (ed.), *The God who Acts: Philosophical and theological explorations*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, pp. 111-135, quoted in Vicens, L.C. 2012

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

#### 4.6 *A Game of Consequences*

An argument for why we should *not* think the distinction is valid is provided by Leigh Vicens as a variation of the Consequence Argument formulated by Peter van Inwagen<sup>20</sup>. What she seeks to show is that the inference “from natural incompatibilism to divine incompatibilism is valid, since both sorts of determinism preclude the existence of free will among creatures.”<sup>21</sup> If this form of the argument were to have force, then it would have serious implications for our examination of the theodramatic conception of history, since it would force us to conclude that theodrama can only ever be, at best, a puppet show. It would mean from the outset that God’s engagement with human history, seen as a drama, could only ever involve performances by automata.

Vicens proposes that “If divine determinism is true, then everything, including every human action, is necessitated by the will of God.”<sup>22</sup> Vicens thinks that this is *analytically* true. However, a Thomist might well question the meaning of ‘necessitated’ in this premise and argue that it in fact conceals a prior premise: that the ‘will of god’ is a form of agency in the world. It is precisely this premise with which Thomists disagree - that the ‘will of God’ is not an agency in the same sense of agency as a so-called ‘natural cause’. Hence Vicens’s argument does not logically prove that the Thomist position is invalid. It only shows us that ‘determinism’ whether ‘natural’ or ‘divine’ is incompatible with free will on a definition of determinism that requires us to think of God as acting in the world as one of many possible determining agents. This of course is what Thomists deny.

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<sup>20</sup> van Inwagen, P. (1983) *An Essay on Free Will*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

<sup>21</sup> Vicens, L.C. 2012, p. 149

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

If we allow then that Thomists may speak validly<sup>23</sup> of ‘the will of God’ whilst holding to the existence of human free will, we may now turn to the question of how Theodrama offers a fresh theological perspective on the issue of the relationship between divine providence and human free will.

#### 4.7 *Indeterminacy and the question of genre*

I said earlier<sup>24</sup> that Quash wishes to steer a course which avoids a ‘systematizing’ view of history, including views which cast human beings as automatons responding only in accordance with divine pre-programming. He therefore highlights the way in which drama, as characterized by von Balthasar, reflects “the indeterminacy which typifies human life: the unprogrammed and unforeseeable interactions of circumstance, compulsion and decision which are features of human existence.”<sup>25</sup> Of course, these interactions are ‘unforeseeable’ only to humans - the separation of natural and divine causation does not require us to think that God does not know the outcome of such interactions, only that humans are left free to make certain choices within them. Balthasar, as explicated by Quash, is interested in the existential experience of ‘indeterminacy’ and the way in which drama expresses “the complications, tensions, catastrophes and reconciliations which characterize our lives as individuals and in interaction with others.”<sup>26</sup> In so far as drama is congruent with our experience of life, we are compelled to watch it, to invest it with an authority “which is difficult to resist.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Or, at least, that they are not disallowed from so speaking by this form of the Consequence Argument

<sup>24</sup> p. 74

<sup>25</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 35

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

We can see immediately why the question of human freedom and providence is central to the use of genres in Theodrama. The limitations of ‘lyric’ and ‘epic’ perspectives in which the private inner space of ‘lyric’ - the “romp of private fancy and indulgence without responsibility”<sup>28</sup> and the “pretensions to analytical distance”<sup>29</sup> of ‘epic’ are overcome in the ‘dramatic’ negotiation between what it feels like to exercise human freedom and what it means to tell a story that includes divine purpose. For both Balthasar and Quash, this negotiation is done from within the drama and in the company of others: “The search for truth - even the truth that resides in the particulars of human experience - is a dramatically social search.”<sup>30</sup>

I have already suggested some ways in which the use of genres creates some distorting theological effects, and to these must be added the criticism that Theodrama on this reading fails to avoid the challenge of ‘incompatibilism’ - the argument advanced by Vicens and others that human freedom is incompatible with divine action. The challenge we made to Vicens was that incompatibilism hides within its first premise an assumption about God’s acting in the world which is denied by those who argue that God is not an agent among other agents. However Theodrama cannot make use of this move because it is committed to the view that God shares the ‘acting space’ with his creatures, and, despite undoubtedly being the protagonist, he is very much one actor amongst others.

It might be countered that a theologian such as Balthasar would not himself be in doubt about the need not to think of God as being ‘one being amongst other beings’ and yet it seems, despite Balthasar’s insistence on the concept of ‘distance’, that

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* p. 34

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* p. 34

Theodrama's metaphors force us into doing just that. Indeed, we can find this confirmed in the Introduction to *Theo-Drama*: "So, ultimately, the good which God brings about can only be explained and demonstrated from within itself and will not allow itself to be drawn into the ambiguities of the 'world theatre' - the theatre of life and of the stage. Not ultimately. But *penultimately*? If God is to deal with man in an effective way and in a way that is intelligible to him, must not God himself tread the stage of the world and thus become implicated in the dubious nature of the world theatre? And however he comes into contact with this theatre - whether he is to take responsibility for the whole meaning of the play or is to appear as one of the cast [...] - the analogy between God's action and the world drama is no mere metaphor but has an *ontological ground*: the two dramas are not utterly unconnected; there is an inner link between them."<sup>31</sup>

#### 4.8 *Theodrama, indeterminacy and mimesis*

This brings us to the problem of *mimesis*. Let us return to the question of the congruence between the particularities of dramatic action, the way they are said to reflect or 'mirror' our lives, and its consequent 'authority' to compel our attention - at least when it is performed compellingly. This compulsion is not fully explained by the fact that we recognize our experience within its representations. As I have argued elsewhere<sup>32</sup> the idea that drama is mimetic - that it is an imitation of an action - is potentially misleading. Aristotle is the source of the idea that drama is based upon *mimesis* but it is hard to see how he could be right in his assertion that "tragedy is a mimesis of a noble action"<sup>33</sup> if *mimesis* means imitation: what precisely is being

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<sup>31</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. (1988) *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* Vol. 1, Harrison, G. (trans.), San Francisco: Ignatius Press, p. 19 (my italics)

<sup>32</sup> For example, in my (unpublished) essay, Fox, M. (2013) *In Search of the Immediate: Theology, Drama and the Hermeneutics of Desire* (paper given to conference at Leeds Trinity, 2013)

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle, (1967) *Poetics*, Else, G., (trans.), Michigan: Michigan University Press



imitated? Is there an originating action, taking place elsewhere, which is being re-presented in front of us? If it were simply an imitation of something else which is happening or has happened in some other place, then what would be *dramatic* about such a re-presentation? The *drama* in that case has already happened and we are witnessing a faint spectacle. If we are to say that what we are witnessing is *dramatic* it must be because an event is taking place in the here-and-now which truly engages us with its *originality*. Walter Kaufmann prefers to translate *mimesis* as ‘make believe’ or ‘pretend’ or even ‘ways of pretending’<sup>34</sup> to give Aristotle credit for including the role of the imagination. As Aristotle further says: “The historian relates what happened, the poet what might happen.”<sup>35</sup>

Earlier (at 1.8) I referred to Heidegger’s image of the temple sculpture of a god which “lets the god himself be present.”<sup>36</sup> Clearly there is some two-way traffic between the art object as presence and the art object as reference. In beholding a statue of the god Pan, we might also think of stories about Pan taking place elsewhere. A play may well refer to events in the real world of which the audience is aware, and may take such references into account in their responses to the play in front of them. However, as States remarks, “the longstanding problem of mimetic theory is that it is obliged to define art in terms of what it is not, to seek a source of artistic representation in the subject matter of art, and to point to a place where it can be found, if only in a set of abstract ideas or truths, or in some field of essences or archetypes.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Kaufmann, W. (1968) *Tragedy and Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 43

<sup>35</sup> Aristotle 1967, 9:51b

<sup>36</sup> Heidegger, M. 1971, p. 43

<sup>37</sup> States, B.O. 1985, p. 5

States tries to improve on Aristotle by invoking Kant's principle of causality in *The Critique of Pure Reason*: "Every substance must contain in itself the causality of certain determinations in another substance, and at the same time the effects of the causality of that other substance, that is substances must stand in dynamical communion, immediately or mediately, with each other if their coexistence is to be known in any possible experience."<sup>38</sup> Ignoring the very real logical objections to Kant's arguments concerning causality,<sup>39</sup> States extracts from Kant the image of a force field in which characters in a play are in a "closed society of substances in dynamical communion."<sup>40</sup> The characters bump off each other like colliding particles (or billiard balls, in States's analogy) expending emotional energy as they go, alive in their actor's performance until the lights go down. The interactions are caused by the initiating actions of other characters, "a continuous oscillation of cause and effect: each line is the effect of the previous line and the cause of the line to follow."<sup>41</sup> This gives us the replacement of the Aristotelian 'imitation of an action' with the Kantian 'imitation of causality'. However this seems equally unsatisfactory since it produces a coldly mechanical, closed view of drama, rather than one which is living and open. It fails to explain the sense of mystery within a drama. This sense of mystery, what we may call an essential 'unknowing', is required in order to engage our attention. Nevertheless States's view of the phenomenon of causality in drama does preserve the idea that drama is about itself, about what is going on onstage, and perhaps it is

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<sup>38</sup> Kant, I. (1961) *Critique of Pure Reason*, Müller, F.M. (trans.), New York: Doubleday

<sup>39</sup> For example, Hume's argument that we cannot rely on our experience of the past to give us knowledge of the future. He explains causality instead as a 'habit' or 'custom' which leads us to associate one event with another. "When I cast my eye on the known qualities of objects, I immediately discover that the relation of cause and effect depends not in the least on them. When I consider their relations, I find none but contiguity and succession; which I have already regarded as imperfect and unsatisfactory." Hume, D. (1965) *A Treatise of Human Nature, Book 1*, Macnabb, D.G.C., (ed.), Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co.

<sup>40</sup> States, B.O. 1985, p. 144

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.* p. 147

true to say that drama is ‘closed’ in that sense. It also helps us distinguish clearly at the dramaturgical level between the compositional design of a script and its use by the actors to produce an effect upon an audience.

In the end I prefer Kaufmann’s analysis because it preserves that element of *pretence*. The action in front of us is pretended, and as we have already noted, we are perfectly aware of this; indeed it forms the basis on which we are prepared to buy our tickets. We are perfectly well aware that it would be inappropriate to intervene in the action when witnessing events on stage which, were they to take place in the outside world would require us morally to take some form of action. It is at the level of our reception of the events on stage that mystery and ‘unknowing’ are present. Part of the task in my second section will be to try to elucidate the complexity of relations, and their significance for theology, of the interactions between audience and events on stage.

#### 4.9 *Engagement and expectation*

Part of the engagement of the audience is explained by the projective nature of its imagination. The audience is shown characters and events whose outcomes and futures are uncertain. Quash recognizes the vital role of ‘anticipation’ in drama - the ‘not knowing’ of the outcome is *not* “just an admission of resignation.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed the playing with possible futures which might arise from a set of given circumstances on stage is what holds the audience in their seats. This very “unframeability”<sup>43</sup> is indeed part of the congruence between ‘real life’ and make-believe, “an ongoing, consuming involvement in a work of interpretation by which the audience invests itself [...] in

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<sup>42</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 37

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.* p. 168

what the outcome of these events will be. Without anticipating - we might say, *without hope* - there is no drama.”<sup>44</sup>

#### 4.10 *Anticipation and hope critiqued*

Now I do not think Quash is quite correct to align anticipation so directly with hope. He heads a chapter on ‘epic’ history and tragedy with a quotation from the *Oresteia*: “Batter, batter the doom drum, but believe there’ll be better.”<sup>45</sup> To anticipate a disaster on the grounds that such an outcome is likely to arise in light of the expectations generated by a character’s actions, or by the impact of other characters’ actions, is not the same as harbouring the hope that such an outcome may be avoided. As members of the audience we may believe that hope is in fact impossible in the circumstances and that to hope for something better is irrational, and might do violence to our sense of the ‘rightness’ of a disastrous outcome, even whilst hoping that we are wrong. Of course in the context of the *Oresteia*, it is the Chorus who makes this utterance to the audience. In Greek drama the Chorus functions as an audience *within* the action, providing a bridge into the story by expressing or hinting at the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters, or by filling in parts of the story. There is, as it were, a pretension to objectivity. Quash indeed points out how this pretension to an ‘epic’ perspective on the part of the Chorus may be subverted by the passionate ‘lyrical’ perspective of a character such as the prophetess Cassandra: “...the chorus clings to a hope that it will be able to read its experience straightforwardly and without itself being implicated in the dark prelude and ghastly entail of what it is witnessing.”<sup>46</sup> As he goes on to acknowledge, an audience too can be so ‘caught up’ in the headlong rush of emotive images which may evoke fear or

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* p. 37

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* p. 85

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* p. 31

pity that we are “coaxed by images into a relationship with the facts of a situation where we no longer retain our bearings.”<sup>47</sup> Our reason, in this description, is in thrall to the emotion generated by the events so as to induce a kind of ecstasy in which we “lose track of narrative inevitability”<sup>48</sup> even where we know the plot beforehand.

We should beware, however, of thinking there is a straightforward equivalence between the Chorus on stage and the audience in its seats. When Aristotle pronounced in the *Poetics*: “And one should go on the premise that the chorus also is one of [his] actors: it should be a part of the whole enterprise”<sup>49</sup> he was, according to G.F Else, reminding writers to ensure that one of the most powerful elements with which to please the audience - the musical songs sung by the chorus - should be related to the action in hand, and not imported from other sources. Aristotle prefers Sophocles over Euripides in this respect, recommending that if one is to win play competitions one should not neglect the elements of ‘lyric’ but include only material that is integrated to the action. To what extent then, should we attribute a pretended objectivity to the chorus when its function was regarded as essentially ‘lyrical’ to begin with?

#### 4.11 *Where is hope?*

To my mind this problem raises the interesting question of where in Quash’s view this ‘practice of hope’ is located. He suggests that in Theodrama the audience itself has a “hopeful orientation to a horizon of meaning”<sup>50</sup> - perhaps a distinction from

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.* p. 32

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Else, G.F. (1957) *Aristotle’s Poetics: the Argument*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, p. 551, commenting on 56a, pp. 25-32

<sup>50</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 37

Ward's view of hope inscribing itself within the text - and that this is of critical importance in Balthasar's theodramatics: "It is here, above all, that he [i.e. Balthasar] sees the worldly 'phenomena' of drama [...] pointing towards an essential feature of theodramatic relation of the creature to God. The theatre [...] holds fast to the question of how human existence relates to what is 'all-embracing'."<sup>51</sup>

The 'all-embracing' is again related to Paul Tillich's definition of religion as 'ultimate concern' - the dimension of the infinite and the unconditioned in the spiritual life of a human being. We have already noted the connection between Tillich and Peter Brook<sup>52</sup>. Tillich's definition was subject to the criticism from Karl Barth<sup>53</sup> that it places human concerns at the very centre of theology, moving the attention away from a doctrine of God that insists that "God is God" who chooses to reveal Himself but need not do so and is certainly not bound by any starting point concerned with what humans contingently hold to be 'ultimate'.

However, we can strengthen the association between Theodrama, Tillich and Brook by filling it out with Balthasar's concept of the 'all-embracing', which relates not so much to the perspective of 'human concern' but to the perspective of the 'action' of God in choosing to reveal himself, or as Quash puts it, "the form as well as the content of God's revelation of himself to us."<sup>54</sup> This active revelation is expressed by Balthasar as "What-is-going-forward"<sup>55</sup> and suggests why, for him, drama is such a

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> p. 54

<sup>53</sup> See Scharlemann, R.P. (1987) *The No to Nothing and the Nothing to Know: Barth and Tillich and the Possibility of Theological Science*, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 55 (1), pp. 57-72

<sup>54</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 37

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* p. 37

suitable metaphor for picturing the “ways of God”<sup>56</sup> - “The divine ground actually approaches us unexpectedly; from its side, paradoxically - and it challenges us to respond.”<sup>57</sup> On this view, the *dramatic*, as a category of the aesthetic, is thought most adequate to capture this sense of the dynamic character of God’s self-revelation. The category of drama thus unites the human perspective of what is of ‘ultimate concern’ with the action of God himself within human affairs. For Balthasar, the aesthetic should not leave us neutrally gazing at beauty in contemplation of formal coherencies or relations between forms. As Quash says, “God’s is the divine dynamism of a love utterly possessed because utterly donated.”<sup>58</sup> Drama therefore feeds a theology which attempts the task of creating “a network of related concepts and images that may serve to secure, to some extent, the singular divine action in our understanding and speech.”<sup>59</sup>

#### 4.12 *Balthasar and the paradox of perspective*

We must keep in mind, however, that the characterization of God’s action is for Balthasar ‘penultimate’ (as we noted above)<sup>60</sup> and that drama and its categories are merely conceptual and “cannot offer anything like a complete grasp. They remain at the level of image and metaphor...”<sup>61</sup>

For Balthasar, clearly, there are two plays going on: ‘world theatre’ (*Welttheater*) representing the sphere of human affairs, and “God’s drama”<sup>62</sup> which is a drama of

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* p. 38 quoting von Balthasar, H.U. 1988, p. 16 (translation amended by Quash)

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.* quoting von Balthasar, H.U. 1988, p. 17 (translation amended by Quash)

<sup>60</sup> p. 80

<sup>61</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. 1988, p. 18

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* p. 20

the “good which God brings about”<sup>63</sup> and which can “only be explained and demonstrated from *within itself* and will not allow itself to be drawn into the ambiguities of the ‘world theatre’.”<sup>64</sup> This looks like Balthasar’s attempt, without explicitly raising the topic, to hold apart the economic and the immanent Trinity. Balthasar seems to want to say that on the ‘penultimate’ stage of world theatre the “clarity of of God’s saving action”<sup>65</sup> - that is the good ‘in itself’, the truth and beauty of God’s glory - is not “invaded”<sup>66</sup> by the ambiguities and multiple interpretations of world history, but is “obscured”<sup>67</sup> by them and thus “remains a hidden good.”<sup>68</sup> Indeed the one play is going on, incognito, within the other: “What takes place, thus decisively, *for us* and *in us*, has already been decided in itself; but, as a result of the contact between God’s drama and the world theatre, the ‘for us’ cannot be isolated from the ‘in itself’.”<sup>69</sup>

This must give us pause for two reasons. Firstly, if the drama of God’s saving action is ‘going forward’, how can it have been ‘decided’? What would it mean for a drama to be still in play and also resolved? Secondly, if this divine momentum is presented as an “answer”<sup>70</sup> we must question how dramatic it can be ‘in itself’, not subject to inhibition and counter-momentum.

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<sup>63</sup> *ibid.* p. 19

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.* p. 19-20

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.* p. 21



#### 4.13 *Balthasar and the epic perspective*

Quash notes that Balthasar's sense of the dramatic is not the result of an empirically-based observation of the phenomena of drama. His sensibility is "already imbued with a worshipping conviction that God's love in creation is to be met in them."<sup>71</sup> (i.e. in the phenomena). This must give us pause again, however - for the phenomena of drama must, on this reading, be part of God's creation and not simply a metaphor for speaking about God's act of self-giving love in creation. The danger then is that of recursion - the metaphor is forced to invoke itself in order to speak beyond itself. We would be entitled to ask, as Karen Kilby does, how Balthasar can be in a position to *know* that the inner life of God is dramatic in the way he describes? And this problem gives his 'dramatic' theology a problematic shape - a totalizing one which appears to know everything, and which eliminates the room for human freedom in the process. "How 'dramatic'...is the very proposal to read all of history, all of God's dealings with history, and indeed the inner life of God itself, *as* an all-encompassing drama? Where is one standing when one makes this claim?"<sup>72</sup>

#### 4.14 *A role for everyone - but where is the audience?*

Both Kilby and Quash point out that Balthasar's description of what it means to do theology *dramatically* requires that the 'epic' dimension - what theology is 'about' - is subsumed by the demand for a response from theology itself to God's action in history, a sweeping up of the 'audience' into the action such that the audience too becomes a 'performer' in the divine drama. "In this play all the spectators must become fellow actors, whether they wish to or not," says Balthasar in volume 2 of

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<sup>71</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 37

<sup>72</sup> Kilby, K. (2012) *Balthasar: A (very) Critical Introduction*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, p. 64

*Theodrama*<sup>73</sup>. “Theology is not an adjunct to the drama itself: if it understands itself correctly, it is an aspect of it and thus has an inner participation in the nature of the drama.”<sup>74</sup>

As Kilby remarks, this is effectively “a drama without audience”<sup>75</sup> for the audience is expected to rise from its seat and involve itself in the action. The criticism that both Quash and Kilby raise in respect of this blurring of boundaries is that Balthasar himself fails to match the standards for dramatic theology that he sets. His own work shows a tendency towards the ‘epic’ such that it ‘flattens out’ characters in both literary and biblical texts by failing to do justice to their individuality and particularity, “to read more resolution and harmony into texts than can legitimately be found in them, and in general to read so strongly through the lens of larger themes as to simplify and distort the material at hand.”<sup>76</sup>

#### 4.15 *Quash’s critique of Balthasar, and the problem of ‘playing a role’*

Quash further suggests that such a blurring results in Balthasar’s insistence on the need for obedience, indifference and abandonment as the appropriate form of creaturely action in response to the divine revelation. This amounts to a flattening out and reduction of human freedom itself and of any notion of real ‘drama’ within the scheme of Balthasar’s *Theodrama*. As an example, Quash cites the manner in which Balthasar treats Marian self-abandonment which amounts to advertising “a sort of ecclesial resolution of the interaction of God and the creature, which reflects

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<sup>73</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. 1990, p. 58

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.* p. 151

<sup>75</sup> Kilby, K. 2012, p. 62

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.* p. 64 (following Quash, B. 2005)

in turn von Balthasar's great desire to see a generalizable shape in the life of believers."<sup>77</sup>

We can further see the problem of confusing the playing of a role with the particularity of any given role by reference to the playwright Jean Anouilh. The heroine of Anouilh's play *Antigone* declares, in explaining her defiance of her father's command not to bury her brother, "A chacun son rôle. Lui, il doit nous faire mourir, et nous, nous devons aller enterrer notre frère. C'est comme cela que ç'a été distribué. Qu'est-ce que tu veux que nous y fassions?"<sup>78</sup> A character in a drama does what she is assigned to do, what she *must* do in accordance with how the author has distributed the roles. Anouilh's theatre exposes the framework by which action on stage is not in the hands of the characters themselves but is a function of an author's intentions towards them. Character does not arise out of action, but from playing out one's role faithfully. We might accuse Anouilh of indulging a kind of vapid fatalism at the heart of this vision of drama which restricts somewhat the range of plot and action. However, Anouilh's history plays, such as *L'Alouette*, in my view succeed in making this very exposure of the framework itself dynamic and engaging, and, as extended meditations on the inherent 'theatricality' of history and contingent human action, they vividly portray precisely the way in which characters within drama co-operate with conflict and resist resolution through an arbitrary imposition of a 'moral' outcome. Anouilh, like Pirandello, presents "the grim game of mask and face."<sup>79</sup> The acceptance of a 'role' may substitute for the acceptance of a grim reality.

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<sup>77</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 161

<sup>78</sup> Anouilh, J. 1946. Translation (my own): "Everyone has their own role. For him, it's to put us to death, and for us, it's to go out and bury our brother. That's how it has been arranged. What else would you have us do?"

<sup>79</sup> Styan, J.L. (1968) *The Dark Comedy: The Development of Modern Comic Tragedy*, 2nd edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 187

Human behaviour is itself fictive - it cannot “bear too much reality.”<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, when such a ‘freezing’ of role is intended to do theological work, as in the hands of Balthasar, we are left with the image of being stuck in a single mode in which freedom of action is reduced to obedience to the demands of the role to which one is assigned. Crucially the bitter ironies with which Anouilh’s plays point up the cruelty of such a state of affairs is entirely absent from theology, or Balthasar’s theodramatic version of it.

#### 4.16 *Feeling ‘the good’*

Balthasar in his defence might reply that dramatic action and interactions are the best means of conveying the ‘existential register’ - the inner feeling of what it is like to be a creature with a creaturely role: “The good which God does to us can only be *experienced as*<sup>81</sup> the truth if we share in *performing it*.”<sup>82</sup> We can see clearly here why Balthasar cannot but help import an ‘epic’ dimension into his theodrama - this ‘good’ which God does to us and for us in Christ is the only way by which God Himself is made known to us and our ‘knowing’ of this good is not separate from our response *to* it expressed in performance *of* it. To ‘know about’ is to ‘do’. The apprehension of God’s action or performance as ‘good’ - indeed *the good* - is not a reification of what is given to human beings to know (that would be to succumb to the genre of ‘false objectification’) but it is nonetheless a form of knowing - of ‘faithful knowing’ we could say. Yet Balthasar needs to preserve an ‘epic’ perspective in order to distinguish this form of faithful knowing from the arbitrary performance of whatever we happen to feel is ‘the good’ at any given moment.

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<sup>80</sup> Eliot, T.S. (1935) *Burnt Norton*, London: Faber & Faber

<sup>81</sup> My italics

<sup>82</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. 1988, p. 19

#### 4.17 Shared experience

Quash himself is not antithetical to the idea which forms this central fulcrum of Balthasar's schema - the idea that an audience is essentially involved in the dramatic action to which it is witness. One of the ways Quash supports Balthasar is by emphasizing the social dimension of drama. It is "social life's staging of itself."<sup>83</sup> In making this suggestion, Quash (as well as Balthasar) is imbued with the *mimesis*-as-imitation thesis. Quash then gives the example from Michel Foucault of the public scaffold on which the 'eternal game'<sup>84</sup> of the interpretation of signs is already afoot before we come to it as witnesses. He reminds us that as interpreters "we do not precede our material."<sup>85</sup> And yet, as he also points out, while our experience does indeed constitute us as interpreters, our experience is in turn constituted by our developing capacity to make interpretations. "It is the spectators themselves [...] who construct the very stage on which their experience comes to them."<sup>86</sup> Now we see Quash switch to the 'projective' theory of *mimesis* when he says: "Our 'poetic' (constructive) imagination has an influence on what is subsequently communicated to our senses."<sup>87</sup> This is to say that we see *as* - we do not just *see*. How we see things is constituted by the fact that we participate in the social dimension of language itself - we are always already receivers of the messages that have been previously posted. The tools to decode the messages are also provided by those who posted them. We do not create a new language in order to read the messages sent to us. To that extent, our constructive imagination, future-oriented as it is, posing Aristotle's question of what *might* happen, is also *reconstructive*. As

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<sup>83</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 35

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.* p. 26

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.* p. 27

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*

Quash sees it, the stage has been put there by the audience as well as the play performed upon it, in order to aid the “staging of its shared experiences and common search for the truth.”<sup>88</sup>

#### 4.18 *New information and unframeability*

This ‘truth’ however, is always subject to the coming of new information, or, in Quash’s words, it is “unframeable”.<sup>89</sup> Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex* is perhaps one of the greatest examples of the dramatization of this quest for truth - we see its unrelenting pursuit unfold before our eyes - with tragic consequences. An old story of ‘salvation’ wrought by the hero, Oedipus, in saving the city of Thebes from the riddling Sphinx, is put in question by a new threat to the city’s existence - a deadly plague. Seeking answers from the oracle at Delphi, Oedipus learns that the city will only be saved when the murderer of the former king, Laius, is identified and driven from the city. The play is all ‘plot’ - the constant arrival of new information which shatters Oedipus’s knowledge of his own identity, an identity which gave him a sense of security and a certain objective aloofness from the unfolding drama. Once his real identity becomes clear to him, he recognizes that he has moved from being a hero outside the chain of cause and effect who can effectively intervene from a position of objectivity, to being the very perpetrator he himself is seeking. We could say, with Quash and Balthasar, that this play dramatizes our own position, as audience, of being swept up into the pursuit of truth, of being always implicated in it from the inside. We can never see the whole of it at once. The truth is therefore never “absolutely framed.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 27

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.* p. 168

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.* p. 28

#### 4.19 *What don't we know?*

'Unframeability' however, also gives us the key theme of 'not knowing' in relation to drama - an audience shares with the characters on stage the detaching of certainty from the beliefs it holds at the outset of the drama. Of course, the playwright may use dramatic irony to allow the audience some knowledge that is withheld from one or more of the characters which gives an *incongruity* between audience and action. So for example in *Oedipus Rex* the audience discovers that Oedipus is the murderer of his own father long before this recognition comes to Oedipus himself. What the audience may not have anticipated or 'seen coming' is Oedipus's specific reaction to the knowledge that he has indeed fulfilled the ancient prophecy that he would murder his father and marry his mother. On finding his wife-mother Jocasta dead by suicide, he takes two gold pins from her dress and plunges them into his own eyes, thus blinding himself. Having earlier taunted the blind seer, Tiresias, not only for his physical blindness but for his blindness in "ears and brain"<sup>91</sup>, we witness a reversal in which Oedipus's failure to see, hear and understand the truth when it was told to him is now physically and symbolically represented on stage. The knowledge which is now too much for Oedipus plunges him into a new kind of unknowing, and in a sense comes to speak of the audience's own blindness, or unknowing - its own inability to see the whole truth - re-establishing a kind of congruity between stage and audience.

#### 4.20 *Enter ethical poetics*

Here is where we must start seriously to part company with Quash and Balthasar. Quash's alignment of anticipation with hope, with which I began this discussion, requires us to think of this 'unknowing' as the basis for a certain kind of ethical improvement, what I previously called 'faithful knowing'. Quash believes that, just as

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<sup>91</sup> Sophocles, (2015) *Oedipus the King* in Taplin, O. (trans.), *Sophocles: Four Tragedies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 28

we are “embedded” within a language and all our interpretations are from the position of being “in the middle” of it, so by analogy ‘the good’ is embedded in “particular interchanges and forms of imaginative construction to which drama gives a unique kind of testimony.”<sup>92</sup> Drama, he thinks, gives insight into the origins of moral experience. In his reading, drama involves its audience in an interpretative process which aids a form of socialized ethical thinking. The sharing of affective language, breathing its air in common with characters on the stage, the being swept up within the affect, means that we cannot avoid an involvement with ‘the good’. “The blurred boundaries between audience and stage mean that everyone can be involved in the ‘working out’ of the good, *which the stage invites us to.*”<sup>93</sup>

Is drama essentially an ‘ethical space’? - that is, one in which an author’s text, and any production of it, is so organized as to invite an audience to look for patterns which not only suggest coherent meanings within the world of the play, but also contain moral guidance to conduct in the audience’s own world. If drama is inviting us, the audience, to find meaning by looking towards the ‘ultimate’, then we are thereby encouraged to consider not only the behaviours of characters on stage but also our own relationship to what is to be considered ‘good’ and therefore what we *should* do. Aesthetics is thereby collapsed into ethics. Theodrama holds fast to the idea that the ‘good’ is legible within the fabric of any drama, even if working it out is a matter of shared interpretation, because there is a commitment to an analogical relationship between the good that God does in ‘coming towards’ his creatures and the action of a drama - an action of which the understanding, whilst not ‘closed’, is thought to disclose something of the nature of that movement.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 36

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.* (my italics)

<sup>94</sup> For a discussion of the function of analogy in Theodrama, see Quash, B. 2005, pp. 168 - 187



#### 4.21 Challenging 'ethical poetics'

However, why should we think that if drama leads us towards an 'unknowing' of our former certainties it also "invites" us towards an interpretation of what is 'good' as an abstraction from the particularity of the events portrayed by the drama? In what sense could drama provide or deliver anything outside of itself? Whilst the audience is 'in the middle' of its own interpretations, it does not know 'more' than the whole of what is to be known by the characters involved in the action. This must include the notion of 'the good'. If the values to which the audience are expected to commit themselves lie not within the drama itself but in the world outside, then nothing 'new' can emerge to compel our attention and overturn our hearts and minds. We are left to 'read off' equivalences and act accordingly, as servants of the 'message'.

'Unframeability' however extends to the entire encounter between audience, text and performance and invites us to question all ideas of 'closure' within drama and to develop an awareness of the provisionality of our subjective, judgement-making role as members of an audience. This in turn leads us to challenge the notion of a 'closed' dramatic system of plot, character and narrative arranged so as to express the intentional meaning of a 'knowing' author.

The idea of drama as *mimesis* in the ordinary sense of 'imitation', of art reflecting life, is therefore overturned in favour of an understanding of drama as the 'play' or 'interplay' of textured surfaces offering a proliferation of meanings. "The denial of the fixed and knowing subject in dramatic literature opens up the possibility of the creative spectator who participates in the theatrical urge to create and recreate identity by willing a relationship to the text which is premised upon doubt and an awareness of the wholly provisional category of the 'I' which speaks and acts upon

the world.”<sup>95</sup> This is a post-modernist challenge to the idea that the audience, as ‘creative spectator’, or ‘faithful performer’ can embrace the role assigned to it by a magisterial or ‘god-like’ author who brings into being all the elements of the drama. This proliferation of meanings also renders impossible the abstraction of a conception of ‘good’ to which a drama, or drama as a whole, might give testimony. Drama does not itself lay outside of the ‘testimony’ it gives.

#### *4.22 Themes and objectives summarized*

In this chapter we have further investigated the nexus of performativity, narrativity and ethics which, I have suggested, lie at the heart of the Theodramatic enterprise. We have found that the ‘theological shape’ which emerges is one that is much flatter than it intends, for several reasons: firstly it does not seem to offer the safeguards to human freedom which would be required if humans are to be distinguished from the roles assigned to them in the divine drama; secondly the drama’s audience appears to have disappeared, absorbed into the drama’s action, and what is drama without its audience? Thirdly, its collapse of aesthetics into ethics obscures the potential for revelation - the emergence of something ‘new’ - within the drama in so far as it depends upon embedding within the action a governing abstraction under the guise of ‘the good’.

If, as we have seen, there is a danger to the audience in Theodrama’s insistence upon a performative response to the divine drama - an insistence upon everyone becoming performers - then we must now turn to the question of what role the audience does in fact play, and begin the process of re-constructing a theological view of drama which respects their presence.

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<sup>95</sup> Banham, M. (ed.) (1995) *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre*, (2nd edition), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 306

In the next chapter we will return to the dramatist Bertolt Brecht and explore the dramatic method of his later period, marking a turning point in his view of the relationship between audience and performance, and providing us with the concept of 'complex seeing' which will allow us to make a step towards a different view of what a dramatic theology might look like.

## CHAPTER 5: BRECHT AND SEEING COMPLEXLY

### 5.1 Brecht, Luther and 'Making Strange'

Brecht draws attention to the illusionary nature of theatre through use of 'alienation' devices - *verfremdung* or 'making strange' - in order to prevent the audience from being tricked into staying at the level of illusion and instead to urge from it a critical response to events represented within the narrative. He himself was no stranger to the use of music and other aesthetic means of pleasing the audience, all serving the objective of instructing it in how to respond to the truth conveyed by the play.

However, in the 'epic theatre' of his later work - *Mother Courage and her Children* and *Life of Galileo*, for example - he buried the overt Marxist messages more deeply within the structure of the play, partly as a result of his exile from Germany and from his native audience during the rise of Hitler and the subsequent Second World War. Nevertheless, as the critic Raymond Williams suggests, Brecht's concern was to produce a dramatic form "in which men were shown in the process of producing themselves and their situations."<sup>1</sup>

Echoing Nietzsche's Dionysian cry, "He ['man'] is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art,"<sup>2</sup> this process of 'becoming' is achieved through what Brecht, in his comments upon *Die Dreigroschenoper*, calls "complex seeing"<sup>3</sup>. This must be practised in order to allow the audience to think "above the flow of the play"<sup>4</sup> rather

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, R. (1973) *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, London: Pelican Books, p 318

<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche, F. (1995) *The Birth of Tragedy*, Fadiman, C.P. (trans.), New York: Dover Publications, p 4

<sup>3</sup> Brecht, B. (1964) *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, (Ed. & Trans.) Willett, J., London: Methuen, p. 72

<sup>4</sup> Brecht, B. 1964, p. 72

than from within it. Williams points out how ‘complex seeing’ in a play like *Mother Courage and her Children* is not achieved through alienating devices, commentaries on the action and so on, but within the action itself, so that the actions by which Mother Courage destroys her own family with the aim of preserving life force the audience to recognize the “essential contradiction... [of its own]... destructive acquiescence in the name of life... [with the]... persistent vitality in a continuing destruction.”<sup>5</sup> Someone less sympathetic to Brecht than Williams might point out that he needed to produce actions on stage which formally carry his political purpose because he could not be certain otherwise of producing the desired attitudes. Audience responses to *The Threepenny Opera* for example horrified him for the evident enjoyment of the play’s ‘cheerful amorality’ - its “eats first, morals after”<sup>6</sup> message having precisely the opposite effect to that hoped for. Rather than simply seeing and criticizing, the audience lapped up and accepted with enthusiasm the behaviour of the whores and highwaymen co-opted by Brecht from John Gay’s *The Beggars’ Opera*. They seem to have missed entirely Brecht’s intended irony.

## 5.2 *Seeing complexly - Crucifixion and Atonement*

Nevertheless ‘complex seeing’ in the form achieved in *Mother Courage and Her Children* and perhaps in *Life of Galileo* is an idea worth examining to see whether it might be of use theologically. On the surface it looks as if we have found a concept which supports what Quash identified as the ‘lyric persuasion’ which coaxes us into emotional submission in combination with (but also in tension with) a desire for an independent and critical stance in relation to what we see on the stage. However we

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<sup>5</sup> Williams, R. 1973, pp. 327-8

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p. 321

will need to keep clearly in mind the differing horizons of text, performance and reception.

It is in the crucifixion that the idea looks to be most useful. We can start by examining Balthasar's analysis of Protestant Theological Aesthetics in volume 1 of *The Glory of the Lord*. Balthasar complains that, despite Barth's "contemplation of the objective revelation"<sup>7</sup> Protestant theology is dutifully subservient to "existential, imageless inwardness"<sup>8</sup> which fails to deal with 'the beautiful' as a theological category, contenting itself only with the question of the relationship between revelation and 'this-worldly beauty.' Martin Luther's theology of redemption is, as Balthasar suggests, a "highly original answer"<sup>9</sup> to this question.

Luther attempts to mine to its depths the question of what actually happened in the moments of the crucifixion during which "the Redeemer takes my sins upon himself as he passes through the hell of God-forsakenness and enters into the very heart of sin."<sup>10</sup> The passing over of guilt from a human sinner to the wholly innocent, guiltless Redeemer is an "unfathomable happening" which can only be expressed in paradox. It is a 'lightning flash' (*exaiphnēs*) experience - drawing on an analogy with Luther's apparent transformation and change of life following a close encounter with an electrical storm. The Lutheran formula of this paradox is *Simul justus et peccator* which speaks of the dual perspective by which a human is understood to be justified by grace and yet is still to be regarded as someone who continues to sin, who continues in 'concupiscence'. This of course contradicts the scholastic doctrine which

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<sup>7</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. 1982, p. 56

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* p. 57

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

taught that concupiscence is a potential sin rather than its actuality. In Balthasar's explication, this "lightning flash exchange event"<sup>11</sup> is apprehended inwardly - the moment in which the sinner receives the grace and mercy of God - and, living within this paradox, cannot allow the event "to gain any breadth or permanence in the world."<sup>12</sup> If it were to do so, it would functionalize the mystery of the Cross. Any attempt to philosophize about an analogy between 'flesh' and 'spirit', humanity and God, to bring the '*absconditas Dei sub contrario*' under the glare of human reason empties the Incarnation of its purpose - a mystery grounded in a love which beyond reason offers its own righteousness to unjust humanity. In the day of the Resurrection, the disciples who each in some way betrayed their crucified Lord, "sit together as if in hell, with an evil conscience and great fear [...] Then Christ the Lord comes to them in his love as if he were coming into hell, and says: "You are my brothers!"... Our hearts cannot comprehend this."<sup>13</sup> It is only with the inward eye of submissive faith that humanity can receive the salvation offered in this act of mercy and grace, "grasped only by an act of totally blind surrender in trust."<sup>14</sup>

Luther, in his elevation above all of the doctrine of Justification by Faith, rejects any attempt by Reason to encompass or achieve a harmony between divinity and humanity. Balthasar summarizes this thus: "No harmonizing, no skill, no comprehension is permitted. Every form which man tries to impose on revelation in order to achieve an overview that makes comprehension possible - for this is pre-supposed in beauty - every such form must disintegrate in the face of the 'contradiction', the concealment of everything divine under its opposite, the

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p. 47

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p. 46

concealment, that is, of all proportions and analogies between God and man in dialectic.”<sup>15</sup> For Balthasar, this produces a “final crossroads”<sup>16</sup> which leads either to an understanding of this dialectic as “the exuberant outpouring of the Gospel’s nuptial love”<sup>17</sup>, an excess which cannot be apportioned or determined, or to the wrenching of the dialectic from the mystery of love to become a “cold methodological protest.”<sup>18</sup> The first way leads to the elimination of aesthetics from theology by rendering all human skills and art invisible under the light of the divine Art. The alternative leads, paradoxically, to an ‘aestheticization’ of theology, which conceives of God as “exteriorizing himself in nothingness and in that which is his opposite, a God who, therefore, contains his nothingness and his opposite in himself.”<sup>19</sup> This points the way to an Hegelian systematizing which, in generating an aesthetic overview of the whole, “is able to reconcile in God himself the final contradictions.”<sup>20</sup> Neither of these alternatives could be attractive to a theologian who wishes to emphasize the freedom of the individual first to gaze upon and then to respond to the dramatic action of God at work in history in the person of his son, Jesus Christ.

### 5.3 *Seeing Theodrama complexly*

How might we use the Brechtian concept of ‘complex seeing’ to explore these contradictions in a theodramatic manner? First of all, in his Epic Theatre practice in such plays as *Mother Courage and her Children* Brecht attempted to embed ‘complex seeing’ within the dramatic action itself, such that his characters live within

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* p. 48

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* p. 49

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*



contradiction and play out the contradictions between themselves. This process of embedding the contradictions within the flow of the action is what Raymond Williams called a “structure of feeling,”<sup>21</sup> by which he means a clarification of the historical situation out of which characters experience themselves - or ‘produce’ themselves - and their feelings. At one pole of this structure of feeling is the isolated individual. In previous ‘bourgeois’ Romantic dramas, this individual was heroic and positive, in the sense that the drama is structured around the battle between such an individual, or ‘hero’, and mute, negative historical forces. In Brecht’s dramatic form, however, the isolated individual is a negative pole, seen not subjectively but objectively against the positive pole of the historical process, the source of values and explanation. As Williams puts it, “human need and satisfaction ironically known and recalled.”<sup>22</sup> Thus the character of Mother Courage, pulling her cart of supplies through the army encampments of Europe during the Thirty Years War, is confronted by an army Recruiting Sergeant attempting to recruit her eldest son as a mercenary:

“MOTHER COURAGE: Go on, you kidnap him, just try. I’ll slit you open, trash. I’ll teach you to make war with him. We’re doing an honest trade in ham and linen, and we’re peaceable folk.

SERGEANT: Peaceable I don’t think; look at your knife. You should be ashamed of yourself; put that knife away, you old harri-dan. A minute back you were admitting you live off the war, how else should you live, what from? But how’s anyone to have war without soldiers?

MOTHER COURAGE: No need for it to be my kids.

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<sup>21</sup> Williams, R. 1973, p. 327

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* p. 331

SERGEANT: Oh, you'd like war to eat the pips but spit out the apple? It's to fatten up your kids but you won't invest in it. Got to look after itself, eh? And you called Courage, fancy that. Scared of the war that keeps you going?"<sup>23</sup>

Her own survival and that of her children is threatened by the war that is their only source of survival. This is because the war is itself the product of the need for order. As the Sergeant says at the beginning of the play, "Peace, that's just a mess. Takes a war to make order. Peace time the human race runs wild."<sup>24</sup> The need for order, of course, in Brecht's Marxist analysis, arises from the need for the ruling political class to maintain its position and privilege. This is the 'objective' source of value and explanation in the world of the play and is what Brecht wishes to demonstrate to his audience, is what he wishes them to 'see'. Yet we do not have a dramatic action that spells this out, only one that involves its characters in contradiction. The play has created a character for whom opportunism is a way of life, but as Williams notes, the play does not then comment on or criticize this way of life, it encompasses "what *other things* happen"<sup>25</sup> as a consequence. It is for the audience, above the action and indeed alienated from the 'pleasures' of the action, to see this for themselves.

#### 5.4 *Crucifixion seen complexly*

In the crucifixion we see the same reversal of polarity, and within Luther's formulations of the contradictions facing human sinners, we see the same process of 'making strange' which lies at the heart of Brecht's alienation techniques. In the crucifixion, seen 'complexly', the proportions of the relationship between God and humanity are explosively reversed. Humanity is no longer the 'positive pole' -

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<sup>23</sup> Brecht, B. (1980) *Mother Courage and her Children*, Willett, J., (trans.), London: Methuen

<sup>24</sup> Willett, J. 1980

<sup>25</sup> Williams, R. 1973, p. 326

individuals struggling to ‘produce’ righteousness against the onslaught of hostile historical forces. The positive pole is now the ‘objective’ situation between God and humanity, in which humanity seeks constantly to maintain its order, its privilege as the measure of what it is to be transcendent - to frame who God is, in fact. In order to do so, scandalously, it is God who becomes the victim, and - in a process of ‘imputation’ - the ‘sinner’. Within this drama, what we are asked to ‘see’, as an audience placed above the flow, is the irony of this. What Luther’s contradictions may also help us to see is that Christian theology itself can become part of the process of maintaining this order through its rationalizing of the relationship - the proportions - between God and humanity. We need the alienating effect of the drama to make it strange to us. Even as we come to apprehend the grace and mercy of God ‘ironically’ revealed in the drama of crucifixion, we must not ‘smooth it out’ and render it safe, as if it had always been there for us to understand, if only we had been looking in the right place.

We can see this process at work within the texture of the New Testament itself. When we read the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, for example, in Luke 18.9-14, we are used to interpreting its meaning in accordance with a Christian theology that describes the direction of God’s grace. And yet, as Jeremias reminds us<sup>26</sup>, the parable is utterly shocking to its original audience, for the Pharisee has done nothing wrong, has prayed in accordance with a Talmudic prayer that gives thanks for his weary lot, a lot which, in sacrificing the wealth of this world through dedication to Torah and religious duties, gives a foretaste of the world to come. The tax-collector, by contrast, gives vent to despair. He remains “at a distance” and doesn’t even “look up to heaven” (v13). Yet he is the one ‘justified’ (v14). The despair,

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<sup>26</sup> Jeremias, J. (1966) *Rediscovering the Parables*, Hooke, S.H. (trans.), London: SCM Press, p. 113

the broken-heartedness, is what pleases God, according to the parable. I think it is equally possible to see Luther's *Simul justus et peccator* within the same light. We need to be alienated from our privilege as '*justus*' in order to see ourselves truly as such. Thus are we also 'hidden with God' *sub contrario*.

Our own inclusion into the process of 'making strange' is not, in my analysis, the same thing as rising from our seats and taking up our assigned roles in God's performance. If we were to do so, we would necessarily be caught up in contradiction, in 'what happens' and '*what else* happens'.

#### 5.5 *Themes and objectives summarized*

In spite of the hope expressed by both Balthasar and Brecht that the audience will take some specific actions on the basis of what they have seen on stage, my own view is that 'complex seeing' points us in a different direction entirely.

The arrival at a point of alienation from our natural tendency to bolster our privileges appears, to an observer, as a spectacle of the deconstruction of the will. Yet we are still left with the impression that drama is therefore *instrumental*, that it has an ethical purpose, envisaged particularly by Brecht, which should result in a change in behaviour on the part of its audience. As I have been suggesting, theodramatic theology as developed by Balthasar and Quash embraces this view. However, as well as the argument I have previously given concerning drama's ontology, there is a good theological reason for rejecting this view of drama and its relationship to ethics, and this theological reason is to be found in the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

## CHAPTER 6: BONHOEFFER AND SALVIFIC HUMILIATION

### 6.1 *Knowledge of good and evil*

At the very beginning of his work on Christian ethics, eventually collected together and published as *Ethics* after his death, Bonhoeffer writes: “The knowledge of good and evil seems to be the aim of all ethical reflection. The first task of Christian ethics is to invalidate this knowledge.”<sup>1</sup> Human beings have their origin in God, a condition in which God’s immediate presence constitutes everything that humans beings know. “Knowledge of good and evil shows that he [sic] is no longer at one with this origin.”<sup>2</sup> To be involved in ethical calculation, of trying to decide what is good and bad, is a sign of alienation from God, a sign that human beings are severed from their origin. Ethics in so far as they derive from this process of calculation, are equivalent to law, the regulation of human behaviour outside of the presence of God.

### 6.2 *Formation*

Two ideas are fundamental to Bonhoeffer’s approach to ethics: ‘formation’ and ‘concreteness’. Formation is not to be seen as programmatic, the application of a “thoughtless and superficial slogan”<sup>3</sup> in the name of practical Christianity, but is concerned “only with the one form which has overcome the world, the form of Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup> It is not the application of Christian principles to the world that matters, but a process of formation by which one is “drawn into the form of Jesus Christ.”<sup>5</sup> Forming into the likeness of Christ is not however an act of will but instead is

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<sup>1</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. 1971, p. 3

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p. 60

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. 61

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

achieved “only when the form of Jesus Christ itself works upon us in such a manner that it moulds our form in its own likeness.”<sup>6</sup>

This is an idea that derives from Pauline Christology. In Galatians 4.19, referenced by Bonhoeffer, Paul reproves his hearers with the words “My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...” We can find this idea expressed even more powerfully in 2 Corinthians 3.18: “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” This verse comes as the climax of an elaborate series of metaphors in which Paul compares the Corinthians to a “letter of Christ” (v3) and then plays with the idea of a letter written “not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts,” (v3f) thus invoking the letter of the Mosaic law and its contrast with the New Covenant. Even more aptly for our discussion, Paul plays with the image of hiddenness and the glory of God, invoking the veil over Moses’ face as an image of the separation of the people of Israel from God: “Indeed to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds.” (v15) The Christian, turning to God and being formed into the likeness of Christ, is able to gaze unveiled at the reflection of God’s glory. Paul’s use of the greek word *doxa* references the Old Testament concept of *kabod*, which refers not to the essential nature of God, but to the “luminous manifestation of his person, his glorious revelation of himself.”<sup>7</sup> For Paul, this means the person of Jesus Christ. Here is an image then, of the presence of God Himself, and indeed, for Bonhoeffer, this is what he has in mind when he says

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Brown, C. (ed.) (1976) *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol 2, Exeter: Paternoster Press

that in Jesus Christ, “The disunion of men [sic] with God, with other men, with the world and with themselves, is at an end. Man’s origin is given back to him.”<sup>8</sup>

### 6.3 *Concreteness*

The restoration of presence, of return to one’s origin, is not for Bonhoeffer a description of a theoretical condition. It is “entirely concrete”<sup>9</sup> taking human beings for what they are as objects of the love of God. “Christ did not, like a moralist, love a theory of good, but He loved the real man [sic].”<sup>10</sup> Being ‘real’ here refers to the humanity at once created by God and in which God manifests himself in the person of Christ: “In every section of his history man is simply and entirely the man taken upon Himself by Christ.”<sup>11</sup> God Incarnate in Christ is fully and ‘really’ human. Bonhoeffer’s christology insists on avoiding the idea that Jesus is a union of “two demonstrable isolated entities”<sup>12</sup> holding together a divine essence and a human nature. “In christology one looks at the whole historical man Jesus and says of him, ‘He is God’. One does not first look at human nature and then beyond it to a divine nature; one meets the one man Jesus Christ, who is fully God.”<sup>13</sup> In other words we do not have a special kind of man - a man who is also God. We have the man Jesus who is God. His humanity is concrete, the place in which he lived and died is entirely concrete, just as is that of any other person.

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<sup>8</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. 1971, p. 60

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* p. 66

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 65

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* p. 67

<sup>12</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. (1966) *Christology*, Bowden, J. (trans.), London: Collins, p 108

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

#### 6.4 *A Christology of humiliation*

When Bonhoeffer looks at the person of Jesus, ‘the whole historical man’, he sees humiliation and weakness: “If Jesus Christ is to be described as God, then we may not speak of this divine essence, of his omnipotence and his omniscience, but we must speak of this weak man among sinners, of his cradle and his cross.”<sup>14</sup> This is the way, says Bonhoeffer, that God exists as man. Christ the Incarnate One is also the Humiliated One. As the Crucified One, he dies forsaken and in agony. Even exalted as the Risen One, he is still the Humiliated One for this is the form in which he is ‘God for us’. Within this christological thinking, therefore, is the key to what it means for ethics to be thought of as conformation to the likeness of Christ in the concrete reality of day to day life. For Bonhoeffer thinks that to be conformed with the Incarnate One is to have the right to be the man [sic] “one really is.”<sup>15</sup> We are not to work out a criterion of ‘the good’ derived from Christ’s ministry and actions. We are not isolated individuals such as might apply “the absolute criterion of a good which is good in itself and [who] has to make his decision incessantly and exclusively between this clearly recognized good and an equally clearly recognized evil,”<sup>16</sup> for that would be to deny our real identity and at the same time to make the good “into dead law.”<sup>17</sup> As human beings who are conformed to Christ, through faith, believers become whole in the sense that their knowledge and will are re-united. Knowledge is no longer something to be sought outside of God’s presence and the will is no longer subject to desire for one’s own privilege. The combination of knowledge and will within the form of Christ produces, in terms of action within the world, an authentic

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. 1971, p. 62

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p. 186

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*



decision in which “a whole man [sic]... seeks and finds the good in the equivocal complexity of a historical situation solely through the venture of the deed.”<sup>18</sup>

### 6.5 *Christology and ‘complex seeing’*

Here we may recognize an affinity with the concept of ‘complex seeing’. We are invited to see humans not as isolated individuals whose subjectivity is the measure of what is good. Instead the polarity is reversed and we see ‘real’ humanity ‘produced’ by the objective action of God in history, characterized as the Humiliated One. The objective situation, as Bonhoeffer would say, is to be found in Jesus’s words “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11.25). As humans, we can only live life, not define it. “Our life is created, reconciled and redeemed; it finds in Jesus Christ its origin, its essence and its goal.”<sup>19</sup> However, as we noted in the analysis of complex seeing, there is in this objective situation a tension, a contradiction between what Bonhoeffer calls the ‘yes’ of creation, atonement and redemption, and the ‘no’ of life that has fallen away from its origin and is subject to condemnation and death: “It is only in this ‘yes’ and this ‘no’ that we can recognize Christ as our life. [...] But no one who knows Christ can hear the ‘yes’ without the ‘no’ or the ‘no’ without the ‘yes.’”<sup>20</sup>

### 6.6 *A unity of contradictions*

The tension between God’s ‘yes’ to us and the potential or space for our ‘no’ to be included within the history of divine and human relations gives us the objective condition under which the existential nature of Luther’s paradox (*simul justus et peccator*) is grasped. As Bonhoeffer says, “We ‘live’ when, in our encounter with men and with God, the ‘yes’ and the ‘no’ are combined in a unity of contradictions, in

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* p. 188

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* p. 190

selfless self-assertion, in self-assertion in the sacrifice of ourselves to God and to men.”<sup>21</sup> In the person of Christ, this contradiction is fully realized. The opposite poles of the contradiction - the ‘yes’ and the ‘no’ - are brought together in a perfect act of living - the Crucifixion. The experience of the Crucifixion, the humiliation, suffering and death of Christ, contains the condemnation consequent upon our offered ‘no’. Christ could not be ‘Christ’ if this were not so for he would not then be fully human, would not be fully incarnated. Not to be subject to this condemnation would mean that his privileges as God shield his humanity from the consequences of being human. This would be a form of docetism, the idea that the humanity of Christ is a mere semblance of humanity, lacking any real existence. The humiliations experienced by Christ which merit the title ‘The Humiliated One’ are real humiliations carried in the flesh, not apparent humiliations with merely symbolic consequence.

#### 6.7 *Goodness and perfection*

For this reason also, Bonhoeffer insists that we do not look to the narratives of the life of Christ as moral exempla of sinlessness: “He was not the perfectly good man. He was continually engaged in struggle. He did things which outwardly sometimes looked like sin. He was angry, he was harsh to his mother, he evaded his enemies, he broke the law of his people, he stirred up revolt against the rulers and the religious men of his country. He entered man’s sinful existence past recognition.”<sup>22</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s discussion of Jesus as ‘the worst sinner’ - Luther’s *peccator pessimus* - and the doctrine of the sinlessness of Jesus takes us into the heart of paradox. “Did Jesus, as the humiliated God-man, fully enter into human sin? Was he a man with

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p. 192

<sup>22</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. 1966, p. 112

sin like ours? If not, was he then a man at all? If not, can he then help at all? And if he was, how can he help us in our predicament, as he is in the same predicament?”<sup>23</sup> The predicament, here, is that we cannot as humans produce our own ‘righteousness’, if righteousness is understood as “conformity of life or conduct to the requirements of the divine or moral law,”<sup>24</sup> because that would be to claim equivalence between our contingency and the standard by which our contingency is judged. We cannot be both the measure and the measured.

### 6.8 *Existential acting and the Humiliated One*

Bonhoeffer’s pathway through this predicament is to distinguish between the identity of the Incarnated One and the mode of existence of the Humiliated One. The latter is dependent upon a decision of the former: “The mode of existence of humiliation is an act of the Incarnate.”<sup>25</sup> The two however are not separated in time: “The God-man in history is always already the humiliated God-man, from the cradle to the cross.”<sup>26</sup> However, says Bonhoeffer, the question turns on the identity of the one who takes on the ‘likeness’ of flesh: “It is really human flesh that he bore - but because *he* bears it, this flesh is robbed of its rights. He pronounces the verdict on his action.”<sup>27</sup>

### 6.9 *Docetism incognito?*

And yet this pronouncement is precisely what we have said the contingency of ‘flesh’ cannot do. So is Bonhoeffer himself no less a docetist than those against whom he protests, if human flesh is ‘robbed of its rights’ because there is in fact *another*

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Little, W., Fowler, H.W. & Coulson, J.(eds.) (1973) *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, revised edition, Onions, C.T., (ed.) vol.2, 3rd edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press

<sup>25</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. 1966, p. 113

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

identity which supercedes the flesh into which it falls? The suspicion is strengthened when Bonhoeffer goes on to say: “He, not the likeness of flesh, is without sin; but he does not will to be distinguished from this likeness of flesh.”<sup>28</sup> The ‘He’ who is not likeness but chooses not to be distinguished from likeness is in some sense ‘incognito’ - we cannot see Him by observing his deeds and pronouncing them as sinless for they are at best ambiguous. For Bonhoeffer it is only the eye of faith which is able to see *who* is behind the incognito. Not even the Resurrection as an ‘act’ can penetrate it - “Even the resurrection is ambiguous. It is only believed in where the stumbling block of Jesus has not been removed.”<sup>29</sup> The ‘stumbling block’ is the refusal of Jesus to attest to his authority in the form of signs.

#### 6.10 Humiliation ‘without reserve’

What I think is identified in Bonhoeffer’s Christology of the Humiliated One is the desire to say that the *whole* of God is present in Jesus, the God-man, and that *contra* the Calvinists there is no reserve or *extra*: “One of the first theological principles must continue to be that where God is he is *fully*.”<sup>30</sup> However he does not appear to find a way of holding this with his *theologia crucis*, lacking some notion such as *kenosis* or self-emptying. In fact Ronald Carson argues that there is a suggestion of prototypical kenotic thinking in Bonhoeffer’s christology: “These [...] references [...] appear to me to be building blocks of a view of the Incarnation which emerged towards the end of Bonhoeffer’s life and which is kenotic in all but name.”<sup>31</sup> He quotes the following words of Bonhoeffer as evidence: “God allows himself to be

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* p. 114

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. 1966, p. 100

<sup>31</sup> Carson, R.A. (1975) *The Motifs of Kenosis and Imitatio in the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, with an Excursus on the Communicatio Idiomatum*, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43 (3), pp. 542-553, p. 548

pushed out of the world onto the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us.”<sup>32</sup>

### 6.11 *Re-imagining Theodrama as ‘Christodrama’*

Notwithstanding this perceived gap in his Christology, the way in which Bonhoeffer reframes Christian ethics away from performance of a standard of morality, albeit one rooted in an understanding of God, and into a participation in the sufferings of the humiliated Christ points the way towards a re-imagining of Theodrama as ‘Christodrama’.

To live ‘in Christ’ as St. Paul would say, is to be identified with the humiliation of the Humiliated One in the knowledge that our actions do not have the character of ethical transactions in which we seek to identify the ‘good’ and fulfill it or not. Rather the ready acceptance of loss, of humiliation, to the farthest extent of the loss of self - not through willed loss with the hope of some compensatory gain, but the very giving up of the prospect of gain - is the mark of someone who has ‘died with Christ’. The return to our origin is therefore through the gateway of humiliation. The surprising discovery is that drama itself, in terms of the processes which give it its very ‘liveliness’ and ‘nowness’, is closely correlated with the process of humiliation that has emerged as a primary characteristic of Christian ‘liveliness’.

Bonhoeffer, therefore, has given us, in the figure of the Humiliated One, a different way of seeing how drama might be theological. It allows us to develop the idea of *drama-as-humiliation* as the key to a salvific account of the relationship between stage and audience. In Section Two I will explore the concept of drama-as-

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<sup>32</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. (1981) *Letters and Papers from Prison*, (abridged edition) Bowden, J. (ed.), Fuller, R., Clarke, F. et al. (trans.), London: SCM Press, pp. 129 - 30

humiliation as a better way of articulating how the life of God in Christ may be understood.

#### *6.12 Dead Law and Deadly Theatre*

However, before we begin the work of constructing 'Christodrama' in terms of 'strangeness' and 'humiliation', we return once more to Theodrama in order to consider one more consequence of its insistence on performativity and ethical narrativity.

Insofar as Theodrama is characterized essentially as ethical and performative, as I have argued above, it leaves us in the situation of making 'the good' into 'dead law', in Bonhoeffer's characterful phrase, and also, of course, into 'dead drama'. When Peter Brook wrote about 'Deadly Theatre'<sup>33</sup> he gave the example of how he had once asked someone with no knowledge of Shakespeare's *King Lear* to read the first speech of Lear's daughter Goneril. The speech was read simply and "emerged full of eloquence and charm."<sup>34</sup> He then informed the speaker that Goneril as a character is a monstrous hypocrite and requested a reading of the speech again using that character definition. The result was a "hard unnatural wrestling with the simple music of the words"<sup>35</sup> and led to the discovery that by not playing Goneril as a 'monster', convulsed with 'hypocrisy', the balance of the play changes in insightful and lively ways, with the eventual revelation of Goneril as a complex and compelling character. "In a living theatre, we would each day approach the rehearsal putting yesterday's discoveries to the test, ready to believe that the true play has escaped us. But the Deadly Theatre approaches the classics from the viewpoint that somewhere,

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<sup>33</sup> Brook, P. 1968

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* p. 16

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

someone has found out and defined how the play should be done.”<sup>36</sup> If Theodrama is not to be ‘Deadly Theatre’ it needs to be free of any suspicion that it is somehow offering a means of identifying the ‘good’ as defining a right way to ‘perform’.

### 6.13 *Deadly theology*

In the example given by Brook, the deadliness of a performance arises from a failure to put previous discoveries ‘to the test’ and instead to accept them and to try to perform within their jurisdiction, as it were. There is a parallel here with the criticisms Quash makes of Balthasar’s failure to escape fully from Hegelian systematization of ‘the Good’ as immanent ‘Absolute Spirit’ and the identification of individual human activity and history with such a Spirit. The Hegelian idea of ‘indifference’ as the *telos* of human history casts something of a shadow over Balthasar’s talk of divine and human harmony: “Dramas, on a Hegelian model, give formed, generalized expression to human patterns of encounter (and therefore by extension into theodramatic terms, can be expected to do the same to divine/human patterns of encounter). That von Balthasar is indebted to such habits of thought in a way that has eschatological as well as ecclesiological implications is perceptible when he talks of ‘drama’s unificatory endeavour that sheds light on existence’...”<sup>37</sup>

If indeed this shadow of Hegelian ‘resignation’ lies over Balthasar, then the danger is of producing a ‘deadly theology’; that is, one which freezes a particular state of affairs and attempts to preserve it as a perspective from which to see ‘everything’. Another way of putting this would be to say that ‘deadly theatre’ (and by extension, ‘deadly

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.* p. 17

<sup>37</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 163

theology’), is one which embeds an absent historicity: a state of affairs going on somewhere else of which the drama (and the theology) is mimetic.

What might Balthasar mean when he speaks of drama having a ‘unificatory endeavour’? At one level we can take this to refer to the resolution of the action of a drama, with its splitting of human will and desire into conflicting agents, into a harmonious ending which brings together the conflicting agents into a ‘just settlement’. At the horizontal level, there is a ‘satisfaction’ which leaves all parties appropriately disposed and accepting of their ‘fate’. The outcomes are fashioned out of a notion of ‘justice’ implicit within the action but submerged until the moment of final resolution. The ending must be ‘deserved’ to allow the sense of harmony to unfold. In this schema, the drama itself is framed by the conflicting agents and the cessation of the conflict, however achieved, brings about a new state of relations, characterized by unity, from which the ‘drama’ has been removed. The *difference* between the conflicting agents, which is to say, the bounds of their particularities, is overcome through what Hegel characterized as an “adoption into indifference”<sup>38</sup> in which the individual “acts in accordance with universal principles.”<sup>39</sup> In Hegel’s thought, an individual transcends his or her particularity through an act of renunciation, a *willed* identification of the self with that which transcends the particularity of the self. For Hegel, it looks as if this turns out to be a political project - the State - a collectivisation of individuals’ subjectivities, subsumed into a higher order which ensures the freedom and security of the individual at the same time as recasting the individual’s identity as being one of a ‘people’.

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<sup>38</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 58 quoting Hegel, G.W.F. (1979) *The System of Ethical Life: First Philosophy of Spirit*, Harris, H.S. and Knox, T.M. (eds. & trans.), Albany: State University of New York Press

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*



#### 6.14 *Fortinbras and Hegelian harmony*

If we were to look for an example from drama of such an Hegelian view of destiny, we might find it in the ending of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in which the Norwegian prince, Fortinbras, receives the dying prince Hamlet's blessing as the future ruler of Denmark. When Fortinbras appears in the final scene, ready to make a claim to kingship, he receives the news of the slaughter of Hamlet, Claudius and Laertes with humility -

"For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune.

I have some rights of memory in this kingdom

Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me."<sup>40</sup>

Fortinbras's journey through the play is very much as a minor, offstage character around whom a political plot is woven until his appearance in the final scene. He is reported by Claudius, the usurper-king of Denmark, as having undertaken an abortive invasion of Denmark under the guise of seeking safe-passage across its territory upon business on behalf of his uncle, the King of Norway, at a time of perceived weakness in Denmark after the death of Hamlet's father. Prior to the beginning of the play, Norway's former king, Old Fortinbras, had been slain by Denmark's king, Old Hamlet, in a duel, and certain lands had become forfeit. Young Fortinbras therefore had hoped, in a piece of subterfuge, to recover the forfeited lands. Claudius, in his first speech, congratulates himself on putting paid to Young Fortinbras's presumption. As the action of the play begins to reveal the presumption of Claudius himself in murdering his brother to claim the kingship - the 'rottenness in the state of Denmark' - the shadowy young Fortinbras acts as a counterweight to Prince Hamlet, himself unable to take the resolute action urged upon him by the

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<sup>40</sup> *Hamlet*, Act 5.2 l. 342 - 344 in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (Eds.), 1988, p 688

ghost of his father. If the play foregrounds the ‘nothingness’ of Hamlet’s will, it is resolved eventually in the unification of the erstwhile warring nations under the stable rule of the man ‘strong in arms’, Fortinbras. The Hegelian interpretation of the play might be further strengthened by noting that following Horatio’s ‘theatrical’ framing of his report of the deaths of Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude and Laertes -

“...give order that these bodies

high on a stage be placed to the view;

And let me speak to th’ yet unknowing world

How these things came about...”<sup>41</sup> - Fortinbras responds with:

“Let us haste to hear it,

And call the noblest to the audience.”<sup>42</sup>

Shakespeare summons the ‘noblest’ with a glance at Aristotle, referencing not only the powerful, the ‘nobles’ (most of whom in this case are dead) but also the most refined in mind and character, very much the sort of people whom Aristotle thought of as suitable members of a theatre audience, capable of responding rationally to events depicted upon a stage, transforming themselves, once purged of the emotions of pity and fear, into schooled and emotionally stable members of the body politic.

The co-opting of drama by Hegel as a suitable category to articulate the emergence of harmony as the ‘end’ of history indeed bears a striking resemblance to Aristotle’s project, sketched in *The Poetics*, to argue for the art of poetry, and in particular tragic poetry, as necessary for the health of society. Of course Aristotle was not interested in the content of poetry but rather its form, and in particular the way that form

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid.* l. 331 - 334

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* l. 340 - 341

serves to produce the right effect upon its audience. We should not be surprised, then, to find that insofar as Theodrama stands accused, in Balthasar's hands, of failing to escape from the incorporation into itself of universal or "architectonic" forms"<sup>43</sup>, it suggests some formal correspondences between a resolved 'end' to history and the role of the church as the institution within which such resolution is expressed.

### 6.15 *Bonhoeffer and the Church*

By contrast with Balthasar, Bonhoeffer is not widely thought of as an ecclesiologist, but as Brendan Leahy and others have suggested,<sup>44</sup> in his early writings, and in particular his doctoral thesis *Sanctorum Communio*, he displayed a strong interest in the church as 'community' rather than 'institution'. His striking phrase, "Christ existing as community",<sup>45</sup> suggests an implicitly dynamic and indeed dramatic approach to the question of Christ, church and world. Adapting as it does Hegel's phrase, "God existing as community",<sup>46</sup> it takes as its ground the relationality of 'I-and-other'. Personhood for the Bonhoeffer of the *Sanctorum* is both a theological and a sociological category in which 'I' occupy my personhood as a unique individual but know myself in relation to others. As Leahy says of Bonhoeffer's anthropology, "The person has to be recognized as a distinct end in itself and as one who is in relation to others and to God. It is only God who creates the other and makes the other become a 'you' to me from whom my 'I' emerges."<sup>47</sup> If this reading is correct,

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<sup>43</sup> Quash, B. 2005, p. 187

<sup>44</sup> See Leahy, B. (2008) *Christ Existing as Community: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Notion of Church*, Irish Theological Quarterly, 73, pp. 32-59

<sup>45</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. (1998) *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, von Soosten, J. & Green, C. J., (eds.), Krauss, R. & Lukens, N., (trans.) Minneapolis: Fortress Press

<sup>46</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. (1985) *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religions* vol. 3, Hodgson, P.C. (ed. & trans.), Berkeley: University of California Press

<sup>47</sup> Leahy, B. 2008, p. 39

then Bonhoeffer is as much an Hegelian as Balthasar although his dialogue with Hegel appears to lead him in a different ecclesial direction. Bonhoeffer himself says “The social basic category is the I-You relation. The You of the other person is the divine You.[...] The individual becomes a person ever and again through the other, *in the ‘moment’*.”<sup>48</sup>

Bonhoeffer shares with Balthasar the sense that the church, as the locus for a “reality which unfolds in Christ”<sup>49</sup> cannot be understood from the outside, but only from within, “cum ira et studio”<sup>50</sup> through active membership. It is a living organism, connected to its Lord, Jesus Christ, through revelation, and for Bonhoeffer represents the beginning of doctrinal logic rather than its end. There is some debate as to whether Bonhoeffer should be considered to have ecclesiology or Christology as his primary focus<sup>51</sup> but these should not necessarily be seen as polarities, as Leahy suggests. However it seems clear that the concept of the church is not conceivable without a Christology, albeit one where the world into which revelation comes yields up the idea of Christ-as-community.

#### 6.16 *The Church and ‘complex seeing’*

The distinction with Balthasar, however, emerges sharply in terms of Bonhoeffer’s presentation of the church not as a collection of individuals each with unique, divinely allocated missions, operating within an overarching and authoritative structure, but as the concrete form of the way of being *properly human* in the world.

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<sup>48</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. 1998, p. 49 (My italics)

<sup>49</sup> Leahy, B. 2008, p. 34

<sup>50</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. 1998, p. 12

<sup>51</sup> Leahy, B. 2008, p. 34, fn. 12 cites Kuhns, W. (1968) *In Pursuit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, London: Burns & Oates as arguing in favour of an ecclesiological reading. For a Christological reading, Leahy cites Phillips, J.A. (1967) *Christ for Us in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, New York: Harper & Row

By the time Bonhoeffer has produced the writings collected in *Ethics*, he is able to say: “The Church is not a religious community of worshippers of Christ but is Christ Himself who has taken form among men... The Church, then, bears the form which is in truth the proper form of all humanity.”<sup>52</sup> The Christ who is at the centre of this thinking is of course the Humiliated One who died, was buried and rose again. Through him we see the concreteness of the life of the church, lived out in denial of self through encounter with and love for the other. As we saw in our previous discussion of ‘complex seeing’, there is again a reversal of polarities: the human is ‘produced’ by the objective reality of the Christ who *is* its life in so far as it lives in community. Having one’s being within the community however also puts one both *within* and *above* the flow of each moment-by-moment encounter. The objective perspective is that of Christ the Humiliated One and the flow of moments - of ‘history’, of ‘what happens’ - is now viewed from that perspective. This is why Bonhoeffer insists that revelation is not just a matter of an individual’s decision, important as this is, but that it always happens in the context of the ‘turning outwards to the other’, by which one can “understand that you have been brought within revelation”.<sup>53</sup>

#### 6.17 ‘Objective spirit’

The ‘objective spirit’ is not therefore a mode of operation in the world such that humans surrender themselves to it. It is not realized within the world as a structure extrinsic to humans. Bonhoeffer thinks of it as the work of the Holy Spirit

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<sup>52</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. 1971, p. 64

<sup>53</sup> Leahy, B. 2008, p. 44 citing Bonhoeffer, D. (1996) *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*, Reuter, H-R. & Floyd, W.W., (eds.), Rumscheidt, H.M., (trans.) Minneapolis: Fortress Press

“actualizing” the reality of Christ-as-community.<sup>54</sup> This is the “life-principle”<sup>55</sup> which gives us the category of ‘liveliness’ - a category which includes, ironically, the brokenness, suffering and death without which it would be a triumphalist assertion of wish-fulfilment.

#### *6.18 Themes and objectives summarized*

In this chapter, we have taken from Bonhoeffer the figura of Jesus Christ as the Humiliated One, a figura which is properly dramatic because it is able to include within itself the impediment to desire necessary to be able to speak of drama within the life of God.

We have also followed Bonhoeffer in rejecting the notion of an abstract ethics which acts as an extrinsic guide to Christian action in the world. We may only speak of a Christian ‘ethics’ as a conformation within the concrete world of the here and now as a ‘conformation’ to the Humiliated One who is not a representative of ‘the Good’ but who is the self-giving God who meets us in the person of Jesus Christ. Any suspicion of the adoption of an abstract ethics leads to what Bonhoeffer calls ‘dead law’ or, in dramatic terms, ‘deadly theatre’.

The motif of humiliation is also key to the understanding (and practice) of drama, and ‘drama-as-humiliation’ will be the key theme of Section Two as we investigate how we may correlate a Christology based on humiliation with the phenomena of drama. We have established that the ontology of drama shares with Bonhoeffer’s Christology the categories of ‘liveliness’ and ‘momentariness’ and we will show how

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<sup>54</sup> Bonhoeffer D. 1998, p. 159

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* p. 143

these categories are key to an ‘episodic soteriology’ which, I claim, is the key to understanding *what drama does for us*.

We have criticized the adoption by Theodrama of a nexus of performativity, narrativity and ethics, which we have said results in the vanishing of the audience and the incorporation of static forms into itself which render it potentially undramatic. We have retrieved from a study of Bertolt Brecht the concept of ‘complex seeing’ which we have used to consider the theology of the Cross and of the Church as a means of preserving the horizons of text, performance and reception by an audience.

In the next Section we will go back to the roots of drama and consider the essential conditions under which it takes place. This will involve a study of the nature of desire and conflict which we will relate to the concept of deconstruction in order to consider what it might mean to say that *drama is salvific*. Using Shakespeare’s *King Lear* we will also investigate dramatic irony and relate it to theological irony, using the motif of ‘uncoiling’ in conjunction with ‘humiliation’.

With our research question in mind we will begin to fill out the lineaments of a theological dramatic theory, which I term ‘Christodrama’, engaging with the ‘Christological poetics’ of John Milbank but also bringing in two important figures from the theatre of the twentieth century, Antonin Artaud and Samuel Beckett, in order to say how Christodrama both discloses and enables the audience to grasp the ‘new new thing’ as ‘grace’.

## SECTION TWO

“I’m going to tell you a secret. Everything is about wanting. Everything. Things happen because of people wanting.”<sup>1</sup>

### CHAPTER 7: DRAMA AS ‘HUMILIATION’

#### 7.1 *The constructive task ahead*

In the course of Section One I made a number of claims about drama and its relationship with theology in support of a view that *drama is in itself theological*. Furthermore, in my critique of ‘Theodrama’, I claimed that by instrumentalizing drama it gives a flattened out, un-dramatic account of what drama is and does with the result that its theology is rendered decidedly *undramatic*. In this section I begin the task of saying how *drama is not only theological but christological* and how it is that drama may be said to be ‘salvific’ for audiences. I intend therefore to construct a Christian theory of drama which gives us access to a non-metaphysical understanding of God and says how salvation may be understood as *available to all*.

#### 7.2 *A kenotic problem*

In making use of Pauline kenotic Christology and the figure of the Humiliated One drawn from Bonhoeffer, there is a danger of being drawn into the deep waters of a debate concerning kenotic Christological models and the question of the passibility of God on the one hand and the valorisation of suffering - or the “divinizing of the tragic”<sup>2</sup> on the other. As I stated at the beginning, it is not within my scope to make a comprehensive study of the problem. However I recognize that some attempt must

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell, D. (1999), *Ghostwritten*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, p. 213

<sup>2</sup> Kilby, K. 2012, p. 121



be made at the outset of my constructive thesis to articulate how my use of *kenosis* relates to this wider theological issue.

Critics of kenotic Christologies - for example Karen Kilby<sup>3</sup> - draw attention to a tendency on the part of some kenotic theologians to valorize suffering. These, it is complained, try to say that a Christian understanding of suffering is intrinsic to an understanding of divine love and that the one is somehow made necessary by the other. So is a kenotic christology of any type committed to saying that love and suffering necessitate each other, and furthermore that God in Godself is subject to change, to new experience, to suffering?

There are, as Kilby and others acknowledge,<sup>4</sup> different types of kenotic Christology: those that emphasise the positive nature of suffering (positive from the point of view of giving some insight into the transcendent nature of divine love) and those that emphasize diminishment - the self-divesting of privilege as a way of understanding the generosity of God. Crisp makes the distinction between those which are ontological and those which are functional - those which make claims about Christ's being and therefore his loss of being in the Incarnation and those which make the claim that Christ forbears from exercising "certain divine properties"<sup>5</sup> for a period in the Incarnation. Rejecting ontological accounts (both weak and strong) of *kenosis* on the grounds that relinquishing divine properties means that Christ ceases to be a member of the divine Trinity in the Incarnation and is therefore anti-Chalcedonian,

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<sup>3</sup> Kilby, K. (2018) *The Seductions of Kenosis*. Paper presented to Centre for Catholic Studies conference: Suffering, Diminishment and the Christian Life, 10 January 2018, Durham. Accessed via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUSujhwdMVQ>

<sup>4</sup> See Kilby, K. 2018, and Crisp, O. (2007) *Divinity and Humanity: The Incarnation Reconsidered*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

<sup>5</sup> Crisp, O. 2007, p. 120

Crisp also suggests that functionalist accounts, while being more compatible with orthodoxy, still require too much to be given up. He does however give a cautious welcome to *cryptic Christology*<sup>6</sup> in accounting for the language of *kenosis* in the New Testament, an account he concedes is “a species of weak functionalist kenotic doctrine.”<sup>7</sup> Kilby is sceptical of all kenotic Christologies in so far as they entail a positive view of suffering and loss on the grounds that such suffering is always bad, is not part of the divine nature and attempts therefore should not be made to transcend it.<sup>8</sup>

In order to keep the discussion within the scope of this thesis, let us start by examining Balthasar’s own kenotic Christology in the company of Kilby in order to elucidate his understanding of the relationship between divine love and divine suffering.

In volume 3 of his *Theo-drama*, Balthasar integrates his Christology into his account of the immanent Trinity by linking the divinity of Christ with his mission: Christ is the one “in whom Person and mission are identical,”<sup>9</sup> and furthermore “the Subject in whom person and mission are identical can only be divine.”<sup>10</sup> Kilby points out that this move is a development of the classical position on the procession of the Son from the Father: “Jesus is the person who so completely accepts, lives out, and identifies with his mission, that whereas others may have a mission, he simply *is* his mission. If one follows Balthasar to the point of saying that Jesus is the one in whom Person and

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p. 121

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Kilby, K. 2018

<sup>9</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. (1992) *Theo-Drama - Theological Dramatic Theory* Vol. 3, Harrison, G. (Trans.), San Francisco: Ignatius Press, p 157

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

mission are identical, then it will not perhaps seem such a conundrum to say that the eternal Son just is his processing from the Father.”<sup>11</sup> I will come to whether or not I think we can follow Balthasar in this respect, but for the moment, let us move on to relate this to the kenotic element in his Christology and how it relates to his concept of “Trinitarian sub-structure.”<sup>12</sup>

In volume 4 of *Theo-drama*, Balthasar elucidates this concept in terms not only of love between persons, but also in terms of (infinite) “distance, otherness, risk and kenosis.”<sup>13</sup> This kenosis begins with the action of the Father: “the Father strips himself, without remainder, of his Godhead and hands it over to the Son.”<sup>14</sup> The Father can “give his divinity away,” letting go of his divinity in an act of “original self-surrender”<sup>15</sup> such that he “must go to the very extreme of self-lessness.”<sup>16</sup>

We have to pause here and ask ourselves not only how we could know this but what it could mean for the Father to strip himself of his Godhead. As will be seen when we come to look at three of Shakespeare’s plays - *King Lear*, *The Tempest* and *Measure for Measure* - there is great drama to be had from stripping oneself of one’s own power, but the drama does not lead us where Balthasar wants to go, which is to retain God as God, not God de-throned. “The Father, in uttering and surrendering himself without reserve, does not lose himself. He does not extinguish himself by

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<sup>11</sup> Kilby, K. 2012, p. 98

<sup>12</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. (1994) *Theo-Drama - Theological Dramatic Theory* Vol. 4, Harrison, G. (Trans.), San Francisco: Ignatius Press, p. 332

<sup>13</sup> Kilby, K. 2012, p. 99

<sup>14</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. 1994, p. 323

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* p. 325

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

self-giving.”<sup>17</sup> We have to ask what sort of self-giving it could be when God is not in some way altered by the act of letting go of his divinity? Balthasar may well, as Kilby suggests, have given “too vivid”<sup>18</sup> an account of Trinitarian ‘sub-structure’ but that does not mean he has given a successfully dramatic one.

What Balthasar appears to want to do is to arrange intra-Trinitarian relations as an expression of the meaning of the Cross rather than seeing the Cross as the site of a change in relations or, in Moltmann’s terms, a new experience in the relations between the divine Persons. As Kilby says, Balthasar presents the Cross “as the enactment of a drama between the Father and the Son, while at the same time insisting, with the tradition, that God is not not somehow altered through an engagement with history.”<sup>19</sup> The abandonment of the Son by the Father is the key theme in this drama. God is alienated from God. “On the Cross the relationship between God’s wrath and sin is played out between the Father and the Son, and therefore taken over into God, into the relationship between Father and Son.”<sup>20</sup> Here Balthasar’s concept of distance comes into play. He writes of an “absolute, infinite ‘distance’”<sup>21</sup> between Father and Son, “a unique and incomprehensible ‘separation’ of God from himself.”<sup>22</sup> We note the inverted commas around ‘distance’, implying a highly provisional and hesitant deployment of the term in relation to the Trinity, which has more normally been associated with closeness and fellowship.

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Kilby, K. 2012, p. 105

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* pp. 100-101

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* p. 101

<sup>21</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. 1992, p. 301

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* p. 302

Kilby points out a number of difficulties<sup>23</sup> in construing this concept, with the chief difficulty located in the apparent implication that “if the Cross is conceived as God abandoning God, and if we are not, like Moltmann, to think of it as introducing something *new*, something previously unexperienced, into the life of the Trinity, then we are bound to suppose that there is something eternally present in the life of the Trinity which anticipates it, something to which it gives expression.”<sup>24</sup> An eternal condition within the life of God that anticipates and therefore also necessitates the Cross - this seems quite close to the Aristotelian concept of *hamartia*, a fatal flaw, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 8.2. However I am quite sure that Balthasar does not intend his concept of ‘distance’ to be construed as ‘flaw’, but perhaps we could say that he intends something like the idea that there is within God *what it takes to overcome the idea of flaw*, and that this expresses itself not only *in* the Cross but *as* the Cross. It is not hard to see why Kilby objects to the idea she finds in Balthasar of the “divinizing” of suffering on account of his importing it into the very nature of the relations between Father and Son, thus conferring a positive value to actual suffering,<sup>25</sup> and we can agree with this objection. If however we constrain our reading of Balthasar to thinking of ‘anticipation’ as a *space* for holding the overcoming of the problem through humiliation, then we may start to have a way forward for thinking dramatically about the Trinity. This does not commit us to thinking that there is *hamartia* within God’s self, nor to think that to be God is always to be locked into a struggle with with evil. What it does allow us to do is to find a way of speaking about the question I raised in the prologue - how can we talk about God being ‘at risk’ whilst insisting that God is not himself a character within the drama? It will also help us, I suggest, to think about how the real experience of

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<sup>23</sup> Kilby, K. 2012, pp. 105-114

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p. 111

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* p. 121

suffering, loss and evil remains essentially unframeable. Chapter 8 will particularly concern itself with this issue.

The ideas of 'anticipation' and 'space', while not being identical, are fundamental to the processes of drama. Space, which incorporates but is not limited to the idea of distance, gives us important concepts to do with 'otherness' as well as the physical place where drama takes place. Space, we can say, in dramatic terms is the 'shared air' between audience and stage which is energised by the entrance of the performers. Each remains 'other' but, as we shall see in Chapter 12, the performers' task is to seduce the audience to become 'other to itself'. Anticipation, as we have already discussed in relation to Ben Quash and the audience's 'unknowing', is also related to the question of necessity in its dramatic form, as we shall see in Chapter 8.3 where I discuss the concept of irony. There is a congruence therefore between Balthasar's 'anticipation' and a Christodramatic concern with 'what works' - with how a play or a performance is dramatic or not - which I will elaborate in the next sub-section.

Before I do, however, it must be acknowledged that there are some significant differences between Christodrama and Balthasar's kenotic theology. Firstly, whilst Balthasar starts with the Father's 'self-stripping', I think we can only speak of Christ's self-giving, incarnated as the Humiliated One. Whilst we may want to 'read back' from the Cross an act of self-humbling into the life of God, I do not see how it is possible to talk with confidence of the 'prior' self-stripping of the Father, which is then mirrored by the self-stripping of the Son. This seems to be a strained reading of the traditional concept of the 'procession' of the the Son from the Father, and cannot easily be derived from the Pauline kenotic text at Philippians 2.5-11, which I take as

the locus for my use of *kenosis*, though Balthasar of course firmly locates his kenotic theology in Jesus's cry from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"<sup>26</sup> The Philippians text is introduced by Paul in the context of an injunction to the church to put the interests of others before one's own.<sup>27</sup> This in turn suggests the second important difference: drama starts with the problem to be overcome - the human desire to be 'first', to have one's own needs met. Paul recommends self-denial as a response to Christ's *initiating* willingness to be humiliated and this is the basis for my correlation between drama and Christology. The assumption is that human desire (still to be found amongst members of the church) has been subjected, as we discussed in Chapter 5, to a reversal of polarities through the Cross. This is an event in the 'proximate' world, not in the 'ultimate', an important fact, discussed in Chapter 10.9, which again suggests a distinction from Balthasar, even though my analysis of the proximate will allow a non-metaphysical presence for the 'ultimate'.<sup>28</sup> Finally, we must also raise a question about Balthasar's identification of the divine personhood of Jesus with his mission. We can say simply that whilst it may be true that God gives a person their 'personhood' *and* that God gives a person a mission, it does not follow that a person *is* their mission, however close the identification may be. At the point where Jesus contemplates giving up his forthcoming suffering, putting the whole 'mission' in doubt, does he cease to be a person? Does he indeed cease to be divine for at least the period when he experiences doubt? We have already criticized Balthasar, in Chapter 4.15, for confusing the playing of a role with the role itself, and we can use the same stricture here: Balthasar is in danger of making Jesus's mission one of fateful submission rather than willed choice.

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<sup>26</sup> Mark 15.34 & Matthew 27.46, echoing Psalm 22.1. Kilby notes that it is quite possible to read this cry not as 'abandonment' but as 'affirmation'. See Kilby, K. 2012, p. 108

<sup>27</sup> "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus..." Philippians 2.4-5a

<sup>28</sup> See the discussion at Chapter 10.10, p. 202

To sum up the discussion, Christodrama's use of *kenosis* is limited to the proximate world and avoids any thought of a fated submission to suffering, but does share 'space' with Balthasar's concept of 'anticipation' suitably constrained. We must now turn briefly to the question of whether this commits us to saying, with Moltmann, that God is open to the future and therefore to new experience within the Godhead, or whether God is 'impassible'.

Perhaps we should start by asking what problem Moltmann's kenotic Christology is attempting to solve. Daniel Rossi-Keen suggests that the answer is to be found in Moltmann's desire to adopt an apologetic stance towards Christianity's relevance to the problems of the contemporary world: "For Moltmann, it is precisely the Christian understanding of the Cross that offers any and all relevance that the bible may have for society."<sup>29</sup> As Moltmann himself writes: "the Christian church and Christian theology become relevant to the problems of the modern world only when they reveal the 'hard core' of their identity in the crucified Christ and through it are called into question together with the society in which they live..."<sup>30</sup> Moltmann's work is a theodicy which proceeds from an awareness of the enormity of human suffering in the twentieth century and is convinced that the metaphysical arguments for the existence of God have no more validity, not to mention relevance, than the arguments of the 'protest atheist', who, argues Moltmann, needs the existence of God in order to be able say why the world should not be the brutal and arbitrary place that it appears to be. "The only way past protest atheism is through a theology of the cross which understands God as the suffering God in the suffering of Christ and

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<sup>29</sup> Rossi-Keen, D.E. (2008) *Jürgen Moltmann's Doctrine of God: The Trinity Beyond Metaphysics*, *Studies in Religion*, 37 (3-4), pp. 447-463, p. 454

<sup>30</sup> Moltmann, J. 1974, p. 3



which cries out with the forsaken God, 'My God, why have you forsaken me?' For this theology, God and suffering are no longer contradictions, as in theism and atheism, but God's being is in suffering and the suffering is in God's being itself, because God is love."<sup>31</sup>

Here this 'calling into question' of both church and world by the Cross of Christ yields a potential alignment with Christodrama and its reversal of polarities, but the question remains whether Christodrama needs to follow Moltmann into the imputation of suffering to the immanent life of God. Moltmann's apologetics start with biblical hermeneutics, centred on the crucifixion of Christ, and proceed to a view of the Trinity which encompasses the suffering in God that arises from what he takes to be the key moment in the drama - the abandonment of the Son by the Father. In contrast to Balthasar, however, he does not employ the concept of infinite distance between Father and Son, but of infinite closeness. "The Son suffers and dies on the cross. The Father suffers with him, but not in the same way."<sup>32</sup> In what way then does the Father suffer? Moltmann locates this suffering in the "infinite grief of love."<sup>33</sup> Now we may well want to say that human love and grief are closely intertwined but does that mean that it is coherent to say that in God grief is 'infinite'? Grief is generally felt to be disabling. Can we speak of God as being 'infinitely disabled' in this way? I do not see how we can know this, nor deduce it from the quotation of Psalm 22.1 on Jesus's lips at the moment of death.

However, this reticence to follow Moltmann applies equally to the arguments advanced by critics such as David Bentley and Kathleen Tanner on the question of

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid.* p. 227

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.* p. 203

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* p.243

passibility. Tanner's point that kenotic Christologies assume that "God is a kind of being over against other kinds of beings"<sup>34</sup> is answered by the example of Balthasar's kenotic Christology, which specifically does not make such an assumption, notwithstanding the difficulties we have also raised with his position. Indeed Tanner employs the concept of 'distance' as Balthasar does, in order to assert the otherness of God to his creation. However it is not clear how Tanner would answer Moltmann's charge that such a view essentially disguises a metaphysical import. Bentley Hart claims that "it is a logical absurdity simultaneously to assert that God is the source of all that is and that God can 'become' something more or other than he previously was."<sup>35</sup> However it is not at all clear in what the absurdity consists: to say that God is the source of being and that God is free to make decisions which open him to the potential for change is not necessarily inconsistent - it depends on the content given to 'God' in the first part of the assertion. It would be inconsistent if one takes 'God' to refer to the impassible God of the metaphysicians, but then how could one coherently speak of God having 'will' whilst maintaining that God is not free to change that will? For Moltmann, to speak of 'God' is always to speak of the tri-une God revealed as passible by the Cross. To adopt, as Bentley Hart and Tanner do, a different starting point means that we do not easily find a vantage point from which to decide one way or the other.

Drama of course deals with suffering and loss. Indeed we shall shortly argue for a sense in which these are fundamental to what makes drama work. However drama, and therefore Christodrama, as I shall argue in relation to an analysis of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, are not answers to the problem of suffering. Drama is not a

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<sup>34</sup> Tanner, K. (2001) *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark

<sup>35</sup> Bentley Hart, D. (2005) *The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami?* Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans

theodicy. In Chapter 1.6 I asked the rhetorical question “If God is God, how can there be meaningful obstructions to his will and desire?” I criticised Balthasar for wanting to flatten out the problem of impediment in terms of a process of human sanctification in which role or mission is conflated with human response to God. My point was that to talk of drama in relation to God, one has to ask what it would be for God to experience impediment and the answer, I suggested, lies in the role of human freedom. Otherwise God’s movement in love towards his creation would be a parade of power rather than a drama. However, as I have said, we cannot have a position within the proximate world from which to see that drama, a drama which for Moltmann is centred on the fact that “in the Cross, Father and Son are most deeply separated in forsakenness and at the same time are most inwardly one in their surrender.”<sup>36</sup>

My arguments may to an extent overlap with Moltmann because he wants to say that salvation implies a certain way God is ‘with us’; Christodrama wants to say that drama has a ‘salvific’ effect in so far as it prepares us to see the ‘new’ which emerges from the drama as *grace*. My Christodramatic *kenosis* only commits me to an act of faith which believes that God holds the ‘space’ that enables the Humiliated One to enter the human drama. This is not fated but willed compassionately. This does not mean that God necessitates the existence of impediment in order to know (or for us to know) that He is God. Balthasar’s principle, reinterpreted as *what it takes to overcome the idea of flaw* and henceforth construed by the term ‘space’ gives us only the idea of God as the ‘space-holder’ who allows the Beloved as the Humiliated One to enter and *energize* the space. We will say a little more about the Trinitarian structure of this space in Chapter 13.

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<sup>36</sup> Moltmann, J. 1974, p. 244

When I speak of God being ‘at risk’, therefore, it is to say that God in some way has a stake in the outcome of the drama. What is at stake for God is the Son who will be humiliated. All sides can agree that the Son sees his mission as the fulfilment of the Father’s compassionate will. However, as will be explored in Chapter 13.4, what stops this from being an unimpeded arrangement lacking dramatic force is the idea that Christ as Logos does not come to us as *assertion* but as *question*, and that Christ’s actions within history throw all human action into question. Therefore Christodrama is as much a neo-*Logos* Christology as it is a kenotic one.

### 7.3 *The fundamental conditions of drama*

For a drama to take place, there are two fundamental conditions that must be satisfied. The first is that there should be a conflict of desire between characters, the outcome of which is in question. The second is that the drama should be observed. The audience must not be made to vanish in the manner of Theodrama and instead has important work to do in relation to the moment-by-moment flow of events. There are transactions which need to take place between actors and audience, constitutive for our understanding of ‘salvation’, ‘liberation’ and ‘grace’. We will explore these transactions in the final chapter with reference to the figure of Prospero from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> See Chapter 13.6, p. 269ff

#### 7.4 *Desire and conflict - a thought experiment*

Desire and the conflicts which ensue from its operation is the working medium, the *stuff* of any drama. The 'throwing into question' of human desire through conflict can be characterized, I suggest, as a process of humiliation, a humbling of the will, and it is this characteristic which will allow us to find within it a christological connection. We will see how the utterance or the expression of desire is necessarily inhibited, leading to violence and loss.

It is a commonplace to assert that drama depends upon conflict. Let us perform the following simple thought-experiment: imagine a series of scenes, in each of which a character walks on stage, announces an intention, immediately fulfils the intention and withdraws, signalling the end of the scene. If that were to be the end of the matter, we would undoubtedly feel short-changed. If there were to be no impediment between the expression of a desire and its satisfaction, we would experience no tension, no question, no uncertainty. To experience these things defines what we mean when we call something 'dramatic'. As an audience, we experience a desire to be satisfied which cannot be achieved without first experiencing a significant threat to the completion of that desire.

Suppose however that we have previously witnessed a scene in which we learn information, perhaps of another character's intentions, or of some hidden facts, which directly impacts upon the carrying out of this latest expression of desire and may indeed make it impossible. We feel tension and uncertainty, anxiety even, because we now know that there is some impediment to the goal; there is something *at stake* in the scene and we need to know how it will play out.

### 7.5 *Corneille, love and honour*

An example which perfectly illustrates this tension can be found in Pierre Corneille's play *Le Cid*. The central character, Rodrigue, son of the former general of the Castilian army, declares his love for Chimène, daughter of the current general, le Comte de Gormas. Chimène reciprocates his feelings. Thus far, with no impediments or inhibitions of desire, we as yet have no drama. However Gormas insults Rodrigue's father and honour demands that Rodrigue should fight Gormas in a duel. "Contre mon propre honneur, mon amour s'intéresse,"<sup>38</sup> as Rodrigue opines. The desire is now thrown into question, or dramatized. The duel is fought and Rodrigue kills Gormas. Now it is Chimène's turn to approach the King and demand the head of her lover.

It should be noted that in my simple analysis it is not necessary to have any knowledge of the specific content of a character's intentions or to make any judgements as to their rightness or otherwise, for the drama to start 'working'. The tension will have a particular quality depending upon whether the announced intention is to kill a brother, secure the affections of an attractive lover or avoid a creditor. In the case of my example, the tension arises from the clash of two values central to that society's ruling elite - courtly, dynastic love on the one hand and family honour on the other. The play is not concerned with criticizing the tradition of honour which drives the play. The tradition is simply one extreme of the polarity, recognizable to its audience, within which the necessary tension is generated. Indeed this play depends for its force upon our sympathy with the demands made upon each character by their respect for the rules of honour. Whether we would prefer to see such rules set aside is irrelevant. If such tension is not generated, we have a reliable

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<sup>38</sup> "My passion strikes at the very heart of my honour." [my translation] Corneille, P. (1637) *Le Cid*, Paris: Editions Hatier

indicator that the action we are witnessing has not yet mounted to the level of the dramatic.

I have isolated this representation of the process within two separated and successive archetypal scenes in which one speech puts another into question. This underlying form need not dictate the particular form of any given play. The process of inhibition may take place line by line, word by word, or most powerfully in the silences between lines. It is up to the dramatist to deploy her art in shaping the succession of intentions and inhibitions, actions and reactions, in such a way as to keep the tension alive from beginning to end of the play. Indeed, the uncovering of hidden motives or the subtle shifting of motives in response to circumstances is likely to form the greater part of a dramatist's artfulness. In the case of *Le Cid*, Corneille's skill lay in combining the emblematic nature of his characters with a sense of the reality of their true feeling which commands the attention and the admiration of his audience. As a writer of hugely successful tragedies (*Polyeucte*, *Nicomède*), comedies (*L'Illusion Comique*) and tragicomedies, of which *Le Cid* is the best-known example, he displayed a superb ability to unwind the consequences of the dilemmas faced by his characters in a way that seems to accord with an audience's sense of natural justice, despite his non-adherence to the aesthetic principles of the classical unities - time, place, action - the totems, derived from Aristotle, which dominated the theatre practice of his time and which caused him to fall out with no less a person than Cardinal Richelieu.

## 7.6 *Natural justice*

Natural justice will prove to be an important ingredient in the mechanics of what makes drama 'work'. Immediately we can see why our second condition - that drama

should be observed - is necessary. The audience carries with it something like a template for 'the rightness of things' which it assembles out of the raw materials of the action on stage. It does not need to agree with itself about particular moral principles - that goodness should be rewarded and evil punished, for example, nor that particular representations of behaviour are good or bad. Nor does it need to project itself into the action and say to itself, "If it were me, I should have done this or that," (although it may well indulge itself privately in doing just that). What is required, I suggest, is that whatever outcomes are delivered by the action should in some sense be recognized as arising naturally from the elements of the drama rather than being imposed in accordance with prevailing moral precepts. There is, in other words, a form of deconstruction at work within drama, out of which emerges something which was previously hidden. We may speak of this as an 'excess' or perhaps 'gift' which an audience receives and takes away with it.

### 7.7 *Irony and the audience*

Closely allied to this sense of justice is the notion of irony. This term refers to the principle of negation which is at work within the drama. The audience is the keeper of the thread which creates the sense of irony. As observers of the process, they hold the tension within themselves, a tension which derives from having knowledge that is hidden from the characters on the stage. We may note the connection here with the notion of *complex seeing* elucidated in the previous section. Events on stage unfold as a flow of actions and reactions, motivations and inhibitions, accommodating themselves to each other in a series of conflicts which await resolution. The audience sits above the flow, it sees the contradictions within the action and holds the resulting tension within itself and, to this extent, is also involved in the action. Just as we may say that as a result of the potential inhibitions of a desire, there is



something 'at stake' for the characters, so there must always be something 'at stake' for the audience. By 'at stake' here, I mean that there is both the threat of loss and the assumption that a character will strive to prevent such a loss. So what, precisely, is it that the audience finds it has staked in giving its attention to the flow of events on stage?

We must be careful here in speaking of an audience as a collective with a single, predictable mind, from which general principles can be extracted. The subjectivities within the collective must always be accounted for, subjectivities which are also 'in play' during the experience of watching a drama. Nevertheless we may assert that while each audience member may differ in their particular reactions, they are united by virtue of their privilege with regard to their witnessing of the threads within the flow. One thing that is at stake for the audience, therefore, is this privilege of being 'above the flow' and of knowing itself to be above it. The drama will do its best to seduce the audience to enter its flow, to 'suspend its disbelief.' Yet as Brecht writes, "Disbelief can move mountains<sup>39</sup>." The audience needs to hold on to its disbelief in order to see the contradictions of the action. It is its disbelief that allows it to escape from the hegemony of a 'message' within a play, expressed as a resolution of a problem exemplified by the play's contradictions. For Brecht, attempting to make theatre (and dramatic theory) for a 'scientific age' the point was for the audience to be enabled to see the conditions which produced and maintained bourgeois privilege in order to change them in accordance with the logic of scientific materialism. Having given us the means to look into the nature of the flow and avoid the seduction of its charms, Brecht proceeds to instrumentalize his dramatic theory in just the way that *Theodrama* demands. As I have argued, *complex seeing* is a useful tool in

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<sup>39</sup> Brecht, B. 1948

theological analysis, but we must beware of surrendering our position as observers, as witnesses and as guardians of irony.

### 7.8 *Time and obliteration*

The question of flow and of what is at stake for the audience in witnessing it is not exhausted by the audience's role in holding the threads of dramatic irony in its hands. To watch a play is to experience the phenomenon of *dramatic time* and our deep-seated attachment to marking its appearance and disappearance within the flow of performance. Dramatic time, "the two hours' traffic of our stage"<sup>40</sup> is a disruption of our perceptions of ordinary, linear time, becoming itself part of the matter of the play. As Martin Meisel notes,<sup>41</sup> writers such as Thornton Wilder, Alan Ayckbourn and Tom Stoppard conjure simultaneity through a variety of timescales operating in a single place. The audience is privileged with access to the resonances that arise between events displaced in time. The fear of loss and of obliteration becomes palpable, even as the audience enjoys its privilege. Drama depends for its effect on this capacity to remind us of what potentially obliterates us, even as it consoles us with the sense that through the drama we are holding it at bay.

The potential for an actual loss of being is therefore a key characteristic of Christodrama. I prefer to use the language of 'being' here rather than 'death' in order to allow us to remain neutral with regard to the traditional view of a Christian 'life after death'. We will examine this theme further with regard to Augustine, performance and memory, with particular reference to the work of Samuel Beckett.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue, l. 12 in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (Eds.), p. 337

<sup>41</sup> Meisel, M. (2007) *How Plays Work: Reading and Performance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

<sup>42</sup> See Chapter 13.2, p. 258

## 7.9 *Desire and frustration*

We have established that desire and the impediment to satisfaction are fundamental to drama. We must now distinguish between ‘desire’ and ‘will’. By ‘desire’ I mean the state of experiencing a lack or a deficit which might be ameliorated by the possession of, or relationship with, that which is lacking. There is an implication that the fulfilment of the desire will bring with it a positive feeling, such as pleasure, and conversely the continued lack or deficit is accompanied by negative feelings or ‘pains’. By ‘will’ I mean the intention (and by implication the capacity) to bring about the fulfilment of the desire, to overcome the felt lack or deficit.

The capacity to bring about or fulfil an intention does not of course imply that the action is thereby guaranteed to be fulfilled. Indeed, my analysis suggests that it is bound to be subject to impediment, to be thrown into question, for that is what makes the situation dramatic. However, without there being some evidence of capacity, we would be inclined to doubt that any desire was really being expressed. A character might, of course, appear weak-willed and inclined to give up easily.

However if the action is to go forward, a means of circumventing or overcoming the weakness needs to be found. Paradoxically, comedy often works on this principle.

The plot of *Cyrano de Bergerac*<sup>43</sup> turns on the very inability of its central character to act upon his desire for Roxane. Cyrano, constrained by a promise he has made to protect Roxanne’s outwardly attractive young lover, Christian, woos Roxanne under the cover of writing love letters to her on behalf of the poetically-challenged Christian. It is only following Christian’s death in battle that Roxane discovers that she has been reading the secret expression of Cyrano’s desire all along and comes to

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<sup>43</sup> Rostand, E. (1898) *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Paris: Librairie Charpentier et Fasquelle

the realization that it is Cyrano who is her true soulmate. Unfortunately, by that time, Cyrano himself is dying. We see in this plot a radical separation of desire and will, externalized and made the subject of the drama itself. Every utterance that Cyrano makes pushes the fulfilment of his desire further away. In his case, desire is its own impediment. Only under the condition of deconstruction - his imminent death rendering his utterances mute - do we catch the possibility of the desires's fulfilment, albeit too late to be enjoyed.

#### 7.10 *Ontological obliteration revisited*

If the roots of the word drama lie within the greek word *drao* meaning 'to do', the action or the deeds that are thereby portrayed are always in tension with a countervailing action which produces a *stasis*. This *stasis* represents a threat of 'nothingness', a sense of everything falling to zero, to failure, to inaction. When I say that drama throws every action, every attempt to fulfil a desire, into question, it is a question which asks whether there can be any future, and therefore whether the desiring human can in fact ever be fully present to him or herself. A 'character' is therefore never something whole, moving through an action in a process of self-revelation, making that character more and more fully available to the perception of others. We are not looking to construct a psychological entity about whom we could enquire, "If Hamlet walked into the room, how would he behave towards us?"<sup>44</sup> Instead the character is a fragile thing, literally a fraction of a thing, or a thing *in fracture*, and for every moment that it persists in the drama it is in danger of losing more of what it is that makes it a 'thing' at all.

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<sup>44</sup> This is the 'essentialist' view of character deployed by A.C. Bradley in Bradley, A.C. 1905

Quite apart from *Cyrano de Bergerac*, with all its romantic idealism, there are a number of plays, ancient and modern, which make this threat of nothingness central to its concerns. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, above all, makes a drama out of a stasis. The character, Hamlet, is unable to act, to carry out or perform a deed of vengeance. As Terry Eagleton suggests, he is an anxious 'nothing', "a hollow void which offers nothing determinate to be known."<sup>45</sup> who is not able to create a relationship between the expression of his desire and the deed required to fulfil it.

No character willingly seeks such a destiny. It is entirely thrust upon it by virtue of being made to breathe the air of a 'play'. It is born with a problem, that of how to realize its desire, and the weight of that problem constantly bears upon it, threatening to bring it to nought. It is this central, structural fact about drama that I think can be characterized by the notion of humiliation. The process of utterance and impediment involves loss and change. The threat to being posed by the impediments means that a character is forced to negotiate, to become *less* than their projected desire led them to believe they might become.

#### 7.11 *Themes and objectives summarized*

I am suggesting, therefore, that humiliation, a process by which a character is 'brought low' through a series of impediments to its self-realization, is a structural feature of drama without which we would struggle to recognize an action as *dramatic*.

In the next chapter we need however to explore more fully the nature of these 'impediments', which weigh on or bring down our characters. A critic of my

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<sup>45</sup> Eagleton, T. (1986) *William Shakespeare*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 72

argument might suggest, for example, that I am building pessimism into the very fabric of drama and that what in fact sustains our interest in drama is its 'ennobling' of human endeavour, its sense of 'hope', its 'uplift' rather than its 'downcast' - even if the events portrayed are 'tragic'.

## CHAPTER 8: DESIRE AND ITS IMPEDIMENTS

### 8.1 *Action and reaction*

In Newtonian physics every action has an equal and opposite reaction. In Corneille's *Le Cid*, Chimène reacts to the death of her father by demanding the death of her lover. However, reactions in drama, whilst not random, are often asymmetrical. Humans remain unpredictable with a remarkable ability to surprise, which is part of the pleasure of watching a drama. An exercise directors sometimes use is one where actors in a scene are asked to imagine holding a piece of rope tight between them. With each line they deliver they pull on the rope, so that the other actors 'feel' the pressure. Each actor has to gauge their reaction to keep the rope (and therefore the scene) taut. The director will have given one of the actors a secret instruction to 'drop' the rope on a pre-arranged signal and thus break the tension with an unpredicted reaction. By such means do actors explore ways to keep a scene 'alive' and guard against any feeling that the scene is simply an unfolding mechanism. The silent pause, or a physical stillness, are part of the grammar of a performance which create anticipation or defeat expectation. Delaying a reaction, masking a reaction or pretending a reaction are all ways of using time to make complex impediments to each character's individual desire.

Yet in order to do their work dramatic impediments need to be sufficiently powerful to inhibit the force of the desire being expressed. If they are not powerful enough, then the drama fails as the character moves happily on its way. Of course, the plot could be arranged so that the successful completion of one act of will inhibits another yet-to-be performed action on the part of another character. Conversely, an expressed desire could be impeded by a previously performed action of which the

character is ignorant. The arrangement will be a function of where the playwright wants the audience to look - of which characters are 'important' and in whom attention should be invested.

I have been careful to call these counteracting forces 'impediments' and 'inhibitions' rather than 'negations', after the manner of Hegel, because it is important that their existence should not finally close down the possibility of reaction. They may close down certain ways of reacting but they also provide the means of moving the action forward, not of stopping it altogether. They are a 'resistant force' but not necessarily an overwhelming one.

## 8.2 *Impediments as 'flaw': Aristotle and the four plots*

The question then arises as to whether these impediments are always 'external circumstances' such as personifications of prevailing social conditions against which a character struggles, natural disasters catching at the heels of the characters on stage, or whether they might be internalized, in the manner of the fatal 'flaw'<sup>1</sup> believed by Aristotle to characterize tragic heroes, whose destiny is brought about through their possession of some moral deficit. Aristotle's use of the term *hamartia* occurs in the *Poetics* in connection with his discussion of the four types of plot he identifies as tragic. The fourth type is rather a rump category after Aristotle has considered and rejected as being insufficiently tragic three other types: a good person's movement from fortune to misfortune; a wicked person's move from misfortune to happiness; a wicked person's move from happiness to misfortune.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Grube's translation of *hamartia*: Aristotle, (1958) *On Poetry and Style*, Grube, G.M.A., (trans.) New York: Bobbs-Merrill. In a footnote this translation is clarified to mean a "moral or intellectual weakness." Else renders it as "mistake" referring to an error of identification: Aristotle (1967) *Poetics*, Else, G., (trans.), Michigan: Michigan University Press

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle (1967) ch. 13



Stepping lightly over the possibilities of a good person moving from misfortune to happiness, he lights upon a person who is neither fully virtuous nor fully wicked but who through some flaw in their character, moves from happiness to misfortune. The precise meaning of *hamartia* has proved controversial amongst Aristotelean scholars. Rather than Gruber's rendering as 'flaw', Butcher prefers 'error', denoting "inadequate knowledge of particular circumstances"<sup>3</sup> particularly where those circumstances might have been known. This is not sufficient to render the character as morally wicked, but more narrowly to suggest culpability in one respect - that of 'not knowing'. Kaufmann suggests that Aristotle took Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus* as his model here to the exclusion of other dramatists<sup>4</sup> but it is not a bad model for all that.

Ignorance, whether inadvertent or willful, could well be a candidate to describe the state of all dramatic characters, who are 'not present to themselves' (in Gadamer's phrase)<sup>5</sup> and who are brought, through external circumstances, to a recognition of how things really stand. Ignorance, blindness, 'not knowing' - in a sense characters need to be in this condition to be 'characters' at all. The irony is in *how* they are ignorant of their 'ignorance'. The moment of 'recognition' in a play, the *anagnorisis*, represents for Aristotle the moment of change "from ignorance to knowledge". In the case of Oedipus, the recognition of who he really is, of how things really stand, is the trigger to a deeper horror, and to embracing fully, and bloodily his own blindness. Here we find source for our belief that drama is fundamentally linked to 'not knowing.' The difference we might have with Aristotle is in our questioning of his

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<sup>3</sup> Butcher, S.H. (1951) *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, With a Critical Text and Translation of the Poetics*, (4th edition) New York: Dover Publications

<sup>4</sup> Kaufmann, W. 1978, p. 70

<sup>5</sup> Gadamer, H.G. 1989

assertion that drama moves us from unknowing to knowing. Rather I think that drama reveals to us our unknowing - it holds the process of our unknowing out to us.

The impediments are never simply 'external circumstances' or 'embracing contexts' but indeed a combination of 'inner' and 'outer' factors - of subjectivity and objectivity - which draw from each other to feed the dramatic encounter. The character who expresses desire and wills the fulfilment of that desire always does so in ignorance of all the consequences that spring to life with the utterance. The consequences, in the form of resistance to the utterance, gather around the character and threaten its sense of being. The negation, therefore, is not something that exists independently and comes from a different world, even if it comes from the lips of a different character, but is implied within the very act of utterance.

Each individual play, in so far as it 'works' as a drama, irrespective of its forms, its employment of certain styles - soliloquy, chorus, narrator and so on - incorporates this dynamic in a series of moments, a series of negations whose movement is inevitably downwards.

### *8.3. Irony and the downward curve*

Does this mean there is some notion of necessity active within the drama? I think there is a necessity at work, but it is not a 'philosophical necessity' in the sense of being a metaphysical principle brought to bear on the action from the outside. Susan Langer describes a dramatic action as constructed in such a way that "a whole, indivisible piece of virtual history is complicit in it, as a yet unrealized form, long before the presentation is completed. This constant illusion of an imminent future [...] is 'form in suspense'. It is a human destiny that unfolds before us, its unity is

apparent from the opening words or even silent action...”<sup>6</sup> I do not quite like the idea of ‘form in suspense’ which suggests something fixed and frozen, but she does capture what Burt States calls an “‘expectation of plenty’”<sup>7</sup>, a sensing of possibilities within the present moment; indeed she offers a present filled with its own future, “an imminent futurity.”<sup>8</sup> States himself prefers the theory formulated by Kenneth Burke, that of ‘internal fatality’<sup>9</sup> - the “extension of oppositional development into the sphere of human action and passion.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, he says, drama is not merely conflict, but “conflict informed by ironic necessity, by an internal fatality operating from within,”<sup>11</sup> although, adds States, it is in fact imposed from without, by the dramatist. Why is this form of necessity ironic? The answer must be because the expression of it in a dramatic action - an utterance and a counter-utterance - is always less than the author, and therefore the audience, knows. The dramatist and the audience are therefore joined in what States calls a “common framework of anticipation.”<sup>12</sup> The characters on the other hand are subject to a ‘fatality’ which lurks within them though its workings are unknown to them.

In the four types of plot that Aristotle considers in terms of their tragic potential - that is, their potential to produce pity and fear in their audiences - there is a key phrase which describes the activity of Burke’s ‘inner fatality’. Aristotle in each case refers to the ‘movement’ from one state to another, from happiness to misfortune or *vice versa*. This movement, far more than its subject, is of critical importance to

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<sup>6</sup> Langer, S. (1953) *Feeling and Form*, New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, p 310

<sup>7</sup> States, B.O. (1971) *Irony and Drama: A Poetics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p 19

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* p. 20

<sup>9</sup> Burke, K. (1989) *On Symbols and Society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 260

<sup>10</sup> States, B.O. 1971, p. 23

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* p. 24

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p. 25

drama. Known in classical drama as *peripeteia*, ‘reversal’ is the lifeblood of the drama. As States observes, “We can think of the peripety [...] as being simply the strongest symptom of a great curve of motion and logic which the play performs and the peripety imitates in miniature.”<sup>13</sup> States thinks of this curve as inferring, in an audience’s mind, a full circle, but before it can come full circle, it must curve downward. This downward curve is inevitable but not by its nature pessimistic. As States argues, irony is not a “philosophical persuasion” but the means by which a dramatist “seeks out the limits of conceivable proportion and disproportion.”<sup>14</sup>

This brings us back nicely to my view that an audience possesses a sense of ‘natural justice’ which represents its own way of seeking out the ‘truthfulness’ or otherwise of the drama’s action. This is what keys the audience into the significance of the humiliation it is observing. It is, I suggest, in this humiliation that the audience finds the uniting moment, the proportionate fit, between inner feeling and outer fact.

#### 8.4 *Themes and objectives summarized*

Humiliation as a uniting moment allows us to surface the key idea that *drama is not simply theological but Christological*. As we saw in Bonhoeffer, the way Christ is ‘for us’ in the world is as the Humiliated One and his humiliation achieves its apotheosis in his crucifixion. When we viewed the crucifixion through the lens of ‘complex seeing’ we saw a *peripety* in motion, by which the polarities of human subjectivity and objectivity are reversed. In the crucifixion, Christ breaks the proportions for measuring ourselves established by our human knowledge and becomes himself the proportion. We can ‘think Christ’ as the uniting moment, the proportionate fit,

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p. 26

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p. 34

between inner feeling and outer fact. And with the help of Bonhoeffer's notion of 'conformation'<sup>15</sup> we can see that for us to be 'who we really are', to be wholly and really human, we must lose our own 'sense' of proportion, and *this is what drama does for us*. When we open ourselves to a drama, we find a way of learning the inner meaning of Jesus' words in Matthew 16.25: "Those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

Is it an exaggeration to say that all drama involves this curvature towards and through humiliation? Indeed is humiliation too narrow and too private a concept to do the work I have earmarked for it? Humiliation is considered to be a state of which we are scornful and which rejoices us when we see it in others. To be humiliated and to experience the emotional effect of it is shameful, and to be hidden from public sight at all costs. It may be that the determination to hide one's feelings of humiliation and to overcome them through a mastery of the situation which produced them provides a positive energy which produces change and eventual vindication.

However this latter point underlines the case I am making: the humiliation of a character in public may well bring about a further change. Humiliation is not necessarily in itself a closure, or an endpoint of the drama but a stage through which a character passes. It brings with it a kind of death - the death of the continuing possibility of being whole and present to oneself in the way one had hoped and imagined for oneself. For to strive to overcome the impediment one faces necessitates change - it necessitates the becoming of the person who has been humbled.

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<sup>15</sup> See p. 115

We should also consider that there is a difference between the theme of humiliation as the content of a drama - what the drama is 'about' - and the structural process of humiliation to which I am referring. In the next chapter we will consider a Shakespearean character whose abasement tragically encapsulates both sides of this theme, as we start to examine the Christodramatic motifs of humiliation, obliteration, downward curve, irony and 'salvific seeing' in action. We may see in Lear a sublime example of a human being 're-proportioned' through humiliation.

## CHAPTER 9: KING LEAR AND THE PROPORTIONS OF SUFFERING

### 9.1 *Lear and 'mastered' irony*

If we consider Shakespeare's *Lear* at the moment, near the end of the play, in which he recognizes his daughter Cordelia, we may catch a glimpse of how non-trivial is this process of abasement. According to States, this moment is an example of what Kierkegaard calls 'mastered irony'.<sup>1</sup> In his youthful essay *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard suggests of Shakespeare's plays: "Irony is now pervasive, ratifying each particular feature so that there is neither too much nor too little, so that everything receives its due, so that the true equilibrium may be effected in the microcosmic situation of the poem whereby it gravitates towards itself. The greater the oppositions involved in this movement, so much the more irony is required to control and master those spirits which obstinately seek to storm forth; while the more irony is present, so much the more freely and poetically does the poet hover above his composition. Irony is not present at some particular point in the poem but omnipresent in it, so that the visible irony in the poem is in turn ironically mastered."<sup>2</sup>

*Lear* is a play which wears its structural humiliations very much on its outside - its dramatic processes are also the stuff of its drama. Prior to the scene in question, the 'recognition scene' in Act 4.6, Lear as a character has certainly been one of those spirits who has 'stormed forth', undergoing the most profound reversal from his position as powerful king and father at the beginning of the play. He has endured wracking storms and exposure to the elements which have, along with the

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<sup>1</sup> States, B.O. 1971, p. 35

<sup>2</sup> Kierkegaard, S. (1966) *The Concept of Irony: with Constant Reference to Socrates*, Capel, L.M. (trans.), London: William Collins, p. 336

humiliations to which his two eldest daughters have subjected him, deprived him of his wits. Yet the tone of the scene is jesting, and light, whilst at almost every moment counterpointed with the most profound feelings of compassion, sorrow and forgiveness.

The scene contains what Robert Heilman calls “completeness of understanding, insight into human division, a full sense of flaw and excellence.”<sup>3</sup> It is an example of “getting everything into the picture,”<sup>4</sup> not through directness of utterance, but through indirectness, through irony.

At the point in the play where the scene occurs, familial relationships and friendships sundered following the initial division of Lear’s kingdom are beginning to reform, albeit in altered states. Cordelia has returned from France at the head of an army, and has met with the banished Kent, disguised as a servant. Kent, secretly returned from his banishment, has been watching over Lear during his wanderings on the heath. Gloucester, blinded and despairing, and his eldest son Edgar, in the clothes of a beggar, ‘poor Tom’, are reunited. However despite this regrouping of the faithful supporters of Lear, their state is weak, and the centrepiece around whom they are gathered is in a pitiable state:

“Lear:           Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?  
                      I am mightily abused. I should even die with pity  
                      To see another thus. I know not what to say.  
                      I will not swear these are my hands. Let’s see:  
                      I feel this pinprick. Would I were assured

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<sup>3</sup> Heilman, R. (1968) *Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience*, Hofstadter, A. (trans.), Seattle: University of Washington Press, p. 26

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*



Of my condition.

Cordelia: (Kneeling) O look upon me, sir,  
And hold your hands in benediction o'er me.  
You must not kneel.”<sup>5</sup>

The ironies circulate. Lear has reached the apparent bottom of his abasement. He does not know himself nor his condition. We understand from the text that he has attempted to kneel to Cordelia, herself kneeling before her father. He does not know even whether the hands in front of him are his own, yet Cordelia asks these same hands to be laid upon her in blessing. Even feeling the prick of a brooch-pin does not restore his knowledge of himself. He has lost his ‘condition’ utterly. He is neither king nor father. We should remember here that Lear’s originating act that set the drama in motion was one of self-lowering, the self-divesting of his kingship -

“...tis our fast intent  
to shake all cares and business from our age,  
Conferring them on younger strengths while we  
Unburdened crawl toward death.”<sup>6</sup>

By Act Four we have seen this old man of “fourscore and upward”<sup>7</sup> crawl towards what surely must be his death, but not by any means unburdened. What should we call the original act of self-lowering? Is it right to call it an act of humility, a self-humbling? Lear accompanies his abdication with a demand that each of his daughters should declare how much they love him in order to decide who should have the largest part of the divided kingdom:

“Which of you shall we say doth love us most,

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<sup>5</sup> *The Tragedy of King Lear*, Act 4, sc. 6, ll. 45-52 [Folio text] in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (Eds.), p. 969

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* Act 1, sc. 1, ll. 38-41, p. 945

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* Act 4, sc. 6, l. 54, p. 969

That we our largest bounty may extend

Where nature doth with merit challenge?"<sup>8</sup>

'Nature' and 'merit' certainly challenge each other during the course of the play and our understanding of each (or our understanding of Shakespeare's view of each) is altered as the play progresses. The demand for a competition in expression of filial piety and love must suggest that Lear's motivation is characterized at least in part by vanity rather than humility. When his youngest daughter, Cordelia, refuses to join in the competition, offering "nothing" in response to the command to speak, she appeals to reason and truth as a framework for the assurance of her proper filial piety. Lear's response is that "Nothing will come of nothing."<sup>9</sup> As Frank Kermode reminds us<sup>10</sup>, 'nothing' was Elizabethan slang for a woman's genitalia, so this threatening response contains a myriad ironies, combining mathematics, 'rude' nature and metaphysics in five short words. A central irony that spins out from this is that language itself, as a social construct, is always ironic, or is potentially always ironic: Cordelia says less than she means, and thereby, as the play unfolds, speaks truth. Her sisters, in straining to speak 'more' than the other, say more than they mean, and neither speak the truth.

All of these ironies are flowing through the recognition scene, as I have suggested.

"Pray do not mock,"<sup>11</sup> says Lear to Cordelia in response to her request for benediction. The reconciliation is not achieved with the simple recognition that his daughter has returned to him. He has no blessing to offer her, being now 'nothing'

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* Act 1, sc.1, ll. 51-53, p. 945

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* l. 90

<sup>10</sup> Kermode, F. (2005) *The Age of Shakespeare*, London: Phoenix

<sup>11</sup> *The Tragedy of King Lear*, Act 4, sc. 6. l. 53 [Folio text] in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (Eds.), p. 969

himself. All that was represented by Lear as King has been obliterated. However, he is sensible of a form of justice that now confronts him:

“Be your tears wet? Yes, faith. I pray, weep not.

If you have poison for me, I will drink it.

I know you do not love me; for your sisters

Have, as I do remember, done me wrong.

You have some cause. They have not.”<sup>12</sup>

In one of the tenderest moments in all drama, Cordelia replies, “No cause. No cause.”<sup>13</sup> Forgiveness, love, truthfulness, understanding; Cordelia brings all these virtues with her to this moment of redemption for Lear. Now Lear’s humility is true. We can say that the principle of ‘necessary humiliation’ through which, I have argued, the process of drama proceeds, has undermined Lear’s original false humility and fashioned a moment of truth from it. It is the moment of ‘proportionate fit’, the uniting moment between the outer and the inner world of the play and its characters.

Of course, although we do not yet know it, there are further, darker ironies to come. It is as if Lear, Cordelia, Kent, Gloucester and Edgar were perched on a ledge, having all fallen from the top of the cliff from which blind Gloucester believed he was throwing himself. A moment of safety, of reconciliation, understanding and humility comes to them, wreathed in sadness and pity as it is for the “great breach”<sup>14</sup> in Lear’s “abused nature.”<sup>15</sup> It does not last for long. Cordelia’s army is defeated by her sisters’ forces, she and Lear are taken prisoner and orders given for their deaths by Edmund, the usurping ‘Bastard’ son of Gloucester. Edmund’s own humiliation and defeat at

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* ll. 64-68

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* l. 69

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* l. 14

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

the hands of his brother, Edgar, and the confession of his plan to have Cordelia killed, do not come in time to save Cordelia.

## 9.2 *Cordelia and the 'worst thing': love and power*

Shakespeare's tragic vision takes us to the further reaches of despair as Lear enters, howling, with the dead Cordelia in his arms. Why does Shakespeare inflict this further suffering upon Lear? When Cordelia and Lear are captured, Cordelia says to her father:

“We are not the first  
Who with best-meaning have incurred the worst:  
For thee oppressed King I am cast down,  
Myself could else out-frown false Fortune's frown.”<sup>16</sup>

Cordelia's fortune had risen since her banishment and she returns to English soil at the head of a French army in full expectation of restoring the order overturned by her sisters' ambitions. Yet she too experiences 'the worst thing', the lowest moment. For her, love and its obligations have led to her suffering on behalf of another. For her own sake, she tells us, she could be as politic and changeable as Fortune herself. Cordelia, we may say, speaks for the way that Truth cannot find its resting-place within the world dominated by power. Those who intend good incur terrible suffering. In a world in which Edmund stands for the Machiavellian principle of power belonging to those who can grasp it and who know how to keep it, Cordelia, standing for Truth, Charity and Forgiveness, is transcendent to the world. As the mid-twentieth century Shakespeare critic John Danby said, “Cordelia stands for no historically realizable arrangement. Her perfection of truth, justice, charity requires a New Jerusalem. She is transcendent to the political and the private. She is the norm

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* Act 5, sc. 3, ll. 3-6, p. 970

itself.”<sup>17</sup> Cordelia’s downfall comes once we have seen her give blessing to her father. It is a moment which acknowledges that love is always trampled by power, marking the sacrifice that love makes to remain true to its nature. For Shakespeare, this represents the inner kernel of what is comprehended by the concept of nature itself.

### 9.3 *Nature and niggardliness*

John Danby has argued that the Elizabethan view of human nature was not a niggardly one: “Man’s [*sic*] nature is not a minimum to which man can be reduced... it is rather a maximum man must attain, and this maximum will involve the willing co-operation of man and his world before the richest image of man will be realized.”<sup>18</sup> Danby cites Richard Hooker’s exposition of the Apostle Paul in evidence of a widely-held Elizabethan view: “The Apostle, in exhorting men to contentment although they have in the world no more than very bare food and raiment, giveth us thereby to understand that those are even the lowest things necessary; that if we should be stripped of all those things without which we might possibly be, yet these must be left; that destitution in these is such an impediment, as till it be removed suffereth not the mind of man to admit any other care.”<sup>19</sup> According to Danby then, the Elizabethans believed that the ideal for man is not the beggar but the King. “Though Nature involves self-control and self-limitation, it does not demand self-mutilation. It is large and free-handed.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Danby, J.F. (1948) *Shakespeare’s Doctrine of Nature: A Study of King Lear*, London: Faber & Faber, p. 138

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* p. 28

<sup>19</sup> Hooker, R. (1825) *Life of Mr. Richard Hooker: Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Books I-V, Bk 1, Ch.10, p. 2, cited in Danby, J.F. 1948, p. 28

<sup>20</sup> Danby, J.F. 1948, p. 29

Lear, in divesting himself of his kingship, is committing an offence against Nature. If we are looking for christological typology, it is not to be found in Lear's action which contains within it an extraordinary element of neurotic anger. In banishing Cordelia for refusing to augment her natural love with unnatural words, Lear shouts:

“The barbarous Scythian  
Or he that makes his generation messes  
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom  
Be as well neighboured, pitied and relieved  
As thou, my sometime daughter.”<sup>21</sup>

He would rather be intimate with someone who eats his children than with his daughter. The image places Lear's own ‘unnaturalness’ at the centre of the play. We might see in this precisely an inversion of Trinitarian relations, of divine self-giving and a mutuality which is never made subject to conditions. At the same time there is an absence of the restraint that characterizes the Nature which is everywhere under review in this play. This lack of restraint on Lear's part is further shown when he intemperately banishes his loyal courtier, the Earl of Kent, who speaks up for Cordelia and tries to dissuade Lear from banishing her:

“That thou hast sought to make us break our vows,  
Which we durst never yet, and with strained pride  
To come between our sentence and our power,  
Which *nor our nature nor our place can bear...*”<sup>22</sup> .

Lear's self-giving has no room for true Nature, since the gap between his word (“our sentence”) and his action (“our power”) is closed by force. During the course of the play, that gap will be forced back open by the twin actions of what Danby calls “The

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<sup>21</sup> *The Tragedy of King Lear*, Act 1, sc.1, ll. 116-119 [Folio text] in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (Eds.), p. 946

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* ll. 167-170

two natures” - the optimistic, rational nature that knows its place, derived, says Danby, from Richard Hooker and Francis Bacon, and the malign, Machiavellian world of capital and lust for power, symbolized in the play by Edmund (“Thou, nature, art my goddess.”<sup>23</sup>). In creating a vacuum by resigning from his responsibilities, Lear allows the forces of the latter for a time, at least, to invade the political sphere and bring about his own downfall. Leaving the scene, he exclaims to Cordelia:

“Therefore be gone

Without our grace, our love, our benison.”<sup>24</sup>

Withholding grace, love and blessing will cost Lear dearly. This is perhaps the outermost pole of the irony that is at work within the play. As we have seen, at his lowest point on the downward curvature, they are restored to him by Cordelia. Here is where the Christological connection is to be found. It is not so much that Cordelia is a symbol of Christ in the play, as opposed to Christian virtues; rather that through her the drama’s necessary structural process of humiliation is united with Shakespeare’s outer theme.

The figure of Christ as the Humiliated One in Bonhoeffer’s theology gives himself to the world in genuine humility, “taking the form of a servant”<sup>25</sup>. Whilst Lear, in divesting himself of Kingship, neurotically demands an expression of love, Christ makes no such condition in his self-offering. The play, as I have noted, is dotted with characters in the guise of servants - notably the Earl of Kent, whose continued service and love for Lear might be thought to be Christ-like. However, the true christological connection comes with the transformed understanding of those who have

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* Act 1, sc. 2, l. 1, p. 947 [my italics]

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* Act 1, sc.1, ll. 264-5, p. 947

<sup>25</sup> Philippians 2.7

experienced, unwillingly, the humiliation that drama's structure offers. As Lear and his daughter are ushered off to prison in Act 5, Lear tells her:

“I'll kneel down  
And ask of thee forgiveness; so we'll live,  
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales and laugh...”<sup>26</sup>

Here, Lear's humiliation has transformed into humility. There is a lightness and quiet joy about the moment, as well as another irony. In the niggardliness of his other daughters' hospitality, laughter and merriment on the part of Lear's followers were the pretext for turning him out of doors. His followers were stripped away from him until, like Poor Tom, he became unaccommodated. In prison, he anticipates having space to see the true comedy of

“great ones  
that ebb and flow by the moon.”<sup>27</sup>

His acceptance that he is no longer numbered amongst the “great ones” signals the return of laughter - for a short time at least.

#### 9.4 *Foolishness and the Fool*

Maynard Mack notes<sup>28</sup> how King Lear follows the archetypal theme of the Abasement of the Proud King, found in sources such as the late mediaeval romance, *Robert of Cisyle*. In this poem, which is not directly attributed as a source of Shakespeare's play, King Robert of Sicily, brother of Pope Urban and of the Emperor of Germany, is a proud and worldly knight, much concerned with his own honour. While attending a religious service, he asks the meaning of the *Magnificat* and in

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<sup>26</sup> *The Tragedy of King Lear* Act 5, sc. 3, ll. 10-12, p. 970

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* ll. 18-19, p. 970

<sup>28</sup> Mack, M. (1965) *King Lear in our Time*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 49-51



response to a priest's explanation that God has the power to bring the mighty low, King Robert boasts of his own invulnerability.<sup>29</sup>

“What mon hath such pouwer,  
Me to bring lowe in danger?  
I am flour of chivalrye,  
Myn enemys I may distruye.”<sup>30</sup>

Sleeping through the remainder of the service, the king awakens to find that an angel has taken on his appearance, has replaced him in his own court and that none of his courtiers recognize or obey him. Brought before the angel, he becomes the court fool, living in kennels. The kingdom meanwhile becomes harmonious under the angel's rule. On a court visit to Rome, Robert, as part of the retinue, finds that his own brothers do not recognize him. He likens his situation to that of Nebuchadnezzar, another proud king 'brought low' and, recognizing himself for what he is, proclaims:

“For that is riht a fool I be,  
Lord on Thi fool Thou have pité.”<sup>31</sup>

In the play *King Lear*, this theme of the King and the Fool, and the king becoming the fool in the course of his degradation, is foregrounded as what we might call a dramatization of the principles of irony. We see it in the nonsense rhyme the Fool offers to teach to Kent:

“Have more than thou showest,  
Speak less than thou knowest,  
Lend less than thou owest,

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<sup>29</sup> Anon. *Robert of Cisyle*, TEAMS Middle English Texts, University of Rochester Library, accessed via <<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/foster-robert-of-cisyle>>

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

Ride more than thou goest,  
Learn more than thou trowest,  
Set less than thou throwest,  
Leave thy drink and thy whore  
and keep in-a-door,  
and thou shalt have more  
than two tens to a score.”<sup>32</sup>

These lines might have come from the mouth of Polonius, the interfering courtier in *Hamlet*, but in the mouth of Lear’s fool, they are a bitter reminder of the ‘nothing’ to which Lear has come, although he himself is not yet able to recognize it. The Fool taunts Lear with the ‘nothing’ that he has become, making him repeat the words he spoke to Cordelia:

“Fool: Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?

Lear: Nothing can be made out of nothing.”<sup>33</sup>

Threatened with whipping, the Fool replies:

“I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are. They’ll have me whipped for speaking true, thou’lt have me whipped for lying, and sometimes I am whipped for holding my peace. I had rather be any kind of thing than a fool; and yet I would not be thee, nuncle. Thou hast pared thy wit o’ both sides and left nothing in the middle... Now thou art an O without a figure. I am better than thou art now. I am a fool; thou art nothing.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *The Tragedy of King Lear*, Act 1, sc. 4, ll. 116-126 [Folio text] in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (Eds.), p. 950

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* ll. 130-131, p. 950

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* ll. 162-169

‘Nothing’ reverberates through the scene, and at this point in the play it has the feel of a scornful and critical commentary on the vanity of a king who has torn his crown in two, whilst expecting it to maintain its former power.

The crown is itself an ‘O’, a nothing, and just as nothing can ‘come of’ or multiply by nothing to produce something, so nothing can be divided within itself to produce anything. Here we come up against a central paradox for Shakespeare - kingship is the height of earthly power that holds the common good, the body politic, within its hands. The very health of the nation is invested in the well-being of the king. And yet, as Henry IV confesses to his son, Prince Harry, in Shakespeare’s history play, *Henry IV Part 2*,

“I myself know well  
How troublesome it sat upon my head.”<sup>35</sup>

Whatever the troubles taken to gain the crown, the king must wear it for all its cares, and yet, at the last, come to nothing like everyone else. Hovering close to the controversies of Tudor politics, Shakespeare constantly throws into question the lust for power and the necessity of power being exercised. Such exercise of power depends upon the creation of certain myths about itself, including the myth that the holder of power has a right to it which is somehow sanctioned by a higher authority still. The Fool’s task is to prod and poke, under the cover of ‘foolery’, the powerful, not in order to bring about reversal, but to frame it.

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<sup>35</sup> *Henry IV Part 2*, Act 4, sc. 3 ll. 314-315 in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (Eds.), p. 534

### 9.5 *The Fool's philosophy*

The Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski identifies the position of the Clown as an alienated critic who moves in high society but is not part of it: "The clown must stand aside and observe good society from outside, in order to discover the non-evidence of evidence, the non-finality of its finality... the philosophy of Clowns is the philosophy that in every epoch shows up as doubtful what has been regarded as most certain; it reveals contradictions... it holds up to ridicule what seems obvious common sense, and discovers truth in the absurd."<sup>36</sup> This is not to suggest however that the play is making a moral point about Lear's behaviour. What we see is the vortex, into which Lear is about to fall, opened up for him, and for us, by the one character who is licensed to say these things to a king. The fool himself follows his master into the vortex. As Lear's descent into 'unaccommodation' and 'nothingness' gathers tragic momentum, the Fool's role disappears. He has gone from view by the end of Act Three, and at the very end of the play we hear from Lear's lips, "And my poor fool is hanged."<sup>37</sup>

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, it is Hamlet himself who assumes some of the functions of the Fool. His wordplay and ironic (if not 'antic') disposition challenge the prevailing myth of King Claudius' right to power, even though he himself is unable to act upon his desire to avenge his father, the former king. In the final act he comes upon gravediggers preparing for the burial of Ophelia. The gravediggers ('Clowns' in the folio edition) throw up a skull, belonging to Yorick, the former jester of Hamlet's father.

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<sup>36</sup> Kolakowski, L. (1959) *The Priest and the Clown - Reflections on the Theological Heritage in Modern Thinking*, *Twórczość*, 10, pp. 82-83, cited in Kott, J. (1967) *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, Taborski, B. (trans.), London: Methuen & Co. p. 131

<sup>37</sup> *The Tragedy of King Lear*, Act 5, sc. 3, l. 281 [Folio text] in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (Eds.), p. 973

“Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning? Quite chop-fallen? Now get you to my lady’s chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come.”<sup>38</sup>

The lady in question is Hamlet’s mother, Gertrude, who has married Claudius and become the object of Hamlet’s disgust and anger. The Fool here is an abstracted figure of death, an actual ‘nothing’, who, despite having passed away, still keeps his power to speak uncomfortable truths.

The Fool gives voice to the process of irony within the play, while protesting it. If irony always threatens to push its characters along the downward curve towards nothingness, and yet keeps the play moving forward, lifting it back into balance after every reversal, the Fool holds this final irony in tension. He ensures that the suffering and loss undergone by Lear are not unframed, that the action is not merely a depiction of a sequence of events, and yet he resists any closure of the meaning of such suffering. “The rain it raineth every day,”<sup>39</sup> says Feste, Olivia’s Fool, at the end of *Twelfth Night*.

#### 9.6 *Uncoiling and the mastering of irony*

This tension, I think, is another way of referring to the “mastered moment,”<sup>40</sup> an irony which rises above its own negativity. States suggests that as a playwright

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<sup>38</sup> *Hamlet* Act 5, sc. 1, ll. 180-190 in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (Eds.), p. 684

<sup>39</sup> *Twelfth Night*, Act 5, sc. 1, l. 388 in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (Eds.), p. 714

<sup>40</sup> States, B.O. 1971, p. 39

explores both sides of every question, ‘uncoiling’, in Maynard Mack’s phrase,<sup>41</sup> the hidden consequences of every utterance, we pass through irony to dialectic. “What this enables him [sic] to achieve in the “synthesis” of his art is a faint replica of infinitude itself, and in this respect, total irony is not nihilistic but apocalyptic.”<sup>42</sup> Whilst it might look as if this leads us back to Hegel, I think it leads us somewhere else entirely. If the ironies within the drama are indeed mastered as States, following Kierkegaard, suggests, then a play, rather than being an embodiment - an aesthetic achievement - of a philosophical system which arrives courtesy of a playwright’s particular disposition and may be judged by its resolution, is in fact something altogether freer from the attachments to history, to experience of the world, than Theodrama leads us to expect. A play like *King Lear* does not answer a question about suffering and loss - what is its purpose? why is it ‘allowed’ in the universe? - even though it is full of brutality, suffering and loss to its very last breath. What it does instead is to hold in tension, to put ‘in play’ and then observe, the unforeseen contradictions that unfurl from any given action, including any given utterance.

“As flies to wanton boys are we to the Gods,” says Gloucester, “they kill us for their sport.”<sup>43</sup> Later his son Edgar, having fought and fatally wounded his half-brother Edmund, author of so much of the suffering, including his own father’s blindness, says:

“The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices

Make instruments to plague us.

The dark and vicious place where thee he got

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<sup>41</sup> Mack, M. (1955) *The World of Hamlet* in Brooks, C. (ed.), *Tragic Themes in Western Literature*, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 30-58

<sup>42</sup> States, B.O. 1971, p. 34

<sup>43</sup> *The Tragedy of King Lear*, Act 4, sc. 1. ll. 37-8 [Folio text] in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (Eds.), p. 964

Cost him his eyes.”<sup>44</sup>

It is not for the drama to decide whether the gods are wanton schoolboys killing for sport or dispensers of justice ensuring that ‘pleasant’ vices reap their reward, nor to decide how the world should look if only its audience would follow its ethical prescriptions. Instead the wheel turns, as Edmund acknowledges<sup>45</sup> with (not quite) his dying breath, and in the turning of the wheel there is to be found a movement (echoing Aristotle) through humiliation towards revelation - the ‘apocalyptic’ which ‘total irony’ delivers.

#### *9.7 Revelation - loss of the object of one’s thought*

What is the content of this revelation? We are led back to my earlier discussion of revelation in the context of narrativity. There I argued against a view, found in Graham Ward, that revelatory content is inscribed within the narrative and writes its way towards us from the horizon of a ‘future promise’. Does this mean that my present discussion of irony and humiliation is leading towards a contradiction of my earlier view? In wanting to say that drama-as-humiliation is in someway christological, surely I am suggesting precisely what Graham Ward suggests - namely that in the act of reading we imaginatively ‘make present’ what is hidden and are thereby transformed. However, I am not in anywise proposing that within drama there lurks an inscription of the ‘messianic’ that makes it present in the here-and-now of the performance. Christ does not appear in drama as a ‘hidden’ character who provides the key to the ‘secret meaning’ of any individual play. A play is always too rooted in the complex particularity of its own action to admit of such a presence.

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* Act 5, sc. 3, ll. 161-2, p. 972

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* l. 163

Rather I am suggesting that drama provides a structure whereby the characteristic expression of Christ as the Humiliated One may be embraced by characters who are constantly subjected to the downward curvature of drama's humiliating action.

'Embrace' here means to take hold of the process, to enter into it and accept the changes it brings, changes which include insight which one previously lacked, a gain in self-knowledge that is an expression of the transcendence of self. This is not at all the same as being "possessed by the object of one's thought," as Ward put it. In that case, 'possession' was a form of bringing into the here-and-now the object desired, reifying it within the 'text'. Drama's process is the opposite, involving as it does the very loss of one's object of thought, one's desire.

It is of the nature of this acceptance of loss that it does not come without struggle - the struggle to become more than oneself by acting on desire is overmastered by the experience of humiliation which leads to an acceptance of being less than one was. This is how we may begin to glimpse a sense in which drama is connected to Christology via the incarnated Humiliated One: drama provides a way in which we see enacted the coming of true humility within the frame of human action: the possibility of becoming Christ-like through an ironizing of the self that was invested in its own desire.

#### 9.8 *Themes and objectives summarized*

*King Lear*, as we have seen, portrays a constant breaking of our sense of a proportion within nature. Lear himself is re-proportioned through the process of his humiliation. He has brought himself to nothing, only to discover through the grace



represented in Cordelia that he is now conformed to the figura of the Humiliated One.

Within the meaning of 'proportion' in mediaeval English usage is the idea of 'due' relation of one thing to another - a balance or harmony between parts of the whole.<sup>46</sup> In *King Lear* natural relationships within families become subject to a deathly 'niggardliness' and the body politic is first disabled by Lear's neurotic vanity and then overtaken and all but destroyed by the unnatural thrust of Edmund's violent hunger for aggrandisement. 'Less' and 'more' circle each other like wary boxers looking for the fatal weakness in their opponent.

Drama offers us a space in which our human commitments are thrown into question or ironized. A drama 'calls forth' the consequences of an action or an utterance, bringing a downward pressure to bear upon the agent concerned. In the process of beholding the spectacle thus offered, we become aware of a *salvific effect* at work. We can say this because the 'calling forth' or the 'bringing everything to bear' is visibly a two-directional process apprehended through the process we called 'complex seeing'. At the same time that the action bears down upon a character, bringing them ever closer to the threat of annihilation, there is at the same time an *uncoiling* of the utterance - the positive part of the irony, the part that rises above its own negativity.

In the next chapter, we will examine more closely the implications for theology of this 'downward curve' and 'uncoiling' as we consider the implications of 'theological' irony.

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<sup>46</sup> Little, W., Fowler, H.W. & Coulson, J. (eds.) 1973

## CHAPTER 10: THEOLOGICAL IRONY AND ‘WORD’

### 10.1 *Gravity and ‘incurvatus in se’*

In *The Gravity of Sin*<sup>1</sup> Matt Jenson draws on the image of weightiness and the tendency to fall downwards, using Augustine and Luther to explore “a radical self-centredness in which we assert an insidious gravitational force, seeking to draw others into our own orbit.”<sup>2</sup> Jenson gives an account of the doctrine of sin which finds its root in an anthropology defining personhood in terms of relationship. Jenson criticizes those theological anthropologies which emphasize the continuities between divine and human personhood through use of the central image of the ‘image of God’ on the grounds that they fail to account for the discontinuities between God and His creation. He seeks to give a ‘relational account of sin’ by examining how it always involves the degradation of relationships with others, with God and with the self. The overarching metaphor he employs is the *homo incurvatus in se*, man turned in upon himself, a metaphor he traces back through Luther to Augustine. Such an inward turn, says Jenson, expresses an urge towards ‘relationlessness’ and ‘dissociation’<sup>3</sup>. A sinner therefore is a person without relations. Before we come to Luther and Augustine, it is worth pausing a moment to consider this relational account of sin.

At first sight Jenson’s view looks to be closely allied to my own. Drama is nothing if not relational. It proceeds by virtue of the relationship one character has with another. Even Molière’s *Misanthrope* or Marston’s *Malcontent* have their being

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<sup>1</sup> Jenson, M. (2006) *The Gravity of Sin*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* p. 2

<sup>3</sup> See Jungel, E. (1999) *On the Doctrine of Justification*, International Journal of Systematic Theology, 1 (1), pp. 24-52

within social relationships, however much they may protest them. In drama too, these relationships are most often proximate, although offstage characters may exert an influence over or imply a relationship with the onstage action, even when that influence amounts only to the promise but not the fact of arrival.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore a conflict of wills between two characters does imply that the one seeks to bend the other away from one 'orbit' into another - this is what brings the necessary impediment to the achievement of one's desire. It is not at all clear however, that that in itself qualifies as sin, without a host of other conditions being met. In the context of a drama, it may not be the case that upholding one's own will against an opposing impediment - which may be the will of another or may be an external physical event - is in itself sinful, though the means by which the objective is carried through may come to be characterized as such.

Jenson's view depends upon a pre-existing conception of a non-sinful set of relationships that exist in the first place between God and human beings, and in the second case between one human and another, from which humans seek to turn away and thereby degrade. Jenson regards relationships as being constitutive of what it means to be a person, which is in itself a problematic view, most obviously when it comes to applying the metaphor of 'personhood' to God himself. God would not be God if he were to be defined by relationship to something else. We may wish to say, with Tillich, that "God is not less than personal,"<sup>5</sup> but that does not mean that he is named only under that condition. The difficulty is not removed by insisting upon the extension of the metaphor into the Godhead itself - the "triumph of relationality" in

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<sup>4</sup> e.g. *Waiting for Godot*

<sup>5</sup> Tillich, P. (1978) *Systematic Theology, Part 2: Being & God*, London: SCM Press, p. 245

the doctrine of the Trinity<sup>6</sup> - since we are then in danger of trying to fix as absolute the finitude from which the concept derives. As Tillich himself says, “God is the ground of everything personal and [...] carries within himself the ontological power of personality.”<sup>7</sup> God may choose to be in relationship with finite humans and this choice may indeed be constitutive for human personhood but that is not to say that a person is a person only by virtue of her relationships, but by virtue of this one particular relationship. We can therefore deny the basis of Jenson’s thesis without needing to import an essentialist ontology of personhood.

One can be said to sin against others without having any prior meaningful relationship with them, except in so far as one is sinning against them. One could imagine an action which had harmful consequences for others at a distance - a bomb placed in a crowded marketplace for example. There is certainly a denial of relationship and a dissociation implicit within such an action but its sinfulness is not established simply by reference to the effect on the potential to form a relationship.

For these reasons I prefer the notion of ‘proportionality’ to ‘relationality’: it accommodates more easily the idea of the ‘proper fit’ between human and divine - the point at which we arrive after conformation to the Humiliated One.

## 10.2 *Augustine and ontological decline*

The question of incurvature of course proposes that one falls from somewhere to somewhere. Finally, one hits the bottom. What is represented by this ‘bottom’ or

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<sup>6</sup> See Grenz, S. (2004) *Rediscovering the Triune God in Contemporary Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press

<sup>7</sup> Tillich, P. 1978, p. 245

final ground? Is there such a thing, and if not, does it render talk of ‘the downward curve’ meaningless?

In *The City of God*, Augustine writes: “Yet man did not fall away to the extent of losing all being; but when he had turned towards himself [*inclinatus ad se*] his being was less real than when he adhered to him who exists in a supreme degree. And so, to abandon God and to exist in oneself, that is, to please oneself, is not immediately to lose all being; but it is to come nearer to nothingness.”<sup>8</sup> Jenson notes that “the inclination towards self is an ontologically downward movement, what is really a *declining* of the level of being offered as one stands in relation to God in favour of a lower level of being.”<sup>9</sup>

This turning away from ontological fullness in favour of something lesser is, according to Augustine, contrary to the order of nature, an order which proceeds from the nature of the supremely real and only becomes less real when disassociated from that supreme reality. Jenson speaks approvingly of Augustine’s “dynamic sense of being” which links being with being good and allows us to find in it a more acute experience of the sliding towards nothingness than “contemporary society’s more existential language which can speak of not being ‘real’ in a way that evokes a sense of personal hypocrisy and maybe dis-integration, but not an actual diminishing.”<sup>10</sup> However the problem with Jenson’s language is that, consciously or not, it is in danger of erasing the distinction between ‘Being’ and God as Being Itself. The danger if we ascribe degrees of being, up to and including the highest degree of being, to God, is that we then have to speak of God as *having* being and therefore of being one

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<sup>8</sup> Augustine (1984) *City of God*, Bettenson, H. (trans.), New York: Penguin Books

<sup>9</sup> Jenson, M. 2006, p. 23

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 24

thing (albeit the mightiest) amongst others that have being. God is a phenomenon rather than the source of phenomena.

Augustine of course was aware of this distinction. In his description in the *Confessions*<sup>11</sup> of his struggles to understand the nature of evil and to escape from his earlier embrace of Manichean philosophy, he describes how Ambrose had convinced him that the Church in its doctrine of Creation does not understand the words ‘God made man in his own image’ to mean that God is ‘spatially-extended’. “...there was nothing in the sound doctrine which she taught to show that you, the Creator of all things, were confined within a measure of space which, however high, however wide it might be, was yet strictly determined by the form of a human body.”<sup>12</sup>

Augustine’s answer to the question, therefore, is that what we fall onto, or rather into, is a state of ontological weightlessness, a falling into unreality. We need to be clear that according to Augustine, we are real, or *have* being, only in so far as we participate in the Divine or highest Good. Our failure to do so, as Partout Burns puts it, is a “defective operation.”<sup>13</sup> Sin is a failure to be what we should be, and as a result we suffer a decline in being, deriving from “a love of self in which the creature rejects God and attempts to establish its perfection and happiness through its own power . In doing so, it deprives itself of participation in the divine love...”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Augustine (1961) *Confessions*, Pine-Coffin, R.S., (trans.), London: Penguin, Book 6.3. See Partout Burns, J. (1988) *Augustine on the Origin and Progress of Evil*, *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 16 (1), pp. 9-27

<sup>12</sup> Augustine 1961, Book 6.4, p. 115

<sup>13</sup> Partout Burns, J. 1988, p. 15

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p. 16

The irony of course, is that humans fail to see that this is what is happening. In turning inwards upon themselves, they believe they are able to fulfil their desires and become *more* than they had been. In attempting to saturate their being, they become *under*-saturated, because they have cut themselves off from the source of their being.

In Genesis 3.22 we read an account of the Fall predicated on the idea that humans, having gained in knowledge, threaten to approach the tree of life itself, thereby not only knowing too much, but *being* too much: “And now he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and *live for ever*.”<sup>15</sup> In searching for a solution to their own mortality, humans, we might say, have misinterpreted their proper role.

Reading Genesis and Augustine in this way gives us a more theologically dramatic - and ironic - account of sin. Desire and acting to fulfil desire is a movement towards being more - to becoming *oversaturated*. The necessary humiliation associated with a dramatic action can be correlated with the humiliation of the human which followed the expulsion from Eden “...therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken.”<sup>16</sup>

### 10.3 *Pride, concupiscence and incurvature*

For Augustine, and for much of the classical tradition which developed from him, the sin of pride is the initiator of this loss. Jenson notes Augustine’s definition of pride as “...a longing [*appetitus*] for a perverse kind of exaltation. For it is a perverse kind of exaltation to abandon the basis on which the mind is fixed, and to become, as it were,

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<sup>15</sup> Genesis 3.22

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 3.23

based on oneself, and so remain. This happens when a man is too pleased with himself; and a man is self-complacent when he deserts that changeless Good in which, rather than in himself, he ought to have found his satisfaction.”<sup>17</sup>

Desire, as Augustine asserts constantly throughout the body of his work, is at the very centre of our life and implies a lack, a requirement of completion - “The whole life of the good Christian is a holy longing [...] That is our life, to be exercised by longing.”<sup>18</sup>

We ought to be careful here to distinguish between Augustine’s view (and experience of) desire as carnal longing, a corruption of the proper longing of the soul for God, which we can call concupiscence, and the cause of such corruption, which Augustine believed to be pride.

Augustine’s view of pride was a developing story with significant differences across his two commentaries on Genesis (*Against the Manichees* and *A Literal Commentary*) and *The City of God*.<sup>19</sup> The technicalities of this are outside my scope but the main point is that Augustine’s metaphysical reasoning about the nature of evil led him to see pride as a hidden sin which lies behind our earthly desires. In his later expositions of Genesis,<sup>20</sup> he argued that Adam and Eve could not have been tempted successfully unless they had previously fallen into self-love, or pride.

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<sup>17</sup> Augustine 1984, Book 14.8, pp. 571-2

<sup>18</sup> Augustine (2008) *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, Doyle, D.E. & Martin, T. (eds.), Ramsey, B. (trans.), New York: New City Press, Book 4.6 quoted in Jenson, M. 2006, p. 25

<sup>19</sup> See Jenson, M. 2006, pp. 20-21 for a full exposition of the development of Augustine’s view of pride

<sup>20</sup> Augustine (2002) *On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees & Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis*, Rotelle, J.E. (ed.), Hill, E. (trans.), New York: New City Press, Book 11.5, 27, 30



We do not need to subscribe to Augustine's platonism, derived from his reading of Plotinus, to see the usefulness of this idea to Christodrama. Pride is the 'inciting incident', the initial assertion of the self, the first utterance, which then plays out in the motivations of a character in pursuit of its (concupiscent) desires.

To be a desiring creature is in an important sense to feel oneself to be lacking and in need of completion from something outside of oneself. While pride may be thought of in terms of being 'puffed-up', of delight in the self and its autonomy and power, as in Augustine's account of what lay behind the incident of the stolen pears,<sup>21</sup> it also reveals itself as neurotic and self-hating in its failure to accept the self as it is created to be.<sup>22</sup>

Humanity's downward direction proceeds out of the attempt to close the gap between the self and its sense of lack. In other words the primary sin is not only a finding of sufficiency in the self but also its opposite, an acute awareness of lack of sufficiency and an attempt to overcome that perceived insufficiency outside of the Creator. The drama proceeds from this attempt to overcome that perceived and felt lack of sufficiency - a restless non-acceptance of who one really is.

#### 10.4 *Christodramatic nothingness*

Augustine's sense of the threat of nothingness that lurks at the bottom of the incurvature is perhaps more of a flirtation with nothingness than an experience of its potential to undo one's being. As Emilie zum Brunn points out,<sup>23</sup> Augustine appealed to the doctrine of creation to establish that there is a foundational relation between

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<sup>21</sup> Augustine 1961, Book 2

<sup>22</sup> Augustine 2002, Book 1.22

<sup>23</sup> Brunn, E. (1988) *St. Augustine: Being and Nothingness*, New York: Paragon House

the individual human soul and the Divine which prevents a soul from being ultimately destroyed. Augustine also believed that a virtuous soul “attains immortality” through a noetic absorption into the greatest reality, the divine, and that turning towards a lower level of reality risks an attachment to an unstable worldliness which will pass away, taking the soul with it. This risk is mitigated however by Augustine’s insistence that the divine power to create and to be the cause of all reality cannot be successfully opposed by a contrary reality and therefore a created soul cannot be annihilated. It exists within a continuum between bliss and misery depending upon the extent to which the soul chooses to look towards God or to itself.

A Christodramatic account of the threat of nothingness takes the potential ‘not to be’ very seriously. The drama requires this in order to maintain its tension. Augustine sees this threat as the ground for the potential to turn back towards God, and Christodrama echoes this ordering, though stripped of its platonic ancestry. In another of Augustine’s earlier accounts of the sin of pride, *On Free Will*,<sup>24</sup> the punishment of Adam and Eve’s sin is intended to provide the opportunity for a humbling of their spirit as a preparation for the acceptance of mercy. We find an important point of contact here with our thesis.

Partout Burns points out that Augustine developed this theme further in *City of God*: “The purpose of the divine prohibition of eating from the tree was to occasion an indisputable and indefensible sin which would manifest the prior, hidden sin of pride and thereby lead to its correction.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Augustine (1993) *On Free Choice of the Will*, Williams, T. (trans.), Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, Book 3.11,29-31

<sup>25</sup> Partout Burns, 1988, p. 21

Augustine traces a connection between St. Paul's analysis of law, the revelation of which convicts the sinner of guilt (Romans 9.13) and the divine command against eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge (Genesis 2.17). Both serve the same function, preparing the sinner "to respond in humility to the divine offer of grace."<sup>26</sup> Burns suggests that for Augustine the humility of Christ revealed in the Incarnation is "at once the antithesis to and the remedy for the human self-assertion which divides persons from God and sets them against each other."<sup>27</sup> Thus we can say that the process of humiliation I have identified as being central to drama has the same structural function as the outworking of the sin of pride in Augustine - to bring us to the point of being ready to find grace, or in my terms, to 'embrace the new'. "On the one hand [...] concupiscence can be construed as a sort of sacrament of sin, itself evil and symbolic of the deeper evil from which it results and for which it serves as punishment; and on the other hand , it can, in an unexpected way, take on salvific significance under grace as a means of overcoming that deeper evil."<sup>28</sup>

Christodrama, however, in so far as it resists Platonism, is not aligned with Augustine's understanding of natural immortality - that as created beings, creatures, that is, who 'have being', humans are privileged as part of their createdness with immortality. 'Natural immortality' therefore is a conception imported by Augustine from his Platonism and which colours his ontology of human desire. We are somatic creatures and everything that happens to us happens to or within our bodies,

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* p. 24

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* p. 25

including death.<sup>29</sup> God's revelation of himself in the Risen Lord is somatic. The resurrected Jesus who appears to the disciples has a body, the wounds of which can be investigated. The body is of course different from the old, corruptible flesh of the Jesus who lived, worked and died in Israel. His body was not left behind to rot but became the 'first fruits'<sup>30</sup> of the 'new creation'<sup>31</sup>. To that extent, as the New Testament Resurrection narratives attest<sup>32</sup>, the body of the Risen One has a history insofar as it was available to the senses of the disciples. What more is true of Jesus's risen body cannot be specified, but as with Tillich's view that "God is not less than personal"<sup>33</sup> so we may say that the Risen One is not less than somatic, as long as we are not trying to anatomize the *soma* in question.

In this schema, death is an ever present threat of obliteration. Christ himself experienced an extremely agonizing and humiliating version of it. Moments before his passing his words echoed with his sense of fear and abandonment - "My God, why have you forsaken me?"<sup>34</sup> No one present had any reason to think that his death was not final and disastrous for his mission. What followed came to be understood by the early church as the definitive action of God - "And God raised the Lord..."<sup>35</sup> and "...the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead..."<sup>36</sup> - with no suggestion at all that Jesus survived his death because he was naturally immortal. Furthermore the

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<sup>29</sup> There is not sufficient space to examine fully the arguments concerning immortality in relation to Christian understanding, but see e.g. Rudder Baker, L. (2001) *Material Persons and the Doctrine of Resurrection*, Faith & Philosophy, 18 (2), pp. 151-165 for arguments against 'immaterial' souls

<sup>30</sup> 1 Corinthians 15.20

<sup>31</sup> 2 Corinthians 5.17

<sup>32</sup> Especially John 20.26-29

<sup>33</sup> Tillich, P. 1978, p. 245

<sup>34</sup> Matthew 27.46, Mark 15.34

<sup>35</sup> 1 Corinthians 6.14

<sup>36</sup> Romans 8.11a

Pauline understanding in both the quotations above from Corinthians and Romans goes on to extend this action of God to humans: “...and will also raise us by his power.”<sup>37</sup> In Romans Paul extends the thought even further by suggesting that God’s work of resurrection is going on in the body of the Christian even before death: “...he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.”<sup>38</sup>

Karl Barth warns us in his commentary on Romans to avoid thinking of this verse as having anything to do with “the speculations of natural philosophy.”<sup>39</sup> The Christian’s body is still mortal, still subject to corruption, decay and death. “As men,” says Barth, “we have no calm hope, no immortal position, no undisturbed relationship with God...”<sup>40</sup> In Barth’s dialectical theology, it is only in what he calls ‘parable’, in metaphorical storytelling, that we can make a contrast between what we know to be the observable world, the finite, the ‘here’, and the infinite: “Only in parable can we represent what is finite (i.e. our bodies<sup>41</sup>) as though it were a thing contrasted with what is infinite. Only in a parable can we contrast the death of our body with the life of the Spirit of God in us.”<sup>42</sup> What is beyond our observation is the reality of this work of the Spirit which, in Barth’s language, dissolves the finite and thereby establishes it. This establishment can only be spoken of because of the knowledge of God which is given by the “self-inaugurated motion of the Spirit

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<sup>37</sup> 1 Corinthians 6.14b

<sup>38</sup> Romans 8.11b

<sup>39</sup> Barth, K. (1968) *The Epistle to the Romans*, (6th edition) Hoskyns, E.C., (trans.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 288

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> My parenthesis

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* p. 288-9

towards us”<sup>43</sup> and is comprehended as the promise of our ‘incorruptible’ future: flesh and blood “in their temporality, await their eternity. With the dissolution of their ‘Hereness’, and with the removal of their relatedness to all that belongs to this world, they participate in a new definition and in a new qualification. This new definition and qualification, of which we know nothing because it does not concern ‘us’, is the resurrection of the body.”<sup>44</sup>

We note that in Barth’s analysis, there is no action of our will involved. The Spirit of God moves towards us and unites us to God, and is both the necessary and the sufficient means of doing so. Barth believes he can make this claim because the Spirit is the Spirit, because the Truth is the Truth, because God is God and therefore utterly other, utterly beyond in a way that is itself beyond our ability to comprehend what ‘beyond’ means: “...only if they were observable, second things, pseudo-beyonds, would it be impossible to claim and formulate in words the *Futuram aeternam* of the Resurrection of the Body.”<sup>45</sup> Let us leave aside the paradoxical elements of such a statement - of claiming to speak of a ‘what’ that cannot be spoken of as a ‘what’, a quiddity - and say that here Barth has given us a way to think of the fact of death seriously and dramatically.

There is no possible complacency available to humans in terms of the survival of the self. What we fall into, then, in answer to the question we posed, is the actual potential not to be, a state in which we are wholly dependent upon the mercy of God. It is a matter of faith in the action of God, and to lack such faith is to know what it means to have oneself thrown into question and to experience the anxiety that

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

springs from such a case. In order to pursue this thought I will turn from Augustine to Luther to extend my Christodramatic interpretation of the *incurvatus in se*.

### 10.5 *Luther and 'humilitas'*

Jenson points to Luther's use of the concept of *humilitas* as a way of understanding what Jenson calls the "soteriological problem of substantiation,"<sup>46</sup> the question of what it is that we subsist upon, are grounded in and sustained by. As we have seen, Shakespeare takes up this question in *King Lear* with the image of the 'unaccommodated man' though it appears also in much of his other work - *Cymbeline*, *As You Like It* and *The Tempest* all deal with the crisis of the loss of one's substance, the thing that allows one's accommodation and ease and protection from the elements.

In Luther's commentary on Romans, he writes of how Paul's purpose is to "break down all righteousness and wisdom of our own, to point out again those sins and foolish practices which did not exist (that is, those whose existence we did not recognize of that kind of righteousness), to blow them up and to magnify them (that is, to cause them to be recognized as still in existence and as numerous and serious), and thus to show that for breaking them down Christ and His righteousness are needed for us."<sup>47</sup> *Humilitas* in Luther's hands can be taken then as a 'preparation for the Gospel' (*praeparatio evangelica*): "The Spirit and grace of God can arise only when the pride of the flesh has been humbled."<sup>48</sup> Are we right to call this humiliation a preparation for the Gospel, or is this in itself the Gospel, or perhaps rather, the working of the Gospel? Why should we think that the Spirit and grace of God 'can

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<sup>46</sup> Jenson, M. 2006, p. 60

<sup>47</sup> Luther LW2 5.3 quoted in Jenson, M. 2006, p. 60

<sup>48</sup> Luther LW 25.385 quoted in Jenson, M. 2006, p. 60

arise only' under certain conditions? Limiting the action of the Spirit and grace of God to the end of a process of humiliation surely risks suggesting that the work of becoming humble is itself a human work and not a work of grace. It also appears to run contrary to the experience of the author of Romans attested to in the story of his conversion in Acts 9. Saul was stopped suddenly on the road to Damascus in the very act of "breathing threats and murder"<sup>49</sup> against the followers of the Way - in the very centre, therefore, of his rebellion against the God revealed in Christ - and yet Paul certainly would not want to say that the Spirit of God was not able to act until he had been sufficiently humbled. The loss of sight (more parallels with Sophocles and Shakespeare) may certainly be said to symbolize the beginning of his humbling, but this looks like an initiating act of God, not one consequent upon a human action. Therefore we must be careful not to associate Luther's use of the concept of *humilitas* too closely with *praeparatio evangelica* or we risk cutting the ground from under the entire thrust of Luther's theology.

#### 10.6 *Luther, solid ground and 'substance'*

We have already noted the way in which the concept of 'complex seeing' helps us to explore the dramatic tensions implicit in Luther's formulation of the paradox of being 'simul justus et peccator'. We may extend this analysis now by thinking a little more about the 'staging' of the paradox, and in particular about the 'stage floor' - the ground of the action. We saw above that Luther is interested in the process of 'breaking down' all attempts at human righteousness and I have previously suggested that drama may be understood as a form of deconstruction or 'drama-as-humiliation'.

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<sup>49</sup> Acts 9.1



In W.B. Yeats's poem 'The Magi' these figures are envisaged staring at "The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor."<sup>50</sup> They stare, "Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied,"<sup>51</sup> fixed in a paradox of poetic time, "hoping to find once more"<sup>52</sup> whatever it is that rustles in the hay on the floor of the animals' stable. Yeats's poem is ironic on multiple levels and influenced by the mystical and occultish beliefs that supplanted the protestant orthodoxy of his youth. The ground, however, seems to hold the key, but it cannot easily be fathomed and brought into the light of a controlling rationality. They are doomed to remain as the "pale unsatisfied ones."<sup>53</sup>

The implication is that the ground has a sacredness that is not easily yielded to thought. The image is a useful one when it comes to thinking about 'ground' and 'groundedness'. For Luther, the scholastic concept of *substantia* required re-definition in the light of his reading of Scripture. Instead of a metaphysical underpinning of creation, it should be understood "...in the sense of a foothold or settled ground, on which a man can stand with his feet, so that they do not slip into the deep and are submerged... Thus 'substance' refers to everything by which anyone subsists in his life... For they will be that kind of people just so long as those things last. And so 'substance' properly is a quality or something from the outside rather than the very being of a thing. For Scripture is not interested in the quiddities of things, but only in their qualities. Thus in whatever manner a person exists and acts, according to that he has substance, and if he does not have it, he no longer subsists. Therefore the pauper, the despondent, the self-afflictor are without substance... Therefore in short whatever is in the world by means of which anyone can subsist

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<sup>50</sup> Yeats, W.B. (1916) *Responsibilities and Other Poems*, London: Macmillan & Co.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

and prosper in this life is called substance. But the saints do not have this substance.”<sup>54</sup>

The dramatic irony of this view is that the more one ‘stands one’s ground’ and insists on one’s rights and privileges, the more in danger one is of becoming in effect ‘insubstantial’. When a character falls through the loss of their subsistence, whether it be economic, or reputational or emotional loss, they become ‘nothing’, without substance. This is what Steven Ozment refers to as “The soteriologically de-substantial nature of all anthropological resources.”<sup>55</sup> Luther’s point is that looking for one’s substance *in se* is to make a mistake about the nature of substance.

So what is the substance that ‘grounds’ the human? The Lutheran response, as both Ozment and Jenson point out, is located in the idea that a human is “not what he [sic] quidditively is but what he looks for and expects.”<sup>56</sup> This ‘extrinsic’ view, that humans are naturally extroverts (in a psychological sense) sits rather strangely with the view that they naturally seek to fill their sense of lack from within the self (*in se*). As Luther writes, “He has not put our hope in ourselves but only in Himself.”<sup>57</sup> In fact then, there is something in ourselves, which is intrinsic to the business of being grounded. It is this matter of ‘hope’ - “the hope that is within you” as the Apostle Peter writes<sup>58</sup>. What we hope for, of course, is to benefit from the salvation of God revealed in the work of Christ. The question is how that hope comes to be ‘within us.’

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<sup>54</sup> LW 11:355-56 quoted in Jenson, M. 2006, p. 59

<sup>55</sup> Ozment, S. (1969) *Homo Spiritualis: A Comparative Study of the Anthropology of Johannes Tauler, Jean Gerson and Martin Luther - 1509-1516 - In the Context of Their Theological Thought*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, p. 185

<sup>56</sup> Ozment, S. 1969, p. 202 quoted in Jenson, M. 2006, p. 62

<sup>57</sup> LW 25:358 quoted in Jenson, M. 2006, p. 62

<sup>58</sup> 1 Peter 3:15

We have already expressed caution at the use of Luther's concept of *humilitas* as a 'preparation for the gospel', because it appears to propose a limiting of the role of the Holy Spirit. What seems to me to be more satisfactory is to think of hope not as an end product of a process but as the arena in which, or rather on which, the process is played out. We then might say that the gaining of hope is a question of becoming more 'real', more substantial, through the process of drama-as-humiliation. At the end of the drama something has emerged which was not there before - a way of seeing desire for what it is, of testing it and undergoing the full force of its consequences.

We can say then that the 'hope within' rises from the ground, the lowest 'bestial' point to which the drama drives, but that it was always there to be found, implicit within the very idea of desire and its utterance. We have to be careful here not to identify the process and the 'ground' too closely with the destiny of individual characters within the drama - the 'good' characters who learn from their humiliation and the 'bad' characters who do not. The point is that each is necessary in order that the drama may proceed and, eventually, come to an ending.

#### 10.7 *Luther and 'ultimate Word'*

This takes us back to Bonhoeffer's reflections on Luther and indeed on the doctrine of Justification by Faith. At the beginning of chapter 4 of *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer remarks, "The origin and the essence of all Christian life are comprised in the one process or event which the Reformation called justification of the sinner by grace alone. The nature of the Christian life is disclosed not by what the man is in himself but by what

he is in this event.”<sup>59</sup> The event in question is the coming of the Word of God to humankind, a final or ‘ultimate’ word which is beyond the human word and which defines everything that has come before it - the ‘penultimate’. This word is final in two senses: there is nothing ‘beyond’ it, it is the last word, and it is eschatological - the last word in time.

For Luther, writing his introduction to Psalm 51, this ultimate ‘Word’ - the revelation of God in Christ - is always defined in its own terms, not by reference to human experience. Rather, the ‘Word’ defines and interprets human experience - a reversal of polarities we have already explored in relation to the crucifixion and ‘complex seeing’. The ‘objective position’ which ‘produces’ humankind’s real position comes from the Word itself. The ‘penultimate’ then is the world seen from this perspective - the perspective of faith in the Word. From this perspective, we know ourselves to be sinners facing the judgement of God and we know ourselves also to be justified by faith in Christ and therefore ‘entered into Christ’ (*ingressus in Christum*). The world, in this schema, is the site of an unavoidable tension. As John Loeschen states: “The dialectical tension in Christian life is precisely that tension between the experience of oneself as *incurvatus in se* and the faith that one is *ingressus in Christum*.”<sup>60</sup> This ‘life in tension’ however is not a static ‘quantum’ model whereby the *incurvatus* and *ingressus* polarities are opposites fighting for supremacy, such that an increase in holiness equates to a decrease in sinfulness. Sanctification takes place within the sphere of the *incurvatus* without erasing it. The penultimate, in Loeschen’s words, is not a resolution of the tension but a preparation for the ultimate. As Loeschen puts it

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<sup>59</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. 1971, p. 98

<sup>60</sup> Loeschen, J.R. (1976) *Wrestling With Luther: An Introduction to the Study of His Thought*, St. Louis: Concordia, p. 35

in remarks about Bonhoeffer's analysis of the 'penultimate', "the penultimate prepares the way by acknowledging that it cannot prepare the way."<sup>61</sup>

As a consequence, the 'penultimate' has no reality in its own right. "As though a thing could justify itself as being a thing before the last thing; a thing becomes penultimate only through the ultimate, that is to say at the moment when it has already lost its own validity."<sup>62</sup> The moment at which the 'penultimate' ceases to self-validate is the moment at which it knows itself to be merely penultimate. This is an important point of contact with drama: the moment at which the assertive utterance of one's desire is uncoiled to the furthest extent, with all the ironies played through, becomes the moment of insight into how things really are. We can go further and say with Loeschen: "In order that the ultimate remain unambiguously last, the penultimate must always be lived through in its entirety."<sup>63</sup>

The stage, being as we know, "all the [proximate] world,"<sup>64</sup> offers its audience a way of looking analogously at the 'penultimate', in the sense that the utterance of its characters' desires are always under the pressure of judgement that the uncoiling process ushers in and before which they are always brought low. The characters themselves have no 'reality' except in so far as they are created by this pressure from 'the ultimate'. For as we have already seen, a character without such pressure is not in any sense a character in a drama. Such a dramatic interpretation of Luther's *incurvatus* and *ingressus* schema seems to me to have another advantage. For it avoids the attempt to construct 'the ultimate' from within the penultimate - to know

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<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. 1971, p. 110

<sup>63</sup> Loeschen, J.R. 1976, p. 31

<sup>64</sup> *As you Like It*, Act 2, sc. 7, l. 139 in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (Eds.), p. 638 [my insertion]

too much in advance of the ultimate and to try to understand the ultimate as an element within the penultimate world.

#### 10.8 *Unknowing and uncoiling*

In our earlier discussion of ‘narrativity’ we expressed caution concerning Ward’s ‘ethical narrativity’ and its correlation between a ‘messianic promise’ writing its way towards us from an eschatological horizon and our ethical responsiveness to the promise. We must ask, however, whether there is not a danger that my analysis of the *incurvatus* and its uncoiling has again led us back to Ward’s own position? We can answer this question quite simply by saying that in the arena in which the action is taking place - the stage - the participants are unknowing of the process of uncoiling. The projection of their unsatisfied desires into the future creates an eschatological dimension but their performance is not oriented towards this dimension but rather is in opposition to it. Indeed it is this very opposition which creates the drama. Its participants are unknowing of its outcomes, ethical or otherwise, and are forced to ‘go through’ the experience to its end - to experience it as ‘texture’ rather than as events charged with a meaning drawn from the eschatological dimension and projected back into the textural flow of events.

#### 10.9 *The ‘proximate’*

This may become a little clearer if we follow Loeschen in amending Bonhoeffer’s schema to include the element of ‘the proximate’. This term is added by Loeschen to make clearer the position of the person who views the world in relation to selfhood - a person indeed who sees selfhood, the world and God Himself as being near at hand, available to be possessed. Humans are “The measure of all, the centre and meaning

of all around... This relationship [...] issues into a single, simple or univocal 'theological' assessment: 'I am righteous.'"<sup>65</sup>

In this schema, the proximate represents the world of subjectivity, the 'I' that struggles to produce itself over and against the given world. The penultimate is the product of the encounter between the ultimate - the Word of God in Christ - and the proximate. The penultimate is revealed as the world in relation with the ultimate - the position of humble faith rather than the position of the overweening self. Such a schema seems to fit well with drama. It captures the dynamic nature of the drama and most importantly incorporates the all important notions of reversal and recognition - the results of a 'complex seeing' which responds to contradictions by reversing the polarities of self and world and reveals the objectivity against which the self is finally measured and judged.

#### 10.10 *Proximate drama and the 'salvific effect'*

Drama, we can say, echoing Ricoeur, is a poetic transposition of the paradox of the self in relation to its world. The self is transposed from the place in which it believes itself to be all-powerful, overcoming the world in fulfilment of its desires, bending the world to its will, to a place in which it recognizes itself never to have possessed such mastery after all.

My suggestion is that drama deals exclusively with the 'proximate' world. It could be said to be a study in the conflict within the proximate world and its desire to be 'ultimate'. However once the conflict is played through to the end, the process delivers a vision of life from the perspective of the 'penultimate' world, a world lit, as

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<sup>65</sup> Loeschen, J.R. 1976, p. 29

it were, by the ‘ultimate’ without the pretence of itself being ultimate. This, I think, is what lies at the root of the *salvific effect* of drama.

We said in relation to Ricoeur that the salvific effect needed to be allied to a notion of freedom in order to protect from the charge that it leaves the Love Command open to abuse - that it leaves its followers stuck in the state of their oppression. Similarly we need to secure drama’s salvific effect against the criticism that its characters are at the mercy of an intrinsic necessity or ‘fatefulness’ that derives from the nature of the process described. We can provide this by reminding ourselves that the ‘uncoiling’ process, in which the consequences of an utterance are always hovering round “in suspense” (as Susan Langer put it) proceed always from an initial speaking, an initial act of will, on the part of a character.

#### 10.11 *The pressure to speak*

Actors and directors in rehearsal talk about finding “the pressure to speak.”<sup>66</sup> This derives from Hamlet’s famous speech to the players in Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*, Act 3 scene 2: “...the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as ‘twere the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and time his own form and pressure.”<sup>67</sup> The “pressure” of the time is of course both created by and a creator of the circumstances into which a character speaks. The characters bring the world of the play on with them and create it between them and at the same time react to it. There is always a right moment, a truthful moment, for the giving of a line in performance and until it

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<sup>66</sup> I used this phrase throughout the 30 years of my own theatre practice

<sup>67</sup> *Hamlet*, Act 3, sc. 2, l. 19 in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (Eds.), p 671



is found, an actor cannot speak truthfully. An actor must find what it is that makes a character speak at a particular moment.

The director Peter Brook, known for his forensic stripping back of the process of performance in order to reveal the essence of a dramatic action in pursuit of what he called 'Holy Theatre'<sup>68</sup> talks of creating a series of exercises designed to help an actor communicate an idea without words: "The actor then found that to communicate his invisible meanings he needed concentration, he needed will; he needed to summon all his emotional reserves; he needed courage; he needed clear thought. But the most important result was that he was led inexorably to the conclusion that he needed form."<sup>69</sup>

What Brook means by 'form' is an action which can become both a container and a reflector for the impulses of the actor - "...an invisible idea rightly shown."<sup>70</sup> The 'pressure to speak' then is the finding of the action that most justly reveals 'how things really are'. This can never be a matter of a fated response - it is only possible if there is an act, an expression of will, which sets off the process by which the utterance is uncoiled. There is a clear correlation here with the way the 'penultimate' is lit by the 'ultimate' and reveals it for what it is. Of course the ultimate also reveals the proximate for what it is since it is within the world of the proximate that a drama necessarily starts.

Drama's movement from 'proximate' to 'penultimate' is essentially 'ecstatic', in the sense that it involves transposition, a movement out of the particular state one is in.

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<sup>68</sup> Brook, P. 1968, ch. 2

<sup>69</sup> *ibid* p. 57

<sup>70</sup> *ibid* p. 57

The task of theatre is to ensure that the audience, as witness to the drama on stage, is itself a participant in this ecstatic movement, even while it retains its status as a “privileged witness”<sup>71</sup> sitting above the flow and “seeing complexly” as the events unfold. Otherwise there is little point to it.

#### 10.12 *Themes and objectives summarized*

Up to this moment, the discussion has centred on an attempt to identify the essence of drama and how this might correlate with theological concerns. I have criticized theological methods which see drama as essentially an ethical space, a space in which we as audience are asked to work out what the play is telling us in terms of how to live. I have also criticized the Theodrama of von Balthasar for allowing the audience, and therefore the drama, to disappear from view. I have criticized the work of Ben Quash in his reversioning of Theodrama for retaining this emphasis on the performative and ethical aspects of drama, such that the audience become performers not so much in an invisible cosmic drama, but in the drama of the everyday practice of faith. I have suggested instead that drama itself has a *salvific effect* by virtue of the process I have called ‘drama-as-humiliation’ and that this may be thought of as Christological. In this chapter I have analyzed drama’s downward curve and its points of connection and disjunction with classical views of ‘sin’. Drama, with its constant threat of ‘nothingness’ drives towards the recognition of what is ‘real’ and substantial rather than proximate and unsubstantial.

Whilst I have endeavoured to keep the audience in view throughout this analysis, it is time now to turn more directly towards the audience and consider in some detail how and why I think that being in an audience at a play not only puts me in touch

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<sup>71</sup> Meisel, M. 2007, p. 231

with the 'ecstatic' but in some way allows me to participate in the salvific effect of the drama.

## CHAPTER 11: AUDIENCE AND SALVATION

### 11.1 *'There and not there' - consciousness shared*

"It is hard to understand the true function of the spectator, there and not there, ignored and yet needed. The actor's work is never for an audience, yet always is for one. The onlooker is a partner who must be forgotten and still constantly kept in mind."<sup>1</sup>

Peter Brook reminds us that just as it was important to keep the audience's role under consideration in thinking about the onstage drama, so it is important to keep the actors' performances always in view as we concentrate on the audience itself. For this reason I will begin this section with a reflection on the nature of performance, (as distinct from the dramatic action) as a way of trying to grasp what the audience is actually doing while it remains in its seats.

At its most essential level, theatre (which I take to be a term describing the whole of the business of producing a drama, including the physical space, the performance, the auditorium as well as the unfolding 'story') involves a marking out of territory on one side of which an action is pretended and on the other the pretended action is observed. This is a matter of convention, an agreement by which an audience understands the limits of its own real world. It understands that it may witness events which, were they to happen anywhere else, might require intervention to prevent harm, but that any such intervention within the world of the stage would do injury to the action and be entirely inappropriate.

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<sup>1</sup> Brook, P. 1972, p. 57

Even this simple territorial marking requires a further distinction, since the performance area can often be invaded by non-actors such as stagehands who are not performing as such but may move scenery or props between 'scenes' in a choreographed manner. This seemingly simple and perhaps obvious point introduces us however to some of the subtle problems in thinking about performance.

The first of these is the question of 'consciousness', both on the part of the performer and of the audience. An actor is judged on how well she performs her role, and part of the excellence or otherwise of her performance depends on how well she manages to eliminate the sense that she is merely 'performing'. Immediately we sense the partnership that Brook hints at - a partnership based on forgetting and recalling - between actor and audience. An actor must perform without showing a consciousness of performing in order to overcome an audience's resistance to mere pretence, in order to seduce it, indeed, away from its consciousness of its own self and world.

We have already established that part of the audience's role is to sit 'above the flow' of events at the same time as allowing itself to be seduced by the world of the drama. Brecht's theatre practice evolved the technique of *verfremdung*, 'making strange' or 'distancing' in order to counteract this seduction process and to make the audience conscious of artifice in order to criticize it. We have noted how in Brecht's later plays, *Mother Courage* and *Life of Galileo*, the distancing effect, manifested by actors stepping out of 'role', placards and slogans at the start of scenes, is suppressed within the action which becomes the focal point for the unfolding of a series of paradoxes which depend for their effect on the audience's ability to understand their implicit ironies. The bourgeois class "owes to science an advancement that it was able, by

ensuring that it alone enjoyed the fruits, to convert into domination, knows very well that its rule would come to an end if the scientific eye were turned on its own undertakings.”<sup>2</sup> By developing a theatre which possessed just such a ‘scientific eye’, a theatre of scientific materialism, Brecht wished his audience to become properly ‘conscious’ or perhaps we should say ‘more conscious’ of the conditions of its own self in relation to its world, to understand how the self is ‘produced’ by the prevailing conditions of that world, and to be affected by the play’s ironies in order to leave the theatre and bring about change in those conditions. Brecht fought against a ‘false consciousness’ in his audience which he feared would be perpetuated by the pleasurable seductions of the theatre, a pleasure which he well understood: “Human sacrifices all round! Barbaric delights! We know that the barbarians have their art. Let us create another.”<sup>3</sup>

### 11.2 *The significance of Barbarism*

While Brecht wanted to create a theatre which would lead an audience to criticize itself on the basis of the actions it witnesses, he failed to take adequate account of the significance of those ‘Barbaric delights’. He wanted there to be a *gedanke* - a thought - that was separate from the play itself and which came to birth in the heads of his audience. The problem is that the thought itself cannot be stated by reference to any coherent unity within the minds of the audience, but only by reference to a ‘programme’ - a body of thought - imported from elsewhere. An audience might consult within itself about how it thinks about and responds to such a programme, but immediately it is alienated from itself as an audience witnessing a spectacle.

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<sup>2</sup> Brecht, B. (1964) *A Short Organum for the Theatre* in Willett, J. (ed. & trans.), *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, London: Methuen, pp. 179-205

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* 33

In order to consider the significance of these barbaric delights, let us return to the remarks of Peter Brook in relation to the audience and the observation that they are “there and not there” from the point of view of an actor during a performance. This remark recalls Freud’s discussion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*<sup>4</sup> of a game played by his grandson, which Freud names ‘Fort / Da’. Freud observed the small child repeatedly throwing a cotton reel out of his cot, making a particular noise each time the object was thrown (“Oo”) and a different noise (“Ah”) each time it was retrieved by the child’s mother. Freud connected the exclamatory “Oo” with the German word *fort* (‘gone’ in English)<sup>5</sup> and “Ah” with the German word *da* (‘there’ in English). He analyzed this game of vanishing and reappearing in terms of the disappearance and reappearance of the child’s mother and the transformation of a painful situation outside of the child’s control into the pleasurable sense of control that stems from the parent’s return of the toy.

In the game, what is ‘performed’ is the disappearance of the mother and the pain, leading to rage, associated with the disappearance. In several senses the actor plays this game with the audience - she is the child throwing the toy to keep the audience coming back to her with their attention *and* she is the toy itself, disappearing into character and urging the audience to come with her into the world of the play, becoming the means of restoring unity between what is performed and what is witnessed. We might also say that the audience is the mother who gives birth to the play but is always threatening its existence through its disappearance.

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<sup>4</sup> Freud, S. (1922) *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 2nd edition, Hubback, C.J.M. (trans.), Vienna: International Psycho-Analytical Library

<sup>5</sup> One of many examples in Freud’s work which depend upon the coincidence of sound utterances and the words of a particular language - in this case, German

The theatre director and academic Herbert Blau notes the connection between Freud's *fort / da* game and drama as an 'ado' in the sense intended by Henry James.<sup>6</sup> James was interested in the way in which the novelist is able to form a large 'ado' from small corners of consciousness within his characters: "Place the centre of the subject in the young woman's own consciousness and you get as interesting and beautiful a difficulty as you could wish... Make her only interested enough, at the same time, in the things that are not herself, and this relation needn't fear to be too limited."<sup>7</sup> A young woman, in James's America, was as much an excluded 'nothing' as he felt himself to be, and the 'ado' of his fiction, particularly from *Portrait of a Lady* onwards, concerns the retrieval of 'something' from the constant threat of vanishing.

What is raised by the connection between drama, the *fort / da* game and James and his 'ado' is the question of how this 'something' is both the medium of expression and the substantive 'subject' of the expression. The connection helps us to avoid a smoothing out of the different layers of consciousness and their significance for our understanding of what is at stake for audience and performer within the spectacle. I want to suggest that there is indeed something 'barbaric' about this, and that the barbarism is not to be feared but rather welcomed as an essential element in the proceedings.

### 11.3 *The Theatre of Cruelty*

When we think of 'barbarism' we probably think of acts of overwhelming and unmitigated cruelty, acts which lie outside boundaries implied by the word 'licence' and which threaten to overrun us and the civilization of which we are members.

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<sup>6</sup> Blau, H. (1982) *Universals of Performance; Or, Amortizing Play, SubStance*, 11/12, pp. 140-161

<sup>7</sup> James, H. (1881) *The Portrait of a Lady*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.



Tragedies such as Aeschylus's *The Oresteia* or Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* confront us bloodily with such spectacles. In the modern period, the British playwrights Howard Barker<sup>8</sup> and Sarah Kane<sup>9</sup> have presented scenes of scandalous and pitiless cruelty. None of these writers were attempting to create drama simply to satisfy a lust for blood in their audiences. However in their various ways they are making a drama that draws explicitly on what is happening at the level of consciousness as shared between audience and performer.

There is a tempting illusion in thinking about theatre to which it is easy to fall prey. This is the illusion that when a performance is powerful and 'compelling', what is compelled is the truthfulness of an illusion - the illusion that art and life are the same. The great french playwright and thinker, Antonin Artaud, developed, through his 'Theatre of Cruelty'<sup>10</sup> a critique of 'representation' which seeks to maintain an ontological separation between what is represented, the 'thing itself', and the representation of the thing. Theatres, according to Artaud, should be "designated sites of the extermination of the mimetic."<sup>11</sup> Artaud complained that theatre had become a place of exhaustion, of the lame reproduction of something that had once been mysterious and sublime, but in its repetition has debased both itself and its audience: "...it is our adulation for what has already been done, however fine and worthy it may be, that fossilizes us, makes us stagnate and prevents us contacting that underlying power called thinking energy, vital power, determination of exchange..."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> e.g. Barker, H. 1988, *The Bite of the Night*, London: John Calder

<sup>9</sup> e.g. Kane, S. 1996, *Blasted*, London: Methuen & Co.

<sup>10</sup> Artaud, A. (1977) *The Theatre of Cruelty (First Manifesto)* in Corti, V. (trans.), *The Theatre and its Double*, London: John Calder pp. 68-78

<sup>11</sup> Artaud, A. 1977 quoted in Blau, H. 1990, p. 255

<sup>12</sup> Artaud, A. 1977, p. 59

The original, unrepeatable gesture is the gateway to an encounter with the sublime. The sublime, for Artaud was something primitive and mysterious lying outside of the concerns of narratively-defined psychological theatre and its moral concerns. Theatre's task is to "express objectively secret truth, to bring out in active gestures those elements of truth hidden under forms in their encounters with becoming."<sup>13</sup> As Blau suggests, the kind of theatre that Artaud pursued (though never achieved) is intended to be the equal of life itself, "the non-representable origin of representation" in Derrida's phrase.<sup>14</sup> However if theatre is the 'equal' of life it is not life itself in the sense of a simulacrum of the 'natural'. Artaud wanted to move beyond naturalism of the nineteenth century variety towards a theatre heavily influenced by Eastern forms - particularly Balinese Theatre, "a physical idea of theatre where drama is encompassed within the limits of everything that can happen on stage, independently of a written script."<sup>15</sup> Artaud sought to incorporate all the dramaturgical elements - voice, sounds, music, movement, costume, set, lighting, and crucially, the audience itself - into what he called "spatial poetry."<sup>16</sup> This involved the voice and body of the performer becoming not the bearer of a message in language from a playscript to an audience but instead the producer of non-linguistic images which generate powerful effects on an audience - the performer as 'transporter' of first herself and then of the audience: "We ought to consider staging from the angle of magic and enchantment, not as reflecting a script, the mere projection of doubles arising from writing, but as the fiery projection of all the

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p. 51

<sup>14</sup> Derrida, J. (1978) *Writing and Difference*, Bass, A. (trans.), Paris: Editions du Seuil

<sup>15</sup> Artaud, A. 1977, p. 50

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p. 54

objective results of gestures, words, sounds, music or their combinations.”<sup>17</sup> The audience itself is set in the middle of this ‘fiery projection’: “We intend to do away with stage and auditorium, replacing them by a kind of single, undivided locale without any partitions of any kind and this will become the very scene of the action. Direct contact will be established between the audience and the show, between actors and audience, from the very fact that the audience is seated in the centre of the action, is encircled and furrowed by it.”<sup>18</sup>

The principle aim of this is to affect the totality of the audience, to create an *affect* on every level of the audience’s sensibility, not in order to bring about moral change but to confront the audience with a sense of its own potential for what Artaud calls “magic freedom.”<sup>19</sup> What he appears to mean by this is the freedom to enter a kind of dream state in which the audience encounters the reality that underlies the great myths of the human story: “Everyday love, personal ambition and daily worries are worthless except in relation to the kind of awful lyricism that exists in those Myths to which the great mass of men have consented. This is why we will try to centre our show around famous personalities, horrible crimes and superhuman self-sacrifices, demonstrating that it can draw out the powers struggling within them...”<sup>20</sup>

#### 11.4 *Cruelty and Incarnation: Artaud and Bonhoeffer compared*

I think that in the Theatre of Cruelty we have a correlation with Bonhoeffer’s theological search for the form of the incarnated Christ who returns humanity to its origin. Let us examine the parallels.

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* p. 74

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* p. 65

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* p. 65

The first and most obvious correlation lies between Bonhoeffer's insistence that humans can only 'live life, and not define it' and Artaud's view that in the image of the human person is theatre's "self-perpetuating enormity: ego, self, personality, a mere reproductive subject, slave to the ideological apparatus of reproduction, who must learn to free himself [sic] from false acting by true performance..."<sup>21</sup> If life is a gift given to humans by their Creator, then for Bonhoeffer the task is to escape from the temptation to think that humans are following a script about themselves that they have written. For Artaud, false acting is also succumbing to the temptation to believe that the script is about the human and its psychological concerns, with its gestures and its performance designed to define and recreate that psychology. For both Bonhoeffer and Artaud, true performance and true living are one and the same: to live or to perform is to do it for the first time - "the venture of the deed"<sup>22</sup> - the gestures of which are aimed at acknowledging and disclosing the original source of all such gestures, the "primordial and juridical power" in Blau's words<sup>23</sup>, whose aim is the abolition of the separation between origin and act. Both Artaud and Bonhoeffer were searching for the expressive form of this urge: for Bonhoeffer it was to be found in the form of the Incarnated Christ who chooses to be identical with the Humiliated One. For Artaud, it is in the form of a theatre which puts the audience's sensibilities into "a deeper, subtler state of perception by assured means, the very object of magic and ritual, of which theatre is only a reflection."<sup>24</sup>

There is a correlation too in the tenor of the very terms each chose to encapsulate this form: in Artaud it is 'Cruelty', and in Bonhoeffer it is 'Humiliation'. However,

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<sup>21</sup> Artaud, A. Quoted in Blau, H. 1990, p. 254

<sup>22</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. 1971

<sup>23</sup> Blau, H. 1990, p. 254

<sup>24</sup> Artaud, A. 1977, p. 70

neither of these terms are intended to portray a form which relates to the kind of barbarism to which I referred earlier - the satisfaction of bloodlust amongst the populace. Artaud, in choosing this term, specifically rejects this idea: "With this mania we all have today for belittling everything, as soon as I said 'cruelty' everyone took it to mean 'blood'. But a 'theatre of cruelty' means theatre that is difficult and cruel for myself first of all. And on a performing level, it has nothing to do with the cruelty we practise on one another, hacking at each other's bodies [...] but the far more terrible, essential cruelty objects can practise on us. We are not free and the sky can still fall on our heads. And above all else, theatre is made to teach us this."<sup>25</sup> In a letter to his friend Jean Paulhan, dated September 13, 1932, Artaud expands on the nature of this 'essential cruelty': "Cruelty is very lucid, a kind of strict control and submission to necessity. There is no cruelty without consciousness [...] for the latter gives practising any act in life a blood-red tinge, its cruel overtones, since it is understood that being alive always means the death of someone else."<sup>26</sup> As Lee Jamieson notes<sup>27</sup>, there is something of Nietzsche in this insistence on violent and turbulent brutality as the groundswell of consciousness, giving it a sense of thrill and vitality. What could Artaud mean, though, by the idea that to be alive "always means" the death of someone else?

In a second letter to Jean Paulhan, Artaud refers to the "inescapably necessary pain without which life could not continue. Good has to be desired, it is the result of an act of willpower, while evil is continuous."<sup>28</sup> There is a strong hint here of an interest in

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* p. 60

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p. 80

<sup>27</sup> Jamieson, L. (2007) *Antonin Artaud: From Theory to Practice*, London: Greenwich Exchange p. 21-22

<sup>28</sup> Artaud, A. 1977, p. 80

Gnostic religions and the notion that the world is created evil, in tension with what he calls a “living vortex engulfing darkness.”<sup>29</sup> He goes on to say: “When the hidden god creates, he obeys a cruel need for creation imposed on him, yet he cannot avoid creating, thus permitting an ever more condensed, ever more consumed nucleus of evil to enter the eye of the willed vortex of good. Theatre in the sense of constant creation, a wholly magic act, obeys this necessity. A play without this desire, this blind zest for life, capable of surpassing everything seen in every gesture or every act, in the transcendent aspect of the plot, would be useless and a failure as theatre.”<sup>30</sup> A play without casualties, Artaud seems to say, is no play at all. Our consciousness embroils us in a costly “ado” from “necessity’. Once this consciousness is awakened from the sleep induced by mimetic reproduction, we are able to experience for ourselves this concentration of force which is dangerous to us and which exposes us to loss - the loss of our insulating sense of privilege. The awakened consciousness however, has the trance-like character of dream. We are ecstatically transported out of ourselves.

### 11.5 *Hiddenness*

A further correlation between the Theatre of Cruelty and Bonhoeffer’s Incarnation theology lies in the theme of ‘hiddenness’. Bonhoeffer’s Christology makes a distinction between the Christ who is ‘without sin’ and the flesh of the Incarnated One - “He, not the likeness of flesh, is without sin; but he does not choose to be distinguished from this likeness.”<sup>31</sup> There is, in this idea of an incognito divinity, a connection with Artaud’s idea that to express a true feeling is to conceal it: “Any strong feeling produces an idea of emptiness within us, and lucid language which

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p. 80

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* p. 80

<sup>31</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. 1971, p. 114

prevents this emptiness also prevents poetry appearing in thought. For this reason an image, a form disguising what it means to reveal, has more meaning to the mind than the enlightenment brought about by words or their analysis.”<sup>32</sup> Artaud has in mind the image of the sun setting which blots out our ability to see its beauty directly.

Leaving aside the Gnostic tinge of this sentence (Jane Goodall refers to Artaud as a modern Gnostic)<sup>33</sup> there does seem to be a clear relationship between an expressive gesture which produces in its beholder a negative impression of that which is intended and, for example, the insistence in Mark’s Gospel on the ‘messianic secret’.<sup>34</sup> Christ *incognito* performs a series of signs and wonders which create a powerful impression and provoke strong reactions within witnesses and yet which cloak, or veil, the reality behind them.

With these parallels in mind, can we go yet further and, as with *complex seeing* and the theatre of Bertolt Brecht, apply the principles of Cruelty to our understanding of the Crucifixion of Christ?

#### 11.6 *Christodramatic cruelty*

The Crucifixion is ‘staged’ by the the gospel writers as something more than an historical report of an event forming the climax to the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth. The hold over the reader’s imagination is achieved by a variety of effects -

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<sup>32</sup> Artaud, A. 1977, p. 53

<sup>33</sup> Goodall, J. (1994) *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama*, Oxford: Clarendon Press

<sup>34</sup> e.g. Mark 8. 30. For a discussion of the Messianic Secret in Mark’ Gospel, see Head, P. (2005) *Christology and the Synoptic problem*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. For our purposes, we may ignore the correctness or otherwise of Wrede’s 1901 hypothesis and the subsequent discussion of Markan priority. The point is that the theme of hiddenness is clearly embedded in Mark’s material.

of pictures, of movement, of cries, of violence, of strange signs - which disrupt any attempt to hold the narrative at an objective distance and instead invite the reader - or auditor - to enter imaginatively the story and to experience it existentially.

If we isolate the events of the crucifixion story within the wider Passion narrative, we can explore more closely these various effects. What we are looking for is the way in which the narrative is lifted from the plane of a closed 'event' into a drama with the capacity to seize and hold its audience and expose it to an ecstatic transposition. Let us first consider the element of violence.

This begins with the 'seizing' of Jesus in the Garden of Gethemane (Matt. 26.50, Mk. 14.46, Lk. 22.54). The source for all three synoptic gospels gives reference to 'swords and clubs' in the hands of the arresting party which prompt outrage on the part of Jesus. The detail emphasizes the blindness of the temple authorities to his identity and mission - "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?" (Matt. 26.55, Mk. 14.48, Lk.22.52) Readers and auditors - let us call them 'the audience' - can surely not miss the reference to the kingdom of God coming "like a thief in the night"<sup>35</sup>, a detail emphasized by the night-time setting. Violence is threatened too by the disciples, one of whom draws a sword. There is no reference elsewhere to any of Jesus's followers having swords so the detail is telling in terms of the mood of the encounter. The crowd on both sides is in the grip of swirling, elemental forces threatening to overwhelm the message of peace the Messiah brings.

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<sup>35</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5.2, cf. Matthew 24.43



As the scene moves to the Sanhedrin, the persistent sense of violence underplaying the action breaks out again as the High Priest, “tearing his mantle”<sup>36</sup> provokes a violent reaction: “ ‘Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?’ And they all condemned him as deserving death. And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to strike him [...] And the guards received him with blows.”<sup>37</sup> The victim is being prepared for death by ritual humiliation, a cruelty which dehumanizes and depersonalizes. The evidential norms of justice are dispensed with. The reference to spitting evokes Deuteronomy 25.9 which gives instructions for the ritual humiliation of a man who refuses to marry his brother’s widow. The scene also encompasses the image of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, ironically invoked by the high priest himself who questions Jesus about his identity. The reference to the ‘marred image’ at Isaiah 52.14 finds an echo not only in the spitting but in the reference in Mark to the covering of Jesus’s face (Mk. 14.65). Luke refers specifically to a blindfold. (Lk. 22.64). The theme of hiddenness announces itself here too.

Violence and cruelty break out again as the scene shifts, in Mark, to the praetorium - the house or palace of Pilate - in which the whole battalion of the palace guard is assembled in a display of power. A crown of thorns is placed on Jesus’s head, they spit on him and strike him, all the time shouting in mockery. The expression of violent humiliation has moved like an electric current from the Temple authorities to the forces of the occupying military power, drawing both into a unified field which turns its full force onto the victim, emphasizing its separation from the whole world of the human.

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<sup>36</sup> Mark 14. 63

<sup>37</sup> Mark 14. 63(b)ff

The crucifixion itself is described perfunctorily by the gospel writers and the methods used are subject to debate in the light of a single piece of archeological evidence discovered in Jerusalem in 1985.<sup>38</sup> Roman crucifixion, according to the evidence of inscriptions investigated by John Cook, involved nails, rope, chains, tallow, candles and bone or lead-tipped scourges. The victim was forced to carry a *patibulum*, the crosspiece to which their arms would be affixed, to the crucifixion site, having been goaded on the way with rods and scourges.<sup>39</sup> Quite apart from being a punishment handed out to convicted felons, it was a usual form of punishment for slaves who dissatisfied their masters. It was very unusual for citizens to be put to death in this way. However accomplished, the resulting death was slow and ‘excruciating’.

As with Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty manifesto, the details of the violence are not intended to gratify a lust for blood on the part of the audience but to assault it in such a way that “its sensibility is put into a deeper, subtler state of perception.”<sup>40</sup> As the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth becomes ‘the Crucifixion Story’, the very details of the cruelty intended by its perpetrators to humiliate and to obliterate its victim from history become the means of “enslaving our attention,”<sup>41</sup> in Artaud’s phrase.

As the shaping of the details around the Suffering Servant imagery makes clear, our attention, once enslaved, is required in order to open up in us an inner dimension which is capable of being “on the track of something [...] the sense of a creation

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<sup>38</sup> The Givat HaMivtar skeleton. See e.g. Cook J.G. (2008) *Envisioning Crucifixion: Light from Several Inscriptions and the Palatine Graffito*, *Novum Testamentum* 50, pp. 262-285

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Artaud, A. 1977, p. 70

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

where we are in possession of only one of its facets, while its completion exists on other levels.”<sup>42</sup> It is not only the dramatically crafted violence of the crucifixion narrative which gives rise to this way of looking at the action. There is a great sense of movement as Jesus is led from place to place, surrounded by a swirling chorus of accusers and onlookers. There is a mob ready to cry out the word ‘crucify’ (Mark 15.13ff) and passers-by to shout out further insults once Jesus is placed on his cross. With his dying breaths, Jesus cries out “with a loud voice” (Mark 15.34a). Dramatic lighting effects are provided by each of the gospel writers (Matt. 27.45, Mk. 15.33, Lk. 23.44) and an image which might stand as a summary of the Theatre of Cruelty - the rending of the Temple curtain - emphasizes that what was previously concealed is about to be available to our senses.

#### 11.7 *Cruelty and Christodramatic completion*

Let us pursue for a moment Artaud’s idea of the way in which a Theatre of Cruelty tracks a sense of a creation whose ‘completion’ exists outside of our ability to grasp it. Is there a Christological analogue for this notion? We may find it, surprisingly, in the Epistle to the Hebrews and its priestly theology and it is, appropriately enough, to von Balthasar that we may turn as a means of entry.

Balthasar’s discussion of the Epistle to the Hebrews<sup>43</sup> takes place in the context of his analysis of the different strands of Christian experience and the question of the extent to which the Church may be considered as an archetypal expression of Christian experience - in other words, the extent to which the Church is a *subject*.<sup>44</sup> We need not be distracted by the details of this analysis, except in so far as Balthasar

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<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> von Balthasar, H.U. 1982, p. 354ff

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* p. 350

unpicks a multi-stranded approach to the question, one strand of which is a discussion of the Pauline tradition of Christian experience.

According to Balthasar, Paul's own 'eyewitness experience'<sup>45</sup> is disjunctive from the horizontal level of history at which, by contrast, the Petrine tradition operates. Paul's experience "proceeds vertically 'from heaven'"<sup>46</sup> as a direct and unmediated revelation from God. Paul's experience is an "ever-new and unforeseen vertical irruption"<sup>47</sup> which foreshadows "the great charisms of mission which suddenly visit and fructify the Church, the great conversions (from Augustine to Newman), the great visions which are 'ineffable' in themselves ... and yet are poured out over the Church in words inspired by the Spirit."<sup>48</sup>

This gives the Church, in Paul's thinking, a more "vertical extension and structure"<sup>49</sup> than is visible in Petrine ecclesiology. Christ, as the Head of the Church, appears 'from above', "articulating and ordering the Mystical Body."<sup>50</sup> Quoting Galatians 4.26 & 31, Balthasar makes the connection between "our mother," the Church, and the "Jerusalem above."<sup>51</sup> This vertical dimension of the Pauline Church finds its first interpretation, according to Balthasar, in the 'platonism' of the Epistle to the Hebrews. "We have come now... to Mount Zion, to the *Civitas Dei Viventis*, the heavenly Jerusalem... It is from here that God's Word now resounds, no longer as a temporal word but as definitive for all eternity, and its acceptance must, therefore,

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* p. 354

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

also be definitive.”<sup>52</sup> God’s Word of course is the Christ who as our “great High Priest” (Hebrews 4.14 & others) has accomplished our redemption and draws us ‘upwards’: “Thus, in Christ’s humiliation and exaltation, we see the full dimension of the redemptive process, and ourselves taken up in it.”<sup>53</sup>

There is, in this concept, a picture of an eternal ‘nowness’ which is forever redemptive. Whilst we might want to say that this redemption is something achieved in the world at the horizontal level through the Crucifixion moment, this reading of Hebrews suggests that the quality of ‘redemptiveness’ is not derived from the historicism of the event, after which there is a heavenly ‘assumption’ of the heroic saviour which changes everything from that moment on ‘forever’, but is indeed the ‘heavenly’ quality which eternally gives the event its meaning, from ‘above’ as it were.

Balthasar draws out from Hebrews the effect on those who are taken ‘upwards’ as first of all to do with sight, with the capacity to ‘see’ form: “As such it is ‘illumination’, a ‘tasting of the heavenly gift’, a ‘partaking of the holy Pneuma’, a ‘perceiving of the beauty of God’s Word and of the powers of the age to come (Hebrews 6.3 - 6). The beginner is still ‘inexperienced’ in true speech, but the one who has been perfected possesses ‘well-trained perceptive faculties’ to distinguish the beautiful from the ugly (Hebrews 5.13f).”<sup>54</sup> Given that Balthasar is writing his theological aesthetics as a response to the idea that, as he finds in Nebel<sup>55</sup>, beauty is a category that belongs to the human world rather than one which is structurally part of divine revelation, this acquiring of such perceptive faculties must be considered fundamental to Balthasar’s

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<sup>52</sup> *ibid.* p. 355

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.* p. 356

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> See discussion of Nebel at *ibid.* p. 66f

understanding of the calling of every Christian. Indeed he calls this “a kind of Pauline mysticism for everyone, one which bypasses the whole realm of special charisms and replaces them with a contemplation of revelation which is generally accessible and even strictly required of every Christian as he [sic] progresses.”<sup>56</sup>

If the structure of the beautiful is something that can be seen only with the eye of faith, then we must ask whether the contemplation of human cultural forms - in this case, drama - may participate in the disclosure. For Balthasar, it is evident that he does not see the tendency to isolate aesthetics as a *habitus* that may be manipulated, a tendency he associates with the Lutheran tradition, as a proper response to the act of God in creation. “Is it really only a matter of metaphor when theology contemplates and describes as *ars divina* the divine *oikonomia* that begins with the creation, unfolds throughout the salvation-history of the Old and the New Covenants, and is consummated in the Resurrection? Can we speak here of God’s art only ‘improperly’, in a perhaps dangerous application of images from the human realm? Or should we not rather consider this ‘art’ of God’s to be precisely the transcendent archetype of all worldly and human beauty?”<sup>57</sup>

Whilst we can take issue with von Balthasar’s implicit Platonism in this last statement, in much the same way that Wittgenstein takes issue with the Empiricist idea that logic has an archetypal form which is extrinsic to the language in which it is expressed<sup>58</sup>, we can retain the insight that the whole of Creation, including the cultural product of created humans, is ‘in play’ and available to us and to our senses.

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid.* p. 357

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* pp. 69-70

<sup>58</sup> See Wittgenstein, L. (2009) *Philosophical Investigations* 4th edition, Hacker, P.M.S. & Schulte, J. (eds.), Anscombe, G.E.M. (trans.), Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell

### 11.8 *Removing Balthasar's Platonism, against archetypes*

This point becomes pivotal for our understanding of how drama and its audience relate together from a Christodramatic perspective. If we remove the Platonism - the concept of an extra-formal archetype which at the same time inheres matter and from which its form is derived - is von Balthasar left with anything useful to say? The point about archetypes is that we expect them to impart certain common characteristics to formal structures, the lack of which tells us that a particular form or structure is not a member of the class of forms or structures of which the archetype is the defining pattern. It is not enough to mitigate talk of archetypes by saying that the archetype is more *unlike* than *like* in order to maintain proper distance between the divine and human. The point is that it is *likeness* which is being proposed as a way of speaking, not *unlikeness*. We are concerned then with the question of origin and representation.

Now there are certain problems associated with any theory of archetypes which we can immediately see with the following example: if we consider the class of objects which measure 'one foot' in the length of one of its surfaces, we can quickly enough determine whether or not any given object belongs to such a class. Can we say, however, that the measure of a 'foot' corresponds to an archetype? A standardized scale containing equal divisions of units, however arrived at over the course of history, has nothing outside of itself which can be used to determine that it itself corresponds to the standard measure. How would one settle rival claims from different scales to be the 'true measure'? We could not do it by appeal to some 'archetype'.

If we abandon the idea of a divine archetype of beauty disclosed within creation, it does not follow that the world lapses into a pit of dull and ugly matter without ‘meaning’ and that reference to human cultural products are ‘only’ that. Nor does it mean that we must collapse all talk of ‘God’ and ‘Christ’ and of there being a relationship between the divine and the human into ‘mere’ human language as just another human cultural ‘production’. Just as we cannot speak of logic as extrinsic to language - this would be a kind of category mistake and indeed a kind of mistake in our ‘looking’, according to Wittgenstein - neither should we expect to speak of the divine *except* by speaking - by employing language to ‘mean’ things. In doing so we should not expect to be able to go beyond our language or our cultural forms, such as drama, in order to ground our use of them, or our actions of ‘pointing at’ things, in some extrinsic and overarching ‘other reality’<sup>59</sup>. What we are denying, in common with the later Wittgenstein, as opposed to the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*<sup>60</sup>, is that meaning only ‘works’ according to certain standards of logic or rationality which are determined outside of the ‘language-game’ in which they are used.

There is a very helpful assessment of how Wittgenstein’s philosophical work relates to theological method in Tim Labron’s book, *Wittgenstein and Theology*.<sup>61</sup> Labron uses the work of Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* to examine Christology and to steer a path between opposing views within the early church concerning the relations between the divine and human ‘attributes’ in the person of Christ. What

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<sup>59</sup> See, for example, the debates between the Canonical-linguistic theory of Vanhoozer and Lindbeck’s Cultural-linguistic theory. Their opposing arguments both make appeal to extrinsic grounding in the ‘ultimately real’. See Rauser, R. (2009) *Theology in Search of Foundations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press pp. 256-7 for a discussion of Vanhoozer’s attempts to decouple his theory from subordination to an ‘alien thought system’. See also Labron, T. (2009) *Wittgenstein and Theology*, London: T&T Clark, pp. 85-92

<sup>60</sup> Wittgenstein, L. (1961) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Pears, D.F. & McGuinness, B.F. (trans.), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

<sup>61</sup> Labron, T. (2009) *Wittgenstein and Theology*, London: T&T Clark



Labron suggests is that it is a mistake to try to understand Christ, in the manner, for example of a Nestorius<sup>62</sup> on the one hand and Eutyches<sup>63</sup> on the other, by seeking an extrinsic viewpoint from which to build a rational case for deciding how it is that Christ combines ‘two natures’. “There is no place to reach outside the language-game to secure knowledge, such as the Cartesian Archimedian point. Likewise there is no place to reach outside of Christ to better understand God [...] The language-games and Christ are the heart of meaning and they show logic and God respectively.”<sup>64</sup>

In short we can give an account of the doctrine of Creation which speaks of ‘ars divina’ not as a rationally-determined adjunct of creation itself but as an understanding with the ‘eye of faith’ from within creation, from within the ‘language game’ of believing and behaving and acting on the basis that humans are created beings, part of whose behaviour is to respond to the beauty of creation in all its colossal variety. The Platonist would want to say that we can speak of ‘beauty’ only because there exists an ideal form of it, but we must reject such an idea because it is impossible to point to such a form outside of the thing to which we ascribe beauty. If it is then said that the world contains much that is ugly, damaged and imperfect and that a Christian God, who is thought to be capable only of perfection in aesthetic matters, could not (or would not) have created ugliness, we can apply the same argument and say that such a view depends upon a hidden appeal to the extrinsic ‘form’ of the beautiful which is then contrasted with its opposite form, ‘ugliness’. To say that the world is created by God, in other words, is not to say that it corresponds to some form or template that is derived from some rationally-derived attributes of

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<sup>62</sup> Nestorius insisted on the ‘two natures’ of Christ

<sup>63</sup> Eutyches argued by contrast that Christ had a ‘unity’ of divine and human natures, i.e. ‘one nature’

<sup>64</sup> Labron, T. 2009, p. 57

God. Christians can 'see' beauty in extreme forms of ugliness, and this seeing is done from within the material culture of the world.

It is for this reason that we can say that the Incarnation is not to be seen as a visitation from a divine being whose purpose is to make the world 'beautiful' or fit for the divine beauty through the revelation of a special *gnosis*, but is rather a way of describing *the experience of coming to see* that in the person of Christ, God is amongst us, reconciling us to himself through his experiencing and ultimately suffering the conditions of existence within the material world, an ugly process indeed but which contains its own terrifying beauty. What I am arguing is that drama, as one particular cultural production within the material world, is capable of participating in the 'structure of beauty' of God's action in the world through Christ, not, as we will see, as a primary source of revelation - we are not to think that drama is Christ - but that the pattern of irony and the process of necessary humiliation which I describe as the essence of drama is a way of 'seeing' Christ in the contemporary world and is, indeed a way of understanding 'Word' in all its complexities.

### 11.9 *Drama as 'salvific seeing'*

We are now in a position to move to a discussion of the theology of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* and its analogical relationship to Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty with its notion that an action is 'completed' outside of our vision - that the fullness of the action escapes our ability to grasp more than a part of it. Having insisted that we strip out the platonism from our approach to this idea, I want to locate my approach within the context of what Scott Mackie calls the "mystical drama"<sup>65</sup> of the *Epistle to the*

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<sup>65</sup> Mackie, S. (2011) *Heavenly Sanctuary Mysticism in the Epistle to the Hebrews* in Journal of Theological Studies, NS, 62 (1) pp. 77-117

*Hebrews* and its “interrelated though episodic series of dramatic events that occur in the heavenly sanctuary.”<sup>66</sup>

As Mackie, following John Dunnill<sup>67</sup>, suggests, *Hebrews* appears to be a “hortatory narrative”<sup>68</sup> in which a community under threat and in danger of resiling from its identity as followers of Christ and children of God is urged to ‘see’ for itself how its real identity is located in events played out in the heavenly sanctuary. This sanctuary is beyond human sight, located as it is at the very heart of the cosmos, “a sphere,” according to the dominant train of Judaistic and Christian mystical thinking identified by Mackie, “a whole realm of divinity which underlies the world of our sense-data and which is present and active in all that exists.”<sup>69</sup> The early Christian community is urged to ‘see’ with the eye of faith the events that are played out in the heavenly temple in order to understand that all its members themselves have access to the sanctuary itself. According to Mackie, *Hebrews* dramatizes a “Divine adoption ceremony”<sup>70</sup> in which the Christian community is offered “membership of the family of God.”<sup>71</sup>

The ceremony takes place within ‘sacred space’ marked out as the site of Christ’s ‘exaltation’ and ‘enthronement’ as Son of God and of his “cultic achievement”<sup>72</sup> as “our great High Priest.” This latter Christology is what concerns us most closely,

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid.* p. 78

<sup>67</sup> Dunnill, J. (1992) *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews*, SNTSMS 75, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

<sup>68</sup> Mackie, S. 2011, p. 78

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.* p. 81

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.* p. 77

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.* p. 79

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.* p. 78

describing the means by which the cultic cleansing of those who are exhorted to “draw near” (Hebrews 4.14 - 16) is delivered by the one who has offered himself in self-sacrifice. The process of cleansing is comprehended within a mounting series of effects on those who do indeed draw near - namely, the effects of purification from defilement (Hebrews 9.14); sanctification, through which the community acquires the attribute of holiness “which renders them capable of confidently relating to a holy God,”<sup>73</sup> and finally perfection (Hebrews 10.14). Mackie suggests that while Jesus’s own ‘perfection’ may relate to his resurrection, that of the community “probably reflects the creation and solidification of their identity, that is, their adoption into the family of God as ‘siblings of the Son’ (Hebrews 2. 11-13).”<sup>74</sup> In terms of Pauline eschatology the faithful community also is promised the hope of resurrection, but within the schema of Hebrews, this is not a term applied to the community. Instead, the eschatological hope expressed at 9.28 is that Christ will come “a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”<sup>75</sup>

The climax of this soteriological drama occurs with the entrance of Christ the High Priest “once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and bulls, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.” (Hebrews 9.12) Just as the killing of an animal is not in itself what, under the Mosaic Law, achieves atonement, but the offering of the blood which is then sprinkled over the Tabernacle of the Lord and over all the vessels used in worship (Hebrews 9.21), so it is not the death of Jesus of Nazareth in the world which obtains ‘eternal redemption’ but the offering of his blood in the heavenly sanctuary. Of course the one is not possible without the other. Once the offering of Christ’s own blood has been made, the action is completed and

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<sup>73</sup> *ibid.* p. 85

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.* p. 86

<sup>75</sup> Hebrews 9.28

he is enthroned “at the right hand of God,” (Hebrews 10.12, echoing Psalm 110.1) “As, then the shedding of blood is not itself the consummation, but is the preliminary condition for the consummation, of the symbolic sacrifice under the Levitical law; so when we turn to the essential realities, though Calvary be the indispensable preliminary, yet it is not Calvary taken apart, not Calvary quite so directly as the eternal self-presentation in Heaven of the risen and ascended Lord which is the true consummation of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.”<sup>76</sup> A more recent commentator on *Hebrews*, David Moffitt, emphasizes the importance of bodily resurrection to the author of *Hebrews*: “...the writer’s priestly Christology depends upon Jesus’ resurrection. It is only because Jesus rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, appeared before God, and presented himself alive to God, that Jesus’ death can be seen, retrospectively, to be part of a sacrificial process. Jesus’ death was the necessary event that set into motion the sequence that resulted in the offering that effected the full atonement he obtained.”<sup>77</sup>

The presentation of High Priestly Christology in *Hebrews* focuses attention on the problematic nature of all theological talk of ‘event’ or ‘action’, whether in the heavenly places or otherwise. The difficulty lies in the ordering of the sequence as a narrative whilst wanting at the same time to think of it as ‘eternal’. The author of *Hebrews* emphasizes constantly that Christ’s offering takes place “once for all” (Hebrews 9.26b), otherwise “he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world.” (Hebrews 9.26a) This suggests that it is the *effect* of what ‘took place’ that is the defining and determining factor for salvation, not the taking place itself for we have no means of thinking how an ‘event’ with a beginning,

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<sup>76</sup> Moberly, R.C. (1919) *Ministerial Priesthood*, London: John Murray, p. 244

<sup>77</sup> Moffitt, D.M. (2011) *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews* in *NovTestSupp*, 141, Leiden: Brill

middle and end can both happen ‘once’ or ‘at one time’ and ‘always have happened’. This is the paradox at which the author hints and then rejects - the idea of Christ’s sacrifice as an endless loop. In the cosmology of *Hebrews*, ‘the foundation of the world’ appears to be a uniting moment between heaven and earth. There is no conception that the Son’s sacrifice is taking place ‘before’ or ‘outside of’ the foundation of the world. Nor does there appear to be any link to the Johannine *Logos* Christology of the Word as Creator, “before all worlds” as the Nicene Creed has it.

#### 11.10 *Time: temple and theatre*

Perhaps a way of thinking about this problem of time can be provided from within drama itself. Martin Meisel, in *How Plays Work*<sup>78</sup>, notes that “Modern science brought the news that the world we live in happens in space-time. The play world is equally four-dimensional, and abstracting time and space from each other can only take one so far, as the prescriptive theorists of the three Unities - time, place and action - learned long ago.”<sup>79</sup> The playwright Jean Racine, perhaps the foremost exponent of plays obeying the Unities, wrote *Athaliah* as a ‘Pentecost’ drama, set within the Jerusalem Temple on the day of the overthrow of Jezebel’s daughter Athaliah and her replacement by Joas, a scion of the House of David. The play is ‘occasional’, written for performance at the Christian festival of Pentecost, and its schema invokes the Temple as the site of ‘condensed time’. Racine refers within the play to the tradition that the Jerusalem Temple was built in the place where Abraham once offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God. In the present action, it is Athaliah who demands the boy Joas as a sacrifice, until the ‘epiphany’ moment when the Temple curtain is thrust aside and Joas is revealed, enthroned as king, and

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<sup>78</sup> Meisel, M. 2007, p. 87

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.* p. 85

Athaliah realizes that she is to be the sacrifice instead as the high priest warns her that she cannot avoid her fate:

“There’s no escape,  
And God has hemmed thee in on every side.  
That God thou bravedst has now delivered thee  
Into our hands.”<sup>80</sup>

This dramatic ‘temple time’ allows the presentation of Joas as a Christ-like sacred image, seated in Majesty. Meisel comments: “The tableau is thus also a vision of what lies latent in futurity in the Temple’s treasures. The High priest, possessed by the Holy Spirit like his Pentecostal successors, prophesies the Temple’s destruction and that of Jerusalem, these places in the historical and dramatic present resonant with the sacred occasion, to be succeeded by a New Jerusalem, truly eternal, and by a universal, multi-local church.”<sup>81</sup>

The consonance of theatre and temple in this play is an important one for our purposes, since it brings out the significance of the theme of space-time to a religious framework. Recent scholarly work<sup>82</sup> on Genesis and its Creation stories has emphasised the importance of the Ancient Near East’s common understanding of existence being ordered by function, and that in contrast to a Western Enlightenment view of origins as having a material ontology, the Ancient Near East shared a functional ontology: “Everything exists by virtue of its having been assigned a function and given a role in the ordered cosmos.”<sup>83</sup> Walton argues from this insight

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<sup>80</sup> Racine, J. (1960) *Athaliah*, Muir K. (trans.), New York: Hill and Wang, Act 5, sc. 5, l 29-31

<sup>81</sup> Meisel, M. 2007, p. 89

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Walton, J.H. (2011) *Genesis 1 As Ancient Cosmology*, Winona Lake, US: Eisenbrauns

<sup>83</sup> Walton J.H. 2011, p. 24

for a view of Genesis' creation accounts as an ordering of space-time, with God assigning functions to the given elements of the 'places' within the cosmos, which taken together become a description of the cosmos as God's temple, within which he takes his 'rest' at the end of the process. On Walton's account, the Hebrew text of Genesis chapter one can be interpreted as a 'cosmic temple inauguration' liturgy, imbued as it is with "temple ideology"<sup>84</sup> and that it was perhaps repeated annually.

The author of *Hebrews*, whilst displaying aspects of Platonism, as von Balthasar suggests, may be thought to share also aspects of a functional ontology in which the temple becomes the site of a *re-ordering* of space-time that is at the same time anticipated by the previous order - the giving of the Mosaic Law as an ordering of the relationship between God and his people is re-ordered by the enthronement of the High Priestly Son.

Temple and 'temple time', I suggest, give us a theological way of thinking about drama and its own 're-ordering' of linear time. We can say then that the 'enthronement drama' which climaxes at Hebrews 9.26 enacts the completion of the crucifixion of Jesus, the 'staging' of which we discussed earlier. *Christodrama* therefore is entitled to draw upon the idea that the 'humiliation' implicit within drama's processes achieves its 'completion' above the level of the action itself, and this completion is soteriological in nature. As with the theology of Hebrews, although theatre points us towards an 'eternal now', this always emerges out of an historicized concrete series of events - so *this* person is humiliated in *this* way, just as Christ dies and is buried, but something else has happened too. The drama itself happens within the ordinary limits of space-time, but the flow of dramatic events opens up the

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<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*



possibility of a ‘completion’ of those events elsewhere. The question, of course, is where such completion can be said to take place, and how it can be said to be soteriological.

#### 11.11 *Ekphrasis and Energeia*

We have seen how Artaud’s manifesto for a Theatre of Cruelty uses certain ‘effects’ to ‘enslave’ the attention of the audience - effects which include placement of the audience in the middle of the action and enacting around them scenes characterized by violence, ‘cries’, and swirling movement, in order to lead that attention elsewhere. Mackie’s article proceeds to analyze the Epistle to the Hebrews in terms of the ‘effects’ it employs to draw its readers into an ‘actual’ experience “intended to engender a visual encounter with Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary.”<sup>85</sup>

The constant urging of the reader to “draw near” (Hebrews 4. 14; 6. 18 - 20; 10. 19 - 23; 12. 22 - 24) represents, according to Mackie, the prospect of a “real and substantial access to the heavenly realm and God’s enthroned presence.”<sup>86</sup> What Mackie suggests is that such access builds upon a tradition of ‘special’ ascent narratives, but rather than being the preserve of a few privileged individuals, such ascent is now open to all who hold fast to the faith in the face of present sufferings. The faithful are given a ‘preview’ of the ‘eternal’ victory of Christ which would “confirm beyond all doubt that their suffering would ultimately result in glorification and vindication.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Mackie, S. 2011, p. 103

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.* p. 94

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.* p. 79

Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and the *Epistle to the Hebrews* both employ rhetorical devices not to persuade the minds of the audience but to transport the audience elsewhere - that is, to make them 'ecstatic', to take them out of the place where they are. Mackie analyzes the effects deployed by the author of Hebrews firstly in terms of 'vivid description' or *ekphrasis* and secondly in terms of 'visualization', the power to 'transport' an audience in such a way that they 'see' an event as if they were present. This second effect is known as *energeia* and derives from Aristotle's *Rhetoric Book III*<sup>88</sup> in which he addresses the question of how persuasion is best achieved - or how to say things in "the right way"<sup>89</sup>. *Energeia* itself is a slippery term<sup>90</sup> but can be thought of as "bringing-before-the-eyes of an audience" as Jeanne Fahnestock puts it, an utterance which achieves the effect it names, of making actual through speech. Technically, we can criticize Mackie's account, which links *energeia* with the 'ascent' of the audience to 'see for itself', whereas the term has more the sense of summoning through vivid speech the actuality of what is described. However, Mackie, citing Longinus, points out how rhetorical visualization "possesses the power to 'enslave' audiences"<sup>91</sup> and it is this 'enslavement of the attention' that provides the connection between drama, and in particular the Theatre of Cruelty, and the intentions of the author of *Hebrews*. Until the audience's attention is 'given up' to the drama completely, so that nothing 'exists' for it - no shaping or grounding of its consciousness outside of the drama - the audience cannot 'see salvifically' and the drama is not fully itself. 'Seeing salvifically', in other words, requires us to be 'ecstatic'.

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<sup>88</sup> Aristotle, (1991) *The Art of Rhetoric*, Lawson-Tancred, H., (trans.), London: Penguin Books

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> See for example, Fahnestock, J. (2008) *Aristotle and Theories of Figuration in Rereading Aristotle's Rhetoric*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. "Energeia and indeed most of the figures of thought can only be approximately specified by the effects they are supposed to achieve, the speech acts they are intended to accomplish." p. 170

<sup>91</sup> Mackie, S. 2011, p. 103

#### 11.12 *Themes and objectives summarized*

Does this confront us with the suggestion that drama can only be rhetorical and not theological - or that its theology can only ever be rhetorical? To put it a different way, can drama do nothing more than play tricks with the audience? This of course is to put the debate about natural theology back into play, but now we are pressing up against the heart of the project and the previous answer that was given to this charge - that drama opens up the paradoxical ground in which encounter can take place - needs to be broadened if we are to be able to claim that drama itself is theological, or more precisely, *Christological*.

Having made a connection between the enthronement drama 'brought before our eyes' in *Hebrews* and the 'completion' of the drama sought by Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, we are challenged to ask whether the events themselves, the utterances, point to something other than the words employed in any way that escapes the charges we have already levelled at attempts to ground theology outside of itself. In order to meet this challenge I will turn to the work of John Milbank and his elucidation of Christological poetics.

## CHAPTER 12: THE WORD MADE SANGUINE

### 12.1 *Substance and relation*

In John Milbank's collection of essays *The Word Made Strange*,<sup>1</sup> we find an argument for Christian 'metaphysics' as essentially linguistic. Frederick Bauerschmidt assesses Milbank's view as a form of "idealist materialism"<sup>2</sup> within which language, understood as the whole range of human cultural production, is "not representative but constitutive of 'natural' realities."<sup>3</sup> Creation *ex nihilo* is not a matter of the "imposition of form upon a pre-existent substance but is a generation of forms that is as much material as they are intelligible."<sup>4</sup> Drawing on Stoic philosophy, Milbank retrieves the idea that signs do not simply refer to non-linguistic 'things', as in Aristotle's account of the relationship between word and object, but instead "connote other elements in a moving continuum."<sup>5</sup> This emphasis on relation rather than substance, on flux and flow rather than rigid reference, on tension rather than equivalence, makes Milbank's exposition of Christology as *poesis* a potential ally of Christodrama, although as we shall see, we will have to make some reservations along the way.

We have already argued that drama does not itself refer elsewhere but only within its own action, an action which consists of a constant flow between utterance and counter-utterance, action and counter-action, desire and inhibition. We have

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<sup>1</sup> Milbank, J. (1997) *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers

<sup>2</sup> Bauerschmidt, F.C. (2002) *The Word Made Speculative? John Milbank's Christological Poetics*, *Modern Theology* 14 (4), pp. 417-431

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Milbank, J. 1997, p. 89

suggested that drama is not so much ‘mimetic’ as ‘pretensive’. Yet that ‘pretension’ is not the same thing as saying that it is ‘mere whimsy’ or meaningless. I have suggested that, uniquely among the cultural ‘forms’ produced by humankind, drama discloses the form of the Humiliated One, and this drama-as-humiliation arises from the very fact of being seen, being ‘witnessed’, by an audience who, in the words of Peter Brook, “assist at”<sup>6</sup> the drama by giving it attention, an attention which is, if the drama is working properly, ‘enslaved’. There is, however, the prospect of liberation in the form of an ecstatic movement into drama’s ‘eternal and redemptive now’.

## 12.2 *Gains and losses in poesis and praxis*

Let us follow Milbank’s exposition of *poesis* further and relate it to this picture of drama. He begins with Aristotle’s contrast in the *Nicomachean Ethics* between *poesis* and *praxis*. *Poesis* is an “act which passes over into something external”<sup>7</sup> whilst *praxis* is an “act which remains within the subject.”<sup>8</sup> Poetry is a going-beyond-itself rather than the execution of a move towards fulfilling the purpose of the subject. “In *praxis*, act and end are identical, in *poesis* act and end are distinguished.”<sup>9</sup> Milbank suggests that Aristotle’s commitment to the principle that “all movement is a progression from the privation of potential to the fullness and sufficiency of act”<sup>10</sup> limits his ability to see *poesis* as ‘ontological gain’: “It is hard to conceive of a procession out of a subject as a positive gain in being, still less as a gain in being for the subject. But this is surely how one wishes to categorize all meaningful

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<sup>6</sup> Brook, P. 1968, p. 156

<sup>7</sup> Milbank, J. 1997, p. 124

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* p. 123

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* p. 124

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

human constructs.”<sup>11</sup> He turns to Thomas Aquinas to supply a means of understanding how this ontological gain can be supplied: “In Thomas we find the idea of *virtus* or active potency: the capacity of an active agent to engender a further gratuitous act, other than the act by which he is in being.”<sup>12</sup> So while in Aristotle ‘procession out of’ a subject comes up against a limiting factor of ‘sufficiency’ once the procession has met its ‘end’, in Aquinas we find a generative ‘chain’ through which potential always generates further potential, and therefore a ‘gain’ in being. “It follows that we are habitually related to the products of *virtus* in that we both identify with them as realizing our selfhood in relation to a *telos*, and distinguish ourselves from them in so far as the self is never exhausted by any of its products and so retains *virtus* as its property.”<sup>13</sup>

Milbank develops this idea (beyond Aquinas, as he acknowledges) in some interesting ways that throw light on our discussion of drama and I would suggest, *vice versa*. Whilst humankind is a maker of signs, it is at the same time always lagging behind the meanings that such signs generate. “In consequence, we come to depend upon the world of meanings that we ourselves have constituted to the extent that there is an infinite surplus of meaning in the human symbol and the human text.”<sup>14</sup>

### 12.3 *Ontological gains and losses*

There are three implications of this analyzed by Milbank. First, when we make meaning, we are performing, in the sense of an utterance or speech act being a

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p. 125

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

performance. We are manifesting energy and desire, which we “never manage to master consciously in the course of our articulations, such that we have always spoken more than we realize.”<sup>15</sup> This is a very clear parallel with our earlier discussion of irony and its importance to drama. Yet in Milbank’s analysis, who discerns this irony? Who is there to recognize that our meanings have escaped us? Milbank is very careful to say, following Vico, that *poesis* is not the following of a technical blueprint, such as a Platonic form, and therefore ‘history’ cannot perform this function nor indeed can an “overruling providence.”<sup>16</sup> What could supply this apprehension if we are keen to avoid Hegelian ‘immanent determinism’?

Milbank, in his second point, says that our self-awareness arises not from a place of certainty, as minimally hoped for by the *cogito* of Descartes, but “in our finding ourselves in relation to other beings in whom we both actively recognize and do not recognize our own subjectivity, in an inexhaustible dialectic.”<sup>17</sup> It is through our experience, then, of the cut and thrust of life, energy and desire that apprehension dawns. The tension between recognizing and failing to recognize our own subjectivity is very like the tension between the epic and the lyric modes identified by Balthasar and Quash. We might think that Milbank suffers from ‘over-epicizing’ his account of *poesis* in the manner of Balthasar, as criticized by Quash, but Milbank avoids this on the whole by incorporating the tension between recognition and failure to recognize our subjectivity into his account, making it properly dramatic: “It is not that later history dispossesses us of an intentional act (*praxis*) once controlled by us and properly our own, but rather that *to act at all* is always to be dispossessed, always continually to apprehend ‘more’ in our own deed once it occurs to us, than our first

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

hazy probings towards the formulation of a performance could ever have expected.”<sup>18</sup>

To be ‘always dispossessed’ as we act sounds remarkably like the process of humiliation that we have said lies at the heart of drama but the question then arises as to why we should think of this as a gain in being rather than a loss?

Is it not rather the case that in terms of being, our ‘manifestations of desire’, once uttered, are always inhibited, and therefore always less than we thought they would be? We are back to the ‘nothings’ that circle round King Lear, and indeed the whole of Elizabethan theatre. Not for nothing does Shakespeare call his theatre a ‘Wooden O’<sup>19</sup>, dangling before us an image of life which is also pretence, of energy and striving and ‘going forth’ - the full mechanics of ‘imaginative production’ in fact - but also of death, of nothingness, the very shape of the ground on which both actors and audience stand (or sit) acting as ironic reinforcement of the play’s action.

Our ‘hazy probing’ of what dispossesses us, which seems in Milbank’s mind to be associated with what our productions become once they have evaded us, can only ever be hazy because it always comes wrapped in this double layer of ‘something’ and ‘nothing’, and is always both in front of us and behind us, like Ariel, Prospero’s provoking spirit in *The Tempest*.

#### 12.4 *Milbank’s oversaturation*

We might suspect that Milbank comes close to arguing in favour of an oversaturation of being, the ‘more’ that our productions become imputing back to us an ontological

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* p. 126

<sup>19</sup> *Henry V*, Prologue, l. 13 in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (eds.), “Or may we cram / within this wooden O the very casques / that did affright the air at Agincourt?”



gain. We discussed the oversaturation of being<sup>20</sup> in the context of the Augustinian account of sin and the desire to be ‘too much’ and suggested that Christodramatic humiliation lies at the centre of answering the problem of oversaturation. Christ’s self-giving and self-emptying implies ontological loss as the patterning within which soteriological potential is to be found. The impression is further strengthened when Milbank later writes: “The entire problematic of the divine overtaking of human purpose in the Old Testament points to the coincidence of the divine presence with the human *telos*. In the first place, humanity as poetic being can have no bounds set to his nature; its only adequate, but unimaginable representation must be identical with the representation that God always makes of himself.”<sup>21</sup> The point that Milbank appears to be making is that through our human ‘works’ (to use a somewhat loaded term) we participate in divine action and divine presence. The boundlessness of humanity’s ‘poetic being’ must, I think, be a reading back from the coincidence of divine and human representation. “The divine reality and the human end which defines human nature do eternally coincide, because God in his being is an infinity of promise for man.”<sup>22</sup> Human fallenness, according to Milbank, is a failure to “inaugurate a response to and realization of this promise, a collapse of the means of representation.”<sup>23</sup> This gives us a picture of sin as the failure to take up the ‘promise’ of full saturation of our being - in other words, of participation in God’s being. He calls sin a “failure of Creation.”<sup>24</sup> This seems to be a development out of and away from Augustinian participatory ontology, which we have previously discussed.<sup>25</sup> The

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<sup>20</sup> See chapter 10.2, p. 183ff

<sup>21</sup> Milbank, J. 1997, p. 135

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p. 134

<sup>25</sup> See chapter 10.4, p. 188

question which does not seem to be resolved in Milbank's analysis is what the nature of this failure actually is. How could we ever hope to realize such participation through our own means, and why would it be considered 'sin' to have failed even to start such an enterprise? The thrust of Genesis 3.22 suggests that the Hebrew Bible's understanding of sin is precisely the opposite - that God gives a divine warning against such a project and takes steps to guard against it.

### 12.5 *Christopoetics and the redemption of language*

If we cannot fully endorse Milbank's refinement and extension of Augustine's participatory ontology, we can however make use of his linguistic and formal apparatus to say how Christodrama answers the challenge that it is 'merely rhetorical'.

Pointing out that the 'signs' of the body and blood of Christ are ones which Jesus "chooses to become in his very being,"<sup>26</sup> Milbank cites Ricoeur's "hermeneutic circle of martyrdom and meaning,"<sup>27</sup> which suggests that "a martyr's death is only such as a witness to an already established value, but on the other hand values are uniquely established when someone dies for them."<sup>28</sup> Christ's death is constitutive of the meaning of his life and work and his passing through death into resurrection "re-defines the sign of language as life"<sup>29</sup> in contrast to human signs which can "speak only death."<sup>30</sup> In Milbank's "metonymic structure of significant cause realized in

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<sup>26</sup> Milbank, J. 1997, p. 138

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p. 139

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

significant effect”,<sup>31</sup> the events of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection become a “poetic act characterized by an ‘overtaking’, such that the intention of the sign is only realized in the full outcome of its explication.”<sup>32</sup> As I have consistently argued, that ‘explication’ is not a matter of reading off the correct interpretation, hypostasized as doctrine, but of allowing the drama to play itself out fully, of uncoiling its ironies to their fullest extent, of moving through its ‘worst thing’ - its humiliation.

Drama-as-humiliation - Christodrama - achieves the same thing in so far as its dynamic structure is always aiming to overtake its ‘worst thing’, dying but also rising in the process. The humiliation is the ground of the adequacy of the structure to undertake this work, and as such, I think we can say, it participates in the process by which Christ becomes what Milbank calls the “realization of human poetic endeavour.”<sup>33</sup> For Milbank this appears to mean the making real of the possibility of overcoming the gap between desire and fulfilment, the soul’s longing, in an appropriate way, that is through the gift of God to man in Christ.

Furthermore, Milbank goes on to say, “Christ as the eternal ‘all’ of humanity may be ecstatically responsible beyond tragic risk<sup>34</sup>, but still in his historical, eucharistic giving he opens himself out to re-crucifixion.”<sup>35</sup> As drama is constantly staged and restaged, we make of it each time the action of this eucharistic self-giving. It is worth quoting Milbank at greater length here, to tease out his densely-packed themes: “But for *us* this continued embracing of risk and tragic responsibility by the *Logos*

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid.* p. 138

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* p. 141

<sup>34</sup> The risk is one of ‘misappropriation’

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

represents also a chance for true appropriation, meaning the recovering of the bare possibility of *any* true appropriation, any true receptivity of God and recovery of trust in the mode of sundered, ecstatic responsibility. This recovery alone allows us to fulfil our own self-creation.”<sup>36</sup> I take Milbank to mean by this that the self-giving manifested in the crucifixion - the ‘worst thing’ if you like - makes it possible that the meaning of this death can make itself understood in language and as such is always redeeming that language. To participate as a human in language, to make utterances within it, is to participate at least potentially, in that redemption, since humans are using a language which in itself has been redeemed, by virtue of its having such potential. Drama, then, is a ‘showing’ of this very process in action, one which allows its audience at least potentially to grasp the ‘new’ new thing which is always coming towards it. The ‘new’ new thing then appears as the excess, the overtaking of the ‘worst thing’, which paradoxically only appears even as it is overtaken.

This view of drama also has the merit of leaving the audience where it needs to be in order to do its proper ‘work’ - the work it is given to do by virtue of being an audience. This work is to give its attention - to attend, indeed - to the emergence of the new in the light of the ‘worst’. Then indeed salvation becomes a matter of ‘fear and trembling.’

## 12.6 *The ‘worst thing’ and the death of the play*

There is one more move that we need to make in order to clarify why I think Christodrama goes beyond Milbank’s Christopoetics. I have previously argued that drama ‘throws into question’ an utterance or a gesture of desire. This must include its own form. The human productive imagination both tries and fails to inaugurate

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

its own attempts at saturation - the fulfilment of its desire. This failure, however, is an important characteristic of the imaginative process. Indeed it is a structural characteristic in the following sense: drama depends upon there being an irruption of the 'new' - some new feature of the matter in hand which, to echo Ricoeur, tilts and re-orientates the action. Yet even as this re-orientation emerges and becomes visible, it threatens to close things down and must itself be tilted and re-oriented. This is why the endings of plays are so difficult, and so often feel like failures. Drama's impulse is always the disruption of the static and the opening to the new - and yet the action cannot continue for ever. The audience needs to go home. There is always a moment in a play when the ending makes itself felt, a moment akin to the sense of approaching death.

Christodrama embraces this death of 'the play'. Christ is himself an irruption, a new thing, a revelation, but what this new thing actually is is in danger of becoming systematized and closed. It starts to point towards an ending which is a confirmation of itself as a new thing, and this confirmation is where the stasis occurs. The urge towards resolution takes over from the urge towards the new and the play 'dies'. We might say, then, that the *figura* (to use Milbank's conceptual language) of the Humiliated One is embedded within drama as a sign of this formal death.

### 12.7 *Edgar and the unnameable 'worst'*

I will give two examples of this formal 'death', drawn from plays which we have already examined. Shakespeare's *King Lear* on the face of it appears to contradict, or at least to resist to the end, my view. The play keeps its ironies spinning until the very last moment as Lear, holding his dead daughter Cordelia, tries desperately to find breath in her before he too breathes his last.

And yet we may see the lineaments of the death of the play begin to show much earlier. At the beginning of Act 4 (in the Folio edition of 1623, nine scenes from the final scene in which Lear's death occurs) Edgar, son of the Duke of Gloucester, disguised as 'Poor Tom' has been given shelter from a storm by his unwitting father as part of Lear's bedraggled entourage. At the beginning of the scene he is given this soliloquy:

"Yet better thus and known to be contemned  
Than still contemned and flattered. To be worst,  
the low'st and most dejected thing of fortune,  
Stands still in esperance, lives not in fear.  
The lamentable change is from the best;  
the worst returns to laughter. Welcome, then,  
Thou unsubstantial air that I embrace.  
The wretch that thou has blown unto the worst  
Owes nothing to thy blasts."<sup>37</sup>

Edgar has reached, he thinks, 'the worst' and therefore there is no more to fear. Everything from that point will return him 'to laughter'. The words are hardly out before his father enters, freshly blinded by the Duke of Cornwall and Lear's daughter, Regan, and cast out by them from his own house.

Edgar again:

"O gods! Who is't can say 'I am at the worst'?"

I am worse than e're I was. [...]

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<sup>37</sup> *The Tragedy of King Lear*, Act 4. sc. 1, ll. 1-9 Folio Edition, 1623, in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (eds.), p. 964

And worse I may be yet. The worst is not  
So long as we can say "This is the worst."<sup>38</sup>

Edgar's contemplation of 'worse' and 'worst' echoes the 'nothings' that swirl around Lear and all he touches. However, the revelation for Edgar is that utterance begets utterance - the 'worst' itself is unspeakable. At the height (or the depth) of his suffering, he has reached the limit of what can be spoken. From here on, he starts to become 'himself' again, leading his blind father to the edge of an imaginary cliff, in order, we suspect, to trick him out of his despairing wish to kill himself (though why even a blind man would fall for such a trick is hard to say). Four scenes later, along the way towards the cliff, Gloucester says to 'Poor Tom':

"Methinks thy voice is altered, and thou speak'st

In better phrase and matter than thou didst.

Edgar: You're much deceived. In nothing am I changed

But in my Garments.

Gloucester: Methinks you're better spoken."<sup>39</sup>

The first inkling of the 'death' of the play occurs at this moment, I think. Although there are many terrors still to come - the full madness of the King, the deaths of Cordelia and Lear - the resolving of the action and the possibility of future stability begin here. To be "better spoken" contains the idea not only of a more 'noble' tone of voice but also a withdrawal from the attempts to enter the unnameable darkness.

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid.* ll. 27-28

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.* Act 4, sc. 5, ll. 7-8, p. 966

Edgar, restored to himself, will defeat his brother Edmund in single combat, the forces arrayed against Lear and Cordelia begin to dissolve with the deaths of Goneril and Regan, and the government of the kingdom will rest upon Edgar's shoulders. From Edgar's mouth, at least, there is no more talk of 'the worst'. Words, we may say, are becoming sanguine.

### 12.8 *Oedipus and the unspeakable past*

A second, briefer example of the death of the play is drawn from Sophocles's tragedy, *Oedipus the King*. We have already examined the end of the play in the context of our discussion of the nature of the impediments to desire, and also of the persistent and relentless entrance of the 'new' into the drama. We identified the process of 'recognition' - *anagnorisis* - as being vital to the audience's experience of the drama and to the operation of irony.

If we look a little more closely at the moment when the *anagnorisis* begins to make itself felt, we will find it in the pivotal moment of the play, very nearly half-way through (line 725 of 1530 lines) when Oedipus's wife Jocasta reassures Oedipus that he could not possibly have been responsible for Laius's death and that "no one human knows the science of prophecy."<sup>40</sup> Jocasta tells Oedipus, with withering scepticism, that an oracle brought to Laius, "I don't say from Apollo, but his ministers -"<sup>41</sup> declared that Laius would be killed by his own son, a son moreover who was then, at three days old, handed over to be "cast out on a trackless

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<sup>40</sup> *Oedipus the King* sc. 6, l. 708 (Trans.) in Taplin, O. (trans.), *Sophocles: Four Tragedies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 41

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*



mountainside.”<sup>42</sup> Since it was reported that “foreign bandits”<sup>43</sup> were responsible for slaughtering Laius, it could not possibly have been at the son’s hand, and the prophecy therefore has failed.

Far from being reassured, Oedipus for the first time begins to feel doubt: “Something you said just now has set my mind in turmoil, wife, and sent it on a wandering way.”<sup>44</sup> Jocasta’s mention of the location of the murder - “where three wagon-tracks converge”<sup>45</sup> has triggered a suspicion in Oedipus, a suspicion that he spends the rest of the play attempting to allay while all the time bringing the evidence of his own guilt nearer. From here on, the new information brought into the drama is not really ‘new’ - it is rather the discrediting of the old information on which Oedipus’s reputation is based, information which has turned out to have been false all along. The beliefs he held about his parents, Polybus, Lord of Corinth and Merope, were wrong, in so far as the Corinthian Man is able to tell him that they were not in fact his parents, and that as Polybus has died of natural causes, he had had no cause to have avoided him for so many years in fear of bringing about the prophecy he had been given secretly at Delphi: “...That I was bound to make love with my mother...and I would be the killer of the father who begot me.”<sup>46</sup> Despite Jocasta’s scepticism, our own sense as an audience is that the game is up - everything is winding towards the resolution, in which Oedipus pays the price for his own honesty - the “curse of honesty”<sup>47</sup> as Kaufmann calls it.

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<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* p. 42

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* p. 45

<sup>47</sup> Kaufmann, W. 1968, p. 140

And yet that phrase now does not seem quite right, because we could also say that Oedipus's relentless pursuit of the truth, motivated at the beginning of the play by the desire to be once more the saviour of Thebes, is corrupted, following the pivotal moment in the scene between Oedipus and Jocasta, into a desire to try to find within 'the truth' an escape route from the advancing sense that he has indeed fulfilled Apollo's oracular announcement of his fate. "Am I not evil, utterly unholy?... Someone who reckoned this would be cruel treatment by a god would have it right. By the great inviolate powers I pray I never , never look upon that day. May I be blotted out from humankind, before I see so foul a stigma branded on my life."<sup>48</sup> The Chorus leader replies: "This makes us anxious, lord, yet keep up hope, until you've heard the eye-witness."<sup>49</sup> "Yes," says Oedipus, "that remains my thread of hope."<sup>50</sup> Hope is indeed hanging by a thread, but the thread is, as we know by now, illusory.

Is it right to say that the play is now 'dying'? I think we can see that there is nothing new now that can inhibit, or throw into question, Oedipus's desire to uncover the identity of the murderer of Laius, and to that extent, it remains only for us to see the layers of irony sweep through the action and claim their victims. This is not to say that the play, formally speaking, is somehow deficient, but only to reinforce the claim that the play has its own death embedded within it. It is also perhaps to say that endings always feel like failures, because something has inevitably been lost in coming to resolution.

It is worth also noting how differently Sophocles handles the question of the 'worst thing'. In *King Lear*, Edgar realizes that you are not at the 'worst' while you can still

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<sup>48</sup> *Oedipus the King*, ll. 822, 829 - 831 in Taplin, O., 2015, p. 46

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

say 'this is the worst.' By contrast, Oedipus, praying that "I may never, never look upon that day," hurtles towards it. Once he has heard the evidence of the two shepherds with knowledge of his real origins, revealing that he was indeed the son of Laius cast from the palace, and that he has indeed murdered his father and married his mother, he recognizes that he himself has become 'the worst thing'. Indeed, he recognizes that in fact he always has been that thing. The 'worst thing' is a kind of unity between word and deed. The Delphic oracle's utterance has issued in the coming together of action and utterance, as it turns out, before the play's 'present time' begins. The play's action in the present is a series of utterances which takes us backwards towards that unity, the effect of which in the present is to reveal a catastrophic irony. The play's problem to be solved - the "detested plague, the god who lights the fever-fires"<sup>51</sup> that has come upon Thebes at the outset of the action - can only be removed by the removal of its hero, the man who has previously been the city's saviour. He was removed from the city once before as a baby, but in seeking to avoid the oracular utterances, which he wrongly believed to refer to parents who were not in fact his parents, he has ensured that the oracle has been fulfilled.

Oedipus drives this unfolding of the 'worst thing' towards himself and to us, the audience, in the present. Once it is upon him, he puts out his own eyes, answering his own prayer so that indeed he does not "look upon that day."

For Sophocles, then, the 'worst thing' has already happened, while for Shakespeare, it is always ahead of us. I do not want to draw any simplistic comparisons between pre-Christian era and Christian era drama (and certainly not on the basis of two

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.* l. 28, p. 15

plays) but it is now worth asking how this exploration of Sophocles and Shakespeare refines what we can say about Christodrama's christology.

### 12.9 *Themes and objectives summarized*

In these two examples we have uncovered two nodes of the operation of the 'worst' in drama - the 'unspeakable' worst thing through which language becomes optimistic; and the unity of utterance and action through which a figure becomes the worst thing.

Oedipus, in becoming such a figure, is a proto-Christ who pre-figures Christ's willing identification of himself with his violent destiny. However, Oedipus, remaining human, both wills what he becomes and seeks to avoid his fate, in such a way that we can conclude that had he known the full truth of all the elements of the drama, he would have made different choices, thereby rendering the drama null and void. Being human, he is always removed from full-knowing, and therefore always being thrown into question. The humanity of Christ also participates in this node - "Let this cup pass from me"<sup>52</sup> - but is overtaken by his willingness to be obedient to his understanding of his Father's will and his trust in the ultimate goodness of that will, a trust vindicated by the Father's action in raising him from the dead. In that sense he is set apart from other humans, and in becoming the unity of word and utterance, has imputed to him the consequences of the general human failure to make such a unity.

Edgar, by contrast, is the universal human, spared the unnameable worst. This means that whilst human language can afford to be optimistic, it is always also

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<sup>52</sup> Matthew 26.39

dramatic because it retains at its heart the cost of that optimism in terms of the price to be paid in violent humiliation. Dramatic human language does not either fully frame or successfully protest that violence, but accepts that both optimism and suffering play their necessary part in the world's drama.

If drama is Christological, our Christology must be properly dramatic, by which I mean that Christ, as the Incarnate One, must be understood dramatically. To do this, we must reframe one of the fundamental concepts of classical Christology - namely Christ as '*logos*'. In the final chapter I will examine the implications of this, starting with a discussion of the connections between Augustine and the dramatic works of Samuel Beckett.

## CHAPTER 13: 'GOING ON': INCARNATION AND THE *LOGOS* AS QUESTION

### 13.1 *Optimism declined?*

In order for Christodrama to 'work' - that is to present to our senses that which may save us if we 'see salvifically' - and to be thereby a properly dramatic Christology, must we temper our optimism somewhat by considering a challenge which begins with Augustine and continues into the present era with the work of Samuel Beckett? This tempering concerns those 'Ariel-like probings' to which I referred above, and the worst, or 'unnameable thing'. We have accepted that language becomes optimistic because redeemed, but does 'language' actually capture 'us' or do we stand outside it in some important way?

There is an important connection to be noted between the evasiveness of our productions, the Ariel-like probings before and behind us, and the Augustinian understanding of the self and its losses. As Rowan Williams has said, we see in Augustine's *Confessions* an unfolding sense of the difficulty, indeed the impossibility, of pinning ourselves down, and this difficulty is of a structural nature which has to do with time, utterance and desire. According to Williams, "Augustine notes the centrality of absence or loss in the simple activity of uttering a sentence: time passes, clinging to any object is clinging to pain and dismembering my soul and thus dismantling language."<sup>1</sup> The way the argument unfolds in Augustine's *Confessions*<sup>2</sup> is in the context of a commentary on Psalm 79.8: "O God of hosts, restore us to our

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, R. (2016) *On Augustine*, London: Bloomsbury

<sup>2</sup> Augustine (1961) Book 4.10

own; smile upon us and we shall find deliverance.”<sup>3</sup> Augustine is talking about how we “clasp sorrow”<sup>4</sup> to ourselves wherever we turn, even to things of beauty, as long as these things are “outside God.”<sup>5</sup> Such things, even though they come from God, are only “parts of a whole” and have death written into their very fabric. “At their rise they have their first beginning; they grow until they reach perfection; but once they have reached it, they grow old and die [...] Our speech follows the same rule, using sounds to signify a meaning. For a sentence is not complete unless each word, once its syllables have been pronounced, gives way to make room for the next.”<sup>6</sup> Just as the sun rises and falls, and words come and go, we cannot have a relationship to another thing in the hope that that other thing will complete us. This, it seems, includes the very language with which we try to place ourselves in relation to God.

This throws ‘us’ properly into question, but brings with it the challenge to our attempt to articulate a Christology in language.

### 13.2 *(Dis)ordering time and memory*

“If he were to utter after all? However feebly. What an addition to company that would be!”<sup>7</sup> It could be argued that the entire oeuvre, theatrical and novelistic, of Samuel Beckett is devoted to an explication of this challenge. Beckett shares Augustine’s melancholia at the ungraspability of time and memory in tension with the need to narrate oneself. Both have a view of the self as unstable and slippery.

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<sup>3</sup> Knox, R. (1949) *The Holy Bible: A Translation From the Latin Vulgate in the Light of the Hebrew and Greek Originals*, London: Burns & Oates

<sup>4</sup> Augustine (1961) *Confessions*, Pine-Coffin, R.S., (trans.), London: Penguin, Book 4.10, p. 80

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Beckett, S. (1980) *Company*, New York: John Calder, p. 16

Both have a view of memory as a repository - a 'stomach'<sup>8</sup> as Augustine puts it - out from which narratives of the self are drawn, ruminated upon before being put away. We have of course already considered an aspect of the problem in our discussion of Strawson's challenge to 'ethical narrativity' and have decided, with Strawson, that we do not need to have a sense of ourselves as identical with our past selves in order to function as moral (or any other kind) of beings. However, Augustine and Beckett take the problem to another level with a question about the self in the 'now'.

At the outset of Book XI of the *Confessions*, Augustine asks, "O Lord, since you are outside time in eternity, are you unaware of the things I tell you? Or do you see in time the things that occur in it? If you see them, why do I lay this lengthy record before you?"<sup>9</sup> As James Olney suggests<sup>10</sup>, Augustine's compulsion to perform his self-narrative before an all-seeing, all-knowing God is refracted by Beckett throughout his plays and novels, never more directly than in his novel, *Company*, whose narrator asks: "Why should I try to put in order, time after time, the stories of so few things, my old stories, my old story, as if it were the first time?"<sup>11</sup>

The challenge is both epistemological and ontological. How do I know who it is who is being recalled when I narrate myself? The very title, 'Company' is an ironic invocation of the question of whether one's present, performing and uttering self is alone, or connected in some sense to a past self which has experienced the memories. The constant drama of this question, as it appears in Beckett's work for stage, radio,

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<sup>8</sup> Augustine (1961) Book 10.15, p. 220

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* Book 11.1, p. 253

<sup>10</sup> Olney, J. (1993), *Memory and the Narrative Imperative, St. Augustine and Samuel Beckett*, New Literary History, 24, pp. 857-880

<sup>11</sup> Beckett, S. (1980) *Company*, New York: John Calder



film and on the page, can be summed up in the question ‘why go on?’ For if I cannot truly connect myself to the self who is the subject of my memories, then I can have no idea who it is who utters. I am stripped of my last possession, my ‘self’ at the same time as I am decoupled from what language appears to promise me - namely, the ability to name myself. Therefore, as the dishevelled, clown-like tramp Estragon, from *Waiting for Godot*<sup>12</sup>, constantly and ironically states, along with the narrators of *Company* and *The Unnamable*, “I’ll go on.”<sup>13</sup> I, alone, impelled to keep performing and narrating, must carry on doing these things without the illusion that I am accompanied by a self who is the object of my memorializing. But no sooner have ‘I’ uttered these words, than I stumble straightaway again on the problem of who the ‘I’ who must go on actually is. The supine narrator of *Company* cannot be satisfied with the endless narrating and re-narrating, the constant beginning and re-beginning of the story:

“Till finally you hear how words are coming to an end. With every inane word a little nearer to the last. And how the fable too. The fable of one with you in the dark. The fable of one fabling of one with you in the dark. And how better in the end labour lost and silence. And you as you always were.

Alone.”<sup>14</sup>

Beckett, we might say, is here sentencing himself to death. Every sentence has within it a form of entropy, and each word in the sentence takes its utterer a little nearer to a final silence.

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<sup>12</sup> Beckett, S. (1956) *Waiting for Godot: a Tragicomedy in Two Acts*, London: Faber & Faber

<sup>13</sup> Beckett, S. (1958) *The Unnamable*, London: Grove Press

<sup>14</sup> Beckett, S. 1989, p. 51-2

Augustine seems to know very well the terror of this possible loss of identity. The utterances and the potential for their becoming ‘more’ in Milbank’s terms are also the means by which they become less.

### 13.3 *Idealism and audience*

For both Beckett and Augustine, the acts of thinking and uttering provide them with the contents of their reflections. Both of them share as a result a version of a methodological Idealism in which the mind’s processes are held to disclose the logic of how things are. Augustine’s Idealism leads him to a view of the human as a being in some sense having to be understood in relation to God, who as the author of creaturely being guarantees the ‘I’ which is in danger of turning away from its proper relation to its creator and therefore tending towards destruction. Beckett’s Idealism, whilst plundering Augustine on a regular basis<sup>15</sup> also adopts the Idealism of Bishop Berkeley, twelve hundred years on from Augustine, as a kind of working model for his own dramatic methods.

Berkeley’s arguments for ‘immaterialism’ or Idealism, in response to the philosophical difficulties raised by Descartes and Locke, are unfolded in *A Treatise Concerning The Principles of Human Knowledge*<sup>16</sup> and usually summarized as *esse est percipi* - ‘to be is to be perceived.’ Berkeley was concerned that John Locke’s scepticism concerning the ability of the senses to represent and give knowledge of the external world might lead to scepticism concerning God himself. Locke had developed a causal theory of perception<sup>17</sup> which allowed him to say that the ideas of

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<sup>15</sup> Olney, J. 1993

<sup>16</sup> Berkeley, G. (1948-57) *Of the Principles of Human Knowledge, Part I, Works 2*, Luce, A.A. & Jessop, T.E., (eds.), London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, pp. 41-113

<sup>17</sup> Locke, J. (1997) *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Woolhouse, R. (ed.), London: Penguin

the external world presented to the mind (or re-presented to the mind) postulate a necessarily inaccessible external world. Berkeley asked why it was necessary to postulate an independently existing material world at all. The difficulties raised by Locke simply disappear if we assume that no such thing exists. What does exist, claimed Berkeley, is an all-perceiving mind he calls God, an “incorporeal active substance or spirit... [who] ...works all in all, and by whom all things consist.”<sup>18</sup>

We need not concern ourselves with the precise nature of the philosophical arguments that preoccupied the minds of the Empiricist philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (an interest revived in the twentieth). What is of interest is Berkeley’s cutting away of what he thought of as the mistaken duplication of ‘ideas’ and their counterparts in the external world. This act of excision is the starting point for Beckett and the drama he makes. This is made most explicit in the text of Beckett’s *Film*<sup>19</sup>, written in English in 1963 and filmed the following year in an American production starring Buster Keaton.

Apart from a single incidence of a human voice saying “sssh!” the film is silent. In the opening section of the script entitled ‘General’, Beckett sets out his project:

*“Esse est percipi.*

All extraneous perception suppressed, animal, human, divine, self-perception maintains in being.

Search of non-being in flight from extraneous perception breaking down in inescapability of self-perception.

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<sup>18</sup> Berkeley, G. 1948-57, p. 52

<sup>19</sup> Beckett, S. (1967) *Film*, London: Faber & Faber

No truth-value attaches to above. Regarded as of merely structural and dramatic convenience.”<sup>20</sup>

The last sentence is critical for our purposes. Beckett’s drama is not attempting to illustrate the truth or otherwise of certain propositions. It is certainly not a world-weary claim about the pointlessness of everything or the ‘absurdity’ of the universe (even though it might evoke such thoughts or feelings in its audience<sup>21</sup>). It is instead, I suggest, the attempted delineation of the minimum conditions, the essences, of being and non-being. The fact that Beckett uses drama in various forms is significant. ‘Performing’ the narrative - ‘going on’ - is a form of asking the question ‘Why go on?’ It should be borne in mind that ‘going on’ is a phrase actors use in referring to leaving the dressing room or the wings and ‘entering’ the stage during a performance. Asking the question in front of an audience, which necessarily involves performing an act of memory in the form of an utterance whose words succeed one another, as we saw in Augustine’s portrayal of memory, forces these implications to be shown to an audience and to be perceived by them. As I said earlier, this showing is not merely the revelation of a ‘content’ - the act of performing has these implications inscribed within it. Performing a script, remembering the words (or the actions, in the case of *Film*) and uttering them, then uttering other words in succession, both states the question and causes it.

#### 13.4 *Restating Logos as question*

The important thing is that drama is framed as a question, not as a set of propositions to be resolved and flattened out. This again helps us to develop our

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* p. 163

<sup>21</sup> Beckett’s drama, beginning with *En Attendant Godot*, first produced in Paris in 1953, was quickly classified as belonging to the category ‘Theatre of the Absurd’. See Esslin. M. (1965) *The Theatre of the Absurd*, London: Penguin Books

understanding of Christodrama in terms of a question that is always being put. Indeed we can say that Christodrama is a restatement of traditional *Logos* Christology derived from the opening of John's Gospel. Beckett's "Why go on? I'll go on..." is an essentialization of the problem of being and non-being. For all its apparent existential *ennui*, which, as we have said, quite deliberately picks up its tone from Augustine, it is not a "What's the point of life and why don't I kill myself?" question. It is a formal question, or a question about form - a "Why is there speaking?" sort of question, which as the inciting moment for a drama refuses any particular form for the resolution of the question. Instead it throws everything into question.

If the question is always being put in the person of the Son, the first question is - by whom is it being put? The next is - to whom is it being put? At the level of trinitarian thinking, the question is always being uttered by the Father to the Son, and the Son 'goes on' in the person of the humiliated Christ who is obedient to the Father's will. The loneliness of Beckett's unduplicated 'I' ("And you as you always were. Alone.") is the form of the abandonment of Christ on the cross. In terms of the Idealism which so influenced Beckett's structure of thought, the will of the Father utters the question in the form of the Son, thus bringing the Son as subject into being ("Begotten of the Father") and also into relation. That relation is incarnated as radical obedience in the form of the Humiliated One. In case Christodrama should be accused of lacking a pneumatology, we can sketch in the idea here of the Spirit as the space - not simply the performance space, but the entire dramaturgical process, including the audience's space - which gives extension to the Son's action ("I'll go on.") There is of course a considerable amount of further work to be done to systematize this perspective and it is not within my present scope to do this here. For the moment it is

enough to try to establish the lineaments of a properly dramatic Christology - one which is true to drama's processes.

### 13.5 *Christodramatic perception*

It is tempting to move from Christodrama's position within trinitarian thinking via Beckett's (and Bishop Berkeley's) Idealism into a consideration of the audience as the all-perceiving eye and will. Beckett's *Film* could be read as doing just this, replacing the idea of the all-perceiving 'God' with the idea of the all-perceiving audience. We have said, after all, that when there is no audience, there is no drama. In the script Beckett divides his protagonist into object (O) and eye (E), the latter rendered, in the film itself, as the camera, through which we, the audience, are invited to gaze. The object is an unnamed man (played in the film by Buster Keaton).

However, things are not quite straightforward. We have already established that the idea behind Beckett's script is the attempted search for non-being and the flight from perception breaking down in the "inevitability of self-perception."<sup>22</sup> Having established a division between the Object of perception and the Eye of the perceiver, Beckett struggles in his script directions to resolve some of the problems associated with realizing this idea: "Throughout first two parts all perception is E's. E is the camera. But in third part there is O's perception of room and contents and at the same time E's continued perception of O. This poses a problem of images which I cannot solve without technical help."<sup>23</sup> The point that Beckett is struggling to make real is that E collapses into O in the final moments. There is of course no single point of view for the camera from which the drama may be sealed in this way whilst the

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<sup>22</sup> Beckett, S. 1967, p. 163

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

audience remains outside of the action. The fact that Beckett is aware of the constraints upon his intentions suggests to me that it is not part of his schema that the actual audience should disappear once the camera through which we gaze has become identified with the object at which we have been gazing, as might be expected if we were to be viewing (and reading) *Film* through the lens of Theodrama. The fact that the audience is left to view the (perhaps imperfectly) resolved drama does not mean that it is figured in the Beckett universe as an all-perceiving presence. Beckett's Idealism is formal within the conventions he creates for the action, but there is no reason to suppose it encompasses what is outside of itself.

This is made clear by his notes on the third section of the script, set in a room from which all external perceivers (cat, dog, goldfish, parrot) have been somewhat comically excluded. E has now trapped O in a room which is clearly not O's own. In the first two sections, E has (with two exceptions) obeyed a convention by which O is always viewed from behind and never more than at an angle of 45° to the perpendicular. Beckett calls this "the angle of immunity"<sup>24</sup> and denotes that O is not in 'perceivedness'. Any infringement of this angle brings O into 'perceivedness' and induces panic in O.

In his 'dénouement' in section 3, Beckett says: "Here we assume the problem of dual perception solved and enter O's perception."<sup>25</sup> In his notes on this moment in the action, Beckett tries to visualize how he wants this to work: "We see O in the room thanks to E's perceiving and the room itself thanks to O's perceiving. In other words this room sequence, up to the moment of O's falling asleep, is composed of two

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p. 164

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* p. 166

independent sets of images. I feel that any attempt to express them in simultaneity (composite images, double frame, superimposition, etc.) must prove unsatisfactory. The presentation in a single image of O's perception [...] and E's perception of O perceiving - no doubt feasible technically - would perhaps make impossible for the spectator a clear apprehension of either."<sup>26</sup> Beckett wants his audience very simply to apprehend the merging of the two modes, as we might call them, of perceiving and being perceived. The impossibility of escaping self-perception establishes a minimum for being. The kind of being this is, and the effort to track it to its minimum, or essence, involves the commitment to 'going on' as a way of looking at its opposite, as a way of looking into the face of non-being. There is no 'double-I' to distract one from oneself. The burden of speaking, of 'going on', has to be borne by oneself alone. To come back to our previous discussion and criticism of Milbank's *Christopoetics*, one's productions do indeed escape one, but again, bring one towards the 'less' rather than the more.

Hitherto I have confined my discussions of drama to scripts written for a stage but I have included an account of *Film* because it completes the circle of works (*Company*, *The Unnameable*) which exploit the formal possibilities of Idealism to punch through to an articulation of the role of memory and desire in establishing a minimum basis for making utterances. It also allows us to follow through Beckett's use of Idealism in conventional and formal procedures which help us to consider the role of the audience from a Christodramatic point of view. Whilst Beckett's work has been visible to theology to some extent, usually with reference to *Waiting for Godot*,<sup>27</sup> there has been less attention paid to the value of Beckett's shorter works to

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p. 171

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Ben Quash on *Waiting for Godot* and Christian 'time': Quash, B. (2007) *Real Enactment: The Role of Drama in the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* in Hart, T.A. & Guthrie, S.R. (eds.), *Faithful Performances*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, pp. 13-32



theology in terms of their concentration on the formal processes of art and what there is to be found in the suppression of distraction from what Paul Tillich called “ultimate seriousness.”<sup>28</sup>

The content of Beckett’s dramas is rooted in the banal and the ordinary - two men waiting by a tree for someone who fails to arrive (*Waiting for Godot*), a man listening to recordings of himself reading his diaries (*Krapp’s Last Tape*), two men “who want to leave but never arrive,” (*Endgame*)<sup>29</sup> - and, when played in accordance with the playwright’s wishes, deeply comic (“Nothing is funnier than unhappiness”)<sup>30</sup>. However their ordinariness, banality and comedy speak of deep seriousness, indeed of ‘ultimate’ seriousness. For Paul Tillich, that is the test of whether a cultural product can be called ‘religious’: its concern with “that which is ultimate, infinite, unconditional in man’s spiritual life.”<sup>31</sup> It makes no difference whether the particular content is apparently trivial, or whether the author is an atheist. If the work is keyed in by its very form to those matters which are of ‘ultimate concern’ they cannot be a rejection of religion: “You cannot reject religion with ultimate seriousness, because ultimate seriousness, or the state of being ultimately concerned, is itself religion. Religion is the substance, the ground, and the depth of man’s spiritual life.”<sup>32</sup> Beckett is “ultimately serious” not because he plays with ideas drawn from Augustine and Berkeley but because “Why go on? I’ll go on” is an archetypal formulation of the question put to humankind in the context of its being and non-being.

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<sup>28</sup> Tillich, P. (1959) *Theology of Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 7

<sup>29</sup> Beckett, S. (1957) *Endgame*, London: Faber & Faber

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Tillich, P. 1959, p. 7

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.* p.8

### 13.6 *Chalcedon and Prospero's endgame*

I will conclude the discussion of audience by returning to the Chalcedonian reiteration that I began to sketch above. As audience, we occupy a space held open as extension of the Son's action, a space I identified as pneumatological. What transactions take place between performance and audience within this space?

Let us start with Shakespeare. At the conclusion of *The Tempest*, Prospero, the exiled magician, breaks his staff, the source of his power, and turns directly to the audience:

“Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;  
and my ending is despair  
Unless I be relieved by prayer,  
which pierces so, that it assaults  
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.  
As you from crimes would pardoned be,  
Let your indulgence set me free.”<sup>33</sup>

These eight lines sublimely echo the Lord's Prayer, particularly in the final couplet, but they also point up the fact that a bargain is being sealed between three parties - audience, character and performer. What is the nature of this bargain, or to put it another way, what are the terms on which each party occupies this pneumatological space?

Prospero, having been vindicated within the drama, is voluntarily divesting himself of his own power, a power which he comes to realize has also been oppressive. He

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<sup>33</sup> *The Tempest*, Epilogue, ll. 13-20 in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (eds.), p. 1189

has released his Spirit 'enforcer', Ariel, and stands looking into the face of loss and despair. There is something of a 'post-ecstatic' *tristesse* about these lines which reminds us that for all the enchantment of a play's complexity, for all its energy, for all its transporting language, it is a fully embodied art form, performed by bodies, about bodies, for bodies. The character's end, his loss of being as 'character' by virtue of its being the end of the play, can only be transformed through a receipt of grace, activated by prayer. The prayer in question, slyly referenced, is embodied in the act of putting hands together multiple times. The appeal for applause is no narcissistic whimsy, however. As Prospero's lines acknowledge and reveal the performer underneath the character, asking for deficiencies of play and performance to be forgiven, so the audience is reminded of its own need for grace. "In the real world," says Prospero, "you the audience long for grace too." The audience's 'indulgence', neatly bracketing the ideas of payment for presumed religious advantage, enjoyment of fleshly delights and forgiveness, or at least, the kind overlooking of faults, both seals the contract and 'releases' character and performer. The idea of indulgence also reminds us that the audience, as a collection of bodies, has been in some sense fed. We cannot escape the Eucharistic references within the lines. For Shakespeare, the transactions going on at multiple levels are both earthy and sacramental.

What permits us to say that the space itself is sacramental is the idea that the audience, symbolized by its 'prayer' at the end of the performance, is also receiver of the 'grace' within the play's action. Its pleasure - or indulgence - signified in the applause it gives is liberative in so far as it indicates a recognition that the attention it has given to the action has opened a channel into which grace revealed within the action can flow. This is possible because of its implied acceptance of the mutual exchange which characterizes not just the final moment of the drama but the entire

performance. Prospero's invocation of the mutuality of forgiveness, echoing "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," invites the audience to assent to a participation in the eucharistic meal which is on offer as soon as the curtain goes up.

Having restated Chalcedon's original doctrinal accommodations by recovering a form of *Logos* christology in which *word* becomes *question*, we can say that God's utterance is always dialogical, seeking to draw into relation. We can also say that as incarnated *question* Christ models a wholly dramatic deconstruction of the will as knowing subject. The invitation to the audience is to participate in this deconstruction by undergoing the humiliation of their own knowing, by embracing, that is, a form of unknowing.

I have employed the notion of deconstruction in this context in the sense given by Derrida. However, there is a danger that this might appear too mechanistic, might resemble too much the stage machinery rather than the lively interaction of human presences. Another way of looking at the process is noted by Peter Brook in his discussion of Prospero's final speech. In an earlier play, *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare gives us a phrase, "the quality of mercy"<sup>34</sup> which Brook describes as "the conviction that there is a certain quality which none of us can see, none of us can define, and yet which has this total capacity of bringing about a true freedom."<sup>35</sup>

Prospero ends his speech, and the play, with the word 'free'. From what does Prospero desire to be set free? One answer is that the audience's indulgence is craved

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<sup>34</sup> *The Merchant of Venice* Act 4, Sc. 1, l. 181 in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (eds.), p. 445

<sup>35</sup> Brook, P. 2014, p. 107

as the means of setting Prospero free from the despair of the nothingness which hangs over him. The language, as we have noted, is touched with the sublime resonances of the Lord's Prayer. Prayer is the one thing that may relieve him; a prayer which assaults Mercy. This is a prayer which 'pierces'. There is here the recognition that such a prayer involves pain and loss. It requires a movement outside of the sphere of one's own influence, one's own power. There is also, paradoxically, a restatement of the Golden Rule, in the manner we found in Paul Ricoeur, invoking a transactional equivalence between character and audience. But here, as we discussed with regard to Ricoeur's 'poetic re-descriptions', is inscribed the notion of freedom, which we found lacking in Ricoeur's analysis of the 'economy of the gift'.

The spectacle we have witnessed in *The Tempest* is the staging by Prospero of his revenge upon his treacherous brother. His stratagem in overcoming his brother and bringing about his own restoration as Duke of Milan has worked. Brook draws an instructive conclusion from this: "Shakespeare [...] leads you to have a sneaking admiration for this super figure called a magician. But in *The Tempest* this isn't the end of the play, nor is it what the play is about. In the subplot, ambition, anger and revenge dominate. Trinculo, Stephano and Caliban conspire to murder Prospero. But Prospero recognizes that he must abandon this magic completely, he must drown his books and break his wand. Only when he's done that is he able to take a totally new step, and this step is the step from vengeance to forgiveness."<sup>36</sup> What Brook further suggests is that in making this move, in embracing his own humiliation, Prospero makes contact with his real need, that is to "return to where he started, to *his* Milan, to his place of origin..."<sup>37</sup> Prospero had been betrayed by his brother because

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.* p. 105

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.* p. 106

Prospero had himself betrayed the idea of a good ruler - one who is attentive to his people. By spending his time in libraries studying magic in occult books, he had allowed his dukedom to become disordered. Returning to Milan as a powerless, ordinary man, not an all-powerful magician, is his salvation from the disorder visited upon him by his own pride in his magical prowess. We hear the echo of what Bonhoeffer spoke of in terms of 'a-ethics' - the need to go beyond ethical calculation in order for one's origin to be restored to one. The connection is through the Christ-like move into the sphere of 'gift'. Prospero is now restored to Presence.

However, even this thought is not quite enough to keep Prospero from despair. Something, says Brook, is still lacking: something which encompasses all of the oppositions of drama - order and chaos, power and powerlessness, pride and humility. "I think it is in order to touch this incomprehensible offer to mankind that's contained in the word 'free', that Shakespeare proposes a 'prayer which assaults mercy.'"<sup>38</sup> There is of course a paradox in the triadic image of prayer assaulting mercy. If mercy is something that can be assaulted by prayer, does that mean its freedom to act in the character of Mercy is constrained? As the full line from *The Merchant of Venice* suggests, "The quality of Mercy is not strained."<sup>39</sup> If mercy is not freely given, as a gift, it is drawn back within the sphere of equivalence; it is not Mercy. Portia, the speaker of the line, goes on to say within the same speech:

"It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings;  
It is an attribute to God himself  
and earthly power doth then show likest God's  
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid.* p. 107

<sup>39</sup> *The Merchant of Venice* Act 4, Sc. 1, l. 181 in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (eds.), p. 445

Though justice be thy plea, consider this:

That in the course of justice none of us

Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,

and that same prayer doth teach us all to render

The deeds of mercy.”<sup>40</sup>

We must ask - does it though? Portia, in disguise, urges Shylock to grant mercy to Antonio (the Merchant of Venice) in his prosecution of Antonio for debt default. The forfeit Shylock presses for is the bond Antonio gave - a pound of his flesh. Shylock's demand for payment of the bond requires, of course the death of Antonio as an unavoidable consequence. If he is to show mercy to Antonio, he must set aside the bond. He is offered generous payment to do so, which he refuses. The answer to this 'bind' is delivered by Portia (in the guise of a learned but very young lawyer) with the judgement that, whilst the law allows Shylock to take his bond of flesh, it allows him to take “no jot of blood”<sup>41</sup> on pain of confiscation of all lands and goods.

Furthermore, it becomes apparent that if any “alien”<sup>42</sup> who by “direct or indirect attempts”<sup>43</sup> seeks the life of a Venetian citizen,

“the party ‘gainst the which he doth contrive

Shall seize one half his goods; the other half

Comes to the privy coffer of the state,

And the offender's life lies in the mercy

of the Duke only, ‘gainst all voice -

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid.* ll. 191-199

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.* l. 303

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* l. 346

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.* l. 347

In which predicament I say thou stand'st..."<sup>44</sup>

To all intents and purposes, the Christians' version of mercy here is a mere ambush for the reviled 'alien'. The Duke does indeed grant mercy to Shylock, but upon certain conditions urged by Antonio, one of which is that he should change his religion. In the resolution of this play, we cannot wholeheartedly say that with the humiliation of Shylock, 'Mercy' is revealed, for we cannot avoid the lingering suspicion of anti-semitism that this scene leaves with us. Shakespeare does indeed make this point through Shylock when the Duke asks him, before Portia's intervention: "How shalt thou ask for mercy, rendering none?"<sup>45</sup>

Shylock's reply points to the hypocrisy of the Christians who buy slaves and treat them mercilessly. There is no uncoiling irony to balance this arbitrary power structure. In this comedy, we can say that Shakespeare has not yet managed to master all the ironies, uncoiling them to their fullest extent, as he does with *King Lear* and *The Tempest*.

### 13.7 *Themes and objectives summarized*

What we can say in the light of *The Tempest*, however, is that drama illuminates for us the nature of the 'prayer' that does the 'assaulting'. Such a prayer arises from the true humility consequent upon undergoing the humiliation of the drama - the exposure to the downward curve and the uncoiling of the full extent of the ironies implicit with the originating desiring action. A prayer from this perspective is one that does not aim to constrain Mercy but instead makes itself available to receive Mercy without any insistence upon the right to receive it. This, I think, is *what*

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* ll. 349-354

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* l. 87, p. 444



*drama does to us and for us.* This lies at the heart of Christodrama as a way of seeing drama theologically.

The overall purpose of this thesis has been to elucidate a specifically Christian understanding of drama in terms of the phenomena it yields; to say how the phenomena of drama create a dramatic Christology; and to argue that drama can be understood not as a way of making statements about the nature of God in God's metaphysical aspects, but as a way of seeing who Christ is for us in the world and what it means to be related to him.

I have made a number of claims which, taken together, amount to a challenge to the normative methods deployed in traditional Christian eschatological and soteriological metaphysics. The thesis invites us to understand Christian metaphysics in a different key: experientially within the immanent.

My final section explores the implications of this for theology.

## SECTION 3

“I too should be getting along...”<sup>1</sup>

### CHAPTER 14: CONCLUSIONS: THE THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ‘SALVIFIC SEEING’

14.1 *The ‘pretence’ of fiction in dramatic form is best-placed to speak of God - drama is in itself both theological and Christological*

My research question has yielded the view that drama is not only theological but also Christological and that theology that is *soi-disant* ‘dramatic’ may sometimes be in danger of playing false with the drama it instrumentalizes. Furthermore this way of seeing Christ is something that emerges for us out of our encounter with the process of being ‘thrown into question’. We begin this process by learning to ‘see complexly’ and end by learning to see ‘salvifically’.

14.2 *Principal Christological motifs*

In the constructive part of my thesis I have picked out two traditional Christological motifs: Christ as *Logos*, and Christ as self-giving. The latter, following Bonhoeffer, has given us the grounding idea of Christ as the Humiliated One and I have argued that this way of seeing Christ is the useful, strong correlate of drama-as-humiliation. Of course there are many other Christological motifs which, if I were concerned with producing a formal christology, I should have to consider - Christus Victor, for example - but my concern is different: I am aiming to provide a Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Beckett, S. (1984) *All That Fall* in *Collected Shorter Plays of Samuel Beckett*, London: Faber and Faber, p. 13

understanding of drama based on drama's phenomena, and my constructive thesis is that the concept of humiliation is central both to an understanding of those phenomena and to an understanding of Christ in the world.

#### 14.3 *Drama is essentially a question - it always 'throws into question'*

I arrive at this correlation via the understanding that drama throws everything into question, including itself and therefore any hard and fast theory based upon it. For this reason, I see the need to think Christ in terms of question rather than answer, and to restate traditional *Logos*-Christology 'dramatically' - that is, as the obedient incarnation of the Father's question to humankind. I have come at this from the ground - from the stage, indeed - rather than from the dogmatic air. This is because I see drama as universal - something like a practice, however different in cultural expression, in which everyone can participate - and I think it has important implications for the way in which we can say that Christ is available to everyone's experience.

#### 14.4 *Logos can be restated as 'question'*

In the early Church, *Logos*-Christology derived from the opening of John's Gospel. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, attempting to defend a developing credal orthodoxy against gnosticism, writes in his Epistle to the Magnesians: "There is one God, who has manifested Himself by Jesus Christ His Son, who is His eternal Word, not proceeding forth from silence."<sup>2</sup> Irenaeus, in the second century, was equally concerned with the defence against gnosticism and other unorthodoxies: "The second article is the Word of God, the Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord, who was shown forth by the prophets according to the design of their prophecy and according

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<sup>2</sup> Ignatius (1867) *Epistle to the Magnesians*, in Roberts, A. & Donaldson, J. (eds. & trans.) *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, vol. 1, Edinburgh: T&T Clark

to the manner in which the Father disposed; and through Him were made all things whatsoever. He also in the end of times [...] became a man among men, visible and tangible, in order to abolish death and bring to light life, and bring about the communion of God and man.”<sup>3</sup>

Justin, the second century Christian apologist, used *Logos*-Christology in speaking with his philosophical peers, equating the Supreme Being of Plato’s *Timaeus* with the Christian understanding of God the Father who created the material world, with the Logos, embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, as mediator between them: “But the Word of wisdom will act as witness for me, being Himself this God begotten of the Father of the universe, and being all the time the Word and Wisdom and Power and Glory of Him who begat and spake...”<sup>4</sup> The divinity of Christ is conceived as a torch lit from another torch, an image eventually embedded in the Nicene Creed: “And as we see in the case of fire another fire comes into being, without that one from which the kindling was made being diminished, but remaining the same, while that which is kindled from it appears as itself existing, without diminishing that from which it was kindled.”<sup>5</sup>

Christ comes to us as Word, as the eternal utterance of the Father. That positive utterance, dignified in theology with all the majesty that human images of power and light can convey, is called into question under the condition of drama - that is, in terms of its reception within the world. Christ comes to us only as question: “Who do

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<sup>3</sup> Iranaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 3.6-7 quoted in Williams, D.H. (2006) *Tradition, Scripture and Interpretation: A Sourcebook of the Ancient Church*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic pp. 82-83

<sup>4</sup> Lukyn Williams, A. (ed. & trans.) (1930) *Justin: Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, London: SPCK p. 127

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

you say that I am?” (Matthew 16.18), “What do you think of the Messiah?” (Matthew 22.41f). Pilate’s question “Are you the King of the Jews?” (Matthew 27.11) is unanswered and returned to Pilate as his own statement. Only at the end of the play’s action can we see Word - see salvifically in other words - and even so, the Word is never frozen for us as an utterance, but always moves forward as question. Even if we take the ‘I am’ sayings of Jesus in John’s Gospel, we have to say that ‘truth’, that resurrected ‘life’ can only be entered by the ‘way’ of humiliation.

14.5 *Drama is best understood as a process of humiliation. Its ‘downward curve’ is Christological*

It is only possible to re-read *Logos*-Christology as question rather than assertion because Christ comes to us as the Humiliated One. I have argued for a strong correlation with the concept of humiliation and its Christological expression as *kenosis*. The Pauline hymn at Philippians 2. 6-8 gives us the dynamic image of Christ ‘emptying’ himself of the full privileges of being God. This is not, of course, an emptying of himself of his Godness, but of the power and privilege of divinity. Entering fully into the mortal world, the Humiliated One assumes humanity with all its attendant limit, and as we have seen, slippery and unstable selfhood. Although Jesus did not have in his earthly life the actual “form of a slave”<sup>6</sup> as Paul puts it, the image is justified by the fact that Jesus “humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross,” which as we have noted was a form of execution reserved for slaves.

In my discussion of the ‘downward curve’ of drama, the pushing of a character’s desire towards the ground - the *substantia*, the limit of a character’s ability to

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<sup>6</sup> Philippians 2.7

maintain itself - I suggested that it derives from the drive to be *more* than one truly is, to make the impossible attempt to close the gap between a sense of lack and the overcoming of that deficiency. In other words, desire is both an acknowledgement of insufficiency and an urge to overcome it. If we relate it to the discussion of Augustine, it is the outworking of our hidden motivations, which he calls 'pride' and which lies at the root of all human sin. This analysis led me to compare Augustine's use of pride with Luther's use of *humilitas*, the breaking down of those urges and strivings after the objects of our desires. I criticized Luther's idea that the resulting humility is a 'preparation for the Gospel' on the grounds that it leads to the assumption that the Spirit of God is working at the end of a process, indeed *can* only work at the end of the process, and that this compromises the grace of God.

In so far as the 'making low', the necessary humiliation of the desiring subject, forms what I think to be the essence of drama, I revised Luther's *humilitas* to say that it is not just a preparation of the Gospel but that it *is* the Gospel: that this is what the working of the Spirit of God looks like in each age. The downward curve *is* the work of the Spirit, conceived as the space in which 'salvific seeing' takes place.

One might ask, in objection to this, whether the audience actually goes to the theatre to seek this downward curve. Does it not rather go in search of emotional intensification, of spectacle, of vicarious thrill? It does not seem likely that it attends in order to deliver itself up to humiliation. Furthermore, we may ask, is that in fact what drama itself actually sets out to do? Do writers and directors, actors and designers together with all the other participants set out to heap coals upon their audience's heads? We have already heard how Brecht's audience side-stepped his

moral teachings, lapping up the very behaviours he expected them to criticize. If nothing else, Prospero at least aims to please.

This is to ignore two fundamental facts about drama, however. The first is that we expect more from drama than mere surface pleasure. We expect to be *satisfied* in return for giving our attention, and that satisfaction requires that we are offered something more than trivial diversion. The second is that in order to give something more, in order to meet the audience's expectation of satisfaction, the drama has to work - it has to succeed in engaging our attention, and the way it does this, as I have argued, is by throwing everything into question, by putting 'at risk', by revealing what is 'at stake', and by requiring its characters to experience loss. The loss in question varies according to style and circumstance, but in some degree the characters will experience the impossibility of achieving the unity of desire and its object. That is not to say there is never restitution of fortune, reward for constancy, reconciliation between lovers; but only after experiencing the downward curve and its attendant humiliations.

#### 14.6 *Christodrama embraces the 'worst thing'*

The image of the Humiliated One appears in Christodrama as the lowest point, the "worst thing" which threatens the being not only of the characters but of the form of the play itself. A play, we saw, in our discussion of *King Lear* and in particular of Edgar, contains its own death. The drama dies in order to give itself up fully to the uncoiling of the farthest extent of its ironies. Each drama has its 'worst thing' - its crucifixion moment - during and after which its polarities undergo reversal and the uncoiling of the play's ironies completes. This uncoiling is what we can call drama's *revelatory correlate*: what is revealed in the uncoiling is the moment of grace - the

point at which we see ‘salvifically’ how our necessary humiliation liberates us from the problem of the over-saturation of our being. Such grace, as we saw in our discussion of Prospero and the final moments of *The Tempest*, is unwilled by us, genuinely new and unknown. It comes to us as a ‘thief in the night’ where the night is the darkness of the ‘worst thing’ and the thief is the one who robs us of the last dignities we cling to.

Such is the nature of the ‘impediments’ to acts of will in drama that the humiliation that ensues can never be false. They take us, under the threat of obliteration and nothingness, into what is really the case - into the reality or the ‘truth’ of a situation, however much room there may be for an audience’s interpretation.

At the beginning of my thesis I borrowed a question elegantly posed by the novelist Yann Martel: “Why would Truth use the tools of fiction?”<sup>7</sup> Here, then, is at least part of the answer. Fiction, in its dramatic form, allows us to experience the threat of obliteration imaginatively as a way of seeing what is the case. There is no suggestion that ‘what is the case’ can be universalized - that the audience all comes to exactly the same conclusion about this truth, and goes away able to utter it for itself in a form that remains stable at all times in all places. The experience of imagining that possibility of obliteration, that loss of being, of being seduced into exercising our imaginations in that way, opens up for each of us the possibility of seeing what ‘salvation’ is like for us in the ‘now’ - within our own present moment. This of course is true for each successive generation. The particularity of the story and its dramatic style changes from production to production, from year to year. The structure of our experience of seeing, however, remains the same. This is what I refer to as ‘salvific

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<sup>7</sup> Martel, Y. 2016



seeing' - the end of the process we have previously analyzed in terms of 'complex seeing.'

#### 14.7 *The 'habit of the question' against Balthasar's formalism*

Drama does not wear only one costume. It continually redresses itself in the clothes of its own time and culture, the "form and pressure" of our time, as we have heard Shakespeare call it. It is not limited to 'western' cultural experience. The costume my analysis wears is not that of Balthasar and Quash, in so far as they subscribe to a thorough-going performativity and a version of ethical narrativity. In my analogy, they are the victims of a wardrobe mix-up and have entered wearing the wrong costume. I prefer the habit, if you like, of the question, which seems to me to be more closely aligned with the phenomenology of drama. What the phenomena of drama actually are, and what they do, and most importantly what they do for us, this study has attempted to illuminate.

#### 14.8 *Once 'made strange' by being thrown into question we become open to the grace of 'the new'*

We have heard how this constant throwing into question works against the recruitment of drama to the cause of structural stasis in the form of an embedded universal. We heard Lyotard say that works of art are always in search of the new, that is, the rules and categories by which the 'new' in art can be understood. We pointed out, however, that these rules relate only to *what has been done*, not to what is coming next, which is the orientation of drama - the question of what *might* happen, as we heard Aristotle say.

To this extent we are not trying to find in each drama a hidden figure, a disguised hero, who represents a universal form - a Christ figure who lurks beneath the surface of every drama and is active within it - and who justifies our claim that drama is essentially theological and therefore sacramental. The 'Humiliated One' is not the name of an abstract, metaphysical form. Instead we are saying that this 'throwing into question' is a process best understood as 'humiliation' and that once an audience has been exposed to and identifies with the 'downward curve' of humiliation, it receives what is 'new' in the production as a form of 'grace'. This revelation of the new through humiliation is what correlates it to the Christology of the Humiliated One.

14.9 *Drama discloses the universality of salvation and an understanding of how Christ is available to all, regardless of time and place*

What is it that we see when we see 'salvifically'? Christodrama is not a formula or credal statement, but a process open to all. We are invited to see the operation of a fully prevailing, natural grace, available to everyone. It is a form of Christian universalism which unites universal phenomenology with a practice that does not require the possession of a specific set of *beliefs* expressed as a set of propositions which deliver a certain outcome - that is, one's personal salvation. The process reveals itself to involve the humbling of the will through the inhibition of desires, bringing us to the point of acknowledging the impossible - that is, the impossibility of achieving the unity of desire and object. We are saved, in other words, from inappropriate completion.

This sounds a little like a version of the universalism associated with Origen<sup>8</sup>, who thought that earthly, material life is a time of chastisement for the human soul fallen into sin through the misuse of free will. Such punishment is always remedial, with the aim of reconciling the fallen soul to God. As with Origen, Christodrama maintains an emphasis on human free will which, as we have seen, is not incompatible with the exercise of the divine will. What I have called the impediments to the fulfilment of our desires looks like a form of imposed suffering which, in leading to humiliation, might be described as remedial. We do not have to follow Origen, nor his twentieth century equivalent, John Hick, in thinking that such a process continues after the actual death of the person. The whole of life is the arena in which the drama of our salvation is played out.

One can of course, destroy oneself. One can try to refuse to engage with the drama and its humiliations. Universalism does not need to be construed as a belief that everyone will be saved in spite of themselves come what may. Otherwise both divine and human freedom are potentially vacuous. Christodrama is a way of holding together an understanding of salvation alongside a belief in the justice of a loving God - all human beings have the potential to embrace their humiliations in a way that discloses him, regardless of their beliefs or situation in history. Christ himself gives an eschatological hint of this in Matthew 25.31ff when he suggests that those who have reached out to others in their vulnerability will inherit the Kingdom of God. Christodrama contains the potential to become nothing in the same sense proposed by Emil Brunner. Paralleling my restatement of 'Word' as 'question', Brunner insisted<sup>9</sup> that the Word of God should be understood as *challenge*, not as

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<sup>8</sup> For this brief survey of Origen and Christian Universalism I have followed Richard Bauckham's account in Bauckham, R. (1978) *Universalism: A Historical Survey*, Themelios 4 (2), pp.47-54 acted via [https://theologicalstudies.org.uk/article\\_universalism\\_bauckham.html#42](https://theologicalstudies.org.uk/article_universalism_bauckham.html#42)

<sup>9</sup> Brunner, E. (1954) *Eternal Hope*, Knight, H. (trans.), London: Lutterworth Press

doctrine. Word is not an “objective truth available to a neutral observer,”<sup>10</sup> but “the subjective truth of existential encounter.”<sup>11</sup> We encountered this perspective in Chapter 1.4<sup>12</sup> where it was argued that the attempt to examine the phenomena of experience ‘scientifically’ or from ‘neutral ground’ is a mere assumption rather than a grounded certainty. The threat of obliteration acts as a challenge to the individual (and, we might add, to the collective) to choose the grace which is offered in the deconstruction of the will. It is not therefore inconsistent to say that the threat of obliteration is a real possibility whilst at the same time maintaining that all may be saved.

Karl Barth was sympathetic to the idea of a universal salvation at least as an “open possibility”<sup>13</sup> whilst insisting that it could not form part of doctrine because God has the freedom to allow the non-salvation of a person who persists in the attempt to deny God. As I have suggested, what it means to ‘deny God’ is not a simple matter of what one says, but how one receives the grace of the ‘new’, embraced through drama-as-humiliation. The threat of obliteration remains real in Barth as a function of divine *freedom*, however much we may understand God’s *will* towards the human, as revealed in Christ, to be entirely loving. We can say, however, that Christodrama is an attempt to dramatize the human experience of this tension - that is, the experience of living *without knowing beforehand* the outcome of this tension. Grace, in Barth, always comes to us as sovereign gift, telling us what we do not know. In my analysis, this ‘grace’ is working through the action of the drama but can only be

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<sup>10</sup> Bauckham, R. 1978

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> p. 15

<sup>13</sup> Barth, K. (1961) *Church Dogmatics* IV, 3, Bromiley, G.W., (trans.), Edinburgh: T&T Clark, p. 478

apprehended as such once the humiliation process has passed through its 'worst thing' and its uncoiling of the drama's ironies has finished.

14.10 *We do violence to the nature of drama if we make it into an ethics*

In the light of this we can still maintain that Christodrama is not an ethics, as we saw in our discussion of Bonhoeffer. It is not enough to say - "Drama is about a process of humiliation, so learn to be humble." The virtue known as 'humility' is never, can never be, the starting point. If it is, it will be undercut and overturned in its own way.

For example, the Duke in Shakespeare's *Measure For Measure* hands over his power to another in order to preserve himself from the necessity of imposing restraint on the licence he has previously granted. Like *King Lear*, the play begins with an act of apparent humility - the giving up of authority to exercise power - with the aim of examining the interplay of law, liberty and authority. Yet as with *Lear*, there is a hidden vanity within the humility:

"I have on Angelo imposed the office,  
Who may in th'ambush of my name strike home,  
And yet my nature never in the fight  
T'allow in slander."<sup>14</sup>

Holding himself aloof from responsibility for the exercise of authority, in this case to preserve his own good name, gives him kinship with Prospero as well as *Lear*: a trio of leaders for whom humility as escape unfolds suffering to varying degrees. *Measure For Measure* becomes a study in the clash between the liveliness of human sexuality, desire and love on the one hand, the dead coldness of law and the question of mercy

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<sup>14</sup> *Measure For Measure*, Act 1, sc. 3, ll. 40-43 in Wells, S. & Taylor, G. (eds.), p. 793

on the other. The Duke's position, less actively focussed than that of Lear and Prospero, also raises the question of the gap between the authentic self and how that self 'seems' or presents itself to view. The discovery, for the Duke at least, is that full engagement of the self is required in order for justice and mercy to be realized and held in proper balance.

This kind of engagement, however, should not be confused with the ethical 'performance' enjoined by Theodrama in its various guises. What the phenomena of drama do for us is to show us life in contradiction and therefore to suggest to us that our salvation from our own contradictions is only achieved by an engagement with and endurance of the downward curve that leads to humiliation.

#### 14.11 *The logic of audience identification*

Why, though, when we speak of drama, can we also speak of the contradictions it shows onstage as *our* contradictions? We took from Milbank the idea that language becomes sanguine because Christ is an adequate sign for the unity of utterance and action. He is the 'fully-mastered' irony.

The audience shares the 'linguistic air' with the characters onstage. We, the audience, are desiring creatures, and we have, in the language of psychology, 'belief-like imaginings' and 'desire-like imaginings'<sup>15</sup> which permit us to project ourselves into another situation and think about the world from another perspective. Story-telling is made possible by the capacity of our imaginings to mirror the inferential patterns of belief in our 'real world'. This is a much more satisfactory view of *mimesis* than the

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<sup>15</sup> Currie, G. & Ravenscroft, I. (2002) *Recreative Minds: Imagination in Philosophy and Psychology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

traditional Aristotelian view rendered as ‘imitation’ and criticized in Section One.<sup>16</sup> Currie & Ravenscroft call our ‘desire-like imaginings’ the affective consequences of ‘belief-like imagining’ and speak of how story-tellers shape these ‘belief-like imaginings’ but leave us to fill in the gaps with our own ‘desire-like imaginings’. The commingling of belief and imagining gives us ‘truth’ in fiction.<sup>17</sup>

#### 14.12 *Theodrama’s false view of mimesis*

This should help us to see how it is that our imagination can interact with and draw inferences from drama without our being said to be performers in that drama except to the extent that we ‘complete’ a work of art in our imagination by filling in the gaps left by the story-tellers. This leads us to say that drama, in common with other genres of fiction, possesses a ‘relational aesthetic’. It makes no sense to talk of it without an audience to complete it. The audience must never be made to ‘vanish’ in the manner of *Theodramatics*.

By this we can say that the phenomena of drama show us *our* lives in contradiction - they point to the possible contradictions we *might* ourselves face and show us what it might be like to be liberated from them. Salvation is not merely linguistic but

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<sup>16</sup> See chapter 4.8, p. 83

<sup>17</sup> Currie & Ravenscroft give the example of a set of inferences:

“It is fictional that Sherlock Holmes is human.

All humans are mortal.

It is fictional that Sherlock Holmes is mortal.”

They say that this not necessarily the inference that readers of stories about Sherlock Holmes make.

They give instead the syllogism:

“Holmes is human (imagines).

All humans are mortal (believes).

Holmes is mortal (imagines).” Currie, G. & Ravenscroft, I. 2002, p. 14

We can see that there is a non-trivial difference between the two conclusions if we consider the following two statements:

A: X believes that it is fictional that Sherlock Holmes is mortal.

B: X imagines that Sherlock Holmes is mortal.

If a coroner (X) were to agree to hold an inquest into the death of Sherlock Holmes, we might say in X’s case that either A is false and B is true, where ‘imagines that’ means exactly the same as ‘believes that’, or, if the context suggests that A is true, B is also true but not in the sense that ‘imagines that’ and ‘believes that’ are identical.

liberative because imaginatively projective. What we *are* is always thrown into question while what we might *become* is offered to us as a gift of grace. To the extent that we as audience identify and engage with the contradictions of the characters on stage, we take with us our own confrontation with our own unknowing. What we thought we knew is made strange to us and the basis of our ground, our substance, the way we produce ourselves and generate our meaning is shown to be illusory - we are not our own objectivity. Drama reverses our polarities and shows us what we do not know by releasing in us an awareness of and response to 'the new'.

#### 14.13 *Christ-existing-as-theatre*

We must ask whether this is in fact any different from Aristotle's desire that exposure to drama should make us better citizens, more fitted for the *polis*? But what kind of *polis* are its citizens to be fitted for? In Aristotle, the purpose of tragic drama was to purge its audience of 'pity' and 'fear' in order to produce more mature, balanced and rational *men* who would therefore play their part in making rational decisions to maintain the order, functions and power of a *polis* dedicated to the 'highest good' - the health and happiness of its citizens.<sup>18</sup>

Christodrama, by contrast, takes its audience in an entirely different direction. The *polis* it points to is one in which its members are first of all attuned to affliction - that is, they give attention to the process of a character undergoing a forcible stripping down, through inhibition and impediment, of the self, with all its attendant anxiety, distress and humiliation. The quality of the audience's attention, drawn out by the self-offerings of the performers, creates a relational space in which the audience can put itself into the shoes of the afflicted characters and experience, projecting their

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<sup>18</sup> Aristotle (1962) *The Politics*, Sinclair, T.A., (trans.), London: Penguin Books



native self-love onto the afflicted, and releasing their compassion, thereby coming to an existential understanding of what compassion is actually like. Christodrama creates a passionately compassionate community. To echo Bonhoeffer, we can say that Christ exists in the world as the theatre of our salvation. Far from being 'purged' of its emotions, the audience is led into acts of radical identification through its own emotions.

Simone Weil wanted to say that such acts of radical identification are sites of revelation of the impossible God - impossible because present only under the form of absence. Compassion is the visible presence of God: "Every moment of pure compassion in a soul is a new descent of Christ upon the earth to be crucified."<sup>19</sup> Drama understood as humiliation, or Christodrama, draws us all, through the volunteering of our attention, into encounter with the presence-in-absence of God in Christ.

#### 14.14 *De-instrumentalizing drama shows how it is 'salvific' for audiences*

There is a great temptation to say that we are thereby transformed into a community of the sort of people who will then 'go out into the world' to live out a life of radical identification with the afflicted; to show solidarity with those who suffer and to work towards the overcoming of the causes of affliction.

Again we must emphasize that drama cannot be instrumentalized in this way as a source of ethical guidance. This is not to say that ethical dilemmas do not form part of its content; only that it does not provide an embedded archetype of the 'good' from which we 'read off' our instructions. Let us remind ourselves that our claim for

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<sup>19</sup> Weil, S. (1970) *The First and Last Notebooks*, Rees, R. (trans.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 97

drama is that it is a *way of seeing*. It does not prevent us from having ethical commitments; it does not prevent us from deriving our ethical commitments from our faith and from our theological understanding. It just does not serve as the guarantee of those commitments, and may indeed serve more to throw the commitments themselves into question. Furthermore, it provides us with the means of looking at human alienation - from self, from world, from the very grounding of our reality in that world.

‘Christodramatic’ theology, or as I would prefer - ‘Christodrama’ - is properly dramatic precisely because it allows itself always to be ‘at risk’ and ‘in question’. To be always at risk is to be properly human - not one of the ‘immortals’ with pretensions to be like God. It is also, as Bonhoeffer teaches us, to be returned to our origins, standing ecstatically on our proper ground.

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