

phenomenological thinking. It represents, within the contemporary trends of philosophy and psychology, the previously mentioned therapeutic ambitions of philosophy, which date back to ancient Greek philosophy.

Its hallmarks are criticism towards the naturalism of the Platonic tradition, as well as affirmation of one's intellectual dimension. Our investigations offer a kind of philosophical cross-section of these issues, as well as a possible outline of the methodology of the *phenomenological care of the soul*.

Patricia BLOCKSOME

# The Birth, Death and Resurrection of Theatre: Religion's Cyclical Relationship with the Stage

What is a wife and what is a harlot?  
What is a church and what is a theatre?  
Are they two and not one?  
Can they exist separate?  
Are not religion and politics the same thing?  
Brotherhood is religion.  
O demonstrations of reason  
dividing families in cruelty and pride!<sup>1</sup>

*Religion and theatre, though currently separated, marked off through 'demonstrations of reason', share a multitude of similarities, and these similarities are more than coincidence. Yet, though the historically religious roots of several theatrical traditions are known, the theatre is and has been often attacked as an immoral influence by various religious majorities. The Sturm und Drang of complex and shifting relationships between the spiritual and the theatrical provides insight not only into the birth of theatre but also its death and resurrection.*

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<sup>1</sup> BLAKE William, *The Complete Poetry and Prose*. Berkeley, 1982. 207.

## I. An Embarrassment of Coincidence

What is a church and what is a theatre? There are several elements of religion in theatre, and vice versa. Religion is defined as the “service and worship of God or the supernatural [...], commitment or devotion to religious faith or observance [...], a personal set or institutionalised system of religious attitudes, beliefs and practices.”<sup>2</sup>

Looking at all of these diverse definitions for religion, let us see if theatre can encompass them. For starters, let us replace the word *religion* with that of *theatre*, and with a few minor changes, use the same definition. Thus, theatre is the service and worship of God or the supernatural, commitment or devotion to a faith or observance of a ritual, an institutionalised system of religious or supernatural attitudes, beliefs, and practices. It fits rather well.

The theatre can even be considered a form of religion. People go to the theatre to be taken to a different plane of being, to experience something that will move them intellectually or emotionally. The audience agrees to accept what is presented as revelatory of the truth, no matter how far from scientific, rational truth the production may be. There is instead a belief in a higher truth, to be revealed by those intermediaries chosen for the task – the actors and the crew.

If theatre is a religion, does the syllogism hold true as well? Peter BROOK provides a very basic definition of theatre: “I can take any empty 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.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, the elements of theatre are a *space*; a *performer*; and an *observer*. Going beyond this very basic classification, though, what does theatre imply? Theatre can further be defined as a space set apart for the performance of a story-ritual, with the understanding of both primary/active and passive/observer participants in the ritual that a meta-reality is to be created.

David MAMET, a playwright, offers the following comparison between religion and theatre in his book *Three Uses of the Knife*: “Religion offers the cleansing mechanism of confession: the Roman Catholic confessional, the Jewish Day of Atonement, the Baptist Testimony. Twelve-step programs are built upon, and proceed from the confession of powerlessness. In all of these we lay our burden down – or we are offered that choice. (...) And we have created the op-

portunity to face our nature, to face our deeds, to face our lies in the Drama.”<sup>4</sup> In MAMET’s opinion, theatre serves the exact same functional role as religion, as that of a place of confession of weakness and enlightenment. Such a duality between the nature of religion and that of theatre should not come as a surprise, given the historical beginnings of the theatrical tradition.

## II. Evolution from Religion to Theatre

The generally accepted theory on the origins of theatre is that theatre evolved from worship of the gods – whatever gods they might be. Margot BERTHOLD, discussing the development of drama in Sumer, remarks: the divine sagas were all “composed during the period when the image of the Sumerian gods became humanised, not so much in their outward appearance as in their supposed emotions. This criterion is crucial in a civilization: it is the fork in the road where the way to theatre branches off. For the drama develops from the conflict symbolised in the concept of gods transposed into human psychology.”<sup>5</sup>

From India, M. L. VARADPANDE is even more explicit about the process: “The explanatory myths generated by the rituals provided the theme for stage enactment. In the frenzied movement of the ritual performer the art of dancing originated. The gesture adopted by the priests helped the formulation of a code of acting for the stage. The priest who acted as a medium of communication with the spirit probably created the form of verbal exchange called *dialogue*. Other accessories like masks, make-up and singing are common to ritual and the theatre. Primitive religion and its system of rituals gave the dramatic art many necessary ingredients to evolve itself into a separate entity.”<sup>6</sup>

Through the world over, religion has birthed theatre, though that same religion may later view theatre as a sort of bastard-child or demonic offspring. After the fall of Rome, for the next fifteen centuries the “Church denied actors the right to receive the sacraments, nor could they be buried in consecrated ground.”<sup>7</sup> This is the same Church that would later, after those fifteen centuries, be responsible for the rebirth of theatre, which led to the re-creation of the professional actor.

4 MAMET David, *Three Uses of the Knife*. New York, 2000. 78–79.

5 FREUND Philip, *The Birth of Theatre*. London, 2003. 38.

6 VARADPANDE M. L., *Religion and Theatre*. Atlantic Highlands, 1983. 2.

7 FREUND Philip, *The Birth of Theatre*. London, 2003. 780.

2 Religion. In Merriam-Webster Online. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/religion>.

3 BROOK Peter, *The Empty Space*. New York, 1996. 9.

Though there is a very murky transition from religious activity to formalised ritual to religio-theatrical endeavours, attempting to pinpoint this transition is probably impossible due to the limited historical records available, as well as because in a number of theatrical traditions the birth of sacred theatre was pre-literate. What is more important than a precise point of evolution is the understanding that the formation of proto-theatre was in multiple – and arguably all – societies a product of organised religious activity.

The shift from proto-theatre to theatre as a separate – though related – entity is also one of gradual evolution. Again, primary source documents are scarce, but an interesting case study can be provided by looking at a resurrection of the theatrical tradition during an age closer to our own: that of Western Europe from roughly 500–1500. “Following the disintegration of the Roman Empire, organized theatrical activities had virtually disappeared in Western Europe as conditions returned to a state similar to the period that preceded the emergence of drama in the sixth century BC.”<sup>8</sup>

During this period of disintegration, proto-theatrical activity was limited, but did exist in a few forms. There were roving troupes of entertainers (jugglers and tumblers) that were regarded as immoral by the Church. Teutonic bards, once honoured as tribal historians, were also condemned by the Church. Festivals, the remnants of pagan rituals, were still widely held and attended. Finally, the new religion of Christianity was expanding and consolidating power. Part of this consolidation was the creation and codification of accepted religious ritual. It is from this religious ritual that the Christians, in celebrations of the teachings of their God (just as the Greeks in their celebrations of DIONYSUS), let theatre spring forth again.<sup>9</sup>

“The earliest traces of the liturgical drama are found in manuscripts dating from the X<sup>th</sup> century. Its genesis may perhaps be found in the chant *Quem Quæritis* (Whom do you seek), a trope to the Introit of the Easter mass. In *Regularis Concordia* (mid-X<sup>th</sup> century), ÆTHELWOLD, bishop of Winchester, described in some detail the manner in which the *Quem Quæritis* trope was performed as a small scene during the Matins service on Easter morning. The *dialogue* represents the well-known story of the three Marys approaching the tomb of Jesus Christ: “Whom do you seek?” “Jesus of Nazareth.” “He is not here. He has arisen as was prophesied. Go. Announce that he has arisen from the dead.”<sup>10</sup>

8 BROCKETT Oscar – FRANKLIN Hildy, *History of the Theatre*. Boston, 2003. 74.

9 BROCKETT Oscar – FRANKLIN Hildy, *History of the Theatre*. Boston, 2003. 74–78.

10 *Liturgical Drama*. In *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/>



The *Quem Quæritis* led to the cycles of mystery plays – a number of short playlets based on Biblical stories. These in turn led to morality plays, which were not based on Biblical stories, but were still created with the intent of religious edification – truth revealed by fictitious stories.<sup>11</sup> “Before the end of the fourteenth century, the production of plays had in most places passed out of the control of the Church, although the scripts were still acceptable to Church officials and were performed at religious festivals.”<sup>12</sup> Again, as in the above discussion on the birth of theatre, as the theatrical events grew in popularity, the religious organisation which had inaugurated them gradually lost possession of both the creation and presentation of the dramas.

For our case study, let us compare four texts, each located at a different point in the evolutionary re-birth of theatre in Western Europe. The texts under consideration are the *Quem Quæritis* Easter Trope; *Noah's Flood* from the Chester cycle of mystery plays; *Everyman*, a full-length morality play; and *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher MARLOWE.

The *Quem Quæritis* trope is all of three lines of dialogue: “This text, found in the introductory portion of the Easter Mass, was probably merely antiphonal (that is, sung responsively by two groups) and probably did not involve actors impersonating the characters.”<sup>13</sup> So the first stage of our religious-theatrical tradition is simply an expanded bit of ritual, smoothly infiltrating a religious ceremony.

*Noah's Flood* is a playlet, and here the greatest jump is made. Mystery playlets were usually presented in cycles and performed outside, so from the time of the *Quem Quæritis* to *Noah's Flood*, the anonymous playwrights had moved from a chorus singing dialogue to specific actors speaking lines. Furthermore, the playlet was outside of the church, and though probably first presented as part of *Corpus Christi* festival activities, was no longer considered part of the church service. The biggest change of all was in the language of the *dialogue*. Instead of Latin, the language of the clergy, *Noah's Flood* was written in the vernacular. Thus, theatre became more accessible to the populace, as it was now in the language of the land, and set design was freed from the constraints of working within a church.<sup>14</sup>

The next stage in our evolution is the play *Everyman*, a play that

discusses moral issues.<sup>15</sup> This is a full-length play, and though containing a strong religious theme, it is not based on a Biblical story. It is for this reason that it is the next stage in our progression. *Everyman* is the starting point of secular drama. This is not to say that this play does not contain Christian attitudes; that would be patently false, as God is a character, Who opens the play with a monologue calling for Death to seek out Everyman, as his time on Earth has come to an end. But the “moralities mark a movement away from Biblical characters and events to ordinary humans in their everyday surroundings. Consequently, they paved the way for the great secular plays of the succeeding period.”<sup>16</sup>

From *Everyman* we come to *Doctor Faustus*, the first British play to have an acknowledged author: Christopher MARLOWE.<sup>17</sup> *Doctor Faustus* does contain some reference to Christian beliefs, but it is far more secular than *Everyman*. MARLOWE's play does contain some allegorical figures, but these are minor characters; all of the major roles are fleshed-out people. Dr Faustus has individual idiosyncrasies and traits, as does Mephistopheles. Furthermore, this play was not performed as part of a religious festival, but instead on the public stage.<sup>18</sup> Plays such as this “bridged the gap between the learned and popular audiences. Their successful blending of classical and mediæval devices with compelling stories drawn from many sources dominated the stage.”<sup>19</sup>

Thus, we can see in the literature of Western Europe the gradual evolution and rebirth of drama. This renaissance of the mediæval Western theatre is all the more intriguing when we remember that it was birthed from the Church – the same Church that had previously refused burial on consecrated ground to actors. This cycling from hatred to espousal does not necessarily seem logical. Yet I propose that it is logical, eminently logical, when you consider the close ties between drama and religion, for numerous religious practices embrace the idea of a cyclical paradigm.

15 WARD Candace (ed.), *Everyman and other Miracle and Morality Plays*. New York, 1995.

16 BROCKETT Oscar – FRANKLIN Hildy, *History of the Theatre*. Boston, 2003. 99.

17 MARLOWE Christopher, *Doctor Faustus*. New York, 1969.

18 BROCKETT Oscar – FRANKLIN Hildy, *History of the Theatre*. Boston, 2003. 110.

19 BROCKETT Oscar – FRANKLIN Hildy, *History of the Theatre*. Boston, 2003. 111.

11 BROCKETT Oscar – FRANKLIN Hildy, *History of the Theatre*. Boston, 2003. 76–99.

12 BROCKETT Oscar – FRANKLIN Hildy, *History of the Theatre*. Boston, 2003. 84.

13 BROCKETT Oscar – FRANKLIN Hildy, *History of the Theatre*. Boston, 2003. 76.

14 BROCKETT Oscar – FRANKLIN Hildy, *History of the Theatre*. Boston, 2003. 82–83.

### III. The Resurrection Cycle of Theatre

James FRAZER in *The New Golden Bough* proposed the idea of the 'year-god' as the Platonic ideal form of a god as reverse-engineered from an exhaustive study of different religious traditions from around the world. This year-god is a god that follows the seasons: is re-born each spring, matures in summer, and decays in fall and dies in winter, only to be re-born once again. FRAZER argues that it is this seasonal cycle unique to Earth that influences the religious practices of the peoples thereof.<sup>20</sup>

So religion and theatre are intimately intertwined. If theatre then is indeed the offspring of religion, could it not be possible that theatre in some form inherited the DNA of its parent, and just as religion celebrates the cycle of death and rebirth, so does the theatre? Based on the two sets of historical data – that of the birth of theatre worldwide, and that of the rebirth of theatre in Western Europe – I propose the following hypothesis: that theatre, inextricably tied to a mothering religion, goes through its own resurrective cycle, of which there are seven phases.

First, ongoing religious activity codifies into ritual; then ritualised religious storytelling evolves into religious theatre; religious theatre transforms into secular-religious theatre; secular-religious theatre becomes independent from ongoing religious activity; secular theatre breaks entirely with sponsoring religion and is typically then denounced by religion as immoral; theatre ties back into a new or ongoing religious or belief system (return to phase 3) – or theatre devolves from the religious mysteries, beliefs and myths, and becomes banal and dispensable to the populace (continue to phase 7); and finally, theatre dies or degenerates into proto-theatrical activity (return to phase 1).

The seven phases are distinguishable in both the Grecian and Western European births of theatre. In the 'classic' Western tradition of Greek-based theatre, the phases would be as follows (dates are approximate):

First, a Greek deity, DIONYSUS, has festivals which start to contain dramatisations (none of which are extant, but there are records that these plays did exist). These dramatisations have a chorus and one actor (625–575 BC).

Second, the *Dionysia* festival, the largest of four Greek festivals in the god's honour, expands on the dramatisations; one playwright,

ÆSCHYLUS, adds a second actor in plays such as *Agamemnon* (525–450 BC).

Third, the playwright EURIPIDES' characters "often questioned the gods' sense of justice, since they seemed sources of misery as often as of happiness. At times, EURIPIDES suggested that chance rules the world, and that human beings are more concerned with moral values than are the gods."<sup>21</sup> The theatre, though still associated with DIONYSUS, has begun to question its religious basis (440–400 BC).

Forth, after the Peloponnesian War, the newer Greek writers start emphasising melodrama and sensationalism; actors become professional (350–300 BC).

Fifth, during the fourth century (400–200 BC), "Greek thought became increasingly secularised. Religious worship and festivals continued, but belief in their efficacy was seriously undermined by the intellectual scrutiny to which the gods and myths were subjected."<sup>22</sup>

Sixth, a new form of Greek theatre, *new comedy*, increases in popularity as tragedy declines. This new form is banal, dealing with neither issues of myth nor religion, but instead relying on formulaic plots (350–150 BC).

Seventh, Greece becomes a province of Rome (146 BC), and the majority of theatrical activity moves to Rome. Roman drama tends to emphasise variety entertainment – proto-theatre – though some plays are still produced. With the conversion of Constantine to Christianity (313), the Church starts persecuting theatrical professionals. The glory of Greek theatre dies.<sup>23</sup>

In the mediæval Western European theatre, the phases would be as follows: first, the Church expands and consolidates power from the end of the Roman Empire and through the early Middle Ages. During this time, codification of the Roman Catholic Mass and other rites of the Church starts the growth of Christian ritual (400–900).

Second, the beginnings of religious theatre appear in church services, coming from the tropes (sung phrases or verses) (900–1200). The *Quem Quæritis* Easter Trope was innovative in that it was sung back and forth by two different groups in the chorus. Liturgical dramas based on stories from the Bible evolve from the tropes.

Third, gradually, as these liturgical dramas increase in complexity, they are moved outside the church and start to be presented in cycles, usually in honour of some festival or feast day of the Church

21 BROCKETT Oscar – FRANKLIN Hildy, *History of the Theatre*. Boston, 2003. 16.

22 BROCKETT Oscar – FRANKLIN Hildy, *History of the Theatre*. Boston, 2003. 36.

23 BROCKETT Oscar – FRANKLIN Hildy, *History of the Theatre*. Boston, 2003. 11–71.

20 FRAZER James, *The New Golden Bough*. New York, 1959. 223–370.

(1200–1350). The responsibility for presenting the cycles, containing playlets such as *Noah's Flood*, changes hands from the church to various guilds. No authorship is given of these dramas; the glory is to go to god, not humans. The playlets are now written and performed in the vernacular, making them more accessible to the general public.

Fourth, morality plays such as *Everyman* break the tradition of using the Bible as basis for story; works may now use allegorical figures to emphasize plots that, though influenced by the Church, do not specifically come from the Bible (1300–1500). The length of the scripts expands, and one play may now be presented by itself, rather than being in a cycle with many others. Though the Church still retains the power to disallow certain plays, that power is waning, and production of the plays is solely in secular control.

Fifth, plays become produced professionally, and actors become professional (1500–1625). The Church loses the ability to ban theatre, and secular theatres, though they may present a play based on religious ideas such as *Dr Faustus*, may also present works containing elements of which the Church disapproves: take for example William SHAKESPEARE's *Macbeth*, with its focus on witchcraft. Also, for the first time the authorship of playwrights begins and becomes common.

Sixth, during the reign of JAMES I, "tragicomedies, with their contrived happy endings for otherwise serious plays, were increasing popular, encouraging the pathetic or sensational as substitutes for the more genuinely tragic emotions. Thrills and excitement took precedence over significant insights or complex characterizations."<sup>24</sup> A play of this period is *'Tis a Pity She's a Whore*, in which incest is given a sympathetic viewing (1610–1642).

Seventh, in England, civil war breaks out (1642). The Puritans (a Christian movement), opposing the rule of royalty, also opposed the theatre both for its association with royalty and because of the immoral content of the plays. The Puritans win the civil war, and theatre is legally abolished.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, in both Greco-Roman and mediæval European births of theatre, we see the same cycle occur. Theatre is born of religion, seeks separation in maturity, and is eventually destroyed as that maturity gradually makes theatre antithetical to the religious beliefs of the majority. If this hypothesis is indeed true, then two points of interest from the resurrection cycle deserve further interest: the death and life of the theatre.

## IV. On the Death and Life of Drama

What happens to make theatre die? It does not always do so, even if it does languish. What is key is phase six, in which there are two options for the theatre: to return to a belief – not necessarily the original sponsoring religion – or to pursue a course towards the banal and petty.

It is not always the case that the course of theatre in a specific region pursues a course of destruction. Though an example was not provided above, at times theatre can be re-invigorated after becoming secular, but before it becomes so antithetical to religious beliefs that it is forced to die.

In following this path, it is not simply religious connection that can save a dramatic culture. That cannot be, for there are many plays that do not specifically or even indirectly reference the gods, yet arguably are still vital. It is not the gods, per se, that theatre must have to live. To remain vital, the theatre *must* contain a sense of revelation of truth, a sense of the mythic, of something vital to the human condition. If the theatre keeps or recaptures that sense, then the theatre will live.

Philip FREUND, discussing this very issue in *Birth of Theatre*, talks of a director who is attempting the sixth path: Peter BROOK has "undertaken to revitalize ritual, to make the theatre the source of emotional experience that can no longer be provided by a church, which has become respectable and no more than a mild social occasion. *But the efficacy of ritual depends on the vitality of the beliefs from which it emerges.* It is the desperate search for contents that are still alive, which still have the power to stir an audience."<sup>26</sup>

If, however, theatre does follow the sixth phase into degeneration or death, how does that come about? What is necessary to bring about this death or dying-phase of theatre, when drama is no longer seen as a necessary art? It is difficult to say when, exactly, the theatre dies from lack of this *élan vital*. "If we talk of deadly, let us note that the difference between life and death, so crystal clear in man, is somewhat veiled in other fields. A doctor can tell at once between the trace of life and the useless bag of bones that life has left; but we are less practiced in observing how an idea, an attitude or form can pass from the lively to the moribund."<sup>27</sup>

Theatre slides to death when it abandons the revelations of myth-

<sup>26</sup> FREUND Philip, *The Birth of Theatre*. London, 2003. 774.

<sup>27</sup> BROOK Peter, *The Empty Space*. New York, 1996. 11.

<sup>24</sup> BROCKETT Oscar – FRANKLIN Hildy, *History of the Theatre*. Boston, 2003. 113.

<sup>25</sup> BROCKETT Oscar – FRANKLIN Hildy, *History of the Theatre*. Boston, 2003. 72–135.

ic truth, following instead a superficial path that provides excellent spectacle but little heart. The audiences that accept such types of theatre are actively encouraging its demise. "When you come to the theatre, you have to be willing to say, 'We are all here to undergo a *communion*, to find out what the hell is going on in this world.' If you are not willing to say that, what you get is entertainment instead of art, and poor entertainment at that."<sup>28</sup> As shown previously, the slide to uninspired drama is a movement that may lead all the way to a death of theatre.

And yet, for all of that, it does not seem it is possible to kill off theatre entirely, no matter what governmental or theological imperatives urge their faithful. Though the religion may change, the very essence of religion, with its ritual and emphasis on storytelling, is fertile ground from which a new theatrical tradition may spring.

Will the resurrection cycle remain unbroken? Will there ever come a day that theatre will die completely, and religion not be able to resurrect it? Predicting the future is a risky business at best, but I would offer up a quote from Antonin ARTAUD, a philosopher of the theatre, as defence against that possibility: "So long as we have failed to eliminate any of the causes of human despair, we do not have the right to try to eliminate those means by which man tries to cleanse himself of despair."<sup>29</sup> As long as the world needs mystery or magic or myth or religion to live, drama will not die.

Jamie MORAN

# Cleave: The Hebrew Word for Passion

## I. Cleave to God

Because the word passion is so degraded today – confused with ego ambition, sex, bullying, etc. – I also use a lot of other terms which seem cognate with the meaning I want to establish. I have a number of key metaphors and alternate expressions, such as the leap into the unknown, being staked to the ground, and others.

I see passion as the key to the Jewish approach to faith in the Old Testament.

I now think I have found another word in Hebrew for the Greek *passion*: this word is *cleave*. Cleave is a strange and powerful word which turns up in various places and in various ways throughout the Hebrew Bible. A man cleaves to his woman in marriage; the tongue cleaves to the roof of the mouth; tired bones cleave to the skin. But what really grabbed me was that in Deuteronomy, early on in the Old Testament, the text repeatedly says, again and again, cleave to God.

Passion is our cleaving to God.

I love the very word, cleave.

In English, as in Hebrew, this word carries a paradox, a contradiction, a mystery, a secret. For, it means both to join with, and to separate. In fact, more concretely, it means a warm embrace, but yet when we wield a sword, we can cut an opponent's head in two: we cleave them in half. To cleave is at one and the same time to hold on to and unite with, yet also to rend, to tear into pieces, to divide. Poetically this captures the peculiarity of passion as I have written of it in so many different ways. To cleave is to love, yet this very love contains a sacred violence, a fight, a separating. Cleave is

<sup>28</sup> MAMET David, *Three Uses of the Knife*. New York, 2000. 19.

<sup>29</sup> ARTAUD Antonin, *Artaud Anthology*. San Francisco, 2001. 61–62.