Up-staging God: from immanence to transcendence. How a hermeneutic of performance illuminates tensions in Christian theology and tragic encounters between God and humanity.

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ABSTRACT:
Up-staging God: from immanence to transcendence. How a hermeneutic of performance illuminates tensions in Christian theology and tragic encounters between God and humanity.

This thesis will argue that by applying a hermeneutic of performance to biblical narratives, religious dramatic texts and Anglican liturgies we are able to encounter the divine as an immanent and transcendent presence in theatrical performance. Performance, and theatricality, create realities beyond our quotidian experience and provide a context for such encounters. To explore these encounters I consider biblical texts, where God is present and active in a narrative, dramatic texts where God is a character on stage and Christian liturgies where God is active as first person of the trinity, passive as object of worship, or supremely in the Eucharist, present as Jesus. All will be examined through the twin lenses of *performance* as an end and *theatricality* as the means to such an end.

Theatrical performance is conditional upon multiple dynamics of action and reaction, feedback and response between both actors and audience which constantly modulate its process. Although capable of repetition, a performance remains unique and possessed of its own truth – however interpreted, *Hamlet* remains *Hamlet*. In performance actors become characters, each working with audiences to create and participate in different realities. This is the single most important application of theatricality. In performance, all characters and audience are of equal value and within the framework of a performance can shape and change what happens. 'Upstaging' of any character, by any character is always possible. This means that outcomes may be expected but can never be guaranteed.

God viewed as a character must be subject to the same constraints as other characters. This raises theological problems. In the biblical narrative of Moses, God is upstaged by Aaron casting the Golden Calf, and by Moses' *post hoc* rejection of divine forgiveness. Once God appears on stage his divinity is at risk by being, or perceived as being a human playing at being God, so finite and

idolatrous. In liturgical texts God is the object of worship, but when worship includes elements of performance and theatricality, God, Jesus and congregations are all potential performers raising the theological spectre of authentic ‘liturgical celebration’ becoming theatrical ‘imaginative representation’.

However, the different realities afforded by performance and theatricality allow mutual liminalities as God and humanity cross thresholds into each other’s presence sharing and shaping events. In all the texts examined there are events where transgression and conflict render them susceptible to becoming tragedies. As a character in their performance God’s impassibility is threatened and he must bear responsibility for their outcomes with their apparent loss of redemptive hope.

As God becomes a character in human stories (Moses, cycle plays) his immanence affects their outcomes, but as humans become characters in divine stories (the Eucharist) they enter moments of transcendence. In their mutuality, realities created by performance and theatricality offer transformative experiences of truth and redemptive hope unique in themselves but unitive in their repetition.

Contents:

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Christopher Taylor

Abbreviations:
BIBLE:

NRSV	New Revised Standard Version.
KJV	King James' Version.
RSV	Revised Standard Version.
NIV	New International Version.
JB	Jerusalem Bible.

BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER:

BCP + Date as appropriate.

COMMON WORSHIP:

CW	
CW1	Common worship Eucharist; Order 1.

Up-staging God: from immanence to transcendence. How a hermeneutic of performance illuminates tensions in Christian theology and tragic encounters between God and humanity.

Introduction.

This thesis argues that theatrical performances are key sites for encounters between God[1] and humanity. It explores the ways in which immanent human characters upstage the transcendent God by taking his place in performances of biblical narrative, religious plays and liturgies, with tragic consequences, but also with opportunities to share transcendence and redemptive hope.

Upstaging – or scene-stealing – happens when an actor, not centrally involved in a scene, finds, or moves to a position 'upstage' – towards the back of a performance space – and forces other actors to turn their backs on the audience in order to face the 'upstage' actor. The upstage actor dominates the space, becomes the focus of attention and weakens other actors' performances. A hypothetical example would be another actor appearing on stage behind Hamlet during the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy. An actual example occurred in 2015 at the second production of *A Passion for Kendal*.[2] At the trial scene before Pilate the 'crowd' – including some audience members – became loud and angry enough to take temporary control of the action, forcing Pilate to halt the trial and wait for calm before continuing the scene. The upstaged actor had to find an unrehearsed way of coping with his loss of control.

As a theatre practitioner engaging with theology I will explore how God is upstaged and loses control, by applying a hermeneutic of performance to texts which are capable of performance to an audience. I will apply this hermeneutic to scripture set alongside other dramatic texts; to plays which put God, or Jesus as divine, on stage; and to liturgies as 'scripts' involving enactment or re-enactment. This methodology will explore how God is represented in

[1] I shall refer to God as 'he', but this does not imply that God has gender. God is neither male nor female. See e.g:1 Cor 12;13, Gal 3;28.
[2] Moir, C. *A Passion for Kendal* (Kendal. © Caroline Moir 2012). See below Ch. 5.

performance, and by reading religious texts against secular plays discover if there are tragic forms common to both western theatre and Christian faith and practice. It will address the challenges to theology which arise from encounters with God in performances and the representation of God as a character in tragedy. While there is a useful body of work on theatricality in relation to theology,[3] much of its emphasis is on how theatre and performance illuminate God's purposes and self-revelation in dramatic terms. However there is little, if any, study of how the self-contained theatrical 'performance', the unstable means by which theatre communicates, impacts and threatens theology.

Engaging with another discipline, from a theatrical perspective requires clear, specific and close definitions of 'performance' and 'theatricality.' On the one hand, the association of theatre and social sciences, brought about especially by the work of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner, has developed ideas of 'performance' beyond its primary locus in the theatre. On the other, 'theatricality' has always attracted negative connotations of assuming roles, artificiality, false representation and a denial of truth. This starts with Solon in the sixth century BCE and carries through to Stanislavsky, Sartre and the work of Erving Goffman and Elizabeth Burns. However, performance and theatricality have been consistently defended, particularly strongly by Peter Brook, Marvin Carlson and Mark Fortier, supported recently by theologians Shimon Levy and Trevor Hart, among others. This support indicates a new recognition of the importance of performance and theatricality, and not just among actors and directors.

The single most important task for the theatre director approaching performance is to read texts 'from the page to the stage'. The director must ask some deceptively simple questions of the text in advance of very complex interactions with actors. How will a performance bring actors into an empty space and send them away again? Where in the space does dialogue start? Does the text demand more than words? Does the director have a pre-determined

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[3] See e.g: Harris, M. *Theater and Incarnation*. (Grand Rapids MI. Erdmans. 1990). Vander Lugt, W. & Hart, T. Eds. *Theatrical Theology*. (Eugene OR. Wipf & Stock 2014). Hart, T. & Guthrie, S. Eds. *Faithful Performances*. (Aldershot. Ashgate. 2007).

interpretation of the text or are interpretations and meanings fluid, to be negotiated initially between the director and actors, and later between actors and audience? Should the 'truth' in a performance also be negotiable? For in performance, meanings and truth ultimately reside with actors and audiences and are always subject to change. Are there characters and actions outside the text which need to be made explicit? In performance, what happens off-stage has no meaning unless characters on-stage refer to people or action elsewhere. The number of characters and dialogue in a performed text need not be fixed. Should extra actors be put in to a play and evolve their own dialogue alongside that of the original text? Can the appearance, age and gender of characters be discounted? Is a text's historical or geographical setting binding? What extra knowledge do I need to make 'this' performance possible? What questions will the actors ask of the text?

Questions lead to rehearsals; rehearsals lead to performance, and every performance is both self-contained and finite, and cyclical: 'The actor makes a journey that ends where it began, while the audience is "moved" to a new place.'[4] The journey can be repeated but always occupies its own time and space as the 'two hour traffic of the stage.'[5] In that 'two hour traffic' theatre creates realities and shows truth, but theatre is ephemeral and 'truth in the theatre is always on the move.'[6] In creating performances, theatre practitioners place themselves and their craft in a position diametrically opposed to that of a theological position which uses 'drama' and 'performance' as metaphors for the whole of life argued, for example, by Ben Quash as: 'the drama of Christian living' which 'so fundamentally determines creaturely existence' that no one could 'look at it from outside or above.'[7]

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[4] Schechner, R. *Performance Theory*. (New York. Routledge Classics. 2003), 193.
[5] *Romeo and Juliet*. Prologue.
[6] Brook, P. *The Empty Space*. (London. Penguin 1972), 157.
[7] Quash, B. *Real Enactment; The Role of Drama in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, in Hart & Guthrie. Eds. 2007;13.

Theatre and theology; uneasy partnerships.
Plato, Tertullian, Levy and Hart.

Tension between the 'two-hour traffic of the stage' and the 'drama of Christian living' means that 'theology and theatre have not always been amiable conversation partners.'[8] Plato's hostile views on the arts in *The Republic* and his analysis of the requisite 'skills' of the actor in *Ion*[9] raise questions around the superficiality of performance and theatricality. These are echoed by Tertullian, though as we shall see, addressed in a theologically more tolerant and nuanced fashion by Thomas Aquinas.

Socrates' 'envy' of Ion appears to be based on 'fine clothes' and the actor's need to appear beautiful. These features, allied with Ion's conviction of his own skill in interpreting Homer, lead to Socrates' assessment that 'No one can fail to see that you speak of Homer without any art or knowledge,' and that Ion – hence all actors – are 'interpreters of interpreters' claiming skills of medicine, cuisine and generalship to which they have no right. If the actor can elicit the deep responses of tears and laughter from a position where knowledge and skill are irrelevant, Socrates continues, then the actor's skill must come through 'divine inspiration'. Ion's initial conviction is of his own considerable and considered skill: 'I doubt whether you will ever… persuade me that I praise Homer only when I am mad and possessed.' His concession to Socrates' invocation of the divine: 'There is a great difference, Socrates, between the two alternatives; and inspiration is by far the greater,' is a response to Socrates' charge: 'You are only a deceiver' and subsequent question: 'Which do you prefer to be thought, dishonest or inspired?'

While Socrates does not dismiss the possibility of an actor's inspiration as God's gift, many performers regard native ability and much hard work as the only secure means to develop skills in performance. The ability of actors to produce the Aristotelian 'pleasures' of pity and terror, or laughter, is the single most important theatrical skill which enables a performance to create new realities. Ion asserts: 'interpretation has certainly been the most laborious part

[8] Vander Lugt & Hart. Eds.2014.xiv.
[9] All quotations from: Plato, *Ion. Trans* Jowett, B. (CreateSpace. Kindle edition.2016).

of my art,' to counter the superficiality of the theatrical as being 'something pretentious and showy.'[10] Training and rehearsal are prerequisites for any performer, and both need to be rigorous if the results are to be all that Ion and Socrates desire.[11] Theologically, there is a strong correlation between Socrates' argument and Aquinas's assertion that the priestly function in Eucharistic presidency lies in divine inspiration and the power of the words. [12] The role of the priest as president and 'performer' is discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

In *De Spectaculis*[13] Tertullian denies any possibility of inspiration in the theatre and forbids attendance at 'the public shows' because they run counter to 'the condition of faith, the reasons of Truth and the laws of Christian discipline' (I;1). The assumption of roles, pretending 'loves and wraths, and groans and tears' and donning of costumes, especially female costumes by men (XXIII; 6), are hypocrisy, building on the perversion of those who promulgate the shows. Pleasure is not for Christians in this world, so to seek it risks forming alliances with Satan and becoming subject to adultery and idolatry: 'a fool thou art, if thou thinkest this life's pleasures to be really pleasures' (XVIII;3). God can only be known by his 'natural revelation' which does not include using God's gifts – rocks, stones or marble to build theatres or the human voice in performance for the 'sweet enjoyment of worldly existence' (II;2).

This position is at odds with some current attempts between the theatre and Christian theology to engage in dialogue, though still has adherents. In campaigns against perceived blasphemy, Mary Whitehouse could mobilise up to 400,000 supporters (including bishops) between 1965-1988,[14] while the Reduced Shakespeare Company's *The Bible. The Complete Word of God (Abridged)* was briefly banned in Newtownabbey in 2014.[15] However for those seeking dialogue, Tertullian's grounds for hostility appear suspect. Tertullian's assessment of David: 'Blessed is the man who has not gone into the assembly of the impious…'

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[10] Vander Lugt & Hart. Eds. 2014.xiv.
[11] See: e.g. Brook, P. *There are no secrets*. (London. Methuen. 1995), 33ff.
[12] Aquinas, T. *Summa Theologica*. *Trans*: Fathers of the English Dominican Province. (New York. Benziger Bros 1948), Pt 3, Q 82.
[13] All quotations from *De Spectaculis*. Trans*:* Thelwall, S. *Anti Nicene Fathers*. (Edinburgh. T & T Clark. 1985. Kindle edition).
[14] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/763998.stm *Mary Whitehouse, Moral Crusader or spoilsport?*
[15] http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/news/reduced-shakespeare-company-banned-unionist-council-smites-bible-comedy-9081629.html

may be pressed into service as 'not far from a plain interdicting of the shows' (III;4), but David brought calmness and healing to Saul by playing music (1 Sam 16;14-23) and took part in an event which might be construed as being close to a processional *komos*, involving naked dance and trumpets (2 Sam 6;12-16). Tertullian's warnings against processions do not take account of descriptions of early liturgical practice in Pss. 122;1, 132;7-9, 149, 150. By the fourth century in Jerusalem, where liturgical processions flourished, any such strictures were discounted.[16]

The representation of God on stage in *De Spectaculis* is less of a problem than the theatricality associated with performances: 'their origins, their titles, their equipments, their places of celebration, their arts' (XIII;1). All of these conspire to seduce Christians away from God and foster idolatry, drunkenness and lust (X). Some Roman theatre performances were intentionally obscene or pornographic,[17] but of itself the theatricality Tertullian castigates has no intrinsic moral or religious qualities. It is in the manner of its deployment that issues of idolatry or lasciviousness may become a danger to susceptible audiences. For Tertullian the binary is clear 'how monstrous it is to go from God's church to the devil's – from the sky to the stye…' (XXV;5), and the way to avoid such degradation is to rely wholly on the literature of the church: 'verses, sentences, songs, proverbs; and these not fabulous, but true; not tricks of art, but plain realities' and to reassure any still wavering: 'Would you also have fightings and wrestlings. Well of these there is no lacking and they are not of slight account… Would you have something of blood too? You have Christ's' (XXIX; 4 & 5).

In its separation of polarities and final emphasis on an eschatologically perfect performance open to Christians, *De Spectaculis* should be at odds with contemporary dialogue between theology and theatre where the concept of 'theo-drama', as 'God's stage [where] it is God who acts on man for man,'[18] is being pressed to accommodate performance as a means of deepening an

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[16] See: *Peregrinatio Etheriae*: Bevington, D. *Medieval Drama*. (Boston. Hughton Mifflin 1975), 10.
[17] See: Walton, M. in McDonald, M & Walton J. Eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre*. (Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. 2007), 291ff.
[18] Von Balthazar, Hans U. *Theo-Drama, Theological Dramatic Theory, Vol. 1*. (San Francisco. Ignatius Press. 1988), 4.

understanding of humanity's capacity to work as co-creators with the incarnate 'enfleshed' Jesus towards 'God's perfection.'[19] Yet signs of a continuing distrust of theatricality as artificial against the ultimate supremacy of divine power and ecclesiastical authority continue to affect the issues which exercise Tertullian but barely concern the theatre.

An opposite approach to that of Tertullian comes with Shimon Levy who uses Old Testament scripture as a source of theatricality. In *The Bible as Theatre*[20] he adopts a methodology using the 'intrinsic theatrical qualities in the biblical texts themselves'[21] to illuminate his selected passages. So, *contra* Tertullian, theatrical devices including lighting, costume, movement into and around a 'stage' and vocal variation, all implicit within a text, contribute to a greater understanding of, and engagement with, God. This approach conforms to the conditions of performance I discuss in Chapter 1. Unlike some Christian interpretations of theatrical praxis which rely on an analogy where God is a cosmic director, and where each of our lives is a one-off event with as Trevor Hart writes: 'no rehearsal, and only a single performance before the reviews are written,'[22] the stories and lives Levy presents lend themselves to repetition *via* the strong theatrical frames in which he suggests they are set. For the full assimilation of the material they contain, these frameworks require an audience, possibly the single most important condition for performance. It is unfortunate that Levy's sole references to his staged biblical productions are in his preface. All the detailed examples he cites appear theoretical.

The problem for Levy is how to present God without idolatry. He must reconcile the bible's 'God came and stood and called [Samuel]' (I Sam 3;8), with his own position. God 'is presented as sensually and physically unimaginable yet…He is a *constantly present Offstage persona*, with varying degrees of presentness.' [23] Levy pre-empts accusations of idolatry by answering his own question in advance. 'God's 'position' in the Old Testament may be perceived as a contradiction in terms in "reality" but is… a highly creative theatrical

[19]Vander Lugt & Hart. Eds. 2014; xvi.
[20] Levy, S. *The Bible as Theatre*. (Brighton. Sussex Academic Press. 2002).
[21] Levy 2002;2.
[22] Hart, T. *Between the Image and the Word.* (Farnham. Ashgate.2013), 201.
[23] Levy 2002;6 (my italics).

metaphor.'[24] He continues his defence by always placing God 'Offstage' (capitalised). In terms of theatre this position undermines or negates God's presence. As I argue, 'offstage' does not exist as an integral part of any performance space. A voice may speak 'offstage' but is heard onstage. An actor may look 'offstage' but if anything is seen or sought it must be incorporated as part of onstage action,[25] or arrive to participate in the performance. Nevertheless, the existence of characters, or objects, is not contingent upon their corporeal visibility. Peter Shaffer's *Black Comedy* starts in darkness but the characters are not 'offstage' and Levy calls for darkness in several of his scenarios without removing his characters from 'onstage'.[26] 'Offstage' becomes more problematic as the locus for a character who never appears or is never heard.[27] In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett is deliberately equivocal over the existence of his titular character, but whatever directorial decision is made, Godot cannot be part of a performance, though he may exist in a character's memory or imagination. If this is the case, even if Godot's existence is agreed by a theatre company, Beckett still leaves audience members to determine Godot's existence. 'Offstage' cannot be an imposed theatrical element determining the course of a performance, so Levy's desire for 'the offstage correctives of *then and there*' to 'activate' the onstage '*here and now*'[28] can only come in to effect if the external force – whether God or anything else - known to be controlling the outcomes of a performance is incorporated visually or audibly into the 'here and now' and so become a character in the performance. The taboo against putting God on stage leads Levy into an over-reliance on possible theatrical effects or 'likely' outcomes,[29] which in spite of the considerable insights they offer into individual Old Testament figures, leads to a predetermined pattern of performance 'under the ultimate dominance of God.'[30] Levy's model fails the ultimate test for a performance being a performance, in which the moment by moment exchange between characters and audience members constantly modulates its evolution, creating a series of

[24] Ibid. p.6.
[25] e.g.: the Watchman seeing the victory beacon in *Agamemnon*. See below Ch. 3.
[26] Levy 2002; 108, Esther and Ahaserus, p.247, David and Nathan.
[27] Or a place never visited, e.g.: Sidcup in *The Caretaker*, Harold Pinter.
[28] Levy 2002;252.
[29] Levy 2002. Ch. 13*The (unabridged) play of David and Bathsheba* p247 gives 13 possible effects lighting 'could' give.
[30] Ibid. p.252.

unique, and ultimately unpredictable, events. Confining God to a 'dark halo… encircling each… performance' leads too easily to a possibility that, were his chosen texts to be performed for any but a partial audience, God would remain invisible and become impotent.

In *Between the Image and the Word*, Trevor Hart seeks to redress many of the imbalances between the arts, including the theatre, and theology. While maintaining the argument for a relationship of faith and obedience, he allows that God must speak in, with and through our speech-acts. This premise leads to scope for uncertainty: 'every bid for understanding of the *other* [is] essentially a journey of imagination in which we are granted the capacity… to engage with *otherness* in ways which plot something of its difference before finally returning to ourselves with our horizons broadened.'[31] For Hart 'broadening horizons' includes allowing divine action to be owned, or shared, by humanity. In Chapter 5, 'Cosmos, Kenosis and Creativity' Hart makes the provocative suggestion that 'far from being the first moment of *kenosis* identifiable in God's dealings with the world, the incarnation should be understood as the most acute instance of a wider pattern.'[32] This insight has major implications for my consideration of how tragedy figures across scripture, liturgy and theatre. Hart continues 'if God himself… actively conscripts the agency of others in the realisation and redemption of his creative project… how can any human maker be prepared to do less?'[33] By allowing God to cooperate creatively on equal terms with others Hart counters the accusation made against Ion, and all subsequent actors, that their work is either dishonest or inspired by an external divine agency. It also challenges the assertion that God on stage, as well as in the 'cosmic drama', represents 'the perfections of God's own eternal nature and the outworking of the divine decree'[34] which will only be fully experienced in the eschaton.

In a similar welcome fashion Hart questions the view of tragedy as a painful journey to a better place through a 'catharsis' brought about by participating vicariously in suffering under 'the vengeful spite or injustice of the

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[31] Hart 2013; 106 (my italics).
[32] Ibid. p.121.
[33] Ibid. p.121.
[34] Lugt & Hart. Eds. 2014; xiv. On the experience of God as a character on stage, see Ch. 1 below.

gods' which 'finally offer[s] a sanguine view… which "makes sense" of it.'[35] He asks: 'might theology have something to learn from tragedy about its own story?'[36] which, even if it disallows Jesus as a tragic hero, picks up Donald Mackinnon's seemingly paradoxical assessment that while 'Jesus is without sin, yet from his life… there flows a dark inheritance of evil as well as good.'[37] Hart's conclusion remains opposed to any synthesis between the Christian gospel and tragedy in his discussion of 'eucatastrophic' endings. These lead to the 'joyous turn'[38] of the resurrection as the most 'remarkable *peripateia* ever,'[39] which, nevertheless 'does not obliterate the *tragic quality* of the life and action by which alone it is won.'[40] The 'joyous turn' is brought about by grace which leads to the eschatological reality of the resurrection 'which its empirical form cannot yet bear.'[41] It is at this point in Hart's argument that theology and theatre may have to part company.

This balanced and nuanced debate brings theology and theatre together in a creative dialogue which allows an exchange of ideas and concepts. Achieving this dialogue relies as much on reflection as action for its effectiveness. Although the 'joyous turn' is only possible after the 'the terrible reality' of Christ's trial and crucifixion, it is contingent upon a temporal (and possibly physical) distancing of the 'radical *peripateia'* from those events. Holy Saturday becomes a time of 'shifting from one imaginative vantage point to another,' as part of a 'carefully emplotted sequence'[42] between potential tragedy and its gracious vindication. This makes the performance of a resurrection much easier, since Jesus' death is not contradicted by his immediate resuscitation. This physical and temporal distancing in relation to a performance of the crucifixion and resurrection is discussed further in Chapter 5.

The theatrical problem of distancing as part of an 'emplotted sequence' centres on the fact that any performance is unique. A continuum of

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[35] Hart 2013.219.
[36] Ibid. p.221.
[37] McKinnon, D, *Explorations in Theology* (London. SCM. 1979) p. 65. See my discussion of Jesus as transgressive, and so a tragic hero, in Ch. 7.
[38] Hart 2013;226.
[39] Ibid. p.224.
[40] Ibid. p.224, (my italics).
[41] Ibid. p.228.
[42] Ibid. p.227.

performances towards a divinely determined future climax is impossible for the theatre. It demands participants willing to commit themselves to the 'seemingly empty' Holy Saturday as the 'emplotted time' in which to shift their vantage points to share in the 'joyous turn'. But the outcome of any performance depends on shared responses between actors and audiences. The theatre cannot guarantee certainty and so is unable to demand that an audience commit itself to a performance whose ultimate outcome – the joyous turn of the resurrection – is predetermined by providential power.

As well as being features of any performance, uncertain outcomes are also features of tragedy. Aeschylus' *Eumenides* concludes with a celebratory *komos*,[43] and the endings of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, or even Shakespeare's *King Lear* are not irredeemably pessimistic.[44] Human suffering can be vindicated and a better life be made possible by an individual's challenge to divine and human power. This acceptance that tragedy allows for good to come from evil echoes MacKinnon's comment on the blending of 'evil and good' in the gospel[45] and is developed by Giles Waller and Kevin Taylor in *Christian Theology and Tragedy*.[46] For Christian theology, they argue, tragedy demonstrates a 'concern to safeguard the finality of *non*-resolution that lies in the worship of the transcendent God of love and election.'[47] In part, this non-resolution comes about through the capacity of tragedies to 'enlarge our understanding of [human situations and actions] by representation of human life and dilemmas in dramatic action in a way that philosophical discourse alone cannot.'[48] In both theological and theatrical discourse, and practice, tragedy illuminates points of 'fragmentation and dissonance'[49] in the world we must inhabit, but simultaneously, 'an attention to tragedy recalls us to the particular, a particularity hallowed by the entrance of the divine into the contingencies of human history.'[50]

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[43] See Ch. 4.
[44] See Ch. 8.
[45] See N. 37 above.
[46] Waller, G. & Taylor, K. Eds. *Christian Theology and Tragedy Theologians Tragic Literature and Tragic Theory*. (Oxford. Routledge. 2016).
[47] Quash, B. in Waller & Taylor. Eds. 2016;22.
[48] Waller, G. in Waller & Taylor. Eds. 2016;102. And also, it may be said, theological discourse.
[49] Ibid. p.102.
[50] Ibid. p.8.

The recognition by Christian theology that gods enter the 'contingencies of human history' in tragedies presents an openness to theatricality and performance. It is an approach which counters 'monolithic understandings' of both tragedy and Christian theology which lead to the perception of tragedy as wholly nihilistic and Christianity as 'naïve escapism.'[51] However the acceptance that tragedy can have positive outcomes, which may not be predictable continues to pose the question over who brings about the outcomes. Are they the result of divine or human action? Can human action divert, correct or undermine divine action and still produce a 'happy ending'? The presence and influence of gods in tragedy may considered axiomatic by both Steiner[52] and Mackinnon but if 'non-resolution' is a prerequisite for the worship of the transcendent God, such power and influence gods exert cannot be predicted. If 'Christianity's doctrines heighten tragedy *when it is understood in a certain way*'[53] then Waller's assertion that 'our tragic and sinful condition… is rendered meaningful by another 'for us' – the 'for us' of God in Christ,' who ensures that the 'tragic victory' of the cross 'ultimately makes our condition intelligible'[54] also limits the scope of 'non-resolution'. Theologically, a victorious outcome is determined by God alone.

The theatre cannot cope with Hart's proposition that 'in our post-mortem existence with God, the broken distorted and incomplete patterns of particular lives may yet, in God's hands come to a satisfying closure and be rendered fit for our eternal enjoyment and God's.'[55] Similarly, Mackinnon's conclusion that 'the whole language of perplexity, uncertainty, bewilderment, hopelessness and pain, even of God-forsakenness, was laid hold of and given a new sense by the very God himself and converted into the way of reconciling the world unto himself,'[56] gives God final control over conclusions. Any hope of eternal enjoyment or reconciliation to which theatre gives articulation is located in the 'now' of performance time, and the reality of this 'now' is other than the quotidian and future reality to which we must return when a performance ends.

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[51] Ibid. p.1.
[52] See below p.143.
[53] Waller & Taylor. Eds. 2016;16. (My italics).
[54] Ibid. p.118.
[55] Ibid. p.207.
[56] Mackinnon 1979. p.81.

If hope experienced in a performance is to be kept alive, participants – audience and performers – must take it from the 'now' of performance to the quotidian 'now'. Regardless of the possibility that hope for redemption from the tragic is not solely the preserve of Christian theology, nevertheless the theatre and theology that Hart, along with Mackinnon, Waller and Taylor explore, share the capacity to make hope, however 'incorrigibly naïve'[57] Terry Eagleton may describe it, a reality through performance, but a hope which is contingent upon decisions and action shared between gods and humans.

Thesis structure:

Chapter 1: *Performance, theatricality and God in tragedy* explores how different realities are possible in the theatre in which transcendence and immanence can meet. In these realities God becomes a character alongside other characters. In them all characters are equally valuable and equally vulnerable.

Chapters 2, 3, 4: *The Tragedy of Moses* considers the story of Moses as leader, and type for Jesus, as a tragedy by setting narratives from Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy against the *Oresteia*. It looks at the transition the Jews make from oppression to freedom, the pressure this puts on leaders and the parts played by humans and God in the journey. The concluding question is whether the tragic fate and accompanying *kenosis* of a hero, Moses, are vindicated by the redemptive hope he and God leave for their people.

Chapter 5: *The Church puts God on stage* moves from potential to real performance noting God's early appearance as a character from the second century BCE onwards. By the fifteenth century civic and ecclesiastical authorities place the human Jesus at the centre of the Corpus Christi cycles. In modern Passion Plays God is seldom seen, opening the way for a discussion on the Passion as tragedy.

[57] Eagleton, T. *Sweet Violence*. (Malden MA. Blackwell 2003), 40.

Chapters 6: *Performance and tragedy in Church of England liturgies.* and Chapter 7: *Performance and Tragedy in the Eucharist*, locate issues of performance and theatricality in the context of acts of worship. The different realities offered by theatrical readings of liturgies allows God to appear alternately as actor and audience in BCP Evening Prayer, while Jesus becomes the tragic, transgressive hero in the CW Eucharist as participants 'do this, in remembrance of me.'

Conclusion. *Immanence touches transcendence* shows the encounter between God and humanity brought about by the new realities in performance. Out of this encounter and in these new realities, immanence and transcendence unite in the present moment, and may at any future moment.

Chapter 1. Performance and theatricality allow God into tragedy.

Performance.

Performance requires a 'script.'[58] Scripts may be printed or written plays, other verbal texts or documents, visual representations, musical scores, memorised stories or experiences, patterns of movement or in any other form which may be recalled by performers. They may include words, or non-verbal vocal sounds spoken or sung; actions – gesture, movement, mime and dance as well as silence and music. A script may incorporate, or derive, from inanimate creations – pictures; stained glass; sculpture; books. A script cannot be wholly spontaneous since unrehearsed 'spontaneous' performances inevitably draw on performers' experience.[59] A script can allow for freedom of expression and inventiveness not planned in the original, but nevertheless contained by it, as in the work of the Performance Group, cited by Richard Schechner,[60] or David's performance in 2 Sam 6. No two performances of the same script are ever identical, in part due to time constraints – performances of the same scripts happen at different times on different days, but more significantly, because a performance is inherently unstable, subject, at the very least, to the vicissitudes of its performer's and audience's memory or mood. This instability of any performed 'script' is discussed later in the thesis.

Performance incorporates *imitation* as defined by Aristotle[61] and criticised as falsehood by Plato and Tertullian. It can be part of the performance of liturgy and condition how God is worshipped and encountered.[62] What is paramount in any consideration of 'performance' as an activity central to both theatre and theology, constantly uniting them, dividing them and without which neither could exist, is that performance is value-neutral. Marvin Carlson posits that negative connotations associated with the notion that 'when we make

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[58] I use 'script' to signify material which can be repeated through a rehearsal process and in performances.
[59] See below, p21, note 68.
[60] Schechner 2003;87ff.
[61] Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans: Heath, M. (London. Penguin.1996), 3-6.
[62] 'Do this in remembrance of me.' Lk,22;18. *How* 'this' is done affects the performance of the Eucharist. See Ch. 7.

ourselves known to others as a "representation" ... we exist as "nothingness,"'[63] is artificially to differentiate the performer's two indissoluble attributes of 'self' and 'role' which coalesce in performance. To prioritise the former as more authentic is to ignore their mutual dependence. The performance of a play may be judged good or bad, depending on the range of technical skills, abilities, and the balance between self and role the performers strike, as well as on the preconceptions of both performers and audiences. However, performance itself remains the act of presenting a story to an audience. The danger for monotheistic religions is that a religious story realised through performance allows humans to upstage God and so dominate the space, presenting an 'alternative reality to the Sacred itself.'[64] This movement to an 'alternative reality' cannot be allowed to encroach into liturgical practice and subvert the place of God in worship away from the 'Sacred'. The problem for the religious establishment is how to avoid the disruption of its means to divine knowledge, through the performance and dramatisation of its texts, while holding its community together through shared and regular worship and ritual.

Performances take place in particular places and at particular times. Conventionally, they happen in dedicated locations: theatres, amphitheatres, village halls, as well as temples, churches and many open areas, but they cannot be confined to such spaces. Any location can become a place for performance. An illustration of this is Bertolt Brecht's example of recounting an accident in *The Street Scene*. [65] He transforms an arbitrary location – a street – into a performance space, by presenting an eye-witness telling the story of an accident. In this performance, the eye-witness 'never forgets, nor does he allow it to be forgotten, that he is not the subject but the *demonstrator*.'[66] The 'demonstrator' does not need to be a skilled actor. He, or she, need only tell the stories to represent those involved in the accident. Recounting a story at work or in a social setting happens after some degree of scene-setting has taken place to enable performer and audience to cooperate, as happens when Jesus

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[63] Carlson, M. *The Resistance to Theatricality*. SubStance, Vol. 31, No. 2/3, Issue 98/99: Special Issue: Theatricality (2002), pp. 238-250. University of Wisconsin Press. p.240 – citing Sartre.
[64] Levy 2002;3.
[65] Brecht, B. *The Street Scene*. in Bentley, E. Ed. *The Theory of the Modern Stage*. (Harmondsworth. Penguin. 1968).
[66] Ibid. p.91.

tells parables. The effect of such stories is dependent on the skills of story-tellers and their audiences; their desires to perform and to listen, and on the way space is used by all those involved.[67]

Performance is planned or rehearsed by an expert, or group of experts with skills in one or more of the activities cited. Planning may happen in the place of performance or elsewhere. This applies as much to 'improvised' or 'spontaneous' performance as to rehearsed performance. Keith Johnstone argues that open-ended performance is possible, but must be learnt. Spontaneous performance happens at the cost of pre-determined outcomes: 'I'm *teaching* spontaneity and therefore I tell them [drama students] that they mustn't try to control the future…' [68] In the realm of performance in relation to worship this gives rise to apparent paradoxes regarding the control of liturgical forms which will be discussed further in chapters 6 and 7. Experts in performance include especially, actors, musicians, singers, dancers, directors, choreographers, lighting and sound technicians, but may include artists and experts from any discipline. They can be professional or amateur but their training, intention and (it is to be hoped) skill is to create performances.

Performance can only happen in the presence of an audience, and no two audiences are the same. Audience members may approve or disapprove and are seldom under any obligation to stay to the end of a play: 'in performance the audience becomes the true master of the situation,'[69] and as I will argue a transcendent God may be as significant an audience as any in a theatre. Although essential, the presence of an audience can be problematic since the complexity of any performance means that 'we have in theatre two sets of readers – the theatre artists who traditionally "read", interpret, the written text, and the audience who read the new theatrical text created by the mediated reading.'[70] The inherent instability of performance increases when the audience colludes, consciously or otherwise, with the performers through

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[67] See: Turner, V. *From Ritual to Theatre*. (Baltimore, MD. PAJ Publications. 1982). Ch. 4, *Acting in Everyday Life and Everyday Life in Acting*.
[68] Johnstone, K. *Impro*. (London. Eyre Methuen.1981), 32 (my italics).
[69] Fortier, M, *Theory/Theatre*. (London. Routledge. 1997), 100.
[70] Rabkin, G. *Is there a Text on this Stage? Performing Arts Journal*, Vol 9, No. 2/3, 10th Anniversary Edition (1985) 157.

spontaneous or planned vocal responses, [71] or invited audience participation, thereby upstaging, and wresting control from characters on stage. This instability or collusion presents welcome challenges for some, but by no means all theatre, and more difficult ones for theology and the church. It will have a critical impact on subsequent discussions around controlling meanings in the performance of liturgy.

In the wider debate around performance it is worth considering briefly how language and its 'performance' affect meaning in theatrical performance. In Chapter 6 I examine in detail how words may determine what happens in the performance of liturgy, thus putting liturgy into a theatrical context. In *Philosophical Papers,* J. L. Austin[72] discusses 'performing an act' through the use of words, and for Judith Butler,[73] while 'philosophers rarely think about acting in the theatrical sense, they do have a discourse of 'acts' that maintains associative semantic meanings with theories of performance and acting.'[74] She proceeds to suggest that 'the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts.'[75] Butler's 'performative acts' correlate with Austin's 'performative utterances' which lead a speaker to 'perform an act.' These philosophical associations of 'language' with 'performance' emphasise the centrality of words as perhaps the most fundamental element in the creation of western theatrical performance.

But although Austin and Butler draw on overtly theatrical language and imagery, both make clear the distinctions between the 'realities' in which they operate – that which Féral describes as 'quotidian', or the daily reality in which we live – and the 'other' reality created in theatrical performance. For Butler 'the act that one performs is *in a sense*, an act which has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence gender is an act which has been rehearsed.'[76] In theatrical terms this is at best optimistic as well as a highly particular use of

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[71] E.g.: at *Gerry Springer, the Opera*. National Theatre 2006. *Hair,* 1970. *Oh Calcutta!* 1970.
[72] Austin, J.L. *Philosophical Papers*. (Oxford. Oxford University Press.1970), Ch.10 & 11.
[73] Butler, J. *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* Theatre Journal, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1988), pp. 519-531. The Johns Hopkins University Press.
[74] Ibid. p.519.
[75] Ibid. p.521.
[76] Ibid. p.526. See also Butler, J. *Gender Trouble* (New York. Routledge. 2006).

theatrical vocabulary. Rehearsals do not require the enactment, imagination or creation of any event before the performance for which they are a preparation.[77] Rather they require time to learn and repeat words, actions, gestures, movement and, supremely, stillness in order to create a different reality in performance, and while this might involve work and discussion beyond the script itself,[78] such additional work is not indispensable. In theatrical terms 'acts', as 'speech acts', 'performative utterances' or 'the act that one performs', do not constitute part of the rehearsal process or discrete elements in a final performance. Rather 'acts' are the divisions of plays into sections determined by constraints of time, place, plot or other considerations felt appropriate by the dramatist.[79]

Austin gives a number of examples of 'the act which is performed' as a result of performative utterances. The first two are a marriage ceremony, in particular 'I do… take this woman [man] to be my lawful wedded wife [husband]' and the 'christening' of a ship: 'I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*.'[80] He proceeds to qualify how these performed actions must be done in order for them to be successful. The circumstances in which the performative utterances are made, he says, must be 'appropriate for [their] invocation' and the 'procedures' – marriage; naming – must be carried through 'correctly and completely without a flaw and without a hitch,' and 'if the rules are not observed we say the act we purported to perform is void.'[81] If the appointed ship-namer is usurped and the ship named *Generalissimo Stalin* by a 'low type' who then launches her, 'we agree… on several things [and] that the ship isn't now named the *Generalissimo Stalin*.'[82] There are two points of dissimilarity between Austin's stance on performance and a theatrical one. The first is acknowledged by Austin in his acceptance that any utterance made 'in the course of… acting a play… would not be seriously meant and we shall not be able to say that we seriously performed the act.'[83] In whatever terms he uses – in this case 'seriously' – Austin distinguishes between the reality of theatrical performance and the reality of

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[77] Stanislavsky may be invoked by some theatre companies in defence of Butler's hypothesis.
[78] See Ch. 2 for definitions of 'script' in theatrical terms.
[79] Usually between 1 & 5 Acts in western theatre.
[80] Austin 1970;235.
[81] Ibid. pp.237-8.
[82] Ibid. p.240.
[83] Ibid. p.241.

daily life. The second dissimilarity is in the examples he gives of performative utterances. Both of these, and his insistence on the importance of legal safeguards to maintain their proper execution, lie outside the definitions of performance I have discussed above. Neither example conforms to the criteria that they must be capable of repetition, nor does either require an audience as a condition of its performance.[84]

Butler acknowledges similar distinctions between conventions which govern 'gender performances in non-theatrical contexts' and those which 'announce that "this is *only* a play" [which] allows strict lines to be drawn between the performance and life.'[85] Although she acknowledges that some theatrical performance 'attempts to contest, or indeed break down, those conventions that demarcate the imaginary from the real,'[86] this can only happen by the creation of 'a reality that is in some sense new… that cannot readily be assimilated into the pre-existing categories that regulate gender reality.'[87] For Austin and Butler theatrical performance remains a metaphor by which to examine linguistic philosophy and feminist theory. For both, performance enlivens the 'acts' which they explore, but the reality of the theatre is for Austin less 'serious' or, for Butler, because it is imaginary, subject to 'political censorship or scathing criticism' rather than 'more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions.'[88] I have argued that the reality made possible through performance is as 'serious' or subversive as either Austin or Butler would wish, that it need not be confined within any pre-determined space, and can have no guaranteed outcome. In creating different realties in time and space, theatre and performance cannot be metaphors for anything else.

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[84] In Ch. 6 I discuss the non-theatricality of baptism and marriage, *inter alia*.
[85] Butler 1988;527, (my italics).
[86] Ibid. p.527.
[87] Ibid. p.527.
[88] Ibid. p.527. But cf. the closing of the English theatres in 1642.

Theatricality

'One thing, but perhaps one thing only, is obvious: the idea of theatricality has achieved an extraordinary range of meanings, making it everything from an act to an attitude, a style to a semiotic system, a medium to a message.'[89] 'Theatricality' is found in many – if not all – forms of human expression – especially, though not exclusively, any which is capable of preservation as a 'text'. Elizabeth Burns states: '"Theatricality" occurs when certain behaviour seems to be not natural or spontaneous but "composed according to… rhetorical and authenticating conventions" in order to achieve some particular effect on its viewers',[90] a view enlarged upon by Josette Féral: 'Theatricality produces spectacular events for the spectator; it establishes a relationship that differs from the quotidian.'[91]

The most important elements of theatricality, implicit in both Burns and Féral, are some form of exaggeration or heightening of language or expression associated with a change in the 'perceptual dynamics linking the onlooker with someone or something that is looked at.'[92] Once an event is perceived as in some way other than quotidian, its location as well as the 'someone' or 'something' perceived also becomes invested with 'theatricality'. Authenticating conventions, special relationships and changes in the dynamic between observer and observed are intrinsic to the theatre, but are also qualities requisite for deepening the awareness of, and response to, the divine.

Theatricality like performance is value-neutral. It is generated through repetition and rehearsal and performers must bring theatricality into performance because it is the exaggeration, the 'particular effect', the escape from 'the quotidian' which holds an audience. For Féral theatricality 'clears a space allowing both the performing subject as well as the spectator to pass from "here" to "elsewhere,"'[93] whether in a theatre or temple. This creation of a

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89 Postlewait, T & Davis, T. *Theatricality*. (Cambridge. CUP. 2003), 1.
90 Burns, E. *Theatricality* 1972;33, in Carlson, M. *The Resistance to Theatricality*. SubStance, Vol. 31. No. 2/3 Issue 98-9 Special Issue: *Theatricality* (2002). University of Wisconsin Press. 240.
91 Féral, J. *Theatricality: The Specifity of Theatrical Language*. SubStance, Vol. 31, No. 2/3, Issue 98/99: Special Issue: Theatricality (2002), pp. 94-108. University of Wisconsin Press. 105.
92 Ibid. p.105.
93 Féral 2002;98.

new reality with its 'display of exceptional achievement'[94] is made possible only by actors transforming the 'quotidian space' of the rehearsal room into the 'theatrical space' of the performance. This spatial and temporal transformation allows the performance space to become liminal – the threshold to a different reality.

For some theatre practitioners and dramatists, the actor's theatricality can block the thresholds to different realities and impede the truth inhering in the performed text. This may be to do with the words spoken in performance. For Beckett: 'The best possible play is one in which there are no actors, only text. I'm trying to find a way to write one.'[95] Truth can also be obscured by objects and movement. Stanislavsky wrote that acting which is externalised through the gratuitous addition of movement, gestures, costumes and properties to create theatricality led away from the truth it should reveal: 'To play truly means to be right, logical, coherent, to think, strive, feel and act in unison with your role. If you take these internal processes, and adapt them to the spiritual and physical life of the person you are representing, we call that living the part.'[96] The problem with Stanislavsky's stance against theatrical externalisation is that even in 'living the part' the actor's truth may differ from that perceived by an audience, which itself may be affected by the very externalisation the actor seeks to avoid. This hostility to theatricality arises from the perceived dishonesty of imitation which Plato condemns in Ion's successful performances, and which Tertullian vilifies as leading to idolatry.

However, there is theological support for Aristotelian 'imitation'. For Robert Alter it becomes 'fictional modality' and an 'imaginative re-enactment of the historical event'[97] as a 'form of play [which] enlarges rather than limits the range of meanings of the text… endlessly discovering how the permutations of narrative conventions, linguistic properties and *imaginatively constructed personages and circumstances* can crystallise subtle and abiding truths…'[98] By validating theatricality Alter gives theological legitimacy to performance as a

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94 Carlson, 2002;249.
95 Quoted in Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: a biography*, (London, Picador, 1980), 433.
96 Stanislavski, C. Ed, Hapgood, E. *An Actor's Handbook*. (London. Methuen. 1990), 149-50.
97 Alter, R. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. (Berkeley. Basic Books. 1981), 41.
98 Ibid. p.46. (my italics).

process which allows performer and spectator to enter a different reality together.[99] This journey affects both spectators' and performers' relationships and perceptions of events and their truth.

The view that actors are not the sole prerequisite for theatricality but exploit it in a place where spectators may already perceive it is supported by Féral.[100] Spectators generate their own theatricality and she discusses the occurrence of 'theatricality' in different locations: 'You enter a theatre. The play has not yet begun. In front of you is a stage; the curtain is open; the actors are absent. The set in plain view, seems to await the beginning of a play. Is theatricality at work here? If the answer is in the affirmative, one recognises that the set alone can convey a certain theatricality. Although the theatrical process has not yet been set in motion… the spectator perceives the theatricality of the stage and the space surrounding him.' [101] Spectators can also ascribe theatricality to locations and people in 'quotidian' spaces: 'you are seated at a sidewalk café watching two passers-by who have no desire to be seen... However, your eyes perceive a certain theatricality in their figures and gestures, in the way they occupy the space around them. As a spectator, you inscribe this theatricality in the real space surrounding them.' [102] This 'watching' allows spectators to create their own performances. By investing an event with its own theatricality, the spectator puts that event into a 'virtual space' coexisting with the real space of the observed incident, as Brecht does in the 'Street Scene'. Both Féral and Brecht describe the possibility of theatricality emerging from everyday events but Féral names this virtual space as 'the space of the "other,"' with for theology, where the "other" is God, obvious implications. Theatricality becomes part of an active process which uses attributes or features of a space and a 'text'. A different reality is created by a spectator's perception of passers-by observed from a café, or witnesses demonstrating a traffic accident. That process is one where aspects of an event become exaggerated, heightened and in some way 'other' than the event itself.

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[99] See also: Turner, 1983; Chs.1 & 3.
[100] Féral 2002;95
[101] Ibid. pp.95-6.
[102] Ibid. p.97.

Theatricality generated by the spectator allows 'space for the "other"' to be found not only on empty stages but also in inanimate objects. Theologically, bread and wine can be perceived as either unchanging or locations for the 'other' during the Eucharist. Where churches have a Sanctuary or altar, these may be perceived as empty or as spaces for the 'other', hence a person occupying the space for the 'other' may up-stage the 'other'. These perceptions, and any consequences arising from them, are open to spectators as much as to performers. If spectators also 'perceive a certain theatricality' in priests and ministers, 'their figures and gestures, in the way they occupy the space around them' as they might do in Féral's scenario, priests and ministers, like the 'passers-by' are 'unwittingly transformed' into actors. [103]

These opportunities for choice and interpretation becomes significant in their application to scripture, liturgy and theatre where God appears. Through their perceptions, spectators may ascribe holiness to particular spaces, objects and performers. When performers – actors or those who lead liturgy – combine their own theatricality with that of their audiences, a performance becomes a shared event in a common space which is transformed, just as actors presenting characters are transformed. However, as long as spectators, audiences or congregations can choose how to interpret the theatricality they perceive in performers, or which they apply to spaces and objects, it is impossible to prescribe where Féral's 'elsewhere' is, and what Alter's 'subtle and abiding truths' are. For theatre *is* ephemeral and its truth 'moves'. If, as a result of choosing to participate in a performance, perceptions of truth risk being de-stabilised, theatricality can readily be seen as dangerous by any group or individual who considers theirs to be the only truth, either theologically or theatrically.

A note on Theatre

A theatre. Theatre used with the indefinite article refers to a dedicated space. It may be a building specifically for the presentation of plays, and similar events. It may be a space in a building not designed for the presentation

[103] Féral 2002;98.

of plays but chosen specifically, as in the Cowley BMW car plant in Oxford, for a one-off *Hamlet*, or many village halls or church buildings. It may be an outdoor site-specific space, for the presentation of performances.

Theatre or *the theatre*, metonymically, is all of that which is performed, critiqued, analysed and assessed, as the realised form of Dramatic Art, wherever it happens. It is this '*theatre'* Socrates, Tertullian, and others perceive as a threat to the ordered morality of society, to religion, in particular to monotheistic Judaism and Christianity. *Theatre* may be the work or profession of those who create performances. *Theatre* may be the practical expression of the theoretical study of *Drama*, as used by Mark Fortier, Peter Brook and many besides.

While theatre buildings or spaces, as well as *the* theatre have been seen, and by some still are seen, as a threat to the godly, it is far easier to define them than it is to define the theatricality which may create the threat perceived in both theatre and performance.

Performance, God and tragedy.

A liturgical or dramatic event which becomes performance may be validated by Ecclesiastical authorities as 'acting in Christ's behalf' (BCP 1559) or condemned as the substitution of an 'alternative reality' and so '*create* a reality rather than *describe* one.'[104] If its means of presentation are those of the theatre, such a performance, while it may seek to mediate between God and humanity because its 'alternative reality' is created and inhabited by humans, it is susceptible to the flaws which lead to tragedy. Consequently, as George Steiner maintains, an encounter with God in the performance of tragedy should be incompatible with the hope of redemption offered by God whether in the Old or New Testament: 'God has made good the havoc wrought upon his servant [Job]' and 'at Gethsemane… the morality play of history alters from tragedy to *commedia*.'[105] However, my following chapters argue that for Christian theology, reading scripture, dramatic texts and liturgy through the joint lenses of

[104] Levy 2002;3.
[105] Steiner, G. *The Death of Tragedy*. (London. Faber & Faber. 1963), 4,13.

performance and theatricality increases the possibility of a close and active relationship with God, present as a fellow character in a different reality with the potential for tragedy. This possibility was first proposed by Honorius of Autun in the eleventh century: 'our tragedian [the celebrant] represents to the Christian people in the theatre of the church, by his gestures, the struggle of Christ, and impresses on them the victory of his redemption.' [106] The new reality and the relationships made possible by performance and theatricality allow human and divine participants to share together 'the victory of Christ's redemption.'

Performance passes control from a director, or God, into the mouths and actions of its characters and the interpretation and response of its audience. I argue that performance can include God, allowing him to encounter others and so keep redemptive hope alive. Performance builds a bridge between 'a current event which could happen at any time'[107] and the unique events of the Exodus, the Crucifixion and the Eucharist. Performances created by humans determine the course of action through their stories, with the characters' potential to make wrong decisions or commit transgressions against God leading to tragic results. Moses, wrongly, strikes the rock at Meribah (Num 20). By murdering Clytemnestra, Orestes commits matricide. Both transgressors are eventually vindicated in encounters with their gods. In their vindication, Moses and Orestes receive redemptive hope for their people. In these stories, representing God as a character does not automatically undermine the person or place of God as Levy fears; rather it strengthens God's position of supreme power. In scriptural performance, God can be repositioned but if God, or any other character, is undermined by being upstaged, the story and other characters will be diminished.

The presence of God as a character in the performance of sacred or secular texts – scripture, liturgy or plays – prompts a range of responses. It challenges Jewish and Christian theology so that for Levy, a divine presence may 'hover above the action', but putting the creator of the world into his own

[106] Honorius of Autun. *De Tragoediis*, in Bevington 1975;9. Notwithstanding the fact that the histrionics Honorius endorsed 'became common enough to rouse the ire of ecclesiastical traditionalists.' Bevington 1975;5.
[107] Auerbach, E. *Mimesis*. Trans: Trask, W. (Princeton NJ. Princeton University Press. 1968), 151.

creation remains idolatrous.[108] Trevor Hart sees the reality of God as too distant to be confined as a character.[109] For theatre companies and their audiences the issue seems less problematic. The *Exagoge* of Ezekiel (2nd C. BCE),[110] the *Ordo Repraesentationis Adae* and fifteenth century English Corpus Christi plays all present God as a character fully engaged with other characters, ready to debate as well as determine issues. God's appearances on the English stage declined under James I who imposed a fine of ten pounds against anyone who, 'in a stage play, interlude, show, Maygame, or pageant, "shall jestingly or profanely speak or use the holy name of God, or of Christ Jesus, or of the Holy Ghost, or of the Trinity."'[111] God did not legally reappear on stage until the repeal of the Censorship Act in 1968.

In the twentieth century, the revival of Passion Plays put a divine presence on stage but they are more likely to feature Jesus than God, although modern productions of medieval religious drama with God as a character regularly occur. In all such performances two elements contribute to tragedy as a likely or inevitable outcome. In a secular theatrical context with no theological need to keep a divine presence off-stage or in some way unseen, God and Jesus can be portrayed by men or women.[112] In these performances the religious affiliations of an audience are of little importance. The transaction between actors and audience allows any of these plays to be received as tragic because the protagonist, whether Adam, Moses or Jesus is the agent of his own destiny and can be seen as transgressive by an audience which is not conditioned by religious beliefs. The effects of Passion Plays performed as tragedies may be as profound as those engendered by any other tragedy, and the pity and terror evoked by the tragic hero can lead to the same redemptive hope in a secular tragedy as that offered by a biblical hero: 'the worst is captured just as surely in the terrible and despairing symbol of the crucifixion as it is in banishment of the

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[108] Levy 2002; Ch. 13.
[109] Hart 2014; 82ff.
[110] Jacobson, H. *The Exagoge of Ezekiel*. (Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. 1983).
[111] Gillan, D. cited in *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*. (Oxford. OUP 1951). In 1549 a similar prohibition was included in the Book of Common Prayer. See Swift, D. *Shakespeare's Common Prayers*, (Oxford. Oxford University Press. 2013), 48.
[112] See e.g.: Harrison. T. *The Mysteries*. (London. Faber & Faber. 1985). Potter, D. *Son of Man*. (Harmondsworth. Penguin, 1971).

self-mutilated Oedipus.'[113] I will argue that in both, the presence of gods, as characters on equal terms with all other characters, ensures an equality of hope.

In the liturgies I discuss, the 1662 BCP Evensong and the Church of England Common Worship Eucharist, all participants, including God, are performers and audience depending on rubrics (or stage directions). Biblical authorisation for such mutuality of performance may be found through the Psalms of Ascent[114] or Jesus' instruction 'do this, in remembrance of me'. The Eucharist, capable of constant representation as a unique event,[115] seeks especially to unite Jesus and disciples in a reality which, through its theatricality, elides past and future into a heavenly present. In its climactic moment, as Jesus endows himself with the power to forgive sins, a power which should be God's alone, the Eucharist becomes a tragedy in which Jesus' transgression results in the crucifixion. As in Passion Plays, the tragedy of the Eucharist, and its consequences, offers the same redemptive hope as other tragedies, and is strengthened by the instruction from Jesus to continue to perform it as a relived memorial.

Using a hermeneutic of performance to examine scripture, liturgy and dramatic texts opens a Pandora's Box of issues inimical to Christian theology, which once released cannot be replaced – God appears to be reduced to a human and fallible form. Additionally, theatricality as the pathway to performance, still suffers from a stigma of artificiality as objects and assumed roles are seen as impositions upon texts and become substitutes for the purity of the discovery of character and plot from within the text itself. We will argue that the realities afforded by performance and theatricality allow for humanity's close identification with God and mutuality of respect and concern between God and humanity. Through the shifting of authority from a fixed and hieratic to an unstable and demotic locus where choice and desire on all sides determine responses to the encounter with the divine offered through performance, transcendence becomes a real possibility for all involved. All the examples I

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[113] Hart 2013;226.
[114] Ps. 134 with its final blessing of people and God encapsulates this mutuality.
[115] Turner 1983;61ff discusses participation in religious ritual and their relationship to dramatic performance at different levels.

explore become tragedies, but as they do, they give humanity the choice to accept the hope the encounters offer.

Chapter 2. The Tragedy of Moses. A potential trilogy
Moses and *Agamemnon*.

To examine whether Moses' story as it is recounted in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, has the potential for performance and may be interpreted as tragedy, I shall set it against Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Both stories portray epoch-changing events in the history of Israel and Greece. Through exploring and comparing characters and issues in the plot – ethical, moral, historical, religious and political – it will be possible to assess whether the Moses narrative fulfils tragic criteria similar to those of the *Oresteia*.

In order to achieve a workable narrative model extended legal and instructional passages from the Pentateuch including the whole of Leviticus are omitted. The resultant three sections may then be set against the three plays of the *Oresteia* – Agamemnon, Libation Bearers and Eumenides[116] – since each section or play has a clear purpose – especially in terms of time – within the whole of both stories. They biblical passages follow the Exodus story in Psalm 105 which unifies the various narratives and focuses attention on Moses and Aaron as the divinely appointed leaders, and with Pss 78, 81, 95 and 106, gives concise and performed accounts of Moses' story:

Exodus 13;17 – 16;35, 19;1 – 20;19. 24;1-14, 32;1-35, 40;16-38 form a narrative to set against *Agamemnon*.

Numbers 10;11 – 14;45. 16;1 – 50, and 20; 1 -29, form a narrative to set against *The Libation Bearers*.

Deuteronomy 27-34 form a narrative to set against *Eumenides*.

These passages follow distinct periods in the journey to Canaan. The escape from Egypt, the giving of the Decalogue and the apostasy of the golden calf all figure in Exodus. The time in the desert, conflict and religious pluralism

[116] *Aeschylus, Plays II*. Trans: Raphael, F & McLeish K. (London. Methuen Drama. 1991).

are in Numbers. The end of the journey and the establishment of the new order are brought to fulfilment in Deuteronomy. In each of these, Moses, God and a small number of 'principal' characters are involved. These vary across the three sequences. At different times in the narratives the congregation, elders, assembly or 'all Israel' become choruses. The 'principal' characters, whether appearing consistently – Moses, Aaron, God, or only in certain events – Miriam, Joshua, Eleazar, and choruses with their supplicatory, rebellious, observational and reflective interjections share features and characteristics with the individuals and choruses in the *Oresteia*. Such similarities of character are not necessarily consistent within the biblical narrative and several characters – Moses, Joshua, and Phineas – may share attributes held only by Orestes, while Clytemnestra may embody qualities found in both God and Korah. The Moses story has fewer principal characters than the *Oresteia*, but is long enough and of a scale to allow changes in characters' behaviour and attitude without compromising its narrative trajectory or losing its potential for performance.

There is a caveat to enter at this point. The authors and redactors of the Pentateuch did not intend to leave their work as dramatic texts. However, theirs' was not a concern to preserve any authorial position, other than that of ascribing ultimate authorship, and intentions, to God. For Michel Foucault, the lack of a named author, but existence of a body of writing allows for the human author's, or God's, 'transcendental anonymity' and (possible) disappearance. It also means that 'we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance.'[117] It is this 'disappearance' that allows the possibility of reading the Moses story in terms of performance and theatricality to become a reality. When Foucault tells us to locate the empty space he is counselling an activity which involves response to an encounter with a text. If the activity required for an audience to be able to interpret a text employs performers presenting it, the space in which they operate becomes theatrical. Every performance is an encounter between actor, reader, priest, orchestra, or even the text itself and audience, listener, worshipper or reader. In the encounter there is no space or place for author or composer in some way distinct from performers and

[117] Foucault, M. *What is an author?* In: Lodge, D. *Modern Criticism and Theory*. (Harlow. Longman 1988), 199-200.

audience.[118] If an audience became more aware of Shakespeare, Aeschylus or Mozart, as invisible authors than of actors playing in *Hamlet*, *Agamemnon* or *Don Giovanni*, the success of any such performance would be questionable. Foucault's empty space must be filled with those whose story the text presents. In the case of the bible, God may be the author, but the experience of God through performance of biblical texts must be as a character, fellow participant or object of worship, actively involved in presenting God's own story in space and time.

It also holds that, although God is the author of Moses' story, and has certain intended outcomes to the story, its characters are seldom, if ever, fully drawn and their actions by no means predictable or reliable enough to indicate or, of themselves, determine, what those divine intentions may be. Times and places may be equally significant in the story but impossible to locate in historical or geographical contexts. Examples include 'at least four candidates for the localization'[119] of Mount Horeb as the site of Moses' reception of the Tablets of the Covenant, while the 'wilderness of Paran' (Num 12;16) is the closest geographical reference for Korah's rebellion. Alter's 'reticence', or Hesk's 'heroic vagueness'[120] over characters and features of narratives, do not detract from the effect of encounters between characters in performance. Rather they help performers and audience, as participants together in the story, focus on the centrality of responding to the new covenant God makes with his people in a universal context.[121]

'Reticence' and 'vagueness' are essential in dramatic texts. We are offered no more information about Agamemnon or Orestes than we are about Moses or Aaron. Their appearance, motivations and personalities will come through their performance – however given – in association with 'playful' and

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[118] Brecht appears to argue against this in *The Street Scene,* in advocating the use of a 'demonstrator' standing outside the encounter between characters and audience. See below Ch.7. I argue that Brecht's 'demonstrator' remains a performer alongside the others. Brecht, B. *The Street Scene*, in Bentley, E. Ed. *The Theory of the Modern Stage*. (Harmondsworth. Penguin. 1968).
[119] Brown, R. & North, R. *Biblical Geography*, in Brown, R. Fitzmyer, E. Murphy. J. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. London. Geoffrey Chapman. 1993), 1179.
[120] Alter, 1981;126ff. Hesk, J. *The Socio-Political Dimension of Ancient Tragedy,* in McDonald & Walton 2007;84-89. See also Auerbach 1968;11ff.
[121] It is noticeable that Josephus, although developing some of these hidden elements to establish character and place, by doing so renders the story more didactic and less theatrical than the original 'reticent' original.

'open-ended' imaginative responses, even if the *reality* they attain does not accord with any pre-determined or 'authentic' truth.[122] The representation of Mycenae or Athens is less important than their significance as places where individuals and groups have suffered or hope for new and better lives. Words and action can convey as much about location as the scene-painter or property-manager.[123] Biblical and dramatic texts share *modi operandi* permitting constant re-interpreting through repeated performance. Alter expresses this view as 'the underlying biblical conception of character [which is] often unpredictable, in some ways impenetrable, constantly emerging and slipping back into a penumbra of ambiguity.'[124]

For the intended divine outcomes of Moses' story, as the religious and legal foundation of Israel to be less ambiguous, the inclusion of lengthy covenantal codes and instructions for their proper observance, divine building regulations and exhortatory addresses in the Pentateuch is understandable, although it militates against the open-ended, imaginative approaches of Alter and Hart. Nevertheless, their inclusion must be respected in that they maintain the 'ideological principle' essential to the unfolding and understanding of Moses' story, and lay down how those principles will be exercised. But how these passages 'cooperate' with the narrative and aesthetic strands 'is a tricky question'[125] so that the sequences produced by their excision are inevitably artificial. They tell Moses' story while excluding much ideological or historiographical material.[126] The 'tricky question' posed by Sternberg may be to speculate whether the legal and religious codes and behaviour made explicit, so compulsory, through Moses' story inspire greater observance and obedience to an ideal among the Israelites than do the exhortatory and exemplary addresses and actions of Athene inviting observance of new moral and democratic codes of behaviour and justice among the Athenians.

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[122] See: Hart 2013;139ff.
[123] Aristotle allows for spectacle as contributory, but subordinate, to plot in 'the evocation of fear and pity.' Aristotle, 1996;22.
[124] Alter 1981;129.
[125] Sternberg, M. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*. (Bloomington IN. Indiana University Press. 1985), 41.
[126] See: ibid. Ch.1.

Moses as a tragic hero

These chapters argue that Moses is a tragic hero and God participates in the tragedy alongside the other characters. A hermeneutic of performance sees the text as happening in the 'now' of performance time where 'meaning never belongs in the past'[127] and the performer, whether God, Moses or 'all Israel' enter 'the fluctuating territory of manifestation and existence that he shares with the spectator.'[128] In the three passages I have used to explore the 'Tragedy of Moses', Moses takes actions which disrupt his community. Breaking 'the tablets of the covenant', followed by the killing of three thousand apostates contravene God's decision to show mercy. 'God changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people,' (Ex 32;14) following pressure from Moses himself. At Meribah, striking the rock twice (Num 20;11) disregards a divine command. The physical act becomes a symbolic relegation of God – the rock and source of life – as subject to violent human control. This becomes the reason for God denying Moses entry to Canaan. Moses' climactic exhortation to Israel to choose life (Deut 30) omits all references to the certain retribution God has hitherto prescribed. These actions conform to an Aristotelian definition of tragedy as the imitation of an action where a person's change from bad to good fortune 'is not due to any moral depravity but to an error.'[129] Moses acts to alleviate situations which in his estimation have become corrupt through apostasy, or life-threatening either through starvation and thirst, or through the possibility of wrong religious and moral decisions threatening annihilation. The remedial action he takes may be *hamartia*, but is 'more of a bungling or missing-of-the-mark in the action itself than some moral defect, an objective blunder or error more than a state of the soul.'[130] At no time does Moses take any malicious or self-serving action. When his own life is threatened his response is invariably to seek help from God.[131]

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[127] Brook 1972;14.
[128] Ibid. p.20.
[129] Aristotle 196;21.
[130] Eagleton 2003;77.
[131] Ex17;4, Num 14;1-10 *inter alia*.

Moses' 'blunders or errors' and those of Orestes in *Eumenides*,[132] divert attention from them as individual characters on to the 'fundamental laws of human life,'[133] as they affect the societies they seek to serve. For Moses these represent Israel's renewal under the religious, legal and moral covenant God instructs him to implement. Moses seeks to be virtuous in encouraging virtue in Israel, but at Horeb finds that although virtue is 'the only sure path to well being,' in a 'violent unjust world it is no guarantee of it.'[134] Nevertheless he persists, as does Orestes, believing that the transformation offered can be achieved in spite of the fear or suffering it may occasion them or others around them. Moses shows loyalty to God and Israel not for himself but for the benefit he can bring to Israel. So Moses, conforms to tragic models described by Eagleton: 'tragedy is the imitation of an action, not of human beings,'[135] by H.D.F. Kitto: 'the real focus is not the tragic hero…but the divine background,'[136] and Jonathan Dollimore, insofar as suffering is not inevitable for humanity but a result of 'praxis' which 'severs the connection between individuality and man.'[137] Moses and Orestes choose to maintain their individuality with the concomitant risk of personal suffering.

Moses may have the choice to reject God's commission, but to do so risks Israel's life as well as his own (Ex 4). Orestes could delegate Clytemnestra's murder to Electra a daughter equally affected by a mother's crime and so seek vindication for her sister Iphigenia, sacrificed by Agamemnon, or return to exile and allow continuing despotism in Argos. Neither resists what they perceive as duty and both persist in pursuing a course of action which identifies them as transgressive. It is in their commitment and persistence that Moses and Orestes emerge as heroes. In seeking to transform their communities they become isolated from them. Once this separation occurs, and especially when it occurs in performance with the tragic figure portrayed by a man or woman, Moses or Orestes become the central and, ultimately, admirable heroes who suffer for their people. In both cases they retain the support and protection of their gods.

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[132] Aeschylus 1991.
[133] Knights, L.C. *Some Shakespearean Themes and an Approach to Hamlet*. (Harmondsworth. Penguin. 1966), 178.
[134] Eagleton 2003;78.
[135] Ibid, p.77.
[136] In Knights 1966;176.
[137] Dollimore, J. *Radical Tragedy*. (Brighton. Harvester. 1984), 157.

Tragic characters

Moses, Aaron and Miriam; Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Orestes,

In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* the heroes seem, at first sight, unlikely to inspire pity and fear. Agamemnon's family is cursed, following infanticide by his ancestor, Tantalus – initially, a friend of the gods.[138] His grandfather, Pelops married Hippodamia after a seven year wait and consistently deceived people, including his father-in-law, in whose death he conspired.[139] His murder by Clytemnestra may appear as an excessively brutal and cold-blooded response to his sacrifice of their daughter Iphigenia, but his action in sacrificing her to ensure a fair wind for his armies, cannot be an error leaving its perpetrator free of 'any moral defect,' even if those armies finally secured victory over Troy. For Agamemnon, moderation – *sophrosyne* – became 'error.' Clytemnestra is as complex a character as Agamemnon, and on hearing news of the Greek victory demonstrates her own awareness of the absolute necessity for *sophrosyne* on the part of Agamemnon's men, celebrating in Troy:

> And the city's gods?
> Tomorrow the Greeks must worship them
> Honour the captured shrines
> And win the right to keep what right has won… ll338-40.[140]

After the murders of Agamemnon and Cassandra it is Clytemnestra who looks forward to a new, more peaceful future,

> I stand apart ready to make a truce
> With the fury that haunts this house… ll1568-77

Both these insights show a leader concerned to appease the gods and possibly to seek to change their attitudes towards her people. In this she resembles Moses, whose first response to the apostasy of the Golden Calf is to seek and get divine reconciliation as God changed his mind (Ex 32;11-14). His subsequent actions may also indicate closer identification with Clytemnestra than Agamemnon in their ruthlessness.

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[138] 'Tantalus was the intimate friend of Zeus.' Graves, R. *The Greek Myths* vol. II, (Harmondsworth. Penguin 1960), 25.
[139] See Gen 29: Jacob & Rachel.
[140] *Agamemnon*, in Aeschylus, 1991.

Orestes (and Electra) are nearer Aristotle's description of tragic characters. In *Libation Bearers* Orestes' madness and uncompromising desire for vengeance can be seen as understandable and morally right, given the male-dominated Athenian society for which the play was written.[141] He avoids *hubris* by the constant questioning of his morality which, as his own form of *sophrosyne,* elicits support from the citizens who see his action as divinely inspired by Apollo.[142] Following the murder of Clytemnestra, he is vindicated, befriended and defended by Apollo who appears as a character in *Eumenides*.

The house of Abraham is not cursed as was that of Atreus – Abraham sacrificing to please God, was spared the guilt of infanticide and there is no suggestion of cannibalism in the succession from Adam to Moses. Nevertheless, successors cheat brothers and fathers-in-law, and like Orestes, Moses, has also killed in defence of his own people. He is, by adoption, a member of a royal household. He is less than loyal to his own wife but remains a friend of God, who, apart from on two occasions – the first is an attack by God (Ex 4;24),[143] the second, which will prove fatal, is striking the rock at Meribah (Num 20;11) – consistently supports Moses through his long leadership of Israel from slavery to Canaan.

In *Jewish Antiquities*[144] Josephus writes of Moses' person and character in detail which renders him more credible as an idealised hero than does the biblical 'reticence.' Josephus recounts his beauty, and size, as a baby: 'God did also give him that height, when he was but three years old, as was wonderful. And as for his beauty, there was nobody so impolite as when they saw Moses, they were not greatly surprised at the beauty of his countenance.'[145] For Josephus, this beauty is God-given and obvious to Pharaoh's daughter: 'I have

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[141] 'The trilogy indicts and systematically evicts women and female influences in the Greek world.'Aeschylus1991;xxiv.

[142] *Libation Bearers* in Aeschylus, 1991; ll931-972.

[143] God's intention to kill Moses (Ex4;24-6), and deflection from his aim by Zipporah's mutilation of their son might echo Agamemnon's propitiation of Artemis' anger through Iphigenia's sacrifice. God or gods may be (apparently) irrationally implacable. See e.g.: C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 3 vols. *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* reprint, (Grand Rapids MI. Eerdmans. 1970).

[144] *Jewish Antiquities*. Bk. 2; 9, 4; 217-227. Josephus. Trans: Whiston, W. *The New Complete Works of Josephus*. (Grand Rapids MI. Kregel Publications. 1999), 97-98.

[145] Ibid. p.98. Cf. 'he was a fine baby' Ex. 2.2.

brought up a child of divine form.'[146] Moses' legacy of divinity in the eyes of the Egyptians inflates his potential for heroism. In principle, this depiction of Moses renders him as susceptible to the 'flaws' of Aristotelian tragic characters, as does a comparison of Moses with Greek characters, but Josephus' omission of the murder of an Egyptian; the episode of the Golden Calf; Aaron's and Miriam's attack on their brother, and striking the rock at Meribah makes Josephus' interpretation of Moses too predetermined and one-dimensional to allow for the imaginative response the bible invites.

The dialectic between the openness of Josephus and the reticence of the bible demonstrates the multifaceted nature of the narrative. Moses, Aaron, Miriam and God become as complex and inconsistent as any characters in the *Oresteia*. Clytemnestra's religious sensibilities may be at odds with her moral position over Agamemnon's murder, and Agamemnon's conflicted moral and utilitarian stance over Iphigenia is never resolved. God's, Moses', Miriam's and Aaron's shifting moral or religious positions are unexplained. We may extrapolate that left in sole command for forty days at Horeb, Aaron was frightened of another Israelite revolt, or that Moses' extended debate with God was irresponsible, encouraging apostasy (Ex 32). We may speculate that Aaron and Miriam become jealous of Moses at Hazeroth, because Moses is genuinely guilty of sinful marriage (Num 12). In both cases, to do so would be to make attributions in a manner similar to Josephus, to impose pre-determined interpretation on the text rather than allow the 'continuum of *discontinuities* [and] sequence of *non-sequiturs'* free rein to 'validate and reinforce the effects of [their] fragmentary communication.'[147] The ambiguity of biblical characters sets them alongside those of Aeschylus. They become vulnerable to the same *hubris* or *hamartia* as Agamemnon or Clytemnestra, so have the potential to become tragic heroes. This will happen to Moses at Pisgah when he is made aware of his sin against God. The biblical texts of the Moses story work in ways similar to dramatic texts, revealing human and divine inconsistency. They invite rather than dictate a response, so vindicating them as potential tragedies. The different realities which both sets of texts offer for their effectiveness is demonstrated by the fact that at the end of each, questions of how to

[146] Ibid. p.98.
[147] Sternberg 1987;47 (my italics).

implement decisions for future well-being, of individuals or nations, are left for their audiences rather than for their characters to answer.

God as a character

Through the Moses story, God is portrayed as guide, mentor, instructor, judge, and perhaps critically, for the purposes of considering God as a character in a tragedy, friend. Yet even at his most intimate, alone with Moses, close to Israel as cloud or fiery pillar (Ex 13;21-22), or in control of battles, as the creator, God should always be beyond human action. God should work through a surrogate (in this case, Moses) as he explains in their first encounter at the burning bush (Ex 3-4). Being beyond the action ensures that God is safe from human corruption and able to remain in control of all that happens in, and beyond, the story. God is constantly biased in favour of the Israelites, but punishment for Moses, Aaron and others of the elect remains an option. For a human character in the story working alongside Moses, such sanctions would seem much more difficult to impose without some apparent form of criminality – as might be imputed to Orestes and Electra over Clytemnestra's matricide in *Libation Bearers*.[148]As the single deity with final responsibility for the well-being – physical, moral and religious – of Israel, God, set apart from them, is able to take any necessary restorative and corrective action without being judged as criminal or tyrant.

This representation of God is undermined by Moses' first meeting with him in Exodus 3. For the reader, or potential audience member, the chapter obeys many of my criteria for both performance and theatricality, and presents God as a character who appears to have planned an event specifically to engage Moses. Moses is expected: 'he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb... the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush' (Ex 3;1-2). Moses speaks and changes direction: 'turned aside.' At this point God either enters the bush from elsewhere, or already *in situ*, starts a dialogue with Moses. As it stands, the language is quite unequivocal 'God called to him...' (3;4) and after Moses reply 'he, (God) said "come no closer"'(3;5). A holy place which is

[148] See: e.g.: *Libation Bearers* ll269-478 in Aeschylus 1991.

also a stage is defined. The reader or listener becomes an audience observing two characters in a performance.

God, as transcendent further undermines his own position in his first dialogue with Moses. In Exodus 3; 7-10, God shows compassion, indicates that he has been moved to pity by the behaviour of Pharaoh and understands the fear instilled by the Egyptian taskmasters. God will alleviate their suffering himself: 'I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians' (Ex 3;8). This will be forceful, but apparently, 'proportional' – in 3;21 God makes clear that he will 'bring this people into such favour with the Egyptians, that when you go you will not go empty-handed' – recalling the privileged position the Israelites enjoyed under Joseph. In the same speech God makes clear that the Israelites will 'plunder' the Egyptians (Ex 3; 22). In the time between Moses' commission and Israel's departure (Ex 12; 33-36) God's wonders have generated enough fear among the Egyptians for them to beg Israel to leave. In making intentions and outcomes clear to Moses in the performance at the beginning of their relationship, but by fulfilling them in even more extreme forms than might at first be expected, a question arises. Is God indulging in a 'witty adaptation of the victor's taking the clothing and jewellery of a defeated army...'[149] or is this an example of dramatic irony, where the audience, knows that the Israelites who are given (or plunder) gold and jewellery will themselves become apostates and be punished as brutally as were the Egyptians?

Were it not 'an all-seeing God'[150] who dictates terms to Moses and follows these with frightening displays of power, issues of *hubris* on God's part, might legitimately arise. As with the 'plundering' of Egypt, questions of proportionality occur throughout the *Oresteia*, from Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra to Orestes' trial and questionable acquittal by Athene following his matricide. If proportionality becomes excess, sequences of events may be set in motion which culminate in tragedy. These questions will recur in the analysis of Moses' and Israel's journey as tragedy. Moses' introduction to God, its dialogue

149 Clifford, R. *Exodus* in Brown *et al.* Eds. NJBC. 1993;47.
150 Alter 1981;115.

and characterisation shows tragic potential and finds parallels in the *Oresteia* and other Greek plays.[151]

Gods appear consistently in classical Greek plays. In Aeschylus' *Prometheus* – among the earliest – there are no humans portrayed on stage. In Aristophanes' *The Frogs* – among the latest, the majority of named characters are gods. In such plays, and especially in *The Frogs*, any distinctions between human and divine characters become blurred as all performers become one group telling a story. In *Prometheus,* gods serve an exemplary function in exploring issues of violence as Greece moves from a primitive to a civilised society. In *The Frogs*, gods work alongside humans to satirise and castigate profligate violence and war. For Aristophanes, with the exception of Pluto, the human poets Aeschylus and Euripides appear as intellectually and culturally superior to all other characters, including gods. Between these polarities, gods and humans may or may not appear together, but when they do so in the *Oresteia* there is a difference in activity and intention between them. It is tempting at this point to push the arguments around performance, theatricality, 'imitation' and 'representation' to suggest that because on stage all characters are performed by humans, gods on stage in Greek tragedy are necessarily immanent. These cannot be directly equated with the transcendent and unseen God of the Old Testament. The suggestion that God could be guilty of *hubris*, or susceptible to 'errors' leading to tragedy should be untenable. This dichotomy influences western medieval Christian drama,[152] but such an image or portrayal of God need not diminish God, either in scripture or on stage. The action of gods in *Eumenides* clarifies their position and dignifies them as intrinsically 'other' and distinct from the humans they guide and influence, even though their performances can only be given by humans. The audience knows this, but can discover that the realities accessible through performance and theatricality allow for more than a journey to an illusory destination.

In *Eumenides* with a cast including gods and humans, intentions and actions between the two categories of being must be differentiated. Apollo is

[151] e.g.: Sophocles: *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus. Antigone*. Euripides: *The Bacchae*.
[152] The issue continues into current productions of Passion Plays. See below Ch. 5.

eloquent and passionate in his opening condemnation of Clytemnestra and the Furies:

> Apollo. Out! Out! Out!
> This is sacred ground.
> The home of prophecy. Out!
> My arrows sing like snakes;
> The golden bow strains back
> To fire. In agony would you choke
> Black vomit sucked from your victims,
> Puke curdled blood? Out… ll178-185.

The Furies, at first violent in their lust for Orestes' death, become as passionately committed to live in love and peace:

> Furies. No civil war
> Will smart its anger
> In the city,
> Class against class.
> The thirsty dust
> Will not gulp down
> The dark blood of the people… ll 975-981.

Clytemnestra, now a ghost, is as violent as the early Furies.

> Cly. Forget not my disgrace
> My anger lashes you. Feel it!
> Am I not right? Breathe upon him,
> Scorch him with the blood-red blast of death,
> With dragon-fire. Run him, bring him down. ll135-139.

The carefully nuanced language of Athene sets her apart, alongside the other divinities, from the only other truly human characters – Orestes, the silent jurors and citizens who appear briefly at the finale –

> Who's here? Strange gathering:
> I'm surprised, not frightened.
> A stranger kneeling at my shrine –
> And you? Goddesses no God would recognise,
> Mortal shapes no mortal womb conceived.
> I mean no offence, and know of none,
> My justice unprejudiced on either side. ll407-413.

The gods carry the burden of the play, so that while they may have metaphorical or symbolic qualities of divinity beyond their roles in a performance of *Eumenides*, their function as characters here is to demonstrate the benefit accruing to Athens by the establishment of a real court of justice in

the newly formed democracy.[153] The *Oresteia* examines the transition of Greece from 'the dark age of Mycean myth'[154] to Athenian democracy; a process thought to be completed within Aeschylus' memory.[155] So great a transition needs popular endorsement and approval. In time endorsement may come from historians, commentators, politicians and the citizen inheritors of a democratic legacy. It may also come from cultural sources, but if this is to be through theatre, who will endorse and approve such a revolution for an audience? If we are to follow Aristotle such people may need to be those 'who are held in high esteem and enjoy good fortune... distinguished men...'[156] Aeschylus gives us no characters more distinguished than Apollo and Athene, and, through their virtuous choice to accept and protect democracy, the Furies.

By showing the gods instituting a democratic judicial system where their power is balanced against that of mortals, but who still may have a casting vote and simultaneously be able to transform forces of evil to lovers of peace, Aeschylus creates mutuality between gods and humans. Through their endorsement and approval, gods give authentication to the new democracy and do so in the secular context of a drama festival. There is no specifically religious ritual or repetition in *Eumenides*, or any other Greek tragedy, if only because they were written for competition and so while treating familiar themes and characters, writers must constantly seek novelty. They were performed at the Great Dionysia in the spring so 'no doubt there were religious reasons for this timing; but considering the scale of the festivals and the number of citizens actively involved we must also see their dates as part of the general activity pattern of the Athenian year.'[157] For Aeschylus, the festival becomes the locus for a great affirmation of the new order. In a markedly brief performance – at under 1050 lines, *Eumenides* is the shortest play of the trilogy – the gods show, and approve, the transition from the old to the new order. They do this without reliance on any specialist legal or historical knowledge on the part of the

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[153] It was less than 100 years before Aeschylus wrote *Eumenides* that the democratic reforms affecting the Court of Areopagus were enacted, and 5 or 6 years since Ephialtes 'deprived the Areopagus of most of its…powers' leaving it as the Athenian homicide court instead of the seat of government. See: Lane, M. *Greek and Roman Political Ideas*. (London. Penguin. 2014), 100ff.
[154] Aeschylus 1991;xxvii.
[155] For the later problems with democracy see Lane 2014, Ch. 3.
[156] Aristotle 1996; 21. Notwithstanding the centrality of Athene, the new democracy was wholly male-dominated. Cf: Moses' treatment of Zipporah, Num 12.
[157] Baldry, H.C. *The Greek Tragic Theatre*. (London. Chatto & Windus.1971),21.

audience. The gods' presence indicates that elements of the old order must be maintained if the new is to flourish; the authenticating gods are older than the changing humans, and the new system has not grown *ex nihilo*.

The predominantly civic nature of Greek theatre does not in any way deny the importance of the gods to Greek society and its theatre: 'Greek tragedy is about nothing if not religion.' [158] Moderation – *sophrosyne* – underpins the whole of Athenian society: 'all people who have even a little good sense always invoke a god at the beginning and end of any undertaking, be it great or small.'[159] This injunction includes the whole life of the *polis*, including festivals and theatre and it is centred on the proper observance and practice of rituals: sacrificing, singing and dancing. Such observance 'did not necessarily involve the worshipper's mental attitude... ritual was the essence of traditional Greek religion, not faith.'[160] It is permissible for Aeschylus to make political and judicial ideology the final focus of the *Oresteia*, and to do so in a civic and non-religious setting using imitation and representation, pity and fear, and an entertaining didacticism to exhort and approve a new society because it is only with the initial approval of the gods that wise democratic change may be affected and impiety avoided.

The *Oresteia* uses a theatre as a laboratory in which to explore and explain a major political and cultural journey in Greek life with performance and theatricality as its methodology. The gods are the guides on the final part of the journey where individual crimes are treated as exemplars for the new judiciary and their treatment universalised. Through their theatricality, the plays enable their audiences to cross thresholds (especially into Athene's court in *Eumenides*) and themselves experience the changes Athenian society recently underwent.[161] The theatre becomes a liminal space and the spectators' gaze allows them to fear with Orestes, be repulsed by the Furies and rejoice with the citizens. The

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[158] Allan, W. *Religious Syncretism: The New Gods of Greek Tragedy*, in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*. Vol. 102 (2004), 113. and 'Athenian religion was in a constant state of change, and these changes did not please everybody…' 114ff.
[159] Plato; *Timaeus* 27c in Warrior, V. *Greek Religion. A Sourcebook*. (Newburyport. MA. Focus 2009), 1.
[160] Warrior 2009;3.
[161] This change of scene in *Eumenides* feels very similar to that in Deut 32; 48ff where Israel's new land is first glimpsed then eulogised by Moses in Deut 33.

wisdom and virtue of the outcomes are assured for the spectators at the time they happen and for the future if the Athenians choose to work with the gods to guide and underwrite the new society. The influence of the gods gives the *Oresteia* one of the most positive and optimistic finales of any tragedy. By contrast, (for example) Aeschylus' final line in *Prometheus* 'you see how I am wronged' highlights the anger infusing the whole play, while the final chorus of *The Frogs* with its hope and expectation on future peace bears closer resemblance to the end of the *Eumenides*. The two plays demonstrate that regardless of genre, proper attitudes towards the gods remain essential to the well-being and development of society. Given this *sophrosyne*, the gods will support human aspirations for better societies. In the plays the gods fulfil a final liminal function in sending the other characters and the chorus, so by extension the audience, back to their quotidian world with divine approval for reoccupying that place and returning their gaze to another more familiar reality which the spectators can now develop for the greater good.[162]

For Moses God occupies just such an authenticating position, but for an audience: 'time and place are undefined and call for interpretation.' [163] There is little detail of people in the story: 'we are given only the barest hints about the physical appearance... the dress and implements of the *characters*, the material milieu in which they enact their destinies...'[164] As we have begun to see, Alter's 'reticence' raises questions of performance, theatricality and whether God takes a part as a character, alongside Moses, or must remain 'always other'. The formulaic phrases 'The Lord spoke to Moses' are frequent enough to maintain God's otherness, just as the non-appearance of God maintains a spatial distinction between divine and human. Conversely, from their first encounter at Horeb (Ex 3-4;23) God and Moses speak together in episodes which are possessed of theatricality and capable of performance as they are written. Before the encounter is presented to an audience, the theatricality of the location as 'the mountain of God' where an angel appears in the burning bush (Ex 32;2) is established. This creates a liminal space analogous with that in the theatre, in

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[162] In *The Frogs*, and other comedies, the future appears closer to 'living happily ever after,' as opposed to being subject to audience reaction and response.
[163] Auerbach 1968;11.
[164] Alter 1981;114 (my italics).

which the characters invite the audience across a threshold and will later affirm them on their return.[165]

In the *Oresteia* and the Pentateuch gods or God are, or become, characters, however they are perceived or performed. For Judaeo/Christian theology this may argue that if gods are characters 'acted' by humans and recognised as human in performance, they stand merely as metaphors or symbols for *real* gods. In Greek drama, regardless of human or divine status 'characterisation is a matter of *personae* speaking out in an agonistic setting, attempting to convince an interlocutor in front of an audience (the chorus). Almost every major figure in Greek tragedy and comedy has such encounters.'[166] If we add to this that the same characters appear regularly in plays by different writers, the likelihood of comparison between the dramatists' gods and actors' performances of them becomes a probability. Such frequent appearance and subsequent comparison renders characters steadily more human so that, in our own time, Laurence Olivier's and Kenneth Branagh's film portrayals of *Henry V* will be compared so blurring distinctions between character and actor. Audiences can choose which actor Henry most resembles, and there is little at stake over the decisions.[167] When this happens with gods – from whatever faith – being portrayed the results may have more significant outcomes. Aeschylus prepares the way for his gods through decorous language and prayers. In both cases there are 'correct' ways to characterise gods and audiences know what these are. External features – masks and costume, may assist in maintaining the correct illusion, but voice and movement will inevitably remain unique to each actor, and words and dialogue are the dramatist's tools to shape his gods as he chooses. The combination of text and performance is the foundation for shaping character upon which external accoutrements add details which give gods their instant identification.[168] The fusing of the actor's attributes with identifiable costume enables a similar blurring of distinctions between god and actor similar to that which happens between king and actor in films of *Henry V*, and strongly

[165] See above, Ch 1; Féral on theatricality.
[166] Martin, R. *Ancient Theatre and Performance Culture,* in McDonald & Walton 2007; 40.
[167] An extreme example of the blurring of distinctions between actor and character, and comparisons made between them, may be observed in the debates surrounding successive iterations of Dr Who or James Bond.
[168] For Athene a cuirass; for Dionysus a yellow robe.

supports the notion of *personae*, humans or gods, addressing an interlocutor (or spectator). In the case of the gods, once such blurring occurs the character of the god is no longer 'correct' or stable and the danger for some theology is that the gods on stage become *personae* giving performances of 'self'; both the self of the dramatist and the self of the actor. God is usurped and up-staged by an actor.

This may be acceptable in a theatre linked to, but not part of, a religious system. In a story performed to maintain religious orthodoxy it is, potentially, hugely subversive. But however human God seems in the journey from Egypt to Canaan, God is not here confined to a theatre nor to the characterisation given by an actor whose aim is to 'invite the spectator to cross over into the realm of the imaginary, to yield to the desire of being the other.'[169] If the 'realm of the imaginary' and 'the other' are both unstable and dependent upon the nature of an actor's performance and its reception by an audience, God, the telling of whose story is designed to elicit and confirm unchanging belief among his chosen people, cannot be represented through such instability.

It is at this point that Schechner's difficult 'not-not not' quality in performance becomes a pointer towards how God becomes a character. 'As Schechner reminds us, the spectator must deal with the "*not-not not*" of the actor. Olivier is not Hamlet, but also he is not not Hamlet; his performance is between a denial of being another [= I am me] and a denial of not being another [=I am Hamlet].'[170] The reality of a performance is more than illusory, more than an imaginary experience. Hamlet dies, and an audience knows he dies. In a performance 'these stage murders are not "less real" but "differently real" from what happens in everyday life.'[171] The emergence of a different reality in performance - "not Hamlet but not not Hamlet" opens the possibility for transformation, both for the actor and audience. The different realities made possible by the "not-not not" rule, with their transformative potential applies to all characters, gods and humans, so that, in *Eumenides*, an actor is not Apollo, but is not not Apollo. In Exodus, representations of Moses or God potentially are

[169] Féral 2002;100.
[170] Ibid. p.107N.
[171] Schechner 1988;190.

not Moses, but not not Moses, and not God, but not not God. The very important implications of a situation when God appears on stage and an actor becomes "not God, but not not God" are discussed in the following chapters where God is put on stage, and appears in Liturgy.

These transformative possibilities for the performer have dimensions less accessible to the spectator. Many actors, musicians, dancers and other performers experience a form of transcendence when a performance 'goes well'. Words, costumes, props, movement, lighting and an audience can all take the performer to a new reality. The sense is of being both in the performance but beyond the physical place or time of performance, although accompanied by other characters and audience. For its duration, the experience may be the only reality the actor is aware of. As it is a reality in part created by an audience's response to actors, so it allows participation by an audience, but that participation may need to be shaped by actors.[172] The shared transformation made possible in the different reality of performance may continue beyond the performance, in some cases as a lifelong change.[173]

The moments of transformation or transcendence possible in performance are unpredictable. They may be planned in rehearsal but never happen in a performance. They may come about as a result of unexpected responses from an audience.[174] Transformation becomes possible in a performance 'which allows an audience to contemplate the action and entertain alternatives...'[175] and is likely to be far greater at the point of intersection between the spectator's gaze and the actors' theatricality. The liminality of theatre, the places where actors, audiences and gods mix and mingle, exists where there is a spectrum of realities latent in the telling and receiving of any story in whatever medium, and a transcendent reality experienced by actors and spectators is among them. The gods, or God, transcendent, omniscient and vital to the life of the communities

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[172] See above, Ch. 1.
[173] I recall moments of insight gained from performing from as long as 50 years ago. For a discussion of this reality and its effects see Schechner 2003; Ch 4.
[174] e.g. *The Threepenny Opera*, Brecht/Weill, written as 'bitter satire on the bourgeois society of post-war Germany' became 'the rare case of a play intended as a work of serious *avant-garde* art achieving genuine popular success.' Esslin. M. *Brecht; a Choice of Evils*. (London. Mercury. 1965), 34-5.
[175] Schechner 2003;190.

of the *Oresteia* and Moses may themselves choose, or may be chosen by their worshippers to become characters in such stories.

The opening of the trilogies: Exodus and *Agamemnon*.

In the progress from good fortune to bad fortune, and in the evocation of pity and terror, many tragedies have inauspicious openings, so allowing their heroes and other characters to experience reversals of fortune – *peripeteia,* and time for self-discovery – *anagnorisis*. The *Oresteia* is no exception and the context of *Agamemnon* one of disruption and multiple transgressions.

Paris' abduction of Helen and the subsequent departure of the majority of able-bodied men from Argos to the Trojan War gives the beginning of the play a sense of introversion where a flourishing society has become a beleaguered family as Aeschylus uses the palace and its remaining occupants, predominantly old, female or – as in the case of Aegisthus in his seduction of Clytemnestra – duplicitous, to represent Agamemnon's and Menelaus' kingdom: 'Old ghosts that haunt the heat of day' (l81). As a result of Paris' action those who remain behind feel themselves as oppressed by the war at Troy as any involved in fighting. The sense of a continuing gloom is heightened by the chorus' muted response to the beacon of victory which appears within the first 30 lines of the play. Such is the disruption Paris causes by his transgression against individuals – Menelaus, Agamemnon, their families and against the *polis* of Argos.

Paris' transgression is not the only cause of disruption prior to the action of *Agamemnon*. Through his offence against Artemis, Agamemnon also contributes to the chaotic background of the tragedy. His offence results in the dilemma of setting the well-being of the *polis* above that of the family through the sacrifice of Iphigenia. Clytemnestra's ambiguity has been noted, and the chorus alludes to the instability of Mycenae through the early part of the play (esp. ll440-50), but without naming a guilty party.

The introduction to the Israelites' escape from Egypt is one of disruption and transgression. The sense of two nations accommodating each other for mutual benefit at the death of Joseph is initially heightened through Reuel's

giving of Zipporah to Moses, the imagined Egyptian, suggesting friendship between Israel, Egypt and Midian. This stability is undermined at the emergence of a new Pharaoh. As Paris afflicts the Greeks through abducting Helen and causing war, the new Pharaoh chooses to oppress Israel creating conditions which will turn them from partners in a peaceful state into a homeless tribe. Just as Aeschylus presents a complex of tensions between individuals, families and *poleis*, so Exodus presents Moses as a transgressor, both against Egypt – for Israel the equivalent to the Argive *polis* – through the secretive murder of an Egyptian (Ex2;12), and against God through his failure to circumcise Gershom (Ex 2;22 & 4;25). It also presents God as an agent of mutual disruption by conferring God-like status on Moses and that of a prophet on Aaron: 'I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet,'(Ex 7;1). They will cause the plagues in Egypt while continuing to negotiate with Pharaoh. At the same time God maintains Pharaoh's capacity to continue to wreak oppression on the Israelites.

The contexts for the opening of the *Oresteia* and Moses' story establish that the central characters are susceptible to the flaws and errors which can lead to them becoming tragic heroes. Like Argos, Israel has suffered as a result of some form of transgression, even if that has been through the divine disruption of Pharaoh's declared intention to allow Moses religious freedom (Ex 8;25-30 & 9;12). This means that when Moses and Orestes undertake journeys which will lead to an escape from oppression to triumphant homecoming, neither start these journeys as wholly innocent. In addition, they travel and work with brothers and sisters, who themselves will become subject to similar pressures to transgress. Wives and children play significant roles in their stories. Orestes and Moses start their journeys in a state of disruption with followers whose loyalty fluctuates. Both are subject to capricious or unpredictable behaviour by their gods and neither sees successful outcomes of their leadership or journey. Nor would these contexts be unfamiliar to Greek or Jewish audiences. Tragedies and the Torah were written for public performance, acted in theatres or read in worship, and all drew on, and reiterated material rooted in the cultural, legal and religious backgrounds of their societies.[176] The manner

[176] *The Exagoge* of Ezekiel presents Moses as a tragic hero in the 2nd C.BCE.

of their performance may have differed, but the style of the narratives – with uncertainties and 'reticence', disruption and transgression by principal characters – and the way they achieve their effects is similar even if the intention of the biblical narrative is to define and circumscribe future religious and political life. Aeschylus too has a didactic purpose in the *Oresteia*, but in both cases, 'for all the didactic pressure exerted … fictional imagination is at work in [each] narrative, giving concrete definition to encounters between…drastically different human figures… which intimates a whole context of social institutions and relations.'[177] Any performance of a text – in a playhouse or temple – introduces 'fictional imagination' and once this happens an audience may perceive their own 'concrete definitions' in the biblical and Greek figures and events other than those intended by their authors, which will affect interpretations of their stories and understanding of the figures themselves. The possibility of 'a whole context of social institutions and relations' attaching to Moses' story allows it to become tragedy along with the *Oresteia*.

'Concrete definitions' in the case of Moses' story tend to be more plastic than they may appear. *Agamemnon* is a short play, as are the others in the trilogy, and Aeschylus largely anticipates Aristotle's rules in making his characters and their attitudes to others consistent. In the Exodus (and Numbers and Deuteronomy) characters, including God, adopt different positions and attitudes throughout the stories. Miriam leads the women's celebrations after the Pharaoh's defeat (Ex 15;20ff) and God chooses to meet Aaron and appoint him as Moses' deputy (Ex 24;9ff) but both change their ethical stance, or have it deemed changed; in Aaron's case by acceding to the will of the Israelites in Moses' absence (Ex 32), or in Miriam's case by questioning Moses' marital integrity (Num 12). Although lacking the consistency of the characters in *Agamemnon* these varying stances do not detract from their tragic qualities, rather adding to their complexity because of the freedom that the 'reticence' of biblical presentation allows. While Aeschylus' characters seem consistent, inconsistency is apparent in other tragedies – notably in Sophocles' differing portrayals of Creon in *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*. This is discussed in Chapters 5 and 7. Overt inconsistency in behaviour, attitude or morality does not

[177] Alter, R. *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. (New York. Basic Books. 1985), 61.

disbar characters from inhabiting tragedies since the tragic heroes of the *Oresteia* and the Moses story become what they are through an inability to resolve fatal inconsistencies.

The most important feature which seems to undermine an examination of the Moses story as tragedy comparable with the *Oresteia*, but ultimately unites the two stories, is the attitude and behaviour of the choruses – old and infirm citizens of Argos in the *Agamemnon* and the Israelites or congregation in Exodus. Again issues of consistency determine much of the progress of both stories.

Aeschylus' chorus seeks a balance throughout the play. It achieves this *sophrosyne* from its first ode with its description of catastrophic events and their inevitable consequences:

> Things are as they are.
> What must happen, must happen.
> No offering, no sacrifice, no tears
> Can turn aside the anger of the gods. (ll67-71)

Their account of the moral ambivalence of Agamemnon over his sacrifice, or murder, of Iphigenia is unequivocal:

> A new wind commands his heart
> Foul, accursed, heathen
> His course is changed; he baulks
> At nothing. Evil ideas feed
> On mortal minds;
> Delusion, sorrow-stained and foul
> Gives birth to pain. (ll218-224)

Their insistence on Clytemnestra's right, duty and ability to act in the best interest of the *polis* is similar:

> Clytemnestra, daughter of Tyndareus
> ……
> Heal our suffering, the pain
> That racks us, twists our minds.
> Let hope, gleaming from the altar-fires
> Keep from us this fearful, ruinous dread. (ll99-101)

This continues through its unswerving support of her actions:

> A woman's view, but spoken like a man
> And evidence… evidence beyond dispute
> The gods be praised … (ll351-352)

and their own responsibility is to proclaim the right response to Zeus:

... Our prayers are to Zeus,
We praise in the victory hymn,
In the wisdom of the wise.
You set our feet on the path
Of wisdom… (ll175-7)

The chorus encapsulates the centrality and overarching necessity of *sophrosyne* in maintaining the well-being of the state. This concern is articulated when the choruses' lines are inserted as a commentary on Clytemnestra's account of the victory beacons, enabling an audience, additionally, to become aware of the ironies of the play. In victory, the chorus seeks what Clytemnestra should seek:

Be moderate sensible peaceful… (l377)
Better to be humble, unenvied. (l470)

Once the plot departs from an ordered course, as Clytemnestra prepares Agamemnon's murder, the chorus at first finds itself at a loss to know what to say. When Cassandra confronts the chorus after Clytemnestra's deceitful exit she faces their confused questions and optimistic platitudes, including:

Who set you on this dreadful path? (l1154)
You cheated Apollo, and had no punishment? (l1211)
There's still hope. (l1299)
You're brave, child. (l1301)

Like the Israelites at Sinai, the Argives respond when they perceive that a situation has become catastrophic. The fury and confusion with which they react to Clytemnestra after Agamemnon's and Cassandra's murder demonstrates that *sophrosyne* has limits -

You're mad with blood
Evil gleams in your eyes… (ll1426-7)

At the end of the play their emotions build to condemnation and contempt for Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, with a commitment to action:

Coward! The idea was yours, and still
You dared not kill the king himself… (ll1642-3)
Comrades, it's now or never. Draw your swords. (l1650)

Whether as a group, or through its leader, the chorus exists as the conscience of Argos seeking, ideally, for the populace to live a balanced existence, but ready to forsake its place as commentator and, through its leader, confront any who curtail that possibility and transgress the laws and *mores* of their society.

The Israelites, as a chorus, also seek equilibrium, but through the opening of the Exodus narrative it is for a nostalgic balance of physical and spiritual well-being felt to have existed in Egypt. Until the preparations for giving the Decalogue (Ex 19) they complain to Moses, initially that the spiritual needs of Israel have been ignored 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us to die in the wilderness?' (Ex 14;11). Thereafter the people's complaint is that their physical needs are consistently denied '…the people complained…saying what shall we drink?' (Ex 15;24); '…you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'(Ex 16;5); 'why did you bring us out of Egypt to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?' (Ex 17;3). The insistence on the indivisibility, hence health, of body and soul may be set against the acceptance of age, infirmity and suffering the chorus of *Agamemnon* is prepared to undergo in hope that 'now, out of sorrow, let good prevail' (l257). The two choruses reflect the way they see their own adversities, although the Israelite chorus proves more susceptible to short-term and immediate changes in circumstance than its Greek equivalent. After the provision of food supplies, the Israelites demonstrate their readiness to accept the divine will 'Everything the lord has spoken, we will do…' (Ex19;8), only to rebel again after they judge that Moses spends too long on the mountain with God (Ex 32). This is the last complaint the Israelites make in this part of the story. Their final response is to accept Moses and God as leaders who will act justly, where Clytemnestra and Aegisthus do not, provoking anger from the chorus. The two choruses are fundamentally resistant to change and seek the same ends, which is the continuation of a *status quo*. For the citizens of Argos, it is that which held before Agamemnon undertook the Trojan campaign. Aeschylus presents old men 'matured by age' (l102) as those who wish to maintain the *status quo*. They may be subjects of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and, later, Orestes, but their first allegiance is to Zeus. There is 'no greater power we know' (l163) and they are moral arbiters with a duty to admonish

anyone who breaks Zeus' laws. The Israelites are God's subjects, but only insofar as God's laws are transmitted by a leadership chosen by God. They remain in thrall to Moses and to God, hence the responses to God's and Moses' instructions and actions. These range from complaints, acquiescence and even subversion of God's laws, instead of forbearance and anger in the constant search for *sophrosyne*. What might, at first sight, be surprising is the similarity of results both choruses achieve. There appears to be such significant divergence in the forms of the narratives and characterization in *Agamemnon* and Exodus that they cannot bear direct comparison. Both celebrate victories and anticipate a secure future consequent upon them, but Agamemnon's should be realised by a journey back to the security he already knows, while Moses' security is dependent upon risking a future unknown but, subject to conditions of obedience, guaranteed by God to be good. What is hidden from the characters at the outset of their journeys is the fact that the result of their victories will be a change in their civilizations in which neither character participates. One journey seems to end in a return home, another in a discovery of a different home, but both point to radical new beginnings which neither hero is able to follow. The tension between the two choruses and their superiors gives the clue to what makes both stories – Agamemnon's and Moses' – tragedies. In seeking a return to an imagined safe past, whether that before the Trojan War, or that under Egyptian domination, the choruses represent passing generations confronted by assertive, but sometimes misguided and flawed leaders. They are leaders caught up in the establishment of new ethical and moral structures which will bring different but greater freedoms and independence to Greek and Israelite nations. It is the determination of the principal characters to attempt these changes that transforms them into tragic figures. They are prepared to confront the state or the family if to do so means a change from a 'world governed by primitive ambitions, apparently inescapable obligations and their equally inescapable consequences.'[178]

[178] Aeschylus 1991;xxiv.

Victories: preludes to tragedy.
The *Song of the Sea* (Ex. 15; 1-18) and the 2nd Ode from *Agamemnon*.

Near the beginning of both stories, victories over the Egyptians and over the Trojans are celebrated in striking poems which should mark transitions from disruption, violence and oppression to peaceful, harmonious and religiously ordered living. Both share similar images and plot lines, as well as ethical and moral ideas. Both songs emphasise the power of God or Zeus to deal with transgressors – especially those who are profane or blasphemous, but the end of the Aeschylean passage 'They're destroyed, swept away, the evil purged…' (ll398-9), resonates more closely with the penultimate verses of the *Song of the Sea*: 'Terror and dread fell upon them…'(Ex 15;16) than the mutual celebration between God and the Israelites made explicit in its final verses. 'You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession…' (Ex 15;17). Notwithstanding the victory at Troy, the Greek Ode carefully maintains an ambiguity in preparation for the violence of the impending tragedy as an essential part of the totality of the dramatic structure of *Agamemnon*. Not being part of a play, *The Song of the Sea* can present the triumph of God's providence towards those who accept his and his chosen leader's authority. Ironically, Exodus continues to manifest elements as suggestive of tragedy as strongly as a progression towards a divinely ordained and governed society.

The *Song of the Sea* stands as one of the most complete hymns in the Old Testament.[179] It is a composite with ancient passages of unspecified date interspersed with relatively late additions. The presence of sections in the first person juxtaposed with repetitions and formulaic acclamations suggest at least two voices – narrator and chorus. Martin Noth describes it as 'a solo hymn…but it has also incorporated elements of the thanksgiving form.'[180] This analysis assumes performers in both roles and I have set it as a possible dialogue. It is less easy to suggest an original context for the *Song of the Sea*. It is acknowledged as a pre-Davidic poem or hymn and W. O. E. Oesterley asserts it was sung, by women, (using vv20-21 as a template for vv1-18) antiphonally in

[179] See: Clifford, R. in Brown *et al*, Eds. NJBC 1993;50. Alter 1985;50-1.
[180] Noth, M. *Exodus* (London. SCM. 1962), 123.

the sanctuary.[181] The difficulty in ascribing the *Song of the Sea* to a particular rite is less important than its incorporation into a longer narrative with its theatricality and potential for performance.

The Song of the Sea.

Set out for at least two voices, or antiphonal performance, using repeated lines and responses to questions gives the following hypothetical layout:

Moses I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.
The LORD is my strength and my might,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.
Chorus The LORD is a warrior;
the LORD is his name.
Moses Pharaoh's chariots and his army he cast into the sea;
his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea.
The floods covered them;
they went down into the depths like a stone.
Chorus Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power—
your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy.
Moses In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries;
you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble.
At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up,
the floods stood up in a heap;
the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.
The enemy said, "I will pursue, I will overtake,
I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them.
I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them."
You blew with your wind, the sea covered them;
they sank like lead in the mighty waters.
Chorus Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in splendour, doing wonders?
You stretched out your right hand,
the earth swallowed them.
Moses In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed;
you guided them by your strength to your holy abode.
The peoples heard, they trembled;
pangs seized the inhabitants of Philistia.
Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed;
trembling seized the leaders of Moab;
all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away.
Terror and dread fell upon them;

[181] Osterley, W. *Worship in the Old Testament*, in Clarke & Harris, *Liturgy and Worship* (London. SPCK.1950), 53

by the might of your arm, they became still as a stone
until your people, O LORD, passed by,
until the people whom you acquired passed by.

Chorus You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession, the place, O LORD, that you made your abode, the sanctuary, O LORD, that your hands have established.
The LORD will reign for ever and ever.

The sudden use of verse after Israel's divinely given victory turns the *Song of the Sea* into a theatrical interpolation. It heightens the effect of the destruction of Pharaoh's army and unlike the victory Ode in *Agamemnon,* reads like a finale. The shape and crescendo of Egypt's destruction demand a pause in the narrative, and the *Song's* insertion into Exodus 15 is accepted as an example of editorial use to support a historical-religious story. It has a narrative which rises steadily through violent images to a serene but powerful climax. It has a repeating pattern of two stories starting with the destruction of one army then building to the submission of four nations. The suggested choral lines near the beginning and at the end emphasise the power and presence of God, while the refrains in the narrative stress the subject of the first story – the destruction of Pharaoh's chariots. Pharaoh is the only individual named and the juxtaposition of 'the Lord' (ll7-8) twice before Pharaoh's name and 'O Lord' (ll13-14) twice after it, figuratively enclosing Pharaoh in God's power demonstrates God as greater than any human tyrant. The later chorus (ll25-29) again shows God's power, but also, useful theatrically, gives a break between the two stories; one a single event, the second an account of many events. This section indicates God's even more important role in the journey to Canaan. The final 'The Lord will reign for ever', theatrically or liturgically, should be followed not by a recapitulation of events as in v19, but by a major change of focus – interval; silence; dance (see below; discussion of vv20-21) or, preferably, ending of the play or ritual or worship. That it occurs at the beginning of an extended narrative covering four more books of the Pentateuch serves to heighten its function marking the triumphant beginning of the journey from slavery to freedom, albeit one which will incorporate tragedy.

***Agamemnon*, the 2nd Ode ll429-482**

Chorus O Zeus, my king, and friendly Night,
you've handed us great glories
to keep as our possession.
You cast upon the towers of Troy
your all-encompassing hunting net,
and no one, young or old, escaped
its enslaving fatal mesh
that overpowered them all

I worship mighty Zeus,
god of hospitality,
who made this happen.
For a long time now
he's aimed his bow at Paris,
making sure his arrow
would not fall short or fly
above the stars and miss.

Men will say it's a blow from Zeus
and trace his presence in all this.
He acts on what he himself decides.
Some people claim that gods
don't really care about those men
who trample underfoot
favours from the pure in heart.
Such people are profane.
For we now clearly see
destruction is the penalty
for those with reckless pride,
who breathe a boastful spirit
greater than is just,
because their homes are full,
stuffed with riches to excess,
beyond what's best for them.
Let men have sufficient wealth
to match good sense, not so much
it piles up their misfortunes.
There's no security in riches
for the insolent man who kicks aside
and pushes from his sight
great altars of righteousness.

Such a man is overpowered
by perverse Persuasion,
insufferable child of scheming Folly.
And there's no remedy.
His evil's not concealed—
it stands out, a lurid glitter,
like false bronze when rubbed.

All men can judge his darkness,
once he's tested by events.
He's like a child chasing a flying bird.
He brands his city with disgrace
which cannot be removed,
for no god hears his prayers.
The man who lives this way,
doing wrong, the gods destroy.

The Ode is at the end of the 'first act' of *Agamemnon*. It too has a degree of finality in that it appears to support Clytemnestra in her knowledge of the Greek victory at Troy and her pious intentions pending the return of Agamemnon and the army. It prepares for the shift in emphasis that comes with Agamemnon's arrival and welcome by Clytemnestra. It also marks an increase in tension and excitement both in dynamic terms – more action is imminent, and ironically – the chorus and audience know that all is not as it seems. In its finality, celebration of divine power and approval of piety the passage above resembles the Song of the Sea. This resemblance is heightened by the details and images the two poems have in common as the following comparisons show. For this section only, line references are my own and placed at the beginning of the quotations to be compared: Ag = *Agamemnon*, S of S = *Song of the Sea*:

Ag; l438 I worship mighty Zeus.

S of S; l4 The Lord is my strength and my might.

At the beginning of both passages the supremacy of one god is established – a supremacy which holds for much of the time through both poems, although Aeschylus refers to Ares, and the *Song* privileges the Lord 'among the gods' suggesting an 'origin in non-Israelite polytheistic ideas.'[182] The actions of the supreme god also share common features:

Ag; ll432-6 You cast upon the towers of Troy
your all-encompassing hunting net,
and no one, young or old, escaped
its enslaving fatal mesh
that overpowered them all.

S of S; ll17-20 you overthrew your adversaries
you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble.
At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up,

[182] Noth 1962;124.

the floods stood up in a heap;
the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

S of S; ll24-5 You blew with your wind, the sea covered them;
they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

The destructive forces of both gods overwhelm their victims. Whether net or water, a mass of people is caught up in a single cataclysmic act in which they are covered. The covering of the enemy is symbolically significant. The sense in both pieces is that a supremely powerful and singular force exists above humanity which can 'cover', 'encompass', 'overthrow' or 'overpower' and given the significance of water in both cases – Agamemnon's bath is the place of his death as the Sea of Reeds is to Pharaoh's army – the similarities continue.

A further comparison exists between the poems. In both cases the only individual person named is the chief enemy or (assumed) perpetrator or transgressor. Pharaoh is identified near the beginning of the *Song of the Sea*, and Paris in the Ode. Each reference follows a confessional statement by the narrator:

S of S; l5 This is my God, and I will praise him

Ag; ll437 I worship mighty Zeus, god of hospitality

These are both followed by the acknowledgement that God or Zeus will destroy their adversaries:

S of S; l10 Pharaoh's chariots and his army he cast into the sea

Ag; ll440-5 for a long time now
he's aimed his bow at Paris
making sure his arrow would not fall short or fly
above the stars and miss.

Once the main enemy has been named, both passages describe how and why great numbers are killed. In the case of the Egyptians, pride and arrogance must be assumed. Given Moses' ethical and modest opening 'The Lord is my strength and my might and has become my salvation…' and the acknowledgement that the Israelites as a nation are the Lord's people (S of S; 31-end), it is reasonable to assume an editorial desire to impute arrogance and evil as inherent in Pharaoh and his army. The solipsistic human threats against the Israelites 'my desire shall have its fill of them…' 'my hand shall destroy

them…' are shown to be futile against God. The third strophe of Aeschylus' Ode employs similar language with even clearer references to punishment for immoral action.

Ag; ll445-52 Men will say it's a blow from Zeus
And trace his presence in all this.
……. those men
Who trample underfoot
favours from the pure in heart.
Such people are profane.

A final comparison comes somewhat unexpectedly.

At the very beginning of the *Agamemnon* Ode:

Ag; ll429-31 O Zeus my king, and friendly Night
You've handed us great glories
to keep as our own possession

and in the final strophe of the *Song of the Sea*:

S of S ll31-2 In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed;
you guided them by your strength to your holy abode

l42 …and planted them on the mountain of your own possession

Once again there is the sense, in both pieces, that the supreme deity chooses his people, who – once they make the commitment to their god – will be rewarded by being given places to possess, for the Greeks, Troy and for the Israelites in shared ownership with God, the sanctuary which is the whole of Canaan.

In the *Song of the Sea*, the final strophe with its obvious movement towards the establishment of God's everlasting realm through the destruction of potential enemies determines precisely the relationship Israel must maintain with its God and removes the power of choice and decision-making from the Israelites. Obedience and right behaviour are the obligatory ways to holiness and God's favour. This alone could prevent the poem from being part of a tragedy. This impossibility of tragedy implicit in the *Song* is later undermined by Moses, Aaron, Miriam and the Israelites themselves and will require God to change his

mind and actions; before any performance the text has a flexibility which produces unintended results. By contrast, placing the beneficent actions of Zeus – under cover of darkness – at the beginning of the Ode, allows Aeschylus to explore a wide range of human response to the gods through the remainder of it. This debate begins in earnest at l461:

> Ag ll461-8 Let men have sufficient wealth
> to match good sense, not so much
> it piles up their misfortunes.
> There's no security in riches
> for the insolent man who kicks aside
> and pushes from his sight
> great altars of righteousness.

It is developed through the Ode to

> Ag ll565-6 May I never be the sort of man
> who puts cities to the sword… (not cited above)

Whereafter, in 30 lines of choric dialogue there is no mention of any god. In this way, although acknowledging the presence and influence of the gods, and Zeus in particular, Aeschylus nevertheless allows his characters to determine events and become good and bad, right and wrong, moral and ethical in ways which should be denied to Moses and the Israelites. For the *Oresteia* to work as a tragedy this must be the case, but at the beginning of the process, in *Agamemnon* 'the gods may not appear in person, but they bear down upon the characters, who seem able to stand aside from their predicaments only intermittently, before returning to their fated roles.'[183] For Exodus, 'the didactic quality of the Biblical narrative sets it apart from other epics'[184] giving it a function which should not be tragic and may apply when considering the *Song of the Sea* as theological writing, but if it is experienced by an audience as part of Moses' story the presence and influence of God allows for nuances and ironies which produce results markedly similar to those of other tragedies.

Defeat in victory.

Early victories are not sufficient to allow Moses, Clytemnestra or Agamemnon to bring in the peaceful regimes they seem to presage. In the case of Moses, the victory is God's alone as he makes clear before the Egyptians are

[183] Aeschylus 1991;xxiv.
[184] Merchant, P. *The Epic (*London. Methuen. 1986), 11.

overwhelmed, in order to demonstrate to Pharaoh that God is 'the Lord, when *I* have gained glory for *myself* over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.'(Ex 14;18 – my italics). The language here establishes the sources of power in the story and points up God's role as a character working in cooperation with Moses. The victory marks God's own rejection of the subjugation and humiliation of Israel and the possibility of a new order, led by people who will accept the freedom he offers in return for reciprocal respect and obedience. For Agamemnon, and Argos, victory over Troy marks the end of an era marked by sexual depravity and the excesses that derive from them, exemplified throughout the first Ode (ll40-256) especially –

> For Helen, woman of many men.
> Knees buckled in the dust;
> Spears splintered; Greek locked with Trojan
> In weary war. (ll63-5)

Both societies need renewal and as immorality, in some form, has tainted the characters in both stories, the centrality of water, literally and symbolically, as an active agent for cleansing and change is unsurprising. Although they may not be literally washed in the Sea of Reeds, simply passing through a body of water is a form of baptism where purification after Egyptian corruption is effected by a providential God. By the time the *Song of the Sea* is sung, the Israelites are a new nation ready for a new way of life. The water which saved them has drowned the source of immorality. The power to make this happen is shared by God and Moses. God has demonstrated his divine uniqueness and supremacy to Pharaoh, the source of corruption. Moses and the Israelites it appears, will seek *sophrosyne* together, a virtuous race protected by God. (Ex 14;26-30).

Water is as significant in Agamemnon's story. The need to cross the sea is at the heart of his decision to sacrifice Iphigenia (ll140-256), as water stands in the way of avenging Helen's immorality. Agamemnon makes the pragmatic, but fatal decision to sacrifice his daughter for Greece. In this he capitulates to the capriciousness of Artemis, condemning himself to an inevitable fate and becoming a tragic figure through transgression against his family. The chorus is unequivocal in its assessment of Agamemnon's choice:

> A new wind commands his heart,
> Foul, accursed, heathen.

His course is changed; he baulks
At nothing… (ll221-3)

After victory the voyage back to Argos has echoes of the Egyptians' encounters in the *Song of the Sea* -

'Fire and water, eternal enemies.
Made common cause against our fleet
In the night came wrecking waves…' (ll650-2) [185]

Agamemnon may be spared, but his experience recounted by the chorus reminds an audience of the means he used to change the motion of wind and water before the war and prepares them for his sacrifice, carried out by his family, with its references to water, fishing and killing of a catch. The parallel with Moses and the Israelites' quasi-baptism relies on an ultimate sacrifice in the manner of *Lex Talionis*. Pharaoh's punishment by God is portrayed as commensurate with his brutality against Israel as God's people. Agamemnon's sacrifice balances that of Iphigenia and both are made by members of the same family. The parallel gathers strength as the references to water, and the sea especially, liken it to blood:

Clytemnestra The sea is there…
An everlasting store of crimson…bubbling red.' (ll958-9)

This image is repeated through the scene between the chorus and Cassandra, with the repetition of 'crimson' leading to direct references to blood and the forthcoming murder (ll1050-1330).

After the sea consumes the Egyptians, Moses and the people accept God: 'the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses' (Ex 15;31). They will, at intervals, change their minds, but their intention is to live well, under God. Agamemnon is incapable of changing his mind and is as solipsistic as Pharaoh. He has sacrificed their daughter and now further insults Clytemnestra in his instructions to look after Cassandra:

Take in this stranger, treat her with kindness
…….
Out of all the riches of Troy
She was my chosen flower… ll950-3. (My italics)

[185] Cf. Ex 15;7-8.

A similar opportunity to that of the Israelites for renewal through water may have been open to Agamemnon, but in his decision to accede to Artemis, and condemn his men to the rigours of the Trojan War, and his refusal to relinquish its human trophies, he remains a symbol of an archaic era and is not permitted to lead Argos to a new state of being.

As well as water, both real and symbolic in bringing death and life to individuals and nations in Exodus and *Agamemnon*, there are other parallels in the progress of Israel and Argos after their victories. The fates of both nations each have a specific time-frame, determined by characters in the tragedies. In Argos, the time of Agamemnon's death is fixed from the moment Clytemnestra sees the victory beacon. Agamemnon was not purified after Iphigenia's sacrifice and Clytemnestra's ambiguous comment on Agamemnon's homecoming makes clear the fate awaiting him:

> There's still the journey home.
> Even with the gods propitiously appeased
> The curses of the dead can hover
> Watchful and dangerous, dangerous and watchful. (ll346-9)

For Israel, the giving of the Decalogue and the casting of the Golden Calf with its catastrophic aftermath will happen when God has led the Israelites to Sinai. The power to choose the moment of punishment brings God and Clytemnestra together as unlikely agents for progressive change and is an example of the fluidity of characterization available to biblical authors and editors. The 'indicators of nuanced individuality… appear to be absent from the bible,'[186] meaning that God, omniscient and good, may adopt similar characteristics and strategies to Clytemnestra, whose over-riding aim is personal revenge.

The giving of the Decalogue and the murder of Agamemnon.

The journey from the Sea of Reeds to Sinai is marked by three themes. The Israelites persistently argue with Moses and God. In spite of their acceptance of God 'as Lord', as soon they suffer physical privation in the form of a drought, a polluted water supply or lack of food 'the people complained

[186] Alter 1981;114.

against Moses' (Ex 15;24), or 'the whole congregation complained against Moses and Aaron' (Ex 16;2), or 'the people quarrelled with Moses,' (Ex 17;2). Each complaint receives immediate redress, following consultations between God and Moses, suggesting that God does not intend to allow complacency or back-tracking on the part of the Israelites. The second and more extreme complaint is that the people would have been better off dying 'by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt' (Ex 16;3). Nevertheless there will be thirst and hunger and they will be alleviated. This alleviation, and those which follow, although provided by God, are all initiated by Moses' intercession. God does share power with his 'friends' and the new order shows signs of emerging.

The second theme is that of exercising power wisely in the new order. It is exemplified when Jethro visits Moses. As God continues to devolve power to Moses, so Jethro encourages Moses to devolve power to others (Ex 18;13-27). This section gives a clear example of *sophrosyne* in Jethro's exhortation: 'you should also look for able men among the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy and hate dishonest gain.' (Ex 18;21). Jethro's advice compares with Clytemnestra's hope, on hearing of Agamemnon's victory, that the returning army will practice:

> Moderation, self-control and discipline
> They must remember… (ll344-5)

The wish is repeated by the Chorus:

> 'Those glutted with wealth
> Who kick Justice from their path
> Choose destruction…' (ll378-9)

Thus far the response of the Israelites to their deliverance from tyranny appears to be both normal – they react against physical deprivation, and reasonable – once Moses remedies problems they accede to the stirrings of democracy instigated by God and developed by Jethro.

The final theme which follows logically, but which comes without warning, is the involvement and consecration of Israel as a priestly kingdom (Ex 19). God has acted with forbearance towards Israel when they have been hungry through the journey, but somewhat unfairly, has castigated Moses after Moses' own admonition of the Israelites for neglecting the Sabbath in their haste to

collect manna (Ex16; 25-30). God's inconsistency will recur, and it is another point of similarity with Clytemnestra. Moses has listened to God and Jethro. Now, as God commands, he willingly consecrates the people in preparation for their encounter with God: 'the Lord said "go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow… because on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people"'(Ex19;10-11). As a performance, the narrative has moved steadily from the destruction of Pharaoh's chariots to an approaching climax involving God with all Israel incorporating thunder, lightning, trumpets and clouds (Ex 19;12-24). In theatrical terms, an audience is invited fully into the story at the unexpected opening of Ex 20;1: 'Then God spoke all these words' as, for the first time, there is no specification as to whom God is speaking. God creates a liminal space, or moment where reader, performer, audience or anyone experiencing God's words becomes part of the climax of the story.

Agamemnon's journey from Troy to Argos and death is also marked by three features which unite the Chorus and audience prior to the violent climax brought about by the double murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra. The first feature parallels the repeated complaints of the Israelites against Moses and God. In spite of the victory over Troy, for those awaiting the army's return there are stirrings of anger and resentment:

Chorus And now,
No living men but ashes
To every home,
Ashes and empty armour
May return (ll434-5)

This builds to:

…angry hearts
Harden against Agamemnon, Menelaus
Who took their sins to war… (ll450-1)

So they mutter in the city
Mycenae is heavy with anger ll459-60)

As distinct from the Israelites, the Chorus does not vent its complaints against particular characters. Any redress by leaders may have to be subject to criteria other than divine or human betrayal if the chorus is to be reassured and leaders keep the audience's sympathy. What is clear is that the chorus, as the *polis*, recognise that Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter was transgressive,

and that the slaughter and mutilation of the young Argive warriors was disproportionate. Agamemnon's emergence as a flawed hero is not solely Clytemnestra's perception. The anger towards the returning heroes is mirrored by the fear felt in their absence. The joy expressed by Agamemnon's messenger: 'I'm home again, now I can die happy' (l508) is quickly undermined by the chorus leader -

Messenger	Our country longed for us, you mean, as we for it?
Leader	Our hearts were often dark and sunk in grief
Messenger	Was it for us alone, your bitterness?
Leader	No more, I'll not incriminate myself.
Messenger	The kings were away. Who else made you afraid?
Leader	You said just now; to die would be happiness. (ll544-550)

Where Moses and God encourage and support their people through anger and anxiety in moving towards a better life, the people of Argos consider themselves betrayed by their leaders, despite repeated protestations of the leaders' apparent desire for *sophrosyne*. By the time Agamemnon and Cassandra arrive and their murder is planned, the Chorus – alone on stage – engages the audience in an ode of fifty-seven lines which does nothing other than articulate its fear:

> Why do empty fears
> Unasked, unsummoned
> Birds of ill omen
> Still flutter in my heart…
>
> (ll974ff)

This ode follows the awkward and ambiguous scene between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, with its arrogant introduction of Cassandra and follows Clytemnestra's first hypocritical appeal to Zeus:

> Zeus, Zeus, in your wisdom
> The future lies. Your will be done. (ll970-1)

For an audience, the irony and blasphemy latent in Clytemnestra's prayer is obvious, and if the Chorus succeeds in gaining its audience's sympathy, the clarity of Clytemnestra's duplicity in the lead-up to the murder can place an audience alongside the chorus in seeking security in known gods. The position of the Chorus is antithetical to that of the Israelites until Moses leaves his people for forty days. Then they make their own new god in the Golden Calf. At the climax of the stories both Argives and Israelites see themselves bereft and so vulnerable to shocking aftermaths.

The final feature in the journey to murder is the disorder created in the scene between Cassandra and the Chorus. Clytemnestra heightens the irony with

> Cassandra, Cassandra, come inside.
> Zeus is not angry now… (ll1032-3)

and the scene progresses through increasing confusion between Cassandra and Chorus: 'these are riddles too dark to understand' (l111-2), and 'I know nothing of oracles'(l1130) to their despairing:

> What mortals on Earth can boast
> that their lives are safe from fate? (ll1341-2)

The Chorus is reduced to a state of impotence reflecting the implacability of the gods. Impotence leads to successive responses of confusion, a fear of tyranny, resignation and finally bathetic stasis when Agamemnon's murder is finally realised:

> …the deed is done
> We must think now. What is the safest plan? (ll1346-7)
>
> Now! We must act now… (l1350)
>
> How can we tell what to do?
> Deeds not words rule now. (ll1358-9)
>
> Never! I'll not endure it!
> Death before tyranny. (ll1364-5)
>
> Are we sure the king is dead? (l1367)
>
> Assumptions are dangerous…. (l1369)

The narrative in *Agamemnon*, like Moses' story, starts from a point of triumph, and uncovers fears, uncertainties and transgression. Through it the Chorus and audience is taken on a journey radically different to that of Israel but to a similar place. The Argives are as vulnerable to the shock of Agamemnon's murder as are those waiting for the Decalogue with its own shocking aftermath. In Argos, power is not devolved, people are not consecrated, and *sophrosyne* appears to become an empty virtue. There may be a polarity of theatrical realities created between the two stories, but once audiences enter their different liminal spaces the tragic possibilities and consequences of human and divine actions are similar.

The Golden Calf, unsaying of words and aftermaths

As performance, the opening of Exodus 20 – 'God spoke all these words' – universalizes the narrative of Moses' story by not identifying, therefore not excluding, any audience. It also opens the way to reversals and discovery (*peripeteia* and *anagnorisis*) on the part of many characters. It is aimed principally at Israel whose reactions to Moses and God are hesitant: 'You speak to us and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us or we will die...'(Ex 20;19). The people are once more persuaded to trust God after Moses passes on God's instructions and gives the ritual initiation into the Covenant in 24;3-8. The combination of words and actions, especially actions where blood becomes life affirming, brings about the repeated response 'all the words that the Lord has spoken we will do' (Ex 24, vv3 & 7). The Israelites, as a consecrated nation turns its back on previous complaints and discovers the new order given by God. The scene is set for the act which will complete the first part of Moses' trilogy and prepare for the journey to Canaan. The Israelites have accepted God's spoken words and will now receive them on tablets of stone.

The back-sliding that follows in Exodus 32, with its consequent violence and confusion is shocking. In the absence of Moses and God – who has already appeared as a character alongside Moses, Aaron and the seventy two other leaders – the Israelites once again revert to their previous behaviour, almost a reversal of *peripeteia* and rejection of the *anagnorisis* asserted earlier. Now they demand new gods (Ex 32;1). What is more shocking is Aaron's capitulation to their demands. He will discover in due course that the Argives dictum 'what mortals on Earth can boast that their lives are safe from fate' (Ag ll1342-2)[187] is accurate, but at this point there is no motive ascribed to his actions and he may be judged pusillanimous or pragmatic in his reply to Moses' anger: 'you [Moses] know the people, that they are bent on evil' (Ex 32;22). The best assessment may be to look to a Hegelian position which sees that a 'hero is both innocent and guilty, innocent insofar as (s)he adheres to the good [the prevention of evil acts by the Israelites]… guilty insofar as (s)he violates a good [obedience to

[187] See also: Num 12 & 22.

God].[188] In the subsequent confusion caused by the Israelite apostasy, the dilemma of which 'good', or 'just position'[189] to support applies to all the characters in the story.

The casting of the Golden Calf, while itself shocking, provokes God's fury beyond limits of the *sophrosyne* Moses believes right. His response is tantamount to another reversal as he accuses God in a manner similar to that of the Chorus Leader accusing Clytemnestra after Agamemnon's murder. Moses': 'Why should the Egyptians say "it was with evil intent that he [God] brought them out to kill them in the mountains...?"' (Ex 32;12) echoes the Chorus: 'Who'll support you? Who'll clear you of this murder so clear to see?' (Ag ll 1505-6). The intervention, accusing God of adopting an evil position, is successful and leads to God again changing his mind – a third reversal – and Moses' reinstatement as the central figure in the story. It also leads to an episode as fearful as that of the Golden Calf.

'Moses' anger burned hot and he threw the tablets from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain' (Ex 32;19). A fourth reversal accompanies another shocking sequence. Moses destroys words 'written with the finger of God' (Ex 31;18). He brought *sophrosyne* to God, then in an act of fury and *hubris*, usurps God's position and threatens, through the smashing of the tablets, to reverse the whole of the movement to a new order which should have culminated with God's change of mind and Moses' return to the Israelites. The shock of the destruction of God's words with its implied return to some form of tyranny reminiscent of the Egyptian domination is potentially more devastating than that of Clytemnestra's *hubris*. The Israelites, and the audience have undergone careful preparation to be part of a new creation. For the Israelites, the knowledge that there will be punishment for apostasy, perhaps mitigated by Moses' intervention, does not lessen the impact of a brutal personal retribution wrought on some of the apostates following Moses' own rejection of God. The two-fold punishment inflicted unilaterally by Moses builds on his shock and revulsion against the calf and the dancing. As performance, the melting of the

[188] Roche, M. *Introduction to Hegel's Theory of Tragedy*, in *PhaenEx* 1, No 2, (fall/winter 2006) 11-20, p 13.
[189] Ibid. p.11.

calf followed by its enforced consumption has overtones of torture, and once again uses water as the means to rid Israel of the physical traces of its reversion to an old order. Water is made bitter, gold as the purest metal is corrupted and those guilty duly murdered. Whether all the apostates are killed is unclear, but symbolically, once the evil elements are conflated and destroyed Moses feels justified in pleading with God for mercy. A fifth reversal suggests that God has changed his mind once more and now supports Moses in his punitive measures; 'whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book' (Ex 33;33), albeit in a more considered manner: 'when the day comes for punishment, I will punish them for their sin' (Ex 33;34). He leaves a reminder of what the old order under Egyptian domination could bring: 'the Lord sent a plague on the people because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made'(Ex 33;35). God has distanced himself from the Israelites and this distancing is carried through in his refusal to accompany them any longer in person 'I will not go up among you or I would consume you on the way'(Ex 33;3).

Moses' reaction to the apostasy shows a disturbing similarity to Clytemnestra's double murder and its justification to the Argives. Her lie of 'Zeus…your will be done' is exposed by 'I am the ruler now, for long years I plotted this…' (*Ag*. l1380). Clytemnestra admits her own *hubris* as she, like Moses, usurps the gods. Her first response after the murder is discovered is to destroy, symbolically, the words which have maintained some degree of equilibrium and wisdom across her world:

> Words! I was all words before –
> Careful words, suitable words –
> And now I unsay them all!
> I've repaid hate with hate. (ll1372-5)

Only after this justification does Clytemnestra go on to describe how Agamemnon and Cassandra themselves have been made to die in water and to consume, metaphorically, the life-giving elements that should have welcomed them back to Argos:

> Is it not right
> To pour libations for the dead
> Libations they deserve? If so
> King Agamemnon has what he deserves
> He mixed a brew of misery for me
> And now he's drained it to the dregs himself
> (ll11393-8)

Clytemnestra rationalises her actions in ridding herself and Argos of the symbol of an out-dated and tyrannical order and, through sexual immorality, the betrayer of his own family. In the same way, Moses perceived the behaviour of his people as reactionary and immoral; by implication as losers instead of victors (Ex 32;18), since it was the revelry and dancing which proved the final spur to retributive action.

The shock and violence of the Golden Calf, Agamemnon's murder and their various aftermaths contribute to casting Moses and Clytemnestra as tragic heroes. For them:

> Ambition steps high, and stumbles.
> Zeus [God] sees with thunderous brow
> And down goes ambition, down… (*Ag*. ll467-70)

Both work with passion for a better order to prevail in their respective societies by ridding them of evil practices or archaic leaders. There are flaws in their actions, and these will be demonstrated to the extent that neither will see the fulfilment of their ambition. But for Moses' and Clytemnestra's people the opportunity for a new order will come. This brings about a situation where acts of *hubris*, and the violence consequent upon them may also be sacrificial. If the two protagonists had not destroyed the apostates or the old tyrant, it would not become possible for others – Joshua or Orestes – to lead their people through the next stages of their journeys. Moses and Clytemnestra, like Aaron, become tragic as they face 'a conflict of opposed sides', each of which 'taken by itself has *justification,'* [190] knowing that one side must be negated or destroyed. They are simultaneously innocent and guilty, and will be forced to make their own sacrifices as a result of what for them is unavoidable and justifiable transgression.

The shock of the violence perpetrated by Moses and Clytemnestra leads to examples of self-discovery which thus far have evaded any of the characters in both stories and they revolve around what happens to the Israelites and the Argives. Moses offers to seek forgiveness for the sins of the people, following the massacre (Ex32;30ff), but on this occasion he accepts responsibility, and its

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[190] Hegel, cited in Roche 2006;12.

possible consequences: ‘But now, if you will only forgive their sin, but if not *blot me out* from the book you have written’ (Ex 32;32, my italics). No reason is given for Moses’ change in attitude towards God, so we may risk the assertion that the catastrophe helped Moses gain a greater awareness of his own position and power than hitherto. He has been made aware that he must apply God’s *sophrosyne* to himself. Clytemnestra also demonstrates that however monstrous her actions, they also may have sparked a reaction which could become more dangerous than the events she has forestalled. As the Chorus and Aegisthus threaten further violence, Clytemnestra, in her penultimate speech, intervenes:

> Stop! Stop! My good lord, enough of killing.
> We’ve reaped harvest enough of death. We need
> No more blood. People of Argos go home.
> What’s done is done, and must be lived with.
> Go home and pray that Argos is gorged with death at last.
> (ll1655-1660)

With her track-record, this may be false pleading, but shortly before she has offered terms to the Argives: ‘I stand apart, ready to make a truce’ (l1569), and in the final scene of the play Aegisthus rather than Clytemnestra seeks to maintain the reign of terror latent after the Agamemnon’s assassination.

These final acts of attempted reconciliation may come about following the reactions of the people to their leaders’ violence. After the Golden Calf, the Israelites are given no more words, either of complaint or acceptance. They mourn (Ex 33;4), they see God’s glory reflected in Moses’ face (Ex34;35), but they play no active part in the final scenes, other than to follow where they are led. The sense is of a people defeated by uncontrollable events and so eclipsed by them. God and Moses plan, but do not announce the future itinerary. God instructs Moses: ‘Say to the Israelites – you are a stiff-necked people… and I will decide what to do to you…’ (Ex 33;5). The calamity has left them wholly dependent on Moses, so that the story ends with an undefined journey: ‘whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle the Israelites would set out on the each stage of their journey…’ (Ex40;36). For the Argives, two reactions, both futile, follow the murders. The chorus leader maintains a violent argument with Aegisthus which, if followed will lead to further bloodshed and is stopped only by Clytemnestra’s intervention. Meanwhile the chorus members are reduced to repeating a dirge: ‘Agamemnon, majesty, how shall we weep for

you…' culminating in: 'O earth of Argos I'd rather be dead, buried in you, than see my king coffined… (ll1489ff, 1513ff, 1536ff). The comparison with the mourning and inarticulate Israelites is obvious, but the danger of incipient ancestor worship among the Argives might be greater.

For both nations the stories end in an *impasse*. Moses and Clytemnestra ensure that the catastrophes are not final by their perceptions and mitigating actions. In his *anagnorisis*, expressed by 'blot me out', Moses accepts responsibility for Israel's transgression. God's vindication is immediate: 'whoever has sinned against me will blot out of my book. But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you' (Ex 32;33). Shortly after, God makes his approval clearer: 'I will do the very thing you have asked, for you have found favour in my sight' (Ex 33;17). Aeschylus is less explicit over whether there is any vindication for Clytemnestra. But it is Clytemnestra who stops further killing and who may stabilise the situation with her final words: 'We are the rulers now'(l1673). If these words are addressed to the Chorus leader as well as, or instead of Aegisthus, a degree of uneasy stability is made possible. As the first parts of trilogies, the stories are incomplete, and through the transgression of their characters, both contain enough elements of tragedy to inspire pity, fear and a need to know how each will be resolved.

Chapter 3. The Tragedy of Moses. Numbers and *Libation Bearers*. Unpropitious openings

In their respective openings *Libation Bearers* and the first narrative section of Numbers (10;11-14;45) appear to have no common features. The former addresses the *impasse* following Agamemnon's and Cassandra's murders. It presents a series of scenes, focussing on Orestes and Electra as they seek to come to terms with the necessity of vengeance and the realisation that they must fulfil that need. Numbers picks up the thread left at Exodus 40 and finds the cloud continuing to hide the presence of God among the Israelites. This distinction between events centred on individual vindication in Mycenae, and rebellion and retribution beginning to re-emerge in Sinai may be more blurred than it first seems. Numbers presents a succession of incidents where groups of protagonists are small enough to compare with those in Greek plays.[191] In the play, Argos remains in the grip of those who seek a return to former corrupt times. This assessment applies with as much force to the narrative in Numbers. After Israel restarts the journey (10;33), the complaining crowds become more defined. A 'rabble among them' (Num 11;4) craved food. 'Seventy elders' are summoned to receive divine authority to support Moses against them (Num 11;16). When 'the whole congregation' appears later in 14;1 it is given dialogue: 'would that we had died when our kinsmen died before the Lord' (14;2), effectively making it into a chorus.

God's frequent appearance, involvement and direct encounter with other people is a feature throughout the book and emphasises the 'inescapable obligations and consequences' dependent upon his presence and influence. The frames in which both stories are placed utilise theatricality to locate their audiences in different realities. In *Libation Bearers* there is a repetitious insistence on death and darkness in which individuals must come to terms with extreme violence. In Numbers, as Israel seeks to find its home, immolations by

[191] In discussing narration and dialogue in the Old Testament, Robert Alter comments on biblical 'dialogue that allows the interchange of only two characters at a time.' And that 'every human agent must be allowed the freedom to struggle with his destiny through his own words and acts.' Alter, 1981 pp.83, 87.

God after complaints and rebellion, force a redefinition of its identity and relationship with its deity. Both stories demand flexibility in performance as they use individuals and single events as the means of exploring their wider themes of justice, revolution and governance. In performance limitations of space, time and number of performers means that characters – Orestes or Moses, Electra or Miriam, Pylades or Phinehas – represent themselves and the nation or *polis* as heroes. For the chorus or congregation, as well as being corporate objects of 'primitive ambitions' and 'inescapable consequences' a single member can become a key witness to Clytemnestra's deranged funeral offering to Agamemnon: 'I know. I was there. It was a delirium of dreams…' (ll524ff).

The re-emergence of Moses and Orestes.

The transition from the stasis following the disruption of the Golden Calf at the end of the Exodus narrative to the triumphal and highly organised departure from Sinai (Num 10-11) marks a deepening of Moses' authority over Israel and its acceptance of the renewed covenant. The Israelites' journey is sanctioned and protected by Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law who is also an ally from the Midianites and by God who resorts to his previous practice of accompanying the main body of the Israelites in the cloud, while the ark travels in the vanguard. Superficially, this degree of acceptance of a new authority and resultant organisation would be the correlative *sophrosyne* to that order Clytemnestra seeks at the end of *Agamemnon* (ll 1653-62). It is the *sophrosyne* Orestes hopes for at the opening of *Libation Bearers*: 'I have come home, an exile, home at last' (l3) continuing 'do they come with offerings to my father, libations to appease his spirit?' (ll12-14). Without appeasement order is impossible, as *Agamemnon* demonstrated.

The sense of order among Israel is compounded by repetitious passage in 10;11-28. The listing of tribes, their places and roles in the march imbues the opening of the narrative with discipline and calmness, not unlike the opening chorus of *Agamemnon* (ll40-101)[192] in which the background to the ensuing disruption is recounted objectively. Moses' prayer at the end of the chapter

[192] But no further – the latent wrath of Artemis follows hard on the heels of 'hope gleaming from the altar fires' (l100).

develops the theme of Israel's acceptance of the new order through its absolute certainty of God's support for his virtually innumerable chosen people 'the ten thousand *thousands* of Israel' (10;36 my italics). The immediate and apparently gratuitous rejection of divine support and authority by 'the people' in 11;1, is as decisive in marking a return to disruption within the state as God's furious and violent response. The first chorus of *Libation Bearers* re-establishes the chaos caused both by Clytemnestra – 'the godless woman, gnawed with guilt' (l41) and Aegisthus – 'who defiled the virgin's bed'(l71). Their sins of immorality – godlessness – stand as signs of apostasy as decisively as do those of all Israel, the rabble (11;4) and named individuals later in the story.

The large-scale and stylised opening of the Numbers narrative gives way to a sudden compression and re-focussing at Chapter 11. The complainants become 'the rabble' and from this point a sequence of scenes, each with fewer characters, builds to a series of tragic climaxes as single significant characters as well as large numbers of Israelites die, or are killed. With the exception of the critically important pivotal scene in Num 20 involving the whole congregation, all the other scenes depend on the interplay of named characters for their effect. In the sequence which follows the first complaints and punishment (Num 11;4), the characters of God, Moses, Aaron and Miriam emerge as central to the attempts to re-establish acceptance of divine rule and guidance. It introduces other individuals who will instigate further disruption or thwart attempts at reconciliation as well as the people who will carry the mantle of Moses as the tragic hero into the new nation. The thrust of the passage up to 14;45, will show how ineffective God and Moses prove to be in maintaining the decorum with which this second part of the story began. It presents a dialectic between deception and honesty which is by no means confined to the clearly identified 'wicked' characters. In its reliance on a succession of relatively short scenes with a small number of 'principal' characters, Numbers has a more nuanced tragic form than Exodus, although its plot is more diffuse than its precursor in the trilogy.

Moses' heroic stature is established early in the narrative. In 11;2, regardless of the fact that he and God planned the expedition from Sinai, Moses again defends his people in their unexplained mass rebellion, so halting God's

punishment. His temerity increases in proportion to the grief of the 'rabble' with an ultimatum to God: 'If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once' (Num 11;15). Moses is in sympathy with the people over their limited diet: 'Where am I to get meat to give to all this people?' (Num 11;13). This identifies him with those who are willing to return to Egypt as apostates: 'If only we had meat to eat. We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt (Num 11;5). His attitude increases his potential to be a tragic figure as he becomes caught between the demands of authority expressed by God and the physical and spiritual needs of the people. However he acts, he will sin against the people or sin against God and be 'guilty of a deed for which he is, in some sense, blameless,'[193] but for which Moses is prepared to face death. The deepening but increasingly questioning relationship with God inculcates in Moses an independence of spirit and action. These are qualities which God must quell or risk Moses' place as Israel's greatest leader subverting his as their God. This dilemma contributes to the tragic *peripateia* at Meribah, following God's accusation that Moses lacks faith, so has broken his divinely appointed trust and lost the holiness ascribed to him.

God's response to the crisis over the demand for meat instead of manna echoes Jethro's earlier advice (Ex 18) of appointing deputies. It establishes God as a pivotal character in reading Moses' story as performance. God's decision to delegate authority in person (11;16) involves him as a participant in the story, so promoting the seventy elders of Israel to a level closer to that of Moses and of God himself, since it is God's prophetic spirit that is to be given. Hierarchical divisions are lowered further in the way God operates: 'I will come down and talk with you there and I will take some of the spirit that is on you and put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people along with you…'(11;17). Here and in what follows, God goes beyond previous practice by executing the actions he has initiated *in situ* – around the tent: 'the Lord took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders' (11; 25).[194] Such a positive reaction to Moses' complaint confirms God's awareness of the physical needs of his people, and acquiescence to Moses' anger and complaint which was

[193] Abel, L. *Tragedy and Metatheatre*. (New York. Holmes & Meier. 2003), 102.
[194] Whether Eldad & Medad (v.26) encountered God is 'left vague' (Levy 2002; 214). If they did not, God reminds the reader of his ultimate superiority.

couched in vibrantly gynaecological terms (11;11-15). While God's action does not imply that Moses has gained any degree of superiority over God, it does mark an intensification of the respect in which Moses is held and contextualises God's paean in Moses' defence (12;6-8) when confronted by Aaron and Miriam. The levelling of differences between the two principal protagonists promotes Moses towards a position where he will be required to make further judgements over life and death. This will require him to maintain a level of *sophrosyne* appropriate to his greater God-given status as Israelite leader and founder of the new state.

The opening of *Libation Bearers* is preoccupied with Orestes' grief and mourning after Agamemnon's death as he prays: 'Hermes, earth-god, earth guide/Strong for my father, be my strength' (ll1-2). The chaos following the double murder shows no sign of resolution until the Chorus Leader suggests a course of action to Electra which would promote Orestes to a position where he would achieve god-like status and appropriate responsibility:

Leader.	Orestes the exile. Have you forgotten him?	
Electra	Well said, my brother. I'll not forget	
Leader	As for the guilty ones, the murderers –	
Electra	What shall I pray for them?	
Leader	That there come some God, some *mortal* –	
Electra	To sit in judgement, or punish them?	
Leader.	To kill them. Say it life for life.	
Electra	Dare I ask such things?	(ll115-22. My italics)

The Chorus Leader's hope for an agent of vengeance, divine or human, becomes a reality when Electra discovers Orestes' lock of hair and footprints. At this point and later, the Chorus Leader assumes a religious or priestly role: 'Electra here at your father's tomb, *our altar*' (l106). Such a role helps to validate the children's' vengeance on their mother, Clytemnestra, and the usurping Aegisthus. However different the contexts, Orestes and Moses both receive a religious sanction to order life and death at the beginning of their separate stories. For Moses and Israel, God's delegation of prophetic power will produce unplanned and disruptive results.

The juxtaposition of the elders' and quail scenes is curious,[195] but allows Moses and God to become closer as characters. Moses' conduct towards Joshua (11;28-30), Aaron and Miriam (12;1-16) demonstrates his respect both of the suppliants and God whose conduct they implicitly criticise. He rebukes Joshua's suggestion that Eldad and Medad prophesy in the wrong place: 'My lord Moses, stop them' (11;28). His response: 'Would that all the Lord's people were prophets' (11;29), potentially universalises the locus of prophecy, enabling God to appear anywhere.[196] After Miriam's punishment in the following scene, Moses 'cries out' to God, humbly but unsuccessfully: 'O God, please heal her' (12;13). In these scenes, the exhortation to the spies (13;17-20) and the flatteringly skilful advocacy with God (14;13-19), Moses' *sophrosyne* shows a depth of mutual concern lacking in his earlier passionate and intemperate outburst against God (11;11-15).

God's character-development is less straightforward, but no less significant and raises a problem when setting theological against theatrical readings. Through 11;16-35 God is present. He argues with Moses between 11-16 and 23, and appears to 'the people' between 11;25-26 and moves outside the tent to bless Eldad and Medad. He orders the gathering of the elders to support Moses and share administrative and religious responsibilities, but also to cope with the effects of the gluttony God is convinced will happen, or may enforce (11;18-25). He then proceeds to use his power to suborn and deceive his people. Once the elders and Moses are gathered and empowered for their new roles, God circumvents them. God promises a month's meat ration for six hundred thousand (11;21-23) then sends a plague 'while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was consumed…'(11;33). The promise of an extended period of over-eating which would bring its own punishment of self-loathing 'because you have rejected the lord who is among you' (11;20) is forgotten. What could have been an experience of suffering leading to greater *anagnorisis* is rejected in favour of an immediate retribution arising from God's easily kindled anger.

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[195] 'The account of the 70 elders is only loosely attached to the quail story…' L'Heureux C. *Numbers*, in Brown *et al.* Eds. NJBC, 1993;85.

[196] For theological reasons (to maintain a requisite distance between humans and God), Levy locates the 'scenic space as the Tent of Meeting.' (p.215). Wenham requires God to appear 'within the court of the tabernacle, in the clean and holy area' as opposed to 'outside the camp, in the zone associated with uncleanness and death.' Wenham1981;123.

Unlike Clytemnestra's ambiguous utterances in *Agamemnon*, there is no clear evidence to suggest how God's actions are determined. If they arise from his anger at 11;10, they share features with the murders of Aegisthus and Agamemnon in that God sends a plague to the Israelites when they too are unprepared. The cruelty of the event is exacerbated because they were explicitly told they would be glutted with meat, but not that they would die as a result – 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat' (11;18). As a series of events integral to the tragedy of Moses, Numbers 11 is little short of perfect. The suborning of the elders by God mirrors the entrapment of Orestes' Nurse by the Chorus Leader, in priestly mode, 'Tell him [Aegisthus] to come alone. Smile, say there's nothing to fear…' (ll771-2). God's dishonesty towards the elders and Moses bears comparison with the duplicity Orestes, Electra and the Chorus Leader deploy to capture Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. While God never relinquishes ultimate power, his delegation of greater authority to Moses and the elders narrows the gap between divine and human characters. God's inconsistency and deception of those he has blessed and his gratuitous punishment of the 'people who had the craving' impart immanence. God is physically present and active in the lives of the Israelites.

Moses has had no part in the disruption over the quails, culminating in the 'great plague' which kills unspecified numbers. His next appearance, at Hazeroth, is 'very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth' (12;3). Humility and godliness are closely linked, as Orestes reflects in the acknowledgement of his own humility:

> Hear us, help us. The house of Atreus
> Is humbled to the dust; let it rise again,
> Make it great again. (ll264-266)

In his prayer, Orestes shows that it is the always-elsewhere Zeus who allows greatness to happen. However great God's flaws may seem to become and however often he appears, for Moses' house to be made great again will also require divine support and cooperation.

Tragic climaxes.

Numbers 12 is the first tragic climax and a pivotal point on two axes common to tragedy and biblical writing. The first is a moral-ethical axis. Moses' appointment as God's surrogate makes him the ethical protector of Israel; Moses, says God, 'is entrusted with all my house' (12;7). The appointment vindicates Moses' plea in defence of meat and his intercession for healing after Miriam's punishment. It simultaneously maintains God as Israel's moral head able, alone, to judge between right and wrong as he does over Miriam's accusations against Moses. God's physical presence alongside the three other highest ranked Israelites brings the narrative in Numbers into closer proximity with *Libation Bearers* than that between Exodus and *Agamemnon*.[197] The equilibrium afforded by this pivot between God and Moses is finely judged through the rest of this and the next sequence and will reach its climax at the end of Numbers 14. The second axis for which this scene serves as a pivot is that between degrees of ambition and jealousy (*ate* and *hubris)* and *sophrosyne*. Aaron's and Miriam's complaint against Moses' apostate marriage appears justified 'for he had indeed married a Cushite woman' (12;1).[198] God has not withdrawn support for Moses, so their accusation, even if well-founded is risky. Their justification lies in the perceived hypocrisy of an apostate Moses having the temerity to claim holiness through possession of the sole rights to transmit God's words: 'Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?' (12;2). This accusation from Aaron and Miriam, as Israel's highest religious leader and holiest woman, must either carry weight or be refuted. Refutation is immediate, and the accusation scandalous enough to lead God to summon three people simultaneously to his presence. God speaks only to Aaron and Miriam to establish the supremacy of Moses' position: 'with him I speak face to face – clearly, not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord' (12;8). The confrontation is judged important enough for God to conduct it 'face to face' since God 'stood at the entrance of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam…' (12;5). Moses is the most humble of the Israelites and God's servant, but chosen to command obedience from the highest in the nation: 'why then were you not afraid to speak against

[197] God's influence in word and action was as significant, but frequently conducted in intimate scenes alone with Moses on Mount Horeb. See e.g.: Ex.32.
[198] Possibly Ethiopian: 2 Kgs. 19;9, or Midian: Hab. 3;7.

my servant...?'(12;8). God has placed Moses at the virtuous end of the axis of Aristotelian 'goodness'[199] with Miriam, at least for the present, at the opposite end.

These two axes form a matrix in which the tragedy in the story develops. God's appearance to support Moses and mete out punishment underwrites the validity and moderation of God's new state that Moses is appointed to establish. After the deceptions leading to the plague at Kibroth-hataavah, God's move to demarcate between the rightness of Moses and wrongness of Aaron and Miriam should vindicate and rehabilitate God as the only possible occupant of the moral end of the moral-ethical axis, and one who is constantly present.

Two elements of the story undermine the apparently neat framework which emerges from Numbers 12. Aaron bears God's wrath but escapes punishment, but Miriam may be the instigator of the accusation which follows '*Miriam* and Aaron spoke against Moses…' (12;1, my italics). The usual order of names is here reversed and may suggest a misogynistic quality in the governance of Israel. God's punishment does little to dispel this notion although Miriam's status as 'first lady' nevertheless requires that the nation wait for her purification before continuing the journey.[200] The untrustworthiness of women is as much a feature of *Libation Bearers*. By their own admission the women's chorus must dissemble in their hatred of Clytemnestra: 'But in secret tears badge our eyes…'(l83). Openly, Clytemnestra's duplicity is recollected in her greeting to the unrecognised Orestes, who with the audience, will be in no doubt over her capacity to re-use her murder weapons -

> 'The comforts of the palace are all yours
> Warm baths, a bed to charm away fatigue… (ll688-9)

For Israel, the forthcoming detailed accounts of the punishments for Korah and the rebels (16;31ff), and the deaths of Aaron (22;24ff) and Moses (Deut 34) will make clear that prejudice against women is of less concern than transgression against God. Clytemnestra may be a source of evil in the *Oresteia,* but men can be equally wicked. The perpetrator of an evil which is perceived to destabilise

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[199] Aristotle 1996;24. 'Speech or action will possess character if it discloses the nature of a deliberate choice; the character is good if the choice is good.'

[200] Later the Midianite women will be condemned as initiating the apostasy at Shittim (Num 25), but the Israelite men are punished in equal measure and simultaneously, or before the women.

or threaten the society it damages – family, tribe, cult, state – is the person deserving punishment. For Athens, the future moral guardians will be the female Furies.[201]

The dramatic irony latent in Numbers 12 is gradually revealed. Regardless of gender, the status accorded Moses, Miriam's rehabilitation followed by Aaron's reinstatement as high priest (Num16) will all be lost in their separate reversals and deaths as a result of actions which undermine God's authority. Irony and the questionable position of women which form a sub-text to the scene subvert its intention to buttress Moses' position as the bastion against Aaron's and Miriam's allegation of immorality. As a character present in the story, God's role in allowing the covert instability instigated by Aaron and Miriam to continue and increase through the dishonesty of the spies, Korah's revolt, Moses' disobedience and Israel's apostasy raises further questions around divine deception. God's actions invite comparison with Orestes or Clytemnestra whose actions, intended to rectify evil, further disrupt their society, rather than Zeus or Apollo who may occupy a moral position relative to that of God, but who do not appear in this story, yet whose influence will be beneficial.

The paradox of Moses' story in Numbers lies in the fact that the matrix of ethics and morality with disruption and obedience is a horizontal or lateral one. All the characters who move the narrative forward appear in the story among the Israelites. In Exodus God frequently appears at the top of a mountain so that Moses, commissioned and ordained (Ex 3 & 4) must himself ascend in order to meet with God in person. In the Numbers narrative Moses climbs no mountains and God elects to enter the action himself. He meets Moses at unspecified locations (Num 11;11, 13;1) and at the tent of meeting when other people are involved. The setting is the desert and as a performance, the story becomes Israel's existential struggle with the elements and with human weakness. They experience shortages of food and water. Aaron's and Miriam's ambition and the spies' dissimulation lead to further revolts by the mass of the people (Num 10 & 11, 14) and by individuals (Num 16). God inhabits the same milieu as all the other characters and becomes closely enough identified with their struggles for

[201] See below Ch. 4.

Moses to be able to summon God as readily as he is summoned by God. This situation heightens the paradox by making some of God's actions – especially the more extreme retributive ones – occur outside the locus of the action. He is able to distribute his spirit, or punish Miriam *in situ*, as part of the performance. The fires and plagues happen when God is absent (11;1-2, 33-34). If God is truly other and transcendent, with universal power extending beyond the geographical confines of Israel's camp, he must occupy *loci* which themselves are beyond those inhabited solely by humanity. He demonstrates this by appearing on mountain tops and calling people to him. When God intervenes *in absentia*, from such *loci*, with no explanation given 'on stage', he risks appearing at best inconsistent, and at worst gratuitously capricious. The next part of the story, of deception leading to rebellion, ends with a disaster building on Israel's increasingly unstable situation and, in part countenanced by a deceitful deity wrought upon a people finally committed to confession in a place where God has promised to be (14;39-45).

Rebellion leads to tragedy

In *Libation Bearers* the pivotal scene (ll246-552) which determines Argos's trajectory towards possible future stability – and Orestes' and Electra's to obscurity – has a framework simpler than that of Numbers. It happens after Electra discovers Orestes and leads into their plan for matricide. Gods are not present in the story and the evil characters are understood from the outset to be Clytemnestra and Aegisthus who will appear only to be murdered. The scene should allow the chaos brought about by Clytemnestra's actions to be resolved acceptably, albeit violently. This simplicity, based on a more economical distribution of characters than those in Numbers and singularity of plot-line and events nevertheless becomes multi-layered. Throughout the scene, the gods' approval for actions which are ethically and morally questionable is indispensable. Zeus and Apollo are both instrumental in determining the course of events but maintain their transcendence to avoid the risk of appearing compromised or deceitful through active involvement with the protagonists. The axis of ethical and moral responsibility, spread between God and Moses in Numbers, is appropriated in *Libation Bearers* by Orestes. His prayer (ll248-65) is a plea that Zeus will remain the moral guardian for the house of Atreus.

> If now you let his [Agamemnon's] nestlings die
> What mortals will trust you, honour you again?
> The eagle's brood once dead,
> Rotted the stem that bears the royal fruit,
> Who'll drive oxen to your altars
> Or believe the signs you send? (ll257-262)

In this it parallels Moses' intercession on behalf of Israel (Num 14;13-19) following the false report by the spies. Both leaders threaten their supreme gods with rejection, should they not heed their human requests.

Orestes' plea will be supported by the Chorus Leader who affirms Orestes in his self-appointed role as the godless mother's devout heir:

> I am the serpent son; I bear the deadly sting.
> Her dream comes true in me (ll549-50)

and is followed by the statement of Orestes' divinely appointed task:

> You read the omens right.
> God make it so (ll551-52)

Prior to this priestly charge, Orestes has already taken the ethical decision to avenge his family on the murder of Agamemnon:

> Apollo cries revenge!
> I know my fate, if I should disobey. (ll272-3)

And, echoing God's charge to Moses: 'my servant Moses is entrusted with all my house' and Aaron's response: 'do not punish us…' (Num 12; 7 & 11), they say:

> Those murderers rule in blood,
> Hands stained forever,
> But children [Orestes & Electra] they're in your hands. (ll378-9)

Orestes ends the scene, which will determine the outcome of the tragedy, empowered to act for the salvation of Argos as its regal and ethical head and with rightfully delegated priestly and moral authority.

The axis of good and evil characters is even more clearly delineated. Apollo's oracle to Orestes is unequivocal:

> Avenge the dead, or else
> The Furies will come, a swarm bloated on blood… (ll283-4ff)[202]

[202] The arrival of the Furies at the end of the play indicates a more complex structure than may be initially apparent, not least that divine appointment as avenger may lead to isolation. It also raises the theatrical question of whether the Furies should be made visible i.e. brought on-stage. See below Ch 7.

While the Chorus consistently identify Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as evil as often as they eulogise Orestes and Electra as good, *inter alia*:

> May I live to see them dead
> Their corpses boiled in pitch! (ll267-8)

And:

> Then we'll shout
> Cry out in triumph
> To see that man hacked down,
> That woman slaughtered. (ll384-8)

Following the acceptance of Orestes as saviour and Electra as aide and supporter, their virtue as heroes should be unimpeachable while Clytemnestra and Aegisthus remain irremediably evil. Orestes is divinely authorised to use cunning, duplicity, 'righteous guile', brutal reminders and accusations of his mother's failings and retributive violence:

> But the exile came home;
> Apollo guided him
> Total victory is his –
> The gods are prompt in his triumph.
> …
> His hand was guided by the anger of Zeus,
> And Justice, Zeus' daughter
> Breathed rage on the hated ones…
> …
> Apollo decreed this act of righteous guile
> This cunning, that rights an ancient wrong (ll940-44, 947-50, 954-56)

For Orestes the moral issues raised in restoring equilibrium to a people devastated by the immorality and godlessness of individuals should not present problems. The clarity of the situation as defined by the chorus 'blood for blood, demands the law' (l404) suggests that divinely designated human leaders can restore justice and freedom without the active presence and assistance of any god.

Libation Bearers is nevertheless framed by theology. It opens at Agamemnon's tomb with prayer and religious ritual and at ll960-970, as revenge is achieved and justice restored, the chorus sings a concluding hymn to Zeus 'God is our master … We bend the knee to heaven' (961). Orestes prays:

> Do you see it father? Not Agamemnon,

> But the sun who is father of us all
> Who sees what mortals do. Do you see this,
> My mother's most unnatural crime?
> Apollo Sun God
> Be my witness when my case is tried
> I killed her in justice's name. (ll985-88)

No course of action is permitted unless it is perceived to be the will of Zeus or by Apollo's direction, yet just 35 lines after his confident plea for justification, Orestes admits the ambivalence of matricide as 'a victory most foul' (l1018) and his final assertion of his moral and ethical position:

> By Apollo's words
> "Do it, no blame will stain you…" (ll1031-2)

has already become subject to self-doubt:

> Where will it end? I am the charioteer,
> Horses plunging off course
> Out of control… conqueror conquered. (ll1021-2)

Clytemnestra's curse invoking her dark gods:

> Kill me, and a mother's Furies
> Snarling bloodhounds will hunt you down' (ll924-5)

has undermined Orestes' conviction of his righteousness and almost led him to a peripeteia towards guilt or madness.

At the last moment, Orestes steps out of the theological matrix of the story. The contemplation of the bloodstained net, its associations with Agamemnon and the corruption of death lead him to take control of the situation. Although authorised by Apollo, he accepts both guilt and responsibility for his mother's murder but must seek his own vindication:

> I must go to Delphi; the world's navel
> God's hearth, where undying fire
> Can cauterise the stain of kindred blood' (ll1038-9)

His course of action risks forfeiting Zeus' approval and protection and there is no further mention of the supreme deity. Orestes' final *peripeteia* is to turn from the gods to the people as the supporters for his journey and beneficiaries of its outcome:

> People of Argos, be my witnesses
> Remember how these horrors came about.
> Keep the truth of it for Menelaus.
> I must quit Argos, an exile once again. (ll1040-4)

As Orestes chooses to seek asylum at Delphi he is pursued by the Furies. The citizens are unable to see them but urge Orestes not to forego Apollo's protection: 'go to his altar: Apollo's touch will save you and set you free' (ll1059-60). Orestes and Moses share similar destinies. Both face journeys disrupted by violence within their communities and both take action beyond the bounds set by their gods. Orestes' new journey, which starts with his *anagnorisis* at the end of *Libation Bearers* will take him to the new city where peace will reign, but he will not experience the start of that peace. Moses will see, but not enter Canaan.

Moses' own disruption of the theological matrix in which the Israelites' journey is set happens in Numbers 20. The movement towards disruption is marked by an increase in tension through the succession of self-contained and graphic scenes which continue after his divine vindication in Numbers 12. It begins with the detailed account of the deception of the Israelites by the returning spies. The shock of this scene lies in the ambiguity surrounding the report which, from 13;25-29 gives a balanced view of Canaan 'it flows with milk and honey… yet the people who live in the land are strong…'(13;27-8). Caleb's own report is as balanced, seeking to calm the incipient panic of the congregation. As the narrative stands, up to 13;31 there is no indication of a planned deception. The spies may see an opportunity spontaneously to sway the congregation as the meeting progresses: 'the men who had gone up with him [Caleb] said "We are not able to go up against this people for they are stronger than we are"' (13;31). The congregation makes its own decision as pessimistically as it has hitherto: 'then all the congregation raised a loud cry and the people wept that night' (14;1). The spies generate doubts about Canaan and Israel's destination becomes a place of fear. The reports disrupt and undermine reader and audience, just as does the switch from extended poetic passages to the shorter scenes of intentional deceit perpetrated on Clytemnestra, the Nurse and Aegisthus which lead to the murders in *Libation Bearers (*ll652-930). In both stories the theatricality of the uncertainty and fear stimulate a desire on the spectator's behalf to experience outcomes, even when these are well known.

The fear that enters the story with the spies triggers a change in Moses' and Aaron's response to another plea for a return to Egypt. In an act of awe

before God 'at the sacrilegious blasphemy of the people,'[203] they 'fell on their faces before all the assembly…'(14;5). Once more there is ambiguity as, for the first time, voices other than Moses' attempt to rally the congregation. Joshua and Caleb emerge as potential successors to Moses and Aaron following the probity of both in their conduct during the mission to Canaan. Their reaction to the outcry: 'they tore their clothes' (14;6) is one of mourning for a misguided and rebellious people and associates them with Moses and Aaron who perceive a modest and priestly response to the developing crises. The congregation rejects this assessment and with 'judicial authority' threatens to exercise its legal right of stoning them (14;10).[204] Coming as soon as it does after the challenge to Moses' leadership in Numbers 13, there is a possible legitimising of Miriam and Aaron's action. The congregation perceives Caleb and Joshua exceeding their authority as appointed spies whose divine appointment will not be ratified until after Moses' minatory intercession to God at 14;13-19.

Moses' and Aaron's silence before the congregation also becomes an act of respect to them. They begin to acknowledge the people's right to a degree of authority with its implicit threat to their own future as the congregation becomes more confident in its holiness. However interpreted, the preamble to Moses' unprecedented appeal to God in the face of religious opposition reflects ironically on a community seeking greater legitimate authority yet becoming increasingly unstable.

The growing uncertainty of Moses' position in the congregation is reflected in his challenge to God's omnipotence: 'It is because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land he swore to give them that he has slaughtered them in the wilderness' (14;16). Even by Moses' standards,[205] this intercession is exceptional but now it occurs openly within the assembly so that the congregation can hear Moses' prayer. God's glory appears to all the Israelites, so we may presume that God's threat to disinherit the people in favour of Moses (14;11-12) is heard by all, as is Moses' reply. Moses' place in the hierarchy is suddenly undermined and he gives a public reminder that Israel's

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[203] Wenham 198;136.
[204] Ibid. p.137: 'stoning was reserved for the punishment of major religious crimes and sins within the family which symbolise breaches of the covenant.'
[205] See: Num. 11; 11-15.

freedom, given by God, is about to be withdrawn. Their desire to return to servitude and death in Egypt is a sign of God's failure. Moses gives God and Israel pause for thought by forcing the acknowledgement that their relationship is active and shared, 'O Lord, you are in the midst of this people; for you O Lord are seen face to face…' (14;14). Moses persists in reinforcing God's goodness towards his chosen people, but for the first time in the developing crisis, it is Moses who reminds God and people of the intimacy of their relationship. Theirs is a relationship built upon God's promise of love, forgiveness and justice: 'the Lord is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty…'(14;18). The scene concludes with further ambiguity. God, still part of the assembly, makes his intention to forgive and its conditional *quid pro quo* clear to the Israelites. Those who publicly rejected the faithful Caleb's report of the mission to Canaan are publicly banned from entering Canaan.

At the end of his judgement, God adds to the increasing disruption occasioned during the time in the desert. He raises another ambiguity by publicly advising a change of route, (14;25) avoiding the Amalekites. He does not refer to those who will not 'see the land that I swore to give their ancestors' (14;23), suggesting that if Israel does as asked they may yet gain a safe entry to the land promised to them. God's advice here undermines Caleb who advocated a direct assault on Canaan (13;30). In doing so God begins to justify the congregation in their newly adopted judicial role and vindicates their demand for new leaders (14;4). The dialogue following (14;26-35), is confined to the three principal protagonists and clarifies God's intentions. The death penalty already announced to the congregation stands and God confirms Caleb and Joshua as Moses' and Aaron's successors. Removal of ambiguity does not lessen the destabilisation already caused among the Israelites, and God's attitude to the congregation, privately expressed to Moses: 'I will do thus to all this wicked congregation gathered together against me: in this wilderness … they shall die' (14;35), sets limits on the greatness of his steadfast love, and willingness to forgive the iniquity of this people.

The end of the first sequence is paradoxical. God punishes the deceitful spies on the grounds of their sedition: 'the men who brought an unfavourable

report died by a plague before the Lord' (14; 37). Whether this event is the subject of Moses' report to the Israelites or whether 'these words' (14; 39) also convey God's confirmation of the ban on entering Canaan is unclear. Either interpretation restores Caleb's and Joshua's status. The Israelites' response is to mourn, repent and, mistakenly, seek God where he has always been: 'we will go up to the place that the Lord has promised' (14;40). Their determination reinstates their acceptance of Caleb's reassurance of God's presence (14;9). It follows Moses' intercession and indicates a wish for *sophrosyne* and a holier life. The Israelites' dialogue with Moses here is a contrite reaction to the punishments prescribed. Moses attempts to deter the people for what appear to be honest motives: 'do not go up, the Lord is not with you; do not let yourselves be struck down before your enemies' (14;42). Their subsequent rout by the Amalekites and Canaanites suggests another unexpected, if not capricious, response by God. He has not countered Caleb's claim that 'the Lord is with us', but if Moses absents himself and the ark from the people, so does God.

The defeat by the Amalekites at Hormah follows the first judicial and theological challenge to Moses by the people (14;10) and his subsequent moral challenge to God. Given God's clear instruction to avoid the Amalekites and Canaanites who 'live in the valleys' (14;25), Moses' dismissal of the nation's desire to confess guilt as transgression (14;40) indicates his positioning of himself alongside God. For the first time Moses deserts the people he has repeatedly defended. His refusal to allow the ark to leave the camp actively removes the possibility of God's protection and marks another *peripateia* as Moses must defend both the moral and religious foundations of Israel while attempting to protect the people themselves. His words 'do not go up' seek to achieve both ends, but they contradict what has already been said by Caleb who has affirmed God's presence and protection, on condition of Israel's obedience, in his honest report of the spying mission (14;9-10). God has endorsed all Caleb reported (14; 24). The instability of the situation is thrown into sharper relief when the Amalekites and Canaanites who, contrary to God's assertion, 'lived in that hill country' (14;45) attack the Israelites. If the passage is understood to suggest that the people are finally persuaded to seek forgiveness by hearing Caleb's report, Moses' intercession and God's threat, and so seek to act in accordance with the divine will then they are ill-served by God who has

promised qualified forgiveness but given misleading information. Moses colludes with God's implacable retribution by refusing to accompany the people. His abandonment of Israel indicates that the people are no longer like the 'sucking child' carried on the nurse's bosom (11;12) Moses has hitherto defended. Israel has become a character who articulates challenges and becomes instrumental in establishing its own, and Moses' fate. The congregation's status and its responsibilities are spelt out unequivocally in the build-up to the defeat in the hill country, and Moses will no longer defend them to God.

The challenge to Moses.

The narrative continues at Numbers 16 with Korah's challenge to Moses.[206] Initially the challenge appears to resemble that brought by Aaron and Miriam, but it accuses Moses and Aaron of going 'too far' in exalting themselves over the congregation. It extends the accusation by involving three more named individuals, Dathan, Abiram and On with two hundred and fifty senior figures 'chosen from the assembly' (16;2). Korah does not make a specific complaint against Moses and Aaron. The challenge builds on the actions of the congregation after the spies' false report, indicating support for a wider rebellion against Moses on radical religious grounds. Korah articulates the status and associated grievance of the people 'All the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them'(16;3). While the truth of the accusation will be determined in Moses' favour, underlying it is a double threat far more dangerous to the emergent nation than the Midianite marriage Moses is said to have made. With leaders coming from two tribes – the Levites and Reubenites – the rebels elide priestly and lay distinctions in the nation. They assert the principle that any Israelite is eligible to become leader with the same privileges as those accorded to Moses and Aaron.[207] Moses views the possibility of transferring power to a lay leader yet to be specifically sanctioned as an affront to God. Prophetic powers may have been granted, but Moses' election as God's sole proxy (14;7) has not been specifically overridden, even if God has since appeared and been heard by all the Israelites (14;10). God will determine where holiness lies in his reply to Korah; 'In the morning the lord will make known who is his, and who is

[206] Cf. the narrative of the journey in Ps. 106; the instructions for new rituals (Num 15) are omitted.
[207] See: Ex. 19;6 '…you [the Israelites] shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.'

holy…' (16;5). The second threat is in the closeness of the challenge. If a new leader were to be priestly and Moses' cousin,[208] divine retribution could easily be accompanied by internecine family disputes. This has almost happened between Moses, Aaron and Miriam, and led to Miriam's death.[209]

A hermeneutic of performance offers a deeper reason than the growing awareness of a demotic religious and judicial role as the cause of the escalating complaints against Moses. This has nothing to do with the privations of desert life. A reading of the story as a tragedy sets Korah's rebellion immediately after the defeat at Hormah and gives a framework to determine who is responsible for God's people. As Levites, Korah's tribe carried the ark with the people up to the place that the Lord has promised for their act of contrition (14;40). The ark affords God's protection. Moses' refusal to allow this can be perceived as compromising the Israelites, resulting in their massacre. Moses' intransigence provides motivation for Korah's assertion of universal holiness. For Korah, Dathan and Abiram, Moses' acceptance of his own authority to direct Israel's right of self-determination, in defiance of God's instructions, exceeds his duty of care. The rebels taunt, 'You have gone too far' (16;3) carries an ironic overtone because by remaining behind, Moses failed to stop the massacre. For Moses and Aaron to 'exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord'(16;3) suggests that staying in the valley was a way of staying alive. Moses' reply to Korah continues the underlying tension among the priestly tribe as he prescribes the method God will choose to ascertain a hierarchy of holiness. His prostration (16;4) acknowledges God's supremacy. His inclusion of all the rebels as directly subject to God grants them the autonomy, with its attendant responsibility they demand (16;5-7). Moses' castigation of the Levites (16;8-11) directs Korah's charges away from Moses and Aaron towards God. Moses warns that the Levites risk exceeding their divine appointment to 'perform the duties of the Lord's tabernacle' (16;9) undermining their 'separate' and privileged place in Israel. Moses is entrusted with 'all my house' and exercises sole authority as he remains the single conduit between God and the people.

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[208] Through their descent from Levi. See also e.g. Josephus. *Ant*. 4.2.1.
[209] Cf. the disruption caused by Aegisthus' usurpation of his cousin's kingdom in the *Oresteia*.

The reaction of Dathan and Abiram undermines Moses position more blatantly than Korah's. Korah seeks redress for what he and his fellow leaders see as Moses' unjustified religious stance. Dathan and Abiram seek to maintain the *status quo* operating in Egypt. Their rejection of Moses' summons 'We will not come! Is it too little that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness' (16;13) reiterates previous complaints. If the revolt is a result of the Amalekite defeat, it is also a deeply ironic refutation of Caleb's report, endorsed by God, which, after confessing their sin, Israel planned to implement. For Dathan and Abiram, as lay Israelites, the attack happened through Moses' abandonment of his people which has led to defeat and starvation.

This attempt to equate physical well-being with right spiritual observance prompts a new reaction from Moses who attempts to deflect any blame accruing from the revolt away from himself. For the first time Moses instructs (rather than requests) God how to respond, so justifying his own position: 'Pay no attention to their offering… I have not harmed any one of them' (16;15). The motivation behind this speech of self-defence is not made explicit, but its theatricality as dialogue – Moses is 'angry'; he has 'not taken one donkey from them' (16;15) – admits the possibility of doubt or guilt on Moses' behalf.[210] The instructions to Korah 'and all your company' (16;16) suggest that Moses continues to elide any differences between the priestly and lay factions, maintaining the holistic and holy quality of all God's people.

The climax of the scene starts at 16;19: 'Then Korah assembled the whole congregation against them at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the Lord appeared to the whole congregation.' The instruction for Moses and Aaron to distance themselves physically from everyone else endorses Moses' decision to refer the rebellion to God. It also publicly reinforces God's refutation of the previous attempt to destabilise Moses by family members at Hazeroth. Set aside, Moses and Aaron will be safe from God's retribution. Moses will continue as spiritual and pastoral guardian of the whole congregation assembled against him and Aaron by Korah. As a climax it marks a change in God's relationship with

[210] Dramatically, Moses would appear a stronger character in this scene if v. 15 were removed. Then Moses would show his unconditional faith in God.

Moses. They have maintained extended dialogues over food (11; 7-24), and how best to cope with the false spies (14;10-34). In the wilderness they regularly met privately for long periods on Mount Sinai. Faced with the congregation increasingly confident of its own moral rectitude, the dialogue between God, Moses and the people becomes terse, threatening total annihilation: 'I may consume them in a moment' (16; 20), with Moses brief response: 'shall one person sin and you become angry with the whole congregation?' The plea proves effectual as God responds: 'Say to the congregation: 'Get away from the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram'(16; 23).

Once again, Moses presumes to amplify God's instructions, successfully dividing the congregation through the threat of physical contamination: 'touch nothing of theirs or you will be swept away for your sins' (16;26). He now justifies himself to Israel: 'this is how you will know that the Lord has sent me; it has not been of my own accord' (16; 28). Moses' elaborates God's threatened punishment in theological terms: 'if the Lord creates something new… and they go down alive into Sheol… then you shall know that these men have despised the Lord' (16;30). God has threatened only to 'consume them in a moment.' (16;21) Moses now demands that God realises his threat and defines the manner in which it will happen. With the announcement before the divided congregation: 'if these people [the rebels] die a natural death, or if a natural fate comes on them, then the Lord has not sent me' (16;29). Moses allows God no room for manoeuvre. God's inaction will vindicate Korah and the previous options of punishment by fire or plague have been effectively removed by Moses in his attempt to strengthen his own position as Israel's uniquely holy leader.[211] God's response is ingenious. As 'the ground under them was split apart'(16;31), he capitulates to Moses' implicit demand: '*if* the Lord creates a new thing…'(16;30 my italics).[212] By reinstating fire as both an established form of punishment and purification: 'fire came out from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men offering the incense' (16;35), God reminds Israel who their supreme leader is as he becomes increasingly polarised from the protagonists, Moses and Aaron.

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[211] Wenham 1981;154 provides the gloss: 'This [God's punishment] will prove conclusively *that the Lord has sent Moses*.'

[212] There are few references to 'Sheol' in the Pentateuch. This is the second after Gen. 37;35 – Jacob going down to Sheol (NRSV) or 'pit' (KJV) in search of Joseph.

The movement of the narrative after Aaron's and Miriam's earlier accusation against Moses amplifies characteristics associated with tragedy. The challenges to authority, with their destabilising consequences, are driven by familial disputes which echo earlier historical events. The most obvious of these is the fraternal discord and deception of the Joseph story, where Egypt became a haven for Jacob's family. Korah's, Dathan's and Abiram's accusations of Moses' unwarranted individual claim to holiness looks backwards to a fundamentally mis-perceived Israelite golden age. Under Joseph, Egypt was the land flowing with milk and honey (16;13). This conservative and nostalgic view parallels Agamemnon's and Clytemnestra's desire for an equally misperceived pre-Trojan *status-quo*. Looking further back into Pentateuchal history, God's curse on Adam and Eve with its consequent vicissitudes, particularly in violent conflicts between brothers, provides a biblical model for familial discord to set against the curses determining the fate of the houses of Atreus or Cadmus. As well as in Greek history, 'there is, in the biblical view a causal chain that firmly connects one event to the next, link by link.'[213] Moses and Orestes must both unravel potentially fatal family feuds while enabling their nations to progress beyond the divine curses once placed upon them. Doing so will prove costly for both.

God's intervention (16;36-40) after the double punishment of the rebels marks another pivotal shift in his relationship with Moses. Moses is reduced to the rank of messenger and Eleazar is presented to the congregation as the agent of purification and holiness. This expands the position he already holds[214] beyond the confines of the sanctuary as he must 'scatter the fire far and wide'(16; 37). The message also makes clear that God allows for some form of atonement with an associated possibility of holiness open to the whole congregation since the two hundred and fifty rebel leaders all burnt incense before God, and their sacrifice proved acceptable. Moses' instruction to God to 'pay no attention to their offering…'(16;15) has gone unheeded, and God is ready to overrule him. God's reaction vindicates Korah's insistence on the holiness of the whole congregation, while not in any way exonerating Korah himself. In selecting

[213] Alter 1981;181.
[214] Num. 3;4,32. 4;16. Eleazar was previously restricted to supervising the Levites and temple duties.

Aaron's son[215] as the theological conduit of his message God adds to the complexity and uncertainty of the situation surrounding the Israelites. The public promotion of Eleazar, following that of Caleb and Joshua also marks a step in the divinely appointed succession which will follow the deaths of all three principal protagonists. Moses' marginalisation has begun and continues to the tragic climax at Meribah.

The rebellion by the whole congregation which follows (16;41) demonstrates the continuing confusion. After their initial horror at the rebels' death: 'all Israel around them fled at their outcry, for they said "The earth will swallow us too"'(16;34), the Israelites seemed reassured by God's acceptance that holiness need not be confined to any individual or tribe. The challenge that follows transfers responsibility for the rebel's punishment back to Moses and Aaron: '*You* have killed the people of the Lord' (16;41 my italics). The demand for the ground to swallow the rebels was seen as Moses' initiative, so he must take the blame for their death. The latest revolt produces another ambiguous punishment from God. Moses' marginalisation continues as God repeats the terse instruction to 'get away so I may consume them in a moment' (16;45). Moses is still the leader but no longer involved in decision-making or discussion.[216] His response is again a unilateral one. In authorising Aaron to make atonement for the congregation without prior intercession Moses 'stops an act of divine punishment while it is in progress.'[217] That it was not an unreasonable interruption may be assumed by God's acceptance of it. Moses' concern to save Israel, despite their hostility may be both *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis*. Moses has realised God's readiness to accept universal holiness as part of Israel's progress towards becoming a greater nation. The realisation overcomes his need for self-justification when first confronted by those claiming holiness for all. Where his previous unsolicited action led to death, this intervention leads to saving life.

[215] And later, his grandson Phinehas (25;10).
[216] A position which holds for the rest of the narrative. See Num. 20;8. 25;10. 31;1-2.
[217] L'Heureux, C. in *Numbers*; Brown *et al*. Eds. NJBC 1993;86.

The tragic denouement.

The narrative sequence leading to Moses' final tragic *peripeteia* in Numbers 20 follows the narrative of the story in Ps 105;41, with the proviso that it incorporates Miriam's death. Her death marks the opening of another scene of suffering and rebellion. In the light of the mounting pressure on all the leading characters through the story, individual and group events heighten the disruption and desolation which lead to Moses' greatest challenge.

Miriam was identified as one instigator of the familial rebellion against Moses, and duly punished privately. The punishment was instantly made public, and, until 20;1 she is not heard of again. Her reappearance reminds an audience that although the last group of rebels have been dispatched, a prime source of rebellion, and a woman, remains to be removed. Her death and peremptory burial, without ceremony or mourning, emphasise her rejection by God and Israel. The sombre opening of the scene followed by another familiar but qualitatively different quarrel between Moses, Aaron and the congregation maintains the tension already created as the tragedy takes its inevitable course. The crisis is once again about starvation and death, and is the result of Moses' and Aaron's irresponsible leadership. This climactic scene echoes the first scene of *Libation Bearers* which is marked by the death and illicit mourning of a woman member of Argos' leading family. Her irresponsibility and transgression led her people into a state of chaos remediable only by divine intervention in *Eumenides*.

The complaint over lack of water is familiar, but one of the developments of the tragedy has been Israel's aspiration to holiness. The awareness of their change of status is made clear: 'Why have you brought t*he assembly of the Lord* into this wilderness for us and our livestock to die here?' (20;4, my italics) The challenge becomes more threatening once it is made by a holy people. Egypt, with its grains, figs, wines and pomegranates, (20;5) has been identified already as a land of milk and honey and is cited once more as preferable to the desert or a yet to be arrived at Canaan. Those who were formerly 'the people' (11;1) or 'the rabble' (11;4) and as such, an inherently weak group to be supported in its suffering by its leader (11;11ff) have transformed themselves – or been

transformed – into the 'assembly of the Lord' alongside Moses and his family. In exercising its power, Israel forces a new response from Moses, and Aaron, 'who went away from the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting' where 'they fell on their faces…' (20;6). On previous occasions of open prayer, Moses has stayed with the congregation to support them against deceitful spies or rebels. Now he is in open confrontation with them as an antagonistic force. The disruptive individuals are gone, so the formal intercession of 16;21 becomes impossible. There is a parallel of form with *Libation Bearers* where the chorus exists as a single entity engaged in dialogue with the chorus leader and named characters through the play, particularly in the build-up to Orestes' final decision to avenge Agamemnon, ll270-586.[218] The chorus grows in confidence from: 'Our hearts, our lives are gorged with grief,' (ll26-7) to: 'The beacon burns at last, the halter is lifted from the house' (ll963-4). There is a correlative dwindling of individual characters as Orestes and Clytemnestra are left isolated at the play's climax. The woman will be murdered, the man face pursuit by the Furies. For Moses and Orestes, their people grow in stature, albeit with different motivations, but ultimately the heroes face their final challenges alone.

Moses' alienation from the congregation is reflected by God's response to the complaint. Moses offers no support or intercession for the Israelites. There is no longer a dialogue so God's own concern to ensure the survival of his people, and their property, becomes the focus of the first part of the scene: 'thus you shall bring water out of the rock for them; thus you shall provide drink for the congregation and their livestock' (20; 8). Where God had last spoken twice of consuming the congregation in the face of Moses' support for them, as Moses now relinquishes support, God supplies it, but still speaks only with Moses and Aaron.

The account Moses gives of God's words continues to embellish divine instructions. Even allowing for God's possible anger at Meribah: 'the people of Israel quarrelled with the Lord' (20;13), his order to Moses is about sustaining his people. God will demonstrate his power as Moses uses God's words to 'command the rock before their eyes to yield its water' (20;8). God makes no judgements

[218] The only extended choral odes are ll22-85 and ll586-651. The rest of the choral dialogue is in short verses. Cf. *Agamemnon* ll40-257, ll355-488, ll681-781

on his people before Moses and Aaron. Moses is faced with a congregation whose rebellious actions have been consistently condemned by God, but which are now addressed directly as petitions for survival. At the same time he is entrusted with the care of God's people. Moses reasserts his divinely delegated authority and reminds the congregation that they use the same phraseology as Korah: 'why have you brought the assembly of the Lord into the wilderness for us and our livestock to die here?' (20; 4). Their claim to holiness is false and Moses counters it in his own words: 'Listen you rebels, shall we bring water for you out of this rock?' (20;10). There is little in Moses' words to suggest any concern over the life-threatening conditions God has ordered him to alleviate. It is difficult to see the scene as other than a double stand-off, firstly between the people, Moses and Aaron; secondly between Moses, Aaron and God, particularly in view of God's refusal to condemn the congregation. Even if the 'we' in Moses' challenge were taken to include God with the two brothers and lessen the gap between them, problems persist because the instructions were given in a place 'away from the assembly', keeping a distance between God and all his people. Additionally, ever since Moses' latent presumption of moral superiority over God in 14;19, God has commanded Moses and Aaron to work together, so restricting the 'we' more readily to them and isolating them from their own community.

The unauthorised method of drawing water emphasises Moses' isolation from the people and God. Moses follows his unwarranted taunt of the congregation[219] by the double striking of the rock. The action lends itself to interpretation as a physical assault on a familiar symbol of God as 'the rock before their eyes' (20;8).[220] Moses once more exalts himself over the people by reinterpreting God's command, and by doing so, forces God to make good his promise. The sequence of unauthorised speech and action parallels the events of Korah's rebellion where Moses commands Aaron to interrupt God's punishment by making atonement after elaborating God's plans for executing the rebels. At Hazeroth Moses spoke and Aaron acted, but at Meribah, Moses does both. God's reaction to the brothers' behaviour is instantaneous, devastating but also ambiguous: 'Because you did not trust in me…you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them' (20;12). God condemns both brothers, but

[219] Cf. Ps 106;33 'they [Israel] made his[Moses'] spirit bitter and he spoke words that were rash.'
[220] See Hart 2013;39ff on '*material* representations of God.'

Aaron seems to have done his duty in assembling the congregation. Whoever was to command the rock to yield water, Moses alone struck it, raising the question of whether Aaron was once more pusillanimous or dominated by Moses, so on this occasion less culpable.[221] If God's contention is that Moses and Aaron together subverted his second attempt to 'show my holiness' (20;12) due to their lack of trust in their God then the punishment may be justified as the final climax in the tragic sequence which started with the Israelites' complaints in Numbers 11. Then they were saved only by Moses' concern for them, and his intercession with God on their behalf. By his later accusation against Moses, denying him God's favour, Aaron sets his own tragic sequence in train.

The scene is brought to a close by an enigmatic editorial comment which excludes Moses from the dispute between the congregation and God: 'these are the waters of Meribah where the people of Israel quarrelled with the Lord and by which he showed his holiness' (20;13). If the narrator here 'can adopt the all-knowing, unfailing perspective of God'[222] it is evident that God no longer needs Moses to show, and to share once again divine holiness with his people. The theatricality of the story redeems God and prepares for him to be the character who, like Athene in the final play of the trilogy, seeks and leads the movement towards a new order.

The question remains: in whose eyes is Moses wrong? His response to the Israelites' consistent desire to return to Egypt is to intercede with God for their protection. His anger is reserved for the rebels who question his divinely authorised position and God's holiness. His moral debate with God is based on a fear that the Egyptians, and so the whole gentile world, will perceive God as sinful and weak instead of the source of the 'great and steadfast love' which marks God as supreme. His violent reaction and liberal interpretation of God's instructions are sparked when the congregation simultaneously assumes holiness while seeking a return to Egypt. If Egypt were to become a promised land Israel would be consigned to slavery and apostasy. Moses remains implacably opposed to any corruption of God's *status quo* threatened by all those who rebel. His commitment is to move the Israelites, physically and spiritually, to the place

[221] Cf. Ex 32;1-6.
[222] Alter 1981;157.

where God directs them. The presence of God and the shared holiness given to all his chosen people allow their dislocation in the wilderness and their relocation to a new holy land to become sacramental moments. Moses resists the rebels' potential disruption of these by seeking God's punishment. He seeks to preserve them by caring for the peoples' physical needs. The attempt to hold these polarities together isolates him and leads to his own transgression at Meribah.

In *Libation Bearers*, after the double murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, Orestes becomes isolated. Like Moses, he has a divine charge to liberate the people of Argos from the tyranny of the old order:

> As Apollo is my guide, his charge upon me,
> I shall go on, come danger as it may
> Apollo cries revenge… (ll270-2)

And:

> Are not the men of Argos my countrymen
> Famous of the famous?
> They never flinched to topple Troy
> Must they forever crook the knee
> To Clytemnestra and Aegisthus…? (ll304-7)

For this he has Apollo's conditional guarantee of safety:

> Avenge the dead or else
> The furies will come, a swarm
> Bloated on blood… (ll283-5)

Orestes is as faithful in his duties as Moses in his. Yet he too is apparently betrayed by Apollo. The Furies do appear after the revenge killings to demand their own legitimate vengeance and drive him away from Argos. In Orestes' case weakness manifests itself in his ambivalence over matricide. Following his self-justification to Apollo after the murders, his words, especially the final two, are taken as a sign of grief, unnecessary under the circumstances

> Orestes She asked to share my house. I'd sooner die.
> Die before I'm a father, *die now*
> Chorus Cruel, dreadful the death of the queen
> A bud of grief sprouts in the son who remains
> (ll1006-9; my italics)

The words prompt Orestes to weep for his actions and risk allowing Clytemnestra's curse to take effect. Like Moses, Orestes never wavers in his refusal to allow Argos to return to its old order, but unlike Moses, whose

vindication must wait,[223] at the climax of the tragedy he is vindicated by his people:

> Chorus Leader You have done right. Bear no burden
> Of reproach. You set all Argos free. (ll1044-5)

Tension between compassion and anger isolates Moses, grief at indispensable violence isolates Orestes. Both risk losing their divine protection but do so as tragic figures who will not be deterred from their divinely appointed tasks of radically and permanently changing their societies.

[223] Deut 34;9. See below, Ch4.

Chapter 4. The Tragedy of Moses: Deuteronomy & *Eumenides*

Disrupted openings

The three great monologues which form Deuteronomy stand 'as Moses' valedictory address to the people of Israel.'[224] They are performances with Israel as the passive audience and active chorus, summoned for the various addresses. In the first scenes, indicated by narrative insertions at 1;1-5 and 4.44-9 the audience is required only to hear Moses' words. The final chapters from 27 onwards show greater dramatic movement and incorporation of characters and are now considered as the third part of the tragedy of Moses, set alongside *Eumenides*. *Eumenides* incorporates and anticipates rapid movement but also requires silent choruses of Jurors and Citizens as participants alongside the chorus of Furies. All of these must make choices to determine Athens' future, as the people of Israel must choose a course of action Moses offers them.

In 27; 1 the quality of Moses' monologue changes. Up to this point he has recapitulated Israel's story of its journey, the giving of the law and the benefits which will accrue from the rigours endured and obedience to God's law. Now two new elements appear. For the first time Moses is not alone as the principal performer. He works with the 'elders of Israel' who 'charged all the people' to keep the law, and at 27; 9 the Levitical priests speak to 'all Israel'. Different groups of characters enter the story, and shift its dynamic from a binary between Moses and the audience – a one person performance – to one of multi-polarity. The dynamic shift is evident from the outset and not solely to do with the action of individual characters: 'Then Moses and the elders charged all the people…'(27;1). For the first time in Deuteronomy Moses demands reciprocal action – setting up altars – to make the divine promise a reality. Moses' position as pivotal in Israel's destiny has started to decline as the people assert their own holiness. God has marked Moses' transgression at Meribah and as more

[224] Alter 1981;155.

characters are brought into the story, actions and decisions made by others will supersede those previously made by Moses.

This sequence of responsibility for the good governance of a society passing from a single hero to a people, with its attendant risks, is echoed in *Eumenides* as the Furies remind us that Orestes' matricide is transgressive. He will be vindicated, this time by the Athenians, who with the Furies must then decide together to choose life with Athene (l916) or death through their own fury at Zeus (ll795-808). As with Deuteronomy, there is comparatively little action – relative to *Agamemnon* and *Libation Bearers*, or Exodus and Numbers. There is much dialogue and debate with gods, either in person when God visits Moses and Joshua (Deut 31;14-23), in the appearances of Athene and Apollo, or through the reporting of divine warnings (Deut 32;19-42). Both pieces include large numbers of *peripeteias* in their progressions to their climactic decisions. Both have a more diffuse range of characters than the earlier stories. This befits their common themes of transference of power from a single leader to an assembly. Non-speaking pilgrims set the scene of intended holiness at the beginning of *Eumenides*, while a chorus of Citizens appears briefly at the end. I have noted the appearance of two groups – elders and all Israel – with Moses within ten verses in Deut 27 and in Deut 31;24-29 the Levites, elders and officials are differentiated and commanded to attend Moses.

Deuteronomy and *Eumenides* show the final transition of nations from governance by regimes which have become familiar but often brutalising, to statehood where the *polis* and its gods may work together for a new common good. Both aim to show that these transitions do not have guaranteed outcomes. Wrong choices by Israel will lead to 'she who is the most refined and gentle among you… begrudg[ing] food to the husband she embraces… begrudging even the afterbirth that comes out from between her thighs and the children that she bears because she is eating them in secret for lack of anything else…' (Deut 28;56-7). For the Athenians, the Furies will ensure the consequences for errors:

> We'll crush this land
> Anger, anger,
> It will feel our pain
> Our poison drop by drop
> Will sour the soil;

Cancer-flowering
Leaf-rotting, child-shrivelling
Death for death… (ll781-788)

Moses and Orestes have worked to enable their people to exercise free choice and, given wisdom and trust in their deities, new epochs will be life-affirming. For Israel and Athens people and gods must make the choices together.

Chapters 27 and 28 form a prologue to the final section of Deuteronomy and bear comparison with the beginning of *Eumenides*. Deut 27;1-14 translates the theory of the law into practice which will sanctify Israel: 'This very day you have become the people of the Lord your God' (27; 9). Until this point all has been preparation: 'the lord is commanding you… you have obtained agreement… the Lord has obtained your agreement…' (26;16-18). Now the covenant is mutually acceptable and will continue if Israel obeys the divine law and follows proper rituals. Israel's holiness is established before the final crossing into Canaan. *Eumenides* opens with prayer and silent characters who bear no relation to any of those encountered in the first two plays of the *Oresteia*. A Priestess instructs the pilgrims in the proper order for prayer and worship, enumerating the powers and laws due to each god, culminating in the supremacy of Zeus:

It is for the father Zeus,
That Apollo – Loxias, the Sun!
Speaks out, infallible. (ll17-19)

Her prologue is intended to prepare her hearers, pilgrims and audience, for holiness, providing they 'never forget' their duty to the gods. The consequent 'good fortune' also relies upon the pilgrims entering a sacred space:

Now may I take my place
Upon the throne: the prophetess.
Gods grant me good fortune,
And best of all for those who enter here.
Are you Greeks? Draw lots then.
Each enter in turn.
Follow our custom here.
The god is in me… (ll29-35)

For Israel, holiness may be given (27;9) but it depends on the creation of sacred space 'you shall set up large stones and cover them with plaster…' (27;2) after which 'you shall build an altar there to the Lord your God, an altar of stones on

which you have not used an iron tool…' (27;5). The inclusion of a priestess and pilgrims who do not appear after the prologue of the play, and Moses' insistence on speaking to 'all the people' (27;1) and 'all Israel' (29;2) stress the increasing importance of corporate responsibility for the good of the community and the structures within which it must operate.

The positive opening exhortations in Deuteronomy and *Eumenides* are followed by *peripeteias* which reveal the consequences of transgressions against divine law. The shocks of desecration (intentional in *Eumenides*[225]) and the placing of curses before blessings (Deut 27; 15-26) remind their audiences of the risks associated with the coming liberation. The actual corruption affecting the pilgrims and the potential corruption affecting Israel happen in particular places where an altar is the focus. The *polis* and its well-being no longer depend on the rule or whim of a single demagogue, be it Agamemnon, Joseph, Pharaoh, or even Moses. The specification of a shrine in *Eumenides* and the instruction for the Schechem rituals, in their closely defined geographical locations lead respectively to the move to Athens and the Tent of Meeting as the formal and religious foci for the action of both. The establishment of religious and civic renewal for Athens and Israel has become contingent upon the inseparability of people and sacred places.

The first *peripeteia* in Deuteronomy occurs in the conditional anathematisation which follows immediately upon the establishment of the two sacred sites on Mount Gerizim and Mount Nebal (27;11-14). Becoming 'the people of the Lord' requires warnings of punishment before the assurances of blessing which follow in Deut 28. God's choice places heavy responsibilities on those chosen, and the curses (27;15-26) follow a clearly defined sequence which reveal the priorities of the nationhood Israel is about to acquire. Maintaining holiness through avoidance of idolatry is the primary requirement (27;15). The gloss, in the same verse, that an image 'abhorrent to the Lord' could be 'the work of an artisan' suggests that skilled workers or artists may present a challenge, or threat to divine supremacy.[226] The holiness of the family emanates

[225] Aeschylus 1998;xxvi: 'the stirring of the Furies is said to have panicked spectators in the first performance.'
[226] Cf. Plato, *The Republic. Trans*. Lee, H.P.D. (Harmondsworth. Penguin. 1966), 113ff. Part Three (Book Two): 'for it is always the poets who have always made up stories to tell men.' 'Which stories

from parents, avoiding in principle, risks of undermining the authority of age (27;16). Land is holy and its integrity precedes care for less fortunate members of society and the need for universal justice (27;17-19). Sexual taboos include oedipal relationships, bestiality and incest, but ignore adultery and homosexuality (27;20-23). The secret murder of neighbours and bribery for bloodshed suggests laws skewed primarily towards the maintenance of every individual's right to land ownership (27;24-5). The ritual becomes an antiphonal liturgy: 'Cursed be anyone…' 'Amen'. It sets in place a theocratic legal system based on an acknowledgement of God as donor of the land Israel is about to occupy and humans constituting its appointed government.

Eumenides' opening is centred on a generous and observant holiness, honouring creation and seeking good fortune at Delphi:

> The first prophetess was Gaia, Mother Earth
> I honour her, first of the gods.
> Then Themis, power of Law, her child
> Second prophetess to rule this shrine,
> Next. Phoebe, bright-shining peaceful one… (ll1-5)

Within thirty-five lines the discovery of religious desecration causes a *peripeteia* as dripping blood is discovered polluting the inner shrine. Through his 'olive branch tufted with wool as custom demands' (l44-5), the blood-stained suppliant is recognised. The priestess does not know whose blood was shed, or whether the suppliant Orestes, is aggressor or defender. For her the second discovery of intrusive beings, unrecognised as gods and barely recognisable as women, brings greater corruption: 'Are they women? Gorgons? Worse than gorgons…'(l48). They occupy the thrones of the inner shrine, trespassing on a forbidden sacred space. They pollute the space in their uncleanness:

> They snort, their breath is poison,
> Pus oozes from their eyes.' (ll53-4)

Such is their pollution that the action can only continue after Apollo is summoned to purify his shrine. He appears, with Hermes, but as he does the Priestess and pilgrims are eclipsed.[227] Their place is usurped by the Furies and

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do you mean, and what fault do you find in them?' 'The worst fault possible…' 'And what is that?' 'Misrepresenting gods and heroes…' See also pp.119; 121, *inter alia*.

[227] 'Pilgrims' are specified as characters in *Aeschylus* 1991.In F.A. Paley's translation: *Greek Drama*, ed. Hadas, M. (New York. Bantam. 1968) they are implied in the opening speech 'If there are any

Clytemnestra's ghost demanding vengeance. Apollo cannot allow his shrine to be desecrated and orders Orestes to flee to Athens. There issues of guilt, innocence and revenge, will be tackled later in Athene's temple, itself holy and associated with wisdom. Athens parallels the holy mountains in Deuteronomy as the place where the Furies and Orestes will 'find justice'.

Gods and humans; blurring the distinctions.

Deuteronomy 28; 1-14 is Moses' discourse on the outcomes of proper observation of the Schechem rituals once Israel arrives in Canaan. Through the rest of his story character distinctions become blurred. God's presence is unclear at the beginning, but he appears later.[228] Here Moses speaks for God but gives praise, encouragement and condemnation in his own words: 'Blessed shall you be…' repeated four times in (28; 3-6) is echoed with 'Cursed shall you be…' (28; 16-19) and the exact repetition of causes assumes a liturgical quality. This contrasts with the conditions and consequences set out in general terms, positively in vv1-2, and negatively in v15. The consequences of disobedience are set out at length in disturbing detail in vv20-68. If the blessings and curses are not God speaking as a character, Moses becomes a narrator and represents God to the people.

This passage and *Eumenides* ll66-92 show similarities between Moses and Apollo in their care for Israel and Orestes. Moses' assurance: 'The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated…' (28; 7) parallels Apollo's: 'I'll never fail you… No comfort for your enemies…'(ll65-6). Israel is promised that God will 'bless all your undertakings' (28;12), while Orestes, if he prays at Athene's temple, will:

> …find justice
> Winning speeches, fair means
> For your release from suffering. (ll83-5)

In *Eumenides* the spectrum between characters who seek merciful and good, or just but bad outcomes gives a context for Athene to become the final arbiter of

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deputies from the Hellenes, let them come forward…' (p. 56). This blurs distinctions between on-stage characters and audience as participants.

[228] 31;14: 'The Lord said to Moses', but God may be present from Ch 29: 'You stand today, all of you, assembled before the Lord your God' (29;10).

Orestes' guilt or innocence. His acquittal will provide the inspiration for uniting the conflicting forces of the old Furies and the new city. Apollo seeks mercy while Athene seeks *sophrosyne* as part of the Athenian transition to a better state. To cover a similar spectrum Moses, as the single character representing one God, must take on mantles similar to those of Clytemnestra's ghost and the Furies seeking a just vengeance for apostasy, as well as those of Athene and Apollo in preparing Israel for its emergence as a new and humane nation.[229]

In the next passage (28;14-57), Moses' recounts a second *peripeteia* wherein the four-fold curses are expanded in frightening detail: 'your corpses shall be food for every bird of the air' (28;26). 'You shall become an object of horror, a proverb, a byword among all the peoples where the Lord will lead you' (28;37). Until 28;44 Moses' description of threatened punishment fulfils the tasks assigned to him by God. It justifies Moses' forthcoming address to all Israel in 29;2 – 30;13 as the hero and saviour he has become. It makes clear the mutuality necessary for the fulfilment of God's choice. 28;45-57 disrupt this potential mutuality: 'Because you *did not* obey the Lord…' (28;45), and 'because you *did not* serve the Lord…'(28;47, my italics) promise inevitable punishment, 'not contingent on disobedience to the law.'[230] This judgement on Israel pushes Moses more towards Clytemnestra's and the Furies' position whose demand for merciless justice is based on Orestes' matricide. They have been cheated of their prey, now an apostate through his own action, and they promise equally violent retribution. Clytemnestra demands:

> Scorch him with the blood red blast of death
> With dragon fire. Run him, bring him down.' (ll139-40)

Apollo knows that without his intervention, Orestes' fate, with others who murder parents, will include:

> Eyes gouged, throats slit.
> Death sentences, castrations, severed limbs
> Stoning and crucifixion, nailed flesh… (ll186-8)

The resemblance between Moses and Clytemnestra is heightened by his declaration 'All these shall come upon you, pursuing and overtaking you until

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[229] So recalling the Golden Calf and Moses overriding God's call for mercy. Ex 32.
[230] Blenkinsopp, J in Brown *et al*. Eds. NJBC 1993.106.

you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord your God… therefore you shall serve your enemies' (28; 47). The story opened with a promise of divine election. Now Moses contradicts God's decision by outlining future catastrophes which are guaranteed because Moses purports to know that Israel will become apostate. Moses' excessive response to crises, and transgression against divine instructions becomes an issue. In his preamble to the ultimatum 'choose life so that you and your descendants may live' (30;19,) Moses is in danger of assuming 'a godlike comprehensiveness of knowledge that can encompass even God Himself.'[231]

Moses' blurring of roles and responsibilities as the sole mediator of God's covenant to Israel has parallels in *Eumenides*. Here inconsistencies between different characters, rather than the internal conflicts to which Moses is subjected, disrupt the course of the action. A theoretical hieratic polarity separates the human Orestes and Clytemnestra from the gods Apollo and Athene – children of Zeus, with Apollo the senior – and the Furies to whom Athene defers during Orestes' trial. The chthonic daughters of Nyx[232] are among the oldest goddesses and command respect. While distinctions between the forward and backward looking characters are clear, regardless of human or divine status, the exercise of divine power in achieving desired ends is limited. Apollo protects Orestes unconditionally:

> Fear not. I'll never fail you.
> Near or far, your guardian and protector (ll66-7)

but he can do no more than debate with the Furies.

> Leader Lord Apollo, your turn to listen now
> Murder's been done, and the guilt is yours
> Apollo How mine, explain yourself.
> Leader You told this criminal to take his mother's life.
> Apollo I told him to avenge his father's death (ll199-212)

The Furies meanwhile need the ghost of the human Clytemnestra to rouse them to action:

> Get up. Forget your weariness
> Forget not my disgrace.
> My anger lashes at you; feel it. (ll134-6)

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[231] Alter 1981.157.
[232] The Night. Aeschylus has the Furies as 'Night's undying daughters' (l416).

Once they find Orestes they exercise their choice not to wreak vengeance until guilt is proven. In another reversal, their leader seeks cooperation with Athene allowing the known fact of Clytemnestra's murder to be debated publicly:

Leader	He murdered his mother. That's enough	
Athene	There are two sides to this. He too must speak.	
Leader	He says nothing. Guilty. He dare not lie.	
Athene	Will you talk of Justice, but not see it done?	
Leader	Subtle words. Explain them.	
Athene	Justice lives in facts, not in words alone.	
Leader	Question him, then and judge the facts	
Athene	You entrust to me the right to judge?	
Leader	Daughter of Zeus, the right is yours	(ll427-436)

Their cooperation is short-lived and antipathy between the Furies and Athene returns after Orestes' acquittal:

> The conscience of the ages
> Dungeoned underground
> Like sordid filth.
> We choke, fury and pant… (ll836-9)

The reaction prompts Athene to exercise her power over the Furies: 'I forgive your anger…' (l848), and restate her near-equality with them '…Zeus gave me a certain wisdom too' (l850) but she is unable to take away their power to punish 'age-old sin.' (l932)

Chorus and audience as characters.

Deut 28 as the end of the extended prologue is analogous with the opening of *Eumenides* up to the scene change from Delphi to Athens at l235. It foresees a world of corruption, disease and reversion to oblivion in ownerless slavery where 'you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer'(28;68). Moses, with the elders, starts the prologue as positively as Apollo's priestess and pilgrims, but his warnings against idolatry lead to a presumption of Israel's future transgression. Recollections of the Golden Calf and Korah's revolt remain powerful influences on the final part of Moses' trilogy, as Agamemnon's and Clytemnestra's murders both affect the narrative of *Eumenides*.

Following the exhortations in 27;1-10 involving Moses, the elders and Levitical priests all addressing Israel, Moses is the only speaking character in the opening of the final part of the story and his multi-layered role continues. Similar layers are distributed across divine or ghostly characters in *Eumenides*. For the climactic decisions of both pieces to be effective, theatrically and theologically, the respective texts build the tensions influencing the outcomes of *Eumenides* and the tragedy of Moses through the use of heightened language employing violent imagery. They maintain these tensions in repeated linguistic reversals and their accompanying dialectics of good and evil or right and wrong as the impetus for physical action. The apparent chaos caused by Moses' ambivalence over care for, and condemnation of Israel and the threats he and God make of the extreme horror envisaged for Israel keep all those present, including an audience, alert for the next development.[233]

In his stinging denunciations of Israel, Moses almost casts his people in the mould of 'the infatuated crowd of servants of Dionysus' to which Friedrich Nietzsche refers in *The Birth of Tragedy*.[234] Through idolatry and its associated breaches of God's covenant, the Israelites 'imagine themselves as recreated geniuses of nature.'[235] In doing so, 'they have become the timeless servants of their god, living outside all spheres of society.'[236] As a backward looking nation rejecting God's offer of a new relationship, Israel here resembles the Furies who themselves remain committed to their own ancient values and primitive attitudes. For both groups their behaviour leads to the physical degeneracy described by Moses in Deuteronomy 28 and Apollo in *Eumenides*:

> Find a lion's cave greasy with blood
> And hunker there. You gangrene this holy place. Out!(ll194-5)

In promising extreme punishment for apostasy Moses shares attributes with the Furies by portraying Israel as deliberately transgressive as Orestes was. Both deserve condemnation to final oblivion. Conversely, as Apollo does, Moses has offered divine protection to an Israel ready to be as devout as Orestes,

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[233] The chaos and instability affecting whole communities in tragedies where judicial issues are central may be seen in e.g.: *Julius Caesar*, 1;i, 1;iii, 2;iii, 3;i &c. or *The Crucible,* Acts 1 & 3, where the actions of a wide range of people, as opposed to particular tragic characters, build up tension and fear.
[234] Nietzsche, F. Trans; Douglas Smith. *The Birth of Tragedy*. (Oxford. OUP.2000), 48.
[235] Ibid. p.48.
[236] Ibid. p.50.

prepared to uphold moral principles and embrace the new order. The narratives of Deuteronomy and *Eumenides* increasingly look beyond themselves into an uncertain future. The identification of Israelites and Athenians with chorus and spectators who may be part of that future will be a decisive factor in shaping that future.

Deuteronomy 29;2 is the beginning of the formal process in which Israel will make its choice whether to accept God's covenant Moses has introduced to bring in the future. It contains the most important *peripeteia* in the trilogy. It vindicates the confused and violent prologue as a means of foregrounding religious obedience and observance, over against apostasy, as central to Israel's, and all humanity's, moral and physical life. 'Moses summoned all Israel' (29;2) indicates a scene change, although its location is unclear and the action will move to the tent of meeting after the latest assembly. Here we have to assume only a break in time. The new scene does not include elders or priests as characters with Moses, but has a more detailed list of those who constitute 'all Israel' (see below p.126), so focuses attention upon two parties, Moses and Israel, seeking to cooperate and ratify a course of action authorised by God. This structure, theatrically, is close to that in *Eumenides* after the move to Athens. From her entrance at l397 Athene takes sole command of the action and seeks just resolutions to all the issues leading to the establishment of a new order.

The reversal in the new scene comes about through Moses' use of language in showing a change in his attitude towards Israel. His introduction in 29;2-9 allows for God keeping knowledge from them until now: 'to this day the Lord has not given you a mind to understand…' (29;4) but this is balanced by 'you may know that I am the Lord your God…'(29;6)[237] incorporating the people as one with God in advance of their commitment. This divine incorporation reminds his people of their journey and explains the miraculous endurance of their clothes and constant feeding. For the first time Moses refers to 'we', as together 'we defeated' Kings Sihon and Og, and 'we took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh' (29;8). In the preamble to Israel's decision, Moses ensures equality of esteem

[237] Moses' words 'I am the Lord…' if not inadvertent, (Blenkinsopp J. in Brown *et a*l. Eds. NJBC 1993.107) again raise the problem of Moses' tendency to speak as God.

and responsibility. The getting and giving of land is now shared and the 'we' who share includes God. Israel's affirmation as holy is stressed by the gentleness of Moses' encouragement: 'diligently observe the words of this covenant that you may succeed in everything you do'(29;9). The language of punishment and command does not entirely disappear, but it is mediated by God being 'unwilling to pardon' specific groups who think 'we are safe' (29;19-20) rather than predetermine universal guilt. Moses continues this conciliatory approach by further explanation: 'surely this commandment is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away…' (30;11).[238]

The *peripeteia* continues in the detail Moses gives of the onstage audience. What is about to take place includes the totality of Israel, and more. 'All the people' (27;1) become leaders, elders, men, children, women and aliens (29;10-11) all to be welcomed into 'the covenant of the Lord'(29;12). The new inclusivity is broadened by the accessibility of the covenant to 'those who are not here with us today' (29;15).[239] Moses reminds his audience that the promise of blessing is to Abraham's descendents, in the past and to come (29;13) and reinforces his own newly expressed assessment of 'all Israel' as holy. He reassures his hearers, characters onstage and audience, that some are too young to have experienced the forty-year journey but that 'the next generation, your children who rise up after you…' (29; 22) will share holiness. The scene allows the final part of the tragedy of Moses to stand independently of the previous two stories by promoting Israel as a 'chorus' of new characters, as *Eumenides* introduces Athenian citizens into Orestes' story.

As the passage proceeds, Moses emphasises the inherent goodness of his people by comparison with the idolatrous nature of 'the nations through which you passed'(29;16). It is no longer axiomatic that the whole nation will become apostate. Punishment for transgression will be contingent upon individuals, single families or tribes who 'may' turn to idolatry. In such an eventuality, God's punishment will be no less severe, but will be specific in its application: 'the Lord will single them out from all the tribes of Israel for calamity…'(29;21). Moses has modified the threats of the prologue into a legal code more applicable

[238] Cf. Mt 11;30.
[239] Cf. Jn 10;16. Heb 3.

to a new, more progressive and democratically supported regime. He ends the first part of the scene by an assertion that he is but one member of Israel and that 'the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to *us and to our children* for ever to observe all the words of the law' (29;29 my italics).

The change in Moses' words and relationship to the characters with him approximates to Athene's conduct of the second scene of *Eumenides*. In preparation for the dual tasks of assessing Orestes' guilt and establishing a new dispensation for Athens, Athene must re-establish the context of the events in Argos for her Athenian audience. As one whose 'justice [is] unprejudiced on either side' (l414), her choice is to show equal respect to all parties.[240] The sequence from ll396-565 recapitulates Clytemnestra's murder from the differing standpoints of the Furies and Orestes. At ll468-9 Orestes refers a final decision to Athene, whose divine authority will administer justice. Athene refuses the task: 'No one person can judge this case'(l470), preferring to delegate power and 'choose from all my citizens/True jurors to render judgement true (ll488-9), so beginning to align herself with her people as Moses does in inviting Israel to decide with him its future course (Deut 29;10-16).

The response from the Furies to Athene's appeal for inclusivity signals their own *peripeteia*. Anger and the necessity for retribution after the murder of parents persist:

> A mother killed, and they call it just.
> Now guilt is innocence;
> A murderer goes free (ll492-4)

and in such an event, they warn:

> Anarchy will come, mob rule
> Or tyranny.
> Refuse them both. (ll526-9)

However, there is a new strand in their argument. For the first time the Furies speak of *sophrosyne* and the dangers of apostasy. The gods 'smile on moderation' (l532), and:

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[240] In contrast to Apollo who consistently favours Orestes. See ll575ff.

> Forget the gods, you'll fall
> Only the pure in heart
> Can find true joy
> Happiness beloved of all
> Once and for all I say
> Pay due respect to righteousness
> Race for riches
> Kick us aside
> And punishment will surely come (ll534-541)

The threat is elaborated in Mosaic terms:

> Down they go
> Who banked on their own immunity
> …..
> Wrecked on justice's reef
> Unwept and unremembered (ll558-9 & 563-4)

The parallel with the warning in Deut 29;17-28, that for those 'thinking in their hearts "we are safe even though we go our own stubborn ways" … the Lord will blot out their names from under heaven.' (29;19 & 20) is striking, as is Athene's response. She offers no comment so accepts unreservedly the Furies' judgement on those who 'forget the gods'. The contextualising sequence concludes with a restatement of the appointment of a human court in partnership with Athene: '*we* constitute a court' (l570, my italics) to apply laws 'forever'.

Opportunities for choice

Deuteronomy 30 constitutes the second part of the scene leading to Moses' challenge for Israel to 'choose life'. (30;19) The ameliorative tone of Deut 29 continues and is heightened: 'When all these things have happened to you… then the lord your God will restore your fortunes…'(30;1-3). God will embrace his people: 'moreover, the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul in order that you might live' (30;6). The change to divine approbation is extended in the following verse as Israel's confidently predicted breaches of God's law are now forgotten. Blame is ascribed to foreign exploitative forces and 'the Lord your God will put all these

curses[241] on your enemies and on the adversaries who took advantage of you. Then you shall again obey the Lord' (30;7).

The formula 'then/when you shall… and the Lord will…' removes the conditionality of the earlier 'if you will' or 'if you do not'[242] and gives a positive foundation for God's wooing of Israel in the prediction of the peoples' fruitfulness and God's delight at being its sole cause (30;9-10).[243] The new physical intimacy envisaged between Israel and God is in stark contrast to the punishments promised earlier. The proximity Moses foresees is expounded further, and radically, in his final preamble to the question Israel must answer. Building on the images of courtship and wooing in 30;6-10, Moses offers a new appeal. The first introductions to the covenant compelled religious observance (27;1-26) or assumed apostasy and consequent guilt (28 & 29). Now Moses seeks cooperation with Israel in a task that 'is not too hard for you.' The covenant will collapse any distance between God and Israel: 'it [God's commandment] is not in heaven… neither is it beyond the sea'(30;12-13). Participation in life with God is not demanding and Moses comes close to by-passing the need for religious rituals and circumventing divine teleology[244] by suggesting that fulfilling the covenant is a task shared equally between both parties: 'the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe'(30;14).[245] Obedience remains a prerequisite for the covenantal relationship, but it has become obedience inspired by love: 'if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God… by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways and observing his commandments… you shall live and become numerous' (30;16). Now disobedience and its punishment will be the result of a rejection of love: 'if your heart turns away' you will be 'led astray to bow down to other gods' (30;17). The softening of this message is carried into the revision of the consequences of disobedience. Moses continues to promise retribution, but it is limited to his present audience: 'you shall not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter'(30;18). The threat of oblivion for the nation, if not entirely vitiated, is

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[241] Referred to in Deut 28;16ff.
[242] As at 28;1 & 58 *inter alia.*
[243] It may also serve as a warning against Canaanite fertility gods. See Brown, R. *The Message of Deuteronomy*. (Nottingham. Inter Varsity Press. 1993), 281.
[244]Cf. *Summa Theologica*.1948. Part 1 q.19.
[245] Cf. Mt,3;2. Mk 1;15.

diminished since Moses excludes children and descendants from the latest warning.[246]

By making the inclusivity of his climactic addresses explicit Moses individuates his audience more obviously than hitherto. This individuation is developed implicitly by the use of anatomical terms 'heart', 'circumcise', 'body' and 'mouth', which apply to each of the elders, men, children women and aliens and metonymically to Israel as a whole. It is underscored by the description of God's desire for a loving and physical relationship with his people. The answer to the question Moses will pose can create the relationship God offers and can guarantee religious and territorial freedom coupled with 'delight' in the relationship shared between God and people together.[247]

Moses has prepared Israel for the theatrical climax which follows in his challenge: 'I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendents may live loving the Lord your God, obeying him and holding fast to him' (30;19-20). The moment that Israel accepts the covenant will be the pivotal point between being a fugitive nation, depending for survival upon Moses as God's surrogate and mouthpiece, and one in an enduring and equal relationship with God. Its preamble is one of continuous reversals as it explores Moses' capacity to use a wide variety of verbal skills to project different aspects of his and God's characters.[248] It functions as an invitation to an intimate relationship with God, and as a commitment to a legal contract by calling witnesses. The calling of witnesses echoes 4;26-249 but allows a more positive outcome. The association of love, before obedience, and 'holding fast to him' ensures that the individual and physical quality of the covenant is held in creative and equivalent tension with its corporate legal status.

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[246] See 28;18, 32ff.
[247] Cf. Jesus' plea in Mt 23;37 & Lk 13;34.
[248] Moses acquires a range of linguistic styles. Deut 27 is formal religious language; 28 moves from formal to polemic language; 29-30 moderate the language in preparation for the call to relationship. He fulfils God's promise 'I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak' (Ex 4;12). Cf. Arnold Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*. 'He is the leader, the figurehead, but he can't speak to the people.' Stuart Jefferies on the Welsh National Opera. The Guardian 15th May 2014.
[249] 'I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that you will soon utterly perish…'

Israel's response to the call to choose life is another striking *peripeteia*. Readers or audience might expect an answer to the eloquent appeal Moses makes.[250] There is none. Neither here, nor after the recital of the *Song of Moses* do the assembled people give any reply, in spite of Moses: 'this is no trifling matter, but rather your very life' (32;47). The silence of those around Moses is deeply ironic. Only after Moses' death do we learn that his appeal was successful. Theatrically, the presence of all Israel with Moses at the moment of decision must have an effect. The text of Deuteronomy 30 gives no indication of how the people react, so, in principle, Moses himself does not know whether he has been successful in his appointed task. However, in a performance characters influence events in that performance, even when they are not required to speak or move. In *The Empty Space* Peter Brook gives the fundamental conditions for any performance: 'I can take any space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.'[251] All Israel has been summoned to enter a space, therefore Moses, and an audience, are justified in assuming a response which will influence their interpretation of events. As performance, such responses cannot be absolutely predetermined and the presence of vital but non-speaking characters profoundly destabilises the text. If Israel appears not to accept the choice of life and its blessings, Moses' isolation and failure is radically increased. By presenting the choice, Moses risks his own and God's rejection.

In *Eumenides*, Orestes knows neither the choice Athene offers Athens, nor its result, but promises support to Athens following his acquittal (ll754-777). Moses and Orestes have both broken taboos and both end their stories with their ancestors, in hope for their people.[252] Not knowing outcomes to which heroes are committed is a feature of other tragedies. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Polynices receives Oedipus' fatal curse with a qualified acceptance 'death, if that's my fate' and 'whether we live or die, who knows?'[253] In *King Lear* Cordelia's death is not made explicit so must remain in the interpretation of actors and audiences at each performance. Lear's final words 'Look on her lips, look there, look

[250] As happens in Josh 24;16: 'Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods.'
[251] Brook 1972;11.
[252] Deut 31;16, 32;50-1. *Eumenides* l757-8.
[253] Sophocles 1984;369

there'[254] remain ambiguous. An audience may bring to a performance their own belief, or knowledge, of her death, but that belief or knowledge decided in advance is an imposition on Shakespeare's text.

Heroes, gods and decisions.

Moses changes the emphasis of his address to Israel at the start of Deuteronomy 31. The directness of the plea for life remains, but is solipsistic in showing his infirmity and passes responsibility for the end of the journey back to God: 'I am now one hundred and twenty years old. I am no longer able to get about and the Lord has told me "you shall not cross over this Jordan"' (31;2). This is another *peripeteia* as Moses' voluntarily removes himself from the centre of the action. As in the first address (29;5), the solipsism is short-lived but here makes God's intervention contingent upon Moses' self-vindication. He gives no indication of any cause, other than age, why God has forbidden him entry to Canaan. The possibility that Israel's silence at 30;20 is non-committal may be a contributory factor to his insistence that God must now carry out Moses' orders and destroy 'these nations before you' (31;3). God 'will give them over to you and you shall deal with them in full accord with the command *I* have given you' (31;5 my italics). Moses continues to assert his dominance in his introduction of Joshua as the next leader. 'Joshua will cross over with you as the Lord has promised' (31;3) grants Joshua a divine imprimatur, but one authorised by Moses following his own assurances and guarantee of God's prior protection of Israel. There is no acknowledgement that God may have made the initial choice of Joshua as successor.[255] Instead, Moses gives Joshua, the new leader, the same exhortations as he does to all Israel. 'Be strong and bold… it is the Lord who goes before you; he will not fail or forsake you' (31;6, to Israel, 31;7-8 to Joshua).

Deuteronomy 31;9-13 starts a new scene with a smaller group, the 'sons of Levi' (31;9-13) as Moses drafts the law and fixes its recounting every seven years. This is the final private act of his leadership and becomes subversive because it circumvents God. Moses gives his own plan for the implementation of the covenant with its promise of new life. It will be rehearsed in sabbatical years

[254] *King Lear* V;ii, l312. (London. OUP.1966)
[255] Num 27;16-23.

at Succoth 'in the scheduled year of remission, during the festival of booths' (31;10). It will be at the height of renewal and celebration, and will be inclusive: 'men, women and children as well as the aliens' (31;12). Uniquely in this final part of the trilogy, Moses makes no reference to Israel's propensity to transgression. Apostasy and any punishment are no longer predicted as inevitable, reinforcing Moses' care for Israel and desire for God's will to be implemented. This prescriptive address on Israel's future is another transgressive act. The earlier addresses in were authorised by God; 27;1b -28;68 continued the extended recounting of history and law introduced at 5;1: 'the Lord spoke with you [Israel] face to face at the mountain… and he said…' (5;4 & 5). The second address began: 'These are the words of the covenant that the Lord commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in the land of Moab…' (29;1). Now there is no divine authorisation. Moses unequivocally involves God as central to the rules for future observance: 'when all Israel comes to appear before God…' (31;11). The rules are structured to maintain the nation's right relationship with God: 'that they may hear and learn to fear the lord your God and observe diligently all the words of his law' (31;12). They are, however, given by Moses, whose task has been fulfilled, whatever its outcome. God has decreed that Moses will not live but in his own eyes Moses may consider himself vindicated. Moses has commissioned Joshua and now gives Israel his own valedictory promise. The result of Moses' consistency in usurping God's position is to bring God into the action, as a speaking character for the first time. Moses may be permitted to behave as he does: 'abandoned to his own unfathomable freedom, made in God's likeness,' [256] but in the event of an undue exercise of such freedom God needs to appear on stage.

God's intervention at 31;14 is his first appearance in Deuteronomy and raises questions for a hermeneutic of performance. Up to this point there is a dilemma underlying a theatrical reading of the story. Moses works for Israel as God's servant, but God is absent during the climactic scenes. Moses proceeds to upstage God, and operate beyond the remit he was given. I have discussed the impossibility of characters being 'offstage' yet involved in performance,[257] so God's absence permits Moses to dominate the greater part of the story. God

[256] Alter 1981;115.
[257] See above, Ch. 1. Also: Levy 2002;253-5.

suddenly appears after Israel has been offered life, after Joshua has been commissioned and after Moses has altered the terms of the covenantal contract. This, and God's minatory first words: 'Your time to die is near' (31;14), strongly suggest that Moses has exceeded his authority and God needs to take remedial action.

The scene break at 31;14b leaves God, Moses and Joshua alone, making 31;15-23 the only sequence that should not have a chorus. God's reiteration of Moses' impending death followed by the threat to reject Israel predicated on their adulterous apostasy (31;16-22) shows God determined to re-establish a superiority which has been weakened through his absence. This re-establishment of God's authority gives shape to the most private scene in the story. After the reminders of Moses' mortality, which do no more than endorse what Moses has announced, and the short polemical attack on Israel (31;16a), God moderates his demands of his people. While he 'will forsake them and hide my face' (31;17a) as a suitable response to a faithless lover,[258] at the same time 'they will become easy prey'(31;17b), because it is God who has given them the opportunity to eat and 'grow fat' (31;20). God vindicates his own actions through his awareness that 'in that day they will say "Have not these troubles come upon us because our God is not in our midst?"' (31;17c). God's solution is to write a song which 'will confront them as a witness, because it will not be lost from the mouths of their descendants' (31;21b). God's song will be a constant reminder of his presence with Israel and parallel Moses own writing of the law for regular repetition.

Through his speech, God allows Israel to become vulnerable as 'terrible troubles come upon them' (31;21a) and he knows 'what they are inclined to do'(31;21b). The opening of God's speech suggested: 'they will begin to prostitute themselves' and 'will forsake me…'(31;16). Now he accepts that as 'easy prey' Israel may be susceptible both to error and oppression rather than committed to apostasy. This susceptibility will be due to God's own generosity in bringing his people to Canaan. A song to show God as the provider of their good fortune may be more in keeping with maintaining his passion for a mutual loving

[258]See 30;9-10.

relationship. God cannot easily recite the song without some degree of self-revelation, so Moses is given a final charge and at least partial divine vindication.

Vindications

At the end of *Eumenides* Athene offers Athens the choice of a new life. To achieve this Orestes, like Moses, must be vindicated and Athene, also like Moses, must persuade her people of the need to accept that:

> Time will bring my citizens
> A glorious tide of fame (ll854-5)

As the instigator, through his transgression, of the events leading to the establishment of the Athenian court which will be 'a watchdog that mortals may sleep in peace' (l707), Orestes has been supported by Apollo. In this support Orestes declares his first vindication:

> In all this my accomplice
> Was Apollo. He threatened me
> Such torments, if faint heart flinched
> From what the murderers deserved. (ll466-8)

Apollo sends Orestes to Athene '…that his loyalty/Might provide true allies for your city' (ll670-1). Athene must accept Orestes' self-vindication and ensure that it is endorsed by his acquittal. Without it there will be no opportunity for a just and humane solution to a 'crisis in which [a] privately generated vendetta, fuelled by the chthonic Furies threatened to destroy Athens.'[259] Like Moses, Orestes' vindication is both his own and divinely given.

Athene's task, once she has ascertained the identities and reasons for Orestes' and the Furies' presence at her shrine, is to secure unanimous agreement for a new order. The task is similar to that of Moses at the assembly of all Israel, but where Moses is chosen to establish God's elect as a new nation through the offer of life and blessings, Athene is coerced into democratisation by Orestes' matricide and the support he receives from Apollo which brings them and the Furies to Athens. Once there, if the Furies lose out to Orestes, Athene knows:

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[259] Hesk, J. in McDonald and Walton 2007;85.

> Whether I let them stay or drive them out
> They bring misery and pain
> I've no choice, and still I have to choose. (ll477-480)

Her choice is consistent with her opening dialogue between the Furies and Orestes. In seeking to make Athens 'the home of justice' (l685), she cannot deny either party their rights.

Athene is careful not to allow debate on the implementation of the new order until the judicial issues which initiated the play are dealt with. This punctiliousness means that *Eumenides* divides into two almost equal halves,[260] with corresponding progressions from disruption to possible resolution in each. The disruption in the first part caused by religious corruption has already been discussed in relation to the Moses story. In the second part, Athene's speech to the jury (ll681-710) and the ballot for Orestes' life (ll711-753) correspond to Deut 27-28 as they rehearse the legal and religious foundation on which the future must rest. Athens must be 'the citadel of Reverence and her cousin Fear'(l692) before all else.

In the trial leading to the secret ballot for Orestes' life, Apollo and the Furies can offer only advocacy as the final decision rests with the human Athenian jurors. In the event, their simple majority must have been to vindicate the Furies and condemn the matricide as Athene chooses to declare of her divine vote 'I cast it for Orestes'(l734) which makes 'equal votes on either side/Orestes is acquitted' (ll752-3). For almost 800 out of 1050 lines *Eumenides* presents an unstable world where divine power, Olympian or more primitive, is undermined or voluntarily relinquished and human choice is valued, but manipulated as the struggle between modernisers and traditionalists is resolved. As in Moses' story, divine intervention is necessary to stabilise a society which is about to choose new ways of being. Through ensuring Orestes' acquittal Athene can guarantee the conditions for change, though not the change itself.

Following the acquittal, the rest of the play bears comparison with Deut 29-34, with one exception. Orestes leaves Athens before Athene's offer of new

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[260] The first half culminates with the entrance of the Jury: ll1-567.The second half - trial and establishment of new order covers ll568-1047.

life to Athens. Athene's task is equivalent to that of Moses, but with the Furies as chorus making contributions vital to the play's outcome. Their presence allows the argument for a new Athens to be a dialectic seeking to balance 'ancient rights and modern systems'[261] in which the Furies are treated with the same 'humane thoroughness'[262] as that given to all of Aeschylus' characters.

In the scene following immediately after Orestes' acquittal, the Furies and Athene draw different conclusions. As the Furies express rage:

> Justice! What's left for us
> The world's fools?
> Night's daughters
> Are come to this.
> Humiliation, ruin. (ll789-93)

Athene counters with:

> Be calm. Your anger
> Has no place poisoning the land
> With fruitless fury, blasting crops…
> In justice I promise you
> A temple here, in land inalienably yours. (ll800-5)

The Furies anger at their abandonment following the trial and Athene's answer parallel Moses' reminder to Israel of the punishment meted to Egypt by God: 'you have seen all that the Lord did… in the land of Egypt' (29;2). He ascribes Israel's inclination to return there during the subsequent years in the wilderness as due to their ignorance of what was to come: 'to this day, the Lord has not given you a mind to understand' (29;4). Moses defines his appeal to Israel as God's covenant for the future and Athene frames her argument as representing the will of Zeus, at first explaining:

> the decision came
> from Zeus. A clear command. It must be so.
> (ll797/8),

Then, uniting herself and the Furies as subject to his power

> You cried for justice:
> *We agree on that*, at one in Zeus. (ll823-4 my italics)

[261] Aeschylus 1998;xxvii.
[262] Ibid. xxvii.

In spite of Athene's assurances of forgiveness and acknowledgement of their divinity, the argument continues until the Furies pejoratively invoke the 'new gods' for the final time:

> …New gods
> Usurping gods
> Have raped our ancient powers
> And with their tricks
> Made us a nothing (ll843-847)

Athene counters that 'reason too has its divinity' in her question: 'how can my mortals exile you?' (l883). This follows her assessment that:

> time will bring my citizens
> a glorious tide of fame. And you
> …
> Will know men and women more generous
> with tribute than all the world could be (ll854-8)

and

> take what I offer; blessings and honour
> given and received… (ll867-8)

Athene includes the Furies among those who have been given knowledge of what will come, as Moses' assured Israel that 'the revealed things belong to us'(29;29) with its attendant promise of good fortune in Deut 30, as humans and God become integrated as one holy community.

From this point the conflict between Athene and the Furies abates as both parties consider how a peaceful and blessed future may come about. The answer to Athene's offer follows her 'persuasion' and leads the Furies to accept life, 'ruled by Zeus omnipotent' (l914). The verbal acquiescence of all the characters is made explicit and Athens' future allows for a shared and confident resolution:

> Peace now, forever peace
> Between our city and its guests.
> Zeus and fate are reconciled.
> Cry joy, echo this our song. (ll1044-1048)

This confidence is less secure in Moses' story as the offer of life has not received the universal acceptance of that in *Eumenides*. Athene's dialogue with the Furies enables her to achieve her preferred result. Moses awaits a mandate from those he seeks to persuade.

Tragic endings and future hopes.

Moses' and God's final attempt to persuade the whole assembly of Israel to accept life comes in the *Song of Moses* (32;1-43). The song reinstates God as the source and focus of Israel's new life, but only after Moses has made his prior position as God's amanuensis clear. Before the recital Moses reasserts God's warnings against Israel: 'I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly turning away from the way that I have commanded you' (31;29). God has reminded Moses of the consequences of apostasy following his death: 'soon you will lie down with your ancestors. Then this people will begin to prostitute themselves to the foreign gods in their midst…' (31;16). Moses gives the Levites the same reminder but persists in claiming his own position as leader: 'I know well how rebellious you are…' (31;27). This duality, allowing God and Moses prominence, is reflected in the text of the song. The song's provenance, dictated by God to be read by Moses: 'write this song and teach it to the Israelites; put it in their mouths in order that this song may be a witness for me against the Israelites' (31;19) is a generous acknowledgement of all Moses has achieved. It expands Moses' own instructions without undermining him and puts almost half of it into Moses' own mouth.[263] God continues to allow Moses the 'freedom to struggle with his destiny through his own words and acts.'[264]

The location for the *Song of Moses* appears to move from the tent of meeting (31;14), to that where Israel was invited to choose life or death: 'Moses came and recited all the word of this song in the hearing of the people' (32;44).[265] Moses commands the presence of the Levites (31;25), then 'the elders of your tribes and your officials' (31;28) and finally 'all Israel' for the performance of the song. This theatrical structure mirrors that in the scene where the choice was offered. The progression from the intimate and instructional scene between three characters to one with the whole cast gives an appropriately substantial context for the song and restores the chorus as a participant in the action.

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[263] 32;1-19a.
[264] Alter 1981;87.
[265] If it is not, the inference would be that Moses reads the song twice.

The first half of the song presents Moses as God's advocate and Israel's conscience. He does not credit God with the song's authorship and speaks in his own voice: 'I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to the Lord' (32;3). He distances himself from the people by his reversion to 'you' and 'your' contrasting with his recent inclusion of Israel with himself and God: 'do you thus repay the Lord, O foolish and senseless people?' (32;6). 'You drank fine wine… you grew fat bloated and gorged' (32;14,15). He describes them as 'his [God's] degenerate children' (32;5). In radically distancing himself from Israel, Moses continues to promote God as their sole protector and parent through the journey, in the form of an eagle which 'hovers over its young, as it spreads its wings, takes them up and bears them aloft…' (32;11), sustaining and feeding them. In denying any personal responsibility for Israel's safety Moses retracts some of his more overweening claims and directives.[266] He distances himself from any responsibility for Israel's apostasy '*He* [Jacob – Israel] abandoned God who made him, and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation' (32;15 my italics). The verbal castigation Moses gives Israel is carefully structured to lead to a climax: 'you were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, you forgot the God who gave you birth' (32;18). As one set apart, Moses achieves a measure of exemplary, but deeply ironic, *sophrosyne* before God and all Israel, which allows God in person to respond to Israel's indictment. Moses' *hubris* at Meribah – striking the rock of salvation, which condemned him but saved Israel – is omitted from the song.[267]

The second half of the song produces further revelations as God presents himself as a rejected parent: 'they are a perverse generation, children in whom there is no faithfulness' (32;20), and lover: 'they made me jealous with what is no god'(32;21). Now God is the speaker and although Moses recites the song, he does so as an appointed surrogate and performer akin to the Brechtian 'demonstrator'.[268] The sequence from 32;20-42 is reminiscent of the punishments threatened in 28;20-68, but more artfully constructed. Since Israel has 'no God' its oppressors will be 'no people', real enough only to be 'foolish' in not accepting God as supreme (32;21). For the first time, God indicates his

[266] e.g.: Ex 32;25-9, Deut 29;5-9, 31;9-13.
[267] This omission occurs in the Psalms which recount the story. See, esp. Ps. 106;32, 'They angered the lord at Meribah, and it went ill with Moses on that account.' Also, Pss. 66, 76, 78, 81, 105, 106, 135, 136.
[268] See below Ch. 7 on a Brechtian reading of the Eucharist.

intention to manipulate a hostile and 'foolish nation' to restore Israel's obedience by force, but at the expected climax:

> In the street the sword shall bereave
> And in the chambers terror
> For young man and woman alike
> Nursing child and old grey head (32;25)

God undermines his own plan, and gives Moses his most public vindication.

God now speaks in a past tense and makes clear that Israel's punishment was provisional. To use other human agencies to destroy Israel threatens God's position of supremacy and he changes his mind again:

> I thought to scatter them
> and blot out the memory of them from humankind:
> but I feared provocation by the enemy
> for their adversaries might misunderstand
> and say "our hand is triumphant:
> it was not the Lord who did all this." (32;26-7)

God cannot allow himself to be upstaged by allowing 'no nation' to claim credit for punishment it did not initiate. Moses has twice challenged God and saved Israel. He deflected God's determination to wipe out Israel over the golden calf: 'why should the Egyptians say "it was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains?" Do not bring disaster on your people' (Ex 32;11-12). In the build-up to rebellion when Moses' life was in danger, he accused God of impotence: 'if you kill this people all at one time, then the nations who have heard about you will say, "It is because the Lord was not able to bring his people into the land… that he slaughtered them"' (Num,14;15-16). In seeking to remain blameless God acknowledges his debts to Moses in an act of great generosity. Israel may not be aware of the significance of God's admission of weakness, and his exoneration of Moses, but an audience, and especially, Moses, will.

God concludes his vindication of Moses by turning his fury back against 'a nation void of sense' (32;28) which will oppress Israel. The violence of the language remains, with its overtones of sexual immorality 'their vine comes from the vinestock of Sodom…' (32;32), but it is set against God's compassion for 'his servants' who 'the Lord will vindicate'(32;36). Theatrically, the song is God's great *peripeteia* in which he and Israel become united against common adversaries. Its final verse, 32;43, in Moses' voice, seeks to achieve a greater

degree of *anagnorisis* for Israel as God and Moses share the vision of the new future. God 'will avenge the blood of his people… will repay those who hate him, and cleanse the land for his people' (32;43).

Moses' own valediction which follows God's song, reverses the pattern of previous scenes in the final part of the trilogy by placing God as the defender of those who are now his 'people' or 'servants' or 'children' and taking up arms against Israel's oppressor.[269] The finality of the song with its commitment to Israel's protection echoes the guarantees made to Athens by the Furies.[270] Unlike the Athenians, Israel must still make its choice as Moses again urges 'take to heart all the words I am giving… This is no trifling matter for you, but rather your very life' (32;46-7). The story of Moses continues 'to reflect a sense of the unknowable and the unforeseeable in human nature'[271] as well as in the divine nature. In the new society the proviso for divine control will remain and although God's threat 'I will make them jealous with what is no people, provoke them with a foolish nation' (32;21), has been rescinded once (32;27), like Athene's warning to her citizens, it is not permanently repealed.

God reappears to impose control immediately after the *Song of Moses* and reiterates his judgement of Moses' transgression. At Meribah the command was to speak to the rock. Instead, 'Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water came out abundantly' (Num 20;11). Theologically or theatrically, there is no suggestion that life under the new covenant will allow pardon for past wrongs which undermine divine authority: 'What matters is the audience [and Israel's] response to the narrative [of the *Song of Moses*], not the fortunes or misfortunes of a protagonist as an end in themselves.'[272] To maintain the momentum generated by the recapitulation of Moses' tragic wrongdoing and its results, there is a temptation to follow Joseph Blenkinsopp's editorial comment on Moses' blessing of Israel in Deut 33.[273] This, he suggests, is 'a late insertion [which] interrupts the narrative continuity' of the impending death scene on Mount Nebo so, as part of a dramatic narrative, could be omitted. To

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[269] Cf. God's action at the Sea of Reeds, at the beginning of the narrative (Ex 15).
[270] *Eumenides* ll938-1020.
[271] Alter 1981;127.
[272] Eagleton 2003;78.
[273] Blenkinsopp, J, in Brown *et al.* Eds. NJBC. 1993;108.

do so risks losing Moses' final assertion of his own belief in the rightness of his and God's efforts for the people undertaken 'as a free agent created in God's image.'[274]

Moses gives his final valediction and blessing a theological frame. It begins: 'The Lord came from Sinai' (33;2) and finishes: 'there is none like God…' (33;26). Between these points he gives his own blessing seven times[275] and invokes God's blessing five times.[276] This determination to make public his acceptance of God's supremacy while appropriating his own role within the divine plan stands alongside Orestes' valediction to Athens, albeit in far greater detail. Moses relates his blessings to the places each tribe will occupy: 'blessed by the Lord be his land' (33;13), 'possess the west and the south' (33;23).[277] Orestes offers thanks to Athene who 'saved my house' (l754), literally, as well as the 'house of Atreus'. In giving a blessing Orestes also gives his valediction a theological context:

> ...those who honour my oath, stay loyal
> To this city and people, in peace or war
> I'll bless them with generous prosperity. (ll773-4)

Moses and Orestes approach their respective departures leaving God at the centre of both their worlds, as saviour and protector. For Orestes:

> May all your enemies be confounded
> God bless you and give you victory (ll776-7)

and Moses

> Happy are you O Israel! Who is like you,
> A people saved by the Lord
> the shield of your help
> and the sword of your triumph
> Your enemies shall come fawning to you
> and you shall tread on their backs. (33;29)

For both heroes, their blessings can be given only in hope for a better future. Orestes cannot erase his transgression in spite of acquittal. Moses is vindicated by God, but immediately reminded that the consequence of his transgression is his imminent death.

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[274] Alter 1981;126.
[275] To Reuben, Zebulun, Issachar, Gad, Dan, Naphthali and Asher.
[276] On Judah, Levi, Benjamin, Joseph and Manasseh.
[277] See also 33;7, 12, 19, 20, 22.

The closing scenes of the tragedy move first to Pisgah with God and Moses. His final encounter with God echoes the first at Midian. God reverts to being the initiator of action and dialogue: 'the Lord showed him the whole land…' (34;1) implies action, before he says 'This is the land of which I swore… I will give it to your descendents…' (34;4). Moses' response may not be articulated, but we may take Howard Jacobson's assessment that playing Moses in the *Exagoge*: 'the actor would have indicated appropriate reactions through his movements, gestures and perhaps expressions.'[278] If the RSV or NIV rendition of 34;6 is followed, God's involvement becomes more intense: 'he [God] buried him [Moses] in Moab... but to this day no one knows where his grave is.'[279] Moses vindication and acceptance by God become complete. God humbles himself and in the kenotic action of burying Moses, allows parity between them which acknowledges all Moses has attempted for Israel and 'that the authoritative status of the Mosaic voice is *almost* indistinguishable from that of the voice of God.'[280] In the most intimate scene in the narrative, an audience gains access to knowledge hidden from the Israelites as God and Moses are reconciled.

In their final appearances Moses and Orestes share the confidence of their gods. Orestes may be expendable after the trial and his end remain a mystery, but he continues to be accompanied by Apollo. He has disrupted his own, and Athenian, society to the extent that Athene must establish a 'mode of peaceful, juridical dispute-settlement sanctioned by state authority and democracy,'[281] for the city's protection, supervised by herself and the Furies. Orestes' achieves his own *anagnorisis* after his acquittal and may bless Athens, but will not know its destiny. Moses is more fortunate. God stays with him, unto and beyond death. He is mourned, honoured and acknowledged as one 'whom the Lord knew face to face' (34;10). Posthumously he receives vindication from his people as they choose life: 'the Israelites obeyed him' [Joshua] but they did so 'doing as the Lord had commanded Moses'(34;9). From the *Song of Moses* to the end of Deuteronomy there is nothing to suggest that the hope and

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[278] Jacobson 1983;105.
[279] Cf. NRSV Moses 'was buried in the land of Moab.' (34;6).
[280] Polzin, R. *Deuteronomy*, in Alter, R. & Kermode, F. *The Literary Guide to the Bible*. (London, Collins. 1987), 96.
[281] Hesk, J. in Walton & MacDonald, 2007;74.

expectation contained in Moses' commands and the final *anagnorisis* of Israel's choice will not continue.

Theatricality in Deuteronomy and *Eumenides*.

The theological similarities between Israel and Athens in their trajectories towards a new order, based on proper reverence towards the gods allied with a humane and egalitarian application of justice, are not reflected in the theatricality of their main characters. In *Eumenides* there are five characters, or choruses simultaneously involved in bringing in the new order. Athene does not relinquish her divine status, despite aligning herself closely with humanity but at the finale any differences between human and divine characters are almost subsumed in celebration.[282] By contrast, the Furies maintain their distance from humanity as the divine guardians of all parents and 'the stranger within your gates' (l549), and become more god-like as the play progresses and Athene affirms their status. Orestes, whose previous transgression precipitated the current tragedy remains human, unchanged and vulnerable and falls under Athene's direct protection. Apollo's power is reduced but he remains apart as a god and has no control over the verdict given in large part, by humans. The final characters are the Athenians who gradually make up a silent group, critically involved in determining the outcome of the trilogy, but having no words until the last chorus.

In Deuteronomy two speaking characters and a silent chorus share a range of features as broad as those in *Eumenides*. God enters the action only to reassert supreme authority, and only in scenes involving dialogue between two or three characters. Moses' character becomes multi-layered as he assumes roles equivalent to different characters in *Eumenides*.

Moses is God's surrogate who deepens the divine relationship with his people by speaking God's words. In this he mirrors the role of Athene. As Israel's human leader, Moses will inform them that God has denied him entry into Canaan,[283] so maintaining his role as the tragic hero. This places him alongside

[282] Cf. Gal 3;28.
[283] Deut 31;2.

Orestes as a transgressive figure. He remains the divinely appointed leader of Israel, who inflicts his own punishment. This gives him qualities in common with the Furies whose authority permits them to punish Orestes. Moses commissions Joshua 'publicly marking him out as the one for whom special prayer was being offered,'[284] so aligning himself with Apollo supporting Orestes. All Israel and the Levites stand as the silent choruses, whose assent to Moses' proposition of God's covenant, and protection of it, is as vital as the Athenians' assent to Athene's offer of a just future.

Eumenides requires a greater number of performers because the decision to accept Athene's proposals for renewal is binary. A court must first hear evidence which must be voted on before the choice to join the Athenian community is offered to the Furies. The process leading to this decision needs different people but the presence and involvement of Orestes, who is not Athenian, with Apollo, a god, are not essential for the final event to take place. Although acceptance of shared honours between the citizens and Furies in the new Athens is contingent upon Orestes' acquittal, once the legal proceedings are concluded Orestes and Apollo choose to leave and the theatrical structure of *Eumenides*, with Athene as the one solo performer, the Furies as one major chorus with citizens appearing at the end mirrors more closely that of Deuteronomy.

The small number of characters in Deuteronomy 27-34 increases its dramatic tension and creates a more accessible theatrical reality by narrowing the audience's focus of attention. The presence of one chorus only, with its members clearly delineated (29;10), offers more concentrated opportunities for the only individual actor – Moses – to engage chorus and audience together to form the new Israel. 'All Israel' as both performers and audience may not have to conform spatially to Nietzsche's suggestion that there need be 'no opposition between public and chorus: for everything is only a great sublime chorus,'[285] but with the audience's predominant focus of the performance being the interplay between Moses and all Israel, it becomes possible for the main character to

[284] Brown 1993;330.
[285] Nietzsche 2000;48.

address both groups on equal terms, wherever they are within the performance space, enabling, in principle, the audience with the chorus to become Nietzsche's 'true spectator' who 'lets the world of the stage work its effect on him not in an aesthetic but in an embodied and empirical way.'[286] The final three hundred lines of *Eumenides* allow the audience a similar concentration on Athene's dialogue with the Furies, and Athene to incorporate the audience as 'citizens' in direct address to them from ll927-996.[287] In both pieces the sharpening of their foci on to the decisions made by one group in a moment which will change nations forever heightens the tensions of the scenes. A hermeneutic of performance means that these tensions are created as much by the forms they take as by the content they contain. Their theatricality is fundamental for their excitement and their meaning, and it is driven by human actions and decisions. The same hermeneutic allows the trilogies of the *Oresteia* and Moses' story to create different realities in which audience and performers become participants together in the 'now' of performance time. Under these circumstances the past can be made present whenever the 'Tragedy of Moses' is performed, and all Israel who finally choose life and God, can include other audiences 'through an experience on the stage that transcended their experience in life.'[288]

The place of God in 'The Tragedy of Moses'.

Moses' commitment to the good of Israel, even when such commitment leads to errors, makes him the pivotal point of the axis between God and Israel. Moses is the conduit for divine communication and the agent of its implementation. God defers to Moses over the ethics and expediency of retribution.[289] He appears only briefly in the final section of Deuteronomy, delegates the recital of his own song to Moses and provides Moses' obsequies. A hermeneutic of performance allows events only in the place and at the time of performance so Moses, acting alone and independently can easily upstage God. God listens to Moses, serves Moses and finally vindicates Moses. In the final

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[286] Ibid. p.43.
[287] The Jurors enter at l578 and do not leave. 'Citizens' could easily be the audience throughout the final sequence. The only words they speak are the final 16 lines. Aeschylus 1991;124 gives a stage direction 'groups of CITIZENS gather'. Hadas (ed) 1968 has no SD for citizens to enter.
[288] Brook 1972;48.
[289] See above – Horeb, Korah's revolt and the *Song of Moses*.

eulogy (Deut 34; 7-10), Joshua's wisdom has been given because 'Moses had laid his hands on him' (34;9). Moses was one 'whom the Lord knew face to face' (34;10). The final verses make a highly nuanced distinction between Moses acting on God's behalf or exercising his own power against Egypt. The initial sense is of Moses as God's agent: 'He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt…'(34;11). This is followed by '*and* for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel' (34;12 my italics). If the '*and*' in v12 refers back to v11, Moses remains God's agent. But this passage shows that for Israel, Moses remains unique. Moses must stand above all other leaders and prophets and, at the end of the Pentateuch, as well as the 'Tragedy of Moses', 'the point is to deny parity between Moses and the prophets…Verses 11 and 12 amplify the prophetic portrait of Moses by alluding to the signs and wonders he wrought.'[290] The 'and' now separates God's 'signs and wonders' from Moses' own 'mighty deeds and terrifying displays.' But this means that God's reticence and willingness to be upstaged are shown in the ambiguity over Moses' power. The end of the story places Moses firmly at its centre.[291]

Moses is not alone in upstaging gods. Apollo's final action in *Eumenides* is confined to watching, anxiously, the ballot to acquit Orestes

> Shakeout every vote my friends
> Count them carefully, no mistake!
> A single error could provoke disaster
> A single vote restore a royal house. (ll748-51)

As well as deferring to the human Athenian jury who determine Orestes' fate, Apollo leaves Orestes to give a valedictory blessing. At the play's finale Athene defers to the Furies. Her final words ask their blessing

> *Eumenides*, kindly ones
> Smile on the people
> And bless us evermore. (ll1030-2)

The citizens ignore Athene's intention. In response to her: 'I'll lead you down/To your cave' (ll1024-5), they choose instead to follow the Furies:

> Lead the procession on
> Great ones, lovers of honours

[290] Blenkinsopp J in Brown *et al.* Eds. NJBC. 1993;109.
[291] JB, RSV & NIV support the ambiguity. KJV leans more towards attributing all Moses' mighty acts to God.

Aged children of the night
Citizens, join our songs. (ll1033-6)

Other heroes upstage their supreme gods. At the end of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*,[292] Zeus announces Oedipus' imminent death in a huge thunderstorm, striking terror into those with Oedipus.[293] Oedipus himself faces the storm and its fatal message, calls for Theseus as his last companion and confidant, and proceeds to his destiny in his own time. His centring of himself at the centre of the tragic climax prompts the gods to call 'You there Oedipus – what are we waiting for? / You hold us back too long…'(Col, ll1844-5).[294] In the Greek and biblical tragedies human heroes who have achieved 'a deep-seated transformation of society' by their own efforts become the final focus. They may be vindicated by their gods but are left in isolation as 'free agents.' For all of them 'if God is fully present in his creation then he robs it of autonomous value, as well as depriving his creatures of freedom.'[295]

All the gods upstaged by the heroes they have adopted or supported allow themselves to be overshadowed. Theatrically this makes sense. All characters in a performance are portrayed by humans, and in performance all characters are of equal value, regardless of their status or place in a hierarchy. 'Upstaging' becomes a necessary element in presenting a story where the action of a character of low status is more pertinent than that of one with a higher status. An audience needs to know Moses' own response to the apostasy of the Golden Calf, or to Israel's prevarication over choosing life because these decisions determine outcomes as much as those made by God. Since God is absent at these moments, Moses upstages God by taking God's hierarchical place onstage. When he challenges God successfully at Horeb and in the desert, [296] where God is present, upstaging undermines God's place in the hierarchy in front of an audience. Theologically the willingness of gods to be upstaged by their protégés raises more questions. God has trusted Moses' advice, and there is a parallel strand of divine uncertainty in Athene's deliberation over the dilemma Orestes

[292] Sophocles. Trans. Fagles, R. *Ed.* Knox, B. *The Three Theban Plays*. (Harmondsworth. Penguin. 1984).
[293] Ibid. ll1659-1687.
[294]. Ibid. ll1380.
[295] Eagleton 2003;209.
[296] Ex. 32, Num. 14.

creates as a refugee from the scene of his crime at Argos. For Athene, the pursuing Furies are equivalent to the Egyptians, or God's enemies, and for her, the problem is that:

> accusers have
> Their rights, their duties
> Not lightly set aside. Imagine if they lose
> Their anger will fester like a plague
> A cancer to blight the land. (ll473-7)

The protecting goddess could be seen to be responsible for causing suffering, and as God appoints seventy human elders (Num, 11;16ff), Athene appoints a human court to assist in determining the fate of her people. Apollo defers to the human citizens of Athens. He may claim responsibility as the instigator of Clytemnestra's murder, but can only thereafter appear to support Orestes.

> I come as witness and advocate
> It was I decreed his mother's death.
> Athene, let the trial begin,
> Preside; let Justice now be done (ll580-3)

God, Athene and Apollo could all make different choices[297] to resolve their own dilemmas, or to guarantee their survival, but each selects particular humans as key to bringing about their divine intentions. Each becomes what Langdon Gilkey describes as 'a God related to us and to our experience, and so a dynamic, active God, who is known, affirmed, and described and not a wholly transcendent, independent and changeless God.'[298] The end of Deuteronomy is not merely God's vindication of Moses as a tragic hero. It marks, as does the end of the *Oresteia*, divine determination to allow humanity the freedom to govern the physical world and choose to do so alongside God. In Moses' case it goes beyond tragedy, performance and theatricality. The Pentateuch encapsulates Israel's law and the foundations for Christian theology. It begins with God and ends with Moses. The encounter between the divine and human with its instabilities and capacity for tragedy will be thrown into sharper relief by applying a hermeneutic of performance to God as a character in dramatic texts - God on stage. For Christian theology, it will blur distinctions between the transcendent God and immanent Jesus by challenging perceptions of the actions

[297] One example is when God kills 14,700 after Korah's rebellion (Num, 16;49).
[298] Gilkey, L. *God*, in Hodgson & King. Eds. *Christian Theology*. (London. SPCK.1982), 72.

of God and Jesus in liturgy. I will first consider the presentation and representation of God in contemporary theatrical performances.

Chapter 5. The Church puts God on stage.

In this Chapter, I examine how God appears on stage in contemporary performances in the United Kingdom. I look briefly at the historical presentation of God in European dramatic texts culminating in the English Corpus Christi Cycles which emerged in the last quarter of the fourteenth century. I follow this by analysis of a number of staged productions deriving directly from the Passion sequences of the Cycle plays which I have been involved with, or gained access to, through photographic and video records or conversation with participants. I set these alongside other texts and subject them to the same hermeneutic of performance which I have applied to the Moses story as a tragic paradigm, and which I will set against liturgy as performance in the following chapters. Before addressing performances in detail, however, there are questions raised in the story of Moses which bear on the more general issue of putting God on stage as a character.

I have argued that under a hermeneutic of performance the story of Moses constitutes a tragic paradigm and that God can be a performer alongside other performers, provided that God as a character is not 'an actor *guaranteeing* salvation.'[299] The possibility of tragedy arises because God is present but gives humanity freedom of choice, delegates power and allows others to take his place. At the end of Deuteronomy, Moses is the dominant figure whose exercise of power has ensured Israel's salvation. Yet God never disappears. Israel remembers that Moses was God's friend and knew him 'face to face.' The presence of God, and whether 'his shadow no longer falls on us'[300] will be central to the discussions of God's appearance in contemporary performance.

The earliest appearance of the Judaeo-Christian God as a character on stage is in the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel,[301] with a suggested date in the second century BCE.[302] God does not appear in the liturgical dramatic texts which came into use in England (and Europe) between the tenth and twelfth centuries. These texts,

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[299] Davies, R. B. *Reading Ezekiel's Exagoge: Tragedy, Sacrificial Ritual and the Midrashic Tradition. Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies 48* (2008) 393-415. p402.
[300] Steiner 1961;353.
[301] See: Jacobson.1983;1ff.
[302] Ibid, p.13.

although theatrical in their use of rubrics and 'stage-directions' are fixed to particular liturgies in the church's calendar and are predominantly in Latin.[303] They are centred on Easter and Christmas where God's gracious actions towards mankind are celebrated.[304] God does not appear in Christian 'dramatic' texts until the twelfth century when he appears in the vernacular Anglo-Norman *Ordo Repraesentationis Adae*. This along with other twelfth century church drama is believed to have been performed outside church buildings and not as part of any set liturgy. The first Corpus Christi Cycles dramatised world history from the Creation to Doomsday and developed by 1377. They include God as both a didactic narrator and central to the dialogue in a small number of the plays. In England the Cycles were banned by 1600.[305] Passion Plays – sequences within the Cycles dramatising the last days of Jesus – re-emerged in England (and Commonwealth countries, especially Canada) from the middle of the twentieth century, and the Passion Trust lists in excess of eighty towns and cities which currently present them.[306] The great majority of contemporary Passion Plays derive directly from the Passion sequences in the Corpus Christi Cycles.

The four extant Corpus Christi Cycles from the fourteenth century are performed regularly.[307] The plays from York, N. Town and Chester, are presented in four or five year cycles. They are performed in churches, theatres and outdoor locations and use both traditional and modern costumes and props. The N Town and Towneley cycles use modernised or commissioned scripts. The pattern of God's appearances is similar across the four surviving cycles. In the York cycle God is a character in eight out of forty-seven plays; in the Towneley plays eight out of thirty-two; in the Chester cycle six out of twenty-four, and in the N Town cycle six out of forty. In all four cycles one of God's appearances is

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303 The *Quem Quaeritis* (*Regularis Concordia of St Ethelwold* 964-75) is part of matins for Easter Day. For other examples see e.g. Bevington, D. 1973; pp21-72.
304 See: e.g. Wickham, G. *Early English Stages, Vol. 1.* (London. Routledge & Kegan Paul 1963), 314ff.
305 See: Edwards, Philip: *And Blood Ran Down* in *The History of Kendal. Lectures at the Fourth History of Kendal Day*. Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society. Vol. 4. May 2000. In parts of Europe forms of Passion Plays continued. See: e.g.: *Obermair, Hannes. "The Social Stages of the City. Vigil Raber and Performance Direction in Bozen/Bolzano (Northern Italy) – A Socio-Historical Outline" (PDF). Concilium Medii Aevi. 7: 2004;193–208.* Oberammagau presents its Passion Play every 10 years.
306 passiontrust.org As the internet is a major source of information for contemporary Passion Plays, I will cite a number of internet references through this chapter.
307 They are from York; Wakefield (the Towneley Plays); Chester and N Town (also called *Ludus Coventriae*, but believed to originate in the East Midlands).

at the *Fall of Lucifer* and one is at *Doomsday*. In the N Town Cycle God appears as the first person of the Holy Trinity. With the exception of these additions, God's appearances as a character on stage in the cycles parallel his appearances in the Pentateuch.[308] In the following discussion of God's role on stage, primary references are to Tony Harrison's *The Mysteries*, which uses elements from all four cycles.[309] In addition to my own experience of a production from *The Mysteries*, it benefits from using religious material but being created for a contemporary non-religious company and audiences. In its conception Harrison does not seek to impose any pre-determined meaning.

God as a character

In the cycle plays God's first appearance is as creator and narrator. 'I am gracious and great, God withouten beginning,'[310] who sets up a perfect 'bliss all-abundant about me,' which will be inhabited by nine orders of angels. Lucifer's *hubris* leads to his fall and is followed by God's creation of the world which appears contingent upon the refusal of Lucifer and his angels to worship God in a state of heavenly bliss. In a monologue of forty-eight lines God carries out his act of creation and brings Adam and Eve into the performance. Thereafter, God speaks in dialogue in the plays until his appearance in *Doomsday*, the final play of the Cycle. Here a declamatory speech of eighty lines recounting humanity's failures announces the coming judgement. The judgement itself will be carried out by Jesus, with God appearing for a final six line speech assuring all damned souls of their fate. Jesus is given the final two lines with their counter assurance to the blessed souls.[311]

God in dialogue with other characters draws from the earlier portrayals of God on stage. In the *Exagoge*, on his journey back to Pharaoh, Moses sees and responds to the burning bush, and God: 'Ha, what is this portent from the bush?'

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[308] The N Town cycle alone has a sequence of 5 plays on the life of Mary. These include an appearance by God as the first person of the Trinity. See Block, K. Ed; *Ludius Coventriae or the Plaie called Corpus Christi*. (London. EETS. 1960), 62-108.
[309] Harrison,T. *The Mysteries*. (London. Faber. 1985).
[310] Ibid. p.11.
[311] There is poetic licence here. The York Cycle gives all the lines to God, but all four cycles differ widely in their final dialogues.

(l90)[312] God stops Moses: 'Halt great sir' (l96) to explain his presence and the task prepared for Moses. Moses argues and they strike bargains over Aaron who 'will speak before the king,' (l118) and Moses' rod, to which God will give power 'to work all kinds of plagues,' (l132). Just as in the medieval plays, the dialogue adds to the biblical account. In an exchange that does not come from Exodus 3, God ends the scene with instructions on how Moses is to implement the Passover.

In the 12th Century *Ordo Repraesentationis Adae,* narration is through bible readings leaving God free to engage with other characters in the two scenes – *Adam and Eve,* and *Cain and Abel* – in which he appears. God's scenes are a lively mixture of shared short lines and extended speeches:

Figure (of God).	Adam.	
Adam.	Sire?	
Figure.	I will tell you my advice. Do you see this garden?	
Adam.	What is it called?	
Figure.	Paradise.	
Adam.	How beautiful it is.	
Figure.	I planted it and laid it out.	(ll81-84)

The nature of the dialogue in both these plays allows all the characters to establish themselves as equally important. Adam questions God and God interrupts Moses' journey. Moses queries God's instructions 'I am not articulate… I cannot address the king,' (ll113-114). God responds to justify himself over planting the garden or appointing Aaron to support Moses.

In the Cycle plays God must make contracts with, and rely on others. His command 'my bidding both obey' comes after his guarantee that Adam and Eve will live in paradise where 'your joys begin.' In the *Noah* play God admits his error 'I repent full sore that ever made I man,'[313] and needs Noah 'my friend' to become his agent of salvation. As dialogue, God's instructions on Ark-building sound like a manager giving an order to a known and trusted foreman.[314] In the *Abraham* play the demand God makes of Abraham's loyalty appears

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[312] References to the *Exagoge* are from Jacobson 1983.
[313] Harrison 1985;32.
[314] Harrison abbreviates God's instructions from the Towneley *Noah* play. He maintains the sense of Noah as a trusted friend. The Cycles and Harrison echo Gen 6 where God's detailed specification assumes Noah's skill.

monstrous,[315] but the bargain remains. Isaac is saved, but Harrison adapts the words of the Expositor in the Chester *Abraham* play, who speaks of God:

> By Abraham I may understand
> The Father of heaven that can fonde
> with his Sonnes blood to breake that bonde. (ll467-70)[316]

to give God himself the words:

> Thy son is spared, but understand
> that I mine own son, free of sin
> will sacrifice to break that band.[317]

In the original versions and modern adaptation, Abraham and Isaac become types for God and Jesus. By giving the explanation to God, an on-stage character, the audience sees two fathers facing their own sacrifices and it becomes clear that God's sacrifice will be greater than Abraham's. God's son will also be obedient but will be 'done to death upon a hill.'[318] From here, Harrison moves straight into the *Annunciation*. The final view of God, (before *Doomsday*) is of a supremely generous father. In *The Mysteries* God is in a critical position at the fulcrum between Old and New Testaments and although Harrison gives God fewer words than the Cycles do, cutting down his didactic speeches adds to his theatrical prominence.

The sole appearance God makes which does not involve a degree of reciprocity is in the *Killing of Abel*. Here it is in response to a crime. Cain rejects God who 'gives me nought but sorrow and woe,' and in his coarseness is close to a clown figure from folk-drama.[319] His first words to Abel 'come kiss my arse' and reference to God as 'that hob-over-the-wall,'[320] show him as an unregenerate member of corrupted humanity after the Fall. His crime is lightly undertaken and its punishment inevitable but of little concern to Cain himself, whose final words maintain his rejection of human society: 'Damned for my deed

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[315] In the N Town and York cycles God does not appear in this play. The message is brought by an angel.
[316] Luminansky, R. & Mills, D. Eds. *The Chester Mystery Cycle*. (London. EETS. 1974), 78
[317] Harrison 1985;48.
[318] Ibid. p.48.
[319] See: e.g.: Axton, R. *European Drama of the Early Middle Ages* (London. Hutchinson. 1974), 177ff.
[320] Harrison 1985;25,29.

I now depart, by all men I set not a fart.'[321] God's intervention is necessary as the only power able to impose sanctions against transgressive action, but in view of the 'oddly festive tone of much of the play's dialogue [it] makes God's intervention and Cain's recognition of evil perfunctory to say the least.'[322]

God and Jesus as characters.

In the twenty-first century God is most likely to be seen on stage in a Corpus Christi Cycle or Passion Play deriving from such a cycle.[323] As we have seen, God's appearances in the cycle plays are few, but they are consonant with his appearances and interactions with humanity in the Old Testament. God is active in bringing about the covenant with Moses. Humanity must then choose its course. All the Cycles use Old Testament stories to point towards the New Testament and events in the life of Jesus. God either does not appear in the majority of the New Testament plays or he appears as Jesus.

Theologically, this presents a problem. God, who has been a character on stage, and has told us that he will sacrifice his son, still exists and is worshipped.[324] His son appears and is himself acknowledged as divine.[325] Neither Harrison's *The Mysteries* nor the Cycles attempt to explain the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and where it appears, in the N Town *Parliament of Heaven,* the language is hierarchical. God refers to Jesus as 'son', who refers to God as 'father', but it was Jesus who made mankind: 'in your wisdom son, man was made there.'[326] The Holy Spirit 'proceeds' from the two as a messenger who will lead Jesus to Mary who will be 'your lover.' In their performance there is no time to reflect on Trinitarian doctrine. As J.L. Styan observes: 'The topping of one dramatic impression by another in their planned sequence as the play pushes on in its pre-ordained tempo checks and directs the contributing

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[321] Ibid. p.30. Although coarse, this is milder than Cain's final words in the York and Chester Cycles. In these Cain passes his curse to the audience: 'That curse that I have for to feill, I giffe you the same.' York Cycle Plays. Play 7, ll138-9.
[322]Axton 1974;180.
[323] Performances of other plays which include God occur, though they are few; e.g. Durham Medieval Drama Group produced *The Mary Play* in 1995/6. Poculi Ludique (Toronto University) have regularly produced *Mankind*.
[324] See e.g.: the *Magnificat* in *The Salutation of Elizabeth* (ll47-79) in the Wakefield Cycle.
[325] See *inter alia*, Shepherd and Magi plays across all the cycles. Harrison 1985;71-79.
[326] Block 1960;103.

imagination of the spectator,'[327] and unless the same actor plays God and Jesus, cycle plays present an audience with two gods.[328] In the biblical episodes they are not on stage together. God is invisible, or off-stage for much of the time. Jesus is present and identifiable as human as well as divine. The distinction between God and Jesus as characters is especially important in Passion Plays, which are presented more often than the Cycles, and where God seldom appears.[329] It leaves open the question of whether an audience perceives God as divine, and Jesus as human, and whether this is because God is off stage, or because there is a divine hierarchy, or both.

Theatrically the issue of divinity is less problematic. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the different reality created by performance allows gods to appear on stage. Because we choose to enter the story, we know that the character telling us 'I am gracious and great, God withouten beginning' is God. In *Eumenides*, Athene announces that prayers summoned her and Apollo informs the court of his 'all-seeing' divine identity. Athene controls the action at Athens and shares power with other characters. Once God is on stage he can negotiate with Adam and Eve, punish Cain and instruct Noah. In performance, the power or control any character can exercise can only be from on stage, or through an intermediary appearing on stage. In the York Cycle God does not appear in *Cain and Abel* but sends an angel to punish Cain. In common with the historical cycles, *The Mysteries* uses Gabriel to bring God's message to Mary. Oedipus is guilty of Laius' murder before *Oedipus the King* begins, but the reality of the murder must be told on stage before the tragedy can be fully realised.[330] Theatre allows a 'here and now performance of there and then events,'[331] but the 'here and now' of on-stage revelation and action gives equal importance to all characters. Cain rebels against God's power. He is punished, but as the last person on stage in the play, he undermines God's authority and upstages him. In the Passion sequence Jesus' trial and execution are contingent upon God's

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[327] Styan. J. *Drama Stage and Audience*. (London. Cambridge University Press. 1975), 18.
[328] In theatrical terms this is be possible but would make dialogue referring to 'son' and 'father' very difficult for an audience, especially at Gethsemane the Trial and Crucifixion.
[329] Very few of the plays on www.passion-plays.co.uk cover Old Testament or Doomsday stories.
[330] As Dunsinane must be known to move or the perfidy of Goneril and Reagan must be told, on stage.
[331] Schechner 2003;190.

existence, but God is off-stage and silent so his power is subverted by those characters who are on stage.

The development of the Corpus Christi Cycles was 'an elaboration sponsored by the church and composed [in part] by its members but not enclosed by the liturgy itself.'[332] After 1377 they became collaborative projects using non-clerical actors, and freed from following liturgical calendars. In the twenty-first century the linking of church, civic and secular organisations, using paid and unpaid actors and staff to produce these plays revives the practices of the fifteenth century when the cycles became theatrically sophisticated. Once the transformation of liturgical texts into dramatic scripts occurs, 'tragic form becomes liturgical replacement,'[333] and plays centre 'on the presence of actual bodies performing in the presence of an audience in real time and space.'[334] The Passion Plays I examine centre on the human Jesus. In the N Town cycle, performed at Lincoln, Jesus is portrayed as 'a man treading the path laid out in prophecy, whose every step must be taken deliberately on a pre-ordained course from which he cannot deviate. This inability to avoid fate by one's own actions is the very essence of Tragedy and inhabits all great storytelling throughout the ages.'[335] As I shall demonstrate, the interpretation of Passion Plays as tragedy has broad applications.

The tragedy of the Passion

All the extant English Corpus Christi Cycles include Passion sequences which follow the gospel accounts of the last days of Jesus and do not include God as a character. They do include Lucifer and a range of non-biblical characters in scenes which embroider the original narrative. The exclusion of God allows the Passion Play, as a theatrical unity, to put on stage a cast of human and supernatural characters as immanent or '"ensouled bodies" in the material cosmos with all its messiness and unavoidable earthiness.'[336] Having a cast of fully human men and women raises the Christological problem of how to

[332] Bevington 1975;7.
[333] Davies 2008;405.
[334] Hart, T, in Vander Lugt & Hart 2014;33.
[335] Colin Brimblecombe, Director's Introduction, from the Lincoln Mystery plays 2016 website. http://www.lincolnmysteries.co.uk/archives/2016-4
[336] Hart, T. in Vander Lugt & Hart. 2014;32.

present Jesus as simultaneously God and human. It is difficult to perform the doctrine that 'Christ is one person of twofold substance being both God and Man'[337] to audiences for whom a concept of 'twofold substance' is unknown or not credible. To achieve a degree of Christological understanding requires a level of theological explication in performance which is not a feature of the original cycles, and will be discussed below in the comparison of different contemporary texts. Against this background of the Passion sequence as human-centred I will argue that its interpretation as tragedy is both reasonable and compatible with its Christian context.

To explore the Passion as tragedy, I shall examine Caroline Moir's *A Passion for Kendal* alongside two very different contemporary Passion Plays: Philip Glassborrow's *A Winchester Passion* and the *Passion* sequence from *The Mysteries*.[338] The first is the result of a commission from a non-religious community theatre company to present the Passion as large-scale street theatre. It has been performed twice in Kendal, a market town in one of the most rural areas of England. *A Passion for Winchester* was an overtly religious undertaking by Churches together in Winchester, but which formed partnerships with the BBC, the Army and Winchester University (*inter alia*). Set in a cathedral city with access to large centres of population the project attracted approximately 600 performers and technicians, and an audience of over 10,000.[339] *The Mysteries* is Harrison's adaptation of extant cycle plays, originally for performance by the National Theatre. The first performance in 1977 was of the *Passion* sequence only. The full cycle was first performed at the Cottesloe Theatre in 1985. The cycle was revived by the National Theatre for the Millenium, and the *Passion* was presented at the Globe Theatre in 2011.

On Good Friday and Holy Saturday 2012, the newly formed Kendal Community Theatre performed *A Passion for Kendal* through the streets of Kendal and at Kendal Castle. The Friday performance consisted of six scenes covering the passion narrative from the betrayal of Jesus to the crucifixion,

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[337] Augustine. *C. Maxim. Ar.* in Kelly, J. *Early Christian Doctrines*. (London. Adam & Charles Black. 1965), 336.
[338] Moir, C. *A Passion for Kendal*, (©Caroline Moir. 2012). Glassborrow, P. *A Winchester Passion*, in Mellor, G.*A Passion for Winchester*, (© Churches together in Winchester. 2008). Harrison 1985.
[339] Mellor 1985;104.

while the Saturday finale incorporated the play of *The Empty Tomb*, an exultant anthem and fire sculptures prefiguring, but not including, the resurrection story. The performances played to audiences of over 1000 on Friday, and over 800 on Saturday.[340] More than 200 people were involved as performers, technical and stage crew and front of house staff. A substantial proportion were drawn from Christian communities, but in keeping with the secular and inclusive aims of the company, there were approximately equal numbers of atheists, agnostics and members of other faith groups.

The audience response to the production indicates the breadth of its appeal and impact. Many reactions, from participants and audience members whose initial interest was due to Christian commitment were positive, although not universally favourable – the lack of a Resurrection scene was perceived as a serious shortcoming or missed opportunity.[341] To have a Resurrection scene in the Kendal Good Friday play would have run counter to Moir's use of the original version of Mark's gospel as the principal source and been chronologically inappropriate. The placing of Resurrection scenes and their associated theatrical anomalies in relation to performance time in both the fourteenth century cycles and modern productions are discussed below.

What was more surprising than the disappointment of some Christians was the nature of many of the comments from those with no particular faith or active atheists: 'It brought out the reality of the story.' 'It showed the relevance of the story.'
'We were blown away.' 'We were moved by the silence.' Others commented on the very strong script; the quality of the design, acting and music; the political nature of the story, and even a leader comment in the press: 'So it was that South Lakeland witnessed two amazing Easter stories, both beginning with fear and despair but ultimately ending in joy!'[342]

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[340] Indications of the nature of the project can be found at: apassionforkendal.blogspot.com www.facebook.com/pages/A-Passion-For-Kendal www.facebook.com/kendalcommunitytheatre www.thewestmorlandgazette.co.uk/opinion/reviews/9641581.A_Passion_for_Kendal_provides_something_magical
[341] A search of the Passion Trust list of plays suggests that a majority end at the Crucifixion. In Harrison's *The Mysteries,* the *Passion* does not include a Resurrection play. This features in Part 3, (*Doomsday*).
[342] Westmorland Gazette; 12.4.2012. Leading article. Contact: info@kendalcommunitytheatre.com

Why should a religious play performed by a theatre company with no religious affiliation provoke significantly strong and positive reactions from sections of the audience who might have been expected to react, at least to the play's content, in a way more congruent with the forthright and entertaining – if somewhat inconsistent – comments on Kendal Community Theatre's and Westmorland Gazette's web-sites:

- *What a completely ridiculous spectacle this turned out to be. Surely in 2012 we should be looking past religious story-telling and embracing the UK as a secular society….and that's not to mention the cost of putting this bizarre and frankly offensive production on.*
- *I stopped and paused and watched this show for all of 30 seconds (until I realised what it was)! I personally felt that they were pushing their religous* [sic] *views down our throats.*
- *Brainwashing for the masses.*[343]

Why too, should a provincial newspaper, also without religious affiliation, give extensive, detailed and theologically sound coverage to *A Passion for Kendal*, thereby appearing to endorse what many saw as an overtly religious performance? In the two-week run up to the performances during Passiontide, the Gazette published three separate accounts of the Passion story, all accurate paraphrases of the biblical originals.[344]

Some answers were suggested. The positive response was a spin-off from the idea of 'the big society.' Did the play encourage disparate groups to work more closely across communities? At one level this could be among the more plausible reasons. Choirs, creative art groups for people with mental health issues, Kendal Lions and Rotary Clubs were keen to be involved alongside the theatre company. A particularly striking aspect of the production was that over half of the funding was given by councils and statutory bodies; in the region of £9000 out of a total raised of £17500.[345]

Was the response to do with a new sense of religion moving across society or the success of Christian evangelism working through – or in spite of - a

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343http://www.thewestmorlandgazette.co.uk/news/9641623.GALLERY

344http://www.thewestmorlandgazette.co.uk/opinion/reviews/9641581.A_Passion_for_Kendal_provides_something_magical/

345 The range of community involvement is a feature of many Passion Plays. See e.g. Mellor, 2008;144 and The Passion Trust for local authorities who support Passion Plays.

venture which strove not to ally itself with any Christian position? Was the Spirit moving in response to an eclectic group's presentation of Jesus' final days? There were undoubtedly members of the company who believed this to be the case[346].The Methodist Superintendent Minister defined the event as a *kairos* moment.

Another reason for the strength of response lies in the theatricality of such projects. At Kendal and Winchester, and in many other towns and cities, large-scale road closures, amplification and film crews, the involvement of other community groups and media support generate much local awareness. Pre-publicity focuses on the story of Jesus as an individual. At Kendal through Holy Week, quasi-Nazi banners were hung on major buildings and 'Roman' soldiers paraded through the streets. As at Winchester, costumes and props were modern.[347] Music, especially when it is commissioned, draws additional performers and audiences. Kendal, in particular, has a history of street theatre festivals and performances. These appeal to audiences, often families, across the region and nationally, so *A Passion for Kendal* was perceived as part of that tradition while performances at the first Bank Holiday weekend attract extra visitors to tourist centres.[348]

While all three explanations include factors contributory to the success of many Passion Plays I maintain that the reactions, across the Christian and non-Christian audience resulted from the fact that the performance of *A Passion for Kendal* became a tragedy. Wickham identifies the possibility of tragedy latent in the medieval cycles as their focus narrows on to the crucified Jesus: 'Once, however, the *central dramatic oblation* [the crucifixion] was firmly and deliberately re-enacted for audiences whether in churchyard, meadow, market place or cathedral nave, the possibilities of dramatic development were legion… Not only was a Christian cosmic drama attainable, but its pattern could be imitated countless times in terms of man in the universe, microcosms for

346. 'I truly believe that many secular people will have been questioning 'what it's all about' after this event.' 'We believe the events in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago are of the greatest possible significance and it is wonderful to have this modern attempt to portray them in a way that stuck close to the Biblical accounts.' Feedback reports on *A Passion for Kendal.*
347 This is unusual. Most Passion Plays use 'historical' costumes and weapons.
348 Among the biggest such Festivals in England was *Mintfest*, now subsumed by Lakes Alive (lakesalive.co.uk).

macrocosms.'[349] Bevington notes that 'the rise of the Corpus Christi cycle during the fourteenth century was one manifestation of a larger movement in religious art in the Middle Ages toward what is known as the Gothic style.' He continues 'the Corpus Christi cycles with… their gruesomely vivid renditions of the crucifixion abundantly reveal this Gothic emphasis on Christ's humanity.'[350] The humanity of all the characters with their own capacity to order events remains a key feature in modern Passion Plays. This shift of focus from divine to human control of temporal events carries with it the fear, expressed by Wickham that, as the divinely ordered macrocosm with its guarantee of salvation within the liturgy became a microcosm where the death of Jesus was the climactic event, so 'the God whose presence had once seemed so real… [might be] deserting his Creation in disgust.'[351] There is a further tragic element latent in the original cycles, which Harrison carries into *The Mysteries*. The final *Doomsday* plays show characters saved and damned in equal numbers, allowing for 'either an idyllic or a tragic ending.'[352] The ambiguity and uncertain endings of the Cycle plays is not diminished in *A Passion for Kendal*,[353] and the unease shown by some Christian performers and audience members stems from the same root. The performance of the Passion as tragedy increases its paradigmatic instability and undermines the religious certainty some audiences and church communities believe Passion Plays should demonstrate.

The discussion of *A Passion for Kendal* as inherently unstable and tragic arises out of the Good Friday performance which ended with the crucifixion. In the first production, the play was in two parts with *The Empty Tomb* performed in a different place on the evening of Holy Saturday.[354] Much of the response and feedback from performers and audience after the Friday performance made it clear that it stood as a complete piece. Moir uses Mark's gospel as her foundational source which raises a dilemma for any who believe an enacted resurrection should be incorporated into Passion Plays. A resurrection is part of Mark's gospel, but only as an allusion by the 'young man': 'He has been raised,

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[349] Wickham 1966;316 (my italics).
[350] Bevington 1975;233-4.
[351] Wickham 1966;319.
[352] Ibid. p.317.
[353] *A Winchester Passion* seeks to overcome the uncertainty and is discussed below.
[354] Castle Hill – outside the town.

he is not here' (Mk, 16;8). This final sequence of the gospel and the advice to travel to Galilee form the climax to *The Empty Tomb*. Discussion on the redemptive qualities of Saturday's performance is included because it raises the dialectical problems between hope and certainty in some Christian interpretations of the Passion and resurrection in relation to the idea that scripture can be tragedy.

Contextualising the Passion.
Locating the plays in contemporary settings.

The first scene of *A Passion for Kendal* is both the longest and, on two counts, the least biblical in the work. There is no triumphal entry and it takes place outside the temple. It shows two encounters. It introduces Joseph of Arimathea before the crucifixion which allows an extended dialogue intended to make clear the division Jesus has caused. The first words ascribed to the High Priest in Mark's gospel are 'Have you no answer?' (Mk. 14;60) when Jesus is before the Council. As a literary device if the gospel is to be read rather than performed, this works effectively to delay the impact of Jesus' blasphemous conduct, but it also assumes knowledge on the part of the reader. In a play for performance, even if the story is known, the words which establish the location for the ensuing story: 'It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened bread. The Chief Priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him' (Mk;14;1) are 'fraught with background'[355] and have to be brought alive. Characters must be introduced as living, physical beings in ways which lend stylistic consistency to the whole play. Moir introduces the priests and scribes at the outset, indicating their motivations and concerns for their people and their God. Their conduct throughout is thus contextualised in the first scene. Although in the gospels he is given no words, and never meets his fellow Sanhedrin members, Joseph's early appearance in the play shows him to be as he is later described in the gospels: 'respected' (Mark 15;43), 'rich' and 'a disciple of Jesus' (Matthew 27;57) and 'good and righteous' (Luke 23;50), while emphasising the duplicity of the Priests and scribes.

[355] Auerbach 1968;12.

Joseph's scene defending Jesus is followed by another non-biblical scene between Judas, the chief priests and scribes which elaborates Judas' willingness to collude with them and betray Jesus, (Mark 14, 1-2 and 10-11. Luke 22, 1-6). In it the dialogue establishes Judas as ambiguous in determining his own course of action. Where in the gospels, Judas is given few words in his agreement to betray Jesus, 'what will you give me if I betray him to you?' (Mt26;15), a performance can find more nuanced ways of indicating that 'Satan entered into Judas Iscariot' (Lk22;3), if indeed he did.[356] Speaking to the priests, Judas is accusatory: 'Caiaphas, who refuses to tell me why he won't approach Jesus in the Temple during daylight hours,' and he defends Jesus: 'He knows more about God than you [Priests] will ever know.'[357] The interpolations in *A Passion for Kendal* derive directly, and by inference, from passages in the gospels, or from Josephus, and serve to give depth to characters and explicate rather than interpret the narrative. From this first scene Judas leads actors and audience to the betrayal at Gethsemane. The remaining scenes follow the synoptic narrative to the two trials and the crucifixion although there are verbal interpolations, especially from the Roman soldiers, to contextualise the action.

The Winchester Passion and the Passion sequence in *The Mysteries* also rely on early interpolations to establish the story and characters for an audience.

Glassborrow follows a similar, but much longer method of foregrounding Jesus and the problems besetting Israel. In the Winchester play a mock radio-commentary with detailed historical explanations of the Exodus, Passover, Davidic myth and the Essenes precedes a scene where Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus, appear at the triumphal entry in a hostile mood. Jesus reproaches them: 'You teachers of the scriptures, haven't you read in the psalms…Oh Lord our God… out of the mouths of babies and children, your Majesty is praised.' Joseph replies with slightly curious logic: 'How dare you? How dare you speak to the religious authorities in this way? Who do you think you are?'[358] Their initial animosity appears to be changed by an off-stage conversion since he and Nicodemus reappear later to defend Jesus against the high priests and Pilate.

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[356] The greater ambiguity of Judas as portrayed in John 13;21-30 is noted below.
[357] Moir 2012.6.
[358] Mellor 2008;120.

Where Moir's additions tell a story derived from the gospels, Glassborrow's intention here seems less to present a scriptural story than to evangelise. To do so he inserts Joseph's and Nicodemus' entirely fictitious conversion in a Stage Direction: 'Jesus walks away in conversation with Nicodemus and Joseph…'[359] This is the sole reference to any conversion. Stage Directions are notoriously unreliable methods of communication since they may be ignored at any time in rehearsal or performance, and tell the audience nothing.

In *The Mysteries* Harrison employs a narrative song to introduce John the Baptist's rhyming monologue at the start of *The Passion*. Music introduces Judas who recounts Mary Magdalene's profligate waste of perfume. This and Jesus' approbation of her actions against providing relief for 'folk famished and feeble that fortune would feed,'[360] are reasons for making what Judas regards as an ethical report to the religious authority. These introductions are in verse and made directly to an audience. Neither attempts to impose an interpretation, although Judas' opening line 'Unjustly injured, I Judas, by Jesus that Jew'[361] invites sympathy and is instrumental in creating ambiguity around his own and Jesus' character.

In the Kendal play Joseph of Arimathea, and in the Winchester play Joseph and Nicodemus, give audiences information about Jesus in contemporary and specific times and places. *The Winchester Passion* juxtaposes modern idiom: 'Hey – you on the donkey – yes, you…tell your followers to shut up' with formal liturgical and biblical language 'blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord, hosanna in the highest…'[362] It sets the production in modern, and specific costumes. These fix the Roman army as identifiably British military personnel, and Priests and Scribes as English academics. *A Passion for Kendal* uses contemporary language throughout, and contemporary but stylised costumes. These aim to identify the priests as priests rather than *Jewish* priests; the soldiers as soldiers rather than *Roman* (or *British*) soldiers; and grieving women from any brutalising regime where men and children 'disappear'. Both plays are site-specific so that coffee stalls, Town Halls, war memorials and a

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[359] Ibid. p.120.
[360] Harrison 1985;99.
[361] Ibid. p.99.
[362] Mellor 2008;119.

cathedral anchor the performances and unite performers and audiences in shared spaces. In *The Mysteries*, Harrison updates fifteenth century texts and suggests contemporary costumes to define occupations and, perhaps, character.[363] Locations are neutral within a single space and music is in the English folk tradition. The language remains in the original verse-form, but with modernised spelling and a number of Harrison's own additions. The company is encouraged to mix with and talk to the audience at the beginning and at the interval. All three plays are constructed in order to make a single past event alive in the present and involve all participants in that event.

In his introduction Glassborrow explains that *The Winchester Passion* happens in a 'village fete' set in the present.[364] It has an eclectic audience of performers including a youth band, Morris Men, children's gymnastic displays, choirs, clowns and a military presence. The play opens with the mock outside-broadcast interview from the 'fete' with a pattern that has become familiar through news coverage to create an illusion of explaining history:

('F/X Radio Solent Jingle)

Tim Daykin. Welcome to the six o'clock news with me Tim Daykin. We're coming to you from Jerusalem, a city which is holy to the Jewish people…[365]

The live broadcast is interrupted by live action from the play – including the conversion scene referred to above. In commentary and acting, the reporters and actors interpret the historical background suggesting the truth both of past events and the message Jesus is giving in the current performance of the Passion Play. The conversion scene is followed by the triumphal entry, introduced and interpreted by the broadcast narration:

(F/X Jingle back into…)

Tim. This is Tim Daykin in the radio car – Amy – Mike – can you tell me what's going on here?

Mike. It's fascinating Tim. This man Jesus has entered the holy city on a donkey. By doing this he is claiming to be some kind of king, or even the Messiah.[366]

This interpretation is continued through the interpolation of pre-recorded

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[363] The opening stage direction stipulates 'uniforms and overalls of carpenter, painter, butcher, fireman…' &c. the emphasis is on 'blue' rather than 'white' collars. Harrison 1985;91.
[364] Mellor 2008;118.
[365] Ibid. p.118.
[366] Ibid. p.120.

interviews with the Bishop of Winchester who gives theological explication to the dramatic presentation of various parables. In the case of the parable of the lost sheep (Mt 18;10-14), the bishop's interpretation immediately precedes its performance by Jesus.[367] The overtly Brechtian use of commentary to frame and interpret scenes where religious judgements are made instructs an audience about the moral values of the characters. For the audience it predetermines Jesus as the character for whom they should feel the greatest pity and fear. In doing so, it restricts opportunities for other characters to experience *peripeteia* or *anagnorisis* and presents all the characters as conduits for a director's message.

In *The Mysteries*, the intention in the opening of the Passion sequence falls between those of Moir and Glassborrow. It makes clear that Jesus is supreme – not least through Jesus' own words to John the Baptist:

> John, kind of man is frail
> To which I have me knit
> ….
> And since myself have taken mankynde
> Men shall me for their mirror take (Harrison. 1985;93)

but the sequence does not interpret the story; rather it is an anachronistic insertion using Jesus' encounter with John to link the nativity to the coming crucifixion. As the son of God and as a man, Jesus chooses to involve himself with injustice and violence from which he will emerge victorious, having received God the Father's approval and protection. This episode emphasises the humanity of Jesus, and his identification with all his people through his choice of their baptism. It implicitly acknowledges the fact that if 'God' as Jesus – divine and human – is to be portrayed or performed by a human, an audience will instinctively – even if instructed otherwise, perceive 'God' as human. To what extent the cycles and Passion Plays in either the fifteenth or twenty-first centuries could assume audiences with a knowledge of scripture and acceptance of Jesus as divine is debatable. In Kendal by the seventeenth century it appears that Christological and biblical knowledge, apart from that derived from performances of the Passion Play, may have been severely limited. In 1644 John Shaw, Vicar of Rotherham, visited Cartmel Fell, near Kendal, to assist people

[367] Ibid. p.122.

'sadly deprived of spiritual guidance.' One old man did not know how many gods there were and when 'I told him that the way to salvation was by Jesus Christ, God-Man who as he was man shed His blood for us on the Cross. "Oh Sir," said he, "I think I heard of that man, once in a play at Kendal called Corpus Christi play where there was a man on a tree and blood ran down." And after that he professed that though he was a good churchman that he constantly went to Common prayer at their chapel, yet he could not remember that ever he heard of salvation by Jesus Christ but in that play.'[368]

Notwithstanding the avowedly human presentation of Jesus, in *The Mysteries* his divinity is expressed on the cross:

> Then shall I come again
> To judge both good and ill
> To endless joy or pain;
> This is my father's will. (Harrison 1985;155)

The straightforward presentation and enactment of a story – complete with angels and the simple acceptance of Jesus as divine – allows greater variety of response than does the Winchester play. The audience is told what has happened, and what will happen, not how to interpret events. Harrison builds on the ambiguity of the story in his expansion of the Centurion's role into that of a miner who, while himself certain of the truth of the story, yet acknowledges that he will not be believed 'but since ye set nought by my saw/I'll wend my way.' The instability of the stated divine truth is increased by the change of pronoun to 'I': 'he was God's son almighty/That bleedeth ye before/ Yet say *I* so and stand thereby'[369] in the miner's case, from the Centurion's: 'this was *a* son of God' (Moir, cf. Mk 15;39). A statement of fact by a Roman commander becomes the personal conviction of an artisan. *The Mysteries* and *A Passion for Kendal* both allow for ambiguity and uncertainty in their performance and open the possibility for tragedy. *The Winchester Passion* moves in an opposite direction and offers certainty.

Before considering the Passion as tragedy I must enter a caveat. Any theatre company inevitably interprets every text it performs, and equally

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[368] Quoted by Audrey Douglas, *Records of Early English Drama*. Toronto 1986;219 in Edwards 2000;2.
[369] Harrison 1985;156.

inevitably destabilises every text it performs: 'the moment an actor dresses up and speaks with his own tongue he is entering the fluctuating territory of manifestation and existence that he shares with the spectator.'[370] Passion Plays processing through a town or city between scenes and integrating actors and audience in their processions provide especially fertile 'fluctuating territory.' The directorial intention behind *A Passion for Kendal* was to present a performance free from didacticism or religious agendas. The range of both cast and audience reaction, especially among those Christians who found it profoundly moving as a faithful biblical rendition of the Passion (which it is not) amply demonstrated the fragility and instability of such an intention. Conversely, *The Winchester Passion* with all its textual safeguards against such instability – didactic commentary; Jesus' insistence on explaining his mission – in another performance could be made as radical or political as *The Mysteries* or *A Passion for Kendal* are intended to be.

Scene setting for Tragedy

In considering the possibility of the passion story being – or becoming – tragedy I will examine the opening scene of *A Passion for Kendal* against *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, and some of Shakespeare's opening scenes. I have not included *The Winchester Passion*, or *The Passion* from *The Mysteries* since these state their intentions to be an unequivocal account of universal salvation, however hard won. *A Passion for Kendal* does not discount the possibility of ultimate salvation, but it may demand that the spectator finds it.

The Kendal play opens with:

Caiaphas	He's late. You said he would be here by half past three.
Annas	This Iscariot –
Scribe 1	Judas Iscariot. He'll come.
Caiaphas	Is he the only way we can get hold of Jesus?
Scribe 2	If you want to get hold of Jesus on the quiet – yes.
Scribe 1	Judas is a fanatic. He needs to come. (Moir p1)

Whatever knowledge audience members may bring to a performance, all that is given here is a state of confusion where a plot, legal or otherwise may be about

[370] Brook 1972;20.

to be hatched. We have come into a story that is already happening. The opening of *Antigone* also brings us into an ongoing story as Antigone informs us of 'an emergency decree, they say, the Commander has declared for all of Thebes' (ll9-10).[371] The play moves towards a situation where arbitrary justice, with fatal results is planned, as 'doom reserved for enemies marches on the ones we love the most' (ll12-13). Philo's abrupt opening words in *Antony and Cleopatra* –'Nay, but this dotage…' indicate disruption in a similar way to Caiaphas' 'He's late'. Sophocles, Shakespeare and Moir take their audiences to disordered societies, which may be more familiar to their audiences than a place where ultimate and universal security is guaranteed. Since the 'representation of Christ's Passion substantially surpasses in violence, horror and pity anything presented in *The Spanish Tragedy*, *King Lear* or *The Duchess of Malfi*,'[372] it need not be only the likes of Genet, Artaud and Brecht who 'far from being afraid of creating a scandal want to provoke one as strongly as possible, because scandal must bring with it a certain disarray.'[373] 'A certain disarray' is a prerequisite of any tragedy and is at the centre of all Passion Plays.

The suspicion and tension generated among the Priests by the late appearance of Judas, is heightened by the unexpected entrance of Joseph of Arimathea. The underlying sense of disorder is compounded when the Priests, as council members, must welcome Joseph, a fellow council member who is not privy to the plot. The dialogue following Joseph's entrance serves two purposes. It distances Joseph from the Priests and Scribes and continues the sense of disorder. However it is played, Joseph's opening line 'You were expecting me?' interrupts the Priests' plot and undermines their position of power before the audience. The subsequent comments appear innocent but show the Priests' hostility to Jesus and the tension between them and Joseph:

Joseph.	You were expecting me?
Caiaphas.	Of course. It's the Passover. All the members of the Council must be here. How was the journey from Arimathea?
Joseph.	Slow. Heavy traffic – the usual. The people of the land coming to the city.
Annas.	The rabble that knows not the law.
Joseph.	The rabble are our countrymen, Annas.

[371] *Antigone,* in Sophocles. *The Three Theban Plays. Trans* Robert Fagles. (Harmondsworth. Penguin.1984).
[372] Wickham 1963;315.
[373] Sartre, *Politics and Literature* 1973;65-6, in Dollimore 1984;3.

Annas. I hear they've become your cronies.
Joseph. What do you mean?
Caiaphas. He means he's heard you've been in the north. Mingling with the Galilean miracle workers.
Annas. Magicians. Devil workers.
Joseph. Not a magician. Jesus from Nazareth. He's a healer. And the reason I've come to find you.
Caiaphas. Why?
Joseph. I hear you've put the word out for him. (Moir pp1-2)

Joseph's accusation 'I hear you've put the word out for him,' is not denied by the Priests or Scribes, creating an atmosphere of antagonism between them and Joseph. The scene prefigures Joseph's biblical role of providing a sepulchre, offering rest to Jesus' body and a place for the dignified grief of his friends. These are actions only hinted at in this version of *The Passion*. Joseph's dialogue with the Priests has an additional choric function in contextualising the story.[374] By the time Joseph leaves, the audience knows it is the Passover Festival; that 'the rabble' in the north are attracted to Jesus; that miracles, magic or healing have become significant; that, regardless of Judas' actions, there has been a call for Jesus' arrest; that in the previous week Jesus and his followers led a wild procession in to the city. All the information is recounted chronologically, and derived directly from Mark's gospel, providing a context for the disruption which follows.

The Priests and Scribes continue the choric function by preparing for Judas' entrance and acquiescence in the plot against Jesus with an account of Mary Magdala's profligacy with perfume, the same incident Judas' uses to justify his actions in *The Mysteries*:

Annas. If he's a money man and a religious fanatic –
Scribe 2. It would explain his reaction when Mary Magdala poured ten thousand pounds worth of scent over Jesus.
….
Scribe 1. Well Iscariot objected – he said the money could have been given to the poor. (Moir pp4-5)

Joseph, the Priests and Scribes do what Antigone, Ismene and the citizens of Thebes do in *Antigone*. Their reported action gives the context for Judas' appearance. In both cases fear on the part of the powers of law will determine

374 In the dialogue which follows, Jesus' triumphal entry; expulsion of the moneychangers; blasphemous teaching; concern for women are all reported. Moir, 2012;2-4.

the tragic fate of Jesus and Antigone. Caiaphas and Creon believe that the central characters – Jesus and Antigone – seek a 'positive rejection of "order" – in the universe, society and the human subject – as [in their eyes] ideological misrepresentation.'[375] For Caiaphas and Creon such rejection and misrepresentation is immoral and heretical and cannot be tolerated.

In Greek tragedy, this scene setting with its moral overtones will be the task of the dramatist whose personal views must be set against the quest for a monetary prize. Tragedies are not sacred texts; the gospels are. To put Passion Plays on stage requires distorting the original sources – the gospels – by inserting dialogue and inventing scenes to augment the scriptural narrative.[376] How the writer of a Passion Play also augments the ethical and moral aspects of them becomes itself an ethical issue. Once any story is presented as a theatrical performance – or actors speak words – moral and ethical overtones will be presented. Whether such overtones are compatible with, or inimical to, those in the texts from which they derive is an inevitable issue. It is also an insoluble one since every performance will differ regardless of a director's, actors' or audiences' intention (not least in which words and phrases are inadvertently omitted). As with all plays, Passion Plays are susceptible to a 'variety of different possible "performances" more than one of which may well be wholly fitting and appropriate for particular [spectators] on particular occasions.'[377]

The Passion as tragedy

The contention that *A Passion for Kendal* stands as tragedy is supported by Hegel's view that 'tragedy arises...when a hero courageously asserts a substantial and just position, but in doing so simultaneously violates a contrary and likewise just position and so falls prey to a one-sidedness that is defined at one and the same time by greatness and guilt.'[378] In the first scene Joseph asserts that Jesus is the courageous hero, who violates the 'just position'

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[375] Dollimore 1984;6. See: Jesus' denunciation of the scribes 'ideological misrepresentation' in Mark 12;37-40.
[376] All the cycles develop the Crucifixion with non-biblical dialogue. Harrison uses the York Cycle Play 34, *Road to Calvary* with Jesus, soldiers and three Marys.
[377] Hart, in Vander Lugt & Hart 2014.40.
[378] Roche, Mark, W. *Introduction to Hegel's Theory of Tragedy*. PhaenEx 1, no.2 (fall /winter 2006). 11-20. p11.

represented in the opening scene by members the Jewish council. As the two supreme Jewish leaders Caiaphas and Annas are both committed to defending Israel's own 'substantial and just' position. As characters they differ in their approach. Caiaphas' lines are longer and more measured than those of Annas. In the opening scene he avoids pejorative or emotive language – 'miracle workers' rather than 'devil workers.' He reasons when speaking of Jesus – 'there are lots of good men.' He cautions against populist uprisings for fear of Roman reprisal since Pilate's reputation for brutality was well-founded.[379] In the final lines of the scene he makes clear that Gethsemane contains the martyrs' column – the Kendal War Memorial – so locating the forthcoming betrayal at a place familiar to the audience, and giving it an ethical role in the implication that Jesus' survival would lead to others becoming martyrs:

> Judas That's appropriate. A representative of the Roman Empire waiting for me at the column which remembers our martyrs.
> Caiaphas There'll be many more of those if Jesus isn't removed.
> (Moir p7)

In Christian terms, the fictional scene between the Priests and Judas may be judged as heretical in its pragmatic justification of the Jewish political and religious position. In doing so, however, it re-imagines the ethical debates in Mark 14;1-2, Matthew 26;1-5 and especially John 11;47-8, where the chief priests say: 'if we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.' In his actions, Jesus forces Caiaphas and Annas to engage in an 'ethico-juridical reflection on the relation of penalty to responsibility.'[380] For the High Priests the penalty, in this case, must be death.

In the opening of *A Passion for Kendal,* Moir establishes a theatrical position which draws on Aristotelian, Shakespearean and Hegelian models of tragedy. To do so, she develops a script from a number of sources, changes the biblical sequence of events and interpolates characters and dialogue in order to give intelligibility and clarity for a large audience. The script also takes account of the theatrical constraints and possibilities of site-specific locations and architectural features. But she has done significantly more in allowing Hegel's

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[379] See, e.g.: Josephus. *Ant.* 3.18; 1-2.
[380] Ricoeur, P. *The Symbolism of Evil.* (Boston. Beacon. 1969), 100.

contention that, in Jesus and the Jewish authorities: 'each of the opposed sides, if taken by itself, has *justification*, while on the other hand each can establish the true…content of its own aim and character only by negating and *damaging* the equally justified power of the other. Consequently in its moral life, and because of it each is just as much involved in *guilt*.'[381] I have shown that the adaptation of gospel narrative for dramatic effect in Passion Plays is common practice, but the more difficult issue *A Passion for Kendal* raises is that of guilt. In *The Winchester Passion,* and many other Passion Plays, guilt is apportioned or ascribed to Jewish and Roman authorities, but can it be that Jesus as human and divine is also guilty? If Passion Plays are presented by a specifically confessional group to tell the Christian story, unequivocally not. But the gospels offer ample material for a non-religious theatre company to show Jesus' guilt in disrupting the religious and political *status quo*. If Christology is not its primary focus a Passion Play, as I have already observed, can become tragedy and no single character, least of all the tragic hero should be excused their share of guilt.

A Passion for Kendal makes clear that the Priests and Scribes must maintain Israel's holiness. For them, as for Creon in *Antigone*, a course of action, seen by some as duplicitous, is acceptable if it maintains the theocratic or ethical *status quo*. Creon's condemnation and punishment of Antigone is demonstrated by Tiresias to be a personal attack based on:

> Stubbornness [which]
> Brands you for stupidity – pride is a crime.
> No, yield to the dead!
> Never stab the fighter when he's down
> Where's the glory, killing the dead twice over? (ll1136-1140)

This is far less the maintenance of a 'substantial and just position' than the Priests' action over Jesus and for Joseph of Arimathea and the women disciples, already representing 'Paulinian *antilegalism* against the law of the tribunal.'[382] Such action may be reprehensible, but in tragic terms it can be justified. However, the people ultimately support their own authorities. Judas is also identified with the priests as one who, while wishing to remain loyal to Jesus, seeks to uphold the values of Israel's God and law, so vindicating his betrayal of Jesus. His dilemma comes in his dialogue with the Priests:

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[381] Hegel, collected works (15;523, A 1196) in Roche 2006;12.
[382] Ricoeur 1969;100.

Judas.	He knows more about God and peace than you will ever know.	
Caiaphas.	Then why are you doing it?	
Judas.	Because that's all he knows.	
Caiaphas.	How much do you want? Ten pounds?	
Judas.	I thought he was going to get rid of the Romans, bring in God's kingdom, our kingdom.	
Caiaphas.	I said how much?	
Judas.	But he hasn't. All he does is talk.	(Moir p6)

Such arguments play no part in the disciples' reaction to the developing disaster. As in the gospels, Moir presents their response as uncomplicated, but with an additional disruptive element:

John:	What's happening?	
James:	Who is it?	
Peter:	I can't see	
Jesus:	It's Judas.	
John:	The one you said would betray you.	
Jesus:	Yes.	
John:	He was never one of us.	
James:	A Judean.	(Moir p10)

The identification of Judas as 'a Judean' is accurate – the other disciples were Galilean. In a piece of site-specific street theatre where real places have resonances for different audience members, the words 'he was never one of us' isolates Judas – who an audience has already seen commit an immoral act – and acquires moral overtones because he comes from a different place.[383] The first scene showing that most disciples were from the north, made them suspect in the eyes of the authorities. Now the disciples join ranks, as northerners, against Iscariot the Judean and southerner.

In the divisiveness they show between the disciples, these lines may be among the most contentious in the play. They reflect all the gospel narratives of Jesus' arrest where Jesus appears to know who is the betrayer, and must know the likely outcome of events. They reflect equally accurately the ambiguity of the gospels over what the disciples saw or knew of the plot to betray Jesus during the Last Supper.[384] Through this unscriptural insertion, with its

[383] In a relatively small, rural town – like Kendal – attitudes to people from 'outside' can be irrational.
[384] Mt 26;20-25, Mk 14;17-21, Lk 22;21-23 (esp).

judgemental overtones, Moir points up the dialectic of the disciples' aspirations against their human frailty at a time of crisis. The same dialectic holds in Luke's gospel (22;24-27) where the argument over human greatness, and Jesus' rebuke follows the revelation of a traitor amongst the disciples. In both cases audience or reader is made aware of increasing pressure on all the characters leading to uncharacteristic or unworthy action. In the Kendal play a second unscriptural insertion adds to its potential tragic quality.

Jesus' line, immediately following those above is: 'A Judean. And one of us. Only more fervent…' This compounds the paradox of his betrayal by rebuking James and John when they identify and seek to condemn Judas. Jesus' position here is ambivalent and his support and promotion of Judas above the other disciples as 'more fervent' can be seen as unacceptable. But nowhere in the gospels does Jesus overtly condemn Judas, and Matthew has Jesus addressing Judas as 'friend' (Mt.26;50).[385] By refusing to condemn Judas he allows him the ethical validity of his decision so maintaining a connection with the Jewish nation, of which they are both members. This connection may also unite Jesus himself with the Priests as belonging to God's people under God's law. His commendation of Judas as 'Only more fervent' becomes an ironic comment on the behaviour of the remaining male disciples' ignominious flight in the face of the Temple guards – the representatives of God's law. The prediction of Peter's denial is a particularly sharp, if implicit, rebuke for Peter, equating his behaviour with that of Judas.

Moir's Gethsemane scene amplifies the gospels' acceptance of the necessity of Judas' actions which will allow Jesus' final soteriological ones. Their paths may lead to death, but an audience is faced with two characters – if not heroes – who, like Antigone, are committed and obstinate enough to make supreme sacrifices for their moral and ethical convictions. For Jesus and Antigone there is a deeper connection. Both know what will be the end of their actions. Antigone knows her burial of Polynices is illegal and the retribution Creon will exact. If Jesus identifies himself with Judas in Messianic hope, he

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[385] Jesus is equally ambiguous in the other gospels – Mark has no words addressed to Judas; Luke uses the ironic 'friend'. *The Winchester Passion,* where Judas is a weak character suborned by a Temple guard and any guilt is not made obvious, does not have a scene between Judas and the Priests. Glassborrow, in Mellor 2008;124-5.

must be aware that healing and claiming the power to forgive sins transgresses the law. Yet it is not simply the knowledge of transgression that unites the two heroes. They choose to face the inevitable outcome alone, and Jesus' determination to stop the armed disciples protecting him renders them powerless, and isolates him.[386] This enforced powerlessness following Jesus' privileging of Judas' position and action leads to a fearful *anagnorisis* as the disciples become aware of Jesus' arrest and failure as a Messianic figure and *peripeteia* as they '*melt away*' (stage direction), or run for their lives, which was not directed but happened in performance. In this context Peter's subsequent denial of Jesus becomes another *peripeteia*. At the critical moment Jesus has failed as the Messiah and betrayed the disciples.[387] They have understood this and Peter justifies them accordingly. In *The Mysteries* the woman who confronts Peter has already condemned Jesus for 'the wonders this wight has wrought… full fiercely should his death be sought.'[388] *The Winchester Passion* introduces Peter's denial with a soldier explaining: 'he was a con artist, apparently. Working on the Sabbath, breaking the rules of the temple, mixing with low-lifes. You name it.'[389] From the Gethsemane scene onwards, but before the rabble-rousing trial, Jesus' transgression is made clear in all three plays. Peter's denial after the interpolated accusations, adds to a presumption of guilt by friends and enemies and moves Jesus closer to becoming a tragic hero.

The possibility of any Passion Play as tragedy is not only due to the ethical issues involved and the guilt of the priests in upholding them, or of Jesus in transgressing them. In *A Passion for Kendal*, Joseph of Arimathea voices Jesus' concern for all people – 'the rabble that knows not the law' – Galileans; foreigners; women. This is the voice of morality – seeking what is good before what is right, disregarding ethical Judaism with its laws and exclusions. Joseph separates ethics from morality citing Jesus as the epitome of the latter. For Joseph, and as the play proceeds, the audience, Jesus, however his divinity is understood, stands for humanity, while the state remains obsessed with the laws

[386] 'Put up your guns and daggers. Have you learnt nothing?' Moir 2012;10. Cf. Mt 26;52 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.'
[387] In a theatrical interpretation of the Synoptic accounts only. See Jn 18;6 'Jesus answered "I am he", they stepped back and fell to the ground.'
[388] Harison 1985;114
[389] Glassborrow in Mellor 2008;129.

of religious ethics.[390] This conforms to Lionel Abel's view that for tragedy (at least) two sets of people are necessary; the family and the *polis*, and the tragic hero is caught between the two. His or her actions are courageous or radical, so creating conflict with one (if not both) groups, so to take any action 'meant to sin against family or *polis*. Thus anyone who acted was necessarily guilty… [but] his guilt followed not from a decision to sin, but merely from a decision to act.'[391] In *A Passion for Kendal*, Moir has established a number of groupings consonant with Abel's. The Priests and Scribes are the embodiment of the ethical structure supporting the Jewish nation at Jerusalem, the religious *polis*, but also, through the latent vindication of Judas, Jesus' own "family". The Romans stand as the temporal *polis*, but more pragmatically than the Priests.[392] The disciples, until their departure, Joseph and above all, the women, represent moral values, regardless of ethical constraints, and constitute Jesus' immediate and biological family. In Moir's play, the women's role is greater than in Mark's gospel. They are prominent throughout the action from Gethsemane and repeatedly protest against the injustice shown to Jesus. Theatrically they counter the violence of the guards and soldiers and plead for acquittal at the trial, balancing the demands for crucifixion. Their prominence distinguishes them from the disciples, whose desertion is based on a fear of the consequences of ethical transgression and failure. There is now an emerging tragedy with Jesus as hero whose actions inevitably set him, with the exception of the women, against all these groups. For many spectators Jesus may remain blameless and innocent, but within the narrative of both gospel and Passion Plays, Jesus is shown to be both guilty and not guilty. The performance of the plays portrays the tragic paradox, but may not easily show who bears responsibility for it.

The question of guilt, especially for spectators and performers who profess a Christian faith, should disappear in Moir's first trial scene, with Jesus before the Council. The scene should remove any possibility of the Passion being a tragedy. To the Priests questions: 'Are you the Messiah?' 'God's chosen one.' 'The son of God?' Jesus' answer 'I am'[393] elevates him to divine status, above

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[390] see Ricoeur 1969; Ch III; *Guilt*.
[391] Abel 2003;101.
[392] Pilate argues for punishment commensurate with Jesus offence.
[393] Also in Glassborrow 2008 and Harrison 1985.

the 'intermediate' category of hero 'not outstanding in moral excellence…'[394] which Aristotle demands. The revelation of Jesus' divinity must remove any possibility of guilt and finally establish the soteriological event of the resurrection. If this were the case, it appears paradoxical that some who saw the play were disappointed at the lack of a resurrection scene. In performance, is the conviction of Jesus' divinity over his humanity not strong enough to carry the underlying message of the Passion? If this is so, must salvation be 'performed' in a resurrection scene to become real? A more likely possibility is that the theatrical process consistently destabilises its subject matter so that even Aristotle's rule is not infallibly demonstrated. Jesus' continuing suffering and cry of abandonment at the crucifixion undermines his assertion of divinity.

In the Crucifixion scene Moir employs uncharacteristically nuanced theological dialogue between the Centurion and the Sergeant which displays compassion among the military unlike any portrayals in the cycles, *The Mysteries* or *The Winchester Passion*. The soldiers do not ascribe guilt or blame, but imply error:

> Sgt There you go, you poor sod. 'Jesus Christ, King of the Jews.' This'll teach you to stand up to Caesar and the rest. (Moir p22)

In their admiration and sympathy for Jesus: 'The man's brave. He has no hatred and no fear,' and for the women as they approach the cross: 'Leave them be sergeant. They won't attempt anything…' the soldiers reinstate Jesus as closer to an Aristotelian hero than a soteriological divinity. The final words of the first play are:

> Jesus. My Father, my God, why have you abandoned me?
> Sgt. He's dead, Sir. Quick. (*Pause*) Very quick.
> Centurion. He was a son of God.
> Sgt. Aren't we all, Sir?
> Centurion. Yes sergeant. (*Pause*) But this man truly was a son of God. (Moir p24)

The repetition of their own shared assertion of Jesus and us as sons and daughters of God unites them and, potentially, the audience with Jesus as human and divine. Performance of this shared existence may have been influential in creating the sense of tragedy for those to whom Jesus' answer 'I am' to 'Are you the son of God?' signifies that humanity is created in the image

[394] Aristotle 1996;21.

of God, and that any person, sharing that image may become a tragic hero.

If Jesus is perceived to be fully divine and fully human, then he must be without sin *and* share all human attributes.[395] But being without sin need not exculpate him from accusations of guilt. Aristotle states that a tragic hero must be good, like us – or better – but subject to error – *hamartia*, so in some way guilty. Such errors may be ethical or moral, though they may not be self-consciously sinful. As a human, Jesus fulfils Aristotle's heroic criteria as a courageous leader with 'no moral defect or depravity' who comes into conflict with the ethical guardians of his own culture. He also conforms to Hegel's view that the individual can be 'morally right and the state retrograde.'[396] Jesus, in his Jewish context 'appears as destructive – transgressing laws.'[397] Moir catalogues the errors Jesus makes in the trial scene. These are ethical transgressions but under Jewish law also sinful – desecration of the Sabbath; sedition as a rabble-rouser; blasphemy in claiming Messiahship and the power to destroy the temple. In performance, Passion Plays present Priests who see Jesus as guilty of the *hubris* and *ate* which mark the tragic hero, while the overwhelming majority of audiences, regardless of religious convictions consistently see an individual defending the dispossessed and who defies the 'social orders [who] have always invisibly shut out the majority.'[398] But if a Passion Play elicits pity and terror for Jesus across religious divides, the guilt must somehow be perceived as genuine: 'the hero is both innocent and guilty – innocent insofar as [s]he adheres to the good by acting on behalf of a just principle; guilty insofar as [s]he violates a good and wills to identify with that violation. Guilt presupposes action for which the hero is responsible.'[399]

The scandal in the gospels is that in the eyes the Jewish Council, Jesus did commit illegal and consequently, unethical acts to challenge those authorities. His justification can be that in defending their ethical position the religious authorities have lost their moral compass which should underpin Mosaic Law. This law and God's covenant put care for humanity above legalism, once more

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[395] Heb 4.15
[396] Roche 2006;13.
[397] Hegel 18;515 in Roche 2006;13.
[398] Eagleton 2003;296.
[399] Roche 2006;13.

drawing a parallel between Jesus and, especially, Antigone. The ethical proof needed to punish Jesus is there and Jesus has to be guilty, but still blameless and still admirable. The level of punishment demanded and achieved by the Priests, in an unethical and immoral partnership with Pilate, serves to heighten the perception of Jesus' blamelessness and adds to the pity and terror his suffering provokes when witnessed in performance.

Aristotle and Hegel agree that tragedy involving only wicked people is impossible since they are not blameless and suffering would not be undeserved. At the same time conflict involving wholly good and wholly bad protagonists leads to mythological or romanticised stories or performances.[400] The only reversals and recognitions available to such stories are those which lead to guaranteed 'happy endings.' They cannot give the opportunity for human beings to become aware of guilt and its consequences – not necessarily entirely negative. Rather they are inimical to the human capacity for choice, so denying the Mosaic paradigm. Some of the participants and audiences for *A Passion for Kendal* would have preferred such a predetermined interpretation, but to have turned the Passion into a melodrama of heroes and villains would have been unworthy of its sources and unfulfilling as theatre. I will argue that the original models for Passion Plays are open-ended in the way tragedies can be. The end of *Antigone* sees Creon repentant, and Oedipus, in exile at Colonus, ultimately becomes if not a saviour, certainly a prophet. Jesus' words on the cross and the Centurion's final response indicate the potential for human involvement and choice open to participants in tragedy through the actions of a hero: 'That is the position of heroes in history… through them a new world dawns. This new principle is in contradiction with the previous one… individually they are vanquished; but the principle persists… and buries the present.'[401]

It is not a 'happy ending' which ushers in the 'new world' which may 'dawn' at the end of the Passion Plays. At the beginning of *A Passion for Kendal*, Joseph of Arimathea outlines Jesus' desire for greater morality and a return to

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[400] See e.g.: *The Deadly Theatre* in Brook 1972. Theatre produced consciously to be repetitive and earn money. Also: The 'Western' giving a distorted view of American history; the Disney Corporation with its self-promotion. The dilemma over the necessity of such theatre & film is beyond the scope of this work.
[401] Hegel 18;515 in Roche 2006;13.

the underlying values of the Mosaic covenant, but it is accomplished in a context of instability and violence. The final scene does not deny the possibility of a 'new world', but suggests that if it happens it will be the result of continued instability. Judicial systems have been subverted. Jesus is abandoned by his friends, and, if he believes the possibility, by his God. Once more, in performance, Jesus' status as divine is called into question. The instability latent in any performance recalls the overt instability of the original texts.[402] The paradox of such textual instability is that is stands in contrast to the formulaic scripts and pre-determined happiness of many romanticised heroic plays and films. In such, unstable texts and uncertain endings are not options as they can allow the wicked characters to find redemption the good ones to be condemned.

A Passion for Kendal, with *The Mysteries*, conforms to tragic models. It elicits pity and terror and it shows error, guilt and undeserved suffering. It is a story of 'the absolute realizing itself in history'[403] and it is a story which may herald a new world. But as a tragedy it cannot guarantee salvation. This is where theology and theatre risk their greatest collision. *A Passion for Kendal* – all Passion Plays – talk of God. Many require performances of God's acts and their results. Tragedies and other plays can put gods on stage. *A Passion for Kendal* held an eclectic audience because its theatricality allows them to identify, sympathise, suffer and fear with characters in a real event. The audience knows that the characters are people like themselves; that *I* in the audience, in other circumstances, could face the same choices as Jesus or the Priests. They also know, as we have seen through theatrical reality that the actor is not Jesus, but, at the same time, is not not-Jesus.

In Passion Plays the transcendent God does not appear as a character so there is no requirement to put God on stage, as in the Old Testament cycle plays, where God engages with other characters but remains in some way 'other'. The first problem this raises for the performance of Christian salvation and redemption particularly, is that of demonstrating that one person can die

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[402] The discrepancies between all the gospels, especially the portrayal of Jesus by John, indicate such instability.
[403] Roche 2006;12.

for another person's sins. Jesus may sacrifice himself for humanity, and this may be explained in a performance, as at Winchester, thereby removing its tragic propensity. As we have observed, in many modern Passion Plays the final image the audience sees is a human being's death brought about by an unjust society. A presentation with liturgical or explanatory dialogue, as in *The Winchester Passion*, renders the crucifixion unconvincing and the play non-tragic. Such devices counter-balance the participatory experience offered in performance through a reliance on over-interpreted Brechtian distancing. The audience sees Jesus, the man, dying but is told that his death is an atonement, by God, and that a happy ending is guaranteed.[404]

The discrepancy between seeing an event and having it explained leads to the second problem preventing the convincing performance of salvation. To achieve this requires a convincing performance of a resurrection, but such performances and their soteriological outcomes are difficult because God 'does' the resurrection, and nowhere is it seen. The extant Cycles and *The Mysteries* all place *The Harrowing of Hell*, carried out by Jesus, before *The Resurrection*. Theatrically this change of location and movement of performance time starts the 'process' of the Resurrection. An audience sees Jesus before the women do, eliminating the need for a performed Resurrection. All the plays end with *The Last Judgement* where salvation and damnation keep open Wickham's possibility of tragedy. *A Passion for Kendal* also goes beyond the Crucifixion. *The Empty Tomb*[405] – following reasonably accurately the gospel sources – took place in the ruins of Kendal Castle more than twenty-four hours after the crucifixion. The dialogue follows closely that of Mark, with the final line: 'He is waiting for you' altered by the actors to '*us*' and repeated *ad lib* as the women left the stage. The 'young man in white' was visible to many of the audience throughout and allowed their identification both with his angelic humanity and with their expectation and excitement as he 'surprised' and 'terrified' the women. As they left, the women's dialogue 'He is waiting for *us*' enabled a greater anticipation, shared with the audience, of an encounter with Jesus somewhere to the north of Kendal. The women's departure 'to Galilee' took the same route as the audience's own departure from the performance, uniting performers and

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404 See: Mellor 2008;141ff.
405 The original second (now third) play in *A Passion for Kendal.*

audience in their journey from theatrical to quotidian reality. The ending coincided with the sun setting, with candles lit all over the castle, large fire sculptures of a lamb and the sun and an exultant anthem[406]

For some Christians this signified the coming resurrection. For others it failed to make the resurrection explicit. For many of indeterminate faith it provided an enigmatic end, reminiscent of the final scene of *Eumenides*. We can aspire to salvation and divinity, if we choose to follow where divinity leads. If this is so, then the argument for the Passion as tragedy gains strength, and shows the possibility of redemption – through the performance of human action and suffering. Eagleton's observations on sacrifice and the religious origins of tragedy apply to Passion Plays: 'Messianic time is thus the opposite of teleology: redemption is not what history immanently brings forth, but what arises from its ruins.'[407] In the Passion Plays and *Eumenides* gods may offer outcomes, but seem to have little to do with determining them. If 'Tragedy' – including Passion Plays – 'results from seeing an action from the viewpoint of perfection,'[408] and if the viewpoint of perfection leads to salvation and redemption, offered but not determined, by God, is an interpretation of the Passion as tragedy acceptable to Christian theology? 'He is waiting for us' is not what the angel said, but acknowledges that we must choose to encounter the transcendent, as well as immanent, Jesus. The following two chapters explore how we encounter the divine in worship and liturgy and in doing so, move from immanence to transcendence.

[406] kendalcommunitytheatre.org/picturearchive
[407] Eagleton 2003;291.
[408] Abel 2003;173.

Chapter 6. Performance and tragedy in Church of England liturgies.
The Divine Office; performance and script.

The Church of England has two major sets of liturgies for regular public worship.[409] The first and most commonly practised is the Divine Office. This includes Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer or any form of worship where scripture, exposition, music, directed prayer[410] in various combinations are used and repeated daily, weekly or seasonally.[411] These acts of worship may have a multiplicity of audiences. They appear wholly directed towards God as creator. There is an analogy between such forms of worship and ancient Greek performance in the Theatre of Dionysus – complete with priestly throne – or modern performances in any theatre with a royal box. In the presence of royalty, performances may be expected to begin and end with an acknowledgment of such personages, making them the non-participatory object of performance. Morning and Evening Prayer do not necessarily require any active participation by a congregation or audience, so readily lend themselves to the skilful performance of a few experts. This, potentially, places the congregation alongside the object of worship, who is God, In the field of all the arts the practice of 'hierarchical' performance is frequently a given since the richest patrons are the most powerful and elevated. Worship as performance to a congregation reflects worldly as much as spiritual practice. But such worship also allows participants to encounter the numinous in ways attested throughout the history of the church. Examples include listening and responding to music (1 Chron 16), or receiving instruction through the interpretation of scripture (Neh 8-9). Worship thus undertaken raises issues of ownership, authority and interpretation which can prove almost intractable and will be discussed below as antithetical to participatory performance in worship.

The second and foundational form of Christian worship is the Eucharist. Here the whole of the gathered community are participants and the active presence of God is assumed, deriving in part, from Paul's reference to the Moses

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[409] In the BCP, 1928, 150 pages out of 780 are devoted to Liturgies other than the Offices or Eucharist. In Common Worship, 2000, it is 32 out of 850.
[410] Not necessarily written.
[411] See: *Didache* Ch. 8 & 12. 1 Chron 16;4-42.

story as Eucharistic archetype (1 Cor 10;1-4).[412] The mix of vague and precise spoken words, actions and rubric in early Church orders and anaphora and the demand for the whole congregation to move, gesture, touch and participate in worship with God – or in his presence – raises the question of whether Eucharistic worship may even be countenanced as performance as there appears to be no audience for its enactment. As a theological interpretation, this does not preclude a theatrical one. It presupposes ecclesiastical structures and instruction which may be at odds with theatrical interpretations. I have argued in chapter one that performance time is finite and extrinsic teleological and eschatological dimensions are impossible within it, but Geoffrey Wainwright states that for many Christians worship involves 'actions that signify divine grace coming to begin and continue the shaping of active recipients into the people God is calling them to become.'[413]

Worship and liturgy conform to my criteria for performance and theatricality more easily than biblical narratives. Applying a hermeneutic of performance to the Moses story requires selection of certain passages and sections to give a narrative where God is an active participant in performance and where tragedy is a possibility. Wainwright employs a similar hermeneutic of 'action' in relation to worship. He asserts that 'Israel experienced the saving presence of God in the historical *events* of the exodus from Egypt.'[414] He continues to suggest that worship, almost by definition, is performance incorporating degrees of theatricality in order to bring about an encounter between God and humanity 'symbolically focused in liturgy': 'Christian worship uses sacraments… [and] rituals in which *gesture* and *movement* and *material objects* play a significant part… the action is accompanied by verbal interpretation and takes place within a framework of understanding. The body is the fundamental communicative sign of the human person; speech is the most supple sign which allows precision in the expression of intention.'[415]

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[412] The identification of the rock as Christ heightens the theatrical and theological interpretation of Moses' action at Meribah, contributing to his tragic *hamartia*.
[413]. Wainwright, G. *Doxology*. (New York. OUP. 1984), 121.
[414] Wainwright 1984.20.
[415] Ibid. p.20.

Wainwright's exploration of worship, as a generality, stands equally defensibly, as an approach to acting and performance.[416] His definition of 'ritual', whether verbal, moving or gestural, has a 'script' which enables its repetition so making it rehearsed. The question then arises of what, in theatrical terms, is the difference between worship and liturgy. Wainwright appears to be saying that worship may correspond with performance and liturgy corresponds with its script as the 'verbal interpretation' of the ritual. A script is the vehicle which enables a performance to happen. This proposition assumes the content of any act of worship to be, in religious terms, liturgical, whether the *The Divine Liturgy* of John Chrysostom where every gesture and tone of voice is prescribed[417] or wholly extempore worship, wherever practised.[418] I will argue that while some liturgies may provide the means to encounter God, others, intentionally, keep God separate from other participants and that not all worship is performance.

A second question which arises out of Wainwright's implied intrinsic theatricality of worship focuses on the assignment of roles. Every performance has a cast of characters who must assume qualities or undertake tasks different from their routine or quotidian behaviour: 'in the more primitive religions, the whole community *acted out* the sacred *drama*… Christian worship does not deny [their] values… It *purifies* them, puts them into an entirely new context and *enhances* them.'[419]

As we have seen, a theatrical reading and interpretation of the Moses' story as tragedy allows all its characters, including God and spectators to become the community which 'acts out the sacred drama'. J. D. Chrichton observes that worship should always include the opportunity for 'men and women of today [to] make a saving encounter with God'[420] as a real event – or

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[416] Cf. 'Stanislavski required actors to be physically free; to develop powers of imagination and concentration… to train the memory… to develop empathy and communicate fully; and to use make-up, properties, costume, settings and effects…' Miles-Brown, J. *Acting: A Drama Studio Source Boo*k. (London. Peter Owen Publishers. 1985), 12. Also, Fortier 1997. Ch 1.
[417] *The Divine Liturgy of Our Father among the Saints John Chrysostom*. (Oxford. OUP. 1995). See e.g.: p.29.
[418] There is little liturgical prescription in NT and the *Didache*, (Ch10) allows 'the prophets to make Thanksgiving as much as they desire.'
[419] Crichton, J. *A Theology of Worship* in Jones, C *et al. Eds. The Study of Liturgy*. (London. SPCK. 1992), 9 (my italics).
[420] Ibid. p.17.

series of events. Real bodies, with real objects in real space and time must be its constituent parts although their 'reality' in worship may be 'purified', re-contextualised and 'enhanced' for them to become effectual. With regard to the 'acting out of the sacred drama', the earliest records for the Eucharist (1 Cor 10-11, Mark 14) show Jesus at the centre of a performance involving a whole community. The *Didache* details roles within the Christian community which include Teachers and Prophets with Bishops and Deacons, and suggests Prophets are involved in leading the Eucharist. By the early third century for the consecration of a bishop at the Eucharist, Hippolytus, diversifies the roles to embrace Deacons, Readers, those offering oil, cheese and olives, Confessors and Widows. In non-eucharistic worship the roles are equally numerous and just as diverse. Levites and Kohathites fulfil priestly functions during the Exodus. Lyre and trumpet players figure in David's worship. Nehemiah has many priests and theologians leading and instructing in worship. Jesus and then the apostles read and instruct at synagogue worship. Biblical records show an over-arching requirement for the whole community to be together for worship. *Koinonia* unites the faithful as holy, whatever form their worship takes, isolating them from the potential corruption of pagan worship or idolatry.[421] The question arising from a whole-cast-in-worship proposition – where worship is seen theologically as implicitly theatrical and so to be performed, or 'acted-out' – is two-fold. Where is God and who (and where) is the audience?

An initial answer is that God, as a character in worship, ought to be an allusive one. Worship should move in an 'upwards and forwards direction towards God, and the achievement of his purpose, which includes human salvation.'[422] It is a 'reaching out *through* the fear that always accompanies the sacred to the *mysterium* conceived as *tremendum* but also *fascinans* because behind it and in it there is an intuition of the Transcendent.'[423] God may be transcendentally or immanently present in worship, but as addressee and so passive. 'Playing' or 'acting' God in worship, by a man or woman, whether bishop, priest or other minister, runs two risks. The risk of idolatry increases as the 'actor' may be perceived as god-like, so upstaging God. I will discuss this in

[421] 1 Cor 10; 15-22. See Jones *et al.* 1992;191.
[422] Wainwright 1984;10.
[423] Crichton in Jones *et al.*1992;7.

a later section of this chapter. The second risk which I discuss in chapter seven is that of God's anthropomorphism, being perceived as human among humans. In being performed by a human, God's divinity and power may be diminished in the way that Apollo's role is reduced to that of witness and advocate in *Eumenides*. In performance the audience is active alongside actors and its response forms and re-forms the performance as it happens. Even without a Nietzschean assimilation of audience and chorus as characters, 'the audience assists the actor and at the same time for the audience itself, assistance comes back from the stage.'[424] Can God be worshipped in worship if God, even as audience, is active in worship – the object of worship? If human characters 'act-out' a liturgy alongside God, also a character, they and God are equal partners in its performance. If God is a character in the theatrical reality created by performance, what happens when performers and audience return to 'quotidian' reality?[425]

One possibility is that God as creator is not a performer in worship (the performance of liturgy), but brought into an asymmetrical relationship with humans through their worship. This is the opening position of Geoffrey Wainwright: 'God himself transcends his creation and therefore transcends this [asymmetrical] relationship. The proper relationship between creature and Creator is, in Christian eyes, the relationship of worship.'[426] Cheslyn Jones states that 'In worship we respond to God,'[427] – God is the instigator of worship. Theatrically, the Creator is the audience to whom a response is made. For some forms of worship, especially those of prayer, praise and instruction which occur in the Old and New Testament, the notion of God as audience and so object of worship is a just assertion. In the evolution of Christian worship it is a more insecure proposition, since to maintain it rigidly would be to undermine the status of the Eucharist as the foundation of Christian worship. Jesus, however as human and divine is instrumental in worship, himself enabling our glorification and enjoyment of God the creator.

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[424] Brook 1972;156.
[425] See above, Ch. 1, and below, Ch. 8, Conclusion.
[426] Wainwright 1984;16 (my italics).
[427] Jones *et al*.1992.9.

Chrysostom uses words after the kiss of peace to suggest divine presence in worship:

> 'Christ is in our midst'
> 'He is and will be'[428]

And in the Church of England *Common Worship* Eucharist:

> 'The Lord is here'[429]

Theologically, these words announce and affirm the real presence of God as God the creator to whom worshippers respond, or God the Son whose actions were the basis for the Eucharist, or God the spirit who enlivens worshippers. A hermeneutic of performance applied to these words in Eucharistic worship indicates the presence of a character: 'He [Jesus] is present in the mass.'[430] It is difficult to identify God the creator as active in the Eucharist, notwithstanding that there is as much theatricality latent in it as in any other liturgy. The central focus of the Eucharist is on Jesus, a man who is God, rather than God the creator. Relating bread and wine to the encounter with a living God in worship theologically and theatrically has consistently presented problems.[431] But objects can acquire significance which brings them into performance more powerfully than any allusive character. Wine, bread and water, if not cast members, may become symbolically and literally, characters in the performance of the Eucharist.[432] This possibility, as well as the presence of the human Jesus weakens the hierarchical relationship between creator and creature. The equal importance of all performers is further established by Jesus' self-offering for his people. His *kenosis* is inherently dramatic[433] and applies to the Eucharist interpreted as tragedy, and will be considered in the next chapter.

Performance and non-performance in worship and liturgy.

Worship uses 'gesture', movement', 'objects' and 'enactment', with their latent theatricality. Worship is directed to God or a congregation as an audience and shared with God as a participant. The church must – consciously or

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[428] *The Divine Liturgy*1995;29
[429] *Common Worship*. (London. Church House Publishing. 2000), 176.
[430] *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. (London. Catholic Truth Society.1967), 9.
[431] e.g. Wainwright 1984;260: Protestant & Roman distinctions over transubstantiation as 'exaggeratedly realistic' or 'on the metaphysical level of inner reality.'
[432] Yorick's skull for Hamlet or Pinter's eponymous dumb waiter may be more influential on-stage than the man Godot, off-stage.
[433] Cf. Oedipus in both Sophocles' tragedies, or Mariana in *Measure for Measure*.

unconsciously - hold together a dialectic of worship as performance with God and worship as communal action for God. In selecting liturgies to explore this dialectic the proposition that not all worship is performance, although performance may be part of all worship is helpful. The proposition could permit some acts of worship which are not performance to employ degrees of theatricality, at the same time allowing flexibility across the gathered community, so that 'cast' and 'audience' may change within any single act of worship. Priests and ministers, singers, choirs and readers seem to have the 'main parts', but congregational responses, antiphons, movements and gestures unite participants as performers and blur distinctions between ministers and worshippers. All are ministers and all are worshippers at some points in the liturgy. Or, at various moments, all – including God – are performers and all are audience. The implications of these distinctions are especially profound in the Eucharist.

A ritual or lesson or trial which can happen in private or does not require an audience cannot easily be considered as performance. Such events in the spectrum of Christian worship need to be excluded from this debate. Christian rites of Baptism, Confirmation, Matrimony and Funerals and Ordination may depend on God's direct action – *ex opere operato*, and not require the 'same enjoyment of God' for their efficacy as the worship of the gathered community. Applying a hermeneutic of performance to the assessment of liturgy, it is possible to restrict the number of primary liturgies, from which others evolve, by excluding those which do not conform to the criteria for performance, or which are variations on original themes. The New Testament, Hippolytus, and the *Didache* all limit the number of liturgical forms used in the early church.

The *Apostolic Tradition* and the *Didache* suggest four discrete liturgies: baptism; daily prayer; the Eucharist; ordination. These are given different degrees of prominence across the two sets of orders, although the Eucharist is predominant. Baptism is significant in both and inextricably linked to the Eucharist. Ordination is treated in different ways and provision for daily prayer,

although present is treated vaguely in both.[434] As the earlier source, the *Didache* may be closer to emerging liturgical practices in the fledgling Christian church.

New Testament accounts of baptism present a varied picture as dependent on individual circumstances as on any liturgical form.[435] Mark's account of Jesus' baptism may be interpreted as a theatrical event witnessed by a large audience (Mk 1;5-9), while Philip's baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8;32) is a private matter requiring only two participants, with God acting *ex opere operato*. There is an ambiguity in Jesus' baptism because it is separated temporally from the mass baptism of 'people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem…'(Mk 1;5) by 'In those days…'(Mk 1;9). There is, in principle, a time lapse allowing Jesus' baptism to be private, involving him, John and God as the only participants. Baptism is always sacramental but can be a performance with an audience, or ceremony without one. The earliest accounts of baptism dispense with any absolute need for an audience. The *Didache's* insistence that Baptism is best administered through immersion in running cold water makes it clear that a church building is no more necessary than a church community.[436] It is a transformative action done by God 'to' a person not 'for' a person. [437] Notwithstanding its function as the means to join the universal Church, the true benefit of Baptism is in the relationship formed between the baptised person and God.

As with Baptism, early orders for Ordination have varying degrees of clarity and vagueness. Chapter 15 of the *Didache* echoes Titus 1; 5-9 over the 'appointment' of bishops and deacons. Many qualities of candidates will be self-evident, including moderation, blamelessness and prudence (Ti 1;7-8), while others, particularly 'trustworthy teaching' will need testing (Ti, 2;1). Methods of testing and subsequent appointment are unspecified. Titus, with Paul's instructions, has sole responsibility for Episcopal and Diaconal appointments in each town and there is little to suggest that ordination should require anything other than his approval. Hippolytus requires 'all the people' to elect bishops and participate in their ordination, which supports the notion of a liturgy involving

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434 *Ap Trad.* is suspect here. See Guiver, G. *Company of Voices*. (London. SPCK.1988), 223.
435 Cf. Mk 1;4-7 & Acts 8;34-8.
436 *Didache.* Ch.7.
437 'It is Christ himself who baptises.' *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* 1967;9.

performance, but he separates appointment and subsequent public ordination.[438] The people make the executive decision to appoint the bishop. They then align themselves with the Presbytery as participants seeking 'the descent of the Spirit' upon the candidate.[439] As with baptism, all are participants in ordination and an audience is not necessary. At baptism the congregation is the community for the newly-baptised and at Hippolytus' ordinations the whole community affirms its new bishop. The earliest description and rubrics for two Sacramental liturgies support an argument against their consideration as performance. In Christian communities where no one can be Baptised and Ordained twice, these events are not repeatable with the same participants for transformation. Their effects carry forward into the subjects' future lives. They do not create a different reality but are extensions of quotidian reality.[440]

The remaining two liturgies of daily prayer and the Eucharist do not require any participants other than the gathered community in order to happen.[441] There need be no preparatory action as a condition of attendance – either the training of Catechumens or the appointment of a Bishop – but full participation may be subject to prior baptism. There are incipient distinctions between performers and audiences. These liturgies require repetition. The Eucharist is to be celebrated every Sunday, daily prayer is to be offered in company and at specific times (Lk 24; 53. Acts 3; 1 *inter alia*). The position of the gathered community as audience has been touched on, and will reappear for further discussion. The early division of the Eucharist into the Liturgy of the Catechumens, or Word, and Liturgy of the Faithful, or Sacrament, demonstrates the vagueness around the roles of some or all of its participants. From the earliest references, active response and participation by all present is a prerequisite. Jesus instructs the disciples: 'Pray then in this way…' (Mt, 6;9) and 'Do this …'(Lk, 22;19).[442] The nature, size and qualification of congregations for Daily Prayer is less determined, but while individual prayer is axiomatic for the Christian, it is set alongside the necessity for corporate prayer, praise and

[438] *Ap Trad.* 1;2ff.
[439] Ibid. 1;2.
[440] The Church of England provisions for Emergency Baptism and dual role of the minister as priest and registrar at Holy Matrimony demonstrate this point.
[441] See: Acts,2;42ff, 20; 7, 11. *Didache* ch 14. Guiver 1988;223.
[442] See: Mk 11;25-6, Lk 11;2, Mt 26;26ff, Mk 14; 22ff &c.

instruction from the time of Moses.[443] Whereas Baptism and Ordination are given *to* a person or people by God, the Eucharist and Daily Prayer are done *by* a community with God and for God. The 'proofs' of the former liturgies frequently involve signs and symbolic action – immersion in water and new clothes or the laying on of hands and presentation of the bishop. Both should be followed by a celebration of the Eucharist; a 'performance' after the transformative event. 'Proofs' for the latter happen within the events and for the community. Daily Prayer and the Eucharist exemplify performance as a transformative event.

The task of identifying specific liturgies to consider as performance through their requirements for an audience, script or repetition from a plethora of options is easier when it is driven by an examination of the earliest recorded and limited number of examples. To this must be added the task of identifying appropriate contemporary forms. Is there an Anglican hermeneutic of worship in the Eucharist and Daily Prayer of the same order and effect in the 21st century comparable to any worship in the 1st century? Applying a hermeneutic of performance it is possible to analyse any liturgy as a dramatic text and produce a serviceable 'prompt copy'. To do so with, say, a pre-reformation order risks begging three questions. What, and how, performance happens in contemporary worship? How can theatricality operate and be understood in such worship? How do these factors affect our perceptions of and response to God in worship? We must not read back our own cultural experience of performance into liturgies of previous eras. This dichotomy applies particularly to the Eucharist. Daily Prayer maintains core elements throughout Judaeo/Christian history. Scripture readings, singing hymns and psalms, praise, directed prayer and instruction are common and it may be reasonable to extrapolate arguments around performance across a wide time scale in the models presented in the following section. The same may not be said of the Eucharist. From earliest records onwards, the presence or absence of an epiclesis, especially within the structure of Eucharistic prayers; reception of bread or wine, bread and wine, and who gives them; exclusion and inclusion of worshippers all radically affect perceptions of the divine presence and God's action in worship. Ascertaining any degree of commonality of performance and theatricality together with the place, nature

[443] E.g.: Deut 6; 20-25, 27; 14-26. Pss. 4 & 5 for evening and morning prayers.

and purpose of audiences across so wide a spectrum of Eucharistic practice and interpretation is a major part of the next chapters.

To examine performance in the Eucharist, I will consider which theological insights and doctrines, as opposed to constituent components, underpin Eucharistic liturgies over long periods of history by examining some ancient and new forms together[444] in parallel with reformation liturgies which 'ascribe power to the ministry of the sacraments as being akin to the ministry of the word.'[445] In all cases it is important to study contemporary practice in order to gauge, however tentatively, what happens and how performance and theatricality work in current liturgy and worship. While results may not be quantifiable, it will be possible to explore how skills in performance transfer to worship and how they can be exploited by 'the skilled liturgist who is both obedient to the biblical pattern of prayer exemplified in Jesus and sensitive to the faith of his contemporaries.'[446] When these skills are shared between those who lead and those whose roles are variously congregation, audience and participants, we can speculate how God is involved and encountered in worship.

Performance and theatricality in liturgical texts.
The Divine Office. Church of England Evening prayer – 1662.
God as character; God as audience.

The predominant purpose of Evening Prayer[447] is to offer a gathered act which will 'tend to the preservation of peace and unity in the Church; the procuring of reverence, and exciting of piety and devotion in the publick worship of God.'[448] As a liturgy devised by humans in response to God the creator, it should be more straightforward to analyse in terms of 'performance' and 'theatricality' than the Eucharist whose initiator, Jesus, is divine and human. As

444 See: *Ap Trad* 1,iv 4-13. This 'inspired the second Eucharistic prayer in the Roman Catholic liturgy.' Comby, J. 1985.Trans. John Bowden & Margaret Lydamore. *How to Read Church History*. (London. SCM. 1985), 52.
445 Colin Buchanan, *Sacrament*, in Ferguson, *et al.* Eds. *New Dictionary of Theology*. (Leicester. IVP. 1988), 606.
446 Wainwright 1984;19.
447 As well as the other Offices.
448 The Preface 1662. *The Book of Common Prayer*. (London. CUP. 1928), 3.

we have seen, the worship of the gathered community – of which Evening Prayer is a continuing example[449] – and the Eucharist are the foundational acts of worship of the Christian church as well as those for which an 'object of worship', congregation or audience and repetition are pre-requisites. Evening Prayer gives 'many lay people… some opportunity to pray the psalms and the canticles and other elements of age-old tradition.'[450] The focus on people, exemplified in Cranmer's opening 'Dearly beloved…' raises two issues. It places the congregation alongside God throughout the liturgy and it creates a penitential atmosphere absent in many other orders for Daily Prayer. The Confession and Absolution impart a uniquely tragic shape to the Office which will be discussed below. By considering Evening Prayer as a locus for liturgical performance it is possible to explore the dynamics of the relationships between performers and audience or ministers and congregation where God's presence is both assumed – God is addressed as object of worship or audience, and made explicit – God is integral to the same liturgy as a performer.

Evening Prayer as set out in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer is a working document as much as a devotional one. From the Preface onwards it is furnished with instructions and rubrics for the best delivery of worship: 'most of the alterations were made… for the better direction of them that are to officiate in any part of the Divine Service…'[451] The strong implication is that how worship is led will determine its quality; there are tensions between the instructions in the Preface and Rubrics and Article XXVI: '*Of the unworthiness of the Ministers which hinders not the effect of the Sacrament*' as they affect performance, theatricality, interpretation and understanding which will be examined below. The Rubrics deal with space, music and singing as well as textual changes and are dealt with prior to the placing of the liturgical texts. Evening Prayer and other Prayer Book liturgies are manuals or quasi-dramatic texts by virtue of their insistence on what, in other contexts, would be called stage-directions. First among these are the requirements that 'The Chancels shall remain as they have done in times past. And…such ornaments of the church, and of the Ministers thereof, at all times of their ministration, shall be retained and be in use as

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449 The office retains strong echoes from early sources: Ambrosian 4thC; Roman 5th C; Benedictine 6thC. Guiver 1988;233-51.
450 Guiver 1988;194.
451 BCP 1928;4.

were in this Church of England, by the authority of Parliament, in the second year of the reign of King Edward the Sixth.'[452] These instructions establish specific spaces for performance which, with the use of costumes, differentiates them from other spaces. Unlike theatres, closed by act of Parliament in 1642, they seek to invoke legal power to support their use, thus equating places of worship, their decorations and the uniforms of their officers and servants with other organs of the state despite the fact that there appear to be no legal sanctions available to enforce this compliance or non-compliance.[453] By comparing the Church's rules with earlier and later theatrical practice it is reasonable to suggest that its rules are as much for its own good order and conduct, 'the preservation of peace and unity in the church' as for maintaining a particular legal status. More noteworthy is the attempt in the 1662 Prayer Book to keep the physical structures and appurtenances as they were 1549, immediately rendering it old-fashioned. The affinity of this with play-scripts containing many stage directions, rendering them old before their time will be noted below, as will the implications for the performance of liturgy which uses old or formal language and its hermeneutic effect.

The intended continuity inherent in the opening rubrics is contradicted in their second and fourth paragraphs which allow hymns and anthems as optional additions and alternative prayers 'at the discretion of the Minister' – subject to appropriate authorisation.[454] The General Rubrics allow for seasonal variations: 'And this form of Exhortation shall always be said on Advent Sunday…'[455] and presuppose a realisation that liturgies will vary as they are led by different ministers. An awareness of the need to keep the shape of the liturgy by the compulsory inclusion of certain elements[456] while accepting the impossibility of freezing the whole office as it once may have been, demonstrates a pragmatic acceptance that every act of worship is a unique event within the universal praise and worship of the church: 'I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will

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[452] Ibid. General Rubrics p.67.
[453] The rubric allowing the minister non-compliance in saying the office 'unless hindered by sickness or some other urgent cause… has been ignored by Puritans and their successors.' Ratcliff, E. *The Choir Offices* in Lowther Clarke W. and Harris, C. Eds. *Liturgy and Worship*. (London. SPCK.1950), 279.
[454] Ibid. p.67.
[455] Ibid. p.93 allows for 3 forms of confession on all but 2 days of the year.
[456] E.g.: 'O lord open our lips…'

sing praises to my God all my life long' (Ps 146;2). The uniqueness comes about not only because the repeated liturgy has seasonal variations, different hymns and a weekly lectionary, but because no person who performs the repeating liturgy is capable of carrying out an exact repetition of any previous performance although the liturgical texts are unchanging. In this respect, church and theatre share identical features.

The General Rubrics give a framework for the performance of liturgy. Within the liturgies particular rubrics, themselves much closer to 'stage-directions' in plays, are revealing. In the Order for Evening Prayer the minister is required to read in a *loud* voice more than once, the congregation once only; the minister is required to *pronounce* twice;[457] congregation and minister are at several points required to kneel, and on one occasion *devoutly* kneel. For Morning Prayer the directions are more detailed.[458] Following absolution the congregation 'shall answer, here and at the end of all other prayers, Amen'. The minister will say the Lord's Prayer with an *audible* voice, and for scripture readings '…he that readeth *so standing and turning himself, as he may best be heard of all such as are present*.' The italics indicate not only what is to be done in the course of the liturgy, but how it is to be done.[459] As is the case with the General Rubrics, these instructions enable their Liturgies to be used consistently across space and time, maintaining a cycle of Anglican worship unbroken since the 16th Century, but with elements recognisable since the earliest records of Christian daily prayer. The rubrics differ from stage-directions which, however often a play is performed, serve at best to provide guide-lines or suggestions towards how any production is staged given that stage directions are frequently removed from acting editions of plays. For the compilers of the Prayer Book and those who lead its liturgies, the acceptance of inevitable variations in 'the publick worship of God' may be seen rather as a recognition of human weakness. In worship, the inclusion of liturgical rubrics assists in the hermeneutical task of relating participation in worship to a better understanding of theology.

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457 Absolution and Lesser Litany.
458 It is reasonable to speculate that the same instructions would be expected at Evening Prayer.
459 Cf. the 10th Century *Visitatio Sepulchri* from the Regularis Concordia, 965-975, which contains detailed rubrics, or stage directions – telling the clergy how to perform – and qualify it for consideration as the earliest English liturgical play-script.

Stage directions to aid understanding, or give a framework for repetition occur in some of the earliest English plays. *The Castle of Perseverance*[460] pre-dates the 1549 Prayer Book by some one hundred and forty years[461] and contains a ground-plan which allows for alternative set construction at different locations: 'if any dyche may be mad it schal be played or ellys that it be strongly barryd al bowt…'[462] Costume and property details which would be part of the company's luggage are included. *Wisdom* (dated c. 1463)[463] contains 'unusually full' costume details with the opening words of a seven line direction 'Fyrst enteryde WISDOME in a ryche purpull clothe of golde…'[464] and has similar instructions for most of the thirty-eight named characters. Both plays present 'a single great theme, the battle between good and evil powers for the soul of man.'[465] To correspond with the symbolic understanding of space in church buildings, in *The Castle of Perseverance* ground plan, God is in the eastern scaffold, the World –humanity – in the western, Belial in the northern and Flesh in the south. The costumes specified for *Wisdom* help to portray the character of Wisdom 'richly dressed as Christ the king.'[466] Although greatly detailed by comparison, these stage directions serve a similar function to the opening General Rubrics in the BCP by stipulating the layout of the place and accoutrements of the performance so reinforcing a theological message and ensuring continuity when different actors were involved.

A perceived or actual need for continuity of performance exists in theatrical as well as liturgical history. It reaches a nadir in the work of Bernard Shaw whose stage directions, literally interpreted would render productions of his plays as written an impossibility: 'Joan appears in the turret doorway. She is an able-bodied country girl of 17 or 18, respectably dressed in red, with an uncommon face; eyes very wide apart and bulging as they often do in very imaginative people…'[467] For dramatists writing in an era where naturalism was

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460 In *The Macro Plays*. Ed, Eccles, M. (Oxford. Early English Text Society. 1969).
461 Eccles 1969;x.
462 Ibid. p.1.
463 The second of *The Macro Plays*.
464 Eccles 1969;114.
465 Ibid. p. xxiv.
466 Ibid. p. xxxv.
467 Shaw. B. *St Joan*. (Harmondsworth. Penguin.1946), 52. The first four of ten lines. Directions are aimed at a reader, although Shaw required them to be fully implemented. See pp44-5 for Shaw's views on control of rights.

desirable, and performances were presented in proscenium-arch theatres – looking into another world, but separated from it – a need to restrict directors' and actors' freedom of expression was essential to maintain the pretence of that world. Styan commends this: 'Naturalism… should tell the truth about people [and] can result in engaging the audience in the finest way,' but adds the important warning 'at the same time, the exclusion of the audience from the peep-show denied it the ritual involvement belonging to the theatre until the nineteenth century. The religious or social ritual changed to a consciously societal posture; Shaw's temple of fashion.'[468] This confining, and consequent control over performance is an equally important aspect of liturgical worship, and will be considered below. A further analogy with the essential repeatable quality of worship has developed in modern theatrical practice where the success of a professional production is judged on the length of its run. For the phenomenon which *The Mousetrap* has become, to survive and flourish it must, outwardly, appear to look and sound the same over sixty-three years and by so doing retain its capacity, paradoxically, to give all its audiences the opportunity for a unique experience.[469]

The irony of external stage directions, which the Prayer Book recognises rather more readily than some dramatists,[470] is that they are not necessary for the performance of liturgy or plays. The 1662 orders for Evening Prayer re-printed in *Common Worship* contain no rubrics, other than any within the text of the liturgy. This is not to deny that external rubrics will persist, rather they will become the property of each worshipping group with a plasticity deemed appropriate for a range of temporal and spatial uses for local application. The 1662 BCP recognises as paramount the needs and wishes of the worshipping community: 'changes sanctioned by this Book… should not be made arbitrarily or without the good will of the people…'[471] The *Common Worship* Service of the

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[468] Styan 1975;75-76.
[469] Cf. Guiver 1988;195. 'The set-piece Sunday Evensong with organ and choir as it has been known needs to be revived, but in a very different form and style.'
[470] 'Any Order of Service contained in this book. Or any paragraph thereof…may be used instead of the corresponding paragraph thereof as printed in this book…' BCP, 1928;67. Flexibility was allowed to Priests presiding at the Eucharist in the earliest Church orders: 'permit the prophets to make Thanksgiving as much as they desire.' *Didcahe*, Ch 10.
[471] BCP 1662;67.

Word 'consists almost entirely of notes and directions and allows for considerable local variation and choice within a common structure.'[472]

The inherent redundancy of rubrics as stage directions is a factor in the 'ownership' of liturgical texts and, in part, determines who constitutes audience and participant in any given act of worship. As my analysis of Evening Prayer shows, distinctions between performer and audience in non-eucharistic worship can become non-existent. Without rubrics, or foreknowledge, the risk of exclusion from full membership or identification with the gathered community can become a reality. Internal stage-directions, given by a minister in worship, or character in a play: 'Wherefore I pray and beseech you…' (Evening Prayer 1662), 'Slaves, be quick, spread tapestries in his way…' (Clytemnestra, in *Agamemnon* ll909-10) or adverbial phrases 'with a pure heart and humble voice…' (Evening Prayer 1662) 'Singing hymns of joy (Chorus, *Agamemnon* l27) are far more important than external ones. They create what Keir Elam refers to as a 'dramatic event' or 'change within the existing state of affairs.'[473] The opening of Evening Prayer contains directions to 'acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness'; not to 'cloke them…but confess them'; 'to accompany me… saying after me…' These directions are qualified by emphasising their efficacy if undertaken 'when we assemble and meet together…' Thereafter, depending on the understanding of performer and audience in Evening Prayer – specifically, the role God plays – the only internal stage direction may be 'Let us pray,' if God is solely the object of worship or audience. There are significantly more if God is an active participant. 'He pardoneth and absolveth all them…' may be an illocutionary act by a Minister requiring an immediate perlocutionary act by God, making God active as a character in the performance. This means that God is on-stage as a character throughout all or part of the liturgy and raises questions over who the audience is. A hermeneutic of performance elucidates what worshippers believe (or 'know') happens in worship and explores the tension Elam draws between 'performer-spectator transaction' and '(fictional) character-to-character transaction'.[474] Is Evening Prayer a performance by ministers and God for an

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[472] *Common Worship* 2000;21.
[473] Elam, K. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. (London. Routledge. 1980), 121
[474] Ibid; Ch.5, Dramatic Discourse.

audience of worshippers who can be drawn into the liturgy only as spectators and listeners excluded from 'the peep-show'? This permits 'Cathedral Worship' as a particular performance genre but raises the spectre of 'worship as concert', where concert may be understood as performance for entertainment with a subsidiary capacity as a means to worship.[475] If this is not the case and all participants are present on equal terms, the next question is how liturgies of daily prayer can be considered as participatory performance.

Evening Prayer: an analysis as performance:
Opening prayers. Confession and Absolution.

The opening words of Evening Prayer: 'Dearly beloved [brethren], the scripture moveth us…' signify that priest and congregation are part of one group with the single purpose of performing an act of worship for God; a 'performer – spectator transaction'. This proposition holds either until 'he pardoneth…' or until the end of the Lord's Prayer. The distinction is a crucial one. If the absolution is an action, it is one taken by God and the words indicate a 'dramatic event'. This changes the course of worship, transforming the worshippers and involving God and the congregation as participants, making the event a 'character-to-character transaction'. This is a reasonable hypothesis as the gathered community is to 'ask those things that are necessary…' itself an action. All the introductory actions fulfil the criteria set by Elam: 'there [are] being[s] conscious of their doing[s] who intentionally bring about a change of some kind, to some end, in a given context. Six constitutive elements of action are thus identifiable; an *agent*, his *intention* in acting, the *act*… produced, the *modality* of the action (manner and means), the *setting* (temporal, spatial and circumstantial) and the *purpose*.'[476]

Priest, God and congregation all perform these actions, leaving unclear the issue of who is performing and to whom. It is here that distinctions between character and spectator, or a fictional and non-fictional world become unstable and the admission of all participants in performance and worship as agents is

[475] While a Parish Priest between 2003-2006 in a city Team Ministry with a 'Greater Church' and choral tradition I knew a number of parishioners who left because Evening Prayer became a 'Concert' displacing worship.
[476] Elam 1980;121.

permissible. I have shown how theatricality allows for the contingency of different realities and explored the encounters between the divine and human in the Exodus and the *Oresteia*. Wainwright's theological encapsulation of worship as a shared activity between agents made in the same image captures the sense of the dramatic event with more immediacy: 'we are playing… the game of the community's conversation with the God who is both creator and redeemer… It includes technical 'moves' [cf: Elam's Dramatic Events] whose efficacy has been proved in past play.'[477] Before examining how this mutual conversation works dynamically through the rest of Evening Prayer following Cranmer's prologue, I will consider other dramatic prologues which contain both internal stage-directions, and relate to God.

The Castle of Perseverance has an extensive prologue (155 lines) summarising the plot, in addition to its detailed stage directions. The final two stanzas both contain blanks: 'At . . . on þe grene in ryal array' (l133), and 'Now mery be all… and wel mote ye cheve' (l148). The play with its large cast of 35 named parts is to be toured, but it is not clear whether by a professional or amateur company.[478] The opening stanza sets the scene by centring the task of the heralds (Vexillatores) as well as the subject of the play on God and his glorification:

> Primus Vexillator Glorious God, in all degres lord most of myth
> Þat heuene and erth made of nowth, boþe se and lond…
> Þe aungelys in heune hym to serue bryth
> And mankynde in mydylerd he made with hys hond . (ll1-4)

The concluding two stanzas reiterate the message and seek God's blessing, first on the actors:

> Primus Vexillator Grace if God wyl graunte us of hys mykyl myth
> Þese parcellys in propyrtes we purpose to playe
> Þis day seuenenyt before you in syth… (ll131-3)

And finally, God's blessing is sought for the potential audience:

> Secundus Vexillator 'Ye manly men of . . . þer Crist save you all!'

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[477] Wainwright 1980;20.

[478] Bevington suggests division of parts between 'professional strollers and an assortment of amateurs drafted from each locality.' *Contra* Eccles who supports a professional company as 'only one character speaks fewer than forty lines.' Eccles 1969;xxii.

> He maynten youre myrthys and keep you fro greve
> Þat born was of Mary myld in an ox stall…
> (ll1146-7)

God's presence and action is not confined to a professionally produced morality play. The *Ludus Coventriae* Cycle (c. 1460), also a touring show,[479] has a prologue whose first objective is to glorify God. It then seeks – if not demands – his blessing on the actors in the play as well as on those who 'sytt and sese and lysteneth to our talkyng with sylens styll and sad…' (ll3-4). In instructing God '*do thou* succour and save' those who 'listen to our talking with *silence still and sad*', the herald arrogates to himself a task analogous with that of the priest at Evening Prayer, praying and beseeching 'as many as here present to accompany me with a *pure heart and humble voice*…' (my italics). None of the prologues are essential to their subsequent plays or liturgy.[480] All serve a number of purposes, which for the plays, include drumming up an audience. In the case of the *Ludus Coventriae* and Evening Prayer there is one shared aim. The play and liturgy seek to create a state of readiness for what is to follow by requiring the potential audience and actual congregation to reflect on themselves and what they may gain from the experience of participating in a dramatic or liturgical performance by undertaking particular actions. The play makes clear the need for spectators to accept their fallen status through the juxtaposition of a 'gracious God grounded in all goodness' with humans who must be 'silent, still and sad,' to be saved from 'woe and pain.'[481] Worshippers at Evening Prayer must 'confess manifold sins and wickedness' to gain forgiveness by God's 'infinite goodness and mercy'. Both prologues present a world disordered by human wickedness which may be transformed by God's intervention with humanity's cooperation. In the liturgy that follows this scene-setting, transformation is actualised more dynamically than it is in either play.

A hermeneutic of performance which allows 'conversation' and 'dramatic events' facilitates a dynamic analysis of liturgy and makes 'listener' and 'speaker' (Elam's terms) or performer and audience – particularly as they affect God – more identifiable. Evening Prayer from 'O Lord open thou our lips' to the

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[479] At vj of þe belle we gynne oure play/ In N towne… (ll526-7).
[480] The plays will both be performed a week hence while the BCP Rubrics allow for beginning the Office at 'O Lord open thou our lips'.
[481] Block 1960;1.

end of the Preces and Responses contains the following conversations and dramatic events.

Versicles, Responses and Psalmody.

'O Lord open thou our lips' and the sequence to the psalmody are supplications to, and glorification of God in which the congregation, as performers direct a plea to God, as audience, who is required to make a response which will bring God into the action as a performer. In the 1662 version the congregation are directed to stand for the first time before the *Gloria Patri*. This movement gives a physical emphasis to the need for change brought about, or to be brought about by divine action. It is at such a point that the skill or technique of the liturgist, and the intention or understanding of the congregation, become instrumental in making worship effective. The dramatic event of God making haste to help may happen in the pause between the antiphon and the *Gloria Patri*, as the participants stand – making the action and words an 'upwards movement' towards God's transforming power. If the change happens later in worship, the *Gloria Patri* is an affirmation of faith of God's willingness to help and save his people. Theologically it may be possible to be dogmatic about moments of transformation; theatrically it would be unwise. A hermeneutic of performance requires only that such moments occur during the time and within the reality of the event.

The Psalmody celebrates the community's belief in God and continues performance to God as object of worship and audience. As structured musical or rhythmical items, psalms bring the second section – or scene – of Evening Prayer to a climax, emphasising God's graciousness now or to come.

Scripture readings

'His [Christ's] presence is realised, by his spoken word, since it is he himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church.'[482] The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council's view of the centrality of scripture in liturgy is supported, albeit with some caution, in Protestantism, 'it is part of the

[482] *Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy*. 1967;9.

ministry … in the Church... to help worshippers listen with a discerning ear to the scripture readings in order at the very least to catch "a whisper of his voice."'[483] The congregation becomes an audience for the Readings. Biblical passages speak in different voices including those of prophet, historian, evangelist, Jesus or God. As performances of God's word where 'he himself speaks', God and Jesus are now characters. In speaking God's words the reader takes the role of God in addition to other roles he or she may have through other parts of worship. As divine authority is devolved to Priests for granting absolution and blessings, so the 'parts' in liturgical performance are shared among all the participants. This gives a model which makes theatrical analysis easier by removing the requirement for God to be a discrete character and allowing different human performers to represent God within the liturgy at appropriate moments. At other times God is able to remain present as audience and object of worship. The hermeneutic of performance risks allowing readers to up-stage God by performing liturgy with an intention to inflate individual histrionic skills, supporting Clement's strictures against those who acquire 'the audacity of vain-glorious men.' He continues: 'And we add this withal, that from such as these God taketh away his grace. For God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.'[484] Clement proceeds to cite Isaiah as a model for the presentation and reception of God's word: 'Upon whom will I look, but upon him that is humble and quiet, and trembleth at my words?' (Is, 66;2). The rubrics for the readings in the BCP help locate them. They are the only announced parts of the Office. Framing passages of scripture with: 'Here beginneth…' and 'Here endeth…'[485] allows the readers to acknowledge that the words are not theirs, so authorising readers to represent the authors, and God.[486] The hermeneutic enables readers and God to maintain their integrity as variously performers and audience.

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[483] Wainwright 1980;167.
[484] *Apostolic Constitutions of Clement Bishop of Rome*. 1848. *Revised*: William Whiston. Trans. Irah Chase. (New York. Appleton. 1848) Bk. 8, ChII.
[485] If we assume the instruction for Morning Prayer is used at Evening Prayer as it is in the 1549 Prayer Book.
[486] The CW antiphons 'This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God,' and Eucharistic Gospel antiphons reinforce the identification of the reader as God's voice.

Magnificat and _Nunc Dimittis_: responses to 'Christ himself speaking'.

The *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis*, as the most commonly used Canticles, are opportunities for participation by everyone, except God, who once again is the recipient of the congregation's praise and gratitude. The canticles are a response from powerless individuals to a benefactor. A reflexive sequence of God speaking in Scripture and humanity responding in Canticles strengthens the hermeneutic of interpreting God as a character in worship.

The regular performance of the *Magnificat* in daily worship reminds congregations of six of God's acts of vindication which have happened and continue to happen. The opening of the *Magnificat* maintains the possibility of two models of performance. It can become a dynamic re-creation and continuing Christological celebration of Luke's story which has God present as Jesus *in utero* in the company of women. A problem then arises as to who constitutes the audience. One solution would be to treat the *Magnificat* antiphonally so that worshippers join the women and all remain as participants simultaneously responding to Jesus at the centre of the action. But God, as Jesus present alongside all the other participants as performers, negates the need for an audience. Liturgical performance with no audience risks becoming an exclusive ritual.[487]

The message of the *Magnificat* is universal, so a better option is to see it as a story about Jesus, who is about to be born, performed for a gracious God who is the audience and object of worship, so removing the danger of exclusivity from within this act of worship. In the context of performance by the whole Christian community, the possible doubt over whether Elizabeth or Mary first spoke the *Magnificat*, demonstrated by J. M. Creed, heightens its potency as a universally acceptable text. Elizabeth as the speaker is blessed by God, but not in the unique manner of Mary. So she aligns herself with all women whom 'all generations' will call blessed. Elizabeth as speaker also relates the *Magnificat* more closely to the *Benedictus* since they are 'assigned to the two aged parents

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[487] Exclusivity is another feature of the *Apostolic Constitutions* – e.g.: Bk 8; XXXIV: 'Do not receive any stranger.... and even when such are presented, let the strangers be examined...'

of the Baptist both of whom "have been filled with the Holy Ghost."'[488] In both canticles God is the recipient of praise and gratitude. God presence as audience or performer depends on which of the two liturgical models a congregation finds most useful.

The ascription of the *Nunc Dimittis* to Simeon as its original speaker locates it more firmly than the *Magnificat*. It addresses God directly: 'Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart…' It seeks God's permission to 'depart in peace,'[489] and recognises the 'fulfilment of hope of Israel in the infant Jesus.'[490] It supports the model of God as present in worship, but not confined to a single role. God's action has not only given hope, but is needed now, before Simeon can achieve his own peace. Where the *Magnificat* marks God's mighty acts in the world, accomplished and yet to be, the *Nunc Dimittis* marks a personal salvific event brought about by an encounter with God. The encounter can be universal if 'all people' see what Simeon has seen.[491] Its regular use reiterates God's continuing soteriological action confirming the radical and universal nature of salvation as applying to Gentiles and Israel individually and collectively. The words in the *Nunc Dimittis* require another 'dramatic event' which allows God, as a character, to choose to be a participant in worship. By doing so all others involved are able to make a common plea for peace on the same terms as Simeon with equality of esteem, supporting the intrinsic inclusivity of such a model.

The Creed.

Creeds are where 'the faith professed and the doctrine taught come to dense and co-terminous expression.'[492] As such, their recitation 'by the Minister and the people standing' affirms all that happens in the sequence of Readings and Canticles. With all standing, the Creed becomes a chorus which does not differentiate between any human performers and keeps God as its object. Every

[488] Creed, J.M. *The Gospel according to St. Luke*. (London. MacMillan.1960), 123. *Contra*: Morris, L. 1984. *Luke*. (Leicester. IVP.1984), 75.
[489] NRSV 'You are dismissing' (Lk 2; 29): God remains active in worship.
[490] Creed 1960;37.
[491] The 1549 Prayer Book is less inclusive 'all *thy* people' (my italics).
[492] Wainwright 1980;303.

worshipper speaks for him or herself and the individual and corporate recitation of the Creed in stillness intensifies the theatricality of the 'dramatic event'. It is the only moment where God is specifically excluded from the action of the liturgy. God is present as the ultimate focus and can take action, but to do so during the performance of the Creed would risk infringing the congregation's choice willingly to state its belief. The best possible response to God's words and actions is to articulate shared beliefs. [493]

The Lord's Prayer, Suffrages and Collects.

The final sequence of the liturgy echoes the opening by bringing the congregation and God together as mutually active in prayer. Priest and people intercede for each other by seeking divine mercy for the second time. God may continue to be involved directly as a character or allow the minister and congregation delegated power as each takes the role of God. This model works for 'The Lord be with you' with its reciprocal blessing, 'And also with you' into the Lord's Prayer but makes the suffrages problematic. A hermeneutic of performance allows the suffrages to become intercessions by different characters seeking God's continuing transformative action. As performance, three other linguistic features strengthen the case for seeing the worshipping community acting in concert with God. The consistent use of 'And…' completes each prayer. The minister's use of the plural 'us' and 'our time' unifies all worshippers as a chorus appealing to God rather than as two separate entities making their own, repetitive, demands of God. The third unifying feature is the use of 'Because there is none other than thou…' which makes explicit the supremacy of God as saviour. A priest or minister starts the series of positive illocutionary acts,[494] but the congregation finish them with a qualification instead of another illocution, in preparation for the final request where God is asked not to do something which would weaken the community: 'take not thy holy spirit from us.'[495] The theatrical trajectory through the prayers is clear. The congregation moves from a position where it has been built up, and transformed

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493 The Chorus in *Oedipus the King* has similar first-person responses where right belief is the only possible action: ll954-997. Sophocles 1984;210-211.
494 'Shew thy mercy…' 'Grant us… ' 'Save the Queen…' &c.
495 Cf. the benefits of the spirit given in Numbers 11;29: 'Would that all the lord's people were prophets and the Lord would put his spirit on them.'

by God, to the extent where it can speak of transformation for others in the *Nunc Dimittis*, to one where it is reminded of its own vulnerability. This holds through the Collects with the congregation's acknowledgement that its darkness continues beyond the reality of worship. In a final illocution 'for aid against all perils' the congregation calls on God for action: 'lighten our darkness' and his continuing presence: 'defend us from all perils and dangers of this night.'

As performance, the ending of Evening Prayer stands in marked contrast with the theatrical texts cited. *The Castle of Perseverance* concludes with God the Father explaining that 'oure gamys [are] to saue you fro synnynge.' God himself speaks the final line of the play 'Te Deum laudamus'.[496] *Wisdom* is as positive in its aims that all

> …may ende with perfeccyon.
> That þe doctrine of Wysdom we may sew,
> Sapienca Patris, grawnt þat for his passyon.[497] (ll1161-3)

The movement from confidence to uncertainty in the liturgy of Evening Prayer has echoes of tragedy far removed from the confidence of heavenly bliss promised in many Morality plays and, though more nuanced, in the Corpus Christi cycles.[498]

Evening Prayer: tragedy or tragic form.

A hermeneutic of performance allows a simultaneous theological and dramatic examination of worship. Humanity's fears, hopes and aspirations are expressed alongside God's revelation and responses to his community: 'the reading of the scriptures… keeps…biblical revelation before the people' and 'with the aid of the preacher as interpreter [the community] becomes attuned to hearing the voice of God…'[499] This happens within a context of change:

> 'O Lord open thou our lips
> *And* our mouth shall shew forth your praise…'

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496 Eccles 1969;111.
497 Ibid. p.152.
498 *Inter alia*. The ending of *Oedipus the King* is unresolved 'now as we keep our watch and wait the final day, count no man happy till he dies free of pain at last.' (ll1693-4) *King Lear* offers no clear vision for the future 'Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say/The oldest hath borne most; we that are young/ shall never see so much, nor live so long.' (V; iii). Of the Corpus Christi Cvcles, only the *Chester Mystery Cycle* reminds its audience of its vulnerability as powerfully as *Evening Prayer*. See Lumiansky & Mills 1974;462-3.
499 Wainwright 1980; 19. Cf. 'Theater audiences like church congregations…demand that the text speak today.' Harris, M. 2005. *Theater and incarnation*. (Grand Rapids MI. Erdmans.2005), 13.

… Glory be to the father…' (my italics)

In the actualisation of worship, the community can offer praise: 'Glory be to the father…' only after God has enabled them so to do by opening their lips. '*And*' offers the guarantee of the result of transformation following their plea. 'Character-to-character' dramatic events with their likely changes mark the beginning and end of the most consistently performed section of Evening Prayer, [500] where the illocutionary acts of some of the characters – generally, but not exclusively, the worshipping community – result in the perlocutionary acts and effects of other characters – generally, but not exclusively, God.[501]

The disordered world that humanity, through its sins and wickedness must inhabit and re-create is paramount in Cranmer's preface to the central, and older, sections of Evening Prayer. The central importance of scripture in Reformation theology meant that 'the Offices, as occasions of the ministering of the Word of God, became, by a process natural within Reformed circles, the central religious observances of English Church Life.'[502] The acknowledgement of humanity's fallen state and need for salvation through God's intervention to save his people is articulated in the plea 'O God, make speed to save us…' These echo the physical and spiritual darkness implied by 'cloke them', 'erred and strayed from thy ways' and 'death of a sinner' in the preface. The atmosphere created through the initial negative language in long individual or congregational speeches, contrasts with the immediacy of the responsive dialogue, suggesting comparison with the disruptive openings of a number of tragedies; *Oedipus the King* is an example.

Oedipus the King opens with a religious gathering led by Oedipus

> And all the rest, your great family gathers now
> Branches wreathed, massing in the squares
> Kneeling before the two temples of queen Athena … (ll23-25)

in a city which 'rings with cries for the Healer…'(l5) as 'black Death luxuriates/in the raw wailing miseries of Thebes'(l36). Evening Prayer and play open with extreme language where images of disease and evil predominate:

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[500] BCP General Rubrics. 1928;68. There has always been an option to omit Cranmer's 1552 Preface.
[501] The congregation's single perlocutionary act is to confess.
[502] Ratcliff. E. in Lowther Clarke & Harris 1950;268-9.

'wickedness', 'there is no health in us' and 'raging plague in all its vengeance' affect all. Alleviation will come only from a saviour to whom all must pray. For Thebes it is Oedipus: 'Now we pray to you...' (l39), for worshippers at Evening Prayer it is 'Almighty and most merciful Father.' Both gatherings address their prayers and confessions to their respective saviours as human. Oedipus is described as the head of a family comprising all the inhabitants of Thebes, and in the opening line of the play himself refers to the priests and suppliants (and by inference the rest of Thebes) as 'my children.' Evening Prayer consistently refers to God as 'father', and in the opening 'Dearly beloved brethren…' encourages a familial, if not filial, relationship between minister and congregation.[503] The correspondence between the beginnings of play and liturgy points up the issue of how God is to be perceived. Both seek salvation which will be mediated through the words and action of a human. The problem is addressed more directly in *Oedipus the King* when the chorus as the people of Thebes, and by implication the audience, show their faith in Oedipus: 'You cannot equal the gods… But we do rate you the first of men' (ll39/42). In Evening Prayer the rubrics dictate that the introduction and confession are addressed by the congregation to God. Thereafter it is the Priest who pronounces absolution. The specified change of speaker may once more, depending on theology and interpretation, allow God to be present as a character performing in the liturgy or be words spoken with God's authority. As performance, the words 'He pardoneth and absolveth all them the truly repent…' make God's action immediate. At this moment, The Priest either defers to God who acts or is God's conduit through whom power to forgive is delegated. Sophocles consistently avoids this theological problem, taking the latter position and giving Oedipus special knowledge to bring the gods' relief to Thebes. Crucially, his divine knowledge and power is recognised by the citizens:

> A god was with you, so they say and we believe it,
> you lifted up our lives.[504] (ll48-9)

In Evening Prayer, the congregation's admissions of transgression followed by the promise and act of forgiveness leads to the offering of praise. There is a parallel with *Oedipus the King* where opening pessimistic choral and solo

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[503] The modern usage – dropping 'brethren' in the interest of inclusivity – tends to strengthen a more parental position: 'beloved' as children.
[504] This is specific to Sophocles. Aeschylus and Euripides both put gods on stage.

speeches give way to brisk optimistic dialogue as Creon returns with the oracle of salvation while the tenor of 'O Lord open thou our lips…' – with God's help we are saved and will offer praise – is echoed in the response to Creon's promise of good news if the present evil can be purged:

> Oedipus God help us. We will see our triumph or our fall
> …
> Priest Apollo has sent his word, his oracle
> Come down, Apollo, save us stop the plague.
> (ll163-168)

After the similar openings, the sequence of Psalmody and scripture gives the liturgy a flexibility which the play cannot be allowed, but lectionaries provide 'a continual course of the reading of scripture.'[505] Over a year a liturgical script can be as fixed as the dramatic one. In the play, the style of the chorus' response to Creon's recounting of the curse of the sphinx is reminiscent of some psalms in its recitation of the qualities of the gods invoked by the speakers, and the relief they could bring to the suffering community:

> women cannot scream their pangs to birth –
> screams for the healer, children dead in the womb
> and life on life goes down…[506] (ll197-9)

Psalms of lament including, Ps 51 as a plea for mercy and source of sections of Evening (and Morning) Prayer: 'O Lord open my lips…' (Ps 51;15), and Pss. 58 and 82 in their overt references to many gods as arbitrary and capricious, reflect Israel's inability to protect itself and consequent need for salvation as urgent as that in Thebes.

The means to achieve salvation for Thebes comes with the introduction of Tiresias as the closest voice to that of the gods, following the lament of the chorus and has parallels with the scripture readings in Evening Prayer. Tiresias speaks truth which, while hostile to Oedipus, is fixed in the words 'you can't destroy me'(l510). Tiresias metonymically identifies the gods, the truth and himself, their prophet, as one.[507] The question of who speaks the words of scripture in the liturgy – God or the minister as God's prophet – might be

[505] Ratcliff. E. in Lowther Clarke & Harris. 1950;268.
[506] Cf. Ps 137. Also Deuteronomy, 28.
[507] Cf. Num 11.

resolved if viewed in a similar way and would have resonances with the early Christian orders where the reader will 'be received as the Lord.'[508]

The choral ode (ll527-572) which follows Tiresias' revelation of truth appeals to the gods as supreme and their truth unassailable: 'Zeus and Apollo know, they know, the great masters/of all the dark and depth of human life' (ll561-2). Nevertheless the citizens affirm the community's belief in the gods' favour to Oedipus, a human: 'Never will I convict my king, never in my heart' (l572). It also serves as a buffer between the expositions of Tiresias and those which follow in the scene between Creon and Oedipus. In this respect it resembles the *Magnificat* which asserts God's blessing to humanity, set between the expositions of scripture. The long scene between Oedipus, Creon and Jocasta (ll593-762), drives the plot forward by combining history and ethical debate. It is closed by a short chorus whose intention is to maintain trust in Oedipus, already perceived as a saviour, for a safe deliverance:

> You who set our beloved land – storm tossed, shattered –
> Straight on course. Now again, good helmsman,
> Steer us through the storm! (ll765-7)

Here the sentiments compare with those of Simeon, who has experienced God, and will entrust the future to God:

> Now lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace
> For mine eyes have seen thy salvation…

In both cases the chorus and congregation conclude preparatory, expository and explicatory sections of play and liturgy, and in both cases what follows is more transformational leading to a climax, actual or anticipated, with hopes or fears for its eventual outcomes.

The climax to Evening Prayer begins in the Lesser Litany with the first and only direct invocation of God's presence, with the need for that presence to continue in the lives of worshippers as 'thy Holy Spirit.'

> Priest The Lord be with you
> Answer And with thy spirit….

[508] *Didache* Ch 11. Cf. Harris 2005;28-30.

The emphasis throughout the final parts of the Office is on humanity's helplessness and consequent need for God's presence beyond that of a fellow character in the performance time of the liturgy. God's spirit must be with his community beyond the confines of a place and period of worship otherwise there cannot be 'in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting'.[509] The denouement of any of the Daily Offices must always be deferred as their liturgies anticipate the eschaton. The act of worship, or performance of liturgy, is both self-contained and simultaneously affected by the events brought into the liturgy in the form of sins to be confessed. It will continue to affect worshippers, or performers, in quotidian time through the revelation and teaching of scripture and the constant carrying forward of the eschatological hope encapsulated in the prayer of Saint Chrysostom. Liturgical time and quotidian time are elided in worship as events specific to both interact in both – worshippers deeply affected by depression or bereavement, or joy and excitement will respond differently and give every liturgical event a unique dynamic. But within each event absolution is given for sins committed outside and before the act of worship. Unlike quotidian time, performance time and liturgical time are always determined: 'At the beginning of Evening Prayer…' and 'Here endeth the Order for Evening Prayer…' This tension, between on-going time and liturgical time can have profound effects on how liturgy is performed and how God is perceived and encountered within and beyond worship. I have discussed 'performance time' earlier and it will continue to be significant in the following discussion of the Eucharist.

In a play there must be some form of denouement. Whether in a subsidised civic festival – where *Oedipus the King* received its first performance – or a modern commercial theatre, the inference is that an audience has left its quotidian world behind, has entered a place and a contract with performers and will spend time encountering a different reality. The performance will be expected to give 'pleasure' to the audience.[510] It may, but is not required, to have associations or contingencies with the outside world.[511] There will be a moment at which the performance ends and the audience returns to its everyday

[509] Prayer of St Chrysostom.
[510] See Aristotle 1996;10.
[511] The *Oresteia* reflects changes in the society for which it was written.

world. But for tragedy at least, the separation of performance time and quotidian time may be only an inference: 'Tragedy is the art in which the ambiguities on stage are also the ambiguities between stage and spectators.'[512] Once the possibility of spectators becoming if not themselves performers, yet united implicitly or explicitly with performers in tragic ambiguities is accepted, then an elision of times and an extension of dramatic effects become realities of a similar order to those of worship. The opening words of *Oedipus the King* are:

> Oh my children, the new blood of ancient Thebes,
> Why are you here? (ll1-2)

Spoken directly to an audience they create the conditions for Eagleton's proposition to be fully realised as a 'character to character transaction' and set a framework corresponding directly with 'Dearly beloved brethren…' blurring, from the outset of the play, distinctions between actor and spectator, supporting the concept of the play and act of worship as constituent parts of a continuum of realities.

The climactic scenes of *Oedipus the King* demonstrate this premise. With the exception of two choral comments which also serve as scene breaks (ll954-77 and ll1311-50), the dialogue is between principal characters as the play approaches its tragic conclusion although the characters continue to address the gods. Oedipus prays for deliverance from corruption:

> You pure and awesome gods
> ……Let me slip
> from the world of men, vanish without a trace
> before I see myself stained with such corruption… (ll919-922)

Jocasta prays for cleansing:

> Apollo, you are nearest
> I come with prayers and offerings, I beg you
> Cleanse us, set us free of defilement. (ll1008-1010)

In the characters' stories, these may appear as futile attempts to deflect the 'Destiny' spoken of by the chorus but in the context of a performance, fixed in theatrical space and time, how the characters act reflects 'the ambiguities on stage' back to the chorus and audience, giving a correspondence with the prayers for mercy, salvation and cleanliness in the Lesser Litany of Evening

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[512] Eagleton 2003;163.

Prayer. In play and liturgy, the final sequences involve participants accepting their guilt, and in both there are pleas for a resolution, with a form of 'realised eschatology' built in to *Oedipus the King* as Creon enforces the removal of power from Oedipus, enabling a return to daily time and life. Prayers for safety in darkness or knowledge of future salvation in Evening Prayer fix the liturgy as an integral part of all time. The final brief chorus of *Oedipus the King* undermines the play's apparent resolution. From looking back on Oedipus' achievements and failure it now looks forward to an uncertain future resolvable only in death as the present tense 'keep…' supersedes the past tense. Oedipus 'solved the famous riddle… rose to power…' but:

> Now as we keep our watch and wait the final day
> Count no man happy till he dies, free of pain at last. (ll1684-5)

In Tragedy and Christian liturgy there is an eschatological dimension. *Oedipus the King*, in the words of the chorus, and Evening Prayer in the prayer of John Chrysostom end with the clear articulation of an eschatological hope, which is present throughout both even if the awareness and acceptance of guilt happens later in the play than the liturgy. Evening Prayer, however, lacks a central character who undergoes *peripeteia* or *anagnorisis*. There is no character equivalent to Moses, Orestes or Oedipus in the Church of England Offices. God is present and active in Evening Prayer but does not change, so cannot experience *peripetaeia*. The congregation experience *peripeteia* but given through God's absolution. They may achieve *anagnorisis* as a result, but they enter and leave the performance of Evening Prayer aware of their failings and vulnerability. In the absence of a central, individual character subject to a 'change to bad fortune …due to an error…'[513] Evening Prayer is tragic in form, rather than a tragedy to be performed.

[513] Aristotle 1996;21.

Chapter 7. Performance and Tragedy in The Eucharist.
Church of England Common Worship. Order 1, Eucharistic Prayer B.

I have chosen to examine the Church of England Common Worship Order 1 with Eucharistic Prayer B. In the 1549 Holy Communion liturgy Cranmer confirms that Jesus' crucifixion and sacrifice for the world was made unique 'by his one oblation of himself once offered'. Cranmer's insertion of these words and his insistence on the singularity of the event of Jesus' death, and its representation prefigure Brook's distinction between 'repetition' and 'representation' in the theatre: 'Repetition denies the living' while 'representation denies time.' Agamemnon is murdered once. Moses transgression at Meribah happens once. The Last Supper happens once. Jesus is crucified once. A performance of any of these 'takes yesterday's action and makes it live again in every one of its aspects – including its immediacy.'[514] Cranmer's words – or variations of them – continue in the Common Worship Eucharist and maintain the uniqueness of Jesus' actions. Cranmer makes the Anglican Eucharist theatrical.

John Macquarrie says of the Eucharist, or Holy Communion, The Lord's Supper, The Divine Liturgy or any act of worship which celebrates, marks or remembers Jesus' last supper, with its demonstration of his self-giving for all humanity, that it 'enfolds in itself such a wealth of meaning and a breadth of symbolism that it is hard indeed to speak adequately of it.'[515] Eucharistic language is inherently performative in requiring and responding to action. The Eucharist is profoundly physical. From the *Sursum Corda*, especially when rendered 'Up your hearts,'[516] suggesting another vertical movement by the congregation to Jesus' 'body given', and 'blood shed' at the centre of the Eucharistic Prayers,[517] to sharing bread and wine at the end of the liturgy there is action throughout the Eucharist. A hermeneutic of performance applied to the Eucharist will illuminate how its language and action affect all those who enact it and how performance may lead to physical and spiritual encounters with God.

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[514] Brook 1972;157.
[515] MacQuarrie, J. (*Principles of Christian Theology*. London. SCM1977), 469.
[516] *Ap Trad.* Ch4.
[517] All references from Eucharistic liturgies are taken from CW,2000, unless otherwise stated.

In the Eucharist roles[518] are assigned. These frequently depend upon status or authority. Objects are required. The Eucharist cannot happen without something to eat and drink, whether real bread and wine or symbolic representations – crackers, water or whatever comes to hand, although congregations using these may be 'more, or less heretical.'[519] People must move, watch and relate to other people – 'bodies occupying space move through time.'[520] As a result of these prerequisites, other objects and constraints become necessary or desirable. Plates or patens, cups or glasses for bread and wine, water for hand-washing, linen for washing vessels and suitably decorous coverings for all the holy objects expand what in a theatre, would be a props list.[521] A fixed altar as the symbolic site of sacrifice may be considered indispensable while Reformation practice requires a table only. The requirement for an ordained person as President or Celebrant, and in the Church of England, suitably approved assistants at the distribution of Holy Communion indicates a more hierarchical structure than that necessary for the Daily Office. The presence of objects in specific spaces through the Eucharist creates a separation of 'stage' and 'auditorium' even though all worshippers are, ostensibly, involved on equal terms. The climactic movement of all participants into the sanctuary, or of hierarchically appointed ministers out of it at the moment of distribution adds a greater degree of theatricality as the barriers between different sacred spaces are breached. Participation in the Eucharist requires participants to cross thresholds.

The physicality of the Eucharist includes sensory experience. As well as language, movement and the use of objects as visual foci, it involves touch – through physical contact at the peace,[522] the giving of bread, and through the act of eating and drinking. Wine has a strong smell, as, in some circumstances, does incense and in many Eucharistic celebrations candles are axiomatic. It is impossible to celebrate the Eucharist other than as a multi-sensory experience requiring performance by specific characters, using a range of theatricalities in

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[518] I use 'roles' as actors' parts. Shorter Oxford Dictionary. (Oxford. OUP.1983).
[519] Dix, G. *The Shape of the Liturgy*. (London. Continuum.1985), 48.
[520] Harris 1990;21.
[521] The range and methods of use for Eucharistic 'props' are left open in CW. Cf. BCP rubrics. See also: Herbert, G. 2003. *Ed* Blythe, R. *The Priest to the Temple. (*Norwich. Canterbury Press.2003) Ch. XIII.
[522] The 'kiss'1 Thess, 5;26 has become a 'sign' in CW.

language, gesture and movement with objects vested with meaning and value well beyond their actual worth.

The theatrical form of the Eucharist derives from its source. Every Eucharistic celebration is a representation or re-enactment of a single, pivotal event in the life of Jesus and the disciples.[523] The Last Supper has a narrative; it happens in a place; it requires significant objects, movement and has characters. At its centre is change and it has outcomes which are not incorporated into its re-enactment. The repetition of the Eucharist using Jesus' words gives it a script. It uses objects appropriate to their settings which need bear no relation to those of the Last Supper. It assigns roles where individuals in some way 'become' Jesus or disciples. All of these give every Eucharist a theatricality in common with the performance of any play.

The Eucharist is an event of heightened emotions, which includes fear and uncertainty. These are reflected in Jesus' announcement of his imminent betrayal. For Mark and Matthew, the disciples share a valedictory meal before Jesus' death. Luke alone includes the request, plea or instruction 'Do this in remembrance of me.'[524] The instability brought about by the fear preceding the Last Supper with Jesus at the centre of what will be a tragedy brings its theatricality close to that of other unstable stories. By the time of the Last Supper Jesus is isolated and pursued by the legal authorities. Hamlet is isolated following the murder of his father and the pivotal encounter which leads to tragedy. Oedipus' unprovoked violence determines his own destiny. The Last Supper stands alongside other great tragedies as a pivotal moment in its central character's journey. In all these stories the hero's trajectories are deliberately left unclear. From the darkness of Elsinore the appearance of the ghost strikes fear into Marcellus and Bernardo. Oedipus tells an ironic, disingenuous and unattested story of justified homicide. Jesus spends his last days in antagonistic stand-offs with Jewish authorities, and meetings away from the city. A hermeneutic of performance allows an audience to be aware of disruption but

[523] Lk 22;19ff.
[524] In Greek *poieite* is imperative. In performance, words cannot be given absolute guaranteed meanings.

not to know what will emerge from any of these confrontations.[525] Awaiting arrest and execution Jesus is seen as a man at his most vulnerable,[526] as may be Hamlet and Oedipus in the course of their own tragedies. In the Eucharist, as the central act of Christian worship, the church shares its humanity with Jesus, encounters God and is offered hope. As the re-enactment of a single event, the Eucharist becomes, simultaneously and expressly, worship and performance.

Eucharistic liturgies lend themselves to theological and dramatic analysis exemplifying the possibility of a simultaneous theological and dramatic interpretation of worship. The dialectic polarities brought about if God and worshippers are performers and audience by turn, as in Daily Prayer, move from a binary to a unitary position in the Liturgy of the Sacrament where God, as the first person of the Trinity, remains the object of worship, source of power and transformation. Daily Prayer may take a tragic shape, but it is always part of a continuum of prayer without any obvious beginning. It bears closer comparison with *Eumenides,* where Orestes is caught up in a process which remains open-ended but hopeful, than *Agamemnon* which recounts the event that leads to that process. In the previous section I examined briefly the dramatic distinctions between Daily Prayer and the Eucharist and prior to an examination of the Liturgy of the Sacrament as an enactment of a single event and tragedy, I will consider the structure and contradictions of the Church of England Common Worship Order 1, and Eucharistic Prayer B.

An examination of CW1[527] through the double lenses of performance and theatricality shows a physical division of the Eucharist into qualitatively different sections marked by movement as the congregation stand for The Peace. The text makes three divisions, *The Gathering, The Liturgy of the Word,* as the first section, followed by *The Liturgy of the Sacrament*. This division does more than create two 'acts' in a performance. Catechumens were required to leave worship before the Sacrament giving a theologically exclusive dimension to the division. Theatrically, the two parts of the Eucharist raise questions of who constitutes an audience and who performer, at once comparable with, and

[525] Even although audience or congregation know what will happen. To avoid the deadliness of repetition (see Brook 1972;44) every performance must be the 'first.'
[526] Mk 14;34-36.
[527] References to Common Worship Eucharist Order 1 are as CW1.

distinct from, Evening Prayer. In this regard the Liturgy of the Sacrament is easier to assess than the Liturgy of the Word. With the exceptions of three of the acclamations[528] in Eucharistic Prayer B and the *Agnus Dei* – all of which are addressed below – none of the Eucharistic Liturgy is directed to Jesus, but Jesus remains the focus and principal performer in it. This suggests that the liturgy is directed to God as first person of the Holy Trinity, or, in terms of performance, God alone is the audience. A theatrical examination of the Eucharist requires additional models to those of God present-as-performer or God-acting-by-priestly-proxy.

God's action in The Liturgy of the Word is nevertheless subject to considerations similar those in Evening Prayer. The Collect for Purity, Confession and Absolution are examples of 'character-to-character' transaction, requiring God's action to 'cleanse our hearts' and 'forgive us all that is past.' With scripture readings, models of God as character or Priest as proxy are possible. The Sermon allows a third model as God's prophetic voice is heard through an authorised minister. This model of God active in worship becomes an attractive one where, formerly, catechumens and currently, often, children leave the Eucharist before the sacrament. The opening words: 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' establishes a relationship with God as the only starting point for Eucharistic worship. But this instantly raises the tension between the theological and the theatrical. Is the priest speaking as the conduit through which God communicates: George Herbert's 'the Parson in God's Stead'[529] or taking on the role of God, fulfilling a human 'destiny to become God-like'?[530] Theologically we may, cautiously perhaps, assume the former; dramatically the question is less sure, and once the possibility of a 'Brechtian' approach, discussed below, begins to emerge, uncertainties accumulate.

The range of theatricality in the Liturgy of the Word shows in the choice of words immediately following the opening of CW1. 'The Lord *be* with you' cannot mean the same as 'Grace, mercy and peace *from* God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you' (my italics). In the first the speaker must

[528] 'Praise to you Lord Jesus'; 'Christ is the bread of life'; 'Jesus Christ is Lord'.
[529] Herbert 2003.21.
[530] MacQuarrie 1966;507.

decide, or know, who the Lord is.[531] Words spoken without a speaker's clear understanding of their meaning will be unclear to others. The same understanding must apply to 'be'. Is it imperative, so instructing the Lord? Is it 'may the Lord be with you', appealing to the Lord. Is it archaic and stand for 'is'.[532] Whichever interpretation a priest adopts, the option selected acknowledges the presence of the Lord, and we may assume 'the Lord' here to be God. 'Grace, mercy – and peace from God…' in the second versicle makes the priest the conduit for God's blessings and gifts. For both openings 'be' with the implied 'may' or as an archaic 'is /are' emancipates the congregation enabling them to reciprocate God's presence or gifts united as a royal priesthood. The priest stands alongside theatrical messengers – particularly those from a known but unseen character whose message may have a profound influence on worshippers lives.[533] The status of 'messenger' simultaneously risks elevating the priest's role to be the single access to any source of divine grace and blessing, making the congregational response little more than a formality. A hermeneutic where 'God is present in all sacramental action…' maintains the theatrical reality of God as performer and the theological reality of God actively transforming 'those who consent to the values of his kingdom.'[534] It serves also, in theory, to limit opportunities for clerical or ecclesial control over doctrine being imposed through the liturgy. Alongside God and Jesus 'our own participation in the sacrament is an essential element in the action, so that this action is not just something that operates on us in a purely objective way.'[535] But as we have noted above, if a speaker decides that he or she is God's messenger and that God is not present, listeners will come to believe the same thing.

The distinction between God and Jesus in CW1, and understanding their presence continues to determine how the Liturgy of the Word functions and is critical in the Liturgy of the Sacrament. In the Prayers of Penitence, it matters who says Jesus' Summary of the Law – Jesus himself or the priest. Unlike the reported account of God's gift of his son which invites confession: 'God so loved

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[531] *Lord* is used indiscriminately for God and Jesus in CW. See Wainwright 1984;46ff.
[532] This would tie the liturgies of the Word & Sacrament together – 'The Lord is here…'
[533] e.g.: Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot* or the Corinthian shepherd in *Oedipus the King*.
[534] Wainwright 1984;83.
[535] MacQuarrie 1966;470.

the world…' the Summary is Jesus' monologue. Wainwright's image of divine presence maintains the immediacy of listening, speaking and acting, and builds readiness for making present the event of the Last Supper. It lessens any teleological qualities of the Liturgy of the Sacrament because every Eucharistic performance happens in the 'here and now'. God's and Jesus' presence opens the way to Confession, Absolution and the *Gloria in Excelsis* becoming a 'one sided dialogue'[536] where all present are able to acknowledge each other.

The shared participation and dialogues in the Eucharist are carried into the scripture readings by direct address either to the congregation: 'This is the word of the Lord'; 'Hear the Gospel…' or to Jesus: 'Glory to you O Lord' and 'Praise to you O Christ.' The readings are what Alter calls 'contrastive dialogue' which is 'the exchange between one voice' – God's voice in scripture – 'and a group speaking in a collective voice,'[537] – the congregation's response. This dialogic pattern continues with the Creed as a response to the sermon and leads to intercession as, properly, another dialogue where 'the world in its deepest reality' is 'offered to God,'[538] building on the example given by Jesus himself 'our advocate in heaven.' All of these dialogues benefit from preparation or rehearsal, and endorse Wainwright's assertion that congregations need 'skilled liturgists'.

The model of God and Jesus as present and active throughout the Eucharist raises more acute questions to do with performance and audiences than those in the Daily Offices. In a re-enactment where all participants are active, the presence of an audience becomes uncertain or unstable. A hermeneutic of performance applied to the Liturgy of the Sacrament identifies new theatrical models. One of these centres on the participation of 'invisible' characters and their perception by other actors and audiences.[539] A second is centred on 'Brechtian' theories of alienation and the use and place of indirect and reported speech and action. I will first examine more closely how 'invisible'

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536 Alter 1981;84.
537 Alter 1981;72.
538 Justin Martyr, *1st Apology*, Ed. Roberts *et al.* (Buffalo NY. Christian Literature Publishing. 1885, rev. 2009) Ch 65. Also, David Jasper, *Intercession* 2015. Unpublished essay.
539 E.g.: Shakespearian ghosts. *Black Comedy*, Peter Schaffer. Apparitions in *The Crucible,* Arthur Miller, &c.

(and often non-speaking) characters and objects manifest themselves in dramatic performances and affect their courses and outcomes.

Pluto in *The Frogs* (Aristophanes).

In this, and the examples which follow, the problems are all, initially, structural and have to do with the theatricality of the plays. Once identified, the ways they may be dealt with profoundly affect what happens in the plays. In *The Frogs* Pluto is a god, but his role is not theological. In *Macbeth* Banquo is dead, but appears as physically active. They are characters whose influence and presence stands both inside and outside the action of a play and exercise varying measures of control or determination of its course of action.

Pluto controls the second half of Aristophanes' *The Frogs* although he is not present throughout it. His contribution to the dialogue towards the end of the play raises issues for a modern director. The first is when to bring him on stage. Moses Hadas gives him his first line 'Then you won't accomplish your errand,'[540] with no indication of when he might enter. At the same point David Barrett gives a stage direction: *'An enormous pair of scales is brought out…Meanwhile Pluto appears at an upper window.'*[541] The 'upper window' has not previously been mentioned – nor need it be necessary. More recent translations give Pluto earlier entrances immediately following the scene between Xanthias and Pluto's Slave:

> *Scene two*
>
> *From Pluto's house enter Pluto, Dionysus (in his usual costume) carrying a cup of wine, and in his early drunken staggering.*[542]

And

> *[Enter Aeschylus, Euripides, Dionysus, and Pluto, with attendants]*[543]

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[540] Hadas 1968;334.
[541] Aristophanes. *The Wasps, The Poet and the Women, The Frogs. Trans* Barrett, D. (London. Penguin. 1964), 206.
[542] http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/Frogs.htm. There is no obvious reason why the gratuitous descriptive statement should be added.
[543] https://records.viu.ca/~Johnstoi/aristophanes/frogs.htm University of Victoria BC.

The technical problem of when to fix Pluto's entrance may be one of economics: 'The convention of employing only three actors…had its effect on the structure of both tragedy and comedy,' but '*The Frogs*… requires an extra actor' [544] to play two parts. If the extra actor playing Pluto is able to delay his entrance to within the last 120 lines of a play 1533 lines long, it may have cost the state less in wages.

Different modern approaches to this original problem indicate the flexibility and mutability of stage conditions with a perceived need to have Pluto on stage and visible for the second half of the play. He may not speak until within a few minutes of the finale, but without Pluto there would be no play, and for Christian theology, Pluto stands as a powerful metaphor for God in worship, and especially God in the Eucharist. In any performance, issues of form and practicality become inseparably and intractably woven with those of content and meaning. In *The Frogs* these depend upon a journey to Pluto's domain and attendance at his palace. He is not always present – or seen – but the action can only continue with his permission. The protagonist and chief instigator of most of the action is the divine Dionysus, son of immortal Zeus and the human Semele. Unlike Pluto, he appears as fully human (and fallible) so mirroring the priest's role in the Eucharist. But at the play's climax, following the comic *agon* between Aeschylus and Euripides, it is Pluto who first invites the on-stage participants to join in a valedictory sharing of wine then gives his blessing to those returning to worldly reality.

It is possible to present *The Frogs* without the physical appearance of Pluto on stage at any time. As he has some twenty lines only, a disembodied and pre-recorded voice makes casting easier and with careful pointing of lines creates a strong awareness of Pluto's presence. It also stands as a potential instantiation of the model of priest-as-proxy where the supreme God is not seen, but his presence and actions are communicated by a minister. But an unseen Pluto weakens the dialogue between Dionysus and Pluto. Barrett prefaces his first words with '*sepulchrally*' which as a description rather than a stage direction has prompted the use of a microphone and reverberation for Pluto's

[544] Aristophanes 1964;17.

appearance.[545] This lends volume and strongly distinguishes Pluto in the climactic decision over which poet will win the competition to save the city:

Dionysus	You know I like them so much I don't know how to judge between them. I don't want to make an enemy of either…'
Pluto	In that case you've been rather wasting your time down here, haven't you?
Dionysus	Well supposing I do make a choice?
Pluto	You can take one of them back with you…
Dionysus	Bless you. (Aristophanes, 1964;208)

This scene stands as an equivalent to the Eucharistic Prayer where one person's decision and action will potentially transform that person's society. The physical presence of those involved in creating change intensifies the participation and proximity of both actors and audience. From their shared and intimate involvement in the performance all can be made aware that the transformation latent within the play must be carried from the theatrical reality of Hades to the quotidian and war-torn reality of Athens. The language between the two gods indicates Dionysus' acceptance of Pluto's superiority and Pluto's intention to allow Dionysus freedom of choice. It incorporates mutual blessings – Dionysus of Pluto and Pluto of all the characters. Pluto's final invitation '…kindly step inside my palace… where I propose to offer you the hospitality the occasion demands…' although framed in comic terms, becomes a Eucharistic celebration between gods and mortals, uniting them as they seek to transform their world. Pluto's valediction 'Good-bye then Aeschylus, off you go with your sound advice and save the City for us…' reinforces divine and human soteriological concerns. A hermeneutical model of God-on-stage encountered in worship is reflected in a play which allows enduring and transformational changes beyond the constraints of theatrical time and space. Theatricality provides the means to move from immanence to transcendence and back in theological and dramatic performance.

Banquo's ghost in *Macbeth* (William Shakespeare).

A more complex problem of presence which cuts across dramatic and theological interpretation and apprehension is introduced into *Macbeth* by the appearance of Banquo's ghost. Daniel Swift sees the ghost at the banquet as a metaphor for the division between Reformation and Roman Catholic positions on

[545] *Frogs*! Brewery Youth Theatre, Kendal 1980, and revivals.

the real presence. The Catholic 'Macbeth at the feast sees it only as real,' [while] "This is the very painting of your fear" insists Lady Macbeth'[546] as a practical, and ruthless Reformer. The hermeneutical significance latent in the trope of the banquet may be particularly relevant to the debates attendant on the 1552 Book of Common Prayer, but the dramatic treatment of the ghost is equally relevant to how Banquo's, or God's presence operates in performance.

Historical practice has been to use an actor to portray Banquo's ghost,[547] a task which raises technical problems in rehearsal if a performance is to be authentic. For all but Macbeth the ghost is not present at the banquet and the audience must know that the court and Lady Macbeth do not see it. Macbeth knows the opposite to be true because he can see the ghost. For an audience, both sets of reactions have truth[548] so a company must find a means or convention to present these truths, however stylised, artificial, natural, over- or understated its theatricality may be. Two dangers of losing authenticity accompany this scene, both of a physical nature. The first is an onset of 'visual inattention' whenever Banquo's ghost appears. Actors' eyes focus anywhere but on the 'empty' place at table, or if, as is Lennox, forced to look in the ghost's direction: 'Here is a place reserved sir,' be averted just above, to one side or directly at the table. Such a presentation colludes with an audience in a shared pretence. The ghost is a corporeal actor, but we pretend together that he's not there. The second danger in using an actor as ghost lies in the risk of any single cast member losing the knowledge of Banquo's invisibility by looking at him and, as a result, 'seeing' him. In the moment that happens, an audience will be aware that a shift of focus has wrongly made the invisible visible. It is the learning and application of technical skill and rehearsal which enables the theatrical to become authentic in performance and give rise to new realities and different truths. A corporeal ghost gives dynamism to the scene (as Pluto does in *The Frogs*) but it relies on an illusion in order to create the new reality of the banquet for the court, and invites an audience to share in that illusion as reality. The authenticity disappears if the illusion fails to convince an audience, so the reality of the story is jeopardised. The problem of creating an illusion within a

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[546] Swift, D. *Shakespeare's Common Prayers*. (New York. OUP. 2013), 175.
[547] See e.g.: Speaight, R. *Shakespeare on the Stage*. (London. Collins.1973), 47.
[548] Brecht *contra* Stanislavsky.

performance is how actors convey their knowledge that 'even an untruth must become a truth in the eyes of the actor…'[549]

For the audience an embodied ghost raises a deeper issue of interpretation. In seeing what Macbeth alone sees, an audience is coerced into knowing that for, Macbeth, the ghost is a malignant force. A visible ghost places the audience in collusion with Macbeth. It implicates them in accepting his actions, and becoming subject to some degree of guilt by association. The choice to reject the enforced theatrical reality remains an option, but only after its manifestation. Banquo's visible ghost raises ethical and moral questions in the play which become contingent upon the method of its performance.

To play Banquo's ghost as imaginary is not unusual contemporary practice and makes directing easier. Actors may look anywhere, without the constraint of having to render a visible ghost invisible. This focuses increasing pressure onto Macbeth, who alone 'sees', Banquo 'shaking his gory locks, glaring with sightless eyes,'[550] and creates his own reality through the theatricality of his words: 'Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear/The armed rhinoceros or the Hyrcan tiger…' [551] while the court maintains its reality of disbelief in the ghost. This approach provides a more robust and, ostensibly, safer framework for an audience to experience different truths within the reality of the banquet. They, with the actors, are freed from the constraint of having to see an embodied ghost, and can see Macbeth as the pivot for the conflict which is about to engulf Scotland. But while maintaining Macbeth as the nexus for evil through the play, not putting a 'real' ghost on stage allows room for doubt on everyone's part and leaves each audience member to decide if Banquo's ghost exists inside or outside Macbeth's head. The invitation to the audience in this case is to side with the court as innocent victims of Macbeth's deranged behaviour and actions, knowing that forces of evil are invisible and located principally within an individual's consciousness. Banquo's ghost, visible or invisible, is a powerful character whose presence has a measure of control on the ensuing action. The issues around the visibility and invisibility of characters also arise in the

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[549] Stanislavsky 1990;23.
[550] Swift 2013;171.
[551] Macbeth III, 4 ll99-100. (Harmondsworth. Penguin. 1967).

presence and use of objects and their importance or symbolism, meaning and necessity.

Objects in performance.

It is difficult (but not impossible) to envisage a production of Macbeth where daggers and blood are not presented as objects on stage. The dialogue between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth: 'This is a sorry sight.' 'A foolish thought to say a sorry sight,' (II;2 ll20-1) leaves a choice for Macbeth's hands to be clean – where the 'blood' is his own perception, as with an imagined ghost, or to be dripping with stage-blood. Lady Macbeth's answer allows either interpretation. If 'blood' is not used here, then her own final appearance will also be blood free, suggesting that she has become as deluded as her husband, paralleling and intensifying the interiority of both characters' madness. A more graphic interpretation, where 'blood' is used may make a clearer causal relationship between Macbeth and the witches as the dark, external forces driving the narrative if they too use 'real' body parts.[552] Such theatricality runs directly counter to the Puritan aspirations to remove 'dumb and dark images…[which] did both darken the light of the Church and obscure the brightness of the Gospel'[553] under Elizabeth I, but it cannot be wholly removed from the Eucharist where 'blood' and 'body' are at its centre. At the Eucharist 'my blood' is present in vessels; in Macbeth blood is present, predominantly, on daggers.

Theatrical logic demands that Macbeth carry two daggers following the murder of Duncan – it would be virtually impossible to perform the second half of the scene without objects: 'Why did you bring the daggers from the place? /They must lie there' (II;ii48-9). The presence of daggers heightens the tension arising from the murder by pointing up Macbeth's error. Daggers and dripping blood help to make actors and audience privy to the burgeoning evil of the protagonists by providing a focus for another relationship: 'an object…ceases to be a simple material thing, it acquires a kind of sanctity.'[554] The servants'

[552] Macbeth I;iii, IV;i.
[553] John Bruen in Swift 2013;176.
[554] Stanislavsky 1990;43.

daggers become participants in the scene and their physical presence reinforces their centrality as the agents of the fear and revulsion affecting Macbeth.

Before Banquo's murder, Macbeth's soliloquy at the end of II.i 'Is this a dagger…' presents an object, whose properties as agent or performer are more complex than the later daggers. It raises directorial and interpretative issues akin to those raised by the appearance of Banquo's ghost. This dagger should be invisible to allow Macbeth the use of both hands at l40 when he must draw his own palpable dagger. If the 'fatal vision' is to be made real for the audience, how is it to be? Modern technology may allow a 'false creation' as hologram or projection. Any decision will affect the meaning of the performance in ways similar to the later presentation of the ghost. If the dagger remains invisible the audience cannot collude with Macbeth by being forced to see it. Its interiority maintains a distance between them. But where Macbeth is unshakable in his belief in the ghost's presence at the banquet, here he is aware that this is either a 'dagger of the mind… a false creation [of a] heat oppressed brain' (II.i ll38-9) or that it is a vision of a higher truth beyond mere sight 'Mine eyes are made the fools o' the other senses/Or else worth all the rest' (II.i ll44-5). An invisible dagger allows Macbeth himself to take control of the scene at 'There's no such thing' (l47) and the rest of the soliloquy stands as an endorsement of his intentions, however evil. He undertakes these consciously and, in his own terms, rationally. A visible dagger made to disappear at l47 removes that independent option as Macbeth and an audience will be aware of its disappearance, leaving control with stage technicians whose work must then be interpreted by an actor.

The problems associated with Macbeth's vision are lessened by Shakespeare's words. Macbeth draws his own dagger at ll40-1, an early point in the monologue, so has space to use a real object alongside its symbolic correlative. The following ten lines may be directed to either dagger with equal effect, and 'there's no such thing' then refers to blood not yet on Macbeth's own blade as well as the dagger of the mind. To paraphrase Stanislavsky: 'what counts is not the material out of which [Macbeth's] dagger is made be it [unreal] or steel, but the inner feeling of the actor who can justify [Duncan's murder].'[555]

[555] Stanislavsky 1990;125.

By keeping the vision as a 'dagger of the mind' Macbeth's creation of a relationship between invisible and actual objects is easier to forge. This allows a controlled build-up of tension in his calculated approach to Duncan's murder. This interpretation highlights his physical and spiritual disintegration in the following scene, and is also focussed upon his relationship with two daggers. 'Macbeth… is the great drama of *uncertain presence*. Is it a dagger or not? Is it a ghost or not? In reading we too must make decisions about what it is before us: about what we are willing and capable of seeing [and experiencing] *in this moment*.'[556]

Uncertain presences; 'meetings between God and humanity'.[557]

Viewed through simultaneous theatrical and theological lenses, the Eucharist also remains 'the great drama of *uncertain* presence.' I have discussed uncertainty as a given in performance, but it is present on more than one occasion in the Eucharist. The choice of words permissible at the administration of bread and wine give one clear example. CW1 gives five options which range from a modern version of the 1662 words, themselves ambiguous, to: 'The body of Christ' and 'The blood of Christ' as (apparently) univocal statements. These may seek to endorse Article 28: 'the body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner,'[558] but here and elsewhere in the Eucharist, a hermeneutic of performance cannot guarantee univocal understanding.

The same hermeneutic means the God and Jesus are characters of 'uncertain presence' but central to the practice and understanding of the Eucharist. The processes of interpreting and portraying characters who may not be required to be visible, and objects whose use may encompass utility, symbolism and metonymy share commonalities across the theatre and Eucharistic liturgy. One of the most significant is referenced in *The Poetics* and Justin Martyr's *First Apology*. Aristotle and Justin both repeatedly cite imitation (*mimesis*) as central in their fields of activity. 'Epic poetry and the composition

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[556] Swift 2013;181 (my italics).
[557] Wainwright 1980;82.
[558] Articles of Religion. 1562. BCP 1928;775.

of tragedy as well as comedy…are all (taken together) imitations.'[559] Before the specific discussion on tragedy as imitation, and its creative effects, Aristotle gives imitation as the foundational activity for the whole of drama. Justin Martyr sees imitation as central to the good end of Christian worship. At the weekly celebration of word and sacrament 'the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation (*mimeousis*) of these things.'[560] For both Aristotle and Justin imitation is normal: 'Imitation comes naturally to human beings from childhood…'[561] leading to delight and understanding of tragedy. Theologically it is essential to the Christian community and simultaneously dangerous: 'From what has been already said, you can understand how the devils, in imitation of what was said by Moses, asserted that Proserpine was the daughter of Jupiter and instigated the people to set up an image of her under the name of Kore,'[562] Underlying the writing of both is the sense that imitation causes events which involve and affect participants and spectators, and rightly used, leads to understanding despite its associated risks.

For Aristotle and Justin imitation allows the creation of realities rather than 'imaginary worlds which remain explicitly remote.'[563] These realities include all those involved whether as performers, participants or spectators. Elam describes this process: 'Dramatic worlds… are presented to the audience as "hypothetically actual" constructs since they are "seen" in progress "here and now" … the dramatic world is assumed by the spectator before he knows anything about it.'[564] The same applies to celebrations of the Eucharist. The world in which 'the mental, verbal and dramatic signs of Christian worship are kinetic expressions of the constant purpose of God on its way to achievement among his responding creation,'[565] is the reality of its performance. The correspondence of audience and worshippers in 'hypothetically actual' secular or religious performances is indicated by Wainwright's judicious use of '*responding* creation' in relation to worship. Performances cannot enforce

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[559] Aristotle 1996;3.
[560] Justin Martyr; 1st Apology, Ch 67.
[561] Aristotle 1996;6.
[562] Justin Martyr; 1st Apology, Ch 64.
[563] Elam 1988;107.
[564] Ibid. p.111.
[565] Wainwright 1984;86.

participation, although their theatricality assists and can stimulate a creative response from an audience or congregation

The Eucharist as performed reality.

I have begun to look at the possible *loci* of performance and theatricality within the Eucharist and how characters in some way 'other' are incorporated into its performance as imitation generates different realities. The primary means to achieve these realities rests with performers' words and actions, and the relationships these create with each other, the space they occupy, the objects surrounding them and a congregation. An analysis of the CW1 Eucharistic Liturgy in these terms will establish its potential as a 'mimesis of the lived.'[566]

The initial area for analysis, especially in the Liturgy of the Word, is the language. Elam refers to *deixis* – the use of pronouns and unspecific words within a text which allow speakers and their actions to contextualise a performance, within a particular space and time – as being a prerequisite for the creation of theatre, which operates without the necessity of a narrator.[567] He gives an example from Bernard Shaw's *Heartbreak House*:

The Womanservant	God bless us! Sorry to wake *you* miss, *I'm* sure, but *you* are a stranger to *me*. What might *you* be waiting *here* for *now*?
The Young Lady	Waiting for somebody to show some signs of knowing that *I* have been invited *here*.
The Womanservant	Oh, *you're* invited are *you*?

This contains 'references by the speakers to themselves as speakers, to their interlocutors as listener-addressees and to the spatio-temporal coordinates (the *here* and *now*) of the utterance itself by means of such deictic elements as demonstrative pronouns and spatial and temporal adverbs.'[568]

Similar conditions hold for the Eucharistic liturgy. In either of the greetings and the Collect for Purity the placing of President and people, the use

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[566] Serpieri, A. in Elam 1988;113.
[567] Narrators are used – see *Our Town* (Thornton Wilder), or much of Brecht's work – but they too are contextualised as characters within the performance by *deixis*, even if placed outside the action.
[568] Elam 1988;138-9.

of solo and group voices, gestures and movements all give a shape for worship and determine the status and place of its participants:

> The Lord *be* with *you*
> *All* and also with *you*.
> *(or)*
> Grace, mercy and peace
> *from* God *our* Father
> and the Lord Jesus Christ
> *be* with *you*
> *All* and also with *you*. (my italics)

Throughout the liturgy the *I/we – you* dialectic keeps the event in the present, while the locus of the action, or characters is indicated here by use of the present tense 'be with…' with no other spatial reference. In the first greeting the presence of God is assumed. In the second greeting, the nature of God's gifts – grace, mercy and peace will depend in part on shared understanding, but equally as much on the way the words are spoken and whether gestures are brought into the performance. The gifts may have fixed theological meanings outwith the Eucharistic event, but the opening of each Eucharist establishes an immediate relationship 'between speaker-listeners and the here-and-now… before any detailed information is given regarding the participants and their world.'[569] This greeting does not assume the presence of God and may be another example of ambiguity latent in Anglican Eucharistic liturgies.

The Collect for Purity follows this pattern and elaborates upon it. God knows our most intimate secrets and if we ask, can change them. Doing so will enable worshippers to take a particular course of action at the moment the words are spoken:

> Almighty God,
> *to* whom all hearts are open,
> all desires known,
> and *from* whom no secrets are hidden:
> cleanse the thoughts of *our* hearts
> by the inspiration of *your* Holy Spirit,
> that *we* may perfectly love *you*,
> and worthily magnify *your* holy name;
> through Christ our Lord.
> **Amen.** (my italics)

[569] Elam 1988;138.

The *we*/*you* dynamic is retained, and God is present in the here-and-now with power to transform worshippers.

The first narratives in CW1 occur in The Prayers of Penitence:

> *Our Lord Jesus Christ said:*
> The first commandment is this:
> 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.
> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
> with all your soul, with all your mind,
> and with all your strength.'
> The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'
> There is no other commandment greater than these.
> On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.
> *All* **Amen. Lord, have mercy.** (my italics)

The setting of the Summary of the Commandments is historical, but the context and the congregational response 'Lord have mercy' is to words spoken in the present, as well as in the past.

The juxtaposition of past and present continues through the Invitation to Confession as God's own historical action is recalled as the reason for a present act of penitence which will allow future benefits:

> God so *loved* the world
> that he *gave* his only Son Jesus Christ
> to save us from our sins,
> to be our advocate in heaven,
> and to bring us to eternal life.
> *Let* us confess our sins in penitence and faith,
> firmly *resolved* to keep God's commandments
> and to *live* in love and peace with *all*. (my italics)

This resolution to keep God's commandments is the first occasion that any action beyond the here-and-now of the Eucharist is contemplated. It shows a unilateral intention on the part of the *I*/*we* participants to continue actions begun in the performance of the liturgy: 'Dramatic discourse is egocentric: the speaking subject [*I*/*we*] defines everything (including the you-addressee [God]) in terms of his own place in the dramatic world.'[570] In Chapter 2 I discussed equality, parity of power and the ability of all characters to make choices in performance; *I*/*we* must work in partnership with *you*.

[570] Elam 1988;143.

The alternative confessions re-establish the action in the here-and-now, but with differing emphases. The first allows for individualised contextualisation within the action of corporate worship. 'Deliberate' sins against God and neighbour prompt the key words 'we are truly sorry and repent of all our sins.' The words promise action and give immediacy in their direct appeal to God as the 'you-addressee.' The second confession defines and limits worshippers' transgressions: 'we have not loved you with our whole heart…' and their future aspirations: 'to do justly… love mercy… walk humbly…' As a narrative account of 'our' misdoings, it risks imposing an historical context upon confession rather than allowing the creation of a dramatic event appropriate to each Eucharistic celebration.

In the Absolution, God becomes the *I*/*we*, expressed here as '*who'*, to the worshippers' *you*.

> Almighty God,
> *Who* forgives all who truly repent,
> Have mercy upon *you*. (my italics)

If God's action is authenticated by the words and actions of the liturgy these words may be allotted to a priest-as-proxy. Absolution happens as a dramatic event in the here-and-now. The present tense of the absolution, and the verb '*keep'* maintain it as a dynamic act indispensable to the fulfilment and efficacy of the Eucharist. God's action in absolving the congregation reciprocates their intention to continue their transformation beyond the performance of the Eucharist. The emerging theatrical model can only exist given parity of involvement and potential for creativity of all those performing the Eucharist, where neither God nor any other participants risk marginalisation since all are instrumental in creating the conditions and contexts for it.

The *Gloria in Excelsis* after the Absolution is a grateful and joyous response to God's action. Theatrically and theologically it celebrates the presence of God as participant in worship and recognises God's activity in the moment. There is a proviso that the 1552 addition 'have mercy on us' to the 4th Century *Gloria in Excelsis* in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, feels like a tautology

after the Absolution.[571] The introduction of Jesus into the *I*/*we* – *you* dialectic of the *Gloria* raises a theatrical problem. His previous appearance is as an historical referent in the recital of the commandments. In the *Gloria*, worshippers address Jesus as 'you' for the first time. Jesus is present and active, as distinct from God, in the Liturgy of the Word as well as in the Liturgy of the Sacrament. Jesus' presence here affects the overall dramatic and theological shape of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Sacrament narrates and re-enacts Jesus' life, death and our salvation which is made possible by them. I will argue that the Eucharistic re-enactment is an apotheosis of tragedy. The introduction of Jesus into the *I*/*we*-*you* dialectic of the Liturgy of the Word introduces its tragic theme and brings dramatic irony into the whole liturgy.

Until the *Gloria*, Jesus has been referred to only as a third party: 'In the name of the father and of the Son…', '…he gave his only Son, Jesus Christ…' or a historical figure 'Our Lord Jesus Christ said…' In the *Gloria* Jesus is the chief agent of forgiveness '*you* take away the sins of the world…'(my italics) after a plea to God alone if the first confession is used, and at best, indirect reference to Jesus in the second confession. This promotes Jesus above the other two persons of the Trinity: 'You *alone* are the Holy One…. You *alone* are The Lord... You *alone* are the Most High…. *in* the glory of God…' (my italics). God is worshipped and glorious, but without warning, power and action are ascribed to Jesus. The *Gloria* emphasises that this happens immediately after Almighty God forgives the worshippers. A hermeneutic of performance, where parity of esteem applies to all characters, applied to the Liturgy of the Word at this point pushes Christology to a dangerously high level where Jesus is in danger of becoming a focus for worship more powerful than God.

If the same hermeneutic enables the Eucharist to be tragedy, a different interpretation begins to suggest itself. By interpreting the Liturgies of Word and Sacrament as a unified text, the *Gloria* allows for the irony of participants knowing that Jesus, who is already the divine hero, will suffer before the conclusion of the performance. Near the beginning of *Oedipus the King* the populace insist on Oedipus' semi-divine soteriological qualities and there are

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[571] *Apostolic Constitutions*. Book 7, Ch. 47. See: Lowther-Clarke & Harris 1950;358.

two later significant scenes between Oedipus and Jocasta (ll924-954, & ll958-978) where Oedipus' position as an absolute and benevolent king appears safe to both characters. The words and style of these scenes give opportunities for all audiences to become aware that outcomes may not be as they might expect:

> Oedipus. you said thieves –
> He told you a whole band of them murdered Laius.
> So if he still holds to the same number I cannot be the killer
> But if he refers to one man, one alone
> *Clearly the scales come down on me*
> *I am guilty*. (Oedipus the King.ll931-6, my italics)

Oedipus and Jocasta do not yet believe Laius' murderer acted alone.

In *Hamlet*, III;iv Hamlet attempts to persuade Gertrude that if the relationship between mother and son can be maintained, both will be saved:

> O throw away the worser part of it,
> And live the purer with the other half.
> Good night. But go not to my uncle's bed (*Hamlet*, III;iv, 159-60)

But he undermines the hope with a threat:

> Let the birds fly, and like the famous ape
> To try conclusions in the basket creep
> And break your own neck down. (*Hamlet*, III;iv, 195-7)

The course of tragedy pursues a linear narrative, where past significant events have already contributed fatally to the denouement and are recalled as evidential. Theologically we know that time is being manipulated in the Eucharist and that the sense and effect of the *Gloria* is for now, the past and, crucially, in the future. The CW Eucharistic liturgy moves simultaneously backwards in time, while happening in the present and it projects certainty into the future: 'you are seated at the right hand of the father.' Performance can move time in any direction at the behest of writer, director or actors, and can make the past present, but can only offer hope, not certainty, for the future. Performance time contains all its events within itself. In the Eucharist the congregation knows that the *Gloria* leads to Jesus' suffering and offer of transformation. Participants, however, must choose to carry their transformation forward into the quotidian time to which they must return.

In the previous chapter I considered whose voice is heard through the reading of scripture and the recitation of the Creed. These are dramatic events

in the present and in the Eucharist the consistent sense of dialogue imparted by the *I/we-you* form of address allows God's presence to be more immediate. As a member of the gathered community God listens to his words as Pluto listens to the poets. The Creed allows worshippers to acknowledge the supremacy of the Holy Trinity in a manner analogous once more with the citizens of Thebes at the beginning of *Oedipus the King*. The lack of deictic language brings the Creed closer to a chorus or soliloquy where thoughts, inner feelings, doubts and beliefs are expressed in stylised and more complex language than that of much dialogue. It gives time for individual or group reflection prior to a change of scene or emphasis. The Creed leads the performance from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Sacrament without a formal break. Intercession reinstates a dialogue, albeit a silent dialogue, between participants and God: 'Lord in your mercy. *Hear our prayer*'. These and the shared Peace become the beginning of the Offertory where participants offer themselves, others in need and tangible gifts to God in preparation for further transformation.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament.

As dramatic script and liturgy, the Liturgy of the Sacrament in whatever form appears less nuanced and more intractable[572] than the Liturgy of the Word. In the latter the first reference to Jesus: 'Our Lord Jesus Christ said "Hear O Israel…"' is as a reminder to Christians of the Old Covenant, not as a character in the enactment of the liturgy. On his second problematic appearance in the *Gloria* his aid is invoked: 'Lord Jesus Christ… have mercy on us…' identifying him as the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, who acts rather than speaks. The Peace and the Offertory serve clear theological and theatrical purposes by uniting all present to become participants with Jesus in the Last Supper. For Eucharistic celebrations, in whichever liturgy, the great transformation or denouement, climax or tragedy starts after the Offertory and is of a very different order from the Liturgy of the Word. The Liturgy of the Sacrament is a new enacted narrative focussed solely on Jesus whose presence must be real, but whose appearance at this point must be accounted for. To explore this

[572] See below p.243 on Paschasius Radbertus' & Rastramnus' identically titled '*De Corpore et sanguine Christi*.'

intractability we must find different models of performance and theatricality through which to examine the core of the Eucharist.

In keeping with the earliest theological practice, CW Eucharistic Prayer B is, along with 'all Eucharistic prayers – true to their ultimately Jewish origins – directly to God, as Father and Creator.'[573] In the Liturgy of the Sacrament, God is no longer acting alongside a congregation, or involved in any *I-you* deictic exchange, so that the opening dialogue between priest and people:

> The Lord is here
> *His spirit is with us….*

establishes the conditions for dialogues, monologues or choruses directed to God, about Jesus. God's role is analogous to Pluto's as the source of power and control, and object of worship. As performance, the problem which arises in all Eucharistic prayers is how to bring Jesus into the performance as anything other than another referent when he is the leading character whose actions and sacrifice save humanity and are to be imitated in the re-enactment of the Liturgy. One model I have already cited is Brecht's theory of epic theatre which he approaches in '*The Street Scene*', and his model provides one solution to the problem of how Jesus can enter the Liturgy of the Sacrament.

The conditions for a Brechtian hermeneutic of performance in relation to CW1 Prayer B are set in the first two lines. By making the definitive statement 'The Lord is here' the President takes control of the performance that follows, determines its content,[574] and by so doing, separates him/herself from the other participants, or becomes the Brechtian 'demonstrator' describing events to onlookers. This distancing or separation[575] is maintained through the dialogue which follows. 'Lift up your hearts' is a direct command, and it is not until 'Let us give thanks…' that the dialectic cooperation of the Liturgy of the Word is found. In Brechtian terms this initial separation of God and Spirit is made possible through the capacity of the President, as performer or 'demonstrator' of any character in the narrative, to tell the spectators (or audience, or congregation) what is happening, where it is happening, or more significantly,

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573 Gavin, F. in Lowther Clarke & Harris 1950;111.
574 Proper Prefaces are optional and the *Sanctus* may be omitted. The President cannot be prevented from altering the prayer, or misreading it in performance.
575 Alienation/*verfremdungseffekt*.

who is making events happen. The President interposes him/herself between God and congregation. This distancing of God requires other agencies to enliven the dynamic necessary for the performance of the Eucharist. For the first time the Spirit, as a character appears in the congregational response and affirmation: 'His Spirit is with us.' It remains with the President-demonstrator to permit or request when such enlivenment occurs.

Following the opening dialogue, the Eucharistic Prayer becomes the demonstrator's narrative or 'clear description and reporting… [with]… choruses'.[576] It is directed to God as thanksgiving and explanation, suggesting that Jesus 'who was sent by you in your great goodness to be our Saviour' is not yet present as a character. The line spacing used by the editors of CW at this point acquires significance. 'By the power of the Holy spirit…' as a new stanza, enables the demonstrator to shift focus, sense and locus away from God, and to introduce Jesus, through a degree of characterisation. With the dialogue 'he lived on earth, and went about among us' or 'he opened wide his arms for us on the cross' the president need not act-out, and indeed 'must not cast a spell over anyone,'[577] but the 'event has taken place; what you are seeing now is a repeat.'[578] The Eucharist is a re-enactment and by such imitation, or *mimesis*, however economical, the president-demonstrator makes the past present, the invisible visible and brings Jesus into the performance by demonstrating Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

The third stanza with the *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* as a (Brechtian) chorus renders the narrative ecclesial and allows the congregation to respond to the President's demonstration of their own holiness by reasserting God's supremacy in the *Sanctus*, as all have become part of 'the company of heaven.'[579] The *Benedictus* gives ecclesial assent to the presence and status of Jesus. It is only after the acceptance of Jesus' presence that the President-demonstrator may engage with God, present as object of worship to authorise divine power from the Holy Spirit, present as a character, to make holy the bread and wine in the first *epiclesis*.

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[576] Brecht, in Bentley1968;85.
[577] Ibid. p.85.
[578] Ibid. p.86.
[579] Cf. Is, 6;1-3.

The principal means of shifting the emphasis through the narrative is in a change of tense. The president's words which demonstrate the events of Jesus' life are in a past tense. The responses are in the present tense, incorporating all participants into the events. Through the Eucharist, linguistic devices both isolate and unite the President and participants and blur distinctions between 'performers' and 'audiences' or Priest and people. The Eucharist as performance 'is a meaningful phenomenon with a clear social function that dominates all its elements.'[580] To Brecht's description must be added that the theological and salvific functions of the Eucharist predominate over its social function.

The Eucharistic prayer reverts to the past tense as it reaches its climax. By giving more specific details of Jesus' actions, it responds sympathetically to a Brechtian analysis. Another stanza break at 'who in the same night that he was betrayed' separates the *epiclesis* from the account of Jesus' final actions. The focus reverts to the demonstrator-spectator polarity of the earlier generalised biographical narrative. The detailed actions and the spoken words enable the President-demonstrator to represent the demonstrated *character* or *subject*,[581] – Jesus – by 'imitat[ing] his actions so allowing conclusions to be drawn about [him].'[582] Jesus is now present for an audience to see and hear as a human male. A hermeneutic of performance, adopting Brechtian theatricality, allows Jesus to have a physical, visible, palpable presence in the enactment of the Eucharist, and means that 'the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is a personal presence... [and] all personal presence is embodied presence.'[583]

Jesus, a man, is now alone with the disciples for the Eucharistic climax and able to speak the words given him by Luke in a 'representation [which] defies time… It takes yesterday's action and makes it live again in every one of its aspects – including its immediacy.'[584] This hermeneutic eases another almost intractable theological problem. If this is the Jesus of the New Testament

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[580] Brecht, in Bentley 1968;95.
[581] Brecht uses these terms for driver, victim or any person involved in the 'demonstrator's' performance.
[582] Brecht, in Bentley 1968;89.
[583] MacQuarrie 1977;479-80.
[584] Brook 1972;155.

speaking, there is no need to have any concern over the nature, substance, accidents or any other quality of the Eucharistic bread and wine. All those present take part in an event which includes and remembers Jesus, who shares bread and wine which he has blessed with the participants, representing those with Jesus each time the Eucharist is performed. Brecht's explication of epic theatre illuminates this possibility – 'the performance's origins lie in an incident that can be judged one way or another, that may repeat itself in different forms and *is not finished but is bound to have consequences*.'[585]

The Eucharist as 'an incident that can be judged…' by its spectators-as-participants is democratised in two ways. The congregation is on equal terms with all other performers and is required to assess, comment, or respond to the shared action. An embodied Jesus, represented through the actions of the President enables this process of democratisation to take place as the congregation see and hear Jesus, as one of them, repeating the words and actions of the Last Supper. They also know that the man Jesus is simultaneously divine through the same process of demonstration that takes place at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer: 'By the power of the Holy spirit he took flesh…' A hermeneutic of performance unites all those who participate in any Eucharistic celebration. Through a mutually acceptable *I/we-you* dialectic the congregation enters a relationship with the Jesus of the demonstration knowing that his actions can change the world. This democratisation further unites demonstrator and spectator, or President and congregation, in that there is no requirement for any 'priestly' quality for the demonstrator to function effectively. Performance and participation in the Eucharist may be changed or enhanced by the celebrant's/demonstrator's acting skills: 'the Theatre's demonstrator, the actor, must apply a technique…'[586] but, with true Brechtian ambivalence, these skills are not deemed essential: 'The Street demonstrator can carry out a successful demonstration with no greater abilities than, in effect, anybody has.'[587] In the Eucharist, Priest and people become ostensibly one body to whom comes the embodied Jesus.

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[585] Brecht, in Bentley 1968;95 (my italics).
[586] Ibid. p.90.
[587] Ibid. p.92.

The effects of embodiment in the Eucharist

In demonstrating and re-enacting the event of the Last Supper the embodied Jesus radically reinforces one of the theological controversies of the Eucharist articulated in the ninth Century by Paschasius Radbertus and Ratramnus[588] on how Jesus may become real in bread and wine. Paschasius maintains: 'No one who believes the divine words of the truth declaring "For my flesh is truly food and my blood is truly drink" (John, 6;55-56) can doubt that the body and blood are truly created by the consecration.'[589] In support of a figurative interpretation of bread and wine as Christ's body and blood Ratramnus counters 'how then can they be called the body and blood of Christ when no change can be seen to have taken place.'[590]

The principles of *The Street Scene* allow Jesus to repeat 'an incident' with his own words and actions to spectators as disciples without occasioning any controversy over bread and wine. The Eucharist is a reframing of the Jewish Passover as Christian Last Supper. Set in this context, Jesus' words 'take; this is my body', 'take eat…', and 'this is my body, which is given for you,'[591] parallel those of the Passover Haggadah post-meal blessing 'it is He Who provides for all… preparing food for all His creatures.'[592] In both Passover and Eucharist food and wine are used for the meal itself and symbolically as a reminder of God's promises in the Jewish celebration, or the means for the Lucan 'remembrance of me' in the Christian adaptation. In neither is there a sense that the food or wine are to be understood as human or divine flesh and blood. Just as the theatrical reading allows the embodied Jesus to be present, it further allows his "remembrance" as 'no mere calling to mind… The past, by being "remembered" becomes a present reality.' [593] If Jesus' presence with us at the Eucharist is embodied, the 'present reality' is the Passover or Last Supper and there is no

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[588] See: Wainwright pp 260-5; McGrath, A. *Ed*. 2001 *The Christian Theology Reader*. (Oxford. Blackwell. 2001) pp.527ff. Zirkel, "*The Ninth-Century Eucharistic Controversy: A Context for the Beginnings of Eucharistic Doctrine in the West*," *Worship* 68, no. 1 (1994): 2-23.
[589] Paschasius Radbertus, *De Corpore et sanguine Christi,* in McGrath 2001;526.
[590] Ratramnus, *De Corpore et sanguine Christi,* in McGrath 2001;528.
[591] Mk 14;22, Mt 26;26, Lk 22;19.
[592] Goldberg, N. *Passover Haggadah*. (Hoboken NJ. Ktav Publishing House.1993), 29.
[593] Jasper & Cuming. *Prayers of the Eucharist*. (New York. Pueblo Publishing Company 1987), 9.

need to concern ourselves over the substance and nature of the bread and wine he shares. Their existence as complete and unchanging in themselves is suggested in Jesus' own words from all the synoptic Eucharistic accounts: 'Truly I tell you I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'[594]

However complex may be the issues over bread and wine in the Eucharist, it is in the nature of theatre to maintain straightforward plot lines. The cataclysmic effects of *King Lear* are introduced by an apparently simple question 'How much do you love me?' The world-changing events presaged at the end of *Eumenides* are far removed from the watchman waiting only for the light signifying victory at the beginning of *Agamemnon*. For the theatre, to challenge Christian doctrines of the real presence (in bread and wine) by interpreting them as of no concern if Jesus himself is present is both acceptable and desirable. As well as questioning the role of bread and wine, an embodied Jesus, sharing the re-enactment of the Last Supper sheds a different light on another great, if contested, Christian orthodoxy in a Brechtian reading of the Eucharist. How can performance of the Eucharist treat the resurrection and *eschaton*?

Immediately following Jesus' words of consecration comes one of four optional acclamations, the first is:

> Christ has died
> Christ is risen
> Christ will come again

which is a response to the President's own words: 'Great is the mystery of faith.'[595] The other three options (introduced by one of: 'Praise to you Lord Jesus'; 'Christ is the bread of life'; 'Jesus Christ is Lord') stand as the President-demonstrator's and congregation's response to the account of the Last Supper and the instruction Jesus has just given. The eschatological acclamation leads to an extended *anamnesis* and *epiclesis* which become incorporated into an anticipated realisation of Jesus' *kerygma*: 'So Father… looking for his coming in glory, gather into one in your kingdom all who share this one bread and one

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[594] Mk 14;28, cf. Mt 26;29, Lk 22;18.
[595] 1 Tim 3;16 'the mystery of our religion is great…' see Jasper & Cuming 1987;69 for a gloss on 'this unusual feature… put into Jesus mouth… reach[ing] the Roman canon as the mystery of faith…'

cup.' The embodied Jesus invites the disciples to share the mystery of faith with him now, and the Brechtian reading offers a hermeneutic which allows their response to be multi-layered. In the synoptic gospels Jesus has initiated the action of the Last Supper and will shortly share bread and wine with his disciples in a form of a Passover Meal. The Acclamation affirms a new dimension in the sharing of bread and wine, in the here-and-now. Jesus' resurrection and return happens when all are gathered to eat and drink together. 'We' stand in God's presence 'in the company of all the saints.' Resurrection and remembrance become realised eschatology in the Eucharist. The President's response, or the Demonstrator's summary of this '*Street Scene*' is one of gratitude and in 'rejoicing in his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension', knowing that 'his coming in glory…' is about to happen as an encounter with the immanent and transcendent God.

The subsuming of the Christian *eschaton* into every celebration of the Eucharist is inevitable in theatrical terms, since every performance is complete in itself and comes to resemble what Gaston Bachelard calls 'a nest in the world, and we shall live there in complete confidence.'[596] At the same time performances 'offer glimpses … of an invisible world that interpenetrates the daily world…'[597] The Brechtian reading of the Eucharist shows the kingdom of God as 'something this-worldly and present [and] as something this-worldly and future,'[598] contained within performance time. In the Eucharist as *Street Scene* the kingdom brought by Jesus becomes equivalent to the 'kingdom which Yahweh was to establish for his people enjoy[ing] the same material reality as the promised land,'[599] and it is through the constant encounter with the embodied Jesus that the material reality of the kingdom is realised, just as for Moses and the Israelites, their journey to an intended promised land remained contingent upon their own constant encounters with God.

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[596] Bachelard, G. *The Poetics of Space*. (Boston, MA. Beacon. 1969), 103.
[597] Brook 1995;87.
[598] Braaten, C. Hodgson & King 1983;278.
[599] Ibid. p.277.

God and Jesus in the Eucharist.

In the Eucharist, the challenge to theology posed by a hermeneutic of performance is the rupture it creates between God and Jesus. It is one made more acute by the presence of God, as creator, father and character in the performance of the Eucharist, who remains the object of worship until the consecration. The embodied Jesus with the identically embodied worshippers-now-disciples are alone for the Institution. After it, God authorises the sharing of bread and wine, gives blessing and valediction, but Jesus directs the trajectory of the Eucharistic re-enactment. He is the real presence and, through 'his one oblation of himself once offered' sets the conditions for entering the Kingdom of God. The Eucharist becomes binary with God and Jesus acting independently of each other – God as object of worship, from outside the place of action; Jesus as the initiator of the action from within. This polarity subverts theology in identifying Jesus with the rest of humanity as a man making independent decisions. It raises the theatrical issue of Jesus up-staging God. The congregation calls on God to sanctify bread and wine before the Institution, and to 'gather into one all who share this one bread and one cup' after it. This leaves Jesus as both one of us and able to make the Eucharist efficacious. In sharing our embodiment, but because he alone chooses to institute the Eucharist as a prelude to his crucifixion, Jesus becomes the tragic hero, or Scapegoat, Terry Eagleton describes in *Sweet Violence*.[600] 'The scapegoat incarnates dirt, deformity, madness and criminality… it is both shunned and regarded with respectful awe. This unclean thing is a substitute for the people and thus stands in a metaphorical relation to them; but it also acts as a displacement for their sins, and is in that sense metonymic.'[601] The embodied Jesus now resembles the first, post-lapsarian Adam, created from clay and alienated from God, but who, unlike Adam, elects to become the scapegoat for his community. The Eucharist as the locus for this choice then becomes the site of another dialectical struggle. On one hand the orthodoxy of the religious establishment (and in certain times and places that of the *polis*) gives its own immutable route to salvation for humanity whose 'heart is so thoroughly envenomed by sin that it can breath out

[600] Eagleton 2003;277ff.
[601] Ibid. p.279.

nothing but corruption and rottenness,'[602] determined by God from above. On the other it gives a personal choice to seek salvation, with a return to God, made by an individual from that same humanity. As Jesus, the man, takes greater control, the Eucharist approximates ever closer to tragedy, but at this point Brecht appears to step back: 'he [the demonstrator] must not go so far as to be wholly transformed into the person demonstrated'[603] and in doing so finds himself in an unlikely alliance with the church in the west from Ambrose until at least the Council of Trent.

For Brecht, the simple recounting of an incident gives authentication to theatrical performance. In order to escape the illusion and artificiality of naturalism, 'most clearly worked out by Stanislavsky'[604] it becomes necessary to affect a 'direct changeover from representation to commentary.'[605] The words used to describe the *Street Scene*, notwithstanding any emotional or descriptive properties, are paramount. The way they are said, it seems, are of secondary importance – art and skill play little part in making the performance efficacious and risk devaluing the 'meaningful phenomenon' theatre should be. The intention here echoes quite clearly that of St Ambrose and the author of *De Sacramentis*,[606] whose instructions on the words of Jesus were instrumental in the evolution of western theology of the Eucharist. In its explanation of the role of the priest *De Sacramentis* shows a similar approach to Brecht's: 'Let us therefore prove this. How can that which is bread be the body of Christ? By consecration. But in what words and in whose language is the consecration? Those of the Lord Jesus. For all the other things which are said in the earlier parts of the service are said by the priest — praises are offered to God, prayer is asked for the people, for kings, and the rest; when it comes to the consecration of the venerable sacrament, the priest no longer uses his own language, but he uses the language of Christ. *Therefore, the word of Christ consecrates this sacrament*.[607]

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[602] Calvin; *Institutes II,5,19,* in Dollimore 1984;167.
[603] Brecht, in Bentley1968;91. There is a contradiction in his argument between aesthetic and political bases for theatre.
[604] Ibid. p.91.
[605] Ibid. p.92.
[606] St. Ambrose On *the Mysteries. And the treatise: On the sacraments*, (*De Sacramentis*) by an unknown author. Trans T. Thompson. *Ed*. J.H. Strawley. (London. SPCK. 1919).
[607] *On the Sacraments* Bk IV; iv 14, (my italics).

The priest remains powerless while the words spoken effect the change in bread and wine. The priest is consciously and deliberately 'not the subject but the demonstrator.'[608] This position is supported by Aquinas[609] and developed in the Council of Trent to determine that grace is 'given through the said sacraments, always and to all men' and 'conferred through the act performed', by any 'minister… if so be that he observe all the essentials which belong to the effecting or conferring of the sacrament.'[610] The same conditions apply to the Elizabethan Church of England, where they are made explicit to the congregation. Following the Intercessions, the exhortation 'at certayne times when the Curate shal see the people negligent to come to the Holy Communyon' continues: 'We be come together at thys tyme, derely beloved brethren to fede at the Lordes supper, unto the which, *in Goddes behalf*, I bydde you all… that ye wyll not refuse to come.' This is followed some fifteen lines later by 'I cal you in *Christes behalf*…that ye will be partakers of Holy Communion.'[611] For Catholic and Protestant Eucharistic theology the minister is the divinely appointed proxy and Jesus is not allowed to be present until the consecration of bread and wine so avoiding the danger of an embodied Jesus engaging directly with a congregation.

The supremacy of words in Brechtian theatre and the Eucharist appears to demean the status of the speakers. Neither Demonstrator nor minister need any qualification beyond those which 'anybody has' for theatre, or Ordination and Intention for the Eucharist, regardless of how Ordination may have been abused.[612] As a principle, attempting to concentrate the attention of spectators or worshippers on the event through words rather than have it deflected by the artistic skill or histrionics of the performer is theoretically sound.[613] In practice it becomes fragile, if not impossible to implement. The idea of *ex opere operato*

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[608] Brecht, in Bentley 1968;91.
[609] *Summa Theologica*,Part 3 Q76.
[610] Council of Trent, Session the Seventh, Canons VII, VIII, XI. *Trans*. Buckley. (London. George Routledge. 1851).
[611] *The Ordre for the Administracion of the Lordes Supper*, 1559. (my italics), in the Prayer Book of Queen Elizabeth 1559. (London. Griffith, Oakden & Welsh, 1890).
[612] *Summa Theologica*, Part 3 Q82 excludes Schismatics, Heretics & Excommunicates but allows Wicked, Sinful & Degraded Priests to preside at the Eucharist.
[613] Hardison. O. *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages*. (Baltimore MD. Johns Hopkins Press 1969), 79 cites Aelred, Abbot of Rievaiulx who condemns: 'priests who contort their whole body with histrionic gestures' as proper 'to the theatre not the oratory.'

in the Sacraments or epic theatre suggests an encounter with Jesus at every Eucharistic celebration, or that Oedipus' exile and Lear's death are made real whether the plays are read aloud by amateurs or presented by the most talented theatre companies. Does how the events are performed matter?

Ex opere operato is an attractive concept for a religious community or a theatre company which wishes to exercise control over its content; how it is expressed, received, and, especially, what is understood. Brechtian theatre may include direct address and discussion with an audience, continuing to dismantle any sense of 'illusion' in performance. In both organisations the concept is flawed because it seeks meaning which is imposed externally in advance of performance. It does not acknowledge the potential for unplanned results, and their integrity, arising from performance of a script - liturgy or play.[614] As a means of grace in Catholic and Protestant traditions the concept relies overtly on the attitude of the participant receiving grace through the sacrament. Individual attitudes among congregations and audiences cannot be assessed or dictated from outside. This is accepted in modern Church of England Eucharistic liturgies.[615] The consistent use of the 1662 BCP keeps the attitude of the communicants central to the efficacy of their Communion: 'Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins and *are* in love and charity with your neighbours and *intend* to lead a new life, following the commandments of God…'(my italics). Even before confession and absolution the Priest requires the congregation to fulfil the Churches' criteria if *ex opere operato* is to work.

The issue of how the efficacy of *ex opere operato* is determined is further conditioned by Aquinas' assessment, endorsed by the Council of Trent, that Eucharistic presidency must be the preserve of ordained priests, however sinful such priests may be. Presidency may not be allowed to schismatics, heretics or excommunicates, disbarring anyone who falls outside orthodoxy and anyone deemed not to be a Christian. It excludes all the laity who seek to be disciples and believe themselves to be included in Jesus' assertion in John 14;12 that 'the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and in fact will do greater works than these.' Under a hermeneutic of performance, ecclesial

[614] For a useful discussion of script in relation to Liturgy see e.g. Hart & Guthrie 2016; Ch. 1.
[615] ASB 1980 & CW 2000.

control over the right speaking of Jesus' words from above – ordination as essential to Presidency – and below – the right inward spiritual disposition – run contrary to the sense of *ex opere operato*. In theatre, anyone may take on any role, and while training may give what are perceived as better results, the story can still be told. In theatrical terms, if the words of Jesus have the power to make his presence real in bread and wine, they will do so for anyone speaking them 'in Christe's behalf' and Eucharistic Presidency is not contingent upon ordination and can be open to anyone. *Ex opere operato* endorses the equality of all performers.

Ex opere operato is implicit in much of *The Street Scene*. By making theatre that rejects 'the urge to self-expression', or 'making a part one's own', or 'spiritual experience' or 'the storyteller's art,'[616] Brecht strengthens his case for a dispassionate theatre that can teach social and political doctrines by removing 'fabrication'. He asserts that performing in such theatre by saying the words in the script, is a task for which anyone is qualified. But for Brecht, as for the church, such impersonal and imposed conditions, even for Epic Theatre cannot work effectively. Within paragraphs of his strictures against the fabrications which demean the trained actor to promote the Demonstrator, he argues that Epic Theatre must allow for and include 'artists, virtuosity, imagination, humour and fellow-feeling.' It must be 'entertaining and instructive' and may 'evolve into the theatrical scene with its fabricated story, its trained actors.'[617]

Church and theatre insist on the power of words but both impose qualifications over who may or should say them, and how congregations or audiences should receive them.[618] Priests' gifts and vocations must be discerned and they are expected to receive training. They are set apart from their congregations through Ordination and must obey their Orders thereafter. The Demonstrator's skill is to be learnt through Brecht's 'Exercises for Acting Schools.'[619] These skills have much in common with Stanislavsky's ideas, as well

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[616] Brecht, in Bentley1964;92.
[617] Ibid. p.93.
[618] Brecht may not specify audience attitudes, but he assumes a succession of positive questions. Hostile responses and heckling do not figure in *The Street Scene.*
[619] Brecht. *Schriften zum Theater 4.* Undated. pp.51-2, in Bentley 1964;92.

as current training methods, and their acquisition sets actors apart from audiences. The mediation and control of the Eucharist, and the 'complex contents' of theatre remain in the hands of selected performers.

In performance, the embodied Jesus meets his fellow men and women on equal terms through the combination of a President's ordination and skills. In this new reality with his disciples, he, and they, transcend the differences given by ordination and skills. More significantly, all share a reality where the embodied Jesus now threatens the structures, society and culture in which he operates.

The performed Eucharist as a threat to theology.

The first threat the embodied Jesus poses is to the self-consciously Trinitarian basis of the Eucharist. The appearance of Jesus at the centre of the reality of the Last Supper, blessing and sharing bread and wine with the instruction to continue the practice makes him, as a man, indispensable to the existence of the Eucharist and its future re-enactment as rememorative. In CW1 Prayer B, Jesus' appearance and action are introduced after the first *epiclesis* ('Lord you are holy indeed…'). By his words Jesus authenticates whatever holiness is provisionally imparted to bread and wine by the power of the Holy Spirit. The implication for a theatrical reading is that the words of the *epiclesis* are preparatory to those of the embodied Jesus conducting the Eucharist. Jesus is visible and his words: 'this *is* my body… this *is* my blood' confirm the congregation's prayer that 'by the power of Holy Spirit these gifts *may* be to us the body and blood.' (my italics). The focus of the Eucharistic Prayer is fixed wholly on Jesus and the disciples.[620]

The final section of Prayer B has the President-demonstrator reiterating Jesus' own actions but very strongly differentiating these, and his persona, from God and from the Eucharistic bread and wine. By making God, who has not been

[620] All the CW Eucharistic Prayers keep a central emphasis on Jesus. See also: Bradshaw, Paul, F. & Johnson, Maxwell, E. *The Eucharistic Liturgies*. (London. SPCK. 2012). Ch.8 on the degree of agreement across Christian denominations in Eucharistic Prayers.

addressed since the first *epiclesis*, the focus to which the prayer is directed with the joyful reminder of the *eschaton* Jesus has achieved through his own words and actions, the President puts a distance between God as object of worship and the embodied Jesus with disciples as worshippers. A similar distancing is maintained between Jesus and the bread and wine which '*we* bring before *you*' (my italics). The second *epiclesis* also appears to subordinate the Holy Spirit to Jesus. The Spirit is only to 'gather into one in your kingdom all who share this one bread and one cup.' Jesus has blessed the bread and wine, as well as giving the forgiveness which will allow his people entry to God's kingdom. The Church of England Eucharistic understanding and a hermeneutic of performance begin to converge in their emphasis on the shared humanity of all those who perform in worship. Both rely absolutely on the power of Jesus alone to transform the shared meal into a unique and world-changing event.

Such convergence cannot be sustained, as to do so would maintain an unbridgeable and theologically unacceptable gap between the persons of the Holy Trinity. The second *epiclesis* seeks to extend Eucharistic efficacy beyond any single 'memorial of our redemption' at the Last Supper into the wider world of space and time by 'gathering all who share' into 'the company of all the saints' to 'praise and glorify you for ever.' This cannot happen solely through the action of Jesus at the centre of the Eucharist.[621] It requires the action of the Holy Spirit in bringing the faithful into the Communion of Saints and the action of God in receiving and reciprocating glory. The sharing of bread and wine followed by blessing and commitment to 'Go in peace' becomes an enactment of a far greater event than the Last Supper fixed in one place and time as it seeks to universalise the Eucharist.[622]

It is at this point that the inevitable rupture between theatre and theology happens. The universalisation ascribed to the Eucharist is impossible under a hermeneutic of performance. Even for Brecht, seeking to extend the reach and effect of epic theatre from the artificiality of the playhouse, the

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[621] Cf. *Eumenides*: Orestes, Athena, Apollo, the Furies and Citizens must all cooperate to bring peace to Athens.

[622] CW encapsulates this in the alternative Post Communion prayer 'May we …give light to the world… and all your children shall be free, and the whole earth live to praise your name.'

constraints of each performance fix its theatrical realities into a particular space and time. I have discussed the specificities attendant upon performance and theatricality, which oblige each Eucharist – interpreted as performance – to be complete in itself. In the final section of the Eucharistic Prayer, God is alongside Jesus as a character participating in the re-enactment and to whom the President-demonstrator recounts what has happened: 'And so Father, calling to mind… his perfect sacrifice, made once.' This narration simultaneously reminds worshippers and makes clear to God their necessary gratitude for Jesus' soteriological actions. Notwithstanding the uniqueness of all performance, including Eucharistic celebrations, where all characters are potentially equal, God's presence must not be diminished by an over-emphasis on Jesus' power to determine events. A direct address re-establishes God's presence, lessening the risk of God's continued up-staging by the embodied Jesus. The association of 'all [we] who share this one bread and this one cup' with the 'company of the saints' praising and glorifying God, in the second *epiclesis* further foregrounds God, present at all celebrations of the Eucharist. We and 'so great a cloud of witnesses' make the Eucharist part of a single continuous mystery transcending worldly time, space, theatricality and performance. Conversely, as performance, sharing the meal remains a re-enactment creating the reality of the Last Supper as a memorial of an alienated and enclosed group establishing its own identity, while the final blessing and commitment to going in peace marks a transition from Eucharistic to quotidian realities, stressing the liminality of the event and accepting all the vicissitudes such a journey may encompass. Here the Eucharist begins to assume a tragic shape with a resolution following a climax brought about by the action of a 'hero' or central character engaging with other characters and represented to an audience which enters the unique theatrical reality so created.

A temporal shift between the reality of the past-made-present at the Consecration and the now of the Administration calls into question the extent to which the final section of the Eucharist is part of a representation 'in remembrance of me' where people enter the reality of the Last Supper with Jesus, or rather share in a meal commemorating a past event which is not

actually experienced.[623] Is it theatrical or theological? As commemoration, sharing bread and wine may be closer to an *agape* open to all as the conclusion to the Eucharist uniting its participants in the now, therefore distinct from, but dependent upon the imitation – *mimesis* – of Jesus' actions. If this is the case, the rupture between performance and theological hermeneutics is complete. An *agape* does not require performers and audience; all become as one in the presence of the Trinitarian God who blesses and empowers all those gathered to worship.

There remains a breach between the prayer of consecration as enacted reality and the administration of bread and wine as shared memorial, which forms the climax of the Eucharist. I have argued that the words of Jesus, with their clear declaration of intent, establish his dominance and control of the Eucharistic event. The 1662 BCP words at the Administration echo Jesus' words: 'The body … which was given for thee… The blood… which was shed for thee…' with the additional instruction to eat and drink '*in remembrance that he died for thee*…'(my italics). A Brechtian reading allows the Priest-demonstrator to continue to represent Jesus here. If the words are truncated: 'The body of Christ', 'The blood of Christ', the risk for participants is that the sharing becomes a distribution at odds with Jesus' own emphasis on remembrance. The form the sharing takes also influences its meaning. Queuing up to receive the elements gives a meaning different from kneeling at a barrier, standing in a circle or remaining in one place. If the real presence is in the bread and wine, theologically there need be no issues in such questions since the manner of reception cannot change the state of the bread and wine, and presence, of Christ.[624] If the embodied Jesus offers bread and wine, blessed, but otherwise unchanged, sharing them is of supreme importance to the disciples. It unites them with Jesus as fellow beings moving from immanence to transcendence at the climax of the Eucharist. If the final act of the Eucharist moves away from the enacted reality, its resolution marks a break between this reality where past

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[623] An example of such confusion occurs in the *Didache*. Ch. 9 describes a Eucharist, Ch. 10 may be an *agape*.

[624] But see: *Summa Theologica*. Part 3, qq75, 76, 77 & 80. For the controversy over reception see Paschasius Radbertus & Ratramnus in McGrath 2001;525-28. Also, Ambrose, *On the Mysteries*, vi;32 and *Treatise on the Sacraments*, iii.1.7.

is made present for all participants including God, over against a united congregational act of worship offered to God.

The related risk – to theology – is that the hermeneutic allowing the self-containment of the enacted event up to, and including the final sharing and dismissal, keeps power and control in the hands of Jesus who operates as an individual independent of God or any ecclesiastical authority. How the Eucharist is re-enacted by all involved will affect its interpretation and continue to make each celebration a unique event. The setting apart of ordained and trained leaders and their skill and ability in presentation, communication of intention or interpretation; the familiarity or strangeness of participants and the time of day or season will all shape the understanding of, and response to, the Eucharist. So Jesus and his disciples are granted independence of action whenever they re-enact the unique Eucharistic event. With independence come the possibilities of individual success, glory, salvation, error, weakness or transgression and the capacity to make right or wrong, good or bad choices. For those alongside him, this independent, vulnerable and embodied Jesus may be more attractive and accessible than the Jesus who is present only in bread and wine.

The Eucharist and tragedy.

The theatrical locus for the Eucharistic re-enactment is the Last Supper. The continuum of which it is part is Jesus' and the disciples' journey up to that point, broadly contextualised in the narrative prior to Jesus' words. In these words, Jesus speaks as one confident of his ability to ameliorate the life of those who value him and whom he values, regardless of any personal cost. This confidence is borne out of events on their shared journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, attested in the synoptic gospels and which are affirmed with significant details in CW1 Prayer D:

> With signs of faith and words of hope
> he touched untouchables with love and washed the guilty clean.

and

> The crowds came out to see your son
> Yet at the end they turned on him.

The narrative indicates the immediate aftermath of the Last Supper. All the Eucharistic prayers recount crucifixion, resurrection and ascension as a series of reported or remembered events inextricably linked to one climax. In the synoptic accounts[625] Jesus is presented primarily as human, but with God-given power as the Messiah, 'a promised ideal king who would deliver the nation and rule in righteousness.'[626] He is ambiguous about the identity of the 'Son of Man.'[627] There is nothing throughout the sequence to indicate that his actions are impelled by any force other than his own response to circumstances he has encountered in Galilee and Jerusalem, coupled with a strong awareness of his own and his nation's duty to God. It is Jesus' humanity as an embodied presence allied to his belief in a calling to Messiahship, made accessible by a theatrical reading, which makes his words at the heart of the Eucharist simultaneously transforming and transgressive. By uttering them, Jesus radically up-stages God as the agent of salvation. To say '…this is *my* blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins,'[628] reiterates the scandal Jesus caused at the start of his ministry by equating healing and forgiveness.[629]

In the Eucharist Jesus chooses to take on responsibilities for his people which identify him with Moses through: 'See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you, in accordance with these words' (Ex 24;8). But as the Messiah, Jesus is a greater leader and saviour. His progress to the point where he knows the end of his chosen course of action, but will continue on it differs from that of Moses. Moses does not realise his own danger of exclusion from Canaan until God makes it explicit. In the risk Jesus is prepared to take for his people he displays characteristics akin to those of heroes from Greek tragedy, particularly Oedipus, whose commitment to his people and regard as god-like I have discussed.

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[625] John's Gospel omits any reference to the Last Supper.
[626] MacQuarrie 1966;292,
[627]Ibid. p.292; 'It is most unlikely that Jesus ever thought of himself in such a way.' See Mk 14;62, Mt 26;64, Lk 22;68.
[628] Mt 26;28 – used in 1559, 1662 BCPs and all CW Eucharistic prayers, (my italics).
[629] See Mk 2;5-7, Lk 5; 20-21. 'Who can forgive but God alone?'

From the opening lines of *Oedipus the King* an audience shares with Oedipus the depth of his feeling for the city, as he expresses own pity and grief over the state of the *polis* he believes he can save:

> My children
> I pity you… well I know you are sick to death, but not as sick as I…
> My spirit grieves for the city for myself and all of you…' (ll69-75)[630]

Once he is acknowledged as 'the best of men' by the citizens, as saviour and parent he demands continuing loyalty with a promise of mercy:

> … I make this proclamation
> If anyone knows who murdered Laius…
> I order him to reveal
> the whole truth to me. Nothing to fear,
> even if he must denounce himself,
> let him speak up
> and so escape the brunt of the charge, (ll255-8)

Oedipus is established as sufficiently regal and holy to identify himself as a prophet equal, and subsequently superior to Tiresias:

> When did you ever prove yourself a prophet?
> When the sphinx that chanting Fury kept her deathwatch here,
> Why silent then, not a word to set our people free?
> There was a riddle. Not for some passer-by to solve,
> It cried out for a prophet. Where were you?
> Did you rise to the crisis? Not a word….
> No, but I came by, Oedipus the ignorant,
> I stopped the sphinx… (ll445-9, 451-2)

At this point, nothing has happened which would necessarily imply that Oedipus is subject to any form of *hubris*, nor does he seek to arrogate power to himself. Rather the veneration in which he is held by all in Thebes and his acceptance of it is a pre-requisite without which the subsequent tragedy could not happen. Oedipus has appeared as a saviour from a distant place and is therefore not subject to the corruption within Thebes, but, as with Jesus, there is one who knows his earlier transgression and others who perceive and trust that knowledge. Tiresias and Creon are respected as the representatives of religion and the *polis*, and until provoked by Oedipus' excesses, manifest the *sophrosyne* due to their relative positions. Their roles are similar to those of the Pharisees, priests and Herodians in Jerusalem even if their portrayal is initially more sympathetic. Oedipus and Jesus see themselves, and are seen as saviours,

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[630] Cf. Mt 23;37.

but within their own society they have both sinned. Those who know of those sins are central to the life and good governance of the cities where the two stories reach their climaxes. Oedipus and Jesus perceive the agencies of good government as corrupt and their confrontations with them lead to disruption. For both men authority must be accompanied by reverence towards the gods. Oedipus' deeply flawed attack on Creon (ll573ff) revolves around the belief that Tiresias' accusation of murder was their conspiracy rather than divinely inspired prophecy. Jesus' attacks on the Jerusalem money-changers and Temple authorities leading up to his crucifixion are provoked by their lack of respect for God.

Jesus' arrival at Jerusalem is as a heroic and charismatic figure.[631] He has cured people and provoked hostility through affecting livelihoods and arrogating to himself the power of forgiveness.[632] He consistently supports those who appear abandoned by their own leaders,[633] echoing Moses' instruction to God: 'Let the Lord… appoint someone over the congregation who shall lead them… so that the congregation may not be like sheep without a shepherd' (Num 27;18). Unlike Moses who seeks this authority for Joshua as successor, Jesus assumes the role of leader, with the implication that the nation is already abandoned while Moses seeks to maintain a *status quo*. Jesus has broken Jewish law provocatively, although claiming justification for so doing: 'Again he entered the synagogue and a man was there with a withered hand. *They watched him* to see whether he would cure on the Sabbath (Mar 3;1-2, my italics).[634] Through his Galilean ministry Jesus makes little reference to God, and his recognition as 'Son of Man' or 'Holy One of God' comes from demons.[635] Jesus carries out his ministry through a sense of duty and compassion, and is revered as a saviour, but in doing so parallels what Oedipus has done. On his return to Jerusalem he expresses grief and anger over its desolation as a result of the godlessness of its leaders. That this may be due to collusion between Jews & Romans is a plausible

[631] Mk 11, Mt 21, Lk 19;28ff.
[632] At Gadara, Mt 8;28-34. At Capernaum, Mk 2;1-12.
[633] Feeding miracles, Mk. 6; 30-44.
[634] Cf. Mt 12;1-14, Lk 6;1-11.
[635] E.g.: Mt 8;29. Lk 8;26. See Vermes, G, *Jesus the Jew* (London. SCM. 1994). Ch 7 & 8 for a useful discussion on Jesus' titles.

inference in the light of the conspiracy between the Pharisees and Herodians engendered in Galilee by the illegal healing in the synagogue.[636]

Jesus' response to the state of government and religious observance in Jerusalem covers a spectrum from the violent removal of the money-changers and verbal attacks on authority figures to a desire to show all the gentleness of maternal care to those he considers exploited.[637] At the triumphal entry, ascription of Messianic or divine qualities to Jesus is given by those around him, whether the individual evangelist: 'this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the prophet' (Mt 21;4), or the crowd 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord' (Mt 21;9, citing Ps 118;26). Once these titles have been publicly assigned to him,[638] Jesus is prepared to use them and acknowledge himself as the one who has come to save the most vulnerable and so recreate the city. Like Oedipus, his concern remains for victims provided those who first recognised him as the Messiah continue so to do.[639]

The stories in *Oedipus the King* and the synoptic gospel accounts of Holy Week lead to climaxes of pity, terror and death as both heroes offer themselves as a sacrifice. At their openings, the back-stories of the two heroes appear less important than the present location and circumstances which lead to the respective tragedies. Oedipus has no stain on his character that anyone is aware of, with the exception of Tiresias, whose divine inspiration proves more conclusive than Oedipus' assumption of divine authority. In the build up to the Passover and Last Supper, Jesus generates religious and civic fury through his behaviour, but is the popular hero whose arrest and execution could cause 'a riot among the people' (Mk, 14;2).[640] That this is not the case is revealed as the stories are performed. The play draws on past events to build in intensity to its violent climax. The CW1 Eucharistic Prayers give a range of brief and theologically mixed references, which either firmly deny or cautiously reveal any possible propensity for sin on the part of Jesus. Prayers A, B, C and E present Jesus unequivocally as saviour. Prayers D, F, G and H give a more nuanced view

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[636] Mk 3;6.
[637] Mt 21-22; Lk 19;11-21;7.
[638] See Mk, 8;27-33, Mt 16; 13-23, Lk 9;18-22 for Jesus' proscription of titles for himself.
[639] Mt 23;37-39.
[640] Also: Mt, 26;1-5, Lk, 22;1-2. Cf. Jn, 11;47-53.

of Jesus as susceptible to human weakness. In Prayer G Jesus comes 'from them' (a people) 'who turned away and rebelled.' In Prayer D, the narrative allows causality: 'With signs of faith and love he touched untouchables…' leads to 'the crowds came out to see your Son, yet at the end they turned on him.' Both heroes have already transgressed the ethical, moral or religious codes of their own worlds and the comparison between them continues through the performance of their stories.

The examination of Oedipus and Jesus through the lenses of performance and theatricality leads towards an unavoidable conclusion, impossible for Christian theology, that the shed blood of both men is guilty blood. Both see themselves as divinely appointed and have acted in ways they believe to be right for their own people. The Thebans regard Oedipus as their saviour after he lifted the curse of the Sphinx. The disciples recognise Jesus as the Messiah. Both know, Oedipus through gradual revelation, Jesus through deliberate confrontation that their actions are, or have been, transgressive. Each has up-staged and usurped the place and power of their gods. They persist because of the better life that may accrue from their actions following the inevitable sacrifices that should end in death, but which are vindicated, by the gods, after the event. In spite of Oedipus 'destroy me,' and Jesus 'why have you forsaken me?' the guilt of both is assuaged and they achieve the propitiation associated with sacrifice. At the end of the play or the Eucharist, Oedipus and Jesus leave their followers without guilt. Such guiltlessness may not necessarily continue beyond the contained time of both events. Creon, who acknowledges Oedipus' sacrifice, himself later transgresses moral codes and Jesus' command to his disciples 'do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me' allows his people constant opportunities to seek to live better lives with the implication that they will continue to need forgiveness.

Blood authenticates the sacrifices. For Israel, blood purifies the transgressor,[641] and 'animal sacrifice was the main ritual of Greek religion on the stage as well as in real life.'[642] Oedipus and Jesus[643] have both 'paid the price of

[641] Lev 3-4.
[642] Fritz G. *Religion and Drama*, in McDonald & Walton, *eds*. 2007;62. See *Eumenides*, ll277-282.
[643] Also, Agamemnon & Clytemnestra in *The Oresteia*.

sin' and this is made palpable – being present we experience the reality of what happens and our response permits reciprocal authentication. In both cases, the heroes have taken a course of action calculated permanently to alleviate the lives and conditions of those in their care. Oedipus fails in the task he was first assigned and willingly embraced, and the reversal and self-knowledge the failure brings leaves him humbled: 'Touch the man of grief' but no less convinced of the rightness of his intention. Following the revelation of his guilt, Oedipus maintains 'What I did was best…' knowing that the city he loves will survive only if his command 'All men must cast away the great blasphemer… I, my father's son.'(ll1513/1515) is implemented. He manifests a similar concern for his daughters, seeking Creon's promise to offer hope for their protection and asking his daughters to 'pray God you find a better life than mine.'[644]

Jesus' sacrifice as it appears in his words at the Eucharist and in Mark's account, where there is no explicit resurrection, is a failure not dissimilar that of Oedipus. He appropriates the soteriological task (not unlike Oedipus) as 'the representative of God's true people.'[645] Unlike Oedipus, who has 'wept through the nights' but must rely on oracles to guide his actions,[646] as 'Son of Man' Jesus appears to extend his task to claim 'authority on earth to forgive sins,' (Mk 2;10) a task which is then endorsed by others throughout his ministry. The narratives of the Eucharistic Prayers leading to the Institution encapsulate all that has led to it. Jesus makes it clear that he will sacrifice himself for his people, and 'for many', as his body and blood are given and shed 'for the forgiveness of sins'. In the light of Old Testament teaching, to which the Last Supper is subject, 'only God can forgive sins so Jesus' claim to forgive sins would thus qualify as blasphemy.'[647] Blasphemy transgresses the law and justifies arrest and execution, so at the climax of the story, in Mk 14;53-62, Jesus 'incriminates himself at once on the political charge'.[648] His subsequent resurrection, referred to in the Eucharist only by others, may seem to disassociate him from Oedipus in suggesting that the sacrifice made by Jesus has been entirely vindicated by God, so Jesus' power of forgiveness is an acceptable claim. This, though, should be

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644 *Oedipus the King* ll1645-1661.
645. Wright, T. *Mark for Everyone*. (London. SPCK. 2001), 17.
646 *Oedipus the King*, ll78-89.
647 Harrington, D. in Brown *et al*. Eds. NJBC.1993;602.
648Wright 2001;204.

set against the conversation between Oedipus and Creon as they seek divine guidance after Oedipus' discovery:

Oedipus	The god? His command was clear, every word:	
	Death for the father killer, the curse –	
	He said destroy me	
Creon	So he did. Still in such a crisis	
	It's better to ask precisely what to do.	(ll1575-9)

This leads to Oedipus' death sentence being commuted to exile by the gods:

Oedipus	Drive me out of Thebes, in exile.	
Creon	Only the gods can give you that	
Oedipus	Surely the gods hate me so much.	
Creon	You'll get your wish at once.	(ll1667-9)

For Oedipus there is mercy, if not vindication. Creon is subject to the gods and suggests their awareness of Oedipus' intention to act virtuously in Thebes. In *Oedipus at Colonus,* time has passed and Oedipus is in exile but may continue to influence for good the lives of those around him, and receive a final vindication, but although Jesus and Oedipus are vindicated by their gods, theatrically and theologically have both transgressed.

The correlation between Jesus and Oedipus, and their shared propensity to *hamartia* and *hubris* shows in the irreparable breaches of moral, legal and religious codes both cause, and the threats and challenges these pose for the authority and rectitude of their own *poleis*. The reaction and response to such breaches leads to the betrayal of the weak, the sick and suffering and the vulnerable to whom Oedipus and Jesus overtly committed support and relief. Thebes continues to suffer after Oedipus has released them from the curse of the Sphinx, and will only be saved when Oedipus' own guilt is expiated through his self-imposed punishment. Jesus' challenge to scribes and Pharisees who 'devour widows' houses' (Mk 12;40) and who 'lock people out of the kingdom of heaven' (Mt 23;13) leads to his own willingness to transgress and die in order to save those exploited by the tyranny of their leaders. The individuals receive due blame and punishment, but do so in their own and others' knowledge that each has gone to extreme lengths to bring general relief from evil, that they have done so as faithful to their gods, and they have done so as human beings both

alike with their fellows and unique in their commitment 'even unto death'.[649] Each becomes 'the cornerstone of a new order' which, as Eagleton continues 'has to be, like Oedipus at Colonus, the reviled and unclean.'[650] In becoming tragic heroes, through their own actions where their desire for good conflicts fatally with society's desire for good, Oedipus and Jesus share features with Agamemnon and Clytemnestra in *The Oresteia* whose sacrificial blood must be made real for their audiences. They are also identified with bloodless but guilty heroes – Antigone or John Proctor – whose transgressive actions of blasphemy or adultery and betrayal may lead to change within their own society. But for all these heroes, change will only come after their disappearance or death. Oedipus, Moses and Jesus hold on to 'the truth of [their] unfaltering fidelity to an ideal,'[651] in the conviction that new life is possible for their people, whatever the cost to themselves.

For the Christian church, a hermeneutic of performance confining Jesus within a theatrical reality is inadequate. The paradigm for maintaining a soteriological relationship with an omnipotent God requires a re-transformation of Jesus from tragic hero susceptible to *hamartia* – an interpretation allowable, at least in Mark's gospel – to divine sonship. As a member of the Holy Trinity, and so transcendent, Jesus can inhabit all time as well as performance time. Luke's expanded resurrection narrative embraces such a re-transformation, but concludes with an ascension: 'while he was blessing them he withdrew from them and was carried up to heaven. And they worshipped him' (Lk 24;50-1). The passage has echoes of *Oedipus at Colonus*, with Oedipus' own blessing on his followers,

> May you be blessed with greatness,
> and in your great day remember me, the dead,
> the root of all your greatness, everlasting, ever-new. (ll1763-5)

In response, the chorus 'adore you with my prayers.' Throughout the play and the synoptic gospels the embodied heroes carry their transgression and vindication and remain with their people.

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649 See: Abel 2003;101ff on the conflict with *polis* & family.
650 Eagleton 2003;165.
651 Ibid. p.99.

Paul also seeks to transform of Jesus to a state of divine innocence: 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor 5:21). In an early assessment of Jesus' sacrifice, Paul makes clear that it is our sins which need propitiation: 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree' (Gal 3;13b). Peter follows in a similar vein: 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness,' and 'For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God' (1 Pet 2;24 & 3;18). Paul and Peter do not seek 'to define the relation of the divine and the human in Christ.'[652] Rather they support the synoptic representation of Jesus as a fully human and willingly *kenotic* figure, as are Moses and Oedipus, but argue for Jesus' unique sinlessness. John casts his gospel so that from the outset sonship is added and there is no doubt that Jesus and God are indivisible: 'In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God,' and who became flesh and 'dwelt among us.'

This Christological *peripeteia* in the epistles is not automatically enshrined in Jesus' words and actions, and the earliest Jewish Christologies,[653] denying Jesus' divinity, can support a hermeneutic of performance in relation to the Eucharist. As I have argued, in a Brechtian reading, the Eucharist is firmly anchored in the Jewish Passover which becomes the Last Supper, and happens before the crucifixion and resurrection. The danger of the Eucharist being a tragedy with a human hero is overcome *a posteriori* in the fourth century with 'the decision promulgated at Nicea, that the Word shared the same divine nature as the Father.'[654] This moves the performance of the Eucharist away from its earlier purpose where it was 'primarily something done, of which what is said is only one incidental constituent part, though of course an essential one,' and where 'the irreplaceable function of the celebrant, his "special liturgy", was to "make" the prayer; just as the irreplaceable function of the deacon or the people was to *do* something else which the celebrant did not do. There was difference of function but no distinction in kind between the activities of the

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[652] Kelly 1965;138.
[653] See: Kelly 1965, Ch. 6 for a discussion on the evolution of Christology and the status of Jesus as a 'mere man' or 'an ordinary man in nature' in Gentile Christology.
[654] Ibid. p.138

various orders in the worship of the whole church.'[655] Before the Council of Nicea the Eucharist 'concentrated attention entirely on the sacramental *act,* as the expression of a will already intent on amendment of life, and as the occasion of its acceptance and sanctification by God; and so far as the liturgy was concerned, it left the matter at that.'[656] The decision that the Word shares the 'same divine nature as the Father' enables a sinless divine sonship in parity with God, now restored to the rightful place of first person of the Trinity, and eliminates the danger of a man fatally upstaging the God he believes in and consequently disempowering the same God.

A hermeneutic of performance, especially when employing a Brechtian lens, imparts an inevitable humanising power to the Eucharist and distorts its theological perspective. This human and embodied power cannot be entirely removed as long as the Eucharist is re-enacted or performed – 'do this' – in remembrance of Jesus. This leaves a question, usually unasked, but worth further exploration. Which 'Jesus' is most approachable, or attractive, or recognisable? The Jesus we encounter in bread and wine or the embodied Jesus who shares time, food and drink and, in his own words, offers forgiveness and a better life? A hermeneutic of performances forces two questions. Does it matter if Jesus is human and fallible? And which Jesus leads us through immanence to transcendence and brings us closer to God? These two questions and the ways in which they juxtapose God and humanity form the conclusion to this study.

[655] Dix 2005*;*12.
[656] Ibid, p.13.

Chapter 8. Conclusion.
Performance merges transcendence and immanence.

Throughout this study I have examined ways in which the transcendent God appears as a character in different dramatic contexts, how he is upstaged and his position and power taken by immanent human characters. I now consider the transformations which become possible as a result of God's onstage appearances and relationships with other characters.

In the Moses story, God and Moses work together. From their first encounter where God appears as a character, giving rise to the first known presentation of God on stage in the *Exagoge*, God acts after 'face to face' contact with Moses. God gives the commandments and sends Moses back to the idolatrous Israelites. God's instructions and decisions are delivered and acted upon – or ignored – only after God has given them to Moses. While God remains the supreme and omniscient creator who will forbid any representation of him as idolatrous, he relies on direct contact with Moses to maintain this supremacy thereby risking being upstaged. The Pentateuch occasionally insists on the invisibility of God,[657] but just as often describes face-to-face encounters.[658] In their narratives God is audible and visible in some form. Costuming God as a living flame or animated pillar of cloud is an example of theatricality in the biblical text which testifies to the power of God as a character. Although they hide his face they cannot conceal his physical presence. However, an audience may need to see God, and the amount of dialogue between God and Moses in the *Exagoge* (100 lines) makes Jacobson's hypothesis 'Ezekiel deliberately avoids bringing God on stage… and all one hears is a voice'[659] seems difficult. Theatrically it feels too long a scene for one character on stage alone and one off-stage voice. However, in deference to religious sensibilities over idolatrous representation of God, a hermeneutic of performance allows God to appear on stage clothed in flame or cloud while Moses chooses to keep his face hidden. God's immanence here and throughout the story, more than his transcendence, imposes his control over Moses and the Israelites.

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[657] Ex 33;18-23.
[658] Ex24;9-11, Num 12;1-9.
[659] Jacobson 1983;20.

Issues of divine immanence and transcendence are of little importance if they do not impinge on an audience. The reader, listener or worshipper must be brought to a knowledge of God's plan for his people in the most direct terms possible. God may be 'special' and 'other' in that he is omniscient and 'elsewhere', but he is constantly present or available and ready to intervene in Israel's journey by initiating dialogue with Moses prior to his appearance and action. He is accessible to Moses or the people in order to respond to anger and criticism.[660] Once the story is considered as performance, God's reality as a character has to stand alongside that of other characters. This allows transcendent otherness and immanent presence equal prominence which can be understood when reading the Moses story as a tragedy, and is realised in portrayals of God from the *Exagoge* onwards. In a context where characters are portrayed by men or women for an audience of other men and women, immanence is axiomatic. When such performances include transcendent beings – *Athene* in Eumenides, ghosts in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* – there are no problems for an audience since theatrical reality is not subject to the constraints of naturalism and seeing such beings renders them simultaneously immanent.

The presence of God on stage in western Christian contexts may be more remarkable for its normality than for its supposed idolatry. I have observed the manner in which God is portrayed in the *Exagoge* as a Hellenised Jewish character whose part in the fragment is second in size to that of Moses. God as a character in Christian dramatic texts incorporated into liturgy begins to appear in the ninth and tenth centuries.[661] I will consider two examples – one liturgical and one dramatic – as stages in the progression of the portrayal of the transcendent God to that of the immanent Son as their central figure, prior to the emergence of the Cycle plays. In the ninth century *Ordo Dedicationis Ecclesiae*, used by the Bishop of Metz,[662] God and the bishop are conflated as characters when the bishop at the door of the new church quotes Psalm 24:

> Lift up your gates, O princes and be raised up, you everlasting doors, and the king of glory will come in.

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[660] Num 11;7-15.
[661] See: Bevington 1975;3ff.
[662] See: Young 1933;103.

Following processions around the church, with the appropriate questions to the bishop, 'Who is this king of glory?' it is the bishop who responds 'The Lord of hosts, he is the king of glory,' and is then invited to 'Walk holy God, enter into the house of the Lord…' The bishop's assumption of God's words, and the direct address to him as 'holy God' are intended to convince performers and audience (if the two can be differentiated – this is an act of worship), 'that the ritual *is* indeed informed with powers both transcendental and immanent.'[663] Theologically, the problem of God appearing in liturgical performances, and future theatrical performances was lessened, since these were sanctioned by the church itself, therefore unlikely to incur the degree of hostility vented against the pagan Roman theatre by the Church fathers six centuries earlier.

A blending of transcendence and immanence is a feature of the twelfth century *Ordo Representationis Adae*,[664] but in a theatrically sophisticated text which demands skills of its performers different from those of priesthood and given in the opening stage directions: 'let all be coached… so that they may speak in an orderly manner and make gestures appropriate to the things of which they speak.'[665] The play demonstrates the ambiguity between divine immanence and transcendence in the same stage direction which requires Jesus and God to appear simultaneously: 'then let *our Saviour* come, clothed in a dalmatic and let Adam and Eve be stationed before him… and let them both stand before *the Figure* [of God]…' [666]

The opening scene is a three-way dialogue wherein God instructs Adam and Eve to take dominion over the world, and in doing so delegates his power to humanity:

> For all the world will be obedient to you.
> Both good and evil are in your power… (ll64-5)

God's exit, forty-seven lines later is 'to the church' so that his location as well as his words and actions maintain his immanent presence. For this play as well as for the *Ordo Dedicationis Ecclesiae* and the Moses story, a hermeneutic of performance renders irrelevant any actual distinction between divine

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[663] Turner 1983;80.
[664] MS 927 in the Bibliotheque Municipale de Tours, in Bevington 1975;80-121.
[665] Bevington 1975;80.
[666] Ibid. p.80 (my italics).

transcendence and immanence. God and his actions in and for the physical world must be made real and accessible to humanity. In a Christian context, this accessibility leads to a merging of God and Jesus as one being, as is implied in the *Ordo Representationis Adae* or in the dominance of the character of Jesus in the Cycle and Passion Plays which, more than the earlier texts, are performed as much in the twenty-first as the sixteenth centuries.[667]

Hieratic or hierarchic assumption or attribution of divine authority can serve to impress upon the Israelite or Christian communities the sanctity of their ordained leaders who have been ontologically transformed by God. Such ordination reminds the people of their own place as subject to their divinely chosen leaders.[668] It also demonstrates the heavy responsibility leaders have for their people, especially in Moses' persistence in risking divine wrath to support Israel, or the risk the Figura takes in delegating divine power to Adam and Eve. People are in the care of their leaders who have been commissioned by the transcendent God and who form a link, but with contingent limits, between divine transcendence and human immanence.[669] This interpretation conforms to a didactic hermeneutic where the divine presence is encountered through instruction from ordained leaders. An exegetically based presentation of God's plans protects both plans and the leaders who formulate and present them while maintaining control over those who are led and instructed.[670]

Liminality extends transcendence.

Performance requires an audience which can participate on equal terms in the theatrical action whether as the 'silent chorus', or in more clearly defined roles. Elevation of the audience to a position of parity with all other performers raises theological issues, for God's plans for creation are no longer the sole preserve of God and ordained leaders. The audience's role becomes critical to the success of the performance so that Israel's future after Moses' death, or humanity's after the Creation or the Crucifixion depends as much on humanity's

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667 See: The Passion Trust bulletins: www.pasiontrust.org
668 Korah's revolt is a result of the failure of such an approach (Num 16).
669 Korah's punishment is imposed after his action exceeds acceptable limits.
670 See: Nehemiah 8, in contrast to Deut 30. Also, Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture.* (Cambridge. CUP. 1990). Ch. 5.

responsive action as on God's initiation of action. In the theatrical reality of any performance which includes God as a character, all those involved are able to share human immanence and divine transcendence so performance becomes unconditionally liminal as it incorporates all its participants in the celebration and determination their own new outcomes.

This is hardly a novel interpretation of performance and theatricality. We have observed a Nietzschean approach to liminality allowing participation in performance, and the final exhortation in *The Birth of Tragedy* is for '*us* to offer a sacrifice'[671] there being 'no opposition between public and chorus.'[672] Lest it be thought that such theological democratisation is a reading back of liberal humanism into theatrical and religious history and practice, the theatre has always embraced the concept of shared participation. Aristophanes is perhaps the first dramatist overtly to include the audience as performers. In *The Frogs* Dionysus and his slave Xanthias travel to Hades to find a poet to save Athens. Charon ferries them across the River Styx to the fearful underworld and the dialogue runs:

Dionysus	Any sign of those murderers and perjurers he told us about?
Xanthias	Use your eyes sir.
Dionysus	*(seeing the audience)* By Jove yes, I see them now… [673]

Shortly afterwards, Dionysus appeals to the priest sitting in the audience: 'Oh mister Priest, oh, protect me – oh, oh, help, help! *Remember that drink we're going to have after the show*.'[674] This is not only an example of 'one-sided dialogue', but a clear demonstration of a link between actors and audience in a performance which could go beyond the confines of performance time.

The introductions to medieval plays frequently require direct address to audiences, acknowledging their necessity as a prerequisite for performance. This awareness and acceptance of the audience is noted in the prologue and chorus to *Henry V,* and elsewhere in Shakespeare is a feature of the 'play within the play.' In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (V;i,), for the performance of *Pyramus and Thisby* the court and the audience are placed in the same relation to Peter

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671 Nietzsche 2000;131 (my italics).
672 Ibid. p.48.
673 Aristophanes 1964;167.
674 Ibid, p.168 (my italics).

Quince and his actors, although the court retains its position as characters who continue to be observed by the 'real' audience. In much modern theatrical practice a 'narrator' figure who links audience and actors has become familiar. Such figures include Wang the Water-seller in Brecht's *The Good Person of Setzuan*; the Stage Manager in Wilder's *Our Town*; Alfieri in Miller's *A View from the Bridge*; the MC in Woods and Bogdanov's *Canterbury Tales*. They speak individual lines and soliloquies directly to an audience but all are given dialogue with other characters, merging distinctions between actors and audiences as participants. The symbiosis of characters and audience in theatrical performance may reach its apotheosis in Pantomime, or any performance which stipulates 'audience participation'. In such performances where unrehearsed contributions are invited, performers must be prepared to adapt rehearsed scenes in order not to exclude the additional material from audience members who become active participants.[675]

As I observed in the introduction, active unprepared participation by audience members gives them control over the performance, and possible outcomes, similar to that of the actors.[676] This delegation of power creates a unitive equality in performance which is less likely to occur in liturgy or religious drama where a hieratic tension between clergy and laity may be considered necessary to maintain control over doctrinal and biblical instruction and priestly example. The imposition of rigid liturgical structures on a performed narrative limits audience involvement – God and spectators may only participate at 'appropriate' moments – and thus access to divine transcendence. However, a performance which deconstructs distinctions between, clergy and laity (or actor and audience), creates a liminal space for all who meet in such a performance and, within its 'other' reality, liberate them to become the 'image of God', with the same divine attributes.[677]

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[675] In one performance of a street theatre piece: '*1715. A Commemoration of the first Jacobite Rebellion'* (Kendal Community Theatre) November 2015, a member of the audience added a 5 minute spontaneous (and accurate) historical monologue to the play. John Lahr discusses some implications of such semi-structured open-ended performance. Lahr, J. *Acting out America,* (Harmondsworth. Penguin 1972) Ch 12.

[676] See Lahr 1972;173ff for the implications of allowing total control to the audience.

[677] I have been questioned on theological points on several – barely appropriate – moments by members of congregations during Eucharistic celebrations. A situation akin to audience participation in Pantomime, and requiring similar responses, and one which creates overt equality between Celebrant and congregation.

Unconditional liminality in relation to performance and theatricality is rare in Christian liturgical drama, but not entirely lacking. The twelfth century St Lambrecht *Visitatio Sepulchri*[678] has an unusual stage direction: 'Meantime let the cantor appoint two, [of the people] one old and one young, who after the shouting of the people has been finished should come to the sepulchre, the youth first and let him wait; let the old man following, gaze attentively into the tomb, and the other with him.'[679] The implication may be that those selected for the two characters – John and Peter – are unlikely to disrupt the performance with improvised interpolations, but all directions for other characters, the angel and three Marys assume prior casting. The stage directions distinguish between community, *conventus* and people, *plebs* from whom the two disciples are chosen. In principle, here is an early example of theatrical flexibility in a religious context which might offer unplanned moments within a performance. Some introductions to the Corpus Christi Cycle plays include direct instructions for the conduct and behaviour of the audience, thereby acknowledging its presence and capacity for interruption if not so instructed. The messenger at the opening of the Towneley *Herod the Great* greets the audience with the charge: 'Most mighty Mahoun meng you with mirth…'and later at line 60 demands action from the audience;

> Down ding of your knees
> All that him sees
> Displeased he bese
> And break many bones. (ll60-3)

As the messenger is alone until Herod's entrance, the audience is essential as members of Herod's court. Failure to comply with the command, and the threat of violence do not necessarily require action by audience members, but do not preclude it. It is significant that this direct engagement, and others,[680] is made by human, sinful and transgressive characters, so identifying the audience as itself sinful.

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[678] *Visitatio sepulchri*, St Lambrecht, MS II, Brev. Monasterii Sancti Lamberti, in Bevington 1975;37.
[679] Bevington 1975;38.
[680] See also e.g.: *Caesar Augustus* in the *Towneley Plays*. Human characters involve the audience. Divine characters deliver sermons.

A more surprising awareness of the liberating liminality inherent in performance and theatricality, taking account the attractiveness of transgression, comes from Augustine's reflections on the theatre and performance. Of his early love of theatre and his confusion over the enjoyment engendered by the performance of suffering in tragedy, he makes the telling assessment that 'when he suffers personally it is called misery. When he feels for others it is called mercy.'[681] Augustine may wish that this were not so: 'he who is genuinely compassionate would prefer that there should be no occasion for compassion,'[682] but reaches this conclusion only after accepting 'that actor most pleased me and strongly attracted me who drove me to tears.'[683] Augustine's response to tragedy is similar to Aristotle's and seems to reflect an awareness that the performance of tragedy shows a less than perfect reality. Suffering is inevitable and can provoke a commendable response through the audience's identification with a suffering hero. His reservation is that the theatre is a disreputable locus for such a demonstration: 'Why does it [grief and its attendant compassion] flow down into that torrent of boiling pitch with its vast tide of foul lusts [the theatre]?[684]

Augustine faces up to the tension within theatricality as a locus for moral instruction and nurture as well as for licentiousness. In exploring the nature of truth he analyses theatricality in terms closer to Richard Schechner than Cicero or Tertullian.[685] Writing of actors he explains: 'neither do they will to be false, nor are they false by any appetite of their own; but by a certain necessity, so far as they have been able to follow the mind of the author. But on the stage Roscius in will was a false Hecuba, in nature a true man; but by that will also a true tragedian in that he was fulfilling the thing proposed.'[686] The similarity between Schechner's 'not Hamlet (Hecuba) but not not-Hamlet (the thing proposed)' is striking, not least for its honest acceptance that 'truth' can be flexible and contextually contingent: 'Augustine allows…acting its own integrity, its own consistency, and its own mode of reality.'[687]

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[681] Augustine. *Confessions III, ii*;59. *Trans*. Blaiklock, E. (London. Hodder & Stoughton. 1983), 59.
[682] Ibid. p.60.
[683] Ibid. p. 61.
[684] Ibid. p. 59.
[685] Barish, J. *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*. (London. UCLP. 1985). Ch 3.
[686] *The Soliloquies of St Augustine II,iixx*. (New York; Magisterium Press.2015)
[687] Barish 1985;56.

The possibility of a theological acceptance of a theatrical 'mode of reality', and of tragedy as a means to explore mercy and compassion, extends the transformational opportunities within liturgy, and especially the Eucharist, beyond the event itself. The requirement to enter the 'spiritual and psychological states with which the given experience is confronted [the Last Supper]' and to become 'something other than *spectators*…'[688] is a theological as well as theatrical one. As members of an audience or congregation who are now a speaking as well as a silent chorus and are, as such, able to share equality, transcendence and immanence with all other characters, they become essential to the performance of the Eucharist.

Performance as a beginning

In this thesis I have argued that the constitutive elements of performance and theatricality essential to the presentation of dramatic texts in western theatre are present in both biblical and liturgical texts. This means that it is possible to enter all such texts from the perspective of possible performance when they are taken off the page and put on stage. It means that the experience of participation in theatrical and religious events is shared as performers by all those involved, whether audience or congregation. It follows that the experience of such performances – where people 'imitate' or become characters – is either to engage in a fictive exercise or to enter a theatrical or 'other' reality. If, as I have argued in Chapter 2, the elements employed to create the events are the same – especially bodies moving in space and time – whatever relational position we adopt towards performance has to be the same in the theatrical and theological context. I have shown that the acceptance of entering realities different from the 'quotidian' is attested in a considerable body of modern theatrical and anthropological scholarship.[689] This acceptance is made explicit in western dramatic writing from the fifth century BCE onwards, and is discernible in religious dramatic texts and, occasionally, in theological discourse. I have argued that particular liturgical texts are *de facto* scripts for

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[688] Knights 1966;178

[689] Turner 1983. Féral 2002.Hardison O.B, 1965 *inter alia*. For a useful introductory discussion see: Harrison, P. *Toward a Dramaturgical Interpretation of Religion*, in *Sociological Analysis,* 1977. 38,4. 389-396.

performance, their characters of equal importance as co-creators of the performance and its outcomes. By making the past present and the invisible visible, a hermeneutic of performance counters the Church of England's warning against liturgy becoming an 'attempt simply to reconstruct past events,' and 'an imaginative representation of the events of our Lord's life.'[690] It enables worshippers to 'enter into the tradition consciously and gladly.'[691] This hermeneutic allows those who participate in liturgical events to engage with the immanent and transcendent. They share time and activity with other human characters: Adam, Moses, the disciples and with Jesus as human and divine and God as divine.

This engagement finds support in the Anglican Common Worship Eucharist liturgy, despite the danger of 'imaginative representations,' through the affirmation: 'Though we are many, we are one body because we all share in one bread.'[692] At this moment, regardless of what causes transformation, a hermeneutic of performance allows participation in theological activity as everyone identifies with Jesus, and therefore with God. It authenticates theologically the equality of all participants so that transcendence and immanence become accessible to humanity as it aspires to the otherness of God through actions performed by Jesus. But this equality among all performers raises the spectre of transgression. Human audiences who make up the silent choruses in the Moses story and the *Oresteia*, or who are heckled and cajoled by Herod, and the congregations at the Eucharist who must confess and be absolved before they encounter God, are all subject to *hamartia* or a capacity for error. Whatever we do is subject to *hamartia* which leads to failure and results in tragedy, or the intentional pursuit of a sinful end: '*hamartia*, or going awry is built into the action, not some external force which afflicts it.'[693] Moses and Orestes transgress religious or moral laws and become tragic heroes. A hermeneutic of performance sees Jesus as susceptible to *hamartia* and so transgressive, both in failing to become the Messiah and claiming the power to forgive sins. If all characters can participate in the reality of God's otherness, divine transgression becomes a possibility, otherwise parity as performers and

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[690] *Lent, Holy Week, Easter. Services and Prayers.* (London. Church House Publishing. 1984), 3.
[691] Ibid. p.2.
[692] CW1.
[693] Eagleton 2003;245-246.

being truly 'one body' would not be achievable. Theologically one example, and vindication, of divine transgression comes to us from Moses who repeatedly upstages God by informing him of the potential or actual error of his ways, so provoking a change in divine intention and practice.[694] A unique example is expressed in Jesus' appeal 'My God, my God why have you forsaken me?'[695] which theologically may be part of a dialogue demanding God's providential and teleological care,[696] but unless this is made explicit, as performance it presents a human leader committed to his own people who is then abandoned by his, and their God, whose own covenant is based on mutual love. *In absentia* God is upstaged.

Vulnerability to *hamartia* and the potential for any performer to suffer, effect a *peripeteia,* or be subject to *anagnorisis*, lead to situations of mutual dependence and contingency within a performance. Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon affects profoundly the citizens of both Argos and Athens. Moses' realisation of his exclusion from Canaan determines how Joshua must behave as Israel's new leader. The Furies' final *peripeteia* is a prerequisite for the good governance of Athens. For Jesus at Gethsemane there is a negative *peripeteia*. He can be perceived as sinful in his assumption of God's prerogative at the last supper; he may be fully aware of his likely execution after his arrest, but refuses any move towards a reversal of his position. He holds this determination not to deviate from a chosen course in common with other tragic heroes, who include Orestes and, significantly, with Oedipus at the climax of *Oedipus at C0lonus*. Through their unswerving resolve these seek to be saviours of the people in their care. For this to happen, the mutual dependence and contingency so created may need to hold beyond their manifestation in performance.

God's transcendent otherness, although less susceptible to *hamartia*, also cannot exist alone: 'it needs others in order to be itself,' accepting 'that this dependence infringes its autonomy.'[697] A hermeneutic of performance indicates that once divine autonomy becomes dependent on other characters, God will be

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[694] Ex 32;11-14, Deut 32;26-7.
[695] Mt 27;46.
[696] Ps 22.
[697] Eagleton 2003;217.

upstaged as transcendence and immanence begin to coalesce as one entity with different facets. George Steiner observes that 'western tragic drama is the least separable from religion.'[698] He suggests that the contents of 'Greek, the neo-classical and almost the entirety of twentieth century tragic theatre, is that of mortal encounters with supernatural agencies of fate, with transcendent visitations and with "other than human" interventions.'[699] It is the combination of 'mortal encounter' with 'transcendent visitation' which gives meaning to the tragic sequence of failure, vindication and hope that occurs in all our examples of performance. It is a bedrock for Israel, Athens and the Christian community which needs to be taken beyond performance into other realities.

Ite, missa est: he is waiting for us.

Ite, missa est:[700] 'Go, the Mass is ended' or 'Go it is sent' or 'Go announce the gospel of the Lord' is the theologically, and theatrically, confused ending of the Roman Catholic Mass and encapsulates the possibility of transformation moving beyond performance. The meanings illustrate the creative paradox of performance simultaneously ending and continuing through the transformation brought about by the encounter between divine transcendence and human immanence.

I have argued that the theatrical reality of performance, with its own truth, is one reality among other realities. Its liminality operates in two directions and an audience or congregation must return from the reality of performance to everyday reality. Both realities change during the event of the performance, if only due to the passage of time. As they exchange realities, members of audiences and congregations have a choice over what truths, relationships and hope to take with them and whether, and how, to take these forward, since all performance carries a propensity for transformation within and beyond itself. This is supremely so in the performance of the Eucharist, but is a strong feature at the end of *Eumenides* where Athene's final 'bless us evermore' (l1032) is followed by a procession of all characters, divine and

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[698] Steiner, G. *A Note on Absolute Tragedy*. *Journal of Literature and Theology*. Vol 4. No. 2. July 1990. pp147-156. p.152.
[699] Ibid. p.152.
[700] *The Sunday Missal*. Ed Gibbons, R. (London. Collins. 2011).

human, invoking a transformation which will give everlasting 'peace between our city and its guests' (l1044). This procession extends the action out from the performance time of the play to everyday time as it presents 'one of the main events of the Panathenaic Festival', so the performance becomes 'linked with a celebration of the city and people of Athens.'[701] It employs language and action almost identical with that of the Eucharist where God gives a blessing and a minister dismisses the participants. It shares qualities with the end of *A Passion for Kendal* where cast and audience join a final exultant journey in the hope of finding Jesus and new life. The final scenes from *Oedipus at Colonus*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *The Good Person of Szechuan, A View from the Bridge* all seek to transform their worlds or leave a situation where others will effect the transformation. Latent transformation, inherent in all modes of performance, means that transcendence is intrinsically present in theatre and that the tasks of both theatre and theology share identical features. Performance can initiate transformation which will affect actors and audiences in the timeless present of 'performance time', but performance cannot prescribe the future; we hope to live happily ever after, but are given no guarantees.

In the analysis of narratives where God appears as a character I have shown that the story of Moses is a paradigm for tragedy with God as a character; that Passion Plays put God on stage and that certain liturgies require performance in which God is active alongside the Christian community. In all these performances an audience or congregation encounters God as immanent and transcendent. Passion Plays present encounters between a fully embodied God in Jesus, other named characters and an audience which becomes the 'silent chorus' able to participate at levels determined by the form of performance. The Eucharist presents in Jesus, a fully embodied God whose own actions are contingent upon those of all participants, similarly embodied, who as 'participants in the major rituals of vital religions…may be passive and active in turn.'[702] Participants in liturgy employ theatricality to represent others, including God, to create a performance. I have argued that 'performance time' is both independent of quotidian time and finite, creating a 'timeless present' or continuum of the present. I have argued that every performance is open-ended

[701] Aeschylus 1998;128.
[702] Turner 1982;81.

and differs from every other performance. Nothing can stop a performer changing words or actions in mid-performance and audiences or congregations may participate or respond to performance unpredictably. For all of these reasons every performance generates a reality unique to itself and a hermeneutic of performance authenticates this uniqueness. Nevertheless, at the end of the Moses story we expect transformation in the nation of Israel; the Passion Plays we have considered leave hope for transformation to those who continue to seek Jesus following the crucifixion; performance of the Eucharist offers transformation to all participants.

In the tragedies of Moses, the *Oresteia*, the Passion and the Eucharist, gods encounter other characters as interdependent and embodied beings. Through the encounter, characters – Moses, Orestes, Jesus as a man – choose to suffer pain or death to bring hope to the people they serve. The choice arises because the hero trusts the encountered god; they each bear responsibility for whatever outcomes occur, and the truths and redemptive hopes which will be enacted in other realities. The presence of gods, and the hope they inspire are at the heart of tragedy, since 'tragedy is that form of art which requires the intolerable burden of God's presence.'[703]

The performance of these tragedies offers similar interactions to audiences. Unique in themselves, though unitive in their representations, the transformation offered is achievable. In these encounters audiences and performers share journeys to transcendence and discover the truth, hope and opportunity for transformation each performance offers. These transformations, held suspended in '*Ite missa est*', only become possible *beyond* performance if God has been up-staged *in* performance. In seeking transformation into a new world beyond performance, all participants must independently and willingly make decisions and take actions. They must risk transgression in achieving their tasks by 'taking a decision to act',[704] as Moses, Adam and, uniquely, Jesus do. Action beyond the encounter with God, which puts another person in God's place, means that upstaging God becomes normative. At Horeb, Moses upstages God by ordering the mass execution of apostates. Jesus is consistently upstaged

[703] Steiner 1961;353.
[704] Abel 2003;102.

in Passion Plays by Judas, the priests and Roman soldiers, and himself upstages God at the crucifixion. In the Eucharist Jesus upstages God and other participants upstage Jesus, especially those who say his words. If we enter the 'other' reality of performance and share transcendence with God, transformation can follow. This transformation will only follow if the redemptive hope and truth in the performance are acted upon, otherwise transformation remains fixed within the performance. We must upstage God to share hope and truth, and especially if 'truth in the theatre is always on the move.' If God is not upstaged, and willing to be upstaged, we may go, but God may never be able to leave the performance.

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