

Drama Alone is Credible: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Interpretive Work of
Theatre and Performance in Twentieth-Century Christian Thought

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the theatrical approach to Christian thought in Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Theo-Drama* (1973 – 1983) as a response to twentieth-century questions about credibility. What frames a good interpretation of God's revelation that is accessible for a public audience? Drama discloses how credibility emerges in action between material given circumstances and co-creative possibility. Theatrical interpretation generates a surplus meaning that does not exhaust its source material. I argue that von Balthasar's own theatrical preferences direct his theological conclusions. Chapters take interest in von Balthasar's readings of plays and dramatic theorists, theologies of stewardship and creation, Christology and human freedom, and his controversial interpretation of the Trinity and Holy Saturday. A credible interpretation will never be far from lived experience. I historicize, evaluate, and develop von Balthasar's dramatic theory using contemporary theatrical practices—dramaturgy, scenic design, writing, acting, direction—and alongside close readings of “secular” plays from *Hamlet* to the Iranian experimental playwright Nassim Soleimanpour. Each chapter follows the theatrical imperative to perform its interpretations and address issues of credibility raised by dilemmas in theological genre and performance anxiety, modernity and doubt, science and materialism, ecology and climate crisis, death and authority.

INTRODUCTION

Christian thought has long speculated a separation between church and stage. The professional illusions and salacious distractions of theatre appear ill-fitting for a religion that prides itself on truth-telling and love of neighbor.¹ Masquerades and pageantry seem to undermine the solemn importance of the Christian liturgy's sacred drama. To call any religious tradition's most sacred rites "theatrical" feels, whether warranted or not, to border on insult. Yet in the twentieth-century, Christian writers made a peculiar turn toward dramatic language and theatrical imagery as analogies for making modern sense of systematic and philosophical questions in theology. In the same period, scholars across humanities and social sciences invoked the analogy of performance to explicate ritual, identity, ontology, and social life. Dramatic literatures and theatrical praxis provide an accessible interpretive framework where public audiences can entertain the mysterious and unprovable phenomena of religion. This dissertation investigates one such writer in order to understand what, if anything, makes drama so suddenly credible for Christian thought. I will demonstrate that theatre's practices provide a set of tools well-suited to aid Christian theology when done for the sake of a contemporary public in search of an interpretation of revelation worth believing. Drama clarifies the content and stakes of theological work and discloses the structures that make theological work meaningful. Drama aids modern interpretations of God's self-revelation (a Christian concern), but drama also models procedures where theological knowledge production pertains to the wider critical humanities and how "secular" theatre does theological work too.²

¹ Great debate exists regarding the proper spelling choices for theatre/theater. I reserve the -er for a physical auditorium (e.g., a lecture theater) and the -re for the art, practice, and study of theatre. My convention will occasion sentences such as "I went to the downtown theater to see my friend from the theatre department make their musical theatre debut." I will violate my convention in the case of a proper name (e.g., the Oliver Theatre), and I will not change quotations.

² The converse—that the study of religion aids the interpretation and production of drama—also holds true.

Christian theology must be credible as both a religious and scholarly practice.³ Drama becomes a credible scene partner while also illuminating credibility itself.

This dissertation addresses drama and credibility in twentieth-century Christian thought at varying levels. Descriptively, my project interprets the writer and producer of the most substantial contribution to theological dramatic theory in this period, Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Theo-Drama*.⁴ Constructively, this dissertation identifies and pursues a correlation between drama and credibility developed across modern Christian thought in the interpretive work of theatre and performance.

Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Theo-Drama* represents a five-volume fusion of Christian theologies and the European dramatic tradition. His own publishing house, Johannes Verlag, produced *Theodramatik* between 1973 and 1983.⁵ These volumes constitute the middle-part of his massive theological trilogy on God's self-revelation according to the philosophical transcendents of being: Beauty, Goodness, and Truth.⁶ *Theo-Drama* contains von Balthasar's central theological argument

³ Undergirding my position is the *a priori* commitment that religious and scholarly practices are neither co-terminus nor mutually exclusive. Ostensibly scholarly practices (e.g., research, rigorous argumentation, teaching) can be religious; ostensibly religious practices (e.g., moral formation, contemplation, communal ritual activity according to institutional traditions) can be scholarly. Consider how for the study of Abrahamic thought, reading is a paradigmatic example of a mutually scholarly and religious practice. It is impossible to treat any Jewish, Christian, or Islamic sacred scriptures without thought and bodily movements that overlap between religious and scholarly interpreting communities. But there are some performances of religious reading and some performances of scholarly reading (even when reading the same text) that, while mutually informing, are not identical. Hermeneutics helps indicate distinctions in the intentions and performances of practices rather than in terms of acceptable and unacceptable subject matters.

⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, 5 vols., Graham Harrison, trans. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988-1998). Hereafter the volumes of Graham Harrison's English language translation are abbreviated in notes as follows: TD 1 = Volume 1: *Prolegomena* (1988); TD 2 = Volume 2: *The Dramatis Personae: Man in God* (1990); TD 3 = Volume 3: *The Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ* (1992); TD 4 = Volume 4: *The Action* (1994); TD 5 = Volume 5: *The Last Act*, (1998).

⁵ The unhyphenated title and these sets of dates correspond to the original German publication. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, 5 vols., (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1973-1983). Hereafter references to the German language version appear in notes as "*Theodramatik*." Its volumes correspond to the English versions as follows: *Theodramatik I: Prolegomena* (1973) = TD 1; *Theodramatik II/1: Die Personen Des Spiels Teil I: Der Mensch in Gott* (1976) = TD 2; *Theodramatik II/2: Die Personen Des Spiels Teil II: Die Personen in Christus* (1978) = TD 3; *Theodramatik III: Die Handlung* (1980) = TD 4; *Theodramatik IV: Das Endspiel* (1983) = TD 5.

⁶ The other two parts of the trilogy, *Herrlichkeit*, translated as *The Glory of the Lord*, 7 vols., (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982-1989) and *Theologik*, translated as *Theo-Logic*, 3 vols., (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000-2005) also appear throughout this project. Hereafter references follow convention and appear in notes as GL or TL, respectively, followed by volume number in Arabic numerals. For example, GL 1 = *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, Vol. 1, *Seeing the Form*, Joseph Fessio, S.J. and John Riches, eds. (1982) and TL 1 = *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory*, Vol. 1, *The Truth of the World*, Adrian J. Walker, trans., (2000). I refer to *Herrlichkeit* with its one-word German title throughout the dissertation in order to emphasize the importance of its aesthetic method and connection to the other parts' singular monikers.

including his Christological and Trinitarian take on the traditional “systematic” loci. *Theo-Drama* presents a flashpoint for engagement with von Balthasar, whose overwhelming literary productivity presents an amount of pages, innovative theological genre, and international popularity (at times an international infamy) that can make von Balthasar’s work inscrutable. Cornelia Capoll’s exhaustive bibliography stretches 207 pages including entries for more than one-hundred monographs, 110 translations, and 537 articles.⁷

My aim is to clarify and develop von Balthasar’s engagement with theatre and performance in his theological dramatic theory. Von Balthasar contends that *Theo-Drama* is a convergence of trends in modern theology, so I historicize *Theo-Drama* amidst other twentieth-century theological concerns. I take seriously von Balthasar’s claim about the theodramatic approach as a methodology for Christian theology. Therefore, I locate *Theo-Drama* in relationship to Roman Catholic and non-Catholic theologians as well as the study of theatre and performance in non-sectarian religious studies and religion, literature, and culture. In order to focus on von Balthasar’s dramatic theory, I frame the production of *Theo-Drama* according to theatrical praxis and in dialogue with plays, playwrights, and performance histories. *Theo-Drama* expresses the correlation between drama and credibility in Christian thought and seeks to put von Balthasar’s interpretation of God in production alongside his love of “secular” art and his reliance on the mystical experiences of Adrienne von Speyr. This project develops von Balthasar’s dramatic theory in new directions and provides tools to critique his theological conclusions within the frame of *Theo-Drama*’s script. The first volume opens with the proclamation that *Theo-Drama* takes interest in “the whole theatre complex [*der ganze Theater Komplex*]: that there is something that is structured as a process (as a performance) and finally: what is being played” and everything (*Das Ganze*) about drama can be made transparent and useful for

⁷ Cornelia Capol and Claudia Müller, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: Bibliographie, 1925-2005*. (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag Einsiedeln, 2005).

theology.⁸ Ultimately, I aim to demonstrate how the interpretive work of theatre and performance provides a method for Christian theology that teaches interested parties to learn from a specific religious worldview without necessarily needing to adopt it for oneself.

§ Getting to Know You: Ratzinger's Eulogy

Hans Urs von Balthasar's life spans the transfiguration of Roman Catholicism in the twentieth century. As the central subject for this study, von Balthasar's life and writing embody many of the modern transitions, continuities, and developments that ground the turn to dramatic themes and theatrical methods in twentieth-century Christian thought. His contribution to the study of literature, music, and the arts as products of human cultures show him to be an important figure for religious studies more broadly. Drama provides an arena where philosophical theologians might speculate about the world's meaning and theorists of culture might make sense of meaningful social performances. A grand theorist of convergence and symphony, von Balthasar models the complexities of a modern approach to Christian thought crisscrossing genres, critically retrieving unexpected resources, and performing its interpretations for a public audience.⁹

Born in 1905 to a patrician family prominent in the breathtaking lake and mountain canton of Lucerne, Switzerland, von Balthasar completed a doctorate in *Germanistik* and never held a university post as a scholarly theologian. He once remarked, in an interview from 1976, that "You address me as a theologian or a theological writer, but I never got my doctorate in theology; by nature and upbringing, I am a Germanist."¹⁰ His interdisciplinary sensibility produced numerous

⁸ This is my translation. "Was hier interessiert, ist der ganze Theater Komplex: dass es so etwas gibt, wie es als Vorgang (als Aufführung) strukturiert ist, und schließlich: was gespielt wird. Das Ganze soll auf Theologie hin transparent, alle seine Elemente auf sie hin brauchbar gemacht werden" (*Theodramatik* I, 9).

⁹ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Convergences: To the Source of the Christian Mystery* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983), and *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987).

¹⁰ "Geist und Feuer: Ein Gespräch mit Hans urs Von Balthasar," *Herder Korrespondenz* 30 (1976): 75-76. Cited in Edward T. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption: The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, (New York: Continuum, 1994), 73. Cited in Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 18n3. He did receive numerous honorary doctorates in theology after the publication of the first volume of *Herrlichkeit*. Peter Henrici writes, "The first volume of his theological *summa* (and also, I supposed, bad conscience about his absence from the Council) brought him

translations and a fervent engagement with both the ecclesial and secular culture-makers in addition to the weight of his contribution to theology. Dr. von Balthasar joined the novitiate of the Society of Jesus on November 18, 1929.¹¹ As a Jesuit in formation, he spent time alongside some of the major names in Catholic theology. He spent time with Henri de Lubac, S.J. at the influential Jesuit house of studies in Fourvière (near Lyons in France), and von Balthasar circulated in the orbit of Erich Przywara, S.J. at Pullach (near Munich in Bavaria).¹² After his Jesuit formation and priestly ordination in 1936, von Balthasar chose to serve as university chaplain in Basel rather than take up a post as professor at a new institute for ecumenical theology to be founded at the Gregorian University in Rome.¹³ With either choice, von Balthasar would always work between worlds. In Basel, von Balthasar would write, befriend Karl Barth, write, serve as confessor and publisher to the convert and mystic Adrienne von Speyr, write, found his own secular institute—the Community of St. John—as well as the aforementioned publishing house, and write. Though von Balthasar’s thought displayed the spirit of renewal that led to the Second Vatican Council, he was not invited to attend. The presence of his ideas, however, influenced the shape of Roman Catholic theology in its post-conciliar wake. He served for decades on the pope’s International Theological Commission, entered into heated arguments with Karl Rahner, S.J., and contributed to the founding of the

many kinds of honors on his sixtieth birthday: the Golden cross of Mount Athos, and honorary degrees from the universities of Edinburgh, Münster, and, after a suitable delay, Fribourg” (Henrici, “A Sketch of von Balthasar’s Life,” in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, D.L. Schindler, ed., [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991], 27).

¹¹ Cf. Henrici, “Sketch,” 10-12. His doctoral dissertation, *Geschichte des eschatologischen Problems in der modernen deutschen Literatur* (*History of the Eschatological Problem in Modern German Literature*), was received *magna cum laude* in Zurich (after additional work in Vienna and Berlin) on 27 October 1928. Henrici dates von Balthasar’s dissertation, perhaps, to a publication in 1929, but the biographical timeline available from the Hans Urs von Balthasar Foundation clearly denotes 1928 for his “Promotion in Germanistik.” See the online *Lebensdaten* / Biographical Sketch, in both English and German, freely available at <http://www.balthasar-stiftung.org>.

¹² Henrici, “Sketch,” 12-13. Henrici emphasizes that von Balthasar never worked under de Lubac or Przywara as a student. These older mentors were friends and conversation partners, not unlike von Balthasar’s relationship with Karl Barth in Basel. In my last chapter, I frame these relationships, along with Adrienne von Speyr, as “directing” von Balthasar’s thought.

¹³ Henrici, “Sketch,” 14. Henrici emphasizes that the plan for this center of ecumenical theology never came to fruition. Further, Henrici writes “Von Balthasar chose Basel—certainly not out of patriotism, but because pastoral work was closer to his heart than lecturing.”

international theological journal *Communio*. His global significance stretched beyond the Catholic world. He has been influential for Protestant theology, held a seat in the French *Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques*, and served as a theological inspiration for the *Heavenly Bodies* exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2018.¹⁴ He was, according to a popular legend, among Pope John Paul II's favorite theologians. He was to be elevated to the rank of a cardinal of the Roman Curia, but von Balthasar died on "June 26, 1988, just two days before his elevation."¹⁵ Joseph Ratzinger gave the homily at von Balthasar's funeral. The future Pope Benedict XVI emphasized not only von Balthasar's religious ideas but his engagement with European culture: "Henri de Lubac has called von Balthasar possibly the most cultured person of our time. Actually, the arc of his works spans from the predecessors of Socrates to Freud, Nietzsche, and Bertolt Brecht; it embraces the entire Western heritage of philosophy, literature, art, and theology."¹⁶ He was interred in the von Balthasar family tomb at the Hofkirche in Lucerne; the memorial reads "Hans Urs, Kardinal."

My project follows from two significant references in Ratzinger's funeral homily: the name of Bertolt Brecht in the quotation above and Ratzinger's interpretation of von Balthasar's promised

¹⁴ Andrew Bolton, *et al.*, *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination*, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018).

¹⁵ Henrici, "Sketch," 41.

¹⁶ Ratzinger, "Homily at the Funeral Liturgy of Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, 291. Note how Ratzinger significantly lists the pre-Socratics and three major representatives of (anti-theistic) materialism as central to von Balthasar's writing. The allusion to de Lubac references the following passage from the essay, "A Witness of Christ in the Church: Hans Urs von Balthasar": "This man is perhaps the most cultivated of his time. If there is a Christian culture, there it is! Classical antiquity, the great European literatures, the metaphysical tradition, the history of religions, the diverse exploratory adventures of contemporary man and, above all, the sacred sciences, St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, patrology (all of it)—not to speak just now of the Bible—none of them that is not welcomed and made vital by his great mind. Writers and poets, mystics and philosophers, old and new, Christians of all persuasions—all are called on to make their particular contribution. All these are necessary for his final accomplishment, to a greater Glory of God, the Catholic symphony" (de Lubac, "Witness of Christ in the Church," 273). I have commented elsewhere on von Balthasar's relationship to the Eurocentrism of Catholic theologies of culture and theological aesthetics on full display here when de Lubac nearly conflates "Christian culture" and "European culture." Such a discussion of von Balthasar's reception history is of great interest to me—especially the importance of Balthasarian theological aesthetics to contemporary U.S. Latino/a theology—but lies outside the scope of this project. Cf. Alejandro García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful: A Theological Aesthetics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999); Roberto S. Goizueta, *Christ Our Companion: Toward a Theological Aesthetics of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009); Cecilia González-Andrieu, *Bridge to Wonder: Art as a Gospel of Beauty* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012); Christopher D. Tirres, *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith: A Dialogue Between Liberationist and Pragmatic Thought* (New York: Oxford, 2014).

red hat as an expression of “distinction, and of honor, [that] remains valid: no longer only private individuals but the Church itself, in its official capacity, tells us that [von Balthasar] is right in what he teaches of the Faith, that he points the way to the sources of living water—a witness to the word which teaches us Christ and which teaches us how to live.”¹⁷ Ratzinger identifies von Balthasar as a figure for a public audience. My short summary of von Balthasar’s life left out some of its greatest drama. His close spiritual friendship with Adrienne von Speyr and his work to found the Community of St. John ultimately led to his departure from the Jesuits in 1950. Peter Henrici writes, “By leaving his religious order, von Balthasar himself was again ‘in the world.’ His life was more the secular one of the ordinary Christian than of a diocesan priest.”¹⁸ There is something public and modern about von Balthasar’s life, work, and theological sensibility tinged with a religious sense of the word “secular”: worldliness.¹⁹ At the same time, von Balthasar is a point of contact for those interested in ecumenical conversations between Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christian thinkers. So too is he a frequent touchpoint for scholars of religion and the arts, literature, and theatre. The public audience constructed by von Balthasar’s work confounds assumptions that positive engagement with religious differences implies theological dilution.²⁰ If theology provides an interpretation of God, then theological resources can be found in every corner of the world and every instance of human cultural production, even, perhaps especially, secular ones. The confluence

¹⁷ Ratzinger, “Homily at the Funeral Liturgy of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” 295. The “red hat” refers to the wide-brimmed and tasseled scarlet *galero* that was once worn only by cardinals as a privileged sign of their authority. The *galero* is still depicted in ecclesiastical heraldry and can still be found according to a tradition that hangs the *galero* over a deceased cardinal’s tomb. Nowadays, in lieu of the *galero*, newly elevated cardinals receive different red hats: a scarlet cornered-hat with a tuft called a biretta and a scarlet skullcap called a *zucchetto*.

¹⁸ Henrici, “Sketch,” 25.

¹⁹ Naming the secular as worldliness avoids the common-sense definition where “secular” describes some arena devoid of or opposed to performances of religious ideology or religious expression (as in “the secular sphere”). See, among many others, John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (Cambridge: Belknap, 1999). Secular in this sense retains its Latin connotations. *Saeculum* indicates notions of generation, age, epoch, and worldliness. In Christian theological language, *saeculum* refers to the created, changing, and perishable world experienced by creatures.

²⁰ Ratzinger clarifies how von Balthasar “thought little of a pluralism which in reality resembles the disintegration of decomposed matter. He knew that only a pluralism which is living and manifold in the unity of the one who is alive will bear any weight” (Ratzinger, “Homily at the Funeral Liturgy of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” 293).

of public pluralism, modernity, and religion, commend the development of a theological dramatic theory that von Balthasar so substantially provides.

Von Balthasar's literary interests and production, too, served a wider audience. Another expression of his training and nature as a Germanist, his translations were as often the works of poets, theorists, and playwrights as they were the works of theologians. His dramaturgical translations once even took the stage. Henrici's biographical sketch explains that "In 194[4], the Zurich Playhouse—[...] probably the best German-speaking theatre in the world—staged the premiere of his translation of [Paul Claudel's] *The Satin Slipper*. Von Balthasar himself collaborated in the production in an advisory capacity. Other plays by Claudel followed."²¹ While von Balthasar's *The Satin Slipper* seems to be his only translation to make its way to a full production, the location of

²¹ "Finally, in 1951, there was the first performance of Bernanos' *Carmelites*, also in his version" (Henrici, "Sketch of von Balthasar's Life," 15). I include the quotation, despite some historical problems, out of deference to the standard in Balthasarian scholarship to treat Henrici's very beautiful sketch as a trustworthy *vita*. The nuances of performance history are difficult to track (particularly without the aid of internet resources), and especially if a theologian's early days of theatre-making appear as "trivia" (a product, I contend, of Christian performance anxiety). Henrici claims that *Schauspielhaus Zürich* staged von Balthasar's version of Claudel's *The Satin Slipper* in 1943. Records from *Schauspielhaus Zürich*, instead, show the production premiering on 6 October 1944 under the direction of Kurt Horwitz. Von Balthasar's essay on the production, as well as an advertisement for this "*neuen, verbesserten deutschen Fassung von Hans Urs von Balthasar*" ("new, improved German version by Hans Urs von Balthasar") also appeared in 1944; see *Schauspielhaus Zürich* 1943-44, *Zürcher Theaterwochen* 1944, 1-5. Henrici alludes to another Claudel play with direction from Kurt Horwitz, *Der Bürge* (*The Hostage*) that opened on 11 January 1945. It does not appear, as Henrici implies, that von Balthasar also did this translation because *Der Bürge* does not appear in the exhaustive *Bibliographie*. Furthermore, 1945 production was not a German language premiere at *Schauspielhaus Zürich*, but the production did receive commentary from von Balthasar in January 1945. See *Schauspielhaus Zürich* 1944-1945, 1-8, in *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten* 41, Nr. 9, Teil 1: 11. Januar; Nr. 10, Teil 2: 12. Januar; Nr. 11, Schluß: 13. Januar. I found both of von Balthasar's writings on Claudel at *Schauspielhaus Zürich* thanks to the Balthasar Archiv in Basel; they are listed in Cornelia Capol's *Bibliographie* as B34 and B38, respectively. Conversation at the Archiv suggested that von Balthasar's *Satin Slipper* remained a standard German translation for performance in Switzerland for many years. The *Schauspielhaus Zürich* history does indicate a world-premiere production of *Die begnadete Angst* (*The Blessed Fear*, the German language title for Georges Bernanos' adaption of the *Carmelites*) directed by the then artistic director of *Schauspielhaus Zürich*, Oskar Walterlin, on June 14 1951. If this is von Balthasar's version, as Henrici claims, he never published it separately through the Johannes Verlag. This would be out of character. This minor confusion makes sense. A book on Bernanos—*Das sanfte Eberman: Briefe des Dichters* (*The Sweet Compassion: Letters of the Poet*)—was indeed published by Johannes Verlag in 1951. The theatrical premier in Zurich, however, was not a translation by von Balthasar; instead, they used the *Die begnadete Angst* translation by Eckhart Peterich (Köln: Hegner, 1951). I found testament to the use of the translation by Eckhart Peterich in a 1952 article by Walter Tappolet titled "Begnadete Angst" in the theological periodical *Evangelische Jahresbriefe*, pp. 30-34. Tappolet praises the "very adequate translation by Eckhart Peterich" and the "unusual meaning" of so Catholic a play in Zwingli's town ("*sehr adäquaten Übersetzung von Eckhart Peterich in der Zwinglistadt herauskam, ist doch wohl von ungewöhnlicher Bedeutung*"). The text of that article is hosted on the legacy publication *Quatember*'s website; it is freely available at <http://www.quatember.de/J1952/q52030.htm>.

von Balthasar's theatrical endeavors provides a fitting intersection with his dramatic theory. During the time of Brecht's exile from Germany, the *Schauspielhaus Zürich* also featured many the Weimar master's premieres.²² Brecht even wrote his major theoretical essay, "Short Organon for the Theatre" while in residence in Zurich.²³ There does not seem to be evidence that von Balthasar ever met Brecht. But evidence abounds, not the least of which is the homiletic observation of Ratzinger, that Brechtian theatre-making influenced von Balthasar and his understanding of the theatrical world. Brecht's epic theatre will feature prominently in this project as a hermeneutic key to unlock von Balthasar's "epic" theology.²⁴

§ Credibility and Drama

My goal is not only to explicate theological dramatic theory on multidisciplinary terms but also to prepare the way for further application of theodramatic hermeneutics as methodology. Theodramatic hermeneutics try to interpret religious questions on analogy to the interpretive practices of theatre and performance. My dissertation engages a number of unanswered questions regarding *Theo-Drama* as a project of interest both to students of Christian thought and to students of religion and theatre. How does a *Theo-Drama* work? What constitutes theatre, drama, and performance in the Christian theological imaginary? What sorts of interpretive nuances emerge and what concerns recede when theological method organizes itself according to the practices of the

²² These premieres include Brecht's *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (*Mother Courage and Her Children*) directed by Leopold Lindtberg on 19 April 1941; *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (*The Good Person of Sezechwan*) directed by Leonard Steckel on 4 February 1943; *Galileo Galilei* directed by Leonard Steckel on 9 September 1943; and *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti* (*Mr. Puntila and His Man Matti*) directed, according to the *Schauspielhaus Zürich* history, by Kurt Hirschfeld on 5 June 1948. David Barnett, by contrast, claims that in 1948 Brecht directed both "his adaptation of *Antigone* in Chur on 14 February 1948 and his own *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti* (*Mr. Puntila and His Man Matti*) in Zurich later that year on 5 June" (David Barnett, *A History of the Berliner Ensemble*, [New York: Cambridge, 2015], 39). Barnett goes on to explain, with reference to an eyewitness, that "While Hirschfeld was credited as director, Brecht was in fact the creative force behind the production, as attested to by Erwin Leiser, who sat in on rehearsals" (Barnett, *A History of the Berliner Ensemble*, 40). The note for this sentence explains that Brecht was denied credit for directing "because he did not possess a Swiss work permit—see Werner Hect, *Brecht Chronik*, p. 823" (Barnett, *A History of the Berliner Ensemble*, 40n6).

²³ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, John Willet, ed., (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992).

²⁴ Von Balthasar would object to the claim that his theology is epic. For a discussion of von Balthasar's epic theology as it relates to a theology of history, see Ben Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2005). My point, here, is to argue that theological dramatic theory could be even *more epic* but in the sense Brecht's epic theatre.

worldly theatre? How does dramatic literature and theatrical praxis influence religious questions? How do *a priori* religious and ethical commitments shape a theory of drama? How might embodied performance interweave theological genres and practical concerns? In other words, what characterizes theological dramatic theory according to von Balthasar? As such this project places unprecedented emphasis on *Theo-Drama*'s first volume as a guide for interpretation: von Balthasar's idiosyncratic survey of plays, dramatists, theatrical theorists, and performance histories prepares the way for the four well-trod volumes of genre-defying systematic and philosophical theology. Drama foregrounds credibility as a dilemma for modern and critical Christian thought. What interpretations are worth taking seriously? In order to comprehend the interpretive work of theatre and performance as it regards credibility *or* Christian thought, one needs to take seriously von Balthasar's self-proclaimed "nature and upbringing" as a scholar of a particular culture. Indeed, von Balthasar will be shown to be at his best when his professionalization as an interdisciplinary thinker (that is, specialization in German studies) can subvert the expectations of scholarly theology and theological metaphysics. I focus on *Theo-Drama* and von Balthasar's theological dramatic theory precisely because of its potential as a model for studying theology in public: that is, doing the work of interpreting God's self-revelation toward new knowledge and meaning with recourse to accessible, "secular," and artistic resources and practices.

I argue that drama discloses how credibility operates in public. Drama helps to frame credibility as the movement between the perception of a potential truth (as a given fact) and the assent to its possible truthfulness. Drama and credibility work together when performance doubles identities without contradiction in communal events between given circumstances and creative possibility. I argue that credibility names what happens within the distance between an audience and actors in the cooperative process of suspended disbelief. Credibility describes the conditions—hermeneutic, existential, structural, material—by which putative facts enter the public record for

dialogue, evaluation, debate, disagreement, and judgment. To be credible in the theatre means to be worthy of belief *for now*. Theatrical interpretation not only foregrounds the performative ontology of any theological discussion, especially those across lines of confessional disagreement, but also emphasizes the public quality of theological debate housed in a religiously pluralistic context.²⁵ Drama's end in theatrical performance binds any abstract notion of credibility to its concrete practices. A correlation between drama and credibility frames the gap between perception of potential truth and assent to its possible truthfulness crossing hermeneutical boundaries between discourse and action, textuality and temporality, ethics and aesthetics, imagination and facticity. Drama, *pave* Brecht, opens a space of judgment and social transformation in its, *pave* von Balthasar, illumination of ordinary and embodied human existence as a resource for theology.

The correlation between drama and credibility functions in and through theatrical hermeneutics. Drama does interpretive work. The choices of actors, the guidance of directors, the built environments of scenic designers, the sensory composition of lighting and sound, the technical labors of stage hands, and the showbusiness acumen of producers and box office staff all work together to interpret a play. Drama takes given circumstances (a playwright's words or an improvisatory suggestion) and interprets them by playing them. Here, drama joins other performing arts by ascribing its phenomenality to the event played. An orchestral score of a song *differs* from the

²⁵ I deploy the overwrought phrase "performative ontology" for theological discussion in order to emphasize the socially constructed, historically contingent, and fleeting nature of scholarly debate. Theological discourse is because it happens; no theological discourse operates in vacuum apart from the subjects who discuss theology. Widespread Christian performance anxiety—a topic addressed at length in this dissertation—wrongfully assumes that a "performance" implies distance from reality. Drama highlights the material and social circumstances of any scholarly knowledge production; the play must be played by players. Consider the matter at hand. This dissertation is submitted as the capstone of a program in Theology, Ethics, and Culture at a public U.S. university in a department filled with students and faculty of various religious, theological, areligious, and atheological persuasions. This project adopts some of this configuration's habits for the sometimes tense but always illuminating conversation between the descriptive interpretation of religious phenomena according to non-religious methods and the constructive interpretation of religious phenomena according to religious methods. Paul Dafydd Jones describes this relationship as "a cheerful unease" characterizing "a scholarly disposition in which individual and communal commitments and norms pertaining to God, salvation, the human, and such, are put in conversation with, and perhaps challenged by, very different sets of commitments and norms" (Elizabeth Shanks Alexander and Beth A. Berkowitz, eds. *Religious Studies and Rabbinics: A Conversation*. [New York: Routledge, 2018], 70).

musical performance of that song in consequential ways. The score is a map for notes to play, the performance is a sonic experience.²⁶ Performing arts exist, therefore, in the temporal, spatial, and creative event of play. This play—by actors or musicians—is always already an interpretive action. Theatrical and performance choices give drama its life and add surplus meanings. Drama’s interpretive work directly presents an audience with another world. That confrontation with a poetic reality shines a spotlight on the ordinary dramatic choices of everyday life. Just as theatre-makers do interpretive work to bring drama to the stage, so too does drama do interpretive work about the ideological, political, social, and economic realities of the present. Drama’s mirror discloses values, assumptions, designs, decisions, quotidian roles, and life-defining narratives. Drama, for von Balthasar, is an “illumination of existence” where “Theatre intends to be an interpretation of the world, in its ‘unreality’ shining a ray of light into the confusion of reality.”²⁷ The descriptive and constructive concerns of this dissertation come together precisely in order to show von Balthasar’s contribution to the interpretive work of theatre and performance in twentieth-century Christian thought. Interpretive work refers as much to the translation of a “private” discourse to a “public” conversation (akin to the translation of a theatre company’s interpretation of a play from a private rehearsal of the “script” to a public performance for an audience) as it does to creative and constructive claims about God, transcendence, and ultimacy.

I aim to make sense of von Balthasar’s contribution to theological, religious studies, and theatre and performance studies audiences. Theological dramatic theory situates religious ideas a putative fact and invites an interpreting audience to play along *as if* those given circumstances are really the case. Unlike other options for weighing religious disagreement, von Balthasar’s

²⁶ For a discussion about the difference between religions as experienced by practitioners and religions as constructed by religious studies scholarship see the work of Jonathan Z. Smith, especially *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

²⁷ TD 1, 10.

theodramatic approach refuses any external standpoint for theological evaluation.²⁸ With unmatched boldness (for some, with an oppressive brazenness), von Balthasar demands the imaginative engagement of his reader in order for theology to be meaningful. Just as theatre falls apart when its audience refuses to play along with its doubles, so too can theology only do its interpretive work when offered the methodological freedom to inquire about a world potentially brimming with religious meanings. For von Balthasar, Christian theology interprets a world, in Hopkins' phrase, already "charged with the grandeur of God."²⁹ Credibility names the worthwhileness for doing the work to make some sense of an unprovable mystery and the openness to possibility. I argue that credible theology requires the same imaginative engagement required to make theatre: a co-creative suspension of disbelief.³⁰

²⁸ TD 2, "No External Standpoint," 54ff. The phrase refers as much to theology's self-determination without need to explain itself in terms of another discipline as it does von Balthasar's inclusion of all phenomena (e.g., worldly culture, scripture, church teaching) within the "drama of salvation history." The lack of an external standpoint is supposed to keep theology in dramatic tensions between lyric-personal spirituality and epic-cosmic narration (TD 2, 55). Quash argues that von Balthasar winds up narrating theology in its epic mode, especially in his "undramatic" theology of the Christ's descent into hell (Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History*, 194-195).

²⁹ Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur." Von Balthasar comments on Hopkins in GL 1 353-399 with this line from "God's Grandeur" quoted, in the context of interpreting Hopkins' "sacramental poetry," on p. 395.

³⁰ The phrase "willing suspension of disbelief" appears first, and most significantly, in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1817), ch. 14, freely available online at <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/biographia.html>. The phrase occurs appears in the context of a plan to write poetry with William Wordsworth, the "Lyrical Ballads." Coleridge describes his intended goal, one expressed in the "Ancient Mariner," to be a focus on the "persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith" (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* [1817], ch. 14). For a thorough discussion of the appropriation, development, and literary critical significance of this favorite phrase, see Michael Tomko, *Beyond the Willing Suspension of Disbelief: Poetic Faith from Coleridge to Tolkien*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016). While I will develop my own discussion of suspended disbelief later in this project (framing it in Brechtian terms as the critical capacity to recognize multiple interpretations of reality), it is important to acknowledge the debt of this phrase owed to Coleridge. As it functions in drama, the willing suspension of disbelief names the attitude of positive regard for receiving theatrical illusions. The willing suspension of disbelief powers the experience of a "waking dream" in theatre. Consider the theatrical explanation of suspended disbelief with "dramatic illusion" that Tomko finds in early Coleridge commentator Earl Leslie Griggs (*Beyond the Willing Suspension of Disbelief*, 4). Shakespeare's *The Tempest* provides Coleridge language to theorize the non-judgmental engagement with the presentation of a dream-theatrical-reality that is "poetic faith." Tomko glosses Coleridge: "In a dream, the relinquishing of the 'comparative power' yields what seems a passive reception of the sundry images that present themselves to the mind. Gone is the striving to determine whether these sensations correspond to external reality. Instead, they are accepted as if they were representative of reality without, crucially, the concession that they are" (Tomko, *Beyond the Willing Suspension of Disbelief*, 8). Tomko notes the political dangers—the essential salesmanship and sophistry—inherent in suspending disbelief into of uncritical trust. Tomko argues that Coleridge also gives resources to talk about the "willing resumption of disbelief" and that Coleridge's poetic faith provides "a model for continued rational query and challenge even as a full investment in the aesthetic illusion is made" because "Coleridge's theology suggests that a

This project hopes to halt the balkanization of Balthasarians into easy stereotypes.

Theodramatic hermeneutics unwittingly provides scholars of Christian thought tools to make sense of von Balthasar's confident interpretive choices without resorting to binaries of adoption and rejection. Drama alone is credible, and one can learn from von Balthasar's method without needing to reiterate his systematic theological conclusions. I will show that von Balthasar's dramatic theory both can take us further than he himself imagines and can, on its own terms, restage some of *Theo-Drama's* most controversial theological opinions.

It is paramount at the outset to make clear a dictum that guides this project's engagement with theodramatic hermeneutics and the question of credibility. *All that is true must first be found credible, but not all that is deemed credible turns out to be true.* Drama presents an interpretation of reality, but some "truth" distinguishes the fragmentary and poetic world explored on stage from the expansive and everchanging world on the street outside the theater.³¹ As with Jaques' great speech

continuing pursuit of truth, therefore, must also accompany both poetic and religious faith" (Tomko, *Beyond the Willing Suspension of Disbelief*, 113, 120). The conclusion to Tomko's monograph anticipates the correlation between drama and credibility that emerges when the "the willing suspension of disbelief" explains the procedure by which dramatic illusion "elevates into structure" mundane performances of human existence. That is, "poetic faith" reaches for theatrical language and performative praxis in order to be credible and not the marker of propaganda's greatest triumph: passive indoctrination. For Tomko, a response emerges in collaboration between disciplines, including and especially theology, and formative and contingent pedagogy. This alliance comes to mirror the (practical and hermeneutical) cooperation between theology and drama. Tomko writes, "theology should not be relegated but rather summoned alongside psychology, natural science, and moral philosophy to guide, unfold, control, and sometimes cancel our worship [of Mammon]. [...] For, on the one hand, 'poetic faith' suggests that interpretive acts, be they critical or pedagogical, should be dramaturgical. If entering into an aesthetic work requires contextual knowledge, formal awareness, and judgment of character, the critic or teacher can offer preparatory guidance on what makes a text or a play or a statue work. This approach allows each interpretation to be performative, while allows debate about what constitutes the best understanding of what should shape and define that performance. Such animating instruction can shift the human horizon of expectations beyond the 'slavish economizing' of Bag End. On the other hand, there is not a particular literary methodology or approach, even one as continually attractive as the 'willing suspension of disbelief,' that would remove the difficulty of distinguishing the powers and perils of art. [...] Such literary and multidisciplinary training is needed for an intelligent, responsive, and responsible citizen, who must tread a hard road, tacking between receptive wonder and incisive critique in a time when illusions are not leaving and human goods are not lost." (Tomko, *Beyond the Willing Suspension of Disbelief*, 149-150).

³¹ The question of truth remains open for a theory of credibility, and so my project "stops" before crossing over into an analysis of the truth as such. For a discussion of the importance of drama to von Balthasar's metaphysics, see D.C. Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth: a Philosophical Investigation*, (New York: Fordham, 2004). My project remains at the level of pluralistic cultures debating meanings in concrete practice rather than an analysis of truth as such. Where Schindler shows von Balthasar's cross-disciplinary engagement with philosophers by means his appeal to dramatic resources, I aim to show von Balthasar's cross-disciplinary engagement with the arts and culture. Mine is another approach where "The *place* of truth, conceived dramatically, is the realm of concrete action, the stage on

about the world-stage in *As You Like It*, to say that “one man in his time plays many parts” does not imply split-personality disorder, Eli Whitney’s interchangeability, or the gig economy’s cycle of jobs. Truth unifies across the abysses and fractions of history and the incommensurable differences of finite lives. An account of “truth” organizes life. Yet to speak an absolute truth would mean to speak transcendently and ultimately. To speak that kind of ultimate truth requires an excessive language with words that can hold infinite sense beyond their mere definition. Such a finality of language eludes the capacity of real human communication. I contend that “truth”—no matter what it may be—is better glimpsed and interpretatively reported through a matrix of events, ideas, arguments, actions, questions, stories, and meaningful living. Such truths can be experienced and shared. Debates about what is true must begin by determining what interpretations of truth’s manifestations are credible and worthy of belief *for now* and what interpretations are not credible and not worth engaging. The unspeakability of an absolute truth, however, does not deny truth’s possibility, reality, or non-reality. In order to treat credibility and clarify the process by which good interpretations of truth are contested, the ontological status of ultimate truth can be bracketed. At no point will this project endorse or sanction crude religious relativism (“All religions are equally true as a matter of personal opinion”) or the negative aestheticization of theological interpretation (“All religious phenomena ornament and/or distort an otherwise more critical and accurate disclosure of reality”).³² Drama, like scholarly theological discussion, depends upon and expresses the critical space between publicly accessible perceptions of the world, credible interpretations, and decisions regarding commitments to truth. A theory of credibility helps ensure a key difference between Christian

which ideas are unfolded in space and time” (Schindler, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*, 423, emphasis original). Schindler’s “philosophical investigation” into von Balthasar’s dramatic structures discloses the nature of truth that gets to the “heart” of things whereas my investigation into the interpretive work of theatre and performance discloses the dramatic structure of credibility for a public and pluralist audience.

³² Articulated more positively, my argument endorses credibility in methodological pluralisms and resists the assumption that aesthetics and cultural productions are *accidental* to matters of truth.

apologetics and Christian theology. The former—apologetics—aims to convert an interlocutor to a supposedly superior interpretation of reality based on evidence and argument. The latter— theology—aims to construct an organizing discourse regarding divinity using evidence and argument. Apologetics seeks a paradigm shift in another person and their changed epistemology (perhaps even some salvific change); theology, especially scholarly theology, seeks new and clarified knowledge.³³ Credibility establishes what is and is not admissible for debate, and it is only by adjudicating *between* credible interpretations that one might discern what is more from less true. As a work of theological method, this project takes for granted the reality of truths and falsities, facts and fictions.³⁴ In order to forward the work of religious studies in the twenty-first century, one requires an approach that takes seriously the drama of modernity's religious and philosophical disagreements and modernity's praise for plurality and mutual awareness. Anything less than an endorsement of the reality of global religious and cultural differences merely reifies nostalgia for an imagined homogenous history or displays the desire for an exclusivist religious public (in other words, a bad kind of theocracy).³⁵ Credibility does not disclose whether or not a discrete interpretation of an idea

³³ This is the difference between Socrates' Apology to the "men of Athens" during his trial and Socrates' speech about love in the Symposium. Cf. *Plato: Complete Works*. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson, eds. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

³⁴ Confidence in the reality of the world presents both the possibility of relationships and communication and the existential terror of the impossibility to confirm, with any absolute certainty, *cogito ergo sum*. Richard J. Bernstein calls the situation an experience of "cartesian anxiety" in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983). Epistemological realism provides enough traction to think and communicate reasonably, but it also treats reality as an ultimately unprovable assumption if one relies on reason's own merits. I follow phenomenology after Husserl to bracket the question of existence. Instead, I take the manifestation of phenomena to consciousness as given. Discourse can debate the difference between credible and non-credible appearances and interpretations of given facts so long as one is willing to assume real knowledge about the existence of the world. My argument will be about interpretations of real experience; these interpretations can be normed as credible or non-credible by standards of goodness. The question for credibility is not whether an apparition is true but whether one's active interpretation of it is a good one (an interpretation that works to create and disclose meaning judged against the horizon of goodness) and whether it is a good action to take (an interpretation that does not harm with a distorted meaning). Drama helps because its judgments about credibility rely on a the play's set of given "facts" already presented to be known: "attention must be paid" to the appearances on stage because we can see a body.

³⁵ Any project utilizing Christian sources must contend with this religious tradition's historical privilege as a court religion in Europe and its colonial diaspora and Christianity's tendency to endorse theocratic regimes. As odd as a dissertation on a Roman Catholic theological realist might be for a degree from a university founded by Thomas Jefferson, it remains my conviction that the Jeffersonian configuration of democratic religious freedom and its

or phenomenon is true, but credibility can help to determine whether pursuing a particular line of entrance into mystery is worthwhile, even for the time being.³⁶

But choosing where and how to enter a mystery means something for how that mystery will be understood. There are as many places to begin a play as there are possible places to stop, but on stage, the interpretive choice of first and last moments are as essential as they are arbitrary. The curtain opens or the lights go up onto a whole world that has not yet unfolded itself to tell a story again for the first time. Even the “ideal” theatre of improvisation begins with suggestions already given.³⁷ The difficulty in writing about drama perhaps consists in the performative thin-place of an event of encounter that can only be embodied. The moment when a play begins is not its first words but its first moment in time: a melody, a crash, a scream, a silence. Just as the play (or an epic journey into God) begins always in the middle of the living of its players, so too does drama happen

expression at the University of Virginia permits both the valorization of manifold religious performances in public and theological study’s contribution to the common good for a culturally and religiously pluralist public.

³⁶ I use the word mystery to imply the unprovability of much religious phenomena according to empirical methods. Mystery, further, indicates the infinite depth of religious questions regarding God’s revelation and spiritual significance or lack thereof. Should God be confined to a finite answer, God has been *de facto* delimited and ceases, philosophically speaking, to be the symbol of that which remains unbounded by the finitude proper to creatures. God is the ground of being, in Paul Tillich’s phrase. Even if one does not subscribe to the veracity of Anselm of Canterbury’s ontological argument, his description for the symbol of God provides a helpful starting point for any Christian philosophical theological discourse: God needs to be the symbol of that greater than which nothing can be conceived.

³⁷ So even extemporaneous improvisatory theatre relies on a set of preexisting relationships, rules, games, loose scripts, stock roles, costumes, props, and tropes. The claim of theatre’s ideal-type in extemporaneous improvisation emerges in von Balthasar’s variation on the *theatrum mundi* theme in the key of Schellingian German Idealism. “Thus we see a new variation of the ‘theatre of the world’ in the making, namely, the extemporized play” (TD 1, 179). Von Balthasar develops the Idealist notion of extempore as absolute freedom in conversation with a longer passage from F. W. J. Schelling’s 1800 *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* (TD 1, 181-183). Jennifer Newsome Martin argues that, for von Balthasar, “it is Schelling rather than Hegel who represents the culmination of German Idealism” (Martin, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Critical Appropriation of Russian Religious Thought*, [Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2016], 11). The Idealism appears in the context of an improvised “happening” in preparation for von Balthasar’s own normative model for theatre: “We have already mentioned the form of the (partial or complete) improvisation, in which the ‘ideal’ play is acted purely from below, on the basis of the transforming skill of the performers, as a spontaneous generation, a ‘happening.’ As in the commedia dell’arte it presupposes an instinctive mutual understanding among actors, operating as a kind of collective and yet integrated and integrating author within the team. Mostly (and this legitimate) it is one particular actor who takes the lead and functions as the core author. The aspect of direction also arises ‘of itself’ here; its presuppositions are, for instance, the costumes and the role-types they suggest. In turn, these roles interact as a result of the energizing of the players’ esprit de corps. In a ‘happening’ of this kind there is no reason why the boundary between auditorium and stage should not be obliterated; the spectator may join in the action throughout or for part of the time, sharing in the ‘authoring’ and introducing things he would like to see” (TD 1, 262-263).

in medias res.³⁸ What makes theatre and performance distinct from the drama of life, then, is its essential and arbitrary beginnings, middles, and ends.

This project proceeds according to the method for religious studies that it espouses, but a detailed account of that method (abstractly, comparatively, or generally) constitutes a different project. My approach defends the cogency for “confessional theology” as a public practice by means of the correlation between drama and credibility. In other words, this dissertation relies on praxis as a “third term” to evaluate the credibility of theological argumentation. Every chapter happens according to a horizon of praxis because tangible and public performance aligns the correlation between drama and credibility. My correlation is more often stipulated by axiomatic slogans: actions speak louder than words; “Truth is Concrete”; *lex orandi, lex credendi*. As von Balthasar writes in the short book that inspires the title of my dissertation, *Love Alone is Credible*: “God’s Word is unconditionally theo-logical, or, better, theo-pragmatic: what God wishes to say to man is a deed on his behalf, a deed that interprets itself before man and for his sake (and only therefore to him and in him). What we intend to say about this deed in this book is that it is credible only as love—specifically, as God’s own love, the manifestation [*Erscheinung*] of which is the glory of God.”³⁹ The interpretive work of theatre and performance gives a modern, critical, and accessible meaning to the credibility of the Christian claim to the God who is Love revealed in and through Jesus the Christ. In this sense, theodramatic hermeneutics never cease to be properly *theological* hermeneutics:

³⁸ Ben Quash demonstrates this plight perfectly by opening his discussion of drama in von Balthasar with Michel Foucault’s description of a theatrical execution in *Discipline and Punish*. “In his celebrated meditation on a public execution and the crowd which gathers around to see it, Michel Foucault articulates what is the presupposition of every interpretive endeavor: the interpreter finds herself always already ‘in the middle.’ ‘The eternal game,’ Foucault writes, ‘has already begun.’ We are players in its movement. The drama of life and death displayed don and around the scaffold invites us to consider this fact in a particularly concentrated way. It prompts us to ask with a certain urgency how we are to read this ‘eternal game’, for it is not at all a text whose meaning lies flat on the surface. It is with Hans Urs von Balthasar’s remarkable attempt to attend to this problem—a problem raised acutely for us ‘moderns’ by the various inadequacies and gaps in our post-Enlightenment schooling in *how to read*—that this essay will deal” (Quash, “Drama and the Ends of Modernity”, *Balthasar at the End of Modernity*, [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999], 139).

³⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, D.C. Schindler, trans. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 10.

interpretations of God's self-revelation found in the world. For Christian theology (especially done in von Balthasar's style of Christian theological realism) such a givenness of revelation *precedes* theological interpretation. At the same time, this project trusts in the freedom of interpretive possibility. Credibility, understood dramatically, merely lays the groundwork for a trustworthy pluralism. That is, credibility signals the sorts of creative opportunities and juxtapositions that are worth pursuing. Credibility does not substitute for truth or certainty. Credibility sets the stage.

A favorite theodramatic metaphor, the courtroom, might also explain the situation. As a project submitted in partial fulfilment of a degree in the United States, let us presume the conventions of the United States' justice system. Criminal court seeks to enact justice by means of the verdict of a judge or jury. Evidence introduced into a courtroom for consideration must be deemed credible in order to support either side's argument. Are documents, laboratory findings, and witness testimonies worthy of belief? A credible piece of evidence does not necessarily establish the truth of the case. In fact, contradictory pieces of evidence can be introduced. Some credible documents might lead to a different conclusion from other credible documents; one set of credible findings from a laboratory might conflict with the findings from another credible laboratory; one credible witness's testimony can contradict another credible witness's testimony. Credibility leaves room for disagreement between parties by opening space for the complexity of truth. In the context of the study of religion, the question of ultimate truth can be deferred long enough for sustained consideration of any given theological system. This is not to say that a theory of credibility *avoids* the question of truth as a legitimate scholarly question. Rather, credibility establishes the boundaries within which differing accounts of truth might be mutually illuminated, debated, and encountered. Such an approach to religious phenomena—including philosophical theology—places a phenomenological experience of givenness prior to interpretation, the same phenomenological experience of givenness prior to interpretation found in theatrical drama. An audience co-creates the

world of the play with the actors by suspending disbelief: all involved are players. Imaginative co-creation in no way undoes the laudatory creative work of the ensemble, playwright, designers, directors, stage crew, and producers. So too, this project assumes that its audience—by willfully continuing to read—suspends disbelief in the theological worldviews proposed by the project’s subject matter. I call this willful engagement a mode of reading with hospitality. The players welcome an audience of strangers to play along with their play; so too, the audience must trust their hosts. The correlation between drama and credibility, therefore, functions like the phrase: “Just as an audience can debate the world-projection and interpretation of any given play, so too can an audience debate the world-projection and interpretation of any given theology.” I argue that the *interpretive work* of philosophical theology is co-creative on direct analogy to this co-creation of drama. I follow von Balthasar in calling such an approach to the interpretation of God’s self-revelation according to worldly materials “theodramatic hermeneutics.”

My project assumes the public accessibility of its theological content through drama because it is a co-creative endeavor. Put bluntly: the reader remains free to consider Christian theology to be “make believe.” On analogy to the co-creative interpretive work of theatre artists, theological interpretations take given testimonies to God’s self-revelation as loving action and interpret them so to “make believing” credible for contemporary life. One sees the same process at work when theological interpretations take the givenness of Christian stories and creeds and traditions and practices, liturgical scripts and holy scriptures, and interpret them so to play along with Christianity’s religious “make believe.” The scare marks remain to distinguish the two kinds of “make believe”: the sense of child’s imaginative play and the sense of the working/doing of belief symbolized by “faith.” The method at work in this study brackets what might be usually called the “perennial questions of

faith” in order to take seriously drama’s theological correlation to modern problems of credibility.⁴⁰

Inspired by von Balthasar’s own multidisciplinary, each chapter works in the company of theatrical disciplines and public dramatic texts. Theatre must happen in public and be attentive to the meaning of its material conditions and social contexts without coercing an audience’s belief or participation. I argue the same must be said about von Balthasar’s approach to Christian theology.

§ Chapter Summaries

Each chapter begins with a brief set of stage directions to help set the scene, and every chapter links the correlation between drama and credibility in Christian thought to praxis. The play must be played in order to be credible. I use theatrical techniques and close readings of drama in order to clarify von Balthasar’s implicit and explicit responses to credibility dilemmas and to show where the theodramatic approach succeeds and where his attempt falls short of its own stated goals.

The first chapter names a “performance anxiety” at the root of the Christian resistance to offer interpretive hospitality to the credibility of drama and von Balthasar’s genre conventions. The chapter employs metatheatrical speeches from Shakespeare and techniques of *ressourcement* and dramaturgy to locate *Theo-Drama* in its twentieth century and multidisciplinary contexts.

The second chapter embraces doubts in dramatic confrontations with the spectacle of an uncertain spiritual presence. Juxtaposing scriptural and theatrical parables, including *Hamlet* and *Doubt*, show theodramatic hermeneutics to be a risky endeavor. Religious and dramatic questions of being must be accessible to the public in order to be credible options for a modern world.

⁴⁰ My notion of credibility does not require belief. Indeed, one might easily believe in the incredible and consider credible that which does not warrant personal or religious belief. In political theory, one can articulate the credibility of that to which an individual does not assent in the formula that acknowledges the sovereignty of nations to which one does not pledge allegiance; in psychopathology, one can articulate the credibility of a reported suffering without assenting to its “reality.” Nightmares and haunted houses are scary and oftentimes credible, but one need not believe they are true in order to acknowledge the fear they produce. Pain can be acute and unspeakable, and one need not deny suffering’s reality because of an assumed lack of credible symptoms.

The third chapter establishes my account of the interpretive work of theatre and performance as a material and creative practice generating surplus meaning. I develop these ideas in dialogue with hermeneutics and materialist theories of value, and I show the problems in von Balthasar's over-directed reading of Bertolt Brecht and his *Life of Galileo*.

The fourth chapter develops von Balthasar's account of the world-stage in response to the credibility of an ecological crisis. Naturalism's environments generate surplus meaning, and I demonstrate *Theo-Drama*'s home within von Balthasar's triptych and the importance of aesthetics to scenic design by going to visit Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*.

The fifth chapter turns to the credibility of *Theo-Drama*'s production history. After tracking von Balthasar's work as his own publisher, I show how its themes of forsakenness, silence, and passivity show the drama to operate according to literary and operatic interpretation theories rather than theatrical hermeneutics. An approach with less performance anxiety can restage von Balthasar's kenotic conclusions, and I end with three sketches for new surplus meanings with Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Nassim Soleimanpour's *White Rabbit Red Rabbit*, and the Deaf West's revival of *Spring Awakening*.

I: DRAMATURGY AND *RESSOURCEMENT*: Performance Anxiety about the Credibility of *Theo-Drama*'s Genre with Three Metatheatrical Speeches from Shakespeare

Stage Directions for Chapter 1: *At rise, the reader finds the notion of “performance anxiety” motivating credibility dilemmas of genre when religion and theatre show up at the same time. What genre is Theo-Drama? The chapter proposes the answer of theological ressourcement dramaturgy by situating von Balthasar’s work within two twentieth-century movements of critical retrieval: one religious and called “ressourcement” and the other theatrical and called “dramaturgy.” The chapter continues to place these movements within three trajectories for religion and theatre whose names and procedures we learn from close encounters with three Shakespearean speeches. By the end of the chapter, anxiety about Theo-Drama relying so heavily on theatrical praxis and esoteric mysticism comes to be seen as one of its many gendered concerns. “Drama” works with the “theo” throughout arguments about the world-stage and Trinitarian and human dramatis personae. Credibility for drama requires cultivating an audience hospitable enough to welcome stages and roles into theology as a co-equal scene partners.*

§1.1 Orientations: Performance Anxiety and Genre

Credibility indicates the willingness to suspend disbelief (that is, in the phenomenological tradition, to bracket it) in order to trust an argument *for now*. Why would anyone do such a thing? Suspending disbelief is like opening the door to anyone who might knock. That kind of radical hospitality is a genre of hospitality that can prompt a profound *performance anxiety*, by which I mean to invoke a bias against theatricality, feelings of existential stage fright, and overtones of erotic or productive dysfunction. So too does *Theo-Drama*'s performance as a literary production press against scholastic expectations and prompt a kind of anxiety all on its own. Just as drama resists an easy fit within established scholarly disciplines, so too does von Balthasar's dramatic approach resist generic classification within the established fields of philosophical and systematic Christian theology, pluralistic religious studies, religion and literature, and theatre and performance studies.

Credibility begins with paying attention. Genre expectations matter for credibility because genres are heuristics that prepare and frame interpretive work, and generic assumptions condition interpretive choices. According to Carolyn Miller, genre is a situational and social rhetorical practice for “meaningful action.” Genres establish categories for contextual meaning; genres are rule-based; genres are distinct but related to form; genres help “to constitute the substance of our cultural life”;

and genres connect the private and the public and the singular with the recurrent.⁴¹ Genre shapes expectations by imposing limits. A given genre works in a certain way, and faithfulness to assumptions about how a genre will proceed helps to offer interpretive hospitality. Mary Jo Reiff and Anis Bawarshi contend, “In this way, genres help us define and make sense of recurring situations while avoiding typified rhetorical strategies for acting in recurrent situations.”⁴² The generic expectations of an “open house” or “university seminar” help prepare us to open doors when we hear a knock. Each and every performance situation will always be different, but they can be grouped into a common genre of activity. When Miller identifies how genres are social activities, she notes the similarity between genre conventions and social conventions. Genres, like the cultures they substantiate, are social systems whose fluid and contextual rules provide for cohesion and meaningful communication amidst differences in content, style, and form.⁴³ Genre is relational.

As regards credibility, genre has a disciplining function for the ways we choose to talk and write, in terms of both the practices by which subject matter and topics are selected and authorized procedures and methods according to which discourse functions.⁴⁴ Vijay K. Bhatia shows how,

⁴¹ Carolyn Miller. “Genre As Social Action.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 70, no. 2, (1984), 163.

⁴² Mary Jo Reiff and Anis S Bawarshi, “From Genre Turn to Public Turn,” in *Genre and the Performance of Publics*, Mary Jo Reiff and Anis S Bawarshi, eds. (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2016), 3.

⁴³ Rhetorical Genre Studies will also emphasize the role of genre in “uptake,” a term adapted from J.L. Austin’s explanation “how illocutionary force becomes a perlocutionary effect—how, that is, an intentional utterance (saying ‘it is hot in here’) helps to produce an effect (one consequence is that someone opens a window) under certain conditions.” Rhetoric leads to social action. Genre, therefore, helps to negotiate uptake in more complex situations. Anne Freadman develops an account where uptakes hold genres together and “enable meanings that are made possible from that set of relations. The seams between genres that uptakes weave, in other words, make movements and translations between and across genres possible.” Reiff and Bawarshi, “From Genre Turn to Public Turn,” *Genre and the Performance of Publics*, 11 with reference to Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1962) and Freadman’s “Uptake” in *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre: Strategies for Stability and Change*, Richard Coe, Lorelei Lingard, and Tatiana Teslenko, eds., (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton, 2002), pp. 39-53.

⁴⁴ “Discursive practices, on the one hand, are essentially the outcome of special discursive procedures, and on the other hand, are embedded in specific institutional cultures and realize various forms of identities, institutional as well as individual. Discursive practices include factors such as the choice of a particular genre to achieve a specific objective and the appropriate and effective mode of communication associated with such a genre. Discursive procedures are factors associated with the characteristics of participants authorized to make a valid and appropriate contribution; participatory mechanisms, which determine what kind of contribution a particular participant is allowed to make at what stage of the genre construction process; and the other genres that make a valid and justifiable contribution to the document under construction” (Vijay K. Bhatia, “Genre as Interdiscursive Performance in Public Space,” *Genre and the Performance of Publics*, 29).

“Both these factors (discursive practices and discursive procedures) inevitably take place within the context of typical disciplinary, institutional, and professional cultures, which validate a particular genre and establish sociocultural identities.”⁴⁵ Fitting into an established genre reflects and shapes public performances of credibility.⁴⁶ When genres fail to discipline writers, readers, or audiences in how to respond with hospitality and cultural sensitivity, the result can be disastrous for credibility. A tragedy eliciting a laugh from the audience during a death scene fails to communicate a shared emotional experience of suffering’s depth; a comedy that does rhetorical violence to a community ruins the fun for those ridiculed. My point is not that tragedies cannot also be funny or that comedies cannot ever offend. Rather, I mean to indicate that a certain amount of trust and expectation is placed in the genre of the show by the audience and in the audience by the genre of the show. Scholarship and fiction produce the same disappointment when genre betrays its promise.

Genre places concerns about trustworthiness in dialogue with form and with style. Genre needs to be disambiguated from formal categories and from variations in style. Form indicates the medium, mode of composition, and mode of performance of any work.⁴⁷ It would be wrong to say that a naturalistic painting and a naturalistic film and a naturalistic short story all demonstrate the same formal characteristics (they obviously differ in their media, composition, and mode of performance between a painted canvas, cinema, and narrative). A naturalist painting, a naturalistic film, and naturalistic short story, however, do share a common style.⁴⁸ The three can be treated

⁴⁵ Bhatia, “Genre as Interdiscursive Performance in Public Space,” *Genre and the Performance of Publics*, 29.

⁴⁶ Risa Applegarth traces how “repetitive, body-focused advice” patterned in the genre of advice discourse “in vocational guides governing the behavior, dress, and comportment of women professionals” constructs a genre of suitable public performance. She suggests “that public genres function as sites of constitutive repetition” that can be read as an archive. “Through historical work that attends to the anxious repetitions of genre, rhetorical scholars denaturalize bodily dispositions of material-semiotic systems that elicited and maintained them, revealing the centrality of genre in shaping and stabilizing social, rhetorical, and gendered spaces of public life” (Applegarth “Bodily Scripts, Unruly Workers, and Public Anxiety,” *Genre and the Performance of Publics*, 118).

⁴⁷ Form is a technical term for von Balthasar meaning the whole as it presents itself as a whole. The truth of that whole radiates from its form as splendor.

⁴⁸ Style, similar to form, is a technical term for von Balthasar referring to the *way* that form expresses itself according to a particular set of shared parameters. So there are many different ways of “seeing the form.”

according to a common philosophical undercurrent described by the stylistic term “naturalism.” At the same time, it would be wrong to say that three naturalistic short stories all share a common genre even though they share a common form *and* a common style. One naturalistic short story could be a murder mystery, another might be a love story, and the third a travelogue. Genre influences the meaningfulness of a plot and how a plot makes meaning. Consider three naturalistic short stories about sudden parental loss. One story could be a tragedy about the sudden loss of a parent due to illness, another could be a comedy about the sudden loss of a parent in a theme park, a third could be a tragi-comic coming of age story about the sudden loss of parent’s sure bet on a futures market. Genre, therefore, is not merely a system of classification but prepares the way for reader and audience as guest.⁴⁹

This chapter treats performance anxiety and genre as a credibility dilemma. Both, I argue, require a sympathetic audience willing to put in their interpretive work. Von Balthasar is a famously inhospitable writer. His books are long, his prose is convoluted, and his references can alienate like a poorly told inside joke. So too, Brechtian alienation might be construed as an inhospitable way of making theatre; indeed, von Balthasar finds Brecht’s techniques to be too strange and committed to the Marxist program to be beautiful or Christian.⁵⁰ For theological dramatic theory to function credibly, *Theo-Drama* must first cultivate its audience. This chapter argues that, despite its shortcomings, *Theo-Drama*’s first volume does the dramaturgical work of theological and theatrical audience building by making a *ressourcement* to dramatic literatures and praxis. This chapter presents

⁴⁹ Hospitality has theological implications in Christian thought despite how, as Christine Pohl has argued, “it is no longer perceived as an essential aspect of the Christian faith and practice, but often is connected to personal entertainment, the hospitality industry, and the use of women’s bodies for sexual favors or financial gain” (Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality: God’s Welcome In a World of Difference*, J. Shannon Clarkson and Kate M Ott, eds., [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009], 116, with reference to Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 145). According to feminist theologian Letty M. Russell, “Hospitality is the practice of God’s welcome by reaching across difference to participate in God’s actions bringing justice and healing to our world in crisis. Such action is not easy” (Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 19).

⁵⁰ I address the *Verfremdungseffekt* and von Balthasar’s interpretation of Brecht at length in a later chapter.

both *ressourcement* and dramaturgy as “critical resource retrieval” and “audience development.” I first rehearse von Balthasar’s place within the so-called *ressourcement* movement and frame its practices as dramaturgical. I then review von Balthasar’s dramaturgical and critical work in the *Prolegomena* as theological literary management. How does *Theo-Drama* compare to and fit with other attempts at fusing religion and theatre in Christian thought? I historicize *Theo-Drama*’s genre at the intersection of three generic-methodological trajectories for “religion and theatre” in the twentieth-century Christian thought that respond to the credibility dilemma of performance anxiety about origins, ethics, and application. I do so in dialogue with three metatheatrical speeches attributed to William Shakespeare from the year 1599.⁵¹ The chapter concludes by framing von Balthasar’s gendered genre problem and proposes my solution to *Theo-Drama*’s genre credibility dilemma. The interpretive work of theatre and performance requires an audience willing to provide comedic-hermeneutical hospitality.

§1.2 *Ressourcement* and Dramaturgy

Theo-Drama mixes theology and drama as a means to articulate more credibly the systematic coherence of a trinitarian Christology. *Theo-Drama*’s five volumes construct its theology by attending to a single, crucial line of the drama of salvation: the Christ’s cry of dereliction on the Cross, Psalm 22:1 “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”⁵² Much more is at play in *Theo-Drama* than rehashing traditional theology according to a novel systematic principle. Indeed, von Balthasar makes a great achievement in his integration of dramatic art, mystical theology, and philosophical theology as equally valid theological resources for interpreting revelation. An integration of theology and drama is not new: Augustine of Hippo, for instance, makes contests of theatricality and

⁵¹ The authorship of the plays attributed to Shakespeare is a contested debate. See, among many, Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*, (New York: Norton, 2004) or James Shapiro, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

⁵² The line appears as if spoken in Aramaic in both the Gospel of Mark (15:34) and the Gospel of Matthew (27:46).

spirituality central to the theological work of *Confessions* and *City of God* and composed his own set of theological soliloquies.⁵³ Neither should von Balthasar be considered the most impressive integration of theatrical art, mystical theology, and philosophical theology evidenced in the Christian tradition. Anselm of Canterbury's dialogue on the incarnation, *Cur Deus Homo*, could be played as a Christological buddy act. Hildegard von Bingen successfully fused theatricality, mysticism, and philosophical theology in the two versions of her own theo-musico-dramatic theology. The final chapter of a mystical treatise shares a plot with the liturgical theatrical "script" of her music drama *Ordo Virtutum*.⁵⁴ John Calvin continuously returns to the "theatre of the world" theme in the *Institutes of Christian Religion* as well as his preaching on the doctrine of creation and the importance of creaturely praise to sustain the order of the world.⁵⁵ Sor Juana de la Cruz articulated theological principles through her literary work.⁵⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher's speeches and Christmas dialogue are both dramatic in their presentation.⁵⁷ Karl Barth puts theatre in the context of providence in the *Church Dogmatics*.⁵⁸ Karol Wojtyła (later to become Pope John Paul II) produced a Husserlian

⁵³ Augustine, *Confessions*, Henry Chadwick, trans., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) and Augustine, *City of God*, Henry Bettenson, trans., (London: Penguin, 1995).

⁵⁴ FN Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, Columba Hart and Jane Bishop, trans., (Mahway, NJ: Paulist, 1995), Book III, Ch. 13; *Ordo Virtutum* in Dronke, Peter. *Nine Medieval Latin Plays*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994. For the relationship between Hildegard's music drama and the *Scivias* see Margot Fassler, "Allegorical Architecture in the *Scivias*: Hildegard's Setting for the *Ordo Virtutum*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (Summer 2014): 317-378.

⁵⁵ John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., John T. McNeill, ed., (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011). For a discussion of the *theatrum mundi* theme in Calvin, see Belden C. Lane, "John Calvin on the World as a Theater of God's Glory," in *Ravished by Beauty: The Surprising Legacy of Reformed Spirituality*. (New York: Oxford, 2011). "The church, as the 'orchestra' in the theater of God's glory, has to assume a leading role in this work. Yet Calvin goes on to affirm the role of the rest of the cosmic order in offering world-changing praise as well" (82). The *theatrum mundi* theme is not unique to the discussion of creation. "The word *theatrum* itself appears at least seven times in the *Institutes* and dozens of times in Calvin's sermons and biblical commentaries, especially in his commentaries on Genesis, Isaiah, and the Psalms" (60).

⁵⁶ For a discussion of Sor Juana's drama in the context of von Balthasar's theological aesthetics, see Michelle A. Gonzalez, *Sor Juana: Beauty and Justice in the Americas*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003).

⁵⁷ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, Richard Crouter, ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and *Christmas Eve Celebration: a Dialogue*, Terrence N. Tice, trans., (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010).

⁵⁸ "Even as God's creatures, and within the world of other creatures, caught up in the great drama of being, we are not in an empty of alien place. It is not God's fault if we do not feel at home in our creatureliness and in this creaturely world. This is a notion which can obtrude only if we suspend as it were our faith in God's providence and do not take seriously our membership in the kingdom of Christ. If we take this seriously, our eyes are open to the fact that the

phenomenology of the acting person that can be said to undergird his theology of the body, his performance as a televisual pontiff, and expression in poetic dramas like *The Jeweler's Shop*.⁵⁹ Drama abounds in the Christian tradition.

Theo-Drama is not a play. Nor does *Theo-Drama* adopt an explicitly fictional form like Schleiermacher's dialogue. Instead, von Balthasar produces a work of theological literary non-fiction. These volumes of literary theology never leave the genre of dramaturgy and dramatic criticism. Of course, von Balthasar does not set out to write his own version of the script for the salvific drama already under way.⁶⁰ He suggestively calls his project only "program notes."⁶¹ The task of program note writing, like the task of translation, for which many must be ever grateful to von Balthasar, falls to the dramaturg. While dramaturgy—a relatively new theatrical discipline—might seem minimally significant for any given production of any given play, it became an absolutely essential mechanism of theatrical institutions seeking relevance in the twentieth century. If the interpretive work of theatre and performance produces surplus meanings according to theatrical styles that are re-

created world including our own existence fulfills that purpose and constitutes that *theatrum gloriae Dei*? (CD III/3, §48, 48).

⁵⁹ Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*. Andrzej Potocki, trans. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, ed., (Dordrecht: R. Reidel, 1979), and *The Collected Plays and Writings on Theater*, Bolesław Taborski, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

⁶⁰ TD 1 sets up the *autos sacramentales* of Spain (most directly in the theatre of Calderon) and the Jedermann/Everyman trope in medieval drama as the anchor for its major metaphors of the world-stage and role-into-mission. Eventually, *Theo-Drama* follows Adrienne von Speyr's visions to see theological dramatic theory's logical conclusion in the Christian sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

⁶¹ TD 3, 11. A bit of imaginative speculation overloads my citation of this passing description at the beginning of TD 3 as justification for talking about dramaturgy. What von Balthasar means by "program notes" is a caution for what he feels to be an incomplete theology of personhood prior to dramatic action. Due diligence also supplies the reference in context: "Furthermore, in the case of the main characters, we shall be moving in the area of highly complicated theological 'treatises' of which it will be quite impossible to give a full treatment. All we can do in these 'program notes' is to present an *outline*, a *sketch* of the characters concerned, just enough to give an idea of their part in the play. Nor is this sketch drawn with a view to its being fleshed out later: what comes afterwards will be nothing more than a presentation of the dramatic interplay itself, the *theo-drama* announced in the overall title of these volumes" (TD 3, 11, emphasis original). That is, the theological description of the "main characters" (e.g., Jesus, Mary, the Church, the Trinity) precedes the reality of the drama in performance. The theodramatic analogy holds even for this list of *dramatis personae* in the program. The list (a) presents itself prior to the play as arbitrary names and relationships waiting for consequential meaning (roles awaiting dramatic realization as mission); the list (b) serves as a reference during the action to make sense of it all; and the list (c) endures after the play as a record of the experience with its meaning now transfigured by the interpretive work of the performance witnessed. I find the liberty to take "program notes" as a meaningful methodological category because von Balthasar asserts that he will not return to "flesh out" his outline. These "program notes" stand as an object for interpretation in themselves.

arrangeable and re-stagable—that is, if one can *and should* do Shakespeare according to any number of theatrical performance conventions—then companies need a guide to recovering the history and form of theatrical texts as ready to be given anew to the present. Dramaturgy excavates the theatrical archive, prepares these raw materials for contemporary performance, and bridges the discoveries of scholarly study and theatrical production.

Dramaturgy emerges as an artistic impulse of the twentieth century directly alongside the quest “behind” and beyond the conventions of inherited textbook theology. Dramaturgy provides a salient lens to frame *Theo-Drama* as a task of cultural, indeed theatrical, *ressourcement*. Framing *Theo-Drama*’s method as cultural *ressourcement* clarifies von Balthasar’s theological task as “program notes.” After all the reformations, enlightenments, revolutions, and wars, one cannot simply return to the patristic pastoral style of Augustine or the medieval cultural synthesis exemplified by Hildegard. The pronouns “I” and “we” in von Balthasar’s *Theo-Drama* always occupy a particular historical context. *Theo-Drama*, like theatre and performance, does its interpretive work within a performance history. As a dramaturgical theologian, von Balthasar must *retrieve* from a religious tradition in which he works and *prepare* those insights for a modern audience. As such, von Balthasar as theological dramaturg must *retrieve* from a dramatic tradition in which he works and *prepare* those plays for a modern audience.

Ressourcement in the context of a dramatics is a dramaturgical enterprise, and the *Prolegomena* demonstrates the merits of such labor for both drama and theology. One sees that von Balthasar *cannot* write a theological drama in the same way that Hildegard writes theological drama because von Balthasar’s twentieth century theology will be encountered in a very different performance context than the liturgies of the Sybil of the Rhine’s Eibingen abbey or the illuminated manuscripts of her visions. But such a change in historical context does not prohibit von Balthasar from performing his own quite modern convergence into a “systematics” encompassing theatrical art, mystical theology,

and philosophical theology. Basel, too, sits on the Rhine, and von Balthasar dramatizes the visions of his own Sybil. I will return to the von Balthasar's writing as a kind of production and *Theo-Drama's* relationship to Adrienne von Speyr's visions of Christ's forsakenness in chapter five. A goal for this study will be to explain why von Balthasar bookends his systematic theology with so many references to secular plays (volume 1, the *Prolegomena*) and so many quotations from von Speyr (volume 5, *The Last Act*).

But first I need to attend to the dramaturgical-*ressourcement* achieved in *Theo-Drama I: Prolegomena* and the subsequent volumes that apply the *Prolegomena's* dramatic theory to theological themes. The term "*ressourcement*" has a number of theological resonances and connotations. *Ressourcement* includes notions of retrieval, renewal, and repair or healing. As a mode of retrieval, *ressourcement* sought to re-incorporate insights of the tradition underplayed in the modern era by returning, *ad fontes*, to the great teachers of tradition liberated from pre-determined genre choices of the authorized theological textbooks. *Ressourcement* meant re-reading well known texts in their original forms, especially Thomas Aquinas, but it also re-centered theology's purpose according to the model of the earliest theologians: prayerful, personal, rhetorically beautiful, and consequential for life together. As a mode of renewal, *ressourcement* sought to undo the stultification of theology by the hermeneutics of those textbooks. If a theological manual teaches not only the content of the history of theology but a singular and outdated method for reading those texts, *ressourcement* looked to retrieve missing or muted voices and remember forgotten ways of reading. As a mode of repair or healing, *ressourcement* sought to clean off the scholastic accretions that further separated dogmatic reflection from lived Christian experience. As a practice of re-pairing, *ressourcement* theologians sought as much to resist scholastic misinterpretations as they did to resist boredom by moving closer to the source text themselves. Theology that cannot be prayed loses its value, and so the "best" of

theological study must be re-paired to the “best” ways of human and Christian life. This final sense of *ressourcement* as re-pairing signals the cultural and affective orientation of Hans Urs von Balthasar.

But *ressourcement* also indicates a movement. The term was the preferred calling card for a cadre of theologians who sought such a rich “return to the Fathers” and medieval theologians on their own terms. As a method, *ressourcement* exemplified the approach of what came to known as the *nouvelle théologie* of the twentieth century. I track the development of *ressourcement* as a methodology in dialogue with the so-called *nouvelle théologie* in three phases.⁶² Phase one denotes the generation of early to mid-century (predominantly French) theologians pejoratively dubbed a new theology—“*nouvelle théologie*”—by the neo-scholastic Dominican Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange.⁶³ “In February 1947, [Garrigou-Lagrange] published his article ‘La nouvelle théologie où va-t-elle?’, the text of which contained his answer: the *nouvelle théologie* is a new kind of Modernism.”⁶⁴ Garrigou-Lagrange argued the methods at work in this “new theology” smuggled modernist positions into theology under the guise of a new hermeneutic: *ressourcement*. For Garrigou-Lagrange and other detractors, resistance to established textbook interpretations of Aquinas could only be understood as resistance to the Church’s normative philosophy—that is, Thomism—in favor of the condemned philosophical attitudes of modernism.⁶⁵ Modernism bespeaks the relativism where all previously held

⁶² For a discussion of the *nouvelle théologie* and its development as a “cluster concept” see Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie—New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II*, (New York: Continuum, 2010). Space does not permit an examination or a defense of the accuracy (if any) of the contested term “*nouvelle théologie*” for the group it purports to describe, including von Balthasar.

⁶³ Garrigou-Lagrange is pertinent for this study because he was among Karol Wojtyła’s teachers at the Angelicum in Rome. Wojtyła’s went on to become both actor-pontiff and avid von Balthasar promoter, John Paul II.

⁶⁴ Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie*, 35.

⁶⁵ The highpoint for anti-modernist sentiment consisted in the oath enforced by Pius X’s 1910 *moto proprio*, *Sacrorum Antistitum* in Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 43rd edition, Peter Hünerman, ed., Latin-English edition, Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash, eds., (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012), DS 3537–3550. My references to Denzinger follow convention and will hereafter appear as DS with its entry number. The context of this rule for analogies between creatures and Creator is also noteworthy. Pius X’s approach to modernism is particularly well suited to a theatrical interpretation as the oath condemns, explicitly, “the conception of those who say that an educated Christian puts on a double personality, the one of a believer, the other of a historian, as though it were allowed for the historian to hold something contrary to the faith of the believer or to advance hypotheses from which it would follow that the dogmas are false or doubtful, provided only that these are not directly denied” (DS 3545). This sort of “double personality” (*personam duplicem*) creates a problem precisely due to a performance anxiety

dogmatic assertions are suddenly open for redefinition. *Ressourcement* theologians, instead, argued not against normative Thomism as such but a reevaluation of the generic scholastic presumptions through which such a normative philosophy came to be taught, distributed, and disputed. Many of the names associated with this first phase of the *nouvelle theologie* taught at the Jesuit seminary at Fourvière in Lyons, France where von Balthasar spent his years of theological formation as a member of the Society of Jesus. Most important for von Balthasar was Henri de Lubac, S.J., whose image hung in von Balthasar's study. The author of a book on *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, de Lubac led the resistance to pre-determining the meaning of Aquinas' theology by means of the scholastic tradition. Phase One culminated in *ressourcement's* apparent condemnation by the papal encyclical *Humani Generis* promulgated by Pius XII on 12 August 1950.⁶⁶

Ressourcement's second phase describes a "looking outward" from the Christian experience toward new and previously unexplored questions and cultures. Two characteristics of *ressourcement* during this phase are directly relevant to von Balthasar. One was a development of interest in non-Catholic resources and non-Christian religions (including the problem of contemporary atheism) and the other avoided ecclesial exclusivism. The second phase of the *ressourcement*, therefore, sought new resources. The period of suppression introduced *sourcing new things* (res-source-ment) in addition to

regarding the capacity of a single person to play different parts at different times. Taken at face value, a split-personality pathologizes the "integrity" of identity by confounding the varieties of human being and doing. The anti-modernist oath clearly means to decry the enforcement of any scientific method or theory that undercuts tenets of the faith. It does not, on my reading, demand that all history become theological history but only that theological history be able to retain dogma's literal sense. In terms of biblical criticism, modernism, in Pius X's view, is when "rationalists" "textual criticism" (read, historical-critical methods) become the "only and supreme rule" (DS 3546). What must be denied, precisely, is the evolution of dogmas (*evolutionis dogmatum*) as if the truth had changed over time in such a way that contemporary and historical dogmatic propositions might be genealogically related but no longer held to be the same (akin to the evolution of birds from dinosaurs). Note that the development of doctrine—a shift in the interpretation of dogma's meaning over time as an aspect of history—never received condemnation. Such a reading would be, of course, against the spirit of the oath. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with the authority of Pope Paul VI, suspended the obligation for bishops, priests, deacons, and teachers to profess the anti-modernist oath on July 17, 1967.

⁶⁶ "This encyclical can be understood as Rome's final serious defence of neo-scholasticism as a normative framework determining the orthodoxy of theology. The spirit of *Humani generis* ran parallel with *Pascendi dominici gregis*. Strictly speaking, *Humani generis* does not mention the *nouvelle theologie*, although it condemns 13 matters it refers to as 'new' (Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie*, 35).

the *nouvelle theologie's* emphasis on retrieval, renewal, and repair. That interest led to the desire to place Catholic Christian theology in direct and fruitful dialogue with non-Catholic religious resources, both non-Christian and Protestant or Orthodox Christian theology. These developments can be found in de Lubac, especially his pioneering interpretations of Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., on evolution, his many books on European atheism, and his scholarly studies of Buddhism and Buddhist atheological spirituality.⁶⁷ The practitioners of the *ressourcement* method invested in knowledge of Protestant theology, both as a corrective to some Catholic mistakes but also as a personal interest in the variable expressions of Christianity in the world. Many of the *ressourcement* theologians studied Luther, Calvin, Schleiermacher; many knew or wrote on the theology of their contemporary, Karl Barth. As such, the second phase of the *ressourcement* argued to open Roman Catholic thinking to engagement with theological interpretations and religious wisdoms at work in the world beyond the boundaries of the Church. Though for a time forced underground, the *ressourcement* impulse saw clearly the problem of a church suffocating from its self-imposed quarantine from the modern world.

The bastions were indeed razed by the Second Vatican Council, the high point in *ressourcement's* second phase. At the Council, the theological method of the *ressourcement* theologians transposed into the ecclesial and cultural spirit of *aggiornamento*—literally, “bringing up to date,” colloquially “upgrading” as in the operating system of a computer—of the Council’s “pastoral attitude.” The Second Vatican Council moved away from procedures like anathematization, definition, and the ecclesial consolidation of power in the office of the Pope. Instead, the Council adopted procedures emphasizing variations in interpretation and shifts in liturgical praxis. These developments applied *ressourcement* sensibilities on an official and global scale. After Vatican II, this

⁶⁷ Henri de Lubac, *Teilhard De Chardin: The Man and His Meaning*, (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1965); *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995); *Aspects of Buddhism*, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954).

“new theology” established itself as a major tool for the Church in the modern world. The Council did not remove scholasticism or Thomism from pride of place in the Roman Catholic theology. Vatican II, instead, opened the door to alternative hermeneutics of continuity that nevertheless allows space for the development of doctrine and ecclesial praxis informed by and according to historical circumstances. Including a reorientation of the Church’s relationship toward non-Christian religions (especially Judaism) and non-Catholic Christian churches (especially Protestantism). A profound consequence (particularly for von Balthasar) was the Christological emphasis of the Council’s doctrine of revelation. A “Christological concentration” (exemplified in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*) demonstrates the conciliar turn to a shared inheritance of Protestant and Catholic biblical scholarship and the importance of the biblical witness for theological meaning-making.⁶⁸ That Christological concentration—I purposefully impose a term most often associated with Karl Barth—introduced a binding teaching on God’s self-revelation where “the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.”⁶⁹ Magisterial justification for von Balthasar’s debt to Barth in *Herrlichkeit*’s theology of splendor hides in the plain sight of this conciliar document.

The victory of *ressourcement* as a modern methodology for theology at the Second Vatican Council propels the term into its third phase. After the Council, *ressourcement* gained the political connotations of “conservatism” and “liberalism” that it continues to signal. The term came to represent a kind of post-conciliar resistance to discontinuity. How could theology in close dialogue with its resources and attentive to the signs of the times be “totally” innovative? Where some *ressourcement* theologians were initially accused of developing a new hermeneutic to baptize relativism,

⁶⁸ “The dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum*, with its emphasis on the sources of the faith, can be singled out in this regard for containing definite echoes of the *nouvelle théologie*” (Mettenpenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie*, 36).

⁶⁹ *Dei Verbum*, Para 2. The document is freely available online at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.

some of these same theologians saw post-conciliar theology moving in that very direction.

Disagreement caused an infamous (and often overdetermined) split between *ressourcement* theologians into political camps, such as *Concilium* and *Communio* so named for two international theological journals these theologians founded.⁷⁰ For the sake of establishing *ressourcement* as dramaturgy for von Balthasar, the *Concilium* and *Communio* debate matters only as much as von Balthasar served as a front man for the *Communio* school alongside Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI). Von Balthasar helped to found the *Communio* journal and contributed many articles to its volumes over the years, but, before launching *Communio*, von Balthasar was also a founding member of the “rival” *Concilium* in 1965.⁷¹ Convenient histories of academic publishing competitions elide the complexity of highly nuanced disagreements, longstanding and public friendships (and their dissolution), and variations in theological style. *Ressourcement* feeds divergent strands of post-conciliar thought and in no way should function as a shibboleth for a political agenda.

Indeed, the third phase of *ressourcement* adds a keen focus on the contemporary situation and existential application to *ressourcement* theological method. The third phase brings about liberation theology’s attention to praxis and the preferential option for the poor.⁷² In the third phase one finds the *Concilium*-style phrase “critical retrieval” alongside the *Communio*-style emphasis on “renewal.” The pastoral focus of *ressourcement* methodology means to overcome the internal feedback loop of an abstract neo-scholasticism. Where neo-scholastic theology raises questions about the tradition for the sake of further clarification of the tradition (the scholastic distinction), *ressourcement* theology raises questions about and from the tradition in order to show that tradition’s continual relevance

⁷⁰ A detailed discussion of movements in twentieth-century Catholic thought can be found in Tracey Rowland, *Catholic Theology*, (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017).

⁷¹ Alongside other *ressourcement* theological types like Karl Rahner, Hans Küng, Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, Johann Baptist Metz, and Edward Schillebeeckx.

⁷² Note, for instance, how Gustavo Gutierrez, O.P. places consistent attention on both scripture and the tradition in *A Theology of Liberation*, (New York: Maryknoll, 1973).

for life in the present and to interpret the present meaning of the tradition. Too fervent a neo-scholastic emphasis on the study of doctrine as if eternal and formulated outside of time perpetuates ahistorical metaphysical abstractions that may not reflect lived experience. The clarifications of scholastic debate require a second-order application in order to be credible. The object of study remains God as understood by the tradition bound according to the (historical) language supplied by that tradition. This insulation protects the scholastic impulse from informing its constructive religious claims with too much reliance on contemporary idiom. Neo-scholasticism remains “scientific” insofar as its claims never expand beyond its stated methodology.⁷³ *Ressourcement* theologians include the contemporary situation as part and parcel to the act of interpretation and understanding. One does not properly understand theology according to the *ressourcement* methodology if theology remains an abstract order of knowledge akin to mathematics or grammar. Propositional theology may be accurate, but it could be accurate about an idol of human projection. The resources for a credible theology *include* its performance history and its situation within a contemporary context. A survey and use of the resources of the tradition and the resources available to theologians in their cultural location provides Christian thought a word language permitting the wisdom of history to speak anew in and for the present. For *ressourcement* methodology, theology that cannot speak to the present cannot *perform* theologically to organize a discourse that speaks right about divinity. *Ressourcement* hopes to engender contemporary credibility.

Theo-Drama, then, operates according to the fully developed *ressourcement* impulse. Phase one (from the turn of the century to official condemnation in 1950) provides the *ressourcement* themes of retrieval, renewal, and repair. Phase two (the suppression by *Humani Generis* through the triumph of

⁷³ I understand this dissertation as a kind of scholasticism insofar as I have restricted the method of my reading of von Balthasar to make *Theo-Drama's* dramatic theory and the theme of credibility the object of study. What can be clarified after reading is not necessary any notion of God's identity or non-identity; rather, a credible method for entering into such debate according to the norms of publicly available philosophical theology and the tools of theatre and performance.

the Second Vatican Council) provides *ressourcement* tactics in resourcing from non-Catholic, non-Christian, and non-theological cultural resources for theology. Phase three (after the Council) contributes the diversity of conclusions suggested by *ressourcement* as a modern, critical, and contextual theological method. *Ressourcement* is an interpretive strategy shared by many theologians, and exemplified by von Balthasar in *Theo-Drama*. Indeed, as Edward T. Oakes, S.J., argues in his essay on von Balthasar and *ressourcement*,

[I]n the real world as we experience it, ‘natural gratuity’ is present everywhere. From this there opens out the extraordinary vista of Balthasar’s five-volume *Theo-Drama* as well as his numerous shorter essays in a kind of theological literary criticism, ranging all the way from careful analyses of Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* to an essay on the plays and poetry of Bertolt Brecht.⁷⁴

Ressourcement demonstrates a theological version of the strategy seen across the twentieth-century to make ancient resources credible for a modern world. The remainder of this chapter will frame the *ressourcement* strategy at work in *Theo-Drama* on analogy to dramaturgy in twentieth-century theatrical praxis. As a figure, von Balthasar models the development of Christian thought (in its Roman Catholic idiom) across the twentieth century. In addition to his contribution to the subfields of religion and theatre, von Balthasar is worth considering as a case study in contextual theology. This claim is surprising only if one “naturalizes” the European cultural context or genre expectations for contextual theology also assume a liberating political position. *Theo-Drama* can be seen as a clear product of the *ressourcement* method.⁷⁵ The *Prolegomena* to *Theo-Drama* places systematic questions in

⁷⁴ Edward T. Oakes, S.J., “Balthasar and *Ressourcement*: An Ambiguous Relationship,” *Ressourcement: a Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 288.

⁷⁵ Another version of this argument would look to the studies of clerical and lay styles of theology in GL 2 and 3 as a *ressourcement* to the history of theological aesthetics. Here, von Balthasar strings together reflections that lead up to and look back to Thomas Aquinas and around 1300 as the apex and hinge between “official theologians...able to treat the radiant power of the revelation of Christ both influentially and originally, without any trace of decadence; but after Thomas of Aquinas theologians of such a stature are rare” (GL 2, 15). A study of Thomas, however, does not appear: “It may be that a deep and lucid philosophical aesthetics has been developed, but that it has failed to achieve a theological translation, that is, to be seen as the unfolding of a theology based on the biblical revelation: that is the reason why Thomas Aquinas has been omitted from our sequence” (GL 2, 21). Instead, von Balthasar gives to studies of

the midst of an array of particular experiences always attentive to praxis. The cultural context is drama, and the praxis is theatrical.

§1.3 Dramaturgy as *Ressourcement*

Theo-Drama employs the *ressourcement* methodology with particular focus on under-treated aspects of the tradition. *Theo-Drama* extracts from the archive of the tradition in both its reading of major thinkers and, as I argue throughout this dissertation, its place in von Balthasar's multi-project critical retrieval of the drama of Holy Saturday theology and Christ's descent into hell for the Latin "West." *Theo-Drama* renews the theological tradition insofar as von Balthasar relies heavily on a reinterpretation of Thomist positions on the relationship between nature and grace for theological dramatic theory (inspired by, but by no means fully accepting the position, of de Lubac).⁷⁶ Renewal also can be seen in von Balthasar's embrace of the "Christological concentration" for the dramatic account of revelation (exemplified by theological reliance on Barth as well as the way *Theo-Drama* presumes the composite image of the scriptures as testimony to God's self-revelation in Christ). *Theo-Drama* repairs the theological tradition in its emphasis on the contextual location of the theologian (the theme of theological interpretation always concerned with action) and its re-pairing of mystical theology with systematic loci. *Theo-Drama* exemplifies how hard it can be to pin down a political or ecclesial position as a result of *ressourcement*. Where von Balthasar is most confident in his ethics seems to be where his theatrical *ressourcement* breaks down. He makes mistakes in a theory of

"clerical styles" through Irenaeus, Augustine, Pseudo-Denys the Areopagite (with a delightful diagram, see GL 2, 163), Anselm, and Bonaventure; von Balthasar gives studies of "lay styles" through Dante, John of the Cross, Pascal, Hamann, Soloviev, Hopkins, and Péguy. Note how these *Herrlichkeit* studies "have omitted anything which relates to theological dramatics, theologians as well as poets (the mystery plays, Shakespeare, Calderon and *auto sacramentales*): they will find their place in the volumes on dramatics" (GL 2, 17). TD 1 could have been better subtitled "Studies in Theological Style: Dramatic Styles" than the more confusing "Prolegomena." Such a title, however, would require von Balthasar to follow the form of the volumes in the aesthetics and pick and choose amongst examples in the history of drama. As "Prolegomena" to the theology to appear in the later volumes, von Balthasar can co-mingle dramatic history in terms of questions and themes rather than discrete writers and theorists. On the one hand, the subtitle relativizes TD 1 as throat-clearing; on the other hand, "Prolegomena" indicates its indispensability to understand von Balthasar's performance of theological dramatic style at work in the whole of the *Theo-Drama*.

⁷⁶ For a discussion of where von Balthasar aligns with Rahner to differ from de Lubac on the question of the supernatural, see Oaks, "Balthasar and *Ressourcement*," 284-287.

drama precisely where he wants to drama to subsidize a contingent cultural argument or theory as a necessity for theological understanding. The most obvious work of *ressourcement* in *Theo-Drama*, of course, is its surprising and profound use of predominantly European drama as a theological resource and ground for a theological method.

Ressourcement requires knowing the archive and how to bring its contributions to bear for a contemporary audience. Such a description applies just as readily to the dramaturg whose job it is to make sense of a drama where meaning can be lost in the passage of history. The *ressourcement* method argues that a theology must be applied to the contemporary situation in order to perform well. So too, dramaturgs argue that drama must be interpreted and staged for the contemporary situation in order to perform well. Dramaturgs provide access to the wisdom inherent in theatre history and dramatic criticism. Only some of the time will dramaturgs aim to reconstruct historical performance practices.⁷⁷ Dramaturgy does not produce the play itself (a kind of artistry more proper to the designers, writers, actors, and directors), but, like von Balthasar's own description of his theology, dramaturgs write the "program notes."

Dramaturgy names the "in house" function of dramatic-literary criticism and theatrical scholarship. Mary Luckhurst avers, "The term *dramaturg* does not have a single meaning, even when it is accepted as the proper designation."⁷⁸ Dramaturg is an amorphous title for the role of the expert in theatrical structure.⁷⁹ Dramaturgs serve in rehearsals as textual experts and contextual advisors.

⁷⁷ That is, where the company attempts to stage a play *here and now* according to the performance conventions and styles of its original production *then and there*.

⁷⁸ Mary Luckhurst, *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 11.

⁷⁹ Such a definition derives, in large part, from the Gotthold Lessing "the world's first officially appointed dramaturg" and his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*. Cf. Luckhurst, *Dramaturgy*, 24. Von Balthasar references Lessing's *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* on a few occasions despite the lack of a major discussion of dramaturgy itself, most notably an approving footnote linking Lessing's theory of acting to Stanislavsky's method (TD 1, 289n39) and praise for Lessing's identification of the possibility of tragi-comedy (TD 1, 444). At the same time, von Balthasar lays some blame at the feet of Lessing's *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* for what he deems to be a widespread misinterpretation of the Aristotelian catharsis of *eleos* (pity) as a social therapy, an "ethico-humanitarian interpretation of *eleos* as 'compassion' (current since Lessing)" (TD I, 315).

Dramaturgs are living and collaborative repositories of research. But dramaturgs also serve a *corporate function* for theatre companies as literary managers. That is, professional dramaturgs do the critical work of preparing performance editions of plays for various theatre companies to stage. The work of production requires someone to bring in the texts to produce. That means that the work of a writer needs to be brought to the artistic attention of a given theatre community.⁸⁰ Literary management locates dramaturgical principles at work in every step of the production process: in the retranslation and preparation of an old play or in the development of a new playwright. That dramaturgy “comes first” in the order of praxis simply regards the fact that the work of establishing historical and genre conventions will fall to a dramaturg-as-literary-manager before anyone else gets access to the play. To do the interpretive work of theatre-making requires the pre-production artistic decision “What sort of show will be performed?”⁸¹ For this very reason the person who chooses the plays for a theatre season gets called the “artistic director.”

Theo-Drama is a work of theological dramaturgy. Its first volume answers the question: “What sort of show does God perform?” The *Prolegomena* summons the materials necessary for von Balthasar (and his reader) to amass a sense for how theology can draw on “dramatic resources” from the theatre. This is precisely the dramaturg’s task in making sense of the material for the sake of its performance by attending to the needs of players (actors *and* audience). Though von Balthasar never calls this turn to dramatic literatures a process of *ressourcement*, the *Prolegomena* is a critical retrieval of the dramatic tradition and theatrical practices so they can become “transparent” and “fruitful” for

⁸⁰ “The proliferation of literary managers demonstrates an impetus to privilege issues connected with playreading, play selection, writer development and artistic policy-making; as theatres engage in competitive battles over audiences for new plays or new angles on classic plays, the literary manager becomes ever more strategically important” (Luckhurst, *Dramaturgy*, 264).

⁸¹ When the professional dramaturg answers this question, and others with commensurate concerns for political stakes and audience development, one sees John Rouse’s sense of the dramaturg as the “‘literary conscience’ of the theatre” (Luckhurst, *Dramaturgy*, 9, quoting John Rouse, *Brecht and the West German Theatre* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), 3).

theology.⁸² As Oaks writes, “Balthasar is such an important *ressourcement* theologian because he was able, with his remarkable erudition, to draw on nearly all of the sources of the Christian tradition, literary, philosophical, and theological.”⁸³ Von Balthasar does the dramaturgical work to strip away Christian performance anxieties about the relationship between drama and theology. In order to talk about God’s performance on the world-stage, von Balthasar must first clarify what it means to speak about God (*theo-logos*) and drama at the same time. The first volume’s curation of plays and theatrical techniques is a stunning achievement in terms of breadth, depth, and insight. *Theo-Drama* makes three major dramaturgical interventions all aiming toward von Balthasar’s grand intention for convergence as the primary goal of the larger theological trilogy: 1) the integration of “religion and literature” into a theology, 2) *ressourcement* directed towards the achievement of European and world cultures as the theological situation, 3) the articulation of theology according to the “traditional” systematic loci formulated without capitulation to twentieth-century pitfalls like religious relativism, neo-scholasticism, or demythologization. *Theo-Drama*’s bold program for the credible interpretation of God’s self-revelation thus breaks a number of heuristic conventions, and von Balthasar’s theodramatic approach prompts important genre questions. The interpretive work of theatre and performance is obviously interdisciplinary, but does *Theo-Drama*’s innovative *ressourcement* produce something credible as an interpretation of God or drama?

The problem of *Theo-Drama*’s genre credibility relates, directly, to the interpretive work of dramaturgy. The dramaturg not only works with the internal form of the play in question—by researching its history, knowing its context, and prescribing its political and commercial exigency in the present—but also must build the expectations of the audience. A literary manager presents scripts for the sake of theatrical interpretation (a set of artistic choices). The literary manager also

⁸² “Das Ganze soll auf Theologie hin transparent, alle seine Elemente auf sie hin brauchbar gemacht werden” (*Theodramatik* I, 9).

⁸³ Oaks, “Balthasar and *Ressourcement*,” 288.

chooses the sorts of stories a theatre will tell with its community. Drama happens in public and this public is larger than the finite audience of any one evening's performance. A theatre company and its theater building sit within a community.⁸⁴ The literary manager not only gathers the resources for the interpretive work of the ensemble in their artistic choices, but also *makes choices* regarding the sorts of audience this theatre company will invite, sustain, and grow.⁸⁵ Dramaturgs and literary managers perform the interpretive work that shapes what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls "prejudice" conditioned by "fore-structures" so an audience might be ready to receive the play.⁸⁶ They construct the expectations of an audience as much as they research and provide information to the rehearsal room to empower interpretive choices. The writing of "program notes" forms the audience in preparation to notice and receive the form (and argument) of the play. The literary review and dramatic theory of the *Prolegomena*, therefore, does not "make any direct transition from the stage to theology" but neither does it sit as an ancillary reference.⁸⁷ Genre matters for interpretation and for credibility.

The genre concern motivates Karen Kilby's pressing questions "What is one to anticipate, for instance, from a work entitled *Theo-drama*? We might know what *sort* of undertaking to expect if

⁸⁴ I am indebted to Nichole Flores' notion of "aesthetic solidarity" in the context of community theatre companies. See her forthcoming work.

⁸⁵ Signature Theatre in New York City, to choose but one example, selects plays and playwrights in order to further a larger mission to diversify Broadway's stories and audiences through programs dedicated to feature affordable ticket sales and full seasons mixing the work of new, underrepresented, and well-known playwrights such as Suzan Lori-Parks, Edward Albee, Annie Baker, Sam Shepherd, Lynn Nottage, David Henry Hwang, and Katori Hall. Dramaturgical choices for the Signature Theatre in New York City will *differ* from dramaturgical choices for the Manhattan Theatre Club up the road, these choices will differ still from those for the Steppenwolf Theater in Chicago and Deaf West Theatre in Los Angeles, these choices differ still from those for the National Theatre in London and for Shakespeare's Globe up the river.

⁸⁶ I discuss Gadamer's notion of prejudice at length later in this project. It is essential to distinguish his notion of prejudice, where expectations for understanding shape perception, from only meaning the contemporary notion of bias. "The recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust. In light of this insight it appears that *historicism, despite its critique of rationalism and of natural law philosophy, is based on the modern Enlightenment and unwittingly shares its prejudices*. And there is one prejudice of the Enlightenment that defines its essence: the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power" (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, rev. ed., Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshal, trans., [New York: Continuum, 1989], 270).

⁸⁷ TD 1, 11.

someone offers a work of systematics, or, in a Roman Catholic context, an undertaking in fundamental theology. But what genre of a project is a ‘theo-drama’? The reader will not be able to guess in advance, and will not necessarily be enlightened by skimming.”⁸⁸ Even to grasp at the genre that could guide expectations, therefore, requires a great investment of time and interpretive energy. *Theo-Drama* presumes its own credibility as a work of theology because it assumes the credibility of revelation.⁸⁹ Questions about a *Theo-Drama* can only be answered by reference to a convergence of theological genres into this new dramaturgical method: theodramatics. Dramaturgy, then, provides one partial reply to Kilby’s prescient critique of the theologian’s posture vis-à-vis the drama of history.⁹⁰

How ‘dramatic’...is the very proposal to read all of history, all of God’s dealings with history, and indeed the inner life of God itself, *as* an all-encompassing drama? Where is one standing when one makes this claim? Is there a contradiction, that is to say, between *what* Balthasar is asserting, and the very act of asserting it? If there is no position ‘outside’ the play, and if we in particular are always involved and drawn into it, always already involved in the action, always already playing a role, can we at the same time propose to see the shape of the whole, and be in a position to characterize it as one vast drama embedded inside another? Is Balthasar himself, in his very construal of the whole of everything as a drama, not taking the role of theater critic—and perhaps also a theorist of drama—rather than an actor *within* the drama?⁹¹

⁸⁸ Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: a (Very) Critical Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012, 4, emphasis original.

⁸⁹ “‘Fundamental theology,’ in Roman Catholic contexts, is a theological subdiscipline which in some sense prepares the way for the rest of theology (i.e., for ‘dogmatic theology’): it was traditionally understood as establishing the credibility of faith before the actual content of the faith was examined. Balthasar is essentially placing his theological aesthetics in the role of a fundamental theology, of an enquiry into the credibility, the believability, of the faith, but insisting at the same time that this question of credibility cannot be considered apart from the actual content of faith—fundamental theology cannot be done apart from dogmatic theology. And the *route* to credibility, as Balthasar presents it, is not by way of any kind of orderly establishing of truths—that some can be known from first principles and others can be accepted on appropriate authority—but by drawing attention to the *beauty* of the whole of what is revealed” (Kilby, *Balthasar*, 50, emphasis original).

⁹⁰ The oblique reference to Ben Quash’s *Theology and the Drama of History* is intentional, here. Kilby asks her own dramatic question after summarizing Quash’s concern with von Balthasar’s “tendencies to flatten characters and to fail to justice to their individuality, to read more resolution and harmony into texts than can be legitimately found in them, and in general to read so strongly through lens of larger themes as to simplify and distort the matter at hand” (Kilby, *Balthasar*, 64).

⁹¹ Kilby, *Balthasar*, 64-65.

Kilby rightly identifies one of the problems with the dramaturg as an emergent phenomenon, but dramaturgical writing about theatre also participates “*within* the drama.” The dramaturg assists in the creative work of the ensemble as she does with the management of the theatre company and its audience. Dramaturgy troubles the neat and tidy boundaries between the creators of the play and its consumers. This messiness can be dangerous. The dramaturg is a participant observer in the liminal space between the “sacred stage” and the “profane audience.”⁹² Dramaturgy brings together very different worlds by applying the skills of the scholar and critic to the artistic task of theatre-making. A dramaturg finds a comfortable home in neither place, partially because the work of literary management knows realization of a play is in the surplus meaning of performance. The dramaturg must prepare the way for performance while working only with scripts, ideas, plans, and demographic goals. Dramaturgy tries to work through performance anxiety aware that the script will mean differently in its performance but nevertheless required to speculate, to dream, to dare to hope that a play will go over well. Dramaturgy, like any theatrical role, stays anxious about the performance of a flop.

Kilby shows a weakness in von Balthasar’s dramaturgical theology when it masquerades as a theology of and for actors playing their parts in history’s play within a theodramatic play.⁹³ At the same time, however, a dramaturgical understanding of the “theatre critic” or “theorist of drama” does not find this interpreter floating independently from the event of the play or the processes of theatrical production. An uninvolved, “superior” dramaturg would be above and apart from the

⁹² Cf. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, (New York: Praeger, 1966).

⁹³ “In fact, as Balthasar presents it, history is a play in which God is the author, the director, and also the chief actor (these are the roles, respectively, of Father, Spirit, and Son). Furthermore, Balthasar suggests, God is himself, even apart from history, to be conceived through theatrical analogies: the eternal relations of the persons of the immanent Trinity are fundamentally dramatic, and, rather dizzyingly, Balthasar proposes that all of history can be thought of along the lines of a ‘play within a play.’ History, as we ordinarily understand it, that is to say, is a drama which takes place in the space opened up by the more fundamental drama played out among the persons of the Trinity” (Kilby, *Balthasar*, 58).

company's performances in "the exile of the writer's and reader's garret."⁹⁴ Such a view would also need to construe dramatic criticism (including the critic's write up in the newspaper) as something utterly distinct from "the whole theatre complex."⁹⁵ As reported in the introduction, von Balthasar *did* translate plays (one of which was performed at *Schauspielhaus Zürich*), and he *did* offer critiques published in newspapers and play programs. Ultimately, the performance anxiety applied to the dramaturg who does not also act like an actor implies the assumption of a passive audience. Another approach views all aspects of theatre-making as part of the interpretive work of performance. The audience co-creates as players in an auditing role. The critics, literary managers, and artistic directors too, co-create the play by means of drumming up an audience interested in seeing this show. Buzz is not merely a marketing tool; the audience must choose to do the work and choose to pay the price of attending and playing the role of an audience. The show goes on even if no one bothers to show up. But the image of a play for an empty theatre can only be called sad. A tragedy. Or, perhaps, a comedy. Or maybe just a moment of history. It depends on the genre.⁹⁶

§1.4 Genre and Three Trajectories for Religion and Theatre

To make sense of *Theo-Drama's* dramaturgy, thus, requires attending to the credibility dilemma produced by *Theo-Drama's* confusing theological genre and theatrical *ressourcement*. In the following sections, I will argue with some help from three, rather long, metatheatrical speeches from Shakespeare, composed around the same time in 1599.⁹⁷ Metatheatricality refers to those moments

⁹⁴ Mary Luckhurst describes Brecht's theory of the dramaturg according to his collection of poetic musings on dramatic theory, *Der Messingkauf*: "The Dramaturg in *Der Messingkauf* represents the conventional qualifications of his post in three principal ways: first, he is a writer and analyst of play texts with a thorough understanding of dramaturgical structures; second, a formidable theatre historian with encyclopædic knowledge of theatre history from scholarly research in libraries and dedicated spectatorship of plays; and third, an incisive, receptive, and articulate communicator-critic. But, radically reversing tradition, Brecht's Dramaturg is to conduct the four nights of discussion on stage, not in his cold, inhospitable office with its innumerable unread play scripts, symbolically relocates the dramaturg from the exile of the writer's and reader's garret to the site of the performance" (Luckhurst, *Dramaturgy*, 112-113).

⁹⁵ TD 1, 9.

⁹⁶ "If we look more closely at human life, we often find that the two aspects [comedy and tragedy] lie very close together, and whether a situation seems more comic or more tragic can be simply a matter of lighting" (TD 1, 450).

⁹⁷ *Henry V*, *Hamlet*, and *As You Like It*, were all in development alongside *Julius Caesar* in 1599. Cf. James Shapiro, *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599*, (New York: Harper, 2005). I ask the reader to grant some leeway because I will

of theatre that foreground the event of drama itself. Larry D. Bouchard has identified three interrelated modes of metatheatre that inform my trajectories: 1) a direct reference to the drama as a performed play, as in a direct address from a character to the audience; 2) an event of theatre within the world of the play, as in a puppet show; 3) an indirect reference to the theatricality of ordinary life within the context of the world of the play, as in a reference to civic pageantry as a political theatre.⁹⁸ These speeches, therefore, represent a conscious dramaturgical reflection by these characters. *Theo-Drama* represents a convergence of these trajectories for religion and theatre in twentieth-century Christian thought. In order to make sense of *Theo-Drama*'s admittedly complex genre, I correlate these trajectories to the established genres of Shakespearean drama: history and genealogy, tragedy and ethics, and comedy and hermeneutics.⁹⁹

quote the whole of each speech (sometimes a bit more!) in order to place Shakespeare's dramaturgy as an argumentative companion. Those familiar with the speeches are welcome to skip them, but I present the entirety for the sake of religionists—theologians, ethicists, cultural critics—for whom these soliloquies do not spring to mind at their mere reference. The decision responds to many of von Balthasar's critics who, rightfully, identify the befuddlement that comes from his constantly shifting allusions. The risk, of course, is that my decision will alienate readers less interested in performing close readings of seventeenth-century metatheatrical speeches for the sake of a point about historicizing a twentieth-century theologian or an argument about drama and credibility. My hope is that making the argument this way will shore up the utility of Shakespeare (and, by extension, the other playwrights in this project) as contributing theoretical resources and praxis rather than examples. In text references refer to line numbers from the Arden Shakespeare. *King Henry V*. T.W. Craik, ed. Arden Shakespeare Third Series (1995); *Hamlet*, Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, eds., Arden Shakespeare Third Series (2006); *As You Like It*, Juliet Dusinberre, ed., Arden Shakespeare Third Series, (2006).

⁹⁸ Bouchard, *Theater and Integrity*, 25. See also Lionel Abel, *Metatheatre: A New View of a Dramatic Form* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963). Bouchard's account of metatheatre also appears in our "Introduction" to the *Religions* special issue on "Religion and Theatrical Drama," *forthcoming*.

⁹⁹ The *Prolegomena* has its own discussion of theatrical genre divided into the tragic, the comic, and the tragi-comic. The philosophical transcendental at stake in *Theo-Drama* is Goodness, and these genres frame the question of what is meaningful. "It would be *hubris* for a man to claim knowledge of a meaning embracing the whole of existence. At best, in happiness or misfortune, success or failure, he will feel his way toward this all-embracing meaning, he will tentatively exercise faith in it; or, on the other hand, having established tiny islands of meaning, he will see them founder in an infinite ocean of meaninglessness. The three words of our heading [tragic, comic, tragi-comic] are concerned with the question of *meaning*, a question that goes through them all. There can be tragedies depicting the fall of the hero within a horizon of meaning or meaninglessness, just as there can be comedies in which the partial reconciliation takes place either as a symbol of belief in total reconciliation or, on the contrary, as an element of lightheartedness against a background of horror. Finally, there can be tragi-comedies that observe the events (which have a simultaneously tragic and comic effect) either with conciliatory humor or with grimness" (TD 1, 424). Von Balthasar's discussion of genre occurs prior to a treatment of judgment that launches into an Excursus on "Shakespeare and Forgiveness." While I agree that dramatic judgment occurs against the horizon of the meaning of the good (this is the central pillar of my argument regarding theodramatic hermeneutics and credibility), von Balthasar limits the utility of genre by separating it from his discussion of ritual, psychology, and sociology in the "Transition: from Role to Mission." The first citation in that section belongs to Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), (TD 1,

- A) *Historical-Genealogical Trajectory*: Metatheatre-1 indicates moments where theatre consciously refers to itself as a performance by directly addressing the audience. From *Henry V*'s opening prologue "O For a Muse of Fire," I theorize a historical-genealogical trajectory that links the European theatrical tradition to religious ritual drama. For von Balthasar, theatre and theology converge in their shared performance histories.
- B) *Tragico-Ethical Trajectory*: Metatheatre-2 indicates moments where theatre stages theatre, such as a play-within-a-play. From *Hamlet*'s "speak the speech I pray you" instruction to his actors for *The Mousetrap*, I theorize a tragico-ethical trajectory that links performance anxiety to theological issues of moral formation, justice, verisimilitude, and social consequence. For von Balthasar, theatre and theology converge in their shared questions about the Good.
- C) *Comedic-Hermeneutical Trajectory*: Metatheatre-3 indicates moments where theatre refers to the theatricality of ordinary life. From *As You Like It*'s "All the world's a stage" speech, I theorize a comedic-hermeneutical trajectory that finds in religion and theatre an analogy for a world-stage and multi-part role-playing. For von Balthasar, theatre and theology converge in shared emphasis on finitude, personhood, and freedom in relationship.

Bouchard's three metatheatrical modes overlap. Consider an example from musical theatre. The opening number of Kander and Ebb's 1966 musical *Cabaret* displays all three of Bouchard's metatheatricalities at once: *Wilkommen* to metatheatre-1 and the literal "you" of *Cabaret*'s paying audience; *Bienvenue* to metatheatre-2 and a show wherein the cabaret-within-a-play will comment upon the plot; *Welcome* to metatheatre-3 and a drama that ultimately suggests, with irony, "life is a cabaret." My trajectories also overlap, and do not represent neat categorizations of movements that find unique and total integration in Balthasarian convergence. My goal will not be to historicize

481). In order to more thoroughly integrate performance studies and other disciplinary visions of "religion and theatre," I include the genre history.

theodramatics in the way von Balthasar presents it: as the inevitable amalgam of other “trends in modern theology” summarized at the start of *Theo-Drama I*.¹⁰⁰ Rather, my goal is to show the *Prolegomena* as a major intervention in the twentieth century about the status of the interpretive work of theatre and performance, one that relates both its credibility for Christian thought and for multidisciplinary debate. These genre-trajectories will not construct a more complete *status quaestionis* for “religion and theatre” than what von Balthasar achieves in the *Prolegomena*, but doing some dramaturgical work to pay attention to *Theo-Drama*’s historical setting will help to clear up its genre-busting confusion. The genre of *Theo-Drama* will be shown to be *ressourcement* theological dramaturgy at the intersection of the historical-genealogical, tragico-ethical, and comedic-hermeneutical trajectories for religion and theatre. After establishing how these three trajectories “converge on what we have called *theo-drama*,” I conclude the chapter by addressing some lingering gendered genre questions about *Theo-Drama*’s relationship to mystical theology and dramatic literatures.¹⁰¹

§3.4.A “O for a Muse of Fire”: the Historical-Genealogical Trajectory

CHORUS:

O for a muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
Assume the port of Mars, and at his heels,
Leashed in like hounds, should famine, sword, and fire
Crouch for employment. But pardon, gentles all,

¹⁰⁰ “Balthasar presents his dramatic approach as something which brings together a whole range of tendencies or movements in modern theology. He depicts eight themes of the theology of recent decades, each of which has something to do with moving theology away from ‘the sandbank of rationalist abstraction.’ Each on his view is of some value, but none alone is ‘adequate to provide the basis for a Christian theology.’ All of them, however, can find their fulfillment—indeed their center—in the dramatic approach to theology, or so he believes. He has tried to show, he writes, that ‘the substantial efforts of modern theology are concentric, converging on a theo-drama, and that it is only in relation to this center that they can reciprocally complement each other.’ He envisions his own approach, in other words, not as coming from nowhere, but as that toward which modern theology has been, without realizing it, pressing (and in which it finds its fulfillment)” (Kilby, *Balthasar*, 59, with internal references to TD 1, 25, and TD 1, 77). Kilby also provides von Balthasar’s titles of his headings, covering TD 25-50, in a footnote: “Event,” “History,” “Orthopraxy,” “Dialogue,” “Political Theology,” “Futurism,” “Function,” “Role,” and “Freedom and Evil.” For a concise summary of von Balthasar’s treatment of these “trends in modern theology,” see Aidan Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth: A Guide Through Balthasar’s Dramatics*, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 12-16.

¹⁰¹ TD 1, 25.

The flat unraised spirits that hath dared
 On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
 So great an object. Can this cockpit hold
 The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
 Within this wooden O the very casques
 That did affright the air at Agincourt?
 O pardon, since a crooked figure may
 Attest in little place a million,
 And let us, ciphers to this great account,
 On your imaginary forces work.
 Suppose within the girdle of these walls
 Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
 Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
 The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.
 Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.
 Into a thousand parts divide one man
 And make imaginary puissance.
 Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
 Printing their proud hoofs i'th' receiving earth.
 For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
 Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,
 Turning th'accomplishment of many years
 Into an hour-glass: for the which supply,
 Admit me Chorus to this history,
 Who prologue-like your humble patience pray,
 Gently to hear, kindly to judge our play.
 (*Henry V*.Pro.1-34).

The multiplicity-in-unity of the Chorus—"Into a thousand parts divide one man"—opens *Henry V*. This Prologue functions to invite the audience's interpretive work. The audience needs to conjure "the vasty fields of France" and "the air at Agincourt" "within" "the girdle of these walls" of a London auditorium. The audience should "piece out our imperfections with your thoughts" so a consequential war can come to life. Interpretive work means that mental energy can multiply, "attest in little place a million," the players seen in the scene. Human actors can mingle words to bring forth animal companions: "Think when we talk of horses, that you see them / Printing their proud hoofs." The audience must contribute something to raise the stakes so that the conflict becomes meaningful. Only "imaginary forces work" to place an afternoon's entertainment in the light of "famine, sword and fire." The benefit is that theatrical temporality can move with dramatic

alacrity “jumping o’er times, / turning th’accomplishment of many years / into an hour-glass” and the finite budget and technology of an “unworthy scaffold” can display “two mighty monarchies.”

A gathered crowd in the “wooden O” of the Globe replaces the Olympian gods to whom this Chorus “prays” directly for charitable and merciful judgment. The prologue is an O-antiphon—“O for a Muse of Fire,” “wooden O,” “O pardon”—for the advent of the historical king in the humble guise of an actor.¹⁰² This emperor might not be naked, but he wears no clothes made from legitimate regalia. It is only “your,” that is, the audience’s, “thoughts that now must deck our kings.” Yet the Chorus’ instructions for the audience to make Dionysian spiritual exercises do not divert any attention away from the reality of the performance event. The speech fuses spirit and form by invoking both the civic drama of the Greeks and Romans (“Harry” will “assume the port of Mars”) and the liturgical drama of Christian ritual. “Imaginary puissance” will transubstantiate “A kingdom for a stage” and the “wooden” “scaffold” into French soil now soft enough to be imprinted by imaginary “proud hoofs i’t’h’ receiving earth.” The Chorus ritualizes because this play’s magic will not depend on spectacle.¹⁰³ Neither will the Chorus call *Henry V* pure fiction or idle play. The prologue cascades apologies precisely because it seems offensive to the reality of history to make up so many things, to “ascend,” like Icarus, to “The brightest heaven of invention.” The stage is not a battlefield; the actors are not kings; the horses are not even there. The chorus asks for the audience’s ticket in a ritual exchange of credibility: “Admit me Chorus to this history.” The “prologue-like” prayer puts its audience into the eschatological judgment seat over and against its presentation of the drama of history. The Chorus pleads gentleness in hearing and kindness in judgment of “our play.”

¹⁰² For a concise summary of the O-antiphon tradition, see Marilyn Krieger, “The O Antiphons,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 4, (2016): pp. 475-482.

¹⁰³ One could, of course, decide to play the speech ironically with high production value, but this would undermine the fundamental interpretive work required to make sense of *Henry V*’s passages of time. Compare, by contrast, the spectacle of magic tricks at work to establish a very different genre in Tom’s metatheatrical prologue to Tennessee Williams’s “memory play” *The Glass Menagerie* or the enchanted beauty of the life-size horses (with visible puppeteers created by South Africa’s Handspring Puppet Company) that cross similar continental battlefields (this time, in the Great War) in Nick Staffords’ play *War Horse*.

Echoes of Aristotle reverberate as drama tries to out maneuver both poetry *and* history. The player's performative utterance co-operates with the audience's imaginative and interpretive work makes the drama's story of Henry real as a public good. Drama stages historical consciousness.¹⁰⁴ The Chorus enacts public memory and a way to hand on narratives that bind Henry's and Shakespeare's "tribes" together.¹⁰⁵ Propagandish histories often serve the purpose of social cohesion. Costume dramas and public reenactments teach, entertain, and re-define the inherited tradition. Theatrical histories *re-member* by handing on stories, myths, and traditions.¹⁰⁶ Gadamer puts it well: "operative in artistic presentation is recognition, which has the character of genuine knowledge of essence; and since Plato considers all knowledge of essence to be recognition, this is the ground of

¹⁰⁴ This relates to Gadamer's understanding of tradition and performance history: "Here the truth that lies in every artistic experience is recognized and at the same time mediated with historical consciousness. Hence aesthetics becomes a history of worldviews—i.e., a history of truth, as it is manifested in the mirror of art" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 98).

¹⁰⁵ Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Knapp's book leaves a definition for "theatre people" loose, open, amorphous as an analogue to Ben Johnson's "tribe" of "good fellows." The porous boundary serves two purposes. On the one hand, it demonstrates the openness and inclusivity of Elizabethan players. Knapp sees the stage's welcome as an inversion to Puritanical exclusion; packed public theaters demonstrated a Christian ideal of hospitality and community unable to be matched by the churches. Theatre sat between mercantile professionals and common laborers; anyone could become a player, and yet to be a "theatre person" lent an air of panache, training, and gentility. Actors and playwrights were *gentlemen*, not simply vagabond bards. Knapp also draws a useful distinction between theatrical companies—that is, economic organizations that organized the labor and cost of theatrical production—and "theatre people" as a general body, a collective identity that signifies interest, skill, and a manner of being. Nevertheless, Knapp strategically underdetermines an exact definition for "theatre people." Here, he imports a contemporary resonance for those strange fans who love everything about theatrical spectacle. Tracking Knapp's argument, to be a theatre person means to inhabit comfort with spontaneity and emotionally availability, a way of being that enjoys both reveling in and marveling at the spotlight, a love and skill for the craft of play-making, a willingness to transform the mundane into a site for drama. The good fellows of the tavern strike a chord with the sensibility of theatrical personhood; openness to the possibility of an augmented, enchanted reality linked always to increasing joy or commiserating in sadness. To be overly dramatic—to be theatrical!—means jettisoning conventional emotionality; "theatre people" embrace such an amplified living. "Theatre people" possessed a comfort with the fluidity of personal and communal identity, and their fluidity spilled over into the performance of tavern good fellows and the seventeenth century's near constant flux of company, royal, ecclesial, and performative allegiances. But, while he never pins down a precise theory for what makes a "theatre person" a "theatre person" beyond family resemblance, affective unity, like-mindedness, Knapp defends Shakespeare's plays from Stephen Greenblatt's claims of spiritual evacuation and Puritanical charges regarding hypocrisy and vice. For more on Greenblatt's secularization theory, see his *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2001). See also Larry D. Bouchard's discussion of Greenblatt in *Theater and Integrity: Emptying Selves In Drama, Ethics, and Religion*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 105, 109, 120, and Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe*, 238n19.

¹⁰⁶ For a discussion of memorial performance in the context of Christian liturgy see Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis As Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology In Dialogue*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000). The notion of a "story formed community" figures prominently in narrative ethics. See Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study In Moral Theory*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

Aristotle's remark that poetry is more philosophical than history."¹⁰⁷ History stages *anamnesis* (recollection, memory) rather than *mimesis* (imitation, replication).

The audience's interpretive work produces the surplus meanings that render history meaningful. An audience develops affection for and judges the characters as presented by the play, and so appears to get to know characters from the past through a new theatrical manifestation in the present. The play's historical characters are not resurrections, but a representation of historical memory in the present. As a theatrical genre, history mythologizes the past in order produce an interpretation that matters (and materializes) in the present.¹⁰⁸

The same sort of mythologizing historical work is at play in the commonplace genealogy that links European theatre-making definitively with Greek tragedy and medieval Christian liturgy. The story proclaims a genetic history to link contemporary theatrical practices with cultic origins.¹⁰⁹ The story goes something like this: religious practices emerge from ancient rituals that look similar to how drama can be performed in the present. The tragedies of ancient Greece and India put gods on the stage; so, too, did the plays of ancient Rome. Eventually, religion suppresses non-sanctioned ritual drama as a threat to proper religiosity (both orthodoxy and orthopraxy). Religious ritual operates as something *other* than drama, just as civil pageantry operates as something other than

¹⁰⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 115.

¹⁰⁸ In some ways, this awareness of a mythological difference distinguishes the dramatic genre of history from practices of historical reenactment. The historical reenactment presents itself in its *accuracy* as an opportunity to make history "real" by minimizing imaginative work (apart, of course, from loading the musket with real bullets or instances where reenactors envision a mythic past). Another approach would see such a bringing together of the past and present align reenactment with performance art, as in Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, (New York: Routledge, 2011). My position is that the genre of historical drama draws attention to the co-operation of the audience's interpretive work. There is a consequential difference between the historical drama of the Christian liturgical meal that cites the supper without replicating it accurately and what is at stake in a performance of a "living stations of the cross" or "passion play" that literally crucifies the actor playing the Christ, even if both sorts of performances sit are "historical."

¹⁰⁹ Examples abound: Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality In Western Literature*, (Princeton University Press, 1953) and Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, Michael Tanner, trans., (New York: Penguin, 1993) offer exemplars for some direct link between ancient theatrical cults and contemporary religious drama; Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (New York: Verso, 1998) challenges the reign of Aristotelean poetics as a common thread linking the Greek tragedies to the German baroque *Trauerspiel*.

drama. One is “real” and the other is “play” (determining which is which belongs to the moral questioning seen in the tragico-ethical trajectory). Later on, drama re-emerges spontaneously from religious practices that have become so theatrical as to produce a mode of entertainment worthy to stand on its own as a non-religious event. The angels stand at the foot of the altar to recite the lines of the *Quem queritas* trope; the ornamentation of the medieval liturgy spills from clerical reserve of the altar in York Cathedral onto the laypeople’s streets in the form of the mystery cycle.¹¹⁰

Theatricality and religiosity circulate between houses of drama and houses of worship.¹¹¹ The genealogy is so tempting because religion and theatre are both culturally relative categories.¹¹²

Anything might be religion just as *anything* might be performance. As David V. Mason argues in *The Performative Ground of Religion and Theatre*, the myth can be displaced by a more general notion of the human need to create as a performative foundation for both religious and theatrical doing.¹¹³

The genealogy only becomes mythic if it tries to assert itself as a definitive or scientific history. The Chorus speech from *Henry V* offers a different kind of historical memory. Like Mason, the Chorus argues that religion and theatre share practices: praying, invoking, gathering in a common space, playing parts, remembering, cooperative imagination. These shared practices ritualize history in meaning made present. The drama interprets the past in such a way that it

¹¹⁰ Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

¹¹¹ The story in this section could (and perhaps even should) be told differently, and my image of circulation risks undervaluing medieval drama because of this project’s disciplinary and historical priority (that is, Christian thought in the twentieth century). It is precisely the *richness* of medieval stages that von Balthasar aims to retrieve. Aesthetic attention imbues both liturgical and theatrical drama with grandeur and consequential meaning. Drama does not ornament history; drama makes history meaningful.

¹¹² For a summary discussion and rebuttal to the ritual origin hypothesis for theatre, see Eli Rozik, *The Roots of Theatre: Rethinking Ritual and Other Theories of Origin*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002).

¹¹³ “There is something performative in religion and theatre. What is *performative* lies in a singular, poetic impulse to bring self into being and manifests in *acting*—a phenomenon that we construe variably. In some cases, we call acting *religion*, in other cases, *theatre*” (David V. Mason, *The Performative Ground of Religion and Theatre*, [New York: Routledge, 2019], 9). Both activities respond to the same “poetic impulse” that grounds creativity: “In theatre, ritual, storytelling, dance, theology, the hundred forms of performing, *poesis*, not *mimesis*, spreads through a group, whose actors mutually coordinate and mutually constitute each other as collaborators with existence’s essential and ongoing undoneness” (Mason, *Performative Ground*, 156).

constructs an inheritance to play for an audience present in the present “gently to hear, kindly to judge.” What links ancient, medieval, and contemporary religion and theatre, therefore, is something closer to Michel Foucault’s theory of a genealogical history of the present.¹¹⁴ It should come as no surprise that theatrical examples abound in Foucault’s genealogy of disciplines, prisons, and the carceral state or that Talal Asad might speak about “dramas of manipulative power” in his *Genealogies of Religion*.¹¹⁵ The same operations and negotiations of power undergird Catherine Bell’s ritualizers in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*.¹¹⁶ The historical-genealogical trajectory suggests how twentieth-century theorists found, in performance, the mechanisms for the transference of knowledge and power.¹¹⁷ Religious and theatrical practices might not evolve from a common ritual organism, but might, instead, transmit recognizable patterns through a tradition. The genealogy follows not a pattern of direct cause and direct effect but patterns of performance histories.¹¹⁸

Theatre provides the terms to interpret the presentational character of human social phenomena. Anthropologists and social theorists—Émile Durkheim, Victor Turner, Erving Goffman, J.L. Austin, Richard Schechner, Judith Butler, to name only a few—found drama to be a hermeneutic key to all sorts of activities by supplying the explanatory language of *performance and performativity* to understand *repeated* traditions and practices that cohere in individual and collective

¹¹⁴ Michel, Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

¹¹⁵ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power In Christianity and Islam*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 67.

¹¹⁶ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Bell’s discussion of ritualization as “a strategy of power” indicates how ritualizers on all sides of ritual exchange are active practitioners. “Ritualization, as the interaction of the social body with a structured and structuring environment, specifically affords the opportunity for consent and resistance and negotiated appropriation on a variety of levels” (Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 144).

¹¹⁷ For Foucault and Bell the two notions are indistinguishable: knowledge is power.

¹¹⁸ The logic of the historical-genealogical trajectory also applies to the theological notion of the development of doctrine. Cf. Maurice Blondel, *The Letter On Apologetics and History and Dogma*, Alexander Dru and Illyd Trethowan trans., (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans 1994) and John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1994). particularly as regards the idea of collegiality and apostolic succession developed at the Second Vatican Council. That is, the bishops are not *genetic* descendants of the apostles who must prove their historical continuity by means of a chain of ordination cause and effect. Rather, the college of bishops genealogically “succeeds” the college of apostles.

identities. Durkheim locates the concretion of religious power and social identity in the “collective effervescence” of communal performance.¹¹⁹ The Chorus appeals to the gathered crowd in order to endow theatrical totems with dramatic meaning.¹²⁰ Turner’s notion of “liminality” in rites of passage accounts for the relationship between the individual role and a larger social drama.¹²¹ Prayerful supplication to the audience makes the finite stage a place between times and between worlds. J.L. Austin found in performance a language that does what it says.¹²² The Chorus announces how performative utterances work by doing: this play presents because it says so. Erving Goffman applied theatrical categories to the performance of everyday life: by playing social roles humans enact identities in relationship.¹²³ The Chorus reminds the audience that single actors will need to take on many different social roles. Richard Schechner saw performance at work across theatre and anthropology.¹²⁴ The performance of *Henry V* will remember civic as well as mythological histories. Schechner opened a subfield of “performance studies” to liberate the study of repetitive action and doing from exclusivity in application to playscripts and drama.¹²⁵ In the realm of gender and political theory, Judith Butler expands performativity to be an ontological category, one that identifies the

¹¹⁹ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious of Religious Life*, Joseph Ward Swain, trans., (London: George Allen, 1915). This version is freely available online from Project Gutenberg at http://www.gutenberg.org/files/41360/41360-h/41360-h.htm#Page_214. A social collective gathers and compounds energy it bubbles over and “that general effervescence results which is characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs” (211).

¹²⁰ Cf. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious the Life*, 219.

¹²¹ Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970) and *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action In Human Society*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

¹²² Performatives are speech-acts that do what the words describe in a given context. Classic examples of a performative utterance include “Class dismissed,” “I accept your apology,” and “I do” (in the context of a wedding ceremony). See the discussion of performatives throughout Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*.

¹²³ Goffman develops his theory of ordinary social “role-playing” through his dramaturgical approach to social phenomena. Drama provides a set of tools to interpret social action. See Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

¹²⁴ Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

¹²⁵ “In the West, the active sense of script was forgotten . . . and the doings of a particular production became the way to present a drama in a new way. Thus, the script no longer functioned as a code from transmitting action through time; instead the doings of each production became the code for re-presenting the words-of-the-drama.” (Richard Schechner, “Drama, Script, Theater, and Performance,” in *Essays on Performance Theory, 1970-1976* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1977), 38).

reality of socially constructed phenomena in bodily doing rather than idealized or essential being.¹²⁶

Thought constructs the world. Little differentiates the imaginary work that crowns the stage Harry from the imaginary work that crowns Elizabeth *regina*.¹²⁷

Performability, then, becomes the commonality between theatre and religion. Religion and theatre are both performed by the same sorts of bodies. The historical-genealogical is not a product of the twentieth century. The trajectory found a new vocabulary and emphasis on comparison providing scholars with a capacity to narrate the relationship between religion and theatre by means of performance. The Greek tragedies can be performed today, so too were the Greek tragedies performed in the past. The same prayer by the Chorus to imagine horses trot across a seventeenth-century stage can be performed for a twentieth-century audience just like an ancient Chorus might call down the Muse to inspire a performance of the history of the Trojan war. Human bodies speak words and do actions. The phenomena described by the words performance, ritual, spirituality,

¹²⁶ Butler has developed her notion of performativity across multiple projects. See especially *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1990); *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, (New York: Routledge, 1993); *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, (New York: Routledge, 1997); *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015).

¹²⁷ The words “performance,” “performative,” and “performativity” are obviously related, but all three will be misunderstood if considered to be synonyms. Performance describes the presentational activity of being. A performance presents itself to be interpreted by someone else. Performance always implies an audience. A chair is, but the chair performs when interpreted as a chair. A stump is, but a stump can perform as a chair when interpreted as a place to sit down. This works for speech-acts, so Austin’s performative utterance does that which speech says that it does (perform + active). Performatives make action present: “make it so.” Performative speech constitutes a meaningful event that has consequence so long as the context authorizes the performative utterance. Context separates the “All rise, court is now in session” performative utterance of the court bailiff so to open the trial from the “all rise, court is now in session” of an actor playing a bailiff on stage. Refusing to rise from one’s chair in court makes a statement about the legitimacy of the context; refusing to stand in a theater makes different meaning. The notion of performativity describes this quality of coming-into-being-by-doing that occurs within contexts of citation, duration, and specificity. Performativity need not be intended as a choice. A “lap” is performative; one’s lap only exists while it is being performed. One’s lap is neither an object to be possessed like other objects, nor is the term “lap” a kind of linguistic fiction. Laps can be real, but each performance of your lap’s performativity cites previous performances. That’s how we know to call this particular performance of a lap one’s lap. Laps have a limited duration: stand, and your lap vanishes as its performativity fades. Laps work differently for different people and different things: even statutes can perform laps. Each discrete performance of a lap bring the lap into being. A term to describe this quality of being of a lap only in and through its performance uses the word “performativity.” It is right to say that a showy or emotional or enthusiastic performance of sitting is “theatrical” or “dramatic,” but it is wrong to say that laps have greater or lesser degrees of “performativity.”

theatre, liturgy, drama, and religion all explode from a constructed history made present again by way of interpretive work. Religion and theatre re-member history.

The historical-genealogical trajectory is decisive for von Balthasar as the source for the credibility of Christian theological claims expressed in liturgical activity and that spin out into drama. “In the West the cultic drama, the liturgy with the Eucharist at its center, unfolding through the course of the year and culminating in Holy Week—which even today, in the Eastern Church, is the dramatic source of all Christian life—developed aspects of the theatre which helped to bring home the Christian reality.”¹²⁸ Ritual performance indicates the porous membrane between religion and theatre.¹²⁹ At the reference to Holy Week, the days of special liturgies with special activities to mark the Christ’s triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, last supper, betrayal, passion, death, and resurrection, von Balthasar footnotes Maurice Blondel’s assertion about holy week’s “*le plus grand des spectacles et des drames*” (“the greatest of spectacles and dramas”).¹³⁰ Easter ritual dramas—with palm fronds and kissed crosses, baptismal waterworks and foot washing, bonfires and shared candle flames, incense and ringing bells, hours of readings surveying the whole of salvation history, processions and communions, and the triduum refusal to the secular passage of time—make good theatre as they form and initiate new Christians. The drama of Holy Week is the liturgical and theological *telos* of *Theo-Drama* when von Balthasar’s Holy Saturday theology appears alongside dispatches from von Speyr’s annual embodied performance of the Christ’s suffering in the last volume. The liturgies of Holy Week were reformed as part of the twentieth century *ressourcement*, and von Balthasar provides a new theological interpretation for a “new” Holy Saturday in the calendar.¹³¹

¹²⁸ TD 1, 105.

¹²⁹ Donalee Dox describes performance in the context of spiritual presences to be a “permeable boundary between people’s sense of an inner, spiritual life and the bodies acting in the materiality of culture” (Dox, *Reckoning with the Spirit in the Paradigm of Performance*, [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016], 60).

¹³⁰ TD 1, 105n53 quoting Maurice Blondel, *Cahiers Intimes 1883-1894* [Cerf, 1961], 200; Apr. 20, 1889

¹³¹ Pius XII’s reforms of the Holy Week liturgies created opened a “new” block of time on Holy Saturday. Local customs lead to the creep of the vigil earlier and earlier into the day on Saturday. No ordinary service occurs from the conclusion of the Good Friday liturgy until the great vigil Saturday *evening*. For the official documents, see the Sacred

In other ways, *Theo-Drama* relies on the historical-genealogical trajectory in order to make its corrective to Christianity's anxiety about performativity. No, performance anxiety has not gone away because of the Chorus' speech. In fact, this very act of historical theatre-making began with pagan prayers to purportedly false gods. Theatrical representations of history are not the same as what happened in the past. One battlefield is a theatre for entertainment with a curtain call; the other battlefield is a theatre of war where the dead stay dead. Shakespeare's Chorus keeps apologizing for a reason. That which is performed can only be a present testimony to a communal memory. Drama's credibility as history relies on the trust of the audience judging what comes into being in the present. Drama, therefore, does not prove any continuity with history other than shared interpretive work with common resources. Performance, however, might be able to make that history meaningful with similar practices to the ways drama and religion came to be made meaningful in the past: ritualizing interpretive work together in "our play."

§3.4.B "Speak the speech, I pray you": The Tragico-Ethical Trajectory

HAMLET:

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you—trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it as many of our players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for, in the very torrent, tempest and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant—it out-Herods Herod. Pray you avoid it.

[...]

Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word the

Congregation of Rites, Decree *Dominicae Resurrectionis*, (February 9, 1951): *Acta Apostolicae Sedis (A.A.S.)*, 43 (1951) 128ff.; Decree *Maxima Redemptionis nostrae mysteria*, (November 16, 1955): *A.A.S.* 47 (1955) 838ff. I am grateful to Gerald Fogarty, S.J. for explaining the significance of Pius XII's liturgical reforms regarding the movement of the paschal vigil.

word to the action, with this special observance—that you o’erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so o’erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as’twere the mirror up to Nature; to show Virtue her feature, Scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now this overdone, or come tardy off, though it makes the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve, the censure of which one must in your allowance o’erweigh a whole theatre of others. O, there by players that I have seen play and heard others praise—and that highly—not to speak it profanely, that neither having th’accent of Christians nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of Nature’s journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

[...]

O, reform it altogether, and let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them. For there be of them that will themselves laugh to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the meantime some necessary question of the play be then to be considered.—That’s villainous and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it. Go, make you ready.

(*Ham.* III.2.1-14, 16-34, 36-43)¹³²

The hesitant and melancholy Prince takes on the role of a directing dramaturg. One scene earlier, Hamlet asked what I will call in my next chapter his dramatic question of being in the “to be or not to be” speech. Did the actor playing Hamlet “announce” “to be or not to be” “trippingly on the tongue” or “mouth it” like a “town-crier”? Did the actor “saw the air” with superfluous gesticulation to express the “torrent, tempest” of Hamlet’s mental anguish, or did the actor “gently” make choices to “beget a temperance that may give it smoothness”? Over-the-top theatrics will not play in the context of a tragedy. The sin of overacting “offends” Hamlet’s very “soul.” “Passion” can be torn to “tatters, to very rags” when it is “o’erdone.” A “robustious periwig-pated fellow”

¹³² Hamlet’s speech is played in the presence of the “three of the Players.” I have omitted the two one-line interjections in order to preserve the clarity of the unity of the speech. The interjections add little to what Hamlet says, but they helpfully divide the speech into three parts and emphasize this speech that is given to other actors.

screams “noise” murdering innocent lines in ways that “out Herods Herod.” The threat to whip an actor who bellows to “split the ears of the groundlings” appeals, directly, to the present experience of this speech played before its own crowd of groundlings. Here, Hamlet’s speech makes a metatheatrical wink at the audience (whether it also signals Bouchard’s metatheatre 1 or 3 in addition to 2 depends on how the line is played).¹³³ Hamlet prepares his actors for his theatrical trick to trap a murderous king, but the “dumb-show” Hamlet plans will require a virtuosic naturalism in order to succeed. Tragedy needs that style to show “Nature” her own “Virtue.”

Hamlet makes a different request to his fellow actors playing actors from that in the prayer to the audience-god that concludes the prologue to *Henry V*. To play tragedy well requires immersion, mimetic illusion, and calm obedience to the script. The final portion of the pre-curtain speech distinguishes the textually obedient style Hamlet theorizes from the improvised style of a clown. Amateurish theatre mocking itself can amuse and entertain but it will not transport. Clowning disregards a play’s tragic and “necessary question.” Hamlet does not render drama boring or indict moments of levity within a tragedy. Clowns still play their role but must have fidelity to the script rather than *ad lib* making “barren spectators to laugh.” A key point of this pre-curtain speech—preparing the actors for Hamlet’s theatrical interrogation of a murder suspect—leads Hamlet to locate skill in the *audience* rather than the actors. The melodramatic “overdone” might entertain by making the “unskilful laugh” but over-doneness fails to cause those with cultivated and

¹³³ The scene is not a play-within-a-play, but it *prepares* for the play-within-a-play these actors will perform in the coming scenes. I locate such scenes of actors working at being actors within Metatheatre-2 to avoid the regress of Meta-Metatheatre-2. The scene does not “break the fourth wall” and comment on *this* event of theatre to the audience. The reference to the “groundlings” certainly represents Metatheatre-1 if the scene were played in a space set up like the recreated Shakespeare’s Globe in London with actual patrons standing on the ground in the pit, but these “groundlings” merely remind us of performance histories “in the world of the play” if the speech happens in a proscenium or thrust auditorium according to a different style. Similarly, the scene could be staged in such a way that Hamlet’s instructions to the actors do not land as a director’s pre-curtain speech. It could be played as a Metatheatre-3 theory of authenticity. Hamlet might mutter these instructions to himself as a meditation on the need for sincerity in the middle of his feigned madness. Potential references abound to other aspects of the plot now articulated in theatrical language: palace intrigue with Claudius, Elsinore’s new “Herod,” and Gertrude as the “clowns” with “ambition”; the ghost whose origin cannot be discerned as to whether it is “Christian, pagan, nor man.” The speech begins with a warm-up tongue twister and the other players could interject to make the unskilled actor but paying Prince feel welcome backstage.

distinguished taste to feel anything. An overcooked scene loses all flavor. Clowning “cannot make the judicious grieve.” The invocation of the clowns thus distinguishes tragic acting from comic acting so the instructions are genre specific. The first part of the speech is a single request to the actors framed by the twice uttered “pray you.” Hamlet pleads against the amateurish lack of subtlety.¹³⁴ The second part of the speech develops the dramaturgical theory behind Hamlet’s directive. The first part anathematizes melodramatic mugging as a Pelagian trying too hard that is unsuitable for the task at hand. The third part calls to “reform” the “villainous” comedic pandering that “shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool.” The “fool” and “clowns” reign in comedy, but the middle part of the speech teaches Hamlet’s ethics of good acting for a tragedy. The first section’s instruction is ambiguous and could be played for laughs; Hamlet goes over-the-top in his denouncement of overacting. “Alas” *Hamlet* is a tragic play where the skull of “poor Yorick,” that fellow of “infinite jest,” can only appear as a *memento mori* (*Ham.V.1.174-175*). So the middle section must follow its own rules and “let discretion be your tutor.”

Hamlet is a virtue ethicist. Action aimed at the good flourishes in a virtuous coherence of outward sign and inward reality. “Suit the action to the word, the word to the action” means a

¹³⁴ Perhaps this could be a warning against the very sort of theatrical over-doing that characterizes performances in Act II when Hamlet tries to preform the Pyrrhus speech (*Ham.II.2.297ff*). The Prince’s excitement at the arrival of the Tragedians of the City seems twofold. On the one hand, Rosencrantz reveals the coming players to be a company in whom Hamlet was “wont to take such delight” (*Ham.II.2.326*). The promise of some theatre lifts Hamlet’s melancholia, at least for a short time. He greets the players as a frequent audience member with enough experience to track changes in facial styling—“O, old friend, why, thy face is valanced since I saw thee last” (*Ham.II.2.429*). Hamlet showers them with a patron’s jokes, welcome, and high praise. But the other nobles of Elsinore do not share Hamlet’s kind of theatrical enthusiasm. Polonius embodies aristocratic artistic consumption without any love for the stage in itself; Polonius is not one of Knapp’s “theatre people” (cf., *Shakespeare’s Tribe*). The courtier can situate the Players’ skill critically and broadly as “The best actors in the world” (*Ham.II.2.392*), yet despite his assurance how “Seneca cannot be too heavy” (*Ham.II.2.396*) with these players, Polonius nonetheless balks at the speech’s length (*Ham.II.2.436*). Extracting performance from the trappings of courtly entertainment saps their pleasure for the flattering Polonius. He lauds Hamlet’s halting attempt as “good accent and good discretion” (*Ham.II.ii.462-463*) but begs to be excused from the spectacle displayed by the lead Player’s passionate delivery: “Look whe’er he has not turned his colour and has tears in’s eyes. Prithee no more” (*Ham.II.2.515-516*). Polonius does not enjoy virtuosic performances of theatrical drama so much as he enjoys playing in the political theatre of the court. As Bouchard observes, “What may well delight Hamlet is how these actors—probably persecuted as vagrants and accustomed to stock parts—may enjoy a freedom from fixed roles, which threatens Polonius but which Hamlet desires” (Bouchard, *Theater and Integrity*, 113).

seamless and tailored translation of script into performance without the accretion, loss, or distortion of the real. The actor's character stays close to the moral register of the colloquial *person of good character*. Interior goodness (symbolized by the words of the play) must be expressed outwardly (symbolized in the actions of the player). The tragic actor provides the "time" "form and pressure" of a "body" for the script's words. As such, the tragic actor also seems somewhat fated by the script to which the actor must be obedient. Naturalistic obedience to the author's wishes will become the only sort of acting von Balthasar will tolerate as good. I treat a theological problem in his imposition of naturalism's tragic fate at length in my final chapters. The point, here, is to emphasize how a tragic sensibility confronts a broken world with how broken it is.

The goal is to "hold as 'twere the mirror up to Nature" so that the audience sees *itself* depicted in the situation on stage. *Pace* Lacan, Hamlet's "mirror-stage" permits the recognition of the theatrical representation as a legitimate reflection of the really real world. Over-acting breaks the illusion by calling attention to itself as a defective imitation. Actors must correctly mimic and recreate the kind of humanity Nature would make. Good acting appears natural when it refuses to "o'erstep the modesty of nature"; bad acting displays the sloppy work of humanity crafted by Nature's unprepared "journeymen" apprentice who has "not made them well, they imitate humanity so abominably." Good tragic acting, therefore, is nothing other than presenting "Nature" with itself by moving the actor's personality out of the way. Style, self-awareness, metatheatrical reference corrupts tragedy's capacity to show human existence to itself. Only properly naturalistic action can conjure the "mirror" "to show Virtue her feature." If *The Mousetrap* plot works, the King will most certainly "Scorn" his moral failure and guilt once confronted with his "image" in the dramatic "mirror."

The Christian ethics of acting seem problematic, however. Hamlet wants to make the *mimesis* Plato banned from the just city into a mirror showing right action. The speech assumes the

longstanding ethical worries about actors' sincerity, transparency, honesty, integrity.¹³⁵ To act poorly, that is, failing to align outwardness with inwardness, means to be unchristian, pagan, perhaps even inhuman. That is, Christians will be known by their "accent" and "gait." The *coup de grace* of the speech arrives at an Aristotelean moral application of the performativity: to *be* a Christian is to *act* Christianly. The Christian is the one with Christian habits that align mind, body, and soul. The religious imagery becomes reminiscent of Paul's theatrical rhetoric for martyrs in his First Letter to the Corinthians: "For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals" (1 Cor 4:9). Mugging puffs up (cf. 1 Cor 8:1), "profanely" acting when it "struts and bellows" by dishonoring others in a self-seeking mockery rather than rejoicing in a display of theatrical truth (cf. 1 Cor 13:5-6). Bad acting mirrors like a fun house. Bad acting deforms the serious into the silly by distorting and darkening Nature's mirror meant to show Virtue (cf. 1 Cor 13:12). Actors play with occasions of sin.

Shakespeare is no stranger to the anti-theatrical bias that runs rampant in Christianity.¹³⁶ While Hamlet presents a confident theory of virtuous acting, most of the Christian tradition greets performance with anxiety. The tragico-ethical trajectory for religion and theatre both acknowledges and continues to worry about the power of performativity. Actors can impersonate others, and this capacity to become someone else raises an existential question regarding the legitimacy of training in the arts of duplicity. Actors are professional liars, with demonic skills usually attributed to the empty showman, Satan. Mimicry divides oneself against oneself. In holding the "mirror up to Nature,"

¹³⁵ Performance carries this ethical resonance of "character." See Bouchard, *Theater and Integrity*.

¹³⁶ The "anti-theatrical bias" predetermines theatre as a kind of deception. For a major review of the theme and its history, see Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981). For a discussion on the role of antitheatricality in negotiations of public life, see Lisa A. Freeman, *Antitheatricality and the Body Politic*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017). The anti-theatrical bias manifests as a symptom of what I call "performance anxiety."

Hamlet has nonetheless asked the players to adopt an identity distinct from their own. Naturalistic tragic acting transforms ordinary lies into a sublime art. Sanctioning theatricality risks the denial of the existence of anything natural at all.¹³⁷ The groundwork of a virtue ethics in the natural law tradition will be to seek to perfect some already latent “natural” capacities. The surplus meanings generated by theatre’s interpretive work prompt the doubt of dramatic doubling. If the theatre conjures a distinct and autonomous addition in its mirror, which reality is to be trusted as real and which reality a mere simulation?

Performance anxiety is older than Christianity, but it finds champions in the Church Fathers.¹³⁸ Von Balthasar’s theatrical *ressourcement* surprises because it appears to rebuff the *ressourcement* appeal to the early church and non-Christian sources. For the sake of framing the tragico-ethical trajectory, I consider four examples: Tertullian, Augustine, John Chrysostom, and Emmanuel Levinas. Tertullian’s objection to Roman spectacles is threefold. In *de Spectaculis*, he identifies the problem with the formation of Christians who attend the circus, plays, and gladiatorial games.¹³⁹ First, public shows enact a kind of idolatry by distracting attention from the Christian God for the sake of celebrations of civic gods or violent immoralities. This might be the obvious idolatry of attending events celebrated in the name of pagan gods, or it might be the structural idolatry of the theatrical mirror that displaces truth for lies. Second, just attending the Roman spectacles could undermine the “public testimony” of the life of a baptized Christian.¹⁴⁰ The wanton immorality of

¹³⁷ So the same anxiety about an ancient actors’ performance can apply in other areas of social life. Consider how theatre prompts discussions of gender’s performativity. Disagreements between feminist theorists, queer theorists, and new natural lawyers redound to varying tolerance for performance anxiety. Do bodies display an *already* encoded “natural” script for the performance of a life? What lines, if any, can or should be drawn between the playful cross-dressing of a comedy like *As You Like It*, the liberating discoveries gender performativity in the cross-dressing at drag shows, or the cross-dressing that leads Euripides’ *Bacchae* to end in tragic violence? These questions depend on predetermined ideas that styles of dress can, indeed, cross boundaries indicated by the performance of clothing.

¹³⁸ TD 1, 89-105.

¹³⁹ Tertullian, *de Spectaculis*, S. Thelwall, trans., in *Anti-Nicene Fathers, Volume III: Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., (New York: Scribner, 1905). The same text can be found freely available online at http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-09.htm#P890_350630.

¹⁴⁰ Tertullian, *de Spectaculis*, IV.1.

the circus or lewd comedies should not be graced by the presence of the adopted children of God. Third, the renunciation of Satan includes a renunciation of theatrical mimicry. The problems often overlap, as in the case with the wearing of masks: “And in regard to the wearing of masks, I ask is that according to the mind of God, who forbids the making of every likeness, and especially then the likeness of man who is His own image? The Author of truth hates all the false; He regards as adultery all that is unreal.”¹⁴¹ Any form of theatrical mimesis rejects fidelity to God’s truth in theatrical hypocrisy.¹⁴² The tragico-ethical trajectory, for Tertullian, promises the reward to the faithful Christian who avoids such worldly distractions and entertainments. The blessed will enjoy the greatest spectacle in the vision of God against the backdrop of a view of the justified suffering of the damned in the eternal performance of divine glory.¹⁴³

Where Tertullian Christianizes Platonic anti-theatricality in his rejection of the spectacles as unbecoming for the Christian, Augustine’s *City of God* furthers the tragico-ethical trajectory. Roman theaters not only offend God with their idolatry, but they perniciously malform those who attend. Just as Roman civil authorities could not be both actors and senators, so too did the early church worry about Christian actors. A leitmotif in *City of God* cautions against theatre’s quite literal collusion with the demonic. Those depicted on stage “are not gods, but malignant fiends.”¹⁴⁴ Demons use theatrical hoodwinking to trick unsuspecting pagans into believing unworthy gods somehow desire to be disgraced in public spectacles. The stage teaches a civil-desire theology. In

¹⁴¹ Tertullian, *de Spectaculis*, chap. XXIII.5.

¹⁴² “Condemning, therefore, as He does hypocrisy in every form, He never will approve any putting on of voice, or sex, or age; He never will approve pretended loves, and wraths, and groans, and tears. Then, too, as in His law it is declared that the man is cursed who attires himself in female garments, what must be His judgment of the pantomime, who is even brought up to play the woman!” (Tertullian, *de Spectaculis*, chap. XXIII.6).

¹⁴³ “I shall have a better opportunity then of hearing the tragedians, louder-voiced in their own calamity; of viewing the play-actors, much more ‘dissolute’ in the dissolving flame; of looking upon the charioteer, all glowing in his chariot of fire; of beholding the wrestlers, not in their gymnasia, but tossing in the fiery billows; unless even then I shall not care to attend to such ministers of sin, in my eager wish rather to fix a gaze insatiable on those whose fury vented itself against the Lord” (Tertullian, *de Spectaculis*, chap. XXX.5). Dante offers a counter-vision of God’s eternal theatre with his image of the heavenly rose-auditorium in the Empyrean (cf. *Paradiso* 33), but the pilgrim’s journey to the *visio dei* nonetheless recounts sufferings of the damned with its own poetic pleasure.

¹⁴⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, II.29, 87.

Book VII, Augustine make the point plain: “Hence it is clear, without any ambiguity, that this ‘civil’ theology has invited wicked demons and unclean spirits to take up residence in those senseless images and by this means to gain possession of the hearts of the stupid.”¹⁴⁵ For Augustine, watching Roman performances—his favorite kinds are the romantic and the violent—invite demons to colonize the heart.

Augustine’s heart is restless for God, and he goes in search of meaning by means of drama.¹⁴⁶ The Doctor of Grace appears to agree with the Melancholy Dane that well performed tragic theatre arouses real emotions in its audience. Augustine raises the problem that those emotions have been misdirected. If performing well means embodying a character’s desires well, then Augustine’s critique of the passions and longings shown on the Roman stage cuts to the ethical core of theatrical *mimesis*. The objection carries additional moral and theological weight if acting means ordering desire in the wrong direction, away from God. Augustine finds the misdirection of acting at the formal level which emphasizes fiction over reality. The “lie” at the heart of theatre-making is the mutually consensual conceit of theatrical doubling. Second, there is the misdirection of love at the thematic level in the performance of a lover’s tragedy. Consider *Confessions* Book III when Augustine explores how he loves to weep over Dido’s tragedy. Watching her story moves him to feel, but this movement of passion is not proper conversion to the Good. Tragedy provokes an empty catharsis for the sake of its own pleasure. Augustine sheds tears for the actress’s lie but ignores similar such suffering in the everyday world.¹⁴⁷ The better an actress deceives, the more applause she receives. The theatregoer weeps at the feigned death of a character in the dramatic mirror, but shrugs off encounters with the poor. Augustine, like Tertullian, identifies how the

¹⁴⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, VII.28.

¹⁴⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, I.i.1.

¹⁴⁷ “A member of the audience is not excited to offer help, but invited only to grieve. The greater [the spectator’s] pain, the greater [the spectator’s] approval of the actor in these representations.” Augustine, *Confessions*, III.ii.2, (Chadwick, 36).

Roman bread-and-circus policy sinfully obfuscates the too-common sufferings bought through cruelty or indifference: starvation, slave labor, and war. Theatre trains an audience willing to play along with such evil.

John Chrysostom continues this trajectory of the tragico-ethical critique of theatre. Blake Leyerle presents Chrysostom's view of ancient theatre in *Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives: John Chrysostom's Attack on Spiritual Marriage* as the source and expression of indifference to suffering. Rather than blame the actors forced into these circumstances, Chrysostom blames the audience.¹⁴⁸ But the drama's moral formation also negatively impacted the spectacle of the liturgy. "Social habits learned in the theater also informed the church in another way. According to Chrysostom, theatergoing had encouraged congregations to regard preaching as a kind of entertainment rather than instruction."¹⁴⁹ Chrysostom thus joins with Tertullian's and Augustine's anxiety about the ways in which theatrical spectacles negatively affect religious ones. Their performance anxiety regards the phenomenological similarity between theatrical and religious spectacles, particularly in the ancient world. Genre expectations miss the key distinction between theatrical performances meant for entertainment and religious performances meant for edification. Chrysostom argues, "What the congregations witness in church is 'not a dramatic spectacle'; nor, he adds, do they 'sit looking at tragic actors' with an obligation only to applaud. Instead of a theater, the church is properly a 'spiritual school,' even as the work of preaching is furthered not by pandering to a taste for entertainment but by fulfilling the need for instruction."¹⁵⁰ The church could not compete with the excitement of the theatre, and the tragico-ethical trajectory continues this line of performance

¹⁴⁸ "It is the audience who will be required to account to God for the lives 'of harlots and prostitute boys.' The source of such callous disregard for the sufferings of others, according to Chrysostom, lies in the theater, where people gather to laugh at slapstick comedy, at the spectacle of people disgracing themselves" (Blake Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives: John Chrysostom's Attack on Spiritual Marriage*, [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001], 57).

¹⁴⁹ Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives*, 60.

¹⁵⁰ Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives*, 66, with internal references to Chrysostom's *Homiliae in Matt.* 17.6 (Patrologia Graeca 57.264) and *Adversus Judaeos* 7.6 (Patrologia Graeca 48.925).

anxiety throughout the history of European drama. Only a few years after Hamlet introduced Shakespeare's concept of the dramatic mirror, the Puritans would proceed to close England's theaters. Christian sermons cannot compete with the entertainment value of theatre.

The tragico-ethical trajectory for religion and theatre is not exclusive to Christianity. In the twentieth-century, Emmanuel Levinas underscores the danger of investing too much meaning in the artistic shadow of reality.¹⁵¹ For Levinas, contemporary philosophies of art inherit Romantic assumptions about artistry's superiority over nature. The cult of art lauds the creation of a material instantiation of absolute being.¹⁵² The cult of art makes "art for art's sake" disinterested in the means or motives of cultural production. The fine arts, as the source and summit of cultural production, are properly a-political and anti-ethical. Levinas excoriates the arts that train a culture to praise beauty, the sublime, grand design and poetic genius. All are distractions from conceptual reflection in a flight from reality to contemplate its shadow.¹⁵³ He writes, "Art does not know a particular type of reality; it contrasts with knowledge. It is the very event of obscuring, a descent of the night, an invasion of shadow."¹⁵⁴ Any art-making, not simply theatrical mimicry, should be disconcerting for the ethical human who wants truth on its own terms, not truth held to an aesthetic standard of beauty that might be dictated by oppressive taste. Disinterestedness in regard to art leads to a disinterestedness in fellow humans, too. Like the demonic-dramatic theatre in Augustine, "An image marks a hold over us rather than our initiative, a fundamental passivity. Possessed, inspired, an artist, we say, harkens to a muse. An image is musical. Its passivity is directly visible in magic, song, music, and poetry."¹⁵⁵ Subordination to the arts distracts humanity from the hard work of ethics. Indeed,

¹⁵¹ Emmanuel Levinas, "Reality and Its Shadow" in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1987).

¹⁵² "[A]n artwork is more real than reality and attests to the dignity of the artistic imagination, which sets itself up as knowledge of the absolute" (Levinas, "Reality and Its Shadow," 1).

¹⁵³ "Art then lets go of the prey for the shadow" (Levinas, "Reality and Its Shadow," 12).

¹⁵⁴ Levinas, "Reality and Its Shadow," 3.

¹⁵⁵ Levinas, "Reality and Its Shadow," 3.

the arts can be turned to nefarious ends. The civic theatrics and aesthetic abuses of “fascinating fascism” prove but one of the logical conclusions of the tragico-ethical trajectory and confirms much merit in Levinas’ aesthetic worries.¹⁵⁶

The tragico-ethical trajectory for religion and theatre provides von Balthasar with a double-edged sword. On the one side, his rehabilitation of theological aesthetics responds to the “root” Platonic anti-mimetic performance anxiety by means of an appeal to a Christian counter-tradition of theological aesthetics that follows from John of Damascus’ defense of icons through Bonaventure’s theological defense of the arts to his reconceptualized account of the Romantic poets. A similar appeal to the power of culture flows from von Balthasar’s compatibility with the aesthetic and cultural preoccupations of critical theorists in the Frankfurt School, especially Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Walter Benjamin. Ideological assumptions about the world are adjudicated in everyday realms of culture, whether it be von Balthasar’s resituating of aesthetics and dramatics as a fundamental theology or Horkheimer and Adorno’s account of the culture industry’s dictatorship of consumerism.¹⁵⁷ On the other side, *Theo-Drama* appropriates much of the dramaturgical theory that undergirds the tragico-ethical trajectory. *Theo-Drama* justifies making a *ressourcement* to the theatre without anxiety by means of von Balthasar’s appeal to the historical-genealogical trajectory. Far from calling into question the legitimacy of drama for Christian theology, the tragico-ethical trajectory emphasizes *Theo-Drama*’s consideration of God’s self-revelation according to Goodness. “For God’s revelation is not an object to be looked at: it is his action in and upon the world, and the world can

¹⁵⁶ The phrase alludes to the title of an essay by Susan Sontag in *Under the Sign of Saturn*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980).

¹⁵⁷ “To posit the human word as absolute, the false commandment, is the immanent tendency of radio. Recommendation becomes command. The promotion of identical commodities under different brand names, the scientifically endorsed praise of the laxative in the slick voice of the announcer between the overtures of *La Traviata* and *Rienzi*. [...] Today works of art, suitably packaged like political slogans, are pressed on to a reluctant public at reduced prices by the culture industry; they are opened up for popular enjoyment like parks” (Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, ed., Edmund Jephcott, trans., [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002], 129).

only respond, and hence ‘understand’, through action on *its* part.”¹⁵⁸ Von Balthasar’s acting theory with its heavy emphasis on Stanislavskian naturalism agrees with Hamlet’s dramaturgy without reservation. Drama does theological work when it holds the theatrical mirror up to illuminate the drama of existence. Drama can be abused and can be led astray, but von Balthasar reorients dramatic resources toward the center of the Christian tradition. He does so by linking drama’s “natural desire” to seek the good with a “supernatural end” in the Good revealed as God in the Christian kerygma.¹⁵⁹ The tragico-ethical trajectory—like all signs of human sin—will be “crossed out” by the tragico-ethical trajectory of the Christ’s life, death, descent, and resurrection. The Christ will become *Theo-Drama*’s ultimate tragic hero. Yet von Balthasar appears to accept the position of theorists who find it impossible to see tragedy in the light of the Easter candle.¹⁶⁰ *Theo-Drama* corrects for Augustinian performance anxiety with von Balthasar’s own *felix culpa*. Within the Christian paradigm, von Balthasar claims the light of the risen Christ relativizes literary tragic flaws into something closer to happy faults.¹⁶¹ *Theo-Drama* thus appropriates the tragico-ethical trajectory without clouding the drama’s mirror with any of its tragic anxiety.¹⁶² It remains to be seen, however, if von Balthasar

¹⁵⁸ TD 1, 15, emphasis original.

¹⁵⁹ See the discussion of drama and “The Struggle for the Good” in TD 1, 413-465. The quotations marks signal *ressourcement* Thomism (especially Rahner and de Lubac) and a focus on an “already graced nature” in the configuration of the human creature possessing a “natural desire for a supernatural end.”

¹⁶⁰ Cf. the reference to George Steiner’s position that “Christianity is an antitragic vision of the world” from *The Death of Tragedy* (London, 1961), p. 331 quoted TD 1, 427n6.

¹⁶¹ “Man, and the Christian in particular, is placed in the tension between election and rejection; as a martyr, he takes on himself the tragic destiny of proclaiming salvation in this world, or else is involved in the battle between faith and unbelief; he finds himself in the contradiction between the divine law and the human desire for self-affirmation; he is exposed to evil. [...] The words... ‘doubt’ and ‘unbelief’ should not be applied to the abandonment of Jesus on the Cross... even though this abandonment is more profound than anything we can imagine and, according to the Christian understanding, underpins everything that can be termed ‘tragic.’ This mystery eludes all literary categories and relativizes them: we shall discuss this at a later point. It is clear from the start, however, that this overarching Christian reality (God on the Cross abandoned by God) goes way beyond the problems of the mere opposition of human and divine freedoms” (TD 1, 429).

¹⁶² “The miracle of Christian trust in God and in the redemption on the Cross is something delicate, something that can be made intelligible and believable only from heaven’s perspective, so that it takes merely a breath to cover this clean mirror with the cloudiness of anxiety” (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian and Anxiety*, Michael J. Miller, trans., [San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000], 94).

adequately takes up the challenges issued by performativity. My project will forward his theodramatics in order to argue that von Balthasar does not take performance seriously enough.

§3.4.C “All the world’s a stage”: The Comedic-Hermeneutical Trajectory

DUKE SENIOR:

Thou seest we are not alone unhappy:
This wide and universal theatre
Presents more woeful pageants than the scene
Wherein we play in.

JAQUES:

All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. As, first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse’s arms.
And then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress’ eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon’s mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper’d pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.
(*AYLI*.II.7.136-166)

A good joke sometimes needs a bit of set-up, and the “all the world’s a stage” speech needs to be played within its context. The play’s proper fool, Touchstone, notes, “the truest poetry is the most feigning” (*AYLI*.III.3.15), and Jaques’ speech feigns a melancholy gravitas about the transience

of life.¹⁶³ Duke Senior prompts the metatheatrical metaphor in reply to the dramatic situation.

Orlando wanders into the Duke's encampment seeking help for ailing Adam, "an old poor man" (*AYLI.II.7.129*). Orlando seeks their aid. Rather than refuse this request for help, Duke Senior offers them unconditioned welcome to their "scene" of the "wide and universal theatre." For Duke Senior, manifold "woeful pageants" call humanity into community, sharing, and mutual care. Bearing witness to the "unhappy" suffering of those "alone" means extending an invitation to a place at the Duke's table and a community "wherein" there is enough room for strangers to "play" too.¹⁶⁴

Jaques follows this introduction with his attempt at foolery. Welcoming strangers recognizes their particularity but also some generic similarities. Jaques notes that "All the world" constitutes the stages of such meetings. "Men and women," rather than occupy some cosmic center of ultimate concern, are "merely players." The serious play of good living permits Jaques melancholy "entrances and exits" to reframe loss and transition, the sorrow felt at the Duke's "woeful pageants," as just another aspect of the movement of a finite life's narratives. Human identity comes not through contingencies of bodily strength, technical prowess, wit, wealth, or status but in a composition of the "many parts" each of plays in a lifetime. The speech proceeds to a mythic typology for a life well lived: "seven ages" with "acts" from infancy to geriatric decline. But each age carries its own contribution to "this strange and eventful history." Jaques confronts nostalgia for childhood—the baby "puking," the schoolboy who creeps slow and snail-like "unwilling to school." His one-line jokes, though, reveal something of the unique possibility each moment carries. The lover's hot "furnace" sighs and love songs, the soldier's mad ambition for "reputation even in a cannon's

¹⁶³ Monsieur Jaques prefigures stereotypes of beret-capped French existentialism; his version of fooling befits the tradition of the sad clown, the fool who is "deep-contemplative" (*AYLI.II.7.31*). But Jaques *wants* to play the fool—"O, that I were a fool! I am ambitious for a motley coat" (*AYLI.II.7.42-43*) and seemingly convinces the young Orlando of this achievement. In a later scene, Orlando will remark that Jaques' reflection in the brook resembles "either a fool or a cipher" (*AYLI.III.2.296*).

¹⁶⁴ For an alternative take on Duke Senior's hospitality, where welcomes in the forest of Arden are far more self-motivated, see James Kuzner, "As You Like It and the Theater of Hospitality," in *Shakespeare and Hospitality: Ethics, Politics, and Exchange*, Julia Reinhard Lupton and David Goldstein, eds., (New York: Routledge, 2016): 157-173.

mouth,” the “wise” judge who embraces the extra stomach-padding of success (seen in his “fair round belly with good capon lined”). The miserly and Scrooge-like “sixth stage” with “spectacles” and money “pouch” “well saved” but whose “big manly voice” will be reduced to pre-pubescent “childish treble” on the road to “mere oblivion.”

These seven ages chide the particular sins at each moment of human development. One grows from one failing and into yet another, but the many parts played stop the infant’s spitting wrath, the schoolboy’s whining sloth, the lover’s burning lust, the soldier’s jealousy and pride, the judge’s gluttony, the fixed-income elder’s avarice, from damning a soul in any one habit of sin. Jaques’ sense of life’s performativity undoes an obsession with ontology. Life changes, so too do people and their roles. An identity, retaining the integrity of a name as “continuity-in-change,” carries throughout.¹⁶⁵ The dark conclusion, an inevitable dénouement that returns dust unto dust—“Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything”—points only to the drama of life’s inevitable ending. Wasting away into nothingness could be positively figured as the limits of confidence in finitude. Jaques returns to gloss Adam’s need for help; the final line would be cruel if not for the camp’s gift of hospitality to one who has begun his transition to the final act. In light of the scene’s immediate action, Jaques’ foolish realism offers a comedic reinterpretation of life’s conclusion. Those in healthier “ages” can try to bring comfort and joy to those nearing their final curtain call. Life’s play on the world-stage responds to the needs of this world’s scene partners. Human being and becoming flourishes in fluid, open, and responsive play together, “not alone.” The response to finitude is to share it.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ “*Identity* is from the Latin for ‘the same,’ *idem*, as in ‘this is identical to that.’ But it is more helpful to define it in terms of what a person *identifies with* or that by which one is *named*. Such identifiers usually persist over time, meaning that identity is a mode of continuity-in-change” (Bouchard, *Theater and Integrity*, 23).

¹⁶⁶ The reframing of finite resources from scarcity into plenty is the core of Juliet Schor’s anti-consumerist ecologically driven argument in *Plentitude: the New Economics of True Wealth*, (New York: Penguin, 2010). For Schor, the presumption of scarcity in late-capitalism is a lifestyle and attitudinal choice that fuels greater consumption. Plentitude calls greater “attention to the inherent bounty of nature that we need to recover. It directs us to the chance to be rich in the things that matter to us most, and the wealth that is available in our relations with one another. Plentitude involves very

Jaques' image of the world-stage prompts a reinterpretation of given circumstances. The comedic-hermeneutical trajectory for religion and theatre finds surplus meanings lying in wait. The dominant narratives for religion and theatre in the context of Christian thought are the historical-genealogical and tragico-ethical trajectories, but a decisive minority report finds theological themes illuminated by means of theatrical rhetoric. Christian theologians often disregard performance's contribution to systematic, dogmatic, and philosophical theology when they refuse to acknowledge the *theatricality* implied by using dramatic images in the comedic-hermeneutical trajectory. Theologians tend to bracket the physical comedy as unserious, and instead ascribe issues of ritual and performance to the purview of a separate theological discipline indexed to praxis rather than speculation. Drama might contribute to the distinct genre of liturgical theology by means of the historical-genealogical trajectory. At the same time, theologians tend to bracket the tone of comedy as unserious, and instead ascribe issues of character formation and ethics to the purview of another separate theological discipline also indexed to praxis rather than speculation. Drama might contribute to a distinct genre of moral theology by means of the tragico-ethical trajectory. The comedic-hermeneutical trajectory houses the performance anxiety of religious claims that cannot be proven according to empirical methods. Rather than appeal to God's self-revelation as self-authenticating, the comedic-hermeneutical trajectory of religion and theatre locates the possibility for credible theology only through interpretive work. What has been operating behind the scenes so far in my project can now be brought in front of the curtain. The comedic-hermeneutical trajectory names the appeal to drama of the world in order for theological realism to operate in public without requiring the assent of a non-religious interlocutor. I contend that this trajectory is "comedic"

different ways of living than those encouraged by the maxims that have dominated the discourse for the last twenty-five years. It puts ecological and social functioning at its core, but it is not a paradigm of sacrifice. To the contrary, it involves a way of life that will yield more well-being than sticking to business as usual, which has led both the natural and economic environments into decline" (2).

precisely because theology risks being laughed out of the room. Theological realism can only function as a credible style if it presents its own weaknesses with playful humility. In an era of what I call “compromised institutions,” theology must dramaturgically cultivate an audience willing to offer interpretive hospitality.

Jaques suggests theatrical possibilities to find credible—even if not ultimately believable—Christian confidence in Trinitarian Father-Son-Spirit-God mathematics, where $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. Anthony J. Godzieba once told me a story about Karl Rahner’s homily on the Trinity. The defender of philosophical rigor in theological reflection, whose groundbreaking essay on the Trinity appeared alongside von Balthasar’s first crack at his Holy Saturday theology in the post-conciliar theological textbook *Mysterium Salutis*, would climb the pulpit and present a Jesuit’s homily in three parts. Like the late Beckett play, this homily is an act without words. First, Rahner raised one hand holding up one finger. Second, Rahner raised the other hand holding up three fingers. Third, Rahner would shrug his shoulders. The story of Rahner’s Trinity routine (regardless of its historical veracity) illustrates how the doctrine of the Trinity might be best approached comically; the doctrine of the Trinity remains playful precisely in the colloquial rule that drawing any trinitarian diagram commits some heresy or another. Just as Jaques argues that one person in a lifetime might play many parts without division, so too will the comedic-hermeneutical trajectory borrow from theatre. Christians claim one God in three persons whilst simultaneously claiming the Holy Trinity is neither a single divine essence-actor wearing Father, Son, and Spirit costumes nor a tri-theist committee of three (or more) ontologically distinct and competing personalities. The most pertinent application of the comedic-hermeneutical trajectory of religion and theatre to Christian thought is also its most personal.

Tertullian, the critic of spectacle, also offered an early Latin formula for the Christian Trinity as “*una substantia-tres personae*.”¹⁶⁷ *Persona* translates the Greek *prosopon*: the word for a dramatic role and its theatrical mask. Joseph Ratzinger argues in an article “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology” how “prosoponographic exegesis” is an ancient practice to “give dramatic life to events” by placing historical narratives into the “artistic devices of roles through which the action can be depicted in dialogue.”¹⁶⁸ Prosoponographic exegesis supplies a character to the different voices at work in a text. Ratzinger applies the term to patristic Trinitarian theology as a dramatic experiment in reading that may find antecedents in rabbinic exegesis.¹⁶⁹ From its inception, the interpretive theological language of Trinitarian persons expands from an interpretation of scripture on analogy to drama.¹⁷⁰ Even the archaic (and amusingly spelled) prosoponographic exegesis generates a surplus of theatrical characters from its interpretive work with the text. Trinitarian persons emerge from narrative, now reframed to spin out the surplus meaning of tri-personal names for God. This comedic-hermeneutical trajectory further suggests a performative and relational ontology. Trinitarian thinking, therefore, requires a sense of personality that is dynamic rather than static substance. So, following the comedic-hermeneutical trajectory of religion and theatre, Ratzinger argues how Trinitarian personhood is “*not* a substance that closes itself in itself, but the phenomenon of complete relativity, which is, of course, realized in its entirety only in the one who is God, but which

¹⁶⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” *Communio* 17, no. 3, (Fall 1990).

¹⁶⁸ Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” 441. An example would be Origen’s prosoponographic reading of the Song of Songs. Lorenzo Perrone finds it to be explicitly dramatic. Cf. Perrone, “Bride at the Crossroads’ Origen’s Dramatic Interpretation of the *Song of Songs*,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, 82/1 (2006), 69-102.

¹⁶⁹ Ratzinger is merely suggestive about the possibility to prove a rabbinic inspiration for patristic prosoponographic exegesis. Cf. Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” 443n5. “In my judgment it would be important to investigate the rabbinic antecedents to this prosoponographic exegesis. [Reference to E. Sjöberg’s “Geist im Judentum,” *TbWNT* 6.385ff.] A closer analysis of the texts could perhaps show that the patristic elaboration of the concept of person does not take its point of departure from the literary criticism of antiquity, but from this rabbinic exegesis.”

¹⁷⁰ For a more detailed discussion and references to the history of *prosopon* in Trinitarian theology see Michael Slusser, “The Exegetical Roots of Trinitarian Theology,” *Theological Studies* 49, 1988. For a book-length discussion of prosoponographic exegesis (rendered in the contemporary idiom “prospological”) see Kyle R. Hughes, *The Trinitarian Testimony of the Spirit: Prospological Exegesis and the Development of Pre-Nicene Pneumatology*, (Boston: Brill, 2018).

indicates the direction of all personal being.”¹⁷¹ Persons point outward, towards and for others. To play the sort of character Christians call a “person” will only be possible in relationship.

For Ratzinger (and von Balthasar), personhood consists in relationality and active giving in performance. Prosoponographic theologies take up the requirements of a theological actualism: “God is.”¹⁷² For most Christian theologians, God cannot be construed as a static or composite being like other created beings. God is not a finite thing like other finite things. God’s being, in the analogical language of Thomas Aquinas, must be considered *actus purus*, pure activity.¹⁷³ This sudden,

¹⁷¹ Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” 445. Ratzinger contrasts the outward-facing “we” of the Trinity understood since Richard of St. Victor’s appropriation by Thomas Aquinas with an inward and closed “I” of Augustine’s psychological analogy. Ratzinger notes that Richard’s “definition correctly sees that in its theological meaning ‘person’ does not lie on the level of essence, but of existence. [...] This seems to me also the limit of St. Thomas in the matter, namely, that within theology, he operates, with Richard of St. Victor, on the level of existence, but [Aquinas] treats the whole thing as a theological exception, as it were” (449) Ratzinger articulates the language of personhood *Christologically* in order to argue it is “the nature of spirit to put itself in relation” (451) and “in Christ there are two natures and one person, that of the *Logos*. This means, however, that in [Christ], being with the other is realized radically” (452). Human persons achieve heights of human personhood only as they relate outwards towards others and God: “If the human person is all the more with itself, and is itself, the more it is able to reach beyond itself, the more it is with the other, then the person is all the more itself the more it is with the wholly other, with God” (452). Theological personhood as outward facing “we”—whether in the Trinity or in the hypostatic union—cannot be an *exception* to how personhood works as a theoretical concept applied to human and divine being. Ratzinger follows Teilhard de Chardin’s theological method in light of the discovery of radium to see “the seeming exception is in reality very often the symptom that shows us the insufficiency of our previous schema” (450). Ratzinger aims to correct the closed interiority—“we have built our closets too small” (450)—of personhood in both Trinitarian and Christological registers that goes all the way back to Augustine. “It was indeed a result of Augustine’s doctrine of the Trinity that the persons of God were closed wholly into God’s interior. Toward the outside, God became a simple ‘I,’ and the whole dimension of ‘we’ lost its place in theology” (Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” 454).

¹⁷² Theological actualism is often most closely associated with the approach of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* (G. W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, eds., [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-1969], references hereafter follow convention and appear as CD with volume and part number) and its Christological concentration that funds Barth’s doctrine of Word and starting place in the doctrine of revelation. Barth begins §28 on “Reality of God” in CD II/1 with this phrase: “God is” (257). “When we ask questions about God’s being, we cannot in fact leave the sphere of His action and working as it is revealed to us in His Word. God is who He is in His works” (CD II/1, 261). Cf. Eugene F. Rogers, *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: Sacred Doctrine and the Natural Knowledge of God*, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1995); Paul Dafydd Jones, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics* (London: T&T Clark, 2008); Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology: Volume I: the Doctrine of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015). For a discussion of Barthian actualism *contra* von Balthasar’s reading of it, see William T. Barnett, “Actualism and Beauty: Karl Barth’s Insistence on the *Auch* in his Account of Divine Beauty,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 66(3) (2013): 299-318. For an application of Barthian actualism in the African Pentecostal context, see Tim Hartman, “The Promise of an Actualistic Pneumatology: Beginning with the Holy Spirit in African Pentecostalism and Karl Barth,” *Modern Theology* 33(3) (July 2017): 333-347.

¹⁷³ For Aquinas, God must be simple (i.e., non-composite, *Summa Theologiae* [ST], I.i.Q3.2) and immutable (i.e., non-changing, ST I.i.Q9.1), because God must be considered a “pure act.” God has no unactualized potentiality, already demonstrated by the First Way to prove God in ST I.i.Q2.3. If God were to actualize a potentiality (in the way the finite creatures do), God would have changed. Such would violate the philosophical rules of simplicity and immutability that protect the Creator from succumbing to the rules of creatureliness and render the infinite God into a finite thing. A changing God would also violate the scripture that Aquinas quotes to defend the position on immutability from Malachi

perhaps jarring, diversion into Christian philosophical theology nonetheless tracks along the comedic-hermeneutical trajectory. Mathematics must be reframed and reinterpreted in order to make sense of the God whose twoness is ambushed by threeness.¹⁷⁴ Claims about Trinitarian threefoldedness and multiplicity-in-unity must be held in hermeneutic tension. The credibility of the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be extracted from the scriptural record without prosponographic interpretive work (a problem for Trinitarian theology for scriptural fundamentalists looking for prooftexts). The credibility of the doctrine of the Trinity expressed in creedal formulae also must be subjected to critical evaluation in the era of compromised institutions (a problem for Trinitarian theology keyed to traditionalistic fideism citing authority). Trinitarian speculation argues from surplus meanings that can be more satisfyingly presented in a performance when bodies present together can hold polysemous meaning in space, time, and with consequence.¹⁷⁵

In a major convergence of these three trajectories for religion and theatre, the history, ethics, and hermeneutics of Christian ritual language becomes one contemporary battleground for Trinitarian theology.¹⁷⁶ To make sense of such themes requires an awareness that personhood can only make sense dialectically between fragments presented for reintegration by an audience, in what Bouchard calls a “weak” version of a self with “kenotic integrity.”¹⁷⁷ The comedic-hermeneutical

3:6: “I am the Lord, and I do not change.” Cf. ST I.i.Q9.1. These positions undergird for Aquinas’ discussion of theological epistemology and the doctrine of analogy in ST I.i.Q13.

¹⁷⁴ I adopt the notion of a “threeness” that “ambushes” twoness from Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay ‘On the Trinity’*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 330.

¹⁷⁵ Hence why so many Trinitarian theologies justify Trinitarian thought in the context of liturgical action. Ratzinger makes this move near the end of his essay: “The Christian’s relation to God is not simply, as Ferdinand Ebner claims somewhat one-sidedly, ‘I and Thou,’ but, as the liturgy prays for us every day, ‘*per Christum I Spiritu, Sancto, ad Patrem*’ (Through Christ in the Holy Spirit to the Father). Christ, the one, is here the ‘we’ into which Love, namely the Holy Spirit, gathers us and which means simultaneously being bound to each other and being toward the common ‘you’ of the one Father” (Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” underlined emphasis mine, 453).

¹⁷⁶ Debate abounds concerning the language for creedal and Trinitarian formulae in multiple Christian denominations at the institutional level. For one discussion of ways to reframe Trinitarian language in a *ressourcement* register, see Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is*, anniversary ed., (New York: Crossroad, 2012).

¹⁷⁷ See the Postlude “On Integrity: Persons and Ensembles” in *Theater and Integrity*, 333-342. “As to weakness, kenotic integrity takes as realistic the view that ‘to seek a self is to lose it’ and ‘to lose a self’ for others is perchance ‘to find’ or receive it. [...] Kenotic integrity may agree that *self* are only insofar as *they are narrative selves*. But past narratives are finite, fragmentary, distorted by rationalizations and pathologies, and need to be encountered anew and reconfigured. My past

trajectory turns outwards in search of an audience willing to find such playfulness credible. The task of audience building is dramaturgy, and *Theo-Drama* enacts the comedic-hermeneutical trajectory precisely in its dramaturgical *ressourcement* to the theatrical tradition.

Decisively, the “dramatic resources” for theological dramatic theory will be found in the wild of the secular-worldly-public theatre. At this point, it is prudent to unmask this dissertation’s own genre-confusion in a decision to be an experiment that continues von Balthasar’s *ressourcement* practices by means of public theological interpretations of plays-that-are-performed. Dramatic literatures and theatrical praxis *are not properly theological categories according to inherited disciplinary genres and yet they do theological interpretive work*. The question for multidisciplinary religious studies is whether cross-disciplinary work can present itself credibly as scholarship within the disciplinary genres already authorized to do such work. The approach, given its complicity within the comedic-hermeneutical trajectory, requires tolerating a mixed bag of theological parlor tricks as befuddling as they might be laughable. The attempt remains “weak” insofar as it speaks out from positions already granted by Jeffrey Knapp’s tribe of “theatre people” in search of a hospitable audience willing to offer *Theo-Drama* interpretive refuge. The credibility of the comedic-hermeneutical trajectory cannot be forced or demanded. Not only because it violates the credibility criteria of non-coercion, but because of the hermeneutic emphasis on freedom. To play a role requires freedom to create, discover, change, and improvise. To play a role on the world-stage demands play’s autotelic account of human dignity. “All the men and women merely players” who deserve co-equal hospitality.

Before returning to the problem *Theo-Drama*’s genre, it is also important to underscore a common thread across the three trajectories regarding reality and audience. Every metatheatrical

narrative-as-a-whole is, on the whole, simply *not there*, not unless it is given anew, and not only on past terms. Against the objection that imitation negates authenticity, the paradigm of kenotic integrity is both imitative and innovative; it is a dialectic that may allow us to retrieve a better sense of authenticity, one in which the ensemble is as important as the individual improviser” (Bouchard, *Theater and Integrity*, 341-342, emphasis original).

speech took interest in a situation requiring the cooperation of an active and co-creating audience.

The “prologue-like” Chorus to *Henry V* requests the joint interpretive work of the audience in order to make manifest a poetic history, and the Chorus apologized for the audience’s constant historical consciousness of its re-presentation at a distance from the real that already passed away. Hamlet’s curtain speech to the players for his *Mousetrap* plot presented the work of tragic acting as that which controls for the ineptitude of an “unskilful” audience. Tragic actors must avoid anything “so o’erdone” to be far afield “from the purpose of playing.” The tragic actor must train an audience unable or unwilling to do the sort of interpretive work requested by the Chorus. Only by submitting oneself to the fate of the script can good actors step out of the way of the real shown in theatre’s “mirror.” Ethical actors stop the audience from making the stage a place for cruel mockery.

Comedy, by contrast, allows Duke Senior and Jaques to contend more positively that “all the world’s a stage” because of the constantly shifting personal roles that can only be held together in the care of others. The “woeful pageants” of the “wide and universal theatre” suggest the need to interpret the sight of suffering as a call for hospitality. An audience who recognizes themselves on the world-stage further recognizes their own theatrical personhood always already in performative relation with and for others. “To be” a person with a role on the world-stage requires actions of what Letty M. Russel calls “just hospitality.”¹⁷⁸ Such comedic-hermeneutical acts reinterpret situations to share finite and given circumstances as freely as possible; failing to act in welcome chooses “not to be” a member of this creaturely ensemble.

¹⁷⁸ Russell proceeds to account for four essential characteristics of a just hospitality: “(1) clarity of mission, (2) reexamination of the Bible and traditions, (3) an alliance of partnership and power, (4) the goal of justice” (Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 118). In the context of ecclesial communities aiming to welcome marginalized Christians (particularly those ostracized due to sexuality or disability), Russell’s attention to “clarity of mission” is a claim about the social activity of genre as framing particular communities’ commitment to just hospitality as an invitation to those seeking refuge. Russell’s discussion of “safe spaces” from “textual harassment” also illuminates social-contextual genres in concerns for a just interpretation of the Bible. See Russell, *Just Hospitality*, 86-91.

§1.5 *Theo-Drama* and the Gendered Questions of Genre

The genre of *Theo-Drama* established by the *Prolegomena*, therefore, is a work of theological *ressourcement* dramaturgy at the intersection of historical-genealogical, tragico-ethical, and comedic-hermeneutical trajectories of religion and theatre. Theological *ressourcement* dramaturgy describes the first step in a “theological dramatic theory.” Confusion remains regarding why make a *ressourcement* to dramatic theory as a systematic principle within a philosophical theology. Must one be a “theatre person” in order to provide interpretive hospitality to *Theo-Drama*? The difficulty arises because von Balthasar develops the theory to render the *Theo-Drama* a credible work of theology in the seven volumes of his theological aesthetics. In a later chapter, I will argue that the scenographic image of a triptych helps to explicate von Balthasar’s theological trilogy because each “panel” utilizes an interrelated but nevertheless distinct systematic principle for its methodology. Like a triptych, each “panel” might be considered as a unified whole *and* as part of the larger composition. The *Gestalt* theory of perception at work in *Herrlichkeit*’s “seeing the form” denotes how understanding will only arise from an experience of the whole that is greater than the sum of its component parts.

Theodramatics depends upon and presumes the conclusions of von Balthasar’s theological aesthetics and so prepares the way for his discussion of theological logic. Theodramatic hermeneutics, however responds to the time and body problem in theological aesthetics. One cannot encounter a theology or a narrative as a whole in the same manner in which one encounters the whole of a painting. Glimpsing a painting can happen in an instant, but narrative requires time.¹⁷⁹ Drama, in von Balthasar’s theory, provides theology with the best of both aesthetic worlds. The unfolding of a dramatic narrative in theatrical time and space is a part of drama’s wholeness. The unfolding of a dramatic narrative by embodied creatures living lives of consequence is also part of drama’s

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984-1988).

wholeness. Therefore, consideration of the scriptural witness utilizes theological aesthetics and the theological interpretation of salvation history develops that aesthetics in theological dramatic theory. The aforementioned appeal to the distinction between aesthetics and dramatics to come is *formal* rather than generic. *Theo-Drama* integrates a matrix of genres *into* a self-described work of “systematic theology.” Dramatics serves as *Theo-Drama*’s method for doing theology, but the *Prolegomena*’s dramaturgy does more than prepare dramatic resources to make a Christological Trinitarian argument. It demonstrates the ways in which theology will be conditioned by the resources a theologian chooses to be a part of its *ressourcement*. The cultures, dramatic literatures, and theatrical techniques on which von Balthasar relies become the given circumstances for interpretive work. The books he chooses are his scene partners. To make dramaturgical sense of theatre or *Theo-Drama* requires making sense of this genre in terms of praxis.

Genre and praxis cooperate for interpretation. Mary Gerhart shows how genre choices spiral together with gendered questions. She writes,

the notion of praxis has brought about an important correction in the ways we conceive of genre and gender. The term *praxis* calls attention to the practical inseparability of theory from practice. In this sense, praxis supersedes the three foregoing characteristics—genre and gender as constitutive of meaning, as historical, and as theoretical—by insisting that we ask about the ends of and purposes of their particular construals. What are the results of any particular generic analysis and of the process of genre differentiation? What are the ends and purposes of any particular gender analysis and of the process of gender identification?¹⁸⁰

Theo-Drama’s genre as theological dramatic theory raises Gerhart’s questions. To embark on a genre analysis requires making active interpretive choices regarding an assumed genre. The interpreted object might resist, refine, or reveal greater depth to that choice. “According to this model, we have preconceptions of gender when we begin reading a text. Without any knowledge of the text, we

¹⁸⁰ Mary Gerhart, *Genre Choices, Gender Questions*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 29.

bring gender attributes to bear from the first moment of reading, and as we read the text for the first time we formulate an assumption about its genre.”¹⁸¹ The process continually circulates as understanding emerges.

Applied to *Theo-Drama*, Gerhart’s modifications to the hermeneutic circle and Lonergan’s “self-correcting process” presents her hermeneutic spiral “in which successive readings of the text, under the influence of genre choices and gender questions, lead to successively more refined understandings, which finally stabilize as an irreducible interpretation.”¹⁸² For theatre, the “irreducible interpretation” is the finite and live performance event: the production. Situated according to the dramaturgical problem of genre, the surplus meanings generated by interpretive work prompt particularly *gendered* questions.. At the level of genre, Gerhart helps to indicate the performance anxiety *Theo-Drama* triggers. The trajectories traced in this chapter concern *Theo-Drama* as a text of “religion and theatre.” But I began the chapter with references to the ways *Theo-Drama* brings together the often separated disciplines of “religion and literature” (also representing “theatre and performance studies”), mystical theology (representing “spirituality studies”), and philosophical theology (representing “systematic theology”). *Theo-Drama* brings two “soft” theological genre to mingle with the “hard science” of philosophically rigorous systematics. Mysticism is a gendered theological genre (all the more glaring when one looks to von Balthasar’s mystical scene partner, Adrienne von Speyr), so too is “religion and literature.” I will return to the question of Adrienne von Speyr’s influence on von Balthasar and theatrical-gender questions concerning persons (human and divine), the spirit’s direction, and bodies in the final chapter.

For now, I need to clarify *Theo-Drama*’s genre as *ressourcement* theological dramaturgy. The first volume of *Theo-Drama* prepares the audience by means of the dramaturg’s work. But if

¹⁸¹ Gerhart, *Genre Choices, Gender Questions*, 42.

¹⁸² Gerhart, *Genre Choices, Gender Questions*, 43, fig. 7.

theological dramatic theory simply prepares for a theology to come later, it can appear that von Balthasar's dramatic theory presents mere examples. Drama functions as an overarching organizational analogy that is pedagogical. A common objection to considering von Balthasar's dramatic theory in the context of religious studies proclaims that any contradictions between the analogue (theatre) and that which is explored (theology) should resolve in theology's favor without further concern. As a demonstration or example, one disregards von Balthasar's dramatic theory when it ceases to properly explain his theological positions. The *Prolegomena* is ornamental set-decoration for the properly systematic and philosophical theology in volumes II-V. This logic explains the minimal interest in *Theo-Drama's Prolegomena* by Balthasarian systematic theologians and cautions against projects (such as this one!) that disciple themselves to the theodramatic approach. The "real theology" happens in its later volumes. Von Balthasar admits something similar in *Theo-Drama's* first paragraph:

This "Prolegomena" calls for an apologia on account of both its length and its contents. I am aware that I am grievously trying the patience of my theological colleagues, since the present work is not theology, properly speaking, but initially only the assembling of materials and themes toward a theology. The book erects the apparatus, as it were, so that gymnasts may eventually exercise upon it. All the same, leafing through these pages, the sensitive theologian will anticipate the actual topics as they begin to emerge obliquely. All it needs is the magnet to align the iron filings and assemble them—into a Christology, a doctrine of the Trinity, an ecclesial and Christian doctrine of how to live.¹⁸³

At least, the writer appears to admit dramatic theory's subservience to the task of theology, but a skilled and hospitable audience—"Der Theologe *freilich*"—can anticipate where the plot will go and begin to see *Theo-Drama's* theology "*quasi in obliquo* announce itself and shimmer."¹⁸⁴ The *Prolegomena*

¹⁸³ TD 1, 9.

¹⁸⁴ Harrison translates the phrase as "the sensitive theologian," but *freilich*—a word that could just as readily translate to mean "of course" or "certainly" or, literally, "free-ly"—might function in the sentence as an aside to *any* theologian "free-ly" already playing along and seeing theological work in the midst of the theatrical prologue. Further, Harrison drops references to themes in von Balthasar's *Aesthetics* alluded to in the poetry of theatrical *anmelden* announcing and

is not strictly a work of systematic or academic theology, but the *Prolegomena* is also not strictly *not* a work of theology. *Theo-Drama* addresses a plurality of publics. The second paragraph makes an “even more pressing” apology to *Den Philologen*—philologists, humanities, and other literati. The first volume announces what the contemporary academy would laud as its interdisciplinarity. Further, von Balthasar, as literary manager and dramaturg, asserts that he has “been obliged to select and present [plays] for [his] theological purposes.”¹⁸⁵ Already, von Balthasar has established the symbiotic relationship between theology and dramatic theory. His *Prolegomena* is a *ressourcement* to human culture because he enacts this survey of dramatic literature and theatrical praxis with an eye to its contribution to theology. Not every aspect of human culture can be critically retrieved in every situation. Curation, citation, and allusion are never theologically or artistically neutral.

Three metaphors govern von Balthasar’s “meta-theodramatic” opening apologia to theologians: metallurgic, athletic, and musical. The interpretation of dramatic resources already contains a potential for “theological fruitfulness.” The fragments have a readiness to be drawn together by means of theological interpretation. All that must be done to assemble a coherent theology is hold up the magnet of systematic loci (e.g., Christology, Trinity, ecclesiology, theological ethics) to bring theatrical fragments into order. Theological foci unify dramatic resources in a magnetic field. Further, theological magnetism circulates throughout so that individual filings become magnetized but nevertheless find the source of attraction in the unambiguous magnet (the Christ). The metallurgic metaphor, therefore, justifies the priority of theology over dramatic theory. *Theo-Drama* will be a *theological* dramatic theory and not a dramatic theology.¹⁸⁶ Theology “charges”

durchschimmern shining-through. As always, his decisions clarify what is otherwise a hard to parse Balthasarian sentence: “*Der Theologe freilich, der mit einem Spürsinn diese Seiten durchblättert, dürfte allenthalben seine Thematik vorweg und quasi in obliquo sich anmelden und durchschimmern sehen*” (*Theodramatik* I, 9).

¹⁸⁵ TD 1, 9.

¹⁸⁶ Compare this to von Balthasar’s discussion of the distinction between aesthetic theology and theological aesthetics, GL I 77-114. Only a theological aesthetics can be “credible.” “By this we mean a theology which does not primarily work with the extra-theological categories of worldly philosophical aesthetics (above all poetry), but which develops its theory of beauty from the data of revelation itself with genuinely theological methods. It is, therefore, not necessary that,

assembled filings of dramatic theory “with the grandeur” and attraction “of God.”¹⁸⁷ This is not to say, however, that theological dramatic theory may avoid a study of theatre to gather those filings.

The athletic metaphor makes clear that the work of theology happens later in the gymnastics (*später geturnt werden kann*), but one cannot cartwheel across the balance beam or flip between uneven bars if the scaffolding (“apparatus,” *ein Gerüst wird aufgeschlagen*) has not already been built. Certainly no one comes to the gymnasium to watch empty rings, but any changes to the gymnast’s apparatus *necessarily* changes the nature of the routine. The apparatus conditions and informs the theological argument to come and cannot be dismissed, hence von Balthasar’s assumption he will try the patience of the theologians who read his book. Pressed to a logical conclusion, if something about the gymnastic apparatus is poorly constructed, it could lead to serious injury. I will argue that under-reported problems in von Balthasar’s dramatic theory lead to the well-documented problems in his trinitarian theology and theological anthropology.

Finally, a musical metaphor hums beneath the apologia to theologians but can be lost in translation: *Das Buch ist eine Stoff- und Motivsammlung* (“The book is a theme and motif collection”).¹⁸⁸ Here, the *Prolegomena* becomes an overture, teaching the tunes and melodies on which the later theology will sing. Placing such a prologue (a prolegomena) before the beginning of the drama helps acclimate various publics to the musical ideas they will hear, but melodies only make sense in the context of the plot once the drama has begun. This is not, however, to say that the themes and motifs established in the *Prolegomena* vanish once the more systematic theology begins. Rather, it is to say, quite plainly, that critics who disregard the *Prolegomena* not only misunderstand theodramatics but also proceed to misconstrue aspects of von Balthasar’s theology. Even worse, von Balthasar

as generally occurs in our century, theology renounce aesthetics, whether unconsciously or consciously, whether out of weakness or forgetfulness or even a false scientific attitude. For if it were, theology would have to give up a good part—if not the best part—of itself” (GLI, 114).

¹⁸⁷ Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur.”

¹⁸⁸ *Theodramatik* I, 9.

tends to universalize and totalize his own theatrical preferences. Like Wagner's opera, the music of the overture begins to dictate the meaning of the dramatic plot.

Confusion regarding the priority of theology and dramatic theory can be alleviated by means of an appeal to the title and subtitle of the work. *Theo-Drama* is a "theological dramatic theory." The resources gathered to establish the dramatic theory were chosen for theological reasons, and theology occurs on the stage set by dramatic theory. Drama serves theology, here. It would make sense if theatre and performance scholars were to reject von Balthasar's review of the dramatic tradition as biased by his metaphysical presumptions and religious affiliations. Yet to choose to bypass von Balthasar's contribution to the subfields of religion and literature and theology and drama in *Prolegomena* for disciplinary genre reasons would ignore one of the major achievements of the twentieth-century critical retrieval of drama for Christian thought. Furthermore, it perpetuates widespread Christian performance anxiety about the capacity to do interpretive work in the comedic-hermeneutical trajectory that might play the play differently. Skipping over the actual dramatic literatures and theatrical praxis at work in theodramatics also conditions how critics interpret its later volumes by closing off avenues of constructive engagement and missing von Balthasar's emphasis on the *public production* of theological interpretation. Theodramatic hermeneutics must be credible for both the study of theology and the study of theatrical phenomena. Otherwise, von Balthasar only produced a "dramatic theology."

II: INTERPRETING DUBIOUS GHOSTS:

Credibility, Doubt and Hamlet's Question of Being

Stage Directions for Chapter 2: *Somehow framing 'Theo-Drama as a blended genre at the crossroads of three trajectories did little to soothe performance anxiety. There's still that ominous feeling when a ghost walks across the stage. Drama calls something surely un-real really present. Things should be or not should be, at least that is a version of Hamlet's dramatic question about being. Christian theology calls for its interpretation of the world to trust in the gaze of faith. Theatre's ghosts present certain doubt and potential madness in the modern interpretation of religious performances. This chapter finds von Balthasar in good company when he turns to dramatic imagery to talk about credibility. Drama characterizes modernity, and both professional theatre and professional theology must happen in public in order to be credible. Theo-Drama can be historicized as part of a modern set of questions about being and the need to take action in an era of compromised institutions. Coercion and secrecy are no longer credible options once doubt haunts being's presence. Why choose to act and follow where a phantom leads?*

§2.1 Dubious Ghosts

"A ghost, particularly in the theater, ought to startle an audience into attention with a shiver. Doubt rationalizes the shiver, but it also signals an encounter. Where doubt exists, there may well be a ghost." —Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre*¹⁸⁹

Theaters are the sorts of places for doubt, the sorts of places where the dead come back to life. This chapter begins a conversation about drama and credibility that is always already haunted by history and location. Any references to drama and credibility in contemporary Christian theology brings ghosts of doubt onto the stage.

Perhaps theatrical visions of the dead emerge from drama's preoccupations with ghostly apparitions and historical impersonations. Theatricality itself is ghostly: every performance remains haunted by a playwright's words and its own ritualized performance history.¹⁹⁰ Even improvisations risk the terror of "dead air" when an actor gets caught in the lurch between suggestion and reaction. A failure of memory haunts any actor who "goes up" on a line and cannot remember how to continue. If the play of performance pauses for too long, the play ceases to play and the magic of

¹⁸⁹ Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xiii.

¹⁹⁰ Acting, itself, is a kind of "ghosting" for Marvin Carlson. See *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

theatrical illusion collapses back into bare materiality: the hellish realization that one has paid good money to be cramped in a hot, dark room with *other people*.¹⁹¹

The dead are not supposed to come back to life with such regularity. To borrow a slogan of the Broadway League, drama resurrects the dead “eight shows a week.” Drama’s ghostly recurrences rupture, rather than confirm, any confidence in certitude. The ghost, after all, is played by a living actor, presumably not an actual specter. Ghosts cross the stage as symbolic markers and invitations to doubt just as the Christian faithful cross themselves with the name of the Holy Ghost before making speech-acts of prayer. Ghosts cause a pause and a reorientation like the flicker of electric light said to prove a spirit has passed through the room. To encounter a ghost stops or starts action and confuses time.¹⁹²

The Prince of Denmark has good reason to hesitate. Hamlet poses his famous question of being in such a way that it cannot be answered except through some action that ventures into “undiscovered country.” Only a definitive choice could ever adjudicate between “to be or not to be” because *being on a stage* is the condition for the possibility of Hamlet’s theatrical moment. For the length of this soliloquy, Hamlet occupies the hesitant and ambiguous third invocation of being between “to be” and “not to be.” This is the mode of being performed by the speech’s first line: the dramatic *is* of Hamlet’s question of being.¹⁹³ “To be or not to be—that is the question.” Questioning “to be or not to be” takes Hamlet outside the ordinary flow of time. In terms of the play’s performance history, the Prince’s philosophical and existential maneuvering might account for the

¹⁹¹ “Hell is—other people!” (Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*, S. Gilbert, trans., [New York: Vintage, 1989], 45).

¹⁹² Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, Peggy Kamuf, trans., (New York: Routledge, 1994), 17-20.

¹⁹³ “If one wants to argue that the First Quarto of Hamlet is in any sense a ‘memorial reconstruction’ of a ‘better’ text, it seems now incredible that the actor or reporter failed to remember this particular line, which appears in Q1 as ‘To be or not to be—ay, that’s the point’” (Thompson and Taylor, “Introduction,” *Hamlet*, 18). The note in the Arden Shakespeare edition clarifies some alternative options for reading the question: “Perhaps, surprisingly after so much debate, editors and critics still disagree as to whether *the question* for Hamlet is (a) whether life in general is worth living, (b) whether he should take his own life, (c) whether he should act against the King” (Thompson and Taylor, *Hamlet*, 284n55, emphasis original).

speech's slipperiness. Theatre companies move it about *Hamlet*, including a 2015 production in London that tried to open with it.¹⁹⁴ The phrase seems, too, to exit the plot. "To be or not to be" functions as a synecdoche for theatrical drama (perhaps coupled with bad iconography that delivers it to poor Yorick's skull). Drama questions being in this open space between affirming and negating verbs of being, between kataphatic and apophatic questions. For Hamlet the distinction between being and not being is a question, and it is dramatic.

Questions direct thinking towards some horizontal and unknown goal. To ask a question is to embark on some miniature quest to Hamlet's undiscovered country.¹⁹⁵ Questions reframe and reconsider. Through questions known knowledge can be clarified, unknown knowledge can be revealed, and contextual assumptions can be reevaluated. Questions always open, and only some questions seek the closure of an answer. That questions open rather than close is all the more obvious in Hamlet's indecision.

The Prince's question of being is indirect. On the page, do we see a question mark? Looking to pages will also miss the (question) mark because the Melancholy Dane indirectly asks an audience the dramatic question of *being* directly in performance. To speak about the distance between being and not being in drama depends on this emphasis on Hamlet's speech *as played by an actor*. That is, an interpretation of the distance between "to be or not to be" happens in and through the actor. That third "is" of the dramatic question of being belongs on stage to the actor.¹⁹⁶ An actor must

¹⁹⁴ A change made before opening night returned the speech to the expected place. See Richard Lawson, "Benedict Cumberbatch's *Hamlet* has Fixed Its 'To Be or Not to Be' Problem," *Vanity Fair*, 19 August 2015. Available online at <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/08/benedict-cumberbatch-hamlet-to-be-or-not-to-be>. I am grateful to Joseph Lenow who brought this innovation to my attention after seeing the production.

¹⁹⁵ Question asking can be construed as a religious practice. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki presents the unity of questions with the questioner as the foundation for enlightenment in the Zen Buddhist sense. "To resolve the question is to be one with it" (D.T. Suzuki, "Enlightenment," in *The Review of Religion*, Columbia University Press, Vol. XVIII, Nos. 3-4, [1954]: 133-144). Alongside Suzuki, Hamlet's "question of being" can be considered a religious question.

¹⁹⁶ The actor's capacity to be within the dramatic question of being points to the stage as symbol for the co-creation of theatrical art shared by performer and audience alongside playwrights, designers, directors, managers, etc. The notion of "belonging" is not exclusive to the actor, as if the dramatic question of being were something "owned" or "wielded" by performers like a tool. Action opens the question for all present with the aid of the entire ensemble. The actor merely dwells within the question most obviously as the one who asks it.

somehow definitively choose and do human uncertainty on the edge of a definitive act. Perhaps this is one of the reasons Hamlet remains such a choice role to demonstrate an actor's mastery of the craft. Everyone may recognize the unmooring feeling of indecision, but few know how to choose to display this refusal to make a meaningful choice for action.

The relationship between Hamlet and the actor playing him complicates the question of being and presumptions about who gets to raise such a query in the first place. The actor occupies the space between "to be" and "not to be." Action happens in this space of an open question to be answered in time with consequential choices.¹⁹⁷ Drama presents this question of being, both by asking it now and embodying it in the presence of an audience. The actor's interpretation for how to play the moment engages the being of the question rather than provides the answer. The response cannot be some abstract conclusion between about being and nonbeing. A reply being or non-being exits the openness of the question by answering it, one way or the other. Providing an answer closes the question rather than explore its open possibility. The only way to follow the question, to remain between being and non-being, is to take the very action whose name has been lost by the end of the speech (*Ham*.III.1.87). But the scene could kill itself in ways other than Hamlet's suicide. To answer the question of being with a philosophical treatise grinds the play to a halt. How could the scene progress if the question received an answer? What audience to *Hamlet* would sit through a lecture on *Being and Time*? The speech rather detours into the impossibility for Hamlet to know non-being: knowledge beyond being requires the experience of death, the desire for which "puzzles the will" (79). If the actor stops playing Hamlet and abandons the text to defend a position on the question of being, the resulting "quietus" will more likely put the audience "to sleep, perchance to dream" of their refund (64). At the very least, the show ventures beyond the pale of Shakespeare's script "and

¹⁹⁷ See Bouchard's discussion of the interaction between questions and space in conversation with Peter Brook's *Hamlet* adaptation and Brooks notion of the empty space in *Theater and Integrity*, 99ff.

makes us rather bear those ills we have / Than fly to others that we know not of" (81-82). Any answer to Hamlet's question of being must be *done* as theatrical action.

Theatrical interpretation, therefore, remains within the question of being that drama stages. Hamlet's speech works so well to demonstrate drama's question of being because the ephemeral, historical, and physical event of theatre makes central drama's relationship to human existence. Drama concentrates a vision of decision. Drama's stakes need to be high because drama must live. Hamlet's "to be or not to be" speech aligns something fundamental about performance with the progression of the play's plot. The speech appears as an *inclusio* between two scenes of rumination on theatricality itself: the decision to use a play to "catch the conscience of the king" at the end of Act II and his pre-curtain "Speak the speech I pray you" monologue later in Act III, Scene 2.¹⁹⁸ If Hamlet's delay matters to religious studies as well as dramatic criticism, it is because the play's many pauses for reflection find drama in the temporality of discernment. Drama presents the extended tension of life's greatest questions set apart from quotidian concerns but constructed from the stuff of ordinary human being. Drama foregrounds not only being's activity but also its relationality, existential stakes, embodiment, consequences, and temporality. These various dimensions open only when the play happens in real time by distilling the infinite number of interpretive possibilities for how to play the speech into this one, historically unique performance. The answer appears in the actor's performance, present in action.

But even real "time is out of joint" (*Ham.*I.5.186) because of ghostly presences and spiritual commissions. Ghosts trespass the gulf between being and non-being, between the living and the dead, between identity and representation. The reason for Hamlet's uncertainty is the dubious origin

¹⁹⁸ Many theatre companies will re-arrange the order of the play's major speeches, but all three extant versions of Shakespeare's play (the two quartos and folio) locate this speech during the "nunnery scene," and the second quarto and first folio (considered most reliable) locate this scene as the first in Act III prior to Hamlet's metatheatrical speeches to the players in III.ii. See Thompson and Taylor's discussion of other productions that have adjusted the location of the soliloquy and the list of productions in a footnote ("Introduction," *Hamlet*, 18ff).

of his father's ghost. Is the ghost of King Hamlet some demon, a wayward spirit, a manifestation of psychological distress and "daddy issues," or a truly justified soul making paradoxical calls for unchristian vengeance?¹⁹⁹ Shakespeare masterfully constructs a puzzle that cannot be solved; the mystery is a core of the play's significance. Nevertheless, actors must make choices in the face of the Bard's inscrutable set of clues. To play the play requires interpretive choices. Theatrical ghosts raise more questions than they provide answers. Alice Rayner explains, "the actor is both haunted and haunting, both quoting and speaking. The scholar Horatio cannot converse with the ghost ('Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio,' says Marcellus [I.i.42]); only Hamlet, the paragon of actors, can both speak and be spoken to."²⁰⁰ Like the actor-prince, audiences remain haunted by drama's demand to act without certainty about spiritual intentions. Theatrical hermeneutics model a way of moving into mystery without foreclosing any possibilities, to "test everything" and "hold fast to what is good."²⁰¹

Hamlet's dilemma may help develop some greater sympathy for poor doubting Thomas. The claims of the disciples to have experienced a risen Christ create a similar sort of trembling indecision to the experience of a ghost on the ramparts of Elsinore. A speculative (and Balthasarian) reading imagines how memories of the violence of Jesus' death surely remain at the forefront of Thomas' mind. A canonical approach to the biblical narrative could inform the spiritual loftiness of the Johannine account with the anxiety and demonic escapades of Mark's Gospel. Thomas' refusal to submit to the other disciple's unbelievable testimony about resurrection recalls the "terror and amazement" that seize the women at the tomb in Mark 16:8.²⁰² Thomas may too "say nothing to

¹⁹⁹ For a survey of some available options in response to *Hamlet's* "ghostly dilemmas" see Bouchard, *Theater and Integrity*, 105-110).

²⁰⁰ Rayner, *Ghosts*, 57.

²⁰¹ An allusion to the title of a 1986 interview between Hans Urs von Balthasar and Angelo Scola, *Test Everything: Hold Fast to What is Good*, Maria Shradly, trans., (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989).

²⁰² My reading is also indebted to recent developments in trauma-informed interpretations of the Gospel of Mark, such as Maia Kotrosits and Hal Tassig, *Re-reading the Gospel of Mark Amidst Loss and Trauma* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013). The spectacle of the violence of the crucifixion applies to more characters than Jesus alone, and trauma,

anyone” without first seeing scars and probing wounds because he, too, remains “afraid.”²⁰³ Thomas has good reason to doubt the other disciple’s trust in this apparition. Crucified people usually do not come back to life. Besides, a ghost in the shape of Jesus could easily be just another demonic trick, part of Satan’s empty show. Thomas therefore deploys an empirical method and demands some sort of tangible evidence written on the ghostly body: “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25).

Rather than frame Thomas’ “doubt” in John 20 as some failure antithetical to good belief, he is better dubbed an early Christian empiricist and a model for the spectator to the narrative in John’s Gospel. Thomas learned this tactic to establish the credibility of a truth-claim from Jesus himself. In John 14, Thomas raises two epistemological concerns. The first locates the ignorance of the disciples in opposition to Jesus’ overconfidence in their knowledge.²⁰⁴ The second requests a technique by which knowledge can be reliably acquired and believed. “Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (John 14:5-6). Here, Jesus’

according to Alexis Waller, “encompasses not only acute instances of violence...but also longterm and persistent affects associated with oppression and displacement” (“Violent Spectacles and Public Feelings,” *Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 22, no. 4/5, (2014), 453). The Gospel’s gendered performances can be read as an “archive of feelings,” following Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). Alexis Waller argues, “In the sense that Jesus’ humiliation and death is figured as a national trauma, it collapses distinctions between ‘national’ public trauma and ‘personal’ or intimate trauma” (463). She construes the Gospel as a possible testimony to public vulnerability in the face of oppressive power (in Mark’s case, Jesus’ powerlessness in the face of the Roman empire). “Perhaps Mark’s story critiques the meager relational options and imaginative limits offered by narratives like the romances, traditional divine aretologies, or even scriptural promises of God’s vindication, thereby articulating a set of counterpublic feelings and aesthetics” (472). Waller’s reading follows Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) to develop Michael Warner’s notion of alternative counter-publics with a “new sociability and solidarity, and a scene for further improvisations” in queer responses to trauma (Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* [New York: Zone Books, 2005], 14, quoted in Waller, “Violent Spectacles and Public Feelings,” 454). Waller frames the high-point of Mark’s Gospel in Balthasarian language: “In the end Mark manages to undermine even Jesus’ aggressive masculine yearnings after imperial power and its social ideals and feelings by dramatically depicting his cry of desolation and by neglecting to narrate the very resurrection and return his followers and readers have been set up to expect” (462). For a reading of the Gospel of Mark alongside Greek tragedy, see Stephen H. Smith, “A Divine Tragedy: Some Observations On the Dramatic Structure of Mark’s Gospel,” *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 37, no. 3, (1995): 209-231.

²⁰³ Cf. Mark. 16:8: “So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

²⁰⁴ Cf. John 14:1-4.

famous self-identification as way, truth, and life responds to Thomas' methodological question of disbelief. The "way" to answer a question about "truth" will be found in Jesus "life." Thomas may have literalized Jesus' teaching about following him into some navigational need for a map or a set of landmarks, but Jesus responds that "the way" is a person. That person—the way that comes to God the Father by means of this person, Jesus the Christ who is God the Son—is simultaneously "truth" and "life." In other words, knowledge of God (i.e., that which is known through Jesus as way, truth, and life) occurs at the nexus of action with process, reality, and live-ness (i.e., the question's verb "to know" is answered with another verb "to come"). This nexus describes, equally, a correlation between theatrical phenomena and theological credibility: revelation (knowledge of God as personal), performance (process and action) and reality (truth and life in existentially validated experience) cooperate in von Balthasar's "theodramatic hermeneutics."

I can provide no properly exegetical analysis, here, either of scripture or of Shakespeare. My purpose in juxtaposing these stories is to highlight the theatrical action that responds to a question of credibility, not to compare the "ghosts" in question. Instead, I raise doubts in *Hamlet* and the Fourth Gospel as examples to flag the theatrical embodiment of credibility, the way drama holds open religious questions of being. In John, the visible *Logos*/Word, the Son of God, serves as revelatory mediator of the invisible God and Father just like the actor's body brings to life the ghost of Old Hamlet (though as a potentially unreliable mediator of Prince Hamlet's dead father). Both encounters are dramatic, but incarnational theophany aligns visibility to invisibility with a divine and Trinitarian perfection impossible for the dramatic double. *Hamlet* is obviously enough a play, but Thomas also *enacts* the procedure for dramatic credibility taught to him by Jesus in John 14. After his death, Jesus appears to the disciples. But the empiricist Thomas misses this première of the resurrection, and he refuses to believe the reviews until he has his own personal experience of the risen Lord. A dramatic encounter will be more credible for Thomas than any second-hand report.

Thomas demands the live-ness of Jesus' body (John 20:25). He identifies the *person* of Jesus as the way by which he will act to come to know the truth, and he desires some physical sign in bio-logical (life-logical) action. After encountering the risen Christ, Thomas exclaims "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). *By following the person of Jesus the Christ as way, truth, and life, Thomas comes know and identify God in and through the performing, resurrected body of Jesus the Christ.* Thomas follows Jesus' instructions.

John's text does not include any mention of touching, poking, prodding, or dissection. Thomas encounters the risen Christ *a la théâtre*, as a participant-observer adhering to rules that maintain physical distance between scene and its witness. Other dramatic dimensions to the Thomas story deserve to be mentioned. The so-called "doubting Thomas" story concludes the narrative arc that links sight, faith, and belief in John's gospel. Immediately following the Thomas story, the Evangelist addresses the reader/hearer to explain that only a portion of Jesus' signs has been "written so that you may come to believe" (John 20:31). This passage, when read out loud in the context of a Christian liturgy, breaks a theatrical fourth wall and foreshadows the Eucharistic embodiment of Christ to follow at the altar.²⁰⁵ The most theatrically important dimension is John the Evangelist's insistence to include Thomas' nickname in this story. Thomas, called the Twin (John 20:24), raises the problematic of dramatic belief in the stage's own twinning: *theatrical doubling*.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ I reference, here, the ordinary operation of a Sunday service (e.g., the mass, service of communion, the Lord's Supper) where a period of scriptural proclamation and preaching (sometimes referred to as a Liturgy of the Word) precedes the period of table prayers and ritual consumption (sometimes referred to as a Liturgy of the Eucharist). Not all Christian liturgies follow this pattern. For the most part, this project assumes an account of the normative theologies of the Roman Catholic tradition and proceeds *as if* the reader provisionally grants those assumptions. If successful, the reader should be able to comprehend, engage, debate, and nuance any of the presented normative theological positions without necessarily also adopting them. I presume a readership able to distinguish between writing that describes a theological position and writing that necessarily endorses its normativity or accuracy. Questions about the ethics of investigating a particular religious tradition's theological norms or a particular theologian's positions are important, but I hold that such meta-normative evaluations can only occur after a religious tradition's theological norms or a particular theologian's positions have been investigated on their own terms. At times, this includes proceeding *as if* fundamental premises were true. This dissertation project performs, *in toto*, a defense of this approach as a contribution to the public and non-sectarian study of religion.

²⁰⁶ Everything visible on the stage presents both itself *and* its role in the *mise en scène*. I refer to this dual signification as "dramatic doubling" following the title of the collection of essays by Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Mary Caroline Richards, trans., (New York: Grove, 1958). For Artaud, "the theater is identical with its possibilities for realization when the most extreme poetic results are derived from them; the possibilities for realization in the theater

Thomas' methodology to determine a credible revelatory encounter means that he can be confident that Jesus has been truly raised from the dead *in body* and not as an apparition, like the ghost of King Samuel summoned by the medium at Endor (1 Sam. 28:3-25). A dead spirit walking the earth recalls the ghost of King Hamlet, whose own postmortem return inaugurates *Hamlet's* plot. Should *this* ghost be believed? Barnardo examines the ghost by means of a watchman's paranoid surveillance and Horatio, the appointed scholar, investigates the ghost's meaning and origin with questions.²⁰⁷ Hamlet will proceed to confirm his own beliefs via theatrical methods: "The play's the thing / wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King" (*Ham.II.ii.600-601*). The Mousetrap does double duty catching both, Claudius who murdered his father, and the good or demonic conscience of the ghostly King Hamlet. For both Doubting Hamlet and Doubting Thomas, escape from the pause of indecision will not be action in general but theatrical action in particular. Confirming a ghost's credibility is not merely about a generalized action speaking louder than words but, specifically, *dramatic action performed as theatre*. The stage and its ghosts offer tools to adjudicate the modern world's questions of being: whether the credibility of spirit(ual) experience or the meaning of human existence.

relate entirely to the *mise en scène* considered as a language in space and in movement" (45). The theatre becomes the space of for the immediacy of "*matter as revelation*" (59). Such a theatre will be cruel to its audience: "The theater must give us everything that is in crime, love, war, or madness, if it wants to recover its necessity" (85). "And just as there will be no unoccupied point in space, there will be neither respite nor vacancy in the spectator's mind or sensibility. That is, between life and the theater there will be no distinct division, but instead a continuity" (126). For an analysis of how "the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, if we follow Balthasar's model in the *Theo-Drama* of the world stage, can be seen as dramatic action, in Artaudian terms, as a production of a theatre of cruelty" see Rick Arrandale, "Artaud & the Concept of Drama in Theology," *New Blackfriars*, vol. 88, no. 1013 (January 2007), 108ff.

²⁰⁷ Enter GHOST.

MARCELLUS: Peace, break thee off. Look where it comes again.

BARNARDO: In the same figure like the King that's dead.

MARCELLUS: Thou art a scholar, speak to it, Horatio.

HORATIO: Most like. It harrows me with fear and wonder.

BARNARDO: It would be spoke to.

MARCELLUS: Question it, Horatio.

HORATIO: What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,

Together with that fair and warlike form

In which the majesty of buried Denmark

Did sometimes mark? By heaven I charge thee speak. (*Ham.I.i.43-52*)

§2.2 Theology and Drama in/as Modernity

What about the “modern world” makes for a turn to drama? While Christian history demonstrates more than its fair share of anti-theatrical biases and resistance to stage performance, the twentieth century exploded with a newly authorized interest in drama as a theological category. The “modern” context has, at least according to the Second Vatican Council, “dramatic characteristics.” Early in *Gaudium et Spes*, the pastoral constitution enumerating the Roman Catholic Church’s place within and toward the modern world, the council endorses a surprising amount of theatrical language.²⁰⁸ “We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its [expectations] [*exspectationes*], its longings [*appetitiones*], and its often dramatic characteristics [*indoles saepe dramatica*].”²⁰⁹ Bodily sensations, affects, and experiences— *exspectationes*, “looking out for”—line up nicely with the longings of the bodily appetites. Drama appears fittingly in the Latin as part of the rhetorical scheme, as a witness to the “signs of the times.”²¹⁰ The Council cites drama to characterize the modern world and to signal the public performance of the Church on a world stage.

What must theology do in order to speak God intelligibly in these dramatic, modern times?²¹¹ The first footnote to *Gaudium et Spes* explains the innovative construction and title: “the

²⁰⁸ The documents of the Second Vatican Council in English are collected in Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *Vatican Council II, Vol 1: the Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, (Northport: Costello, 1996). The documents are also freely accessible on the Vatican website in both English and Latin.

²⁰⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, “The Church in the Modern World,” 4. “*Oportet itaque ut mundus in quo vivimus necnon eius exspectationes, appetitiones et indoles saepe dramatica cognoscantur et intelligantur.*” The official English translation reads “explanations” at the bracketed “expectations.” Charity presumes a mere transcription error. A different reading notes the shift from an additional range of *good* visual and anticipatory meanings when creatures “ex-spectate” (“to look out for”). The swap for the didacticism and dubiousness of worldly or technocratic “explanation” blurs a larger theatrical metaphor running throughout the sentence.

²¹⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, “The Church in the Modern World,” 4.

²¹¹ For von Balthasar, any answer will *not* include a call to abandon or avoid difficult and confusing aspects of revelation’s mysteries. “If transpositions are to succeed, however, they must not be bought at the cost of losing any of revelation’s substance or weight. The light that streams forth in the self-illumination of the dramatic action must be neither obscured nor trivialized, that is, robbed of its divine uniqueness. Naturally, therefore, the aim of ‘greater intelligibility for modern man’ cannot be an ultimate criterion, particulate as what Jesus *really* meant then, even clothed in the conceptual garb of the time, cannot be limited to these concepts; furthermore, even when his words were understood, they caused the same offense then as they do now. When a translation has been made, it is often not clear at first glance whether there has been a loss of substance; it requires deeper reflection upon the organic interconnections of revelation” (TD 2, 98).

constitution is called ‘pastoral’ because, while resting on doctrinal principles, it seeks to express the relation of the Church to the world and modern mankind.” The “pastoral constitution” is divided into two parts that “constitute an organic unity”: the first “develops [Church] teaching on man, on the world which is the enveloping context of man's existence, and on man's relations to his fellow men” and the second “gives closer consideration to various aspects of modern life and human society” with “greater urgency in our day” namely, issues of marriage and family (para. 47-52), the development of culture (para. 53-62), social and economic concerns (para. 63-72), and politics, warfare, and international cooperation (para. 73-93). The dual-composition of the document itself attests to the intermingling of contingent and universal concerns faced by theology in the modern context.²¹² Theology addressing the concerns of a modern world would, as von Balthasar demonstrates, need to embody, express, and perform something of the dramatic characteristics necessary to be credible for modern audiences.²¹³ Official statements about modern credibility appear alongside the invocation of drama.²¹⁴ Theatre, already, models the simultaneity of permanence and the temporary with an eye towards a public audience. In order to establish this correlation between drama and credibility, particularly in the presence of dubious ghosts, I need to first unpack what I see to be as a “modern” epistemological landscape adopted in twentieth century

²¹² “Some elements have a permanent value; others, only a transitory one. Consequently, the constitution must be interpreted according to the general norms of theological interpretation. Interpreters must bear in mind—especially in part two—the changeable circumstances which the subject matter, by its very nature, involves” (*Gaudium et Spes*, “The Church in the Modern World,” note 1).

²¹³ “For theology is not an adjunct to the drama itself: if it understands itself correctly, [theology] is an aspect of it and thus has an inner participation in the nature of the drama (where content and form are inseparable. Secondly, theology has at its disposal various degrees of intensity of such participation as well as various literary themes and patterns, enabling it to represent revelations dramatic character, and each of these embraces one aspect of the unique, archetypal, and inexhaustible drama” (TD 2, 151).

²¹⁴ For a discussion of the “teaching office” of the church in the context of theo-drama see “c. The Regulating Church” in TD 2, 100-102. Here, von Balthasar offers helpful analogies for “official teaching” as a surveyor of the field that reacts akin to a “seismological instrument—when some substantial underground tremor threatens the totality or catholicity of revelation” (TD 2, 101) and as a regulating and updating mechanism to the safeguard the healthy function of an organic system over time.

Christian thought. This context is important for understanding von Balthasar's hope to situate theology within a world culture larger than just Roman Catholicism.

The contested languages of modernity and theology sit well with theatrical ghosts and doubt. Modernity remains haunted by religious ideologies even as it imposes a "default" potentiality to trouble their veracity.²¹⁵ According to some critics, to be modern *is* to acknowledge such doubt. In some senses, "modernity" proclaims a caricature of the Cartesian ego: thinking and being operate, properly, together. Enlightenment praises a thinking for oneself as a sign of human maturity, Kant's challenge to "Dare to know!" in answer to the question "What is Enlightenment?"²¹⁶ Emerson can endorse the requirement of "self-reliance" against a past "foolish consistency."²¹⁷ If the human being most perfectly expresses the critical freedom of the intellect by means of a distance from

²¹⁵ Graham Ward, in an essay on Michel de Certeau, describes the conditions of modern belief (that is, the praxis of saying "I believe" in a religious *Credo*) to be caught up in the "plurality of systems" through which any originary truth has been, must be, and will continue to be "mediated" and "disseminated" ("The Weakness of Believing: A Dialogue with de Certeau," *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 52:2-3 [2001]: 233-246). De Certeau's historically situated theology and theory of language map onto the shape of the Christ-event (incarnation, passion, death, resurrection, ascension). "According to de Certeau, from the moment the historical body of Jesus the Christ ascends there is a dissemination of the Logos – a dissemination in which institutions will wax and wane. The immediacy of the Word, what de Certeau calls 'the event which inaugurated' (1997: 135 – 55, 142), is henceforth mediated through various Christian discourses no one can control. Each mediation is related to the event and permitted by it, 'but none is identical to it' (1997: 144). The event itself is irrecoverable; and because it is irrecoverable though there is a theological foundation that foundation cannot be grasped as such. God's Word, as other, continually goes forth and human societies are continually being transformed" (Ward, "The Weakness of Believing," 236, within internal reference to de Certeau, "How Is Christianity Thinkable Today" in Graham Ward ed., *The Postmodern God*, [Oxford: Blackwell, 1997]). The meaning of the event, however, can be carried on through tradition. Belief is not merely the acquisition of a dogmatic proposition: "More profound than 'knowledge of' is *praxis*—both the acting that issues from a believing and the acting that issues in coming to believe. *Praxes* inform more than, and frequently transgress, what is codified in any discursive knowledge." (Ward, "The Weakness of Believing," 242, emphasis original). Therefore, de Certeau will also locate historical praxis where "the fundamental organisations structuring belief remain in the transit of believing" as that which "verifies" the object of belief in "the ability of the event to continue this movement of transcendence" (Ward, "The Weakness of Believing," 243). This "weak believing"—dispersed throughout the practices of ordinary life and constantly at risk of forgetting the truth (rendered as "uniqueness") of the Christ-event—can be distinguished from the visibility of "strong expressions of Christian faith" in the forms of new cathedrals, the global rise of Pentecostalism, and papal spectacles (Ward, "The Weakness of Believing," 245). Ward diverges from de Certeau's confidence in the secularization hypothesis by, instead, suggesting how a theory of "weak believing" illuminates the historically shifting socio-cultural conditions of religious practice: "a recognition that embodiment too is being understood differently today; that there are new articulations of ecclesiology yet to be written but which *do refer* to a practice of belief continuing and a production that is regaining its symbolic weight" (Ward, "The Weakness of Believing," 245, emphasis original).

²¹⁶ Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals: And What Is Enlightenment?*, Lewis White Beck, trans., (New York: Macmillan, 1959).

²¹⁷ "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines" (Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance*, [New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1911], 13).

indoctrinating institutions or subservience to history simply because it has passed, the modern world endorses the capacity to doubt as a sign of human flourishing. One finds justification for “critical thinking” as a marker of intellectual maturity and a laudable “learning outcome” for college coursework. Doubt, therefore, is not merely the absence of faith, but an expression of the weight of those histories that indict faith’s self-authentication. Expressed positively, modernity’s doubt is the dramatic question of being raised toward a theatrical ghost: *could* this be real? Such an account of positive doubt as an expression of critical faith holds as readily for the divergent possibilities of Hamlet’s father’s ghost as it does for Thomas’ experience of the risen Christ. In the first instance, the King’s ghost might be a demon, a Dantean shade, a spectral projection of violence perceived by the melancholy Dane and his friends as mass delusion. But the Ghost is also played by an actor. In the second instance, the Christ encountered by Thomas is not a ghost (commonly understood to be living spirit divorced from dead body) but the resurrected One himself. Surely a dubious ghost is not what it portends to be according to a critical reflection, but what if it could be true.

One might contend, along with Charles Taylor, that a pre-modern articulation defaults to the obviousness of faith that grounds society (so the removal of religion from the public square to craft “secularized public spaces” denotes Taylor’s secularity 1) or the prevalence of faith and practices of belief in that society (so “the decline of belief and practice” denotes Taylor’s secularity 2).²¹⁸ Taylor’s

²¹⁸ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge: Belknap, 2007), 20. The introduction provides clear access to Taylor’s contribution to my project without requiring a detailed review of his technical terminology (e.g., immanent frames, buffers, nova effects, fragilization, mobilization, etc.), another version, albeit trading on a code-switching pun, of “code fetishism” in the nomolatri of theoretical vocabularies (cf. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 707). Stories about secularization regard a (1) process by which the religious underpinning to social structures decline “whereas the political organization of all pre-modern societies was in some way connected to, based on, guaranteed by some faith in, or adherence to God, or some notion of ultimate reality, the modern Western state is free from this connection” (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 1). Another option describes how (2) “secularity consists in the falling off of religious belief and practice, in people turning from God, and no longer going to Church. In this sense, the countries of western Europe have mainly become secular—even those who retain the vestigial public reference to God in public space” (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 2). Hans Urs von Balthasar appears twice in Taylor’s book: first in reference to the possibility for a theological aesthetics after Schiller in the midst of a review of the nineteenth century extraction of art from the realm of religious practice (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 359 with a citation to *Herrlichkeit*), and second as a seeming exemplar for the fixed “supposedly eternal and unchangeable, definition of the [sexual] difference” pole of contemporary debates about human sexuality against an

book advances a third option directly related to my argument. His secularity 3 describes the modern *possibility* for variations in belief and unbelief as realizable and legitimate options.²¹⁹ Narratives of historical processes of secularization as a change in the conditions of belief, according to the theme of “modernization,” denotes not only the explosive proliferation of potential interpretations of transcendence—“spawning an ever-widening variety of moral/spiritual options, across the span of the thinkable and perhaps beyond”²²⁰—but the eventual defaulting, even as regards questions of religion or transcendence, to a materialist account of a closed world-structure: “the paradigm examples of valid knowledge in the modern world (supposedly) take the realities they study as made exclusively of matter, that we are supposed to conclude that everything is matter.”²²¹ Significant for my purposes is Taylor’s identification of the status “modernity” with mutually authorized and authorizing options for belief in social life as a result of the critical appraisal of falsifiable world-structures presented as unassailable fact: “Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives.”²²²

The claim is not, however, that the advent of modernity and a critical public *undoes* the possibility of belief or religion or unbelief or ideology. Taylor’s claim, rather, is that modernity fractures and scatters the surety for a singularity of explanation, an enforceable and categorically held

opposite pole that considers “the differences of gender identity as trivial, or quite malleable, or freely determinable by individuals” (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 767).

²¹⁹ This becomes Taylor’s account of secularity 3: “the change I want to define and trace is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others. I may find it inconceivable that I would abandon my faith, but there are others, including possibly some very close to me, whose way of living I cannot in all honesty just dismiss as depraved, or blind, or unworthy, who have no faith (at least not in God, or the transcendent)” (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3).

²²⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 299. This is the definition of Taylor’s technical term, “nova effect.”

²²¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 574. This is the condition Taylor refers to as “the immanent frame” and it also affects religion. “The consequences of this change for religion have been complex and multidirectional. I have argued that the developments of Western modernity have destabilized and rendered virtually unsustainable earlier forms of religious life, but that new forms have sprung up. Moreover this process of destabilization and recomposition is not a once-for-all change, but is continuing. As a result the religious life of Western societies is much for fragmented than ever before, and also much more unstable, as people change their positions during a lifetime, or between generations, to a greater degree than before” (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 594).

²²² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

vision devoid of contingency or polyvalent interpretations. For Bruno Latour, the persistence of belief (especially in the allure of science to explain away the interconnectivity of human and nonhuman networks), confirms his slogan we have never been modern.²²³ At a minimum, modernity raises issues with the credibility of social structures, political and economic institutions, and their transcendental givenness as axiomatic. Latour's anthropology of science, similarly, blurs the neat separations of human and nonhuman networks projected by Taylor's materialist "immanent frame." To be modern, therefore, is to take seriously these proliferating ensembles of differences with critical attentiveness.

Like the term "religion," debates rage across disciplines about what actually constitutes "the modern." The word "*modernus*" appears first in Cassiodorus XXX, so the meaning of the modern shifts and develops in waves across history. The word washes ashore in the early twentieth century to signal a discrete period. So perhaps "the modern" can index a widespread paradigm shift indexing, perhaps, to the First and Second World Wars? Is modernity the conditions that produce "modernism" as a fungible set of periods, movements, and styles? That is, does "modernity" spawn the aesthetics of mid-century modern architectural and interior design (e.g., Frank Lloyd Wright), *Modernist Cuisine* and molecular gastronomy (in the mode of a major 2011 cookbook²²⁴), an umbrella for late-nineteenth and twentieth century artistic and literary movements (e.g., impressionism, surrealism, abstract expressionism, stream of consciousness, futurism, etc.). Or is modernism as a style a red herring? Perhaps "modern" refers, instead, to the noticeable shift in easy continuity and

²²³ The central tenant of Latour's argument is that modernization consists in 1) processes of translation that create "mixtures between entirely new types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture" and 2) "purification" between two "distinct ontological zones: that of human beings...and that of nonhumans." "So long as we consider these two practices of translation and purification separately, we are truly modern—that is, we willingly subscribe to the critical project, even though that project is developed on through the proliferation of hybrids down below. As soon as we direct our attention simultaneously to the work of purification and the work of hybridization, we immediately stop being wholly modern, and our future begins to change." Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, trans., (Cambridge: Harvard, 1993), 10-11.

²²⁴ Nathan Myhrvold, Chris Young, and Maxine Bilet, *Modernist Cuisine*, 5 vols., (Bellvue, WA: The Cooking Lab, 2011).

so describes some local version of what comes with the normalization of industrialization, electrification, televisual culture, computers, cellular networks, digitalization, globalization, the cloud?²²⁵ So given the impossibility of an absolute definition for “modern,” this project will locate “the modern” in what it means for a Roman Catholic figure like von Balthasar. Situating von Balthasar as a modern thinker is especially important to further historicize his innovative turn to theatre and performance in direct contrast to the rise of televisual culture.²²⁶

I contend that von Balthasar’s Roman Catholic interpretation of “modernity” indicates a particular historical location, a positive engagement with world cultures, and a particular definition for “modernization” as up-dating, *aggiornamento*. Such is the root of my subtitle’s interest in von Balthasar and “twentieth-century Christian thought.” In sum, Catholic modernity denotes the period of Church history that leads up to, includes, and follows in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. This periodization indicates a shift from Tridentine Catholicism (that is, the period from the Council of Trent through the so-called Counter-Reformation and the era of the First Vatican Council and its aftermath in early twentieth century). The Second Vatican Council made a conscious turn outward to address the different religions and cultures of the world.²²⁷ Catholic modernity can be construed aesthetically in the changes made to vernacular liturgies and desire “to foster the genius and talents of the various races and peoples” authorized by dogmatic constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.²²⁸

²²⁵ Latour’s book explicitly attacks this account of modernity as rupture as if human cultures were not always in flux and continuity. His development of an “actor-network theory” responds to global connectivity and disconnection.

²²⁶ I follow Alejandro García-Rivera to find von Balthasar’s “synthesis of traditional sources may be more relevant in the postmodern world of today than in the modern times of Vatican Council II” (*Community of the Beautiful*, 75). Louis Dupré, by contrast, finds von Balthasar’s triptych to be closer to a the “last great *summa*, so original and so traditional, in which Tridentine theology attains its final, perhaps most beautiful expression” (“Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theology of Aesthetic Form,” *Theological Studies* 49, no. 2 [June 1988], 314 quoted in García-Rivera, *Community of the Beautiful*, 75).

²²⁷ This is especially visible in the positive regard for non-Latin and non-European cultural locations indicated in the documents *Lumen Gentium* (“Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” 1964), *Unitatis Redintegratio* (“Decree on Ecumenism,” 1964), *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (“Decree on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite,” 1964), *Nostra Aetate* (“Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” 1965) and *Gaudium et Spes* (“Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” 1965). The different titles of documents from the Second Vatican Council imply varying degrees of authoritativeness.

²²⁸ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, “On the Sacred Liturgy,” 37.

Catholic modernity can also be construed in the valorization of religious freedom confirmed in the declaration *Dignitatis Humane* (1964): “The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power.”²²⁹ Therefore, *the era called Catholic modernity assimilates public and intellectual positions which endorse a critical and affirming posture especially toward cultural and religious pluralism*. This “modern attitude” should not dilute the specificity of Catholic truth claims; in other words, a “critical and affirming posture” cannot be uncritical in its affirmations.²³⁰ Such a posture endorses apparent changes in the tone and assumptions of theological interpretation as the church in history discovers what is already known but not yet fully understood. This practice is often configured, *pace* John Henry Newman, in the phrase “development of doctrine,” without suggesting any fundamental changes in dogmatic subject matter according to what might be called, in the anti-modernist language of Pope Pius X, an “evolution of dogma.”²³¹ Paramount is the Council’s spirit of “up-dating” expressed in the Italian phrase *aggiornamento* (the same word Italians use for an “update” to a computer program).²³² Any account of *Catholic* modernization carries with it the aforementioned sensibility of a positive, rather than totalizing, approach to cultural differences. Any “changes” brought by modernity correct a static and

²²⁹ *Dignitatis Humane*, “Declaration on Religious Freedom,” 1.

²³⁰ Cf. *Nostra Aetate*’s identification of commonly known truth exhibited throughout the Abrahamic traditions as illuminated, most fully, by the Catholic faith. This hierarchy of truths always reiterates the centrality of Christ as the rationale for respecting the dignity of non-Christian religions, cultures, and peoples. *Nostra Aetate* is especially salient, for instance, in its condemnation of “hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone” (*Nostra Aetate*, 4).

²³¹ Cf. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. Pius X identifies the problem of modernism in its subordination of faith to the theories of science, specifically that of the theory of evolution. See Pius X’s encyclical, *Pascendi dominici gregis*, “The general principles [for explaining the faith in a modernistic manner] is that in a living religion everything is subject to change, and must change, and in this way they pass to what may be said to be among the chief of their doctrines, that of *evolution*. Everything, therefore: dogma, the Church, sacred worship, the books we revere as sacred, even faith itself—if we do not wish all these to die—must be subject to the laws of evolution” (DS 3493). This pairing of Newman and Pius X presumes the distinction between doctrine and dogma wherein doctrine indicates the teaching and interpretation of Church dogma, commonly articulated as “tenets of the faith.” Doctrine interprets dogma; dogma provides first principles of any doctrine. Ergo one might speak of a particular person’s “doctrine of the Trinity” distinct from a binding “Trinitarian dogma.”

²³² John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II?*, (Cambridge: Harvard, 2008).

inward-looking cultural perspective. Such a notion of modernity does not discard anything other than a problematic theory of history devoid of historical and cultural consciousness.²³³

Modernity construes for Catholic theology the same public, pluralist, and critical audience that might be expected to attend a modern theater. To *enact* a modern theology (as a living practice, a theological “doing”) will not consist in the rejection or relativizing of previously held tenets of faith so to fit into a secularizing society (Taylor’s secularity 1; how Pius X condemns an “evolution of dogma”). Neither will a modern theology retreat from a world manifesting itself as worthy of engagement (Taylor’s secularity 2; the sensibility of anathematization). Rather, the task of theology must take seriously the Christian situation in a world that acknowledges the optionality of belief. Theological interpretation must assimilate some of the “dramatic characteristics” of the modern world in order to remain credible, to present theology as worth believing in the midst of such optionality without coercion.

Drama frames an additional and surprising issue for Christian theology at the core of von Balthasar’s project. In order to be deemed credible, theology must recapture the excitement, passion, and joy derived from catching the world illuminated by the light of faith. A theology credible for a

²³³ Cf. Blondel, *History and Dogma*. On this score, one further might contrast the sort of “modernization” at work in Vatican II’s *aggiornamento* with the “modernism” decried in the anti-modernist oath enforced by Pius X’s 1910 *motu proprio*, *Sacrorum Antistitum* (DS 3537-3550). Pius X’s approach to modernism is particularly well suited to a theatrical interpretation as the oath condemns, explicitly, “the conception of those who say that an educated Christian puts on a double personality, the one of a believer, the other of a historian, as though it were allowed for the historian to hold something contrary to the faith of the believer or to advance hypotheses from which it would follow that the dogmas are false or doubtful, provided only that these are not directly denied” (DS 3545). This sort of “double personality” (*personam duplicem*) creates a problem precisely due to a performance anxiety regarding the capacity of a single person to play different parts at different times. Taken at face value, a split-personality pathologizes the “integrity” of identity by confounding the varieties of human being and doing. The anti-modernist oath clearly means to decry the enforcement of any scientific method or theory that undercuts tenets of the faith. It does not, on my reading, demand that all history become theological history but only that theological history be able to retain dogma’s literal sense. In terms of biblical criticism, modernism, in Pius X’s view, is when “rationalists” “textual criticism” (read, historical-critical methods) become the “only and supreme rule” (DS 3546). What must be denied, precisely, is the evolution of dogmas (*evolutionis dogmatum*) as if the truth had changed over time in such a way that contemporary and historical dogmatic propositions might be genealogically related but no longer held to be the same (akin to the evolution of birds from dinosaurs). Note that the development of doctrine—a shift in the interpretation of dogma’s meaning over time as an aspect of history—never received condemnation. Such a reading would be, of course, against the spirit of the oath. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, with the authority of Pope Paul VI, suspended the obligation for bishops, priests, deacons, and teachers to profess the anti-modernist oath on July 17, 1967.

modern audience cannot be an algorithmic enterprise and retain its sense as an interpretation of God's self-revelation.²³⁴ Indeed, the accumulation and foregrounding of *boring theologies* relied too heavily on the Church's worldly and political coercion of belief. As will be developed in the next section, I intend "boring" as an *aesthetic* term that ramifies *theologically*. That is to say, a boring theology implies—by means of practices, tone, and approach—that its God is a dull, uninteresting, and technical subject reserved for experts. Christian theology may very well be dull and uninteresting to many, and Christian thought certainly benefits from technical expertise. But, for von Balthasar, theology has failed to adequately engage its subject matter (that is, God) if dullness and disinterest derive from the exclusivity of a technical genre.²³⁵ As the temporal power of the Church waned in the twentieth-century, the false comfort of policeable cultural hegemony reveals itself in the exclusive credibility of undramatic scholastic distinctions.

§2.3 Boredom as a Theological Problem for von Balthasar

Drama is an elusive and complicated word that refers to moments and stories about life at its most interesting. Etymological breakdowns of the word (from the Greek *drao*, "I do") can miss the sorts of narratives about doing that deserve to be called "dramatic": the over-the-top, the exciting, the intriguing, the hilarious, the heart-breaking. Dramatic events demand to be retold, and the spirit of drama persists so long as the story remains interesting. Drama opposes the reign of boredom as a default human attitude. Drama attests to the importance of life. Life's importance resists boredom, and the claim is crystalized when drama achieves its goal and brings audiences "to the edge of our seat."

²³⁴ "A method of proof that diminished the dramatic character of the Christian event would automatically show itself to be a failure" (TD 2, 115).

²³⁵ In some respects, modern boredom is one of the problems confronted by Marlow's Doctor Faustus when he turns—bidding the scholastic distinctions in the study of "Divinity, adieu!"—toward "These metaphysics of magicians, / And necromantic books are heavenly; / Lines, circles, scenes, letters, and characters; / Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires" (Christopher Marlow, *Faustus*, Rupert Goold and Ben Power, eds., [London: Nick Hern, 2007], I.i). Surely it is the fact that magic also gives Faustus *power* over the world that provokes the drama and its bargain with evil, but what draws him, at first, is the excitement of the esoteric page.

Theology lectures rarely produce such seat-edge excitement. At least not in von Balthasar's experience in the early twentieth century. The compulsory Thomism (this time the Angelic Doctor, Thomas Aquinas) found in theological textbooks and droned about in seminary lectures would often put the young Hans Urs to sleep.²³⁶ Far from the dynamic stories of God's mighty deeds in history—floods and dragons, rescue from captivity in Pharaoh's Egypt, the incarnate Son's ultimate self-sacrifice for all on the cross—these manuals presented ideas of a God frozen in footnotes of sterile scholasticism. Balthasarians recount the story of this pupil who stuffed tissue in his ears rather than listen to the power, beauty, and excitement of the patristic theologians blasphemed into boring, philosophical technicalities. No wonder such a student would abandon the halls of an academic post for the mixed life of a chaplain and “independent scholar.” No wonder such a student would write so to refuse easy categorization and to wreath his prose with references to rich experiences of art, culture, and good storytelling. No wonder such a student would seek to highlight the drama at the heart of his own foray into systematic theology. For von Balthasar, Christian theology cannot be just another theoretical reading of scripture or graph of given historical data points or a critical disclosure of worldly knowledge already present but as yet unseen.²³⁷ Christian theology is, to core, a co-creative enterprise interpreting God's self-revelation in and through Jesus the Christ as guided by

²³⁶ Pope Leo XIII's 1879 encyclical, *Aeterni Patris*, calls to reestablish the “golden wisdom of St. Thomas, and to spread it far and wide for the defense and beauty of the Catholic faith” (31, DS 3140). Thomas is commended as a central figure for high school and university instruction in philosophy (cf. *Aeterni Patris* 27-28). The full encyclical is freely available online in English at https://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris.html.

²³⁷ I contend these three positions to be summations of von Balthasar's negative opinion about the options available for twentieth-century theology, all of which, as it were, move away from God as the object of study: historical or literary criticism of the Bible devoid of any theological commentary (historical-critical methods); interpretation of church traditions and historical theology but without development as regards understanding theology's divine subject matter (neo-scholasticism); bracketing theological debate for the sake of analyzing religious practices as worldly phenomena (descriptive religious studies, sociology of religion)

scripture, tradition, and magisterial Church teaching.²³⁸ For von Balthasar, all theology is hermeneutics.²³⁹

Taken as a whole, drama might also be considered a hermeneutic practice. At least, this must be the case for theatrical drama: the sort of drama that comes to life only when performed.²⁴⁰ Theatrical drama belongs to the *performing arts*: those artistic practices that exist only insofar as they are interpreted by the performing artist. In a technical sense, all art “performs” insofar as the arts are material practices with material productions. A book “performs” only when read; a painting “performs” only when viewed. I follow Hans-Georg Gadamer to highlight the ontology of the work of art in an observer’s interpretive reception via hermeneutic encounter. Drama takes more interest in the “work” of a “work of art” than a term for the art-object itself. Art works are made.²⁴¹ I take art to be productions of human creativity. In order to avoid the Kantian, Eurocentric, and colonial taste-trap that reduces aesthetics to the determination of worthwhile “high art” and kitschy “low art,” I instead prefer the phrase “cultural production” to denote the amalgam of human art-makings constructed in and through human social life.²⁴²

But this project intends to contribute to the fields of “religion and the arts” and “philosophical theology” working with primarily Christian materials. A Christian theological account finds *the arts to be human practices of co-creativity with God*. By co-creativity, I mean that art-making

²³⁸ Cf. Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum*, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” 1965.

²³⁹ “All theology is an interpretation of divine revelation. Thus, in its totality, it can only be hermeneutics. But, in revealing himself in Jesus Christ, God interprets himself—and this must involve his giving an interpretation, in broad outline and in detail, of his plan for the world—and this too is hermeneutics” (TD 2, 91). This striking assertion by von Balthasar that all theology is an act of interpretation also appears in the original German. “*Sofern alle Theologie Auslegung der göttlichen Offenbarung ist, kann sie als ganze nur Hermeneutik sein. Sofern aber auch die Offenbarung Gottes in Jesus Christus Selbstauslegung Gottes ist—worin zudem Gottes eigene Deutung seines Weltplans im ganzen und im einzelnen enthalten sein muß—, ist auch sie Hermeneutik*” (*Theodramatik* II/1, 81). The theme of God’s interpretation of Godself and its influence on theological logic takes pride of place in *Theo-Logic*.

²⁴⁰ “We go to the theatre to share in the experience of an action which interprets itself as it unfolds” (TD 2, 92).

²⁴¹ For a critique of the term and ideology of “work” in the context of music see Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay In the Philosophy of Music*, (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1992).

²⁴² This is not to say that matters of taste are antithetical to Christian religious aesthetics. See Frank Burch Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste, Christian Taste: Aesthetics In Religious Life*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

depends on given materials already present: art relies on pre-existing media. If God creates *ex nihilo*, “out of nothing,” then the human artist makes art *ex creatio*, “out of creation.” Art is a “secondary creation” that works alongside and with God’s primary Creation, that is, the world. It makes sense, therefore, to interpret the beauty of the natural world with similar tactics to the ones used in the interpretation of art. I propose to reframe the dictum “art imitates nature,” at least in a Christian theological register, as “art-making imitates God’s nature-making” or “human creativity imitates and participates in God’s creativity.”²⁴³ The *work* of art is to produce something, the aforementioned cultural productions. Sometimes those productions are of such a noteworthy quality that they catch the attention of an observer and invite that observer into relationship with the work of art. Art requires some reception, some play, in order to be rightfully called art.²⁴⁴ All arts, therefore, “play” in some way or another. Theatrical drama joins with music, dance, and performance art (among others) as arts of duration. The performing arts highlight their own space and temporality: performance occurs in a given place for an amount of time.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ In a non-theological register, one finds the same sentiment in Oscar Wilde’s anti-mimetic turn of phrase, “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life.” See Oscar Wilde, “Decay of Lying,” in *Oscar Wilde: The Dover Reader*. Dover Thrift Editions. Mineola: Dover, 2015.

²⁴⁴ A question about the utility of some distinct category of material culture to be called “art” remains in need of an answer. The language of play recalls Kant’s definition for art as that which demonstrates nature’s purposiveness without purpose in itself so to conjure the free play of imagination and intellect. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Werner S. Pluhar, trans., (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987). Like John Dewey, I am skeptical of the Kantian legacy that defines the arts as disinterested creations “for their own sak,” cf. John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, (New York: Berkeley Publishing Group, 2005). Rather, I follow Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method* to find the self-sufficiency and self-presentation of art in its play. The moment of “play” is his clue to the ontology of the work of art: some great masterpiece hidden away in a warehouse might be better described through reference to its material composition (canvas, paint, wooden frame) than to its image-as-encountered. Play, similarly, invokes the enjoyment of art—often theorized with a term like “appreciation”—but too romantic an account of art-making precludes the inclusion of those arts that are sublime, horrible, or cruel. Cf. Maggie Nelson, *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning*, (New York: Norton, 2011). Straightforwardly, I define “the arts” as those practices which cultivate a technique worthy of note, a craft. I track on the etymology from the Latin *ars*, *artis* to mean as much the way art is made as it does the product of art-making. This permits the word to retain its resonance both for the so-called fine arts (e.g., painting, sculpture, poetry, storytelling, music, theatre) and the so-called liberal arts (e.g., philosophy, history, literature, theology). Art, therefore, is that which craft produces, and the elevation of some technique to an expertise worthy of note (to deploy an underdetermined, perhaps to the point of useless, phrase) might be called “artistry.”

²⁴⁵ This remains the case even for metaphorical applications of “performance” to other areas of life. If everything is just a performance, that performance of everything necessarily ceases performing when the world ends.

So too, the art of theatrical drama interprets. Todd E. Johnson and Dale Savidge identify theatre as an artistic practice “referred to as one of the interpretive (as opposed to creative) arts. Live theatre is a hybrid art form combining literary arts (scripts) with plastic arts (physical realities in space and time). [Johnson and Savidge] prefer to use the category of narrative art rather than literary art, since theatre may have a narrative without having a script, as in improvisation.”²⁴⁶ While I dissent from their oppositional dichotomy between “interpretation” and “creativity” (on grounds of the account of “interpretive work” I develop later in this project) their notion of interpretive art highlights both the narratives of dramatic storytelling and the necessary “self-interpretation” of the performing arts. The event (that which is encountered in performance by an audience) *is already* the performer’s (secondary) free interpretation of the dramatist’s (primary) free interpretation of what Stanislavsky calls given circumstances (be it the world, the script, a prompt from the audience for improvisation). The actor’s performance choices provide a glimpse into one possibility for a given character in a given situation among an infinite reservoir of other possibilities. So too the choices of directors, dramaturgs, designers, managers, and producers intermingle with the actor’s choices and the contribution of the audience that plays along. All of these interpretations are the work that co-creates the performance of theatrical drama. To speak of drama, therefore, is always already to speak a language of interpretation: hermeneutics.

Drama triggers a legion of hermeneutic questions. What differentiates theatrical drama from literary drama? Do actors and directors interpret a different text than the reader of a play, even if none of the words change? Do theatrical or performance choices distort the meaning of a dramatic text? Do theatrical or performance choices clarify the meaning of a dramatic text? Does drama need to follow a script? Does drama even require a recognizable theatrical structure? History, politics, and

²⁴⁶ Todd E. Johnson and Dale Savidge, *Performing the Sacred*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 12.

family life are dramatic; must drama signal fiction or the imaginary? Must drama have a narrative component and tell stories?

To the narrative question, this project issues a resounding “yes.” Narrative and drama go together, and it is narrativity that ultimately forges the inextricable link between literary drama and theatrical drama. But narrativity need not be explicitly linguistic or foregrounded in dramatic storytelling. Drama demonstrates the inherent wholeness of a fragment. Even for a fragmentary bit of a larger story, the plot arc of beginning, middle, and end will be held in the theatrical structure of a performance event. The show must begin and the show must end; we also know, of course, “the show must go on.” Even the so-called “post-dramatic theatre” (which would be better named “anti-narrative theatre”) or performance art cites the duration of its event (its “happening”) as constitutive of its being and story-telling. My point is only that theatrical drama—because its temporality has “lights up” to start, the on-going middle, and a the final “curtain” to end—always has a narrative structure. This is why dramatic events can be narrated as stories in their own right. The events of a play can be written up as prose; prose can be adapted for the stage as a play. The mode of performance changes (and so do its meanings), but the narrativity of drama displays itself in drama’s capacity for its excitement to be recounted as a story.

Stories help to overcome the theological problem of boredom because stories incorporate emotions. In order to appear credible, an argument must be both effective and affecting. The difficulty of bringing these two points into clearer distinction goes further than the spelling errors produced by their homophony. An effective argument convinces due to a superior command of commonly available evidence (e.g., empirical facts, reference to trusted authority, practical experience) and strident fidelity to reason and rules of logic. An effective argument “does something” by advancing its logical moves, reframing questions so to appeal to shared and objective standards rather than individual and relative standards, and positioning the argument so it operates

on its own merits. By contrast, an affecting argument convinces when it intrigues and entices. An affecting argument “does something” by moving the heart, exciting the passions, when it speaks to some knowledge felt beyond words, and when it gathers a crowd. *Credibility emerges only when an effective argument is also affecting and vice versa.* An effective argument that is not affecting can be dismissed as boring or out-of-touch with reality, “real people,” or a given set of stakeholders. Both moves can function as technical logical fallacies, but they nevertheless operate across scholarly discourses to authorize admissible tactics.²⁴⁷ An effective argument that is not affecting does not produce enough interest and emotional investment to be credible as an argument (that is, “worth believing”). An affecting argument that is not effective can be dismissed as dangerous, illogical, or unconvincing to unaffected parties. Affecting arguments that are not effective might be aptly labeled “sophistry,” “spin,” or “personal.” An affecting argument that is not effective lacks the accessible and reasonable grounds to be credible as an argument (that is, “worthy of belief”). My claim is that an argument must meet both criteria—effective and affecting—in order to be deemed credible. An effective and affecting argument *works well*. An effective and affective argument, in short, is a good argument.

²⁴⁷ There are certainly ways to deploy both of these strategies that will not fall to the charge of a logical fallacy. Profound boredom, for Heidegger, is a mood of attunement toward the world. I imagine a situation where the objection “boring” or “out-of-touch” does not reflect the subject matter under discussion, but, instead, describes the argument as such. To call an argument “boring” is *ad hominem*. An argument can only be “boring” on the grounds of personal interest: boring arguments cause people to become bored. Such a move *could* be received as a vulnerable admission of intellectual incapacity where bored people lack the capacity to remain engaged in the argument, but the dismissal from boredom more frequently functions to forestall a line of investigation. The dismissal from boredom might be argumentatively phrased—that is, expressed with an appeal to accessible reason—as “Your argument is wrong because you are boring me” or “You are a boring person, therefore your argument must be wrong.” Both examples make clear the *ad hominem* structure of the dismissal from boredom. Similarly, the dismissal from non-contact—to claim an argument is “out-of-touch”—often works as *ad hominem*, but it could necessarily assume its own premise (so be fallacious on the ground of begging the question, *petitio principii*). This happens when the community or account of reality with which the argument is “out-of-touch” grounds the objection in that very account of a community or account of reality that funds the objection (hence the immediate rejoinder “Out-of-touch with whom?”). More frequently, however, the dismissal from non-contact constitutes *ignoratio elenchi* because the importance of a logical argument for an account of community or reality will be irrelevant to the argument itself. To be clear, both the structure of the dismissal from boredom and the structure of the dismissal from non-contact can be logically sound when they are germane to the argument’s subject matter. What renders these dismissals fallacious is precisely the claim to *dismiss* the argument without need for further appeal to reason and evidence.

I construct this rather artificial definition for a good argument that is both effective and affecting arguments to emphasize the distance between credibility, as I define the term, and truth. Credibility does not equate with truthfulness, so one might find an argument to be affective and effective (that is, credible) without needing also to find the argument compelling enough to be convincing. Credibility names when an account of reality presents itself in such a way as to be worthy of suspended disbelief and imaginative engagement. Credibility neither indicates that an account of reality is true nor does it contest the possibility of truth as such. A theory of credibility—especially one that intends to contribute to religious studies and Christian thought—provides language so to bracket and defer the question of ultimate truth. Rather, the discourse of credibility seeks to enlarge the number of seats at the table and voices in the conversation; credibility norms investigation against an ever-expanding standard of accessibility.²⁴⁸ Credibility does so by articulating, widening, and dwelling within the provisional space of encounter between awareness and experience of some phenomena that is potentially true and assent to truth. In von Balthasar's theological systems, this provisional space becomes the realm of dramatics between aesthetics and logic. The moment of encounter narrated by "awareness and experience of some phenomena that is potentially true" explores aesthetic perception—that is, an encounter with being as illuminated by beauty. The moment of encounter narrated by "assent to its truth" explores logical reflection—that is, an encounter with being as illuminated by truth. Dramatic engagement—that is, an encounter with

²⁴⁸ Put in Christian theological terms, the accessibility criterion is *anti-gnostic* because it denies the legitimacy of secret knowledge purposefully withheld from the public community. Gnostic cults practice specialized initiation rites in order to safeguard a set of teachings that are unavailable to anyone who is not also member of the cult (perhaps including even the existence of a gnostic teaching). Gnostic teachings do not meet the accessibility criterion because such secret knowledge remains inaccessible to uninitiated parties. In Roman Catholic contexts, the ratification of miracles, special revelations, demonic possession, or divine apparition by a qualified external (often episcopal) authority seeks to render such propositions credible through a public confirmation. To be clear, Christian communities continue to practice rites of initiation in order to deepen knowledge of Christian mysteries. My point, here, exclusively refers to any defense of "secret and inaccessible knowledge" that must be safeguarded from public accessibility. Credibility makes no claim as to gnosticism's potential truth, but it can determine that such secret knowledge remains non-credible for scholarly theological argumentation. Cyril O'Regan addresses von Balthasar responds and attempts to correct gnostic patterns in modern thought in *The Anatomy of Misremembering: Von Balthasar's Response to Philosophical Modernity*. (Chestnut Ridge, NY: Crossroad, 2014).

being as illuminated by goodness—narrates the moment of encounter *between* aesthetic perception and logical reflection. The true, the good, and the beautiful—as convertible and philosophical transcendentals of being—always cooperate in and through any distinctions. Von Balthasar very loosely organizes the philosophical transcendentals of being into a quasi-trinitarian processional formula. In his estimation, one might cogently say that an experience of aboriginal beauty in the world begets acts of goodness and so together inspire knowledge of the world's truth. There is a theological logic at work in the order of von Balthasar's phenomenological theological operations. It remains patently wrong to map the transcendentals of being onto a polytheized quatrain of persons (as if the Father were the Beautiful, the Son were the Good, the Holy Spirit were the Truth, and the Godhead were Being). But Balthasarian assurance in the convertibility of the philosophical transcendentals of being further justifies credibility, rather than truth, as the domain of the dramatic. Here, credibility operates within the attitude of dramatic encounter along with all of drama's embodiments, decisions, and consequences. Drama and credibility correlate. It becomes both more accurate and more direct to say that the attitude of dramatic encounter performs *the suspension of disbelief* in the service of wonder.²⁴⁹ The dramatic metaphor of suspension underscores the entangled, provisional, aesthetic, precarious, and contingent qualities of credibility. Disbelief might come crashing down at any moment.

Lest themes of effective and affecting argumentation become lost in the sea of Balthasarian phenomenological and theological references, it behooves me to return and clarify that the credibility afforded to an effective and affecting argument does not, in and of itself, confirm the argument's claim to truth. In short, credibility identifies that an argument will “do” two things: 1) make a legitimate claim to truth that is *worth pursuing* (that is, an effective argument will work well

²⁴⁹ On the metaphor of suspension in the interlacing of theology, ethics, and the arts see González-Andrieu, *Bridge to Wonder*.

enough to be concretely worth the energy, resources, and time required to believe into it so to evaluate it and learn from it *even if ultimately untrue*); and 2) make a claim to truth in a way that is *worthy of pursuit* (that is, an affecting argument will be intriguing and well-done enough to merit the risks of serious and attentive contemplation *even if ultimately untrue*). As such, a credible argument must meet standards for good logical reflection (an effective argument) and good aesthetic perception (an affecting argument). Credibility dismantles the assumption that scholarly form is ever accidental to scholarly content or that aesthetics could be ancillary to logic. Credibility names why scholars give such importance to idiosyncrasies in formatting, style, genre, and rhetoric. These so-called “aesthetic” dimensions of an argument matter as to whether or not that argument should be engaged, whether or not an argument is credible. At the same time, credibility names why scholars invest such importance in an argument’s methods, sources, moves, and conclusions. These so-called “logical” dimensions of an argument matter as to whether or not that argument should be engaged, whether or not an argument is credible. Neither the so-called “aesthetic” or so-called “logical” dimensions of a scholarly argument determine its truthfulness. Indeed, an array of distinct (sometimes even competing) credible claims must be brought into closer conversation in order to approximate a claim to the truth. Credibility, therefore, qualifies an argument for debate; credibility does not sanction an argument for adoption. An argument may be credible and nevertheless untrue, or the truth may fail to find expression in a credible argument.

What, then, to make of the fact that a theory of credibility avoids the questions of ultimate truth? It would be a category mistake to hold that an epistemological theory somehow issues an ontological conclusion, but, often, theological commitments to the concreteness of truth in the world available to universal reason aligns “credibility” with “truth.” Why does drama look to standards of credibility rather than standards of truth? Truth already has credulity in its positive theological sense: a readiness to be believed. The phrase *pius credulitatis affectus* (perhaps derived from

the Second Council of Orange in 529) describes such affective preparation for the will's free assent to the truth of faith. But contemporary resonances of "credulity" as intellectual gullibility and naïveté undermines the legitimacy of Christian theology's contribution to critical humanist discourse.²⁵⁰

Credulity has limited utility for modern theology. Even in the context of a discussion of faith credulity captures the aptitude, capacity, and willingness to believe necessary prior to adopting position as true. Discussions of credulity in the philosophy of religion present credulity as the reasonableness to believe that if something appears to be the case then probably is actually the case.²⁵¹ In a simplistic binary, incredulity would name the position of default skepticism and

²⁵⁰ Consider Henry Bars assessment: "The word 'credulity' is not good currency. Even in classical Latin it is used to mean a dubious combination of trust with artless simplicity. But the Fathers and the Councils did not hesitate to describe an aptitude for faith as *credulitas*, nor a man open to the gift of faith as possessing *pious credulitatis affectus*. No modern writer dare use such language in his mother tongue, for we contrast that simple 'credulity' which is prey to every superstition with rational belief" (Henry Bars, *The Assent of Faith*, [Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1960], 19).

²⁵¹ See the debate between Richard Swinburne's *The Existence of God*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979) and Michael Martin's "The Principle of Credulity and Religious Experience," *Religious Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (March, 1986), pp. 79-93, on the principle of credulity and the argument for the existence of God from religious experience. For Swinburne, one finds good grounds for one's inclination to believe that what seems to be present during a reported religious experience probably is present. So, given the widespread reports of religious experience across the world and the world's religious traditions, one can take such religious experience into account as evidence when forwarding rational argument regarding the existence of God. (I will not, here, evaluate the interreligious component of the Swinburne and Martin debate, but the topic under consideration would be more clearly articulated as "that which is symbolized by the god-concept" or using closer to Donalee Dox's term "spiritual presences", cf. *Reckoning with the Spirit in the Paradigm of Performance*). Swinburne dubs his rationale the principle of credulity: it makes sense to believe that one's experience of a thing is evidence for its existence, it is right to believe that things are as they seem, until corrected. Martin counters that such a principle of credulity fails to provide evidence for God because it might also defeat arguments for the existence of God by means of religious experience. Martin's negative credulity principle appears to render the experience of God's absence into proof for the non-existence of God: "Thus the appearance of God may be evidence under some conditions that God does *not* exist. Whether it is or not depends on what conceptual conditions hold" (Martin, 85). Hence, the religious experience of God's non-presence, following his negative principle of credulity, provides evidence for the non-existence of God. Swinburne replied to this argument by qualifying the principle of credulity to refer only to positive experiences and so invalidating the possibility of a negative principle of credulity. Swinburne and his defenders submit that it is wrong to argue to assume non-existence from the evidence of the experience of absence, whereas it remains rational to argue for existence from the evidence of the experience presence. Most applicable for this study of the correlation between drama and credibility is Martin's rhetorical flourish in his conclusion. He writes, "Given Swinburne's version of [the principle of credulity] there would indeed be more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in anyone's philosophy" (Martin, 92). This well-done allusion to Hamlet's lines to Horatio (*Ham*.I.5.165-166) regard the impossibility of Horatio's scholarly (*Ham*.I.1.41) philosophy to grapple with the apparition of the Ghost. Martin assumes that philosophizing the impossible magnitude of possibilities of the world as "undiscovered country" (*Ham*.III.1.78) from whence has come this ghostly "worthy pioner" (*Ham*.I.5.162) risks a "cluttered ontological landscape" (Martin, 92). The allusion presumes that undreamt realities lead to rational problems in a cogent but nevertheless highly contestable interpretation of Shakespeare's drama. One can imagine a staging inspired by Martin's fragment where the Ghost is completely cut and his dialogue remains unsoken (stepping even further than the 1980 production at the Royal Court in London where Richard Eyre directed Jonathan Pryce to recite the Ghost's lines as if Hamlet suffered from split personality disorder or demonic possession, cf. the "Stage History" of *Hamlet* on the Royal Shakespeare Company's webpage: <https://www.rsc.org.uk/hamlet/about-the-play/stage-history>). Martin's interpretation, however, leads an

suspicion. Credulous ideas and theories are those easily or “ready” to be believed; incredulous ideas and theories are those believed with difficulty or easy to doubt. Credulous people believe things easily; incredulous people do not.

An identical sort of simplistic binary cannot apply to credibility. That which one extols to be incredible (e.g., amazing, wonderful, dumbfounding, miraculous, inexplicable) might be perfectly credible. A credible mathematical theory (such as the theory of general relativity) might be, at the same, an “incredible achievement.” When an idea becomes incredulous, that idea exceeds its readiness for belief. Therefore, one approaches the idea as if it might not be true; one approaches an incredulous idea with the posture of incredulity. When phenomena become incredible, by contrast, they demonstrate an excessive and ecstatic worthiness for belief as that which is abundantly worth believing. Incredibility, therefore, does not invalidate credibility but, to borrow the moist imagery of Jean-Luc Marion, *saturates* its credibility.²⁵² The most magical or most horrifying stage spectacles (Aristotle’s *opsis*) require the highest suspension of disbelief and, paradoxically, the least amount of imaginative labor. A dramatic correlation to a theory of credibility must include the affecting contribution of aesthetic delight to the effective work of a good show. To be caught up in the credibility of the stage’s illusions—to will the suspension of disbelief in order to imaginatively enjoy another (possibly untrue) world and perhaps be entertained or moved or potentially transformed by such an encounter—describes the promise of theodramatic hermeneutics.

audience to witness the tragedy of an absolutely insane Hamlet suffering from private hallucinations. As the play stands, however, Horatio and Marcellus and the audience see the Ghost, too. The Ghost takes the stage as a theatrical presence that demands some interpretation. Martin’s *admittedly ornamental* allusion in no way invalidates Martin’s philosophical objections to Swinburne’s overly wide applications of his principle of credulity (that is, the allusion could be excised with no harm to Martin’s arguments that Swinburne provides insufficient restrictions to the principle of credulity and that superior responses to the problem of evil “lend additional inductive support to atheism” [Martin, 93]), but Martin’s allusion, like the Ghost, is nonetheless present and deserves engagement as yet another example of the correlation between drama and questions of credibility. Theodramatic hermeneutics—rather than the analytic philosophical approaches forwarded by Swinburne and Martin—provide a route better still to investigate contestations of being.

²⁵² See Jean-Luc Marion, *The Essential Writings*, Kevin Hart, ed., (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

So von Balthasar is certainly right to view theatrical hermeneutics alongside theological hermeneutics. The theodramatic analogy reflects the embodied and praxological concerns of ritual, sacraments, scripture, history, and culture in addition to the scaffolding drama offers for making sense of a Christological Trinitarian theology. Drama takes another step for von Balthasar by emphasizing the *life* brought to stories through performance. On one level, this is the life indicated by the phrase “live theatre”: the events depicted on stage occur *materially* during a shared space and time. This sort of life is the reason to see the “drama of salvation” narrated in scripture and the tradition enacted—that is brought-to-life—in the “drama of salvation” performed during the rituals of the Christian Eucharistic liturgy.²⁵³ On another level, however, drama recalls the moments of human existence worthy of care and concern. People talk about all sorts of drama because drama describes moments that matter to them. Drama bears witness to consequence and meaning with stories of life’s importance.

In his short book considering the relationship between Christianity and the experience of anxiety, von Balthasar describes the stakes of God’s love for the world expressed through the incarnate and crucified Christ. “It is, finally and most profoundly, the anguish that God (in human form) suffers on account of his world, which is in danger of being lost to him—which, indeed, at the moment *is* an utterly lost world. So as to be able to suffer this anxiety and therein *to demonstrate*

²⁵³ To speak of the liturgy as a “drama of salvation” invites the precise ecumenical ambiguity I find so fruitful about theodramatic hermeneutics in general and von Balthasar’s project in particular. Other Christian liturgies will certainly also cite the “drama of salvation” insofar as the narrative of God’s saving action in history is remembered in the context of Lord’s Supper (being, as it is, a citation of the Passover *and* cross). I retain the context of the Catholic mass only for continuity with the Catholic von Balthasar and to avoid wading, here, into the complicated debates regarding the salvific efficacy of the Eucharist, the mass’s status as a sacrifice, or its participation in/with the singular sacrifice of Christ. In such a view, however, the Word encountered in the scriptural drama transitions into the Body of Christ. “This way of speaking can be approved provided we keep in mind that one form of the Body is able to pass over into another, that is, if we maintain the integration of all aspects into the total incarnational form. The physical body would be inarticulate, and hence not the body of the Word, if this Word were not also enfleshed in human language (which is documented by so-called ‘Scripture’), and if this Word (both the physical and uttered Word) did not give rise, in the believers who receive it, through Eucharist and preaching, to the Body of the Church. [...] The purpose of these remarks has been to refute the superficial idea that, in theo-drama, Scripture plays the part of a somehow uninvolved spectator and reporter who can survey the whole process and can ‘tell in advance who the murderer is’. In all its aspects, Scripture is something quite different: it is part of the drama itself, moving along with it” (TD 2, 112).

humanly how much the world matters to him in his divinity and how concerned he is for the world's sake: for this purpose he became man."²⁵⁴ Here, in a striking summation of von Balthasar's kenotic Christology, the motivation for the incarnation is laid plain. God so loves God's world that God demonstrates that depth and power of God's love through a *human* drama of forsakenness, crucifixion, death, descent, and resurrection. The drama of the Christ-event shows the meaning of the world to God. Ever faithful to the Chalcedonian definition, von Balthasar maintains distinction between the Christ's human and divine natures. The incarnation renders comprehensible the profundity of divine love and the discomfort ("anguish") of the dramatic lengths to which God is willing to make that love known to God's creatures. God's love is invested in the well-being of God's world. To speak of the God who "is Love" (1 John, etc.) cannot be to speak of an abstraction. Drama provides von Balthasar the language to imbue his theology with the deep feeling and romantic excitement of God's passion for God's creatures. For von Balthasar, no scholastic syllogism could do such a tale justice. Without drama, any meaning for Christian theology falls away because it will not be credible, both effective and affecting. The stakes must be cosmically high because, when it comes to the interpretation of the self-revelation of God most clearly and perfectly demonstrated on the cross, this Christ-hero quite literally saves the whole world.

§2.4 *Theo-Drama* and Credibility

The story recounted in *Theo-Drama* is a drama about God's activity in history to show the importance of the world to God. Therefore, a theodramatic method is most appropriate to take seriously the drama of salvation: as a framework interpretation. Theodramatic hermeneutics emphasize the potential cosmic significance in the mundane. Every action carries to high stakes in non-fated freedom of choice to love and risk with God's authority. Theodramatic hermeneutics, therefore, contain the possibility for new interpretations in relationships drawing on resources both

²⁵⁴ Balthasar, *The Christian and Anxiety*, 75, emphasis mine.

within and beyond the confines of the Christian community. Drama makes these dimensions of theological reflection sparkle even for a critical public. Drama shows the theological story to be one worth believing, at least for now. Drama makes Christian theology credible.

But why should you believe me?

Drama—especially its realization in theatrical performance—puts life on display for judgment. The representation on stage may or may not be based on a correct perception of the world. Theatrical representation (that is, *mimesis*), always interprets as it re-presents, but these interpretations start to point toward something beyond a photorealistic copy. Theatrical representation tells stories with the interpretive excesses of its poetry. Drama’s excesses contain and nuance emotional and sensual notions bigger than cognition left on its own. Drama’s excesses break open self-obsessed particularities to show experiences communicable across differences of history, culture, and bodies.²⁵⁵ Drama’s excesses deconstruct and rearrange the reigning assumptions that distort and constrict the realization of creaturely freedom. In this way, drama discloses the complexity and event character of credibility.

Credibility establishes the conditions for the possibility of discerning the truth; credibility does not establish the truth as such. There are multiple *credible* testimonies to truth.²⁵⁶ Truth remains an open possibility for theatrical hermeneutics, but it must be an underdetermined possibility. On

²⁵⁵ Cf. TD 2, 118-130. This position has theological consequences because the content of revelation consists always as an “(ever-greater) totality” for von Balthasar. “Thus the starting point for beholding this (ever-greater) totality is that primal relationship between God and the world (man) that leaves God, the Creator and Redeemer (through his self-communication), free to allow free, created beings to exist. They come into existence out of him, exist in his presence, they are in him, and oriented toward him” (TD 2, 118). Theological dramatic theory gives space for the realization of a real encounter between divine-infinite and human-finite freedom: “we must assert that unconditional (divine) freedom in no way threatens the existence of conditional (creaturely) freedom, at whatever historical stage the latter may find itself—whether it is close to the former, alienated from it or coming back to its real self” (TD 2, 119). For a major discussion of these themes see Thomas G. Datzell, *The Dramatic Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 2nd ed., (Berne: Peter Lang, 2000).

²⁵⁶ In Christian thought one finds conflicting but mutually credible testimonies paradigmatically expressed in the multiplicity of authorized gospel accounts of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Despite significant differences, each of the four gospels presents itself as a credible witness to the truth revealed in and by the Christ. On the “problem” of friction in biblical narrative, see Ashleigh Elser, *Beyond Unity: Reading Hermeneutic Frictions In Biblical Literature*, (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, Department of Religious Studies, Diss., 2017).

the one hand, theatrical interpretation seeks after “true” readings of the drama, but no single interpretation can achieve a drama’s ultimate truth. Like any human endeavor, theatre requires an embodied aesthetic sensibility: that is, an interpretation aware of its origin in particular perception and open to complication when placed into dialogue with the particular perceptions of others.

Theatrical interpretation, however, cannot be ordered to beauty for its own sake because drama does actions with consequences. Dramatic doing happens in performance. This does not mean that drama remains aloof from beauty, but, rather, that theatrical interpretations incorporate concerns about beauty at various stages in the process attentive to contingency. There must be more than one beautiful way to interpret the drama. Instead, theatrical interpretation—like all hermeneutics—organizes itself according to the Good. There are certainly *bad* interpretations of any given play, but there remains an infinite potential for good interpretations.

The minimum standard for a good theatrical interpretation is one that retains the drama’s life. Bad theatrical interpretations kill drama by making it boring. A boring drama is dead because it fails to produce the tension necessary to reproduce its liveliness by means of the audience’s co-creative investment. A boring drama provokes none of the excessive meanings that expand outward to render its performance into something larger than the repetition and reception of its component parts. Such bad-because-boring theatrical interpretations function akin to Paul Ricœur’s dead metaphors. Conceiving live metaphors as sentence constructions that spontaneously generate meaning by achieving “semantic innovation,” Ricœur writes, “Live metaphors are metaphors of invention within which the response to the discordance in the sentence is a new extension of meaning, although it is certainly true that such inventive metaphors tend to become dead metaphors through repetition.”²⁵⁷ An interpretation of theatrical drama, like a metaphor, loses its life when it

²⁵⁷ Paul Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 52. Note that for Ricœur, the fundamental unit of meaningful discourse is the sentence. The death of a metaphor does not mean the sentence should be retired from conversation, but rather that it has been reabsorbed into the ordinary

becomes boring and recedes into the background of ordinary conversation. Drama ceases to live when its interpretation stops elevating drama above the quotidian. Herein lies the odd secret of the crowds that flock to witness a flop or the *schadenfreude* produced by a disastrous performance. Dramatic failures garner interest as readily as dramatic successes. At the flop, one enjoys watching not the ensemble's interpretation of the drama (what might be called its theatricality) but the now transparent drama of the event of the disastrous performance. At the theatrical disaster, interpretation has not merely failed according to the standard of the good and so killed the play but drama proceeds to resurrect itself into its own, self-representing farcical parody. The drama displays itself as a spectacle of interpretive failure.

Credibility, like theatre, begins by piquing interest. That which does not have human attention cannot be credible. Credibility, therefore, consists primarily in the *attention that must be paid* in order to engage ideas. The italicized phrase alludes to the central line of Linda's major speech from the first act of Arthur Miller's 1949 *Death of a Salesman*. "I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fold into his grave like an old dog."²⁵⁸ Willy Loman makes a striking example of the way drama tests credibility. The play's longform family drama denounces not only the fragility of the American Dream but also the "empty show" of salesmanship, deception, and misplaced self-importance. Linda's speech, by contrast, cuts to the quick of dramatic credibility.

and non-excessive use of language. "There are no live metaphors in a dictionary." Language develops as dead metaphors become the ancestors of new, living metaphors. Dead metaphors are not banished from discourse. Some eventually transfigure into quasi-eternal symbols. "Lacking any status in established language, a metaphor is in the strong sense of the word, an event of discourse. The result is that when a metaphor is taken up and accepted by a linguistic community it tends to become confused with an extension of the polysemy of words. It first becomes a trivial, then a dead metaphor. Symbols, in contrast, because they plunge their roots into the durable constellations of life, feeling, and the universe, and because they have such an incredible stability, lead us to think that a symbol never dies, it is only transformed. [...] [S]ymbols must be dead metaphors" (Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 64).

²⁵⁸ Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, Act I, in *Death of a Salesman, The Portable Arthur Miller*, Christopher Bigsby, ed., (New York: Penguin, 2003), 60.

Attention must be paid to the dignity of a person simply by virtue of their dignity as an existing human person in contrast to a dog. The speech rejects fame, wealth, achievement, or morality as ideological benchmarks for the obligation of attention. *This is the credibility standard of attentive perception.* The economic overtones, here, are enlightening (especially as regards the development of credit-driven economics throughout “modern” period). Credibility extends a line of credit by suspending disbelief *for now* and creates a credited time for the sake of investigation, debate, discernment, and discovery. That is, credibility describes the active suspension of disbelief that comes at the cost of attention. One pays attention *as if* that to which attention is paid could be true. The dramatic question of being must be actualized and acted in such a way as to charge the attention of the audience. In the modern context, amidst the optionality of belief and unbelief, credibility regards paying attention to the phenomena under consideration. Theatrical ghosts come to matter because they materialize in the bodies of actors. Spiritual entrances demand the sentinel’s attention: “Who’s there?” (*Ham.I.1.1*) or “Jesus came, stood in their midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’” (cf. John 20:19, 26). Just as von Balthasar moves from aesthetics to dramatics to logic, so too will credibility begin with and presume perception and paid attention. The primary, and most obvious, criteria that correlates drama and credibility is the materialization of phenomena toward which an interpreter might pay attention in the form of suspended disbelief. The dramatic question of being takes on consequence when and where attention is paid, even in the midst of doubt as to whether the ghost is real.

Theodramatic hermeneutics refers to a mode of theological interpretation done on analogy to theatrical interpretation. As such, theodramatic hermeneutics puts as much interpretive emphasis on philological, exegetical, historical, and aesthetic analyses as it does on existential and human interest and issues of performance in reception, application, and social location. Theodramatic hermeneutics treats its objects of study in constant relation. The centrality of relationship reflects

theodramatic hermeneutics' theological register insofar as all objects for theological study begin and end in God as the first principle of theology. This centrality of relationship reflects theodramatic hermeneutics' theatrical register insofar as all objects for dramatic study begin and end in human life together as the first principle of theatre. The performing arts require space, time, and bodies in order to be played. Drama's being cannot be seen in abstraction. Put another way, the absolute and universal drama is life together.²⁵⁹ Drama requires relation in order to be alive.

My point about the relationship between drama and life needs to be taken at its most plain sense level. No drama can happen without a relationship between dramatic objects. Drama describes some quality of relation, usually, but not always, a relation of conflict. Drama does not exist by itself in the world; rather, the world's way of being the world enacts dramas. Drama comes into the world through the performances of life. As such, drama's event character expresses the mode of relational metaphysics called "performativity." Drama does not subsist as an entity separable from other things. That is, drama's ontology requires performance in order to be; drama cannot be abstracted or absolutized apart from the doing that constitutes the event of its being. Drama provides the model for performative ontologies. It makes sense that studies of performance emerged from studies of dramatic literatures in the historical-genealogical trajectory for religion and theatre: both the performative and literary senses of drama can be held in dialectical tension with words like theatre and theatricality.²⁶⁰

Theodramatic hermeneutics takes the relational metaphysics and performative ontology of the stage, concretizes those assumptions as a technical but nevertheless portable vocabulary (that is, creates a jargon), and applies the framework of theatrical drama to the latent performative ontology of the world as illumined by God's self-revelation. Theodramatic hermeneutics interprets the world

²⁵⁹ Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, (New York: Harper, 1954).

²⁶⁰ A premier example is Mason's *The Performative Ground of Theatre and Religion*. See the discussion of performativity above in the context of my historical-genealogical trajectory for religion and theatre in §1.4.A.

in relation to God according to a framework anticipated and exemplified by the art of theatre-making when it interprets the drama of life together. Drama and theology share the desire to be realized in public. Theatre must produce public interpretation in order to be called “theatre.” Only an audience can confer credibility to a theatrical interpretation; for professional theatre-makers, only a *paying* audience confers professional credibility. Indeed, drama has not been properly interpreted if its staging remains closed. Without the possibility of an audience to join the performance, drama has not yet been credibly interpreted as theatre. Pressed further, theatrical interpretation remains insufficiently realized so long as there remain barriers for public accessibility. *This can be called the public accessibility standard for credibility.* If a show cannot be shown, then it cannot be considered a credible theatrical interpretation of a given drama. Where actors apply the categorical imperative “the show must go on” as an ethical mandate to overcome any obstacle to performance, theatrical hermeneutics supplies the credibility test of performability against the credibility standard of accessibility. That is, “the show must [be able to] go on.” If drama cannot be staged, it cannot be interpreted theatrically because it cannot be accessed by a public. In order to be credible theatre, drama must be performed. In order to be credibly performed, drama must be publicly accessible. Performability underscores my credibility standard of public accessibility. Public accessibility does not, however, mean unrestricted access without the need for interpretive work. The credibility standard of public accessibility names the capacity for any member of the public to have access to the drama. It does not require that every member of the public have 1) identical access or even that 2) every member of the public will be able to witness the performance. As such, the credibility standard of public accessibility describes *potential access* and not default, easy, or even reasonable access. There will always be some cost of entry to be paid. At minimum the cost of attention that must be paid.

Applied to theodramatic hermeneutics, the credibility standard of public accessibility norms the use of jargon. Jargon, here, means as much specialized vocabulary as it does a willingness to entertain foreign religious paradigms. Technical language *and* cosmological presuppositions demand a price of entry in the form of imaginative labor, and the cost will be particularly high for engagement with a religious thinker such as von Balthasar. Theodramatic hermeneutics, however, operates according to the dramatic characteristics of modernity wherein religious ideas must be made in public for those outside the rehearsal room by making accessible the given circumstances for imaginative engagement. Theodramatic hermeneutics enact their own *communicatio idiomatum* by articulating theological ideas through dramatic literatures and theatrical praxis. The *communicatio idiomatum* is, in itself, both Christian jargon and a theodramatic principle for von Balthasar. Human interpretations of God only make sense when predicated on and through God's self-revelation, paradigmatically the Christ, as the mediation of knowledge of God. The

self-interpretation of God's revelation, which does not throw partial, unconnected rays of light on individual truths but is intended to communicate a complete orientation concerning God's action and man's response. To that extent, all revelation also has its point of unity in the definitive Word of God, Christ [...(a)] and since Christ is the definitive revelation, the 'sealed book' opens of itself [...(b)]. In Christ, God speaks a final Word (*eschaton logon*), albeit in the midst of the ongoing drama of the world."²⁶¹

The omitted sections are Latin references to Hugh of St. Victor and Bernard of Clairvaux that provide the groundwork for von Balthasar's metaphor of Christ as the unified and unsealed "book" of God's self-revelation. The first reference (a) from Hugh is that "all of divine scripture is one book, and this one book is Christ" (*omnis scriptura divina unus liber est, et ille unus liber Christus est*).²⁶² The second reference (b) from Bernard is that "he opens the book himself" (*liber ipse aperit seipsum*).²⁶³

²⁶¹ TD 2, 124.

²⁶² TD 2, 124n23 with reference to "Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Dei morali* II, 8 (PL, 196, 642C)."

²⁶³ TD 2, 124n24 with reference to "Bernard, *In die s. Pasche, sermo de septem signaculis* (PL 183, 280C). Quoted in de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale* I (1959) 322-23."

Von Balthasar brings together these two medieval sensibilities of the Christ as both the *liber unus* sum total of revelation (enfolding both the book of nature and the Bible) and the Christ as the one who opens and interprets this composite *liber* (as in the Emmaus story). The Christ is both the revelation of God and the human interpretation of God's self-revelation. Theodramatic hermeneutics anchors the self-interpretation of God in the Christ to be simultaneously literary-scriptural and active-interpretative. When the Christ takes the world-stage, humans can come to know through that consequential performance the definitive and dramatic self-revelation of the living, saving, and loving God.

§2.5 Public Outcry and Response: Faith, Public Reason, and Scholarly Credibility

Two versions of an objection to the credibility of theodramatic hermeneutics as suitable for scholarly work rush the stage as variations on the theme of faith and public reason. The first variation regards the purported necessity of some act of faith to make sense of God's self-revelation. The notion of God's self-revelation already *assumes the existence, veracity, and/or worthiness for study of this God that reveals God-self according to Christian materials, testimonies, and traditions*. These words reflect credibility criteria already introduced: existence (is it real?) asks about a criterion of interest and visibility formulated as the standard of attentive perception; veracity (is it true?) asks about a criterion of credence, willing buy-in, formulated as the cost of attention in interpretive work; worthiness for study (is it appropriate?) asks about the standard of public accessibility. The audience for scholarly work in Christian thought seems to be restricted insofar as only certain people receive the ticket of entry commonly called "faith": the capacity to notice, care about, and access God's self-revelation as the revelation of God.

The second variation on the theme faith and public reason regards a supposed incompatibility between public reason and theological reflection in non-sectarian religious studies. The second variation of the objection maintains that religious studies cannot import a

“comprehensive doctrine” or “normative” framework and still be properly public and accessible.²⁶⁴

Religious studies will only maintain its modern scholarly credibility as a critical discipline if it restricts commentary to “descriptive” claims. Description remains universally valid for everyone whereas normative reflection appeals only to the aforementioned special subset of faith-ticket holders. According to this second variation of the objection, any theological speculation grounded in a faith-claim is a form of normative interpretation of God’s self-revelation. Therefore, theologies that assume God cannot achieve the credibility standard of public accessibility. Theodramatic hermeneutics can be dismissed, from the perspective of non-sectarian studies, on grounds that it relies on *a priori* tenets of faith inaccessible and unacceptable for non-adherents.

Both variations on the faith and public reason objection misunderstand the interpretive work of theatre and performance for twentieth century Christian thought. My argument responds to this public outcry precisely by noting how theodramatic hermeneutics renders Christian theological reflection publicly accessible. Drama does so by providing a non-religious framework by which religious ideas can be interpreted and contested. Put another way, theatrical jargon and theatrical praxis articulate Christian theological ideas in a public and accessible way and subject Christian theological ideas to a pluralistic audience’s critical judgment. Any Christian theological method, however, norms its credibility according to the interest of religious communities and buys into the funding of God’s self-revelation, even if only as imagined. Theodramatic hermeneutics firmly grounds theological reflection’s worthiness for study insofar as credibility invites the suspension of disbelief for the sake of encounter and debate using the *communicatio idiomatum* scaffolding of dramatic theory and theatrical praxis. As before, dramatic theory and theatrical praxis provide a

²⁶⁴ Here, a method for religious studies adopts the post-metaphysical assumptions of political liberalism as espoused by theorists like Rawls, Habermas, and Rorty. Scholarship, like the law, should not appeal to transcendental ideals or arguments derived from the evidence of revelation. Instead, religious studies operates as a credible discipline when its methodology is decidedly non-religious.

worldly idiom through which theological concepts can communicate. Credibility does not produce a universally valid conclusion, but, rather, sets the table for debate about drama within the context of life together.²⁶⁵ At the same time, theodramatic hermeneutics cannot convince an uninterested party to pay attention if they choose against paying the admission cost of imaginative and interpretive work. Theodramatic interpretation makes the articulation of an experience of God and reflection about its meaning publicly accessible. By differing the claim to truth in favor of theatrical hermeneutics' reliance on the good, theodramatic hermeneutics invites any *interested party*, interested in any and all matters of existential and human interest, to join the conversation. Theodramatic hermeneutics, therefore, aims to make the drama of salvation interesting for the modern and critical audience. On the one hand, this thoroughly relativizes theological interpretation to the human agents who enact it and considers the task of scholarly theology to be among, but distinct, from the tasks of ecclesial, dogmatic, or magisterial theology enacted by the Christian communities as religious interpreting bodies. On the other hand, differing claims to ultimate or absolute truth establishes the worthiness for study of these religious ideas outside the confines, funding structures, or political interests of those interpreting communities. Only by interpreting revelations of God so to be meaningful in the present can theology do its interpretive work. This interpretive work can welcome public participation whether or not the public believes in a given theology's coherence with an ultimate truth. What matters is finding a given theological position credible enough for conversation and debate.

A third variations of the faith and public reason objection raises concerns about the ease with which a scholarly theology might defer and differentiate between truth-claims and the status of faith. Does this idea of a gap between perception and assent descend into supposed nihilism of a

²⁶⁵ Recall the distinction between Christian theology and apologetics developed in the Introduction.

pure relativism?²⁶⁶ Expressed differently, what renders a scholarly theology credible as the product of study and expertise in ways distinct from a particularly well-articulated, perhaps even beautiful, private opinion. Like the higher cost expected for “professional theatre,” some standards of credibility must also be distinct to “professional” Christian theology as a scholarly practice.

I turn, then, to two of the major “professionals” of twentieth century theology to glean their sense of what makes a credible Christian theology. After the Second Vatican Council, Karl Rahner, S.J. took “What is a Christian, and why can one live this Christian existence today with intellectual honesty?” as his starting point for a foundations course in the Christian faith.²⁶⁷ As we have seen, modern believers could no longer rely on the “default” Christian paradigm of wider European culture. Christianity now needs a set of fundamental justifications, explanations, and investigations into the groundwork for theological reasoning by embodied and free human beings. The inheritance of the tradition could not supply sturdy departure points simply because those dogmatic tenets were derived already from faith, *de fide*. I will quote from Rahner at length in order to highlight his point about credibility:

²⁶⁶ Derrida’s concept of *différance* can structure both this relativism objection and a theological and hermeneutical response. What seems to be at stake, as a fundamental premise, is whether a text or a sign *can* be reconstructed by the interpreter so as to project identical meaning shared with the writer, composer, producer, signatory. Christian theological meaning always finds itself in the midst of a theological *différance*: the fullness of meaning of a theological truth-claim about the infinite God in finite words always *differed* against the eschatological horizon of the kingdom of God and *visio dei*; the ontological *difference* between the infinite God and finite creation that renders theological speech possible only as analogy. Therefore, on theodramatic terms, all theological interpretation filters through the mediation of the Christ, and it is the Christ that guarantees the coherence of meaning between creaturely speech and divine reality. The Christ *is* the *Logos* of God, and, in any logocentric theology, serves as the guarantor of meaning. The objection presumes that any hermeneutical posture that concedes the impossibility of a perfect communication in human writing and interpretation also at the same time suggests some meaninglessness in words. The objection implies that “if communication is imperfect, communication is meaningless.” The latter position trades on a zero-sum logic and presumes the direct communication of angels rather than embodied creatures. Pressed further, in a Christian theological register, it presumes that human speech acts could not also be *distortive* as a result of sin. The Augustinian map of salvation history, wherein humanity after Christ exists *posse non peccare* with the aid of grace, also describes communication: through grace, theology has the capacity not to distort wrongfully in its finite attempts to speak with infinite sense. This grace does not overpower an intrinsically distortive speech-act, but, rather, aids ordinary worldly speech to point, in analogy with *différance*, toward the truth of God. See Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* and *On Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, trans., corrected edition, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). Kevin Hart emphasizes that Jesus’ preaching discloses eschatological reality in an experience of God’s kingdom in *Kingdoms of God*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

²⁶⁷ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 2.

In dogmatic theology there is in the dogmatic treatise “De fide” (on faith as such) a so-called analysis fidei. This analysis of faith considers the inner structure of fundamental theology’s **arguments for the credibility of faith**, and considers the significance which these have for faith and for making an act of faith. It says that in the Catholic understanding these **arguments or proofs of credibility** do not intrinsically establish faith in its properly theological character as *assensus super omnia firmus propter auctoritatem ipsius Dei relevantis* (as a firm and indubitable assent because of the authority of the revealing God Himself), but that they belong to faith nevertheless, and that such **arguments of credibility** have their function in faith as a whole. But it is assumed in this context that under certain circumstances and for theologically uneducated people or the *rudes*, an entire reflexive fundamental theology...is not necessary as a presupposition of faith. [...] **So I would like to formulate the thesis that in today’s situation all of us with all of our theological study are and remain unavoidably *rudes* in a certain sense, and that we ought to admit that to ourselves and to the world frankly and courageously.**²⁶⁸

The old *analysis fidei* in scholastic theology, in Rahner’s view, established a simultaneously reflective and critical character for dogmatic theology (that is, a theological interpretation predicated on already accepted tenets of belief). Dogmatic theology interprets and responds to the data provided by God’s self-revelation in Jesus the Christ, the human experiences of creatureliness, and the norming inheritance of the scriptures and the church’s traditions. Making dogmatic theological sense of the data requires the “firm and indubitable assent because of the authority of the revealing God” that is the graced act of faith. Two points need to be emphasized, here. The first is that Rahner has bracketed this “theological character” of faith for the dogmatic treatise “De fide.”²⁶⁹ So “arguments for the credibility of faith” suggest a mode of argument distinct from reliance on arguments from authority. Second, these arguments should render the phenomena of faith credible to those who themselves lack the gift of faith, on the one hand, or specialized theological training (the *rudes*) on

²⁶⁸ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 9.

²⁶⁹ For Rahner, the transcendental Thomist, I take the “theological character” of faith to signal faith as a theological virtue and therefore a human activity achieved only in and through God’s grace. In short, the “indubitability” of faith comes directly from an active gift of God and not some extreme or laudable willing into belief exclusively on the part of the human creature. Such faith (like hope and love) is graciously given, not achieved.

the other. At the same time, these arguments never reduce the fullness of faith's credibility to an extra-ecclesial standard. In other words, Rahner suggests that the dogmatic interpretation of faith itself—and, therefore, the credibility of later positions built on *de fide* doctrine—must be already satisfactorily and rationally explainable on its own terms. Such epistemological throat clearing remained only a challenge for the scholastics. Rahner notes that a long tradition provided for the possibility that the uneducated masses, the *rudes*, need not master the arts of philosophical deduction in order to justify their belief in God. He argues that “today’s situation” requires students of theology to “frankly and courageously” confess the complexity in the credibility of theological claims. Rahner’s post-conciliar framework unifies philosophy and theology and so “the justification of the faith includes fundamental theology and dogmatic theology together.”²⁷⁰ After a Council that so thoroughly pressed Pope John XXIII’s pastoral vision for the church, Rahner asserts that Christian theology “with intellectual honesty” must proceed in a dialogue.²⁷¹ Credible theology oscillates between (a) general reflection on the experience of faith by an embodied and historical human creature and its questions and (b) specialized theological commentary according to the answers of various systematic loci and their unique methods.²⁷²

Rahner’s quest for credibility—that is, his “intellectual honesty”—invites a back and forth between existential human questions (philosophy) and “the fundamental assertion of Christianity as the answer to the question which man is, and hence we must do theology.”²⁷³ His method to elucidate some credible “idea of Christianity” is simultaneously introductory (beginning at the beginning), foundational (coherently self-establishing and from first principles), and conversational

²⁷⁰ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 9.

²⁷¹ “The point of our foundational course in theology is precisely this, to give people confidence from the very *content* of Christian dogma itself that they can believe with intellectual honesty” (Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 12, emphasis original).

²⁷² Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 11.

²⁷³ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 11.

(a process of question and answer with attention to lived experience). Rahner embarked on piecemeal “theological investigations” elsewhere. Here, the task of laying believable groundwork requires his readers puts trust in the dynamic movement between human particularity (existential questions) and theological universality (religious answers). Rahner’s foundations are sturdy but certainly not static.

In this way, Rahner rises (at least implicitly) to the challenge issued by Paul Tillich in the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*. In the midst of a discussion on the “The Method and Structure of Systematic Theology,” Tillich turns to the problem and promise of the systematic theologian’s denominational affiliation and cultural context.²⁷⁴ The systematic theologian writes in her own language and out from an experience of her own church in her own culture; the experience of the “concrete life” of the Church and its expression of Christian ultimate concern enriches the systematic theologian’s nuanced understanding of the sources of theology.²⁷⁵ But these details—to which might be added experience-shaping social categories (such as race, class, gender, and form of life) and expressed collectively in the parlance of “social location”—nonetheless “operate as an unconscious and conscious principle of selection.”²⁷⁶ In contrast to the “dogmatic sterility of Roman Catholic theology,” Tillich argues for theological creativity and innovation to require freedom from doctrinal supervision and “dogmatic prohibitions.”²⁷⁷

While Tillich understands from his first line that theology is “a function of the Christian church,” he writes with the precision of a scientific and scholarly discipline.²⁷⁸ Where Rahner glosses

²⁷⁴ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 34ff.

²⁷⁵ Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 38.

²⁷⁶ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 37.

²⁷⁷ “Roman Catholic dogmatics uses those doctrinal traditions which have gained legal standing (*de fide*) as the real source of systematic theology. It presupposes dogmatically, with or without a posteriori proofs, that those doctrines whose validity is guaranteed by canon law agree essentially with the biblical message. The work of the systematic theologian is an exact and, at the same time, polemic interpretation of the statements *de fide*. This is the reason for the dogmatic sterility of Roman Catholic theology, in contrast its liturgical and ethical creativity and the great scholarship it develops in areas of church history which are free from dogmatic prohibitions” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 37).

²⁷⁸ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3.

credibility as “intellectual honesty,” Tillich strives for theology to proceed rationally. Credibility for a diverse audience—that is, a theological readership drawn from the Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and non-Christian religious and non-religious communities of the modern world—requires not only creativity and innovation in response to the contemporary situation but the application of “semantic rationality,”²⁷⁹ “logical rationality,”²⁸⁰ and “methodological rationality.”²⁸¹ As a scientific or scholarly discipline, Tillich’s vision for credible theology adopts a technical approach in its use of terms that “cannot be a sacred or revealed language” and resists the mystifications required to obfuscate logical contradictions in theological thinking.²⁸² Christian theologians work rationally when they intend “to give the adequate, understandable, and therefore logical expression of the infinite tensions of Christian existence.”²⁸³ Such an approach produces a rational and consistent method for theology expressed, most fully, in the form of a theological system.²⁸⁴ Systems can be fragmentary and need not be closed or complete.²⁸⁵ For Tillich, the systematic approach operates somewhere between the totalizing treatment of a *summa* and the specificity of one topic in an essay.²⁸⁶ “The system deals with a group of *actual* problems which demand a solution in a special situation,” and a rational system can supply the tools to address other many such actual problems in similar light.²⁸⁷ Tillich develops and deploys a correlational method throughout his theological system. The method of correlation

²⁷⁹ “The principle of semantic rationality involves the demand that all connotations of a word should consciously be related to each other and centered around a controlling meaning” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 55).

²⁸⁰ “Theology is as dependent on formal logic as any other science,” Tillich writes, but formal logic neither excludes proper dialectical thinking between “yes and no, affirmation and negation” nor paradox. “Paradox points to the fact that in God’s acting finite reason is superseded but not annihilated; it expresses this fact in terms which are not logically contradictory but which are supposed to point beyond the realm in which finite reason is applicable” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 56-57).

²⁸¹ Methodological rationality “implies that theology follows a method, that is, a definite way of deriving and stating its propositions” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 58).

²⁸² Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 55.

²⁸³ Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 57.

²⁸⁴ Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 58.

²⁸⁵ “A fragment is an implicit system; a system is an explicit fragment” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 58).

²⁸⁶ Rahner explored these other options in his own work. Rahner’s “foundational course” might be called the transcendental Thomist’s crack at the *prima pars* to a post-Heideggerian *summa*, and Rahner’s *Theological Investigations* resisted the totalizing problems of textbook theology by embracing the method of the occasional essay.

²⁸⁷ Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 59, emphasis original.

attempts to unite the Christian message with the human situation by continuously developing and placing “existential questions and theological answers in mutual interdependence.”²⁸⁸ Tillich proceeds by analyzing a question of ultimate concern posed by human existence and correlating an analysis of the religious symbol that responds. The method of correlation thereby achieves Tillich’s scientific and scholarly standards for semantic, logical, and methodological rationality.

Tillich’s approach can be deduced (obviously) from its title, *Systematic Theology*. But Rahner’s 1976 *Foundations* demonstrates what Roman Catholic theological creativity can look like after the Council. Tillich’s diagnosis of Roman Catholic sterility (published in 1951) joined the already loud chorus of European Roman Catholics (e.g., the *nouvelle theologie*) tired of repeating scholasticism’s abstract minutiae. Rahner achieves an approach that, while faithful to resources of the Church’s “teaching office” and magisterial tradition, nevertheless manages to navigate between the poles of historical fidelity and contemporary relevance without slavishly norming theology to either.²⁸⁹ I contend that Rahner’s *Foundations of Christian Faith* meets Tillich’s criteria. The material norm for reflection in Tillich’s *Systematic Theology* is “New Being in Jesus as the Christ”;²⁹⁰ the material norm for Rahner is reflection on the totality of Christian existence after the “external stimulus” of the Vatican II Decree on Priestly Formation and its “overriding thematic task...to concentrate the whole of theology on the mystery of Christ.”²⁹¹ While I cannot prove Rahner directly replies to Tillich in *Foundations*, he nevertheless fits the bill for a Roman Catholic existential systematic theology open to ecumenical dialogue in content and meets Tillich’s rationality requirements in style.

²⁸⁸ Tillich, *Systematic Theology* I, 60.

²⁸⁹ Tillich calls for this balance. He writes, “A way must be found which lies between the Roman Catholic practice of making ecclesiastical decisions not only a source but also the actual norm of systematic theology and the radical Protestant practice of depriving church history not only of its normative character but also of its function as a source. [...] The systematic theologian cannot claim validity for the norm he uses by pointing to Church Fathers, councils, creeds, etc.” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 51).

²⁹⁰ Tillich, *Systematic Theology* I, 50

²⁹¹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 1-3.

The most striking similarity, however, remains the relationship between credibility and dialogism. “The Christian message provides the answers to the questions implied in human existence,” though a quotation from Tillich, equally describes Rahner’s approach to laying “intellectually honest” foundations.²⁹² The existential and communicative purpose behind Tillich’s rational yet circularly interdependent method of correlation might be expressed in Rahner’s phrase, “The question creates the condition for really hearing, and only the answer brings the question to its reflexive self-presence.”²⁹³ To express and theorize the theological interpretation of doctrine credibly requires that theology can stand up to the critical, existential questions posed by the modern world and provide rigorous, analytical answers in accord with the strictures of reason. Such an approach opens theological discourse to scrutiny across lines of devotional and denominational difference *within* Christian communities (marking ecumenical Christian scholarship in theology an intellectual pursuit oriented towards mutual understanding and, ultimately, peace). These philosophical methods also make the interpretive task of Christian God-talk legible to non-Christians and non-religious audiences (so comparative and parallel scholarly investigations into God, god-concepts, and ultimacy from multiple religious and philosophical traditions and cultural contexts describes an intellectual pursuit oriented towards mutual understanding and, ultimately, peace). Philosophical theology can achieve such credibility.²⁹⁴ Their work gains this sort of credibility precisely when theology proceeds

²⁹² Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 64. For Rahner, see the threefold exposition of the process by which the question posed by human existence—“which man *is* and not only *has*”—is situated in “the transcendental and historical conditions which make revelation possible” and is so answered by “the fundamental assertion of Christianity” (Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 11, emphasis original).

²⁹³ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 11. For Tillich, see a paragraph rife with metaphors of voices and volume and the problem of apologetics (Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 7) and the explanation of the method of correlation as question “developed by an analysis of human existence and existence generally” and its answer “given on the basis of the sources, the medium, and the norm of systematic theology” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 66).

²⁹⁴ I prefer to group both Rahner and Tillich under the heading “philosophical theology” for a number of reasons. The first reason grants Tillich’s assertion about the superiority of the term “systematic theology” over the term “dogmatic theology” for Protestant approaches, since systematics can include “apologetics, dogmatics, and ethics” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 32). The second reason is the problem for ecumenical theological work produced by the *alternative* subdivisions in systematics more common in Roman Catholic theological circles: for instance, fundamental theology (reflection on first principles, the disciplinary successor to “natural theology” and already containing “philosophy of religion”) as a counterpart to dogmatic theology (reflection on God’s self-revelation and God’s self-interpretation of

as an intellectually honest account of the historical and cultural conditions of the human experience and the semantic, logical, and methodological rationality that contributes to scholarly (“scientific”) knowledge-production.²⁹⁵ That credible mode of procedure seeks a dialogic method—Rahner’s foundation course (itself a reference to a pedagogical situation) or Tillich’s method of correlation—predicated on analyzing the existential question of the modern situation and answers formulated by Christian theology.

A dialogical situation describes a dramatic situation in the interpretive interplay between modern questioning and God’s self-revelation. The problem of credibility emerges as a quintessentially modern but nonetheless theological problem. In the language of modernity sketched above, credibility describes wherein the dramatic question of being engages events and materials testifying to God’s self-revelation. Modern credibility calls for a theodramatic approach wherein the problem of existential experience as it encounters dubious ghosts can be included within philosophical theology. At the same time, drama provides publicly accessible and critical methodologies by which to enact the *as if* of imaginative, co-creative theological interpretation. For von Balthasar, revelation’s

revelation in and through the recordings of scripture, traditions of the Church and her magisterial teachings). The third reason reflects a theme of this dissertation because von Balthasar’s trilogy resists categorization within either “systematics” camp. The fourth is the openness to interreligious and interdisciplinary conversation signaled by “philosophical theology.” If Rahner is right to unify philosophy and theology (and I hold that he is), then Christian theology should be legible to non-Christians with philosophical training. At the same time, non-Christian theology (that is, god-talk and existential reflection on ultimacy from other religious or philosophical perspectives) should be possible *as a credible scholarly discipline* on the grounds that scholars in the critical humanities all share philosophical training. The full-throated defense of this position and its concomitant theory of academic disciplinarity goes beyond the scope of this already beleaguered footnote. Consider, however, that almost all humanities disciplines identify the end of training by conferring the Doctor of Philosophy degree. In that vein, the fifth reason I prefer “philosophical theology” occurs in conjunction with the University of Virginia’s determination that *philosophical theology* merits research, training, and teaching at a secular and public research university.

²⁹⁵ Tillich convincingly notes that “scientific disciplines,” including philosophy, require some sort of detachment between the personal interests of the scientist and the subject matter. A theologian cannot attain such detachment because “The basic attitude of the theologian is commitment to the content he expounds” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 23). Yet Tillich also writes “Every creative philosophy is a hidden theologian...in the degree to which his existential situation and his ultimate concern shape his philosophical vision” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology I*, 25). Luckily, ambiguity regarding a requirement for “scientific detachment” remains a field-wide open question in religious studies.

historical fact presents us with one impressive interpretation of the world, capable of holding its ground among others: here [in Christianity], quite explicitly, we are presented with a total meaning which—in spite of its historical a posteriori character—cannot be surpassed; it is ‘always more’ than we can imagine, and this is something we can read from it a priori.²⁹⁶

Drama does not answer or explain away the ever-present problem of the Christian faith’s given facts *including* the position that God’s status as infinite God exceeds even the human imagination (and, by definition, the already “imagined” propositions of theology).²⁹⁷ Instead, drama borrows from public cultural productions to bulwark the credibility of theological interpretation. Theodramatic hermeneutics demonstrates this enfolding of credibility by means of the critical willingness to suspend disbelief *for now* shared between drama and theology: “there is an initial and basically human appeal about the fact’s testimony, allowing us to weigh the seriousness and reliability of the witness with a degree of certainty” whether the fact’s testimony appears in the dramatic situation of the courtroom, classroom, altar, or theatrical stage.²⁹⁸ Theology begins with the assumption that its facts are credible and worth paying attention to in scholarly study. Drama expositis the nature of this sort of worthiness for belief.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ TD 2, 116.

²⁹⁷ The point should not be misread to imply that the human “imagining God” is synonymous to Feuerbach’s “God projections.” Rather, an emphasis on theology “imagining God” assures that God, in Godself, will neither be exhausted nor bound by human concepts. One can close one’s eyes and imagine an orange on the table does not, by virtue of the fact that the orange can be imagined, denigrate the orange’s potential or actual reality. Consciousness retains the image of the orange in memory, see Edmund Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898-1925)*, John B. Brough, trans. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005). Similarly, Rahner’s “intellectual honesty” that theology “imagines God” in no way necessarily denigrates God’s reality. Rahner’s point, instead, is that a human presumption about God’s actuality undergirds the possibility to imagine God in the first place because God has revealed Godself to the world.

²⁹⁸ TD 2, 116.

²⁹⁹ Indeed, von Balthasar shows how it would be a problem if theology had to justify its resources by means of another scholarly method before treating them according to its own. “Subsequent reflection can lead us to separate the two aspects and give a natural priority to the first, developing it into a distinct science (‘exegesis’, ‘fundamental theology’—however that may be conceived); the ‘credibility’ of the chief witnesses will have to be assessed, next that of the supporting witnesses and finally the credibility of the Scriptures that testify to the witnesses; only then, after this has proved sufficiently reliable, can reflection go on, in a second science (‘theology’, ‘dogmatics’) to ponder the momentous meaning contained in the testimony. Clearly, there is something wrong with this analytical process: the Witness who proclaims the fact, or rather, the Fact who witnesses to Himself, also—inseparably—bears witness to his eternal, a priori unsurpassable meaning; thus the reflecting person is faced with a choice: either he rejects the supporting testimony (for example, by accusing the supporting witnesses, Paul and John, of a faulty or excessive interpretation of Christ, the chief

But where does theology acquire the facts? From whence do faith's first statements of the givenness of God's self-revelation derive? The analysis of the correlation between drama and credibility requires application; it must live. Drama needs to take the stage in order to make credible theatre, and the credibility of any Christian theological interpretation of God's self-revelation can be found in and checked by Christianity's performance history. Christian thought can be distorted in order to support moral evil. Dolores Williams, for instance, rightfully highlights the complicity of prevalent modes of Christian theology with the institutions of slavery and racist misogyny in the United States.³⁰⁰ Credibility, therefore, sits within the context of the Christian tradition and Christian interpreting communities. In order to demonstrate the centrality of the problem of credibility to the modern theological situation and its dramas of doubt, this chapter concludes with two case studies: one before, and the other after, von Balthasar. The first is a close reading of a theory of credibility by the French Jesuit Pierre Rousselot, S.J. from 1910 alongside our two aforementioned dubious ghosts and some reference to Karl Barth. The second concludes the chapter by engaging the contemporary status of the credibility of the post-conciliar Catholicism in John Patrick Shanley's 2004 play, *Doubt: a parable* with some reference to "something rotten in the state of" a compromised institution.

witness) or else he must acknowledge the integrity of the foundational testimony to be part of the Fact (in which case he is acting as a 'dogmatician' as well as an 'exegete' or 'fundamental theologian')" (TD 2, 116).

³⁰⁰ Williams critiques the image of surrogacy that rhetorically connects the historical experience of black women in the United States with Christian theologies of substitutionary atonement. Theology in Christian churches "including black ones, teaches believers that sinful humankind has been redeemed because Jesus died on the cross in the place of humans thereby taking human sin upon himself. In this sense Jesus represents the ultimate surrogate figure standing in the place of someone else: sinful humankind. Surrogacy, attached to this divine personage, thus takes on an aura of the sacred. It is therefore altogether fitting and proper for black women to ask whether the image of a surrogate-God has salvific power for black women, or whether this image of redemption supports and reinforces the exploitation that has accompanied their experience with surrogacy. If black women accept this image of redemption, can they not also passively accept the exploitation surrogacy brings?" (Dolores S. Williams, "Black Women's Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption," in *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions*, Paula M. Cooley, William R. Eakin, and Jay B. McDaniel, eds., [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991], 9. See also Williams discussion of the rhetorical power of theological symbols in *Sisters In the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1993.

§2.6 Credibility and the Eyes of Faith: Another Take on Doubting Thomas and *Hamlet*

‘My Lord and my God!’ ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’ Tradition has always seen in these exclamations of the converted centurion and of the apostle who recovered his faith both the beginning and the manifestation of faith. There is no room here for a ‘judgment of credibility’ as a distinct act. But these words of the Gospel also exemplify very well another feature of the rapid and supernatural induction that, to our mind, explains belief better than what is generally meant by ‘demonstration of credibility.’ –Pierre Rousselot, S.J., *The Eyes of Faith*³⁰¹

In one sense, my argument for a correlation between drama and credibility directly opposes Rousselot’s confidence in the coincidence of faith and credibility in a singular act. The doubting apostle or the centurion sees reality by the light of faith by means of “the rapid and supernatural induction” and so proclaims its truth. The movement of the act of faith proceeds with “reciprocal causality”: a (non-vicious) hermeneutic circle.³⁰² The object of perception confirms the accuracy of perception, and accuracy of perception is required in order to perceive the object accurately. If the object were not properly perceived, it would not be a proper object of perception. The converse makes a bit more sense: an act of faith is only possible insofar as the object of the act of faith is God. A theory of already-graced nature supports this kind of act of faith, and so Rousselot anticipates the metaphysical conclusions of later *ressourcement* theology and the style of Christian theological realism exemplified by von Balthasar. Rousselot’s confidence to claim there can be “no room” for judgment mirrors the theological rejection of room for dormant materiality (“pure nature”) prior to grace. A “judgment of credibility” traverses the threshold of potentiality. The object must be judged true or false before the act of faith can occur. An act of faith inclined toward some non-divine object is, strictly speaking, idolatry. The positive act of faith depends, *a priori*, on the divinity of the object of the act. Rousselot’s examples both speak about the crucified and/or risen Lord. For Rousselot, the proclamation of faith asserts a claim about understanding—“I get

³⁰¹ Pierre Rousselot, *The Eyes of Faith*, Joseph Donceel, trans., (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), 32.

³⁰² Rousselot, *Eyes of Faith*, 50. See also Schindler’s discussion of Rousselot’s “reciprocal causality” in *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth*, 392-394.

it!”—at the same time as a claim about the reality of the situation. One identifies that which is perceived in faith as the truth worthy of belief and worth believing (i.e., credible) because it is true. The act of faith confirms the truth within the hermeneutic circulation between epistemology and ontology: I believe this truth because it is true. The centurion asserts what should have been noticed earlier; Thomas realizes his perceptive laziness. Rousselot does not say that the centurion or Thomas *could* have noticed the reality of the situation prior to the illumination of faith. Rather, the moment of what Bernard Lonergan might call insight, requires the *lumen fidei* in order to be perceived.³⁰³

Lonergan, himself, discusses credibility as part of the analysis of faith in his early Latin theology. A review of Lonergan’s position helps frame the stakes for the analysis of the act of faith. Lonergan distinguishes six acts that are immediate to faith itself: 1) the supernatural beginning of faith (that is, any act of faith is already graced activity); 2) a “practical judgment on the credibility of the mysteries” that consists, primarily, of an affirmation that the human is ordered to a supernatural end as a good; 3) an affirmation of the “credendity of the mysteries” whereby one affirms that the sum-total of revelation ought to be believed; 4) one “wills the supernatural to which one is destined, and intends to pursue it”; 5) willing the means of the pursuit of this supernatural end by means of an active desire to believe, the *pius credulitatis affectus* affirmed by the Canon 5 of the Council of Orange; 6) “the assent of faith itself, elicited in the intellect and freely commanded by the will.”³⁰⁴

Lonergan’s theory can be further explicated in the terms of this study. 1) Supernatural beginning: Any theology begins with the givenness of the “facts” of God’s self-revelation. 2) Credibility: theology proceeds to evaluate given facts against the hermeneutical horizon of the good (expressed by Lonergan as a “practical judgment of credibility”). 3) Credendity: in order to proceed

³⁰³ Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958).

³⁰⁴ All quotations from this paragraph reference Bernard Lonergan, *Early Latin Theology*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan vol. 19, Michael G. Shields, trans., Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour eds., (Regis College, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 418-419. For the Council of Orange, see DS 375.

to analyze further a given fact deemed credible, theology “suspends disbelief” in order to affirm, however provisionally as a line of epistemological credit, the (ever-greater) totality of revelation. At this point, no aspect of analysis has required personal, affective, moral, communal, or prayerful assent to the given fact as revealed truth; rather, the first three steps in describe an imaginative and co-creative interpretive process. 4) Willing the supernatural end: this can be construed as the willingness for the given fact to be consequential for other aspects of one’s own life. Notice that, at this point, a religious idea becomes *consequential* but not, necessarily, mutually believed. The fourth step describes interreligious encounters where one might adopt the practices or concepts of another religious tradition for the sake of what one already believes to be the case (e.g., the Christian who removes shoes in a mosque). This is the willingness to “hallow” the given facts of ideas, practices, and sacredness of others without assenting to the religious meaningfulness of that fact oneself.³⁰⁵ 5) *Pius credulitatis affectus*: an aesthetic and affective *desire* to encounter this given fact as personally consequential in the shift from “this fact matters to someone as their idea” to “this hallowed fact matters for me.” By this fifth step, an emotional attachment begins to render an aspect of engagement with a religious idea “personally meaningful.” Such affinity does not in any way render an idea necessarily believed or even beloved: step five explains fandoms (e.g., Tolkein, sports), areas of study (e.g., Han dynasty China, particle physics), or places and communities of importance. 6) The assent of faith: only at this final step does one will to believe the given fact as truth. The correlation between drama and credibility examines steps 2 through 5 as the transition from the perception of a given fact, through its practical, logical, and affective evaluation, to assent to this given fact as truth.

³⁰⁵ I indebted to my collaboration with Justin Crisp and Justin Kosec for this concept of “the hallowed.” We first presented our concept of “religious hallowing” and drama during a panel entitled “The Work of the People: Liturgy, Theatre, and a Method of Performative Research” at the Association for Theatre in Higher Education Annual Meeting, Chicago, Illinois, 11-14 August 2016.

The *lumen fidei* theme can also be put in theatrical language: some reality took the stage but the lights had not yet come up on the performance. What's the point of a play if the audience cannot see? Quite a lot, actually, provided one abandons an ocular presumption of spectacle: a defense of "partial view" ticket discounts on the one hand and a reminder that the audience's theatrical experience encompasses the *whole* of the sensorium, on the other. Discrete sensual experience come together a composite experience of being present for an event. Seeing the stage picture, hearing the dialogue and sound, feeling the heat of the lights, smelling the must of an old playhouse, tasting overpriced snacks and drinks all contribute to the experience of a play. Rousselot rightfully sees the richness of an act of faith and the assent of credibility (the conclusion of worthiness for belief) within the temporality of a total experience of being present. The exclamations of the centurion and the doubting apostle signal the present-ness of the moment when a perception of the truth, revealed in the light of faith becomes a human activity. The intuition of faithfulness seeks and finds dramatic confirmation. I would know *if* this stranger *might* be the resurrected one if only I could feel the wounds; I would know *if* this dying revolutionary *might* be who he claims to be if only I could see natural wonders accompany his death. Thomas and the centurion, at least in the biblical narrative, match the assertion of faithfulness to an immediate confirmation of that faith's credit-worthiness ("credendity") in a supernatural event. For Rousselot to claim the coincidence of credibility and faith in the single act presumes the real presence of the divine. The scriptural account symbolizes that presence through dramatic irony (the Gospel situates these stories as testimony to the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ and Son of God) and immediate and miraculous proof (such as wounded hands and side, earthquakes, and eclipses). Rousselot finds the same immediacy in any ordinary act of faith—now without the requirement for some externally visible miracle confirming Christ's real presence. Rather, Rousselot seems to shift emphasis on to the "externally visible signs of inward spiritual grace" of the sacraments. Paradigmatically (in his Roman Catholic register) the drama of the

real presence of Christ ritualized and re-presented in the sacrifice of the Mass. So Rousselot's confidence about the impossibility of room for a "judgment of credibility" makes perfect sense as part of the hermeneutics of an experience of the Christ—scripturally for centurions and disciples *or* liturgically for the faithful in the Eucharist. To assent to faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is to take action: to kneel, to say "Amen," to receive. In language taken from the most recent Roman Missal's translation of the *mysterium fidei*: "When we eat this bread and drink this cup we proclaim your death, oh Lord, until you come again."

Such a liturgical theology of the "act of faith" understands Rousselot's non-space for the "judgment of credibility." Ritual practices fuse reflection with action. The speech-act of the *mysterium fidei* performs an analysis of consumption. The mystery of faith consists both in pronouncing the rules of ritual eating and in the activity of ritual eating. There can be no space for the "judgment of credibility" between prayers of consecration, theological statements, and acts of faith. The Tridentine sacramental theology of *ex opere operato*—"from the work worked"—precisely rules the necessity for some "judgment of credibility" out of court.³⁰⁶ The concern would be well founded. Consider a catechetical thought experiment. Catholic magisterial theology teaches that to receive the sacrament by ingestion while conscious of serious sin commits blasphemy (perhaps, even, the unforgivably sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit, cf. Matt. 12:31). What happens, then, if a priest celebrates the Eucharist in a state of so-called "mortal sin"? Does this endanger the salvation of the faithful who consume the Eucharist during such a liturgy? The theological rule of the work worked resolves the conundrum by finding the efficacy of any sacrament in its work according to an intention to do what the Church does and the Christ's work of grace rather than in any merit in or by the sacrament's human actor.³⁰⁷ *Ex opere operato* insulates not only infallibility of the sacraments as

³⁰⁶ The phrase derives from Canon 8 of the Council of Trent on sacraments (DS 1608). A discussion of *ex opere operato* in the context of the work of Christ can be found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church 1128.

³⁰⁷ Cf. Can. 11 and Can. 12 of the Council of Trent on sacraments (DS 1611, 1612).

permanently trustworthy signs of the real presence of God but also theologizes around sacramental magic as *hocus pocus*. In this Catholic picture, the Christ does the work of the sacraments, including the Eucharist, not the human celebrant. Therefore, Christ's work ensures the veracity of the sacramental performance and the "act of faith" leaves no room for the "judgment of credibility." Christ's real presence grounds both the premise and object of the "act of faith" in Rousselot's hermeneutic circle.

A credibility problem (according to the standard of public accessibility) persists in that such a description of the "act of faith" remains private as part of that closed circle. Rousselot's description of the "act of faith" presupposes real presence in the object. One takes God's real presence as given prior to analysis of the "act of faith." Making space for the "judgment of credibility" requires an account where God's reality subsists without faith's supernatural certainty. That is, God's truth would be an open question: God *could* be false. The veracity of God, as a philosophical or theological problem, matters ontologically (i.e., a god's falsehood in that god's non-being) and devotionally (i.e., false gods are idols). One Christian solution will be to decry the very idolatries a theory of faith seeks to avoid. All god-concepts that do not rightfully index to the God of Jesus the Christ fall short of revealed truth. Proponents of the alternative strategy will follow Karl Barth's *Nein!* to all idols and will center reliance on God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ.³⁰⁸ Space for the "judgment of credibility" emerges only insofar as the theologian must discern the difference between true God and idols by reference to the way God confirms the truth of Godself in God's self-revelation. The theologian can and must join God's *Nein!* to idols because God has revealed

³⁰⁸ I choose to contrast Rousselot with Karl Barth for reasons that are germane to the larger topics at hand: drama, credibility, and von Balthasar. Rousselot and Barth represent two great Balthasarian influences: modern Thomism (both of the French Jesuits and Erich Przywara) and Barth's Christocentric doctrine of revelation. While it has been tempting to straw man either position as representative of Catholic or Protestant responses to the problem of credibility, it will be more faithful to von Balthasar to remain at the level of individual thinkers and intellectual movements rather than risk confusion brought by ecclesial politics.

Godself as the definitive denial to all other gods.³⁰⁹ Such a theologian locates God's self-confirmation of this fundamental truth in God's prohibition of idolatry *and* in God's aseity.³¹⁰

The "act of faith," then, consists in turning away from idols of the world toward the non-idolatrous Wholly Other. Supernatural knowledge of God is supernatural insofar as God can be known only through Godself. Barth's doctrine of the Word of God amplifies this claim to the point that human knowledge must exceed the limitations of worldly expectation and ride the current of revelation.³¹¹ The human creature knows about God only because God elects to share knowledge of Godself with God's creatures through Jesus Christ, and any "supernatural knowledge" for the human more accurately describes participation in the activity of God's self-knowledge through the Holy Spirit. Hence Barth builds his theology on an "analogy of faith" anchored in revelation rather than an analogy of being.³¹² Room for a "judgment of credibility" emerges in the space opened by the shadow of election that is the real possibility for rejection.³¹³ As a result of God's antepremordial decision to be "for us" in the election of humanity through the election of Christ "before the

³⁰⁹ Cf. Barth CD I/2, §17. For a discussion of Barth's notion of idolatry in the context of natural theology, see Gerard den Hertog, "Barths 'Nein' Zur 'Natürlichen Theologie' Im 'Streit Um Den Rechten Gehorsam In Der Theologie': Kampfpapare Und / Oder Prinzipielle Absage?", *Zeitschrift Für Dialektische Theologie*, vol. 26, no. 1, (2010). God's rejection of worldly religions also grounds Barth's critique of nationalism. See Carys Moseley, *Nations and Nationalism In the Theology of Karl Barth*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³¹⁰ For a fuller development of God's *aseity* and hiddenness in a Barthian key see Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology Volume I*.

³¹¹ The Bible becomes the site for such a revelation of a new world. "There is a new world in the Bible, the world of God. [...] There is a stream in the Bible that carries us away once we have interested ourselves to it; it carries us from ourselves to the sea! The Holy Scripture interprets itself despite all of our human limitations" (Karl Barth, "The New World in the Bible, 1917" in *The Word of God and Theology*, Amy Marga, trans., [London: T&T Clark, 2011], 19).

³¹² "And those who perhaps fear the rightly suspect *analogia entis* are reminded of the earlier descriptions in which it is quite clear that there can self-evidently be no question of anything but the *analogia fidei sive revelationis* even in this description of creaturely occurrence as a mirror and likeness" (CD III/3, §48, 51).

³¹³ The theme of rejection as the "shadow-side" of election (that is, rejection is only visible by means of the light of election) emerges first throughout Barth's commentary on *The Epistle to the Romans*, Edwyn C. Hoskyns, trans., (New York: Oxford, 1933). Barth picks up the theme in his reformulation of predestination in the doctrine of election in the *Church Dogmatics* where Jesus Christ is both electing and elected, CD II/2, §33, "The Election of Jesus Christ," 94ff. "In its simplest and most comprehensive form the dogma of predestination consists, then, in the assertion that the divine predestination is the election of Jesus Christ" (103). Any election includes the possibility of rejection as its opposite, God's Yes to humanity in election contains (and overwhelms) the possibility of a rejection. Christ is both, "He is *the* Rejected, as and because He is *the* Elect" (353, emphasis original). Of particular note is the return of theatrical imagery in Barth's doctrine of election: "It is by Him, Jesus Christ, and for Him and to Him, that the universe is created as a theatre for God's dealings with man and man's dealings with God" (94).

foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4), God reveals Godself as the One who Loves in Freedom.³¹⁴ A share in God’s freedom-love entails what von Balthasar calls “letting be”: the real capacity for rebellion against God that Barth symbolizes in his doctrine of *das Nichtige*.³¹⁵ God reveals Godself as the judge of sin’s rebellion. Therefore, room consists for some “judgment of credibility” between true God and false idol only on the basis of an analogy of faith. Confidence in a this-worldly “real presence” (the groundwork for an *analogia entis*) must be deferred lest God’s aseity, freedom, sovereignty, and activity be crudely reduced to an idol of creatureliness, determinacy, contingency, and substance.³¹⁶ Any “act of faith,” if it begins and ends with God, removes room for the *human* “judgment of credibility”: God authenticates Godself. So the “act of faith” will be, to core, God’s activity.

Rousselot, however, represents a slightly different approach toward a similar conclusion. Where Barth’s doctrine of revelation denies room for a human “judgment of credibility” by prioritizing God’s activity in the “act of faith,” Rousselot’s theory argues for a synthesis between

³¹⁴ CD II/1, §28, “The Being of God as the One Who Loves in Freedom,” 257ff.

³¹⁵ CD III/3, §50 “God and Nothingness,” 289ff. “In plain and precise terms, the answer is that nothingness is the ‘reality’ on whose account (i.e., against which) God Himself willed to become a creature in the creaturely world, yielding and subjecting Himself to it in Jesus Christ in order to overcome it. Nothingness is thus the ‘reality’ which opposes and resists God, which is itself subjected to and overcome by His opposition and resistance, and which in this twofold determination as the reality that negates and is negated by Him, is totally distinct from him. The true nothingness is that which brought Jesus Christ to the cross, and that which He defeated there” (305).

³¹⁶ My language of deferral, here, takes seriously Barth’s admission that he would need to accept a *Christological* natural theology and, therefore, a philosophical-theological method like the *analogia entis*. Only after the Christian theologian establishes non-competition between grace and nature as a first premise could one proceed *on Barthian grounds* to an already-graced-natural theology. The wide-spread turn from an older language of “natural theology” to the more contemporary idiom of “fundamental theology” or “foundational theology” reflects a major concession to Barth’s school. Rather than begin so-called natural theology from Creation as *natura pura*, one begins fundamental theology from Creation as *general revelation*. (I would add, on Balthasarian grounds, to append human cultures and creativity as the situation for the interpretation of general revelation and, therefore, proper to fundamental theology.) This creates the possibility for a second theological debate over methodological differences between the Protestant-dialectical or Catholic-analogical approach. Extracted from denominational politics (and bracketing debates regarding the priority of place for ecclesiology in systematic theology), I contend that von Balthasar’s method in the triptych responds directly to Barth’s call for a Christological natural theology where “participation in being is grounded in the grace of God and therefore in faith, and that substance and actuality must be brought into this right relationship” as the basis for any *analogia entis* in an excursus of CD II/1, §26, 82. One can imagine *Theo-Drama* in response to Barth’s question, “How is it that Roman Catholic theology does not seriously and unambiguously investigate the being of the God who acts among us and towards us as His one true being, besides which there is no other?” (CD II/1, §28, 83).

natural and supernatural knowledge. For Barth, judgments of credibility index to God's prior judgment against idols. Acts of faith are participation in God's activity. For Rousselot, judgments of credibility would forestall an "act of faith." First and foremost, Rousselot agrees that knowledge of God is a supernatural knowledge guided by grace: faith begins as a gift of God pointing toward the end of knowledge of God. Further, Rousselot controls against false god-knowledge by means of grace. Supernatural knowledge happens *alongside* worldly knowledge but is illuminated (actualized) by grace rather than human/worldly intelligence. Human/worldly intelligence gets illuminated (actualized) by the being of the world: intuitions of phenomena derive from their appearance to the intellect. Without an intuition of being, human/worldly intelligence could not know nature. As a rule, natural intelligence cannot know that which is not, but human/worldly intelligence might go astray if it actualizes falsehood with an intuition of being. (Critical theorists decry these sorts of errors of worldly intelligence as *reification*: the projection of "essential being" or "ontology" onto fictions or social constructions.) For Rousselot, being actualizes natural knowledge and grace actualizes supernatural knowledge. Rousselot writes,

Natural intelligence, which may err about notes [notions] that are more comprehensive than being, never errs concerning the notion of *being* itself, which constitutes its formal object, because only this notion can *move* it. Likewise and much more so, the light of faith is infallible in making supernatural being manifest. The reasons for believing, perceived under the influence of grace, are good reasons for believing, and necessarily so.³¹⁷

In other words, the being of the world illuminates natural knowledge. This is a world about whom human knowledge could only be imperfect and potentially fallen. Knowing the world is, for Rousselot, knowledge of the world's being. But what about being beyond the world, something supernatural? Grace, figured here as the infallible *lumen fidei*, illuminates an object of supernatural knowledge. That is, supernatural being can become intelligible only in the light of faith. Rousselot

³¹⁷ Rousselot, *Eyes of Faith*, 34.

illustrates such a process in the language of manifestation. Supernatural knowledge requires an intuition of supernatural being actualized by grace, and knowledge of God is only possible by means of an operation of grace.

Unlike strict Barthians, Rousselot does not hold that supernatural knowing and worldly knowing operate separately.³¹⁸ Rather, the “act of faith” is a pre-critical synthesis of supernatural knowledge through human/worldly knowledge. The light of faith illuminates something really known by manifesting supernatural being so that it can be known as being. Theologically, however, Rousselot would contend that this proceeds in reverse: knowledge of worldly being only makes sense because of grace. Any knowledge, if it is to be true knowledge, must anchor itself *analogically* to the (real) “Truth about God.” A good (transcendental) Thomist, Rousselot finds any and all human/worldly knowledge fulfilled only by its properly supernatural end: “Some saints went into ecstasy on viewing a blade of grass. So, too, when it comes to faith.”³¹⁹ The illumination of the light of faith only makes sense as a worldly knowing *in* the light of faith. Grace never ceases to be gift, and the persistence of “those bereft of the Spirit” are the exception that proves the rule of gratuity. Whether bereftness of Spirit indicates non-election or human stubbornness can remain mysterious for Rousselot’s analysis of the act of faith. What stands, and elucidates the reference to the Angelic Doctor’s grass-blade mysticism, is a sense of difference (perhaps even a hierarchy) between those who have received a gift of faith and those wandering in the dark without grace’s illumination.

Rousselot offers a surprising defense of the religious differences between actors of faith, and his rhetoric anticipates the context of pluralism that will characterize conciliar theology. Scholastic

³¹⁸ Barthian strictness, here, refers to the weight placed on God’s status as Wholly Other from creation. The capacity to know the Word resides in God by means of the Spirit. I construe strict Barthians as those who hold the converse to the rule of God’s self-revelation. Because humans can only rightly know God because God reveals Godself in Jesus Christ, then any human “knowledge” of God derived from any source other than God must be *de facto* idolatrous. The strictest version includes even a putatively “natural” capacity to know God. At its most dangerous, so-called “natural theology” leads to the *analogia entis*, for Barth “an intervention of Antichrist” (CD I/1, *xiii*).

³¹⁹ Rousselot, *Eyes of Faith*, 37.

theology follows Aquinas to assert that any and all “absolute speculative assent” (that is, real and analogical knowledge of complex phenomena, including “natural” phenomena) must proceed from “a perfect objective certitude as its foundation.”³²⁰ Speculation about God, then, also must proceed from an objective certitude: faith. But what about faith in differing accounts of the God of Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, and Jacob from the Triune God of Jesus Christ? Rousselot’s philosophical theology maintains that the object of Jewish, Islamic, or Christian “faith” is *the same God understood differently*. Rousselot’s theory, however, protects differences in religious interpretations of God (i.e., theological difference) from proceeding according to what might be called various subjective certitudes.³²¹ Rousselot’s philosophical theology helps to clarify why “faith” is an unfortunate synecdoche for religious systems. As a technical term, inextricably linked to Christian thought, faith describes the “objective certitude” for speculative knowledge about God. God’s “objective certitude” can be shared across lines of theological (i.e., interpretive) difference without reducing God’s objectivity into subjectivism. That is, God’s reality provides an objective certitude prior to the act of faith and God does not change depending on the religious system of the believer. Variations in understanding do not indicate variations in God’s identity; rather, variations between interpretations of faith must indicate subjective difference on the part of the believer. Rousselot goes on,

But in the case of the young villager brought up on the catechism, how can we claim that he possesses either a scientific faith or a rational demonstration, or in any event the perfect certitude of credibility based on reasons that are absolutely valid? And how could any such thing be claimed of the native whose belief relies on the word of a missionary? We need more than a *psychological* explanation purporting to show how belief or credulity operates, for such explanation would apply to the [Muslim’s] faith as well as to the

³²⁰ Rousselot, *Eyes of Faith*, 25.

³²¹ “Hence, when the answer is given by appealing to ‘respective certitudes’ based when necessary upon ‘reflex practical principles,’ the difficulty does not seem to vanish. Buddhists and Shintoists have ‘respective certitudes,’ and Socrates appealed to a ‘reflex principle’ in order to conclude that everyone out to worship the gods of his city” (Rousselot, *Eyes of Faith*, 25).

Christian's. If the young Catholic is right in believing his mother or his pastor, is the young Protestant wrong in believing his minister or his mother?³²²

Yet again, Rousselot anticipates later twentieth-century concerns by differentiating between a philosophical theological theory of the act of faith (what he calls “rational demonstration”) and subjective analyses of the individual believers (what he emphasizes as “psychological explanation”). Rousselot's line of thinking could be extended to contemporary religious studies methodologies, be they neurological, sociological, anthropological, or historical-critical. These approaches, while emphasizing the very real differences between human believers, shift the subject matter for consideration from transcendence and ultimacy (e.g., God) to the material, individual, or social. As a result, these other methodologies, by bracketing transcendence as a matter of method, can rely on empirical evidence in order to bolster the credibility of their claims. Crucial for studying the correlation between credibility and drama, Rousselot sees that such a shift in subject matter by means of a change of method (e.g., from philosophical theological theory to psychological theory) necessarily shifts the groundwork of faith from objective certitude to subjective certitude. By holding fast to methods of philosophical theology, Rousselot makes room for differences in theological interpretation without conceding the god-concept to a matter of personal opinion or taste. He therefore develops a theory of faith that admits a so-called hierarchy of truths wherein some religious systems of knowledge will “get it” to a greater or lesser extent than other religious systems of knowledge.³²³ One finds here, *in nuce*, an expression of the later and more positive

³²² Rousselot, *Eyes of Faith*, 24-25, emphasis original.

³²³ I have introduced the inelegant “religious systems of knowledge” in lieu of “theology” or “theological interpretation” to make greater space for the sorts of non-cognitive understandings of God, ultimacy, and transcendence evidenced by the world's many spiritualities and religious practices and cultures. I hope to pursue a later project that will more robustly defend drama and theatrical hermeneutics as a method for pluralistic religious studies in addition to and distinct from Balthasarian theological dramatic theory, what might be called in such pluralistic contexts a “Christian theodramatics.”

Catholic affirmation of religious pluralism discussed earlier to be affirmed by the Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate* and *Gaudium et Spes*.

This is not to say that Rousselot throws open the door to a radical (or even postmodern) relativism. For this Jesuit, non-Catholics answer God questions incorrectly. One presumes Rousselot finds even some fellow Catholics misconstruing God every now and again. Rousselot directly confronts the problem of alternative “certitudes.” He first rejects any claim that the foundation of faith could be unstable. That is, the positive affirmation of God as the objective certitude for any act of faith (even a putatively “incorrect” act of faith by a non-Christian or the atheology of a non-theist) means that *any* act of faith, regardless of its veracity, points somewhat in the right direction. Otherwise philosophical theologians compromise God’s goodness—expressed here in the aesthetic register of patristic and medieval *conveniens* theology: “Is it fitting that faith be based upon or make its entry by way of a disorder?”³²⁴ Obviously not, because the perfect object of the act of faith is the perfect God. Rousselot’s theory stands or falls on God’s perfection. In a qualified sense, it does so because an account of God’s perfection undergirds the patristic and medieval *conveniens* theology at work in Rousselot’s question.

This creates a second set of problems for Rousselot. For the *conveniens* theology to function, Anselm’s definition for God—“that greater than which none can be conceived”—must reign supreme. But Rousselot seems to want the Anselmian definition not to imply the ontotheology concomitant in Anselm’s ontological argument for God.³²⁵ Indeed, ontotheologies in arguments like Anselm’s fail to emphasize the gratuity of God’s self-revelation by collapsing the legitimate and non-

³²⁴ Rousselot, *Eyes of Faith*, 25.

³²⁵ Anselm’s ontological argument proceeds from two premises: his definition of God and his hierarchical metaphysics of being (that is, existing is better than not existing). If God can be rightfully defined as “that greater than which none can be conceived” and one operates with an *a priori* account of reality wherein being is superior to non-being, then God must have being (that is, exist). This is because one can conceive that an actually-existing-God would be greater than a not-actually-existing-God. Therefore, *only* an actually-existing-God can meet the prerequisite definition of “that greater than which none can be conceived.” Cf. Anselm, *Proslogion* in *Basic Writings*, Thomas Williams, ed. and trans., (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007).

relativized space for religious interpretive differences Rousselot's theory of the act of faith just established. The rejection of such ontotheologies may have been the impetus for a theory of the act of faith. Without employing Kantian categories, Rousselot makes a second round of corrections to the usual resolutions to the problem of alternative certitudes. Some thinkers locate the problem of misunderstanding God in a faulty representation of faith made present to superior or inferior intellects.³²⁶ Supplying the distinctions he implies, superior or inferior understandings of God (typified by religious or denominational differences) ramify through variations in understanding the contents of faith as manifest to the intellect as phenomena. Alternative certitudes, therefore, do bespeak alternative noumena in the object of the act of faith. Like the variations in the ways humans hear melodies, Rousselot contends "It should not constitute a real theological difficulty *that the affirmations can differ although the represented notes are alike*, since theology conceives of faith as a supernatural cognitive activity."³²⁷ Rousselot's transcendental Thomism, further, leads him to emphasize divine simplicity as an aspect of God's perfection. So too should simplicity characterize the act of faith in the perfectly simple God. Rousselot intervenes to identify how the distinction between the natural/worldly being of the intellect—the assent of which is human activity—cooperates with grace in order to notice a supernatural being that can be seen by the eyes of faith in a synthetic (simple) act. Rousselot's act of faith requires grace at all points.

(a) Grace moves the human intellect to assent in the act of faith.

³²⁶ "Most of these writers restrict themselves to *analyzing* the believers' conscious states: they take account only of the *elements of representation* and overlook the *synthetic activity of the intelligence*, whether natural or supernaturalized. In Scholastic language we would say that they consider exclusively *id quod repraesentatur* ["that which is represented"], and never mention the *lumen* ["light"], *id quod inclinatur ad assensum* ["that which moves us to assent"]. Some others, it is true, do consider this aspect. But when, following St. Thomas, they speak of an assent that is given by virtue of an attraction, they regard it too much as something needed to *supplement* external motives rather than something that illuminates them. It would seem, for these writers, as though we were dealing with attractions that are consciously experienced, satisfactions grasped reflectively, lines of coherence *qua represented*. Some, as a result, deploy all their inventive ingenuity to discover objective elements in the *representative* consciousness of the Catholic child that would be lacking in the Protestant youngster, while others incur the charge of reducing the proofs of faith to a mixture of probabilities and subjective preferences, and of depicting the unlearned as believing only by virtue of a blissful superficiality" (Rousselot, *Eyes of Faith*, 26-27).

³²⁷ Rousselot, *Eyes of Faith*, 29.

- (b) Grace illuminates the object of the act of faith and so manifests it to the human intellect.
- (c) Grace refers equally to God's self-communication, the manifestation of which is an instance of God's self-revelation as the object of the act of faith.

In sum (and pun), the act of faith follows, *pace* Newman, a “grammar of assent”: grace graces grace. The human actor relies on grace (a) in order for the intellect to become a graced SUBJECT for the act of faith; the quality of that movement of the intellect (b) is grace as VERB; the OBJECT of the act of faith is grace, understood as (c). Therefore the act of faith might be described as an event where grace-SUBJECT-(a) graces-VERB-(b) grace-OBJECT-(c). Rousselot identifies such a moment to be exemplified in the mystic's ecstasy, a moment that transfigures quotidian seeing into seeing as an act of faith.

A sidebar into mystical experience as a concentration for the act of faith prepares us to close the circuit on the connections between Rousselot and topics germane to this study of drama, credibility, and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Recall Rousselot's invocation of Aquinas the mystic quoted above: “Some saints went into ecstasy on viewing a blade of grass. So, too, when it comes to faith.”³²⁸ Far from undermining the argument, this concluding flourish draws Rousselot's reader back to a consideration of the object of the act of faith in itself: supernatural knowledge. Mystical experience—that is, an experience of special revelation—concentrates the experience of the act of faith at its most intense. The mystics see directly with the eyes of faith without distraction or distortion. Mystical visions perfect the world's mediation of grace as grace: the mystic in ecstasy enjoys a transparent sense of the world as grace in itself, whether articulable in Adrienne von Speyr's sense that all is grace or Julian of Norwich's “all shall be well.”³²⁹

³²⁸ Rousselot, *Eyes of Faith*, 37.

³²⁹ On Adrienne von Speyr, Matthew Lewis Sutton avers that her account of “Grace is actually God's one great movement toward humanity in order for humans to be brought within God's triune love”, *Heaven Opens: the Trinitarian Mysticism of Adrienne von Speyr*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 58. On Julian of Norwich, see her *Revelations of Divine Love*, A.C. Spearing, ed., (New York: Penguin, 1998).

When Rousselot places a theoretical account of the act of faith on par with its concentration in mystical experience, he concedes that he understands *all* acts of faith on analogy to non-durational perception. This emphasis seems to align Rousselot with the contemplative-anticipatory *visio dei* that expands from the graced-nature vision of the mystical tradition.³³⁰ That a text titled *The Eyes of Faith* understands faith as a kind of ocular perception and contemplation seems obvious enough. But Rousselot would betray his own transcendental Thomist rejection of ontotheology and the ontological difference between God and then world if the eyes of faith catch a glimpse of a special God-substance (protoplasmic *ousia*?) as a sort of supernatural X-ray vision. God is not a thing to be seen amongst things. Rousselot's theory employs a more eventual understanding of God's being: expressed in Thomist language as *ipsum esse subsistens* or Barth's actualism.³³¹ Insofar as God's being relates *analogously* but is not *identical* to the being of the world, God cannot be found in creation like other creatures. The Creator God does not sit in competition with God's creatures; the revealed God remains greater than even the gods of Olympus or Valhalla or Wall Street. God must be, continuing along such Barthian and Thomist lines, truly incredible—properly beyond reason's limits, inexplicable according to worldly knowledge [*scientia*] alone—in order to be rightfully called God and not an idol. This is the very reason von Balthasar titles the final section of *Theo-Drama*, “If You Comprehend It, It Is Not God.”³³² The mystics report impossible, fantastic, and incredible things. Indeed, as I have shown, the *lumen fidei* theme joins with the aesthetic register of the medieval and patristic *conveniens* theology and expresses itself through visionary literatures. The promise of theodramatic hermeneutics consists in its proposition to integrate the wisdom of mystical experience that confounds ordinary explanations. Drama stages the incredible in ways worth working to believe.

³³⁰ Cf. William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: the Epistemology of Religious Experience*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). Cf. Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, Rosmary Sheed, trans., (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

³³¹ Cf. ST I.i.q3.4.

³³² TD 5, 489ff.

Analysis of the act of faith according to methods that retain the reality of grace *and* a positive regard for religious pluralism requires hermeneutical reflection rather than a search for empirically verifiable data according to a scientific method.

Empirical datum like a narwhal horn or a dinosaur skull cannot credibly prove the existence of unicorns and dragons, but belief in mythical beasts persists based on the perception of certain evidences. So how does one identify *credible* perception of an incredible (but potentially true) God? Rousselot writes, “in the cases of supernatural knowledge we have been discussing, we must not imagine a ‘judgment of credibility’ that constitutes a distinct act. *Perception of credibility and belief in truth are identically the same act.*”³³³ Rousselot’s theory of faith begins and ends with supernatural immediacy. The supernatural need not compete within the temporality of created nature; the grace of faith need not bind itself to the operational rules of space or time. Supernatural knowledge distinguishes itself from worldly knowledge as an instantaneous knowing. Supernatural knowledge appears to the mind without duration. Therefore, the perception of credibility (worldly perception) and belief in truth (supernatural knowledge) can be called an identical act. “We do not first perceive a proof as such, and only then what has been proved. Rather, we see both conjointly, grasping the general law as it subsumes the particular case.”³³⁴ Seeing *is* believing. This is especially so because the supernatural knowledge of faith in Rousselot’s theory depends on a prior fact that the object of belief really is what it purports to be in its self-presentation. That which performs as God is God. Collapsing the perception of credibility and belief in truth presupposes the truth of the object perceived in the act of faith.³³⁵ Faith funds, confirms, and manifests that presupposition of truth according to a theological confirmation bias.

³³³ Rousselot, *Eyes of Faith*, 31, emphasis original.

³³⁴ Rousselot, *Eyes of Faith*, 29.

³³⁵ Insofar as any statement of theological truth relies upon faith in order to be true. That is, for Rousselot’s Thomism, faith confirms the truthfulness of the truth believed in faith. “Theologians will readily grant, supposing faith to be present, that its light can make credibility manifest. But there is not reason for explaining the *first* act of faith any

All human knowledge, for Rousselot, depends on synthesis. “The real movement of the intelligence remains unexplained unless one views it, above all, as an active power of synthesis.”³³⁶ A synthesized knowledge will be more than the collection of data points or schematics. Knowing emerges from intellectual fusion, harmony, comingling. Rousselot offers two models for knowledge as synthesis: comprehending a mathematical equation and getting to know a character in a play. He chooses Hamlet. Coming to understand Hamlet as an “intuition of the character as an intelligible whole”—“to *enter into a mind*”—does not happen thanks to the willful desire to understand the play. Understanding Hamlet comes from repeated exposure (“I may have read *Hamlet* ten times, without understanding Hamlet”) and a sudden happening of discovery: “I’ve got it! That’s it!” For von Balthasar, Rousselot’s philosophical idiom of synthesis in the movement of the intellect sterilizes the erotic connotations between knowledge and love frequently at work in scriptures and fused in Balthasarian credibility. To know someone is to love them; to understand Hamlet is to follow through the spark of an “utterance as a *clue*, as *meaningful*.” Such knowledge about a person demands a kind of intimacy, mutual vulnerability, and desire to know and be known in a process that “*introduces*” Hamlet. Rousselot’s knowledge as the product of intellectual synthesis comes closer to what later twentieth-century theories of interpretation, and certainly von Balthasar, will also call “understanding.”³³⁷

differently, and refusing to say that the supernatural light illuminates the very act through we acquire that initial faith. The clue is really cause of the assent we give to the conclusion, yet it is the perceived conclusion that sheds light on the clue, that endows it with meaning. The same is true when we come to believe: insofar as it makes the assent reasonable, the perceived clue / precedes the assent; insofar as it is supernatural, it follows upon the assent. There are two orders, of rationality and supernaturality, and we can construct some abstract scheme along the lines of either order” (Rousselot, *Eyes of Faith*, 31-32).

³³⁶ Rousselot, *Eyes of Faith*, 27.

³³⁷ Any unsigned quotations in this paragraph derive from the following, and it is worth providing the fuller context. Passages I have quoted above are emphasized with boldface: “If the idea of such a reciprocal causality [*“reciprocal priority between the affirmation of the law and the perception of the fact that serves as a clue”*] puzzles some readers, I would ask them to consider a case in which we are no longer looking for an explanation or trying to verify an hypothesis, but trying, rather, **to enter into a mind**, so to speak, to grasp the inner harmony of a psychological makeup. **I may have read *Hamlet* ten times, without understanding Hamlet.** I take up the play again and, lo and behold, an utterance I had hitherto read without really grasping it all at once awakens me to the **intuition of the character as an intelligible whole**, of a reality that makes sense. **‘I’ve got it! That’s it!’** I exclaim. The perception of that **utterance as a clue, as meaningful**,

The perception of a character's credibility, therefore, ambushes the reader/actor as a moment of instantaneous recognition. Hamlet has surely been encountered and a friendship forged.³³⁸ Theatrically, however, Rousselot's italics prove a point. He has "read *Hamlet* ten times" (the italicized play, *Hamlet*) in an attempt to understand our mutual friend, the non-italicized "Hamlet," the character. So where is the liveness of performance to embody the dramatic characteristics of modernity? Hamlet's dramatic question of being has not been asked in performance; Hamlet exists, so far, only in the reader/actor's imagination as she interprets the drama. Rousselot remains in the singular interpretation of a closed system, a *private* system, a rehearsal. The eyes of faith supply a theory of acting that begins in contemplation. To enter into Hamlet's mind is to try and know Hamlet *like* another person, to befriend him so the actor might impersonate Hamlet as easily as close friends can do impressions. Rousselot provides a fascinating inroad to a theory of credibility and interpretation from the perspective of the actor.

I have, thus far, proceeded from the perspective of an audience to a performance who witness the drama as participant-observers in public. A public audience was shown to be a marker of modern credibility. This must be the case for a theodramatic hermeneutics that takes seriously the impossibility to do scholarly theology from God's perspective in anything other than a kind of speculative theological poetry or literary representation of mystical experience.³³⁹ Rousselot, therefore, can so confidently elide the perception of credibility and belief in its truth because the

is simultaneous in time with the perception of the character as a whole. Logically, it comes first, as truly causing my act of understanding; it is the clue that *introduces* me into Hamlet, *makes* me understand Hamlet. But just as logically, from another point of view, it follows upon the understanding; perceiving an utterance as disclosing a character trait makes sense only if the character is already known" (Rousselot, *Eyes of Faith*, 30, italic emphasis original).

³³⁸ See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, (New York: Oxford, 1990) on friendship with books and a sense of the "deep connection between content and form" in ethics and in literature (22).

³³⁹ Indeed, von Balthasar has been accused of doing theology from a "God's eye view" as "*the characteristic mode of his theology*" by Karen Kilby, *Balthasar*, 14. See also Martin's discussion of Kilby's critique in *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Critical Appropriation of Russian Religious Thought*, 8-11. For a positive construal of von Balthasar's poetic style, see Anne M. Carpenter, *Theo-poetics: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Risk of Art and Being*, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2015).

object of faith assumes the real presence of the divine. Even his dramatic explanation of his theory assumes the *real and ideal presence* of Hamlet, prince of Denmark.

The dramatic question of Hamlet's being, when it has been asked by an actor who may or may not also be prince of Denmark, has consequences for an encounter with what appears to be a piece of bread but who may or may not present the real presence of the living God.³⁴⁰ The dramatic question of being, when it has been asked by an actor who may or may not also be prince of Denmark, further raises the dubious ghost of Hamlet's father. The actor haunting Hamlet with real presence on stage is purportedly not the real presence of the actor's dead father or any dead actor returned in spectral form.³⁴¹ Rousselot's theory of credibility does not rise to the standards of credibility incurred by a modern theology's requirement to be public-facing in its theorization. Rousselot, however, does rise to the standard of a critical affirmation of pluralism. The lack of public audience does not undermine Rousselot's analysis in the *non-dramatic* situation. Rather, Rousselot proves the correlation between drama and credibility obliquely. Bracketing drama (by bracketing an encounter with Hamlet as performed) simultaneously brackets the problem of credibility. The modern theological situation does not operate with the assurances Rousselot presumes. Rousselot remains in the moment of von Balthasar's theological aesthetics: the "eyes of faith" denoting the contemplative and aesthetic register of the gaze. Theological dramatic theory does not retreat from confidence in the fact of revelation or the glories accessible in contemplation. Rather, von Balthasar leaves an open space for dubious ghosts to enter and raise problems of credibility. Rousselot's faithful eyes, too star-struck by the direct vision of God, never could see

³⁴⁰ For a discussion of Eucharistic theology amidst the Protestant and Catholic theologies in Hamlet, see Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, ch. 5, especially pp. 216-218.

³⁴¹ The "actor" does not need to be a flesh and blood actor, of course. The ghost could be played by a recording, a projection, or a puppet. My point is only that no instance of an *actual* ghost materializing to play the ghost of Hamlet's father has been recorded in the play's performance history. For an imagining of what might happen in such a case, see the Canadian television program *Slings and Arrows*. I am grateful to Joseph Lenow for his vociferous recommendation. For a discussion of paranormal investigation in the context of religious studies, see the work of Daniel Wise.

doubt coming. A supernaturally confident gaze contemplates God's beauty in the timeless *apatheia* of theological aesthetics.

§2.7 Credibility and Compromised Institutions: Parables of *Doubt* in Lieu of a Conclusion

"The more Christianity acts in a triumphalist and absolutist manner in the world of today and tomorrow, the more it is felt to be a ghost."³⁴² Other sorts of dubious ghosts haunt the post-Balthasarian Catholic Church on the contemporary world-stage. John Patrick Shanley's *Doubt: a parable* won the Pulitzer Prize in 2004 and begins with a sermon. Here is a selection:

What do you do when you're not sure? That's the topic of my sermon today. You look for God's direction and can't find it. Last year, when President Kennedy was assassinated, who among us did not experience the most profound disorientation. Despair. [...] It was a time of people sitting together, bound together by a common feeling of hopelessness. But think of that! Your *bond* with your fellow human beings was your *despair*. It was a public experience, shared by everyone in our society. It was awful, but we were in it together! How much worse is it then for the lone man, the lone woman, stricken by a private calamity? [...] For those so afflicted, only God knows their pain. Their secret. The secret of their alienating sorrow. And when such a person, as they must, howls to the sky, to God: 'Help me!' What if no answer comes? Silence. [...] There are those of you in the church today who know exactly the crisis of faith I describe. I want to say to you: Doubt can be a bond as powerful and sustaining as certainty. When you are lost, you are not alone."³⁴³

A priest, clad in "green and gold vestments," directly addresses his congregaudiuce.³⁴⁴ This opens the play. Before any context of story, Flynn speaks as if in the given circumstances of a Sunday homily. He will preach again—later on gossip "in blue and white vestments"—and he will sermonize to the boys' basketball team in the locker room.³⁴⁵ But this first sermon also interacts with the play's performance context. Shanley has Father Flynn set events in the fall of 1964: after

³⁴² TD 5, 491.

³⁴³ John Patrick Shanley, *Doubt*, (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2005), Scene I, 5-6. (Hereafter citations to the script of the play will include the scene number in Roman numerals and the page numbers in Arabic numerals from this edition.)

³⁴⁴ *Doubt* I, 5-6.

³⁴⁵ The gossip speech appears in *Doubt* VI, 35-37. The locker-room speech appears in *Doubt* III, 16-17.

Kennedy's assassination and in the middle of the Second Vatican Council.³⁴⁶ Father Flynn may have prepared for his homily by reading some von Balthasar. He addresses themes of God's direction (that is, the transition from role to mission); the shared and public nature of emotionally charged religious experience; theology's "affliction" and "pain" of the "secret of an alienating sorrow." Flynn recapitulates von Balthasar's theology of the cross and Holy Saturday in God's forsaking a cry of dereliction in silence—"when such a person, as they must, howls to the sky, to God: 'Help me!' What if no answer comes? Silence." For von Balthasar, any experience of alienation from God participates in the Son's experience of rejection by the Father. (I return to develop the drama of these eschatological and musical themes in my last chapter.) The play's premiere happened in 2004: only a few years after the September 11th attacks and the first reports of widespread clergy sexual abuse by the Boston Globe.³⁴⁷ Flynn announces "Your *bond* with your fellow human beings was your *despair*" to an audience in the Manhattan Theatre Club, a room full of still-rattled Catholics and their neighbors, still-anxious New Yorkers and their neighbors.

An essential distinction needs to be drawn between the credibility of the Church as a theme for theological reflection (an ecclesiological and pneumatological question) and the credibility of the Church as an institution working in a pluralistic and uncertain world.³⁴⁸ Under modern conditions,

³⁴⁶ Flynn is a proponent of the Council's spirit of *aggiornamento*; Sister Aloysius is significantly more suspicious. See *Doubt* V, 30-31. The concerns of the modern world reflect both theological issues and racial integration of the community. Donald Muller, the unseen young boy at the center of the play's drama, is the school's first black student. As Flynn says: "It's a public thing. A certain ignorant element in the parish will be confirmed in their beliefs" (*Doubt* III, 34).

³⁴⁷ According to the print version's preface, Shanley sought to dramatize his theology of Doubt's (always with a capital D) superiority to certainty. He writes in the print version's Preface, "Doubt requires more courage than conviction does, and more energy; because conviction is a resting place and doubt is infinite—it is a passionate exercise. You may come out of my play uncertain. You may want to be sure. Look down on that feeling. We've got to learn to live with a full measure of uncertainty. There is no last word. That is the silence under the chatter of our time" (Shanley, "Preface" in *Doubt*, ix-x). In order to confront the silence requires becoming present to dramas of change: "It is Doubt (so often experienced initially as weakness) that changes things. [...] Doubt is nothing less than an opportunity to reenter the Present" (Shanley, "Preface" in *Doubt*, viii).

³⁴⁸ Spirit and institution go together within Christian thought, but there are various and contested questions about *how* these themes relate including fundamental concerns for ecumenical theology and issues of religious authority. The connection between spirit and institution, for von Balthasar, can be explained via his Christological Trinitarian pattern: the Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity who illuminates and interprets the self-revelation of the invisible Father in and by the visible Son. As the love exchanged between God the Father and God the Son, God the Holy Spirit

the Church's credibility will be judged by both its members and its neighbors. The credibility of a religious institution as it performs amidst other global and political institutions can, and indeed has, been compromised across history. Awareness of the complex histories of compromised institutions belong to modernity's "signs of the times." Compromised institutions mar the *prima facie* worthiness for belief, for trust. The weight of the evidence against the institution, often previously ignored, must be taken with the full seriousness of that to which "attention must be paid." The compromised institution does not signal a total rejection of traditions or institutions, but reveals the complicity of its members who desire continuity with the past and a fidelity with it towards its future. No longer, however, can the strategy to confront the looming presence of that which compromises be a call to look away or keep doubt hidden. My account of the compromised institution applies as readily to Christian churches as it does to any inherited and historical institution (e.g., universities, nation-states, economic systems, methods of research and teaching, political treaties, family systems, normative forms of social life).

Dubious ghosts are material spirits that haunt all aspects of the compromised institution with reminders of doubt's presence, like that way Hamlet's ghost also invites Derrida's specters of Marx.³⁴⁹ Marcellus notices that "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (*Ham.*I.4.90) in response to Hamlet's desire to pursue a private conversation with the dubious ghost. The presence

incorporates the members of the Mystical Body of Christ (that is the Church) into the Triune life of God. To enter into the love of God is to be enveloped in this movement of the Holy Spirit. To analyze a theology of the church (an ecclesiology) already embarks on the task of a theology of the Holy Spirit (a pneumatology) because it is the Holy Spirit that safeguards and inspires the Church's authority and secures (salvific, transcultural, transhistorical) unity. Von Balthasar will consistently add Mariological dimensions to his ecclesiology. For example, "Access to the Father had already been opened when it was revealed that the Spirit who directs Jesus is also the Spirit who overshadows Mary—as the primal cell of the Church—and is breathed into the now-reconciled Church by the Passion. The self-surrendering attitude of the Son under the direction power of the Holy Spirit does not ultimately originate in itself but is ordained for a more comprehensive goal in the unity of the Spirit: the salvation of the world" (Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Spirit and Institution," in *Explorations in Theology, Volume IV: Spirit and Institution*, Edward T. Oaks, S.J., trans., [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994], 230).

³⁴⁹ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 3ff.

of a dubious ghost has compromised the institution, here the state, with something rotten.³⁵⁰ Any response to the compromised institution must enter into Hamlet's dramatic question of being by acting. The decision to follow after the ghost foreshadows the themes of embodiment, solitary journey, suicide, and madness of the "to be or not to be" speech. Marcellus and Horatio warn against a private conversation with the ghost. Could it be dangerous to go alone? Hamlet already acknowledges that the ghost may be "a spirit of health or goblin damned" (*Ham.I.4.40*) but it is the "questionable shape" (*Ham.I.4.43*) of his father's image that first lures the Prince. Hamlet exhausts natural reason and requires supernatural aid ("thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls" in l. 56). Hamlet asks "What should we do?" (*Ham.I.4.56*) and in response the ghost transitions from aesthetics to dramatics. The ghost *acts* beckoning a walk along the coastal edge. Marcellus identifies the problem of the ghost's invitation to privacy: "Look with what courteous action it waves you to a more removed ground" (*Ham.I.4.61*). The ghost resists the credibility criteria of public accessibility. Horatio, further, warns Hamlet against a demonic suicidal ideation that "puts toys of desperation / Without more motive into every brain" (76-77). The ghost could "tempt you toward the flood" (69) and ever-greater political problems if Hamlet's now compromised (institutional) faculties should see a spectral vision that would "deprive your sovereignty of reason" (73). The scene equivocates on the waves that could "draw you into madness" (74): the "roar beneath" (78) of the crashing sea and silent ghostly/physical gesture to walk to the edge: Hamlet's line "It waves me still" (79). The Prince orders his friends to stay away under threat to "make a ghost of him" (*Ham.I.4.85*) who tries to stop Hamlet's own spectral liaison when he pursues the dubious ghost.

But Marcellus and Horatio have their doubts, provoking a critical investigation of orders to obey issued on the authority of a compromised institution.

³⁵⁰ Parallels abound between my account of compromised institutions and the Christian doctrine of original sin. We learn, much later, how theologically sophisticated is Marcellus' sense of political smell. The rottenness at the core of the state is the "rank" "offense" of Claudius that he confesses "smells to heaven" (*Ham.III.3.36-37*).

HORATIO: He waxes desperate with imagination.
 MARCELLUS: Let's follow. 'Tis not fit thus to obey him.
 HORATIO: Have after. To what issue will this come?
 MARCELLUS: Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.
 HORATIO: Heaven will direct it.
 MARCELLUS: Nay, let's follow him.³⁵¹

The presence of the dubious ghost means the response cannot be to “lose the name of action” and wait for heavenly direction or ponder the justice of the order. Marcellus and Horatio, instead, enter into the dramatic question of being by following after their Prince and friend with responsibility for the consequence of their actions. Choosing *to follow* after a prince and a dubious ghost—whether Thomas’ encounter with the resurrected Son who really is the Prince of Peace or Hamlet’s encounter with his putatively “resurrected” father asserts how “a theodramatic theory is not primarily concerned with spectating and evaluating but with acting and the ability to act.”³⁵² The dramatic question of being must be pursued even if it means to leave one’s ordinary place behind.

Theatre raises the dramatic question of being as parables of modernity’s doubt in the place where a ghost has a body. At least, enough of a body in order to beckon Hamlet, Horatio, Marcellus, and a crowd of onlookers to come listen with a wave. As von Balthasar writes,

in the theatre man attempts a kind of transcendence, endeavoring both to observe and to judge his own truth, in virtue of a transformation—through the dialectic of the concealing-revealing mask—by which he tries to gain clarity about himself. Man himself beckons, invites the approach of a revelation about himself. Thus, parabolically, a door can open to the truth of the real revelation.³⁵³

Theatre’s dubious ghosts encounter the “truth of the real revelation” on a slant, as a parable for the critical, public, and historical consciousness necessary for modern credibility. An experience of drama—worldly drama, secular drama—sneaks back into the frame of theological reference.

Parables on the dramatic stage can also follow the dubious ghost’s invitation freely and riskily on the

³⁵¹ *Ham.*I.4.87-91.

³⁵² TD 2, 13.

³⁵³ TD 1, 12.

edge of madness. Theatre and performance walk the dramatic question of being along a turbulent coastline. Theatre works in ways fully distinct from the self-accrediting credibility of theological thinking done at prayer—*lex orandi, lex credendi*—in the presence of von Balthasar’s “truth of the real revelation,” what Jean-Yves Lacoste might call “*coram deo*.”³⁵⁴ But, on stage, the ghosts do not need to be real to invite theological interpretation.

Other revelations beckon, like the ghost, to follow the dramatic question of being into action. Sister Aloysius, the old-school headmistress in Shanley’s *Doubt*, avers “innocence can only be wisdom in a world without evil. Situations arise and we are confronted with wrongdoing and the need to act.”³⁵⁵ Such action follows the dubious ghost onto the slippery slopes of Elsinore’s seawall. To follow the dubious ghost means to be sent out with a risk of falling: “When you take a step to address wrongdoing, you are taking a step away from God, but in His service.”³⁵⁶ Drama only provides an experience of credibility, not a definitive experience of some truth, as the evidence for Sister Aloysius’ decision to take action against Father Flynn remains off-stage. We never learn, conclusively, whether Father Flynn really “interfered with Donald Muller”; Sister Aloysius has proven it only to herself.³⁵⁷ We only know that Father Flynn has left St. Nicholas to be appointed by the bishop to be “the pastor of St. Jerome Church and School. It’s a promotion.”³⁵⁸ But Sister Aloysius’ step away from God line returns, with gusto, as the play’s final benediction on the costliness of pursuing a dubious ghost’s credible attestation of a compromised institution.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: In the pursuit of wrongdoing, one steps away from God. Of course there’s a price.

SISTER JAMES: I see. So now he’s in another school.

³⁵⁴ Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute*, Mark Raftery, trans., (New York: Fordham, 2004). On narrating the experience of God in dialogue with philosophy, see also Lacoste’s *From Theology to Theological Thinking*, W. Chris Hackett, trans. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014). On the relationship between prayer, presence, and thought with greater reference to von Balthasar, see Andrew Prevot, *Thinking Prayer: Theology and Spirituality Amid the Crises of Modernity*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).

³⁵⁵ *Doubt* IV, 24.

³⁵⁶ *Doubt* IV, 20.

³⁵⁷ *Doubt* IX, 57.

³⁵⁸ *Doubt* IX, 58.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Yes. Oh, Sister James!

SISTER JAMES: What is it, Sister?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I have doubts! I have such doubts!

(*Sister Aloysius is bent with emotion. Sister James comforts her. Lights fade.*)

END OF PLAY

To risk a step away from God towards a dubious ghost is to step outward toward the world and its doubts.³⁵⁹ To act in accord with one's role-in-mission invites the experience of alienation. The "parable" that Shanley creates in *Doubt* physicalizes Sister Aloysius' step away from God toward "such doubts." Signs of Catholic religious aesthetics parade on a secular stage; there is no real presence to adore or invitation to pray. But Sister Aloysius gives a final sending. *Doubt: a parable* is only one act. An apocryphal story recounts that the ensemble talked in interviews about a post-curtain *second* act: the conversations between people sharing their impressions and judgments about Father Flynn's guilt or innocence, their own complicated memories of nuns like Sister Aloysius or Sister James, their own confusions or discoveries made while navigating the play's intersectional questions of race, class, sexuality, Church reform, violence, patriarchy, and theological credibility. Shanley's parable invites conversation in the world as dramatic acts of theological interpretation. The play ends, and yet "time is out of joint." Paradoxically, only through conversations about credibility had while leaving the theater, after the dramatic revelation of the "facts," can a theology done according to the interpretive work of theatre and performance now begin.

³⁵⁹ The stepping metaphor is instructive in light of an Augustine. No accidental change in physical distance by means of the step away from God remarks a substantial change in metaphysical distance from the unchanging God whom Augustine identifies to be "more inward than my most inward part and higher than the highest element within me" (*Confessions* III.vi.11, Chadwick 43). The realization that God can be "closer to me than I am to myself" (*interior intimo meo*), appears in the *Confessions* Book 3 context of Augustine's twinned discussions of theatre and rhetorical form and content. For this phrase as a hermeneutic key to Augustine's anthropology in the context of religious ethics, see Charles T. Mathewes, "Augustinian Anthropology: Interior intimo meo" *Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 27, no. 2, (1999): 195-221. Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), too, finds this formulation to be the "principle that guides every itinerary toward oneself and toward God (for these is but one): "*Interior intimo meo, superior summo meo*" (Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 260).

III: VERFREMDUNGS BEDFELLOWS:

The Interpretive Work of Theatre and Performance with Brecht and *Galileo*

Stage Directions for Chapter 3: *To understand or explain a dubious ghost, we can call in a priest or a scientist. Can they work together? Paul Ricœur thought they must. The interpretive work of theatre and performance generates surpluses of meaning in excess of its script. That surplus materializes in the form of the bodies and activity playing on stage in the company of an audience. Drama does not remain closed in its own geocentric world. Have you noticed these stage directions ask you questions? Theo-Drama will need to become comfortable paying attention to the strangeness of multiplying meanings, but it appears that von Balthasar prefers to over-direct his interpretations to feel less alienated. Maybe Bertolt Brecht was on to something by forcing the audience to notice the labor of theatre-making. There is still more to be done and more meaning to value. It will take work to make a dramatic connection between materiality and theology credible.*

DER KLEINE MÖNCH *zeigt auf eine Stelle in den Papieren*: Diesen Satz verstehe ich nicht.
GALILEI: Ich erkläre ihn dir, ich erkläre ihn dir.

THE LITTLE MONK *indicating a passage in the papers*: I do not understand this sentence.
GALILEI: I will explain it to you, I will explain it to you.³⁶⁰

These lines conclude Scene 8 of Bertolt Brecht's *The Life of Galileo*. The conversation between Galileo and the Little Monk arrives at the very dialectical tension Paul Ricœur identifies between *erklären* and *verstehen* in the hermeneutic circle. Ratzinger was right to include Brecht in his list of thinkers important to von Balthasar, for it is Brecht who so closely approximates the Christian response to the chief credibility problem of modernity: the alliance of atheistic materialism and science against the hypocrisy and ideological distortions of the Church. Wolfhart Pannenberg's *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* (1973) and Bernard Lonergan, S.J.'s *Insight* (1957) and *Method in Theology* (1972), too, tackled questions about the relationship between Christian thought and contemporary science. Pannenberg and Lonergan enter debates about theological credibility around the same time as *Theo-Drama*. The advent of the "new age" of modernity requires not only a change in the articulation of theological interpretation, but a change in the attitude between theological interpretation and empirical interpretation. No playwright took these scientific concerns to the stage

³⁶⁰ Bertolt Brecht, *Life of Galileo*, John Willet, trans., (New York: Arcade, 1994), Scene 8, 69. (Hereafter citations to the script of the play will include the scene number followed by page numbers from this edition.)

more forcefully than Brecht, and, on von Balthasar's account, "There is surely no writer of the modern period who has conducted a more beautiful dialogue with Christianity than Bert Brecht."³⁶¹

This chapter will apply my account of the interpretive work of theatre and performance to von Balthasar's dialogue with Brecht. This first requires developing a theory of interpretive work that pays close attention to the materiality of performance so important to Brecht. I do so by tracking the surplus meaning of the interpretive work of theatre and performance with help from Ricœur's interpretation theory. The aim will be to discern *how* interpretive work's surplus meanings illuminate the drama of human existence. At stake are two versions of scientific ideology that Brecht's *Life of Galileo* dramatizes. One is the ideal of scientific demythologization where one assumes that explanations according to the scientific method display *de facto* truth (akin to the attack on tradition addressed by Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*). The second is scientism and atheist materialism as ideologies in themselves. In order for drama to be deemed a credible partner for theology—an aim of both von Balthasar's and my projects—drama must be able to critically engage existence, to show things "as they are," and, in such a way, prepare for public conversation and imaginative debate. Von Balthasar over-directs his reading of Brecht in order to avoid the strangeness of epic theatre's similarity to the Balthasarian world-stage.

§3.1 Interpretive Work in Paul Ricœur

My notion of interpretive work derives from Paul Ricœur's theory of interpretation. His interpretation theory develops according to a dialectical relationship between explanation (that is, *erklären* with its "paradigmatic field of application in the natural sciences") and understanding (that is, *verstehen* with its "originary field of application in the human sciences").³⁶² One interprets in order to know; ultimately, Ricœur argues that one interprets others and alterity by means of texts in order

³⁶¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Volume III: Creator Spirit*, Brian McNeil, C.R.V., trans., (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 459. Hereafter abbreviated "ET 3."

³⁶² Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 71-72.

to come to know oneself.³⁶³ Interpretation “gives to the subject a new capacity for knowing himself. If the reference of the text is the project of a world, then it is not the reader who primarily projects himself. The reader is enlarged in his capacity of self-projection by receiving a new mode of being from the text itself.”³⁶⁴ Ricœur identifies a series of dialectical relationships that structure the circulation of content to be explained and understood as discourse—symbol and referent, event and meaning, speaking and hearing, reading and writing. These dialectical relationships help to articulate why and how interpretation operates as a process of appropriation where that which is foreign is made one’s own. Interpretation is an act of hospitality toward a text that appears, at first, to have no meaning for me. “This goal is achieved insofar as interpretation actualizes the meaning of the text for the present reader.”³⁶⁵ The dialectic of reading and writing helps to illustrate the event of interpretation. Ricœur begins *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* by claiming “the central problem at stake in these four essays is that of works; in particular, that of language as a *work*.”³⁶⁶ Work signifies two ideas. The first is the productive event of discourse (how language works meaning) and the second is the product of that event (discourse as an autonomous work of language to be interpreted akin to a work of art).³⁶⁷ Reading and writing underscore the centrality of language to Ricœur’s theory of discourse.³⁶⁸ “Language is submitted to the rules of a kind of craftsmanship, which allows us to speak of production and works of art, and, by extension of works of discourse. [...] Text means discourse both as inscribed and wrought.”³⁶⁹ Once discourse comes to

³⁶³ Cf. Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, Kathleen Blamey, trans., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

³⁶⁴ Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 94. He concludes the book saying, “In this self-understanding, I would oppose the self, which proceeds from the understanding of the text, to the ego, which claims to precede it. It is the text, with its universal power of world disclosure, which gives a self to the ego” (Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 94-95).

³⁶⁵ Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 92

³⁶⁶ Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, xi.

³⁶⁷ I turn to consider Maurice Blanchot’s theory of discourse and work expressed in writing in chapter 5.

³⁶⁸ Ricœur’s account of language as discourse is indebted to Ferdinand de Saussure’s distinction between *langue* and *parole*. Cf. *Interpretation Theory*, 2ff. Ricœur identifies discourse as “the event of language” (Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 9). This permits the governing principles like the sentence, rather than the word, as the fundamental and irreducible unit of discourse and the claim “If all discourse is actualized as an event, all discourse is understood as meaning” (Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 12, emphasis original).

³⁶⁹ Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 33

be understood as a work, practices of textual interpretation also become a *working out of meaning*.³⁷⁰

Ricoeur extends the notion of a text so that all sorts of discursive phenomena are “written.”

“Writings” are composed through the work of discourse to become an autonomous work that

“reveals this destination of discourse as projecting a world.”³⁷¹ Interpretation seeks to appropriate

“the meaning of the text itself, conceived in a dynamic way as the direction of thought opened up by

the text. In other words, what has to be appropriated is nothing other than the power of disclosing a

world that constitutes the reference of the text.”³⁷² Interpretation welcomes the other world

projected by the text through the reader’s work.³⁷³ An autonomous work of discourse might be

“read” on analogy to how the existential encounter with literary productions project imaginary

worlds, conjure far-away histories, and allow an experience of the unattainable interiority of another.

Yet text functions as a concretion of discourse. Ricoeur stops before transforming all hermeneutics

into practices co-identical to the reading of literature. The overwrought objections to deconstruction

where “everything is text, nothing is real” cannot apply to Ricoeur. Rather, what he finds in literary

interpretation is projection and appropriation of another world that is characteristic of any event of

interpretation. Ricoeur’s interpretation theory does not passively decode that which is metaphorically

read. The hermeneutic encounter symbolized by “reading the text” enables a confrontation with the

text’s projections of other worlds and its “disclosure of new modes of being...new forms of life.”³⁷⁴

Primarily, interpretation bridges the distance between the interpreter and the foreign text, akin to

Gadamer’s fusion of horizons.³⁷⁵ “Interpretation, philosophically understood, is nothing else than an

³⁷⁰ “By meaning or sense I here designate the propositional content, which I have just described, as the synthesis of two functions: the identification and the predication” (Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 12).

³⁷¹ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 37.

³⁷² Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 92.

³⁷³ The relevance to theatre is clear: the actor supplies some “direction” in a “dynamic way” that actualizes the “meaning of the text” as a “power” to “disclose a world.” Actors make interpretive choices to create the world of the play by projecting it onto stage.

³⁷⁴ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 94.

³⁷⁵ Indeed, Ricoeur acknowledges his similarity to Gadamer. In the sense of “the process of distanciation, of atemporalization, [...] connected to the phase of *erklärung*, is the fundamental presupposition for this enlarging of the

attempt to make estrangement and distancing productive.”³⁷⁶ Interpretation transforms the terror of difference—“estrangement and distancing”—into the possibility to *make* something.³⁷⁷

That which is produced by the work of interpretation is a surplus of meaning. Ricoeur theorizes the surplus of meaning by means of metaphor:

this excess of signification in a symbol can be opposed to the literal signification, but only on the condition that we also oppose two interpretations at the same time. Only for an interpretation are there two levels of signification since it is the recognition of the literal meaning that allows us to see that a symbol still contains more meaning. This surplus of meaning is the residue of the literal interpretation. Yet for the one who participates in the symbolic signification there are really not two significations, one literal and the other symbolic, but rather a single movement, which transfers him from one level to the other and which assimilates him to the second signification by means of, or through, the literal one.³⁷⁸

Ricoeur sees that interpretive process as one act assimilating the “literal” and “symbolic” together. Metaphors are not interpreted in such a way where their literal and symbolic meanings remain in competition. Only through the work of interpretation (an event) could such a surplus of meaning come to mind. In the case of a metaphor, interpretation does not abandon literal meaning in order to seek out symbolic meaning; interpretation, rather, works out meanings in excess of the literal. The brilliance of Ricoeur’s *Interpretation Theory* is its expansion on the aphoristic “the symbol gives rise to thought” with which he concludes his earlier *The Symbolism of Evil*.³⁷⁹ Interpretation engages the symbols produced in discursive work and further works them out to produce new surpluses of

horizon of the text. In this sense, appropriation as nothing to do with any kind of person to person appeal. It is instead close to Hans-Georg Gadamer calls a fusion of horizons (*Horizonsverschmelzung*): the world horizon of the reader is fused with the world horizon of the writer. And the ideality of the text is the mediating link in this process of horizon fusing” (Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 93).

³⁷⁶ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 44.

³⁷⁷ In this context, Ricoeur helps to explain the idiom “making friends.”

³⁷⁸ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 55.

³⁷⁹ Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, Emerson Buchanan, trans., (New York: Beacon, 1967), 347-357. He references his account of hermeneutics in his previous work on p. 45. “In my earlier writings, especially *The Symbolism of Evil* and *Freud and Philosophy*, I directly defined hermeneutics by an object which seemed to be both as broad and as precise as possible, I mean the symbol. As regards the symbol, I defined it in turn by its semantic structure of having a double-meaning” (Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 45).

meaning. Interpretation, therefore, creates surpluses of meaning in *addition* to the meanings already at work in the event of discourse.

If symbols give rise to thought, the symbols of “work” and “surplus” give rise to thoughts of Karl Marx’s theory of work and its surplus-value. While Ricœur does not explicitly cite Karl Marx’s theory of surplus-value in his theory of interpretation, surplus-value emerges in the context of a discussion of credibility, political legitimacy, and belief in Ricœur’s *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*.³⁸⁰

George H. Taylor comments,

It is here that Ricoeur develops his theory of legitimacy as ideology. Ideology fills the ‘credibility gap’ between claim and belief. In an argument that is one of the most well known within his theory of ideology, Ricoeur argues for elaboration of a concept of ‘surplus-value,’ now tied not to work but to power (Ricoeur, 1986, 201). Where Marx’s theory of surplus-value discusses the difference between a worker’s pay and the worth of what the worker produces, Ricoeur’s claim is that a similar surplus-value operates in the context of political power. Ideology functions to extract more belief—in our vocabulary, more faith—from the citizenry than the claim to authority merits and so closes the gap between claim and founded, spontaneous belief (Ricoeur 1986, 201; Ricoeur 2004, 83; Ricoeur 2007b, 142-43). Ricoeur’s analysis here is acute and incisive.³⁸¹

The double-helix of Ricœur’s appropriation of the Marxian tradition of critical theory as it understands the creation of value by means of a worker’s work and Ricœur’s insight that surpluses accrue both in the work of interpretation and the social work of politics applies directly to a discussion of drama and credibility. Ricœur develops Max Weber’s assertion that political legitimacy depends on the “addition of belief.”³⁸² Taylor’s development of Ricœur’s theory shows that political

³⁸⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures On Ideology and Utopia*, George H. Taylor, ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

³⁸¹ George H. Taylor, “Developing Ricoeur’s Concept of Political Legitimacy: The Question of Political Faith,” in *Paul Ricoeur and the Task of Political Philosophy*, Greg S. Johnson and Dan R. Stiver, eds., Lanham: Lexington, 2013), 169 with internal references to Paul Ricoeur: *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, George H. Taylor, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); *Reflections on the Just*, David Pellauer, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

³⁸² “Ricoeur’s argument is predicated on appraisal of the following Weber statement. In discussing the motives that individuals have for adherence to the state’s authority, Weber writes, ‘[C]ustom, personal advantage, purely affectual or ideal motives of solidarity do not form a sufficiently reliable basis for a given domination. *In addition* there is normally a further element, the *belief* in legitimacy’ (Weber, 1978, 213, quoted in Ricoeur 1986, 200, emphases added). [...]

legitimacy performs itself through interpretations of political reality that authorize the use of power:

“Legitimacy is an instance where we grant *human meaning*.”³⁸³ Meaning operates as a motivational force to sanction political authority.³⁸⁴ Political legitimacy therefore signals the meaningful and authorized use of political power. Meaningfulness derives from *belief* in political legitimacy because political legitimacy does not derive from rational bases alone.³⁸⁵ There is therefore some distance between political legitimacy and belief in authority’s meaning. Taylor calls this a “credibility gap.” Through an analysis of Weber, Ricœur tracks the belief necessary for political legitimacy; belief fills the gap between authority’s claim to legitimacy and the citizenry granting a human meaning to that claim. “In his tripartite division of ideology as distortion, legitimacy, and integration or identity (254), Ricœur’s depiction of legitimacy and its credibility gap evidences [legitimacy’s] distortive role.

Belief or faith that acts to fill the political credibility gap acts as a form of mystification and deception. It grants

Legitimacy is not established by the factors Weber addressed but only by the addition of belief. What is striking to Ricoeur about Weber’s statement is that the notion of addition is mentioned here, mentioned again in the next paragraph (Ricoeur 1986, p. 200, citing Weber 1978, 213), and then completely dropped. While, as we shall observe, Weber returns at several points to note the citizenry’s belief in legitimacy, he never discusses this theme. Instead, Weber focuses completely on the political authority’s *claim* to legitimacy. Ricoeur’s entire theory of legitimacy as a form of ideology is built on the ‘empty space’ in Weber’s theory for the role of belief (Ricoeur 1986, 200)” (Taylor, “Developing Ricoeur’s Concept of Political Legitimacy,” 166, emphasizes original with internal references to Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* and Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, eds. [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978]).

³⁸³ Taylor, “Developing Ricoeur’s Concept of Political Legitimacy,” 165 with reference to Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 188.

³⁸⁴ Taylor goes on to emphasize that “It is essential to Ricoeur’s larger argument here that motivation operates on a different basis than the Marxist notion of economic causality. If Marxism argues that society operates by means of an economic base (infrastructure) and ideas are simply the efflux (superstructure) of this economic base, the existence of legitimacy within a motivation framework disrupts this causal framework. Motives and meaning in fact exist at the base; they are infrastructural also” (Taylor, “Developing Ricoeur’s Concept of Political Legitimacy,” 165, with reference to Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 183). Part of the difficulty Ricoeur overcomes here, in my view, is a strawman of the Marxian interpretive tradition that tends to posit Louis Althusser’s base/superstructure framework as causally simple and unidirectional (as in “base determines superstructure”) as opposed to dialectical and complex (as in “base and superstructure mutually determine each other”). Such a dialectical approach allows the base to remain fundamentally material and the superstructure to remain fundamental ideational and interpretative. Taylor’s application of infrastructure to the economic base already distances itself from the *materialist* orientation of Marxian thinking. The practice that calls the economic base an infrastructure and includes motivation and meaning is far from wrong, but I contend that it begins the slippery slope of abstraction from the material history of production that ultimately mystifies the operations of power *within* this so-called “economic base.” With that said, Ricœur and Taylor are certainly right to correct for the hollowness of any deterministic account of economics or biology; ideas matter.

³⁸⁵ See Taylor, “Developing Ricoeur’s Concept of Political Legitimacy,” 165-169, especially for the discussion of how three kinds of claims to political legitimacy—on rational grounds, traditional grounds, and charismatic grounds—all find ultimately rest on a kind of belief.

more authority to government than is warranted or deserved.”³⁸⁶ On the basis of Ricoeur’s comments in the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, Taylor goes on to develop a positive account, where ideology serves as “symbolic mediation of action” for authority granting positive legitimacy for integration, to establish cooperative political identities, to enunciate values, to elicit beliefs, and to augment social structures.³⁸⁷ Ideology, therefore, is not always distortive in authorizing legitimacy (whether political or interpretative), but Ricoeur’s theory still establishes the credibility gap between a claim to legitimacy and its humanly meaningful realization. While Taylor’s essay wishes to expand the notion of faith or belief for applications outside of religion, his analysis of Ricoeur’s political philosophy frames the efficacious work of interpretation and its intrinsic connection to credibility. To be clear, credibility and legitimacy are not precisely synonyms: a legitimate authority has credibility, whereas credible authorities may or may not be deemed legitimate.³⁸⁸ Legitimacy, however, is not automatic. Taylor demonstrates that Ricoeur requires interpretive work (whereby a group grants “human meaning”) to surmount the credibility gap between the claim to political authority and its realization as legitimacy through political faith. The process is insidious. Ricoeur argues this claim to legitimacy always exceeds “the beliefs actually held by citizenry.”³⁸⁹ In order to justify the use of political power, authorities rely on the ideology of political legitimacy. Taylor interprets the operations of power apart from individual agents and so ideology appears as an emergent phenomenon. One can further locate ideology’s performance by and through material

³⁸⁶ Taylor, “Developing Ricoeur’s Concept of Political Legitimacy,” 169, emphasis mine, with internal reference to Ricoeur, *Reflections on the Just*.

³⁸⁷ Cf. Taylor, “Developing Ricoeur’s Concept of Political Legitimacy,” 170ff.

³⁸⁸ This distinction must remain axiomatic because a defense of this distinction in the arena of political philosophy lies far beyond the pale of this project. In brief: the distinction between credibility and legitimacy must hold in order to account for political and interpretive situations of competing authorities. Legitimacy commands and elicits belief, at least according to Taylor and Ricoeur. Credibility, in my account, regards the worthiness for propositional belief. This reflects one of the foundational metaphors for credibility: the courtroom. One can easily imagine political, social, and argumentative situations where any number of credible authorities disagrees but none of them, on their own, possesses the legitimacy necessary to command belief. On the other hand, the legitimacy of a judge *determines* the rules for credibility. Ricoeur and Taylor rightfully show ideology coerces belief (both positive and negatively).

³⁸⁹ Taylor, “Developing Ricoeur’s Concept of Political Legitimacy,” 165 with reference to Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 13.

entities and their discourse by means of Ricœur's interpretation theory. The institutional, political, and social structures through which ideologies function "to extract more belief...from the citizenry than the claim to authority merits and so closes the gap between claim and founded, spontaneous belief" *perform this work of ideology*. Like the mute text that cannot speak for itself in *Interpretation Theory*, the distortive world-picture projected by ideology (echoing, here, Marx's inheritance of Feuerbach) does not operate independently of the works of discourse.³⁹⁰ Works of discourse may be cultural productions constructing what Emilie Townes calls the "fantastic hegemonic imagination" and deform ordinary perception according to prejudice.³⁹¹ Systems of oppression may further mystify the operations of power through what Jürgen Habermas calls "communicative distortion."³⁹² Ricœur's political theory identifies the process by which surplus-value comes to be appropriated by political power-brokers: the alienation of labor. In the political context, the appropriation of surplus-value happens through the alienation of interpretive and social labor under the guise of the ideology of legitimacy in political faith; in an economic context, the appropriation of surplus-value happens through the alienation of workers' labor under the guise of ideology in religious faith and social convention. The key for my purposes is to ascertain how work produces a surplus of value and then apply that theory to the interpretive work of theatre and performance. By reviewing Marx's theory of surplus value, we will be able to apply it to Ricœur's interpretation theory and thereby ascertain the creation of the surplus meaning through interpretive work.

³⁹⁰ "The text is mute. An asymmetric relation obtains between text and reader, in which only one of the partners speaks for the two. The text is like a musical score and the reader like the orchestra conductor who obeys the instructions of notation. Consequently, to understand is not merely to repeat the speech event in a similar event, it is to generate a new event beginning from the text in which the initial event has been objectified" (Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 75).

³⁹¹ Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

³⁹² Paradigmatically communicative distortion occurs in the classic conspiracy between capitalism and the ideologies of family, nation-state, private property, and religion or a more contemporary intersectional conspiracy between white supremacy and the ideologies of race, class, sexuality, gender, and ability. Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols., Thomas McCarthy, trans., (New York: Beacon, 1985).

§3.2 Marx's Theory of Work and the Creation of Surplus-Value

The “reason” for capitalism lies not in a promise of global peace through sharing the products of shared labor and mitigating violence by shifting competition and warfare to the realm of trade, but in capitalism’s extraordinarily efficient extraction of value from processes of production. For Marx and Marxian tradition (especially in light of the contributions of Max Weber and Antonio Gramsci), capitalism (a) perpetuates violence against workers by means of establishing greater concern for capital (construed as private property) than for individual persons by: (b) dividing and commodifying work thereby alienating workers from their labor and syphoning profit—the surplus difference between the cost of materials and the value added by labor—towards (c) capitalists who hold a monopoly on the means of production and reduce work to a commodity by means of wages in exchange for time. This process (d) mystifies social and material structures via various ideologies that can, on Weber’s account, also supercharge worker’s productive capacity by means of a “religious” work ethic. Eventually such ideologies (e) block the capacity to think outside the system by establishing what Gramsci called cultural hegemony. Before turning to the ways Brecht’s theatre sought to resist these developments, we need to discern how interpretation works out excess surplus meanings.

While a general notion of work can be applied across human contexts, Marx’s theory addresses the sort of ordinary and necessary work motivated by some reward or value *external* to the activity of work itself. I contend that this quality of motivational unpleasantness interprets work as labor.³⁹³ After reviewing Marx on work as labor and the production of surplus value presented in the

³⁹³ There are Christian theological reasons, too, to describe the existence of work that is necessary for human flourishing but not a source of flourishing in and of itself as a result of original sin. Such a theory both cites the scriptural connection and problematic linkage between the first sin and labor-as-toil (cf. Gen. 3) and embraces contemporary theories of original sin (following Karl Rahner, S.J. or Gustavo Gutierrez, O.P.) that frame it as a historical and social predisposition toward corruption. Material and attitudinal structures render labor into drudgery, and the inequitable distribution of drudgery indicates what can be rightfully called “social sin.”

first volume of *Capital*, I can more clearly describe the interpretive work of theatre-making, done for its own sake, as “play.”³⁹⁴ Labor, for Marx, is a particular human activity of creativity (in the Idealist sense insofar as human labor intends to express a preexisting idea) and concentration (insofar as labor distinguishes itself from play by demanding the full attention and intention of the worker).³⁹⁵ Marx argues that raw materials gain value by their transformation through work into commodities that can be bought and sold. Consider the story of a wooden table. A tree in the middle of a forest has limited value for a chef who wants to open a restaurant and requires a table for his guests. The tree lacks use-value for the chef who needs a table, but a logger can actualize the use-value in the tree. The logger can transform the tree (raw material) into wooden planks through work.³⁹⁶ These wooden planks now have greater use-value because of the logger’s work; the logger’s work transfers use-value and makes the wood into a product. “If we examine this whole process from the point of view of its result, the product, it is plain that both the instruments and the subject of labour, are means of production, and that the labour itself is productive labour.”³⁹⁷ But products “though ready

³⁹⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. I, The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert C. Tucker, ed., (New York: Norton, 1972). My aim is not a strong distinction between labor-work and play-work. Sometimes play can also be labor for a paycheck.

³⁹⁵ “Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature. [...] By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway. [...] We pre-supposed labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his *modus operandi*, and which he must subordinate his will. [...] This means close attention. The less he [the laborer] is attracted by the nature of the work, and the mode in which it is carried on, and the less, therefore, he enjoys it as something which gives play to his bodily and mental powers, the more close is attention is forced to be” (Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 345).

³⁹⁶ “In the labour-process, therefore, man’s activity, with the help of the instruments of labour, effects an alteration, designed from the commencement, in the material worked upon. The process disappears in the product; the latter is a use-value, Nature’s material adapted by a change of form to the wants of man. Labour has incorporated itself with its subject: the former is materialized, the latter transformed. That which in the labourer appeared as movement, now appears in the product as a fixed quality without motion” (Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 346-347).

³⁹⁷ Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 347.

for immediate consumption” can be recirculated into the means of production.³⁹⁸ The wood now can become raw material for later, additional work.

The existence of the market enacts a particular magic where use-value can become an exchange-value: that is, the wood can fetch a price on the market as a commodity. Such exchange-value might, in fact, be greater than the wood’s use-value. “Use-values are only produced by capitalists, because, and in so far as, they are the material substratum, the depositories of exchange-value.”³⁹⁹ This makes sense as to why our chef-owner would wish to purchase a table for a restaurant. The chef’s cooking work can transform raw materials (ingredients) into a commodity (a finished dish) that has a much higher exchange-value than the raw materials. The chef does not work in order to consume the finished dish (and so consume its use-value as food) but in order to sell the commodity (to gain its greater exchange-value as commodity). This excess of value is surplus-value. The work of the logger has produced surplus-value from the raw material and this surplus-value can be capitalized. When the wood-product goes on the market as a commodity, the logger can transform his labor into profit (surplus-value) by means of the product’s exchange-value greater than its use-value. Marx’s insight distinguishes capitalism from barter economies. Surplus-value emerges not from the commodity itself but through the work that transforms raw materials into commodities.

Work takes time. The creation of value, therefore, occurs in time through work with raw materials. Surplus-value appears through the transformation of raw materials into commodities and in the time of the labor-process. Therefore, work done with the minimum of raw materials necessary in the minimum amount of necessary time maximizes surplus-value.⁴⁰⁰ The creation of surplus-value can be disinterested in the particular work of an individual worker. Marx’s theory of surplus-value

³⁹⁸ Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 348.

³⁹⁹ Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 351.

⁴⁰⁰ Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 353.

shows that it does not really make much of a difference whether the worker creates wooden planks, tables, or *haute cuisine*. What makes a decisive difference is the quality of production and the time of work.⁴⁰¹ Value circulates through capital because *all value now indexes to money*.

A new problem arrives for the capitalist if the cost of paying workers to make products over time exceeds the surplus-value generated through their labor. When the tree becomes wood, it can be sold as a commodity. The logger no longer possesses the wood (or its use-value and exchange-value) but, by being paid, retains the surplus-value of his labor in the form of money. The cycle continues. Perhaps the wood was purchased by a carpenter who uses the wood to build a table. Now the carpenter's work produces even more surplus-value in addition to what the logger already has in the form of money. The tree has undergone two transformations into commodities—wood and table—but its materiality has not been consumed. The wooden table now has its own use-value and exchange-value as a table in excess of its use-value and exchange-value as wood. The table is still made of wood, however, so its use-value as wood is diminished but nevertheless still present. The chef might purchase the table from the carpenter for a greater amount of money than the carpenter paid the logger for the raw materials. The carpenter thus enjoys the profit that is a translation of her labor's surplus-value into money. No new materials have been created, but work generated surplus-values *distinct* from the exchange-value and use-value of the commodity itself. Each worker along the way retains surplus-value in the form of money.

In the aforementioned scenario, each episode of work completed a new commodity. The logger worked the tree into wood; the carpenter worked the wood into a table. This can be called an

⁴⁰¹ "For the operation of spinning, cotton and spindles are a necessity, but for making rifled cannon they would be of no use whatever. Here, on the contrary, where we consider the labour of the spinner only so far as it is value-creating, *i.e.*, a source of value, his labour differs in no respect from the labour of the man who bores cannon, or (what here more nearly concerns us), from the labour of the cotton-planter and spindle-maker incorporated in the means of production. It is solely by reason of this identity, that cotton planting, spindle making and spinning, are capable of forming the component parts, differing only quantitatively from each other, of one whole, namely, the value of yarn. [...] In the process we are considering, it is of extreme importance, that no more time be consumed in the work of transforming the cotton into yarn than is necessary under the given social conditions." (Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, *Marx-Engels Reader*, 353-354).

artisanal approach to production for the market. Here, a single craftsperson owns the raw materials, does the work, and retains the surplus-value. The craftsperson operates similarly to an artist or poet in Ricœur's account of discourse: the craftsperson produces some autonomous work by means of their work. The artisanal approach retains close and straightforward ties between the worker, the work, and use-, exchange-, and surplus-value.

By distinguishing the labor-process in this way, Marx clarifies how the capitalist can come to “own” the means of production and workers cease to “own” the products of their work and, eventually, their work itself.⁴⁰² Marx analyzes capitalism under the conditions of industrialization: the factory.⁴⁰³ The factory-owner (the capitalist) retains ownership of the raw materials, tools, and labor—the means of production—and also retains ownership of the finished product. Capitalism changes what might be an intimate relationship between worker and product by treating work's use-value identically in both the worker and the product. The worker's use-value as laborer can be bought and consumed as a commodity distinct from human workers.⁴⁰⁴ The phenomenon of

⁴⁰² “Therefore, the value of labour-power, and the value which that labour-power creates in the labour-process, are two entirely different magnitudes; and this difference of the two values was what the capitalist had in view, when he was purchasing labour-power. The useful qualities that labour-power possesses, and by virtue of which it makes yarn or boots, were to him nothing more than a condition sine qua non; for in order to create value, labour must be expended in a useful manner. What really influenced him was the specific use-value which this commodity possesses of being *a source not only of value, but of more value than it has itself*. [...] The seller of labour-power, like the seller of any other commodity, realizes its exchange-value, and parts with its use-value. He cannot take the one without giving the other. The use-value of labour-power, or in other words, labour, belongs just as little to its self [the worker], as the use-value of oil after it has been sold belongs to the dealer who has sold it. The owner of the money has paid the value of a day's labour-power; his, therefore, is the use of it for a day; a day's labour belongs to [the employer]” (Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 357-358).

⁴⁰³ A factory is “machinery organised into a system” (Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 407). While finance driven capitalism has certainly changed the picture from Marx's initial theory in *Das Kapital*, I contend that the dialectical materialist analysis of work continues to be useful for contemporary analysis. New work in theology and economics, such as Kathryn Tanner's *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), update the foundational metaphor to account for the fact that finance-driven capitalism creates even more distance between the workers and the owners of the means of production by way of shareholding.

⁴⁰⁴ “With the keen eye of an expert, [the would-be capitalist] has selected the means of production and the kind of labour-power best adapted to his particular trade, be it spinning, bootmaking, or any other kind. He then proceeds to consume the commodity, the labour-power that he has just bought, by causing the labourer, the impersonation of that labour-power, to consume the means of production by his labour. The general character of the labour-process is evidently not changed by the fact, that the labourer works for the capitalist instead of for himself; moreover, the particular methods and operations employed in bootmaking or spinning are not immediately changed by the intervention of the capitalist” (Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 350).

capitalist factory work is best understood in tension with the work of craftspeople.⁴⁰⁵ Both the factory and the craftsperson make things: they produce products through work in time. But the capitalist, the owner and manager of the means of production, must also derive a profit from the surplus-value created through work. This leads, in Marx's theory, to argument over production quotas (as a metric for regulating the speed of work) and the length, frequency, and payment for the working day.⁴⁰⁶

Strategies for reducing the time it takes to produce a product need not only be through the disciplined regulation of workers' efficiency. Industrialization imposes the division of labor to increase the speed of production by means of an economy of scale. By separating the discrete tasks of production into component (and interchangeable) parts, a factory can produce more products in the same amount of time it takes a craftsperson. Rather than a single carpenter completing a single table, one finds a group of carpenters working together to build a collection of tables. Just as the logger might produce a second tree's worth of wood at the same time as the carpenter assembled a table, so too might various carpenters produce different aspects of the table at the same time. Dividing the labor also divides the time required for each component part. Some carpenters might work on the legs of the table while others prepare the table-top. It stands to reason that by dividing the labor, a group of carpenters would be able to produce a greater number of tables in the same amount of time. Over time, leg-makers become specialized and can move at a faster rate as an expert

⁴⁰⁵ "The process of production, considered on the one hand as the unity of the labour-process and the process of creating value, is production of commodities; considered on the other hand as the unity of the labour-process and the process of producing surplus-value, it is the capitalist process of production, or capitalist production of commodities" (Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 360).

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 361-376. "Hence it is that in the history of capitalist production, the determination of what is a working-day, presents its as the result of a struggle, a struggle between collective capital, i.e., the class of capitalists, and collective labour, i.e., the working-class" (364). It is also worthy of note that Marx identifies intrinsic links between the ownership of the time of labor in capitalism and the institution of slavery in the United States and the desire of the capitalist system ever to expand into new arenas (374).

in their given operation.⁴⁰⁷ Decreasing in the amount of time-per-commodity more efficiently produces surplus-value. “Time is money.” This sort of artisanal factory can be called a workshop. Workshops more efficiently create value. Assuming that a workshop divides surplus-value in proportion to each craftsperson’s work identically to if the craftspeople worked alone, an optimized and equitable workshop would increase the surplus-value attained by each craftsperson by producing more commodities in a given length of time than any individual could. Indeed, a workshop can further divide labor and increase productivity by distributing and lessening each person’s “overhead costs” in time and space.⁴⁰⁸ The workshop operates as an ensemble where the collective will produce more surplus value in total than the sum of each individual worker working alone. This process of the division of labor emerges as a means not only of more efficiently producing all sorts of products, but as a way of regulating the operations of society as a whole.⁴⁰⁹

But the purpose of an industrialized and automated factory is—in the words of the famous chocolate factory scene from *I Love Lucy*— to “speed it up a little!” Shifting from carpentry to culinary imagery, a craftsperson might make one box of artisanal chocolate truffles in an hour, but a workshop of five chocolatiers in a factory might produce ten boxes of artisanal chocolate truffles in the same time. So far, all the chocolates are still “made by hand.” Industrialization provides technology to move the production line still faster because technological automation increases the speed at which production occurs. The automated assembly line now relies on machinery to perform tasks at a much faster rate than a human craftsperson. Those five chocolatiers, now managing

⁴⁰⁷ “[A] labourer who all his life performs one and the same simple operation, converts his whole body into the automatic, specialized implement of that operation. Consequently, he takes less time in doing it, than the artificer who performs a whole series of operations in succession” (Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 390).

⁴⁰⁸ Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 389.

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 392-397. “The *a priori* system on which the division of labour, within the workshop, is regularly carried out, becomes in the division of labour within the society, an *a posteriori*, nature-imposed necessity, controlling the lawless caprice of the the producers, and perceptible in the barometrical fluctuations of the market-prices” (395).

machines rather than making chocolate, might be able to produce hundreds of boxes of chocolates per hour. The chocolate machine, we might say, “prints money.”

This moment of technological automation marks the decisive change in capitalist factory production. The owner of the means of production notices skyrocketing surplus-value, that ever-elusive period of growth.⁴¹⁰ Automation means the artisan must be the passive manager of machinery instead of doing work that could be understood on analogy to creative expression. Industrialization introduces distance between work and production. The maximal creation of value consists in maintaining the hum of the factory’s machinery. When the “overhead costs” for a workshop are equitably distributed to an ensemble of craftspeople, all workers remain directly involved in the task of production and exert common intellectual and creative control.⁴¹¹ The size of the ever-expanding industrial factory, however, leads to the creation and expansion of a managerial class. Those who do the intellectual work of organizing the factory are the owners of the means of production and those working who become, under the conditions of modern industry, machine-like managers of the machines.⁴¹² “The labourer produces not for himself, but for capital.”⁴¹³ As a system, then, capitalism seeks to expand the accumulation of value by means of increasing the efficiency of wage-laborers and maintaining political stability in the marketplace which is always, in

⁴¹⁰ “Machinery produces relative surplus-value; not only by directly depreciating the value of labour-power, and by indirectly cheapening the same through cheapening the commodities that enter into its reproduction, but also, when it is first introduced sporadically into an industry, by converting the labour employed by the owner of that machinery, into labour of a higher degree and greater efficacy, by raising the social value of the article produced about its individual value, and thus enabling the capitalist to replace the value of a day’s labour-power by a smaller portion of the value of a day’s production. During this transition period, when the use of machinery is a sort of monopoly, the profits are therefore exceptional, and the capitalist endeavors to exploit thoroughly ‘the sunny time of this his first love,’ by prolonging the working-day as much as possible” (Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 405).

⁴¹¹ Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 398.

⁴¹² “By means of its conversion into an automaton, the instrument of labour confronts the labourer, during the labour-process, in the shape of capital, of dead labour, that dominates, and pumps dry, living labour-power. The separation of the intellectual powers of production from the manual labour, and the conversion of those powers into the might of capital over labour is...finally completed by modern industry erected on the foundation of machinery. The special skill of each individual insignificant factory operative vanishes as an infinitesimal quantity before the science, the gigantic physical forces, and the mass of labour that are embodied in the factory mechanism and, together with that mechanism, constitute the power of the ‘master’” (Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 409).

⁴¹³ Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 418.

Marx's view, under the threat of collapse due to the exploitation of the working class (hence both the power of the workers' strike that can grind the production process to a halt and the allure of technological innovation immune to the caprices of human labor).⁴¹⁴

§3.3 Surplus Value as a Portable Theory: The Theatricality of Work

An extended review of Marx's theory of the creation of surplus-value and the process of capitalist accumulation of profit lays the necessary foundation to apply these ideas to a discussion of drama and credibility. The first is how the theory by which work produces surplus-value by extracting from raw material a value that is *greater* than the use-value of the materials themselves can be applied to all sorts of work. The second regards how the theory of surplus-value undergirds Marx's assertion that the commodification of labor by industrialized factory division and the concentration of the ownership of the means of production alienate workers' labor.⁴¹⁵ Both points illuminate the interpretive work of theatre by clarifying the creation of a surplus that does not

⁴¹⁴ Cf. Marx, *Capital Vol. I, Marx-Engels Reader*, 411-438.

⁴¹⁵ "For example, the fact that surplus labour is posited as surplus value of capital means that the worker does not appropriate the product of his own labour; that it appears to him as *alien property*; inversely, that *alien labour* appears as the property of capital. [...] In fact, in the production process of capital...labour is a totality—a combination of labours—whose individual component parts are alien to one another, so that the overall process as a totality is *not the work* of the individual worker, and is furthermore the work of the different workers together only to the extent that they are [forcibly] combined, and do not [voluntarily] enter into combination with one another. The combination of this labour appears just as subservient to and led by an alien will and an alien intelligence—having its *animating unity* elsewhere—as its material unity appears subordinate to the *objective unity* of the *machinery*, of fixed capital, which, as *animated monster*, objectifies the scientific idea, and is in fact the coordinator, does not in any way relate to the individual worker as his instrument; but rather he himself exists as an animated individual punctuation mark, as its living isolated accessory. Thus, combined labour is combination *in-itself*, in a double way; not combination as a mutual relation among the individuals working together, nor as their predominance either over their particular or individual function or over the instrument of labour. Hence, just as the worker relates to the product of his labour as an alien thing, so does he relate to the combination of labour as an alien combination, as well as to his own labour as an expression of his life, which, although it belongs to him, is alien to him and coerced from him.... Labour itself, like its product, is *negated as the labour of the particular, isolated worker*. This isolated labour, negated, is now indeed communal or combined labour, posited. The *communal or combined labour* posited in this way—as activity and in the passive, objective form—is however at the same time posited as an another towards the really existing individual labour—as an *alien objectivity* (alien property) as well as an *alien subjectivity* (of capital). Capital thus represents both labour and its product as negated individualized labour and hence as the negated property of the individualized worker. Capital therefore is the existence of social labour—the combination of labour as subject as well as object—but this existence as itself existing independently opposite its real moments—hence itself a *particular* existence apart from them. For its part, capital therefore appears as the predominant subject and own of *alienated labour*, and its relation is itself as complete a contradiction as is that of wage labour" (Marx, *The Grundrisse, Marx-Engels Reader*, 260-261).

deplete its source and demonstrating the alienation that comes from commodification. Ricœur demonstrates how estrangement can be overcome through interpretation.

The discussion of Marx's theory of surplus-value can now inform Ricœur's discussion of surplus meaning in the work of interpretation in new ways. Marx's theory of surplus-value explains (in Ricœur's sense or *erklären*) how the interpretation of a text generates a surplus of meaning. Marx's account of commodification explains how a text comes to be alienated from its writer as an autonomous work of discourse. "Labour's realization is its objectification."⁴¹⁶ The writer produces a text that is a material object distinct from the writer. Again, Ricœur's use of literary imagery provides only one model. The hermeneutic encounter of interpretation recalls aspects of Marx's Idealistic understanding of human work as a creative movement. The work of interpretation proceeds by first identifying some given text that is *foreign and autonomous* to the interpreter. "To 'make one's own' what was previously 'foreign' remains the ultimate aim of all hermeneutics. Interpretation in its last stage wants to equalize, to render contemporaneous, to assimilate in the sense of making similar. This goal is achieved insofar as interpretation actualizes the meaning of the text for the present reader."⁴¹⁷ *Interpretation is the work that actualizes meaning in the present.* The foreignness of the object of interpretation (the text) includes both a sense of strangeness and newness (as in reading a book for the first time or encountering a sign in an unknown language) and a sense of autonomous distance, givenness, and independent reality. Even the most beloved and well-known text remains distinct

⁴¹⁶ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, *Marx-Engels Reader*, 71. Marx clearly means objectification to carry all of its negative connotations, but that a product of work would be estranged from the worker does not necessarily have to be negative. Maurice Blanchot's theory of writing, for instance, construes something positive in the differentiation of the literary work from the writer in the act of writing. That writing differentiates itself from the writer in ways that could also be interpreted therapeutically. Marx, however, considers production under the conditions of exploitative capitalism that strips ownership of the product from the worker. Labor becomes objectified in order to be taken away. "The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and range. [...] Labour produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the work as a *commodity*—and does so in the proportion in which it produces commodities generally. This fact expresses merely that the object which labour produces—labour's product—confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of labour is labour which has been congealed into an object, which has become material: it is the objectification of labour" (Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, *Marx-Engels Reader*, 71).

⁴¹⁷ Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory*, 92.

from the interpreter. The relevance of Ricoeur's notion of autonomy ramifies immediately for the modern interpretive re-encounter with sacred phenomena.

Does this mean that we could go back to a primitive naïveté? Not at all. In every way, something has been lost, irremediably lost: immediacy of belief. But if we can no longer live the great symbolisms of the sacred in accordance with the original belief in them, we can, we modern men, aim at a second naïveté in and through criticism. In short, it is by *interpreting* that we can *hear* again. Thus it is in hermeneutics that the symbol's gift of meaning and the endeavor to understand by deciphering are knotted together.⁴¹⁸

The work of interpretation brings text to life, both in the sense of rendering its meaning accessible for the present reader *and* in revivifying its meaning. In a theatrical way, the work of interpretation renders the written script (a mute text) into something that can be heard and seen anew (a production).

The theatricality of work finds expression in Marx's frequent argument for the personification of labor-power in the human worker. Personification becomes commodification once a worker's labor can be bought and sold as "wage-time." The employer "then proceeds to consume the commodity, the labour-power that he has just bought, by causing the labourer, the impersonation of that labour-power, to consume the means of production by his labour."⁴¹⁹ In this example, Marx does not say that labor-power expresses itself through the worker or that the worker generates labor-power like a steam engine. Instead, the image is theatrical, as in the English translation's "impersonation." In German, the sentence carries similar performativity.⁴²⁰ The worker wears labor-power like a costume: *den Träger der Arbeitskraft*.⁴²¹ Work puts on the mask of labor-

⁴¹⁸ Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 351, emphasis original.

⁴¹⁹ Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, *Marx-Engels Reader*, 350.

⁴²⁰ "Unser Kapitalist setzt sich also daran, die von ihm gekaufte Ware, die Arbeitskraft, zu konsumieren, d.h., er läßt den Träger der Arbeitskraft, den Arbeiter, die Produktionsmittel durch seine Arbeit konsumieren" (Marx, *Kapital I*, 199). The German text is freely available online at http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me23/me23_192.htm#Kap_5_1.

⁴²¹ One might object to my confidence that *den Träger der Arbeitskraft* carries so clear a connotation of costuming. My logic consists in treating the root of *der Träger* in the verb *tragen*, "to wear." The word *der Träger* also can be used for one who bears or carries something (so the "carrier of work-power"), as a word for the means (so the "means of work-power"), or as a noun that can mean beam, bracket, carrier, truss, porter, or sponsor. In many cases, however, *der Träger*

power and *does* something. The worker's production quotas offer metrics for a "performance review." A performative account of labor-power makes sense in light of Marx's theory of alienation. Marx, as shown, claims that labor-power generalizes itself so that it does not much matter to the capitalist (whose aim is to expedite the creation of surplus-value) what variations of labor-power workers enact. Many different kinds of work—Marx enjoys comparing yarn-making to boot-making; I used images of logging, carpentry, and cooking—all perform the same sort of labor-power, all wear the mask of the worker-role. The worker is therefore anonymized. So anonymized, in fact, that automation rightfully takes on the role of labor-power whenever and where-ever it can. The worker merely operates the machinery like a marionette-player. The automated self-performing robot can wear the mask of labor-power; automation eliminates the redundancy of a human actor-worker.⁴²² Eventually, the marionette will generate surplus-value all on its own without the cost of wages.

Before continuing to develop the theatrical dimensions of this line of thought, Marx's theory of work's surplus can clarify six aspects of interpretive work according to Ricoeur's hermeneutics and surplus meaning.

retains a semantic range of holding up clothing: suspenders, girders, bra straps. *Der Träger* holds up what one wears (*tragen*). Any further objections that I have "read" a dramatic image "into" Marx's German without sufficient evidence seems to disregard the greater context of a hermeneutic theory of interpretive surplus-meaning. The subject matter (Gadamer's *die Sache*) of my investigation is not exegesis of Marx's German on a quest for his "original intent" but, rather, its contribution to a theory of theatre and performance's interpretive work. As it stands, the English translator already appears to align with theatrical surplus meaning.

⁴²² An obvious contemporary application of this theory can be found in the proliferation of smartphone driven rideshare services. Companies like Über are some of the largest funders of development for autonomous vehicles. While the initial "boom time" shifted value away from traditional taxi companies towards contingent "gig economy" drivers for rideshare services, such services have, over time, experienced diminished surplus-value in precisely the pattern Marx predicts. Ultimately, the profitability of the platform lies in automating the delivery of its product: transportation. The use of the application with human driver-workers, while presented under the guise of an ideology of the share-economy and societal cooperation, serves to develop consumer habits ready for autonomous vehicles. I have elsewhere connected this eschatological imaginary for automation and capitalism to theatrical performance in Walt Disney's *Carousel of Progress*. See a future article "Praying for a Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow" originally presented at the Association for Theatre in Higher Education annual meeting in 2013.

- 1) Work is a human and creative process that interacts with preexisting materials, so interpretive work is a similarly human (that is, existential, historical, embodied) and co-creative process.
- 2) Work is reflexive insofar as it both creates value and can form workers in particular habits, skills, and dispositions. Interpretive work is reflexive insofar as it both creates meaning and can form the identity of the interpreter through the disclosure of another world (for Ricoeur, reading texts constructs the identity of a self).
- 3) Work transforms materials into products, but, unless taken from the earth as a natural resource, any materials for work may already have the quality of a “finished product” with independent and autonomous value. Interpretive work either engages natural phenomena (the areas of study Ricoeur aligns with explanation or *erklären*) or interpretive work engages with other products of human interpretation (the areas of study Ricoeur aligns with understanding or *verstehen*).
- 4) When work transforms materials into products, that work also creates additional value. The finished product retains both use-value as a product and an exchange-value as a commodity. Selling the product, and so actualizing its exchange-value, does not consume the product’s use-value. Profit from exchange-value can be called surplus-value. Interpretive work, therefore, *adds* something to phenomena already produced and does not exhaust or consume the text. Interpretive work generates meaning in excess of the text’s literal meanings but does not negate the text’s literal meanings. This excess of meaning can be called surplus meaning.
- 5) The cycle of production does not necessarily stop after the completion of a “finished product.” As in (3), a product can be worked *again*, perhaps in combination with other products, to produce a product of even greater surplus of value. So too, interpretive

work does not conclude the task or possibility of interpretation. Rather, as in (3), meaning can be continually interpreted, perhaps in combination with other meanings, to produce create an even greater surplus of meaning.

- 6) The work can be commodified and automated at the risk of a human cost and the alienation of labor. Interpretive work can also be commodified (that is, bought and sold) and automated (e.g., algorithmic analysis) at the risk of a human cost (e.g., algorithmic analysis does not attend to the whole person) and the alienation of labor (e.g., the substitution of computerized translation programs for human translators).

§3.4 Playtime (featuring Special Guest Hans-Georg Gadamer)

It now becomes possible to say *interpretive work is a human and co-creative endeavor that actualizes meaning in the present as a surplus superadded to the text*. I now turn to the centrality of play in Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics to make the transition between a general theory of interpretive work derived from Ricoeur and Marx toward one specifically applied to the dramatic situation of theatrical performance. An actualization of surplus meaning does not replace, negate, or deplete the literal meanings of the text that were present prior to the act of interpretation and remain present afterward. The actualization of surplus meaning remains inextricably connected to the text as *that text's surplus*.⁴²³ This means that an infinite number of readers can encounter any given text for the first time. "There cannot, therefore, be any single interpretation that is correct 'in itself,' precisely because every interpretation is concerned with the text itself."⁴²⁴ The plurality of potential

⁴²³ "Thus we do not allow the interpretation of a piece of music or a drama the freedom to take the fixed 'text' as a basis for arbitrary, ad-lib effects, and yet we would regard the canonization of a particular interpretation—e.g., in a recorded performance conducted by the composer, or detailed notes on performance which come from the canonized first performance—as a failure to appreciate the real task of interpretation. [...] As we know, it is also mistaken to limit the 'freedom' of interpretive choice to externals and marginal phenomena rather than think of the whole performance in a way that is both bound and free. In a certain sense interpretation probably is re-creation, but this is a re-creation not of the creative act but of the created work, which has to be brought to representation in accord with the meaning the interpreter finds in it" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 119).

⁴²⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 397.

interpretations is all the more clear in the context of performance. Gadamer emphasizes the interpretive quality of performance:

Interpretation does not try to replace the interpreted work. It does not, for example, try to draw attention to itself by the poetic power of its own utterance. Rather, [interpretation] remains *fundamentally* accidental. This is true not only of the interpreting word but also of performative interpretation. The interpreting word always has something accidental about it insofar as it is motivated by the hermeneutic question, not just for pedagogical purposes to which it was limited in the Enlightenment but because understanding is always a genuine event. Similarly, performative interpretation is accidental in a fundamental sense—i.e., not just when something is played, imitated, translated, or read aloud for didactic purposes. These cases—where performance is interpretation in a special demonstrative sense, where it includes demonstrative exaggeration and highlighting—in fact differ only in degree, and not in kind, from other sorts of reproductive interpretation. However much it is the literary work or musical composition itself that acquires its mimic presence through the performance, every performance still has its own emphasis. There is little difference between this emphasis and using emphasis for didactic ends. All performance is interpretation. All interpretation is highlighting.⁴²⁵

This paragraph demonstrates a number of the ways Gadamer's performance theory falls short because he considers understanding to be the precondition for performing any text, score, script, choreography, recipe, set of instructions, etc. Located after my discussion of interpretive work's surplus meaning, however, Gadamer's construal of performative interpretation as "*fundamentally* accidental" can be clarified.⁴²⁶ Performative interpretations are accidental insofar as they do not

⁴²⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 400, emphasis original.

⁴²⁶ To say that performative interpretation is accidental, in the strictest sense, would contradict Gadamer's breakthrough in citing play as the clue to the ontology of the work of art. Gadamer makes a number of mistakes because of his refusal to allow the free play of interpretation to influence his transcendental theory of language as the point of contact for any mutual human understanding. On the one hand, Gadamer rightfully finds in language the capacity for real events of mutual understanding. Like Ricoeur's turn to discourse as the work of language, Gadamer avers "The guiding idea of the following discussion is *that the fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language*" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 378, emphasis original). On the other hand, Gadamer's reliance on an ideal dialogue in mutually and perfectly understood language creates problems for non-linguistic communications and performances. Indeed, his theory of performance makes blatant mistakes. "Demonstration is interpretation in much the same sense as in a translation that embodies an interpretation, or the correct reading aloud of a text that has already decided the questions of interpretation, because one can only read aloud what one has understood. Understanding and interpretation are indissolubly bound together" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 399). Here, Gadamer disregards the reality of trained performers who can

change something essential about the object of interpretation. Ricœur's language of surplus makes better sense on this score by avoiding the pitfalls of the Aristotelian metaphysics of substance and accident Gadamer implies. Calling performative interpretation an accident, however, shows that performative interpretations do not transubstantiate the work of art interpreted as an act of ontological change. A character is "really present" only in the form of a dubious ghost. This means that any text might be reinterpreted an infinite number of times in ways that complicate and add but do not negating previous actualizations of meaning for the present. What Gadamer's hermeneutics clarifies, however, is that performative interpretation—that is, the interpretive work of a performance—constitutes an increase in meaning over time in the form of an expanding surplus. Notice, then, that interpretive work becomes a *historical* process. The historical character of the event of interpretation could already be seen above in point (1)'s assertion of the human dimension of any work. It bears all the more importance when interpretations connect across persons by means a community of interpretation and across time through a tradition. Here, Gadamer's hermeneutics of tradition further connects the material historicizing of Marx's theory of surplus-value with the historical character of an interpretive process. "Interpreting music or a play by performing it is not basically different from understanding a text by reading it: understanding always includes interpretation."⁴²⁷ Interpretive work fuses horizons in ways that are reflexive, as in point (2) above. Interpretive work adds a surplus of meaning *and* (trans)forms the interpreter as a subject, but something of the surplus meaning that is generated by the work of interpretation "sticks" to the being of the object of interpretation insofar as the essence of any object of interpretation might be construed as its meaning. In other words: the tradition of interpretive history matters for interpretation, so too does the historical context in which the text is interpreted. "Consciousness of

correctly *intone* a text (that is, perform a reading) without necessarily understanding the words meaning. Many singers, for instance, are trained in deciphering the pronunciation of languages they do not speak.

⁴²⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 399.

being affected by history (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*) is primary consciousness of the hermeneutical *situation*.⁴²⁸ Performance itself demonstrates the historically affected consciousness in the hermeneutical situation of the players who do interpretive work. As will be emphasized throughout my project, player indicates both *actor* and *audience* because both have roles to play in theatre-making. Gadamer agrees (with Aristotle) “that spectator belongs essentially to the playing of the play. The way the spectator belongs makes apparent why it is meaningful to figure art as play.”⁴²⁹ Cooperative interpretive work welcomes the performance event given as part of a living tradition that provokes lasting and efficacious meaning.⁴³⁰

Gadamer adds two more components that are vital for a transition from a general theory of interpretive work towards one applicable to theatrical and theodramatic hermeneutics: (a) his notion of play as a transformation into structure and (b) his account of the event-character of understanding articulated with reference to the experience of the beautiful. The first is Gadamer’s account of a transformation into structure that occurs when play presents itself as a work of art. For Gadamer, “play itself is a transformation of such a kind that the identity of the player does not continue to exist for anybody. Everybody asks instead what is supposed to be represented, what is ‘meant.’ The players (or playwright) no longer exist, only what they are playing.”⁴³¹ The *meaning* of the work of art can be located only in its performance, as played by a performing interpreter. Gadamer’s sense of play as the clue to the ontology of the work of art is precisely the reason that Ricoeur can say that interpretation allows us to hear meaning anew. Play is activity.

⁴²⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 301, emphasis original.

⁴²⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 130.

⁴³⁰ “This is shown by the fact that the great achievements in the human sciences almost never become outdated. A modern reader can easily make allowances for the fact that, a hundred years ago, less knowledge was available to the historian, and he therefore made judgments that were incorrect in some details. [...] [T]he subject matter appears truly significant only when it is properly portrayed for us. Thus we are certainly interested in the subject matter, but it acquires its life only from the light in which it is presented to us. [...] Modern historical research itself is not only research, but the handing down of tradition. We do not see it only in terms of progress and verified results; in it we have, as it were, a new experience of history whenever the past resounds in a new voice” (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 284).

⁴³¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 112.

Thus the action of the drama—in this respect it still entirely resembles the religious act—exists as something that rests absolutely within itself. It no longer permits any comparison with reality as the secret measure of all verisimilitude. It is raised above all such comparisons—and hence also above the question of whether it is real—because a superior truth speaks from it. [...] The transformation is a transformation into the true. It is not enchantment in the sense of a bewitchment that waits for the redeeming word that will transform things back to what they were; rather, it is itself redemption and transformation back into true being. In being presented in play, what is emerges.⁴³²

Here appears the active being of Hamlet's question: "what is emerges." Being is presented in its play; when played, the question of being is transformed into a structure able to be recognized. In being presented *in play* the question of being really exists as a question of being in action. But the Romantic Gadamer, again, implies something beautiful and strange about performance. Play's transformation into structure renders the players fully transparent to the meaning of the play as the play's meaning presents itself. The underlying logic is play's self-sufficiency. Play points toward no purpose or end other than itself.⁴³³ The players have not irrevocably changed into their characters nor do musicians stop existing as people while playing a symphony. Rather, being gives itself over to the truth of the structure of the event played: the composite and played *drama* realizes meaning more extensively than any description of its component parts.

Theatrical reality, whose being is created and attested to by play, is the surplus meaning generated by the interpretive work of the players. The interpretive surplus adds something to the text, at least insofar as interpretation adds to the meaning of any text by focusing on certain aspects and downplaying others.⁴³⁴ The creation of surplus meanings contributes to the tradition of

⁴³² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 112.

⁴³³ Gadamer learns this position from anthropologist Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, (Boston: Beacon, 1955). In terms of play as an element of culture. In an aesthetic register, the claim is reminiscent of Kant's definition of aesthetic experience as the free interplay of imagination and intellect regarding art's reflection of nature's purposiveness without any purpose of its own (*Critique of Judgment*, §58, 220ff).

⁴³⁴ One finds Gadamer's notion of interpretation as highlighting. The practice has ethical and theological implications. Alejandro García-Rivera follows the semiotician Jan Mukarovsky to call this process "foregrounding: the lifting up of a bit of background and giving it value" (García-Rivera, *Community of the Beautiful*, 158). Transposed into Christian terms,

performance histories.⁴³⁵ Every act of interpretation, therefore, expands not only a kind of basic access to the being of the work of art by transforming it into a recognizable structure but also generates ever greater surpluses of meaning. One sees this process clearly in the act of translation: “A new light falls on the text from the other language and for the reader of it. [...] Translation, like all interpretation, is a highlighting.”⁴³⁶ Even here, my interpretation of Gadamer constructs meaning in excess by squeezing together two shorter sentences that appear six lines apart on the printed page. This spatial movement of words—although none of the “original” text has been changed—is an act of interpretation *in addition* to the interpretive work of Gadamer’s translators. My interpretive work does not negate the capacity for another reader to return to the work with different hermeneutic questions that actualize, and so disclose, new meanings.

Gadamer allows the further clarification of my definition of interpretive work via performance by nuancing “actualization of meaning in the present” to be an aesthetic event of play. My ultimate goal remains mobilizing a theory for the interpretive work of theatre and performance, so I will now substitute Ricœur’s fungible “text” with the slightly more specific “drama.” I call drama only slightly more specific because this word holds dual citizenship in the realm of texts (e.g., literary dramas, playscripts, plotlines) and consequential and interesting action (e.g., dramas of everyday life, dramatic moments, the drama of a wave or stock market crashing). Substituting drama, here, narrows consideration from any piece of writing towards those texts with inherent theatrical

García-Rivera turns foregrounding into a theological aesthetic principle for “lifting up the lowly.” Encounters with beauty invite action toward the good. “The aesthetic sign ‘calls’ the heart to discern original Beauty so that it may orient itself towards a Beautiful end [and] does this through the analogical imagination which foregrounds or ‘lifts up’ the discerning heart from the ‘lowly’ Beautiful (God’s humbling of absolute power) to its loving origins in Beauty (the full glory of God’s absolute power)” (190).

⁴³⁵ “Although the tradition created by a great actor, director, or musician remains effective as a model, it is not a brake on free creation, but has become so fused with the work that concern with this model stimulates an artist’s creative interpretive powers no less than does concern with the work itself. The performing arts have this special quality: that the works they deal with are explicitly left open to such re-creation and thus visibly hold the identity and continuity of then work of art open towards its future” (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 119).

⁴³⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 386.

potential in performance. *Drama points towards a performance as its meaningful realization.* In other words, the event of performance actualizes drama's meaning because drama exists (has its being) in the self-presentation of play.⁴³⁷ So the interpretive work of theatre is a human and co-creative endeavor that actualizes meaning in the present as a surplus superadded to the drama through an aesthetic event of play, its performance. "A drama really only exists when it is played, and ultimately music must resound."⁴³⁸ To really encounter drama's meaning requires performing it.

The being of drama occurs in the event of its self-presentation through play. Only in play can drama be truly meaningful in the present. Gadamer goes on to show, by linking *Truth and Method's* review of play, the aesthetic tradition, and a transcendental theory of language, that the event of understanding is aesthetic and immediate: sensual, existential, and arresting. Understanding ambushes.

When we understand a text, what is meaningful in it captivates us just as the beautiful captivates us. It has asserted itself and captivated us before we can come to ourselves and be in a position to test the claim to meaning that it makes. What we encounter in the experience of the beautiful and in understanding the meaning of tradition has something of the truth of play about it. In understanding we are drawn into an event of truth and arrive, as it were, too late, if we want to know what we are supposed to believe.⁴³⁹

The freedom and temporality of Gadamer's account of understanding are important. Understanding precedes cognition. This is the constructive payout to Gadamer's comprehension of the fore-structures of knowledge and inescapable prejudice.⁴⁴⁰ Play cannot be applied as a tool or method any

⁴³⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 310.

⁴³⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 116. Earlier in the same page paragraph he makes explicit connections to religion and divine revelation in and through ritual: "The performance of a play, like that of a ritual, cannot simply be detached from the play itself, as if it were something that is not part of its essential being, but is as subjectivity and fluid as the aesthetic experiences in which it was experienced. Rather it is in the performance and only in it—as we see most clearly in the case of music—that we encounter the work itself, as the divine is encountered in a religious right" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 116).

⁴³⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 490.

⁴⁴⁰ "The recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust. In light of this insight it appears that *historicism, despite its critique of rationalism and of natural law philosophy, is based on the modern Enlightenment and unwittingly shares its prejudices.* And there is one prejudice of the Enlightenment that defines its

more than a real, mutually vulnerable conversation (or an adventure into “undiscovered country”) can predetermine its outcome. The event of understanding does not predetermine the outcome of any hermeneutic encounter. Interpretation, in the human sciences, begins with an open-ended question rather than a testable hypothesis. Gadamer concludes that there is no possibility for any unifying sure and certain method for interpreting truth in the “human sciences” (the *Geisteswissenschaften*, the humanities). He distinguishes a positive view of the scientific method as a technique of certainty from a position on the scientific method as a pathway to truth.

Thus there is undoubtedly no understanding that is free of all prejudices, however much the will of our knowledge must be directed toward escaping their thrall. Throughout our investigation it has emerged that the certainty achieved by using scientific methods does not suffice to guarantee truth. This especially applies to the human sciences, but it does not mean that they are less scientific; on the contrary, it justifies the claim to special humane significance that they have always made. The fact that in such knowledge the knower’s own being comes into play certainly shows the limits of method, but not of science. Rather, what the tool of method does not achieve must—and really can—be achieved by a discipline of questioning and inquiring, a discipline that guarantees truth.⁴⁴¹

For Gadamer, the event of understanding is an existential encounter towards truth. Truth emerges freely in dialogue, inquiry, and discovery. Questioning is precisely the spontaneous and self-sufficient character of truth that reflects (but is not co-identical with) the freedom and autotelic nature of play. Gadamer rightfully shows (and von Balthasar will develop a theological version of this idea in his theology of splendor) that understanding finds its free and spontaneous (i.e., playful) expression through the experience of the beautiful via the immediacy of event.⁴⁴² Gadamer writes,

That being is self-presentation and that all understanding is an event, this first and last insight transcends the horizon of substance

essence: the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power” (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 270, emphasis original).

⁴⁴¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 490-491.

⁴⁴² Von Balthasar will develop a theological version of idea develop in his theology of splendor. For a fuller treatment of von Balthasar and Gadamer, see Jason Paul Bourgeois, *The Aesthetic Hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hans Urs von Balthasar*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

metaphysics as well as the metamorphosis of the concept of substance into the concepts of subjectivity and scientific objectivity. [...] The metaphysics of the beautiful can be used to illuminate two points that follow from the relation between the radiance of the beautiful and the evidentness of the intelligible. The first is that the appearance of the beautiful and the mode of being of understanding have the character of an event; the second, that the hermeneutical experience, as the experience of traditionary meaning, has a share in the *immediacy* which has always distinguished the experience of the beautiful, as it has that of all evidence of *truth*.⁴⁴³

The event of understanding encounters a performance of the self-presentation of being playing out in the world. Interpretive work, therefore, enlivens the being of meaning as a surplus. The performance of meaning presents itself through the play of interpretive work.

§3.5 Theses on the Characteristics of the Interpretive Work of Theatre and Performance

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics contributes the language of play and the importance of performance history to the discussion of interpretive work. I can now add these six characteristics of *theatrical* hermeneutics that correspond to the numbered list at the end of §3.3 above).

- 1) The interpretive work of theatre and performance is a human (that is, existential, historical, embodied) and co-creative process that interacts with preexisting materials (i.e., drama, playscripts, texts, situations). Theatrical terminology can call these preexisting materials "given circumstances."
- 2) The interpretive work of theatre and performance is reflexive insofar as it presents meaning through play and forms habits, skills, dispositions, and identities. Performance histories connect over time in meaningful traditions (including the performed continuity of a self).
- 3) The interpretive work of theatre and performance refers as readily to the ordinary drama of everyday life (on analogy to work with natural resources) insofar as drama "illuminates

⁴⁴³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 485, emphasis original.

human existence.” The interpretive work of theatre and performance also refers to the performative interpretation that plays theatrical drama.

- 4) The interpretive work of theatre and performance generates surplus meanings that adds to the literal (and literary) meaning of the drama without ever exhausting the drama’s (the text’s) interpretive potential.
- 5) The cycle of the interpretive work of theatre and performance does not stop after the completion of a production. As in (3), any drama can be interpretively reworked again and in new directions. This new interpretation cooperates and sits within a performance history. Like in Ricœur’s hermeneutics of vivification, theatrical terminology can call this new interpretation a “revival.”
- 6) The interpretive work of theatre and performance can be commodified (e.g., showbusiness) and automated (e.g., film) at the risk of a human cost and the alienation of labor.⁴⁴⁴

The hermeneutical situation of performative interpretation also adds the following three characteristics to the interpretive work of theatre and performance:

- 7) The interpretive work of theatre and performance happens as a live event.
- 8) The interpretive work of theatre and performance points to activity (that is, playing) as drama’s performative ontology. Drama only becomes meaningful as theatre when transformed into its structure as a play through performance.

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt, ed., Harry Zohn, trans., (New York: Schocken, 1969), 217-251.

- 9) The interpretive work of theatre and performance requires the co-operative interpretive work of all present. Spectators are implicated in the event of the play as the players of the role of the spectator.⁴⁴⁵

§3.6 Science, Disenchantment, and Myths of Demythologization

Time spent paying attention to an extended review of Ricœur's interpretation theory and its Marxian take on surplus value makes abundantly clear the *worldly* nature of interpretive work. According to the theory I have suggested, there is nothing magical, miraculous, alchemical, or supernatural about theatrical interpretive work.⁴⁴⁶ Theatre and performance work with stuff in the world in order to produce surplus meaning in performance. Theatrical surplus meaning exists autonomous from the stuff used to produce it, so plays can be reinterpreted and reperformed in an infinite number of ways. Drama always presents more than one possible reading because theatre realizes itself in the play of performance.

I now turn to the dramatist who transformed Marx's call for workers to seize the means of production into a theatrical mandate for audiences to notice and participate in the means of theatrical production: Bertolt Brecht. At the same time, I also continue themes of interpretive work by investigating Hans Urs von Balthasar's interpretation of Brecht. Brecht's dramatic theory symbolizes, for von Balthasar, the constriction of modern "science" as an Enlightenment ideology: the reduction of the world to materiality and political expediency devoid of any potential for mystery or meaningful depth. The problem goes beyond disenchantment, but it certainly begins there. Materialism presents a world fully contained within itself, a world that can only be properly interpreted through technology's measurements, precision, and dissection. Von Balthasar's

⁴⁴⁵ Augusto Boal dubs an audience aware and ready of its capacity to become part of the action "spect-actors" in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985).

⁴⁴⁶ Some of these words, especially "alchemical," belong to the theatrical theories of Antonin Artaud. See his essay on alchemy and theatre in *Theatre and Its Double*, 48-52.

hermeneutics, here, align closely with Gadamer's. To be an interpretation that understands the phenomenon interpreted, an interpretation that encounters otherness as a potential site for a revelation of truth, hermeneutics cannot disentangle the whole in order to reconstruct it as a sum of its component parts. If Ricœur is right to call hermeneutics a practice of revivification, that which animates a whole with the uniqueness of its life gets lost in any deconstruction for its own sake.⁴⁴⁷ (Deconstruction in the service of greater discovery—particularly when disclosing unsaid or unrealized distortions of ideology by noting unintended resonances, highlighting deferrals of completed meaning—forms the cornerstone of any critical thought that takes language's power to the disclose the world seriously.) Seeing the form radiates something excessive of the material phenomenon. For von Balthasar, glimpsing such splendor is akin to witnessing (finite) form's participation in the (infinite) glory of God. Prevenient disenchantment precludes the possibility of such a revelation. Transcendence gets swallowed by technical mastery, and this can include the relevance of beauty or goodness or truth to modern life. So thoroughgoing is this devotion to modern science's explanatory powers that the antiquated notion of God can no longer compete. In Ricœur's terms, any "truth" about God can only be encountered according to *verstehen*-understanding because God is not a measurable or finite thing to be *erklären*-explained. By the end of the trilogy, von Balthasar fears the incomprehensibility of his cultural theology in the face of technology. "But where is the famous 'point of contact' with the *anima technica vacua*? I for one certainly do not know. Some table rapping, a séance or two, some dabbling in Zen meditation, a smattering of liberation theology: enough."⁴⁴⁸ The offensiveness of von Balthasar's complaint in its willful

⁴⁴⁷ D.C. Schindler's example from a seminar remains seared in my memory. Deconstructing a clock can yield lots of knowledge about how a clock's internal component parts work together to make a clock tick. Taking the clock apart and putting it back together (properly) explains much about the wonder of clockwork. Dissecting a frog, too, will yield much understanding about how a frog's internal component parts work together to make a frog tick. But one cannot put back together a dissected frog and expect it to spring back to life.

⁴⁴⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Epilogue*, Edward T. Oaks, S.J., trans., (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 11.

misunderstandings of non-European spiritualities and concerns for social justice have been rightfully corrected elsewhere.⁴⁴⁹ What remains of interest is von Balthasar's seemingly quite justified anxiety about television and technology.⁴⁵⁰ His *anima technica vacua* anticipates, too, the screen-temporality of the smartphone age. The world's ordinary enchantments cannot measure up.

An even deeper problem, for von Balthasar, is the malaise imposed by scientism's compulsory demythologization of Christianity. Any project to demythologize the world will eventually plunge it into despair. I quote the great demythologization manifesto by Rudolf Bultmann at length to show the problem science and technology pose to scriptural and theological accounts of the "drama of salvation."⁴⁵¹ The attacks on von Balthasar's favorite themes of the Christ's descent into hell or the symbolism of heaven will be immediately apparent.

Man's knowledge and technical mastery of the world have advanced to such an extent through science and technology that it is no longer possible for anyone to seriously hold the New Testament view of the world—in fact, there is no one who does. What meaning, for instance, can we attach to such phrases in the creed as 'descended into hell' or 'ascended into heaven'? We no longer believe in a three-storied universe which the creeds take for granted. The only honest way of reciting the creeds is to strip the mythological framework from the

⁴⁴⁹ Todd Walatka foregrounds the possibility to compatibility between von Balthasar and liberation theological themes about preference for the marginalized and concern for economic justice. *Von Balthasar & the Option for the Poor: Theodramatics In the Light of Liberation Theology*, (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017).

⁴⁵⁰ Earlier, von Balthasar reviews the catechetical dilemma of television. "Now whether this concluding word has much to say for catechesis and for the teaching mission of the Church in the face of the kind of society and civilization as we encounter them today I sincerely doubt. The slogan is much bruited about these days that we should try to meet modern man 'where he is'. According to one report, 'In America an adolescent by the time he has reached the age of seventeen has on average sat in front of a television set for 15,000 hours, the equivalent of almost two full years.' Here in Europe, according to a recent study, children even as early as three- to six-year-olds sit before the TV screen on average of five to six hours a week, and ten- to thirteen-year-olds devote more than twelve hours a week to it" (Balthasar, *Epilogue*, 10).

⁴⁵¹ Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, Hans Werner Bartsch, ed., (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), pp. 1-44. The translator's preface announces "No single work which has appeared in the field of New Testament scholarship during the way years has evoked as much lively discussion as Bultmann's original manifesto *New Testament and Mythology*" (*Kerygma and Myth*, vii). My argument will not present a full treatment of Bultmann considering larger developments in his approach to the biblical witness. My aim is to showcase an example that grounds von Balthasar's objection to what he perceives in the rhetoric of demythologization as a technique for making Christianity credible. Bultmann would readily agree that scientific ideologies also occlude access to the kerygma and all historically contingent worldviews must be continually reevaluated in tension with the biblical witness. See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Kendrick Grobel, trans., (Waco: Baylor, 2007), and *New Testament & Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, Schubert M. Ogden, ed. and trans., (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984). For a more expansive approach to Bultmann's theology (in dialogue with Barth) see David W. Congdon, *The Mission of Demythologizing: Rudolf Bultmann's Dialectical Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015).

truth they enshrine—that is, assuming that they contain any truth at all, which is just the question that theology has to ask. No one who is old enough to think for himself supposes that God lives in a local heaven. There is no longer any heaven in the traditional sense of the word. The same applies to hell in the sense of a mythical underworld beneath our feet. And if this is so, the story of Christ's descent into hell and of his Ascension into heaven is done with. We can no longer look for the return of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven or hope that the faithful will meet him in the air (1 Thess. 15ff).⁴⁵²

On the surface, Bultmann's argument makes intuitive sense when framed as a challenge to credibility. The world-picture that aligns with biblical symbols no longer coheres to the human experience of the world mediated through scientific knowledge, and any reliance on a disproven cosmological narrative undermines the credibility of the Christian message (*kerygma*). A revelation of God that depends on myth must be mere fantasy because any smattering of mythology contaminates religion and so helps to prove the arguments against religious ways of life like the ones often ascribed to Marxism. Such mythological traditions obfuscate the world that enlightened science reveals. The credibility of Christianity's facts wavers when theology sets itself against rational discovery.

Von Balthasar agrees with part of the diagnosis. The Church must adjust its articulation of the Christian *kerygma* if it is to retain any meaning in the present. The "development of doctrine" accounts for such changes to theological interpretation across history.⁴⁵³ Certainly, cloudy and angelic harp accompanied heavens that depict Baroque churches, Valhalla, Olympus, Elysian fields, even Dante's "Empyrean" cannot be considered co-identical with the skies whose movements confound geocentrism and whose crystalline shell can be propositionally shattered by space shuttles.

⁴⁵² Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," 4, emphasis original.

⁴⁵³ The notion of the development of doctrine does not portend any change in the subject matter (e.g., God's self-revelation) of theological interpretation but describes changes in the mode in which that subject matter is interpreted and taught across history in the context of a tradition. If theology is rightfully understood as hermeneutics, the development of doctrine reflects the expansion of theological interpretation into new existential, historical, and cultural contexts. The doctrine is surplus to the reality doctrine teaches. This increase necessitates development. A corollary to the reality of the historical development of doctrine is the reality of doctrinal corruption or distortion. Cf. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine*, Maurice Blondel, *History and Dogma*.

Von Balthasar's problem will not be with the emergence of historical criticism of the Bible, and his problem is certainly not the existentialist picture of the human interpreting person like the one learned from Heidegger.⁴⁵⁴ The project of demythologization (when framed as the "modernizing" Christianity) introduces a standard for theology that evacuates theology's drama because of its fundamental reasoning: that the world is only and fully comprehensible through anthropocentric interpretations.⁴⁵⁵ The whole of von Balthasar's theodramatic retelling of salvation history could be called a response to Bultmann's prompt against the possibility of a critical (therefore modern and credible) theological interpretation in light of scientific discoveries, "man's knowledge and technical mastery of the world." The physics of the "three-story universe" of the New Testament world-picture can be jettisoned as an insufficient explanation of the created world as it is existentially encountered. So too, however, von Balthasar joins other *ressourcement* theologians to reject the metaphysics of the *duplex ordo* between nature and grace as an insufficient explanation of the created world as it is existentially encountered. Theology's interpretation of the event of God's self-

⁴⁵⁴ On the centrality of Heidegger and the question of being to von Balthasar's theology, see Oliver Davies, "Von Balthasar and the Problem of Being," *New Blackfriars*, vol. 79, no. 923 (1998): 11-17. Davies identifies the aesthetic-contemplative "weakness of von Balthasar's ontology then is its very strength. By making Being an expression of the cosmic *pulchritudo*, weaving it into the threads of the narrative, placing it in glorious suspension between the self-impooverishment of the individual called to holiness and the Creator God, von Balthasar makes of Being an icon: beautifully fashioned, richly adorned" (16). Davies goes on to locate his critique to be that von Balthasar has built his ontology "upon the contemplative, or knowing, aspect of this whole of the Christian person, while a kenotic ontology will be predicated upon the perspective of action" (17). The aesthetic-contemplative mode of Balthasarian ontology becomes kenotic and dynamic in its dramatic-active mode in *Theo-Drama*. Von Balthasar does not seek to ignore the problem of historical consciousness via his dramatic theory, but finds that a discussion of hermeneutics involves the activity of the interpreting person within a lived context. Unfolding interpretations in time belong to theological dramatic theory. Cyril O'Regan discusses von Balthasar's movement beyond Heidegger in the second volume of *Anatomy of Misremembering*.

⁴⁵⁵ "The central presupposition of modernism, in a nutshell, is that every objective dogmatic proposition must be measured in terms of its suitability to the religious subject, in terms of its positive effects on and capacity to complete and fulfill that subject. To be sure, this fulfillment has to occur within the subject's process of coming to perfection; this process includes deaths and conversions of every degree and kind, which the ever-greater truth demands from the subject in order that it may become capable of embodying the objective proposition. And, of course, in relation to God, we have to understand subjectivity as pure neediness in absolute dependence. Nevertheless, whatever God reveals in this subjectivity in grace must exist in such a way and be expressed in such a way that the subjectivity is able to assimilate it to itself, and thereby to grow. The primary objection that was raised against modernism—namely, that revelation's forms of expression would thus fluctuate with the historical transformations of religious activity—is in fact less of a concern than the initial anthropological determination of the criterion for revelation" (Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, 40).

revelation can retain its depth, eschatological import, and freedom as God's self-revelation of love for the world. Bultmann and von Balthasar share the conviction that any and all knowledge of God's self-revelation comes to be expressed in and normed by the fact "The Word became flesh" as saving activity in history.⁴⁵⁶

Von Balthasar, however, presumes Bultmann makes an assumption that technological advancements control the fate of the world and so dictate the credibility of God's self-revelation. Like Max Weber's "iron cage," an interpretation of the world driven by the spirit of demythologization ultimately dechristianizes theological interpretation by disincarnating the experience of God.⁴⁵⁷ The Christian experience is a human one for von Balthasar. He writes, "The distinctive Christian factor is that here we not only 'start from' the corporeal and sensory as from some religious material on which we can then perform the necessarily abstractions; rather, we abide in the seeing, hearing, touching, and savouring and eating of this flesh and blood."⁴⁵⁸ God's self-revelation explodes the confines of any self-generated experience, but, at the same time, convicts

⁴⁵⁶ "The agent of God's presence and activity, the mediator of his reconciliation of the world unto himself, is a real figure of history. Similarly, the word of God is not some mysterious oracle, but a sober, factual account of a human life, of Jesus of Nazareth, possessing saving efficacy for man. [...] All these are phenomena subject to historical, sociological and psychological observation, yet for faith they are all of them eschatological phenomena. It is precisely its immunity from proof which secures the Christian proclamation against the charge of being mythological. The transcendence of God is not as in myth reduced to immanence. Instead, we have the paradox of a transcendent God present and active in history: 'The Word became flesh'" (Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," 44).

⁴⁵⁷ Cf. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Talcott Parsons, trans., (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁴⁵⁸ GL 1, 306. Von Balthasar goes on to gloss Bultmann's analysis of the story of Thomas stating, "Nonetheless, the manner in which the whole theology of Christian mysticism has belittled the form of Biblical vision, taken as a whole, constitutes an alarming fact which is not to be overlooked. In view of this history, we ought not to marvel if the period of the de-fantasmagorizing of faith was succeeded by a radical period of the de-mythologizing of all sensory God-experience in the Bible, a move which had its beginnings with the Reformers, was taken up by Liberal and Idealist theology and finally perfected by existential theology. [...] If, in the story of Thomas, Bultmann sees 'a characteristic critique of the evaluation of the Easter events' which 'can claim only a symbolic value', then 'we must ask whether those who practice such de-mythologization do not also declare the testimony of the resurrection and even the resurrection itself to be merely symbolic', whether these are not being spiritualized into a purely existential event, whereby, in true gnostic and Alexandrian fashion, the corporeal and historical event is wholly being neglected. What is historical and real is sensory, whether it is perceived directly through the human senses or whether it is witnessed to as having been perceived. The *proton pseudos*, the 'primal lie,' of theology and spirituality is the naive or reflected equation (or confusion) of the human 'spirit' with the Holy Spirit, of 'abstraction' with the resurrection of the flesh, which corresponds to the tendency in Alexandrian theology to identify the Biblical 'flesh' with the Platonic 'body'" (GL 1, 308, quoting Markus Barth, [*Der Augenzeuge*]: *Eine Untersuchung über die Wahrnehmung des Menschensohnes durch die Apostel*, [*The Eyewitnesses: A Study of the Apostles' Perception of the Son of Man*] [Zurich: Evang. Verlag, 1946], p. 340).

and captivates the full attention of the interpreter. The structures of aesthetic experience and interpersonal experience point toward the experience of a revelation of God. Von Balthasar's argument presumes three qualities of God's self-revelation: 1) objectivity and gratuitousness, 2) subjectivity and unique meaning, 3) freedom in self-interpreted meaning.⁴⁵⁹ First, God's self-revelation is objective and gratuitous insofar as no creature could reveal God apart from God's decision to reveal Godself. At the same time, creatures encounter God's objective self-revelation as a gift. God need not reveal Godself to God's creatures for any reasons other than God's. Second, God's self-revelation ramifies with unique consequence for particular creatures as meaningful in their particularity. God's self-revelation simultaneously reveals the meaningfulness of God's love and the meaningfulness of creatures as loved. Third, the experience of God's self-revelation authenticates itself as meaningful on its own terms. God interprets the meaning of God's love for the world. Von Balthasar reaches for the example of a beautiful melody as the catalyst for a summary of his theology of revelation in terms of beauty and inter-subjective human love.

Such a convergence of what I cannot have invented and yet at the same time what possesses compelling plausibility for me is something we find only in the realm of disinterested beauty. Admittedly, the plausibility of all worldly beauty remains limited by the common worldly nature of the object and subject; 'attunement' and competence play an indispensable role, and thus the aesthetic, just like the personal encounter, can serve at best as a sign of Christianity. But this sign is valid to the extent that, just as in mutual human love, where the other *as* other is encountered in a freedom that will never be brought under my control, so too in aesthetic perception it is impossible to reduce the appearing form [*Gestalt*] to my own power of imagination. In both cases, 'to understand' what reveals itself does not mean to subsume it under master categories; neither love in the freedom of its grace nor beautiful in the gratuitousness of things 'to be produced' (Rilke), least of all on the basis of a 'need' on the part of the subject. Such a reduction to a 'need' would be the cynical destruction of love through selfishness; only in the acknowledgement of the pure grace of being loved can the lover also claim to be fulfilled by that love. To dispel the charm of beauty by reducing its

⁴⁵⁹ Recall from the previous chapter that, for von Balthasar, an experience of revelation can be occasioned by anything, including the parables of the secular theatre.

‘appearance’ into some ‘truth’ lying behind or above it is to eliminate beauty altogether and to show that it was never really perceived in its distinctiveness.⁴⁶⁰

Like God’s self-revelation, experiences of beauty or human love require distances of “freedom” (gratuitousness) and “distinctiveness” (objectivity). Neither an experience of the beautiful nor interpersonal relationships can be reduced to possession, coercion, or need. Despite the Kantian register of disinterestedness (another expression of free gratuity and objectivity insofar as love or beauty cannot be accidents of utility “on the basis of a ‘need’”), von Balthasar incorporates the older medieval *conveniens* (fittingness) aesthetics.⁴⁶¹ The musical metaphors of attunement and competence simultaneously elevate the importance of some formation, readiness, perhaps faith. Only an instrument that is in tune is competent to play its part. At the same time, “attunement and competence” acknowledges the expertise of the tasteful connoisseur.⁴⁶² But an experience of beauty

⁴⁶⁰ Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, 53-54. Note that the larger context is a discussion of the impossible anticipation of the finale to a beautiful piece of music, like “Mozart’s *Jupiter*” (53).

⁴⁶¹ “We can easily see that, in order for me to say that an object is *beautiful*, and to prove that I have taste, what matter is what I do with this presentation within myself, and not the [respect] in which I depend on the object’s existence. Everyone has to admit that if a judgment about beauty is mingled with the least interest then it is very partial and not a pure judgment of taste” (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 46). For Kant, universally valid aesthetic judgments (those made according to taste) cannot be motivated by interest in the pleasant qualities of the aesthetic object (despite the necessity of subjective aesthetic experience in any reference to beauty). Judging an object based on whether it is aesthetically pleasing to me “agreeable” (47) or morally worthy and “for the Good” (48) does not make a judgment of taste because it remains *interested* by some standard different from a “pure” judgment of taste. Kant argues, instead, for universally valid *a priori* aesthetic judgments to be disinterested and according to taste (154, 212). This allows Kant to locate a shared experience of beauty as a symbol of morality in taste: “Taste enable us, as it were, to make the transition from sensible charm to a habitual moral interest without making too violent a leap; for taste presents the imagination as admitting, even in its freedom, of determination that is purposive for the understanding, and it teaches us to like even objects of sense freely, even apart from sensible charm” (230).

⁴⁶² “There can be no objective rule of taste, no rule of taste that determines by concepts what is beautiful. For any judgment from this source [i.e., taste] is aesthetic, i.e., the basis determining it is the subject’s feeling and not the concept of an object” (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 79). Judgments of taste rest upon “our sensation of both the imagination in its *freedom* and the understanding with its *lawfulness*, as they reciprocally quicken each other; i.e., [taste] must rest on a feeling that allows us to judge the object by the purposiveness that the presentation (by which an object is given) has insofar as it furthers the cognitive powers in their free play. Hence taste, as a subjective power of judgment, contains a principle of subsumption; however, this subsumption is not one of intuitions under *concepts*, but, rather, one of the *power* of intuitions or exhibitions (the imagination) under the *power* of concepts (the understanding), insofar as the imagination *in its freedom* harmonizes with the understanding *in its lawfulness*” (151). The cultivation of taste, therefore, produces public habits of morality prompted by private habits of “receptivity for the feeling that arises from moral ideas...for only when sensibility is made to harmonize with this feeling can genuine taste take on a definite, unchangeable form” (232). Friedrich Schiller saw aesthetic education as a formation in culture (*Bildung*); aesthetic sensibility leads to intellectual and moral sensibilities in community. Culture (as a social expression of taste) can be taught. See Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: and, Letters to Prince Frederick Christian von Augustenburg*, Keith Tribe, trans., (London: Penguin, 2016).

is not restricted to the person of taste thanks to von Balthasar's emphasis on distinctiveness: sometimes beauty will remain implausible when "limited by the common worldly nature of the object and subject." There remains space for the subjective inability to grasp what another sees: the reality in the face of a piece of art where the learned critics see profound beauty and another viewer simply "doesn't get it." By acknowledging the necessarily human experiences of the beautiful and relationality, however, von Balthasar safeguards any reduction to a general anonymity.⁴⁶³ While beauty and human relationality can only be analogous pointing to God's self-revelation, the experience of these phenomena structure how "understanding" what "reveals itself does not mean to subsume it under master categories." The argument makes great sense of the common sense romantic advice that "every relationship is different." Relationships of interpersonal love share much, including a phenomenality ("form," *Gestalt*) similar enough to draw parallels between relationships, but every given instance of love reveals particular contours and expressions that are "distinctive" and properly incommunicable.⁴⁶⁴

The interpretation of God's self-revelation—including the interpretation of God's self-revelation mediated by the Bible—cannot be demythologized so as to cohere with the prejudicial readiness (Gadamer's fore-structures) of the human interpreter according to scientific or empirically verifiable preconditions. Demythologization, in this sense, is a restriction on God. For von Balthasar, the demythologizer challenges God's capacity to rupture human knowledge in its expectations. Demythologized interpretation predetermines (and makes historically relative) the sorts of meanings that will compel a human response. Not only must revelation fit within those

Furthermore, Schiller notes the formative power of drama in his theory of tragedy. See Lesley Sharpe, *Friedrich Schiller: Drama Thought, and Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 118ff.

Von Balthasar has Schiller in mind and quotes him earlier on *Love Alone is Credible*, 53.

⁴⁶³ Objections to "general anonymity" provide one basis for von Balthasar's rejection of Rahner's phrase "anonymous Christianity." Cf. *The Moment of Christian Witness (Cordula oder einen Ernstfall)* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994).

⁴⁶⁴ The close links between form, interpersonal human love, and beauty provide the early examples of *Gestalt* in *Herrlichkeit*. Cf. GL 1, 27.

presumptions, but none of the experiences of revelation might be shared across the historical tradition by means of some common human experience of God. The world disclosed by reading the New Testament is decidedly not the world experienced today. The argument with Bultmannian demythologization is not over whether a scientific understanding of the world matters for theology (it does!). The debate is over whether the categories of scientific knowing should set the terms for theological interpretation. Adopting the scientific explanation can still produce an interpretive surplus: the *kerygma* interpreted by and for the Christian community. Bultmann emphasizes the meaningful present-ness of Church preaching. “In the word of preaching and there alone we meet the risen Lord.”⁴⁶⁵ Theodramatic theology appeals to the illusory delights of theatre in order to re-mythologize the anthropocentrism imposed by Bultmann’s sense of the ordinary modern experience of the world. Something of mythological mystery persists despite the reign of a kind of scientific secularism. Wonder revivifies dead religious metaphors on analogy to the way the interpretive work of performance revives a well-known drama. The relationship between drama and theology, in this view, expands from the task of the preacher and catechist as an act of interpretive work. Drama functions pedagogically *within* the culture of the church according to borrowed techniques from outside. This homiletical function for drama and theology can also be seen in the ritual performance of Christian liturgies.

The “preaching” approach invites the public outcry addressed by Rahner and Tillich in the previous chapter and accusations of the willful ignorance of a closed community at best and superstition at worst. What better proof of Marx’s opiate of the people than the term “re-mythologization”? So von Balthasar knows that debate cannot remain an intermural Christian discussion about the status of biblical revelation under modern scrutiny. At the same time, von Balthasar begins by accepting the intermural difficulty Christian theology encounters in a dialogue

⁴⁶⁵ Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 43.

with theatre and performance.⁴⁶⁶ Instead, the context for theodramatics will be the audience of the wider world-stage and its public standards of credibility. Structurally for von Balthasar, theodramatics makes a shift from the homogenous public of the aesthetics and its consideration of biblical revelation to the heterogenous public of the world-stage and its consideration of theology.⁴⁶⁷ External objections to religion-as-ideology issue a strong challenge. Modernity's doubts respond to concrete abuses of ecclesial and political power. The self-authentication of God's self-revelation is a cyclical argument, and faith's interventions to enforce its authority carry swords.⁴⁶⁸ The self-authentication of God's self-revelation can be easily declined in the modern era. This is especially so by the public audience to theology's performance on the modern world-stage. The interpretive work of theatre and performance, if it is to render theology meaningful in the present, must assure theology's credibility by confronting the problem of ideological distortion. Not only is demythologization problematic for theology's meanings, demythologization will not be enough on its own to make Christian claims credible.

Drama responds differently to the problems of history and historically affected consciousness. The interpretive work of theatre and performance provides theology with a capacity to interpret God's self-revelation in light of the putative fact of God's activity in history and with meaningful consequence for temporal and embodied creatures. Theatricality suggests the model for this immediate experience of meaning. The experience of revelation cannot remain only an

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. TD 1, "Objections," pp. 51-87, and "The Church and the Theatre," pp. 89-123.

⁴⁶⁷ Internal to von Balthasar work, one sees the transition from intermural-biblical debate to public-theological debate displayed in the unwritten, but planned, final volume of *Herrlichkeit*: "We have had to spend a great deal of time on *A Theological Aesthetics*, and its ecumenical conclusions still remains to be written" (TD 1, 15). This transition presumes the pluralistic context of the modern world. A clear dramatization of the shift in magisterial Catholic thought can be found in Papal encyclicals addressed "to all people" that follows from the Pastoral Constitution "On the Church in the Modern World" addressing "the whole of humanity," *Gaudium et Spes* 2 (1965). Cf. Francis, *Laudato Si'* 4, (2015); the salutation "to all people of good will" in Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, (2009); John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* 3, (1993); the salutation "to all people of good will" in Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (1967) and *Humane Vitae*, (1968).

⁴⁶⁸ Faith, here, signals both the theological category of the gratuitous precursor for any further interpretation of God and a wider phenomenon, as in Ricœur's discussion of faith in the context of political legitimacy.

atemporal and momentary glance (the contemplation of the theological aesthetics) but must bear consequence for a life played out over time. *Theo-Drama* gives action to the invitation to participate issued by an experience of the beauty of God's self-revelation. In this sense, the relationship between von Balthasar's two "phases" of theological aesthetics can be dramatized. The first phase is the "theory of vision" which denotes fundamental theology and "a theory about the perception of the form of God's self-revelation." The second phase is his "theory of rapture" which denotes dogmatic theology and "a theory about the incarnation of God's glory and the consequent elevation of man to participate in that glory."⁴⁶⁹ Rapture is not a metaphor for a disembodied experience. God's glory manifests itself in action; the good of truth must be performed.

The *good* which God does to us can only be experienced as the *truth* if we share in *performing* it (Jn. 7:17; 8:31f.); we must 'do the truth in love' (*aletheuein en agape* [Eph. 4:15]) not only in order to perceive the truth of the good but, equally, in order to embody it increasingly in the world, thus leading the ambiguities of world theatre beyond themselves to a singleness of meaning that can come only from God.⁴⁷⁰

Perception of God's self-revelation is bidirectional activity: the drawing closer of God to the creature by means of God's self-revelation and the drawing closer of the creature to God by means of participatory action. What lingers as nebulous participation in the tone of theological aesthetics can be clarified, precisely, as co-acting on the world-stage with God in the dramatics.⁴⁷¹

A set of difficulties remains unresolved. The first is the apparent contradiction between my claims about surplus meaning and plurality and von Balthasar's assertion of a "singleness of meaning that can only come from God."⁴⁷² All translation is, of course, interpretation. This instance is a

⁴⁶⁹ GL 1, 122. Note that von Balthasar ultimately distinguishes these "phases" of theological aesthetics in order to unite them: "For it would follow that fundamental theology and dogmatic theology—the theory of vision and the theory of rapture—are, in the last analysis, inseparable" (GL 1, 123). Theological aesthetics and theological dramatic theory are, similarly, inseparable.

⁴⁷⁰ TD 1, 20, emphasis original.

⁴⁷¹ This does not equate human actors to God but demonstrates the relationship between creature and creator on the world-stage. (TD 1, 18).

⁴⁷² TD 1, 20.

particularly prescient demonstration of ironic surplus meaning. Harrison offers “singleness” as the translation for von Balthasar’s *Eindeutigkeit*. This word tracks, rather poetically in the German, with the *Zweideutigkeiten* Harrison translates as “ambiguities.” While there is a root of oneness in *Eindeutigkeit* that matches the root twoness in *Zweideutigkeit*, these words are better understood as “clarity/ambiguity” than “singleness/twoness.” Aquinas’ solution to the conflict of univocity and equivocity in analogy still holds.⁴⁷³ The implication of God’s singular meaning distorts drama’s capacity to unite via the performance of the good. There can be no “singleness” of meaning in the context of a good perceived as convertible with the beautiful that expresses the truth in its performance; to reach for “singularity” collapses distinctions that drama holds in tension. Instead, von Balthasar finds unification in God’s oneness that remains distinct from its analogy to creaturely mathematics. God’s uniqueness, unity, definiteness, and clarity of unambiguous meaning confounds finitude’s requirement that God’s meaning be in any way uniform or reductionistic. A singularity of meaning that floats above and impervious to history performs both the demythologizing gnosticism and the anti-historical anthropology von Balthasar rejects. So singleness of meaning must be the unity of the performance as a unique event.

So how might the problem of distortion in *Zweideutigkeit* seeing double be confronted? Theological dramatic theory makes an appeal to the good, to activity, to praxis. It is *performance* that does truth in love, and it is the interpretive work of performance that will demonstrate an effulgence of meaning transposable across the difference between materiality and language, scientific perception and aesthetic perception, *erklären* and *verstehen*. A theatrical style that emphasizes the event of performance by showing the means of theatrical production could, similarly, display the good by doing truth. Brecht’s epic theatre, therefore, functions as a foil to von Balthasar’s dramatic theory.

In everything that has been said in the previous two sections [on the triads of author-actor-director and presentation-audience-horizon],

⁴⁷³ Cf. ST I.i.Q13.

the voice of Bertolt Brecht has been heard in the background like a radio-jamming transmitter. We have spoken as if his radical criticism of the middle-class theatre of escapism and illusion did not exist, as if he had never replaced the dramatic theatre with the epic theatre, resulting logically in his new theory of dramatic art (that is, that it no longer consists of the actor ‘feeling himself into’ his role [empathy], but calls for a conscious distance between the two, so that the character being played is only ‘shown’, and can thus be handed over to the audience for its critical appraisal.⁴⁷⁴

Rhetorical flourishes say much in von Balthasar. To speak of Brecht as a “radio-jamming transmitter” admits the distortions that Brecht both uncovers and demonstrates. Brecht cannot be fully integrated without abandoning von Balthasar’s expressive sense of authorial unity across a life-work (what von Balthasar and his interpreters call an “ultimate attitude”).⁴⁷⁵ The interpretive work of theatre and performance presents surplus meanings even in excess of the dialectical relationship between Brecht’s dramatic literature and his theatrical techniques. Theology cannot excommunicate the facts of science any more than science should demythologize away the facts of revelation. Drama can still be credible—indeed, it must be—in modern alternations of explanations and understandings.

§3.7 Reading the Balthasarian Brecht

The discussion of Brecht does not include any references to Bultmann in the *Prolegomena* to *Theo-Drama* (indeed, Bultmann’s name is mentioned only in the context of the modern trend of “event” theology and its relationship to Biblical time’s pattern of prophecy and fulfillment).⁴⁷⁶ A similar version of demythologization’s mission structures the question of “ultimate attitude” that guides study in von Balthasar’s separately published essay on Brecht’s plays. “Does there exist an

⁴⁷⁴ TD 1, 324.

⁴⁷⁵ Christoph Schönborn, O.P., “Foreword,” *Razing the Bastions: On the Church in This Age*, Brian McNeil, C.R.V. trans., (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 118.

⁴⁷⁶ The “horizontal relationship” between Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment in time “plays no part in the thought of the young Barth or Bultmann; it was already obscured in the tragic Lutheran dialectic between ‘law’ and ‘gospel’” (TD 1, 27). Demythologization receives a more thorough treatment in *Herrlichkeit* as a contemporary Gnosticism: “From Valentinus to Bultmann, this flesh and blood has been spiritualized and demythologised” (GL 1 306, cf. 305-309).

essential substance that merely became visible in Christianity and that achieves its authentic character only now, when the husk is left behind? This is the question to which, above all, we need an answer.”⁴⁷⁷ In many ways, Brecht represents the demythologization of drama.

There are two major discussions of Brecht in *Theo-Drama's Prolegomena*. The longest appears as “Excursus: Brecht and Ionesco” and focuses on Brecht’s techniques and dramatic theory in counterpoint to the surrealist approach of Eugene Ionesco.⁴⁷⁸ In a footnote von Balthasar asserts “We are not dealing thematically with the plays themselves” and refers the reader to his separate essay on Brecht’s plays, “Bertolt Brecht: The Question about the Good.”⁴⁷⁹ A summary of that essay’s conclusions appears earlier in the volume in tandem with a treatment of Thornton Wilder.⁴⁸⁰ Both Brecht discussions bookend major developments of von Balthasar’s dramatic theory. Brecht is von Balthasar’s dramatic expression of the modern challenges to traditional religions: science, politics, ideology, and history. Acute will be the issue of atheistic materialism: evolutionary theory and communism. Interpretations of Brecht and Wilder conclude the “Objections” section as the dramatic response to “The Overwhelming Weight of Material Reality.”⁴⁸¹ Interpretations of Brecht and Ionesco bridge the double-helix triads of author/actor/director and presentation/horizon/audience to the themes of temporality, finitude, and death that are the dramatic resources which support von Balthasar’s guiding theodramatic concepts of world-stage and the transition from role-into-mission. Ionesco and Brecht become the diametrically opposed twin peaks of modern theatre.⁴⁸² Brecht “jams the signal” precisely by forcing open questions of practical

⁴⁷⁷ ET 3, 420.

⁴⁷⁸ TD 1, 324-343.

⁴⁷⁹ TD 1, 324n1, referencing “Bertolt Brecht” in ET 3, 413-460. The Brecht essay was also published in the collection by Hans Urs von Balthasar and Manfred Züfle, *Der Christ auf der Bühne*, Offene Wege 4/5, (Einseideln: Benzinger, 1967), pp. 137-82.

⁴⁸⁰ TD 1, 83-87.

⁴⁸¹ TD 1, 79-87.

⁴⁸² “A fruitful comparison between Brecht and Eugène Ionesco, no doubt the only modern dramatist in the same class as Brecht, and one who consistently opposed him” (TD 1, 332).

ethics, application, and embodiment that von Balthasar's hermeneutics of the good should, but do not, take seriously enough as a challenge to credibility. Brecht hits close to home, and he puts von Balthasar's dramatic resolution to a theology of obedience and freedom to the test.⁴⁸³

As a figure, Brecht unifies two impulses von Balthasar sees to be in opposition to Christianity. On the one hand, Brecht's scientific theatre demythologizes drama just as Bultmann's scientific sensibility demythologizes the biblical worldview. Brecht's "program" stands against any drama that incites the empathy of its players (actor and audience alike) to enchant them into a phantasmagoric escape from the reality of the world. The goal of modern theatre, by contrast, is to provoke a critical attitude.⁴⁸⁴ "It is based on the insight that science has given man power over nature, but that, so far, he has failed energetically to apply this power to the social conditions on which—whether yesterday, today, or tomorrow—man's destiny depends."⁴⁸⁵ This summary gloss on Brecht's amalgam of modern theatrics and science tips von Balthasar's hand. Scientific knowledge and its technological applications that transform the ordinary conditions of human life require adjusting (interpretive work's) presentation. Brecht's critical expulsion of empathy from epic theatre's dramatic interpretation parallels Bultmann's critical expulsion of mythology from scriptural interpretation. Where Bultmann's "scientific" interpretation of scripture requires techniques of

⁴⁸³ The theological payout for *Theo-Drama* makes sense of the dramatic confrontation between divine/infinite and human/finite freedom in such a way that the human freedom is given space to be free and not swallowed up by divine freedom into determinism. See Dalzell, *The Dramatic Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*.

⁴⁸⁴ "Brecht rejects [empathy] on the basis of a vehement critique of the (middle-class) audience's need for empathy: the audience wants to be 'transported' into a state in which it 'stares vacantly' at the stage as if 'entranced'—a term that comes from the 'middle ages of witches and clerics.' It wants to 'surrender to vague but powerful emotions', to cast aside 'all restraint', using the theatre purely 'aesthetically', as a 'means of pleasure', and looking for 'illusions rather than experience, wanting to swoon rather than to be elevated, to be deceived rather than to be enlightened'. All this, according to Brecht, characterizes the end of a period and is symptomatic of resistance to the onset of the next. But we have entered the scientific age and are thus 'challenged to adopt, not a passive stance that lacks will and rests on magic and hypnosis, but a critical attitude'. The dramatic arts may originally have come from cultic practice, but today they must 'liquidate the vestiges of their cultic past that still cling to them from former times; they must also leave the stadium where they helped man to interpret the world and enter the stadium where they can help to change it.' Thus Brecht's program is already adumbrated" (TD 1 324-325; internal quotations are from Brecht's "Short Organon" and selections from Brecht's critical writing).

⁴⁸⁵ TD 1, 325.

existential exegesis, Brecht's "scientific" interpretation of drama requires the techniques of estrangement.⁴⁸⁶ The interpretive work of performance can jolt audiences from the comfortable posture of empathy and its passive acceptance of a singular interpretation of the world.

There are a number of tactics by which Brecht's theatricality estranges its audience from the mentality of consumption. These techniques take the name *Verfremdungseffekte* or "alienation effects." I prefer Brecht's short-hand, the V-Effekt. While the standard translation "alienation effect" rightfully highlights the V-Effekt's connection to Marx's theory of alienated labor, the term undermines the affective and sensuous quality of V-Effekts in practice. These "effects of estrangement" are "making foreign effects." What is estranged, however, is not the joy of theatergoing now rendered in the modern language of "entertainment." What is estranged is the normalization of performance as enchantment. Epic theatre should be *fun*. Classic examples of V-Effekts include obvious lighting and scenery, presentational acting, stylized symbolic gesture (Brecht's *Gestus*), title cards or announcements that provide an abstract of the scene yet to unfold, musical numbers, dance, and comedy. When V-Effekts happen unintentionally one says that the actor has "broken character." V-Effekt names any intentional tactic by which the audience is made to confront the *work* of theatrical performance. V-Effekts intend to break the so-called "fourth wall" (a symbolic vestige of nineteenth century naturalism's theatrical aesthetics). In other words (and following Ricœur's theory of interpretation of a "making the foreign familiar"), Brecht's V-Effekts stalls the assimilation of theatrical work so there can be time for critical judgment. It *calls attention* to the alienation of performance's labor; the V-Effekt demythologizes theatre's commodity fetish. That

⁴⁸⁶ To display the power to transform social conditions "on the stage, both author and actor need a new technique, the technique of distanced and informative demonstration (= 'epic theatre'), and the audience needs a new approach, that is, reflection. Instead of an individualistic 'theatre of amusement' we have the socio-didactic theatre. It is no longer the feelings that are addressed, but the reason" (TD 1, 325). The critical literature on Brecht's technique is enormous. See, among many, Maurice Blanchot's essay on "The Effect of Strangeness" in *The Infinite Conversation*, Susan Hanson, trans., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 360-368, Frederic Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (New York: Verso, 1998); John J. White, *Bertolt Brecht's Dramatic Theory* (Rochester: Camden House, 2004); *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, 2nd ed., Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2006).

is, the interpretive work of players effects estrangement performance. V-Effekt make obvious the work of performance as a work triggering something like what Ricœur calls the “second naïveté” in real time. The scenery must be lifted; the actors must *do* things. In this way, alienation implies an increased distance between players and their interpretive work. This could not be further from the truth. V-Effekts lay bare the means of theatrical production and invite the judgment of the audience as co-producers of a theatrical work.

In some contexts—like in the Anglo-American tradition of musical theatre—V-Effekts have become synonymous with Broadway spectacle. In others, V-Effekts destroy the magic of theatre-going. V-Effekts *intend* to kill this sort of illusory enchantment by aiming to depict the world as it really is.⁴⁸⁷ Scientific debunking of magic provides one of the best examples of V-Effektive demythologization. Consider how V-Effekts “ruin” magic shows: they display the “gimmick” by which the illusion has been performed.⁴⁸⁸ V-Effekts make visible all the trap doors and secret magnets. Yet at the very same time, *Verfremdungseffekte* also invite the audience to imagine and play alongside the players. The Greek *deus ex machina* need be considered no different from the visible wires that fly Mary Martin as a singing and cross-dressing Peter Pan. Awareness of the technological ingenuity to make theatrical magic *adds to its pleasure*. Von Balthasar knows V-Effekts, on their own, do not destroy drama’s performance in the same way that they undo a sorcerer’s magic or the fascination of a fascist dictator. He thus likens the pantomime and Stage Manager in Wilder’s *Our Town* to the visible mechanisms and presentational performance style in Brechtian theatre-making:

In terms of world-view, Brecht and Christianity are in close competition; in both, life is seen as being full of tension, however different the two horizons may remain. Today’s polemics against the middle-class, commercial theatre shows that people still expect the theatre to be a genuine laying-bare of existence. The fact that this is

⁴⁸⁷ In other words, the political aims of epic theatre sit within what I have called the tragico-ethical trajectory of religion and theatre. Brecht hopes for the audience to have a moment of self-recognition and critical judgment about the drama of social life like the one Hamlet designs in the *Mousetrap* play.

⁴⁸⁸ I am grateful to Sean P.C. McAvoy for introducing me to the technical language of magicians.

expected of the *theatre*, with its aspects of play and illusion, and that Wilder and Brecht—to go no farther—use ‘alienation effects’ (*Verfremdungseffekte*) and desacralize the theatre, manifests the theatre’s intrinsic function, namely, to be a place where man can look in a mirror in order to recollect himself and remember who he is.⁴⁸⁹

V-Effekts “desacralize” the stage by showing its enchanting operations to be *thoroughly* human. Yet Wilder’s pantomime and actor-produced sound-effects can still point towards transcendent meaning in the world. At the same time, Brechtian Epic theatre is a continuation of the ancient or Elizabethan practice wherein the audience’s imagination co-creates the surplus meaning of the performance. Von Balthasar’s issue with Brecht is not simply that Brecht removes prestidigitation from the drama. Once demythologized, the mirror of the stage and its “laying-bare of existence” reveals a world that must be technologically mastered by seizing the means of ordinary cultural production to make the disenchanted world anew in the image of emancipated, scientific humanity.

This is where von Balthasar confronts the problem of uncritical obedience to scientism he finds latent in Brecht’s Marxism. Not only does Brecht’s sense of science desacralize a world into meaningless materiality (the *natura pura* rejected by *ressourcement* theology through Christianity’s doctrine of creation), but the organization of that disenchanted raw material must be ordered by allegiance to communist party ideology. Science both demythologizes the interpretation of the created world and also dictates that world’s transformation through human action. Resonances of Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach ring loudly: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways, the point, however, is to *change* it.”⁴⁹⁰ Von Balthasar construes Brecht’s political theatre as a pleasurable indoctrination into the communist project seen through Brecht’s devotions to the “classics (Marx and Lenin).”⁴⁹¹ Dramatists of the past have only interpreted the dramatic illumination of existence in various way, the point, for Brecht, is to use theatre to prove how the

⁴⁸⁹ TD 1, 86, emphasis original.

⁴⁹⁰ Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” *Marx-Engels Reader*, 145, emphasis original.

⁴⁹¹ TD 1, 329.

socially constructed rules of ordinary life can be examined, judged, and changed. Social dramas play out on analogy to theatrical dramas, and so theatre can teach a way of resisting ideological indoctrination by means of critical reflection.

Brecht brings these concerns together in familiar language and estranging theatrical practice when the interpretive work of theatre and performance occurs as a critique of ideological distortion. Oppressions can be short circuited, in Brecht's approach, by rendering their operations visible. The scientific age, therefore, requires a social performance that demystifies the ideologies that have oppressed humanity into subservience (to capital, to religion, to political regimes, etc.). Theoretically, one such mystification came through the cultivation of sentiment and empathy by means of drama and public spectacle.⁴⁹² One cannot judge a character's action (drama's display of doing) if one has been overwhelmed by feelings.⁴⁹³ Epic theatre forms audiences into an experience of the freedom of their own critical appraisal of a situation by distancing empathy through the V-Effekt. "The purpose of all of this, in Brecht's dramatic theory, is not to make the audience into a collective enjoying itself, but to bring the individual spectators to personal decisions: 'It polarizes the audience.' It creates 'conflict in the auditorium.'"⁴⁹⁴ Such conflict and conversation express the critical assessment of the audience in response to the play, as in the post-curtain conversations of *Doubt's* "second act." Brecht's plays unsettle spectators to prompt argument about, and eventually the transformation of, socially given circumstances rather than bask in an escapist joy.⁴⁹⁵ This freedom comes alongside a

⁴⁹² Cf. Augusto Boal's discussion of Aristotle, Machiavelli, and Brecht in *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

⁴⁹³ "In his celebrated 'two-column list' [from "The Modern Theatre is an Epic Theatre" in Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 37] in which the dramatic and epic forms of theatre are compared, the epic is said to 'compel the spectator to make decisions' (instead of producing 'feelings' like the dramatic theatre); but he also says that it shows 'what man *must* do' (instead of what man *ought* to do', as the dramatic theatre does). In the dramatic theatre 'thought determines being', whereas in the epic 'social being determines thought.' In spite of this 'must', Brecht is continually summoning the spectator to make free decisions, and the actor is supposed to distance himself from the character he is showing so that 'the audience is left perfectly free'" (TD 1, 327-328). Brecht's topic in the quoted essay are not "straight plays" but musical theatre, and the distinction between the epic and dramatic theatre addresses Wagnerian drama *specifically*. Wagner, too, lurks in the background of the Brecht excursus.

⁴⁹⁴ TD 1, 328 with internal quotations from Brecht.

⁴⁹⁵ Unlike later developments in political theatre, Brecht's plays retain the production value and process of a traditional theatre company. The audience does not move from their seats and the actors still take a bow; the play does not end, as

strong defense of obedience to a mission greater than oneself. It is precisely here, on this point of a self-giving surrender to a form of life, that von Balthasar bristles at similarities with his own theology a bit too close for comfort.

§3.8 Revolutionary Obedience and Interpretive Over-Direction

Brecht's theory of obedience to the party mission provokes von Balthasar to cite the similarities between Brecht's theatre and the Spanish Baroque and Jesuit theatre. "From very early on (1930), and increasingly over time, Brecht points to the Asian, and particularly Chinese art of demonstrative drama, and also mentions—though only for the sake of its didactic aim—both 'the medieval mystery play and the classical Spanish and Jesuit theatre'."⁴⁹⁶ A footnote complains that Brecht pays too little attention to the ways such demonstrative performance techniques (V-Effekts) "have become conventions and rituals" in Asian cultures.⁴⁹⁷ Von Balthasar objects to the dismissal of transcendence by means of Brecht's dialectical materialist paradigm, especially since it can be shown that Marxist obedience and Christian obedience (in von Balthasar's Ignatian terms) are so similar. The Marxist version must be wrong. The argument appears twice in the *Prolegomena*, always in the context of a reference to Brecht's *Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis* (1929) as well as an anecdote about Lenin learning Spanish in order to read Ignatius of Loyola in the original.⁴⁹⁸

Here, doubtless, we have the counterpart, created by Marxism's 'atheistic theatre' [Brecht, Suhrkamp, p. 174], to the Christian relationship between the creaturely human being and the summons that comes to him from the personal God and endows him with a mission. The difference here is that the personal absolute becomes an impersonal order; the program does not rest on a historical fact (Christ) but in a future that is to be created; and the total obedience, which man has to give if he is to be a true person, is rendered not by a someone who has been created free, but by a 'nobody', anybody.⁴⁹⁹

did Schechner's *Dionysius in '69*, with a parade into the streets. Epic theatre cannot be called anything less than a commercial enterprise. Brecht's *Lehrstücke*—pedagogical plays meant to be performed for workers as teaching exercises, perhaps in factories—also received *professional* productions at established theaters to international acclaim.

⁴⁹⁶ TD 1, 327, with internal quotations from Brecht.

⁴⁹⁷ TD 1, 327n26.

⁴⁹⁸ Referenced TD 1, 84 and 329 (cf. the full repetition of the *Baden Lehrstück* and Lenin story in notes 42 and 44).

⁴⁹⁹ TD 1, 329.

Disjunction between Christian and Marxist obedience redounds to the fact of the Christ and the triune God. Does vocation and mission transcend the confines of the material world to be a realization of personhood that ramifies across history (against the eschatological horizon of the resurrection), or does obedience serve an unrealized futurity (the eschatological horizon of the revolution) that anonymizes personal identity? At stake, in this question, are the dramatic resources prepared for theology: a theory of the world-stage and an account of role-into-mission in order to make theological sense of the dramatic confrontation of finite and infinite freedom. The similarities von Balthasar perceives in Brecht's eschatology and von Balthasar's own is all the more apparent in an earlier admission of closeness between the Brechtian message and the Christian kerygma in the communist teaching-play *The Measures Taken*.

Brecht's drama is one of absolute obedience...because here the communist program is taken seriously as the absolute horizon (like God's plan for salvation in Christianity), and over against it there is a real, life-size human being who has not been ideologized. The two things cannot, however, be reconciled—like Christianity's absolute obedience which goes to the lengths of Godforsakenness—and the young comrade must die. He dies consenting to the program, just as Jesus dies consenting to the 'program' of his divine Father, but the comrade's consent has to include a denial of his love for his fellow men, a denial Jesus does not need to make.⁵⁰⁰

The pattern of scientific demythologization toward desacralization and depersonalization results in catastrophe. The Christ's obedience to God the Father permits an obedience that confirms, rather than erases, humanity. The reign of scientific materialism that Brecht represents not only transforms the theatre into an indoctrination program by prohibiting its flights of fancy, but it further demands the annihilation of the very humanity it seeks to free. The obedient party members become indifferent even to themselves. "Perfect *indifferentia* now belongs simply to the requirements of discipline, justified by the fact that the plan of transforming the world that is to be realized is total

⁵⁰⁰ TD 1, 84.

and far surpasses the horizon of the individual.”⁵⁰¹ Lost is not only the emotional power of theatre, but its capacity to value the intrinsic meaning of the humanity depicted in the mirror of the stage.

Brecht fascinates von Balthasar as a grand contradiction. The beauty of some Brecht’s plays resists the anti-emotional rhetoric of Brecht’s writing to which one might add the lush entertainments of the Berliner Ensemble and anticipate the spectacle of later twentieth-century commercial theatre. The Epic theatre should not conjure *empathy*; rather, it should *entertain* and *teach*. Von Balthasar knows this; he quotes the pedagogical dictum from the “Short Organon” in a footnote: “If a person cannot teach while entertaining and cannot entertain while teaching, he does not belong on the stage.”⁵⁰² Has von Balthasar rightfully understood the pedantic Brecht? An over-direction according to a typology determines von Balthasar’s work with Brecht’s theatrical theory. I consider over-direction an interpretation that predetermines its conclusion and so resists the spontaneous discovery and transformation of a hermeneutic encounter. Over-direction undoes the autonomy of the interpreted object by refusing to learn from it. Over-direction tells the text what surplus meaning to generate. Over-direction inhibits freedom by rendering a scene partner into a vehicle and by treating a play or idea as an argumentative tool. Over-direction will not wander on a tangent or leave open loose opportunities. Over-direction overrides the co-creative freedom of the actor in response to the director’s suggestion and the author’s gift.⁵⁰³ Over-direction renders the hermeneutic encounter with an autonomous text into an expression of the author’s personal

⁵⁰¹ ET 3, 429. The theme of Ignatian indifference also appears in von Balthasar’s reading of Brecht’s poetry. “At the end of this lengthy period, Brecht is ready for some kind of absolute decision after such radical ‘exercises’, which were basically only a training in *indifferentia*. *Indifferentia* had been described for the time being as the state of standing beyond every situation is life. One is trained continually to feel and consider oneself to be a corpse—buried or floating along in seas and rivers, eaten up by fish, etc. Brecht is ‘from the very beginning / fortified by every sacrament of the dying’. For him, *indifferentia* is the *wiping-out of the face* in death, and this happens in principle in life on the basis of death” (ET 3, 419, emphasis original, quoting one of Brecht’s poems).

⁵⁰² TD 1, 326n19.

⁵⁰³ Importantly, Brecht’s own style as a theatrical director proceeded by asking questions to encourage the contribution of the actor’s interpretive work. Brecht stands as an example of practice in professional theatre where directors should avoid supplying actors with line readings as if the actors were puppets. For a discussion of Brecht’s directorial techniques drawn from conversation with members of the Berliner Ensemble, see Barnett, *A History of the Berliner Ensemble*.

identity. Brecht is not the first or only “over-directed” reading in von Balthasar. Balthasarian over-direction is not a misinterpretation strictly speaking. Over-directions present *von Balthasar’s* interpretive work as the conclusive and inevitable meaning of a text as an expression of a person’s “ultimate attitude” according to von Balthasar’s interpretive intuition. Christoph Schönborn, O.P., in his forward to von Balthasar’s self-described “programmatic little book”⁵⁰⁴ *Razing the Bastions*, summarizes the Balthasarian technique: “When, with inconceivable intensity and breadth, [von Balthasar] questions writers from the classical period to the present day—poets, mystics, philosophers, and theologians—about their ‘ultimate attitudes’, what is at stake is always the question Christ poses to each man in a wholly unique, unmistakably personal way: ‘But who do you take me to be?’ (Mk 8:29).”⁵⁰⁵ Von Balthasar’s studies are not for the sake of any general knowledge-accumulation or neutral assessment. That is, when von Balthasar cites an interlocutor, he writes in the mode of a poetic allusion rather than a transparent or taught reference. Cultural symbols give rise to theological thought.

In many senses, von Balthasar’s over-direction results from his literary and cultural application of the Ignatian injunction to “find God in all things.”⁵⁰⁶ Reading and sharing serves the fundamentally “ever-greater” purpose of elucidation in the light of the Christ. On this score, at least, von Balthasar’s disciplinary and ecclesial location (as a Roman Catholic writer outside, but in relation to, the academy) and hermeneutic goal (“the discernment of what is Christian”) are both clear.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “In Retrospect,” *My Work: In Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 51 quoted in Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions*, 7.

⁵⁰⁵ Schönborn, “Foreword,” *Razing the Bastions*, 11-12.

⁵⁰⁶ Ben Quash identifies the Ignatian resonance in von Balthasar’s dramatic theory in “Ignatian Dramatics: First Glance at the Spirituality of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *The Way*, 38 (January 1998), 77-86. “There could hardly be a better description of the *Spiritual Exercises* than this: an ‘immersion’ in revelation. This is the first big indication that von Balthasar’s dramatics are in a vital way *Ignatian* dramatics” (83, emphasis original).

⁵⁰⁷ Schönborn argues that Romano Guardini’s phrase “the discernment of what is Christian” could “serve as the heading for much of what von Balthasar wrote after the [Second Vatican] Council, for example, his *Elucidations*, his *Moment of Christian Witness*, his *Christian Meditation*. But this concern is not at all new in von Balthasar. In a certain sense, the ‘discernment of what is Christian’ is the fundamental trait of his whole oeuvre, from the *Apocalypse of the German Soul* (1937-1939) onward” (Schönborn, “Foreword,” *Razing the Bastions*, 11).

What remains muddled is how the discernment of what is Christian relates to von Balthasar's understanding of a dramatic theory. His quest for attitudinal ultimacy may be theologically and morally correct within a Christian frame of reference—care of the soul overrides care for the argument—but such a procedure creates a problem for von Balthasar's interpretation of Brecht that can be extrapolated to reveal a glitch in the theodramatic system's credibility as an interpretation theory. Where theodramatic hermeneutics promises to take seriously *dramatic being as historical activity*, von Balthasar's dramatic theory, at times, redounds to an investigation of the *idea of action expressed theatrically*. If credibility can be figured by the image of a gap, I contend that drama's credibility similarly requires the theologian become comfortable with fractures. One such fissure in *Theo-Drama's* edifice stretches from von Balthasar's over-directed interpretation of Brecht.

The problem of over-direction relates to von Balthasar's difficulty with Brechtian pedagogy: learning must be free, in a technical sense, even free to subvert the system which the lesson ostensibly serves.⁵⁰⁸ This point might easily be twisted to claim that any kind of learning automatically authorizes the lesson learned and thereby the authority of the teacher. I call this a “twisting” because learning's freedoms always occur against the horizon of truth and justice. One might easily abuse the freedom of learning in order to indoctrinate oppressions or to unlearn goodness; we know all too well the abuses of pedagogical power and traditionary authority. Those rightfully concerned with the “open-ended” nature of Heideggerian-Gadamerian hermeneutics locate precisely the ease with which this line of reflection could (and at times did) endorse fascism.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁸ On Brecht's pedagogy and *Galileo*, referencing Balthasarian themes of contemplation and action and grounding *Galileo* in Brecht's Marxist critique of religion, see Cathy Turner, “*Life of Galileo*: between contemplation and the command to participate,” *Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, 143-159.

⁵⁰⁹ See the debate regarding Gadamer's relationship to fascism in Richard Wolin, “Untruth and Method - Nazism and the Complicity of Hans-Georg Gadamer,” *New Republic*, vol. 222, no. 20, (2000), 36-45, and the response by Richard E. Palmer, “A Response to Richard Wolin on Gadamer and the Nazis,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 10, no. 4, (2002), 467-482. The well of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics may or may not have been poisoned by its proximity to the Third Reich, but everyone must agree that the Heideggerian trajectory raises some of the problems of its history. When an argument chooses to recover and deploy such unambiguously compromised intellectual lineages, that writer chooses to invite the objection of proximity as a legitimate objection. The philosophical hermeneutic

To trust the authority of a tradition in conversation does not begin by evaluating the tradition's truth, goodness, or beauty. Emphasizing tradition forestalls the ideology of novelty that disregards traditional experience simply because it was given by a tradition. Over-direction becomes acute, however, in von Balthasar's interpretation where Brecht's anti-religious "communist" program determines the meaning of Brechtian drama and theatrical technique.

It is here, perhaps, that my own weary reader will find justification for wading through the marshlands of Marxian theories of value and Weberian disenchantment.⁵¹⁰ My approach has attempted to perform the hermeneutic theory I espouse: namely, that interpretive work generates a surplus of meaning in the present and these surplus meanings are contextually portable and situated within a tradition. To invoke Marxian theories of work, in tandem with Gadamer's theory of historically affected consciousness, certainly conjures the memory of Nazi, Stalinist, Leninist, and Maoist horrors.⁵¹¹ Theories of political economy—those ways in which humans organize social life together—inherently unpleasant, abhorrent, and evil histories. Utopian aspirations need not be dashed against the rock of reality, but no social theory enters the arena of metaphysical debate unscarred by memory or the charge of wish-fulfilling projection. Historical application (a performance history) does not pre-determine the explanatory and interpretive capacity of a theory. Performance history does, however, influence credibility. While it is certainly possible to reduce Brechtian techniques to

tradition—rightly understood—provides a response to the challenge of complicity in further and critical conversation. Putting distance between Gadamer's diagnosis of inevitable prejudice (that is, pre-judgment and fore-structures of meaning as component to human understanding) and an endorsement of what our era rightfully decries as "implicit bias" requires detailed ideology critique. Such a critique of ideology is not the immediate denouncement of all authority in its formulation rejected by Gadamer as an Enlightenment "hermeneutics of suspicion." Rather, ideology critique would serve justice building ethical practices and the cultivation of emancipatory prejudices (e.g., decolonial, anti-racist, anti-patriarchal). At the same time, the ideology critique for its own sake risks the constitutive negation that swaps fascism for other oppressions (e.g., totalizing logics, unfettered corporatist consumerism, deterministic scientism, cultural hegemony). I contend such moral formation operates through critical traditions that can retain the inheritance of wonder while curtailing the perpetuation of cruelty.

⁵¹⁰ "In the same way that a marsh is drained and fertile land comes into being when the water is drawn off, so the world of Brecht, which is decaying because nothing flows out of it, becomes dry, healthy and fruitful through Marxism" (ET 3, 425).

⁵¹¹ Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

the banality of their ubiquity in mid-century French theatre or to find in Brecht only the apotheosis of communist ideology, I contend that von Balthasar recognizes but cannot canonize the importance of Brechtian dramatic theory to his own.⁵¹² Brecht's "ultimate attitude" sits close by von Balthasar's.⁵¹³ As a result, von Balthasar over-directs Brecht's dialectical materialism into crude Marxism (that is, material conditions *determine* meaning over time) rather than evoke Brecht's nuanced application of the interpretive work of theatre and performance.

The over-direction of Brecht in *Theo-Drama* is twofold: the first is that von Balthasar knows that Brecht's Marxism rejects transcendence, so von Balthasar assumes that Brechtian dramatic theory also *de facto* rejects transcendence. "Quite simply, the basic contradiction is that Brecht, as a Marxist, believes in materialistic determinism, and yet at the same time, he appeals to human freedom to decide to change the prevailing conditions."⁵¹⁴ The rules of Epic theatricality produce an educational theatre for the transformation of the performance of ordinary life. Aesthetically, this is

⁵¹² When von Balthasar's frames the debate according to the antipathy between Ionesco and Brecht he mirrors mid-century debate in France. Roland Barthes was chief among the champions heralding 'la revolution brechtienne' in an editorial to the 1955 edition of *Théâtre populaire* dedicated to Brecht. Ionesco parodied this Brechtmania in his 1956 *L'impromptu de l'Alma*. A major scene, featuring characters named Bartholoméus I, II, and III dressed as "doctors" advise on writing a new play in the "scientific" and "political" style: that is, according to the Epic theatre of Brecht. The scene concludes with an allusion to Brecht's *Lehrstück*, *The Exception and the Rule*. The first Brecht play performed in postwar France, *The Exception and Rule* written around 1930, is such a teaching play. It premiered in Paris in productions directed by Jean-Marie Serreau in 1947 at *Théâtre de Noctambules* and 1950 at the *Théâtre de Poche* in Montparnasse. Von Balthasar comments, "Reason, in this marvelous parabolic play *Die Regel und die Ausnahme* (1950), is neither communist nor Christian reason: here the divided fronts stand together against their common enemy, the egotism of man that comes from 'original sin' and naturally is wicked" (ET 438). Von Balthasar may have had the French debates in mind as he proceeds to work on Brecht. He flips the order of Brecht's title in both the original essay and its reprinting in ET 3, but the first version (in *Der Christ auf der Bühne*, 160) has the correct date of composition (1930).

⁵¹³ The separate essay on Brecht begins with a fascinating question. "What did Bertolt Brecht mean when he said 'with an ironic smile' to the convert Ernst Ginsberg, 'Take care when you discuss questions of faith with me, my friend; I am the last Roman Catholic brain?'" (ET 3, 413). Von Balthasar proceeds to provide a series of experimental answers: "the desire for order"; Catholicism's "anti-philosophical, anti-Idealistic, anti-Aristotelian" Incarnational articulation of "Truth is Concrete"; crafting as "his own scholastic" the "rational" doctrine of dramatic "revelations"; Brecht's sense of himself as the "legitimate heir of the whole 'Catholicity' of Rome, so that the communist finally does what Christianity ought to have done all the time for two thousand years but had neglected for such a long time, until it was too late?" (ET 3, 413-414). The essay goes on to argue for the final interpretation. The next paragraph admits as much: "If this [the 'Catholicity' argument] were the position—and it is in fact the face, in our opinion" (ET 3, 414). Where, however, is the sensuous and cultural Catholicism that von Balthasar so ardently defends? Where is the Catholic capacity to think, at once, both the visible sign and its invisible reality? Von Balthasar fails to notice that Brecht's "Truth is Concrete" takes seriously the ability for stuff to bear the weight of meaning.

⁵¹⁴ TD 1, 327.

not a wrong-headed interpretation; plenty of critics (including atheists in favor of communistic friendship like Maurice Blanchot!) find an emptiness in Brecht's overtly political and "pedantic" theatre.⁵¹⁵ The pleasure of the stage, on von Balthasar's account, delights in drama's illusions as they illuminate beautiful and tragic representations of the world.⁵¹⁶ Brecht's insistence on judgment, alienation, presentation, and obviousness rejects theatre's rituals of beauty. Von Balthasar identifies the problem as both teleological and aesthetic. When theatre functions properly, it dramatizes aesthetic rapture: "the seriousness of what is being enacted can be so overpowering that the spectator is seized by it and recalled to the 'authenticity' of his own existence. We cannot reprove the theatre—as entertainment and as a moral and educative institution (*Schiller, Brecht*)—for its ambivalence, since the latter characterizes itself and its self-understanding."⁵¹⁷ Where Brecht takes issue with empathy in illusion, von Balthasar wishes to praise theatre's joy in its recognition of the drama of existence. Theatrical enchantment works when the whole self is caught up into the world of the play. For von Balthasar, pedantic instructions ruin the playfulness of the play. The constant reminders about the seriousness of political decisions in Brecht's "program" also ruins drama's eschatological and religious dimension that reaches beyond the material exigencies of politics. Where

⁵¹⁵ Blanchot, "The Effect of Strangeness," *Infinite Conversation*, 363.

⁵¹⁶ "The ambivalent 'pleasure' of theatre-going (a harmless relic of the cultic age's hubris in being able to depict the 'solution' of life's riddle at the peak of an orgiastic self-transformation) is a mixture of a vigorous delight in transformation and curiosity as to what may unexpectedly emerge from such transformation. This 'pleasure' can also be described in terms of the 'excitement' of the theatre, which is again composed of the synthesis of both elements: it is the taut expectation of existence itself—hoping to discover itself in this projected form, hoping to find its own tracks—and the excited anticipation of what may be encountered along this road, what will happen either from without or from above" (TD 1, 261).

⁵¹⁷ TD 1, 249. The educational component of theatre raises the question of seriousness because of the paragraph's internal work with the category of play reminiscent of Gadamer's sense of play as the clue to the ontology of the work of art. Here, von Balthasar also finds theatre's mirror to be expressive of existence precisely insofar as the players "play" the play akin to how ordinary reality "plays" itself when interpreted as an aesthetic object: "In this regard, theatre—expressly seen as 'theatre of the world'—is an image that is substantially more than an image: it is a 'symbol of the world' [here, von Balthasar writes *Weltsymbol* and footnotes Eugen Fink's *Spiel als Weltsymbol* (Kohlhammer, 1960)], a mirror in which existence can directly behold itself. True, this relationship between the event and reflection upon it in life, a relationship which is reduplicated in the reflective spectacle of the theatre, exhibits a confusing ambivalence. But this is only the primary ambivalence of immediate existence itself. When existence beholds itself on stage, it may be that the 'game' aspect of existence, its irrationality, predominates, spilling over, as it were, from the stage into the audience" (TD 1, 249). I call the theatrical reduplication ["*redupliziert*"] of the relationship between the play of the world and theatrical play "dramatic doubling."

can the wonder of the mystics or the inspiration of holiness be found? The Christian, in von Balthasar's view, sees

himself as put on stage in a double manner in Brecht's theater: as one who has failed in his own visible form—and as the one who could succeed beyond his self, no longer a Christian, but as a 'communist' (to use this word in a nontechnical sense for once). There is no interest in a portrayal of the individual 'successful' Christians, so long as Christianity as a whole sells itself to the bourgeoisie and to capitalism, thereby depriving of usefulness the faith in God that it has hired out to others.⁵¹⁸

Heartache lingers in von Balthasar's account of Brecht's heroes who so relentlessly attack religious inspiration as an engine of war and so eloquently upbraid beauty's ethical lapses. Brecht's challenge to Christian hypocrisy lands where it most deeply wounds von Balthasar's theology: the complicity of Christian culture in real evil.⁵¹⁹ The aesthete von Balthasar appears judged by Brecht's dramatic mirror: the lover of creation's goodness forced to question the material conditions by which beautiful things come to be made, bought, and sold. Brecht's interpretive work, here, cannot be as easily avoided as common and glib iconoclastic objections to the riches of the church. At the same time, von Balthasar trips over Brecht's distaste for theatrical feelings. To call for a dispassionate theatre would be drama's greatest sabotage. Drama carries with it the meaningfulness of emotions for action, the Christian requirement to do truth in love in order to ensure that action shows forth the love of God. What good is a drama that simply entertains and teaches lessons if it cannot also enrapture and transform? Certainly, von Balthasar appears to say, Christianity can do harm but it is nonetheless the place of continuous revelations of God's beauty. Theatre and performance, too, can do harm, but plays should nonetheless be beautiful in the ways von Balthasar likes to see beauty.

§3.9 Unmasking Galileo's Conversation with a Forgotten Little Monk

⁵¹⁸ ET 3, 414.

⁵¹⁹ "Because the truth is concrete, all that interests Brecht in *Christians* is whether they take seriously their program of universal fraternal love, with its requirement that one 'give up one's life for (all) one's brothers'" (ET 3, 415, emphasis original).

I contend that von Balthasar over-directs Brecht because he cannot abide the freedom of Brecht's theatrical hermeneutics in the context of atheistic, "scientific" "freedom from" any "home."⁵²⁰ The contradiction between the power of Brecht's theatrical theory and its deep failure moments of beauty, troubles von Balthasar because this Brechtian fissure cannot be resolved. The studies of the Christian element of the major plays and "the question about the good...the final, all-decisive question Brecht poses" focuses on *St. Joan of the Stockyards*, *Mother Courage*, *The Good Person of Szechuan*, and the *Caucasian Chalk Circle*.⁵²¹ The Brechtian confrontation between science and Christianity, modern credibility and Christian ideology comes in *The Life of Galileo*. Von Balthasar reminds his reader that Brecht did not intend *Galileo* as an "anti-Christian polemic."⁵²² The Church symbolizes all ideology.⁵²³ As such, von Balthasar focuses his attention on Brecht's apparent difficulty completing the play. Galileo, too, is a representative of ideology: the ideology of science left to itself without concern or care or love for others. Balthasarian analysis consists in trying to make sense of the changes between the versions of the play that conclude with differing warnings about science, technology, and its propensity to be turned toward waging war. The final scenes of the postwar version, on von Balthasar's reading, make Galileo responsible for the devastation of the atomic bomb dropped at Hiroshima because Galileo breaks under the threat of torture.⁵²⁴ The

⁵²⁰ "At this point we must ask where Brecht's human being got this freedom, since, even before Brecht's communist period, he had been totally deprived of it in any personal sense, in favor of an impersonal chance. It was Brecht's fate to rescue himself and his human beings from all cultural addictions, but without having anywhere to go. Violently he tears himself loose from a decaying bourgeoisie, to commit himself to a socialism that, with the onset of the Third Reich, once more makes him an alien and an emigrant; in his mature years he never totally identified himself with it. It is a negative freedom, resistant to all modern fascinations: the freedom of being home nowhere" (TD 1, 328).

⁵²¹ ET 3, 440ff.

⁵²² ET 3, 414.

⁵²³ An "accusation of failure falls, not on the Church (which has failed in any case), but on the representative of the modern age. Brecht's intention is to take care 'to portray in as positive a manner as possible the princes of the Church and the courtiers. Otherwise I make it too easy for Galileo'" (ET 3, 414 quoting Brecht).

⁵²⁴ "In the face of Hiroshima, Brecht puts [Galileo's] self-condemnation into the mouth of the protagonists in the second version (1945/1946). He ought to have resisted. And now he has given the first example to a 'race of inventive dwarves who can be hired for anything' and who hand over their knowledge to those in power 'so that they can use it or not use it, or misuse it—just as it may serve their own purposes. I have betrayed my profession. A man of who does what I have done cannot be tolerated in the ranks of science.' It is not elements that can be used to make a synthesis that count but integration. Galileo has 'enriched astronomy and physics by robbing these sciences at the same time of a great

“lesson” of the play, on von Balthasar’s reading, is total obedience to the program in the face of threat. When Galileo recants his position but sends forth his discoveries in the *Discorsi*, Galileo engenders the rift between ethics and science that obedience to the cause of the revolution and social responsibility would retain.⁵²⁵ The Christian hero fails, and, in failing, von Balthasar identifies yet another Brechtian *Fable* about Marxist obedience.

But the Little Monk in *Galileo*, lover of both science and the Church, both a physicist *and* a priest, never appears as an exemplar of possible compromise. Neither in *Theo-Drama* nor in the separate essay on Brecht will von Balthasar meditate on the scene of Galileo and his pupil reading together when their debate over cruel worldly suffering and religion’s opiate appears incommensurable. Physical expression and gesture—action, perhaps even *Verfremdung*—“shows” drama’s “nontechnical communism,” workless working together that is the play of theatre.⁵²⁶

The many *unmaskings* that are undertaken in Brecht in the service of the absolute program, and which correspond to the fundamental function of his theater, ‘showing’, have only an indirect connection with our theme. Brecht shows how things are, what happens in reality, and leaves it to the spectator to draw the consequences. The showing must be objective and dispassionate and must therefore make use of alienations in order to attain its goal.⁵²⁷

part of their societal significance,’ and this ‘can be considered the ‘original sin’ of the modern natural sciences.’ But does not Brecht make an impossible demand of his protagonist, who fails and who is condemned by the author as a ‘criminal’? This is not so important as the point that Galileo must furnish the model of the way in which ‘the ethics of the new age’ lays claim to the *whole* man, the integrated existence that must become the witness—and, if necessary, the witness in blood—to the indivisible, total demand. Mere specialization is dilettantism, and the consequences are Hiroshima” (ET 3, 434-435, quoting Brecht).

⁵²⁵ “Galileo makes a decisive contribution to the ‘new age’. But his contribution is only scientific, and his personality is not integrated with his contribution. He is a gourmet (something that Brecht does not take amiss in him on principle), but worse than this, he is resolved (as cheating with the Dutch telescope shows) ‘to take the easy path and to make use of his reason in a base way and in an exalted way’. His investigations come more from the thirst to know than from a sense of responsibility; thus he takes the easy path in his recantation too; he makes use of the advantage gained from his recantation to write the *Discorsi* and to bring the copy of them secretly into a foreign country through his pupil Andrea. [...] [Brecht, in the second version,] has the old Galilei destroy this all too beautiful, cheap myth [of recanting for justifiable reasons]: he recanted because he was afraid of torture, and continued work was a yielding to the urge to know (‘he pursues his science as if it were a vice’), not a yielding to a sense of social responsibility” (ET 3, 434 quoting Brecht).

⁵²⁶ This sense of workless-ness as nontechnical communism points toward ideals of friendship, community, perhaps even the experience of the Christian church in Blanchot and Lacoste.

⁵²⁷ ET 3, 436, emphasis original.

Brechtian style—this need to show, to unmask, to display without sentiment or illusion the work of theatrical performance—can *only* serve the Marxist “absolute program.” Von Balthasar never treats the removing of a mask as a sign of mutual vulnerability or the gift of showing one’s face as a revelation of self against anonymity. The mask is always coterminous with the face so there is no room to set aside anonymity as an act of hospitality. Brecht’s V-Effekts, too, extend the interpretive work of the stage toward the audience. Any reading of the V-Effekt as humble gift of hospitality goes against the grain of Brecht’s theory, to be sure, but it presents a theological opportunity. Symbolically, the removal of a mask cannot be too far from von Balthasar’s sense of divine kenosis as radical solidarity, glossed even in the context of a Brecht as “Christianity’s absolute obedience which goes to the lengths of Godforsakenness.”⁵²⁸ Brecht inverts the power of the dramatic revelation. Rather than display ultimate authority in the animation of a disguise (as when a human medium *becomes* the god in Greek tragedy or Artaud’s sense of Balinese theatre), some risk accrues in disclosing the unshielded and vulnerable human face.⁵²⁹ The proclamation of the centurion, “Truly, this man was the son of God,” responds in Balthasarian terms to the kenotic profundity of divine unmasking, the theodramatic laying bare of God’s willingness to reveal love in and through the death on the cross. In a materialistic frame, one sees the affinity for a kind of kenotic “death of God” theology.⁵³⁰ Balthasarian theological realism, instead, points toward a transcendent and divine reality as it persists in excess and beyond its unmasking. Brecht’s “‘Christianity’ *lying beyond historical Christianity*” might be theologically rendered as the infinite and divine truth that endures beyond fallen and finite meaning-making.⁵³¹ The giving over of the mask of divinity (in human death)

⁵²⁸ TD 1, 84.

⁵²⁹ Bouchard, *Theater and Integrity*, 336-338.

⁵³⁰ Discussions of the “death of God” and the “pain of God” appear at length in TD 5.

⁵³¹ ET 3, 420, emphasis original.

becomes, for von Balthasar, the cruciform measure of God's self-revelation as a radiance of glory.⁵³² To be God in solidarity with humanity is to be the God who can dispossess the false glories of worldly power in order to display the glory of God's kenotic self-gift.

Unmasking certainly implies demythologization, and this is why any evaluation of von Balthasar's interpretation of Brecht must be called an "over-directed" rather than "incorrect" reading. But Brecht's V-Effekts are not a metaphorical unmaskings. They are really performed stage effects. V-Effekt unmasking does not stop the show or the interpretive work of performance. Consider the links that von Balthasar drew between Brecht's V-Effekt and the Stage Manager and pantomime in Wilder.⁵³³ For Brechtian unmasking to stop the play of interpretive work would mean that any V-Effekt simultaneously stops the show or pauses time. A V-Effekt only "breaks character" in the Stanislavskian sense of disrupting the illusion of a poetic reality distinct from ordinary materiality in the stage picture. V-Effekts operate, however, within a wider theatrical aesthetic (that is, Epic theatre): to intend a V-Effekt is to make it part of the *mise en scene*, to make *obvious* the co-creative interpretive work of theatre and performance as an element of drama's self-display. In order to interpret an unmasking as symbolically relevant to the meaning of the play, however, von Balthasar would need to take seriously the surplus meaning of embodied performance. Brecht's theatre is about entertainment and education as it "unmasks" the operations of power. A teaching

⁵³² "The descent of God's love to the Cross is already its very glorification" (GL 1, 464). This is only possible because the incarnation of the Christ, as fully human and fully divine, indicates the only perfect coincidence of finite form and infinite meaning. The Christ is the measure by which all beauty is measured: "The interior attunement, proportion, and harmony between God and man in Christ-form raises it to the level of an archetype, not only of all religious and ethical, contemplative and active behaviour, but equally of the beautiful, regardless of whether this is agreeable or not to the person with a creative aesthetic sensibility and regardless of all the questions that may be raised concerning the 'aesthetic imitation' involved in following such an archetype. For this beautiful object *is* revelation: it is the beauty of God that appears in man and the beauty of man which is to be found in God and God alone. This is not beauty which draws things into unity in accordance with an abstract scheme of 'infinity and perfection', 'emanation and encapsulation', but in the precise and unique mode of the Incarnation. What perfection and infinity really are for man, what emanation and encapsulation, self-surrender and being caught up really are, what 'transfiguration', 'deification', 'immortality' really are and what all the great words of aesthetics signify: it is in the Christ-form that all of it has its measure and its true context" (GL 1, 465, emphasis original). Cf. GL 1, 455-468.

⁵³³ TD 1, 86.

scene demonstrates the surplus meanings of interpretive work that von Balthasar neglects. These meanings only emerge in *performance*, however, because the scene displays the competition between scientific and religious interpretation that can be transcended in “nontechnical communism” and being present together.

This alternative vision of pedagogy undoes the obedience theory that von Balthasar assumes to be Brecht’s Marxist “ultimate attitude.” I have shown that von Balthasar fixates on Brecht’s inability to find a satisfactory ending for *The Life of Galileo* that could match up to the absolute communist program of the subservience of personal identity to the proletarian cause with a “credible consistency” (most perfectly displayed, and decried, in Brecht’s *The Measures Taken*).⁵³⁴ This makes sense, too, of von Balthasar’s interpretation of the revised conclusion where the achievements of Galileo’s physics appear to march inextricably to the hydrogen bomb. Yet ideology is polysemous in *Galileo*. Drama indicates a freedom beyond such demythologized and fated reduction of the world to materialistic determinism by pointing beyond the play to a surplus meaning: the one performed.

Scene 8 is “A Conversation.” At best it signals a side-quest on Galileo’s hero’s journey. Its simplicity allowed it to be played in front of the curtain during a scenic transition.⁵³⁵ Despite how Brecht constantly edited the play, Scene 8’s “general direction, and much of its dialogue, have remained constant since the first typescript,” with only a few additions over time.⁵³⁶ After the V-Effekt poem that describes the content of Scene 8, it begins with Galileo berating the Little Monk for the freedom afforded by his religious costume: “The habit you’re wearing gives you the right to

⁵³⁴ TD 1, 331n49. The conclusions of the discussion of Galileo from the Brecht essay are summarized in this *Theo-Drama* footnote: “The most shattering document of this vulnerability [a sense of communist tragedy emblemized by *The Measures Taken*] is Brecht’s *Galilei*, whom he wanted to make into an ‘epochal’ character in Hebbel’s sense, a man responsible for the rising technology that would transform the world. In spite of his three subsequent versions and interpretations he did not succeed in giving the play a credible consistency. The hero with the personal conscience, standing against the age in which he lives, becomes a criminal responsible for the atom bomb, and finally the cowardly egoist who prefers to keep his skin rather than persist in the truth. The ethical value of the action initiated is determined by its success” (TD 1, 331n49).

⁵³⁵ Brecht, *Galileo*, 175.

⁵³⁶ Brecht, *Galileo*, 175.

say whatever you want.”⁵³⁷ In the previous scene, we saw the Church put astronomical discoveries on the Index of Forbidden Books, and that outward appearance (mask, costume) signify, but do not totalize, individual identity.⁵³⁸ A habit-costume is the sign of a religious form of life that contains a personal vow of obedience but expresses an outward political freedom. The opening line is anything but accidental; themes of religious costume, freedom, and identity permeate the play, including the Pope “dressing” sequence to come in Scene 12.⁵³⁹ The topic of their conversation is knowledge (“*Wissen*”), and Galileo and the Little Monk talk about variations of surplus meaning. Should one pursue science or follow the orders of the Church’s hierarchy? Whose knowledge does the Church seek to protect with its censorship? Does credible science conflict with the credibility of God?

The Little Monk provides a faithful account of how the Church’s theology gives meaning to the lives of those who suffer. Brecht makes it a point to tell us that the Little Monk, “decided to say an early mass and come” to talk with Galileo.⁵⁴⁰ The Monk, whose “parents were peasants in the Campagna,” grew up poor. The Little Monk’s long speech describes, “with every detail of their old worn hands”, the ordinary and cyclical toil of a peasant’s life spent washing, planting, harvesting, carrying “their baskets sweating up the stony tracks.”⁵⁴¹ The Little Monk argues that his parents’ hope, the “strength they need,” comes to them through the interpretation of their ordinary labor as meaningful on the world-stage. “They have been assured that God’s eye is always on them—

⁵³⁷ *Galileo* 8, 64.

⁵³⁸ Scene 7 is a masquerade ball that contains an exchange regarding the power of interpretation and that the “Holy Office decided that the doctrine of Copernicus, according to which the sun is motionless and at the centre of the cosmos, while the earth moves as is not the centre of the cosmos, is foolish, absurd, heretical, and contrary to the faith. I [Cardinal Bellarmine] have been charged to warn you that you must abandon this view” (*Galileo* 7, 60). Crucially, Cardinal Bellarmine also explains, “None of us seriously believes that you want to shake men’s faith in the Church” (*Galileo* 7, 61). The scene explicitly refers to the power and freedom of costume-masks. As Cardinal Barberini (who will become Pope) says: “It’s my own mask that permits me certain freedoms today. Dressed like this I might be heard to murmur: If God didn’t exist we should have to invent him. Right, let’s put on our masks once more. Poor Galileo hasn’t got one” (*Galileo* 7, 61).

⁵³⁹ The parallels between church authority, costumes, and props continue. Galileo reframes the Little Monk’s euphemism, “exceptional powers of enforcement at the Church’s disposal” to “instruments of torture” (*Galileo* 8, 65).

⁵⁴⁰ *Galileo* 8, 64.

⁵⁴¹ *Galileo* 8, 65.

probingly, even anxiously—: that the whole drama of the world is constructed around them so that they, the performers, may prove themselves in their greater or lesser roles.”⁵⁴² Nowhere in *Theo-Drama* does von Balthasar discuss this Little Monk who makes an immediate pastoral application of the *theatrum mundi* theme. The Balthasarian turn of phrase is unmistakable: “*das ganze Welttheater*.” The Little Monk’s application may be less rigorous than von Balthasar might like. This interpretation of the Monk’s parents place on the world-stage comes from the same Scripture that seems disproven by scientific discoveries: “What would be the use of Holy Scripture, which has explained and justified it all—the sweat, the patience, the hunger, the submissiveness—and now turns out to be full of errors?”⁵⁴³ The promulgation of the teachings of the physicists does harm by demythologizing the cosmic significance of quotidian suffering: “Our poverty has no meaning: hunger is no trial of strength, it’s merely not having eaten: effort is no virtue, it’s just bending and carrying.”⁵⁴⁴ Tinged with theodicy, the Little Monk articulates the consolation of church teaching. While Galileo, the Little Monk, and the esteemed Cardinals can hold together the apparent contradiction of theological and scientific interpretations, the Little Monk knows the level of theological sophistication required to ensure this dramatic tension does not collapse under its own weight. To restrict this terrifying knowledge from disturbing “the peace of mind of the less fortunate” is the Church *doing* of goodness for Rahner’s *rudes*.⁵⁴⁵

Were von Balthasar’s interpretations of the play not so over-directed by his intuition of Marxism’s materialist atheism, he might take more interest in Galileo’s response to the Little Monk. At no point does Galileo assault the dogmatic principles of God’s creation of the world or its meaningfulness to God confirmed through the mission of the Son. Indeed, Galileo’s response will

⁵⁴² Galileo 8, 65.

⁵⁴³ Galileo 8, 65-66.

⁵⁴⁴ Galileo 8, 66.

⁵⁴⁵ Galileo 8, 67.

draw on the theological anthropology of human dignity indexed to the *imago dei*: “My dear fellow, authority is rewarding me for not disturbing the peace of mind of people like your parents, by offering me the wine they press in the sweat of their countenance which we all know to have been made in God’s image.”⁵⁴⁶ Galileo’s objection is not to Church theological teaching but to the Church’s temporal action: “Your Campagna peasants are paying for the wars which the representative of gentle Jesus is waging in Germany and Spain. Why does he make the earth the centre of the universe? So that the See of St Peter can be the centre of the earth!”⁵⁴⁷ Galileo serves as Brecht’s mouthpiece with references to familiar themes of the military-ecclesial-industrial complex, but differs, significantly, in theological horizon.⁵⁴⁸ Galileo never decries the worthiness of these peasants in God’s eye or the meaningfulness of the world to God. Galileo denounces the exploitation of these peasants’ labor. Science and technology need not undermine faith but could extend and share the possibility for reflective leisure enjoyed by the princes of the Church.⁵⁴⁹ Galileo’s argument regards the abuse of authority that hoards knowledge because it unmasks the ideological abuse of temporal power. Furthermore, Galileo’s concern for the peasants is not impersonal and indifferent against the eschatological horizon of utopia. Instead, science could reduce suffering now and so *expand* the conditions of peasants to achieve the Little Monk’s possibility to be both “priest” “and also a physicist” and Galileo’s possibility to be scientist and “a son of the Church.”⁵⁵⁰

So where might non-contradiction between theological and scientific knowledge and mission derive? Galileo turns to poetry and theological aesthetics. Brecht provides a drama of critical

⁵⁴⁶ *Galileo* 8, 67.

⁵⁴⁷ *Galileo* 8, 66.

⁵⁴⁸ Compare the role of the Christian hypocrisy in *Galileo* to *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

⁵⁴⁹ “Virtues are not the offshoot of poverty, my dear fellow. If your people were happy and prosperous they could develop the virtues of happiness and prosperity. At present the virtues of exhaustion derive from exhausted fields, and I reject them. Sir, my new pumps will perform more miracles in that direction than all your ridiculous superhuman slaving. —‘Be fruitful and multiply’, since your fields are not fruitful and you are being decimated by wars” (*Galileo* 8, 67).

⁵⁵⁰ *Galileo* 8, 67.

reconciliation through learning. Galileo, upon announcing his familial membership in the Body of Christ that is the Church, adds an aesthetic register to his ethics. Galileo cites a hypothetical change to Horace's poetry as an analogy for the church's censorship. When the elegance of creation cannot be expressed in accord with its truth, scientific interpretation no longer reflects the fact of creation's beauty. "Sir, it offends my sense of beauty if my cosmogony has a Venus without phases."⁵⁵¹

Though admittedly also demythologization against superstition—"I can't calculate the courses of flying bodies in such a way as also to explain witches taking trips on broomsticks"⁵⁵²—Galileo's argument for the "truth" appeals to a Balthasarian theological logic. An interpretation of God's self-revelation cannot be deemed true if it offends the beauty of the world and the goodness of creation. Galileo aims to augment one explanatory mythology, the geocentric universe, with another, the explanations of science. The problem is not that Galileo's astronomical and scientific progress disproves the teaching of the Church, but that restrictions on applying the benefits of scientific discoveries for the sake of maintaining a socio-economic and metaphysical status quo challenges the goodness of the Church's practices.⁵⁵³

The conversation between Galileo and the Little Monk reaches an impasse. Galileo asks, "I see your people's divine patience, but where is their divine anger?" to which the Little Monk replies, "They are tired."⁵⁵⁴ The conversation seems to be going in circles: poor material conditions are bearable only because of the very ideology that maintains that political order. At the same time, a violent and sudden disclosure of the truth would take away both ideology's oppressions and its comforts. This is all the more dangerous, within the theological paradigm espoused by both Galileo

⁵⁵¹ *Galileo* 8, 68.

⁵⁵² *Galileo* 8, 68.

⁵⁵³ Similar to von Balthasar's interpretation of Brecht's general sense of Christianity: "But the fact that Christians are caught up in a capitalist ideology and praxis—which Brecht demonstrates in many passages—means that they fail vis-à-vis their own program (which is that of the Sermon on the Mount) at the decisive moment" (ET 3, 416).

⁵⁵⁴ *Galileo* 8, 68.

and the Little Monk, as any abandonment of the faith risks the eternal salvation of these hard-working peasants.

Galileo does not emphasize the theological side of his own argument, but there is an element of education required to hold both scientific and theological interpretations of the universe at once: “unless they get moving and learn how to think, they will find even the finest irrigation systems won’t help them.”⁵⁵⁵ Critical thinking goes in three directions in this scene. First, critical thought regards the capacity to look at the world and interpret it empirically according to the rules of science (Ricœur’s *erklären*, scientific explanation). Second, critical thought regards the capacity to interpret the world in light of its human meaning (Ricœur’s *verstehen*, humanistic understanding). Third, again, is the dramatic situation of the question of critical thought. Galileo thus challenges the *audience* to learn the style of critical thinking that can be suitable for a priest and who is also a physicist. The dramatic question of being can only be resolved in the surplus meaning that is encountered as an event played-out before the audience. This conversation can find its resolution only through action.

The end of the scene produces a surplus meaning in performance that achieves an escape velocity from the circular orbit of the debate between scientism’s ideology and religious ideology, ethics and theology, *erklären* and *verstehen*. Galileo throws the censored books at the feet of the Little Monk and taunts him as he voraciously reads from the forbidden “apple from the tree of knowledge! He’s wolfing it down. He is damned forever, but he has got to wolf it down, the poor glutton.”⁵⁵⁶ The simultaneity of the play’s themes of gluttony, vicious knowledge, and biblical symbolism seem to crescendo toward a victory for Brecht’s supposed atheist materialism. Given von Balthasar’s interpretation, the scene should end with the Little Monk abandoning his habit and “betraying” the ideology of the church as an “unmasking” of theology as a smokescreen for

⁵⁵⁵ *Galileo* 8, 68.

⁵⁵⁶ *Galileo* 8, 68.

capitalist violence. The V-Effekt of the Little Monk removing his habit as he reads to reveal that he had worn the costume of a modern scientist underneath the whole time would make perfect sense. The Little Monk, after all, displays the same sinful self-motivated “desire to know for its own sake” that damns Galileo and the world at Hiroshima. But the scene ends with a very different sort of unmasking. Vitriol and argument give way to a scene of ethical teaching and the hospitality to learn, and the surplus meaning of performance overrides the impossibility to resolve Ricoeur’s dialect polarities of *erklären* and *verstehen*. Charles Laughton’s translation adds a stage direction to the end of the scene (now appearing as Scene 7) without changing any of Brecht’s words. This stage direction displays the surplus meaning of interpretive work and the capacity for the co-presence of modern and critical theological interpretations of scientific knowledge:

LITTLE MONK (*immersed in the manuscript*) I don’t understand this sentence.
 GALILEO I’ll explain it to you, I’ll explain it to you.
 (*They are sitting on the floor*)⁵⁵⁷

The choice, a realist dramatic action only *visible in performance*, does the interpretive work to frame Brechtian unmasking akin to von Balthasar’s theology of self-emptying gift. The Little Monk and Galileo share co-equal vulnerability and status symbolized by their physicality, their *gestus*. The scene turns attention to reading, learning, and discovering together as people. Sitting characters mirror, too, the sitting audience. If Epic theatre works properly, the audience must now grapple not with mathematical formulae but with their own masks of power and authority. The scene, two unpowerful Christians trying to make sense of God’s self-revelation in the beauty of the cosmos, offers a scene of theology in public. This moment not only displays the Brechtian contradiction but could transcend it by means of theatrical performance’s interpretive work.

I contend the reason von Balthasar cannot fully integrate *Galileo* into his treatment of Brecht’s “program” is the play’s credibility as a modern drama of the tension between forms of

⁵⁵⁷ Brecht, *Galileo*, 233.

modernization, demythologization, and theatrical experiment. Both science and the Church proclaim a totalizing ideology that, if left to their own power grabbing, risks a conflagration that will consume “us all.”⁵⁵⁸ Brecht’s play is a dramatic vita for the sainthood cause of Galileo Galilei, the martyr for a faithful and critical modern church. The drama asks questions about the good greater than explanations available in the systematic eschatology of demythologized dialectical materialism von Balthasar ascribes to Brecht’s writing. The play is as much a caution about Christian and scientific ideology as it could be directed to be about Marxism. The Christian theologian can call into question the reduction of the world to its materiality exemplified by the Marx on Christian grounds, but Brecht’s Marxism is not so reductionistic in *Galileo*.⁵⁵⁹ The laying-bare of existence by Scene 8 is not the Eureka discovery of theological or theatrical illusion. Scene 8 is a mirror that reveals a community gathered telling stories made ever richer through the performances of surplus meanings that can be taught and shared without being consumed by any single interpretation, a passive audience, or a billowing mushroom cloud.

§3.10 Conclusion: V-Effekts and Sacramental Theological Realism

⁵⁵⁸ The poem that introduces the final scene invokes the disaster of science’s weapons: “May you now guard science’s light / Kindle it and use it right / Lest it be a flame to fall / Downward to consume us all. / Yes, us all.” (“*Hütet nun ihr der Wissenschaften Licht / Nutzt es und mißbraucht es nicht / Daß es nicht, ein Feuerfall / Einst verzehre noch uns all / Ja, uns all.*”) (English: *Galileo* 15, 110).

⁵⁵⁹ One could argue along with Walatka that the same pattern reflects von Balthasar’s engagement with liberation theology. Von Balthasar’s objection to the Marxist paradigm that undergirds liberation theology mirrors his objection to the Marxist paradigm that undergirds Brecht: the problem is the assurance of the human capacity to change the world on their own and reliance on an atheistic sense of responsibility. The problem, of course, is that decrying any ethical responsibility sanctions lifestyles imbedded in systems of oppression. Walatka demonstrates that “Balthasar’s theological work needs to be reformed in light of the option for the poor. It is a strength of Balthasar’s thought that it is able to be reformed in this direction, and it is the argument of this book that it is only in such a reworking that Balthasar’s vision becomes internally consistent, more attentive to the shape of divine revelation, and more responsive to the challenges facing the Church in every age” (Walatka, *Von Balthasar & the Option for the Poor*, 20). Walatka goes on to argue, “In the concrete, the way forward for the Church is provided in part by the praxis and teaching of Jesus. It is further supported by engagement with the actual situation of the poor, that is, real knowledge of their suffering, its structural causes, and their pursuit of justice and liberation” (209). Ultimately, “Pushing Balthasar’s theology to engage more deeply the realities of structural violence and sin and the need for concrete transformation in history does not entail backing off from his fundamental theological commitments” (211).

The purpose of this engagement with the interpretive work of theatre and performance has been to clarify two key components to the correlation between drama and credibility. The first key component is that theatrical hermeneutics deal in surplus meanings created through a co-creative engagement with a drama whose reservoir of potential meanings not depleted by interpretation. The product of performance is the surplus meaning made by theatrical interpretive work. Performance presents the ontology of the drama as act, and this event is what comes to be interpreted. Furthermore—and crucial for an application of these categories to Christian theology—surplus meanings do not destroy the object of interpretation. Surplus meanings explode outward from the text, but they do not consume it. The drama can be taken up and played again and again without any loss of its originality. The second key component is the presentation of the ontology of the drama as act also makes meaning *differently* from the drama's words. Performance ontology changed the “is” of the third “being” in Hamlet's dramatic question and turns the conversation between Galileo and the Little Monk outward towards the audience. So too, performance ontology can hold difference in tension. Drama argues against a reducibility to pre-determined singularities of meaning. Theatrical hermeneutics present incommensurable articulations sitting together. Scientific methods and critical humanist dialogue hold each other up. Drama *doubles*, and it is in an encounter with the performing double that one finds meaning in the present.

Interpretive over-direction forestalls this discovery, and von Balthasar's literary reading of Brecht's intention to perpetuate the communist program avoids *Galileo's* profoundest lesson for theodramatic hermeneutics. Demythologization and modernization should not presume to constrict God's capacity to reveal Godself. This is not, however, to say that a rejection of the world (symbolized as Church-ideology in *Galileo*) safeguards theological “truth.” The same Counter-Reformation double-think that affirms Galileo's faith but denies his science will affirm the hypothesis of a natural world devoid of God's grace. The trajectory from Brecht's “new theatre” to

the *nouvelle theologie* appears on von Balthasar's page but remains underdeveloped. After linking the *Verfremdungseffekte* of Wilder and Brecht as theatre's inescapable function as a mirror of human existence, von Balthasar supplies the Christian interpretation as to why the materialist reduction of science (be it demythologization, Marxism, or atheism) leads only to despair.

Cut loose from its origin and goal (which is 'supernatural'), creaturely existence would be bound to appear tragic in its immanent structure, and the perfecting structure—in God's becoming man—would both set its seal on this tragic dimension and bring it to an end. Erich Przywara, in a perceptive analysis, has uncovered this essential relationship between the tragic and the Christian. Equally, Henri de Lubac (*The Mystery of the Supernatural*) has demonstrated this insoluble 'paradox' of spiritual existence and distinguished it with great precision from contradiction and dialectic. Existence has a need to see itself mirror (*speculari*) and this makes the theatre a legitimate instrument in the pursuit of self-knowledge and the elucidation of Being—an instrument, moreover, that points beyond itself. As a mirror, it enables existence to attain ultimate (theological) understanding of itself, but also, like a mirror, it must eventually take second place...to make room for the truth, which it reflects only indirectly.⁵⁶⁰

Drama, therefore, does not *stop* debate regarding "ultimate (theological) understanding" but *starts* it.

Like Brecht's desire for a critical consciousness in the audience, drama displays the nature of existence ready for interpretive work to generate surplus meaning. This requires theologians to abandon certain kinds of interpretive work when its surplus meanings negatively distort their argument. Brecht becomes the signal-jamming representative of the modern condition and in dialogue with Christianity. So too, Brecht's vision of co-presence on stage produces meanings in excess of the script. Brecht's sense of theatrical materiality meaning more than just stuff rhymes with von Balthasar's *ressourcement* concerns about an already-graced nature. The fact of Christianity, taken as a given for theological work, discards even the hypothesis of *pure nature*. From Brechtian dialectical materialist realism (a longwinded description of the performance style in Epic theatre) we discover

⁵⁶⁰ TD 1, 86.

the groundwork for a theological dramatic style attentive to the surplus meaning of interpretive work and materiality: sacramental theological realism.

Ressourcement instincts can be applied to Marxian scholasticism as well as Aquinas by modifying a theological slogan: “There is no such thing as a ‘pure base.’”⁵⁶¹ Thought cannot imagine the economic base without ideological superstructures like language and philosophy. The materialist idea where “base determines superstructure” should be read to describe logical rather than ontological priority. A more dialectical approach sees the interpretive framework of “base and superstructure”—materiality and ideology, creation and grace—working always simultaneously in relation. Sacramental theological realism does not emphasize spirit competing against nature, but it understands materiality sacramentally as mediating signs of grace and assurances of God’s reality. Sacramental theological realism can be articulated in dialectical materialist terms: cultural frameworks (such as language) condition the interpretation of materiality from the start, even though material conditions remain logically and ontologically prior to acts of theological interpretation. A real, autonomous object (e.g., the raw material of the tree, a dramatic script) begins the chains of interpretive work that will generate surplus meaning. So too *theology* operates as an interpretation of revelation made visible in the form of creaturely materiality. Theological meaning derives from analogical or correlational reference to religious symbols, but the human experience of material and cultural conditions come first. Acts of interpretation generate surplus human and theological meaning.⁵⁶² Theological knowledge is given as a supernatural surplus to materiality. That is, theology happens during and through human experiences of the world God has created and to which God

⁵⁶¹ I allude, here, to the theological dictum drawn from de Lubac and Rahner: “there is no such thing as a pure nature.”

⁵⁶² Practices of theological interpretation may be further interpreted as co-operations with grace in the work of the Holy Spirit to ensure analogical coherence between familiar finite referents and the infinite otherness of God (e.g., by following doctrine taught by the historical church or expanding theological interpretation from Schleiermacher’s religious feeling of absolute dependence or grounding theology Bultmann’s Lutheran account of preaching or doing theology according to the pattern of Barth’s *analogia fidei* or the Balthasarian *analogia entis*). At the same time, practices of interpretation might be interpreted *materially* (e.g., according to Berger’s “methodological atheism” for religious studies) to be acts of human imaginative speculation on the basis of purportedly religious materials and symbols.

has revealed Godself. Theology happens according to the pattern of a sacrament where worldly materiality mediates supernatural knowledge. Ricœur, Brecht, and von Balthasar all emphasize that the credibility of an interpretation includes the simultaneous recognition of a real material thing and a real surplus of meaning. Sacramental theological realism asserts its interpretations will only work if an interpreter suspends disbelief in materiality's capacity to mediate a shared and really knowable meaning. All the stuff presented on the world's stage must be credible despite how uncertainty prompts anxiety about the meanings of performance.⁵⁶³ If everything on the stage of the world has meaning, what then is the meaning of the world-stage? How can stuff become scene partners too?

⁵⁶³ Tillich takes a different approach to the same question. The symbol of the Christ correlates to the problem of human existential estrangement. Anxiety at being in the world finds ground in the symbol of God as ultimate concern, and one develops "the courage to be" by looking to the accessible manifestation of the New Being: Jesus the Christ. "If there were no personal life in which existential estrangement had been overcome, the New Being would have remained a quest and an expectation and would not be reality in time and space" (Tillich, *Systematic Theology II*, 98). It is not enough for Tillich that the Christ is this manifestation. Assuaging existential estrangement also involves "the believing reception of Jesus *as* the Christ." "Without this reception the Christ would not have been the Christ, namely, the manifestation of the New Being in time and space" (Tillich, *Systematic Theology II*, 99).

IV: STAGE AND SCENOGRAPHY:

Triptychs, Naturalism, and Ecological Crisis with Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*

Stage Directions for Chapter 4: *Environment influences action, both for von Balthasar's theology and for the interpretive work of theatre and performance. In what setting does drama happen? Theo-Drama shows a way to make sense of the surplus meanings that generate from everything visible on the world-stage. This chapter takes seriously the aesthetics of the backdrop according to a theatrical discipline called "scenography." At the same time, Aesthetics form the argumentative backdrop to Balthasarian Dramatics prior to Logic. Seeing the forest for the trees can be difficult, but applying theodramatic scenography can expand von Balthasar's relevance for a crisis with ecological questions. A visit to see *Uncle Vanya* helps to imagine what naturalism does for the meaning of the world-stage as a shared home.*

§ 4.1 Homeward Bound

Time spent with Brecht recognizes how theatrical materiality highlights von Balthasar's own performance anxiety. The interpretive work of theatre and performance generate surplus meanings that go beyond self-contained expectations.⁵⁶⁴ Anything that enters the stage presents both itself as a finite and material object and the many roles that it plays. According to the Chorus from *Henry V*, an audience's interpretive work will "Into a thousand parts divide one man." In the context of a play, a wooden table might become a stage for a big speech. A wooden table might even play the role of a bed, a shack, a balcony, a sailing ship. Play endows the table with the surplus meanings of performance, but theatrical interpretive work never erases the table's use-value as a table. The same structure can apply to theatrical and liturgical tables.⁵⁶⁵ I called this dramatic doubling, a process that raises credibility questions about appearance and identity. I symbolized dramatic doubling in the apparition of a dubious ghost. Drama raises questions about credibility that relate to theatrical interpretive work's origin, ethics, and application. That is, drama and credibility turn like Galileo to

⁵⁶⁴ "An idea of God which overcomes the conflict of naturalism and supranaturalism could be called 'self-transcendent' or 'ecstatic'" (Tillich, *Systematic Theology* II, 5).

⁵⁶⁵ "A true priest is aware of the presence of the altar during every moment that he is conducting a service. It is exactly the same way that a true artist should react to the stage all the time he is in the theatre," (Konstantine Stanislavski, *Building a Character*, Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, trans., [London: Bloomsbury, 2013], 216).

interlocutors and ask them to look for themselves and “go by the evidence of your eyes.”⁵⁶⁶

Performance anxiety resists the demand for active and co-operative interpretive work. Will my eyes perform properly? Will I see what I am being shown? Or will performance distract and dissemble rather than make an effective and affecting argument that is convincingly credible? Performance is a mode of interpretation, but performative interpretations may do something *artistic* or *poetic* that belongs to a different disciplinary genre from the interpretive work appropriate for critical scholarship. Performance anxiety reflects not only the longstanding antitheatrical bias that makes drama a problematic scene partner for Christian thought, but also the feeling of discomfort (Brecht’s alienation) that accompanies religion and theatre as a multidisciplinary enterprise. Writing about performance is odd because writing must testify to embodied experience without any guarantee that the reader takes up the active event of reading as interpretive work. (Reading Ricœur’s “mute text” is never passive unless you have already fallen asleep.) Performance anxiety wonders how to act once a crisis breaks epistemological molds.

Rhetorically, the idiom “breaking the mold” usually praises a particularly innovative and change-making achievement trading on the same markets as corporate “disruption” and shattered “glass ceilings.” Corporate institutions do not truly mean to echo “start-up culture” in these entrepreneurial calls for rhetorical failure. Bottom-line reprisals against costly and failed experimental ventures can prompt fear, paralysis, and stagnation in business.⁵⁶⁷ Idioms that “fail fast” fail to attend to their aftermath: useless cracked molds, disrupted radio static, or a floor full of glass shards. But the *ressourcement* movement of the twentieth century proves that some glass ceilings need to be broken in the same way that Galileo’s orbiting satellites cracked the heavenly crystal spheres. Some

⁵⁶⁶ *Galileo* 4, 41. “GALILEO: I am used to seeing the gentlemen of the various faculties shutting their eyes to every fact and pretending that nothing has happened. I produce my observations and everyone laughs: I offer my telescope so they can see for themselves, and everyone quotes Aristotle.”

⁵⁶⁷ I am grateful to Tara E. Powers for her review and explanation of how these metaphors can be perceived and play out in corporate workplaces.

theological and cosmological textbooks need to be rewritten.⁵⁶⁸ A theological picture that ignores the “signs of the times” will not be credible. Both the “epic” approaches of von Balthasar and Brecht can be called disruptive; von Balthasar, after all, referred to Brecht as a theodramatic “radio-jamming transmitter.”⁵⁶⁹

Crises disrupt life at home. A crisis turns ordinary expectations for life upside down in ways that cannot be ignored. How does drama respond to the credibility of a crisis? In political theory, the ideology of crisis (whether crisis is real or a spectacle of crisis gets manufactured) can fill up Ricœur’s “credibility gap” between a claim to authority and its legitimacy.⁵⁷⁰ Crises assert their own credibility by preempting any need to make the decision to pay attention. Untold traffic jams can be blamed on eyes drawn to watch a scene of crisis unfold on the other side of the road. A crisis is an emergency that demands immediate attention and action. A crisis is dramatic by nature.

This chapter turns to a crisis *of* home. The economic concerns of the previous chapter’s engagement with theories of value transpose into an ecological register. The theodramatic symbol of the world-stage can illuminate environmental questions about the material things that populate the scenery of life, what Pope Francis calls “our common home” in the title to his encyclical *Laudato*

⁵⁶⁸ MATHEMATICIAN: Let’s not beat around the bush. Sooner or later Mr. Galilei will have to reconcile himself to the facts. Those Jupiter satellites of his would penetrate the crystal spheres. It is simple as that.

FEDERZONI: You’ll be surprised: the crystal spheres don’t exist.

PHILOSOPHER: Any textbook will tell you that they do, my good man.

FEDERZONI: Right, then let’s have new textbooks. (*Galileo* 4, 41).

⁵⁶⁹ TD 1, 324.

⁵⁷⁰ Crises raise a familiar question from the study of sovereignty wherein government actors can suspend ordinary rules by proclaiming a state of emergency. Carl Schmitt, in *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, George Schwab, trans., (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), defined sovereignty as the capacity to determine exceptions to the *status quo*. The sovereign is “he who decides the exception” (5). Giorgio Agamban’s *State of Exception*, Kevin Attell, trans., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) develops this idea into his theory of a sustained “state of exception.” Once recognized as an emergency, the crisis floods the “credibility gap” and legitimizes the expansion of authority by denying the capacity to object. Other issues must wait until the crisis has ended.

Si.⁵⁷¹ Ecology, economics, and house share a common Greek root: *oikos*.⁵⁷² Von Balthasar's theological *ressourcement* dramaturgy implies the importance of the entirety of the theatrical experience for theological dramatic theory. If it is right to say that von Balthasar's dramaturgical "program notes" are part of the ensemble's interpretive work (as I argued in chapter 1), then it is also right to say that the house of theatre matters for theological dramatic theory. "Opening the house" is the theatre industry's term for the moment when audiences are welcomed with interpretive hospitality into the theater space. A large crowd is "a full house." To darken the places where the audience sits in order to focus attention to the drama on stage requires dimming the "house lights." Theology attending to *der ganze Theater Komplex* also must include these environments surrounding, encompassing, and constructing the world-stage.⁵⁷³

In theatre, environmental concerns are also aesthetic concerns. The action of the play will be framed by the artistic choices of designers. This includes the design of the house in how the auditorium's architecture influences the choices of the actors and directors. A play done "in the round" will do its interpretive work differently from a play on a three-quarter thrust stage from a play framed by naturalism's preferred proscenium arch and curtain. Like von Balthasar's athletic metaphor for the *Prolegomena* at the start of *Theo-Drama*, how a designer builds the "scaffolding" conditions possibilities for gymnasts and actors.⁵⁷⁴ Designers also make particular choices for the set, lighting, costumes, and props for every given production. New worlds of meaning can be opened

⁵⁷¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, 84. Promulgated on 24 May 2015. The full text of the encyclical is available online at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html. "Our insistence that each human being is an image of God should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God. The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those memories does us much good. Anyone who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink, or played outdoors in the neighbourhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of their true selves" (84).

⁵⁷² I am indebted to Larry Bouchard for his suggestion to frame this chapter according to *oikos*.

⁵⁷³ *Theodramatik I*, 9.

⁵⁷⁴ See §1.5 above for a discussion of von Balthasar's three organizing metaphors for the relationship between drama and theology at the start of the *Prolegomena*.

and disclosed by changes in costume and scenery without making any changes to the drama's script. Scenography refers to the environmental artistry that projects the world of the play onto the world of the stage. Determining how these artistic choices of set design produce surplus meaning in the composite experience of the play's performance shows why aesthetics matter for dramatics.

This chapter uncovers the scenographic and ecological implications of theological dramatic theory by making sense of *Theo-Drama's* place within its environments as the middle panel of a theological triptych and the credibility dilemma of climate crisis for the play of non-human scene partners on the world-stage. At the end of the last chapter, I argued that von Balthasar and Brecht could be more closely aligned to see how they share the dramatic style of sacramental theological realism. This chapter attends more closely to von Balthasar's preferred theatrical style: naturalism. I demonstrate how von Balthasar appropriates the Russian master of naturalism, Konstantin Stanislavski, as the norm for theatrical interpretative work. The chapter concludes by bringing together its themes of theodramatic scenography, the meaning of the natural world, and Stanislavskian kenosis by reading a naturalistic drama about a house: Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. The play emphasizes surplus meanings generated through work, labor, and play in a common home. The forest need not be enchanted for the trees to have meanings for theodramatic scenography, and von Balthasar believes "There is something sacramental about Stanislavsky's method."⁵⁷⁵ *Uncle Vanya* helps emphasize the ecological implications for *Theo-Drama's* backdrop and setting.

Human civilizations constantly confront an impending ecological crisis.⁵⁷⁶ An ecological crisis fits our established criteria for drama: high existential stakes with lasting consequence

⁵⁷⁵ TD 1, 289.

⁵⁷⁶ At time of this writing, ecological crisis can be located primarily in the phenomenon of climate change. For this reason, I will use "ecological crisis" and "climate change" interchangeably. But the phrase "ecological crisis" expansively relates just as readily to the visible rise in extreme weather events, global pollution and air quality concerns, management for human, toxic, and rare earth mineral waste, political confrontations over land use and water rights, access to clean energy and transportation infrastructure, and the competition between human economic development and planetary ecosystems. A socio-political approach to the ecological crisis directly relates environmental concerns to an ongoing migration crisis and the exponentially increased impact of climate change on the world's poor. I frame "ecological crisis"

compressed to a short amount of time. One cannot disregard the urgency of global ecological questions because the world's dramatic situation informs all decisions and impinges all ways of life. In this way, the ecological crisis reveals an aspect of the correlation between drama and credibility. A crisis demands attention, so an available tactic to undermine a crisis' credibility will be denying its existence (e.g., "climate change is a hoax", "calm down, there is nothing to worry about"). One denies drama in order to avoid engaging with it.

§4.2 Triptych, Systems, and Environments

Theo-Drama is not a self-described eco-theology or even a very "green" text. The image of the world-stage never fills out to refer to the theatre of creation because more emphasis gets placed on the people who take the stage (the *dramatis personae*) than the stage itself, yet theodramatic hermeneutics intervenes to see environmental concerns as central to Christian thought. Denying ecological crises makes a theological mistake. The drama of an ecological crisis demands theology take the world-stage's own existence and the surplus meanings of its performance into account. Any theology must take stock of the stage conditioned by the dramatic situation. Put another way, theodramatic hermeneutics includes reflection about the meaning of environments and setting as a part of its interpretive work. Getting clear about the meaning of the world comes before making any moral judgments, ethical pronouncements, or policy proposals about how to act ecologically.

This chapter construes environments in relation to drama and credibility in two ways: the first is methodological and the second is ecological. There is an environmental component to theological and theatrical interpretation that filters through aesthetics.⁵⁷⁷ In this sense, the

as a perennial crisis because one always pays attention to the weather, and the understanding and organization of one's home (*oikos-logos*) denotes a universal aspect of human being in the world.

⁵⁷⁷ "If we identify coherence with a loose and notably inconsistent completeness, we reach the artistic representing of environments, a representing pressed so far that the poem actually *is* an environment. This view would assert that there are two external real worlds, the one we daily walk around in (or drive cars thought), and the one the environment-poet has invented. Both would have equal shares of the real—equal shares of Being. This view blurs the sharp distinction between fictions of fact and fact itself, but the point is that such poems are not *about* the environment." (Angus Fletcher, *A New Theory for American Poetry: Democracy, Environment, and the Future of Imagination*, [Cambridge: Harvard, 2004], 242).

environment refers to the aesthetic dimensions of surplus meaning generated in performance. In the case of *Theo-Drama*, an environmental component of interpretation regards its setting at the center of the theological triptych. How does *Theo-Drama* relate to its own framing between *Herrlichkeit* and *Theo-Logie*? The second way investigates the environmental component to theodramatic hermeneutics. In this sense, environment refers to the role of ecological questions and the doctrine of creation. How does theodramatic hermeneutics make ecological concerns credible in the midst of a Christological Trinitarian theology? These two senses of environment express the central metaphor of the world-stage.

Concern for the credibility of the environment in the midst of an ecological crisis recalls the relational character of performativity. The relational ontology of performance extends to the whole world. For von Balthasar's theological *ressourcement* dramaturgy, the ontological primacy of relationality radiates from the primary relationship between creature and Creator. All material things are creatures that were created by God. No-thing exists apart from a relationship of origin with the divine. The theatrical analogy conceives something similar. In a theatrical production, nothing

Angus Fletcher's work on poetry and the political entanglement of environment and imagination approximates frames a few of the terms at work in my investigation of von Balthasar's latent ecological theology. Poetic language invites natural imagery. "There is no more striking index to the nature of poetic language as distinct from discursive language, than the fact that poetry seems unable to exert its expressive and representing powers without using naturalistic terms. What we usually call poetic imagery tends to be derived from myriad fundamental images of nature, such as the rising moon or setting sun, rushing rivers, wind-blown branches of trees, and all the distinctive movements and appearances of animals. We are nature's fabulists, and it seems that no poet can write strongly without recourse to natural imagery" (2). The "environment poets" discover "a limited but true knowledge by means of making the rounds in search of the perpetually vanishing traces of our having passed this way. In a scientific sense this poetry is always self-organizing and nonlinear..." (237). Looking to find ecology in theodramatic scenography returns to von Balthasar to ask questions about the stage after the show ends. Fletcher intuitively feels that much of the slow creep of ecological disaster derives from a failure of the imagination. So too would missing the implication of the meaning of the world-stage. While his study focuses on the poetic connections between environments and politics, "A more extensive treatment would allow me to show that many conflicts today considered political are actually *environmental* conflicts, which need to be treated as such" (14, emphasis original). Fletcher's reading of Walt Whitman anticipates the relationship between environment and aesthetics I find to be at work in von Balthasar's theological dramatic theory: "Climates, in fact, absorb us. The problem of climate and also of environment is that they resemble the galaxy: they are a soup of sameness and difference. In them, differences are absorbed by the recurring sameness. To express these relations, Whitman shifts vista into *vision*." (96).

happens alone. Performance restricted only to oneself identifies a rehearsal.⁵⁷⁸ Finding credibility in the role of the environment requires extending this notion of relation to non-human actors as legitimate players in the drama. Ecosystems describe the radical interrelationship between plants, animals, humans, things, and places. Every creature relates “all the way down.” These relations operate prior to any substantive account of an individual; to be an individual means to be individuated in relation to otherness, so individuality derives from more fundamental entanglement with relation.⁵⁷⁹ Relational ontologies presume that being can be imagined only according to interconnection.⁵⁸⁰

Ecological crisis brings about an interpretive problem in addition to all the usual concerns about biodiversity, extreme weather, economies of scale, and ways of social life. Thinking with environments requires finding all performances already in relation. Everything present in the room in such a way as to be noticeable performs a part in theatrical storytelling. The dictum also applies to design: scenery and set pieces, props and costumes, sound effects and lighting. Scenography names this composite sensory contribution of stage design and frames the world of the play and its given circumstances. Through scenography, directors and designs begin the interpretive work of theatrical performance by establishing moods, feelings, and tones for the event about to take place. Scenography presents the aesthetics of the play’s imaginary world. Scenography influences the actors’ decisions in rehearsal and audience expectations for performance by setting a stage for the

⁵⁷⁸ This is not to say that theatre requires an audience separate from the players, but to forestall the thought experiment objection of the actor performing for himself. In such an instance, like when practicing in a mirror, the player plays both the roles of performer *and* audience.

⁵⁷⁹ The correlation between scenography and ecology attempts to think around inherited dichotomies of nature and culture and some forms of the subject-object relationship that misunderstand the interconnections of materiality. A similar impulse undergirds Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory and Catherine Keller appeal to quantum physics in her approach to planetary entanglement in *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

⁵⁸⁰ The word “imagined,” here, reserves space for religious disagreement about the ontological status of being itself. As I have presented relational ontology, adherents to various traditions might credibly disagree on the status of being itself. Christian philosophy and Zen Buddhist philosophy might agree on “the non-possibility of fundamental independence” without needing to agree whether this non-possibility proves the relational quality of being itself or the illusion of being.

action yet to begin. Scenographic aesthetics signal genre expectations. So too, von Balthasar's aesthetics condition the possibilities for interpreting his drama. A scenographic and environmental approach to von Balthasar's theological dramatic theory clarifies the role of drama and the world-stage between theological aesthetics and theological logic. *Theo-Drama* as the middle panel of the Balthasarian theological triptych. Though von Balthasar never develops an explicit theological analogy for scenic design, it hides in the plain sight of the environments for the *theatrum mundi*.

There are variations of method in the Balthasarian madness, but the most significant is Stanislavski's so-called Method. Lee Strasberg and the Actor's Studio popularized "method acting" as a psycho-spiritual technique to tap into the depths of a character's emotional experience by informing the playwright's words with the actor's "affective memory." Strasberg's Method approach is not the only U.S. inheritor of Stanislavski's "System." Sanford Meisner's technique and Stella Adler's review of the system both took more seriously Stanislavsky's emphasis on the actor's imaginative engagement with given circumstances. For these interpreters of Stanislavski, interpretive work brings the text to life by working with the playwright's words towards an embodied interpretation on stage. The actor creatively responds to and works within the finite frame of the circumstances as given by the author's play, the stage space, the director's wider interpretive vision, and in reaction to the choices of fellow members of the theatrical ensemble. If both reception histories take up Stanislavski, what differentiates Strasberg's "Method" from Meisner and Addler's "System"? Terminological problems about the difference between method and system also plague von Balthasar's interpreters.

Theo-Drama already performs within a specific environment and its own set of given circumstances. *Theo-Drama* is the second movement of a three-part trilogy, so *Theo-Drama* carries forward conclusions reached in von Balthasar's theological aesthetics and looks forward to their

consummation in his volumes of *Theo-Logic*.⁵⁸¹ The narrative progression implied by the word “trilogy” can be misleading by favoring a linear itinerary toward a conclusion superior to its starting point. All the while, a theology of the *Logos* who is the Christ guides and roots both the words “trilogy” and “logic” in the Balthasarian project. If read in this way, aesthetics and drama “prepare” for the theological logic. We have already seen, however, that von Balthasar’s notion of the credibility of God’s self-revelation folds dogmatic theology into concerns usually set apart for fundamental theology. This trilogy continuously circles back on itself, returning again and again to a common set of organizing concerns with insights gleaned from its tangents.

The trilogy pursues a mission of reintegration according to a common task in von Balthasar’s interpretation of the infinite God’s self-revelation expressed through as many modes and timbres as finite and creaturely creativity can permit. In a trilogy, one must know the first part in order fully to understand the second, and one must know the first and second parts in order fully to understand the third. Only after encountering all three parts can one go back and begin to see how they are interconnected from the beginning. No second portion of a trilogy can ever really be interpreted on its own.⁵⁸² “Trilogy,” therefore, would describe the tripartite relations of von Balthasar’s project only insofar as they are books presented in an interrelated sequence: to read them is to move along a linear progression from beginning to end, from *Aesthetics* to *Drama* to *Logic*.

⁵⁸¹ “From first to last, the trilogy is keyed to the transcendental qualities of being, in particular to the analogy between their status and form in creaturely being, on the other hand, and in Divine Being on the other. Thus, there is a correspondence between worldly ‘beauty’ and divine ‘glory’ in the *Aesthetics* and between worldly, finite freedom and divine, infinite freedom in the *Drama*. By the same token, our task in the present theological *logic* will be to reflect upon the relationship between the structure of creaturely truth and the structure of divine truth. This reflection will set the stage for an inquiry into whether God’s truth can exhibit and express itself (in various forms) within the structures of creaturely truth. By its very nature, theological insight into God’s glory, goodness, and truth presupposed an *ontological*, and not merely formal orgnoseological, infrastructure of worldly being. Without philosophy, there can be no theology.” (TL 1, 7).

⁵⁸² This does not mean that the middle segment of a trilogy is *de facto* inferior to its other parts. For instance, many critics consider *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) to be the best of the three films in the original *Star Wars* trilogy, even though its plot presumes knowledge of the first film.

What does such a view of *Theo-Drama* mean for those who hope to read theological dramatic theory on its own terms? Surely drama must also be credible *alone* if it contributes to the distinct interpretive work of theatre and performance for Christian thought. Yet any interpretation of *Theo-Drama* must take seriously its relation to the other two parts of the trilogy. For this reason, I prefer the minority report for referring to von Balthasar's unusual project with a metaphor from visual art. *Theo-Drama* forms the middle panel of a metaphorical triptych. Unlike the implied progression of a trilogy, a triptych places three self-sufficient images into inextricable conversation.⁵⁸³ One can focus on any single panel of a triptych and derive meaning from that panel as an internally coherent whole. A strategy to calm the complexity of a triptych like Hieronymous Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* will be to study its panels in sequence before considering their work together as a whole.

Von Balthasar rarely refers to his theological trilogy as a triptych. In interviews and other publications that reference *Herrlichkeit*, *Theo-Drama*, and *Theo-Logic*, he more frequently uses the word trilogy. The strategy makes sense from a marketing perspective, and von Balthasar is his own publisher (I return to the importance of this fact in the next chapter). One better attracts audiences and readers with terms indebted to one's own argument. Marketing the triptych as a trilogy further encourages readers to finish the marathon. The theory of "seeing the form" requires that one understand the theological aesthetics and the theological dramatics in order grasp the particular intervention of his theological logic. Logic must occur in the context of existential experiences of beauty and goodness in order to capture theology's splendor and dynamism.⁵⁸⁴ One of von

⁵⁸³ Any painting or mixed media art divided into multiple sections or panels can be called a polyptych. Triptychs are polyptychs with three sections, contrasted by diptychs that have two sections or pentptychs that have five sections, etc.

⁵⁸⁴ "In order to maintain the right balance, a 'theological aesthetics' should be followed by a 'theological dramatics' and a 'theological logic.' While the first of these has as its object primarily the perception of the divine self-manifestation, the 'dramatics' would have as primary object the content of this perception—which is God's dealings with man—and the 'logic' would define as its object the divine (or more exactly: the human-divine, and therefore already theological!) *manner of expressing* God's activity. Only then would the [beauty] *pulchrum* appear in its rightful place within the total ordered structure, namely as the manner in which God's goodness (*bonum*) gives itself and is expressed by God and understood by man as the truth (*verum*)" (GL 1, 11).

Balthasar's keenest insights, however, falls through the cracks and only becomes visible at his triptych's hinges.

In synthetic essays like *My Work in Retrospect* or the prefaces at the beginning of *Theo-Drama* and *Theo-Logic* that form internal bridges, von Balthasar does not cite the titles of his triptych's panels but, rather, their special methods.⁵⁸⁵ He prefers to refer to the achievement of the *Aesthetics*, the *Dramatics*, and the *Logic*. These are the subtitles that indicate the methodology governing each section-panel of the triptych. He makes the word trilogy polysemic. His trilogy is not one story played out across three thematic episodes. Instead, the tri-logy demonstrates three interlocking *logoi* (in the Greek sense of an "organizing principle"). Each panel demonstrates one of three interdependent and convertible approaches to the theological interpretation of God's self-revelation according to the philosophical transcendentals of Being: beauty, goodness, truth, and unity. The final term, unity can only be expressed by interrelating differences into a whole. Threefold difference expressing unity insinuates the Platonic and Trinitarian framework guiding von Balthasar's approach. When von Balthasar calls his project a trilogy, he seems to mean it in the sense more clearly indicated by the word triptych.⁵⁸⁶

Unlike the innumerable uses of trilogy throughout the triptych's volumes, von Balthasar only chooses the word triptych a few times. It appears once at the start of *The Glory of the Lord I: Seeing the Form* to describe his plan of action.⁵⁸⁷ Triptych occurs three times in one section of *The Glory of the Lord VII: Theology: The New Covenant* as a description for the stories of infancy, baptism, and temptation in the desert in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.⁵⁸⁸ Triptych appears once as a

⁵⁸⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work in Retrospect*. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993).

⁵⁸⁶ I will continue to follow von Balthasar's lead by considering the terms triptych and trilogy convertible.

⁵⁸⁷ "According to the original plan, the *Aesthetics* forms first part of a triptych" (TD 1, 15).

⁵⁸⁸ The whole triptych of the appearing of Jesus is governed by an imperious propulsion of necessity, in which (both in Matthew and in Luke) the direct divine will acting efficaciously, the driving 'Spirit', and human obedience that is driven on, are everywhere to be felt. But this force that propels and drives on is such that it can be understood in all three panels of the triptych as the recapitulation of the salvation history that come anew in the river Jordan: accordingly, it does not merely assume and effortlessly dismiss what had been carried down to the time of the fulfiller, but rather

reference to the one surviving play of a Goethe cycle from *Theo-Drama's Prolegomena*.⁵⁸⁹ Triptych occurs again in reference to the project as a whole in the opening preface to *Theo-Logic I*. In church settings, medieval artists created complex polyptychs that opened hinged wings to create a triptych forming the backdrop to an altar. Situated in place, triptychs are interactive bits of liturgical scenery. They invite movement and dramatic relationship. This sense of interrelated dynamism carries through when von Balthasar writes an oft-quoted description of theology's task:

The circumincession of the transcendentals suggests the necessity of, and therefore excuses, a new discussion of issues that, at least in part, we have treated in previous panels of our triptych. After all, there is simply no way to do theology except by repeatedly circling around what is, in fact, always the same totality looked at from different angles. To parcel up theology into isolated tracts is by definition to destroy it.⁵⁹⁰

Here, Trinitarian theology collides with art and philosophical method. The panels of a triptych retain their integrity, but the whole cannot be understood by divorcing its component parts. The panels display being from the convertible vantage point of beauty, goodness, truth, and unity. Convertibility does not simultaneously mean identity. For von Balthasar, one requires a different method to interpret revelation's beauty from the method necessary to interpret revelation's goodness or truth. At the same time, von Balthasar's word "circumincession" signals the relationship between the triptych's structure and its subject matter, triune God of Christianity who three persons always already relate in love. Like Trinitarian procession, the volumes of the trilogy only progress in an order of logical priority. Understanding emerges from an encounter with the whole (the

pushes in the opposite direction, taking back into what is to be fulfilled, and takes on itself the whole of the 'promise' as far back as the origins, so that it may bring it from beneath and from within (not merely from above, as the Baptist surely expected) to 'fulfilment.' (GL 7, 54) and "In Matthew, this becomes clear only in the last panel of the preparatory triptych."⁵⁸⁸ (GL 7, 69).

⁵⁸⁹ "Three cycles of dramas by great writers are based on [the French Revolution]. The first remained unfinished: *Goethe's Die natürlich Tochter* is the only complete part of a **triptych** now lost" (TD 1, 409).

⁵⁹⁰ TL 1, 8. This description of theology as circling its subject matter appears frequently in diverse contexts, from von Balthasar studies monographs like Jennifer Newsome Martin's *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Critical Appropriation of Russian Religious Thought* to models for comparative theology in Francis X. Clooney, S.J.'s *His Hiding Place Is Darkness: A Hindu-Catholic Theopoetics of Divine Absence*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

interpretation theory of Balthasarian theological aesthetics) that transforms the life of the interpreter through a mission (the interpretation theory of the Balthasarian theological dramatics) for greater relationship with the absolute truth that is love in God (the interpretation theory of the Balthasarian logic). This process does not occur in a chronological sequence. One “repeatedly circles” the topic to view its form from a variety of perspectives.⁵⁹¹

“Form” is a technical term for von Balthasar implying a recognizable shape and an implicit reference to Platonic metaphysics. Form is the *Gestalt* that cannot be found through dissection or deconstruction. Form is a whole whose wholeness is greater than the sum of its parts. One perceives form only through composite experience: the whole novel—read from front to back—alongside the material culture of the book, the feel of its pages, and the design of the dust jacket and font. To behold form is to encounter a whole *as* the whole and to reread it. Such perception does not come easy, and von Balthasar laments how seeing the form

is difficult because our eyes lose their acumen for form and we become accustomed to read things by starting from the bottom and working our way up, rather than by working from the whole to the parts. Our multi-faceted glance is, indeed, suited to the fragmentary and the quantitative: we are the world’s and the soul’s analysts and no longer have a vision for wholeness.⁵⁹²

Narrating the chain reaction of the clockwork of an old watch cannot explain the mysterious essence of a family heirloom: “If form is broken down into subdivisions and auxiliary parts for the sake of explanation, this is unfortunately a sign that the true form has not been perceived as such at all.”⁵⁹³ Truth is “symphonic” for von Balthasar, and an encounter with an object requires taking into consideration its place within its environments. The form of the theological triptych radiates from the immensity of its sixteen volumes. But does von Balthasar want to know too much? A

⁵⁹¹ I am grateful to Jewelle Bickel for pointing out the similarities between von Balthasar’s intellectual circling and Bonaventure’s theological method.

⁵⁹² GL 1, 25.

⁵⁹³ GL 1, 26.

Schleiermacher-inspired insistence on real understanding only through knowledge of everything about the totality of a work and its author will be impossible for theatrical interpretive work. Such totalizing command of the object and its environment refuses mystery or freedom for spontaneity and improvisation. Concessions in *Theo-Drama* demonstrate that von Balthasar did not read or (more importantly!) see every play written by every author he mentions. Grasping at totality differs from appreciating a work in light of its wholeness.

With his visual metaphor von Balthasar manages to occupy a middle ground. Parts of the triptych can be understood on their own in a qualified sense, but the greatest possible understanding comes by beholding these ideas in relation. The relations appear in the surplus meaning generated through interpretive work. “Only if parts or aspects of a whole are measured by each other can they together produce a form.”⁵⁹⁴ Forms can also be dynamic as in “formation,” and von Balthasar’s theory does not restrict form to static objects. Taking on a Christian vocation means to adopt a particular form of life and to allow that form to shape oneself.⁵⁹⁵ (From the beginning, a Balthasarian theory of the form in *Herrlichkeit* anticipates theodramatic transitions from role to mission.) The expression of these forms manifests differently from individual case to individual case, but the recognizable structure of a form is reflexive. Participation in a form of life transforms the person. Forms of religious life point beyond the finite structures of the created world, and so the Christian form of life expresses a graced participation in the transtemporal and transcultural Body of Christ (a theological gloss on the idea of a “universal Church”). The manifold styles that can express the common form of a Christian vocation exemplifies von Balthasar’s theology of difference-within-

⁵⁹⁴ GL 1, 455.

⁵⁹⁵ “For, to be Christian is precisely a form. How could it be otherwise, since being a Christian is grace, a possibility of existence opened up to us by God’s act of justification, by the God-Man’s act of redemption? This is not the formless, general possibility of an alleged freedom, but the exact possibility, appointed by God, for every individual in his existence as a member of Christ’s body in his task within the body, in his mission, his charism, his Christian service to the Church and to the world.” (GL 1, 28)

unity. A plethora of finite forms image the one primordial and infinite form as their archetype: God's self-expression in the form of Jesus the Christ.⁵⁹⁶

The interpretive work of theatre and performance finds in drama this repetitive dance between whole and part. Junius Johnson explains, "Methodologically, it is why *The Glory of the Lord*, *Theodrama*, and *Theologic* form a triptych rather than a trilogy, for trilogy implies a separation among the three parts that would deny the type of unity von Balthasar wishes to champion; rather, the dramatics is already both an aesthetics and a logic, and so on."⁵⁹⁷ The composite surplus meaning of a play only comes from seeing it through to the end. The Balthasarian triptych balances the aesthetic hermeneutics of wholeness with the inherently fragmentary and particular nature of drama.

While it is certainly possible for readers to pick up *Theo-Drama's Prolegomena* without reading *Herrlichkeit*, one therefore misses the background where von Balthasar forcefully argued for the analogy between God's Glory and worldly Beauty and the necessity to "see the form." These general aspects of von Balthasar's aesthetics can be implied from the earliest pages of *Theo-Drama*, but the fuller and more compelling account of his theology of splendor has been taken as a given. So when *Theo-Drama* treats the work of the actor, the meaning of the stage lighting has already been implicitly theorized. The lights come up before the play starts. A theory of the gaze and the supernatural illumination that allows "the eyes of faith" to perceive the splendor of divine already occurs in the theological aesthetics. A theological drama is not played in the dark, but rather in the light of "glory

⁵⁹⁶ God takes visible form in Jesus the Christ, but von Balthasar does not confine God to a single form. The form of Jesus the Christ, rather, *expresses* who God is. "Jesus bears witness to God as man, by using the whole expressional apparatus of his human existence from birth to death, including all the stages of life, all the states of life, the solitary and social situations. He *is* what he expresses—namely, God—but he is not whom he expresses—namely, the Father" (GL 1, 29). He articulates Jesus' expression of a human and divine nature and so brings trinitarian distinctions *into* the mystery of the Incarnation. Jesus' non-identity with the Father's personhood *positively* points toward the primacy of trinitarian relations (rather than divine essence) in von Balthasar's trinitarian theology. The expression of a "not" still provides positive data about God; *difference*, as well as sameness, finds an archetypal formula in Christology. Only in Jesus Christ can there be a perfect *imago dei*: an image of God that also is God.

⁵⁹⁷ Junius Johnson, *Christ and Analogy: The Christocentric Metaphysics of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 42-43

and the Cross” (as the French translation, *La Glorie et La Croix*, renders the German *Herrlichkeit* or the English *The Glory of the Lord*). The credibility of the drama of the Cross depends on accepting what one sees as given in its own light.

§4.3 Scenography in *Theo-Drama's* Theatrical Plot

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?
Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet. —Psalm 8:3-6, NRSV

Human beings, like the angels, sit just below the God in the Psalmist's ecological hierarchy. The stars and moon hang carefully hand-painted in the sky like a backdrop for humans that seem strangely favored in the midst of such beauty. God commissions this beloved and crowned creature to steward all the rest. God makes birds and fish and oxen with God's hand, but the rest of the world's fields and seas have been placed under humanity's feet. God designs, crafts, and populates the world's stage. The human creature then walks upon it with a special kind of freedom and responsibility, “And man is involved in all this insofar as he is the apex of organic creation and thus connected with the animal universe”⁵⁹⁸ Humans take their place at the top of the world's billing as the creature made in the creator's image and likeness. Theodramatic ecology locates human creatures among God's design choices for the world without absorbing human creatures into the background.

To understand a drama requires, on von Balthasar's own account, to experience the entirety of its form. On the one hand, drama helpfully moderates von Balthasar's tendency toward totalization. Seeing the form does require the aesthetic experience of *Gestalt*, a whole. Drama can only show part of the world of the play in an inherently fragmentary, suggestive, and gestural way.

⁵⁹⁸ TD 4, 195.

The set's doors lead to elsewhere that never become visible, yet the play's scenography works to project the entirety of that world. A technical term from theatre studies, "scenography" refers to the composite work of set designers and props masters, costume shop tailors and lighting and sound techs. In her conveniently titled book, *What is Scenography?*, Pamela Howard offers, "A definition of scenography is 'collaborative work that makes theatre from a visual perspective.'"⁵⁹⁹ Scenographic artists take the empty space of a stage and build a play's visual landscape. Bruce A. Bergner explains this process quasi-mystically with allusions to divine *creatio ex nihilo*. He writes, "Ultimately, space is an identifiable, dimensional 'nothingness' with the potential to become a world. You must understand worlds to create worlds. And creating worlds is by design."⁶⁰⁰ The world of the play filters through an experience of its scenography, and term includes the surplus meanings generated by all of the non-human actors that take the stage as part of theatrical performance.

Scenography means more than a painted backdrop or the furniture for acting. Von Balthasar would most certainly agree: "It is a characteristic of theo-drama that its stage is not a neutral area on which any tragic or comic action whatsoever can be played: its stage has been determined in part by the action that is to take place there. The drama [of salvation history], too, can only be played on this stage and no other."⁶⁰¹ Only the created world can house the consequential and salvific performance of God that endows it with theological meaning. God's creation of a world with freedom finds an analogue in the artistic choices that co-create fields of possibility for dramatic conflict. The language of scenographic design enters von Balthasar's lexicon by means of his *theatrum mundi* metaphor. Undeniably one of von Balthasar's most significant contributions to modern theology transforms

⁵⁹⁹ Pamela Howard, *What is Scenography?* Second ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 218.

⁶⁰⁰ Bruce A. Bergner, *The Poetics of Stage Space: The Theory and Process of Theatre Design*, (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2013).

⁶⁰¹ TD 2, 173.

this trope of European theatrical drama into a technical term for explicating the space, freedom, and meaning afforded to creation in Christian thought.

Readers of *Theo-Drama* focus the bulk of their attention on the project's contribution to theological anthropology, Trinitarian theology, eschatology, freedom, and atonement. The theological *ressourcement* dramaturgy in the *Prologomena*'s rich and unprecedented engagement with European theatre practice allows his dramatic theory to build upon and go far beyond the aesthetics. In *Theo-Drama*, we not only stand at distance, enraptured and invited by Beauty's form, but get swept up into the drama in which God takes part. The audience-players are cast with a challenge to play roles too. This transition from beholding across distance to participation in the midst of dramatic action sees how the beautiful form moves and lives. The interpretive work of theatre and performance see drama realized in the convergence of bodies, space, time, and action for a specified event. Theological aesthetics contemplates the form of God's self-revelation in the world, but theological dramatics cultivate a sensibility of the history in which God intervenes. Static beauty becomes dynamic action in the drama. *Theo-Drama*'s method will need to be different from the method that guides the first panel of the triptych. Theological aesthetics has formed a reader into "seeing the form," but von Balthasar concedes how "wearying" it would be to "take up the methods of theological aesthetics once again" for treating the "dramatic character of existence."⁶⁰² *Theo-Drama* suits form to function; von Balthasar adopts an argumentative structure that tracks the artistic work necessary for the actual performance of plays.

It may also have been too "wearying" to see productions of all of the plays von Balthasar references. If the literary reviews responded to embodied performances, von Balthasar may have attended more closely to the contribution of scenography as a development to theological aesthetics. The *theatrum mundi* metaphor presents a theory of the "world as stage" at the same time as it

⁶⁰² TD 2, 10.

articulates a theological intuition. That is, von Balthasar presumes an account of “stage,” a created world, on which will play out the drama of salvation history.⁶⁰³ The dramatic confrontation between divine and human freedom that undergirds and converges in God’s action requires a setting. That is, just as von Balthasar’s theology protects those lovers of natural theology worried about a Barthian tendency to collapse creation into incarnation, so too will von Balthasar’s soteriology ameliorate concerns about Barthian tendencies to collapse pre-creative election into an eschatological consummation that might override human responsibility. Put another way, a real share in playing the drama of history indicates how God shares freedoms of time and space to act with a community of partners in the theatre-making. Theological attention to the stage space sees a reflection of “space-in-time” (adopting the spatial imagery in Barth’s notion of God’s *Raum* in the discussion of God’s *Zeit*).⁶⁰⁴ God’s triune life symbolizes this theatrical prerequisite.⁶⁰⁵

One fundamentally misunderstands von Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory, however, if “stage” presumes one particular type of theatrical architecture or one particular theatrical style. *Theo-Drama* never claims a totalizing norm for the Enlightenment’s proscenium arch, the Delphic amphitheater, or Shakespeare’s Globe. The symbol of a stage is any location demarcated as the space for theatrical performance for a particular length of time. A stage (raised platform) is a stage (place

⁶⁰³ The central theodramatic “Acting Area” consists between Jesus’ statements of “coming (‘kingdom of God’) and going (‘Cross’-Resurrection). This stage is the ‘a priori’ and—in the precise theodramatic sense—‘transcendental’ precondition of the theo-drama—although the concrete play of Christ seems to have been enacted on a stage that has long existed and seen many performances” (TD 3, 53).

⁶⁰⁴ “Time, then, is willed and created by God as the form at any rate of human existence. A few words of explanation are needed here. Time is not eternity. Eternity itself is not timeless. It is the simultaneity and coinherence of past, present and future. Thus eternity is the [space/room, *der Raum*] of God’s own life, the life in which He is self-positing, self-existent and self-sufficient as Father, Son and Holy Ghost. It is this in contrast to time as the [space/room, *der Raum*] of our life—the [space/room, *der Raum*] in which past, present and future follow in succession. Eternity is not created. Eternity is God Himself. For as God is self-existent, He is also His own [space of life / room of life, *Lebensraum*]” (CD III/2, §47, 526 [English], 653 [German]). Interwoven with the theo-poetics of Barth’s doctrine of time is a strong critique of Nazi ideology and its spatial and temporal propaganda.

⁶⁰⁵ “With regard to the aspect of *space*, its primal origin in the Trinity lies in the way in which the Persons of the Trinity ‘make room’ (‘space’) for one another, granting each other freedom of being and action. Thus the Giver detaches himself from the One on whom he bestows this gift, and the latter receives himself from the Giver in genuine freedom and so distinguishes himself from him” (TD 5, 93-94, emphasis original).

set apart for making theatre) only so long as it stages (does the framing work of “stage” to) a play. “Stage” names a flexible arena ready for action, and the “world-stage” names the readiness of all creation take part in the drama of salvation history. *Theo-Drama*, therefore, implies the rules for developing a theology of creation, stewardship, and the environment inspired by von Balthasar. The arc of *Theo-Drama*’s theological argument tends to be psychological and overly focused on personhood and theological anthropology. Theodramatic hermeneutics in the comedic-hermeneutical trajectory can allow theatre to expand the frame of artistic reference to something physically off-stage. A sound emanating from the wings plays a part in the storytelling. Events relevant to the plot can occur unseen behind the closed doors of the set. But notice how quickly the demarcation of the stage leads to a description of the human players. Does the aesthetic picture of the stage’s scenography contribute to theological surplus meaning?

§4.3 From Stage to Scenography; from Theodramatic Cosmology to Theodramatic Ecology

Another symptom of von Balthasar’s apparent performance anxiety, discussions of the theological metaphor of the world-stage fail to include consideration of theatrical scenography. Talk about the world-stage is not meant to reintroduce some superstitious mythology about the universe. While von Balthasar remains averse to the justification for the demythologization he saw at work in Bultmann’s or Brecht’s concessions to scientism, von Balthasar writes, “Even on cosmological grounds it is wrong to speak of the ‘three-decker model of the world’ as a central biblical idea.”⁶⁰⁶ To locate environmental concerns in the backdrop of *Theo-Drama* will require differentiating ecological questions from cosmological ones. Cosmology addresses fundamental questions about the nature of the created world *as such*. Ecology, by contrast, addresses discrete systems working in concert. Ecology refers as much to the macro-interconnectedness of the whole planet’s climate as ecology

⁶⁰⁶ TD 2, 174.

does to humanity's role in the diverse local ecosystems of New Mexico's desert, New York's urban jungle, or the West African savanna.⁶⁰⁷

Scenography entangles aesthetics and dramatics. This implicit link to his aesthetics provides another component to why von Balthasar does not stop to devote time to a detailed scenographic theory in *Theo-Drama*. Pamela Howard calls scenography "the creation of a stage space" that does "not exist as a self-contained art work. [...] Scenography is always incomplete until the performer steps into the playing space and engages with the audience."⁶⁰⁸ Without dramatic action, scenography would be a kind of installation art or interactive sculpture.⁶⁰⁹ Other reasons for the lack of scenography in the *Theo-Drama* are evinced by the *Epilogue*'s architectural metaphor of the cathedral. To treat scenography means von Balthasar would have needed to include reflection on the cultural and perspectival differences that influence "seeing the form" (in other words, the social co-construction of aesthetic taste). Scenography invites theological meditations on other creaturely phenomena by and large ancillary to the triptych's focus on God's self-revelation in Jesus the Christ interpreted according to the beautiful, good, and true.

The role in the drama portrayed by non-personal creatureliness slips into the background because of *Theo-Drama*'s interest in personhood and activity and the saving confrontation of divine and human freedom in love. Non-personal creatureliness refers to those creatures who do not share in the gift of divine dignity of the *imago dei* or as the creature elected to bear the Incarnation of the Son. Freedom (human or angelic) reflects God's gift to be creatures who love in freedom like God,

⁶⁰⁷ "The biblical rejection of the divinization of heaven—and to that extend the account of creation and all that follows from it signifies a process of 'demythologization' (which does not imply, however, an abolition of religion)—indicates the difficult path of seeing the earth/heaven distinction not only as a (dispensable) metaphor for the man/God distinction but also as an (indispensable) *sacrament* of the latter" (TD 2, 177, emphasis original).

⁶⁰⁸ Howard, *What is Scenography?*, xxiv.

⁶⁰⁹ Dramatic action, however, does not necessarily mean human players. Samuel Beckett's short experimental play *Breath* (1969), for example, features only recorded sound effects, timed lighting cues, and a "stage littered with miscellaneous rubbish" (Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, [London: Faber and Faber, 2006], 373).

to be free to love like the tri-personal-in-unity God loves.⁶¹⁰ For von Balthasar, non-personal creatures may not shine forth with the *imago dei* and *imago Christi*, but they do nevertheless share in the fundamental dignity of the goodness of creaturely being. Such creatures, by definition, cannot actualize finite freedom as an obedient embrace or sinful rejection of God. But, as dignified and good, non-personal creatures matter, too. The effulgence of creaturely difference in the world and the expression of finite freedom in response to the gift of being represents an *imago trinitatis*.⁶¹¹

Tracking ecology in *Theo-Drama*'s scenography already helps narrow our approach to a particular kind of non-human creature. A fuller picture of non-human participation in the drama of salvation history would need to include living things, plants, and animal communities.⁶¹² Theatre praxis allows me to side-step the issue because animals are actors, not props. Scenography turns our attention to non-animal creatures like chairs and tables, walls and curtains, costumes and properties that make up the environment of a play, the drama's artistic and aesthetic ecosystem. Therefore, theological questions of ecology correlate to where scenography does theatrical interpretive work.

Theodramatic scenography presumes the conclusions of von Balthasar's aesthetics. Scenography, further, describes the world-stage as a co-created habitat whose meaning derives from actors and the action. Meaning appears as a surplus generated by interpretive work. All stages—theatrical and ordinary—begin their performance of surplus meaning through scenography because

⁶¹⁰ "By way of anticipation, however, we can already assume that *if* God designs and creates a world, it can only be that he wills thereby to communicate his trinitarian life of love, which it must therefore reflect. Furthermore, it must not reflect the trinitarian life in the way a finished, discrete copy reflects its prototype: since God's very essence is communication, the 'copy' must continue to be open to the 'prototype', there must be sharing between them. There is a difficulty in this idea in God when one goes into detail: since freedom is of the very essence of love, God cannot and will not withhold such freedom from the chief beings in the world, and this in turn means that, from all eternity, he designs the world in such a way that it includes the eventual misuse of freedom in the form of human (and angelic) sin" (TD 5, 99).

⁶¹¹ "This clarifies what we said in *Theo-Drama* II (209ff, 238), namely, that in the finite being *reflexio completa* coincides with 'letting be' everything that shares in being. This now appears as *imago trinitatis*, since in God each Hypostasis can only be itself insofar as it 'lets' the others 'be' in equal concreteness. Indeed, as we shall see, it can only be itself insofar as it endlessly affirms and gives thanks for its own existence and all that shares existence. This also sheds light on that 'real distinction' in the world which is regarded as the structural reflection of triune Being" (TD 5, 75).

⁶¹² "The worldwide reality of suffering, which extends beyond the human world to the world of animals, has its center of gravity beyond that periphery [of what we can still grasp]" (TD 4, 191).

perception in experience happens first. Scenography without a drama describes a component to “architecture” or “design”; the everyday scenography of the built environment anticipates everyday performances on analogy to theatrical action. Students of scenic design might deploy their skills elsewhere in interior decorating or restaurant lighting. The design (or intentional lack of design) of a space contributes to its meaning even if the purpose of the space can be identified to be extraneous to design. In theatre, scenography interacts with the drama’s players. Theatrical scenography also anticipates the play’s action and responds to it. Sets and costumes craft a play’s mood and establish the horizons of the play’s world as “a phenomenon of beckoning promise” bounding its environment.⁶¹³ Consciously choosing to perform one play on another play’s set prompts unintended surplus meanings that can distort the meaning of the production. *Phantom of the Opera* requires different scenography from *Oklahoma!* A design belongs to a given production by working alongside the surplus meanings of its interpretation of the script and story. Scenography provides a home isomorphic to its inhabitants, only meaningful *because* of those inhabitants.⁶¹⁴ Ecological questions do not distract from theology’s object as an interpretation of God’s self-revelation; rather, these concerns for home confirm the location of the theologian amidst other players on the world-stage. The form influences content and cannot be disregarded in service of analytic clarity. Clarity, as a metaphor, points to analytic engagement; the form of the text should be “seen through” as a total

⁶¹³ Fletcher, *A New Theory for American Poetry*, 22. “The art of poetry has many ways of constraining linguistic flux and holding content at bay, and within these limiting constraints the horizon marks an outer limit of hopes, fears, and dreams. [...] Horizon is a function of all the obstacles to an observer’s line of sight, and hence only the only on the ocean or on great open plains does it appear to be an absolute geometrical limit. But then it is always only a phenomenon of beckoning promise, reminding us that we are encircled by our own ignorance, even as we are protected by the circle of our tentative knowing. Finally, horizon carries us outside of ourselves, yet keeps our feet on the ground” (22).

⁶¹⁴ This argument takes a different line of inquiry from Wesley Vander Lugt’s thoughts about culture and environment in *Living Theodrama: Reimagining Theological Ethics*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014). Where Vander Lugt emphasizes the phenomenology of theatrical space (closer to my preliminary examination of the symbol of a “stage”), I am more interested in the co-created built environment of the set, costumes, and props than the how actors inhabit that built environment. Scenography participates in theodramatic hermeneutics prior to the role of *dramatis personae* but remains fundamentally dependent upon theatrical action for any dramatic meaning. Vander Lugt’s analysis—a self-proclaimed theological ethics!—reflects on actors within a stage environment rather than the theological work done by scenography’s aesthetic framing. See Vander Lugt, *Living Theodrama*, 179ff.

mediation of its content. The form of the art-object, however, is part of its content. This is von Balthasar's very point in "seeing the form" as it radiates splendor. While splendor might be analyzed apart from form, such an analysis does not actually encounter splendor as it appears. No one can encounter beauty apart from the form that radiates it, particularly not the beauty of God's glory. Since theodramatic hermeneutics presumes von Balthasar's aesthetic theory, his engagement should take stock of a play's form brought into being by the interpretive work of its performance. This chapter focused on how an aesthetic encounter with the stage and the realization of a play in theatrical performance begins with its scenography. I now pass from the more general account of theodramatic scenography as the place to find von Balthasar's ecological theology toward a specific application towards a specific play. The reason for such an application, as always, regards the correlation between drama and credibility.

§4.4 Visiting *Uncle Vanya*

Houses play their own roles in drama. As I discussed in the context of its genre-confusion, *Theo-Drama* has a credibility problem because of its resistance to analytic theological engagement. Von Balthasar crafts a piece of theology that undermines one's ability to bracket its self-presentation in an attempt to extract its "theological analysis." In many ways von Balthasar's theo-poetic style intentionally obfuscates such a possibility. God is not a point of fact to be stipulated like other philosophical concepts. When interpreters bring a genre assumption that von Balthasar intended to write a scholarly systematic theology like other scholarly systematic theologies, his theo-poetics and anti-pedagogical references seem to fall short of his own intentions. The *Prolegomena's* review of theatre seems ancillary to the later, more theological volumes. While many theologians have deployed "seeing the form" without necessarily needing to adopt von Balthasar's typology of theological styles or his programmatic interpretation of scripture, only the "theatrical theology"

movement has attempted a similar project with *Theo-Drama*.⁶¹⁵ Amongst all the talk about the “whole phenomenon of theatre,” von Balthasar appears to treat only the plot-content of plays as theodramatic data. His dramatic theory remains idealized and over-directed, frozen in a compulsory naturalism. I return to the problem of von Balthasar’s theatrical and theological naturalism in the next chapter.

Naturalism, however, may also call attention back to the drama of the ordinary world. This chapter began by situating theodramatic scenography in response to an environmental crisis. I was able to show how *Theo-Drama* sits within the larger environment of the theological triptych. At the same time, I have emphasized the ways in which von Balthasar’s theological realism performs consistently according to the style of Stanislavskian naturalism. Now, the task becomes an application of theological dramatic theory’s tools in order to demonstrate the eco-theological potential latent in theodramatic scenography. To do so, I now turn to the ecosystems (environmental, economic, and social) in Anton Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya*. This play exemplifies Stanislavski’s naturalistic theatre, and Stanislavski himself played the roles of its director and acted onstage as the play’s ecological hero, the country doctor and environmentalist, Astrov. The play, therefore, provides a practical example of what theodramatic scenography might have been if von Balthasar’s *Prolegomena* included an excursus on the meaning of the natural world.

In order to further emphasize the contribution of scenography to the play, I utilize Annie Baker’s adaptation and its innovative design choices. Annie Baker’s version of *Uncle Vanya* premiered in the summer of 2012 at the Soho Repertory Theatre. The show featured an elite cast

⁶¹⁵ “Theatrical theology” represents another attempt at developing theological dramatic theory in von Balthasar’s wake but foregrounds interest in theatre’s performed, liturgical, ecclesial, and ethical dimensions in various Christian denominational settings and a more explicit use of theatre for the sake of Christian theology. See the collection edited by Wesley Vander Lugt and Trevor Hart, *Theatrical Theology: Explorations In Performing the Faith*. (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2015). Kevin Vanhoozer articulates Balthasar’s dramatic analogy in Reformed theological terms in order to situate the role of doctrine and the theologian in the life of the Christian church. See Vanhoozer’s *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) and its companion *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

and unusually claustrophobic staging where audience members reclined on carpeted risers rather than sat in chairs. Baker's conversational "translation/adaptation" finds a colloquial voice for this classic of Russian drama. She writes, "The goal was to create a version that would make Chekhov happy; to create a version that sounds to our contemporary American ears the way the play sounded to Russian ears during the play's first productions in 1898."⁶¹⁶ Her interpretive work fusing the horizons of turn of the century Russia and recent United States history demonstrates one of the many reasons I have chosen to work with Baker's text. Her adaptation deflates any potential pompousness that might be read into Chekhov's writing. Baker's adaptation deploys an overt Christian vocabulary that makes her text a ready conversation partner for von Balthasar. We might imagine that she pulls theological themes to the fore in the same way von Balthasar's reading would over-direct the script to determine Chekhov's "ultimate attitude" regarding Christianity. Religious language and scriptural allusion resound in Baker's rendition of Sonya's final monologue. Though I did not see the Soho Rep production, it featured an extremely simple and contemporary scenography. Such an inclusive aesthetic experience foregrounds the play's explicit ecological themes and demonstrates the readiness of this play to do theological work according to theodramatic scenography. The audience's closeness to the action, constant need to balance their own bodily comfort with assumed theatrical decorum, and the ordinariness of the costumes encode Chekhovian themes in the body as well as the gaze. Like theodramatic scenography argues, there can be no external standpoint for this play about an impending crisis for a common home.

⁶¹⁶ Annie Baker, "Preface" in Anton Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2014), v-vi. Hereafter references to the playscript indicate both Chekhov and the act number in Roman numerals and the page in Baker's adaptation in Arabic numerals after a semicolon.

§4.5 Kenosis and the Doctor's Orders

Chekhov self-identified as a country doctor. Stanislavsky writes, “He was much more proud of his calling as a doctor than of his gifts as a writer.”⁶¹⁷ Critics often read his forest loving doctor characters as stand-ins for the playwright. Stanislavsky originated the part, infusing Astrov with an aloofness inspired by one of Chekhov’s mid-performance notes. The director recounts this interpretation of Astrov in his artistic autobiography: “Uncle Vanya is heavy-hearted, he gives way to depression, but Astrov whistles. Why? Because he has so little faith in people and in life that skepticism has turned to cynicism. People cannot touch him any more. But fortunately he loves nature and defends her because of an ideal, without thought of gain. He plants trees which retain the humidity the rivers need.”⁶¹⁸ Something about Astrov’s connection to the natural world releases him from the maelstrom of the others who appear so obsessed with things and themselves. Stanislavsky captures the importance of Chekhov’s forests to Astrov: an economics of grace.⁶¹⁹ To care for “both the flora and the fauna” “without thought of gain” indicates the positive orientation toward others occupying the core of Chekhovian naturalism in *Uncle Vanya*.⁶²⁰ Chekhov’s *thematic* other-orientation rubs against the inward-facing psychologism at work in the theatrical techniques of many of Stanislavski’s interpreters.

Facing toward the other in love recalls von Balthasar’s understanding of self-sacrificial gift as the structure of divine love. *Uncle Vanya* retains dramatic ambivalence in its account of self-sacrifice. Not all self-abnegations conform to the salvific shape of the cross even if the structure of self-sacrifice reflects the Balthasarian “pattern of redemption.”⁶²¹ Vanya and Sonya spend most of their life toiling for the sake of sustaining a Professor’s posh lifestyle. When Vanya’s patience finally

⁶¹⁷ Stanislavsky, Konstantin. *My Life in Art*, Jean Benedetti, trans. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 202.

⁶¹⁸ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, 203.

⁶¹⁹ Cf. Kathryn Tanner, *Economy of Grace*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

⁶²⁰ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act III; Baker, 68.

⁶²¹ The phrase alludes to Oaks, *Pattern of Redemption*.

bursts in Act III, his excoriation of Serebryakov invokes Christian images of substitution for love, debt, and the yoke of servitude: “Now listen to me: my father would never have bought this estate if I hadn’t refused my entire inheritance for the benefit of my sister, whom I loved with my entire being. What’s more, I worked here for decades, I worked *like an ox*, and I’m the one who paid off the debt.”⁶²² Vanya claims that his family owns the estate only due to his refusal of a rightful inheritance for the sake of the love of his sister. Vanya’s drudgery, one that undercuts his humanity to make him into a bloody sacrifice “like an ox,” cancelled out the remaining balance of the purchase.⁶²³ Vanya’s sorrow—“The thought that my life has been...irretrievably...lost”—finds acute expression in his rage at Serebryakov’s lack of care or attention or willingness to develop a capacity to acknowledge another’s suffering.⁶²⁴ Vanya’s work meant nothing for the future or past, and Serebryakov’s plan to sell the estate confirms the professor’s lack of regard for the estate’s inhabitants. Vanya has been forgotten, but the dramatic turn in Act III takes aim to ensure Vanya’s promise to Serebryakov, “You’re going to remember me!”⁶²⁵ The mood shifts from the tragic to the

⁶²² Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act III; Baker, 82, emphasis original.

⁶²³ Vanya refers to his work for Serebryakov as ox-like in two circumstances. The first time, in Act II, the simile seems to praise the strength of his labor even in the midst of his complaint about Serebryakov. “I loved the professor. I loved that pathetic, gout-ridden man, I worked like an ox for him. Sonya and I squeezed every last drop out of this estate; we lived like peasants; we sold vegetable oil and beans and cheese, and nearly starved to death so we could save every kopeck and send it to him. Oh, and I was so proud of him. I lived and breathed for him. Everything he wrote, everything he said was a work of genius to me. God. And now? He’s retired and I can step back and look at the sum total of his life: he won’t be survived by a single sheet of paper. He’s completely unknown, he’s nothing. A soap bubble” (Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act II; Baker 40-41). The key to my distinction is the fact that Vanya’s “soap bubble” speech identifies his and Sonya’s lifestyle “like peasants.” By the time Vanya feels fully betrayed by the Professor’s plan to sell the estate in Act III, his simile to oxen strength becomes a fuller simile to beastly existence with resonances of a sacrificial offering.

⁶²⁴ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act III; Baker, 38. Serebryakov’s defense for his actions is his state in life. “As you know, I’m a scholar, a, uh, absentminded professor, and I’ve never been very good at the practical side of life” (Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act III; Baker, 79). Serebryakov does not float above *any* understanding of pain, but the professor’s willingness to acknowledge suffering stops at the edges of his own body. The opening sequence of Act II reveals a man whose strange sleep patterns derive from his intense gout pain: “I dozed off and dreamt that my left leg didn’t belong to me. The pain woke me up. Excruciating pain” (Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act II; Baker, 30). Marina’s concern for Serebryakov’s bodily suffering—pain she shares; “My legs ache too”—creates one of the play’s most tender moments. Marina leads Serebryakov’s off to bed saying, “Old people are like children, all they want is a little pity. Isn’t that right? But they don’t give us enough of it. Never enough. (*she kisses Serebryakov on the shoulder*) Let’s go to bed, sweetie pie. I’ll tuck you in. Come on. Let’s go, you shining star. I’ll make you some linden tea and then we’ll warm up your little legs. And after you fall asleep I’ll say a prayer” (Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act II; Baker 36).

⁶²⁵ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act III; Baker, 85.

comic. Vanya attempts to shoot Serebryakov twice. The first shot, offstage, misses.⁶²⁶ Vanya's second try will be point-blank, visible to the audience, and accompanied by an onomatopoeic "Bang!" It, too, fails to hit the target.⁶²⁷ The fundamental asymmetry between the estate-sale argument and gunshots, Vanya's wails for his mother, and the slapstick chase sequence allow the scene to play for laughs.

Ironically, the fourth act confirms that Vanya's failure to kill the Professor only ensures a return to the material *status quo* before this failed experiment of life in the country. After his "strange experiences...in the past few hours," Serebryakov announces his intention to write "an entire treatise on how to live. For the benefit of future generations." To this, Vanya promises, "Everything will go back to the way it was."⁶²⁸ But the emotional experiences of the summer leave characters affected. Chekhov resolves the complicated love triangles involving the doctor, the professor's wife, Sonya, and Vanya. Astrov and Yelena—in Yelena's words, "For once in my life!"—share a fleeting moment of sober physical intimacy: "*She embraces him fully, impulsively, and then the both immediately walk away from each other.*"⁶²⁹ As the play winds toward a close, Chekhov portrays the tragedy in characters who refuse to make lasting change but who similarly refuse to reframe their choices given their circumstances. The fourth act displays a series of movements from distraction to distraction, from reaction to reaction. The professor and Yelena use the gunshot debacle (all is forgiven) as convenient and conclusive evidence to depart the estate. Vanya searches for "Work, work..."⁶³⁰ Astrov departs immediately. The final tableau restages the state of affairs prior to Serebryakov and Yelena's arrival, but any hope for reward thanks to the estate's sacrifices dissolves in the events of the summer. Only toil without purpose remains for these country inhabitants, drudgery for its own

⁶²⁶ "A shot rings out offstage; Yelena screams; Sonya flinches" (Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act III; Baker, 87).

⁶²⁷ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act III; Baker 88.

⁶²⁸ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act IV; Baker, 104.

⁶²⁹ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act IV; Baker, 103.

⁶³⁰ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act IV; Baker, 107.

sake. Astrov returns to providing care that cannot hope to make a difference; Vanya and Sonya return to squeezing the estate for miniscule profits in order to support Serebryakov. At first glance, the final scenes confirm the nihilistic and tragic reading offered by Stanislavski,

This minute remark [that Vanya “has a splendid tie. He’s a man of refinement. It’s not true that our country gentlemen wear greasy boots. They are educated, get their clothes from Paris”], for Chekhov, indicated the whole drama, the drama of contemporary Russian life: an untalented, irrelevant professor enjoys the pleasures of life, he has the undeserved reputation of a famous scholar, he is the darling of Petersburg, he writes stupid books of science, which his old mother devours. Caught up in the general enthusiasm, even Vanya, for a time, is under his spell, thinking him a great man, working his estate in a completely unselfish manner, to support his work. But it turns out that Serebriakov is a soap-bubble, not worthy of his high position, while men of real talent, like Uncle Vanya and Astrov, rot away in the backwoods of Russia. You feel like summoning the real workers and laborers to take the helm and award them the high places, instead of ungifted though famous people like Serebriakov.⁶³¹

The play laments the missed opportunities of wasted talent subordinated to delusions of academic grandeur. Social fate’s stranglehold on personal happiness leads to a suffering from obedience to one’s *form of life* regardless of whether that obedience actually serves the common or ultimate good. No easy solution emerges from *Uncle Vanya*, so the resolution of the play could have been a return to works’ righteousness in service to others regardless of their worthiness. Marina’s theological quip to Telegin—“We’re all God’s moochers”⁶³²—theorizes the pettiness in upholding any human debt in comparison to God’s gifts. Slavish obedience to forms of life comes under comic scrutiny. Telegin’s speech about radical marital fidelity provides comedic relief in contrast to Vanya’s first description of the Professor’s profligate lifestyle: “Being unfaithful to your wife or to your husband, that’s... that’s...that’s...that’s like being unfaithful to your country!”⁶³³ Uncritical

⁶³¹ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, 201. The Chekhov quotation (in brackets) appears immediately beforehand.

⁶³² Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act IV: Baker, 91.

⁶³³ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act I; Baker, 15. Telegin goes on to give his speech about the nature of faith to his marriage. “My wife ran away the day after our wedding with an another man on account of my...uh...my unbecoming exterior.

adherence to dramatic roles lead to the tragic situation at the end of the play. *Uncle Vanya* suggests that the work and obedience cannot be done duty for duty's own sake.

Sonya, by contrast, reinterprets the situation theologically. Her final speech weaves a longform paraphrase of Revelation 21:3-4 in its promise of eschatological rest, reward, and new life in the face of a life of sin and suffering. I quote this final sequence at length to uncover its theodramatic structure.

MARINA: (*yawning*)
 We're all sinners...every one of us...
Telegin comes in on tiptoe, sits by the door, and quietly tunes his guitar.
 VOINITSKY: (*to Sonya, running his hand over her hair*)
 It's so difficult for me.
 If only you knew how difficult it is!
 SONYA: What can we do?
 We have to live.
Pause.
 SONYA: We'll live, Uncle Vanya.
 We'll live through a long, long row of days and drawn out evenings;
 we'll endure the trials that fate sends us; we'll work for others; and
 finally, in our old age, having never known peace, when our hour
 comes, we'll die. And from beyond the grave we'll be able to look
 back and say that we suffered, that we wept, that we were bitter, and
 God will take pity on us, and you and I, Uncle, dear Uncle, we'll see a
 radiant new life, beautiful, full of grace, and we'll smile and look back
 tenderly at our past unhappiness.
 And we'll rest. I believe this, Uncle, I believe it passionately.
 (*she gets before him on her knees and lays her head in his hands; in a weary voice*)
 We'll rest!

But I take my duty seriously. I still love her and I'm faithful to her...I help her out whenever I can...I gave her my property so she could stay there and raise the children she had with this other man. I'm not happy, I lost my happiness long ago, but I still have my pride. And her? She's getting older, her beauty has faded—in keeping with the laws of nature—and the man she loved has died. So what does she have left?" (Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act I; Baker, 16). The speech's joke comes from the fact that his wife retains all of Telegin's property and her children by means of the man she loved. While they are now equal in "unbecoming exteriors," she benefits financially. The speech, coming so quickly on the heels of Vanya's philosophic argument on behalf of infidelity's natural merits, at least in Yelena's situation, provides a limit case for von Balthasar's theology of obedience to form and flourishing. "And marriage is only true to itself if it is a kind of bracket that both transcends and contains all an individual's cravings to 'break out' of its bonds and to assert himself. Marriage is that indissoluble reality that confronts with an iron hand all existence's tendencies to disintegrate, and it compels the faltering person to grow, beyond himself, into real love by modeling his life on the form enjoined. When they make their promises, the spouses are not relying on themselves—the shifting songs of their own freedom—but rather on the form that chooses them because they have chosen it, the form to which they have committed themselves in their act as persons" (GL I, 27). Telegin lacks happiness *and* grace; he only keeps his sinful pride. In this instance, the *form* fails to provide growth. Rather, a disordered obedience to the form of marriage transforms Telegin into a twofold serf.

Telegin starts playing chords on the guitar.

SONYA: We'll rest! We'll hear angels, we'll see the entire sky lit up in diamonds, we'll watch all of our suffering drown in a divine mercy that fills up the world. Everything will be quiet and gentle and tender and sweet. I believe that. I really do.

(she wipes his tears with her handkerchief)

Poor, poor Uncle Vanya, you're crying...

(through tears)

You've never known happiness, but hold on.

We'll rest...

(she embraces him)

We'll rest!

The watchman knocks about outside.

Telegin plays a song on the guitar. Mara Vasilyevna writes in the margins of her pages; Marina knits a stocking.

SONYA: We'll rest.

END OF PLAY

Marina frames the situation with theological language. Scenographically, the final stage directions recreate aspects of the first scene. At rise, the stage directions indicate “*Marina, a sedentary old woman, sits by the samovar, knitting a stocking*” and the final tableau returns to this stage picture.⁶³⁴ Chekhov does not argue for a cyclical return to the beginning; the point is shown through the image of the knitting old woman. Throughout the play, Marina’s religious wisdom fails to be incorporated into the scene’s main argument. The finale, however, responds directly to Marina’s aside. Baker’s rendition of Sonya’s speech references a new life “full of grace.” Sonya’s own theological language and Vanya’s tears cite the announcement of the New Jerusalem at the end of the world’s performance when God “will wipe every tear from their eyes. / Death will be no more; / mourning and crying and pain will be no more, / for the first things have passed away.”⁶³⁵ Sonya locates the cessation of their pointless labor outside of the world-stage as it is currently known. Rest does not mean stopping the play, but, rather, a mode of doing different from the world’s labors. Rest retains

⁶³⁴ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act I; Baker 7.

⁶³⁵ Rev. 22:4, NRSV.

action as a verb even though its possibility emerges only after death.⁶³⁶ The meaninglessness of peasant sufferings will be overcome, retroactively, in God's pity. Rest, therefore, remains impossible for them in *this* life because this rest requires, first, that Vanya and Sonya continue to live and endure until that time when they might "watch all of [their] suffering drown in a divine mercy that fills up the world." For von Balthasar, a vision of the world-stage flooded with mercy highlights the theodramatic meaning conveyed to all *missio* through its participation in the mission of Jesus the Christ's experience of the cross, death, and resurrection. The rest that Sonya locates at the end of time, von Balthasar folds back into time as a possibility to be realized in the present. In the Christ, God's eternity can be found within creaturely time.⁶³⁷ Sonya's final eschatology as a theology of rest does not denote some simple end to their endurance and labor. For her, rest is a "resting in peace," the consummation and transformation of worldly suffering *for the sake of others* into an experience of God's mercy.

For what does Sonya need to ask forgiveness? She reconciles with Yelena in Act II; unlike Vanya, she never attempts to murder the professor or to pressure Astrov into loving her in return. Sonya, instead, offers a vision of the new creation. Mercy is not here understood to be recompense for debt, but the kind of overflowing beatitude given in excess of what is owed. The new creation reconfigures memory. Sonya promises the capacity to "smile and look back tenderly at our past unhappiness." She promises neither bliss nor consolation; at no point does she say that Vanya's happiness will be achieved or their suffering made to make sense. Rather, she looks forward to the transfiguration of labor into rest, a promise that relocates the meaning of worldly toil from service to the ungrateful professor toward an unknown and as yet unrealized future. Sonya argues to work because rest comes later. This promise might be some fever dream delivered on high from Marx's

⁶³⁶ I take up the theodramatic importance of action verbs and death in Chapters 3 and 4. Sonya's speech performs von Balthasar's theodramatic interpretation of the eternity's temporality as it intersects with creaturely time.

⁶³⁷ "The presence of the Son is the presence of eternity in time" (TD 5, 250).

religious opiate. Stanislavski's sense of the play confirms its indictment of the Russian ruling elite. A Bolshevik reading interprets this speech more readily as an anticipation of the life of leisure after the Revolution, but Baker's religiously rich prose complicates a too blatantly communist interpretation. Chekhov seems to have more room for grace than Brecht. Grace eludes expression in clear language, so Sonya reaches for poetry in the last act's material litanies and arithmetic shifts, instead, to praise "everything quiet and gentle and tender and sweet." Sonya's orientation toward this mysterious future allows her to see suffering in the present—"Poor, poor Uncle Vanya, you're crying..."—so unlike Serebryakov who cannot look out from his own experience of pain.⁶³⁸ Endurance, in Sonya's theological language, commends living in light of the promise of an ultimately unknown futurity. She believes in this promise "passionately." Such a passionate belief, in a Balthasarian framework, looks through one's own experience of forsakenness towards others, and, in so doing, anticipates the eventual saturation of the mundane by grace.

Sonya's eschatological hope might be problematically quietist. Her call to endure suffering for the sake of heavenly reward appears structurally identical to Telegin's rational for radical fidelity: obedience to the form of suffering in hope of a good deferred. Such a hope might lack critical awareness of acting for justice or the common good in the present. God's mercy—rather than the achievement of the prideful moral high ground—differentiates Sonya's eschatological hope from Telegin's patriotic analogy for asymmetrical marriage.

Sonya's is not the only other-facing account of action in the play. *Uncle Vanya* exemplifies the dramatic character of human action. On one level, the play stages the familiar contest between the active and contemplative life. At times, Serebryakov's self-obsession leads to an ironically literal call to action. As the Professor flees the work of the estate for the lifestyle of the city he misses, he extolls those who remain in the country to "Do something with your lives, ladies and gentlemen!

⁶³⁸ Cf. Act II; Baker, 30.

You must always take action and *do* something!”⁶³⁹ It is precisely *non-action* that Vanya and Astrov take to be the problem of Yelena and Serebryakov’s presence at the estate. Astrov diagnoses Yelena and Serebryakov as the agents of an infectious acedia. “You came here with your husband and everyone had to drop their work to spend the summer taking care of you. You both infected us with your *uselessness*. I was infatuated, I did nothing for an entire month. People got sick and the peasants used my new forest to graze their livestock”⁶⁴⁰ Their presence introduced a contagion that spread a disease that began to undermine Vanya’s and Astrov’s claim to a lifestyle that might be judged *well* by future generations.⁶⁴¹ For Vanya, that lifestyle regards *working* the estate. Astrov, instead, stewards creation.

§4.6 Forests and Flourishing, or the Forest for the Trees

Astrov’s relationship to nature allows him to avoid being caught in family drama in the house, at least until Yelena’s beauty infects him with “uselessness.” Psychologically, Astrov first comes to the estate to escape the trauma of a dead patient. He first reports the death of the railway man on the operating table in Act I, and his increased drinking attempts to drown the memory of the lost patient.⁶⁴² Astrov’s aloofness stems from this recurring memory, and his conversation with

⁶³⁹ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act IV; Baker, 105.

⁶⁴⁰ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act IV; Baker, 102. Compare these lines to Vanya’s soap-bubble critique of Serebryakov’s intellectual contribution in Act II (cf. Baker, 41).

⁶⁴¹ Astrov explains, “Look, in one hundred, two hundred years there will be people who look back and laugh at us because we lived our lives so foolishly and tastelessly. Maybe those people will have found a way to be happy. But you and I have only one hope left. The hope that when we’re finally laid to rest in our graves, the visions that greet us will not be unpleasant. (*sighing*) Listen, brother. In this entire district there used to be only two, respectable, intelligent people: you and me. But in ten years this way of living has dragged us both down; it’s poisoned our blood, and we’ve become vulgar, just like everyone else” (Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act IV; Baker, 97).

⁶⁴² ASTROV: I was in Malitskoe during Lent...for the epidemic...typhus... and the peasants were lying side by side in these little cabins, almost on top of each other...I mean, the filth, the stench, the air was filled with smoke, cows were lying on the floor right next to people...pigs, too...I worked all day, I didn’t sit down once, didn’t eat or drink, and when I finally get home they don’t let me go to sleep...there’s been an accident...they bring me this switchman from the railroad, I put him on the table so I can operate...and then he up and dies on me under chloroform. And just when I didn’t need it, these emotions started flooding in, and... this... this thought just kind of *nipped* at my conscience...The thought that maybe, just maybe, I had intentionally killed him. (*pause*) I sat down—I closed my eyes—like this—and I thought: those who live one or two hundred years after us, the people for whom we—we—we clear the road, will they say nice things about us? Nanny they won’t even remember!

MARINA: People won’t remember, but God will. (Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act I; Baker, 10)

Sonya in Act II explicitly links beauty to trauma. In response to Sonya's request that he stop drinking, Astrov unwittingly reveals the connection:

ASTROV: [...] What still gets me is beauty. I'm not indifferent to beauty. If Yelena Andreyevna wanted to, she could make my head spin...but see, that, that's not love, that's not real attachment, that's...

He covers his head with his hands and he shudders.

SONYA: What's wrong?

ASTROV: I uhh...

I had a patient die under chloroform. During Lent.

SONYA: You need to forget about that.⁶⁴³

More than any character in *Uncle Vanya*, Astrov feels an obligation to care for creation because of its inherent goodness and beauty. His confession to Sonya demonstrates the emotional pain that undergirds Astrov's love for forests, animals, peasants, and land. He comes to diagnose his infatuation with Yelena as a sickness of distraction that abandons care, but reflection on Yelena's beauty triggers his guilt over the dead patient. Now in summertime, Astrov remains haunted by his failure back in the spring. Beauty freezes and unfolds time akin to guilt. Astrov's *joy de vivre*—Chekhov instructed Stanislavsky to whistle!—derives from an understanding of the world's composite beauty reflected, most concretely, in forests. Sonya reports Astrov's pedagogical aesthetics: “He says forests are the most beautiful things on earth and that they actually teach us what beauty *is*. They also inspire...umm...they put us in a more spiritual mood.”⁶⁴⁴ Forests teach beauty because they express the coherent unity of manifold creaturely differences. Forests, necessarily, are ecosystems. Forest beauty shines forth from the whole of their flourishing. In von Balthasar's terminology, Astrov knows how to “see the form” of this creaturely goodness and

⁶⁴³ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act II; Baker, 50. Chloroform was a popular nineteenth century anesthetic.

⁶⁴⁴ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act I; Baker, 23.

transforms that care into the dramatic action of a kenotic mission Astrov expresses in the language of “true calling,” vocation.⁶⁴⁵

Prefiguring the liberationist understanding of systemic sin, Astrov attends to the sufferings of creatures in relation. Though we do not learn where or how he was trained, this doctor treats malfunctioning systems through a holistic medical approach.⁶⁴⁶ He applies as readily to his human patients as the forests he nurtures. One might say that Astrov diagnoses Serebryakov’s leg pain environmentally. Serebryakov claims his pain derives from rheumatism and so is an unavoidable and acute arthritic problem. Astrov diagnoses the problem as gout, an *environmental* issue that relates as much to diet and lifestyle as joint decay. Serebryakov does not agree. He thinks Astrov is a bad doctor: “The man is a joke, I have nothing to say to him.”⁶⁴⁷ Serebryakov demonstrates my claim about how the drama of crisis can only be ignored through the denial of credibility. The doctor must be found to be laughable so Serebryakov can disregard his diagnosis and its demand the professor *change how he lives*.⁶⁴⁸ Astrov knows that the mere recognition of an environmental crisis demands a change in lifestyle. Those changes may be harder than denying the validity of the crisis.

An environmental response cultivates beauty. For both Astrov and von Balthasar, beautiful and harmonious systems reflect and up-build spiritual sensibilities. Astrov understands healthy ecologies on analogy to healthy bodies, and both healthy bodies and healthy forests produce the grandeur of physical beauty and emotional sensitivity.⁶⁴⁹ Like Serebryakov’s gout or theodramatic

⁶⁴⁵ YELENA: Yes, I’ve been told that you love the forest. That’s very sweet, but doesn’t it interfere with your true calling? I mean, you’re a doctor.

ASTROV: Only God knows about our true callings. (Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act I; Baker, 23)

⁶⁴⁶ The aesthetic dimensions of the interpretation of the sick resonates with Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics as well as his book *The Enigma of Health*, Jason Gaiger and Nicholas Walker, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996).

⁶⁴⁷ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act II; Baker, 34.

⁶⁴⁸ This interpretation makes sense of Sonya’s quip to her father that prompts his line about Astrov: “So what do you want? The entire medical faculty to come and write a prescription for your gout?” (Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act II; Baker 34).

⁶⁴⁹ Sonya reports what she learns from Astrov: “The forest tempers a harsh climate...and...in countries where the climate is gentle, people are kinder...they’re more adaptable and attractive...their speech is elegant...they even move gracefully” (Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act I; Baker, 23-24).

ecology, climates need to be tended. Astrov's mission requires his willingness to co-create alongside the God from whom all creatures ultimately depend (and mooch). Small and everyday acts of co-creative stewardship aggregate with historical consequence. Environmental degradation diminishes the beauty of the forest and comes from human laziness. Healing comes from care and attention. Tending for forests seeks a reward *exterior* to the exigencies of the present. That self-obsession (like Yelena and Serebryakov's uselessness) identifies something sinful, an abuse of human freedom.

Astrov explains:

Man has been blessed with reason and creativity, but instead of progressing, he only knows how to ruin. There are fewer and fewer forests, rivers are drying up, wildlife is being displaced, the climate is changing, and every day the land becomes less fertile and more disgraceful. [...] But when I walk through a forest that I saved, when I hear the sound of wind rustling in young trees, trees I planted myself, I realize that I have my own little bit of control over the climate. And if after thousands of years one person is happier because of it, well then...⁶⁵⁰

Astrov does not place himself on par with the God who creates and sustains. The forest symbolizes a transtemporal horizon (like Sonya's eschatological hope). Work to care for the forest now trusts that it will give joy to an unmet other "thousands of years" later. Second, the forest creates a complex grace-filled economy of scale reminiscent of Sonya's passionate belief. Astrov's constant labors index to the potential to better the life of *one* person in the future, and he takes his pride in this microscopic improvement. This speech also introduces Astrov's sense of ecological crisis as a collective and theological problem for humanity. Astrov understands the human person akin to von

⁶⁵⁰ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act I; Baker, 24. Paul Schmidt's translation, in *The Plays of Anton Chekhov*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), makes more explicit the connections Astrov draws between theological anthropology, forests, beauty, and the future happiness of others. Schmidt renders these same lines, "We were born with the ability to reason and the power to create and be fruitful, but until now all we've done is destroy whatever we see. The forests are disappearing one by one, the rivers are polluted, wildlife is becoming extinct, the climate is changing for the worse, every day the planet gets poorer and uglier. It's a disaster! [...] but every time I drive by a stand of trees that I persuaded the owners to spare, or hear the breeze at night in young trees I planted myself, I realize that I *can* do something about the climate, and if a thousand years from now people are a little happier, then it's partly because of me" (Schmidt, *The Plays of Anton Chekhov*, 217).

Balthasar and the psalmist: humans are creatures with capacities for both reason and co-creative work alongside the Creator. This positive capacity risks the abuse of freedom insofar as humans can also destroy the beauty of God's creation. The gift of stewardship contains within it the possibility for ecological ruin. Doctors can fail to heal. If not treated well, the splendor of creaturely beauty twists into haunting desolation: patients dead under chloroform on the operating table, dried up river beds, and burning trees.

The play makes the decline of its forests and people visible by means of scenography. The stage and its non-human inhabitants matter for this play. In terms of plot, the play's drama erupts from the estate's claustrophobic inability to make enough room or money. The silence at the end of Act II when Serebryakov refuses to allow Yelena to play the piano typifies a world where only the Professor has room for self-expression. Yelena plans to play and "cry like a fool," but Serebryakov stifles both sound and expression.⁶⁵¹ The clearest scenographic contribution occurs in the play's maps. The doctor relaxes by illustrating maps of the region.⁶⁵² Astrov creates paintings of theodramatic scenography. The maps make art from Astrov's encounter with the transtemporal horizon of the forest. By painting three sets of images, he crafts his ecological triptych. The beauty of the forest shines forth from its differences. Astrov translates biodiversity into the thickness of paint dollops and crosshatch. Animals and trees become shapes and colors; the glory of the forest's diversity-in-unity transcribed into the beauty of a painting. At the same time, the maps express space and time. As a triptych, they project the capacity to see the form of what has been lost through human inaction. Furthermore, Astrov's map-making dramatizes the connections he draws between

⁶⁵¹ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act II; Baker, 57.

⁶⁵² "When I'm overtired, or fed up with work, I drop everything and I hurry over here and I spend hours amusing myself with this thing... Ivan Petrovich [Vanya] and Sophia Alexandrovna [Sonya] work right near me, clicking away at their accounts, and I sit at my little table and I daub my little paintbrush and I feel very warm and peaceful and I listening to the crickets chirp outside..." (Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act III; Baker, 67).

beauty, loss, health, and the forest. The rich descriptions of the maps make them visible to the audience even if the actor does not hold up the painted page.⁶⁵³

A more direct scenographic map forms the backdrop to Act IV. In Vanya's bedroom/office, Chekhov places an absurd image of difference and distance. The stage directions at the top of the act read: "*There is a large table at the window covered in his accounting books and all sorts of papers. A writing, a cabinet, and scales. A smaller table for Astrov. On this table are materials for drawing, paints, and portfolio. A cage with a starling. On the wall, for no reason, a map of Africa.*"⁶⁵⁴ The stage directions make clear that the map of Africa serves only for aesthetic contemplation. The final scene, including Sonya's eschatological speech, happens under the backdrop of another far-off place. Why does Vanya's office feature a map of Africa? This educated man with fashionable silk ties will never get to see the world. The map matters, however. Near the end of the act, Astrov "*walks over to the map and looks at it,*" and he muses,

⁶⁵³ "Well. I have a table here in the house...in Ivan Petrovich's [Vanya's] room. When I'm overtired, or fed up with work, I drop everything and I hurry over here and I spend hours amusing myself with this thing... Ivan Petrovich [Vanya] and Sophia Alexandrovna [Sonya] work right near me, clicking away at their accounts, and I sit at my little table and I daub my little paintbrush and I feel very warm and peaceful and I listening to the crickets chirp outside... But I don't allow myself this pleasure very often. About once a month. (*he points to the map*) Now look. This is our district, the way it looked fifty years ago. The dark green and the light green represent the forest; you can see half the entire district was forest. The red cross-hatching on the top half of the green, that's where the animals are...elk and goats and...I'm showing both the flora and the fauna. This lake over here...this lake had swans, geese, ducks...a whole heap of birds, the old men used to say...just, you know, thousands and thousands of birds...you can't even imagine...when they were in flight it was like this giant black cloud...okay...uh...In addition to the countryside and the village you can see...scattered around are these little settlements...tiny farms...homesteads, not estates...here's a couple monasteries, there's a water mill...and there were a lot of cattle and horses, everything was...that's the blue. See, in this section, I applied the blue very, uh...thickly...because there were entire herds, and three horses in every yard. [...] This is a map of our district twenty-five years ago. Now just a third of the district is covered by forest. There are no goats anymore, there are just a few elk left. The green and the blue are faded. And so on and so on.... Now we come to the third part. Our district at present. The green is scattered now; it only exists in tiny patches. The elk are gone. The swans are gone. no more wood grouse. No more little homesteads or monasteries. This is a map of gradual and undeniable degradation, a degradation that will take about ten to fifteen more years to complete. Now you might argue that this is progress, this is civilization, that the old has to step aside for the new...and I would understand that argument if in place of these forests there were paved roads or schools or train tracks...anything that made the population healthier or wealthier or smarter...but it's nothing of the kind. We still have the same swamps and mosquitos and impassable roads, and there's more poverty and typhus and diphtheria than ever...more fires...no, this degradation of the land is the result of man's pointless battle for survival; this degradation comes from ignorance, from a total lack of self-awareness, from freezing hungry or sick people desperate to survive who instinctively grab at anything that could relieve their hunger or provide warmth for their children...everything is destroyed in the name of survival and nobody thinks about the day after tomorrow. I mean, look. The land has been ruined. And nothing has been given back in return." (Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act III; Baker, 68-69).

⁶⁵⁴ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act IV; Baker, 89.

“It must be very hot in Africa right now.”⁶⁵⁵ For Astrov, maps are the aesthetic form through which to contemplate the beauty of the world-stage. Africa’s heat, different from the temperate climate of the Russian forest, nevertheless indicates the fundamental interconnectivity of the globe. As a piece of scenography, the map of Africa casts its own aesthetic judgment on Vanya and Astrov as men who refuse to learn from their encounters with beauty.

§4.7 Conclusions and Yelena’s Prognosis

Does care for the climate relate to care for others? Only one character connects themes of kenotic mission and ecological stewardship, and it sets a tone for understanding Astrov. Yelena reprimands Vanya’s mockery of her husband and pity for a young woman married to the much older man, and she connects the family’s bickering to Astrov’s lament for the forest,

It’s just like Astrov said. Man will indiscriminately destroy the forest until there’s nothing left. It’s the same thing when you pick people apart and try to make sure that there’s no purity or self-sacrifice left in them. Why can’t you make peace with a woman who isn’t yours? The doctor is right—the demon of destruction is inside all of you. You don’t care about the forest, you don’t care about the birds, and you don’t actually care about me.⁶⁵⁶

Care, in Yelena’s estimation, equates to concern for wellbeing in relation and what von Balthasar calls the freedom to “let be” that reflects spaces of freedom in God’s triune life.⁶⁵⁷ The “demon of destruction” attempts to undo the kenotic goodness (“purity” and “self-sacrifice”) that constitutes personal identity. Yelena transforms Astrov’s accusation of ecological neglect into rebellion against the divine. To care for others (human, animal, or plant) requires granting the dignified freedom of scene partnership. Yelena rightfully interprets the social situation theodramatically. The commodification of the forest prefigures the objectification of other people by refusing to make room for their action. Without an environmental sensibility, even dramatic relationships will

⁶⁵⁵ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act IV; Baker, 111.

⁶⁵⁶ Chekhov, *Uncle Vanya*, Act I; Baker, 26.

⁶⁵⁷ Cf. TD II, 240.

eventually devolve into crude use. Care not only means perseverance. For Yelena, care for otherness requires sustaining others' capacity for *good* kenotic self-giving.

Theodramatic scenography, therefore, already places a necessary check on any inherent goodness of self-sacrifice. Difference needs to be cultivated or the forest will be lost. Pressed further, climates and compassion operate hand-in-hand as forests, at least symbolically, emphasize the cooperative systems of the world-stage. Chekhov demonstrates why theodramatic hermeneutics and theatrical performance presume a relational ontology. *Uncle Vanya* dramatizes the interlacing of theological method, ethical praxis, and theatre. Theodramatic scenography requires the sort of looking towards futurity and others exemplified in Astrov's version of environmental naturalism. Not only a theatrical style, naturalism must care for the facticity of the presentness of Others in need.⁶⁵⁸ Theological or theatrical realism pays attention not only to the content of any argument but also its situation within lived experience. In the case of von Balthasar, this lived experience also means *Theo-Drama's* theoretical backdrop. Theodramatic hermeneutics presume the aesthetic contribution achieved by the design of a play, and this contribution only contributes to theology if plays are treated according to their realization in a theatrical performance.

The consideration of Chekhov, therefore, helps to nuance a number of von Balthasar's theological positions. First and foremost, unbridled self-sacrifice plays in a melancholic key. Scenography troubles a kenotic ethics for finite creatures because finitude simply cannot empty itself totally without dumping the beauty of difference. Astrov's forest speeches and Sonya's eschatological hope, once interpreted through Yelena's prescient social observation, underscores kenotic ethics must serve otherness rather than obedience to roles in themselves. Kenosis will need

⁶⁵⁸ Matthew T. Eggemeier puts von Balthasar and Heidegger in closer conversation on ecological issues in his article, "A Sacramental Vision: Environmental Degredation and the Aesthetics of Creation," *Modern Theology*, vol. 29, no. 3, (July 2013): 338-360.

to be tempered in order to serve a “true calling.” A self-emptying gift, even on stage, requires cultivation and action. I turn to these themes in the next chapter.

At the same time, dialogue with Chekhov helps to clarify theodramatic scenography as an intrinsic ecotheology. Beauty needs to be cultivated through co-creative acts along a transtemporal horizon. The stage not only indicates space but also time. Theodramatic scenography incorporates theological aesthetics while preparing the way to theologize the consequential experience of temporality. Sanctification—another way to figure the “rest” in Sonya’s speech—indicates some capacity for a transtemporal and transcultural Christian imagination.⁶⁵⁹ Von Balthasar’s theology of time does not sit aloof from theodramatic encounters with the world. Nor does his theology of dramatic confrontation. Environmental deprivation holds no distinction between personal rebellions against God and systemic destruction of the planet. Theodramatic scenography does not care for the world in such a way as to elevate non-human creatures to parity with human actors, but rather challenges the presumption of a disenchanted world that can be treated only as “pure stuff.” Stanislavski’s materialist interpretation of the *Uncle Vanya*’s indictment of the ruling class meets von Balthasar’s inherent compatibility with ecotheology: the stakes of climate change are simply too dramatic to be ignored. The drama of ecological crisis makes *credible* the contribution of even the most mundane acts of care to a home. Drama reveals the cosmic significance of a personal act. That personal acts of care might hold eschatological weight invites the question of dramatic credibility and Christology. With a correlation between drama and credibility established, the next chapter takes up von Balthasar’s theories of authority, obedience, freedom, kenosis, and death.

⁶⁵⁹ The Christian imagination’s relationship with the created world has not always been liberative or even good. See Willie James Jennings’ discussion of racial categories that emerge from the logic of settler colonialism in *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). “The ordering of existence from white to black signifies much more than the beginnings of racial formation on a global scale: it is an architecture that signals displacement. [...] This distorting vision of creation will lodge itself deeply in Christian thought, damaging doctrinal trajectories. My use of the word *distortion* does not imply a prior coherent, healthy, and happy vision of creation that will be lost in the age of discovery. The newness of the world was unanticipated by all. That newness couple with European power, greed-filled ambition, and discursive priority drew distortion form out of Christian theology” (24-25).

V: WRITING, DIRECTING, PRODUCING HOLY SATURDAY:

The Will of the Author and Forsaken Silence

Stage Directions for Chapter 5: *If the Christ descends to hell, does it make a sound? A finale turns to the “ultimate attitude” and central theological argument of Theo-Drama to clarify how von Balthasar’s obsessions with forsakenness, unmasking, and the will of the author influence his own writing, directing, and producing. The drama of the Christ’s descent appears in a published volume, and the theological applications of his dramatic resources proves to be literary and operatic rather than theatrical. This chapter makes sense of Adrienne’s place within a process of production and finds problems of both theological and theatrical credibility. Drama needs a world-stage on which to play, but Theo-Drama imagines a silent space of literature amid von Balthasar’s book collection. Theatrical conclusions, however, can always be staged differently. Three sketches for theodramatic revivals in new contexts conclude the chapter. On Holy Saturday, we’re left waiting with bodies together.*

§5.1 Credibility’s Wager

The cost of attending the play and the ticket-cost of paying attention must be paid in advance. Drama correlates to credibility most directly in theatre’s invitation to the risk of buying into a set of ideas on a line of epistemological credit. This risk can pay out in a pleasurable evening of excitement and joy, new discoveries, personal transformation, learning, deepened relationships, and long-lasting insight. Or the interpretive work of theatre and performance can go wrong. The show might be terrible, harmful, uncomfortable, unpleasant, boring, ruined by cell phone rings or damp clothes or sudden and unavoidable sleepiness. So too, credibility must be conferred prior to further debate. Credibility follows from perception and precedes discernment of the truth. One cannot find credible what one has not encountered; one cannot find to be true what one does not find credible. One can, of course, find some phenomena to be miraculous or mysterious. Such an event would be “incredible” in the sense of a saturation of its credibility. Theatregoers use “incredible” this way in ordinary language to describe phenomena that needs to be experienced as an event in order to be believed. “That show was incredible. I can’t describe it. You simply must go.” Excessive credibility does not negate the worthiness of the event to merit the suspension of disbelief in interpretive hospitality. Excesses of credibility, instead, spill over into the cultivation of an audience and a

community. Credibility creates an environment to be shared. When drama and credibility reach their heights, they both gather a crowd.

So where does credibility leave a crowd that gathers to read Hans Urs von Balthasar's *Theo-Drama*? Some find his theological interpretations to be credible intervention in Christian thought. His theodramatic hermeneutics provide an option for a "thoroughly Christian and thoroughly worldly" approach to the achievements of North Atlantic art and culture. By halting my argument at dramatic credibility and not pressing on to logic's truth, I aim to delay a need to articulate why anyone should adopt his positions as they are given. Credibility helps readers to learn from von Balthasar even if one finds his theology predicated on an apparent fideism, if one takes issue with its reliance on private revelation, or if one finds his readings of plays and thinkers less than appealing or accurate. My goals locate the interpretive work of theatre and performance as an analogue for von Balthasar's style: theological realism. In the third chapter, I reviewed the distinction between a dubious ghost like Hamlet's father (whose supernatural origins remain unproven except through theatrical interpretive choices) and the real presence of the resurrected Christ (whose supernatural origins remain unproven except through the surplus meaning of faith). Critical analysis in the twentieth century must meet the problem of a public and pluralistic audience. Even for believers ready to assent in faith, analysis of the Eucharistic host or a purported experience of God adopts the dramatic shape of credibility.

My account of credibility necessitates that theological aesthetics come before theological dramatic theory. The grounds upon which one might choose to take up von Balthasar's interpretation of God's self-revelation are perceptual, contemplative, and convertible. One must first see the form of God's self-revelation in the Christ-event concretized on the Cross in order to speculate about the drama of salvation already underway in world history. One must speculate how being really manifests real beauty prompting real good actions that are expressions of real truth. This

is not the same, however, as finding von Balthasar's theology credible for debate. The threshold for attentive entry is much lower for his style of theological realism than might be assumed from the way von Balthasar writes. Systematic theological credibility can be construed *playfully* meaning both (a) "play" as the way to link a theological/theatrical argument of the players with the co-creative interpretive work of a hospitable audience and (b) *Theo-Drama's* situation within the comedic-hermeneutical trajectory of religion and theatre. The correlation between drama and credibility contends that the audience/reader should proceed *as if* sharing von Balthasar's perceptual and convertible premises without actually adopting them permanently.

To be clear, von Balthasar never says that one can follow *Theo-Drama* without "agreeing" with its dogmatic premises. I imagine von Balthasar would be too worried about the soul of his reader to be as cavalier about the truth of the world as an analysis of his writing in the context of pluralistic religious studies must be. Balthasarian theodramatic soteriology proceeds in the form of a question. But dare von Balthasar hope that all his readers be saved? Such a concern for the conversion of the reader is, to reiterate a point from my introduction, the task of apologetics rather than theology. Furthermore, shifting analytical concern from the text in question to the intentions of von Balthasar the author imposes nontheatrical hermeneutics. Focusing on the will of the author refuses to do the interpretive work that generates surplus meaning independent of the writer's own self-interpretation of the script. Theatre, following Ricœur, centers the autonomy of the text. Theatrical art-making redounds to making choices that do interpretive work. A viable (if crude) summary of theatrical hermeneutics in the wake of Stanislavsky says that the work of an actor and director is to discern and enact living intentions for the playwright's words for the sake of the public. Plays can have production histories unimaginable at their premiere. William Shakespeare could not

have written *Hamlet* with Sarah Bernhardt or Lawrence Olivier in mind.⁶⁶⁰ So too, von Balthasar's books enter into conversations unimaginable at their first appearance. My task is not to excavate the mind of this Germanist and chaplain who read a lot of plays but to attend to the credibility of his published writing. Only in production can theology be credible for a public audience.

This chapter will frame von Balthasar's writing as a literary production that uses the interpretive work of theatre and performance to prove the credibility of both fictional dramas and Adrienne von Speyr's mystical visions as "dramatic resources" for theology. Where von Balthasar falls short is not his confidence in drama or von Speyr, but his own anti-theatrical interpretation theory that over-emphasizes radical obedience to an author's will. The language of obedience introduces theatrically problematic categories of passivity into von Balthasar's otherwise active sense of theological interpretation. This chapter reviews the origin of the "passivity problem" in von Balthasar's kenotic Trinitarian theology. When von Balthasar appropriates a nineteenth century focus on the self-emptying of God and he also appropriates a nineteenth century naturalist theatrical style. Where theological *ressourcement* dramaturgy appears least critical and creative is the same place where von Balthasar's dramatic theory becomes too literary. Christ's descent into hell and the *ur*-kenosis of the Cross can only be written and imagined because such a "theatre of cruelty" could never be acted on stage.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁶⁰ A more Romantic theory of the author as genius allows for Shakespeare, the person, to have anticipated these unimaginable consequences in his writing the script. My argument would be to afford the status of classic to the *text* instead of its author. For Shakespeare, this is especially important because the author's identity remains an open question.

⁶⁶¹ The phrase, of course, belongs to Artaud's manifestos and theory. According to Maggie Nelson, Artaud's "theatre of cruelty" failed to launch as a theatrical aesthetic. "Despite all his work as an actor, director, and playwright, Artaud's most enduring legacy as not lived on in the theater, but rather in more experimental, physically immersive spheres of expression, such as punk rock, radical performance art, carnivals, butoh, 'happenings,' festivals such as Burning man and so on. (During his lifetime, Artaud's major attempt to apply his principles to the stage was 1935's *The Cenci*, which was a messy flop; Artaud abandoned the theater shortly thereafter.)" (Nelson, *Art of Cruelty*, 15).

§5.2 Kenosis and the Active Audience

In the previous chapter, I argued that a crisis authorizes its own credibility. While the credibility of a crisis demands attention because of its threat to all of the players on the world-stage, the Cross indicates another kind of KRISIS.⁶⁶² Two consistent themes of my project's argument can now be articulated more directly: kenosis and the active audience.

Von Balthasar's kenotic theology undergirds the utility of the dramatic transition from role into mission.⁶⁶³ Dramatic roles and Christian persons perform existence by doing for others. The play of any show plays out for and with others. Drama's meaning happens in this action of bodies in space and time with consequence. This is the performative ontological foundation for interpretive work: surplus meaning erupts from theatrical action. The *play is the thing* that catches consciences.⁶⁶⁴ Only through the playing of the play will an audience, troubled by dubious ghosts and compromised institutions, be caught by conscience. Conscience bespeaks knowledge together, a literal "with-knowledge" from the Latin *con – scire* that becomes *con-scientia*. Performative catching is twofold. A conscience is *caught up with and in beauty* and a conscience is *caught by drama*. The first sense of "conscience caught" regards von Balthasar's theological aesthetics of rapture that transports the knowing subject into the meaningful experience of the knowledge of God. To perceive God is to be caught up into contemplation where to know God is to know love. Such knowledge must be both affective (embodied, emotionally rich, and personally significant) and effecting (real, rational, and

⁶⁶² The font reflects Barth's use of the term for the Christ-event at the center of history in *The Epistle to the Romans*. KRISIS works as a kind of V-Effekt to signal the peak and un-domesticatable challenge of possibility, cosmic significance, and paradox (cf. Barth, *Romans*, 105, 121, 243): "Law brings all human possibility into the clear light of an all-embracing KRISIS" (242). The KRISIS includes the divine and salvific "Yes" to creation in the "impossible possibility" "declared" by the wholly other God in the Christ's KRISIS of the cross (105). Being and action in KRISIS is decisive: "The KRISIS of death and resurrection, the KRISIS of faith, is a turning from the divine 'No' to the divine 'Yes'. There is no subsequent reverse movement." (177).

⁶⁶³ Kenosis is a surprising theme for a twentieth-century Roman Catholic theologian. Kenotic theology reached its height in Anglican and Lutheran circles in the nineteenth century.

⁶⁶⁴ The allusion is to Hamlet's confidence that "the play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king" (*Ham.* II.2.600-601).

leading towards action) to be credible. As shown in the previous chapter, Balthasarian aesthetics prepares the way for theodramatics just as a fundamental experience of beauty, goodness, and truth in worldly culture provides the environment for theology.⁶⁶⁵ God's self-revelation offers knowing-with God as a participation in God's Triune mutual and reciprocal love: for von Balthasar, knowing and loving are simultaneous in action.⁶⁶⁶ Action, as an act of love, gives of oneself for the sake of the other.

The second sense of "conscience caught" is judgment demanded by the drama into which the audience has been "caught up." For von Balthasar, participation in revelation by knowing-with the love that is revealed both reflects on love's beauty at a distance and also participates in love's goodness by receiving love as gift and extending that love to others. To receive the gift of love in the form of being cast in a role in God's drama transitions to the action that plays that role for the sake of the good of others. In *Theo-Drama*, a given role describes a given mission. A conscience caught by the love of God also judges conscience's own goodness. Drama, for von Balthasar, is confrontation and battle. The credibility of the Trinitarian drama arrives through the Christ as God's actual participation and actual experience of rejection as a safeguard for freedom. At every step of the way in *Theo-Drama* von Balthasar reminds his reader that the purpose of gathering dramatic resources will be to theorize the stage on which the Christ can play the role of the one forsaken by God. The

⁶⁶⁵ See my discussion of "environment" in reference to Angus Fletcher in the previous chapter.

⁶⁶⁶ Some important background for von Balthasar's Trinitarian theology can be seen in dialogue with Richard of St. Victor's *On the Trinity*, in *Trinity and Creation: A Selection of Works of Hugh, Richard, and Adam of St. Victor*, Boyd Taylor Coolman and Dale M. Coulter, eds., (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2011). Von Balthasar published a major translation of Richard's treatise into German in 1980 during the period he was working on *Theo-Drama*. Especially pertinent for my discussion of passivity is Richard's distinctions of the persons according "a gratuitous love alone, an owed love, or a combination of both, that is, on the one hand, an owed love, and on the other hand, a gratuitous love. Love is gratuitous when someone gladly bestows love to a person from whom he did not receive any favors. Love is owed when someone requites nothing but love to the person from whom he freely receives it. And love is a combination of both when by loving in both ways a person freely receives love and freely bestows it. But the fullness of gratuitous love, the fullness of owed love, and also the fullness of love perfected in both loves can in no way be possessed by a person who is not God" (Richard, *On the Trinity*, Bk. 5.16, 310). Note that while Richard includes von Balthasar's account of giving and receiving, Richard's language of *gratuitous* and *owed* loving emphasizes the *act* of loving on all fronts as opposed to von Balthasar's framing according to activity and passivity.

capacity to dramatize God's act of self-sacrificial love "in a human way," one that promises eternal solidarity with the senselessness of suffering, is the Christological Trinitarian center of von Balthasar's theology. Divine and kenotic love, alone, is the love that is credible.

A portrait of Balthasarian theodramatic kenosis has become visible, piece-by-piece, in each chapter. Sister Alysius' final benediction to the audience blessed their "second act" conversation with the doubt that results from the "stepping away" from God necessary to do the work of God's justice. Sending moves away. Role transitions into a mission from the Father (perhaps God, perhaps King Hamlet, perhaps a patriarchal demon) into the forsakenness of an undiscovered country.⁶⁶⁷ On the one hand, Hamlet's "to be or not to be" speech about impending death follows the arc of von Balthasar's theology of the descent of the Son of God to the dead. On the other hand, human actors continue to be those who do not "lose the name of action" by dying. Action requires following the call and following after a dubious ghost. Doubt will not be assuaged by keeping secrets or hiding reality behind the mask of antiquated mythologies. Modern science can never become loving conscience by unmasking beauty and joy. Behind ideology's mask that needs demythologization is a person's face. Addressing ideology's abuse of its power does not mean denigrating the human scene partners behind their masks of anonymity. The Little Monk and Galileo, therefore, need not put the stars in opposition to the Love that moves them. Modern physicists can trust, in Balthasarian fashion, that real truth converts with real beauty to do real good. The convertibility of the transcendentals generates surplus meaning in its work of interpretation but also retains meaningful differences between beauty, goodness, and truth.⁶⁶⁸ This is certainly the case when interpretive work

⁶⁶⁷ There are close affinities in von Balthasar between Hamlet's "undiscovered country" and Barth's "far country."

⁶⁶⁸ Importantly, the philosophical transcendentals are *convertible* (platonic) and not *co-identical* (neo-platonic) for von Balthasar. The distinction becomes more visible if one adds a comparison between the transcendental of unity to the consideration of beauty, goodness, truth. Convertible transcendentals retain their distinctiveness of context and mode of operation. Convertible transcendentals work together in ensemble akin to Plato's theory of the forms. Co-identical transcendentals, by contrast, can be reduced back to a prior and more fundamental unity, so beauty is truth or goodness by another name. The neo-platonic picture, as in Plotinus, imagines ideas like beauty, goodness, and truth emanating from the One. The difference between convertible and co-identical transcendentals of being grounds my assertion that

moves from contemplating the beauty of a drama to the surplus meaning generated by playing it on stage in community with others. Every performance of the drama will notice, highlight, and co-create *new* disclosures of meaning without exhausting the source. Theatre generates such effulgences of surplus meaning that bring about performance anxiety. One begins to wonder if the “real” play is the “ideal” image of the script or the composite work of writers, actors, directors, dramaturgs, technicians, newspaper critics, designers, producers, and members of the audience. No hero can transform the theatre of the world all-alone; to act the drama (either an entertaining play or the drama of human existence) requires an ensemble of parts willing to pour out hospitality for others. To trust the surplus meaning of a reinterpretation requires cultivating an audience willing to offer interpretive hospitality as a share of one’s own home. This is the theodramatic kenotic comedic-hermeneutical approach to the material environment of the world-stage as scene partner waiting to be shared. In less technical language, the invitation to share in one’s home is the dramatic realization of Ricoeur’s interpretive hospitality “making the foreign familiar.” Drama endows the lifeless with meaning in the present. That meaning can only perform by playing out with personal consequence. That meaning can only become credible, even propositionally, in drama.

The second theme that has run throughout this project came most directly in the context of the early discussion of genre: the active audience in the context of religion and theatre. The Brazilian political theatre-maker Augusto Boal refers to spect-actors as his term for the always already active witness to a theatrical event.⁶⁶⁹ My project locates the widespread assumption of a passive, consuming audience in theological dramatic theory to be insufficiently credible on drama’s own grounds. A passive audience, by definition, would not do any interpretive work. That is, the quiet audience in a dark house still does interpretive work even when it appears “passive”. The quiet

von Balthasar’s trilogy is better called a triptych, and also helps to block the misreading wherein a certain philosophical transcendental neatly maps onto an interpretation of revelation tied to a certain trinitarian person.

⁶⁶⁹ Cf. Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

audience plays its role as audience according to a particular and historically situated theatrical style: naturalism. “The audience’s indifference as to what is to be performed is not apathy; it is a taut, underlying disposition to respond to whatever comes.”⁶⁷⁰ The same (Stanislavskian) indifference and *disponibilité* characterizes the actor willing to give a whole self over to the role that “transitions” to (Ignatian) *indifferencia* in obedience to one’s mission from God.⁶⁷¹ The audience’s indifference follows from the sort of *naturalism* lauded in the previous chapter as a component of Stanislavsky’s interpretation of Anton Chekhov and theoretically productive as an entrée to ecological concerns and environmental crisis. I contend that such theatrical naturalism necessarily includes the naturalistic play of an audience who hide behind the fourth wall of the stage. Theatrical naturalism intends to promote two-sided *apatheia*.

Even an indifferent audience nevertheless *does* things.⁶⁷² The wide acceptance and enforcement of naturalism as the dominant mode of theatre-making naturalizes the choices of quiet observation, non-participation, and aesthetic detachment as components of theatrical realism rather than naturalism. Realism and naturalism are related but remain distinct: the style of naturalism is but one species of theatrical realism. Even Brecht’s anti-naturalistic actors perform a realist drama in

⁶⁷⁰ TD 1, 309.

⁶⁷¹ “In a nutshell, Stanislavsky’s method consists in a total dedication—encompassing body, mind, and soul—to the role, a total mobilization for its sake. *Disponibilité*: here the whole human system is made available, beginning with relaxation exercises for every part of the body...observation exercises to overcome our everyday distractedness and semiattention, right up to the total activation of the imagination.... This training aims at enabling the actor convincingly to embody the (poetic) reality of the role, to ‘substantiate’ its ‘truth’. The archenemy here is the stage cliché that is like an empty concept, devoid of substance, all merely cerebrally deduced ways of speaking and gesturing that are not believable in the actor and hence not believable to the audience because they cannot inwardly ‘substantiate’ the action on stage” (TD 1, 288). Later, after the survey of philosophical, psychological, and sociological applications of dramatic imagery to the question “Who Am I?” to which the transition from role to mission responds (Cf. TD 1, 481ff), von Balthasar will say, “only in Jesus Christ does it become clear how profoundly this definitive ‘I’-name signifies vocation, mission. In [Christ] the ‘I’ and the role become uniquely and ineffably one in the reality of his mission, far beyond anything attainable by earthly means” (TD 1, 645-646).

⁶⁷² “On the other hand, the audience’s underlying, open readiness has certain expectations. It expects to be led ‘into the open’—and this must be made clear through the closed, finite action on the stage. This justified expectation means that, without diminishing its unconditional readiness, the audience has a criterion with which it can assess the performance; under certain circumstances it can refuse, wholly or partially, to go along with it. Whistling or lukewarm applause expresses the critical attitude that is part of the audience’s readiness and that may put the author’s and actor’s work on the scales...” (TD 1, 309).

epic theatre because the actors make present characters and situations that are recognizable representations of ordinary (real) human life.⁶⁷³ A realist performance style need not be naturalistic, so too realist plays need not be received exclusively by audiences performing the role of audience according to naturalistic expectations.⁶⁷⁴ The third chapter analyzed theological dramatic theory within the frame of Hamlet's dramatic question of being. Theological dramatic theory concerns itself with concrete choices of action and finite conditions. The dramatic question of being expresses the requirement *to act* in response to both the non-certainty of an encounter with mystery (expressed in my image of the dubious ghost) and the reality of pernicious distortions by traditions and socio-political structures (expressed in my image of the compromised institution). The dramatic demand to act extends to the interpretive work of the audience that co-creates the event of theatre by bestowing credibility upon the performance.

This final chapter treats the credibility of the appropriation and use of dramatic theory in von Balthasar's theology. "From this vantage point" at the end of *Prolegomena* von Balthasar writes,

we can anticipate how the two triads we presented in 'Resources' will find their blueprint in Christian theo-drama, how seriously—more seriously than any other *Weltanschauung*—finitude and death are part of the action and how the battle for the good is waged at a more profound level here than anywhere else; for here man's freedom is established by God's freedom, and the doctrine of the *imago Dei* in man is taken to its ultimate conclusion. As a result the 'aesthetic'

⁶⁷³ An alternative to realist theatre might be postdramatic performance (like Sarah Kane's *4:48 Psychosis*), lyric drama (such as those done according to the style of Karol Wojtyła's plays in the Rhapsodic Theatre in Poland), stylized ritual, or symbolic dance theatre. I define theatrical realism, with von Balthasar, along the lines of the credibility of its characters and situations as "real people" even if presented in non-natural settings. Ghosts, dragons, and witches can be realistic even if ordinarily considered to be beyond what counts as "natural."

⁶⁷⁴ This point invites a conversation about theatrical manners that cannot be fully addressed or resolved in this project. Suffice it to say, most audiences in the United States have been trained to consume theatre according to naturalistic expectations and their social norms. Consciously violating these norms may be considered rude, threatening, amateurish, disrespectful, or trite. My argument does not proceed to make a proscriptive claim as to superior or more ethical modes of audience receptivity. All I aim to prove is that the naturalized naturalism that dominates Euro-American theatre etiquette is a particular historical style and decidedly not a general description of theatrical phenomena in the way von Balthasar and his interpreters present it to be. For a discussion of the historical character of audiences in the context of musical performance, see Goehr's discussion of the "Beethoven Paradigm," *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, especially 236-239.

picture becomes dramatically three-dimensional.⁶⁷⁵

This three-dimensionality is the Trinitarian revelation of the Cross and the crucial line of the theodramatic analogy: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Dramatic resources converge in the service of an interpretation of the demonstration of the depth of God’s love in the drama of the crucifixion and the cry of dereliction. The archetype of the Christ can be applied to anyone willing to follow a mission from God. “It follows, quite naturally that if, obedient to his mission, a person goes out into a world that is not only ungodly but hostile to God, he will be led to the experience of Godforsakenness.”⁶⁷⁶ Drama provides von Balthasar a test for the credibility of any religious or atheological world-view: God’s solidarity with the forsaken revealed in and through the drama of the Cross and Holy Saturday.

§5.3 Music Dramas, Interesting Analogies, and Theological Realism

The Son of God dies on the cross, and the dramatic performance of the incarnation is met with silence. The idea of the silence of an audience that does not applaud is, in itself, a symbol of forsakenness. But for what audience does this drama of crucifixion and forsakenness play? The silence of the Father’s non-responsiveness to the Son’s cry of dereliction on the cross raises questions about the passivity of any audience. Silence might be forsakenness, and von Balthasar argues the Son experiences the silence of the Father as an active rejection. Silences need not be lonely.⁶⁷⁷ My goal in this final chapter will be to demonstrate that the play *could* be staged otherwise

⁶⁷⁵ TD 1, 647.

⁶⁷⁶ TD 1, 647.

⁶⁷⁷ “Solitude as the world understands it is a hurt which requires no further comment here” (Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, Ann Smock, trans., [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982], 21). The implication of loneliness as a perpetual characteristic of God’s Triune life as a result of the Cross demonstrates one of von Balthasar’s basic theological mistakes. A drama cannot be lonely because theatre’s essence is being present together. He writes, “The mystery of Good Friday and Holy Saturday is thus a mystery of the loneliness of love between Father and Son in the Spirit, so much so that the outcome of these events (in their reunion, in the Resurrection) which is a ‘mystery of eternal life’, can take place only in ‘full loneliness’” (TD 5, 269, quoting von Speyr). Von Balthasar is right insofar as God is the only Triune God who could undergo such an experience of mutual rejection in unity; von Balthasar is wrong insofar as he has implied that God’s singularity constitutes a “loneliness” or “solitude” (“*Einseamkeit*,” *Theodramatik* V, 243) like the feeling of being the “only one like this in the world” for all eternity. The Trinitarian God is dynamic relationality.

within the frame of its script. The correction I seek to offer is to von Balthasar's interpretation theory. The theatrical praxis at work in *Theo-Drama* happens according to a style of naturalism indebted to a style of nineteenth century musical performance rather than modern theatre. *Theo-Drama* performs as *Theo-Opera*, and it is Wagnerian.

In many respects, one of *Theo-Drama*'s goals might be summarized as von Balthasar's attempt to do theology "around" Richard Wagner.⁶⁷⁸ Von Balthasar's cultural *ressourcement* does not ignore the big players and Wagner appears in many of the references to great achievements in drama. *Theo-Drama* displays God's role in history's *Gestalt Gesamtkunstwerke*—"the whole of integrated works of art."⁶⁷⁹ Drama's aesthetic and theological convergences, the project's epic

⁶⁷⁸ Wagner appears sporadically throughout *Theo-Drama*, particularly with references to the *Ring* cycle. Henrici (with an unattributed quotation), notes the connection between von Balthasar's unfinished quest to identify a "German spirituality" and his lament, "If only Wagner had been a Christian!" (Henrici, "Sketch," 35). Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, Rodney Livingstone, trans., (New York: Verso, 2005), identifies why Wagner would make such a good dramatic resource for von Balthasar: "The basic idea is that of totality: the *Ring* attempts, without much ado, nothing less than the encapsulation of the world process as a whole" (Adorno, *Wagner*, 90). Wagner represents the convergence of aesthetics and dramatics with the interpretive work of music to sustain emotional investment in the present: "The remote origins represented by the mythic action, reconstituted in music and made accessible by music to the emotional understanding of a different age, are also the goal towards which the history of mankind is traveling. The rule of law and coercion is to be replaced by the spirit of reconciliation and love, the language of thought and reflection by that of emotions. [...] Form and content converge: given presence and language by music, myth recoils from the complications and confusions of reflections and returns to the language of emotions, and it thus becomes a form of expression that has its place in a future that is both desired and confidently expected; at the same time the myth provides the content, the dramatic idea of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, which is about nothing less than the downfall of a world of law and force, and the dawn of a utopian age" (Carl Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas*, Mary Whittall, trans., [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979], 81). On religious themes in Wagner, see Marcel Hébert, *Religious Experience in the Work of Richard Wagner*, C.J.T. Talar, ed., C.J.T. Talar and Elizabeth Emery, trans., (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015).

⁶⁷⁹ "With the 'concealment of the poetic aim', the *Gesamtkunstwerk* strives towards the ideal of the absolute phenomenon which the phantasmagoria dangles so tantalizingly before it: 'We thus designate the most perfect unity of artistic form as that in which a widest conjuncture of the phenomena of human life—as content—can impart itself to the feeling in so completely intelligible an expression that in all its moments this content shall completely stir, and also completely satisfy, the feeling. The content, then, has to be one that is ever present in the expression, and therefore the expression one that ever presents the content in its fullest compass; for whereas the absent can be grasped only by thought, only the present can be grasped by feeling'" (Adorno, *Wagner*, 87, quoting *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 344-45). Hilda Meldrum Brown, *The Quest for the Gesamtkunstwerk and Richard Wagner*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) addresses "Wagner's operatic revolution" in his development of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* tradition (Brown, *Quest for the Gesamtkunstwerk*, 1). Around the time von Balthasar was writing *Theo-Drama*, the *Ring* celebrated its one-hundredth anniversary. Brown discusses Patrice Chéreau's "deconstructionist" direction for the centenary production of the *Ring* in Bayreuth in 1976 with language immediately reminiscent of von Balthasar's stylistic preferences, the "declared models here are the *autos sacramentales*, religious allegories associated with the Spanish Golden Age dramatists...as well as vaguely indicated medieval masters" (228). Chéreau's politically charged production had overt Brechtian influences (232ff). The conductor of the centenary production, Pierre Boulez, adopted a *Gestalt* approach to analyzing *Leitmotives* and musical

proportions and roots in *Germanistik* approaches to literature and culture, and von Balthasar's own love of music all point towards worthwhile comparisons with Wagner. *Theo-Drama* could easily masquerade as one of Wagner's preparatory essays anticipating the poetry of a music-drama to rival the *Ring*. A Wagnerian reading understands the fundamental driving force of von Balthasar's theodramatic hermeneutics: music. A Wagnerian reading could resolve questions raised in recent von Balthasar studies: why is this figure so popular and so polarizing? But *Theo-Drama* needs to be *anti-Wagnerian* in order not to succumb to Wagner's aesthetic atheology. That is, Wagner's false piety demonstrates the danger in spectacles of grandiose religiosity exploited in order to sell tickets and win fans. Wagner's musical religion of the will to power opposes the self-giving revelation of the Triune God and theologies of God's beauty, goodness, and truth. The anti-Wagnerian finds justification in Henri de Lubac's treatment of Wagner in *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* or by citing Wagner's performance history.⁶⁸⁰

Many objections to *Theo-Drama* harmonize with similar worries about Wagner's totalizing aesthetics and production practices. There are Wagnerian problems and Wagnerian wonders in von Balthasar's massiveness, richly textured and synthetic imagination, and the musical premise for making sense of truth (that is, the concert metaphor treated at book length in *Truth is Symphonic*). A musical premise undergirds and unifies the triptych's organizing metaphors: visual/*Herrlichkeit* (visual/*Herrlichkeit*), narrative (*Herrlichkeit*, *Theo-Drama*), performative (*Theo-Drama*), architectural (*Epilogue*),

time expressed in space (251ff). Boulez's *Gestalt* functions as a non-theological version of von Balthasar's seeing the form.

⁶⁸⁰ De Lubac's discussion of Nietzsche prompts a meditation on Wagner's importance for transmitting Feuerbach's ideas to him: "At the time when [Wagner] was at work on his *Memoirs*—those memoirs of which Nietzsche himself corrected the proofs—Wagner still considered Feuerbach the 'only real philosopher of modern times' and 'the representative of the radical and categorical liberation of the individual' [Richard Wagner, *Ma vie* (French trans. of *Mein Leben*), vol. 2, pp. 335-38; vol. 3, pp. 99-101 and 254]. [Wagner] not only found in Feuerbach's doctrine the idea for a play called *Jesus of Nazareth* (which he never finished), and dedicated to the philosopher his work on *Religion und Kunst* (Religion and Art), but it was from Feuerbach that [Wagner] had received the inspiration for his Siegfried, described by Mr. René Berthelot as 'a wonderful incarnation of the hero as conceived by Nietzsche' ['Friedrich Nietzsche,' in *Evolutionnisme et platonisme*, p. 101]" (de Lubac, *Drama of Atheist Humanism*, 43). For a discussion of Wagner's reception history, see Slavoj Žižek, "Foreword: Why is Wagner Worth Saving?" (Adorno, *Wagner*, viii-xxviii).

and philosophical treatise (*Theo-Logic*). Each element of culture is but one irreducible “part” in the concert of truth. For his cultured despisers, von Balthasar’s writing is too big, too sublime, too ambitious, and too easily appropriated by the conventions of political oppression. For his fanatics, von Balthasar’s Wagnerian problems, though acknowledged, will be drowned by the beauty of his leitmotifs. Idiosyncrasies and mountainous proportions offer a challenge for the worthy, and genius radiates so self-evidently that dissent must be a willing refusal to do the work of aesthetic and theological appreciation and to “see the form.”

Credibility sits between hagiography and derision. *Theo-Drama* did not emerge from a compositional vacuum. Dramatics connects the being of God’s self-revelation in goodness to the being of God’s self-revelation in beauty because any theatrical theory depends upon a fundamental aesthetic theory. Theodramatic scenography presupposes von Balthasar’s aesthetics of “seeing the form.” A turn from aesthetic experience toward dramatic encounter foregrounds the human activity of interpretation. While aesthetics can remain forever in the realm of non-temporal abstraction, dramas must be performed in time and space in order to be interpreted. This is, of course, a concession. Von Balthasar is unlike Kant, whose emphasis on disinterestedness can be misread to mean a lack of concern for the phenomena of the object in question that gives rise to the pleasure of the free play of imagination and intellect.⁶⁸¹ The triptych corrects Enlightenment disinterested by re-ordering the Kantian critiques. Kant proceeds from pure reason (truth) to practical reason (goodness) to judgment (aesthetics), but von Balthasar begins with aesthetics (beauty) leading to drama (goodness) that prepare the way for logic (truth). Reason cooperates with the God of a religion that cannot be expressed within the bounds of “pure” reason.

Put another way, von Balthasar’s cultural *ressourcement* precludes the possibility of a Christian theology that becomes *disinterested* in God’s reality or *disinteresting* in its expression. Boredom is a

⁶⁸¹ See §3.6, p. 210n461-462 for a discussion of Kant’s notion of disinterestedness in aesthetic judgment.

credibility problem because *Theo-Drama* requires the fundamental premise of the fact of God's self-revelation in Jesus the Christ. *Verbum caro factum est* (John 1:14, "The Word was made flesh") anchors von Balthasar's hermeneutics of scripture, the tradition, and theatrical drama. Theological dramatic theory assumes the validity of a dispassionate treatise defending the logic of the incarnation (e.g., Athanasius or Anselm) because von Balthasar seeks an approach that centers the Incarnation's promise of a consequential relationship that lures, entices, and seduces. That God became human should, on all accounts, be the greatest story ever told.

So *Theo-Drama* aims to raise the stakes in how one tells that story of salvation history. *Theo-Drama* does not call for sermon summaries of scripture stories in search of succinct lessons. A theological account of scripture as a whole belongs, properly, to the aesthetics. Volumes six and seven of *Herrlichkeit* are exactly this: von Balthasar's theological exegesis of the Bible. Just as *Theo-Drama* presupposes the composite sense-experiences of theological aesthetics for the work of scenography, it presents a model for systematic theology that presupposes the composite sense-experience of God's self-revelation recalled, recorded, and remembered by the church's tradition, paradigmatically the scriptures.⁶⁸²

A *Theo-Drama* will make God's self-revelation credible in the present by dramatizing the narrative perceived as a whole in the aesthetics.⁶⁸³ *Theo-Drama* pinpoints salvation history's moments of decisive tension. His favored Johannine logic of the incarnation organizes his theological method. The *fact* of God's self-revelation as the Word who takes flesh, the incarnate Son, conditions the possibilities of theatrical interpretation. That the visible Son reveals the invisible Father exclusively

⁶⁸² In Catholic parlance, this collection of the faith's teachings takes the title *depositum fidei*. See, for example, Pope John Paul II's apostolic constitution *Fidei Depositum* on the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (11 October 1992).

⁶⁸³ "God does not want to be just 'contemplated' and 'perceived' by us, like a solitary actor by his public; no, from the beginning he has provided for a play in which we must all share. This has already been clearly demonstrated in the *Aesthetics*, above all in the concluding volumes, which focus on the Bible. But such a play must now be dealt with directly, thematically, especially since the lack in our time of an explicit 'theo-dramatics' appears more and more glaring and painful, with the principle tendencies in modern theology—all more or less detached from the 'epic' of scholastic thought—seeming to converge on such a dramatics, yet without attaining to it" (Balthasar, *My Work in Retrospect*, 97).

and without reservation demonstrates the concomitant logical pluralism at work in von Balthasar's theological imagination. God's one self-interpretation by the Christ prompts many interpretations of the Christ by other creatures. This multiplicity gets unified in God, a point all the more clear against the backdrop of the planned but unwritten eight volume of *Herrlichkeit* on ecumenical theology. Only a year separates the publication of *Truth is Symphonic* (1972) from the *Prologomena* (1973). Many of von Balthasar's claims for symphonic unity-across-plurality anticipate the theatrical argument for ensembles of *dramatis personae*.⁶⁸⁴ This includes an account of the audience as co-player in the music-drama of history:

As for the audience, none is envisaged other than the players themselves: by performing the divine symphony—the composition of which can in no way be deduced from the instruments, even in their totality—they discover why they have been assembled together. Initially, they stand or sit next to each other as strangers, in mutual contradiction, as it were. Suddenly, as the music begins, they realize how they are integrated. Not in unison, but what is far more beautiful—in sym-phony.⁶⁸⁵

Like the theatrical analogies that will govern *Theo-Drama*, the world-symphony generates meaning only in the surplus of performance. The music must resound, and there are no players other than every creature. *The audience for the symphony is its musicians.*

So how does von Balthasar's dramatize the symphonic score in *Theo-Drama*? He writes theological *ressourcement* dramaturgy rather than a dramatic script, but von Balthasar nonetheless employs the age-old stratagems of ticket sales: war and sex. This producer's dream emerges frequently in von Balthasar's analogies and theological examples (e.g., the sexualized theology of the Trinity in volume three or the imagery of battle in volume four). A narrative theology takes its cues

⁶⁸⁴ "In his revelation, God performs a symphony, and it is impossible to say which is richer: the seamless genius of his composition or the polyphonous orchestra of Creation that he has prepared to play it. Before the Word of God became man, the world orchestra was 'fiddling' about without any plan: world views, religions, different concepts of the state, each one playing to itself. [...] Then came the Son, the 'heir of all things', for whose sake the whole orchestra has been put together. As it performs God's symphony under the Son's direction, the meaning of its variety becomes clear" (Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic*, 8).

⁶⁸⁵ Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic*, 9.

from the story-arc of God's self-revelation. Ordinary formation in the Christian tradition hears the tales of God's works in the world *before* catechetical formulae. So too, von Balthasar seeks to do Christology and Trinitarian theology according to the received stories of salvation history. "Ways into" the scriptural witness were already established in the aesthetics, so the dramatic theory turns to world-changing consequences of God's action according to a presumptively factual history.

Theological realism cannot pretend its facts are hypotheses. These dramatic consequences influence the lives of everyday Christians. To live a Christian life means, in narrative terms, to find one's story entangled with God's story. Transient lives and quotidian struggles of both the living and the dead receive significance through the narrative memory of the Church. Salvation, in some respects, recasts the Roman desire for eternal life in glorious memory into the Christian desire for eternal life reactivating performatively in the memory of God. Writing abounds in scriptural metaphors. Consider the image for life beyond death as a vision of names inscribed in God's book of life.

Theo-Drama harbors no anxiety regarding some impasse between text and embodied performance. God's infinite Word can take on a finite human expression without losing its sense through the Son's perfect self-communication of the Father's glory in and through the fullness of the Spirit "of grace and truth." The written words of merely mortal playwrights can similarly be performed without destroying their meaning. *Theo-Drama* takes its interest in the embodiment of this divine-human storytelling. To the form of the story (that is, the narrative or plot) dramatics adds the surplus meanings of the interpretive work of performance: bodily enactment in space and time with the consequential meanings of artistic choices. Only on these grounds can one understand the twofold semantic sense volume four's title, *Die Handlung* (The Action), in its theatrical context. The fourth volume interprets not only the activity of the players on stage (i.e., the action) but also the order of events through which that activity takes place (i.e., the plot). This nexus of action and story

forms the whole Theatre Complex from which *Theo-Drama* takes its interpretive cues.⁶⁸⁶ In order for the narrative to be consequential it needs to be lived. Living distinguishes the mythological gods of idolatry from the living and revealed God of Jesus the Christ.

The capacity for meaningful transposition between abstract and concrete grounds theodramatic hermeneutics. In sum: von Balthasar holds that any words can become incarnate because God's Word has been incarnated. The theodramatic analogy plays on the analogy of freedom between God's incarnation and the incarnation of characters, both words made flesh to dwell among "us." The us, here, regards a general humanity, even a general creatureliness. The problem of the inclusivity of the first person plural is its denigration of dissent. Von Balthasar's facts presume the God who pitches a tent among the people of the world without their explicit consent or assent in faith.⁶⁸⁷ For von Balthasar, no space remains for even reasonable objection. Dissent from God, at its most basic, bespeaks an irrational dissent from the facts of reality. How then to grapple with an "us" that includes against the will? One strategy will be to refuse its sense. Von Balthasar's "us" might describe only a particular interpreting community (e.g., only European Catholic Christians or those interested in the worldview of European Catholic Christians). Drama, however, provides von Balthasar with secular resources to enact theological interpretation so that the particular facts of Christianity, presented and presumed as real, might be speculatively held to be credible by the reader. The fact of revelation, as presented by von Balthasar, requires *a priori* assent to its performance of the Christian paradigm. I argue that the requirement for understanding need not be assent but an imaginative, playful, critical, and co-creative engagement *as if* playing within the

⁶⁸⁶ Cf. TD 1, 9.

⁶⁸⁷ Von Balthasar will develop an account of "antecedent consent" that applies especially to the procession of the Trinitarian persons and to Mary. For a summation of consent as it influences von Balthasar's gendered Trinity, see TD 5, 91. Many scholars raise the idea of the Son's "consent" as theologically problematic, see Pitstick 127-128. For a discussion of the problems of consent in von Balthasar in light of his sexual metaphors see Elizabeth T. Vasko, "The Difference Gender Makes: Nuptiality, Analogy, and the Limits of Appropriating Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology in the Context of Sexual Violence." *The Journal of Religion* 94 (2014): 504-528.

world of the *Theo-Drama*. *Theo-Drama* does not describe a neutral world that happens to have room enough for the Triune God; von Balthasar writes about a dramatic “world from the Trinity” that happens to have room enough for creaturely coconspirators playing right alongside the Christ.⁶⁸⁸ *Theo-Drama* does not *argue* for its superior interpretation of reality any more than a given theater marquee *argues* for the superiority of its interpretation of a play over and against another option down the road. Instead and like the marquee, *Theo-Drama* aims for conversion according to appeal. The marquee displays cherry picked references to reviews by credible critics. *Theo-Drama* makes its case not by defeating objections on their own terms but by implying the non-Christian and non-Balthasarian worldview to be something worse than wrong: simply boring.

Von Balthasar’s literary-operatic imagination is a hermeneutical problem for his own stated theological goals. Primarily, I demonstrate how Balthasarian overdetermination of obedience to an intuition of the author’s intended objective is a non-theatrical hermeneutics. In von Balthasar’s zeal to write a credible work of scholarly theology (a goal most certainly achieved by virtue of the avalanche of secondary literature on his writing), he forgot to ensure he wrote according to a credible dramatic theory. The problem does not lie in his choice of plays or his favorite theatrical styles. The problem consists in an interpretive theory of absolute obedience to the Author’s will. *Theo-Drama*’s trinitarian metaphor of the author, actor, and director as they relate to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. My task will be to expound *Theo-Drama*’s use of this analogy and to show how assumptions in dramatic theory (especially in the context of an interpretation theory) leads directly to theological convolution.

The theodramatic analogy does not perfectly align theology and dramatic theory. Analogies illustrate similarity despite significant differences. Studies of the theory of analogy in von Balthasar frequently cite his reliance on an axiom of the Fourth Lateran Council’s condemnation of Joachim

⁶⁸⁸ TD 5, 61ff.

of Fiore (1215): “For between Creator and creature no similitude can be expressed without implying a greater dissimilitude” (*quia inter creatorem et creaturam not potest tanta similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda*).⁶⁸⁹ I construe the *maior dissimilitudo* qualification as an “irreducible difference.”⁶⁹⁰ That which is compared by analogy cannot be the same and co-identical. Analogy exposes similarities that depend on greater dissimilarity. The major dissimilarity in analogies must be real, otherwise there can be no analogical third term to compare these *different* entities. The structure of analogy without irreducible difference is tautology (“The sun is like the sun”); the structure of analogy without any apparent comparison to a third term is predication (“The sun is warm”). Theological speech has its own set of unique problems because *all* finite speech-acts about the infinite must be, by definition, analogies. Even a concept of “the infinite” appears finite when symbolized with a definition, the definite article and a singular word. A poetic language speaks God better than predication.

The concept of God ruptures ordinary rules for predication. All human speech describing God is analogical for von Balthasar. Greater dissimilarity makes theological analogies illustrative and expansive with the potential to spill out into the surplus meaning of theological poetry. Theological analogy need not require grammatical signals. Analogy safeguards both the sentence “God is like a painter who colors the autumn leaves” (a grammatical analogy using “like”) and the sentence “God

⁶⁸⁹ DS 806. It appears with a discussion of the injunction from Jesus (here called *Veritas*, “the Truth”) in Matt. 5:45 “You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” The Council notes that the sense of perfection differs. Humans can only approximate the sort of perfection exemplified by aboriginal divine simplicity (the Father’s *aseity*) because such heavenly perfection—that is, the sort of perfection of nature (*perfectio naturae*) that is God’s perfection—could only be “achieved” by creatures through the perfection of grace (*perfectio gratiae*). The Council does not, however, take the opportunity to interpret the analogy of fatherhood afforded by this same example. By the Council’s logic, there must also be a greater dissimilarity implied between God the Father’s paternity and any creaturely paternity.

⁶⁹⁰ Here, I follow Schindler to see difference in von Balthasar as constitutive of analogy. Analogies require difference in order to function; it is dissimilarity that grounds analogy in the first place. I do not mean to endorse a position of radical alterity as if analogies prove or expand from difference because individuation constitutes being. Rather, I hold a fundamentally relational ontology wherein interrelation (something that requires differentiation) remains prior to individuation. Analogies make sense by illustrating and foregrounding similarities that persist *despite* irreducible difference. An alternative approach to “irreducible difference” can be found throughout *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth* in the context of a description of consciousness (e.g., 36ff).

paints the autumn leaves with color” (a metaphor) from implying the divine to be the eternal Bob Ross (“happy trees” and all). Analogy secures the irreducible difference between God and painters: the former is the Creator and the latter are creatures, the former is an expression of simple being-activity and the latter a complex amalgam of beings and activities. At the same time, analogy illuminates understanding by disclosing something shared across irreducible difference, but the shared attribute changes its sense when predicated about God and when predicated about the analogue. God is like a painter insofar as God can be held theologically responsible for the colors of autumnal foliage that beautifully change the image of a landscape, but God does not paint leaves with paintbrushes nor is the image of a natural landscape co-identical with a landscape painting. Poetic analogies break and, in breaking, prove the utility of poetic-analogical thinking for coming to understand theological concepts. Analogies explore conceptual depth by disclosing already recognizable meanings and applying a surplus in creative and illuminating ways. The analogical activity of application toward theological understanding across irreducible difference is fundamental to the human use of language (Aquinas), an existential and hermeneutical practice (Gadamer), and necessarily imaginative (Tracy). The structure of poetic analogy, therefore, holds for both positive (cataphatic) and negative (apophatic) theological predication even if Christian theologians disagree as to the accuracy or adequacy of analogy as an approach to understanding God.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁹¹ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, (New York: Crossroad, 1981), is particularly helpful when he demonstrates how negative dialectics in theology (particularly the dialectical theologies of the Word of God typified by Lutheran and Reformed theologians and political and liberationist theologies that emphasize God’s conclusive rejection of death, oppression, and sin via theologies of the cross) undo the calcification of analogy by scholasticism (e.g., manual Thomism) rather than supplant the structure of analogy itself. “Without the ever-renewed power of the negative, all analogical concepts eventually collapse into the false harmony, the brittle sterility, the cheap grace of an all-too-canny univocity or an unreal compromise pleasing no one who understands the real issues. Without the similarities produced through differences and negations, without the continuities, the order and even the possible, actual *or* proleptic harmony produced by an internal theological demand for some new mode of analogical language, negative dialectics, left to itself, eventually explodes its energies into rage or dissipates them into despair. For alone, a theological negative dialectics leads into the uncanny whirlpool of the chaos of pure equivocity: a chaos whose uncanny *fascinans et tremendum* power must one day discover that its own radicality and liberating power is ultimately empowered by, because rooted in, the same reality as its analogical counterparts: the always-already, not-yet event of the yes disclosed in the grace of Jesus Christ” (Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 421).

Analogy and von Balthasar's theology have been extensively studied elsewhere.⁶⁹² My project focuses on how the dramatic analogy does theological interpretive work and what theodramatic hermeneutics offers to studies of religion and culture (in general) and Christian philosophical theology (in particular). The correlation guiding my investigation remains between drama and credibility. Already, I have shown *Theo-Drama* as a convergence of three trajectories for theatre and Christian theology and placed theodramatics within the context of von Balthasar's theological aesthetics and theological logic. So, before turning to treat the credibility of the theodramatic production, I need to ask: what is the role of analogy in his Christological Trinitarian theology and how does it relate to drama and credibility?

For von Balthasar, Jesus the Christ is the concrete analogy of being that reveals the love of God for the world that makes credible the relationship between God and the world.⁶⁹³ It is the Christ, the visible Son of the invisible Father, who performs the meaningfulness of the world to God and the meaning of God for the world. Making a Balthasarian modification to a phrase from Brecht: Christ is the visible truth of God, and the truth is concrete. God's love begins at being. Balthasarian emphasis on the *analogia entis* is an analogy of the excessive meaning of being to God because God creates and loves the being of the world. Through the Word, God reveals the world as meaningful to God (in the act of creation out of nothing) and in the mission of the Son, God reveals

⁶⁹² See, among many, Johnson, *Christ and Analogy*, the discussion of analogy in the second chapter of Dalzell, *The Dramatic Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom*, 59-100, James V. Zeitz. "Przywara and von Balthasar on Analogy." *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 52, no. 3 (1988): 473-498.

⁶⁹³ Cf. TD 3, 220-228. "Between the divine and the created natures there is an essential abyss. It cannot be circumvented. The fact that the person of Jesus Christ bridges this abyss without harm to his unity should render us speechless in the presence of the mystery of his person" (TD 3, 220). This irreducible gulf will be unified by the incarnate God-human. "Now the question arises: How can such a union [between divine and human in Christology] be possible, given the 'abyss' between two different realities that have nothing in common? This can be made credible to some extent in the aspect of being (which is more abstract), but in the aspect of consciousness it becomes acutely difficult. [...] Jesus experiences his human consciousness entirely in terms of mission" (TD 3, 223-224). The principle by which von Balthasar finds credibility in Jesus as the concrete analogy of being is the dramatic transition from role to mission. "We can even say that, in the cry of dereliction on the Cross, Jesus reveals how God is forsaken by sinners. [...] He is the revelation of man as he ought to be, as he is and he is once more to become (through Christ's action on man's behalf). However, this latter aspect takes place *concomitantly*: Jesus does not live in order to exhibit himself as the highest example of the human species but solely to fulfill the Father's will" (TD 3, 225, emphasis original).

the depth of the world's meaning to God. This depth descends beyond meaningfulness to the abyss of suffering abandonment and death's forsaken senselessness.⁶⁹⁴ No sense can be made of suffering and pain because to make sense of suffering in theodicy justifies it.⁶⁹⁵ But von Balthasar sees a God who elects to sit in solidarity with those who suffer.⁶⁹⁶ The Christ's experience cannot be construed simplistically as "substitution" for justified punishment.⁶⁹⁷ God's solidarity with suffering's senselessness is as evident in the Christ's healing of the sick and concern for the poor as it is in the Christ's endurance of death and God-forsakenness. The resurrection of the Son breaks through

⁶⁹⁴ The shift in terminology from *meaning* to *sense* is intentional. The "opposite" of meaningfulness should be "meaninglessness." Meaninglessness, however, is properly neutral: it is zero degrees full of meaning. Something meaningless simply means a *thing* that lacks the regard of love that bestows it with meaning. In a fully materialist cosmology, meaninglessness describes materiality prior to its being made meaningful by interpretive work. In a Christian paradigm of the performative ontology of creation, the being of the world indicates a basic meaningfulness to God by virtue of being created. In both cases, because of the link between being and meaning, that which is "meaningless" does not (actually) exist. Consider the situation of a "meaningless" old law still on the books but without any enforcement mechanism or the "meaningless" invitation to a cancelled party. In both cases, the thing in question lacks the capacity to actualize its ordinary meaning. The old law could produce surplus meaning in the form of its testament to what a community values; the invitation to a cancelled party could produce surplus meaning as a memento of an unrealized future. The category of substantial "meaninglessness" as something negative and opposed to meaning remains an impossibility for thought because meaning functions as an open signifier for that which makes things (whether considered as pure materiality or as created) meaningful to some agent. Negative meaning is still meaningful. In a materialist frame, meaninglessness refers to materiality before it is interpreted as meaningful (i.e., social construction). In a Christian theological register, one can say that humans endow other creatures with meaning by loving them in the way analogous to the how God loves them. The converse is also true, so that humans undermine the meaningfulness of the world to God by refusing to endow other creatures with meaning by loving them in a way analogous to how God loves them.

⁶⁹⁵ "Thus the least one can say about suffering is that, in its own phenomenality, intrinsically, it is useless: 'for nothing.' Doubtless this depth of meaninglessness that the analysis seems to suggest is confirmed by the empirical situations of pain, in which pain remains undiluted, so to speak, and isolates itself in consciousness, or absorbs the rest of consciousness" (Emmanuel Levinas, "Useless Suffering," in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, [New York: Columbia University Press, 1998], 93).

⁶⁹⁶ An applied version of von Balthasar's move is perhaps akin to what Jennifer Geddes calls "compassionate asymmetry" in "Theodicy, Useless Suffering, and Compassionate Asymmetry: Primo Levi, Emmanuel Levinas, and Anti-Theodicy," *Religions*, vol. 9, no. 4, (2018). To prohibit another from making sense of her own suffering might, in fact, "be co-opting what little the sufferer has left at her disposal in the aftermath, or the present enduring, of extreme suffering" (6). Rather than conceive of theodicy as an intellectual sense making to resolve tensions or rationalize evil, Geddes argues "We can think about theodicy less as a complete explanation or a final justification, but rather as a space of inquiry in which we raise questions, explore possible responses, register protest and outrage at our sense that things are not the way they should be, and engage the conditional and the hypothetical—forms that keep open the space of conversation, the possibility of error and of dissent, ongoing thought, engagement and unknowing, imagination, and even role playing. Theodicy as inquiry, rather than justification" (7).

⁶⁹⁷ The position goes even beyond Barth's notion of double predestination in election ascribed so "that Christ is the One chosen to be solely condemned on behalf of all the condemned. The comprehensive formula is too close, however, to the view that the sufferings of the Cross were punishment, a view rejected in *Theo-Drama IV*, 284-316; the Crucified Son does not simply suffer the hell deserved by sinners; he suffers something below and beyond this, namely, being forsaken by God in the pure obedience of love" (TD 5, 277).

senselessness by overcoming death's finality in God's solidarity with the dead. Suffering and death will not get the last line of the drama.⁶⁹⁸ Importantly, the Christ's victory over death is not presented in the drama as a Balthasarian theodicy to explain away the senselessness of an experience of suffering.⁶⁹⁹ *Theo-Drama* never justifies or imposes forsakenness but continually refers to its mystery. For von Balthasar, the self-giving love of God only evacuates senselessness of its power to negate the meaningfulness of being.⁷⁰⁰ Being is finite and free but infinitely meaningful to God, including the meaningfulness of a possible rejection by God.⁷⁰¹ Importantly, the resurrection of the Son does not negate experiences of the senselessness of suffering. Wounds remain but are transfigured into the signs of God's beauty-glory. Resurrection life retains what might be meaningful in the experience of forsakenness, but God never sanctions any imposition of senselessness onto others.⁷⁰² For love to forsake the beloved is senseless.⁷⁰³ The singular self-sacrifice of the Christ in free willingness to be

⁶⁹⁸ This is not a removal of the possibility of biological death as the conclusion to biological life, but, instead, represents von Balthasar's argument against suffering and death's continued determination of creaturely meaning in the life of resurrection. Here, one finds a sensibility in the mode of 1 Cor 15:55-57: "Death where is your sting." This is the theological direction of *Theo-Drama*. The *Prolegomena* ends with the lines, "And how can the highest reality of earthly existence point to an existence in God, from the perspective of whose transcendent reality, nonetheless, 'Life's a dream?' 'And death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away' (Rev 21:4)" (TD 1, 648).

⁶⁹⁹ By contrast, see TD 5, 256. Adrienne von Speyr's mystical writing implies strongly that "Sufferings, understood and accepted as an expression of love" will increase joy. While her tone comes close to a theodicy for suffering as a "transformational" or "learning experience," it is important to note that suffering must be first interpreted in order to become meaningful. That is, suffering can be the given circumstances for interpretive work to generate surplus meaning, but such surplus meaning is therefore not coterminous with suffering itself or automatically learned via experience.

⁷⁰⁰ Blanchot describes a similar structure in the production of meaning from senselessness: "That which produces meaning (nothingness as the power to negate, the force of the negative, the end starting from which man is the decision to be without being) is the risk that rejects being—is history, truth. It is death as the extreme of power, as my most proper possibility, but also the death which never comes to me, to which I can never say yes, with which there is no authentic relation possible. Indeed, I elude it when I think I master it through a resolute acceptance, for then I turn away from what makes it the essentially inauthentic and essentially inessential. From this point of view, death admits of no 'being for death'; it does not have the solidity which would sustain such a relation. It is that which happens to no one, the uncertainty and the indecision of what never happens. I cannot think about it seriously, for it is not serious. It is its own imposter; it is disintegration, vacant deliberation..." (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 155).

⁷⁰¹ "Human freedom is not self-constituted: it is appointed by God to operate in its limited area; ultimately it depends on *absolute* freedom and must necessarily transcend itself (*Theo-Drama II*, 207ff) in that direction. Thus it will be perfected in *absolute freedom*. While infinite freedom will respect the decisions of finite freedom, it will not allow itself to be compelled, or restricted in its own freedom, by the latter" (TD 5, 295, emphasis original).

⁷⁰² "In other words, anyone who tries to choose complete forsakenness—in order to prove himself absolute vis-à-vis God—finds himself confronted by the figure of someone even 'more absolutely' forsaken than himself" (TD 5, 312).

⁷⁰³ Forsakenness is a symbol of ultimate rejection and expresses the inversion of love. At the level of grammar, it is senseless to say that "love forsakes the beloved" because the beloved would no longer be-loved in the act of forsaking.

forsaken in extreme solidarity with all Godforsakenness provides the finite script for an infinitely repeatable gift of participation. The sacraments function, in theodramatic terms, as invitations to participate in miniature dramas of salvation.⁷⁰⁴

Ordinary human drama also points beyond the world to locate meaning in God.⁷⁰⁵ But von Balthasar's books are not written in ordinary language. The poetic-analogical style of von Balthasar's theological dramatic theory is, admittedly, a challenge to parse within systematic theology's genre expectations of logical progression and Tillich's "semantic rationality." Von Balthasar's argument accrues over time across its surpluses achieved only through a reader's interpretive work. What does von Balthasar the writer have to do with von Balthasar's theological dramatic argument? Framing von Balthasar's writing as *production* prepares the way to disclose the work of dramatic theory in von Balthasar's Trinitarian Christological theology, specifically the moment of "trinitarian inversion" in von Balthasar's Holy Saturday theology of the cross, cry of dereliction, and descent into hell. This chapter identifies a problematic weakness in von Balthasar's dramatic theory, narrates this problem's consequence for his kenotic doctrine of Trinity and descent into hell, and proposes a revival staging of both theological themes in order to resolve the identified problem. I contend the problem with von Balthasar's dramatic theory redounds to his antitheatrical hermeneutics that over-directs

To forsake the beloved is no longer to love the beloved. In terms of theodramatic hermeneutics, this also recalls the fact that action, for von Balthasar, occurs against the horizon of the good. To actualize evil (that is, to sin) means to turn away from the horizon of the good (cf. TD 5, 300ff). Rejecting God is sinful, so the forsaking of the Son *as sin* by the Father could only be done by God. "This is the central mystery of the theodrama: God's heightened love provokes a heightened hatred that is as bottomless as love itself (Jn 15:25)" (TD 5, 285). Von Balthasar's theology argues that the Father's rejection of the Son is actually an expression of their unity in the Spirit (cf. TD 5, 256-269).

⁷⁰⁴ "In her actions (*drāma*, that is 'doings', from the Greek *draō*), the Church is always related, at least indirectly, to the Paschal drama. As a result, the celebration of the Eucharist has often been described as a dramatic action" (TD 4, 389).

⁷⁰⁵ "It seems that these conflict situations could all be explained at the horizontal level, by history, psychology, and anthropology. But the very fact of coordinating two antinomian free decisions—neither of which can be dismissed as superseded and unsustainable—calls for some authority superior to both that is able to judge and recognize or reject them. [...] Generally speaking, in the drama, the name 'God' is not to be uttered; it has an extravagant ring to it. Frequently drama is content to address a question to this overarching dimension by stripping the veil from what, in everyday life, is covered up and by fomenting turmoil. It always takes some kind of *faith* to see the emergent form, the constellation-in-destiny. This faith reaches backward and forward for an ultimate horizon of meaning that is not accessible to rationality" (TD 1, 358).

authorial intention as the only credible interpretation. I narrate the consequences of von Balthasar's dramatic theory in terms of its influence on his kenotic Trinity and Holy Saturday theology by showing how his antitheatrical hermeneutics predetermines the interpretive work of the Actor-Son and the Director-Spirit by collapsing their interpretive work into an ornamental expression of the will of the Author-Father. The Director-Spirit conducts the Author-Father's score without need for theatrical choices. I conclude the chapter with brief sketches for revival stagings of both the Holy Saturday and Trinitarian theology by offering theodramatic readings of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Nassim Soleimanpour's *White Rabbit Red Rabbit*, and Deaf West's *Spring Awakening* as counterpoints to von Balthasar's confidence in the Author's will.

§5.4 Going Public: Secular Theatre and Adrienne von Speyr in *Theo-Drama's* Production

By analyzing a *particular* religious tradition's theology anchored in readings of a *particular* writer, this project signals the possibilities for later work on drama as a method for public religious studies. Drama models the public practice of Christian scholarly theological reflection. I define Christian scholarly theological reflection as analyses of the interpretation of God's self-revelation according to Christian and other resources (including the fundamental theological idea of a God who reveals Godself to the world). As an academic endeavor, scholarly theological reflection must be accessible through reason by any interested party. I deploy "scholarly theological reflection" in direct opposition to what might be called "esoteric theology." I define "esoteric theology" as a private practice aimed at divination or the interpretation of a private or special revelation. I prefer "esoteric theology" to the misapplication of the term "mystical theology." Mysticism denotes a style of theological writing that endeavors to share/replicate an experience of divinity rather than translate its meaning into a point of fact "teachable as doctrine."

One of von Balthasar's explicit aims in *Theo-Drama* is to make public an esoteric theology. His argument relies heavily on the special revelation experienced by Adrienne von Speyr but denied

public authentication by church authorities. The relationship with von Speyr and their work to found the secular institute, the Community of St. John, prompted von Balthasar's departure from the Jesuits. The final volume interlaces von Balthasar's Trinitarian eschatology with von Speyr's visionary writings. "Here many passages from the works of Adrienne von Speyr are reproduced and referred to in footnotes... [...] I quote her to show the fundamental consonance [*Übereinstimmung*] between her views and mine on many of the eschatological topics discussed here."⁷⁰⁶ Harrison's choice to translate *Übereinstimmung* as "consonance" captures von Balthasar's sonic sensibility well, but the English word carries overtones of separability much harder to hear in a word that might be literally rendered "super-attunement," "accordance," or "consensus." Consonance implies sounding the same despite difference and makes co-identity a matter of perception. The other options within the semantic range imply a stronger superiority of similarity and co-thinking that gets closer to von Balthasar's insistence, seen in the publication *Unser Auftrag* (Our Task, 1984), "to prevent any separation whatsoever between his own work and that of Adrienne von Speyr."⁷⁰⁷ *Theo-Drama* quotes and references other writers to express consonant ideas. This is von Balthasar's strategy when he mines the theatrical tradition for theological resources. Drama and theology can sound the same, just as theatrical performances of religious phenomena appear so similarly to performances of religious ritual. Consonance anchors the theodramatic analogy and justifies the legitimacy of theodramatic hermeneutics as a mode of theological interpretation.

Von Balthasar has a much different view of von Speyr's contribution from Kevin Mongrain's "assumption guiding [his] reading of von Balthasar [that] von Speyr's influence on [von Balthasar] was deforming rather than constructive, derived rather than original; von Speyr is

⁷⁰⁶ TD 5, 13.

⁷⁰⁷ Johann Roten, S.M., "Two Halves of the Moon: Marian Anthropological Dimensions in the Common Mission of Adrienne von Speyr and Hans Urs von Balthasar," 74.

dispensable for theologically understanding [von Balthasar].”⁷⁰⁸ Mongrain’s assumption about the contribution of Adrienne von Speyr’s esoteric theology and purported spiritual experiences to Balthasar’s philosophical theology matches the widespread assumption that one might disentangle *Theo-Drama*’s properly “theological volumes” from its *Prolegomena*. The importance of dramatic literatures for *Theo-Drama* cannot be found in Mongrain’s otherwise astute recapitulation of the Irenaean themes in von Balthasar’s theological dramatic theory.⁷⁰⁹ While summarizing many of the dramatic resources present in *Theo-Drama*’s first volume, Mongrain mentions none of von Balthasar’s readings of actual plays. The Balthasarian genre dilemma returns. Writing about actual plays is not Mongrain’s task, and Religion and Theatre is not Mongrain’s field. Systematic theology need only track broad-strokes dramatic symbols that are later used to illuminate theological points. The tactic, however, causes literary, artistic, and genre-proscribing side effects to Mongrain’s assumption about von Speyr’s importance. The cultural aspects of *Theo-Drama* appear also to be *theologically* disposable, especially in moments when dramatic spectatorship slides back into the contemplative mode of aesthetic viewing in apparent passivity.⁷¹⁰

The disposability of Adrienne’s influence leads Mongrain to a perfectly reasonable interpretation of von Balthasar’s ideas but cannot be called a credible interpretation of theatrical phenomena: “Unlike the audience at the theater, however, the audience of the theodrama of salvation history ‘participate’ in the play through the guidance of the Spirit, who calls them out of their spectator positions and onto the stage.”⁷¹¹ Every theatrical performance contains “audience participation” because the audience is essential to theatrical happening. Mongrain, of course, means

⁷⁰⁸ Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 11-12, 2002

⁷⁰⁹ See especially Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 189-201.

⁷¹⁰ “Thus Irenaeus’s opposition to sectarian elitism and emphasis on the public nature of the church is also highly significant for von Balthasar’s own ecclesiology. This commitment to the visible, sacramental church guides the discussion of dramatic theory in TD 1, where von Balthasar uses terms such as ‘beholding’ and ‘contemplative’ to refer to the audience’s relationship to the aesthetic form of theatrical drama” (Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 201).

⁷¹¹ Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 201.

participation as actors like the other actors; he signals this through the use of scare marks around “participate” and phrase “onto the stage.”⁷¹² Distaste for audience-participatory theatrical events is well known. Most serious productions follow the nineteenth century protocol and do not invite the audience to cross the threshold between worlds called the “fourth wall.” Bringing members of the crowd up on stage feels too amateurish, too similar to improvisation, like a kind of playfulness better suited to children’s theatre. The distaste for audience participation is a judgment of aesthetic preference. In many cases, incorporating members of the audience into the show is done *in poor taste*. When scholars enforce this preference for an austere distinction between actor and spectator at the level of dramatic theory, however, they misunderstand the phenomenology of theatre: both audience and actor are roles that are played during the event of the performance. The spectator role most frequently involves such notable activities as sitting or standing, applauding, quietly opening candy, gasping, laughing, dancing in one’s seat, or resisting the lull of sleep. Even the most strictly naturalist style of theatre with its unbreakable fourth wall breeds a sense of audience participation: to attend a theatrical performance in French borrows a cognate for *to assist* (“to attend a play” in the phrase *assister à une pièce de théâtre*). The spectator role might even be played by spectators seated on the stage around the performers, as in the original staging of the musical *Spring Awakening*.⁷¹³ Perhaps a play’s scenography spills out into the seating area as in the lamped tables, food, and beverage service that

⁷¹² The previous sentence makes a connection to the audience’s “nonneutral, contemplative awareness” that “forms a ‘communion’ between the author’s vision, the actor’s visible embodiment of the vision on stage, and the audience’s cooperation in the presentation of the vision” but the work of an audience remains exclusively visual. In other words, this non-participating audience has not crossed the threshold from aesthetics to dramatics. What distinguishes the “nonneutral, contemplative awareness” of a play from the contemplation of a painting? I contend that framing theatrical art-making as a movement from author’s vision to visible form in the actor to the cooperative reception by the audience collapses distinctions between media. The actor—of the painting—is a canvas rather than a human body.

⁷¹³ For *Spring Awakening*, some tickets included seating rows to the right and left of the playing space on the stage. These seats included paying audience members as well as a chorus of “plants” who stood, produced microphones, and sang along during big production numbers. These “audience” roles connected the time of the play to the present reality of the crowd. The actors wore street clothes indistinguishable from the patrons amongst whom they were seated. The stage effect, for someone sitting out in the house, rendered members of the “actual audience” into part of the *mise en scene*.

became part of the Roundabout Theatre Company revival of *Cabaret*. With such a picture, where does the designated acting area (the stage) stop and the designated spectating area (the seats) begin?

Mongrain's strategy to view von Balthasar's "systematic thought" puts less emphasis on those areas of *Theo-Drama* that make it engaging for members of the participating public less intrigued by the field of Christian theology. Such an interpretation shuts down the avenues by which von Balthasar employs cultural production in order to allow his philosophical theology to function like a mystic's writing and perform a moment where readers as "audience members" might be trained by the "director Spirit...to overcome the fear, horror, and grief that results from witnessing the reality of tragedy on the world stage...and instead to open themselves to being struck and enraptured by the divine mystery revealed in Christ's incarnation, cross, and resurrection."⁷¹⁴ The genre-defiance of *Theo-Drama*'s inclusion of actual plays and theatrical praxis allows this work of literary theology to become its own occasion where readers might be "led by the Spirit into contemplation."⁷¹⁵ Von Balthasar, in his theological *ressourcement* dramaturgy, assembles the literature necessary for the reader's own insight. Von Speyr's visions appear, in *The Last Act*, as narrations of God's drama. All five volumes do the interpretive work to incorporate von Speyr as the ultimate "dramatic resource" for eschatological speculation. Von Balthasar writes what she *sees* happening on Holy Saturday.⁷¹⁶

Theo-Drama has more notoriety as a work of philosophical theology, but it portends to be a credible work of theological dramatic theory. This chapter will contend that problems in von Balthasar's dramatic theory sanction the misidentification of a theatrical audience as passive

⁷¹⁴ Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 201.

⁷¹⁵ Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 201.

⁷¹⁶ The Holy Saturday theology responds directly to "Adrienne's Paschal experiences. These are reflected constantly in the publications between 1945 (*The Heart of the World*) and the fifth and last volume of *Theo-Drama* in 1983. The booklet, *Der Christ und die Angst* [*Christianity and Anxiety*] (1951), for instance, goes back to Adrienne's supernatural states of anguish" (Rotten, 76).

consumer of the stage drama *as such*. I will show that von Balthasar “over-directs” his thought by means of this personal preference for the style of theatrical naturalism. Ultimately, theatrical praxis can correct this over-direction; the script can be restaged. I contend that von Balthasar presents *Theo-Drama* as a credible modern theology, one where its theory of the audience can and should be as applicable to a congregation at a liturgical performance (the sacred drama) as for the congregation at a theatrical performance (a secular drama). Should *Theo-Drama*’s audience theory continue to be orthodox after the Second Vatican Council, this audience must be “fully conscious and active” in its “participation.”⁷¹⁷ When scholars excise the drama from *Theo-Drama*, they reproduce von Balthasar’s theological misunderstandings about passivity when von Balthasar’s writes this event of God. Part of that drama comes in the form of these books as a production for a public reading audience.

§5.5 Writing as Production and Books as Archive

Perhaps the most scathing challenge to von Balthasar’s theological credibility regards his self-publication.⁷¹⁸ In addition to the various student communities, secular institutes, and international journals, von Balthasar founded a publishing house. The Johannes Verlag began in 1947, primarily for the dissemination the spiritual writings of Adrienne von Speyr.⁷¹⁹ Von Balthasar

⁷¹⁷ A point of contemporary Roman Catholic liturgical theology follows from this invocation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, para. 14. Advocates and opponents of the expanded use of the extraordinary form of the Roman Catholic mass (that is, the so-called Tridentine, Latin, or traditional mass) alongside the now mandated ordinary form (that is, the reformed *novus ordo* or post-Vatican II mass, almost always in the local vernacular) diverge on interpretation of the word “participation.” Does participation imply outward activities like speech, leadership, movement, and gesture? Or does participation imply inward activities like attentive presence, contemplation, and prayer? According to the current magisterial teaching of the Roman church, the ordinary and extraordinary forms of the liturgy are two expressions of the same rite. If Pope Benedict XVI rightfully teaches “These two expressions of the Church’s *lex orandi* will in no way lead to a division in the Church’s *lex credendi* (rule of faith); for they are two usages of the one Roman rite” (*Summorum Pontificum*, Art. 1), then the magisterial teaching regarding “full, active, and conscious participation” also applies to the extraordinary form. Even in silence (perhaps, especially in silence), the congregation always *participates* in the celebration of the sacrament.

⁷¹⁸ “A self-published book can be defined as one in which the author or authors initiate the creation, production and distribution of a title and therefore have control over the process; as opposed to a contract with a commercial publisher which may include advance payments but also involves deadlines, restrictions and guarantees of minimum sales that the writer may have no control over.” See Thomas Peter Stehlik, “Self-publishing: A Creative Solution to Academic Survival in the Commercial World,” *International Journal of the Book*, vol. 10, no. 3, (2013): 53-60.

⁷¹⁹ Henrici, “Sketch,” 19.

and von Speyr could find no publisher willing to put out her four-volume commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John.⁷²⁰ She dictated her visions to von Balthasar who transcribed them for publication.⁷²¹ The Johannes Verlag came about through a relationship with Dr. Josef Fraefel and a partnership with the larger and more established Benzinger church publishing company in Einsiedeln, Switzerland.⁷²² The small and specialized Johannes Verlag could do its physical printing through Benzinger; the director of the publisher was a “former member” of one of von Balthasar’s student groups and “was willing to put part of the technical and organizational strength of his company at the disposal of Johannes Verlag.”⁷²³ While von Balthasar possessed a surprising knack for the intricacies of book design, the means of production came through a partnership with one of Benzinger’s high ranking staff.⁷²⁴

Eventually, Johannes Verlag also began to publish von Balthasar’s translations and commentaries in service to what was understood to be a “central idea” of the publishing imprint: “To let the treasures of Christian thought come to life—Christian thought not only of our own time, but of all centuries.”⁷²⁵ Where other *nouvelle* theologians made recourse to the Church Fathers in search of a more pastoral theological tone, von Balthasar democratized and promulgated their texts to be read and encountered directly by readers. The Johannes Verlag produced sources so others

⁷²⁰ Maximillian Grider, “The Community of St. John: A Conversation with Cornelia Capol and Martha Gisi,” in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, 98.

⁷²¹ Adrienne “would read the verse, close her eyes, reflect for a few seconds and then begin to dictate continuously, usually very quickly, so that being a poor stenographer, I followed only with difficulty and frequently had to ask her to pause for a moment.... Soon she was so accustomed to dictating that she spoke fluently, and in the last years what she dictated was often ready for direct publication. I later made a fair copy of all that had been dictated, making insignificant changes... but nothing of her thought was ever changed” (*First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr*, [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1981], 98-99, quoted in Roten, “Two Halves of the Moon,” 71).

⁷²² Henrici, “Sketch,” 19.

⁷²³ “The Community of St. John,” 99.

⁷²⁴ Longtime secretary and archivist, Cornelia Capol, remarked, “How and where he acquired all his knowledge about graphic layout, types of paper, and typefaces I do not know—probably on the side, like many other things.” (“The Community of St. John,” 90)

⁷²⁵ “The Community of St. John,” 99. The interview describes the various series using their titles: “The first collection, *Christe heute* (Christian today), attempted to do this for contemporary theology. Later there were the series *Sigillum*, *Lectio*, *Spiritualis*, *Horizonte*, *Kriterien*. A final great series is *Christliche Meister* (Christian masters).”

might rush to drink from their font. The task of production became the central concern of von Balthasar's life: "my publishing, which takes up much of my time, is more important to me than the completion of my own works."⁷²⁶ Whether taken as false humility or an honest confession, the surplus meaning of this publishing company should influence how one interprets the production of *Theo-Drama*.

Long before the era of omnipresent personal blogs, von Balthasar took his theological reflections directly to print without much pause for editorial reflection. Peter Henrici's biographical sketch sums up the situation:

What can be said, without exaggeration, is that, without this publishing firm at his disposal, von Balthasar's own work would have been neither written nor published. Once again von Balthasar applies his working principle of a minimum of organization. He was often translator, editor, and publisher in one person, and the authors came mainly from his circle of friends.⁷²⁷

The process was rapid and can account for the volume of volumes. Von Balthasar wrote his initial manuscript in an aesthetically pleasing but impossibly arcane shorthand. The runes would be deciphered by Cornelia Capol and typed.⁷²⁸ The footnotes were written on separate sheets of paper, often because von Balthasar made his many references from memory and added quotations later. The typed manuscript then received one editorial pass from the author where von Balthasar would make corrections to word-choice and phrasing. Rarely would any large section be subject to a total rewrite. The edited manuscript would be published. Like a painter, study sketches of the work in question were prepared, and some of these preparatory papers were also considered worthy of publication. *Love Alone is Credible*, for instance, can be interpreted as a miniature study for the

⁷²⁶ Balthasar, *My Work in Retrospect*, 108

⁷²⁷ Henrici, "Sketch," 30.

⁷²⁸ "At the beginning, I [Cornelia Capol] also had difficulties with his speed. At that time, when I asked, when faced with two different tasks, which I should do first, he answered in a matter-of-fact manner, 'Both' ("The Community of St. John," 100).

Triptych, and von Balthasar frequently refers to that small book as a summary of his theology. *Theo-Drama* encountered a few delays in its completion because of other obligations.⁷²⁹ All told, however, it might have been composed in as few as three “drafts”: the initial shorthand, the typescript corrections, and a final version.⁷³⁰

In some ways, von Balthasar represents an early example of an “alt-ac” career as a public intellectual. His writing process challenges the confidence of academic theology as a university discipline and the restriction of intellectual contribution to those writing while living the professor’s lifestyle. In this regard, it may feel easier to take seriously the literary theologies of the great university dons Tolkien and Lewis because they drew a sharper distinction between the genres of their “scholarly” and their “literary” writing. Publishing for a secular public came to be an enactment of the Johannesgemeinschaft’s spirituality of “disappearing.”⁷³¹ The secular institute generated a thoroughly secular-worldly mode of theological thinking: the Johannes Verlag bypassed, wholesale, any hiddenness in the ivory tower by bringing theology directly to the public. At the same time, von Balthasar’s erudition and esoteric references resist any possibility for his writing to be called “popular” or “readily accessible.”

Theorizing self-publication in terms of production affords benefits for reading *Theo-Drama* on theatrical terms. The first is that “production” rather than “publication” indicates the *telos* of a dramatic playscript in the surplus meaning of performance. Theatrical dramas are not written in order to be realized privately and read like a book. The term for an argument presented in dramatic fashion without the intention for theatrical realization is dialogue.⁷³² Production further clarifies the

⁷²⁹ See the list on Henrici, “Sketch,” 40.

⁷³⁰ I am grateful for my own laughter-filled conversations with Martha and others at the Archiv Hans Urs von Balthasar for their explanations of *Theo-Drama*’s composition process. I am further grateful to the University of Virginia Society of Fellows for providing a summer research grant to fund my visit to Basel.

⁷³¹ “This is what we desire as a characteristic of the Community of St. John: the ability to disappear into the Church” (“The Community of St. John,” 94).

⁷³² To be clear, the intentionality I describe here is one fully contained *within* the text. Philosophical dialogues can be easily adapted into playscripts, but this change in genre remarks an adaptation rather than “simple” performance. As we

importance of material conditions, especially von Balthasar's book collection. Von Balthasar was his own librarian and curator. In dramaturgical terms, he is a *literary manager*. He was an avid collector of books, but this also means that his references are those available to him because he purchased them.⁷³³ He meticulously organized his home-library; every room of the house featured a different subject or theme.

The Archiv Hans Urs von Balthasar in Basel preserves the legacy of his curatorial and publishing work. The archive houses not only von Balthasar's book collection but also keeps copies of the full extent of his published work. The archive's mission is to preserve, in one place and free of charge, access to the totality of von Balthasar's books. Unlike some other archives, it does not (as of yet) offer access to his private papers. In the future and after cataloguing, there are hopes to open some manuscript collections and to reopen the many files of correspondence. What matters in terms of production history are not these rehearsal notes but the actual performances and the material cultures left behind: the books. The Archive thus preserves the Balthasarian production history like a theatre archive. Here one finds archives of the work as performed (published books and articles) and archives of scenography (taking the liberty to see his library of books as loosely analogous to an archival collection of costumes, props, and preserved rehearsal spaces).⁷³⁴ The archive's dual preservation of publications and book collection holds a key to understanding the relationship between this writer and his books. Von Balthasar surrounded himself with the ideas, images, musical scores and stories he most loved. The affective and erotic dimension of learning (a Platonic motif repeated throughout the Triptych) also influenced the sorts of materials von Balthasar brought to his

saw in chapter one, plays possess a "readiness for theatricality" distinct from the "readiness for reading" evidenced by philosophical dialogue. Strict boundaries cannot be firmly established nor would they be desirable.

⁷³³ On book collecting, see Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library," in *Illuminations*, 59-67.

⁷³⁴ For a continuation of the correlation between scenography and ecology with reference to the sustainability of theatrical archives, see Tanja Beer, "Ecomaterialism in scenography," *Theatre and Performance Design*, Vol. 2, no. 1-2, (2016): 161-172.

writing desk. Every reference of a source bespeaks a fondness for ideas and stories. The many references are introductions to these literary friends and treasures. This starts to make sense of the “Do you see what I see?” inflection of his theological aesthetics. Eventually, von Balthasar will stop arguing for a position and simply indicate that one must cultivate the eyes and sensibility to see the form of beauty in its truth.⁷³⁵ To fail to catch what von Balthasar has seen (e.g., in Christ, in a poem, in a play, in a logical theory) can imply moral and intellectual failure. In regards to God’s self-revelation in Jesus the Christ, the failure to recognize the truth in the dramatic splendor of its beauty and goodness is a culpable act of human sin. The tone of its presentation can be off-putting and the ethics of such references questioned, but von Balthasar’s positions remain internally consistent.

Talking about theatrical production takes material conditions into account. Production refers to the realization of the drama in theatrical performance. In this way, one narrates a show’s “production history” by analyzing the particular and diverse contributions of actors, directors, companies, and designers over time. Larger theatre companies with bigger budgets will be able to do more in terms of spectacle than smaller companies that must be more creative with more limited resources. Bigger is not always better. Small companies can achieve an intimacy of theatrical discovery lost in massive spectacles for huge audiences.

Two additional aspects of von Balthasar’s book collection influence the means of his literary production. The first, as I have already mentioned, is the library’s self-curation as a reflection of affection. The second is the relationship between books and quotations, and the third is the difference between literary and theatrical events. Von Balthasar’s references are less citations than

⁷³⁵ The way von Balthasar makes arguments “very often proceeds through extended exposition and survey; somehow in the process, through commentary ranging over several thousand years of thinkers and texts, he presents the reader with the approach he takes to be correct. In an extended sense one might still call this an argument—an implicit argument that this must be the way things are because the vision laid out is compelling, because things hang together and the tradition makes sense if one reads it this way. But there is often no argument offered in any narrower sense of the word” (Kilby, *Balthasar*, 7).

they are poetic allusions. *Theo-Drama* tries to “get at” a mode of doing dramatic theology without ever crossing the Rubicon into an actual piece of dramatic art.⁷³⁶ *Theo-Drama*’s genre is theological *ressourcement* dramaturgy and not a theological drama. The prose style may be charged with dramatic tension, but its “drama” never truly breaks free from scare marks. *Theo-Drama*’s allusions stick to the repertoire and the company, the availability of books in von Balthasar’s library to be “cast” as supporting roles in theodramatic theology. When necessary, the references can unfold into full quotations; for the most part, they remain signposts for the familiar rather than necessary building blocks for an argument.

His allusions to other writers work akin to theatrical allusions. On a linguistic level, theatrical allusions function like poetic allusions. Excavating a poet’s references can make or break the meanings of a poem; close readings load fragmentary connections with depth from the supplied reference. A poem does not fail, however, if the reader’s conscience does not catch the reference as a part of interpretive work. Allusions differ from inside jokes because allusions promise extra surplus meaning for the ready interpreter but do not deprive the unready interpreter of a genuine encounter. Inside jokes, by contrast, cannot launch because “You had to be there.” Such humor consists in an external historical referent and not something contained within the joke itself. Theatrical allusions (particularly ones expressed in staging) deepen the meanings of a theatrical moment without necessarily requiring an audience to know the reference in order for the sequence to make sense. A cocktail party exchange “What’s in the punch? Lemons and melons and pears. Oh

⁷³⁶ In this way, von Balthasar’s writing appears closest to Blanchot’s description of the Orphic space of literature. “Writing begins with Orpheus gaze. And this gaze is the movement of desire that shatters the song’s destiny, that disrupts concern for it, and in this inspired and careless decision reaches the origin, consecrates the song. But in order to descent toward this instant, Orpheus has to possess the power of art already. This is to say: one writes only if one reaches that instant which nevertheless one can only approach in the space opened by the movement of writing. To write, one has to write already. In this contradiction are situated the essence of writing, the snag in the experience, and inspiration’s leap” (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 176). Writing expresses von Balthasar’s intuition of truth refracted in the various symphonic parts without looking at it squarely or directly. Writing circumnavigates the problem of *how* to speak the infinite in finite words. Writing the theodrama requires writing about this event that cannot be seen in order to show it to others.

my!” seems silly enough on its own; placing that exchange in the Oz of *Wicked* makes the link to the well-known “Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!” of the original film. Knowing an allusion’s reference does not further the plot, but a sense of the reference makes for a good “punch line” or a richer understanding of character.⁷³⁷ Allusions internal to a play or novel take on the quality of a leitmotif. Citations, by contrast, corral evidence to construct an argument. Knowing the citation is necessary for understanding a plot, even in a theatrical production. Historical references required for a play to make sense must be contained within the plot itself or printed like a footnote in the program.⁷³⁸

The third aspect of von Balthasar’s books regards a distinction between literary and theatrical events and their spaces and temporalities.⁷³⁹ Theatre highlights the event-character of interpretation as a world-shaping practice. Scenography, for instance, is the externalization of setting as an interpretive choice in theatre-making. Reading a novel requires interior designs of the imagination, but staging a play requires the manifestation of a scenographic choices. A book travels alongside the reader on trains and across university lawns; to play a part in an audience requires that one must go to the theater as a “theatre-goer.” Theatres are *outside* home as places for spectacle.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁷ More sophisticated, perhaps, are Stephen Schwartz’s uses of musical motifs from the source material. *Wicked*’s “Unlimited” theme, for example, begins with the same notes as “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” and the phrase “couldn’t be happier” in “Thank Goodness”—staged to make a visual allusion to the musical, *Evita*—follows notes of the melody to “Follow the Yellow Brick Road.”

⁷³⁸ The best contemporary example, at the time of this writing, is the multipage “summary” and “glossary of terms” from the seven Harry Potter novels that appear as program notes for *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*.

⁷³⁹ Which is not to say that the work of writing is not, also, an event performed in time. Blanchot provides an alternative sense of the book’s presence to the idea of writing as production. “This presence of being, the work, is an event. This event does not come to pass outside of time any more than the work is simply spiritual. Rather, through the work there takes place in time another time, and in the world of beings that exist and of things which subsist there come, as presence, not another world, but the other of all works, that which is always other than the world” (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 228).

⁷⁴⁰ Two points are important, here. The first is that large mansions featuring big screens in a “home theater” would be less confusing if the industry standard term became “home cinema.” A terminologically correct “home theater” would need to be an auditorium of some kind. Second, “theatres of war” and other such analogical uses of theatre to mean “the field” rightfully describe places outside and away from home. Such common usage does not denigrate dramaturgical approaches to everyday life but helps to underscore theatre’s requirement for a place and time. Theaters must be places to which one can go and leave; even the theatre of the world-stage has “entrances and exits” according to Jaques’ speech. My consideration of Holy Saturday and the “space” of a theodramatic conception of the Trinity hinge on the theatrical hermeneutics of space and time.

Books, however, can do the heart-work of home-making. Souvenirs of an evening at the theatre—ticket stubs, programs, trinkets—denote recollection of an evening’s journey like souvenirs from a vacation to a far-off place. The very words “souvenir” or “memento” contain the roots of “memory” these objects conjure. Theatrical souvenirs remain relics of an unrepeatable experience. Books can be mementos, too; a book collection might be inherited (and so bring memories of a past) or be a record of travels for famous booksellers or courses taken.⁷⁴¹ Anytime a reader opens a given book, however, there remains the possibility for a new hermeneutic encounter.⁷⁴²

By surrounding himself with his books, von Balthasar immersed himself in printed words always ready to hand. A legend describes von Balthasar’s day like this: “In the morning, he would translate a book. In the afternoon, he would write a book. And at night he would read a book.” The clichéd and hyperbolic description might not help make sense of how he spent actual time, but it does rightfully indicate the literary space in which he lived. Books are omnipresent, and they constitute both his literal and theoretical archive. In order to see the particular interpretive work of theatre and performance in the midst of such a literary life, I contend that a more credible approach would shift from bookish imagery to the mindset of theatrical production.

Von Balthasar’s *work* is a composite production like Maurice Blanchot’s theory of the work of the writer, infinite and only achieved fragmentarily over time.⁷⁴³ For Blanchot, the task of the writer is to try and approximate an idea known only in the solitary space of literature. The writer

⁷⁴¹ “Actually, inheritance is the soundest way of inheriting a book collection. For a collector’s attitude toward his possessions stems from an owner’s feeling of responsibility toward his property. Thus it is, in the highest sense, the attitude of an heir, and the most distinguished trait of a collection will always be its transmissibility” (Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library, 66).

⁷⁴² “But one thing should be noted: the phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its personal owner. Even though public collections may be less objectionable socially and more useful academically than private collections, the objects get their due only in the latter. [...] Only in extinction is the collector comprehended” (Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library, 67).

⁷⁴³ “The infinite nature of the work, seen thus, is just the mind’s infiniteness. The mind wants to fulfill itself in a single work, instead of realizing itself in an infinite of works and in history’s ongoing movement” (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 22).

must be silent in order to serve the work, but the work is never completed during the writer's lifetime. "This is what is meant by the observation that the writer, since he only finishes his work at the moment he dies, never knows of his work. One ought perhaps to turn this around. For isn't the writer dead as soon as the work exists? He sometimes has such a presentiment himself: an impression of being ever so strangely out of work."⁷⁴⁴ A work takes a lifetime because "The writer never knows whether the work is done."⁷⁴⁵ Each book is just another halting step trying to make perceptible an inchoate experience of solitude and silence.⁷⁴⁶ Themes of loneliness and silence return later in this chapter's consideration of von Balthasar's Holy Saturday theology and writing the Christ's descent into the literary space of hell. For now, Blanchot helps to indicate the intimate connection between von Balthasar's practices of writing and the production of his books. If *Theo-Drama* is to be believed when it presents itself as the convergence of modern theological trends, then it makes sense to imagine all of von Balthasar's publications and all of von Balthasar's book collecting as the archive of a lifework's production history. This permits the interpretive work of theatre and performance to notice connections across von Balthasar's work that do not redound to biography, psychology, diagnoses of his relationship with Adrienne von Speyr, or archaeologies of authorial intent. The examination proceeds according to the production materials accessible in the archive.

I aim to distinguish the credibility of publication as a measure of a text's worth from the credibility of the production in and of itself. This distinction helps to begin to make sense of meaningful differences between theological genres rather than a gulf between modes of

⁷⁴⁴ Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 23.

⁷⁴⁵ Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 21.

⁷⁴⁶ "To write is to make oneself the echo of what cannot cease speaking—and since it cannot, in order to become its echo I have, in a way, to silence it. I bring to this incessant speech the decisiveness, the authority of my own silence. I make it *perceptible*, by my silent mediation, the uninterrupted affirmation, the giant murmuring upon which language opens and thus becomes image, becomes imaginary, becomes a speaking depth, an indistinct plenitude which is empty. This silence has its source in the effacement toward which the writer is drawn. Or else, it is the resource of his mastery, the right of intervention which the hand that doesn't write retains—the part of the writer which can always say no, when necessary, appeal to time, restore the future" (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 27, emphasis original).

promulgation with varying degrees of intellectual respectability. Policing von Balthasar's stylistic originality because of its material interventions in academic theological knowledge production hampers understanding. This is especially true for *Theo-Drama* as it forges links between multiple usually estranged fields as the convergence of many trajectories in religion and theatre. At the same time, grappling with his self-published writing as production incorporates Karen Kilby's rightful concerns about misrepresenting his status in the field. Though von Balthasar's writing struggles to fit according to established disciplinary boundaries, his theology finds a still growing, international, and excited readership. Von Balthasar may have once been marginalized, but, especially in Anglophone theology, he has become a super star. Kilby writes, "No recent Roman Catholic theologian is more studied, discussed, and generally admired in universities at the moment, and yet he continues to be presented as someone who is usually rejected."⁷⁴⁷ The language of production takes no sides in the debate about the sanctity or problems of an "independent scholar" with the resources to self-publish. From drama, we know that what matters is credibility of the public production.

§5.6 *Theo-Drama* According to Walter Benjamin's "Author as Producer"

We can only encounter what von Balthasar produced. "In his will he laid down that manuscripts left unpublished at his death should be destroyed: he had published everything that was to be published."⁷⁴⁸ The consideration of the author as a producer requires the sort of materialist criticism apropos of a chapter that considers writing about the drama of a God who experiences the forsakenness of death. In an essay on the topic of "The Author as Producer," Walter Benjamin centered the social relations that surround the writer's work as a major component for interpretation.

Social relations, as we know, are determined by production relations. And when materialist criticism approached a work, it used to ask what was the position of that work *vis-à-vis* the social production

⁷⁴⁷ Kilby, *Balthasar*, 6.

⁷⁴⁸ Henrici, "Sketch," 34.

relations of its time. [...] Before I ask: what is a work's position *vis-à-vis* the production relations of its time, I should like to ask: what is its position *within* them? This question concerns the function of a work within the literary production relations of its time. In other words, it is directly concerned with literary *technique*.⁷⁴⁹

Benjamin links a “correctness” in the aesthetic merit and quality of writing to a “correctness” in the work’s political commitments, its tendency. The essay establishes how “a work which exhibits the right tendency must, of necessity, show every other quality as well.”⁷⁵⁰ The concept of technique grounds Benjamin’s materialist analysis in material objects, and he holds that examinations of technique avoid the problem of separation between form and content.⁷⁵¹ Benjamin’s author-as-producer no longer works in the ahistorical vacuum of the Wagnerian genius. The author is a human writer and operates within a system of relations and under historical conditions. The language of production undoes the commodity fetish of the finished product of the book. The writer produces something in the world according to the rules of the world. Few miracles explain an author’s literary labor. The author-as-producer peels away the cult of the genius that mystifies the material conditions in which texts are composed and books are made, however “inspired” those writings may be.

Conceiving the author as a producer puts intellectuals and writers on par with the working class. The author does not achieve the political tendency of solidarity with the proletariat so long as a writer remains aloof. Too often, Benjamin argues, well-meaning intelligentsia perpetuate the mythology of the author’s moral superiority. Only the “man of mind” can rightly diagnose the ills of society and foment social change through the power of well-written words. The writing’s content could present a revolution mentality or signal the right kind of politics, but such an author fails to

⁷⁴⁹ Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer” in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 2003), 87, emphasis original.

⁷⁵⁰ Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” 86.

⁷⁵¹ “By mentioning technique I have named the concept which makes literary products accessible to immediate social, and therefore, materialist, analysis. At the same time, the concept of technique, represents the starting-point from which the sterile dichotomy of form and content can be surmounted” (Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” 87–88).

apply critical thought to the material means of production. As a practice, aloof writing perpetuates the *status quo* of social stratification because “political commitment, however revolutionary it may seem, functions in a counter-revolutionary way so long as the writer experiences his solidarity with the proletariat only *in the mind* and not as a producer.”⁷⁵² Production hypocrisy undermines the political efficacy of an argument by bankrupting its material credibility. The progressive author creates a gap between political argument and political action when that writer remains unwilling to share means of literary and intellectual production. Benjamin raises credibility issues especially where he identifies the pragmatic problem in a cult of authorial brilliance.⁷⁵³ Intellectuals justify their status by decrying which party leaders’ “‘thinking is more faulty.’ I daresay it is; but what is the use of that if the important thing in politics is not private thinking but, as Brecht once put it, the art of thinking

⁷⁵² Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” 91, emphasis original. Benjamin singles out two such groups in the essay, Activism and New Objectivity (*Neue Sachlichkeit*). According to Benjamin, the Activists—he references the names of novelists Heinrich Mann and Alfred Döblin as examples—sought to establish “the rule of ‘men of mind’”: governance by intellectual elites. Benjamin cites the picture book *The World is Beautiful* by Albert Renger-Patzsch as an example of the New Objectivity. The style sought to render a sense of beauty in the mundane or industrial through simple, modern photographs. Benjamin worries about the commodification of suffering in the ways such stylish representation “has succeeded in turning abject poverty itself, by handling it in a modish, technically perfect way, into an object of enjoyment” (Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” 95).

⁷⁵³ Benjamin’s astute and general language of political tendency helps this essay to retain its relevance once separated from the historical conditions to which its politics speak. He never calls for the elimination of authorship as a distinct vocation; rather, he continually emphasizes the systems of social relation that restrict that vocation to a particular class. Authorship—as a calling—requires a set of intellectual talents and personality predilections; writing—as a practice—should be democratized. Hence the essay’s turn to theatre and the press as models for kinds of writing done in solidarity with workers. While Benjamin decries the social systems that uphold the cult of the genius, he has not presumed an anthropology of radical equality. Benjamin’s argument emerges from a benign Platonism with minimal angst regarding differences in ability between various individuals. He frames the issue of the political tendency in writing and authors’ contributions to structures of production in terms of Plato’s sense of the writer’s political power: “Plato has a high opinion of the power of literature. But he thought it harmful and superfluous—in a *perfect* community, be it understood. Since Plato, the question of the writer’s right to exist has not often been raised with the same emphasis; today, however, it arises once more. Of course it only seldom arises in this *form*” (Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” 85, emphasis original). Benjamin does not want his reader to forget how the “*perfect* community” of the *Republic* has been engineered; philosopher-kings and elite guardians receive different educations suitable to their class. Writers must be banished as much for their mimetic indiscretions (Plato’s anti-representationalist aesthetics) as for their capacity to expose the mythologies about the identity of the workers on which the *Republic*’s governance relies. One ventures to guess that Benjamin’s emphasis on perfection indicates as much some deferential nod to the superfluity of progressive political tendency for writers in post-revolution utopia (i.e., in a classless society, any and all writing will be *de facto* in solidarity with the proletariat) as it does a critique of Plato’s social theory (i.e., the *Republic*’s perfection requires the maintenance of a class structure). At no point does Benjamin’s call for solidarity with workers in the author-as-producer’s political tendency advocate an eventual abolition of authorship—whether of literature or scholarship—as a form of life. The essay first appeared as an address to the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris (27 April 1934).

inside other people's heads?"⁷⁵⁴ Mystifying the author as an identity distinct from the means of literary production wedges a divide between revolutionary reflection and practical action according to what Benjamin calls the correct tendency. Furthermore, the cult of the author delegitimizes critical thought into a matter of private opinion. Just as the author-as-producer works to liberate access to the means of literary production, so too the author-as-producer should liberate access to intellectual production. Politics of a proper tendency seeks to include the proletariat; so too, must literary production be in solidarity with the proletariat. Benjamin reaches for Brecht in order to link, with immediacy, the (privately held) intellectual labor of the author with its (public and political) social reception.

Benjamin's paradigm for authorship, therefore, shifts from the poet or novelist to the dramatist. With this first invocation of Brecht's political aesthetics, Benjamin capitalizes on the affinity between the language of production and theatre. Theatre happens *in public*. This fact retains importance for materialist political theatre and for von Balthasar's theodramatic self-publication. To conceive of the author-as-producer exploits the murky distinction between drama-as-theatre and drama-as-literature. Performance anxiety challenges the credibility of drama in its decadence, escapism, and presentism, but Benjamin flips the script so theatrical performance best approximates the political reception of any art or art-making.⁷⁵⁵ Under the conditions of Brecht's materialist aesthetics, dramatic writing occurs with full knowledge of its political tendency and its material

⁷⁵⁴ The author must "never be concerned with products alone, but always, at the same time, with the means of production. In other words, his products must possess an organizing function besides and before their character as finished works. And their organizational usefulness must on no account be confined to propagandistic use. Commitment alone will not do it" (Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," 98).

⁷⁵⁵ Defending Benjamin's position on theatre's superiority as a means of political reception trades on aesthetic conclusions from materialist analysis. Theatre promises a direct and immediate encounter between people and stories in a social context. Theatre, at its most basic, is a "public reading." Unlike private reading (individual) or cinema (mediated through the mechanical reproduction of the camera), theatre allows the ritual performance of stories to transform into a site of political action. Later political theatre-makers made this possibility explicit by making explicit social change—rather than art open to the possibility of social transformation by its political tendency—the *telos* of the theatrical event. For a practical application that includes the concerns of the community see Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, especially the discussion of the Joker in the context of the Arena Theater of São Paulo, 159-190.

conditions. Brecht serves as Benjamin's exemplar because epic theatre constitutes a theatrical technique (a style) rather than genre of playscripts. That technique makes as much reference to staging and the actor's craft as it does to dramatic writing. To write consciously for epic theatre requires knowledge of the mode of production in a live event. The performance event makes evident the social relations that constitute the means of production (e.g., actors, stage crew, and audience). As a public event, theatrical performance demonstrates paradigmatic conditions for a technique that creates art both of high aesthetic quality and high political efficacy.⁷⁵⁶

Benjamin, through this appeal to Brecht, establishes his criteria for evaluating technique as the fusion of tendency and aesthetic quality exemplified by the author-as-producer. Good technique demonstrates not only a correct political commitment but also influences the system of relations through its transformation of the means of production. In short: correct technique models correct politics, both in form and content. So-called Leftist intellectuals and artists can, therefore, participate within the structures of the *status quo* "production apparatus" if and only if, "at the same time and within the limits of the possible" they work to modify the "apparatus" in service of the social justice

⁷⁵⁶ My invocation of the work of art means to differentiate artistic and scholarly writing from journalism. The former continues to invite repeated interpretation over time; literature and scholarship endeavors to remain perpetually relevant. Journalistic writing, by contrast, transfigures over time. "Old news" constitutes an archive but lacks the perpetual relevance afforded by interpreting works of art or scholarship, but the political importance of the press cannot be understated. "The press is the most decisive point of reference for this process, and that is why any consideration of the author as producer must extend to and include the press." The press constitutes the vanishing point of the line between author-as-producer and reader-as-consumer; a reader of a newspaper is invited to write back, to comment. Benjamin provides resources not only to defend the accessibility of the news through online publication, but also to challenge the political efficacy of comment boards. Print comingles the materiality of the journalist's writing with the commentary of the public; online publications have (oftentimes rightly) denigrated engagement to third-party platforms (e.g., Twitter) or the "comments section." Authority, previously reserved to those writers with the credibility of a publisher, now roams freely. A Benjaminian assessment of "fake news" would raise concerns not with the democratization of writing thanks to the internet but with internet writing's mode of production: technological mediation, speed, susceptibility to propaganda, and indebtedness to capitalist funding structures. According to a note, Benjamin quotes himself to explain, "Authority to write is no longer founded in a specialist training but in a polytechnical one, and so becomes common property. In a word, the literarization of living conditions becomes a way of surmounting otherwise insoluble antinomies, and the place where the words is most debased—that is to say, the newspaper—becomes the very place where a rescue operation can be mounted." The political tendency of internet publication resists any claim—unlike an ideology that lauds the press as harbinger of truth—to a common good, "common property" (Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," 90).

they champion. Such modeling enacts meaningful change to systems of production through a process Brecht called *Umfunktionierung* or “functional transformation.”⁷⁵⁷

I now can more clearly establish why Benjamin’s author-as-producer illuminates von Balthasar. Until now, von Balthasar’s writing could only be called “production” by loose analogy to theatre. The production is the final theatrical event accessible to audiences. In (capitalist) economic terms, the production is the product purchased by audience members through ticket sales. One does not pay money for the sake of owning a paper ticket; one pays money in order to see the production as a product. An evening at a play can be consumed like any other consumable product. Framing von Balthasar’s writing as production puts focus on that which a reading public can consume: the published volumes by Johannes Verlag. Theorizing von Balthasar’s writing as that of Benjamin’s author-as-producer indicates how theological writing occurs within some production apparatus open to critical and materialist interpretation. Theorizing von Balthasar the author-as-producer is not meant to imply that he fits Benjamin’s preferred political tendency. Another study could more definitively determine whether or not von Balthasar’s writing made a functional transformation to the apparatus of scholarly theology or if he worked in such a way as to put his style on the side of the Swiss working class.

But Benjamin’s self-avowed progressive materialist analysis and political tendency (in broad strokes Marxian in ways similar to the discussion of Brecht in a previous chapter) might be recast in terms of von Balthasar’s self-avowed ideological starting point: Roman Catholicism. In this regard, von Balthasar does, indeed, write with practices in solidarity with a “religious proletariat”: those doing the work of building the church in the world. The notion of a “religious proletariat” does not mean to imply a strict parallel with Benjamin’s analysis of the bourgeoisie and working classes

⁷⁵⁷ “Brecht has coined the phrase ‘functional transformation’ (*Umfunktionierung*) to describe the transformation of forms and instruments of production by a progressive intelligentsia—an intelligentsia interested in liberating the means of production and hence active in the class struggle” (Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” 93).

expressed in economic terms. The hierarchical structure of the Roman Catholic Church should not, in theory, necessitate a sacramental class struggle between its clergy and laity. History shows some links between clerical power and lay and religious disenfranchisement.⁷⁵⁸ My invocation of a “religious proletariat” seeks to foreground von Balthasar’s identification of secular and public life as the location (or stage) for the church’s work.⁷⁵⁹ That is, the “working class” of the Church’s mission to the world occurs on the frontiers of public culture. Like Benjamin’s author-as-producer, von Balthasar tried to live out his own perception of the “correct” tendency. “His life was more the secular one of the ordinary Christian than that of a diocesan priest. Here, in retrospect, may lie the deeper significance, for his mission, of the decision to leave the Jesuits: lifestyle and mission came to

⁷⁵⁸ Clergy, religious, and laity are variations in forms of life for Roman Catholics and properly understood to be vocations (that is, forms of life to which the faithful are called by God). In common parlance, clergy refers to those ordained to sacramental ministry (e.g., priests); religious refers to those who live as a part of a religious community (often taking vows of some kind: nuns, monks, friars, etc.); and the laity usually refers to those baptized members of the Church who are neither ordained nor religious. This way of speaking creates confusion because boundaries between these vocations, as popularly understood, can be complicated to parse. Often, these terms connect to the well-known Roman Catholic Church’s celibacy requirement for clergy. Roman Catholic clergy in the Latin rite remain celibate by custom, but this celibacy requirement is not coterminous with being a part of the clergy. The Church restored a permanent diaconate (the lowest “rank” of ordained clergy) at the Second Vatican Council which permits married men, and the eastern rites of the Catholic church also permit married clergy. A member of a religious community can also be a priest, and non-ordained religious (a Mother Abbess, for example) can, indeed, “outrank” some priests in some contexts. The Church uses more technical language in the term “presbyter” to designate the clerical rank most commonly expressed in the role of a local parish priest. Bishops and popes, after all, are also *priests* despite their elevation beyond clerical rank of the presbyterate. Permanent deacons are not priests in the same sense as a presbyter (deacons, for instance, cannot celebrate the Eucharist or hear confessions). All baptized Catholics, however, exercise and reflect Christ’s priesthood in some capacity, however limited. Rather than become lost making the Church’s language chime in time with cultural expectations, it can be easier to introduce more nuanced language distinguishing between 1) those ordained to holy orders (clergy) and those not (laity) and between 2) those living a form of life in accord with local cultures of the world (secular) and those living a form of life in accord with a religious community (religious). In this way, one sees that clergy can be secular (living in the world; e.g., a diocesan priest) or religious (living as part of a religious community; e.g., a Dominican priest). Laity can be secular (living in the world; e.g., a married lay person) or religious (living as part of a religious community; e.g., a Sister of St. Joseph). Vowed religious receive the honorific “Brother” or “Sister” as a sign of respect for their consecrated life in service to the church and world according to religious vows, but lay religious are nevertheless “theologically considered” members of the laity. By treating forms of life as vocations, one can emphasize the credibility of a “calling to the laity” or a “calling to religious life” distinct from the clericalism that prizes vocation language only for the call to ordination.

⁷⁵⁹ “The issue is the Church in the world, not a radiating of the Church’s holiness into the profane world, but the leavening of the world from within in order to make visible God’s glory which still shines in the world. The center of the Church, says von Balthasar, is where people usually see the periphery: her secular mission. That is why the defensive bulwarks must be razed to the ground and spacious boulevards built from the rubble. The mission of the Church in the world must be carried out by the laity, who live completely in the world. But to be able to fulfill that mission, they really must be ‘salt’ and ‘leaven’. They must live in the very heart of Christianity, in the shade of the Cross, in prayer, and renunciation. Here von Balthasar sees the role of the secular institutes, as proposed in 1947 by *Provida Mater*, and as the Community of St. John tries to put into practice” (Henrici, “Sketch,” 24-25).

coincide more closely.”⁷⁶⁰ The mission of the secular institutes and the Johannes Verlag and their founders coincide in decisions to work and act in solidarity with the public. At the same time, this decision to be “secular” denotes the bottom rank of the religious hierarchy. For von Balthasar, those seeking to be the “working class” of the Church disappear into the secular public.

The *ressourcement* to culture as the site of the church’s secular frontier that von Balthasar represents can now be articulated as a particular movement of theology into the world and for the public as an attempt to display its credibility. In order to be credible, theology must do its interpretive work in solidarity with the working class of the Christian community. That is, theology must be a credible contribution to the “dramatic characteristics” of a pluralist and critical modern situation. At a certain level, theatre already does this by illuminating the drama of existence and asking proto-theological questions that prompt decisions with consequence on the world stage. Those questions must be dramaturgically reconfigured in order to continue to be meaningful in new historical contexts. Seen in light of Benjamin’s author-as-producer, von Balthasar’s grandiloquence can be called an attempt to synthesize and present the whole inheritance of a tradition for the sake of a reading public.

As we have seen, von Balthasar’s interpretations over-direct and overwhelm the autonomy of the surplus meanings of the books he hopes to share. Benjamin helps to see the problem as the aversion to pedagogical theatre at play in von Balthasar’s own studies of Brecht. Benjamin writes,

Commitment is a necessary, but never a sufficient, condition for a writer’s work acquiring an organizing function. For this to happen it is also necessary for the writer to have a teacher’s attitude. And today this is more than ever an essential demand. *A writer who does not teach other writers teaches nobody.* The crucial point, therefore, is that a writer’s production must have the character of a model: it must be able to instruct other writers in their production and, secondly, it must be able to place an improved apparatus at their disposal. This apparatus will be the better, the more consumers it brings in contact with the production process—in short, the more readers or spectators it turns

⁷⁶⁰ Henrici, “Sketch,” 25.

into collaborators. We already possess a model of this kind, of which, however, I cannot speak here in any detail. It is Brecht's epic theatre.⁷⁶¹

Juxtaposing Benjamin's discussion of Brecht with von Balthasar demonstrates both positive and negativity similarities. On the positive side, von Balthasar's work with the Johannes Verlag did, indeed, adopt "a teacher's attitude" by translating theological works and ideas across languages and styles. Von Balthasar understood the strength of his own writing to be in translation and preface writing. He divides his literary output into unequal thirds in terms of transcribing Adrienne von Speyr's visions, composing his own theological work and its many allusions, and preparing translations with instructional prefaces.⁷⁶² Like Brecht's epic attention to displaying the means of theatrical production, von Balthasar foregrounds the symphonic cooperation of the means of theological production.⁷⁶³ Theology's response in answer to God requires listening for the resonance of each particular experience. A sense of the truth of the matter comes together only in the form of

⁷⁶¹ Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," 98, emphasis original.

⁷⁶² Note the preponderance of musical metaphors and von Balthasar's notion of symphonic truth highlighted in boldface. "The works of Adrienne von Speyr, almost all of which were dictated to me, represent about a third of the books written with my own hand; a second, weak third is made up of the books published under my own name; a more full-bodied third, finally, is made up of books translated by me for my publishing house. And if now I search my heart, there are in this last category many books that are dearer and important to me than my own books. There are the works of my friends, such as Henri de Lubac and Louis Bouyer, of the great poets, such as Claudel, Péguy, Bernanos, without speaking of Maurice Blondel or of Ignatius, Calderon, and John of the Cross, to whom also I have dared to draw near. **Then there are works of less well-known authors whose voices, so it seems to me, ought not to be missing from the contemporary concert.** For a great number of authors whom I have edited, **I have each time written a preface in order to situate them more correctly, with their specific tonality, in the orchestra.** In this way, my publishing, which takes up much of my time, is more important to me than the completion of my own works. It offers a condensation of what I understand by contemporary Catholic spirituality (in theology, philosophy, and literature). **In a concert one instrument must no longer sound like just *one* instrument—the ensemble is involved, the whole orchestra.** Were I to be asked which volumes of the *Ästhetik* (*The Glory of the Lord*), I love most, I would reply: the one (volumes 2 and 3 of the English translation) in which I tried to expound twelve great theologians, beginning with Irenaeus and ending with Soloviev; **in their integrity they let the sound of what I wanted to make heard ring out**" (Balthasar, *My Work in Retrospect*, 107-108, emphasis mine).

⁷⁶³ Benjamin helps to show why the attempt at displaying the means of theological production creates difficulties it tries to solve. Reading von Balthasar can be quite taxing and presumes a certain privilege in preparation. "The solidarity of the expert with the proletariat—and therein lies the beginning of the solution—can never be other than mediated. The Activists and adherents of New Objectivity may strike whatever poses they like, they can do nothing about the fact that even the proletarianization of the intellectual hardly ever makes him a proletarian. Why? Because the bourgeois class has endowed him with a means of production—in the form of his education—which, on the grounds of educational privilege, creates a bond of solidarity which attaches him to his class, and still more attaches his class to him" (Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," 102).

the whole symphony. So too, epic theatre prompts some judgment towards a transformation of ordinary social life by means of an experience of the whole of a play by all its players.⁷⁶⁴

On the negative side, however, juxtaposition between von Balthasar's theological dramatic theory and Benjamin's sense of Brechtian dramatic theory foregrounds von Balthasar's dramaturgical elision between drama whose ordinary mode of interpretive reception is book to be read and drama as theatre whose ordinary mode of interpretive reception is a theatrical performance. Where Benjamin highlights the importance of instruction to other writers, von Balthasar fails to create adequate playing space for the interpretive work of theatre and performance to produce surplus meaning. Perhaps this is because von Balthasar privileges a completed form over against an experimental fragment. I found this opposition explicitly in von Balthasar's interpretation of *Galileo*. Benjamin, rather, sees some promise in Brecht's refusal of a finished theatrical product. Benjamin praises how Brecht "opposes the dramatic laboratory to the finished work of art. He goes back, in a new way, to the theatre's greatest and most ancient opportunity: the opportunity to expose the present."⁷⁶⁵ So too, von Balthasar displays performance anxiety regarding the contribution of other scene partners on the world-stage. The literary management in *Theo-Drama* readies itself for *von Balthasar's* staging of the script, not for other credible interpretations of the Good's revelation illuminated by Christian and theatrical materials. In other words, von Balthasar presents drama as a resource for his interpretive work as its spiritual director rather than present theatre as a public resource to aid in the comedic-hermeneutical re-interpretation of the dramatic conditions of modern social life.⁷⁶⁶ For Brecht, the "conditions of our life" get recognized "as real—not, as in the theatre

⁷⁶⁴ Music has an important role to play in epic theatre. See Brecht's essay, contrasting modern theatre with Wagnerian opera, "The Modern Theatre is an Epic Theatre" in *Brecht on Theatre*.

⁷⁶⁵ Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," 100.

⁷⁶⁶ "It is in the interests of this dialogue [with newer means of communication] Brecht went back to the most fundamental and original elements of theatre. He confined himself, as it were, to a podium, a platform. He renounced plots requiring a great deal of space. Thus he succeeded in altering the functional relationship between stage and audience, text and production, producer and actor. Epic theatre, he declared, must not develop actions but represent conditions" (Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," 99).

of naturalism, with complacency, but with astonishment. Epic theatre does not reproduce conditions; rather, it discloses, it uncovers them.”⁷⁶⁷ Benjamin understands the interpretive work of Epic theatre to be an illumination of existence that discloses the world’s possibilities and new discoveries. That disclosure of possibility *reframes and reinterprets* commonly held materiality. In Balthasarian terms, drama reinterprets the given and creaturely world without adopting an external standpoint beyond finitude. Benjamin’s discussion of Epic theatre operates according to similar hermeneutic terms to the ones that undergird Ricœur’s sense that reading the literary productions of others discloses new worlds and ourselves.

Von Balthasar does not make a perfect analogue to the author-as-producer in Benjamin’s essay. Good questions can be raised about the quality of the teaching of his prose. Most obviously, von Balthasar’s aims are theological rather than ethical. But if one swaps Benjamin’s language of a political tendency towards solidarity with the proletariat for a theological tendency toward conformity with God’s purported self-revelation, one begins to see the form of Benjamin’s ideas in von Balthasar’s theodramatics. Hence why Brecht offers von Balthasar a hinge for the theatrical and theological question of the Good. The detour to consider *Theo-Drama*’s production history helps uncover why yet another version of von Balthasar’s Holy Saturday theology and Christological Trinitarian theology appears as its finale, constantly foreshadowed in the theme of dereliction and forsakenness. Von Balthasar presents this distinctly Christian idea to a reading public who will write and read along in conversation. *Theo-Drama* never promises some substitute for the dramatic experience of revelation. It challenges the reader to see Christian revelation in accessible and portable terms provided by dramatic literature and theatrical praxis. There is much shared between the apocalyptic sense of the battle between good and evil in *Theo-Drama* and Benjamin’s framing of

⁷⁶⁷ Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” 100.

class struggle.⁷⁶⁸ For von Balthasar, the consummate battle is apocalyptic rather than material or commercial, and the date is Holy Saturday.

§5.7 Death and/of the Author: Obedience and the Holy Saturday Trinity

Perhaps von Balthasar's most important theological contribution to late twentieth and early twenty-first century debate regards his "Holy Saturday theology" of the Christ's forsakenness on the cross, descent into hell, experience of radical God-forsakenness in ever greater solidarity with the dead.⁷⁶⁹ The Holy Saturday theology provides the foundation for von Balthasar's quasi-universalism in the form of eschatological hope for the redemption of all. For von Balthasar, soteriological positions can only be articulated in the form of a question because the drama of history has not yet been completed. Concerns with the last things remain properly speculative. Theodramatic hermeneutics makes sense of the interrogative mood of von Balthasar's speculations. In theatrical terms, von Balthasar proceeds like a good director. First, von Balthasar surveys a particular set of resources and presents them as given circumstances. An account of theodramatic hermeneutics in light of scenography helps to find potential surplus meaning in every citation and reference. Second, von Balthasar produces the conclusions of his reading and reflection by writing and publishing. Time spent working through Benjamin's theory of the author-as-producer now ramifies in a major distinction. Like theatre, von Balthasar's published writing is a production whose meaning-making is not yet finished. The published book is a production for a non-coerced public. He holds that his book-production has no credibility as theology unless it can show von Balthasar's reader how to see the form of theological insights as demonstrated in and through the given circumstances gathered

⁷⁶⁸ "the more precisely [the writer] thus understands his position within the production process, the less it will occur to him to pass himself off as a 'man of mind'. The mind, the spirit that makes itself heard in the name of fascism, *must* disappear. The mind which believes only in its own magic strength *will* disappear. For the revolutionary struggle is not fought between capitalism and mind. It is fought between capitalism and the proletariat" (Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," 103, emphasis original).

⁷⁶⁹ Many studies take up von Balthasar's Holy Saturday theology, notably the major negative evaluation of the *decensus* theology as a "de facto rejection of the Catholic Tradition" by Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 346.

according to theological *ressourcement* dramaturgy. The third step—that is, performance—*depends upon the reader's interpretive work* but has been guided all along by von Balthasar's interpretive and authorial choices. The writer arranges insights from various given circumstances and produces the work in a kind of spiritual direction for the reader-actor's interpretive realization of the original vision.

The production testifies to a reality greater than itself by means of its readiness for interpretive work to generate surplus meaning. “The playwright's work is *potentially* drama: it only becomes *actual* through the actor.”⁷⁷⁰ A production must be in the world in order for interpretive work to disclose new worlds, as in Ricœur's consistent return of interpretive attention to the autonomous text. Framing the writer as a producer assumes a network of preexisting relationships of production on analogy to the Balthasarian image of the world's drama within the Triune drama.⁷⁷¹ That is, *any* production in the world responds to the “natural” production of the world as its given circumstances and resources. For von Balthasar, prior relationality also includes God's creation of the world from nothing. “The world's becoming has its origin in the sublime transactions between the Persons of the Trinity.”⁷⁷² The world can be interpreted to generate human meaning greater than itself. One can articulate this point non-theologically and non-theatrically (in a disenchanted mode) in terms of human labor's capacity to generate surplus value by working on raw materials. One can articulate this point non-theologically and theatrically (still in a disenchanted mode) in terms of the actor's capacity to generate surplus meaning from the playwright's script by doing interpretive work in performance. One can articulate this point theologically in a Christian register and non-theatrically in terms of the human capacity for creaturely stewardship of God's creation and the return, unto God, of God's gifts made by “the work of human hands” into “a sacrifice of praise.” One can

⁷⁷⁰ TD 1, 281.

⁷⁷¹ “This is possible because it is already a reality for God and through God, because he has already taken the drama of existence which plays on the world stage and inserted it into his quite different ‘play’ which, nonetheless, he wishes to play on our stage. It is a case of the play within the play: our play ‘plays’ in his play” (TD 1, 20).

⁷⁷² TD 5, 80.

articulate this point theologically in a Christian register and theatrically (i.e., theodramatically) by referring to the relational drama of God's Triune life as the fundamental precondition and ultimate participatory end for any human social drama. Creatures find an invitation to share in God's creative and saving activity in the work of the Christ (e.g., building the kingdom of God, membership in the Body of Christ).

Books, therefore, serve as von Balthasar's production freely presented to a heterogenous public. The audience must do interpretive work that co-creates surplus meaning. I continue to leave any precise or exact notion of truth underdetermined in favor of an account of credibility. That is, surplus meaning will be understood according to the horizon of the good and so reflects the multiple credible interpretations of any phenomenon. Further argument would need to be made in order to align the credibility of surplus meanings generated through interpretive work with the truth in a general sense. My argument contends that drama provides a portable structure wherein a given production's presentation of *that given production's account of the truth* can be debated, engaged, developed, and learned from without the necessity for the audience to adopt a binding position on its truthfulness. The audience remains an active and co-creative partner; the audience, therefore, is not "passive" in the sense of having meaning "done" to them. The audience is only passive in the sense that locates "receiving" as a passive activity. Theatrical performance does the interpretive work when players provide action to given circumstances. Actors, therefore, must supply action verbs to perform the lines of the script. The verbs that matter for an audience to act their role as audience include catching, holding, watching, applauding, laughing, reflecting, judging, encouraging, booing, changing, learning, transforming. The difference between notions of active and passive reception ramifies in the crude but illustrative image: the person who reads a book is receptive to the book's performance as an audience to its literary production; the person who has a book thrown at them is passive to the book's performance as the target object of a projectile. The former—reading and

interpretive work—is active in its mode of reception; the latter—assault by book—is passive in its mode of reception. A book can only be read through co-creative interpretive work, and that interpretive work generates a surplus of meaning.

The interpretation theory at work in *Theo-Drama* finds the need for all members of the ensemble to be freely obedient to the primacy of the loving will of the Author-Father.⁷⁷³ I have argued that interpretive work generates surplus meaning in the present. This is precisely how von Balthasar understands the work of the actor. The reality of the actor is “that reality which *makes things present*: through his own reality he causes the idea to be embodied.”⁷⁷⁴ Obedience (that is, reception of a call) might be competitive or reciprocal. The competitive notion identifies obedience through a contest of wills where one yields to trust in the will of a “superior.” The Actor-Son must be obedient to the will of the Author-Father even if the Author-Father’s will contrasts with the will of the Actor-Son. The actor should respond with a totality of self to the role given to the actor by the author: “not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).⁷⁷⁵ Theologically, the perfection of God the Father’s will ensures that God the Son could never go against the grain of divine authority. They will together because Father and Son are both one God. Theatrically, von Balthasar follows Stanislavsky to leave room for the fact that ordinary actors might discover insights greater than the

⁷⁷³ The “author with his shaping role, stands at the beginning of the whole production triad [of author-actor-director] and ensures it has an effect, beyond itself, on the audience; that audience which the author has envisaged right from the start and with whom, over the heads of the actor and director, he has established an understanding. The constellation into which he draws the individual figures (*Gestalten*) of his play in order to make them into a whole (*Gesamtgestalt*) signifies the whole of reality in microcosm, and it is to this reality that the author wishes to direct his audience’s attention. In giving the name ‘poetic justice’ to this constellation or total figure (*Gesamtgestalt*), we are pointing to the unattainable metaphysical justice” (TD 1, 279). The link to theology—the “unattainable metaphysical justice” achieved in God—is made explicit when von Balthasar writes, “if the author is to be ‘God the Father to his characters’, he must not ultimately allow himself to be governed by their interplay. He must love his characters, but for that very reason he must also cherish their autonomy. He owes it to himself, however involved he may be in the fate of his characters, to stand above them, so that in the very last analysis he can embody their destiny” (TD 1, 280).

⁷⁷⁴ TD 1, 281

⁷⁷⁵ “The real paradox is that the dramatic art is precisely that: an *art* (and hence a technique); its material is the actor’s entire physical, emotional, and spiritual self. The actor puts himself and all the powers of his soul, including his emotions, at the service of the work of art, at the service for the part he is to play. This is what profoundly distinguishes his art from all the other arts that work with a nonhuman material” (TD 1, 287).

author's.⁷⁷⁶ Obedience, in the first sense, is the same "becoming transparent to one's mission" that von Balthasar hopes for dramatic resources in relation to theology.⁷⁷⁷ Material things can be called on to take on divine meaning.

Another sense of obedience, however, is reciprocity.⁷⁷⁸ The polarities of Author-Father and Actor-Son can be bridged by the Director-Spirit.⁷⁷⁹ The Director-Spirit aligns the apparently opposed wills of the Author-Father and the Actor-Son, and the Director-Spirit brings together the many different actors into *one unified* ensemble.⁷⁸⁰ "Performance requires that [the director] come up with a unified vision embracing both the drama (with the author's entire creative contribution) and the art of the actors (with their very different creative abilities). It is mistaken, therefore, to say that the direction side is not a distinct art, unless 'distinct' is taken to mean totally independent."⁷⁸¹ The work of the director brings together the reciprocal contributions of the entire ensemble—including the audience—into the one finite and historical event of consequence with meaning for the present.⁷⁸² The Director-Spirit's interpretive work consists in making present the play so it is relevant for the presence of its audience, so that the play is credible for a modern public.⁷⁸³ When this mutual reciprocity of obedience succeeds, the contributions of the interpretive work of the Author-Father,

⁷⁷⁶ TD 1, 284-285.

⁷⁷⁷ TD 1, 289.

⁷⁷⁸ "We must reject any suggestion that would make the actor into the author's servant and equally any that would degrade the author to the level of a mere cobbler of plays for the actor. We can say, indeed, that the poet is dependent on the actor, but the converse is equally true" (TD 1, 283).

⁷⁷⁹ "Between the dramatic poet and the actor there yawns a gulf that can be bridged only by a third party who will take responsibility for the play's performance, for making it present here and now" (TD 1, 298). The director's role will be to integrate the author and actor: "its whole *raison d'être* consists in the way it mediates between them" (TD 1, 298-299).

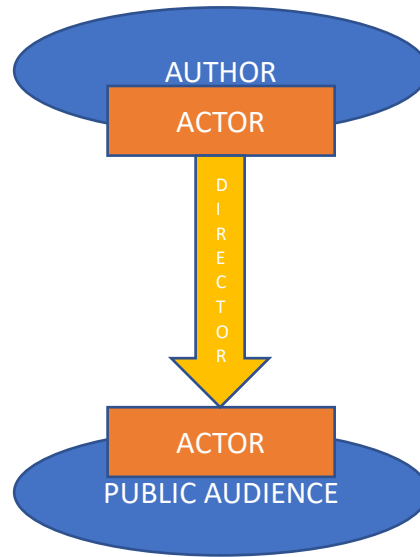
⁷⁸⁰ Since there is a multiplicity of actors, [the director] must guide their ensemble and interplay[.]" (TD 1, 298).

⁷⁸¹ TD 1, 298.

⁷⁸² "In the *première*, the play enters into time as an event. [...] The play is performed in a particular time and this once more raises the question how a play from the past can be performed in the present. Neither the epic nor the lyric is ever rewritten; the reader himself must make the connection between then and now. The drama is itself a making-present, however; it jumps over this distance: it speaks (and must speak) for today. The producer or the director's concern is to secure this actuality" (TD 1, 301-302).

⁷⁸³ This makes sense of von Balthasar's allusion to the conciliar "valid *aggiornamento*" in the context of a discussion of the director (TD 1, 303). "Here the director meets his hardest task: he must be committed enough to make the play relevant and at the same time civilized enough not to equate this here-and-now relevance with a narrow doctrine of society. The theatre *is* a political reality, in a lofty and noble sense, but it should not be misused for political party propaganda" (TD 1, 303).

Actor-Son, and Director-Spirit unify in the performance of surplus meaning through a singular historical event. The unity of meaning between author, actor, and director can be mapped according to movement as follows.



Over time, different directors work to unify the same authorial sanctioned meaning for different audiences with different actors. The audience of the *Theo-Drama* might be idealized as a consuming audience, often conflated with a reader, who encounters the drama as an inconsequential entertainment.⁷⁸⁴ The antidote to such idealism will be a thoroughly Christian drama where the dramatic horizon of the play matches the theological horizon of the world. “All post-Christian drama can be regarded as a fragment of a drama that presses toward the Christian horizon.”⁷⁸⁵ The

⁷⁸⁴ “Naturally there are broad areas of the stage business where the only concern is the demand for and the supply of diversion, where the audience remains enclosed in its own amusement (Brecht referred to the ‘culinary theatre’, particularly in connection with opera), laughing, chickling, or shedding a few tears at man’s all-too-human nature. Or it may simply follow some train of events that could be read just as well in a weekly magazine. This is not something we need to criticize or despise. But for as long as theatre has existed, in all its high periods—which were clearly characterized by something over and above the business side of things—people have asked more of drama than this. People have sought insight into the nature and meaning of existence, things that cannot simply be read off from its immanent course but radiate from a background that explodes the beautiful and gripping play on the stage—which suddenly becomes inwardly relevant to the spectator—and that relates it to something that transcends it.” (TD 1, 314).

⁷⁸⁵ TD 1, 321. By contrast: “Christian drama sets forth a horizon that, in virtue of its clarified idea of God, has a more unified effect than that of the ancient world, but at the same time its infinitely deepened dramatic context (embracing man and God) is patient of hidden and diverse interpretation” (TD 1, 319).

choices of theatrical interpretation happen according to the same shape of the dramatic decisions that constitute salvation history. Choices must be free, consequential, and done against the horizon of the Good for the present, but von Balthasar objects to directors who impose a political message onto a play. Politically motivated theatre makes interpretive mistakes when it precludes the freedom of play from pointing beyond itself. The play can only be a pedagogical exercise in learning the party program, as seen in von Balthasar's interpretation of Brecht. Directors should take their cue from the author's intention for the play's meaning because von Balthasar's hermeneutics locate the primacy of meaning-making in the Author-Father's gift of the role. So von Balthasar reads Brecht exclusively through his intuition of an authorial intention as if reading a production done by Brecht as simultaneous poet-and-director intended for party indoctrination.⁷⁸⁶ The literary production (von Balthasar's book) *over-directs* its readings of its own dramatic resources, refusing to give room for interpretive play or the reality of multiplicative surplus meanings in excess of those consciously intended by an author.

The interpretive work of the Director-Spirit appears closer to a conductor than a member of a theatrical ensemble.⁷⁸⁷ The most perfect Director-Spirit would will to unify the Author-Father's will with the Actor-Son for the sake of the Public Audience-Creation. The Director-Spirit is a principle of unity, and *need not necessarily discover or create additional surplus meaning* because the Director-

⁷⁸⁶ "There is nothing against the author himself taking on this role—and there are famous instances of this—or a particular actor doing so" (TD 1, 298).

⁷⁸⁷ The question of time in theatrical performance brings up music. "A comparison with music suggests itself: music's present moment is nothing apart from its tension vis-à-vis past and future; each note played only has significance insofar as it successively interprets, unveils, justifies the past and anticipates what is to come. [...] With the passing of each note we sense the presence of the whole, which simultaneously comes into being in time and—in some incomprehensible supratemporal realm—always *is*" (TD 1, 350, emphasis original. Music helps von Balthasar unify the approach of Stanislavsky and Brecht to this tension between immediate moment and the whole of the play by means of a reference to symphonic truth: "It would be wrong to say that these two demands contradict each other: the conductor of a symphony too must have the whole work in his head in determining the significance of a particular passage, and yet he does not allow this overall view to distract his full attention from the detail" (TD 1, 351). Further down, von Balthasar approvingly references when Thornton Wilder's "Stage Manager directs the whole like an orchestral conductor" (TD 1, 351).

Spirit's role ensures the Actor-Son presents the Author-Father's intended meaning.⁷⁸⁸ The premier examples of perfected performance are not theatrical but musical. In von Balthasar's discussion of the actor's work there is a decisive musical turn. "All the same, if the dramatic art really is *art*, it must—in the extreme case—exhibit the general paradox of art, namely, that the highest technique can be (and must be) surpassed under conditions of complete inspiration. So it is when Mozart is played by the Haskil or Haebler Quartets or conducted by Böhm[.]”⁷⁸⁹ Such a hermeneutic vision utilizes musical performance rather than theatrical performance as its preferred analogy and equivocates between the “inspiration” of performers and conductors “in the extreme case.” The *true* production in question is not a play but a *symphony*. Oscillation between theatrical and musical performance makes sense. Gadamer, for example, already demonstrated the importance of the common verb “to play” that links theatrical and musical performative interpretation. It would be reasonable to assume that a discussion of drama and credibility would spill over into an analogous conversation about symphonic credibility, particular in this context of a theologian for whom *Truth is Symphonic*. My argument has been, however, that drama alone is credible, and the merits of symphonic truth occlude the merits of dramatic credibility. Put another way: the truth of a symphony circulates within itself as the component parts work together to produce a resonant whole greater than the sum of their parts in concert together. “But the director is not a conductor and the actor is not a mere musical instrument.”⁷⁹⁰ A play is not a concert.⁷⁹¹ This distinction between a *theatrical part* and a *symphonic part* ramifies theologically in terms of theodramatic hermeneutics,

⁷⁸⁸ That God interprets the truth of Godself in the Spirit becomes the central theme for the third panel of the Triptych, *Theo-Logic*. God is God's own interpreter in terms of God's truth. My project focuses on the public credibility of God's revelation in terms of goodness which, remaining in the imaginative realm of theatrical possibility, need not require interpreters to settle on a standard of truth and stays open to variations in interpretation.

⁷⁸⁹ TD 1, 290.

⁷⁹⁰ TD 1, 300.

⁷⁹¹ The exception that proves the rule is the fact that many musical theatre pieces can be performed *in concert* rather than *as a theatrical play*. Sometimes, as in the anniversary concert for the musical *Les Misérables*, the recorded concert version may be musically superior to many recorded theatrical versions.

anthropology, Trinitarian theology, and constructive re-staging. In concrete application, the symphonic image loads far more pre-determined meaning onto the natural or physical body than does the theatrical image. The physical appearance of an actor can augment and transform surplus meaning without altering a single word of the script, but finite vocal range can preclude some casting choices in opera or require productions to make changes to the score. A tuba cannot play the part of a violin without adapting the score. Both music and drama share the philosophy of play, but theatre invites the disclosure of new surplus meaning through innovative or interesting casting choices in ways that raise a different set of questions from those of musical performance.

If we were to follow the hermeneutic theory presented in the *Prolegomena*, properly interpreting the book-production means freely performing surplus meaning in accord with the goals intended by the author-producer guided in unity of spirit by the director. Herein lies von Balthasar's consistent emphasis on theodramatic obedience and freedom. The performance of surplus meaning must be free in order to meet the credibility requirement of non-coercion. The performance of surplus meaning cannot assume the assent of the reader in faith because of the critical hospitality offered to the production by a modern public. Reading through von Balthasar's tables of contents provides an experience of the form of the argument in fragment as an introduction to its leitmotifs and *dramatis personae*. Direction, however, implies a vector for movement. Theological dramatic theory finds its ends not in some static idea that can be abstracted and known as a premise, but in movement as active theological interpretation oriented toward knowing-with the love of God.⁷⁹² Such direction is the purpose of presenting a systematic theology on analogy to the activity of drama. The realization of that which is theologically meaningful cannot occur apart from activity (that is, interpretive work signified in actionable choices) within the drama of salvation history and

⁷⁹² The final section of TD 5 confirms this point with mystical gusto under the heading "If You Comprehend It, It is Not God." TD 5, 489ff.

its play for whom von Balthasar has played dramaturg. Von Balthasar's theological credibility *happens* in a reformulated (that is, comedic-hermeneutical) interpretation of the performance of the world already at play in the Triune drama. Such surplus meaning can only be generated because of the reader-actor's interpretive work.

Theodramatic hermeneutics never moves away from his own production's table-work of preparation, scene analysis, and conversation to embodied theatrical realization. Indeed, von Balthasar's theory of acting also serves as his theory of interpretation. The movement of theological interpretation on the scaffolding of dramatic resources draws on the interpretive work of theatre and performance in order to show interpretive freedom in Christian obedience to God's will. God's infinitely free authorship of the world does not imply fate because God grants creatures finite freedom to play along according to their given roles. The core of the theodrama, visible in the Christ-event and concretized on the Cross, consists in the dramatic confrontation between God's infinite freedom and creaturely finite freedom. The hero of the theodrama is the only actor able to take on God the Father's cosmic script: Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, who is both fully human and fully divine. The Son of God adopts this role as the Son's mission. Biblical images of the sending of the Son also indicate the trinitarian theological images of the procession of God the Son from God the Father. The *direction* of the Son's mission will be ensured by the Holy Spirit. That is, the Son's mission that proceeds (away) from God the Father in order to bring the whole world into God's triune life unifies God the Son to God the Father in God the Holy Spirit. Triune life images the "letting be" of the Trinitarian persons that opens space for shared being and freedom in relationship for the world.

For von Balthasar, letting-be includes space for both creaturely existence and for creaturely freedom. A creature is by definition finite, and the creaturely environments in the world are bounded by horizons. The horizon of the world that is positively expressed by the letting-be of

creaturely finitude remains open to the infinite God through adoption into Triune multiplicity-in-unity.⁷⁹³ A finite creature can both have its own name and meaning *and* be freely related to the infinite God. Finite things can always mean more than their mere materiality by means of interpretive work, but the freedom to be finite (that is, bounded by horizons and so able to relate) also brings the potential to pass away or stop being in relation. The horizon of the world that is negatively expressed by the letting-be of creaturely death closes participation in God's infinity. The freedom to reject and be rejected by God is the principle of God-forsakenness. For von Balthasar, the symbol of hell must be the total inversion of the symbol of heaven. The *communio sanctorum* (the collection of the saints enjoying eternal life in God) finds the fullness of individual personality confirmed to be eternally meaningful to God whereas the damned find a total absence of personality itself confirmed in senselessness. The Holy Saturday theology and von Balthasar's conception of divine kenosis extends the drama beyond the boundaries of the stage. Christ's descent into hell takes on literary or televisual qualities because God's solidarity with the dead can only resound in the silence of vacuity. A descent into hell departs from the world-stage.

On the one hand, von Balthasar's quasi-universalism makes sense in the mode of his questions in *Theo-Drama*. How could a non-place (without a stage) exist for anyone other than the Christ to play a total experience of God-forsakenness? The Christ's expression of God's solidarity with the dead extends beyond ordinary dying into an experience of ultimate forsakenness: the eternal loss of the love of God symbolized in the place where "the chaos produced by sin, is being burned eternally; the devouring pit devours itself eternally."⁷⁹⁴ Eschatological reflection on Christ's descent

⁷⁹³ "The sending of the Son into the world is the extension into time and history of his eternal coming forth from or being begotten by the Father, while the Spirit guarantees their unity and thus inclusion of the world in the theodrama. The patterns of the economic trinity follow from the immanent, although the two cannot be strictly identified with each other (TD3:157). [...] Because the sending of the Son into the world is the temporal extension of the Son's eternal relation to the Father, the sending of the Son—and the Spirit in his wake—draws the world into the inner-divine relations" (Linn Marie Tonstad, *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude*, [New York: Routledge, 2016], 31).

⁷⁹⁴ TD 5, 316.

into hell as a part of *Theo-Drama* makes greater sense insofar as the Spirit *directs* without physical presence on stage. The director does not act, but sends the actor to do the will of the author. The Christ descends into the undiscovered country beyond Hamlet's dramatic question of being. This hell remains *properly undiscoverable* in von Balthasar's account because only the Son of God could experience the total forsakenness of God.⁷⁹⁵ The Spirit that hurls the Son into hell—the same Spirit that expels Jesus into the wilderness after his baptism—is a director giving direction. Descent transfigures into a problematic spatial category that cannot be rectified because the descent into hell must, at the same time, be ascent towards unity.⁷⁹⁶ The Son's willing obedience to the will of the Father conditions the possibility for senselessness to be made theologically meaningful in God's solidarity with the dead. Senselessness does not get resolved but becomes held in dramatic tension with God's willingness to endure it. The dramatic presentation of Holy Saturday situates the Christ's descent into hell as the assurance of God's understanding the human experience God's silence.

The meaning of God's silence gets symbolized in the theodramatic obsession with Christ's cry of dereliction on the Cross. The Cross is the world-stage performance of desolation that makes imaginable the Christ's unimaginable *experience* of Godforsakenness. The Christ-event—incarnation, passion, death, descent, resurrection—conquers the synonymousness of death and finitude. The Holy Saturday theology develops from the theodramatic focus on the Christ's most crucial line. "O God, why have you forsaken me" is the dramatic expression of forsakenness by God for the sake of the world. Insofar as von Balthasar understands kenotic self-sacrifice as part of atonement (the

⁷⁹⁵ "In other words, anyone who tries to choose complete forsakenness—in order to prove himself absolute vis-à-vis God—finds himself confronted by the figure of someone even 'more absolutely' forsaken than himself" (TD 5, 312).

⁷⁹⁶ Cosmologically, von Balthasar remains indebted to Dante's insight that any flight from God is also a flight towards God. Rather than create hell by the meteoric fall of Satan, von Balthasar's "ever greater" experience of desolation has been carved out by the descent of the Son. The Orphic spatial images of descent and ascent misconstrue what is more properly a breaking through to another side (what Blanchot might call "the Outside") of resurrection.

pouring out of the self ultimately unified in God), the cry of dereliction is also a testimony to God's love for the world as the dramatic conclusion of the mission of the Son.

The resurrection, therefore, proves for von Balthasar that *the horizon of the creaturely world symbolized by death cannot be coterminous with the horizon of the creaturely world symbolized by finitude*. Prior to the Christ-event, death and finitude appear to be complementary accounts of the same horizon for created being. In the Christ-event, death and finitude can no longer be conceived as two versions of the same horizon. Death, after the Christ-event, symbolizes the horizon of Godforsakenness witnessed in the (self-revealing) performance of Christ.⁷⁹⁷ Death symbolizes the risk of the freedom to let-be; that is, death represents the negative possibility "not to be," to deny or reject or corrupt being. Finitude, now distinct from death due to the revelation of Triune relationship on the Cross, symbolizes the positive risk of the freedom to let-be. Finitude represents the positive possibility "to be" free to play out one's own role: one's own name, personhood, and personality. Love confers freedom to be a free person. Personhood requires distinction and a positive value for difference-in-unity. Christ's descent into hell testifies to the reality of experiences of the senselessness of suffering. God's activity in the world (i.e., the Christ-event) demonstrates that there is no aspect of the human experience foreign to God. Suffering and abandonment and estrangement are *understood* by God (in Ricœur's sense of understanding that makes the foreign familiar). At the same time, von Balthasar's way of theorizing the Christ's descent into hell as the experience of Godforsakenness never overrides suffering's senselessness with a positive meaning. The revelation of the descent further proves that, for von Balthasar, the theological work of the symbol of death is not co-identical with

⁷⁹⁷ Perhaps one of the most controversial aspects of von Balthasar's Holy Saturday theology is the claim that the depths of the Christ's experience goes beyond worldly suffering to an unimaginable experience of rejection by God. The Christ has gone further than any other sort of creature could be asked to go, precisely because the Christ, as God, *can* go further. Only the Son can be rejected, in his divinity, by the Father. In *Mysterium Paschale: the Mystery of Easter*, Aidan Nichols, O.P., trans., (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), von Balthasar describes this process as the creation of hell as "a product of the Redemption" (174). The Christ is the grand explorer into Barth's "far country" who lays a trail "there and back again."

the theological work of the symbol of finitude. Death does not end the trinitarian drama. God's freedom is, properly speaking, infinite (*unendlich*). The direction of the Spirit always ensures that the Son's mission remains inextricably the same mission of God the Father. On this ground, von Balthasar can claim that death, in God, becomes life.⁷⁹⁸

Examined akin to the Balthasarian transition from aesthetics into dramatics, the Cross offers a visible form for God's drama. The Cross stands as the singular moment of crisis (what Karl Barth called KRISIS) that summarizes and presents a timeless icon of God's self-sacrificial atonement encounterable in history as singular, dramatic event. The movement from aesthetics to dramatics is *movement* from the image of the Cross (atemporal form) to the drama of salvation history (dynamic event). A description of that drama can go further by speculating (with help from von Speyr and on the grounds of the cry of dereliction) about what the Actor-Son does and undergoes off-world-stage in hell.

An evaluation of von Balthasar's theological speculation regarding kenosis and Holy Saturday sits beyond the scope of this project and has been dutifully studied elsewhere.⁷⁹⁹ Nevertheless, von Balthasar concludes *Theo-Drama* with an entire volume dedicated to his Trinitarian Christological with a long-form investigation of the *decensus*. A constellation of concerns more closely related to this project regards how the interpretive work of theatre and performance explicates the relationships between forsakenness, silence, Holy Saturday, and Trinitarian kenosis. The final volume of *Theo-Drama* turns with almost scriptural fidelity to the visions of Adrienne von Speyr and uses the interpretive work of theatre and performance for Christian theological questions regarding eschatology, theological anthropology, sacraments, personhood (human and divine),

⁷⁹⁸ "In this context, Jesus' death, even his most bitter death in abandonment, is the pure expression of his eternal, trinitarian life" (TD 5, 252).

⁷⁹⁹ Many agree with Ben Quash when he finds von Balthasar's Holy Saturday theology, as it appears in *Theo-Drama*, "consummately undramatic" (*Theology and the Drama of History*, 194).

freedom, and universal salvation. Drama gives von Speyr's visions credibility. Credibility names an event wherein one endows some object (e.g., a narrative, argument, religious worldview, metaphysical position, phenomenon, idea, tactic, crisis) with meaning worth believing *for now* through interpretive work that pays the cost of attention *as if* for a potential reality. My account of credibility establishes that I need not prove the truth of von Balthasar's theological claims or the veracity of Adrienne's visions in order to show how von Balthasar uses drama to make them credible.

§5.8 Credibility and Hell

There are some problems with von Balthasar's infernal eschatology. The contradictions of the spatial metaphor recall the confusion Sister James felt at Sister Aloysius' "step away from God" ethics. The spatial references aim to demonstrate the depth of Trinitarian union by means of von Balthasar's kenotic theology. The fact of the kenotic self-emptying of Jesus the Christ includes the going beyond experience of Godforsakenness. The Son gives over, even, the experience of being the beloved Son of God: "the Son, as God-man, went through an experience of forsakenness that took him far beyond Sheol and Gehenna."⁸⁰⁰ The biblical images of hell cannot approximate the depths to which the Christ descends after death. The descent into hell theologically imagines a descent beyond the absence of God to a unique experience of God the Father abandoning, judging, and rejecting God the Son. This forsaking is the depth-dimension of the Christ's mission in love for the world (including depth's theopoetic resonances of profundity in the pit as well as Tillichian philosophical resonances of ultimacy). Quoting the kenosis hymn in Paul's letter to the Philippians, von Balthasar ties together self-giving love within the divine Trinity and God's self-giving love for the created world.

For, 'at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth' (Phil 2:10). Such homage is appropriate

⁸⁰⁰ TD 5, 256.

only for someone who has not only shared the general lot of mortals but has undergone their fate, including every possible remoteness and alienation from God. Such distance is possible, however, only within the economic Trinity, which transposes the absolute distinction of the Persons in the Godhead from one another in the dimensions of salvation history, involving man's sinful distance from God and its atonement.⁸⁰¹

The spatial metaphor remains in the realm of the "economy of salvation." Space is a creaturely and finite category, so von Balthasar goes both further and farther. The Son's mission toward the world and experience of life, passion, death, and descent into hell ramifies in the Son's experience of Godforsakenness that expresses the ultimate unity of God the Father and God the Son. That is, the mission of the Son that moves the Son infinitely far away from God the Father into the netherworld reveals, most decisively, their Trinitarian interconnection.⁸⁰² Notice that this movement away from God does not refer to the spatiality of the economy of salvation (an alienating separation created by the free human rejection of God in sin), but the sending of the Son "opens up" "space" between Father and Son according to the self-emptying that characterizes kenotic Trinitarian procession. Economic trinitarian activity "is only the expression of something 'immanent' in the Trinity": reciprocal love in the form of self-surrender in obedience.⁸⁰³ The Christ, as the incarnate Son of God, freely surrenders divinity back to God in solidarity with creatures. Following von Speyr's language, von Balthasar calls this the Christ's "laying up" of his "divine power and glory" with the

⁸⁰¹ TD 5, 257.

⁸⁰² "We have to show, therefore, that the God-forsakenness of the Son during his Passion was just as much a mode of his profound bond with the Father in the Holy Spirit as his death was a mode of his life and his suffering a mode of bliss. To understand this, we need to grasp what is meant by saying that the Son's divine power and glory is '*laid up*' with the Father. This concept only summarizes what is described in Philippians 2:6-7 and is grounded in the eternal Son's unerring movement to the Father" (TD 5, 257). The referenced verses from Philippians contain and ground the incarnation-kenosis theme:

"6 who, though he was in the form of God,
 did not regard equality with God
 as something to be exploited,
 7 but emptied himself,
 taking the form of a slave,
 being born in human likeness.
 And being found in human form." (NRSV)

⁸⁰³ TD 5, 258.

Father.⁸⁰⁴ The confusing phrase “laying up”—presented in scare marks in both English and German—is a literal translation of “*Hinterlegung*.” *Hinterlegung* is not an exclusive theologoumenon. As a term, *Hinterlegung* carries other sorts of economic connotations in the world of banking: deposit, escrow, filing, lodgment. “Laying up” becomes a kind of reverse-inheritance. The Son “empties himself” and deposits the Son’s inheritance of divinity back in the Father.⁸⁰⁵ “The depositing of the Son’s divine prerogatives in the Incarnation reveals the Son’s mission in terms of *obedience*.”⁸⁰⁶ The *Hinterlungen* connects to Christological themes of obedience and investment from the Gospel of Luke.⁸⁰⁷ Similar words for kenosis, servitude, and violence appear in Luke’s version of the parable of the tenants (Luke 20:9-19) to link the language of the Philippian hymn to themes of crucifixion and the destruction of the temple. Like in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), the Son of God does not take an inheritance of divinity from God the Father and throw it away, but, rather, “reinvests” that inheritance in God the Father as an adoption of the whole world into the life of the Trinity.⁸⁰⁸

⁸⁰⁴ TD 5, 257.

⁸⁰⁵ “Given the divine nature as essentially kenotic love and Jesus’ mission in the world as the perfect manifestation of his divine procession from the Father, Balthasar introduces a new term to describe the Incarnate Son’s kenosis in the economy: *Hinterlegung*. By this term, he seeks to interpret the revelation in human terms of the divine nature as kenotic love in the movement of the Son’s condition from *forma Dei* to *forma servi*. When the Son surrenders the form of God to take up the form of a slave, the divine Son ‘deposits’ his divine prerogatives with the Father so that he is able to suffer and die in the condition of a slave all the way to experiencing the abandonment of the Father on the Cross. The Son empties himself of these divine prerogatives, not thereby ceasing to be divine but in fact to reveal his divinity. By *Hinterlegung* Balthasar wishes to show that what appears as *separation* between the Father and the Son in the economy is in fact an act of their eternal *unity* of love revealing the *distinction* of their Persons” (John R. Chiak, *Balthasar and Anxiety*, [New York: T&T Clark, 2009], 165).

⁸⁰⁶ Chiak, *Balthasar and Anxiety*, 165, emphasis original.

⁸⁰⁷ Luke’s relationship to Paul and Pauline theology is a contested question in biblical studies, but the tradition can be found as early as Irenaeus. See *Against the Heresies* 3.1.1, Dominic J. Unger and M.C. Steenberg, trans. (New York: Yale, 2012). For a commentary on Luke indebted to this interpretive tradition, see Pablo T. Gadenz, *The Gospel of Luke*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018).

⁸⁰⁸ The comparison to the prodigal is, admittedly, confusing because it moves the symbolic mapping of God the Father onto the prodigal son and God the Son on to the prodigal son’s father. One sees the demonstration of the Christ’s obedience in the actions of the prodigal’s father. At the end of the parable of the prodigal, the returned son is given signs of his status as the son of the father in the form of ring, sandals, robe, and feast. The father “empties himself” of signs of authority for the sake of celebrating the returned son. In this image, the father of the prodigal does an image of the *Hinterlungen* of God the Son. “As a result of the Cross of Jesus, the least of all the ‘prodigal sons’ has become Jesus’ and God’s neighbor, and it follows that he must also be a neighbor to the disciple of Christ” (TD 5, 279).

The idea of the Christ “laying up” divinity with the Father grounds the entire series of Christological moves in von Balthasar’s theology of atonement. Kenotic “laying up” permits von Balthasar to talk about the Christ’s absent foreknowledge of the resurrection so the horror of crucifixion and abandonment and travel into unknown territory would be fully human experiences. Kenotic “laying up” also refers to the Christ’s veiled God-consciousness (in Schleiermacher’s turn of phrase), including von Balthasar’s position that Jesus the Christ’s did not have access to the incarnate Son’s perfect self-knowledge of himself as the Son of God throughout the experience of the Passion.⁸⁰⁹ The Christ’s expression of obedience is a perfect human obedience.⁸¹⁰ *A perfect and human obedience must be freely chosen.* Obedience without free interpretive work (in theatrical language: choice) cannot be called perfectly human. Tools obey without free interpretive work. Obedience without interpretive work is what things do, but God and the people made in the image of God are not things.⁸¹¹ The Christ is not fated to make inevitable decisions (so acting without freedom) nor is

⁸⁰⁹ On Christ’s knowledge and mission, see TD 3 149ff.

⁸¹⁰ “Obedience to the Father more than knowledge constitutes the Son’s human perfection. Therefore, the Incarnate Son’s surrendering of his form of God and being obedient unto death is the highest revelation of the divine nature. The kenosis of the Incarnate Son is the revelation, taking into account the sin of the world, *par excellence* of the Triune God. Jesus’ kenotic existence is a scandal because it can only be explained by Triune love” (Chiak, *Balthasar and Anxiety*, 165-166).

⁸¹¹ It is important to identify, here, the problematic nature of the language of slavery in the kenosis hymn in Phil. 2:7. The NRSV translates “form of a slave” for the Greek “μορφὴν δούλου.” The Greek word, *doulou*, however, also provides the etymological root for a doula, that is, a guide or companion during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum periods that may or may not also have medical and obstetric training. The Latin shorthand for the Greek, *forma servi*, indicates the possibility for English speaking theology to emphasize the idea of non-coercive ethical service as companionship (in the sense of the doula) rather than coercive indentured servitude (in the sense of a slave). The key to my argument regarding the “thingification” of people regards the dangerous surplus meaning that emerges from the close proximity, in Phil. 2:7, between the *forma servi* and ὁμοιωμάτι ἀνθρώπων, “human likeness.” *Omoiomati* shares a root with the creedal *homoousious* language of the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son. When the Son “empties himself” in the kenosis from *forma Dei* to *forma servi*, interpretation of the rest of the verse equivocates between the *forma servi* and its “human likeness.” To look like a human is to appear *forma servi* as regards God; to look like a God is to appear *forma Dei* as regards humanity. The problems only redouble with the introduction of humility in the next verse. Slavery language sanctions the thingification of people by forgetting the theological and theological aesthetic dimensions of human likeness. That is, humans are made in the image and likeness of God. So even the human *forma servi* is nonetheless an *imago Dei*. So kenotic action in the *forma servi* responds as servant *imago Dei* to God in *forma Dei*. The only just model of kenotic servant-action is, therefore, Trinitarian: coequal, nonhierarchical, and reciprocal across differences. In sum, the history of dehumanizing modes commodified servitude in the form of slavery—such as practices of chattel slavery in the history of the United States or practices of coercive labor in contemporary United States’ prisons—should rule out the theological efficacy of “slave” language in a U.S. context. Furthermore, the racialization of the *forma servi* as a slave in the history of the United States implies a non-fully co-equal humanity (cf. the three-fifths compromise). Not only is the (continuing) legacy of slavery and economic anti-blackness in the United States a distortion of white supremacist ideology, the use of slave-

the Christ demonstrating human obedience to God virtually (so acting without reality). The appeal to dramatic theory finds a non-theological “third term” to make von Balthasar’s kenotic theology of obedience credible. Indeed, kenotic “laying up” of divinity is precisely what makes free and real the drama of the Christ’s obedient self-giving sacrifice on the Cross for von Balthasar. The Cross is the concretion of God’s self-revelation and the assurance of the credibility of the depth of God’s love, but the judgment displayed on cross and descent into hell is not a show trial because performance does not indicate *de facto* falsehood.

In fact the reverse is true, as should be clear from the basis of the separation as found in the Trinity: the infinite distinction of Persons within one Being. In virtue of this distinction, which entails relations within the Trinity and hence facilitates that ‘laying up’ of which we have spoken, the *Cross* can become the ‘revelation of the innermost being of God.’ It reveals both the distinction of the Persons (clearest in the dereliction) and the unity of their Being, which becomes visible in the unity of the plan of redemption. Only a God-man through his distinction-in-relation vis-à-vis the Father can expiate and banish that alienation from God that characterizes the world’s sin, both in totality for all and in totality for each individual.⁸¹²

Kenosis and obedience demonstrate the dramatic credibility of the Christian notions of incarnation and atonement because they concretize God’s real solidarity with an estranged humanity. That is, the Christ’s experience of Godforsakenness goes beyond and contains “in totality for all and in totality for each individual” the experience of forsakenness by God typified in the experience of suffering.

The coincidence of opposites discussed in the context of the theodramatic interpretation of the Christ’s experience of forsakenness expands outward as surplus meaning generated through

language in Christology is also theologically bankrupt in a U.S. context on Nicean and Chalcedonian Christological and Trinitarian grounds. My theory of the surplus meanings generated by theology’s interpretive work situates this objection to slavery language as historically and culturally contingent. My argument against the perpetuation of *forma servi* to mean “slavery” and my argument to reemphasize the *forma servi* as non-coercive service and companionship akin to a doula is not one that claims slavery language cannot disclose theological meaning in other contexts. My argument is that the interpretive choice to defend the continued *theological* use of slavery language is an interpretive choice that invites surplus meanings that have been irrevocably polluted by the performance history of the thingification of people. These theological interpretive choices no longer disclose any credible Christian theological meaning devoid of such distortion.

⁸¹² TD 5, 259-260. This quotation from TD 5 contains a series of detailed internal references to Adrienne von Speyr’s commentaries on John.

interpretation of the cry of dereliction. The Christ's cry of abandonment dramatizes the credibility of God's solidarity with Godforsakenness. In the parenthetical above—"clearest in the dereliction"—von Balthasar identifies how the revelation of Trinitarian distinction performs in the Son's abandonment by the Father. The Son is neither totally separated nor co-identical with the Father because the Son can be abandoned in an act expressing unity. The spatial metaphor now transitions into dramatic and dynamic movement so overcomes part of the obviousness of the spatial metaphor's contradiction.

Questions remain whether von Balthasar's solution is satisfactory, particularly since so much of his argument relies on an account of passivity dependent on explanatory analogies of sexual difference.⁸¹³ Linn Marie Tonstad demonstrates that von Balthasar's gendered Trinitarian theology does, indeed, introduce hierarchy into triune life by means of his theory of passivity in the generation of the Holy Spirit. Her method does so through "the use of over-literalization to make visible how a theology *works*, how it achieves its effects" and tests for "internal adequacy" to the Christian theological tradition's stipulated parameters "for coherent theological speech."⁸¹⁴ Creaturely difference derives from the fundamental differences of the Trinity expressed in kenotic processions.⁸¹⁵ The collisions of opposing forces that unify in the Trinity nevertheless lead to the economic "trinitarian inversion" whereby the Spirit functions as the principle of unity between the forsaking Father and forsaken Son.⁸¹⁶ For Tonstad, the negative implications for the understanding

⁸¹³ Sexual difference functions as an explanatory mechanism in von Balthasar's theology. In the context of the discussion of the coincidence of joy and pain, for example, von Balthasar cannot help but claim "The Passion is therefore the highest act of the Lord's love, just as birth pangs are for a woman giving birth" (TD 5, 253). Linking connotations of sexual difference, motherhood, and suffering do little to illuminate von Balthasar's theological point unless one already shares this joy/pain/love interpretation of "birth pangs." There are other examples in the tradition that link the suffering of the crucifixion to motherhood. Julian of Norwich makes a similar comparison in her *Revelations of Divine Love*, but, unlike von Balthasar, does not do so in order to invoke a commonsense rational for the conflation of joy and pain.

⁸¹⁴ Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 29.

⁸¹⁵ Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 33.

⁸¹⁶ The term is von Balthasar's. "In infinite divine freedom, the Son offers himself in obedient responsive gratitude to the Father's unspoken supplication; in his finite freedom, Jesus remains faithful to the Father's command as mediated to him by the Spirit. [...] Balthasar terms this shift in the relationships the *trinitarian inversion*. In eternity, the Father begets the Son and the Father and Son together breathe out the Spirit. When projected into the temporal sphere, the trinitarian

of gender and sexuality are “symptomatic: the fundamental problem is not merely that Balthasar uses terms with gendered connotations but that contrasts between activity and passivity should not be applied to the immanent trinity.”⁸¹⁷ To do so undermines the co-eternal, co-equality of the Trinitarian persons according to both ontological priority (the logical order of their processions) and temporal priority (no Trinitarian person precedes another in time because they are co-eternal). That von Balthasar interlaces human sexual difference with theological differences deploys an essentialist metaphor that serves to confirm the root problem of passivity in the dynamic event of God.

Tonstad’s argument also indicts the ways “Balthasar presents the decision to send the Son into the world to save as a decision made by divine committee that nonetheless reflects the order of procession in its genesis.”⁸¹⁸ Von Balthasar assigns apparent oppositions within God’s Triune life to

order becomes vertical rather than horizontal: Father to Son via Spirit, with the Spirit above the obedient Son. The Spirit mediates unity of the wills of Father and Son as well as their distance: ‘It is as if the Spirit now embodied in the form of a rule, says to them both: This is what you have wanted from all eternity; this is what, from all eternity, we have determined!’ (TD3:188). The difficulty, however, remains: Why does Balthasar insist on creating such over-againstness within the trinity itself?’ (Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 35-36). The chapter goes on to supply three answers to the question: von Balthasar’s understanding of what constitutes a divine person, the relationship between Triune divine personhood and singular divine being, and the kenotic notion of Trinitarian generation as self-surrender. Tonstad identifies a problem far beyond a kind of political competition within what she calls von Balthasar’s “trinitarian committee.” “The problem lies in the introduction of the possibility and even, as it were, pre-reality of death into God. [...] Balthasar moves directly from difference to death, from betting to renunciation, from generation of a son to sacrifice” (Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 38).

⁸¹⁷ Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 29. Locating the root of the problem does not relativize the disastrous quality of the gendered symptoms. “These analogical relationships are performed through the theodrama. The human Jesus, sexed male, is gendered feminine in relation to God, as is all creation. As the Son, he is ‘super’-feminine in relation to the Father. His role is to pour himself out in a kenotic self-emptying that constitutes the church as his body or his feminine counterpart in his life, death, and resurrection. By placing himself at the disposal of the Father in the mode of obedience (feminine mode of creaturely freedom), the Son is the one from whom all other theological personhood derives (masculine mode of creaturely freedom). He has to be male in order to represent the Father in the world, but he is divine in a feminine mode (the mode of receptivity). Indeed, the (fully active) passivity or indifference that is the mode of Jesus’ mission translates into Balthasar’s account of a *feminine* mission” (Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 41). For Tonstad, von Balthasar’s theology is not only flawed in its construal of the hierarchical relationships between Trinitarian relations, but these missteps concretize in the divinization of (worldly) masculinity vis-à-vis the only creatureliness of (worldly) femininity. “To make the point clear: the trinitarian theodrama hangs on what actual men and symbolic males can do—that is, become feminine, be squandered and poured out, without losing their primacy or their fullness. Their emptiness is also symbolic, because their fullness has feminine space, feminine wombs, and feminine bodies in which to realize itself” (Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 45).

⁸¹⁸ Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 34. “Balthasar wants to avoid the implication that the Father pitilessly or alone determines that the Son must go—thus demanding a sacrifice, rather than allowing the Son to offer the sacrifice. [...] Although the Son’s self-offering is as original as the Father’s desire that the Son go (TD5:95-96), every trinitarian decision preserves ‘the hierarchy of the hypostatic processions’ (TD3:199)” (Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 34).

distinct Trinitarian persons in differing ways. The appearance of these oppositions shifts depending on whether one views them in the economic or immanent Trinity.⁸¹⁹ Tonstad avers, “Balthasar’s rule for determining the distribution of initiative, consent, self-offering, supplication, and so on seems arbitrary, although sourced in Adrienne von Speyr’s insights.”⁸²⁰ I contend that the perceived arbitrariness simultaneously derives from the exclusive naturalistic style at work in von Balthasar’s dramatic theory. The unified will of the director ensures continuity between the will of the author and the performance of the will of the actor. That is, the director is responsible for ensuring the actors’ free interpretive work remains faithfully obedient to the will of the author.

The problem of von Balthasar’s interpretive over-direction by means of obedience to an intuition of an author’s fundamental or ultimate concern, treated at length in conversation with Brecht, now causes both theological and theatrical difficulties. The account of obedience-as-passivity leads to an implied hierarchy in the Trinity precisely because the Spirit, rendered as a supra-feminine and passive, “loses the name of action.” The Director-Spirit offers no interpretive work to increase the surplus meaning of the play in performance. The Director-Spirit should, instead, mediate the unity of an ideal meaning of the play imagined by the author so it reaches “that audience which the author has envisaged right from the start and with whom, over the heads of the actor and director, he has established an understanding.”⁸²¹ Even worse, the play of the play stops. The descent into hell causes the drama to lapse into silence. The life of the drama dies on the Cross, but the meaning of theodramatic musicality does not. In the descent, von Balthasar elides the drama of literary silence with the drama of embodied action. So far as von Balthasar’s dramatic theory goes, obedience in the Spirit means the director does not contribute equal play in the form of any *theatrical* interpretive work but rather brings together the interpretive work of the author and the actors for the sake of the

⁸¹⁹ Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 35.

⁸²⁰ Tonstad, *God and Difference*, 34.

⁸²¹ TD 1, 279.

audience. God the Spirit is a conductor for the Trinitarian symphony, harmonizing the will of God the Father and the will of God the Son.⁸²² What resounds in the ultimate theodramatic revelation of the Cross and its crucial line is the musical hiatus of the descent: the silence of hell's "worldlessness."⁸²³

World-less-ness must also be stage-less-ness or the organizing theodramatic metaphor of the world-stage has lost its sense. Scenography and naturalism demonstrated the power of von Balthasar's *theatrum mundi* theme; the world-less-ness of hell demonstrates a failure in the dramatic credibility of the Christological Trinitarian eschatology. That is, if theodramatic hermeneutics properly understands the world as the *necessary* playing space for creaturely life to participate in Triune life, the world-less-ness of hell *necessitates* its lack of a stage. Hell is the non-place of the dead. The stage, as discussed in the context of dubious ghosts, is the place where the dead come back to life. As such, hell can only be written, not expressed in the spatial temporality of performance. Without a stage, the drama remains a theatre of the mind or a private rehearsal. Without a stage, the drama has not become public. Without a stage, the drama of the descent is not credible *for the public*. But von Balthasar nevertheless takes Adrienne's "televisual" or "novelistic" depiction of the Christ's

⁸²² "During the Passion the Spirit maintains the internal divine diastasis between Father and Son in its economic form, so that 'What seems to be the sign of separation of Father and Son is precisely the sign of greatest unification.... The separation that is perceptible to us is the highest proof of definitive unity, for if they had not been so certain of their unity, they would not have been able to go as far as the mystery of the night of the Cross without producing alienation, misunderstanding or the division of truth.' Here we see that 'there is only one single truth: the truth of the Son in the Father and the Father in the Son.' 'The Son's cry of dereliction on the Cross', which demonstrates God's triune love for the world is 'the loftiest assertion in the knowledge of God' because, 'as night, it is truth's ultimately confirmation.' [...] Again, this revelation takes place through the presence of the Holy Spirit, for 'since the Spirit is not separated like the Son from the Father, he can establish union in the separation of the Son without abolishing the separation'; [the Spirit] can cooperate in such a way that, in the extremity of suffering, 'the deepest mystery of the union of the Lord with the Father' persists and is revealed in faith" (TD 5, 262, with internal quotations from von Speyr).

⁸²³ The Cross expands, and it appears that the entirety of von Balthasar's theology of forsakenness explores Adrienne von Speyr's sense of the widening contours of the moment of the Christ's death concurrent with the cry of dereliction. "Thus for the Son, as for us, the Cross grows until it exceeds our grasp. Although it is the overcoming of the chaos of sin, it becomes a 'pathless,' a 'worldless' suffering, unveiling the world itself as chaos" (TD 5, 260, TD 5, 260 quoting von Speyr, 3 Jo 330 with other internal references to von Speyr). Furthermore, "He undertakes this journey in pure 'wordlessness' (for, after all, the Incarnate Word of God is dead) but also in 'pure obedience'...into the pure essence of sin that has been separated from the world, into what has been condemned by God, in which God cannot be found" (TD 5, 267 quoting von Speyr 4 Jo 211).

descent into production. The remarkable interpretive work of the *Theo-Drama* is its building of scaffolding (the *Prolegomena*'s arrangement of dramatic resources) for Adrienne's esoteric theology to play alongside the biblical witnesses to Christ's descent into hell (developed on their own in von Balthasar's book-length treatment of the Holy Saturday theology in *Mysterium Paschale*) and alongside the arguments of the Church fathers (developed on their own in von Balthasar's book-length treatment of the question of universal salvation in *Dare We Hope?*).⁸²⁴ The theodramatic analogy *projects* the notion of the world-stage onto a "worldless" undiscovered country. This projection is von Balthasar's use of the interpretive work of theatre and performance myopically restricted to operatic obedience to the composer or collapsed into recitation. Von Balthasar's theory never needs to go beyond tablework. That is, von Balthasar's hermeneutics remain dramaturgical insofar as they present an account of theatrical action that is speculative. How could an actor and director work together to realize the world-stage-less-ness of hell? Perhaps akin to *Doubt*'s unperformed second act or an intermission. Another option is literal projection. A production of Brecht's *Galileo* by the Irondale theatre company in Brooklyn added the hero's confession to the Inquisition as a video-recording, a "projection" of the experience of the hell of torture. Von Balthasar objects to Brecht's failure to allow Galileo to break through the experience of Godforsakenness in the (sinful) display of the Roman church's torture devices. Galileo will only be *shown* the instruments of torture in the same theatrical way that the Cardinal becomes Pope in the accumulation of costumes and props; for Brecht, ideology's power can only operate with the cooperation of the proleteriate and so theatre can turn spectacle back against a compromised institution to force reflection and a change to given circumstances.⁸²⁵ If Galileo perseveres as a martyr, there would be salvation. Galileo fails (but the

⁸²⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?* David Kipp and Lothar Krauth, trans. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986).

⁸²⁵ *The Pope is now in his full robes.*

THE POPE: At the very most he can be shown the instruments.

THE INQUISITOR: That will be enough your Holiness. Instruments are Mr. Galilei's speciality. (*Galileo* 12, 94).

consequences of the atomic bomb were dropped from the Irondale production). The Christ, however, obediently experiences Godforsakenness in kenotic solidarity with the dead and so wins the world a share in God's triune life.

As it stands, the Director-Spirit is a passive messenger and principle of unity. *Direction symbolizes movement without the contribution of a creative theatrical choice.* All creativity redounds to the Author-Father alone. As such, von Balthasar's theodramatic script breaks its own rules and the Christ appears, on theatrical terms, to be a willing victim of a cruel fate. God's final act is tragedy.⁸²⁶ The end of the section will clarify that the story of God's activity in history oversteps "the limits of what we mean by 'tragedy'—although the word retains its validity in its own sphere. For in itself, however baffling it may be to the finite mind, the all-embracing reality within which 'tragedy' is played out is—eternal blessedness."⁸²⁷ The concession to bafflement should have been a clue that von Balthasar should have reached for another dramatic resource. If the "all-embracing reality" is "eternal blessedness," von Balthasar should learn from Dante and title the genre comedy. To call the eschatological drama a comedy, however, resolves and absolves the dramatic tension of suffering by laughing at it rather than sitting with it. The achievement of von Balthasar's theological speculation is the capacity to envision how God might take pain and powerlessness seriously without absorbing its senselessness as a cruel parody of understanding. Drama does provide a solution, however. I submit that von Balthasar's theodramatic account can be revived in ways more creatively interesting and in ways more consistent with his own theodramatic script by correcting for his over-direction of an intuition of the author's will. That is, I argue that correcting von Balthasar's nontheatrical hermeneutics will allow his innovative approach and dramatic theory to be developed in more credible ways. I conclude this project, therefore, with suggestions of ways to restage von Balthasar's

⁸²⁶ See the section "The Final Act as Tragedy," TD 5, 191ff.

⁸²⁷ TD 5, 246.

Christological Trinitarian theology in light of the interpretive work of theatre and performance. My purpose is to reframe the problematic elision of obedience-passivity-silence by envisioning a world-stage for Holy Saturday and its waiting silence. A more active theology of the interpretive work of the Holy Spirit finds improvisation, contribution, and delight in surprising discoveries. The genre of the last act should be more playful; speculation, I argued, belongs in the comedic-hermeneutical trajectory of religion and theatre. A less naturalistic understanding about the interpretive work of the audience undoes the presumption of passivity in silence. For a more credible theological dramatic theory, von Balthasar must be shorn of his own performance anxiety and become willing to trust that the world has more to say during Holy Saturday. Rather than follow the Christ-actor Outside with von Speyr's esoteric camera, it seems better to wait on stage for the Christ to come back. I thus offer Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* as a tragi-comic mystery play for von Balthasar's Holy Saturday.⁸²⁸ Rather than allow musical silence to signal the erotics of passivity and death, it seems better to envision a dramatic gathering co-present with various wounded and wounding bodies and abilities in mutual gift exchange playing out in surplus meaning for a community gathered to watch and wait *together*.

§5.9.A First Sketch: Waiting for Holy Saturday

Vladimir and Estragon play vaudeville games to pass the time. There is "*A country road. A tree.*" The tragi-comedy follows these friends in their waiting games across two days in two acts. Each act features one day's series of mismatched memories, communicative failures, plots for minor diversions, and abundant silliness and suffering. Godot will meet them by the tree. Samuel Beckett has been extraordinarily clear that he did not intend his play to be about waiting for God. Maybe Godot was a cyclist.⁸²⁹

⁸²⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: a tragi-comedy in two acts*, (New York: Grove, 1954).

⁸²⁹ Hugh Kenner provides the oft referenced anecdote where Beckett hinted at the inspiration for the play's title from waiting for a "veteran racing cyclist, bald, a 'strayer,' recurrent placement in town-to-town and national championships,

The audience gets left waiting too as witness to scenes of physical suffering, economic injustice, and wordplay. The play dramatizes the anti-temporality of von Balthasar's Holy Saturday when meaning gets deferred. Christ's descent into the senselessness of "worldless" hell will explain as much as Lucky's equally baffling thinking speech. One can try to construct a glossary for Beckett's references, but the joy of the play of the speech derives from the actor's virtuosity and Beckett's untangling and re-tangling of sounds and half-meanings "quaquaquaqua" words.⁸³⁰ But Lucky's speech, not exactly meaningful and not exactly meaningless, nonetheless tricks the mind into resonances of theology. The speech begins with references "Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia..."⁸³¹ Commentaries abound on how to make sense of Lucky's ramble. So the personal God of Christianity—qua-qualified, by good scholarly reference to the uncitable Puncher and Wattmann, and qua-qualified, again, by means of God's eternity "outside" time—must be understood in terms of the triune divine apathia, athambia, and aphasia. The symbol of divine apathia gives rise to thoughts about the Balthasarian theme of God's impassibility.⁸³² The symbol of divine athambia (whatever it means) gives rise to thoughts about the Balthasarian theme God's incomprehensibility.⁸³³ The symbol of divine aphasia gives rise to thoughts about the Balthasarian theme of "wordlessness" experienced by God the Son.⁸³⁴ The dead Word can no longer speak as a revelation of God, yet it is precisely in

Christian name elusive, surname Godeau, pronounced, of course, no differently from Godot" (Kenner, "The Cartesian Cyclist" in *Samuel Beckett: a Critical Study*, [New York: Grove, 1961], 124).

⁸³⁰ Beckett, *Godot*, Act I, 45.

⁸³¹ Beckett, *Godot*, Act I, 45.

⁸³² "There can be no *pathos* in God if by this we mean some involuntary influence from outside. Or, to put it positively, God (and this applies to the Incarnate One also) can only be 'passive', subject to *passio*, if this accords with some prior, 'active', free decision" (TD 5, 222).

⁸³³ "The only way to grasp the 'figure' of Jesus, the central actor of the theo-drama, is by *not grasping* it and by allowing it to take place in the 'ungraspable' context of the mystery of the Trinity. This grasping by 'letting go' is what we mean by faith, and it probably requires more letting go than it is prepared for; fortunately, however, what it tries to hold on to will ultimately be wrested from it anyway. Mystery does not begin at the point where reason, having taken many rational steps, does not know how to proceed: mystery begins right in the middle of the Prologue" (TD 5, 493).

⁸³⁴ TD 5, 267.

death that von Balthasar locates the most credible revelation of God's love for the world in the divine aphasia of dereliction and descent. Nothing in Lucky's thinking speech means in the sense of a discrete communication of theological predication. Lucky's theology occupies the night of Holy Saturday in its impossibility of making sense of the senselessness of Godforsakenness. Positive speech has been silenced; all that remains are drama's "public works" to behold.

The play's waiting takes on the anxious character of meaning deferred, but also the boredom of Holy Saturday meditation. Modern theology written after the disaster will sit ambiguously in a confusing sense of time.⁸³⁵ Beckett implies the weird calendar of Holy Week and the Easter Triduum where single liturgical days stretch over periods greater than single evenings and mornings.

VLADIMIR: He said Saturday. (*Pause.*) I think.

ESTRAGON: You think.

VLADIMIR: I must have made a note of it. (*He fumbles in his pockets, bursting with miscellaneous rubbish.*)

ESTRAGON: (*very insidious*) But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it rather Sunday (*Pause.*) Or Monday? (*Pause.*) Or Friday?

VLADIMIR: (*looking wildly about him, as though the date was inscribed on the landscape*). It's not possible!

ESTRAGON: Or Thursday?

VLADIMIR: What'll we do?

ESTRAGON: If he came yesterday and we weren't here you may be sure he won't come again to-day.

VLADIMIR: But you say we were here yesterday.

ESTRAGON: I may be mistaken.⁸³⁶

Interpreted as a mystery play, *Waiting for Godot* expands the date of Holy Saturday to an epoch. Holy Saturday is not a fixed moment in light of von Balthasar's sense of God's solidarity with the dead, the estranged, and the abandoned. While waiting, time is out of joint. The play's two days occur in one theatrical evening: to presume that the audience will watch the actual passage of real time, as if these days are twenty-four hours, imposes a kind of naturalism the play resists. Why must the fall of night, with its low hanging metatheatrical moon, put us to actual sleep? Better, perhaps, to see

⁸³⁵ Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, Ann Smock trans., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

⁸³⁶ Beckett, *Godot*, Act I, 9-10.

attending to Godot as a kind of parallel theatrical-liturgical time, staging the silence of von Balthasar's Holy Saturday on earth, still firmly on the credible and public stage of the world. What the audience sees is not the forsaken Son tormented in hell symbolized, too, by the reports of the beaten brother of the Boy and the consensual sadomasochistic play of Lucky and Pozzo (e.g., to the passive and obedient Son-*Logos*-Lucky the active Father-Pozzo bellows "Think!"). Beckett's play tracks the forsakenness of two friends left waiting in the quiet of von Balthasar's literary, rather than dramatic, contradiction. The Gospels do not all agree about the events of the Passion. Only Matthew (27:46) and Mark (15:34) record Jesus' announcement of Psalm 22 at the moment of his death. Why does von Balthasar make *this* version of the story so central? John simply announces that the work is done: "It is finished" (John 19:30). Luke, by contrast, waxes pneumatological: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Didi and Gogo similarly debate about the contradictions of the Passion as recorded in the four inherited Gospels and equivocate on the horizon of meaning between death and hell.

VLADIMIR: One out of four. Of the other three two don't mention any thieves at all and the third says that both of them abused him.

ESTRAGON: Who?

VLADIMIR: What?

ESTRAGON: What's all this about? Abused who?

VLADIMIR: The Saviour.

ESTRAGON: Why?

VLADIMIR: Because he wouldn't save them.

ESTRAGON: From hell.

VLADIMIR: Imbecile! From death.

ESTRAGON: I thought you said hell.

VLADIMIR: From death, from death.⁸³⁷

Yet it is Godot who will save Didi and Gogo from death should they actually hang themselves.

"We'll hang ourselves to-morrow. (*Pause.*) Unless Godot comes. [...] We'll be saved."⁸³⁸ The early discussion of scriptural conundrums creates a frame within which the two friends try to abandon

⁸³⁷ Beckett, *Godot*, Act I, 7.

⁸³⁸ Beckett, *Godot*, Act II, 109.

each other and continually fail to go away. Waiting decays action and memory. The question of what to do on Holy Saturday while the Christ experiences Godforsakenness offstage finds its answer in a waiting that can neither move on nor stay in place. Language no longer *performs* what it seeks to effect on Holy Saturday. “Let’s go” means staying put.⁸³⁹ Waiting means playing or doing or daring to hope. The play lapses into multiple silences, extending the experience of waiting from the friends on stage to the collective who have gathered to watch *Godot’s* rituals of bowler hat exchange and metatheatrical self-awareness.⁸⁴⁰ The play explores the experience of a world remembering meaning that may not ever make good on a promise to return. The world, on Holy Saturday, is a world of ceaseless repetition in hope of being found waiting to begin.⁸⁴¹ The waiting on Holy Saturday occurs in silences on the edge of meaninglessness. But, because of bodies laughing and in pain together, waiting on Holy Saturday never crosses over into nothingness or total despair.

Holy Saturday waits in silence, certainly, but a silence that maintains comedic-hermeneutical hospitality in its response to the tragedy of Godforsakenness. Tragi-comedy represents a high point as a theodramatic genre for von Balthasar.⁸⁴² Holy Saturday must be tragi-comic. How can something so horrible be claimed about the experience of the world in light of the Godforsakenness

⁸³⁹ “Instead of instigating physical actions or articulating their relevances, language now operates to ignore, question, or annul them. The most striking examples of this are the last lines of both acts—“Yes, let’s go”—which are followed in the text by the words ‘They do not move’ and on the stage by the tramps remaining immobile. There is no explanation of the failure to stir, only the presence of the gap. In this way the orderly universe of utterance followed by logically related movement, of volition succeeded by steps taken, which we inhabit as our very air, is disrupted, pulled asunder” (Richard Gilman, “The Waiting Since,” *Samuel Becket’s Waiting for Godot*, Harold Bloom, ed., [New York: Chelsea House, 1987], 75).

⁸⁴⁰ “*Waiting for Godot*...is not only relentlessly theatrical, it is relentlessly cognizant of its theatricality. In the midst of a moment saturated with theatrical terms, Vladimir says suddenly, ‘I’ll be back,’ and *hastens toward the wings*. ‘End of the corridor, on the left,’ says Estragon, a character in a play expressly set on *a country road*. The play not only does not deny that it’s a play, it does not deny that it’s a performance. *In a theatre*” (Mason, *Performative Ground of Religion and Theatre*, 39, emphasis original).

⁸⁴¹ “Beginning again, repetition, the fatal return—everything evoked by experiences where estrangement is allied with the strangely familiar, where there is no cognition but only *recognition*—all this alludes to that initial error which might be expressed as follows: what is first is not beginning, but beginning over, and being is precisely the *impossibility* of being for the first time” (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 243, emphasis original).

⁸⁴² “By affirming the ethical...but rejecting the metaphysical, tragi-comedy hovers between despising and accusing God and accepting that the world has a hidden meaning” (TD 1, 449).

of God? Waiting, transfers meaning from speech-acts to “public works,” kenotic acts of care that play together: picking up those who fall, pulling off shoes, telling jokes, inquiring uncomfortably about urological frailty. The silence of Holy Saturday is not some silence of an untheatrical hell. Holy Saturday can be, instead, the time of the drama of the world after catastrophe and in an era of compromised institutions. The question, rather, becomes if death is really the most interesting or most fun way to pass the time.

§5.9.B Second Sketch: Obedience, History, and Casting

Passed time becomes a way to imagine history. Standing by the side of the road, time passes into what has gone past. Time fades into silence to be held in memory. There is no time, here, to defend that position by means of the vast critical discourse about time and memory and sound. I, too, pass over the opportunity to defend time’s passage into the past. But what has passed comes rushing back into the present without human knowing or control through an encounter with material objects. Examples to illustrate the point can be sourced from high or popular cultures; Proust’s madeleine or Anastasia’s music box both trigger the unexpected “journey to the past.”⁸⁴³ What has passed into the past and memory can be made present again on stage. The residue of surplus meaning to which Ricoeur refers in his appeal to metaphor to make sense of surplus meaning can be a material stickiness: “This surplus of meaning is the residue of the literal interpretation.”⁸⁴⁴ For theatre, a production history sticks to the pages and words of a play. Good taste demands the actors memorize their lines to clean up that residue of literal interpretation. No one pays to see paper. Readers’ theatre belongs to living rooms, college seminars, and rehearsals. Actors are paid to transcribe the script into memory. Actors write authorial words onto the heart guided in such

⁸⁴³ The first allusion refers to the madeleine moment in Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past, Volume 1: Swann's Way: Within a Budding Grove*, C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, trans., (New York: Vintage, 1982). Here the narrator, Marcel, tastes a pastry dipped into tea and sees involuntary memory rise “up like a stage set.” The second allusion refers to a theme from the 1997 animated film-musical *Anastasia* adapted into a stage-musical in 2017.

⁸⁴⁴ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 55.

obedience to the author by a director. Holding books and paper scripts passes into the past during a rehearsal process. The paper and its printed letters signify words to be made flesh. Holding paper is a V-Effekt of the worst kind because it pollutes the stage with drama's origins in materiality. To escape into the world of a play requires forgetting the world and its work. Visible paper makes the past too present by adding the script's materiality to the scenography of the play. Finding a crowd gathered and waiting for the show to begin, words arrive to make the past present again for the first and only time through the interpretive work of the performance.⁸⁴⁵

Drama's past made present is polysemous.⁸⁴⁶ Usually, theatrical repetition refers to the making present the memorization of the rehearsal process. But the phrase "make the past present again for the first and only time" also describes the explicit theatrical goals of the Iranian experimental theatre-maker Nassim Soleimanpour. All theatre exists only for the duration of its performance because *that* moment in history cannot be repeated. A theatrical event is absolutely singular. The banal observation applies to stage drama a general characteristic of any event performed in history. The peculiar and particular combination of factors that prompt any given performance at time t_1 will be different from the peculiar and particular combination of factors for the same sort of performance event (even if enacted in the space place by the same players for both actors and audience) at time t_2 . The second performance will be different in time. Soleimanpour makes this reality the centerpiece of his plays by refusing theatre its rights of reflection, repetition,

⁸⁴⁵ Von Balthasar avoids attending to *Waiting for Godot's* Holy Saturday themes about the deferral of meaning because he finds the play derivative. "So far we have understood the 'audience' as a function of the theatre, in relation to the performance. However, there arises the disturbing possibility of isolating this function from the other elements and giving it independent existence. Of course this only makes sense if we can see through it to the concrete 'theatre of the world', and then the question arises, as it does with uncanny insistence in Ludwig Tieck's short play *Ein Prolog* (1896, WW [1829], 13, 241-266), long before Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*: Will there be anything to see at all? For we do not know *what* will be played. *Will* anything be played?" (TD 1, 312, emphasis original).

⁸⁴⁶ For a description of an application to ritual drama in a Christian liturgical context in dialogue with the work of Tom Driver, Richard Schechner, and Mikhail Bakhtin, see Charles A. Gillespie, Justin Kosec, and Kate Stratton, "Treasure in Clay Jars: Christian Liturgical Drama in Theory and Praxis," in *Theatre Symposium: Ritual Religion and Theatre*, vol. 21. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 90-103.

and rehearsal. Soleimanpour writes dramatic experiments about the power of language to constitute community across lines of political, religious, physical, and temporal distance. These plays can only happen *now* even if others can share their versions of the experience at another time.

Soleimanpour's experimental plays are *drama* in a way legible to theodramatic hermeneutics, however, and not rightfully categorized as performance art. Soleimanpour's plays break genre expectations for theatre-going especially by valuing activity in "audience participation" and dramatizing the receptivity of the actor's choices. A Soleimanpour play can be played and seen again and again, but each and every instance of a Soleimanpour play in performance will be a unique generation of surplus meaning. The actor cannot play the play twice because the actor *must* see the script for the first time during the course of the play. The actor plays the entire play holding the script. This is not an optional staging convention. The lack of knowledge about what comes next goes to the core of the play's surplus meaning. Both the fun and the angst of *White Rabbit*, *Red Rabbit* emerges from the drama's questions about obedience, history, belief, death, and writing. The play explores the theodramatic theme of actors in kenotic obedience to the commands of the author mediated by words. With the script, the actor makes present something from the past through a performance that brings timelessness into the present.

The play requires a producer and scenography but no director. The decoration of the set, the assembling of necessary props, the finding of a space, and the conscription of the actor require the process of production. The producer warns the actor not to look up the play or ask any questions. The actor is also told to prepare their best ostrich impression. The rules of this theatrical game are simple. The actor performs the script as a "cold-reading." The actor is free to improvise, make comments, expand and reflect or ask the audience questions. In these moments, the act must raise a hand to indicate clearly the difference between the script's words and the actor's commentary. On the one hand, the actor *can* skim down a given page to inform choices with a sense of what comes

next. On the other hand, the actor sometimes cannot turn the page without first making meaningful and consequential performance choices. There some pages and moments where theatre games erupt with playfulness and where members of the audience come to be invited to join the show. Most pages of the script can be played in a few minutes. Other pages of the script could take an hour to play depending on the performance choices of the actor and audience. Nassim Soleimanpour has written a few plays in this genre.

I will not quote the text or give away too much of the plot, but I will tell a story about my first performance of *White Rabbit Red Rabbit* where I played as an audience member during its off-Broadway run in 2016. The run featured celebrities playing the role of the actor on stage. I attended on April 4, 2016 with master improviser Wayne Brady as the actor. Soleimanpour's drama manifests in a total refusal of dramatic irony. Every player in the room (actors and audiences) plays the play during their first performance. The show begins with the actor asking *every* person in the room to speak a number. I cannot remember my number (perhaps 31?), but Brady complimented my ability in vocal projection. There is no external standpoint to a production of *White Rabbit Red Rabbit*; the event in history is singular. The contradiction of a singular event in a commercial run off-Broadway only confirms the importance of production history to drama. A single production (that is, the same producers—Tom Kirdahy and Devlin Elliott—with the same scenography) realized as many different interpretations of *White Rabbit Red Rabbit* as there were performances.⁸⁴⁷ The play exemplifies the relationship between participations in both particular historical situatedness and communicable traditions of experience.

Another moment of the play calls for a certain numbered member of the audience to announce today's date. The date cannot be contained in the script because the date for its realization

⁸⁴⁷ The curious reader can refer to the Playbill article "17 Outrageous Moments from the Run of *White Rabbit Red Rabbit*" for a sense of some of the surplus meanings generated by the choices of actors and audiences alike across the run.

must be today. The date was correctly given as April 4, 2016, rapidly followed by a voice proclaiming something like “the anniversary of Martin Luther King’s assassination.” Brady paused and took stock of the significance of the situation. The play (billed as a comedy) generated surplus meaning immediately in excess of the producer’s chosen genre. Brady balanced a night of improvisational silliness with reverence for the play’s themes about the spectacle of death, self-sacrifice, playful freedom, and obedience. At one point, Brady raised his hand to ask “Do you see what he’s saying here?” The play never stopped being funny, but its meditations about the danger of absolute obedience took on specificity in surplus meanings created by the interpretive work of a famous black actor in the United States guiding his room full of players on *this* anniversary. One page of Soleimanpour’s script calls for a series of improvised prompts for theatrical suicide. The page can be elongated and played for laughs by miming each idea in the list as a suggestion. In some ways that suicide page of *White Rabbit Red Rabbit* (far from its only reference to self-sacrifice or self-caused death) recapitulates rehearsal games that heighten melodrama to the point of absurdity. Brady refused to play the suggestions in order to emphasize the significance of the play’s questions. (He made one exception for a slip of the tongue from “shock” to “shark” leading him to consent to improvise death by shark attack. Brady made a hilarious squeaking noise as he donned a mimed “swimming cap.”) Brady made no reference to *Godot*, but obedience unto death recalls Didi and Gogo’s hanging tree in such ways to generate a whole different surplus of meanings for theodramatic hermeneutics done in the context of a memory of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination and the persistence of anti-black racism and violence in the United States.⁸⁴⁸

⁸⁴⁸ In the U.S. context, the hanging tree is a lynching tree. According to James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), “the lynching tree joined the cross as the most emotionally charged symbols in the African American community” during the period between 1880-1940 (3). “Both the cross and the lynching tree represented the worst in human beings and at the same time ‘an unquenchable ontological thirst’ for life that refuses the let the worst determine our final meaning” (Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 3, quoting Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959], p. 64). The U.S. context demands the interpretation of the lynching tree *alongside* the cross. “God saw what whites did to innocent and helpless blacks and claimed their suffering as God’s own. God transformed lynched black bodies into the crucified body of Christ. *Every*

The plot for *White Rabbit Red Rabbit* revolves around Soleimanpour's own historical predicament. Its title reflects a parable about obedience performed in the middle of the play. Many receive the play's production history as a meditation on theatre's capacity to transcend political borders. The author explains through the actor how words could travel when Nassim Soleimanpour could not. The script demands that a seat be left open in the front of the house for the sake of the absent presence of the author. The Iranian government seized his passport after Soleimanpour refused to participate in national service. The author sends forth words now waiting for an actor to realize them with an audience in performance. The play complicates how even the most basic assumptions about obedience might create the conditions of possibility for deadly violence. To what authority do actors owe self-sacrificial obedience to the point of the risk of kenotic death? What differentiates the authority of a script from the authority of a government or the authority of a god? How do you know whose orders to find credible?

The play offers a concrete application for von Balthasar's theology of time and obedience expressed without recourse to the Christian symbol system. The actor abdicates foreknowledge in obedience to the author's will made accessible only in by reading the scripts' call to follow in obedience. The play operates according to the *Hinterlegung* theme of the Christ's non-foreknowledge about what it means when he says "thy will be done."⁸⁴⁹ In the realm of theatre, this obedience to the word of the author expresses the timelessness of writing by interpreting it into embodied action. The actor mediates between the timelessness of this script's author and the temporality of the world.⁸⁵⁰ "If we participate in Christ's time, it means that, in him, we share in bringing our time into

time a white mob lynched a black person, they lynched Jesus. The lynching tree is the cross in America" (Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 158).

⁸⁴⁹ "For the sake of obedience, he has renounced his divine foreknowledge and given it into the Father's keeping: 'This lack of knowledge in him is something perfectly serious, not in the least a game in which he would merely make a pretense of not knowing. Even his supernatural, human knowledge in God is made use of by him only to the extent that this is necessary for his task[']" (TD 5, 128, with internal references to Adrienne von Speyr).

⁸⁵⁰ "But this mysterious communication between time and eternity—a time that is not destroyed by eternity yet is embedded within it—is something we owe to the *time of the Mediator*, Jesus Christ" (TD 5, 126). Eternity, for von

eternal time, insofar as Jesus' past (as a historical person) is the guarantee of his future."⁸⁵¹ The actor is the concrete analogy between the timelessness of the author's words and the performance of its intervention in history now. Later, now able to leave Iran, Soleimanpour once attended a performance of *White Rabbit Red Rabbit* and jumped on stage to talk with his own history made present. Nassim Soleimanpour both is and is not the author of *White Rabbit Red Rabbit* on analogy to how the Father both is and is not the Son.⁸⁵² Like all analogies, an appeal to Trinitarian theology to explain an experimental play falls short. Soleimanpour's rabbits are not Easter bunnies.

So where is the director in *White Rabbit Red Rabbit's* unintended theodramatic parable? Like von Balthasar's triads, direction functions as the principle of unity between the meaning of the world to the Father-Author disclosed in the surplus meaning of the script and that can be realized only in the play of performance by the Actor-Son. Better than von Balthasar's Director-Spirit, the event of Soleimanpour's play taps and unfolds one pattern of infinite possibilities of the script into the historical and finite singularity that waits, perhaps longing, to be made excessive. "Now our creaturely becoming has a share in the ineffable 'becoming' of the Divine Being."⁸⁵³ The play

Balthasar, can be defined as time-less-ness (with neither beginning nor end) as opposed to a finite creature's participation in eternity symbolized by "everlasting-ness" (with a beginning and a potential end eschatologically deferred by participation in God's eternity). The creaturely invitation to resurrected life, therefore, constitutes something like the "feeling of lightness" of "the infinite opening up?" in existence after the Christ's death similar to Blanchot's account of writing after the experience of aborted execution: "I know, I imagine that this unanalyzable feeling changed what there remained for him of existence. As if the death outside of him could only henceforth collide with the death in him. 'I am alive. No, you are dead'" (Maurice Blanchot, *The Instant of my Death*, Elizabeth Rottenberg, trans., Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery, eds., [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000], 8-9).

⁸⁵¹ TD 5, 129

⁸⁵² For von Balthasar, all creaturely distinctions—including differences in time—find their ground in trinitarian distinction. This is his "idea permeating everything that the world, *in spite of and because of* its being genuinely created, and created in freedom, cannot be 'outside' God; there cannot be such an 'outside'; on the contrary, the world must have its locus within the trinitarian relations. This locus, in its finitude, must be always embraced and surpassed by the infinite distinction between the Divine Persons—which provided the basis for our attempt to interpret the redemption of even a world that is sinfully alienated from God [...]. There can be no question, therefore, of the world moving from a position 'outside God' to a position 'inside God'; instead, there must be a change in the condition of the world while it remains equally close to, and immanent in, God" (TD 5, 395, emphasis original). Drama provides resources to make this claim credible for debate. The movement "outside the theater" to "inside the theater" is not the same as participation in drama. The interpretive work of scenography and critical advertising demonstrates how the play begins for the audience even before and the audience arrives. Dramas of ticket sales or pilgrimage to the theater can become as theatrical as performances themselves.

⁸⁵³ TD 5, 131

performs its own theatrical reversal of theodramatic reality by staging what one dares to hope is only a virtual manifestation of the actor's forsakenness by the playwright in potential self-sacrifice.

Theatrical virtuality operates in *Soleimanpour* as the polar opposite to von Balthasar's argument for the need for reality in the drama of history. Credibility moves between these poles, and both exemplify performance anxiety insofar as plays like *Soleimanpour*'s make present a threat for drama's madness and violence to become real. One never knows for sure until after making choices. The play concludes with an audience departing from the theatre while the actor lays and lies "dead." Brady remained still, and the room of audience-players departed in reverential silence.

White Rabbit Red Rabbit questions the closure of interpretive work in obedience to a singular vision of theatrical possibility. There is still some loss. Like von Balthasar's notion of the history of the world illumined by the fact of the incarnation, the play can only be played once as the actor without knowledge of what comes next. Now, with awareness and dramatic irony, the play opens for participation in infinite numbers of *other* credible interpretations. Players return to participate in yet another instantiation of singular meaning. Anyone who has seen or read the play now can produce it (with *Soleimanpour*'s permission included in the script read aloud). The script should leave with a new actor sent on a mission from the author and delivered by the actor.⁸⁵⁴ *Soleimanpour* provides his contact information in the midst of the play for those who wish to testify to their experience. He aims for some real connection via the timelessness and spacelessness of his words made present.⁸⁵⁵ Even after its performance, *White Rabbit Red Rabbit* gestures toward creaturely invitation to resurrected life as something akin to von Balthasar's theology of all creature's ability to participate in

⁸⁵⁴ The producers of the off-Broadway production took the script back from an audience-player at the end of the performance and stood guard over the stage area. Their control over the audience's experience emphasizes the closeness of "producing" to "directing" in von Balthasar's dramatic theory.

⁸⁵⁵ These themes, anchored in more positive ideas about love, language, and theatrical pedagogy, are all the more apparent in his more recent autobiographical work, *Nassim*. The actor still will not know the play's script, but *Soleimanpour* appears in the flesh on stage.

the Christ's death because even death's "non-time" has been engulfed by God's eternity.⁸⁵⁶ Perhaps it can be better put in the language of Blanchot's "feeling of lightness" of "the infinite opening up?" when writing the experience of a virtual execution: "I know, I imagine that this unanalyzable feeling changed what there remained for him of existence. As if the death outside of him could only henceforth collide with the death in him. 'I am alive. No, you are dead.'"⁸⁵⁷ Blanchot's phrase now applies to Brady (still alive and still working as an actor, at least at the time of my writing, still alive and still working on this dissertation) and to everyone else complicit in a production of *White Rabbit Red Rabbit*. So too is the confrontation between Blanchot's phrase with the interpretive work still left to do for every player in a social drama tacitly complicit in violence. *White Rabbit Red Rabbit* calls attention to the credibility of present and active bodies, especially those whose surplus meanings fail to obey arbitrary genre expectations.

§5.9.C Third Sketch: Revivals and the Credible Silence of Communion

Surplus meaning adds to surplus meaning via theatrical interpretive work. One set of surplus meanings arise from performances of Frank Wedekind's 1891 *Frühlings Erwachen*. Another collection of surplus meanings arise from Steven Slater and Duncan Sheik's 2006 adaption into *Spring Awakening*, a Broadway rock musical. Still more surplus meanings arise from Deaf West's revival of the 2006 musical in 2015.⁸⁵⁸ North Hollywood's Deaf West Theatre Company makes theatre for

⁸⁵⁶ "In his Resurrection, Jesus has already taken the whole of transitory time (including life and death) with him into eternal life which was the source of his constant obedience to the Father's commission. This means he also recapitulated the 'non-time' of the dead. It also means that the Risen One does not live in some 'intermediate time' before the 'end of the world'" (TD 5, 128, with internal references to Adrienne von Speyr). Due diligence notes that while von Balthasar also appeals to the poetics of wideness, he more frequently invokes military-sexual metaphors for God's relationship to the world and its time. For example, "God intends not only to dominate creaturely time from above but to embed it, with all its created reality, in his eternal time" (TD 5, 127).

⁸⁵⁷ Maurice Blanchot, *The Instant of my Death*, Elizabeth Rottenberg, trans., Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery, eds. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 8-9.

⁸⁵⁸ Here, I invoke a common distinction between the transformation of artworks from one manifestation to another. In professional theatre, an *adaptation* shifts genre or media to create a "new artwork based on a preexisting source." Much musical theatre works this way: Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II's *Oklahoma!* (1943, with choreography by Agnes de Mille) is an adaptation of Lynn Riggs's play *Green Grow the Lilacs* (1930). Notice that an adaptation applies "authorship" to the adaptor because significant changes are made to the source material (most obviously, in *Oklahoma!*, in the addition of musical numbers and the dream ballet). In professional theatre, a *revival* is a re-staging of an already

both Deaf and hearing audiences.⁸⁵⁹ The model aims for theatrical credibility in the form of accessibility and inclusion. The Deaf West revival took a *bilingual* approach, performing this musical for both Deaf and hearing audiences with a mix of spoken and written English and American Sign Language (ASL). This included doubling some characters so they were played by both hearing and Deaf performers. Theatrical doubling always calls attention to the both / and of embodied performance, but Deaf West's staging choices consistently bring our attention to another sort of theatrical doubling. Bilingualism invites hospitality for two cultures, two languages, two sorts of musicality. Inclusion need not compromise aesthetic concerns or theatrical virtuosity, and the proof happens in public testament to Deaf West's credibility.

Deaf West's revival awakened a multidirectional invitation to see differences between Deaf and hearing interpretation of the world. That seeing might be dramatized in choreography that "sings" to those fluent in ASL and yet recalls the gestural abstractions of Bill T. Jones movement work for the original production. The 2015 revival came quickly on the heels of *Spring Awakening's* 2006 premier. Many of Deaf West's design choices paid homage to the first production's scenography. The 2006 version symbolized an analogy between the experience of nineteenth century German youth and twenty-first century U.S. teenagers using music as an expression of interiority and subtext. The musical numbers sit alongside the plot; as composer Steven Slater writes, "I wanted a sharp and clear distinction between the world of the spoken and the world of the sung."⁸⁶⁰ Clues in

existing play. In the case of a revival, minimal changes are made to the source material. A revival aims to be legible as different surplus meaning generated from the same source material. A revival, however, can fundamentally transform the intention of the original authors. Trevor Nunn's 1998 *Oklahoma!* at the National Theatre in London (with choreography by Susan Stroman and orchestrations by William David Brohn) emphasized some the plays darker themes. Daniel Fish's 2019 Broadway revival—transforming the big musical into a chamber piece—further emphasizes the violence lurking in the background. Notice that a revival applies "authorship" to the director or production company by identifying the surplus meaning their interpretive work adds to this production. Ultimately, a revival of an adaptation demonstrates the chain of unexhausted surplus meanings I established in dialogue with Ricœur and Brecht.

⁸⁵⁹ I follow the standardized practice of discussing Deafness (with a capital d) as a linguistic minority and culture. When I use "deaf" (lower case d), I mean to signal a "non-hearing person."

⁸⁶⁰ Duncan Sheik and Steven Sater, *Spring Awakening*, (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2007), 12.

self-referential set pieces (for example, a classroom chalkboard listing the show's musical numbers) and the presence of hand-held microphones and lyric anachronisms (Hanschen's "I go up to my room, turn the stereo on") link historical and contemporary experience.

The plot of *Spring Awakening* follows a group of middle-class German students as they experience social and sexual enlightenment to the alarm of the adults. The drama's vignettes match ordinarily unspoken tragedies of childhood with the misunderstanding or abuse of adults. Wedekind called his version *Eine Kindertragodie*.⁸⁶¹ The 2015 Deaf West production, however, emphasized the encounter with and fear of difference that undergirds the show's depictions of social and sexual violence. Unlike the original musical, Deaf West foregrounded differences in ability as a feature of the plot and the staging. We now find difference and interiority physicalized in the doubling of certain characters. Wendla and Moritz (among others) as well as the Adult Man and Adult Woman were doubled with a Deaf character played by a deaf actor who interacted with others in the world of the play and that character's Voice, played by a hearing actor.⁸⁶²

Visually, this choice underscores how ASL and written/spoken English are two *distinct* languages. So too, sign languages and oral/written languages reflect from two distinct theatre cultures: English speakers and the Deaf community. The choice, and the show's prevalent classroom themes, permitted Deaf West's production to point surplus meaning in the direction of educating its audiences. Moritz's inability to succeed at school now reflect a system unwilling to make pedagogical accommodations. While the fundamental cognitive proficiencies for ASL and English are related and so support inclusive classroom models, many studies have affirmed key cultural and linguistic

⁸⁶¹ Frank Wedekind, *Frühlings Erwachen in Werke*, (Berlin: Artemis & Winkler Verlag, 1994), 473-548.

⁸⁶² Theatre creates a unique opportunity to visualize interiority by doubling characters, as in Brian Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and its difference between "Public Gar" and "Private Gar." Key to Deaf West's model of inclusivity is how the Deafness operates on stage as public self-presentation *in addition* to the presentation of the play.

differences between ASL acquisition and acquiring spoken / written English.⁸⁶³ Bilingualism twins cultures; it does not simply add captions.

Bodies and their differences are central to the Deaf West revival, both in the shift to the pedagogical plot but also in the technical complexities required to make a musical with hearing and non-hearing performers. Casting the first wheelchair using Broadway actor, Ali Stroker, broadened the scope of the play's inclusivity. Deafness need not dis-able musicals any more than Stroker's wheelchair disqualifies her from a Broadway role. Borrowing language from Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Deaf West's staging imagines an "accessible future" for theatre-making beyond the industry's compulsory able-bodiedness.⁸⁶⁴ Not only does this show display an inclusive spectacle, Deaf West's performance practice proves the political and social construction of disabling spaces. That is, the capacity for particular bodies to participate in social life redounds not to individuals but to choices about social scenography.

Gestures of stylized choreography and ASL perform side-by-side in a paradoxical undoing of the exclusion of the Deaf community precisely by *sharing* a character between both a hearing and non-hearing actor. Doubling Wendla, Moritz, and the adult characters shows the gap between Deaf and hearing experience. By naming that difference, Deaf West proceeds to transcend it by rendering the play accessible (but not *identical*) to hearing and non-hearing audiences. Distances between the

⁸⁶³ "According to Livingston (1997), deaf students should be taught in the same way as hearing students, and to accomplish this both ASL and English need to coexist in the classroom" (Marc Marschark, Gladys Tang and Harry Knoors, eds., *Bilingualism and Bilingual Deaf Education*, [New York: Oxford University Press, 2014], 7). "The assumption that transfer could occur between a sign language and a written/spoken language was called into question because the conditions in Cummins's interdependency hypothesis—shared foundational proficiencies [the two iceberg model, shared proficiencies under the water level, but manifest in two different languages]—could not be fulfilled. At the same time, however, various studies have indicated that sign language proficiency correlates with reading proficiency (e.g., Hermans, Knoors, Ormel, & Verhoeven, 2008; Prinz & Strong, 1998), Strong and Prinz, 1997), suggesting transfer even if Cummins's framework does not apply. Such findings notwithstanding, there are indications that spoken language proficiency correlates more highly than sign language with reading proficiency in bilingual deaf children (Niederberger, 2008) and that transfer between sign and written language may only occur after a certain threshold proficiency in sign language has been reached (Hermans, Ormel & Knoors, 2010; see also Holzinger & Fellingner)" (Knoors, Tang, and Marschark, *Bilingualism and Bilingual Deaf Education*, 11).

⁸⁶⁴ Alison Kafer. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013.

audience and the stage, between adulthood and childhood, between sexed bodies and social locations, between God and world, found symbolic undercutting by the original production's placement of audience members on the stage with chorus members in street clothes. Deaf West staged a visual undoing of a supposed gap between differently abled bodies on Broadway and its audiences. This undoing came not in re-writing the lyrics or text, but through redirecting the stage spectacle to generate whole new surplus meaning. *Nothing about the play's words or the music's notes changed for the Deaf West performance.*

Two moments bear on the discussion of von Balthasar in Deaf West's *Spring Awakening* revival: the Act I finale, "I Believe" and the play's final moment. The surplus meaning of the performance foregrounded a fusion of theology, sexuality, and disability in scenes showing the "adult world's" wrongful forced separation of transcendence, pleasure, and embodiment. At the same time, Deaf West's spectacle cited and critiqued a hayloft scene's portrayal of sexual violence. In short, Deaf West's spectacle theorized an erotic theology of the Christian communion ritual in ways that undo von Balthasar's connection of passivity and silence. The spectacle of communion on stage also recalls the problem of the dubious ghost.

Spring Awakening's first act concludes with Wendla and Melchior's first sexual experience. In the midst of a rainstorm, the two find themselves alone in the hayloft of a secluded barn while the rest of the town "is at Church. Rehearsing for our Michaelmas chorale."⁸⁶⁵ Wendla and Melchior's conversation leads to kissing, embrace, and, ultimately, sexual intercourse. Throughout the scene, the cast sings a simple chorale of their own: "I believe... there is love in heaven. I believe... all will be forgiven. I believe..." "I Believe" translates the first words of the creedal statements for the Christians in the play. *Credo in unum deum*. "I believe in One God." If the song is to be taken as a liturgical piece, then this moment visually connects sexual bliss and heavenly bliss, erotic

⁸⁶⁵ Sheik and Sater, *Spring Awakening*, 56.

transgression and ultimate forgiveness. The chorus prays a version of Melchior and Wendla's faith in "feeling something," an inherent goodness that leads to "peace, joy, harmony, wisdom." The moment, also, inaugurates the plot of youth forsaken by adults in the second act.

The 2006 musical version of *Spring Awakening* made a significant change to the hayloft scene from Wedekind's original. Wedekind shows Melchior ignore Wendla's protest in rapacious violation in the middle of the second act, pronouncing the absence of love from sex over Wendla's objections.⁸⁶⁶ The 2006 musical plays out this erotic expression as a fully consensual and mutual pleasurable embrace as a finale for act one.⁸⁶⁷ The Deaf West revival took a third option and visualized the ambiguities of sex, bodies, and belief. While Wendla embraces Melchior with enthusiasm, Wendla's Voice appears visibly concerned and hesitant. The two actresses share a look, performing a moment of active decision rather than Balthasarian gendered passivity. Wendla's Voice turns her back on Wendla who, in turn, chooses to lie down on the hay. Rather than elide or validate this scene's origin in sexual violence, doubling Wendla's character shows forth a more complex approach to sexuality and spirituality. Surplus meanings are rarely clear.

Deaf West's spectacle confirmed and pressed this *theological* reading. While Melchior and Wendla ascend the hay, two lit candles flanked the implication of the hay bales as an altar. The cast circled behind singing and signing their creed. At the same time, two members of the cast, costumed in Christian liturgical clothing of cassock and surplice, walked down the aisles of the Brooks

⁸⁶⁶ MELCHIOR: O glaub mir, es gibt keine *Liebe*! – Alles Eigenutz, alles Egoismus! – Ich liebe dich so wenig, wie du mich liebst. –

WENDLA: – – Nicht! – – – – – Nicht, Melchior! – –

MELCHIOR: – – – Wendla!

WENDLA: O Melchior! – – – – – nicht – nicht – – (Wedekind, *Werke*, 507, emphasis original)

⁸⁶⁷ WENDLA: Now, *there*—now, *that's*. . .

MELCHIOR: Yes...?

WENDLA: Yes.

(*As the song continues, Melchior climbs on top of Wendla and lowers his pants.*)

[...]

WENDLA: Melchior—*oh!*...

BOYS AND GIRLS:

I believe... (Sheik and Sater, *Spring Awakening*, 81-82, emphasis original)

Atkinson theater swinging incense. Dressed in ritual garb as readily found in churches of the nineteenth century as it could be today, the musical made-present the sights, sounds, and smells of Christian ritual. Behind the hay, members of the cast knelt before the Adult Men dressed in preaching tabs who mimed the placement of a communion wafer into the cast's mouths.

The *Credo* "I Believe" could also be a loose translation of the Hebrew word "Amen." The word more literally translates to "so be it," "truly," or "verily." Many Christians utter "Amen" at the moment of communion, a ritual act believed to unify the believer with the real presence of Christ in a foretaste of the experience of God in heaven.⁸⁶⁸ To utter "Amen" in the presence of the consecrated bread—"Body of Christ"—attests to the reality of this spiritual presence. Despite profound and significant differences in theology and terminology, Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, and Lutheran and Anglican Christians will mostly agree to a theology that supports some *real presence* of the Christ in the Eucharist. In von Balthasar's turn from theodramatic eschatology to liturgical theology, the Eucharist is the credible making present of God in the world by means of the performance of bread and wine. Deaf West enacts a theological *tour-de-force*. The erotics of Eucharistic reception—kneeling, feeding, taking Christ's body onto the tongue—occupy the same visual field as the moment of sexual communion. Rather than merely function as a theatrical warning against conservative prudishness, Deaf West's *Spring Awakening* does theology and sexuality at once. Word becomes flesh in the movement of creed into ASL choreography; no bodies are ineligible for communicating as the Word of the Christ's Body. This spectacle of en-fleshed multiplicity-in-unity repairs the abusive sermons of silent obedience preached by pastors and parents throughout the second act. "I believe... all will be forgiven," however, now includes *all* of that which seems unforgivable and forsaken.

⁸⁶⁸ "Christians know above all else that the Church's *sacraments* directly communicate heavenly reality to them by brining to them the heavenly Lord, who comes to earth. [...] First and foremost Holy Mass is a union between heaven and earth" (TD 5, 134).

These spectacles of the sacred, however, must be respected as spectacles worth taking seriously for its theological argument. This bit of *secular* theatre does generate religious surplus meaning. Deaf West's choices do theological work precisely in the bilingual idioms of musical theatre and Christian ritual enacted through the revival's spectacle. Performance's permeable barrier flows in many directions. Deaf West's spirituality of sexual complexity and its theatrical liturgy of an accessible future in the bilingual comingling of difference occurred through its spectacle for an active audience participating by means of presence.

Silence returns in *Spring Awakening's* own theatrical eschatology. At the end, the play's final moments show differently-abled members of the cast assisting one and other through a portal that has opened into a colorful Outside. Perhaps, eventually, "All shall know the wonder" in the dawn of a newly verdant garden seen through this crack in the set. Music faded into silence as the cast continue to help one another and sign the lyrics. "All shall know the wonder" promised by the finale's sustained moment of shared, sacred, fully bilingual silence. Far from an expression of passivity, silence spoke of the possibility of returning an experience of credible co-presence as gift only accessible if the world matters to God because of its drama.⁸⁶⁹

⁸⁶⁹ The final line of *Theo-Drama* implies the surplus meaning of performance to be a gift returned freely to God "What does God gain from the world? An additional gift, given to the Son by the Father, but equally a gift made by the Son to the Father, and by the Spirit to both. It is a gift because, through the distinct operations of each of the three Persons, the world acquires an inward share in the divine exchange of life; as a result the world is able to take the divine things it has received from God, together with the gift of being created, and return them to God as a divine gift" (TD 5, 521).

ENCORE: CONCLUSION

The interpretive work of theatre and performance begets surplus meaning waiting for interpretive hospitality to find it credible. Credibility refers to what happens when a public audience chooses to pay attention and chooses to suspend disbelief *for now*. Bowler-hatted friends passing time by the side of the road remind us that drama waits for its meaning to be realized in performance. Godot never arrives but play comes and goes. The show comes to an end. Bowing to a final word circles back to make a now familiar argument about credibility and drama one more time. For whom does an applauding crowd cheer? After a tragedy, the dead bounce up to reverence the living audience with a solemn bow. After a comedy, the villain gets booed, but only if the actor achieves such a credible display of evil to merit a phenomenon of transference. Even the curtain call cannot stop the cascade of surplus meaning, and the audience goes forth to share stories of the experience, critiques of the performance choices, judgments, speculative restaging, perhaps to change the world but more likely for a drink.

Credibility's suspended disbelief does not imply skepticism as the ordinary state of affairs. The play of any play calms the impulse to reject foreignness too strange to merit making friends. Audiences welcome to the stage in the same way audiences congratulate: applause. Drama correlates to credibility with a positive sense of provisional and imaginative engagement that avoids the occluding surplus meaning of the metaphors of suspension and bracketed disbelieving I have used. Credibility cannot be coerced but must be earned and given. Like any drama, credibility does not persist forever but endures only for the length of an argument's play.

My dissertation has argued that drama endows a particular interpretation of a set of religious ideas, symbols, and interpretations (that is, a theology) with consequence and personal meaning. Drama—especially dramas of crisis—demand that attention must be paid. I placed my discussion of drama and credibility in dialogue with Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological dramatic theory.

Dramatic literature and theatrical praxis provided a non-confessional “third term” for theological realism. The facts presented by testimonies to God’s self-revelation, absolutely essential for von Balthasar’s argument about drama, can be taken as given without any necessary need to assent to those fact’s truthfulness by joining a religious community or for its public audience to convert to a religious worldview. I showed *Theo-Drama* to be in the genre I called theological *ressourcement* dramaturgy. I argued that the production of his literary management staged the private revelations of Adrienne von Speyr for a public audience providing her a share in the credibility he and his theodramatic hermeneutics offer to other dramatic responses to God. I showed the promise of theological *ressourcement* dramaturgy in its innovative appeal to theology’s environments. Drama foregrounds the contextual work of the Christian writer interpreting culture as a resource for theological reflection. Balthasarian theodramatics presumes and furthers the project of Balthasarian theological aesthetics, and von Balthasar’s theology of the world-stage provides tools to rethink ecology within reflection on the nature of creation. All the same, I showed some of the problems in von Balthasar’s dramatic theory, particularly his tendency to over-direct plays and playwrights toward only *one* possible and correct surplus meaning (the one that he himself has seen). I showed the problem at work in his inability to treat Brecht’s *Galileo* as an autonomous work of drama opened to meanings different from the one’s implied by Brecht’s political theatre-making, and I demonstrated how the problem of over-direction led to contradiction about the role of the Holy Spirit in his Trinitarian theology. The dramatic triad of author-actor-director not only prefigured the “trinitarian inversion” revealed in cross, dereliction, and descent, but the *Prolegomena* provides a map for von Balthasar’s theory of interpretation.

On the whole, my argument sought to correct two widespread problems in the Christian theological appropriation of the interpretive work of theatre and performance I framed as a “performance anxiety.” I showed performance anxiety at play in the presumption of a theatrical

audience's fundamental passivity, and I showed performance anxiety at play when scholars fail to see the readiness for materiality to find meaning in surpluses generated through interpretive work. My correlation between drama and credibility places its doctrinal speculations within the comedic-hermeneutical trajectory for religion and theatre. When theologians eschew "methodological atheism," the result need not be indoctrination. The interpretive work of theatre and performance locates the interpretation of revelation circulating in surplus that does not consume its origin but expands its accessibility. Play ends with a realization of play's gift now returned to its source illuminated in light of new excesses of surplus and human meaning.

So long as the performance of the world-stage endures, interpretive and conversational work will be unfinished. Drama cannot be credible until actors embody and share surplus meaning with a public audience in performance. Undiscovered theological country waits so drama can materialize yet unrealized credibility to change the directions of our questions. Let's go. (*They do not move.*)

END OF DISSERTATION

CURTAIN CALL: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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