



Terms and Conditions of Use of Digitised Theses from Trinity College Library Dublin

Copyright statement

All material supplied by Trinity College Library is protected by copyright (under the Copyright and Related Rights Act, 2000 as amended) and other relevant Intellectual Property Rights. By accessing and using a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library you acknowledge that all Intellectual Property Rights in any Works supplied are the sole and exclusive property of the copyright and/or other IPR holder. Specific copyright holders may not be explicitly identified. Use of materials from other sources within a thesis should not be construed as a claim over them.

A non-exclusive, non-transferable licence is hereby granted to those using or reproducing, in whole or in part, the material for valid purposes, providing the copyright owners are acknowledged using the normal conventions. Where specific permission to use material is required, this is identified and such permission must be sought from the copyright holder or agency cited.

Liability statement

By using a Digitised Thesis, I accept that Trinity College Dublin bears no legal responsibility for the accuracy, legality or comprehensiveness of materials contained within the thesis, and that Trinity College Dublin accepts no liability for indirect, consequential, or incidental, damages or losses arising from use of the thesis for whatever reason. Information located in a thesis may be subject to specific use constraints, details of which may not be explicitly described. It is the responsibility of potential and actual users to be aware of such constraints and to abide by them. By making use of material from a digitised thesis, you accept these copyright and disclaimer provisions. Where it is brought to the attention of Trinity College Library that there may be a breach of copyright or other restraint, it is the policy to withdraw or take down access to a thesis while the issue is being resolved.

Access Agreement

By using a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library you are bound by the following Terms & Conditions. Please read them carefully.

I have read and I understand the following statement: All material supplied via a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of a thesis is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or for educational purposes in electronic or print form providing the copyright owners are acknowledged using the normal conventions. You must obtain permission for any other use. Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone. This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

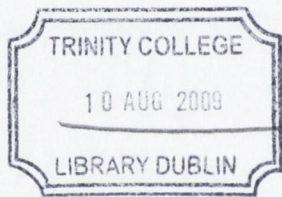
**Religion in Contemporary German-Language Theatre
and Drama**

Sinéad Crowe

Submitted for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy

**Department of Germanic Studies, University of Dublin, Trinity
College**

2009



THESIS
8719

Declaration

This thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other University and is entirely my own work. I agree that the library may lend or copy the thesis upon request, subject to normal conditions of acknowledgment.

Signed:

Sinéad Crowe

Sinéad Crowe

Date:

04/02/2009

Summary

It is the contention of this thesis that religion plays a major role in a number of significant examples of contemporary German-language theatre and drama, but that it has largely been neglected by the secondary literature, which has instead been devoted mainly to the questions of postmodernity, politics, gender, ethnicity or postdramatic performance which appeared to be dominating the German-language stage over the last thirty years. The following study seeks to redress the imbalance by examining the place and significance of religion in selected works by Botho Strauß, George Tabori and Werner Fritsch. The study investigates how, why and to what effect religion is invoked in these works. It also aims to contextualise the selected works' treatments of religion by analysing the extent to which they are rooted in the traditions of modern theatre, and the extent to which they reflect broader socio-cultural attitudes towards religion.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of major theories about the place of religion and spirituality in contemporary Western society, and addresses the problem of defining these terms. It establishes that, though the borders between what is religious and what is not religious are often very blurred in the West today, the thesis focuses on the organised forms of religion which have historically been dominant in Western Europe: Judaism and Christianity. Drawing on the work of the phenomenologist of religion, Ninian Smart, I identify the various 'dimensions' of organised religion which might be invoked in a theatrical text. I also suggest that a work can be described as 'quasi-religious' if it emulates, as well as references, certain functions and phenomena of organised religion.

Chapter 2 interrogates the widely held notion that theatre and religion are closely related, examining theories about the religious origins of theatre and about the performative connections between theatre and religious ritual. In addition, this chapter maps out some of the key ways and characteristic forms in which religion has informed modern European theatre and drama, from the Symbolists, through August Strindberg, the Expressionists, and the 'holy theatre' of Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski, to Samuel Beckett.

Chapter 3 examines the role played by religion in Botho Strauß' *Groß und klein* and *Die eine und die andere*. It demonstrates that these works expose the degeneration of the Judaeo-Christian heritage to meaningless cultural vestiges. However, it is argued that the unsettling, indeed sometimes highly disturbing, juxtapositions of religious motifs with quotidian reality also challenge what Strauß sees as our complacent secularity, forcing us to think again about the implications of the loss of religious meaning for our late capitalist society. Parallels are drawn in this chapter between Strauß' depiction of the search for spiritual meaning and the conventions of Expressionist drama, but it is shown that the resigned metaphysical despair which pervades Strauß' theatrical texts has a more Beckettian flavour.

Chapter 4 focuses on George Tabori's *Mein Kampf*, and contends that, in contrast to the disquieting sense of metaphysical loss which Strauß' plays evoke, Tabori's treatment of the decay of the 'grand narratives' of religion is characterised by facetious irony. However, while the play pokes fun at certain theological notions, it is argued that religious motifs also create an undertone of gravitas which helps Tabori to defend the ethical legitimacy of this controversial 'farce'.

Chapter 5 discusses the theoretical and programmatic texts of Werner Fritsch, which stylise theatre as a surrogate religion in the Romantic tradition. I problematise the tendentious parallels which Fritsch constantly draws between theatre and liturgy, and I argue that religious motifs play a rather superficial, rhetorical role in these texts, for his key aims and strategies – like those of Artaud and Grotowski before him – owe more to psychoanalytic psychotherapy than they do to religion. Chapter 6 turns to Fritsch's theatrical texts themselves, and argues that here, too, religious elements are exploited primarily for their aesthetic and atmospheric value. *Wondreber Totentanz* and *Aller Seelen* do not generate significant insights into the contemporary meaningfulness and relevance of religion itself, but instead deploy religious motifs to create an atmosphere of sacredness, sonorousness and perhaps even *communitas*, which is supposed to offset the rationalism and banality of real life. I find that Fritsch practises an

individualistic, experientialist type of religiosity which has more in common with contemporary alternative spiritualities than it does with traditional religious forms, and that in this respect his work reproduces several features of the postmodern consumer culture which he sets out to resist.

The thesis concludes with a recapitulation of the main arguments and findings, and looks to the much trumpeted ‘return’ which religion has supposedly made to the German stage of the 2000s in order to identify some areas for further research.

Acknowledgments

It is my great pleasure to acknowledge the support I received from so many sources during the preparation of this thesis.

Thanks are due first and foremost to my supervisor, Professor Moray McGowan, who read and discussed with me draft upon draft of this thesis with care, patience and infectious enthusiasm. I also thank other staff and students in the Department of Germanic Studies, Trinity College Dublin, for their advice, ideas and encouragement. I am extremely grateful to Helen O'Sullivan, Klara Vanek and Sean Ward, who helped me overcome bouts of writer's block, and to my team of proof-readers: Elaine Carey, Evanna Craig, Caitríona Crowe, Clive Jackson, Stephen Lynam, Joe O'Gorman, Aoife Walsh and Daniel Whiting.

I am indebted to the unconditional moral support provided by my family, Pearl, Michael, Caitríona and Eimear, and to the kindness of many friends, in particular my wonderful housemates, Róisín Ward and Margaret Burke. Above all, I want to thank Daniel Whiting, who has cheered me on through my crises of confidence with boundless understanding and good humour.

This project was funded by a scholarship from the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

In loving memory of Andy Breslin, 1912 – 2008.

Table of contents

List of abbreviations	4
1. Introduction.....	7
1.1 <i>Twenty-first century German theatre: The return of religion?</i>	7
1.2 <i>Defining religion and assessing its social significance</i>	10
1.2.1 Substantive and functional definitions	11
1.2.2 The secularisation thesis.....	12
1.2.3 Beyond the secularisation thesis.....	14
1.3 <i>Identifying religion in theatre and drama: Methodology</i>.....	18
1.3.1 Manifestations of official religion.....	19
1.3.2 Quasi-religious features.....	21
1.4 <i>Structure of thesis, selection of material and key critical themes</i>.....	23
Note: Drama versus theatre.....	25
2. The relationship between theatre and religion: Theories of origins, performance theory and modern European theatre and drama.....	28
2.1 <i>Historical and performative links between theatre and religion</i>.....	28
2.1.1 Theories of ritual origins	28
2.1.2 Ritual, theatre and performance theory	30
2.1.3 The antagonism between theatre and religion: The antitheatrical prejudice	34
2.2 <i>Religion in modern European theatre and drama, ca. 1880-1970</i>.....	37
2.2.1 Symbolism and antirealist theatre in the late nineteenth century	38
2.2.2 The ‘struggle towards God’? Strindberg and the Expressionists.....	41
2.2.3 ‘Holy Theatre’: Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski.....	53
2.2.4 The dramatisation of the absence of religious meaning: Samuel Beckett	66
Conclusion	71
3. ‘Niemand will mehr zu Gott’? Botho Strauß’ <i>Groß und klein</i> and <i>Die eine und die andere</i>	73
3.1 <i>Religion and cultural despair</i>.....	75
3.2 <i>Religious motifs: The evocation of loss and cultural critique</i>	82
3.3 <i>Religious struggles and longings</i>	89
3.4 <i>Developing religious insights</i>.....	95
Conclusion	98

4.	Theological farce: George Tabori's <i>Mein Kampf</i>.....	100
4.1	<i>Farce and the dialectic of humour and seriousness</i>	102
4.1.1	Farce and the Absurd.....	102
4.1.2	Jewish humour, therapeutic laughter and 'holy' theatre	106
4.2	<i>Exploring Jewish identity</i>	109
4.3	<i>Foreshadowing the Holocaust</i>	115
4.4	<i>Theological notions: The idea of God, theodicy and the Holocaust</i>	122
4.5	<i>Religious values</i>	126
	<i>Conclusion</i>	130
5.	'Der letzte Ort für Metaphysik': Werner Fritsch's theatre theory.....	132
5.1	<i>'Furcht und Hoffnung': Cultural pessimism and utopianism</i>	133
5.2	<i>'Das Theater des Jetzt': Recuperating theatre's specificity</i>	135
5.2.1	Language	136
5.2.2	Physical co-presence and liveness	138
5.2.3	Community	141
5.3	<i>Theatre as dream and 'Jüngstes Gericht': Ethico-therapeutic aims and ritual features</i>	147
	<i>Conclusion</i>	153
6.	'Ist ohne Gott unsere Natur / Totschlag nur / und Tortur?' Fritsch's <i>Wondreber Totentanz</i> and <i>Aller Seelen</i>	155
6.1	<i>Plot and structure: The dream-play and the 'Film des Lebens'</i>	155
6.2	<i>Themes and motifs</i>	158
6.2.1	Motifs of death.....	159
6.2.2	Imagery of the Fall	163
6.2.3	Theodicy	168
6.3	<i>Creating a 'Gegenraum'</i>	171
6.3.1	'Schau auf deine Provinz!' Bavarian folk religiosity, primitivism and Fritsch's spirituality of nature.....	172
6.3.2	Liturgical elements in <i>Wondreber Totentanz</i>	182
	<i>Conclusion</i>	186
7.	Conclusion.....	188
7.1	<i>Recapitulation</i>	188
7.2	<i>Into the twenty-first century: Suggestions for further research</i>	192

8. Bibliography	196
8.1 Primary material	196
8.1.1 Published theatrical texts.....	196
8.1.2 Other primary material consulted: Prose, poetry and films.....	198
8.2 Essays, manifestoes and interviews by the studied dramatists and theatre practitioners	199
8.3 Secondary material	202
8.3.1 On Symbolism, August Strindberg, and Expressionism	202
8.3.2 On Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski	203
8.3.3 On Samuel Beckett and the Theatre of the Absurd	203
8.3.4 On Botho Strauß.....	204
8.3.5 On George Tabori	206
8.3.6 On Werner Fritsch.....	208
8.3.7 Other works on drama, theatre, ritual and performance	210
8.3.8 On religion and its place in art, literature, culture and society	215
8.3.9 Miscellaneous.....	220

List of abbreviations

References to the following works will be cited parenthetically within the main text of the thesis:

- Ea* Botho Strauß, 'Die eine und die andere', published in the Berliner Ensemble programme to its 2005 production of the play, pp. 9-55.
- Gk* Botho Strauß, 'Groß und klein', in Strauß, *Trilogie des Wiedersehens / Groß und klein. Zwei Theaterstücke* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980), pp. 125- 260.
- MK* George Tabori, 'Mein Kampf', in Tabori, *Theaterstücke II*, trans. Ursula Grützmaker-Tabori (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1994), pp. 143-204.
- H* Werner Fritsch, 'Hieroglyphen des Jetzt – Theater Sprache Hörspiel Film', in Hans-Jürgen Drescher and Bert Scharpenberg (eds.), *Werner Fritsch: Hieroglyphen des Jetzt. Materialien und Werkstattberichte* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), pp. 227-35.
- N* Werner Fritsch, 'Natalität versus Fatalität: Einige Gedanken zum Theater des Jetzt im Kontext der Inszenierung von *Das Rad des Glücks*', published in the Bayerisches Staatsschauspiel programme to its 2005 production of *Das Rad des Glücks*, pp. 8-15.
- AS* Werner Fritsch, 'Aller Seelen. Traumspiel', in Fritsch, *Aller Seelen. Golgatha. Stücke und Materialien* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 7-67.
- WT* Werner Fritsch, 'Wondreber Totentanz. Traumspiel', in Fritsch, *Es gibt keine Sünde im Süden des Herzens. Stücke* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), pp. 139-213.

All English Bible quotations are from the *New International Version*.

1. Introduction

1.1 *Twenty-first century German theatre: The return of religion?*

In the early years of this millennium, an apparently sudden ‘return’ of religion to the stage caused a good deal of surprise, interest and indeed exaggeration among observers of the German theatre scene. ‘Neuerdings beschäftigt sich das Theater wieder ganz gern mit der Religion’, asserted Matthias Heine in *Die Welt*.¹ ‘Glaubens- und Religionsthemen erobern die deutschen Bühnen’ wrote Christine Dössel in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.² In the 2005 *Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik*, Katharina Keim maintained that there had been a ‘Wiederkehr des Religiösen im deutschsprachigen Theater heute’,³ and *Die deutsche Bühne* devoted a special issue to the theme ‘Theater und Religion’ in June 2005, claiming ‘Lange nicht mehr waren Theater und Glauben, ja Theater und Kirche so nahe wie in diesen Tagen.’⁴ Religion certainly seemed to be almost ubiquitous during the 2004-5 theatre season, in particular. During this period, Hamburg’s Thalia Theater premiered Lukas Bärfuss’ *Der Bus (Das Zeug einer Heiligen)*, a play later awarded the prestigious Mülheim Dramatikerpreis, whose plot revolves around the persecution of a devout Catholic in an unbelieving Germany. At the Münchner Kammerspiele, Johan Simons directed *Die Zehn Gebote*, based on Polish filmmaker Krzysztof Kieslowski’s *Dekalog 1-10* cycle (1987). The Schauspiel Frankfurt am Main entitled its season ‘Warum Religion?’ The Volksbühne Berlin – which only five years previously had devoted a season to the theme ‘Ohne Glaube leben’ – adopted the slogan ‘Religion ist ein Anker’, and premiered as its centrepiece Ulrich Seidl’s *Vater Unser*, an exploration into the nature of religious faith. Meanwhile, Berlin’s Maxim Gorki Theater premiered Lutz Hübner’s *Gotteskrieger*, which deals with religious fundamentalism, and Bruno Cathomas’ *Die Bibel – Eine Sinnsuche in fünf Teilen*, a hugely popular series of

¹ Matthias Heine, ‘Tschüß, du Jugend ohne Gott’, *Die Welt*, 11 October 2004.

² Christine Dössel, ‘Vater unser. Glaubens- und Religionsthemen erobern die deutschen Bühnen’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 October 2004.

³ Katharina Keim, ‘Glaubensfragen? – Zur Wiederkehr des Religiösen im deutschsprachigen Theater heute: Versuch einer Bestandsaufnahme’, *Jahrbuch für internationale Germanistik*, 2 (2005), pp. 79-102.

⁴ Detlef Brandenburg, ‘Schwerpunkt: Theater und Religion’, *Die deutsche Bühne*, 6 (2005), p. 5.

improvisations inspired by biblical narratives. During this period the Gorki's box office was decorated with devotional pictures; the Ten Commandments and Luther's 95 Theses adorned the toilet doors; a 'Bibel Corner' (sic) was established from where the theatre's visitors could propound their own religious views (or indeed lack thereof), and even the bar was jokingly renamed 'Glauben und Trinken.'

The preoccupation with religion this millennium has not been confined to the stage. In 2005 the literary journal *Literaturen* noted 'ein gesteigertes Interesse an Glaubensdingen' and registered the publication in Germany of more than fifty religiously-themed books in autumn of that year alone.⁵ A number of major European thinkers – including Jürgen Habermas, Terry Eagleton, Giorgio Agamben and Slavoj Žižek – have also demonstrated a growing concern with religious topics,⁶ adding weight to Stanley Fish's prediction, expressed following the death of Jacques Derrida in 2004, that religion was about to emerge as the new 'centre of intellectual energy'.⁷ It can only be presumed that this intensification of interest in religion has had at least something to do with the dominant role religion has played in many of the major world events of the twenty-first century. These include Islamist terrorist attacks, especially the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York; outbreaks of intercultural and interreligious tension, such as the worldwide Muslim protests over the cartoons of the prophet Muhammed which were published in a Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, in September 2005; the growing political power of religious fundamentalists – Christian as well as Muslim – in many countries; and the vigorous debates which have been going on about the official place of religion in an expanding, multicultural Europe: the 'headscarf

⁵ Anon., 'Editorial', *Literaturen. Das Journal für Bücher und Themen*, 12 (December 2005), p. 1.

⁶ See for example Jürgen Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion. Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005) and the transcripts of Habermas' dialogues with the (then) Cardinal Ratzinger in Jürgen Habermas, Joseph Ratzinger, and Florian Schuller, *Dialektik der Säkularisierung. Über Vernunft und Religion* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2005); Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2003); Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London Routledge, 2001) and Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

⁷ Stanley Fish, 'One University Under God?' *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 7 January 2005.

issue', for example, or the question of whether the new EU constitution should include a reference to God.

While such developments certainly seem to have helped attract a good deal of attention towards religion in recent years, it is the contention of this thesis that there has been no abrupt 'return' of religion to the German-language stage, as so many theatre critics have rather excitedly claimed, insofar as religion was never entirely absent. The following study will show that religion was playing a major role in some notable works long before the seismic events of '9/11' and the current growing discourse on religion, but it has been largely ignored by the secondary literature, which has generally been devoted instead to the questions of postmodernity, politics, gender, ethnicity or postdramatic performance which appeared to be dominating German-language theatre.⁸ The marginalisation of

⁸ At the time of writing, there has been no full-length study of religion in German-language theatre and drama of the last thirty years. The major surveys of contemporary German-language theatre and drama – including Christopher Innes, *Modern German Drama: A Study in Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Denis Calandra, *New German Dramatists: A Study of Peter Handke, Franz Xaver Kroetz, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Heiner Müller, Thomas Brasch, Thomas Bernhard and Botho Strauß* (London: Macmillan, 1983); Lothar Pikulik, Hajo Kurzenberger, and George Guntermann (eds.), *Deutsche Gegenwartsdramatik*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987); W.G. Sebald (ed.), *A Radical Stage: Theatre in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s* (Oxford: Berg, 1988); Richard Weber (ed.), *Deutsches Drama der 80er Jahre* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992); Birgit Haas, *Modern German Political Drama, 1980-2000* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003); Franziska Schössler, *Augen-Blicke: Erinnerung, Zeit und Geschichte in Dramen der neunziger Jahre* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2004); and Martin Buchwaldt, *Ästhetische Radikalisierung. Theorie und Lektüre deutschsprachiger Theatertexte der achtziger Jahre* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007) – mention religion only in passing, if at all. Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatisches Theater* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1999), one of the most-discussed studies of contemporary theatre and its most recent developments, mentions the importance of the sacral or spiritual in the theatre of Jerzy Grotowski, Ariane Mnouchkine, Botho Strauß and Peter Handke, but, again, only in passing.

Olivia G. Gabor's *The Stage as 'Der Spielraum Gottes'* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006) appeared too late to be fully taken account of here, but in any case its focus is on German theatre in the first half of the twentieth century; the most recent work to be treated in depth is Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon* (1953). Furthermore, as the title suggests, its focus on divine presence involves just one, very specific, theological aspect of religion: the idea of God. This study takes a broader approach by examining also the significance of the various other dimensions of religion – ritual, mythic, experiential, ethical, material and organisational (see p.18 ff.) – which are invoked on the stage.

Two collections of essays and conference papers on the relationship between theatre and religion have been published in Germany in recent years: Günter Ahrends and Hans-Jürgen Diller (eds.), *Theatre and Religion* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1997); and Ingrid Hentschel and Klaus Hoffmann (eds.), *Scena: Beiträge zu Theater und Religion*, 2 vols. (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004-5). However, both of these have an international focus in terms of the dramatists, practitioners and productions they treat. Ahrends and Diller include only one essay on a contemporary German dramatist, Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer's '“Born Losers Comparing Notes”: Bible Quotation and Drama Construction in Tabori's Plays' (pp. 177-194), which will be referred to in this study's

religion is characteristic of contemporary German literary and cultural studies, too, where, as Olaf Berwald and Gregor Thuswaldner note, Gottfried Benn's view that 'Gott ist ein schlechtes Stilprinzip' seems to prevail.⁹ This project aims to contribute towards rectifying this shortfall of research by interrogating the place and significance of religion in a number of major German-language plays from the 1970s to the 2000s. Before describing in more detail the key questions, methodologies, material and parameters of the project, I want to address the problems of defining religion and assessing its place in contemporary European societies. My intention is to establish a context and a rationale for this project's understanding of the term 'religion'.

1.2 Defining religion and assessing its social significance

The primary interest of this project lies in examining theatre and drama which invoke the two institutionalised, organised (or 'official'¹⁰) forms of religion which have historically been dominant in the Germany-speaking countries, and in Western Europe as a whole: namely, Christianity and Judaism. However, it must also be recognised that the concept 'religion' cannot be pinned down solely to its chief historical forms, for many sociologists argue that religiosity manifests itself today in an almost bewildering variety of modes which often have little to do with the Judaeo-Christian traditions. In order to take adequate account of the problematic nature of the term 'religion', and to demonstrate that the borders between what is religious and what is not are often very blurred, this section provides a brief survey of some of the ways in which religion can be defined,

chapter on George Tabori. Hentschel and Hoffmann also include only one essay with a German focus, Hentschel's '“Gott ist ein DJ” oder: Was hat deutschsprachige Dramatik am Jahrtausende mit Religion zu tun?' (pp. 61-78), which discusses the place of religion in Tankred Dorst's *Die Geschichte der Pfeile. Ein Triptychon* (1996) and Falk Richter's *Gott ist ein DJ* (1999). These plays are not considered in this thesis.

⁹ Gottfried Benn, cited in Olaf Berwald and Gregor Thuswaldner, 'Vorwort', in Olaf Berwald and Gregor Thuswaldner (eds.), *Der untote Gott. Religion und Ästhetik in der deutschen und österreichischen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Köln: Böhlau, 2007), pp. 1-6, p. 2. The original source is Gottfried Benn, 'Doppelleben', in Gerhard Schuster (ed.), *Gottfried Benn. Sämtliche Werke. Stuttgarter Ausgabe in Verbindung mit Ilse Benn* (5; Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991), pp. 83-176, p. 166.

¹⁰ Meredith McGuire defines 'official religion' as 'a set of beliefs and practices prescribed, regulated, and socialized by organized, specifically religious groups. These groups set norms of belief and action for their members, and they establish an official model of what it means to be "one of us".' Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Thomson Learning, 2002), p. 104.

followed by an overview of some of the major sociological theories about the place and forms of religion in contemporary Europe.

1.2.1 Substantive and functional definitions

Ever since religion first began to be studied from a scientific perspective, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists and other scholars have put forward countless definitions of the term, but not one of these has gained general consensus. Most attempts at defining religion can be divided into two categories. The first category is 'substantive' definitions, which identify the beliefs at the heart of religion, and therefore generally make some reference to the way in which religion engages with a postulated spiritual or supernatural realm. The anthropologist Edward Tylor, for example, suggested a 'minimum definition' of religion as 'belief in spiritual beings'.¹¹ However, a major problem with such definitions is that they are heavily influenced by Western traditions and cultural presuppositions, for positing belief in a spiritual being as the defining element of religion primarily reflects the Judaeo-Christian, particularly Protestant, experience. There are certain cultures which lack the clear division between the physical and the spiritual implied by substantive definitions,¹² and certain Eastern religions, such as Confucianism and some strains of Buddhism, do not involve concepts of supernatural beings at all.¹³ Many sociologists argue that new forms of religiosity which have emerged in the West since the 1960s have also abandoned belief in supernatural beings, replacing it with concepts like 'nature', 'peace', 'cosmic energy' or, as I will show later in this chapter, the self.¹⁴ Furthermore, by emphasising the 'belief' dimension of religion, substantive definitions run the risk of underplaying the other, non-intellectual aspects of religion, such as ritual, which is a very important element of Roman Catholicism, for example.

The second category, 'functional' definitions, overcomes the limiting Western bias of substantive definitions by leaving aside beliefs and describing instead the

¹¹ Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London: Mowbray, 1903), p. 424.

¹² Stephen J. Hunt, *Religion and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 16.

¹³ See McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context*, p. 10.

¹⁴ Detlef Pollack, *Säkularisierung – ein moderner Mythos? Studien zum religiösen Wandel in Deutschland* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), p. 33.

functions which religion performs, for the individual and/or for society as a whole. Functional definitions focus on what religion *does*, such as providing human existence with ultimate meaning; offering answers to eternal human problems; providing a sense of order; interpreting the unknown; supporting social norms; or – the function which Emile Durkheim believed to be of primary importance – building community.¹⁵ Clifford Geertz offered a functional definition which was to become highly influential among sociologists and anthropologists of religion:

A *religion* is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.¹⁶

Whereas substantive definitions are criticised for their narrowness, the main problem with functional definitions is that they are too broad to be truly useful. Geertz's definition, for example, could be applied to a range of phenomena normally categorised as secular, such as political movements, rock music, art, football, consumerism, or even, to use Geertz's own example, golf.¹⁷ Thus the functional approach complicates everyday, common sense distinctions between what is religious and what is not. However, a functional approach can be helpful in identifying the *quasi-religious* features of otherwise secular phenomena, a point I will return to later in this chapter.

1.2.2 The secularisation thesis

Given that there is so much disagreement about what exactly religion is, it is hardly surprising that there are also many diverse accounts of its place in contemporary Europe. The official religious institutions' loss of social and political power, along with empirical data demonstrating a clear decrease in the

¹⁵ In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), Durkheim defines religion as 'a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called the Church, all who adhere to them.' Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. James Ward Swain (New York: Free Press, 1971), p. 47.

¹⁶ Clifford Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in M. Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London: Tavistock, 1966), pp. 1-46, p. 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

more orthodox indicators of religiosity, such as church membership and attendance, has led many sociologists to conclude that organised religion has been in decline in most European countries for some time. Empirical data certainly show a clear decrease in such traditional indicators of religiosity in Germany. In 1949, church membership in Western and Eastern Germany amounted to over 90%. By 2000 it had decreased to approximately 80% in the West and 25% in the East.¹⁸ Though nominal church membership is still high in Western Germany, the level of active religious practice within the churches is much lower. According to one study, the percentage of Protestants who regularly attend church services dropped from 13 to 7 between 1952 and 1999, while the percentage of Catholics attending church over the same period regularly dropped from 51 to 26.¹⁹ There is no evidence to suggest that the minority who do belong to a religious denomination in Eastern Germany are any more actively committed to their church than their counterparts in the West. According to the sociologist Detlef Pollack, 'In beiden Teilen Deutschlands zeichnet sich die Beziehung der Mehrheit der Kirchenmitglieder zur Kirche durch Konventionalität, Distanz und geringe Partizipationsbereitschaft aus.'²⁰

Until the 1980s, it was a commonplace that secularisation is a feature of modernity. Max Weber argued that rationality erodes religious beliefs, leading to the 'Entzauberung der Welt', an idea core to most subsequent restatements of the secularisation thesis. Intellectual attacks on religion by figures such as Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud shook the very foundations of religious faith, and many current scientific advances would appear to undermine further the credibility of religious cosmologies. Contemporary secularisation theorists such as Bryan Wilson and Steve Bruce have proposed various other factors contributing to religious decline, including individualism and

¹⁸ Detlef Pollack and Gert Pickel, 'Religious Individualization or Secularization? Testing Hypotheses of Religious Change – The Case of Eastern and Western Germany', *British Journal of Sociology*, 58/4 (2007), pp. 603-32, p. 612. The original sources of this data are *Glaube und Individualisierung* (1999) and *Political Culture in Central and Eastern Europe* (2000), surveys conducted by the Chair of Comparative Sociology of Culture at the European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder).

¹⁹ Pollack, *Säkularisierung*, p. 162. The original source is Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, *Allensbacher Markt- und Werbeträgeranalyse* (1978ff.).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

the weakening of community life;²¹ institutional differentiation;²² and religious pluralism, which, it is argued, not only prevents religion from performing its major traditional function of promoting social cohesion, but also leads to overall scepticism about the truth-claims of each individual religion.²³ More specific factors contributing to official religious decline in Germany during the latter half of the twentieth century include the radical questioning of traditional values which took place during the late 1960s and the 1970s in the West, and state repression of religion in the East.²⁴

1.2.3 *Beyond the secularisation thesis*

Weber's classic theory that societies inevitably and irrevocably secularise as they modernise has come under increasing criticism in recent years. One line of attack comes from sociologists who dispute that official religious membership and practice are the defining elements of what it means to be religious. The 1999/2000 European Values Study (EVS), a large-scale cross-national survey, found that although church attendance was low in Germany and in most Western European countries, there were comparatively high levels of various types of religious beliefs. For instance, 67.8% of Germans believed in God (the European average is 77.4%), and 38.8% believed in life after death (against a European average of 53.3%).²⁵ This data leads the sociologist Grace Davie to argue that a situation of 'believing without belonging' is emerging in contemporary Europe.²⁶ She suggests that European populations may be increasingly 'unchurched', but they cannot be described as secular, because 'some form of "religious disposition" and acceptance of the moral concepts of Christianity continues to be widespread among large

²¹ See for example Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Bryan Wilson, *Contemporary Transformations of Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976).

²² See Bryan Wilson, *Religion in a Secular Society* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966).

²³ See for example Peter Berger, *A Rumour of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (London: Allen Lane, 1970).

²⁴ Pollack, *Säkularisierung*, pp. 80-81.

²⁵ Data supplied by the European Values Study, University of Tilburg, cited in Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2002), pp. 6-7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

numbers of Europeans, even among those for whom the orthodox institution of the Church has no place.²⁷

Other sociologists take issue with the secularisation paradigm by arguing that religiosity is not dying out, but transforming. Some point to the proliferation since the 1960s of New Religious Movements (NRMs) such as Scientology, Transcendental Meditation or the Unification Church. However, though movements such as these tend to generate a good deal of media attention, data suggests that in reality their membership is very small.²⁸ A more mainstream example of possible religious transformation is the growth of 'alternative spiritualities' such as New Age, holism, feng shui, chakra, reiki, meditation, paganism, rebirthing, and many more. A quick look in the 'Mind-Body-Spirit' section of almost any bookshop will reveal that the 'spirituality industry' is currently booming,²⁹ but, again, there is much disagreement as to whether such alternative spiritualities are really replacing official religion. While Davie views the New Age movement as a significant 'religious innovation',³⁰ Pollack maintains that its impact has been grossly exaggerated. Though there is certainly great *interest* in alternative spiritualities, he argues, there is little real commitment to them, and therefore they cannot be described as supplanting official religion.³¹ Steve Bruce also argues that alternative spiritualities are too individualistic, superficial and diffuse to have any real social impact or longevity.³²

This leads us to the problem of what, exactly, is meant by 'spirituality', a term which is surely as slippery as 'religion' itself. In the pre-secular Christian world, 'spirituality' had a relatively specific meaning, referring to 'the piety, the religious sensibility of an individual, usually a saint'.³³ In popular usage today the term still

²⁷ Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 7.

²⁸ Hunt, *Religion and Everyday Life*, p. 143.

²⁹ I have borrowed the term 'spirituality industry' from Wade Clark Roof, 'Religion and Spirituality: Toward an Integrated Analysis', in Michele Dillon (ed.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 137-48, p. 137.

³⁰ Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe*, pp. 138-42.

³¹ Pollack, *Säkularisierung*, p. 134.

³² Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 75-105.

³³ Jonathan Z. Smith, *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 1023.

usually has something vaguely to do with experiencing the transmundane, but it is often understood as being distinct from official religion. Wade Clark Roof points out that the word 'spirituality'

has been broadened beyond its traditional usage involving faith grounded in a tradition and affirmation of a transcendent Deity to refer to the presence of a human spirit or soul, and the human quest for meaning and experiential wholeness. Hence the word 'spiritual' when used today may refer to the inner life that is bound up with, and embedded within, religious forms, or much more loosely in keeping with humanistic psychology as a search on the part of the individual for reaching, through some regimen of self-transformation, one's greatest potential.³⁴

Though alternative spiritualities vary greatly, Roof's view that their central common denominator is a focus on the self is one that is widely shared by sociologists.³⁵ The emphasis on self-realisation, inner experience and a personal search for the sacred represents a significant point of contrast with official religions, which instead valorise conformity to established doctrines, rituals, and authorities. The contrast allows Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead to maintain that processes of both secularisation *and* sacralisation are going on in the West. They argue that traditional, congregational forms of religion which involve 'subordinating subjective-life to the "higher" authority of transcendent meaning, goodness and truth' are declining, but are being replaced by spiritualities which locate the sacred *within* the self, whereby 'the subjectivities of each individual become a, if not the, unique source of significance, meaning and authority.'³⁶ Whether or not it is true that alternative spiritualities are replacing religion, the distinction between traditional religious forms and new spiritualities is very useful to this thesis, which highlights a number of instances where dramatists and theatre practitioners invoke traditional religious signs, yet practice a spirituality which is very much in the self-directed, quasi-therapeutic vein described above.

³⁴ Roof, 'Religion and Spirituality: Toward an Integrated Analysis', p. 138.

³⁵ See for example Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005); Hunt, *Religion and Everyday Life*, pp. 147-66; and Christopher Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West (2: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture*; London: T & T Clark International, 2004).

³⁶ Heelas and Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution*, pp. 3-5.

The privatised, relativistic, individualistic, consumerist, experientialist and ‘mix ‘n’ match’ nature of today’s alternative spiritualities is often thought to be distinctly postmodern. Many sociologists argue that, in postmodern culture, religion, like almost everything else, has become a commodity or lifestyle choice. Religion, maintains Heelas, is now

very much in the hands of the ‘free’ subject (again, assuming that the subject has not disintegrated into a series of discourses or cultural processes). The deregulation of the religious realm, combined with the cultural emphasis on freedom and choice, results in intermingled, interfused, forms of religious – or ‘religious’-cum-‘secular’ – life which exist beyond the tradition-regulated church and chapel. People no longer feel obliged to heed the boundaries of the religions of modernity. Instead, they are positively encouraged to exercise their ‘autonomy’ to draw on what has diffused through the culture. [...] They – so to speak – raid the world, drawing on whatever is felt desirable: the religious (perhaps shamanism and Christianity); the religious and the non-religious (perhaps yoga and champagne).³⁷

Some argue that, as well as shaping the features of contemporary spiritualities and religiosities, postmodernity has also created a space where religiosity – in new as well as old forms – can flourish. Thus, for example, it is claimed that the collapse of the ‘metanarratives’ (of which, of course, the secularisation thesis is one) has, ironically, strengthened human desires for ultimate meaning.³⁸ Other theories about postmodern religion hold that doubts in the Enlightenment project and the rejection of scientific materialism have created a demand for nonrational, mystical experiences,³⁹ or that the postmodern revalorisation of tradition has intensified interest in archaic religious forms.⁴⁰

³⁷ Paul Heelas, 'Introduction: On Differentiation and Dedifferentiation', in Paul Heelas (ed.), *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 1-18, p. 5. It is worth remembering at this point, however, that Christianity itself is a highly syncretistic religion which incorporated many diverse Jewish and pagan elements as it evolved.

³⁸ See for example Zygmunt Bauman, 'Postmodern Religion?' *Ibid.*, pp. 55-78.

³⁹ See for example Arnaldo Nesti, 'The Mystical Option in a Postmodern Setting: Morphology and Sense', *Social Compass*, 49/3 (2002), pp. 379-92.

⁴⁰ See for example Kieran Flanagan, 'Introduction', in Kieran Flanagan and Peter C. Jupp (eds.), *Postmodernity, Sociology and Religion* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 1-13.

The literature on the forms and significance of religion in the late modern age is vast, complex and often contradictory, and I have been able to sketch out only a few key ideas here. The following study does not take any particular position with regard to the question of whether religion is declining, persisting, resurging or transforming; it simply recognises that the contemporary religious landscape is highly variegated and ambivalent, and at certain points it considers whether the place of religion in German theatre and drama could be seen to reflect some of the broader socio-cultural theories and tendencies discussed above. The very contention currently surrounding the issue of whether European society has taken a ‘post-secular’ turn or not indicates, perhaps, the value of paying closer attention to the role that religion has played in a particular segment of German drama and theatre over the past few decades.⁴¹

1.3 Identifying religion in theatre and drama: Methodology

The foregoing discussion has highlighted some of the problems involved in defining religion. On one hand, the concept cannot simply be reduced to a set of beliefs about God or any other postulated superhuman agency, and there needs to be some recognition of the possibility that religiosity may take multifarious forms in today’s world. On the other hand, however, a discussion of every phenomenon which shares some attributes with religion, such as politics, sport or consumerism, would be an almost boundless task. This study takes the following approach. First and foremost, it examines the deployment in contemporary German-language theatre and drama of ‘official’ Judaic and Christian religious elements. A typology of these elements, based on a phenomenological description of religion, is set out in section 1.3.1 below. The study is concerned not only with how official religion is *referenced*, however, but also with how some of the work under consideration itself demonstrates quasi-religious characteristics in certain functional and phenomenological respects. This aspect of my analysis is explained in more detail in section 1.3.2.

⁴¹ On the notion of post-secularism, see in particular Habermas’ much discussed comments in *Dialektik der Säkularisierung* and *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*.

1.3.1 *Manifestations of official religion*

The influential phenomenologist of religion, Ninian Smart, eschews attempting to find a universally valid definition of religion, and instead suggests that any religion will contain up to seven basic overlapping dimensions, though different religions may attach varying degrees of emphasis to each dimension. Smart's schema is a useful 'checklist of aspects of religion'⁴² which does not simply reduce religion to a set of beliefs. Following Smart's 'checklist', this study examines how contemporary theatre and drama, in its forms, themes, plots, characters, language and/or other theatrical signs (such as sounds, music, paralinguistic signs, mimic signs, gestural signs, proxemic signs, mask, hair, costume, stage conception, stage decoration, props and lighting⁴³) invokes the following dimensions of Judaism and/or Christianity:

1. *Doctrinal or philosophical*: In other words, the systemised set of 'relatively abstract and philosophical terms' in which a religion expresses itself.⁴⁴ Probably the most common example of a religious philosophical concept which is treated in the works discussed in this thesis is the idea of God. The theological problem of how a God who is supposed to be benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent can allow so much evil in the world is particularly prominent in those works which deal with the Holocaust. Other examples might include references to the doctrine of the Trinity; the doctrine of grace; doctrines of salvation; the doctrine of the 'covenant' between God and the Jews; or simply quotations and allusions to rabbinic and other theological texts.
2. *Ritual or practical*: As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, 'ritual' is another rather slippery concept, and it can have secular as well as religious meanings. Nevertheless, some concrete examples of religious rituals,

⁴² Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 8.

⁴³ This typology of theatrical signs is borrowed from Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Semiotics of Theater*, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 15.

⁴⁴ Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, p. xv.

practices or festivals which might be invoked in theatre and drama include prayer, liturgy, funerals, the Stations of the Cross, Shabbat, Passover or Easter.

3. *Mythic or narrative*: These are religious ‘stories’, particularly those contained within sacred writings. Examples might include cosmological, eschatological and apocalyptic narratives, biblical accounts of the exile of the Jews, or the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
4. *Experiential or emotional*: This refers to the subjective and emotive aspects of religiosity. Religious experience may take a wide variety of forms, including the personal experience of faith; momentary feelings of wonder, mystery and meaningfulness; visions, revelations, conversions and experiences of spiritual rebirth; or completely overwhelming mystical experiences, such as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, the unique mixture of fear and awe which Rudolf Otto believed characterises the human response to the sacred or ‘numinous’.⁴⁵ However, this project is concerned with doubt and disbelief as much as religious faith, and perceptions of religious absence as much as mystical experiences of divine presence.
5. *Ethical or legal*: In other words, the moral values which are supposed to guide the behaviour of a religion’s followers, such as the biblical Commandments; the three ‘theological virtues’, faith, hope and love; or kosher food regulations.
6. *Material or artistic*: i.e. the ‘material creations’⁴⁶ through which a religion expresses itself, such as chapels, statues, paintings, books, vestments, music etc.

⁴⁵ Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Munich: Beck, 1987). On the qualities of mystical experience, see also William James’ highly influential study, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

⁴⁶ Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, p. 11.

7. *Organisational or social*: This refers to the institutional forms of religion (the Catholic Church, for example), their leaders (the Pope; the clergy) and their members.

It should be emphasised again that these dimensions overlap to varying degrees. For example, Judaic and Christian doctrines are largely based on the ‘myths’ which are recorded within the sacred writings of these traditions; one function of religious rituals is to celebrate and affirm the myths and doctrines; and the material creations of a religion, such as its art or music, may help to generate religious experiences. In a later edition (2001) of *Dimensions of the Sacred*, Smart added an extra two dimensions to the basic seven: the ‘political’ and the ‘economic’. However, these dimensions are not considered in any depth in this thesis, for, as I explain in Chapter 2, my focus is not on works which engage rationalistically with the more material ways in which religion impacts on society. (Classic examples of dramas which examine the political and economic dimensions of religion would include Rolf Hochhuth’s *Der Stellvertreter* (1963), which attacks the way that the Vatican dealt with National Socialism and the Holocaust, or Bertolt Brecht’s critiques of the corrupt bond between religion and capitalism in plays such as *Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe* (1929-30), *Leben des Galilei* (1938) or *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (1938-40).)

1.3.2 *Quasi-religious features*

It is argued in this thesis that as well as (and indeed, often as a result of) *referencing* religion in the ways described above, some of the theatre and drama under discussion demonstrates, or at least attempts to achieve, distinctly quasi-religious features. I suggest that the quasi-religious features of modern and contemporary theatre and drama can be divided into two main (and again, greatly overlapping) categories:

1. Theatre and drama which seeks to perform functions traditionally associated with religion. As mentioned in my discussion of functional definitions above, religion can be seen to perform a wide range of

functions for the individual and for society as a whole. However, it will become apparent over the course of this study that the function which appears to appeal most to modern dramatists and practitioners is that of generating community. Tellingly, modern and contemporary theatre is generally less interested in emulating religious functions such as supporting social norms or providing answers to ultimate human questions. As we will see, modern theatre tends to question and challenge rather than answer and affirm.

2. Theatre and drama which seeks to simulate some of the phenomenological dimensions of religion identified by Smart. I suggest that modern playwrights and practitioners are particularly interested in recreating the interlinked dimensions of the ritual and the experiential. My study will examine the tendency towards ritualisation which characterised much twentieth century avant garde theatre, and will assess the extent to which contemporary German-language theatre and drama also demonstrates this tendency. I will discuss how this ritualism is often bound up with both an interest in generating community and a desire to create quasi-mystical experiences of numinosity, transcendence and spiritual renewal.

Of course, it might be argued that almost any piece of theatre has at least one quasi-religious attribute. However, the focus is narrowed here by concentrating on those works which deliberately and explicitly set out to reproduce religious functions and dimensions. This means that a good deal of attention is paid, not just to theatrical texts, but also, where possible, to theoretical and programmatic texts which redefine theatre's potential in quasi-religious terms. Though such programmatic texts often exhibit a desire to fill the (supposed) void left by the demise of official religion, an irony repeatedly flagged up in this thesis is that modern theatre is very often parasitic upon the very religious traditions it seeks to replace.

1.4 Structure of thesis, selection of material and key critical themes

As already indicated, the central aim of this project is to explore the place and significance of religion in contemporary German-language theatre and drama. However, in order to contextualise this analysis, Chapter 2 explores the historical and performative connections between religion and theatre. The first part of Chapter 2 interrogates the popular notion that there is a fundamental bond between theatre and religion by examining theories about the religious origins of theatre, on one hand, and the efforts of performance theorists to clarify the relationship between ritual and theatre, on the other. The second part of the chapter establishes that religion has played a major part in the work of some of the most significant modern European dramatists and theatre practitioners. Focusing on key representative examples, from the Symbolists and the Expressionists, through ‘holy theatre’ practitioners such as Artaud and Grotowski, to Samuel Beckett, this chapter maps out and critically engages with some of the very different roles played by religion in modern theatre.

The core of this thesis, Chapters 3 to 6, does not attempt to provide an encyclopaedic survey of religion on the contemporary German-language stage. Instead, it focuses on representative works by three major contemporary German-language playwrights: Botho Strauß (b. 1944), George Tabori (1914-2007) and Werner Fritsch (b. 1960).⁴⁷ These three very different figures have been selected, firstly, because religion, according to the schema set out above, is extremely prominent in their work. Secondly, these dramatists can be considered important because their dramatic output is prolific and performed regularly on the German stage, because they have all been awarded major literary prizes,⁴⁸ and because

⁴⁷ Tabori’s nationality is somewhat more complex than that of Strauß and Fritsch. Born in Hungary, he was made a British citizen in 1945 and he has also lived and worked in the United States, Bulgaria, Turkey and the Middle East. From the early 1970s onwards, however, he was based in Germany and Austria, and it is in these countries that his theatre work achieved the greatest recognition. Though he wrote his plays in English first, they were written to be translated and performed on the German-speaking stage for German-speaking audiences, and it is for that reason that he is included in this study of contemporary German-language theatre.

⁴⁸ Major awards received by Strauß include the Hannoverscher Dramatikerpreis (1974); the Mülheimer Dramatikerpreis (1982); the Jean-Paul-Preis (1987); the Georg-Büchner-Preis (1989) and the Berliner Theaterpreis (1993). Tabori has been awarded the Mülheimer Dramatikerpreis (1983 and 1990); the Berliner Theaterpreis (1988); the Peter-Weiss-Preis (1990) and the Georg-Büchner-Preis (1992), among others. Awards received by Fritsch include the Robert-Walser-Preis

their work has been featured in important theatre journals such as *Theater heute* and *Die deutsche Bühne*, as well as other secondary sources. Thirdly, the work of these three playwrights covers a significant time span, allowing me to examine plays from each decade from the 1970s to the 2000s, thus providing a good overview of the role played by religion in theatre of the last thirty years. Chapter 3, then, discusses the place of religion in the work of Strauß, focusing on one of his earliest and one of his most recent plays: *Groß und klein. Szenen* (1978) and *Die eine und die andere* (2005). Chapter 4 interrogates the highly ambivalent, often paradoxical role played by Judaic and Christian elements in Tabori's *Mein Kampf. Farce* (1987), drawing brief comparisons with some of Tabori's other work, too. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the theatre of Werner Fritsch. I have devoted two chapters to Fritsch because, of the three German-language dramatists considered in this thesis, his theatre has the most explicit quasi-religious aspirations. Chapter 5 examines the ways in which Fritsch's theatre theory relies heavily on religious motifs, ideas, practices and values, while Chapter 6 analyses the place of religious elements in his theatrical texts themselves, focusing on *Wondreber Totentanz. Traumspiel* (1995) and *Aller Seelen. Traumspiel* (2000).

Taking a broadly comparative approach, these four core chapters discuss how, in semiotic terms, religion is invoked, based on Smart's dimensions of religion paradigm outlined above. They also critically engage with the issues of why, and to what effect, religion is invoked. This part of the analysis is dominated by (but not limited to) the following key, and again often overlapping, critical themes:

1. The thesis interrogates whether and how the selected works can be described as religiously-themed, and it assesses the nature of the thematic insights into religion that are developed. (My definition of a religious theme is clarified in Chapter 2.)
2. I examine whether and how religious signs serve ends which cannot be described as specifically religious.

(1987); the Hörspielpreis der Kriegsblinden (1993); the Bayerischer Staatsförderpreis für Literatur (1996); the Else-Lasker-Schüler-Preis (1997) and the ARD Hörspielpreis.

3. The study investigates the various effects – theatrical, dramaturgical, aesthetic, emotional, atmospheric or other – that are created by the deployment of religious signs.
4. I explore the quasi-religious features of the selected theatre and drama, focusing on how official religious signs are used to bring these quasi-religious features into effect.
5. The thesis seeks to define the location of the selected contemporary German works’ treatment of religion within the traditions of modern European theatre and drama.
6. I explore whether and how the place of religion in contemporary German theatre and drama reflects broader socio-cultural tendencies, such as those outlined in this introductory chapter.

Finally, Chapter 7 brings together some of the conclusions of the project and offers some suggestions for further research.

Note: *Drama versus theatre*

The distinction between drama and theatre intimated in the title of this thesis is a familiar one: whereas the former refers to the written work ‘composed *for* the theatre’, as theatre semiotician Keir Elam explains, the latter refers to what is performed *in* the theatre.⁴⁹ Twentieth century avant garde theatre practitioners such as Antonin Artaud, performance theorists such as Richard Schechner, and contemporary ‘postdramatic’ practitioners have all challenged the dominance of text-based drama in Western theatre. Theatre semioticians, too, have drawn attention to the fact that theatrical performance consists of much more than the primarily linguistic signs contained within the dramatic text, generating meaning via a complex cluster of signs. Thus, as Christopher Balme notes, ‘[z]eitgenössische Theaterwissenschaft betrachtet textbasiertes dramatisches

⁴⁹ Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (Second edn.; London: Routledge, 2002), p. 3.

Theater nur mehr als eine Option unter anderen, selbst wenn sie im westeuropäischen Theater bis heute die dominante darstellt.⁵⁰

The works by Strauß, Tabori and Fritsch which lie at the centre of this investigation could probably be legitimately categorised as ‘dramas’ insofar as they are in the text-based, logocentric tradition (though they do not follow *all* of the conventions of dramatic theatre, as will be shown elsewhere). Indeed, this is what makes them particularly amenable to an in-depth examination such as this, for in contrast to the ephemeral and variable nature of performance, the dramatic text is fixed. However, in order to avoid the overly literary connotations of the term ‘drama’, and in order to remain mindful of the ‘performability’⁵¹ of the texts in question, they will be treated here as ‘theatrical texts’, in Balme’s sense of ‘transcription[s] of [...] conceived performance[s].’⁵² This will entail paying sufficient attention to how the texts anticipate and potentially shape performances via stage directions and other *didascalía* (i.e. ‘everything that is in the written text but which is not spoken by the actors’⁵³), as well as referring, where possible, to my own experiences or others’ accounts of the performed plays. This approach seems especially appropriate given that very often it is the non-linguistic aspects of the *mise en scène* – the deployment of religious music or visual iconography, for example – that contribute greatly to the palpably religious quality of the works under discussion, though of course it must be recognised that any specific production can always opt to exaggerate or play down the prominence of religious signs such as these.

⁵⁰ Christopher Balme, *Einführung in die Theaterwissenschaft* (Second edn.; Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2001), p. 74.

⁵¹ Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, p. 191.

⁵² Christopher Balme, *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 7. On theatrical texts and *didascalía* see also Anne Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre*, trans. Frank Collins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), pp. 8-9.

2. The relationship between theatre and religion: Theories of origins, performance theory and modern European theatre and drama

Insofar as they both attempt to interpret human existence, it can be argued that religion and the arts have always been linked, and indeed that together they belong to the roots of culture.⁵⁴ However, since at least the late nineteenth century, the notion that there is an especially close bond between theatre and religion has been an influential one. This chapter aims both to introduce some important ideas about the nature of this bond, and to map out some of the ways in which religion has been a source of inspiration and fascination for certain major modern European dramatists and theatre practitioners. The first part of the chapter briefly examines some of the most notable theories about the historical and performative links between theatre and religion, focusing on various understandings of the nature of the relationship between theatre and religious ritual. The second part of the chapter provides an overview of some of the key ways and characteristic forms in which religion informed European theatre and drama from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s.

2.1 Historical and performative links between theatre and religion

2.1.1 Theories of ritual origins

The theatre historian Eli Rozik traces the belief that there is a fundamental bond between theatre and religion back to Romanticism, finding its earliest expression in the writings of the French critic Charles Magnin (1793-1862).⁵⁵ However, this belief only began to become more widespread towards the end of the nineteenth century, with the emergence of some highly influential, though scientifically dubious, scholarship contending that the earliest forms of theatre originated in cultic rituals. In the hugely seminal *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der*

⁵⁴ Cf. Robert Detweiler and David Jasper, *Religion and Literature: A Reader* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), p. xi.

⁵⁵ Eli Rozik, 'Religion and Theatre', in Dennis Kennedy (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Theatre and Performance* (2; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 1127-9, p. 1127.

Musik (1872), Friedrich Nietzsche claimed that Greek tragedy emerged out of the ritual re-enactment of the dismemberment of Dionysus, though little proof existed to support this hypothesis.⁵⁶ Some years later, members of the Cambridge School of Anthropology – Gilbert Murray, Jane Ellen Harrison, and Francis M. Cornford – tried to give the theory of ritual roots more scientific credibility, drawing on Sir James Frazer's now widely discredited *The Golden Bough* (1890) to locate the origins of Greek drama in a seasonal 'Ur-ritual' of death and rebirth.⁵⁷ But despite their scientific pretensions, there was little solid evidence for the existence of such an 'Ur-ritual'. Convincingly refuted by A.W. Pickard-Cambridge in his book *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy* (1927), the claims of the Cambridge Anthropologists remain unproven to this day.⁵⁸

Some of the most influential modern theories about the development of medieval drama invoke a very similar paradigm to theories about the ritual origins of Greek tragedy, for they claim that, following a hiatus in dramatic activity during the Dark Ages, European drama was reborn in medieval liturgy, evolving from the tropes (i.e. sung dialogue) of the Easter Mass.⁵⁹ However, while the Church was unquestionably the main catalyst for the development of medieval mystery and miracle plays, the theory of liturgical origins has been attacked in more recent scholarship for being overly reductive. It is criticised in particular for ignoring the probability that pagan quasi-dramatic practices which had survived the Dark Ages,

⁵⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik', in Nietzsche, *Werke*, ed. Karl Schlechta (1; Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1979), pp. 21-134.

⁵⁷ Francis M. Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy* (London: Edward Arnold, 1914); Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912); Jane Ellen Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual* (New York: Henry Holt, 1913); and Gilbert Murray, *The Four Stages of Greek Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912).

⁵⁸ For more detailed critiques of the theories of ritual origins see Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Geschichte des Dramas 1: Von der Antike bis zur deutschen Klassik* (Tübingen: Francke, 1999), pp. 18-19; Rainer Friedrich, 'Drama and Ritual', in James Redmond (ed.), *Drama and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 159-224 and Eli Rozik, 'The Ritual Origin of Theatre – A Scientific Theory or Theatrical Ideology?' *The Journal of Religion and Theatre*, 2/1 (2003), pp. 105-40.

⁵⁹ See E.K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903) and Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933).

such as mumming, also exerted a significant influence on the development of the vernacular drama of the Middle Ages.⁶⁰

A more detailed analysis of the various rival theories about the origins of theatre is beyond the scope of this project. It is enough for my purposes to note that theories of ritual roots made a major and tenacious impact on modern theatre, and indeed on modern thought in general. It is probable, however, that the rather tendentious insistence on the religious and ritual origins of theatre reveals more about 'what scholars of a certain culture desire than about what may have actually happened,' as performance theorist Richard Schechner puts it.⁶¹ Later in this chapter, as I discuss the attempts by certain modern dramatists and theatre practitioners to 'recover' the ritual dimensions of theatre, I will suggest that the appeal of theories of ritual roots is bound up with two fundamental desires: to defend the role of theatre in modern society by investing it with sacred significance, and to overcome the materialism, rationalism and individualism of modernity.

2.1.2 *Ritual, theatre and performance theory*

Rather than attempting to resolve what he dismisses as pointless 'chicken-versus-egg' debates about the origins of theatre,⁶² Schechner argues that the real connection between ritual and theatre is to be found in the fact that they are both types of performance belonging to a 'continuum' of 'performance genres, performative behaviours, and performance activities' which also includes games, sports, pop entertainments, the performing arts, identity constructions and even aspects of everyday life.⁶³ What ritual, theatre and other types of performance have

⁶⁰ For critiques of the theory of liturgical origins, see Fischer-Lichte, *Geschichte des Dramas 1*, pp. 61-6; Benjamin Hunnigher, *The Origin of the Theatre: An Essay* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961); Rozik, 'Religion and Theatre', p. 1128; and Glynn Wickham, *The Medieval Theatre* (Third edn.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁶¹ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 71-2. Eli Rozik also argues that the theory of ritual origins represents a 'theatrical or cultural ideology' rather than a credible scientific theory, and that its appeal lies in the fact that it 'has provided theatre with a numinous aura, which it does not always possess, and probably also satisfies the sense of loneliness and yearning for community belonging typical of twentieth century individuality.' Rozik, 'The Ritual Origin of Theatre', p. 106.

⁶² Richard Schechner, 'Believed-in Theater', in Corina Caduff and Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (eds.), *Rituale heute: Theorien - Kontroversen - Entwürfe* (Berlin: Reimer, 2001), pp. 181-90, p. 181.

⁶³ Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, pp. 49-50.

in common, according to Schechner, is that they are made of 'restored behaviours'; that is, '[p]hysical actions that are not-for-the-first-time, prepared or rehearsed'.⁶⁴ The recognition that religious rituals and theatre share performative commonalities is not new, though, and it is not just twentieth century artists – such as T.S. Eliot, who wrote, 'the only dramatic satisfaction that I find now is in a High Mass well performed,'⁶⁵ or Jean Genet, who described the Mass as 'the loftiest modern drama'⁶⁶ – who appreciated the dramatic and theatrical qualities of liturgy. As long ago as the ninth century, Amalarius (780-850), the Bishop of Metz, had written about the affinities between the Mass and Greek tragedy.⁶⁷

While performance theory offers a useful theoretical framework for analysing the similarities between theatre and ritual, its attempts to single out the distinguishing features of ritual are somewhat more problematic. Schechner contends that whereas the principal purpose of most other kinds of performance is to entertain, ritual is efficacious; that is, its aim is to bring about some kind of change to lived reality:

Whether one calls a specific performance 'ritual' or 'theatre' depends mostly on context and function. A performance is called one or the other because of where it is performed, by whom, in what circumstances, and for what purpose. The purpose is the most important factor determining whether a performance is a ritual or not. If the performance's purpose is to effect change, then [...] the performance is a ritual. But if the performance's purpose is mostly to give pleasure, to show off, to be beautiful, or to pass the time, then the performance is an entertainment.⁶⁸

Schechner's analysis is strikingly at odds with the more colloquial use of 'ritual' to mean an empty, repetitive process of 'going through the motions' which, as Henry Bial puts it, is '*pro forma* or without impact'.⁶⁹ Schechner's insistence that a

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

⁶⁵ T.S. Eliot, 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry', in Eliot, *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964), pp. 31-45, p. 35.

⁶⁶ Jean Genet, 'A Note on Theatre', *Tulane Drama Review*, 7/3 (1963), pp. 37-41, p. 39.

⁶⁷ O.B. Hardison, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in The Middle Ages: Essays in the Origin and Early History of Modern Drama*. (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 37-9.

⁶⁸ Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, pp. 71-2.

⁶⁹ Henry Bial, 'Ritual', in Henry Bial (ed.), *The Performance Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 87-8, p. 88. Jean Genet (1910-1986), who as already suggested was greatly impressed by the dramatic qualities of the Mass, was also fascinated precisely by what he saw as the *pro forma* nature of religious rites, or the way in which 'the point of departure disappears beneath the

ritual's purpose is to effect change would also appear to jar with many anthropologists' and sociologists' observation that a major function of official religious rituals in the West – notably 'anamnestic' rituals such as the Eucharist – is to preserve memory, conserve tradition, reaffirm ancient beliefs and norms and generally promote continuity.⁷⁰ (I am leaving aside for the moment one particular category of these religious rituals, the rite of passage, which is obviously concerned with marking – if not necessarily actually bringing about – transitions and transformations.⁷¹) But while the word 'change' seems inapt in these contexts, sustaining the *status quo* and providing reassurance can themselves certainly be described as efficacious functions. Yet even the concept of efficacy is troublesome, in that it is perhaps too imprecise to be truly helpful. After all, it could be argued that almost all great art is efficacious in so far as it has the potential to change one's perceptions in some fundamental way. Of all the art forms, theatre has long shown a particularly strong fascination with the possibility of affecting lived reality, whether by educating, agitating, manipulating or purging emotions, generating insights, moulding opinions or propagating ideas. Thus, for example, Aristotle believed that in tragic theatre, catharsis – the purification of the emotions of pity and fear – helped people to be emotionally balanced in their lives outside the theatre; Schiller argued that theatre should be a 'moralische Anstalt' which transformed spectators into better people; Brecht's Epic theatre sought to generate insights into existing social conditions and ultimately, like most other social and politically committed drama, to provoke social change. Categorising all

profusion of ornaments and symbols' (Genet, 'A Note on Theatre', p. 39). Empty ceremonies are a recurring motif in dramas such as *The Maids* (1946), *The Balcony* (1957), and *The Blacks* (1959) which depict not just religion but life itself as being full of meaningless rituals and symbols, and which portray change as impossible. This understanding of ritual is clearly very different from that of the avant garde practitioners discussed later in this chapter, who, like Schechner, invoke ritual as a medium of transformation. A closer examination of Genet's work is beyond the scope of this chapter; for more detailed discussions see Jacques Guichardnaud and June Guichardnaud, 'The Glory of Annihilation: Jean Genet', in Peter Brooks and Joseph Halpern (eds.), *Genet: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1979), pp. 98-113; Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre 1892-1992* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 108-116; and Jeannette L. Savona, *Jean Genet* (London: Macmillan, 1983).

⁷⁰ See in particular Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. Simon Lee (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), which makes the concepts of collective memory and tradition central to its definition of religion. Hervieu-Léger contends that 'a religion is an ideological, practical and symbolic system through which consciousness, both individual and collective, of belonging to a particular chain of belief is constituted, maintained, developed and controlled' (p. 82), and that therefore its rituals, doctrines, values and other dimensions express social continuity.

⁷¹ See my discussion of rites of passage on p. 55 ff. below.

these types of performance as ‘ritual’ surely stretches the term far beyond its usefulness. (Brecht himself would certainly have resented such a categorisation, given that he explicitly aspired in his mature Epic Theatre to cleanse theatre of its ritual ‘residues’.⁷²)

A final aspect of Schechner’s analysis of ritual which might be found problematic is its emphasis on ‘purpose’. The contention that ‘[t]he purpose is the most important factor determining whether a performance is a ritual or not’ neglects the fact that a performance may be experienced in a variety of ways which have little to do with its intended purpose. For example, the purpose of a Native American rain dance is certainly efficacious, but if performed for a gathering of European tourists, it is probable that it will be experienced primarily as an entertainment. Indeed, a given performance may simultaneously be a ritual for some people and an entertainment for others, depending on the varying expectations and attitudes that they bring.⁷³ Thus while Schechner does acknowledge that ‘no performance is pure efficacy or pure entertainment’,⁷⁴ the problem of defining ‘ritual’ would seem to be even more thorny than his analysis suggests, for there is a complex range of factors – involving a great variety of expectations, beliefs, experiences, interpretations and meanings as well as purposes and contexts – which needs to be taken into account.

Despite its flaws, Schechner’s view that ritual is characterised by a tendency towards efficacy is broadly shared by several other prominent theatre scholars and performance theorists, including Erika Fischer-Lichte and Victor Turner. Moreover, Schechner’s analysis is useful for this study because the aspiration to change lived reality characterises a good deal of the work discussed in this thesis. Later in this chapter I will show how the concepts of ritual and transformation are

⁷² Bertolt Brecht, ‘Kleines Organon für das Theater’, in Brecht, *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, ed. Werner Hecht et al. (23; Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1993), pp. 65-96, p. 67.

⁷³ Cf. Anthony Graham-White’s argument that participants’ ‘expectations of consequences beyond itself’ are a crucial constituent of ritual, in Anthony Graham-White, *The Drama of Black Africa* (New York: Samuel French, 1974), p. 68. See also the discussion of White’s argument in Christopher Balme, *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 66-70.

⁷⁴ Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, p. 72.

inextricably linked in the work of major avant gardists such as Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski, who sought to 're'-ritualise theatre because, ironically, they felt that bourgeois theatre had become a *pro forma* 'ritual' in the pejorative colloquial sense mentioned above. Before beginning my discussion of religion and ritual in modern theatre and drama, however, I want to examine briefly one further important aspect of the historical relationship between religion and theatre: the antitheatrical prejudice.

2.1.3 The antagonism between theatre and religion: The antitheatrical prejudice

While the idea that they are closely linked has become popular in modern times, it should also be borne in mind that, for centuries, the relationship between religion and theatre was characterised by deep antagonism. Jonas Barish shows that an 'antitheatrical prejudice' existed within Christianity from its very beginnings. Early Christians objected to theatre's licentiousness, and they expressed ascetic disapproval of the pleasure theatre offers its audiences. They were also suspicious of the supposed subversiveness of the make-believe worlds created by theatre, which were believed to be blasphemous distortions of God's creation. In this respect, according to Barish, the religious antitheatrical prejudice was bound up with

the lifelike immediacy of the theatre, which puts it in unwelcome competition with the everyday realm and with the doctrines espoused in schools and churches. Moreover, by the element of freedom implicitly claimed in it, it threatens at any moment to depart from the fabric of received belief, even if in all good faith it intends to abide within it. By the closeness of the imitative process, in which it mimes the actual unfolding of events in time before the spectator's eyes, it has an unsettling way of being received by its audiences, at least for the moment and with whatever necessary mental reserves, as reality pure and simple. As such, it implicitly constitutes a standing threat to the primacy of the reality propounded from lectern and pulpit.⁷⁵

Theatre's 'element of freedom' and the manner in which it can 'depart from the fabric of received belief' continue to represent major points of contrast with traditional religious rituals, which, according to most sociologists, affirm the

⁷⁵ Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), p. 79.

values and beliefs of the community.⁷⁶ (This is particularly true of contemporary theatre, which is generally more concerned to probe and to question than to propound received wisdom, a point I will address in more detail in later chapters.) But while it has been claimed that the antitheatrical prejudice undermines the view that there is a fundamental bond between religion and theatre,⁷⁷ one could equally argue that the sense of competition which appears to have existed between these two cultural forms only confirms that their relationship has been, at times, uncomfortably close. Indeed, it could be argued that the antitheatrical prejudice of religious figures stemmed not just from theatre's 'competition with the everyday realm', as Barish suggests, but also from the competition that it represents for the sacred. Organised religion was suspicious, perhaps, of the manner in which theatre offers an alternative outlet for human desires for the transcendental. (This is an argument that would surely appeal to 'holy' theatre practitioners such as Artaud and Grotowski, who, as discussed later in this chapter, insisted on theatre's potential to offer transcendence.) In either case, there is ample evidence to suggest that it was the very *affinities* between liturgy and theatrical performance which worried some major religious figures. Barish writes that, for St. Augustine,

the theatre [...] played the role of a false temple, or anti-temple, standing in mocking antithesis to the true temple, with its own antipriests and antirituals, inhabited by demons, devoted to the Devil, and dedicated to the overthrow of humanity.⁷⁸

While Augustine was suspicious of the quasi-religiousness of theatre, St. John Chrysostom tried to downplay the theatricality of liturgy by banning the practice of applauding in church. More than a millennium later, sixteenth century English Protestants such as William Tyndale and Thomas Becon also attacked the theatrical qualities of Catholic rites in tracts in which anti-Popery and antitheatrical rhetoric converged.⁷⁹ (Though ironically, as Regina M. Schwartz observes, '[i]t was the Reformer's very insistence on the *representation* of the sacrifice, rather than the recurrence of the event itself, that brought the character of

⁷⁶ See my discussion on the relationship between ritual and belief on p. 57 ff.

⁷⁷ See for example Rozik, 'Religion and Theatre', p. 1128.

⁷⁸ Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, pp. 63-4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-89.

the Mass closer to the theatre – with its representation of events rather than events themselves'.⁸⁰)

Organised religion was as responsible for the downfall of medieval mystery and miracle plays as it had been for their emergence. Largely as a result of the antitheatricalism of the Reformers and the counter-Reformers, the religious dramas which had been so popular during the Middle Ages had been wiped out from most of Europe by the end of the sixteenth century.⁸¹ During the Renaissance, art generally began to detach itself from religion, and a rediscovery of the classical brought 'a shift away from medieval symbolic narrative towards psychological realism'; a trend which, according to John Wesley Harris, 'was perhaps the final nail in the coffin of the religious drama.'⁸² Though religious themes, motifs, language and ideas were to play an important role in the work of such major European playwrights as Lope de Vega, Calderòn and, of course, Shakespeare, there can be little question that theatre became more secular as it commercialised. By the turn of the twentieth century, it seemed to many that this process of secularisation was complete. In his 1909 essay 'Zur Soziologie des modernen Dramas', Georg Lukács argued that modern drama is a bourgeois art form: entirely rationalistic, he claimed, it lacks 'das Festliche, das Religiöse oder das zumindest irgendeinen Wesensteil religiösen Empfindens in sich Tragende.'⁸³ Some years previously August Strindberg had (somewhat prematurely) declared religion and theatre to be the first two fatalities of the rationalistic values of modernity: 'Nowadays,' he wrote in 1888, 'the primary process of intuition is giving way to reflection, investigation and analysis, and I feel that the theatre, like religion, is on the way to being discarded as a dying form which we lack the necessary conditions to enjoy.'⁸⁴ However, in the second part of this chapter, I will illustrate how,

⁸⁰ Regina M. Schwartz, 'Tragedy and the Mass', *Literature and Theology*, 19/2 (June 2005), pp. 139-58, p. 142.

⁸¹ On the decline of medieval religious drama, see Fischer-Lichte, *Geschichte des Dramas 1*, pp. 87-92, and John Wesley Harris, *Medieval Theatre in Context: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.188-195.

⁸² Harris, *Medieval Theatre in Context*, p. 194.

⁸³ Georg Lukács, 'Zur Soziologie des modernen Dramas', in Lukács, *Schriften zur Literatursoziologie*, ed. Peter Ludz (Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1972), pp. 261-95, p. 265.

⁸⁴ August Strindberg, 'Preface to Miss Julie', in Strindberg, *The Plays*, trans. Michael Meyer (1; London: Secker & Warburg, 1964), pp. 99-113, p. 99.

against the context of a marked decline in traditional religious practice in many Western European societies,⁸⁵ a powerful interest in ‘das Festliche, das Religiöse’ began to emerge in European theatre and drama of the late nineteenth century, and it gained momentum as the twentieth century got underway. Ironically, as will emerge over the course of this discussion, theatre’s attempts to ‘recover’ its religious dimensions have often been a key tactic in its endeavour to halt its own demise: a case of one apparently anachronistic institution borrowing from and/or trying to usurp another cultural form that no longer plays the pivotal role in European society that it used to.

2.2 Religion in modern European theatre and drama, ca. 1880-1970

The following is not intended to be an exhaustive synoptic survey of religion in modern theatre. Instead, I want to explore four key ways in which religion has appeared on the modern stage: (1) the aestheticised religiosity of early antirealist theatre, in particular Symbolist theatre; (2) the religious struggles portrayed in Strindberg’s drama, and two very different Expressionist depictions of the quest for spiritual regeneration; (3) the quasi-ritualistic ‘holy’ theatre of Artaud and Grotowski; and (4) the dramatisations of the absence of religious meaning in the work of Samuel Beckett. As already indicated in Chapter 1, for the most part I do not address drama or theatre which intellectually interrogates the more materialist aspects of religion, such as its social, political and economic influence. Thus, for example, I do not address the critiques of religion in Naturalist dramas, where, as Roy Pascal suggests, ‘religious belief usually appears as a hypocritical defence of social privilege’,⁸⁶ nor do I examine the depiction of religion as a (usually repressive) element shaping petit bourgeois language and consciousness in the socially-engaged *Volkstücke* of dramatists such as Ödön von Horváth or Marieluise Fleißer.

⁸⁵ For statistics on declining religious practice in Germany, France and England between c.1860 and c.1914, see Hugh McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe, 1848-1914* (Houndmills: Macmillan 2000), pp. 180-1.

⁸⁶ Roy Pascal, *From Naturalism to Expressionism: German Literature and Society, 1880-1918* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973), p. 186.

My typology also omits the very few examples of modern religious theatre and drama which are of an obviously apologetic or confessional nature, such as the work of T.S. Eliot, Christopher Fry or Paul Claudel. There are certainly some similarities between Claudel's dramas, which were particularly influential in Germany, and a number of the works discussed in this thesis, such as a radical opposition to scientific materialism; an interest in ritualising theatre; and a preoccupation with themes of sacrifice and salvation. However, plays such as *Break of Noon* (1905), *Tidings Brought to Mary* (1910) or *The Satin Slipper* (1924) are essentially assertions of faith. Communicating a Catholic vision of the world and propagating Catholic dogma, they are, as Dorothy Knowles suggests, a case of 'art serving faith with a vengeance.'⁸⁷ In contrast to this kind of proselytising religious drama, my focus is on the (much more common) moments where modern theatre invokes religion without propounding any particular religious ideology. Thus there is a heavy emphasis in this chapter on avant garde theatre and its predecessors, which, though usually antagonistic towards organised religion, draw very heavily from religion in theory as well as praxis.⁸⁸

2.2.1 Symbolism and antirealist theatre in the late nineteenth century

A rejection of the realistic replication of everyday experience is a fundamental principle of most of the works discussed in this thesis. An antirealist (or

⁸⁷ Dorothy Knowles, *French Drama of the Inter-War Years, 1918-39* (London: George C. Harrap & Co., 1967), p. 234. This is not to suggest that Claudel's dramas are necessarily only of interest to fellow devout Catholics. For example, Jean-Louis Barrault modelled Claudel's dramas as 'total theatre' and was more interested in the physicalised spirituality and the borrowings from archaic theatre in Claudel's work than in its treatment of Catholic doctrine. More recently, Stefan Bachmann's 2007 production of *Die Gottlosen* – a trilogy comprised of *Die Geisel* (1911), *Das harte Brot* (1918) and *Der Erniedrigte* (1920) – at the Maxim Gorki Theatre, Berlin, sought to bring out the relevance of Claudel's drama to contemporary audiences by foregrounding its anti-capitalist tenor.

⁸⁸ My understanding of 'avant garde theatre' is based on Christopher Innes' study of this category of experimental modern theatre, *Avant Garde Theatre, 1892-1992*. Despite the diversity of its movements and proponents, Innes identifies within avant garde theatre a consistent trend consisting of radical politics; antagonism towards Western civilisation and its artistic traditions; the aim of revolutionising theatrical performance; 'an aspiration to transcendence, to the spiritual in its widest sense' (Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, p. 3), and crucially, if paradoxically, primitivism. There are a great many more avant garde dramatists and theatre practitioners who extensively invoke religion – including Reinhard Sorge, Oskar Kokoschka, Ernst Barlach, Jean-Louis Barrault, Jacques Copeau, Jean Genet, Fernando Arrabal, Peter Brook, Tadeusz Kantor, the Gardzienice Theatre, and Ariane Mnouchkine – but my discussion is limited to only a few key representatives.

‘antinaturalist’) tendency was taking root even when naturalism was at its zenith; indeed, strains of antinaturalism can be detected even prior to this, in Goethe’s and Schiller’s attacks on bourgeois illusionistic theatre, for example.⁸⁹ However, much of the groundbreaking work of figures now considered to have been at the vanguard of antirealism, such as Adolphe Appia, Edward Gordon Craig and Georg Fuchs, was not produced until the early years of the twentieth century. For figures such as these, basic antirealist aesthetics – the repudiation of mimesis, psychologism, logical plot structures and illusionistic stage techniques – were bound up both with disaffection with positivist materialism and a conviction that theatre was in crisis and in urgent need of ‘revolution’.⁹⁰ In the following I want to provide a very brief overview of the place and significance of religion in Symbolism, the first theatrical antirealist movement, which emerged in the theatres of 1890s’ Paris. Rather than provide detailed analyses of the role of religion in specific Symbolist dramas (which in any case often verged on the gnomic), my aim is to summarise the main features of this movement’s treatment of religion in order to create a basic picture of how religion began to emerge as an important tool in theatre’s attempts to redefine its potential at the close of the nineteenth century.

Symbolist theatre aimed to evoke by symbolic means a reality behind the world of appearance, whether this be hidden psychic states such as dream worlds, or other mysterious, invisible forces supposedly controlling the phenomenal world. However, a number of Symbolists struggled with the obvious paradox that theatre is among the most material and fleshy of all art forms. Stéphane Mallarmé, for instance, felt that theatre is superficial because it merely depicts the ‘exterior aspects of things’,⁹¹ while Maurice Maeterlinck called for the removal of actors from the stage and even argued at one point that, ideally, dramatic works should be

⁸⁹ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Kurze Geschichte des deutschen Theaters* (Tübingen: Francke, 1993), p. 263.

⁹⁰ See for example Georg Fuchs, *Die Revolution des Theaters* (Munich: Müller, 1909).

⁹¹ Mallarmé, cited in Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theatre: The Formation of an Avant Garde* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 23. The original source is Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, eds Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 295.

read and not staged.⁹² The Symbolists experimented with various strategies for dematerialising the stage, such as using puppets or shadows instead of actors. However, the deployment of religious signs and symbols was perhaps the most widely used means of creating the impression that realms transcending material reality were being invoked. Pre-Symbolist and Symbolist dramas such as Auguste Villiers de l'Isle Adam's *Axël* (1890) or Joséphin Péladan's *Le Fils des étoiles* (1892) and *Babylone* (1893) heavily expropriated and aestheticised Christian – especially Roman Catholic – elements, and combined them with borrowings from other esoteric and occult traditions which were enjoying a *fin de siècle* revival, such as Cabbala, alchemy, Gnosticism and Rosicrucianism.⁹³ As well as relying heavily on traditional religious signs, Symbolism can be described as quasi-religious in that it stylised theatre as an alternative (to) religion; greatly influenced by Richard Wagner as well as by the Romantics, redefinitions of theatre as a sacred space or 'temple' pervade Symbolist programmatic texts.⁹⁴ But in general, Symbolist theatre did not explore specific religious ideas about the metaphysical 'truths' which underpin human existence. Instead, religious motifs tended to be drained of much of their original, theological content. Their main function was to produce a vague atmosphere of mystery, sacredness and ceremonialism, and thereby to evoke a state of reverie among spectators. Thus religious signs were used as part of an attempt to offer within the theatre transmundane, non-rational sensations which did not require commitment to any particular religious doctrines.

While the subjectivisation of Western religion can be traced back to medieval mystics,⁹⁵ the *privileging* of religious (or quasi-religious) feeling over religious belief is a phenomenon which is linked to the development of modernity. It is particularly associated with Romanticism, which the poet T.E. Hulme once described as a 'spilt religion' because it was pervaded with the religious feeling of

⁹² See Deak, *Symbolist Theatre*, pp. 22-25.

⁹³ On the *fin de siècle* occult Revival, see Pascal, *From Naturalism to Expressionism*, pp. 175-9.

⁹⁴ Patrick McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 68.

⁹⁵ Gustavo Benavides, 'Modernity', in Mark C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 186-204, p. 196.

people who 'don't believe in God'.⁹⁶ This emphasis on the experiential dimension of religion can be understood as a reaction to a world which was becoming increasingly dominated by post-Enlightenment scientific materialism, as Gustavo Benavides explains:

It is not surprising [...] that the development of Western modernity has been accompanied by an emphasis on the experiential aspects of religion, even when this emphasis has been explicitly intended to counteract the deleterious effects of the Enlightenment. The cultivation of subjectivity found among the romantics, the pietists, and the theorists of religion who flourished among the first few decades of this [the twentieth] century can be seen as a response to the Enlightenment, and then to the accelerating urbanization, industrialization, and above all to the disciplining of everyday life.⁹⁷

Thus for all that Symbolist theatre purported to transcend time-specific social, cultural or political conditions, its pervasive use of religious elements can be understood more as a reaction to modernity than as a genuine interest in religion itself. The quasi-mystical intuitions of hidden mysteries which it sought to generate were intended as an antidote to the rationalism and instrumentalism which dominates modern life, and, as the romanticised medievalism of many Symbolist dramas would suggest, the aesthetic revalorisation of religion was bound up with a sentimental nostalgia for premodern times. Though most of the subsequent works discussed in this thesis are not quite so uncritical in their treatment of religion, the use of religious signs to resist some of the realities of modern life would become a recurring theme in twentieth century avant garde theatre.⁹⁸

2.2.2 The 'struggle towards God'? Strindberg and the Expressionists

Expressionism inherited the Symbolist interest in exploring subjective states and dream worlds, but it has been argued that the unspecific, uncommitted religiosity

⁹⁶ T.E. Hulme, 'Romanticism and Classicism', in Herbert Read (ed.), *Speculations* (London: Routledge, 1936), pp. 111-40, p. 118. The obvious exception to this vague, unbelieving religiosity is Claudel, who is often categorised as a Symbolist.

⁹⁷ Benavides, 'Modernity', p. 197.

⁹⁸ For a more detailed discussion of how Symbolist theatre anticipated and laid the groundwork for the twentieth century avant garde, see John A. Henderson, *The First Avant Garde 1887-1894: Sources of the Modern French Theatre* (London: George G. Harrap & Co, 1971).

of the Symbolists developed in Expressionist drama into a more urgent 'struggle towards God'.⁹⁹ In this section I interrogate the validity of this claim by comparing the place and significance of religion in three important pre-Expressionist and Expressionist plays: Part 1 of August Strindberg's (1849-1912) *To Damascus* (1898-1904), the dramatic trilogy which is generally acknowledged to have established a template for Expressionist drama; Georg Kaiser's (1878-1945) *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (1912); and Ernst Toller's (1893-1939) *Die Wandlung. Das Ringen eines Menschen* (1919).

Written in the immediate aftermath of Strindberg's 'Inferno' years, a period of psychological breakdown and religious crisis, the highly autobiographical *To Damascus, Part I*¹⁰⁰ depicts the spiritual quest of a central figure, known only as 'the Stranger', as he battles with money problems, marital difficulties, and feelings of guilt, alienation, disorientation and meaninglessness. Like Strindberg's later work, *A Dream Play* (1901), *To Damascus* imitates 'the disconnected but apparently logical form of the dream'.¹⁰¹ At the same time, however, its series of episodic scenes, or 'stations', each depicting a stage of the Stranger's quest, is also modelled on the structure of medieval Passion and morality plays and the Catholic rite of the 'Stations of the Cross', thus establishing an obvious analogy from the outset between the suffering of the central figure and the Passion of Christ. As well as its structure, *To Damascus* is pervaded with other religious referents, including religious figures (for example, parallels are drawn between the Stranger and characters from Judaeo-Christian myth such as Christ, Adam, Jacob, Job, Cain, Saul/Paul, Ahasuerus, God and even Lucifer); religious language, such as prayers and biblical allusions; religious music; religious settings, such as churches and abbeys; and religious stage decorations, such as Crucifixes and 'Calvaries' ('small chapels of expiation' which line the route along which the Stranger travels¹⁰²), all of which contribute towards the palpable religious quality of the

⁹⁹ Richard Samuel and R. Hinton Thomas, *Expressionism in German Life, Literature and the Theatre, 1910-1924* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1939), p. 119.

¹⁰⁰ Subsequently referred to in this chapter simply as *To Damascus*.

¹⁰¹ August Strindberg, 'A Dream Play', in Strindberg, *A Dream Play and Four Chamber Plays*, trans. Walter Johnson (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), pp. 17-86, p. 19.

¹⁰² August Strindberg, 'To Damascus, Part 1', in Strindberg, *The Plays*, trans. Michael Meyer (2; London: Secker & Warburg, 1975), pp. 27-110, p. 63.

play. However, these traditional religious referents are frequently juxtaposed with a variety of mythological, folktale, Gnostic and occult allusions. Thus the play also makes references to *Doppelgänger*, witches, ogres, changelings, Bluebeard and Medea, and the Stranger is associated with mythological figures such as Prometheus, Aeneas, and Hercules, as well as with the Judaeo-Christian characters mentioned above.¹⁰³

This syncretistic approach owes something to biographical factors, reflecting Strindberg's own unconventional and constantly changing religiosity, in which the legacy of his strict Pietistic upbringing was combined with an eclectic fascination for comparative mythology, mysticism and the occult.¹⁰⁴ However, *To Damascus* is not, like many Symbolist dramas, merely a 'pick and mix' amalgamation of religious and mythological forms detached from much of their original content, for the play's main themes are essentially religious. Admittedly, defining what constitutes a specifically religious theme is probably almost as difficult as defining the term 'religion' itself, for almost any work of art that grapples with the fundamental questions of human existence – What is the purpose of life? Why is there so much evil and suffering in the world? How does one achieve redemption? What is the meaning of death? – shares at least some territory with the basic existential issues which religion also seeks to address. However, there is a difference between themes which demonstrate some overlap with religion by virtue of the fact that they relate to such fundamental existential questions, and themes which address the meaningfulness and relevance of *specifically religious responses* to such questions. Throughout this thesis, my definition of a religious theme belongs to the latter category. Hence, although *To Damascus* deals with existential anxieties which certainly cannot be regarded as specific to religion – 'If only I knew why I exist, why I stand here, where I must go, what I must do,'¹⁰⁵ agonises the Stranger in the opening scene – much of the play centres on the Stranger's struggle to find and accept religious answers to these anxieties. I would

¹⁰³ See Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Geschichte des Dramas 2: Von der Romantik bis zur Gegenwart* (Tübingen: Francke, 1990), p. 146.

¹⁰⁴ On Strindberg's eclectic interest in myth, religion and the occult see Harry Carlson, *Strindberg and the Poetry of Myth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

¹⁰⁵ Strindberg, 'To Damascus, Part 1', p. 30.

suggest that the play depicts a struggle *with* God (though, as I will show below, not necessarily the conventional Christian idea of God) as much as a struggle *towards* God. Constantly vacillating between scepticism and a religious instinct which he cannot quite shake off, the Stranger is, as Fischer-Lichte puts it, a ‘metaphysischer Rebell,’¹⁰⁶ a proud blasphemer who refuses to submit to God, preferring to wrestle with Him¹⁰⁷ as an equal. He hubristically views his own creative powers (as a writer) as a Promethean challenge to God’s own creativity, and he violently rails against the cruel injustice of suffering and evil.

While it is a familiar idea that the blasphemer may be closer to God than someone who is conventionally pious,¹⁰⁸ the Stranger achieves the religious awakening suggested in the title’s biblical allusion to the road to Damascus when he overcomes his hubris and tentatively begins to submit to a power greater than he. Learning to identify with the humiliated, tortured Christ rather than the all-powerful Creator God,¹⁰⁹ he comes to believe that suffering has a higher metaphysical meaning, and that it is a necessary part of the path to salvation. But although the journey towards spiritual transformation depicted in *To Damascus* is very obviously indebted to Christian ideas, motifs and patterns of suffering and salvation, the Stranger’s ‘conversion’ itself is far more ambivalent than Saul’s transformation into Paul. The play is circular in structure, so that the Stranger returns to his journey’s starting point, apparently condemned to repeat the process *ad infinitum*. In its final scene, the Stranger is still very sceptical of the Christian idea of God as he stands hesitantly at the entrance to a church, having come only to a vague belief in mysterious ‘Powers’ which control human destiny and mete out punishment for past sins. The religious vision informing the play, then, is a very idiosyncratic take on traditional Christian doctrine, and, like the Gnostics or the writings of the eighteenth century Swedish visionary Emanuel Swedenborg (a figure greatly admired by Strindberg), the Stranger’s religiosity is based on a

¹⁰⁶ Fischer-Lichte, *Geschichte des Dramas* 2, p. 136.

¹⁰⁷ I use the male pronoun here as this is the form which appears in *To Damascus*.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel Murphy notes in his study of Christianity and modern European literature that ‘Modern literature, pointing overwhelmingly to the co-existence of faith and doubt, tends to emphasise the torment and agony of unbelief, representing this as the condition from which faith, paradoxically, must spring.’ Daniel Murphy, *Christianity and Modern European Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), pp. 492-3.

¹⁰⁹ Fischer-Lichte, *Geschichte des Dramas* 2, p. 144.

personal search for a relationship with God as opposed to rigid adherence to established religious dogma and practice. One might be tempted to draw a parallel between the individualistic, idiosyncratic religiosity portrayed in *To Damascus* and postmodern forms of religiosity and spirituality, which also place a heavy emphasis on personal processes of spiritual seeking, as discussed in Chapter 1.¹¹⁰ However, it is important to note that contemporary alternative spiritualities can generally be seen to ‘embrace the core values of secularity’¹¹¹ in that, rather than appeal to the ‘higher’, supernatural forces postulated by traditional Western religious forms, they seek spiritual meaning within the self. In contrast, the Stranger’s spiritual seeking is still largely embedded within a supernatural frame of reference; it eventually involves subordination of the self to ‘higher’ authorities of meaning; and it is greatly – if idiosyncratically – informed by traditional Judaeo-Christian notions about faith, suffering and redemption.

Contemporary criticism tends to favour psychological over religious interpretations of *To Damascus*. For example, Fischer-Lichte views the play as a dramatisation of identity crisis and mental breakdown. She interprets the Stranger’s journey as one of self-discovery – albeit one portrayed with the archetypal motifs of myth and religion – rather than a religious one, and she argues that, by using the secondary figures to represent aspects of the Stranger’s unconscious, Strindberg anticipates many of the insights of Freudian psychology.¹¹² In a similar vein, Innes suggests that religious motifs are simply metaphors for psychological processes:

On the surface the dramatic conflict is presented as a Promethean challenge to God, with the Unknown defying the “Invisible One”, daring “unseen powers” to strike him down with a bolt of lightning, and working to free mankind from “suffering”. But the sufferings are in fact psychological repressions; and the human beings to be saved, as well as those characters who represent the “unseen powers” he struggles against, are all projections of his own mind.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ See also the discussion of ‘spiritual seeking’ as a major feature of contemporary Western religiosities and spiritualities in Michele Dillon and Paul Wink, *In the Course of a Lifetime: Tracing Religious Belief, Practice, and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 119-120.

¹¹¹ Stephen J. Hunt, *Alternative Religions: A Sociological Introduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 223.

¹¹² Fischer-Lichte, *Geschichte des Dramas 2*, pp. 135-46.

¹¹³ Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, p. 29.

However, Fischer-Lichte's and Innes' subordination of the play's religious meanings to its psychographic ones underestimates the importance of classic religious and theological themes – such as the conflict between scepticism and faith; the problem of evil and suffering; and the nature of sin and redemption – in a play which explicitly depicts a process of religious awakening, albeit one which is somewhat heterodox. Strindberg's use of a dream-play aesthetic may, like Symbolist drama, associate religion with the unconscious and irrational sides of the human psyche, but this does not render the religious struggles depicted in the play any less significant.

The great influence exerted by Strindberg on German Expressionism is well documented.¹¹⁴ The Expressionists adopted Strindberg's *Stationendrama* structure and dream-play aesthetic, as well as his basic themes of alienation, suffering, and spiritual seeking, though they generally eschewed the highly autobiographical nature of *To Damascus*, striving instead for a more universal relevance.¹¹⁵ Georg Kaiser is generally seen as one of the best Expressionist playwrights, and *Von morgens bis mitternachts*, which depicts a bank cashier's escape from drudgery when he steals money from the bank, and his subsequent search for transcendent experiences and spiritual fulfilment across typical scenes of German life, is often regarded as the Expressionist *Stationendrama par excellence*. The play certainly exhibits many of the 'textbook' stylistic and thematic conventions of Expressionist drama: there is the episodic structure; dream-like and grotesque incidents; the unnamed central figure who is supposed to be emblematic of modern man; secondary figures who are de-individualised representatives of society; telegraphic language; stark scenography; a metropolitan setting; themes of revolt and spiritual quest; and pervasive religious motifs. But *Von morgens bis mitternachts* differs from the typical Expressionist drama in that the wished-for

¹¹⁴ See for example R.S. Furness, *Expressionism* (London: Methuen, 1973), pp. 5-7; Nicholas Hern, 'Expressionism', in Ronald Hayman (ed.), *The German Theatre: A Symposium* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1975), pp. 111-2; Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, pp. 36-7; and Samuel and Thomas, *Expressionism in German Life, Literature and the Theatre*, p. 120.

¹¹⁵ Hern, 'Expressionism', p. 111.

spiritual renewal is never achieved:¹¹⁶ the cashier is unable to find fulfilment in any of the ‘stations’ he travels through, and the play ends bleakly with his death. Kaiser’s portrait of humanity as shallow, greedy and treacherous is not tempered by the ecstatic utopianism normally associated with Expressionism. The ironic tone and cynical humour of the play differs markedly from the earnestness of most other dramas considered typically Expressionist, including Toller’s *Die Wandlung*. Indeed, it might even be argued that *Von morgens bis mitternachts*, which comes from the early phase of Expressionism, parodied many of the clichés of Expressionist drama *before* they had even become clichés. As I will now argue, Kaiser’s ironic use of religious elements, in particular, seems to pre-emptively mock the bombast of Expressionist religiosity.

Religious motifs are most prominent in the last station of the cashier’s journey, which is set in a Salvation Army hall. Whipped up into a religious frenzy by the evangelical army officers’ calls for ‘Bekenntnis und Buße’,¹¹⁷ the cashier experiences a ‘Damascene’ moment when he realises that money can never buy true fulfilment. Confessing his sin, he elatedly throws away the stolen money and pledges to atone for his crime. The cashier’s apparent redemption is sardonically undermined, however, when the Salvation Army congregation scrambles for the money. His last-ditch hope in the redeeming value of a woman’s love – which he expresses in biblical terms, as a return to prelapsarian bliss: ‘Mädchen und Mann. Uralte Gärten aufgeschlossen. Entwölker Himmel. Stimme aus Baumwipfelstille.’¹¹⁸ – is dashed when, in a parody of the betrayal of Christ, the Salvation Army girl on whom he had pinned his hopes betrays him to the police. *Von morgens bis mitternachts* does not depict a painful, self-conflicted struggle towards God, then, but offers instead a coolly ironic comment on religion’s failure to provide solutions to the existential and spiritual needs of modern man. The cashier’s sudden religiosity is exposed as a naïve emotional state which is cynically exploited by others, and, rather than representing alternative, spiritual

¹¹⁶ Cf. Ernst Schürer, ‘Provocation and Proclamation, Vision and Imagery: Expressionist Drama between German Idealism and Modernity’, in Neil H. Donahue (ed.), *A Companion to the Literature of German Expressionism* (New York: Camden House, 2005), pp. 231-54, p. 243.

¹¹⁷ Georg Kaiser, *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005), p. 63.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

values, organised religion is shown to be as materialistic and corrupt as the rest of society.

Von morgens bis mitternachts also subverts the Expressionist convention of portraying the plight of modern man (and the central figure of the *Stationendrama* is always a man) in Christological terms. The cashier shoots himself and dies in a cruciform position, his last sentence, 'Ecce homo',¹¹⁹ echoing the words uttered by Pontius Pilate when he presented Jesus Christ to the mocking crowd shortly before the Crucifixion. But the imagery of Christian martyrdom is immediately deflated by the subsequent words of a security guard, who is more interested in a sudden power-cut than the cashier's death and simply comments, 'Es ist ein Kurzschluß in der Leitung.'¹²⁰ Here, the Passion and Crucifixion are demythified, in the sense that the cashier's death is not imbued with any higher, metaphysical significance.¹²¹ The Crucifixion is invoked to symbolise the suffering caused by the greed and spiritual bankruptcy of the modern, mechanistic world, but it is drained of its original religious significance as a sign of hope and salvation. It is soaked in bathos, too. The dim-witted, petit bourgeois cashier is a rather ridiculous 'Christ' whose death is either a suicide or a silly accident caused by self-centred desperation rather than a self-sacrificial desire to atone for the sins of mankind. The cashier is also, therefore, a travesty of the Expressionist ideal of the 'neuer Mensch', a Christ-like messianic leader who would bring about the revitalisation of a corrupt and degenerate civilisation.¹²²

As its title would suggest, Ernst Toller's *Die Wandlung* depicts the process of spiritual regeneration which never actually takes place in *Von morgens bis mitternachts*. Charting the transformation of Friedrich, a lonely Jewish outsider, into a spiritual and political leader who attacks the evils of contemporary society,

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 65.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Cf. the distinction drawn between 'demythified' and 'remythified' crucifixions in Annette Pankratz, 'Crucifixions in Contemporary Drama: Berker, Berkoff, Bond, Brenton, McNally and Tabori', in Michael Hensen and Annette Pankratz (eds.), *The Aesthetics and Pragmatics of Violence: Proceedings of the Conference at Passau University, March 15-17, 2001* (Passau: Karl Stutz, 2001), pp. 183-96, p. 184.

¹²² It should be noted, however, that Kaiser himself promoted the 'neuer Mensch' ideal in some of his other major works, including *Die Bürger von Calais* (1913) and *Hölle Weg Erde* (1919).

undergoes great suffering for the sake of humanity, and unites his followers in a brotherhood of man, this *Stationendrama* contains the inflated emotions, secularised mysticism and utopianism for which Expressionism is famous. Though written in the aftermath of World War I, seven years after *Von morgens bis mitternachts*, *Die Wandlung* contains exactly the kind of ecstatic Christian imagery in its portrayal of Friedrich's rebirth as a 'neuer Mensch' that Kaiser's play presciently appears to parody. The parallels between Jesus Christ and Friedrich are particularly overblown in the fifth station, which deploys the Christian imagery of death and resurrection to symbolise Friedrich's transformation from patriotic soldier to leader of the struggle for peace and universal brotherhood. In a scene entitled 'Tod und Auferstehung', Friedrich dreams that he is a persecuted prisoner who dies (rather melodramatically) with his arms outstretched, as if crucified. His exalted death inspires his fellow prisoners, and enables them to recognise the redemptive value of self-sacrifice: 'Bruder, deine Worte künden Wege. / Gekreuzigt wolln wir uns befreien. / Gekreuzigt wolln wir uns erlösen / Zu hoher Freiheit auferstehn.'¹²³ These allusions to the Crucifixion are conflated at the end of the scene with rather kitsch resonances of the nativity when, as a symbol of new beginnings, the prisoner's widowed wife gives birth to a son, radiating light and surrounded by awe-struck prisoners as she does so. Friedrich's transformation is again imbued with rather heavy-handed Christian resonances in the following scene, where echoes of the biblical narrative about the stone that was removed from Jesus' tomb (John 20:1-18) are invoked to compare Friedrich's spiritual and political regeneration to the Resurrection: 'Mir ist, als ob ich heut / Zum erstenmal erwache, / Als ob ich eine schwere Grabesplatte fortgewälzt / Und auferstehe.'¹²⁴

We can say that imagery of the Crucifixion and Resurrection is 'remythified' in *Die Wandlung*, in the sense that it is divorced from traditional Christian other-worldly concepts, such as God or the Kingdom of Heaven, and reinterpreted to promote a message of hope and salvation which centres around this-worldly,

¹²³ Ernst Toller, 'Die Wandlung. Das Ringen eines Menschen', in Toller, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. John M. Spalek and Wolfgang Frühwald (2; Munich: Hanser, 1978), pp. 7-63, p. 45.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

socio-political values. Toller's *Stationendrama* resembles *Von morgens bis mitternachts* in that it is highly critical of organised religion and its clergy, which are depicted as being part of the corrupt, hypocritical establishment that must be destroyed in order for regeneration to take place. The play attacks the ossified, empty traditionalism which characterises Friedrich's mother's adherence to Judaism, and suggests that the barbarity of World War I has rendered belief in a loving God impossible. It also contends that the teachings of Jesus Christ have been forgotten: in a typically hysterical gesture, a priest (in fact, yet another of Friedrich's dreamed alter egos), breaks a crucifix, lamenting, 'O Jesus, deine Lehren sind verstümmelt – / Wie gings sonst zu, daß kraftlos sie zerbröckeln. / Da ist kein Heil ...'¹²⁵ *Die Wandlung* does not thematise a struggle towards God, then, so much as a struggle towards a secular rediscovery of Christ's teachings on universal love and forgiveness, which it remodels into a humanist ideology of pacifism and brotherly love. Toller's play seeks to reinvigorate these Christian values by detaching them from the supposedly atrophied religion from which they stem, while at the same time exploiting the original numinous aura, as well as the sheer aesthetic impact, of Christian motifs. The intention, I suggest, is to generate a quasi-religious atmosphere which sweeps spectators up into the euphoric utopianism of the play and creates an inspiring sense of 'brotherhood'. The assumption seems to be that, even when secularised, religious signs can still evoke quasi-religious emotions which can then be channelled into generating enthusiasm for other socio-political utopias.

Toller's endeavour to promote a sense of 'brotherhood' within the theatre should be seen against the context of a wider performative search for community which, influenced in part by the theories of ritual origins discussed at the beginning of this chapter, began to emerge at the turn of the twentieth century. (An obvious point of contrast would be the dramas of Brecht, who believed that epic theatre should divide rather than unify its audience.) This phenomenon is discussed by Fischer-Lichte in her book *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre* (2005). Fischer-Lichte examines how a desire to counteract the atomisation of

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 33.

modern life lay behind performances as varied as Max Reinhardt's 'Theatre of the Five Thousand' and his productions at the Salzburger Festspiele; the twentieth century revival of the Olympic Games; Soviet mass spectacles; Nazi *Thingspiele*; and American Zionist pageants. These performances sought, in more or less explicit ways, to usurp the community-fostering function once performed by organised religion and its rituals, and yet, circularly, many of them borrowed material from the same, putatively atrophied, religious traditions in order to do so. For example, Hugo von Hofmannsthal's reworking of *Jedermann* for the Salzburger Festspiele in 1920 turned to medieval religious drama. Elements used in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games, meanwhile, 'either originated in or alluded to a religious context', bringing about and reinforcing 'an atmosphere of solemnity, dignity and ceremony, the atmosphere of something "sacred"'.¹²⁶ Soviet mass spectacles and *Thingspiel* productions borrowed more specifically, and more blatantly, from Christian myth and ritual. Fischer-Lichte argues that the deployment of familiar religious motifs and patterns, in particular those relating to tropes of sacrifice and salvation, 'had a strong appeal to the emotions and habitual behaviour of the people',¹²⁷ and she maintains that the atmospheric impact of these religious elements generated a powerful and 'contagious' sense of a shared, quasi-religious experience.¹²⁸ The obvious similarities to Toller's emotionally manipulative use of Christian motifs of sacrifice and salvation highlight the fact that there are some troubling parallels between the avant garde and fascism, particularly in respect of their cultic and messianic aspects.¹²⁹

Though *Von morgens bis mitternachts* is highly critical of pre-war German society, it neither calls for social or political action, nor does it attempt to generate a utopian community among its spectators. In fact, the play demonstrates a very cynical attitude towards the possibility of regeneration, and appears to mock outright the very ideal of such a utopian, egalitarian community. In a station set at

¹²⁶ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 79.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹²⁸ The primary focus of Fischer-Lichte's study, however, is the way in which 'bodily acts and actions' are used to generate community (*Ibid.*, p. 32). I will consider this aspect of her analysis during my discussion of Werner Fritsch's search for community in Chapter 5.

¹²⁹ Cf. the discussion of the links between Expressionism and Nazism in Furness, *Expressionism*, p. 93.

a six-day bicycle race, the cashier believes that he has found transcendence by losing his individuality to the Dionysian excitement of the crowd, in which all class divisions seem to have been eradicated. The illusion is shattered however, when the crowd kowtow to a member of nobility. In contrast, *Die Wandlung* very idealistically agitates for socio-political change: the programmatic aim of its premiere performance in the Berlin Tribüne theatre in 1919 was, in the words of fellow Expressionist Walter Hasenclever, 'Änderung der vorhandenen Welt'.¹³⁰ This desire to change the 'real' world clearly fits Schechner's definition of ritual performance. *Die Wandlung* certainly aimed to create a new but enduring sense of collective identity based on shared socio-political goals. It is, however, questionable whether this was actually achieved, or whether the effervescent, quasi-religious sense of community generated by the play dissipated once the performance was over and the audience had dispersed. This is an issue I will address in more detail in the discussion below of Artaud's and Grotowski's attempts to fuse theatre and ritual.

Despite their obvious similarities, in terms of form as well as the thematic focus on the search for spiritual regeneration, the place and significance of religion in the three pre-Expressionist and Expressionist plays discussed here is very different. *To Damascus* can most accurately be described as depicting a struggle towards – but also with – God. Though the spiritual seeking undertaken by the play's central figure is of a very personal and idiosyncratic nature, many of the play's central concerns can be described as traditional religious themes. *Von morgens bis mitternachts*, meanwhile, is not very concerned with exploring themes such as the tension between faith and doubt or the religious meaning of suffering. Instead, it deploys religious motifs ironically to comment on religion's inability to counteract the existential disorientation and spiritual bankruptcy of modern life. In contrast, though certainly as antagonistic to organised religion as *Von morgens bis mitternachts*, *Die Wandlung* re-mythifies religious motifs in order to channel quasi-religious emotions into a secular socio-political ideology of peace and brotherly

¹³⁰ Walter Hasenclever, 'Das Theater von Morgen' (1916). Cited in Horst Denkler, 'Ernst Toller: *Die Wandlung*', in Manfred Brauneck (ed.), *Das deutsche Drama vom Expressionismus bis zur Gegenwart. Interpretationen* (Bamberg: Buchner, 1971), pp. 52-63, p. 52.

love. In the next section I will consider how this already very variegated treatment of religion further changes and develops in the subsequent work of two of the leading lights of twentieth century avant garde theatre: Artaud (1896-1948) and Grotowski (1933-1999).

2.2.3 *'Holy Theatre': Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski*

Peter Brook famously described the work of Artaud and Grotowski as 'Holy theatre'. By this he did not mean that it promotes any particular religious views, but that it aims to make the invisible visible and to create 'an experience that is beyond the humdrum.'¹³¹ As we have seen, this concern with communicating invisible realities and providing transmundane experiences had already been prominent in late nineteenth century Symbolist theatre. The influence of Expressionism (or at least the 'high' Expressionism of Toller), meanwhile, can be detected in Artaud's and Grotowski's drastic anti-clericalism; their hostility towards contemporary civilisation in general; and their preoccupation with themes of suffering, transformation and salvation. However, the goal of returning theatre to its supposedly ritual roots is far more explicit in the case of Artaud and Grotowski, and their programmatic texts are pervaded with references to religion and religious rituals. It is often claimed that these texts, especially Artaud's *The Theatre and its Double* (1938) and Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968) – though both extremely abstract in many places – have been far more influential than their actual productions. For that reason (but also partly because Artaud and Grotowski did not create the kind of dramatic, text-based theatre which is amenable to a study such as this), there will be a heavy emphasis in this section on analysing the extent to which their programmatics could be described as religiously-inspired.

Artaud, an iconic figure whose now legendary status owes as much to his eccentric personality as it does to his theatre work, tends to be referred to in the secondary literature as the 'prophet', 'visionary' or 'spiritual father' of avant garde theatre.¹³²

¹³¹ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 53.

¹³² George E. Wellwarth, *The Theatre of Protest and Paradox* (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 16; Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, p. 61; and Jerzy Grotowski, 'He Wasn't Entirely

The religious terminology is apposite. Artaud styled himself as a heretic, and, like many of the neo-Romantic writers already mentioned in this chapter, he wanted to mould theatre into an alternative (to) religion. Greatly inspired by theories of ritual origins (theatre is 'first ritualistic and magical, in other words bound to powers, based on religion', he wrote in one essay¹³³), a Nietzschean belief that solutions to contemporary problems can be found by returning to these origins runs through all of Artaud's writings on theatre. In Balinese dance-drama – ancient rituals which, he believed, communicated primal aspects of human experience through precise physical movements and incantation rather than through language – he famously found inspiration for a radical alternative to bourgeois drama. Ironically, given Artaud's extreme antagonism towards Western civilisation, his idealisation of the supposedly archaic, pre-rational and anti-Occidental qualities of these Balinese performances can be seen as a typically Orientalist attitude which has its roots in nineteenth century imperialism.¹³⁴ In fact, Artaud witnessed these Balinese dances at an event which glorified the 'colonising spirit' of Europe, the 1931 Paris Colonial Exhibition.¹³⁵

Artaud's attempts to ritualise theatre were closely tied up with the desire to transform his audiences. The profound changes which Artaud sought to generate within the theatre were designed to be painful: as its title suggests, his 'Theatre of Cruelty' was essentially intended as an assault on the audience. However, Artaud insisted that 'cruelty' did not simply mean gratuitous stage representations of violence (though many of his productions did involve a degree of blood and gore), but rather 'strictness, diligence, unrelenting decisiveness, irreversible and absolute determination,'¹³⁶ language which again highlights the fascistic undertones of some avant garde discourse.¹³⁷ Artaud was convinced that this 'cruelty' would

Himself', in Eugenio Barba (ed.), *Towards a Poor Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1975), pp. 85-93, p. 86, respectively.

¹³³ Antonin Artaud, 'Theatre is First Ritualistic and Magical ...' in Claude Schumacher (ed.), *Artaud on Theatre* (London: Methuen Drama, 1989), pp. 123-5.

¹³⁴ Cf. Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, p. 16.

¹³⁵ Nicola Savarese, '1931: Antonin Artaud Sees Balinese Theatre at the Paris Colonial Exhibition', *The Drama Review*, 45/3 (2001), pp. 51-77, p. 54.

¹³⁶ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, trans. Victor Corti (Montreuil: Calder, 1995), p. 79.

¹³⁷ Even Peter Brook expressed reservations about the 'fascist smell in [Holy theatre's] cult of unreason'. Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 60.

purify, heal and transfigure spectators. He borrowed from St. Augustine's *City of God* (ca 413-426) the metaphor of plague to describe this process of purification. But whereas Augustine disapprovingly compared theatre to the plague because of its supposed propensity to induce moral breakdown, perversity and madness, Artaud turned Augustine's antitheatrical prejudice on its head by placing a positive value on theatre's anarchic, amoral and irrational qualities. Like the plague, claimed Artaud, theatre generates a massive psychic upheaval which frees participants from the constraints of civilisation, leading to a rediscovery of the primitive, and therefore authentic, sides of the psyche. Like the plague, he wrote, theatre is

a revelation, urging forward the exteriorisation of a latent undercurrent of cruelty through which all the perversity of which the mind is capable, whether in a person or a nation, becomes localised. [...] It unravels conflicts, liberates powers, releases potential, and if these and the powers are dark, this is not the fault of the plague or theatre, but life. [...] It seems as though a colossal abscess, ethical as much as social, is drained by the plague. And like the plague, theatre is collectively made to drain abscesses. [...] And finally from a human point of view we can see that theatre action is as beneficial as the plague, impelling us to see ourselves as we are, making the masks fall and divulging our world's lies, aimlessness, meanness and even two-facedness.¹³⁸

On one hand, Christian resonances might be detected in the Theatre of Cruelty's exaltation of pain and the manner in which, like the Expressionists, it posits suffering as a necessary part of the process of spiritual renewal.¹³⁹ On the other hand, Artaud's desire to incite an almost orgiastic release (on an 'inner level') of the audience's 'taste for crime, its erotic obsessions, its savageness, its fantasies, its utopian sense of life and objects, even its cannibalism'¹⁴⁰ goes against all Christian principles. It has been suggested that Artaud's concern with bringing about emotional release is the modern counterpart of catharsis.¹⁴¹ However, Philip Auslander shows that the Theatre of Cruelty's catharsis owes more to psychoanalytic ideas about the therapeutic effects of exploring repressed psychic

¹³⁸ Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, pp. 21-2.

¹³⁹ Ronald Hayman, for example, argues that the severity of the Theatre of Cruelty had 'its root in a penchant for spiritual self-discipline, acquired during [Artaud's] Catholic education'. Ronald Hayman, *Artaud and After* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 67.

¹⁴⁰ Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, pp. 70-1.

¹⁴¹ Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, p. 59.

materials than it does to Aristotle, who sees catharsis as 'a type of learning' rather than a type of healing.¹⁴²

Artaud was keen to emphasise that the process of transformation went beyond the purely psychological, and was of a metaphysical nature. In contrast to Symbolists such as Maeterlinck or Mallarmé, who as we have seen were troubled by the disjuncture between theatre's materiality and their desire to invoke immaterial realms, Artaud insisted that theatre's ability to invoke the metaphysical is predicated, paradoxically, on its very physicality: 'In our present degenerative state, metaphysics must be made to enter the mind through the body',¹⁴³ he proclaimed. This strong linkage between the physical and the metaphysical represents an obvious point of similarity between the Theatre of Cruelty and religious rituals, in particular sacramental rites such as the Eucharist. The 'metaphysics' which Artaud sought to materialise, however, do not have much to do with the specific metaphysical beliefs and concepts of organised religion. Instead, they seem to involve a vague mixture of the inner world of the unconscious and the 'cosmic';¹⁴⁴ Artaud's programmatic texts contain nebulous references to 'the reality of the imagination and dreams';¹⁴⁵ 'ancient, primal Myths';¹⁴⁶ 'great social upheavals, clashes between peoples, natural forces, the interventions of chance, the attractions of fate',¹⁴⁷ and 'ideas on Creation, Growth and Chaos'.¹⁴⁸

As well as its echoes of psychoanalytic concepts and strategies, the process of transformation which Artaud wanted to bring about closely resembles the pattern of a rite of passage, the ritual form on which avant garde theatre most frequently models itself, according to Innes.¹⁴⁹ The anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep defined a rite of passage as a ceremony marking a transition from one social status

¹⁴² Philip Auslander, "'Holy Theatre" and Catharsis', *Theatre Research International*, 9/1 (1984), pp. 16-29, p. 17.

¹⁴³ Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, p. 77.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁴⁹ Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, p. 11.

or stage of life to another, such as baptism, marriage, initiation rite or funeral. Its basic pattern is threefold. During the 'preliminal' stage, the participant is separated from everyday time, place, state and status. During the 'liminal' stage, the process of transformation takes place. In the final, 'postliminal' stage, the participant is reintegrated, in a transformed condition, into everyday life.¹⁵⁰ Anthropologist and performance theorist Victor Turner was particularly interested in the liminal phase of the ritual process, during which the participant is 'betwixt and between' social positions or identities. Liminality, he wrote,

is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon. Liminal entities, such as neophytes in initiation or puberty rites, may be represented as possessing nothing. [...] Their behaviour is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new stations in life.¹⁵¹

The affinities between the dark, disturbing liminal stage of the rite of passage, during which the rules governing everyday life are abandoned and the participant is reduced to a state of vulnerability, on one hand, and Artaud's abandonment of the conventions of realistic drama and his use of cruelty to transform spectators before releasing them, in their changed condition, back into the 'real' world, on the other, need hardly be highlighted.¹⁵² But while Artaud wanted to effect a fundamental, permanent change to his participants which would ultimately lead to a new kind of human existence – an existence freed from the constraints of rationalism, individualism and logocentricism –, this existential change is much more difficult to define or indeed identify than the clear change elicited and formalised during a rite of passage. The change supposedly experienced by the Theatre of Cruelty spectator is of a very introspective nature which is not marked in any outward way. In contrast, traditional religious rites of passage use official,

¹⁵⁰ Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

¹⁵¹ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), p. 95.

¹⁵² Cf. Balme's discussion (albeit in the different context of post-colonial theatre) of how dramatists may 'make use of the anti-structural freedom engendered by liminality to break open the rigid temporal and spatial limitations of realistic drama.' Balme adds that '[s]een in this way the rupture created in ritual sequence by a liminal phase corresponds to the dissolution of the Aristotelian model of dramatic structure.' Balme, *Decolonizing the Stage*, p. 78.

shared symbols to mark and formalise the transformation, thereby enabling the wider community to recognise and affirm one's new identity and new place in the community.¹⁵³

In fact, the Theatre of Cruelty's entire understanding of the relationship between individual and community seems rather confused. Paradoxically, Artaud set out to destroy the Western cult of the individual,¹⁵⁴ yet the Theatre of Cruelty's goal of provoking a personal, inner purgation of repressed instincts on the part of each spectator seems to be of a rather individualistic nature. It is perhaps possible that the sensual, visceral nature of its productions may have helped produce an atmosphere of heightened emotional energy, or collective 'effervescence', Durkheim's term for the feeling of community generated by sacred rituals, which he contrasted with the 'uniform, languishing and dull' character of everyday, profane life.¹⁵⁵ However, it seems unlikely that the Theatre of Cruelty could have provoked in conjunction with this a sense of group solidarity which would have survived in the world outside the theatre. Victor Turner used the term 'spontaneous communitas' to refer to the feeling of camaraderie which people might experience when they go through the liminal stage of a rite of passage together, but he pointed out that 'this is necessarily a transient condition if society is to continue to operate in an orderly fashion.'¹⁵⁶ He contrasted this with the 'normative communitas' which is officially organised and regulated, and which takes place during the traditional religious rituals which are more widely found in the West, such as Communion in the Roman Catholic Mass.¹⁵⁷ According to most sociologists, such traditional religious rituals help to promote the *shared* beliefs, traditions and values – or what Durkheim referred to as 'collective representations'¹⁵⁸ – which create a more long-lasting sense of social solidarity. In contrast to these traditional religious rites, and indeed to Toller's *Die Wandlung*,

¹⁵³ Fischer-Lichte suggests that such 'public acclaim' is what distinguishes ritual transformation from theatre transformation. Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*, pp. 254-4.

¹⁵⁴ Fischer-Lichte, *Geschichte des Dramas* 2, pp. 183-191.

¹⁵⁵ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. James Ward Swain (New York: Free Press, 1971), pp. 214-5.

¹⁵⁶ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 274.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁵⁸ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, p. 435 ff.

too, which tries to rally its spectators around shared socio-political ideals, the vague ideology which underlies the Theatre of Cruelty can be defined only in terms of what it is against: the constraints of Western civilisation. Thus the paradox of the Theatre of Cruelty is that although it rejects Western individualism, it is reluctant to deploy the kind of shared rules, taboos, conventions, values, beliefs, traditions and attitudes which would promote an enduring sense of group identity, because this would involve curtailing to some degree one's 'natural' instincts.

It was at least partly because of its perceived tendency to repress humanity's natural instincts that Artaud was so hostile towards organised religion. Explicit religious references in his productions tended to be blasphemous, for the violation of sacred figures, ideas, values and beliefs was a key weapon in the Theatre of Cruelty's effort to liberate its audience from the shackles of civilisation. For instance, Artaud's staging of Claudel's *Break of Noon* in 1928 was, writes Innes, a 'farcical treatment of a poetic celebration of Christian conversion' which 'parodied the all too easy target of religion and automatically insulted the social establishment of which Claudel was a prominent member.'¹⁵⁹ Similarly, *The Cenci* (1935) attacked 'the antiquated notions of Society, Order, Justice, Religion, the Family and Country,' as Artaud himself boasted.¹⁶⁰ Featuring murder, incest, rape and various other acts of depravity perpetrated by superhuman figures who are 'oblivious to the petty human distinctions between good and evil',¹⁶¹ *The Cenci* inverts conventional, Christian-based values, which are portrayed as contrary to man's true nature.¹⁶² However, the obvious danger with blasphemy is that even if initially it does have the power to shock (though it is debatable whether 1930s Parisian audiences were indeed committed enough to religious motifs to feel deeply shocked by their violation), it can quickly lose its shock value. The

¹⁵⁹ Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, p. 89.

¹⁶⁰ Antonin Artaud, 'Letter to André Gide, 10 February 1935', in Schumacher, *Artaud on Theatre*, pp. 144-6, p. 144.

¹⁶¹ Antonin Artaud, 'The Tragedy *The Cenci* at the Folies-Wagram', in Schumacher, *Artaud on Theatre*, pp. 148-9, p. 148.

¹⁶² Such reversals of moral and religious values also feature in the work of a number of other avant gardists, including Strindberg, Grotowski and Genet.

spectator can very easily be ‘assaulted into apathy’, as Brook notes. ‘What follows a shock?’ he asks. ‘Here’s the snag.’¹⁶³

Grotowski was probably not directly influenced by Artaud, for he did not come across *The Theatre and its Double* until his career was well established.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, his theatrical aims during his ‘productions phase’ with the Polish Laboratory Theatre in the 1950s and 1960s strongly resembled those of Artaud in that they revolved around moulding theatre into a cross between therapy and quasi-religious ritual.¹⁶⁵ As therapy, he sought to promote among participants transformative inner journeys of self-discovery. As quasi-religious ritual, he wanted to stimulate experiences of transcendence and community. His main programmatic text of the period, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, is awash with religious terminology: ‘holy actor’, ‘via negativa’, ‘sacrifice’, ‘apotheosis’ and ‘communion’ belong to his key concepts. One effect of these religious references is to imbue his project with a sense of substance and solemnity. Like Artaud, who wanted to recover a ‘serious theatre’ to supplant ‘our longstanding habit of seeking diversions’,¹⁶⁶ Grotowski was concerned with returning to theatre its supposedly lost gravitas. His view that theatre was originally a solemn event is not altogether convincing, however. Like theories of ritual roots, it ignores the strong possibility that theatre developed as much out of the human impulse to play, to have fun and to entertain as it did out of any serious motivations.¹⁶⁷

It has been suggested that, like Artaud, Grotowski ‘operated[d] on the anti-pleasure principle’.¹⁶⁸ One way in which Grotowski’s ‘anti-pleasure principle’ differed from that of Artaud, however, was that Grotowski wanted to strip theatre of everything that is superfluous to its fundamental dynamic: the relationship between actor and spectator. Artaud, in contrast, believed that theatre should utilise all possible means of communication, including

¹⁶³ Brook, *The Empty Space*, pp. 61-2.

¹⁶⁴ Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, p. 153.

¹⁶⁵ Grotowski’s later ‘paratheatrical’ activities also demonstrated strong quasi-religious undercurrents, but this discussion is limited to his productions phase.

¹⁶⁶ Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, p. 64.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, pp. 71-2.

¹⁶⁸ Robert Brustein, quoted in Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, p. 458.

[s]houts, groans, apparitions, surprise, dramatic moments of all kinds, the magic beauty of the costumes modelled on certain ritualistic patterns, bright lighting, vocal, incantational beauty, attractive harmonies, rare musical notes, object colours, [...] the tangible appearance of new surprising objects, masks, puppets many feet high, abrupt lighting change, the physical action of lighting stimulating heat and cold, and so on.¹⁶⁹

Grotowski's asceticism was not just a matter of aesthetics, but also of ethics and politics, for it signified, in part, a repudiation of the materialism of contemporary life. Poverty in theatre, claimed Grotowski, 'defies the bourgeois concept of a standard of living. It proposes the substitution of material wealth by moral wealth as the principal aim in life.'¹⁷⁰ Grotowski's valorisation of 'poverty' seems implicitly to appeal to Christian values, and even the everyday *modus operandi* of the Laboratory Theatre, which demanded of its members discipline, seclusion, and renunciation of material pleasures, resembles in some respects a religious order or cult: 'I don't know whether the members of the group made their triple vows as monks and nuns, but this theatre was modelled along the strict lines of a cloister,' observed Jan Kott.¹⁷¹

Ironically, both Artaud's and Grotowski's austere disapproval of those kinds of theatre which offer entertainment or diversion echoes elements of the antitheatrical prejudice, in particular its puritanical disapproval of 'putting on an act', 'making a spectacle of oneself' or 'playing to the gallery'.¹⁷² For Grotowski, theatre should not involve exhibitionism and pretence, but rather authenticity and sincerity, and,

¹⁶⁹ Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, p. 72.

¹⁷⁰ Eugenio Barba, 'The Theatre's New Testament. Interview with Grotowski', in Eugenio Barba (ed.), *Towards a Poor Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1975), pp. 27-53, p. 44.

¹⁷¹ Jan Kott, 'Why Should I Take Part in the Sacred Dance?' in Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford (eds.), *The Grotowski Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 132-38, p. 132. Such quasi-cultic qualities are also to be found in another major experimental Polish theatre collective, the Gardzienice Theatre, founded in 1997 by Włodzimierz Staniewski, who had previously worked with the Laboratory Theatre. Grotowski's influence can be detected in Gardzienice's emphasis on communal living, theatrical 'poverty' and rigorous physical training, and in its interest in 'recovering' the ritual, religious and mythic dimensions of performance. See Paul Allain, *Gardzienice: Polish Theatre in Transition* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), p. 53.

¹⁷² These are all everyday expressions associated with theatrical activity which even today convey disapproval, and contain traces of a deep-seated antitheatrical prejudice, according to Barish (*The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, p. 1.) See also Barish's discussion of modern theatre's own strain of antitheatricalism, as exemplified by figures such as Artaud and Grotowski as well as Ibsen, Chekhov, Pirandello, Brecht, Beckett and Handke (pp. 450-478).

paradoxically, he argued that acting is not about performing a role, but about laying bare the most intimate parts of the psyche. A metaphor which features prominently in his theoretical statements is that of *removing* a mask (a metaphor which, as we have seen, also features in *The Theatre and its Double*). The ideal actor, according to Grotowski, takes the *via negativa*, St. John of the Cross' term for the 'negative way' that leads to knowledge of God, secularised by Grotowski to mean 'not a collection of skills but an eradication of blocks.'¹⁷³ Thus, echoing the emphasis on pain and suffering in Artaud's writings on theatre, Grotowski viewed acting as a process of self-sacrifice through which the actor attains a secular 'holiness' and transcends his/her corporeality to form a 'perceptual, direct, "live" communion'¹⁷⁴ with the spectator. In the Laboratory Theatre's actual productions, such as *Kordian* (1962), *Akropolis* (1962), *Dr. Faustus* (1963), and *The Constant Prince* (1965), Grotowski's fascination with gestures of self-sacrifice and transcendence was almost always expressed by means of Christological motifs; one critic observed that Grotowski 'shows one and the same thing, namely the death of Christ, over and over again.'¹⁷⁵ It has also been argued, however, that the almost sadomasochistic moments of 'apotheosis'¹⁷⁶ supposedly achieved by Grotowski's actors were in fact bombastic and self-aggrandising rather than self-mortifying in effect. One American critic complained that

[a] Grotowski production is a Mass in worship of its own devotion. [...] This air of self-celebrating piety – the aggrandizing sacrifices, the smug humility – combines with the fashionable, even superciliously elitist ambience of the company's New York performances to produce that most noxious of attitudes, chic spirituality. [...] [T]he showy gestures of self-sacrifice, the nobility-on-tour tone, and the victimised-by-superiority themes are nothing less than loathsome.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Jerzy Grotowski, 'Towards a Poor Theatre', in Eugenio Barba (ed.), *Towards a Poor Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1975), pp. 15-25, p. 17. George Hyde points out that 'Grotowski's use of this term from St. John of the Cross is heterodox, since he incorporates in it states of trance and ecstasy which St. John specifically excludes.' George Hyde, 'Poland', in Ralph Yarow (ed.), *European Theatre 1960-1990: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 182-219, p. 216.

¹⁷⁴ Grotowski, 'Towards a Poor Theatre', p. 19.

¹⁷⁵ Jan Bloński, cited in Jennifer Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 81. The original source is Jan Bloński, 'Grotowski and his Laboratory Theatre', *Dialog*, Special Edition 1970, pp. 142-50, p. 147.

¹⁷⁶ Grotowski, 'Towards a Poor Theatre', p. 22.

¹⁷⁷ Ross Wetzsteon, 'Theatre: Two by Grotowski', *Village Voice*, November 27 1969. Cited in Richard Schechner, 'Introduction: The Laboratory Theatre in New York, 1969', in Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford (eds.), *The Grotowski Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 112-15, p. 114.

Grotowski believed that by stripping away the social ‘mask’ the actor would prompt the spectator to undertake a similar act of ‘self-penetration’, thereby discovering his/her supposedly authentic self.¹⁷⁸ This goal of penetrating the veneer of civilisation (a surface/depth paradigm which has since been severely unsettled by postmodernism) strongly echoes Artaud’s programmatics, with the slight difference that the liberation of repressed instincts was not, for Grotowski, an end in itself, but rather a means of facilitating self-analysis. Nevertheless, Grotowski’s view of theatre as reality rather than illusion, together with his theatrical aim of generating transformative, quasi-psychotherapeutic insights into the core of both actors’ and spectators’ humanity, clearly demonstrates an efficacious impulse similar to that which characterised the Theatre of Cruelty.

Despite the pervasive religious allusions in both his theory and his praxis, Grotowski insisted that his ritualised theatre was a ‘secular sacrum’.¹⁷⁹ As with so much of the work already discussed in this chapter, Grotowski’s desire to create a secular sacrality can be positioned within a tradition which stretches from the ‘natural supernaturalism’ of the Romantics – that is, the Romantics’ tendency to secularise ‘inherited theological ideas and ways of thinking’, by draining them of their ‘supernatural’ content and translating them into a ‘natural’ context, as discussed by M.H. Abrams in his classic study¹⁸⁰ – to many contemporary alternative spiritualities. Of all the drama and theatre discussed so far, Grotowski’s focus on individual self-discovery and self-transformation probably demonstrates the most striking parallels with today’s alternative spiritualities, which, as discussed in Chapter 1, are sometimes referred to as ‘self-spiritualities’ because in contrast to traditional, congregational religious forms, they tend to locate the sacred within the self. The sociologist Thomas Luckmann argues that in contemporary Western society, religiosity has shifted away from the ‘great transcendences’ which involve experiences related to postulated ‘other-worldly’ or supernatural forces, towards ‘little transcendences’ which revolve around ‘this

¹⁷⁸ Barba, ‘The Theatre’s New Testament’, p. 34.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁸⁰ M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 12.

worldly', solipsistic values such as self-expression and self-realisation.¹⁸¹ The foregoing discussion has shown that Grotowski's theatrical aims were firmly centred on achieving such 'little transcendences'. These 'little transcendences' might be contrasted with the gestures of aesthetic transcendence struck in Symbolist dramas; the 'great transcendences' (notably, the struggle towards God or other higher 'Powers') dealt with by Strindberg, or the 'intermediate transcendences' – i.e. forms of transcendence which are oriented towards socio-political ideals – upon which Toller's *Die Wandlung* hinges.

Echoing the tension between individualism and collectivity in the Theatre of Cruelty, Grotowski's concept of theatre as a process of self-discovery is not easily reconciled with his interest in generating a ritual sense of 'communion'. Grotowski was acutely aware of lack in the contemporary world of the kind of shared symbols which could promote group solidarity, but he hoped that abolishing the social 'mask' would create a strong sense of intimacy, enabling participants to discover together a universal level of human experience. Religious motifs play a rather confused role in Grotowski's attempts to reveal the universal. Whereas in Artaud's scheme religion is part of the repressive 'mask' of civilisation which needs to be destroyed, Grotowski seems to take a Jungian view, claiming that religion lies *underneath* the mask, and within the collective unconscious, as archetypal 'myths which are not an invention of the mind but are, so to speak, inherited through one's blood, religion, culture and climate'.¹⁸² However, given the lack of 'a common sky of belief',¹⁸³ Grotowski thought that the only way to force spectators to engage with these 'inherited myths' was to violate them. Perplexingly, then, like Artaud, Grotowski used blasphemy to provide 'the shock which rips off the mask',¹⁸⁴ again, apparently working under the assumption that religious signs can still trigger powerful responses even when there is no conscious identification with the myths and values that are blasphemed.

¹⁸¹ Thomas Luckmann, 'The Paul Hanly Furfey Lecture, 1989: Shrinking Transcendence, Expanding Religion?' *Sociological Analysis*, 51/2 (1990), pp. 127-38.

¹⁸² Barba, 'The Theatre's New Testament', p. 42.

¹⁸³ Jerzy Grotowski, 'Towards a Poor Theatre', *Ibid.*, pp. 15-25, p. 23.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

As well as deploying religious motifs to express the collective unconscious of the audience, some of the Laboratory Theatre's major productions also sought to explore the contemporary relevance and meaningfulness of these motifs. *Akropolis* (1962), for example, is a meditation on the absolute failure of Christian values and beliefs in twentieth century Poland. Based on Stanisław Wyspiański's drama about the 'sum total of all civilisations' contributions to humanity,¹⁸⁵ Grotowski transplants the setting to Auschwitz in order to stimulate a re-evaluation of the central myths, symbols and achievements of Western culture against the context of the Holocaust. A dream-like montage of mythic and biblical narratives juxtaposed with brutal depictions of life in the concentration camp, the play ends with the grimly ironic 'resurrection' of Christ as a grotesque corpse which the hysterical inmates have mistaken for a saviour. *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* (1969), generally regarded as Grotowski's masterpiece, takes a more ambivalent approach, depicting the Second Coming of Christ without affirming or rejecting Christian beliefs and hopes. An eclectic collage of biblical, liturgical and literary quotation and allusion, it sought to represent the Gospels in a radically new way, profaning them in order to interrogate their contemporary relevance. It depicts a group of debauched social outcasts acting out scenes of the Passion and Crucifixion of Christ, a role which is taken in this 'play within a play' by a 'simpleton'. Throughout this obscene and violent montage of biblical parodies, the simpleton/Christ is degraded and persecuted until he is finally banished by the mocking Simon Peter with the words 'Go and come no more'¹⁸⁶, taken from the tale of Christ's meeting with the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-80). Yet despite its apparent attack on Christian eschatology, in typical Grotowski fashion the production ennobled the Christological 'translumination' achieved by the simpleton's suffering.¹⁸⁷ Because of this ambivalence, *Apocalypsis* was widely regarded as a complex and thought-provoking contemporary re-imagining of the Gospels. The critic Konstanty Puzyna noted that this production did not simply rehash the platitude that God is dead, but questioned this platitude, probing

¹⁸⁵ Kumiega, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, p. 59.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

¹⁸⁷ Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, p. 156.

whether Christian myths have really died out or whether they 'still live on in us as an inward need'.¹⁸⁸

In summary, the place of religion in Grotowski's theatre is multifaceted. On one hand, both his theory and his praxis relied heavily on traditional religious motifs to create an (arguably somewhat bombastic) atmosphere of solemnity and sacredness, and to exalt the processes of 'self-sacrifice' undergone by his actors. Yet ultimately his work embraced secularity, for his theatre 'rituals' were oriented towards 'little transcendences' which locate the sacred within the self. On the other hand, unlike most Symbolist dramas, it cannot be claimed that religious motifs were exploited in the Laboratory Theatre for purely aesthetic or atmospheric ends, for these motifs were often not just incorporated but also critically engaged with. Some of Grotowski's major productions can be described as religiously-themed, in that they probed the contemporary relevance and meaningfulness of religious myths, values and ideas, and stimulated reflections on their place in the collective unconscious and cultural identity of the audience.

2.2.4 The dramatisation of the absence of religious meaning: Samuel Beckett

A discussion of religion in twentieth century theatre and drama would not be complete without mentioning Samuel Beckett, given that his drama, along with that of other Absurd playwrights such as Eugène Ionesco or Harold Pinter, is often regarded as capturing most perfectly the metaphysical and existential uncertainties of the twentieth century: the apprehension that, as Ionesco put it, '[c]ut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless.'¹⁸⁹ The highly symbolic quality of Beckett's work, and the sense that it reveals uncomfortable truths about the human condition, led Brook to classify it as another example of 'holy theatre'.¹⁹⁰ Of course, dramas such as *Waiting for Godot* (1948) and *Endgame* (1954-6) are too complex and multivalent to be pigeonholed as plays specifically about religion.

¹⁸⁸ Konstanty Puzyna, 'A Myth Vivisected: Grotowski's *Apocalypse*', in Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford (eds.), *The Grotowski Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 86-104, pp. 88-9.

¹⁸⁹ Ionesco, quoted in Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Third edn.; Harmondsworth: Penguin 1985), p. 23. The original source is Eugène Ionesco, 'Dans les armes de la ville', *Cahiers de la Compagnie Madeleine Renaud-Jean-Louis Barrault*, Paris, No. 20, October 1957.

¹⁹⁰ Brook, *The Empty Space*, pp. 64-6.

Nevertheless, like much of Beckett's writing, they are pervaded with religious referents – in particular biblical, theological and liturgical allusions – and frequently grapple with religious themes. Rather than attempting a detailed analysis on the vast topic of religion in Beckett's theatre – this has, in any case, already been undertaken in a number of other studies¹⁹¹ – I want to highlight some of the central features of Beckett's treatment of religion in order to then draw comparisons with the other examples of religious theatre discussed in this thesis.

Beckett himself put the prominence of religious referents in his work down to the fact that it is 'a mythology with which I am perfectly familiar'.¹⁹² To an extent, then, Christianity feeds into his work simply because of its centrality to Western culture. There is little question that elements of this 'mythology' contribute valuable aesthetic and atmospheric qualities to Beckett's dramas. Biblical quotations, for example, are exploited for their linguistic beauty, while the Bible's many stark images of catastrophe, death and suffering contribute a sense of desolation and even menace to Beckett's evocations of the transience and wretchedness of human existence.¹⁹³ But Beckett was attuned to the potential of religious material to generate comedy as well as bleakness, through for example the juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane; irreverent wordplay (such as Hamm's 'Lick your neighbour as yourself!' in *Endgame*¹⁹⁴); or ludicrous parodies of theological discourse (such as Lucky's monologue in *Waiting for Godot*: 'Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqua with white beard quaquaquaqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown [...]'¹⁹⁵). I will show

¹⁹¹ See for example Mary Bryden, *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1991); Mary Bryden, 'Beckett and Religion', in Lois Oppenheim (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in Samuel Beckett Studies* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 154-71; and Lance St John Butler, ' "A Mythology with which I am Perfectly Familiar": Samuel Beckett and the Absence of God', in Robert Welch (ed.), *Irish Writers and Religion* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1992), pp. 169-84.

¹⁹² Beckett, quoted in Butler, ' "A Mythology with which I am Perfectly Familiar": Samuel Beckett and the Absence of God', pp. 169-70.

¹⁹³ Bryden, *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God*, pp. 102-8.

¹⁹⁴ Samuel Beckett, 'Endgame: A Play in One Act', in Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 89-134, p. 125.

¹⁹⁵ Samuel Beckett, 'Waiting for Godot', in Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, pp. 7-88, p. 42.

in Chapter 4 that George Tabori, a great admirer of Beckett, borrows many of these comic techniques in his treatments of religious material.

Religious allusions are almost always ironic in Beckett's drama, and they deride any hope that religion can provide solutions to the existential and metaphysical disorientation of the twentieth century. Biblical narratives and images such as the Fall, the Flood, the Apocalypse and the Crucifixion serve as archetypal images of human suffering,¹⁹⁶ but, as Mary Bryden points out, they are always detached from the message of hope that is expressed in the Bible itself. Bryden notes that 'wherever passages of doom and destruction are followed or counterpointed in the [biblical] original by messages of hope, these latter palliatives are never allowed to intrude.'¹⁹⁷ Thus, for example, *Endgame*, which depicts a post-apocalyptic scenario, subverts its various allusions to the biblical Creation myth so as to negate Judaeo-Christian teleology and replace it with the hopeless, typically Beckettian vision of cyclical stasis.¹⁹⁸ Likewise, pervasive allusions to the Crucifixion in *Waiting for Godot* serve as a resonant metaphor for the torment of the human condition, but they do not convey the symbol's original message of victory. Like *Von morgens bis mitternachts'* demythified Crucifixion, and in stark contrast to the Christological exaltation of suffering in the work of Toller or Grotowski, there is no connection between suffering and salvation in Beckett's work. Estragon may identify with the sufferings of Christ the victim ('All my life I've compared myself to him'¹⁹⁹), but Beckett's figures do not find hope or higher meaning in Christ's death.²⁰⁰ Similarly, attempts to pray or religious vociferations (e.g. Estragon's 'God have pity on me!'²⁰¹) serve as powerful expressions of anguish, but the figures do not truly believe that such 'vague supplication[s]'²⁰² will be

¹⁹⁶ Though by no means a specifically religious concern, Beckett himself was conscious of the fact that his preoccupation with human suffering shared some territory, at least, with one of the great themes of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. When asked in one interview whether his plays dealt with themes that could be considered religious, he replied 'Yes, for they deal with distress'. Tom Driver, 'Interview with Samuel Beckett', in Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (eds.), *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 217-23, p. 221.

¹⁹⁷ Bryden, *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God*, p. 108.

¹⁹⁸ Fischer-Lichte, *Geschichte des Dramas* 2, pp. 242-3.

¹⁹⁹ Beckett, 'Waiting for Godot', p. 51.

²⁰⁰ Bryden, *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God*, pp. 140-1.

²⁰¹ Beckett, 'Waiting for Godot', p. 71.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

answered.²⁰³ Furthermore, the fragmentary nature of Beckett's religious allusions and the way in which they are jumbled up with various other cultural fragments indicates that they are now only meaningless vestiges: what Theodor Adorno called 'Kulturmüll'.²⁰⁴ As I discuss in subsequent chapters, this treatment of religious material is echoed in the theatrical texts of Strauß and Tabori, though of course Beckett's bricolage aesthetic also anticipates a much more widespread characteristic of postmodern writing.

Beckett's ironic use of religious material highlights the absence of religious meaning and pokes fun at the absurdities of theology. Nevertheless, plays such as *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* are haunted by, yet simultaneously mock, a sense of religious longing. Beckett's characters yearn for God, but God can no longer offer them any solutions, a quandary summed up in Hamm's famous line following his abortive attempt to 'pray to God': 'The bastard! He doesn't exist!'²⁰⁵ Bryden writes that

the hypothesized God who emerges from Beckett's texts is one who is both cursed for his perverse absence and cursed for his surveillant presence. He is by turns dismissed, satirised or ignored, but he, and his tortured son, are never definitively discarded. If God is not apprehended in the here-and-now, there is nevertheless a perceived need, a potential opening, for a salvific function which a Deity could fulfil. [...] It cannot be said that Beckett's people show much aptitude for religious faith as conventionally understood, but what they are never healed of is a faint hope/misgiving that, as Hamm puts it: "We're not beginning to ... to ... mean something?"²⁰⁶

Thus for example in *Waiting for Godot*, the figures' awareness of the transience of life – the recognition that man must 'waste and pine waste and pine'²⁰⁷ – leads them to a preoccupation with religious notions of salvation, damnation and hope. This preoccupation is introduced near the start of the play with Vladimir's fixation on the fact that 'of the four Evangelists only one speaks of a thief being saved,'²⁰⁸

²⁰³ Bryden, *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God*, p. 114.

²⁰⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Versuch, das Endspiel zu verstehen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 167. See also Fischer-Lichte, *Geschichte des Dramas 2*, p. 248.

²⁰⁵ Beckett, 'Endgame', p. 119.

²⁰⁶ Bryden, *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God*, p. 2.

²⁰⁷ Beckett, 'Waiting for Godot', p. 42.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

and it is sustained throughout the play by various reminders of Golgotha, not least of which is the presence of the tree in the background. Vladimir's and Estragon's connection with their Christian heritage is disintegrating, but nonetheless they seem to be unable to rid themselves entirely of traces of Christian beliefs, notions and hopes. During the play they toy with vestiges of Judaeo-Christian eschatology and ideas of repentance and redemption, but these no longer provide a viable means of escaping the ineluctable stasis of their situation.

Whereas Artaud and Grotowski turned to ritual as an attempt to find solutions to the spiritual and existential crises of modernity, Beckett's work dramatises these crises without offering any solutions or alternatives: 'He's not flogging me a remedy or a path or a revelation or a basinful of breadcrumbs,' wrote Harold Pinter admiringly in a letter to a friend in 1954.²⁰⁹ Not only does Beckett show religion itself to be an unfeasible 'remedy', but, unlike many of the other dramas discussed in this chapter which are also characterised by disbelief, he also refuses to offer *secular* relief from the disenchantment of the Western world. He does not attempt to generate in the theatre consolatory experiences of sacredness or community, nor does he attempt to create surrogate religions, and it is partly this uncompromising negativity for which he is admired: 'The more he grinds my nose in the shit the more I am grateful to him', wrote Pinter.²¹⁰ But as Albert Camus argued in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), the rejection of all false consolations can in fact invest human existence with value and meaning.²¹¹ Ironically, too, it is possible that the shared rejection of false consolations fosters a stronger sense of community, and that the sense of the absence of religious meaning has more similarities to certain types of genuine mystical experience,²¹² than the secular

²⁰⁹ Quoted in Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman, 'Introduction', in Graver and Federman (eds.), *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 1-38, p. 12.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²¹¹ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (London: Penguin, 2000).

²¹² It has been argued in several studies that the negations, voids and absences pervading Beckett's drama call to mind certain aspects of negative or apophatic mysticism. See for example Helen L. Baldwin, *Samuel Beckett's Real Silence* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981) and Marius Buning, 'Samuel Beckett's Negative Way: Intimations of the "Via Negativa" in his Late Plays', in David Jasper and Colin Crowder (eds.), *European Literature and Theology in the Twentieth Century: Ends of Time* (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 129-42.

rituals and faux mysticism which pervade much of the other theatre discussed in this thesis.

Conclusion

In this chapter I firstly examined the notion that there is a fundamental bond between theatre and religion, arguing along with Richard Schechner that while ritual and theatre undoubtedly demonstrate certain performative parallels, the popularity of the idea that theatre emerged out of cultic rituals probably reveals more about disaffection with the rationalism, materialism and individualism of modernity than it does about actual theatre history. My analysis of religion in modern theatre and drama demonstrated that a prevalence of religious material does not necessarily signify a strong thematic interest in religion itself. A distinction was drawn between moments where religion itself is thematised, in the sense that the meaningfulness and relevance of its doctrines, rituals, myths, experiences, values or other dimensions is explored, and moments where religious signs serve various other ends. I found that the former kind of moments features strongly in Strindberg's *To Damascus*, which depicts a process of religious awakening and explores specifically religious ideas about the metaphysical significance of suffering; the problem of sin and the possibility of redemption; as well as the conflicts between faith and doubt, freedom and authority, pride and humility. Such moments can also be found in Kaiser's *Von morgens bis mitternachts* and in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, which 'demythify' religious signs in order to expose the inability of religion to satisfy modern existential and spiritual needs.

The other dramatists and practitioners considered echo in their practice and/or programmatic the Romantic desire to mould art into a surrogate religion, yet ironically they rely very heavily on the concepts, patterns and/or motifs of the very religious traditions which have apparently outworn their usefulness. In many cases, religious signs help to generate a quasi-religious atmosphere which is supposed to resist the rational scientific mentality which dominates modern Western culture, but they are detached from most of their original, theological

content. I suggested that Symbolist theatre demonstrates an aestheticist, 'pick 'n' mix' fascination with the externals of religion, but fails to generate any real insights into the more 'substantive' dimensions of religion, such as its fundamental myths, doctrines and values. In Toller's *Die Wandlung*, religious motifs are 're-mythified' and imbued with secular, socio-political utopian meanings. I argued that both Artaud and Grotowski look to ritual as a medium of change and even upheaval. This is clearly a very different type of ritual from those traditional religious rituals which promote continuity and provide reassurance. Moreover, the transformations which Artaud and Grotowski seek to produce are quasi-therapeutic and self-directed rather than religious in nature. It was suggested that the emphasis placed on self-discovery and self-realisation by these two practitioners sits very uneasily with their programmatic desire to create quasi-religious experiences of community within the theatre. It was also found, however, that while Grotowski's programmatic texts frequently transplant religious concepts – such as 'via negativa', 'apotheosis', 'holiness' or 'communion' – into a secular frame of reference, many of the actual productions of his Laboratory Theatre did succeed in provoking reflections on the contemporary relevance of religion itself.

In subsequent chapters, I will analyse the work of Botho Strauß, George Tabori and Werner Fritsch against this context of modern religious theatre. I will examine how Strauß adopts the 'high' Expressionist *Stationendrama* form, but, like Kaiser and Beckett, deploys religious elements ironically in order to examine their contemporary meaningfulness. I will argue that while Tabori overtly emulates Beckett in the way he ironises and pokes fun at religion, he simultaneously appeals to religion as a source of authority which imbues his black comedies with a sense of profundity and ethical legitimacy. Finally, I will show that in both theory and praxis, Fritsch is indebted to the traditions of twentieth century avant gardists such as Artaud and Grotowski, deploying religious signs as part of an attempt to re-enchant theatre, yet practicing a secular spirituality of the self.

3. ‘Niemand will mehr zu Gott’? Botho Strauß’ *Groß und klein* and *Die eine und die andere*

Due to its striking use of religious imagery, Botho Strauß’ *Die eine und die andere. Stück in zwei Akten* (2005), was cited by Germany’s foremost theatre journal, *Theater heute*, as exemplifying religion’s twenty-first century ‘return’ to German theatre.²¹³ However, this ignored the fact that religion has been present in the theatrical texts of Strauß – one of Germany’s most acclaimed writers and regarded in some quarters as the voice of his generation²¹⁴ – since the beginning of his long, prolific career. In order to illustrate the broad tenet of this thesis that religion has informed contemporary German theatre and drama for a good deal longer, and to a greater extent, than many critics acknowledge,²¹⁵ it will be shown in this chapter that religion also played an extremely prominent role in Strauß’ breakthrough play, *Groß und klein. Szenen* (1978).²¹⁶

²¹³ Franz Wille, 'Seltsame Heilige', *Theater heute*, 3 (2005), pp. 4-7.

²¹⁴ See for example Marcel Reich-Ranicki, 'Gleicht die Liebe einem Monolog', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 September 1977.

²¹⁵ While ample critical literature has been dedicated to the significance of myth in Strauß’ work, comparatively little has been written on the place of religion in his dramas. The following are notable exceptions, and will be referred to where relevant over the course of this chapter: Gerhard vom Hofe and Peter Pfaff, 'Botho Strauß und die Poetik der Endzeit', in Michael Radix (ed.), *Strauß Lesen* (Munich: Hanser, 1987), pp. 37-63, provides a broad overview of the way in which religious and mythological motifs are used throughout Strauß’ oeuvre to highlight the contemporary emptiness of traditional teleological concepts. Similarly, Christoph Türcke, 'Auferstehung als schlechte Unendlichkeit. Theologisches bei Botho Strauß', *Frankfurter Hefte*, 4 (1982), pp. 50-56, argues that Strauß’ prose works deploy resurrection motifs to highlight the meaninglessness of the passage of time. As its title suggests, Sebastian Schauburger’s doctoral thesis, *Permanenz der Urbilder. Mythische und biblische Anspielungen bei Botho Strauß* (Universität Bielefeld, 2000 <<http://bieson.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/volltexte/2003/169/>>), is a rather descriptive account of Strauß’ deployment of biblical and mythological motifs, and includes one section on *Groß und klein* (pp. 137-164). Christine Winkelmann, *Die Suche nach dem großen Gefühl. Wahrnehmung und Weltbezug bei Botho Strauß und Peter Handke* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990) examines in one section (pp. 17-61) the relationship between the disintegration of man’s relationship with God and the enervation of human relationships and emotions.

²¹⁶ I would like to note here in passing that *Groß und klein* also seems to anticipate in several respects Lukas Bärfuß’ *Der Bus* (2005), another work cited as exemplifying religion’s ‘return’ this millennium. Bärfuß’ play was widely celebrated for its supposedly original and provocative probing of the place of

Strauß' first major critical and commercial success,²¹⁷ *Groß und klein* was widely celebrated as an incisive portrait of late 1970's West German society. 'Zum ersten Mal – ich hoffe, nicht zu übertreiben – ist hier die Apparatur unserer gegenwärtigen Zivilisation in ein lückenloses System von Theaterzeichen übersetzt worden,' enthused Reinhard Baumgart in *Die Zeit*; similarly, Wolfgang Ignée wrote in the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* that Strauß 'hat wie kein anderer Gegenwartsstückeschreiber seine Zeit gefunden'.²¹⁸ So here the curious situation emerges whereby a play rich in religious language, motifs, themes and various other religious signs is felt to articulate the *Zeitgeist* of an advanced capitalist and supposedly secular society – a society in which, according to the play's central figure, Lotte, 'niemand will mehr zu Gott' (*Gk*, p. 150). This chapter seeks to interrogate this curious situation by examining the relationship between religious elements and socio-cultural commentary in Strauß' theatrical texts. Though the focus of the discussion is weighted somewhat in favour of *Groß und klein*, in which religious signs are most pervasive, I will draw comparisons with *Die eine und die andere*, along with some other brief examples of Strauß' writing, in order to demonstrate that the fundamental positions explored in the earlier play have barely changed over the intervening decades. I will begin by examining the

religion in contemporary German society (see, among others, Christine Dössel, 'Leben ist Glaubenssache', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 1 February 2005; Stefan Grund, 'Im spirituellen Vakuum - ein übler Zustand', *Die Welt*, 29 January 2005; Monika Nellison, 'Pilgerfahrt als Passionsgeschichte', *Die Welt*, 31 January 2005, and Eberhard Rathgeb, 'Wenn wir Todesraben krächzen', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 31 January 2005). But in fact *Der Bus* demonstrates a number of striking echoes of *Groß und klein*, in that it is a *Stationendrama* depicting the persecution of a religiously-motivated young woman in an individualistic, spiritually bankrupt society which has become distanced from its Judaeo-Christian heritage. However, a more detailed examination of the similarities and differences between these two plays cannot be undertaken here.

²¹⁷ With 48 different productions between 1979 and 1986, *Groß und klein* was staged more often than any of Strauß' other plays of that period, and the overwhelming majority of critics surveyed by *Theater heute* singled it out as the best play of the 1978/9 season. Moray McGowan, 'Unendliche Geschichte für die Momo-Moderne? Rezeptionskontexte zum märchenhaften Erfolg der Stücke von Botho Strauß', *TheaterZeitschrift*, 15 (1986), pp. 88-106, p. 88.

²¹⁸ Reinhard Baumgart, 'Ein Engel aus Remscheid-Lennep', *Die Zeit*, 6 October 1978, and Wolfgang Ignée, 'Szenen einer Nicht-Ehe', *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 11 December 1978.

cultural pessimism which pervades these two plays and establishing a broad sense of what this pessimism has to do with religion. Secondly, I will examine how certain religious motifs in *Groß und klein* are used to express anxieties about contemporary culture. In the third section of this chapter I turn to Strauß' treatment of themes of religious longing and struggle. Finally, I will consider the theatrical and dramaturgical effects created by Strauß' very distinctive invocation of religion, arguing that the highly unsettling juxtapositions of religious elements and quotidian reality promote a fresh engagement with the contemporary meaningfulness and relevance of religion.

3.1 Religion and cultural despair

Groß und klein is a postmodern *Stationendrama* which depicts the lonely Lotte's quest for meaningful human contact from a package holiday in Morocco through day-to-day scenarios in Saarbrücken, Essen and Sylt. Like the central figure of the Expressionist *Stationendrama*, who, as Peter Szondi puts it, 'trifft zwar auf Menschen, aber sie bleiben ihm fremd',²¹⁹ Lotte encounters, but is rebuffed by, a succession of stereotyped representatives of mainstream society. However, in contrast to the typical high Expressionist protagonist, who heroically revolts against bourgeois norms, Lotte is an outsider who desperately wants to be accepted as an insider, and this results in a series of ill-judged attempts on her part – more cringe-inducing than inspiring – to forge relationships. Ironically, it is precisely because she tries so hard to be accepted that she is ostracised, for the central (and perhaps only) norm governing human relationships of the 1970s, according to the play, is that one be independent and aloof, a norm summed up by the advice of Lotte's estranged husband, Paul: 'In den siebziger Jahren finde sich einer zurecht' (*Gk*, p. 178). Another major difference between Strauß' central figure and the typical Expressionist protagonist is the fact that Lotte is a woman, embodying a range of stereotypically 'female' attributes which are drastically at odds with the stereotypically 'male' qualities that are valued by the people around her. Thus whereas the secondary figures are generally detached, unfeeling and

²¹⁹Peter Szondi, *Theorie des modernen Dramas* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), p. 47.

rational, Lotte is needy, emotional and mentally fragile.²²⁰ She is an ambivalent *Stationendrama* central figure, therefore, in that she is embarrassingly gauche yet also functions as a figure of identification, demonstrating characteristics which are clearly supposed to be – and were certainly perceived by critics to be – preferable alternatives to the soullessness of her contemporaries: ‘Je kälter, je aussichtsloser es zugeht, desto „wärmer“, mitleiderregender wirkt Lotte: ihr kommt zugute, was an Apathie um sie herum ist’, wrote Gerhard Stadelmeier in the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, while Peter Iden claimed in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* ‘daß wir alle mit jener Lotte etwas gemeinsam haben’.²²¹

As socio-cultural critique, *Groß und klein*’s main themes are the atomisation, broken relationships, self-absorption, neuroticism, materialism, apathy and stunted emotions which Strauß depicts as characteristic of the Federal Republic of the 1970s.²²² It also portrays a breakdown in human communication, continually pointing up the irony that the technology of the communications age – the telephones, radios, televisions, computers, Dictaphones or intercoms which feature in almost every scene – has actually created greater emotional distance between people. In contrast to the hysterical anti-bourgeois rhetoric of high Expressionist dramas, however, the tone of Strauß’ critique is resigned and muted, and instead of Expressionist gestures of exalted suffering, *Groß und klein* depicts scene after scene of banal discontent. Yet the underlying implication is that such discontent can be more damaging, in its way, than more extreme kinds of suffering: ‘Sowas kommt nicht mal im Krieg vor. / Statt Krieg haben wir das. / Haben wir Pech’,

²²⁰ Lotte’s religiosity – discussed in section 3.3 of this chapter – might be seen as another typically female characteristic, for sociological research suggests that ‘in western societies, women are more religious than men on every measure of religiosity.’ Tony Walter and Grace Davie, ‘The Religiosity of Women in the Modern West’, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 49/4 (1998), pp. 640-60.

²²¹ Gerhard Stadelmeier, ‘Eiseskälte wie von Eiscreme’, *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 19 February 1979, and Peter Iden, ‘Statt Krieg haben wir das’, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 December 1978.

²²² Themes to do with the so-called ‘Beziehungselend’ and the ‘Wunsch nach mehr Wärme und menschlicher Nähe’ preoccupied many other major West German writers of the 1970s and 1980s, including Nicolas Born, Gerhard Roth, Hannelies Taschau, Karin Struck, Peter Handke and Martin Walser. Hermann Glaser, *Kulturgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (3; Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1989), p. 124.

(*Gk*, p. 224) grumbles Lotte's sister-in-law, drawing a rather outrageous parallel between the torment of war and the indeterminate malaise – what psychologists now call 'influenza', perhaps – afflicting her wealthy but dysfunctional family.

It is often argued that the 'Alltagsmisere'²²³ depicted in *Groß und klein* perfectly captured the disillusionment which followed the failed utopianism of the late 1960's student movement.²²⁴ However, a very similar mood of muted depression is present almost thirty years later in *Die eine und die andere*, though here post-*Wende* disillusionment is the major contributing factor to this mood. The setting of the play, a failing Oderbruch hotel at the end of a hot, arid summer, feels no less desolate than Lotte's stations, but in place of *Groß und klein*'s *Stationendrama* structure, *Die eine und die andere* constellates its characters in Beckettian-style pairs (a much more common constellation in Strauß' writing²²⁵). The title of the play refers to the begrudgingly interdependent archenemies at its centre, Insa and Lissie. Both of these figures belong to the same generation as Lotte (and indeed Strauß himself),²²⁶ which is now approaching pensionable age. Insa runs the hotel with her daughter, Elaine, and is joined one day by Lissie, who almost thirty years previously had had a son, Timm, by Insa's (now ex-) husband. Realising that most of their contemporaries are 'weg, gestorben, verschwunden, wiederverheiratet, verspießert und verkegelt' (*Ea*, p. 25), Insa and Lissie resign themselves to living out the rest of their days squabbling with each other. Meanwhile, Tim and Elaine, who are unaware that they are related, form another pair after they become acquainted in a shopping centre.

²²³ Georg Hensel, 'Ausführliche Erkrankung eines Engels', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 December 1978.

²²⁴ See for example Dieter Kafitz, 'Die Problematisierung des individualistischen Menschenbildes im deutschsprachigen Drama der Gegenwart', *Basis. Jahrbuch für deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur*, 10 (1980), pp. 93-126, p. 125, and McGowan, 'Unendliche Geschichte für die Momo-Moderne?', pp. 88-9.

²²⁵ Characters function in pairs in prose works such as *Marlenes Schwester* (1975), *Theorie der Drohung* (1975), *Die Widmung* (1977) and *Rumor* (1980), and in theatrical texts including *Kalldewey*, *Farce* (1982), *Der Park* (1984), *Das Gleichgewicht* (1993) and *Unerwartete Rückkehr* (2002).

²²⁶ In fact, in the Berliner Ensemble's 2005 production of the play, Insa was played by Edith Clever, who had played Lotte to critical acclaim in the first production of *Groß und klein* at the Berliner Schaubühne.

Die eine und die andere repeats the basic socio-cultural criticisms that are made in *Groß und klein*. Like Lotte's contemporaries, Insa and Lissie are neurotic, individualistic and cold, but here it is their children who suffer as a result. Timm is weak-willed, incapable of action, and, like Lotte, tormented by the failure of human communication in a technologically advanced age: 'Wie leicht ist es, Nachrichtensatelliten an den Himmel zu schießen, die alle Menschen miteinander verbinden. Aber Vater und Sohn hören nichts mehr voneinander', he complains (*Ea*, p. 38). Meanwhile Elaine is dominated by her mother and alienated from society – one of the scenes in which she features is called 'Cocooning' (*Ea*, pp. 17-20), a marketing term used to describe the retreat of the individual from society to the domestic sphere – and she resorts to performing sadomasochistic acts in a bid to escape the sterility of her surroundings. As in *Groß und klein*, the position put forward is that the banality of late capitalist society is possibly worse than real, material suffering, because it leads to a hollowing out of human experience and emotion. (A similar idea is explored in Strauß' 1977 novella, *Die Widmung*, in which the narrator complains that 'Das wirkliche Leben bietet keine Gelegenheiten, an denen man sich satt erleben könnte'.²²⁷) Belying Strauß' reputation as an obscurantist (see p. 98 below), this position is conveyed in a very blatant manner when Insa and Lissie visit an exhibition on futurology and learn about a soon-to-emerge disease called 'Dolorie', where sufferers become addicted to self-inflicted pain because life is otherwise oppressively bland (*Ea*, p. 41). It need hardly be remarked that Strauß' complaints about the banality of the Western middle-class way of life would surely be rather galling for the very many people in the world who do not have the luxury of the 'nahezu schmerzfrei' (*Ea*, p. 41) conditions depicted in his plays.

The attitude of resigned gloom struck in *Groß und klein* and *Die eine und die andere* brings to mind Kenneth Tynan's criticism of the Theatre of the Absurd that it wallowed in 'privileged despair' rather than attempting to develop constructive

²²⁷ Botho Strauß, *Die Widmung. Eine Erzählung* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), p. 63.

insights into the social causes of, or possible remedies to, human misery.²²⁸ Like the Absurd playwrights, Strauß apportions a large part of the blame for the misery of contemporary experience to metaphysical losses which human beings are now in no position to recuperate. A link is repeatedly made in the two theatrical texts under discussion here between the various inadequacies of everyday life and one of the fundamental upheavals of modernity: the erosion of the religious and mythic heritage of Western culture.²²⁹ Briefly summarised, Strauß' view, as propounded in several culturally conservative essays, is that Western society's focus on progress and innovation has almost entirely erased its connection with its mythic-religious roots, leading to a vapid 'liberal-libertäre Selbstbezogenheit' which offers no higher beliefs or values to inspire, provide order or bind people together.²³⁰ In Strauß' theatrical texts, the 'Fortschrittsradikalismus',²³¹ dominating

²²⁸ Kenneth Tynan, 'Mortal Fools Without a Lord', *The Observer*, 3 June 1962. Cf. Michael Schneider's criticism of Strauß for indulging the self-pity of his middle-class audiences. Schneider also attacks the conservatism at the heart of Strauß' rapturous reception by a literary establishment in which, he claims, 'Untröstlichkeit' is regarded as a 'literarische Gütezeichen' (p. 236): 'Wie man weiß, lieben die hiesigen Kulturverwalter den Geruch des Todes und der Verwesung, weil er so ein schönes, vornehmes Frösteln erzeugt. Sie lieben die verzweifelt Abgesänge auf das Leben, die düsteren Nekrologe auf eine Gesellschaft, in der es ihnen doch bestens geht; auf deren Veränderung zu pochen ihnen daher nicht im Traume einfiel, ja, geradezu obszön erschiene. Was gibt es auch Schöneres als Hoffnungslosigkeit? Hoffnung verpflichtet nämlich' (p. 250). Michael Schneider, *Den Kopf verkehrt aufgesetzt: oder Die melancholische Linke. Aspekte des Kulturzerfalls in den 70er Jahren* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1981).

²²⁹ Though mythological allusions are profuse in *Die eine und die andere*, my discussion is limited to Strauß' explorations of religious loss.

²³⁰ Botho Strauß, 'Anschwellender Bocksgesang', *Der Spiegel*, 8 February 1993. 'Anschwellender Bocksgesang' is the most notorious of Strauß' polemics, largely because his use of the term 'rechts' to describe his position seemed to suggest proto-fascist tendencies. Yet the essay's reflections on themes of religion, sacrifice and community – in particular the claim that mainstream European culture is incapable of understanding the mentality of cultures which are prepared to make sacrifices in order to defend their beliefs and values – seem to have developed pertinence in the post- '9/11' context. The argument put forward in 'Anschwellender Bocksgesang' that the West needs to re-examine its relationship with its historical values and traditions also appears to have grown in relevance in the 2000s, when there has been a growing discourse on the role which the Graeco-Roman-Judaeo-Christian heritage should play in an expanding and increasingly multicultural Europe (see for example José Casanova, 'Religion, European secular identities, and European integration', *Eurozine*, 29 July 2004 <<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2004-07-29-casanova-en.html>>, accessed July 2004; and Danièle Hervieu-Léger, 'The Role of Religion in Establishing Social Cohesion', *Eurozine*, 17 August 2006; <<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-10-02-hervieuleger-it.html>>, accessed August 2006). Strauß himself returned to this theme in 'Der Konflikt', an essay published in *Der Spiegel* in 2006 which considers multiculturalism and the limits of tolerance, and argues that the spread of Islam offers the opportunity to re-evaluate the place of 'die alten zivilen Werte' in contemporary European identity: 'Mit der westlichen Einfühlung in einen unüberwindlichen Antagonismus, sakral/säkular, ist die herrschende Beliebtheit, sind Synkretismus und Gleich-Gültigkeit in eine Krise geraten. Vielleicht darf man sogar sagen: Wir haben sie hinter uns. Es war eine schwache Zeit!' (Botho Strauß, 'Der Konflikt', *Der Spiegel*, 13 February 2006). In contrast to the apocalyptic tone of 'Anschwellender Bocksgesang' 'Der Konflikt' concludes on a note of optimism, but the sweeping, divisive rhetoric

contemporary life tends to be traced back to the antiauthoritarianism and antitraditionalism of the 1968 generation. In *Die eine und die andere*, for example, former '1968er' Insa and Lissie suffer from 'Gedächtnislücken' (*Ea*, p. 26) and are obsessed with technological innovations and futurology. One of the characteristics which starkly separates Lotte from the forward-looking secondary figures in *Groß und klein*, meanwhile, is her profound inability to let go of the past (even her name calls to mind Lot's wife, who turned to salt because she looked back [Genesis 19:26]): 'Oh, wie ich mich erinnern muß! / Bitte Paul, weitermachen, zusammenbleiben. / Sonst sterb ich an zuviel Gedächtnis!' (*Gk*, p. 178) she begs Paul.

The severance of the West's bonds with its ancient traditions, beliefs and values is shown in a good deal of Strauß' work to have contributed to pervasive rootlessness, purposelessness, incoherence, loss of identity and 'pluralistisches Chaos.'²³² His texts frequently invoke modern science (particularly chaos theory) to reinforce this sense of disorder, and they lament the manner in which the scientific worldview has shattered all previously cherished ideas about humanity's place in the universe, to profoundly disorientating effect: 'Ein solches Weltbild ist nichts für Kinder und nichts für Christen und schon gar nichts für Marxisten,' complains the narrator of Strauß' 1982 novel, *Rumor*. 'Es bedroht jede Philosophie, die den Menschen in ihren Mittelpunkt steht, indem es die tatsächliche Abseitigkeit seiner Existenz in der Naturgeschichte verkündet.'²³³ Over the course of her quest Lotte is overwhelmed, and ultimately mentally destroyed, by the chaos which surrounds her. 'Alles ist sehr einfach: nichts klappt. / [...] Überall Unordnung, jahrelang / Unordnung und Pech' (*Gk*, pp. 131-135) she bemoans in her very first monologue, ostensibly a litany of complaints about her unsatisfactory holiday which in fact has the quality of an existential lament. (As we shall see, this is one of many moments in Strauß' texts in which the mundane is

of 'us' (indigenous white Europeans?) versus 'them' (Muslims?) in this essay is nonetheless troubling.

²³¹ Botho Strauß, 'Die Distanz ertragen. Programm eines Wiederanfangs – Rudolf Borchardt und die Entstehung von Vergangenheit', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 May 1987.

²³² Botho Strauß, *Paare, Passanten* (Munich: Hanser, 1981), p. 178.

²³³ Botho Strauß, *Rumor. Roman* (Munich: Hanser, 1982), p. 143.

conflated with the profound.) Lotte's painful awareness of a lost totality is echoed by Elaine in *Die eine und die andere*,²³⁴ whose sense of fragmentation and dissociation is compounded by the absence – not just literally, but also metaphysically – of a father-figure.²³⁵ Even Elaine's mother is perturbed by feelings of purposelessness, lamenting that since time has been drained of teleological meaning, it has become as aimless as a stray dog. The anxiety expressed here that the passage of time lacks meaning in a desecralised world – that, as Lotte puts it, 'Die Zeit vergeht, aber nicht richtig' (*Gk*, p. 131) – also runs throughout *Groß und klein*, and indeed through many of Strauß' other writings, too:²³⁶

Nämlich die Zeit war der Hund der Götter. Und als die Götter alle vertrieben und verschwunden waren, da lief dieser Köter herrenlos, verwildert und hungrig jaulend rund um die Welt. Da er keinen Brocken von der Goldenen Dauer mehr fand, die ihm die Himmlischen einst zuwarfen, fraß er nun die Wochen und die Tage, sogar die Minuten und die Sekunden, und dann die klitzekleinen Augenblicke. Und doch wurde immer magerer.
(*Ea*, p. 22)

Of course, themes such as eroded 'metanarratives', cultural fragmentation, existential disorientation and metaphysical rootlessness were already present in the Theatre of the Absurd, and they continue to be prominent in postmodernist art. However, Strauß' treatment of these themes generally lacks the facetiousness which is sometimes associated with postmodernism. Instead, his theatrical texts lament the disintegration of the West's religious traditions and link it with various negative consequences: not only existential and metaphysical chaos, but also the enervation of human emotions and relationships, because, as Christine Winkelmann puts it, 'Lust und Liebe kann es nur geben, wenn es eine

²³⁴ See for example *Ea*, p. 48: 'Wenn Mann und Frau. Mond und Sonne. / Land und Meer. Die große Scheidung. / Himmel und Hölle. Wenn das nun alles nicht mehr / zusammenpaßt? Wenn das nie wieder eins wird am / Ende?'

²³⁵ Cf. Christopher Schmidt, 'Sprache, die sich Körper sucht', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 29 January 2005.

²³⁶ Christoph Türcke goes so far as to suggest that Strauß' writings 'sind allesamt Aufzeichnungen der universal und allmächtig werdenden leeren Zeit, in der, auf dem Höhepunkt der Betriebsamkeit der Weltmaschine, eigentlich nichts mehr passiert, weil alles, was passiert, seiner Bestimmtheit beraubt ist und als Schatten seiner selbst im Dunkel jener Zeit verschwindet, die es ausfüllt.' 'Auferstehung als schlechte Unendlichkeit', p. 51.

Lebensordnung den Rahmen dafür vorgibt.²³⁷ Strauß' texts therefore also differ from those of Absurdists such as Beckett, in that they examine the implications of religious loss in very ordinary, familiar settings, exploring how 'great' losses have impacted even on the 'smallest' events and interactions of everyday life, as the title *Groß und klein* might suggest. The following section interrogates how religious motifs are used to make this link between 'great' and 'small'. Focusing on just a few examples from *Groß und klein*, I will show that religious motifs firstly expose and mourn their own loss of meaning; secondly, that they prompt reflections on the everyday implications of this loss; and thirdly, that they serve as instruments of cultural critique by creating a 'higher' (or 'greater') critical perspective from which the inadequacies of the present can be viewed.

3.2 *Religious motifs: The evocation of loss and cultural critique*

For the mostly irreligious secondary figures of *Groß und klein*, the Judaeo-Christian heritage has wasted away to a few vestiges whose original significance has long since disappeared. In *Die Widmung*, the narrator memorably compares such vestiges to an ancient custom which continues to be performed by an Abyssinian tribe, even though the original meaning of the custom has been lost:

So ergeht es uns nicht anders als jenem abbessinischen Eingeborenen, der einen wichtigen Mythos nicht mehr wußte und sich deshalb nicht erklären konnte, weshalb er zu so verschiedenartigen Anlässen ein Stück Butter auf dem Kopf trug. "Unsere Vorfahren kannten den Sinn der Dinge, aber wir haben ihn vergessen".

Wir kennen den Sinn der unzähligen Überbleibsel, in denen wir uns ausdrücken, noch sehr viel weniger. Das allermeiste ist uns Butter auf dem Kopf. Und kein Mythos, kein Romanwerk wird es uns je wieder erklären.²³⁸

Like the religious 'Kulturmüll' strewn throughout Beckett's dramas, religious elements are very often deployed in Strauß' dramas in a way that highlights their degeneration to meaningless cultural 'Überbleibsel'.²³⁹ The most obvious examples of such leftovers in *Groß und klein* are the colloquial vociferations such

²³⁷ Winkelmann, *Die Suche nach dem großen Gefühl*, p. 63.

²³⁸ Strauß, *Die Widmung*, p. 65.

²³⁹ Cf. the discussion of Strauß' thematisation of 'die verlorene metaphysische Bedeutsamkeit der heilsgeschichtlichen Überbleibsel' in vom Hofe and Pfaff, 'Botho Strauß und die Poetik der Endzeit', p. 39.

as ‘Großer Gott’, ‘Gebe Gott’ or ‘Mein Gott’ (*Gk*, p. 161, p. 163, p. 244), which, along with technological and scientific jargon, literary allusions, advertising slogans and street slang, contribute to the bricolage-style language of the secondary figures. ‘Die große Freizeit kommt, so sicher wie das Amen in der Kirche’ (*Gk*, p. 254) warns a chess-mad computer technician in the penultimate scene: a religious allusion made here by a figure who is completely indifferent to religion (‘Nicht mal [...] Atheist –’ he tells the outraged Lotte [*Gk*, p. 251]) ironically highlights the fact that, for most people, religion now survives only in a set of empty clichés.

While his theatrical texts imply that the original significance of religious ‘Überbleibsel’ has been lost forever, one of Strauß’ stated programmatic goals is nonetheless to fight against this memory loss. In ‘Der Aufstand gegen die sekundäre Welt’ (1990), his epilogue to the German translation of George Steiner’s *Real Presences: Is There Anything in What We Say?*, Strauß argues that art has an anamnestic function, which he compares to that of the Eucharist.²⁴⁰ It will be shown in subsequent chapters that recalling the past is also a major goal for George Tabori and Werner Fritsch.²⁴¹ However, whereas Tabori and Fritsch remind their audiences of what took place during a specific historical era – namely the Third Reich – Strauß invokes a less definable sense of religio-mythic ‘pastness’. His theatrical texts do not try to counteract the loss of religious memory by reminding us in any specificity of the original meanings of religious vestiges. Instead, they evoke recognition of something once present but now wholly lost to us. Such moments of recognition are described in *Die Widmung* as unexpected, fleeting and disconcerting:

²⁴⁰ ‘Jedes Opus ist Opfer, alle Dichtkunst die Magd der anámnesis, im ursprünglichen Wortsinn des Alten und Neuen Testaments: “sich vor Gott ein Ereignis der Vergangenheit so in Erinnerung zu bringen oder zu ‘repräsentieren’, daß es hier und jetzt wirksam wird”. Hierin feiern Gedicht und Eucharistie dasselbe; im Versklang tönt noch der “Brotbrechlaut”.’ Botho Strauß, ‘Der Aufstand gegen die sekundäre Welt. Bemerkungen zu einer Ästhetik der Anwesenheit’, *Die Zeit*, 22 June 1990. First published as a postscript to George Steiner, *Von realer Gegenwart. Hat unser Sprechen Inhalt?* (Munich: Hanser, 1990), pp. 305-320.

²⁴¹ Redefinitions of theatre as a locus of remembrance also take place in the work of numerous other contemporary writers and practitioners, including Elfriede Jelinek, Heiner Müller, Rainald Goetz, Marlene Streeruwitz, Tadeusz Kantor, Sam Shepard and Thomas Bernhard. See Jeanette R. Malkin, *Memory-Theatre and Postmodern Drama* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), and Franziska Schössler, *Augen-Blicke: Erinnerung, Zeit und Geschichte in Dramen der neunziger Jahre* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2004).

Du hebst, mitten in einer leichteren Unterhaltung, ganz ungewollt, ein Wort hervor, das ziemlich belastet ist von vergangenen Bedeutungen. Vielleicht das Wort "Scham". Etwas verwirrt dich dabei, du spürst ganz deutlich eine kulturelle Erfahrung, die du selber nicht gemacht haben kannst. Doch kaum ist das Wort geäußert, da, merkst du, sinkt es auch schon wieder, unhaltbar schwer, zurück in die Geschichte. Es war wohl doch nur ein Zitat. Ein Paar Gänsefüßchen, das dich gekitzelt hat; das Wort selber hat dich nicht berührt.²⁴²

As well as resisting contemporary 'Fortschrittsradikalismus' by evoking such disquieting recognitions of lost meaningfulness, Strauß' use of religious motifs provokes reflections on the implications of this loss. Returning to the 'große Freizeit' example cited earlier, the chess fan's predictions of a looming leisure culture have a distinctly apocalyptic flavour: 'Vielleicht schon morgen, vielleicht erst übermorgen', he warns. 'Wer sich dann nicht fest / in der Hand hat, wer sich dann nicht zu beschäftigen weiß, wer sich also gehen läßt – !' (*Gk*, p. 254) The echoes of Christ's 'Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come' (Matthew 25:13) produce bathos, but they also offer a bleak commentary on the emptiness of contemporary life by contrasting the transcendent *telos* once offered by religion with the banal prospect of never-ending leisure time, thus confirming Lotte's deep fears that the passage of time has been drained of real meaning.

Another striking instance of the ironic deployment of religious motifs to comment on the inadequacies of the present can be found in the second station of Lotte's journey, entitled 'Nachtwache'. Here, Lotte pokes her head in through the bedroom window of a former socialite and her husband, and, in an awkward attempt to ingratiate herself, compares the socialite's beauty to that of a medieval lady:

Lotte

Im Mittelpunkt des Mittelalters stand felsenfest das Bild der wunderschönen Frau.

Denn sie war damals dem Manne der erste Schritt zu Gott.

Frau

Und ist es noch. Und ist es heute wie damals!

Lotte

²⁴² Strauß, *Die Widmung*, p. 65.

Nur: niemand will mehr zu Gott.
Wer will noch über die schöne Frau hinaus?
Sie ist dem Manne zum Selbstzweck geworden.
(*Gk*, pp. 149-50)

The picture painted by Lotte of a medieval world in which romantic love offered the possibility of transcendence clashes in a bleakly comical way with the cold, mistrustful relationship between man and wife depicted in this scene, and the irony that life is not remotely ‘heute wie damals’ is abundantly clear. The disappearance of the sacred, it is implied, has taken a disastrous toll on earthly relationships. The paranoid wife is so suspicious of her own husband that she cannot bear to have him near her while she sleeps, demonstrating a lack of faith in human relationships which perhaps reflects the decline of religious faith: ‘um wieviel sinnvoller ist es, das Leben im Vertrauen zu begründen statt im Mißtrauen, das mit dem Sturz des Heiligen allzufrüh geweckt wird und sich rasch ausbreitet, fortfrißt bis in die Liebe’ muses the narrator of Strauß’ *Die Fehler des Kopisten* (1997) as he listens to his son saying his bedtime prayers.²⁴³ Meanwhile, because she is now a ‘Selbstzweck’ rather than ‘der erste Schritt zu Gott’, the wife cannot offer her husband the possibility of transcending the day-to-day grind and the functionalistic specificity (or ‘smallness’) of his identity – a manufacturer of tiny ventilation valves for aquariums – in the consumer capitalist system.²⁴⁴ The longing to transcend material reality remains – ‘Meine Selbstachtung bist du. Laß das Materielle nur ein Lustspiel sein, laß es da unten nur kichern und kreischen. Hier oben soll es ernst bleiben und still. Hier oben wir’ (*Gk*, p. 153), implores the husband – but in the contemporary world it cannot be fulfilled.

In the station ‘Familie im Garten’ – its idyllic-sounding title jarring ironically with the highly dysfunctional family portrayed in the scene –, religious iconography again serves to evoke a perturbing recognition of lost meaningfulness, and in so doing to highlight the diminished state of contemporary human emotions and relationships. A statue of the weeping Madonna in the barren, concrete garden of

²⁴³ Botho Strauß, *Die Fehler des Kopisten* (Munich: Hanser, 1997), p. 41.

²⁴⁴ Cf. the analysis of Strauß’ thematisation of ‘die automatisierte Welt der Spezialisten und Funktionsträger im “technischen Zeitalter”’, in Kafitz, ‘Die Problematisierung des individualistischen Menschenbildes im deutschsprachigen Drama der Gegenwart’, p. 94.

this bickering family is another religious leftover: detached from its original meaning, it serves a purely ornamental purpose.²⁴⁵ Tellingly, however, the statue appeals to Lotte on a level beyond the aesthetic. Providing a hint of the religiosity which will manifest itself with full force in the following scene, she strikingly identifies with the grief-stricken Madonna: 'Bevor ich dir begegnet bin, Albert, / da war ich in ebensolchem Schmerz erstarrt / wie die Figur dort auf der kleinen Säule ...' (*Gk*, p. 217) she tells her bored nephew. Again, there is an element of bathos in Lotte's identification with this kitsch garden ornament, but the Madonna nonetheless also functions as an image of profound anguish and all-consuming maternal love which throws into relief the pettiness of the disgruntlement exhibited by the family. The statue serves not to inform or remind spectators about the concrete theological significance of the *Mater Dolorosa*, but to evoke a depth of feeling (of literally 'biblical' proportions, one might say) which, according to Strauß' analysis, is no longer possible. The writer and critic Susan Sontag once argued that 'despite the virtual incomprehensibility to most educated people today of the substantive experience behind religious vocabulary, there is a continuing piety toward the grandeur of emotions that went into that vocabulary'.²⁴⁶ I would suggest that in 'Familie im Garten', the Madonna emblem calls to mind just such 'grandeur of emotions', and in so doing it creates what Hans-Thies Lehmann calls (albeit in reference to the place of mythic motifs in Strauß' writing) 'einen ästhetisch überzeugenden Ort [...], von dem aus ein Blick von oben auf dem Kleinmut der Menschen fallen kann'.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵Elke Emrich, ' "Der Mensch verliert das Bild vom Menschen". Wahnsinn und Gesellschaft in Botho Strauß' *Groß und klein*', *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter*, 87 (1983), pp. 225-41, p. 237.

²⁴⁶Susan Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 69.

²⁴⁷ Hans-Thies Lehmann, 'Mythos und Postmoderne: Botho Strauß, Heiner Müller', in Albrecht Schöne (ed.), *Kontroversen, alte und neue*. (Akten des VII. Internationalen Germanisten-Kongresses Göttingen 1985, 10; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986), pp. 249-55, p. 252. However, whereas Lehmann argues that Strauß deploys mythological motifs primarily to criticise the diminished sexuality of contemporary life, I suggest that *Groß und klein*'s focus is not just sexuality but also everyday human interactions.

In a scene entitled *Zehn Zimmer*, in which the inhabitants of a sterile apartment block gather together to watch a slideshow presented by an elderly couple, it is the central icon of suffering in the Christian tradition, the Crucifixion, which evokes a lost grandeur of emotion. Instead of showing the customary holiday photographs, the slideshow begins with photographs of everyday scenes and objects, and the couple provide a commentary which appears to make a series of extremely abstruse allusions to Martin Heidegger's writings on the deteriorating relationship between human beings and things.²⁴⁸ The mundane images are suddenly interrupted by a slide showing an amateurish, but nonetheless grisly, re-enactment of the Crucifixion, in which a Turkish neighbour plays the part of Christ. The re-enactment emphasises the physical nature of Christ's sufferings, focusing on the crown of thorns and the bleeding scourge wounds. This visceral rendition of the Crucifixion serves, again, to counterpoint the hollow, complacent nature of contemporary existence. It also refers to the genre conventions of the Expressionist *Stationendrama*, in which, as we saw in the previous chapter, Christ on the Cross was invoked as the archetypal image of the persecution of the outcast. But Strauß' use of the symbol has more in common with Beckett's or Georg Kaiser's ironic use of Christian iconography than it does with the sentimental, remythified religious imagery which pervades the work of high Expressionists such as Toller. With the emphasis very firmly on the wounded, victimised Christ as opposed to the Christ of glory, this is a demythified Crucifixion which conveys no message of hope, whether sacred or secular. Here, the Crucifixion highlights the spiritual bankruptcy of the present rather than the possibility of spiritual renewal. Moreover, it evokes an awareness of distance from God rather than a sense of His presence: 'Herr, im Grunde von allem, was wir tun, herrscht dein Schlummer ...'

²⁴⁸ The slide-show appears to make several allusions to Heidegger's 1950 essay, 'Das Ding', which reflects upon ways in which the instrumentalism of technological rationality might be overcome in order to establish a better relationship with the world of things. The couple's discussion of the religious meanings of everyday objects – so that an outpouring of olive oil, for example, recalls Roman Catholic unction ('Öl, wasche mich rein und bringe mir Frieden. / Erbarme dich meiner' [Gk, p. 183]) – echoes Heidegger's eccentric argument in 'Das Ding' that things consist of 'die Einfalt der Vier': earth, sky, gods and mortals. In marked similarity to the scene under discussion, the example Heidegger gives is of an outpouring from a jug: 'Das Geschenk des Gusses ist der Trunk für die Sterblichen. Er labt ihren Durst. Er erquickt ihre Muße. Er erheitert ihre Geselligkeit. Aber das Geschenk des Kruges wird bisweilen auch zur Weihe geschenkt. Ist der Guß zur Weihe, dann stillt er nicht einen Durst. Er stillt die Feier des Festes ins Hohe'. Martin Heidegger, 'Das Ding', in Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. 1. Abteilung: Veröffentlichte Schriften 1910-1976*, ed. Walter Biemel (7; Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), pp. 165-88, pp. 174-5.

intones the old man as he displays the slide (*Gk*, p. 185), while the old woman, too, admits that ‘Jedes Jahr fällt es mir schwerer, an ihn zu glauben (*Gk*, p. 184). The ironic detachment is further intensified by the fact that the Crucifixion is cited in a self-conscious manner, as a kind of play-within-a-play. ‘Habe ich gut gespielt. / Also wirklich, sag ma, gut gespielt,’ the Turkish Christ-figure interrupts the show to brag (*Gk*, p. 185), estranging the image of the Crucifixion in an almost Brechtian manner by calling attention to its theatricality.²⁴⁹ The inane comments of the ‘audience’ of neighbours at the end of the show – ‘Schöne Fotos. Lebendig’ (*Gk*, p. 187) – also have a distancing and deflationary effect by laying bare the artificiality of the moment, and by indicating that what they have witnessed has failed to resonate deeply.

In marked contrast to the quasi-religious emotions which many avant garde practitioners sought to generate by expropriating religious signs, the ironic detachment with which religion is invoked by Strauß prevents any naïve or sentimental escape from the disenchanted present. I have tried to show in the foregoing discussion that his texts instead force the spectator to face up to the repercussions of disenchantment. In the following section I want to explore Strauß’ thematisation of one more of these repercussions: a powerful and destructive religious longing – or, to borrow George Steiner’s expression, a ‘deep, unsettling nostalgia for the absolute’²⁵⁰ – which has a tendency to break through

²⁴⁹ Metatheatricality is a recurring feature of Strauß’ theatrical texts, including *Die eine und die andere*, in which the figures correct each other’s lines, ponder aloud whether they should interrupt the dialogue to take a break, or even call out stage directions. See for example *Ea*, p. 31:

Insa

Wem habe ich gelauscht? Wem nicht alles ... Unterbrechen wir?

Lissie

So nicht, Jetzt nicht.

Insa

Dann eben nicht. Weiter im Text. Was willst du von mir?

Lissie

Ich frage hier. Ich frage dich.

Insa

Ich frage ja gar nicht.

²⁵⁰ George Steiner, *Nostalgia for the Absolute* (Massey Lectures; Toronto: CBC, 1974), p. 50.

the apparently rational, secular surface of everyday life in brutal and traumatic ways. However, as I will show, it is open to question whether it is humanity or in fact ‘the absolute’ itself that is experiencing the nostalgia in Strauß’ texts.

3.3 *Religious struggles and longings*

Groß und klein follows the *Stationendrama* tradition in combining its socio-cultural critique with the theme of spiritual questing. However, despite hints of a latent religiosity which are scattered throughout the play (such as a strange quasi-apocalyptic vision she experiences while on holiday in Morocco; her striking self-identification with the Madonna discussed in the previous section; or the incongruous message of ‘Gott ist einfach. Gott verwandelt sich nicht und betrügt niemanden’ [*Gk*, p. 212] with which she signs off a letter to Paul, to mention just a few examples), in most of her stations Lotte seems to be searching – at the conscious level, at least – for purely this-worldly, human relationships. It is extremely startling, therefore, when in one of the final stations, a strange monologue entitled ‘Falsch verbunden’, her quest is fully forced – seemingly against her wishes – onto the religious plane. The monologue begins with a frail-looking Lotte finally succumbing to despair, disorientation and a sense of dissolution of the self. ‘Wohin?’ she asks herself, a classic *Stationendrama cri de coeur*,²⁵¹ and her monologue combines disjointed biblical, philosophical and scientific allusions with echoes of W.B. Yeats’ poem ‘The Second Coming’ (1921) to express an apocalyptic vision of a world without a centre, in which chaos reigns and ‘Die Dinge, die zusammenpassen, / haben sich satt und fliegen auseinander’ (*Gk*, p. 232). During this monologue Lotte sits alone in front of a massive open book which makes her appear even more vulnerable, and creates a powerful visual evocation of the contrast between ‘great’ and ‘small’ referred to in the play’s title. The book – a traditional religious symbol of divine revelation – is

²⁵¹ See for example the ‘Wohin?’ uttered by Kaiser’s bank clerk protagonist in *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (p. 65).

devoid of script, suggesting that it is yet another empty cultural remnant, and its blank pages reflect Lotte's own sense of complete abandonment.²⁵²

Lotte's existential lament is suddenly interrupted when God appears to burst forth with an answer, though one of the many ambivalences in this scene is that the audience sees nothing, thus creating uncertainty about whether this is really a mystical experience, or just evidence of Lotte's final mental breakdown. In either case, the Christian mystical tradition of describing union with God in erotic terms is brutally travestied here. Whereas mystics such as Origen, Bernard of Clairvaux and Teresa of Avila compared their direct experience of God to a passionate marital union, Lotte greets God much as a proud housewife might receive an unexpected visitor ('Ach Gott, bei mir sieht es chaotisch aus.../ Nein, bitte, laßt mich!' [Gk, p. 233]), and she experiences union with Him as a terrifying rape.²⁵³ Ironically, it is now Lotte who is the one trying to drive away a social outcast: 'Näher dürft Ihr mir aber nicht kommen, / Ehrwürdiger Schöpfer' she cries; 'Ich kann Euch weder Schale noch Kelch sein, / und auch kein anderes Gefäß, / Ihr wünschet denn, ich zerspränge / und ich platzte aus all meinen Nähten' (Gk, p. 234). Thus while August Strindberg's original *Stationendrama, To Damascus*, was about the 'struggle towards God', in Strauß' version it is God who is doing the struggling, towards human beings who seem to need Him, but who do not want Him. In this respect, *Groß und klein* resembles Wolfgang Borchert's post-World War II *Stationendrama, Draußen vor der Tür* (1947), in which God is personified as a frail old man who is as much an outsider in the modern world as the alienated

²⁵² The book also suggests an empty 'Book of Life', in which, according to the Book of Revelation, the names of the righteous are recorded. Associations of Revelation, which states that on the Day of Judgment the righteous will be dressed in white (Revelation 3:5), are also evoked by Lotte's pale face and washed-out clothes. The title of the play itself possibly refers to the following passage from Revelation: 'And I saw the dead, *great and small*, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books' (Revelation, 20:12; my italics).

²⁵³ Again in this chapter I use the male pronoun to refer to God as this is the form used in Strauß' text.

Heimkehrer protagonist, though Strauß' play lacks the pathos of Borchert's treatment of the theme.²⁵⁴

Lotte's attempts to defend herself fail, and the message 'Glaube Liebe Hoffnung' (*Gk*, p. 235) – the three virtues of Christian theology, described by St. Augustine as 'the qualities of a perfected Christian moral life'²⁵⁵ – bleeds from the side of the book, recalling the bloody wounds of the suffering Christ depicted in the old couple's slide-show earlier in the play. Paradoxically then, God appears here as terrifyingly aggressive ('Er dringt hin, wo er will,' says Lotte [*Gk*, p. 235]), yet also, like the victimised Christ, He is suffering and (literally) stigmatised as He tries to make contact with a disenchanted world and to promote values which died out long ago. Winkelmann notes that representations of God or gods as 'verwahrloste Gestalten' who come down to earth only to find that they are unwanted there recur in Strauß' dramas of the 1970s and 1980s:

Die Götter im Werk dieses Autors sind buchstäblich heruntergekommene Götter. Sie haben ihren Wohnsitz jenseits der Welt aufgegeben und existieren nun unter uns als materialisierte Wesen. Diese Götter sind verwahrloste Gestalten, die Kleidung ist ihnen zu groß geworden und außer der Zeit; entsprechend schrumpft auch ihre Macht und ihr Ansehen: als Schurken, Idioten oder Schalfmützen müssen sie sich beschimpfen lassen. Wie die „letzten“ sozialen Randfiguren sind sie Spott und Verunglimpfung ausgesetzt.²⁵⁶

Thus for example in *Der Park*, Oberon and Titania, fairy characters from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, come to 1980's Hamburg in order to

²⁵⁴ See Wolfgang Borchert, *Draußen vor der Tür*, ed. P.B. Salmon (London: Harrap, 1963). Peter Iden suggested in passing that, by capturing the various social, existential and spiritual anxieties of the 1970s, Strauß 'hat ein *Draußen vor der Tür* seiner Generation geschrieben' (Iden, 'Statt Krieg haben wir das',), but this striking comparison cannot be followed up here.

²⁵⁵ David Lyle Jeffrey (ed.), *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1992) p. 761. It should be noted, however, that in the Bible they are not listed by St. Paul in this order (1 Corinthians 13:13: 'And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love'). Strauß' rearrangement of the order of the virtues is possibly an allusion to one of Ödön von Horváth's best known plays, *Glaube Liebe Hoffnung* (1932). Depicting an ostracised young woman's search for human warmth and meaningful communication in a materialistic world which has abandoned the values mentioned in the title, von Horváth's play demonstrates some obvious thematic similarities to *Groß und klein*.

²⁵⁶ Winkelmann, *Die Suche nach dem großen Gefühl*, p. 17.

reinvigorate human sexuality, only to be defeated by human mediocrity and to lose their magical powers in the process.²⁵⁷ A similar type of disappointing God-figure might also be observed in *Die eine und die andere*, where the mysterious father whose absence haunts the entire play turns out to be a shabby down-and-out with nothing to offer his children (*Ea*, pp. 54-5).

Unlike the spiritual renewal undergone by the protagonists of high Expressionist dramas, there is nothing glorious or redemptive about Lotte's encounter with God. In contrast to traditional mystical literature, too, where the experience of ultimate reality imbues power, Lotte's new sense of religious mission only seems to cause increasingly erratic behaviour and to alienate her even further. In her penultimate station, she looks and behaves like a deranged tramp as she hangs around a bus-stop and roots around in dustbins. The message which she preaches to bystanders – 'Gott ist einfach' (*Gk*, p. 250) – seems like a desperate attempt to seek refuge from the complexities of modern life in moribund religious platitudes, and she is dismissed by the computer technician who observes her as a mentally unstable Jehovah's Witness. Like Strindberg's *To Damascus*, therefore, *Groß und klein* tends to be interpreted by critics as a study of psychological disintegration rather than of a genuine religious struggle. For example, Walter Hinck contends that '[d]ie Nähe zum Stationendrama mag für gewisse Anklänge ans Mysterienspiel mitverantwortlich sein – eine unbereinigte Beziehung Lottes zu Gott wird angedeutet –, aber die Stationen sind Stationen der Psyche, nicht der unsterblichen Seele, und sie führen bergab.'²⁵⁸ But while the line between religiosity and insanity is undoubtedly very blurred, such reductive psychographic interpretations tend to overlook the nature of the religious insights which are developed in this play. In section 3.4 below I will argue that the highly unsettling theatrical and dramaturgical effects created by the sudden irruption of religious struggle in *Groß*

²⁵⁷ Cf. Irmela Schneider, 'Myth and Mythology in the Drama of Botho Strauß', in W.G. Sebald (ed.), *A Radical Stage: Theatre in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s* (Oxford: Berg, 1988), pp. 31-51, p. 40.

²⁵⁸ Walter Hinck, 'Tribunal und Diagnose. Zum Theater der Gegenwart', in Walter Hinck, Lothar Kühn, and Walter Pape (eds.), *Drama der Gegenwart. Themen und Aspekte* (Schwerte: Katholische Akademie Schwerte, 1987), pp. 7-26, p. 10. See also vom Hofe and Pfaff, 'Botho Strauß und die Poetik der Endzeit', p. 41, which suggests that '[h]ysterische Züge lassen die Mystik auch als eine Projektion beschädigter Subjektivität erscheinen'.

und klein force us to think again about the contemporary significance of religion itself. Before that, however, I want to draw some brief comparisons between Lotte's religious experience and Elaine's yearning for transcendence in *Die eine und die andere*.

Where Lotte goes through a traumatic, unwelcome encounter with a 'heruntergekommener Gott', Elaine unsuccessfully attempts to transcend the banality of her surroundings by experimenting sadomasochistically with religious iconography. Despite this clear difference in Strauß' treatment of religious experience, *Die eine und die andere* contains a nightmarish Crucifixion scene entitled 'Marter' which demonstrates several strong echoes of *Groß und klein*. It begins very like *Groß und klein*'s slideshow scene, with abstruse reflections on our relationship with the world of things. 'Schwamm' and 'Nagel', who come to Timm's apartment after meeting him in a bar, insist that they are the living embodiment of the objects denoted by their names. On one hand, Timm's encounter with these strange 'Dingmenschen' (*Ea*, p. 29), who make fleeting references to the ontological writings of Heidegger, the spectre of a posthuman future, and the theology of 'real presence', is extremely enigmatic. On the other hand, however, the allusions to the Crucifixion are blatantly obvious. As well as the references to the nail and the sponge used during the Crucifixion, we learn that Timm's surname is 'Kelch', recalling Christ's words to God in Gethsemane, 'Take this cup from me' (Mark 14:36). Elaine, who suddenly appears, seemingly from nowhere, makes the biblical resonances even more explicit as she explains that she increasingly identifies with the persecuted Christ in Gethsemane, abandoned by friends and apparently even his own father. The scene culminates in Elaine's attempt to fulfil the identification by performing a bizarre re-enactment of the Crucifixion, which, like Lotte's 'mystical' experience, travesties Christian iconography. Attaching herself to the back of a door, Elaine demands that Schwamm and Nagel slam it shut so that a nail protruding from the doorframe becomes lodged in her head. The 'crucifixion' is complete when Schwamm offers her a drink from a mop which has been soaking in dirty water.

Like the characters of Beckett's dramas, it is the tortured, rather than the glorious, Christ with whom Elaine identifies. Moreover, her attempt to achieve transcendence through pain fails, for her crucifixion simply does not hurt enough: 'Es tut mir nicht weh', she sighs disappointedly at the end of the scene (*Ea*, p. 31). Like Beckett, Strauß depicts religio-spiritual longing as something that is both very human, yet also very unrealistic, and religious forms are exposed as being incapable of providing transcendence, or indeed any solutions to the problems of modern life. (Tellingly, both plays end with scenes of Beckettian stasis, the problems of their protagonists left unresolved: Lotte waits aimlessly in a doctor's waiting room, one of the 'in-between places' symbolising 'scenarios of expected but never occurring transcendence', which, according to Sigrid Berka, recur in Strauß' writing,²⁵⁹ while *Die eine und die andere* ends with Insa and Lissie sitting around, still squabbling, but otherwise incapable of action: 'Sitzen bleiben!' [*Ea*, p. 55] Insa orders Lissie, the last words of the play.) *Die eine und die andere* also echoes the deflationary self-consciousness of *Groß und klein* by quoting the Crucifixion as a kind of play (or what Elaine herself calls an 'Aktion' [*Ea*, p. 38])-within-a-play. Furthermore, the preposterousness of the scene makes one wonder whether Strauß is almost teasing his spectators, who might be tempted to laugh nervously. But despite the elements of comedy, self-consciousness and irony, this Crucifixion scene is highly disturbing. Ironically, given that 1968 is usually seen as a materialist and certainly not a religious movement, Elaine's 'crucifixion' serves as a stark theatrical symbol for the existential and metaphysical anguish with which the offspring of the '1968er' have supposedly been burdened. Elaine's self-destructive attempt to establish some kind of connection with the ancient religious symbols which had been scorned by her mother's generation forms an unsettling counter-image to Insa's and Lissie's obsession with the future. Furthermore, whereas more traditional representations of the Crucifixion have become devalued by superficial familiarity, this grotesque, defamiliarised rendition manages to recreate some sense of its original grisly brutality, producing a moment of genuine shock and startlement which forces the audience to look again at religious iconography, as I will discuss in the following section.

²⁵⁹ Sigrid Berka, 'Botho Strauß', in Matthias Konzett (ed.), *Encyclopedia of German Literature* (2; Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000), pp. 913-6, p. 914.

3.4 *Developing religious insights*

When *Groß und klein* was first performed in the late 1970s, several critics were vexed by the difficulty of reconciling the religious aspects of the play with their perception of it as a document of its time. Their reviews expressed bewilderment and even irritation at what was seen as the awkward intrusions of religion into the play's socio-cultural commentary. For example, Lothar Schmidt-Mühlisch's otherwise glowing review in *Die Welt* complained that '[w]oran Botho Strauß aber letztlich scheitert, das ist die Überheblichkeit seines Anspruchs und die quasi religiöse Komponente, die er schließlich auch noch ins Spiel bringt.'²⁶⁰ Similarly, Walther Schmieding opined that

[d]ie grundsätzliche Schwäche ist die Unentschiedenheit zwischen einem auf Pointen versessenen satirischen Realismus und einer metaphysischen Deutung und Bedeutung. [...] Botho Strauß ist ein exzellenter Beobachter unserer Gesellschaft, aber nicht der ideale Umdeuter ihrer Probleme ins Metaphysische-Religiöse.²⁶¹

However, it is my contention that what Schmieding dismissed as 'Unentschiedenheit'²⁶² – the incongruous juxtapositions of 'great' and small'; the sudden swings in mood between the profound and the ridiculous; and the disconcerting shifts in ontology, too, between material reality and the metaphysical – opens up the possibility for developing genuine insights into the contemporary meaningfulness and relevance of religion. I have already argued that the confrontations of familiar religious 'Überbleibsel' with mundane reality evoke a deep, disquieting recognition of the loss of religious meaning, and prompt reflections on the everyday implications of this loss. In the following, my discussion focuses on the sudden, violent manifestations of religious experience in these plays: the 'rape' of Lotte and her traumatic encounter with the giant bleeding

²⁶⁰ Lothar Schmidt-Mühlisch, 'Saarbrücken ist auch in Agadir', *Die Welt*, 11 December 1978.

²⁶¹ Walther Schmieding, 'Platonow und *Groß und klein* – ein Vergleich', *Bühne und Parkett* 1(1979), pp. 15-17, p. 16.

²⁶² This so-called 'Unentschiedenheit' would later become widely recognised as a hallmark of Strauß' aesthetic. For example, Reinhard Baumgart's 1984 retrospective of Strauß' drama refers to the 'Mischung aus Trivial und Sublim und [...] die leisen Stürze vom Pathetischen ins Komische und wieder zurück, die ab jetzt den Reiz- und auch den Erkenntniswert seines Theaters ausmachen.' Reinhard Baumgart, 'Das Theater des Botho Strauß', *Theater heute*, 11 (1984), pp. 16-23, p. 17.

book and Elaine's gruesome attempt to achieve transcendence. I want to show that these irruptions of religious struggles and longings blast religious signs out of their familiarity as cultural leftovers, and thereby force the spectator to engage with religion a fresh way.

Strauß' treatment of religious experience employs shock tactics in order to challenge contemporary apathy about religion. The shock stems not only from the disturbing, visceral images of blood, rape and self-inflicted torture, but also from the suddenness with which religion irrupts into the grey, supposedly disenchanted world evoked in the plays. The unexpected manner in which 'eine Szene kommt, in der man sich ganz woanders findet', as the director Peter Stein put it,²⁶³ catches the spectator off-guard, before he/she has had a chance to adopt his/her customary attitude towards religion and is therefore open to new perceptions. The potential of unexpectedness to trigger new awareness has long fascinated Strauß. In 'Der Aufstand gegen die sekundäre Welt', he celebrates art as a place where 'das Unvorhersehbare' bursts forth, invoking historical ruptures such as the *Wende* and the systems theory notion of emergence (which asserts that reality is characterised by 'novelty, nonpredictability, and a sort of irrational [not anti-rational] nondeterminism'²⁶⁴) to support this idea.²⁶⁵ Thus moments of startlement are a recurring dramaturgical device in Strauß' theatrical texts; Franziska Schössler notes that 'Strauß setzt sich in seinem Oeuvre wiederholt mit Konzepten auseinander, die den sinnlichen Schock, den Sturz, die Plötzlichkeit zur Bedingung neuer Wahrnehmung und künstlerischer Intensitätserfahrung erheben.'²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Peter Stein, 'Ein Autofahrerfaun. Das ist doch etwas Schönes. Ein Gespräch mit Peter Krumme', in Michael Radix (ed.), *Strauß lesen* (Munich: Hanser, 1987), pp. 172-87, p. 180.

²⁶⁴ Paul Brockelman, *Cosmology and Creation: The Spiritual Significance of Contemporary Cosmology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 49.

²⁶⁵ Botho Strauß, 'Der Aufstand gegen die sekundäre Welt. Bemerkungen zu einer Ästhetik der Anwesenheit', in Botho Strauß (ed.), *Der Aufstand gegen die sekundäre Welt. Bemerkungen zu einer Ästhetik der Anwesenheit* (Munich: Hanser, 1999), pp. 303-20. See also Botho Strauß, 'Die Erde – ein Kopf. Dankrede zum Büchner-Preis 1989', *Die Zeit*, 27 October 1989, which argues that moments of suddenness can be used in the theatre as a means of resisting the mediated world.

²⁶⁶ Schössler, *Augen-Blicke: Erinnerung, Zeit und Geschichte in Dramen der neunziger Jahre*, pp. 140-1.

The idea that suddenness can provoke revelatory perceptions is in fact an old one, and scholars and artists from Plato through Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, Edgar Allan Poe and Ernst Jünger to Brecht have all sought in various ways to explore or exploit ‘der Erkenntnisschock der Plötzlichkeit’, as Moray McGowan notes.²⁶⁷ Suddenness is also identified by Hans-Thies Lehmann as a recurring device in the work of postdramatic theatre practitioners who, like Strauß, seek to resist the tyranny of the present by transforming theatre into a ‘Gedächtnisraum’. According to Lehmann, such postdramatic works generate shock and perplexity in order to destabilise the spectator’s normal perceptions and confront him/her with ‘eine andere Zeit’, an approach which suggests some close correspondences with Strauß:

Bedeutsam als Gedächtnisraum wird das Theater dort, wo es den Zuschauer unversehens überrascht, den Reizschutz durchbricht, der auch ein Schutz vor der Begegnung mit dieser anderen Zeit ist, einer “Un-Zeit”, die nicht ohne den Schrecken des Unbekannten zu denken ist. [...] Man erfährt in diesen Momenten des Nicht-Verstehens, des Shocks, der sprachlosen Wahrnehmung das Ausgesetztsein in eine *andere Zeit*, die nicht einfach Gegenwart ist und in ihrer Vieldimensionalität vielleicht nicht einmal in einem deutlich anzugebenden Sinne Zeit.²⁶⁸

The grotesque distortions of traditional religious tropes and iconography which occur in *Groß und klein* and *Die eine und die andere* are another means of generating ‘der Schrecken des Unbekannten’. As already suggested, these distortions have the effect of making the familiar seem strange, but in contrast to Brecht, Strauß’ religious *Verfremdungseffekte* do not promote altogether rationalistic insights or advance material or social change.²⁶⁹ On one hand, the

²⁶⁷ Moray McGowan, ‘“Die schwache Stimme in der Höhle unter dem Lärm”. Gedanken zur Bühnerpreisrede von Botho Strauß (1989) und zur Politik des Unpolitischen’, *Weimarer Beiträge*, 40/2 (1994), pp. 190-202, p. 196. For a general discussion of ‘Plötzlichkeit’ as an aesthetic device, see Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Plötzlichkeit: Zum Augenblick des ästhetischen Scheins* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981).

²⁶⁸ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1999), pp. 348-9.

²⁶⁹ Cf. McGowan’s comments on Strauß’ affinities with Brecht: ‘Genau wie Brecht verwirft er [Strauß] an der bemüht naturalistischen Wirklichkeitsnachahmung das Undialektische und Erkenntnishemmende; überhaupt hat die postmodernistische Dramaturgie von Strauss – der den marxistischen Geschichtsoptimismus radikal verneint – sehr viel mit Brecht gemeinsam: fragmentierte, gestisch-karikierende Figurenzeichnung, sprunghafte Handlung, bewußte Fiktionalisierung des Bühnengeschehens.’ McGowan, ‘Unendliche Geschichte für die Momodern?’, p. 91.

unexpected, bizarre irruptions of religion contribute an element of opacity to Strauß' analysis of contemporary society, thereby frustrating the 'secondary' discourse which Strauß has criticised for inhibiting a direct encounter with the artwork:²⁷⁰ scholars are more or less united in the view that Strauß 'will nicht interpretiert werden'.²⁷¹ On the other hand, however, Strauß does not offer the spectator respite from the rationalism of everyday life by stimulating quasi-religious emotions in the manner of many of the avant garde practitioners discussed in the previous chapter. Strauß' ironic, self-conscious deployment of religious signs means that the spectator is never allowed to lose sight of the supposedly banal, disenchanting realities of contemporary life. In other words, Strauß confronts us with religion, but does not allow us to seek refuge in it. His theatrical texts evoke an unsettling recognition of the loss of the sacred, yet they also confront us with the possibility that beneath the disenchanting surface of everyday life there are religious longings which continue to fester in increasingly self-destructive forms, but which can now neither be fulfilled nor rationalistically explained away.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that religion operates on multiple levels in Botho Strauß' *Groß und klein* and *Die eine und die andere*, that it serves a variety of dramaturgical ends, and that it produces numerous different effects, including comedy and bathos as well as melancholy, startlement, shock, uneasiness and perplexity. These plays expose and mourn the loss of religious meaning, and use religious motifs as instruments of socio-cultural critique which throw into relief the materialism, individualism and mediocrity of a world which has severed its connection with its religious roots. Yet religion also appears in Strauß' work as a powerful force which unexpectedly irrupts into a supposedly disenchanting world,

²⁷⁰ Strauß, 'Der Aufstand gegen die sekundäre Welt'.

²⁷¹ Henriette Herwig, *Verwünschte Beziehungen, verwebte Bezüge: Zerfall und Verwandlung des Dialogs bei Botho Strauß* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1986), p. 9. Paradoxically, however, the web of intertextual allusions in Strauß' work almost seems to invite decoding, as the quasi-exegetical nature of much Strauß scholarship would suggest: 'Eine Horde fanatischer Wünschelrutengänger heftet sich seit Jahren an den Erinnerungsarchäologen Botho Strauß, im Bestreben, in jeder seiner Schriften auch noch die dünnste mythische Quelle freizulegen,' notes Werner Krause in 'Die Zwischenwelten des Botho Strauß', *Spectaculum*, 52 (1991), pp. 254-58, p. 255.

whether as a self-destructive human yearning for transcendence, or as God's aggressive desire to reconnect with humanity. At the same time, however, religion is shown to be incapable of offering solutions to the problems of late capitalist life. What has emerged over the course of this discussion is that, unlike much of the drama and theatre discussed in this thesis, the prevalence of religious signs in Strauß' theatrical texts reflects a thematic focus on religion itself. I have argued that Strauß' startling and unsettling juxtapositions of the religious and the quotidian challenge what he sees as the complacent, liberal secularism of the West, and that it is precisely because he refuses to generate compensatory quasi-religious emotions in the theatre that he promotes a fresh engagement with the real meaningfulness and relevance of religion.

4. Theological farce: George Tabori's *Mein Kampf*

Since first coming to prominence in Germany with *Die Kannibalen* (1969), a black comedy depicting cannibalism among prisoners at Auschwitz, George Tabori has been best known as a 'memory-worker' whose provocative treatments of National Socialism and the Holocaust explode the conventions of *Betroffenheitsdramatik* and documentary theatre.²⁷² Criticism has been so preoccupied with assessing Tabori's contribution to the 'Theatre of the Holocaust' that the important role played by religion in his work has been greatly neglected.²⁷³ This chapter seeks to redress the imbalance somewhat by exploring the place of religion in Tabori's most successful play, *Mein Kampf. Farce* (1987),²⁷⁴ taking sidelong glances at

²⁷² See Norbert Otto Eke, 'George Tabori', in Alo Allkemper and Norbert Otto Eke (eds.), *Deutsche Dramatiker des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2000), pp. 382-402, p. 390.

²⁷³ Even a cursory survey of the titles of many major studies of Tabori's theatre – e.g. Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer and Jörg Schönert (eds.), *Theater gegen das Vergessen. Bühnenarbeit und Drama bei George Tabori* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1997); Anat Feinberg, *Embodied Memory: The Theatre of George Tabori* (Iowa City: Iowa Press, 1999); Peter Höyng (ed.), *Verkörperte Geschichtsentwürfe: George Taboris Theaterarbeit/ Embodied Projections on History: George Tabori's Theater Work* (Tübingen: A. Francke, 1998); and Jan Strümpel, *Vorstellungen vom Holocaust. George Taboris Erinnerungs-Spiele* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2000) – gives a good idea of the huge emphasis placed on the topos of memory. Apart from Bayerdörfer's and Schönert's *Theater gegen das Vergessen*, which includes Sibylle Peters' 'Die Verwandlung der Schrift in Spiel. George Taboris Metaphysik des Theaters: *Die Goldberg-Variationen*' (pp. 270-82), a chapter examining the parallels drawn between theatre and religion in Tabori's *Die Goldberg-Variationen*, these studies demonstrate only a peripheral interest in religion, at most. The following works attend to the theme in somewhat more depth, and will be referred to where relevant over the course of this chapter: Stefan Scholz, *Von der humanisierenden Kraft des Scheiterns. George Tabori - Ein Fremdprophet in postmoderner Zeit* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002) examines the theme of failure in Tabori's work from a theological perspective. Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer, ' "Born Losers Comparing Notes" – Bible Quotation and Drama Construction in George Tabori's Plays', in Shimon Levy (ed.), *Theatre and Holy Script* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), pp. 82-98, surveys the various dramatic functions served by biblical allusions in *Die Kannibalen* and *Goldberg-Variationen* (1991). It argues that biblical material is deployed to develop plot and characterisation, but also serves as a 'means of presenting the human situation in post-Shoah times by relating it to the religious horizon of the pre-Shoah times' (p. 93). Birgit Haas, *Das Theater des George Tabori. Vom Verfremdungseffekt zur Postmoderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000) argues in certain sections (pp. 160-168 and pp. 171-195) that Tabori's plays attack religion, a rather reductive interpretation which this chapter will take issue with.

²⁷⁴ Adapted from a prose version which had appeared one year earlier (George Tabori, *Meine Kämpfe*, trans. Ursula Grützmaker-Tabori [Munich: Hanser, 1986]), *Mein Kampf* received 'fast ausnahmslos positive Kritik' when first performed in May 1987 in the Akademietheater, Vienna, observes Chantal Guerrero (Chantal Guerrero, *George Tabori im Spiegel der deutschsprachigen Kritik* [Cologne: Teiresias Verlag, 1999], p. 54). It was voted best play of the year by *Theater heute* critics, and was a huge hit with audiences, too: Peter Höyng notes that there were at least 100 different productions of *Mein Kampf* worldwide between its premiere and spring 1998 (Peter Höyng, ' "Immer spielt ihr und scherzt?" Zur Dialektik des Lachens in George Taboris *Mein Kampf. Farce*', in Peter Höyng (ed.), *Verkörperte Geschichtsentwürfe: George Taboris Theaterarbeit / Embodied Projections on History: George Tabori's Theater Work* [Tübingen: A. Francke, 1998], pp. 129-50, p. 129).

some of his other theatrical texts for comparison's sake. *Mein Kampf* exemplifies the darkly comic treatment of historical horrors which is Tabori's trademark, and it also contains the extensive religious allusions which are another distinctive feature of Tabori's writing for theatre. Tabori himself called *Mein Kampf* 'ein theologischer Schwank',²⁷⁵ but religious borrowings serve a variety of ends in this play, not all of which have a great deal to do with theology or indeed any of the other dimensions of religion. Thus whereas Botho Strauß' deployment of religious signs generally reflects a thematic interest in the place of religion in contemporary German culture and society, a rough distinction is drawn in this chapter between those moments where religious signs perform functions which are not specifically religious – such as exploring Jewish identity, problematising the relationship between Jew and Gentile, or evoking the depravity of the Third Reich – and instances where the play examines the meaningfulness and relevance of religion itself. Throughout the following analysis I will be concerned to show that, although Tabori is famous for the irreverent gallows humour with which he tackles highly sensitive issues, religious elements are persistently deployed in order to sustain throughout his 'farce' an undertone of gravitas. The chapter begins, therefore, with an investigation of the genre classification 'farce' and an examination of the dialectic between humour and seriousness which underlies Tabori's theatrical aims and strategies. Section 4.2 discusses the use of biblical allusion to explore constructions of Jewish identity which have little to do with Judaism as a faith, and section 4.3 interrogates Tabori's deployment of elements of religious texts and practices to foreshadow the horror of the Holocaust. Finally, Sections 4.4 and 4.5 examine how *Mein Kampf* probes the relevance of religious doctrines and values against the context of the Holocaust.

²⁷⁵ Reinhard Palm and Ursula Voss, ' "... so viele Ichs, so viele Figuren ..." Interview mit George Tabori zu seiner Inszenierung von *Mein Kampf* im Akademietheater Wien, Juli 1987', in Wend Kässens (ed.), *Der Spielmacher. Gespräche mit George Tabori* (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 2004), pp. 53-67, p. 58.

4.1 *Farce and the dialectic of humour and seriousness*

4.1.1 *Farce and the Absurd*

The plot of *Mein Kampf. Farce* mixes the historical with the fictional, invoking the well-known fact that Adolf Hitler spent time as an impoverished artist in a pre-World War I Viennese flophouse, but imagining that he was befriended at this time by a (fictional) Jewish roommate, Schlomo Herzl. Herzl is a struggling bookseller and author, working on a book which, under the suggestion of Lobkowitz, another Jewish inhabitant of the flophouse, he has entitled *Mein Kampf*. Lobkowitz, an unemployed chef who claims to be God, looks on disapprovingly as Herzl takes the oafish Hitler under his wing, comforts him when he is rejected from art college, encourages him to pursue a career in politics instead, and even styles the ‘toothbrush’ moustache which would later become a central part of the image of the Führer. Associating the title of Hitler’s infamous autobiography/political manifesto with a Jewish author and implying that a Jew was partly responsible for Hitler’s trajectory are just two of the outrageous premises with which Tabori seeks to shock. The genre classification ‘farce’ in the title of the play is itself provocative. It indicates from the outset that *Mein Kampf* offends what Terrence Des Pres calls ‘Holocaust etiquette’, which demands that the Holocaust be approached ‘as a solemn or sacred event, with a seriousness admitting no response that might obscure its enormity or dishonor its dead’.²⁷⁶ Tabori was by no means the first to create a comedy about Nazism – some famous prior examples include films such as Charlie Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator* (1940) and Mel Brooks’ *The Producers* (1968) – but, with the notable exception of Brecht’s *Der Aufstieg des Arturo Ui* (1941), German-language theatrical representations of this period had hitherto been dominated by the kind of pious solemnity described by Des Pres.²⁷⁷ For that reason, *Mein Kampf* cemented

²⁷⁶ Terrence Des Pres, ‘Holocaust Laughter?’ in Berel Lang (ed.), *Writing and the Holocaust* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988), pp. 216-33, p. 218. See also the discussion of Tabori and ‘Holocaust etiquette’ in Norbert Otto Eke, ‘Das Schreckliche und das Komische. George Tabori und die Shoah’, in Pól Ó Dochartaigh (ed.), *Jews in German Literature since 1945: German-Jewish Literature?* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 567-86, p. 567.

²⁷⁷ See in particular examples of ‘documentary theatre’ such as Rolf Hochhuth’s *Der Stellvertreter* (1963), Heinar Kipphardt’s *Joel Brandt. Die Geschichte eines Geschäfts* (1965) or Peter Weiss’ *Die Ermittlung* (1969), as discussed in Strümpel, *Vorstellungen vom Holocaust*, pp. 31-53. More recently, the controversy caused by Dani Levy’s film comedy, *Mein Führer: Die wirklich wahrste*

Tabori's reputation in the German-speaking world as a taboo-breaker. The assumption underlying the mostly positive reception of *Mein Kampf*, however, was that it was only as a Jew whose own family members had perished in Nazi concentration camps that Tabori was 'permitted' to break the prohibition against making jokes about the Holocaust. Konrad Paul Liessmann's view that '[d]asselbe Stück, nicht von Tabori, sondern von einem Deutschen geschrieben, wäre unsäglich gewesen' is typical.²⁷⁸ This assumption seems rather dubious, particularly since the 'death of the author' in literary theory, but its validity cannot be assessed here.

Theories of comedy are hugely complex at the best of times, and farce, in particular, is one of the most ill-defined and under-researched dramatic forms,²⁷⁹ making a precise analysis of how *Mein Kampf* conforms to the genre extremely difficult. The situation is not helped by the fact that, as Sandra Pott notes, 'Tabori geht mit Genre-Zuweisungen in beliebiger Weise um',²⁸⁰ using the terms 'farce' and 'Schwank' interchangeably even though there are in fact fine distinctions between them.²⁸¹ Rather than becoming mired in these intricacies, however, it is enough for our purposes to make the general observation that Tabori's play contains a good deal of the kind of ribald humour – involving ludicrous and frantically-paced situations; cuckolding; stereotyped figures; cases of misunderstanding and mistaken identity; sexual innuendo; quick-fire repartee;

Wahrheit über Adolf Hitler (2007), demonstrated that there is still a good deal of anxiety in German culture surrounding the issue of whether it is acceptable to laugh at Hitler.

²⁷⁸ Konrad Paul Liessmann, 'Die Tragödie als Farce. Anmerkungen zu George Taboris *Mein Kampf*', in Jan Strümpel (ed.), *Text + Kritik: George Tabori* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1997), pp. 81-89, p. 82.

²⁷⁹ See Gregory Dobrov, 'The Dawn of Farce: Aristophanes', in James Redmond (ed.), *Farce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 15-31, p. 15.

²⁸⁰ Sandra Pott, ' "Ecce Schlomo": *Mein Kampf* – Farce oder theologischer Schwank?' in Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer and Jörg Schönert (eds.), *Theater gegen das Vergessen. Bühnenarbeit und Drama bei George Tabori* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1997), pp. 248-69, p. 253.

²⁸¹ Christopher Balme explains that the terms *Schwank*, *Posse* and *Farce* all 'approximate to the English term "farce" in its broadest sense of an uncomplicated, comic genre'. More specifically, however, *Schwank* 'refers to the crudest of the German comic genres. They are mainly simple peasant romps, involving cuckolding and devoid of any attempts at realistic motivation', whereas the German term *Farce* 'is linked almost exclusively to the nineteenth-century French farce.' Meanwhile, 'the genre expectation associated with the *Posse* remained that of uncomplicated, frequently rustic humour with a fair spicing of the burlesque performed in a local dialect.' Christopher Balme, 'Grotesque Farce in the Weimar Republic', in James Redmond (ed.), *Farce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 174-84, p. 174.

buffoonery and crude slapstick – broadly associated with farce, and that the bickering and cuckolding that goes on between Herzl and Hitler is perhaps loosely reminiscent of the ‘Geschlechterfront im bürgerlichen Heim’ scenarios typical of the German, French and English farce traditions.²⁸²

There is as much uncertainty about the functions and value of farce as there is about its aesthetics. Traditionally, it has been seen as the lowest, crudest form of comedy, catering to the spectator’s basest instincts. George Bernard Shaw, for example, complained that farce produces

base laughter [...] by turning human beings onto the stage as rats are turned into a pit, that they may be worried for the entertainment of the spectators [...] resulting in] the deliberate indulgence of that horrible, derisive joy in humiliation and suffering which is the beastliest element in human nature.²⁸³

The idea that farce indulges the spectator’s ‘joy in humiliation and suffering’ is also central to Eric Bentley’s analysis of the genre. Bentley placed a positive value on this ‘joy’, however. He argues that farce offers ‘comic catharsis’, providing the opportunity of being ‘in delicious darkness [...] while on stage our most treasured unmentionable wishes are fulfilled, [...] all without taking the responsibility or suffering the guilt.’²⁸⁴ Both Bentley’s and Shaw’s descriptions of farce are clearly morally problematic when applied to a play which deals with the Holocaust, because they imply that the anti-Semitic acts depicted therein fulfil the secret desires of the spectators. Even in more recent scholarship, the view that farce is fundamentally crude, amoral, ‘uncomplicated’²⁸⁵ and devoid of profundity is still prevalent. ‘Farce subverts all aspirations towards solemnity, its only purpose being to excite laughter’, asserts Glen Cavaliero,²⁸⁶ while Jessica Milner Davis’ monograph on the topic defines farce as ‘broad, physical, visual comedy, whose

²⁸² Volker Klotz, *Bürgerliches Lachtheater. Komödie – Posse – Schwank – Operette* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987), pp. 156-8.

²⁸³ George Bernard Shaw, *Our Theatre in the Nineties* (1932), quoted in J. Paul Marcoux, ‘Georges Feydeau and the “Serious” Farce’, in James Redmond (ed.), *Farce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 131-43, p. 132.

²⁸⁴ Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama* (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 229.

²⁸⁵ Balme, ‘Grotesque Farce in the Weimar Republic’, p. 174.

²⁸⁶ Glen Cavaliero, *The Alchemy of Laughter: Comedy in English Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 25.

effects are pre-eminently theatrical and *intended solely to entertain*'.²⁸⁷ Again, this understanding of farce would raise obvious moral issues if applied to *Mein Kampf*, for it would imply that the play instrumentalises the most horrific period in modern European history for no other end but entertainment.

The Theatre of the Absurd offers an altogether different way of understanding farce. In the works of Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco, with their depictions of helpless 'human clowns harshly flung into a world over which they have little or no control',²⁸⁸ elements of farce convey the absurdity of the human condition. Ionesco once wrote that 'the comic alone is able to give us the strength to bear the tragedy of existence'.²⁸⁹ Thus far from abandoning all 'aspirations towards solemnity', farce was invoked by the Absurdist to capture nothing less distressing and momentous than the experience of ultimate meaninglessness. Tabori was a great admirer of Beckett, and *Mein Kampf* is full of echoes and blatant intertextual allusions to Beckett's dramas, such as 'music-hall' repartee; references to famous Beckettian tropes, such as failure and waiting; and direct quotations from *Waiting for Godot*.²⁹⁰ Perhaps foremost among the many echoes of Beckett and the Theatre of the Absurd in *Mein Kampf* is its use of farcical humour to confront themes which are normally considered serious, important and indeed painful. I would suggest that the label 'theologischer Schwank' represents an attempt by Tabori to elevate *Mein Kampf* above the level of 'low', bedroom farce and situate it instead within the Absurd tradition, for the epithet strikingly echoes Rosette C. Lamont's famous description of Absurd plays such as *Waiting for Godot* or Ionesco's *The Chairs* as 'metaphysical farces'.²⁹¹ Although Tabori's rather cryptic label does not make clear whether *Mein Kampf* is a farce which deals with serious theological issues, or a play which turns theological issues into a farce – I will argue in this chapter that in fact it demonstrates elements of both tendencies –, its effect is

²⁸⁷ Jessica Milner Davis, *Farce* (The Critical Idiom 39; London: Methuen, 1978), p. 1; my italics.

²⁸⁸ Marcoux, 'Georges Feydeau and the "Serious" Farce', p. 134.

²⁸⁹ Ionesco, *Notes and Counternotes* (1962). Cited in Neil Cornell, 'The Theatre of the Absurd (1945-1975)', *The Literary Encyclopedia* <<http://www.litencyc.com/php/topics.php?rec=true&UID=12>>, accessed 3 April 2008.

²⁹⁰ See Feinberg, *Embodied Memory*, p. 130 and p. 254.

²⁹¹ Rosette Lamont, 'The Metaphysical Farce: Beckett and Ionesco', *French Review*, 33 (Feb. 1959), pp. 319-28.

nonetheless to imply that there is more to the play than silly, ‘uncomplicated’ and amoral humour.

4.1.2 *Jewish humour, therapeutic laughter and ‘holy’ theatre*

Mein Kampf is prefaced by a Hölderlin quotation which reflects Tabori’s position that there is a close relationship between anguish and laughter: ‘Immer spielt ihr und scherzt? ihr müßt! O Freunde!/ mir geht dies/ In die Seele, denn dies müssen Verzweifelte nur’ (*MK*, p.143). In programmatic statements Tabori repeatedly invoked the familiar idea that Jewish humour developed as a weapon of the oppressed to suggest that the linking of humour and pain in his work was of a quintessentially Jewish character: ‘im jüdischen Witz ist die Katastrophe verträglicher, damit man sie ertragen kann’, he claimed, adding ‘[d]ie besten Witze kommen von den Juden, und die, die nicht von Juden stammen, sind einfach nicht komisch’.²⁹² Tabori was not only convinced that humour is an appropriate response to suffering – especially suffering on the scale of the Holocaust, the enormity of which he regarded as being ‘jenseits aller Tränen’²⁹³ –, but also that it has healing qualities (another familiar idea, of course, and one which has some scientific basis).²⁹⁴ But while it is normally argued that Jewish humour is of therapeutic value to Jews themselves, because it ‘turns the tormentor into a figure of ridicule and it mocks hunger and misery, thus removing their sting’,²⁹⁵ Tabori’s ‘laughter therapy’ was directed for most of his career at his German and Austrian, predominantly non-Jewish audiences. Tabori aimed to use transgressive humour to explode the taboos and repressions surrounding the Holocaust, and thereby to enable his Gentile spectators to confront the Nazi past more directly, without the

²⁹² Andrea Welker, *George Tabori. Dem Gedächtnis, der Trauer und dem Lachen gewidmet. Portraits.* (Vienna: Bibliothek der Provinz, 1994), p. 303. On theories about the origins, functions and characteristics of Jewish humour, see Ben Eliezer, *Jewish Humour* (London: Prion, 2003); Peter L. Berger, *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), pp. 87-98; and Salcia Landmann, *Der jüdische Witz. Soziologie und Sammlung* (Freiburg: Walter Verlag, 1988).

²⁹³ George Tabori, *Unterammgau oder Die guten Deutschen*, trans. Ursula Menck-Adriani (Frankfurt am Main: Edition Suhrkamp, 1981), p. 38.

²⁹⁴ ‘Ich glaube nicht, daß Lachen weniger wert ist als Weinen oder Nachdenken. Es ist eine heilsame Reaktion. Therapeuten in Los Angeles zum Beispiel erzählen ihren Patienten neuerdings Witze, um sie von krankhaften Spannungen zu befreien.’ George Tabori, ‘Die Heiterkeit der Verzweiflung’, *Theater heute*, 4 (1991), pp. 71.

²⁹⁵ Abraham Hochwald, *The HarperCollins Book of Jewish Humour*, trans. Anne Moellers (London: HarperCollins, 1996), p. vii.

usual inhibitions. Thus whereas Eric Bentley argued that farce allows for an *enjoyable* purging of our 'joy in suffering', Tabori's farces may provoke laughter, but the process of facing up to the past is ultimately supposed to be painful. These farces are cathartic in the psychotherapeutic rather than Aristotelian sense, then, and the bringing into consciousness of repressed memories of the Third Reich was intended to help prevent a Freudian 'Wiederkehr des Verdrängten' in the world outside the theatre.²⁹⁶ 'Nur wenigen von uns ist es gelungen, das zu erinnern, was wir vergessen wollen, und wir können nur das vergessen, was wir wirklich erinnert haben,' claimed Tabori. 'Bis das soweit ist, werden die peinigenden Erinnerungen uns wieder und wieder hochkommen.'²⁹⁷

It is debatable whether the painful healing process envisioned by Tabori actually took place. Some have argued that by inviting his Gentile German and Austrian spectators to laugh along with him, Tabori offered a rather glib sense of reconciliation with Jewish victims of the Holocaust which had not really been earned;²⁹⁸ after all, Freud himself noted that 'jeder Witz verlangt so sein eigenes Publikum, und über die gleichen Witze zu lachen ist ein Beweis weitgehender psychischer Übereinstimmung'.²⁹⁹ The problem is particularly glaring in the case of *Mein Kampf*, which is arguably more likely to assuage consciences than to create disturbing insights into German history because it shifts most of the blame onto a ridiculously caricatured Hitler, as Anat Feinberg points out:

I have met spectators perplexed, hesitant, shocked, or unsure of how they are expected to react. I have encountered others who, as Peter Kemp so aptly formulated his own feeling upon viewing the play in England, left the theatre 'feeling slightly uncomfortable, because it hasn't made you feel at all uncomfortable about its appalling subject'. I have spoken to some who were relieved to discover that a Jewish

²⁹⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'Die Verdrängung', in Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Anna Freud (10; Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1991), pp. 248-61. For more detailed discussions of Freudian aspects of Tabori's comedy see Höyng, ' "Immer spielt ihr und scherzt?" Zur Dialektik des Lachens in George Taboris *Mein Kampf. Farce*', and Timothy B. Malchow, 'George Tabori's *Jubiläum*: Jokes and their Relation to the Representation of the Holocaust', *The German Quarterly*, 72/2 (1999), pp. 167-84, pp. 172-4.

²⁹⁷ Tabori, *Unterammerngau oder Die guten Deutschen*, p. 201.

²⁹⁸ See for example Konrad Paul Liessmann, 'Der Versöhnungskünstler', in Andrea Welker (ed.), *George Tabori: Dem Gedächtnis, der Trauer und dem Lachen gewidmet* (Weitra: Bibliothek der Provinz, 1994), pp. 237-40.

²⁹⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten und "Der Humor"* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1992), p. 164.

playwright absolved the majority of the Germans of the collective guilt, fellow-travellers and bystanders included, while putting the blame – like the so-called Intentionalists among historians of the Third Reich – on Hitler, who, on top of it all, is depicted as a laughable neurotic.³⁰⁰

Whatever about the actual responses of spectators (an aspect of theatre studies which is always extremely difficult to assess), Tabori's optimistic belief in the healing power of theatre differs markedly from the attitude of despair which pervades Beckett's dramas. Tabori's quasi-psychotherapeutic aim of revealing repressed materials instead suggests some basic affinities with the utopian programmatic of avant gardists such as Artaud and Grotowski. In fact, insofar as Tabori's comedies seek to transform spectators in a way which impacts on lived reality, they demonstrate what theorists such as Richard Schechner regard as the defining characteristic of ritual, though the psychological transformations sought by Tabori come from remembering the past rather than from creating a break with the past. Nevertheless, it is ironic that Tabori's work should demonstrate such parallels with the historical avant garde, for his 1991 comedy *Die Goldberg-Variationen* expresses a good deal of scepticism about the pretensions of avant garde 'holy theatre'. Depicting a theatre company's shambolic rehearsals for a stage version of the Bible, *Die Goldberg-Variationen* both parodies biblical narratives and scoffs at holy theatre's po-faced ritualism, faux-mysticism, and grandiose gestures of sacrifice and transcendence. In this play, megalomaniac director Mr. Jay's claims to be an exponent of 'eine heilige Improvisation'³⁰¹ and a 'Theater der Grausamkeit'³⁰² are exposed as a cynical attempt to boost box office sales by exploiting the violent and semi-pornographic qualities of biblical material.

Birgit Haas explains:

Zentral ist das Insistieren auf dem Showcharakter des "Heiligen Theaters", sakrale Zeichenhandlungen werden in Produkte der Popkultur verwandelt. Die Liturgie verkommt zum Showbiz, da – laut Mr. Jay – die Riten ausschließlich der Befriedigung von Sensationslust sollen.³⁰³

³⁰⁰ Feinberg, *Embodied Memory*, pp. 261-2. The original source of the Kemp quote is Peter Kemp, 'The Sick Joke', *Independent* (London), 6 October 1990.

³⁰¹ George Tabori, 'Die Goldberg-Variationen', in Tabori, *Theaterstücke II*, trans. Ursula Grützmacher-Tabori (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1994), pp. 291-346, p. 332.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 336.

³⁰³ Haas, *Das Theater des George Tabori*, p. 211.

To summarise so far, the foregoing discussion has established that *Mein Kampf* resists traditional descriptions of farce as a form that is crude, amoral, totally devoid of seriousness and intended solely to entertain. Like the Theatre of the Absurd, Tabori invokes farce as a form which captures the tragic absurdity of human suffering, and he embraces laughter as an appropriate response to misery. However, Tabori's comedies resemble the quasi-rituals of the avant garde more than the Theatre of the Absurd insofar as they pursue therapeutic objectives rather than succumb to despair. Over the course of the rest of this chapter, I will be concerned to highlight how religious elements reflect the dialectic between humour on one hand, and seriousness on the other, by showing that religious material is used to generate both laughter and moments of sombreness. Andrea Kunne observes in her discussion of the prose version of *Mein Kampf* that 'Die Gattungsbezeichnung "Farce" gibt Anlaß zu der Frage, wie weit ein Autor bei der Behandlung ernsthafter und höchste Pietät erheischender Themenbereiche gehen darf, ohne die Moralvorstellungen seiner Leser grundsätzlich zu verletzen.'³⁰⁴ I will argue that Tabori borrows what Susan Sontag refers to as 'the prestige of religious vocabulary'³⁰⁵ in order to create the impression that his farce is not just a flippant treatment of historical traumas which is in extremely bad taste, but that its underlying message and motives are profound, intelligent and ethically sound.

4.2 Exploring Jewish identity

A major dramaturgical function performed by religious elements in *Mein Kampf* is to evoke the Jewishness of its hero, Herzl. Allusions to Judaic texts such as the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud, and to Judaic festivals and practices such as Sabbath, Yom Kippur, the Passover Seder, and Kaddish (a prayer of mourning) are effective in creating a recognisable Jewish flavour, and in establishing a sense of Herzl's deep rootedness in the Jewish religio-cultural heritage. This rootedness contrasts sharply with the disconnection from religious traditions demonstrated by most of Botho Strauß' figures. But while Herzl seems very connected with the

³⁰⁴ Andrea Kunne, 'Die Apokalypse als "Farce" in George Taboris *Mein Kampf*', in Elrud Ibsch and Ferdinand Van Ingen (eds.), *Literatur und politische Aktualität* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), pp. 283-97, p. 285.

³⁰⁵ Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will*, p. 69.

traditions of Judaism in terms of his cultural identity, there is less of a bond in terms of actual faith. As an assimilated, agnostic Jew, Herzl's Jewish self-identity does not involve strong commitment to Judaic beliefs, for Jewish identity is made up of a complex mix of factors, including history, culture, tradition, ethnicity and nationhood, which need not also include religious belief, as Nicholas de Lange explains:

To be a Jew means first and foremost to belong to a group, the Jewish people, and the religious beliefs are secondary, in a sense, to this corporate allegiance. The contrast with Christianity is self-evident. The Christian also belongs to a corporate entity, the Christian Church, but the Church is defined as the body of Christian believers, who are defined as Christians by their beliefs. Religious belief is only one ingredient in the make-up of the Jew, and it may not be the most important ingredient at that. Indeed there are many people in the world who consider themselves to be loyal Jews in every respect and who would deny that they have any religion at all.³⁰⁶

I will return shortly to a closer examination of how Tabori uses religious elements to explore – and I will argue, to celebrate – certain aspects of the Jewish identity of his hero. Before doing so, I want to mention briefly an aspect of Jewishness which is problematised in the play: the role played by anti-Semitism in the shaping of Jewish identity. The controversial idea that '[i]t is the anti-Semite who creates the Jew' was perhaps most famously put forward by Sartre in *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1946),³⁰⁷ but *Mein Kampf* shows these two categories – anti-Semite and Jew – to be dependent on each other for their definition to a great extent. Thus Hitler's political ideology relies greatly on making scapegoats out of the Jews, while Herzl is reminded of his Jewishness by Hitler and even by his young German girlfriend, Gretchen, who repeatedly refer to him as 'Jude' or 'euch Juden' (*MK*, p. 188 and p. 177). Furthermore, Herzl exhibits various characteristics which have traditionally featured in anti-Semitic stereotypes of the Jew. For example, he is ugly, smelly, neurotic and lecherous, with a predilection for virginal Aryan girls. Feinberg notes that

In his 1987 premiere Tabori emphasized the Jew's ugly features, calling to mind savage anti-Jewish depictions. Played by Ignaz Kirchner, Schlomo was a stooped-over man with red ears, a protruding

³⁰⁶ Nicholas de Lange, *Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 5.

³⁰⁷ Jean Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), p. 143.

false nose (which Hitler mistakenly pulls), and scummy rags, who shuffled along nervously.³⁰⁸

The appropriation of racial stereotypes by those they are meant to degrade is familiar from certain aspects of African American culture, in particular rap music. However, whereas many rappers *embrace* certain stereotypes, ‘transforming the would-be attack into a positive cultural expression’, as Richard Schechner puts it,³⁰⁹ Tabori set out to neutralise anti-Semitic stereotypes by making spectators laugh at their ludicrousness, another example of how his theatre sought to have a positive effect on ‘real’ life: ‘Wenn wir nicht über die Tabus und Klischees hinwegsehen und einander als Menschen und nicht als Abstraktionen betrachten können, dann kann man genauso gut die Öfen wieder anzünden,’ he warned.³¹⁰ Again, whether or not this neutralisation of stereotypes is achieved is debatable. I contend that Tabori is in fact rather selective about which stereotypes are made fun of. For example, his attack on essentialist constructions of Jewish identity is certainly undermined by his insistence that there is a quintessentially Jewish brand of humour, which surely amounts to little more than another cliché about Jewishness. In what follows I argue that religious signs are used by Tabori to celebrate, rather than to dismantle, some of the other positive stereotypes of the Jew, such as the Jew as bookish, clever, witty and expressive.³¹¹

Biblical material constitutes the overwhelmingly dominant form of religious allusion within *Mein Kampf*. (Tabori’s reliance on the Bible as an intertext is even self-mockingly highlighted within the play, when Herzl tries to begin his own *magnum opus* with a biblical quotation: ‘Es ist leicht, die Bibel zu plündern –’ admonishes Lobkowitz, ‘– und die Propheten zu verdrehen’, agrees Herzl. *MK*, p. 164.) As he belongs to the ‘People of the Book’, Herzl’s speech is steeped in biblical allusions. However, fitting the stereotype of the Jew as cultured and erudite, Herzl values the Bible more as a work of literature than as a sacred text containing historical and theological truths: ‘dieses eine Buch, das schon

³⁰⁸ Feinberg, *Embodied Memory*, p. 251.

³⁰⁹ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 134.

³¹⁰ Tabori, *Unterammergau oder Die guten Deutschen*, p. 24.

³¹¹ Cf. Juliet Steyn’s list of common negative and positive Jewish stereotypes in *The Jew: Assumptions of Identity* (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 13-18.

geschrieben ist, sagt alles über alles', he says admiringly as he looks to the Bible for aesthetic inspiration for his own novel (*MK*, p. 149). Herzl's appreciation for the Bible as what William Blake called 'the Great Code of Art'³¹² encompasses the New Testament as well as the Hebrew Bible. Both his and Lobkowitz's countless references to these sacred texts are intermingled with an eclectic range of other literary and cultural allusions, including Shakespeare, Beckett, Nietzsche, Robert Musil, Richard Wagner, Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, Erich Kästner and Edna St. Vincent Millay and the Hollywood films *Casablanca* (1942) and *Some Like It Hot* (1959), which highlight their thorough-going knowledge of both popular culture and the Western canon. Birgit Haas suggests that this hotchpotch of 'high' and 'low' cultural allusions is typically postmodernist:

Taboris Zugriff auf die Welt [ist] ein entschieden postmoderner, da er jede Fiktion der Uniformität zugunsten einer Pluralität an Meinungen verabschiedet. [...] Seine Stücke tragen der Vielfalt der Sprach-, Denk-, und Lebensformen Rechnung, wie sie sich in der "Popkultur" zeigt. Gezeigt wird das Nebeneinander von (Religions)Philosophie, Showbusiness und Popkultur, in dem Halbwahrheiten und kleine Lügen dominieren: In dem Meer an Halb- und Scheinwahrheiten existieren nurmehr Inseln des Wissens, die kurzzeitig auftauchen und sofort wieder untergehen. Die daraus resultierende Offenheit der Texte kann als Ausdruck der Toleranz verstanden werden, die keinem holistischen Erklärungsmodell den Vorrang einräumt, sondern alle Meinungen nebeneinander gelten läßt.³¹³

However, while *Mein Kampf's* bricolage aesthetic might appear to reflect a postmodernist rejection of 'grand narratives' and of traditional cultural hierarchies, I suggest that, though it is certainly not revered as a repository of ultimate truths, religious material, in particular the Bible, is nonetheless repeatedly appealed to in the play as a source of authority. While in this section I show that religious elements serve to valorise the Jewishness of Herzl, in other sections I will show that they are used as a source of gravitas, profundity and ethical legitimation.

As well as foregrounding their erudition, Herzl's and Lobkowitz's incessant allusions to religious texts play to the stereotype of the Jew as eloquent and witty, for their rapid-fire repartee frequently uses religious material as a source of

³¹² William Blake, 'Laocoön', in David V. Erdman and Harold Bloom (eds.), *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Garden City, N.Y. Doubleday, 1965), p. 271.

³¹³ Haas, *Das Theater des George Tabori*, p. 37.

comedy via pastiche, parody, word-play and irreverent juxtapositions of the sacred and the profane. While this repartee is reminiscent in some respects of the crosstalk of Beckett's double-acts, it also has a strong Jewish flavour, which is due in no small part to the way in which it frequently replicates the convoluted patterns of reasoning of rabbinic texts.³¹⁴ In the following example, Herzl's tortuous response to Hitler's banal question is a pastiche of religious texts, blending eclectic biblical fragments – an arcane reference to 'God's finger' of Exodus 8:19 and the famous lines from 'A Time for Everything' in Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 – with the hair-splitting, legalistic style of the Talmud:

Hitler

Was hältst du von der Nacht?

Herzl

Eine von zwei Möglichkeiten, die Nacht. Sie kommt und geht, die Nacht. Ein Stachel in der Seite ist Gottes Finger in der Nacht, welche Gottes Zeit ist, eine Zeit zu lieben, eine Zeit zu sterben. Wenn man alt wird, zieht man den Tag vor.

(*MK*, p. 168)

There are several other similar exchanges in *Mein Kampf*, where the humour derives more from the playful treatment of the forms, motifs, conventions and eccentricities of religious texts than from an ironic questioning of the content of such texts. In sections 4.4 and 4.5 below I will consider instances in which Tabori's treatment of the substantive aspects of religion, such as its beliefs and values, is more satirical. Here it suffices to note that Herzl's and Lobkowitz's dazzling wit and learnedness are explicitly rooted to some extent in the very texts and traditions of Judaism. These characteristics are repeatedly contrasted to comic effect with the ignorance and stupidity of Hitler, who rarely refers to the Bible; whose reading repertoire centres upon Karl May; and who simply cannot keep up with the verbal and intellectual acrobatics performed by his room-mates. It seems to me, then, that the play deploys religious material to celebrate rather than to dismantle the clichéd conception of the Jew as clever, well-read and droll – incidentally, a stereotype which Tabori himself reputedly lived up to³¹⁵ – in order

³¹⁴ The replication of patterns of rabbinic logic has long been a recurring feature of Jewish jokes; see Chaim Bermant, *What's the Joke? A Study of Jewish Humour Through the Ages* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), pp. 24-36.

³¹⁵ Feinberg described Tabori as 'bewilderingly well-read, generous, gentle, witty, and humorous'. Feinberg, *Embodied Memory*, p. 267.

to provide Herzl, the archetypal Jewish victim, with a kind of moral and intellectual victory over his Nazi persecutor.

Another standard trope of Jewish identity discourse explored by Tabori with the help of biblical material concerns the extent to which Jewish identity is constructed by victimhood, stigmatisation and alienation. In *Mein Kampf*, biblical allusions serve to situate Herzl's experiences of anti-Semitism in early twentieth century Vienna within the context of millennia of oppression. Thus for example Herzl's complaints about his persecution in the coffee houses of Vienna – 'Wenn du gegen mich bist, wer ist für mich? Meine Feinde bedrängen mich. Erst gestern nacht erklärte mir ein Kellner im Café Central, keine Hunde, keine Juden.' (*MK*, p. 146) – contain echoes of Psalms ('All day long my enemies taunt me', Psalms 102:8), thereby establishing a link between Herzl's experiences and the biblical oppression of the Jews. Characteristically, however, these Hebrew resonances are conflated with New Testament echoes – 'He who is not with me is against me' (Matthew 12:30) – which simultaneously cast Herzl as a persecuted Christ-figure, a point I will address in more detail at a later stage. Other New Testament allusions are used to invoke the anti-Semitic stereotype of Jews as the 'killers of Christ', and to make the (also very well-rehearsed) point that anti-Semitism was present in the very origins of Christianity.³¹⁶ Thus Gretchen holds Herzl personally responsible for the murder of Jesus Christ (*MK*, p. 177), and Herzl advises Hitler to seek inspiration for his rhetoric of racial hatred in the New Testament, claiming that stigmatisation of the Jews pervades its very grammar:

Natürlich müßtest du deine Grammatik verbessern und dazu das Markus-Evangelium studieren. UND ER KAM NACH GALILÄA, UND SEIN NAME VERBREITETE SICH IN DER FREMDE, UND ER LEHRTE IM TEMPEL. Markus verbesserte die Grammatik, indem er hinzufügte: in IHREN Tempeln, und so erfand er das Ghetto. So einfach ist das, vergiß Schlomo, EINEN Juden, sprich nur von DEN Juden, und du wirst ein König sein, der über eine Decke von Gebeinen schreitet, und sie werden dir in den Schnee folgen, und in die Wüste, zum brennenden Tempel.
(*MK*, p.182)

³¹⁶ See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997).

Mein Kampf's many allusions to the catastrophes which characterised the biblical history of Israel – the Israelites' forty years in the wilderness (*MK*, p. 147), for example, or their Babylonian exile (*MK*, p. 182) –, and to the lists of rules and regulations which are often associated with Judaism, demonstrate the gently self-mocking tone often regarded as characteristic of Jewish humour: 'Vergib mir, lieber Schlomo, aber was ist los mit euch Juden?', asks Gretchen; 'Alle diese Flüche und Klagen, diese Reue und Regeln!' (*MK*, p. 177)³¹⁷ In contrast to Hitler, who is unable either to laugh or to cry, Herzl embodies the stereotype of the Jew as persecuted and therefore emotional. A self-confessed 'talentierter Weiner', Herzl claims to have been crying 'Seit zweitausend [Jahren] plus oder minus eineinhalb Wochen. [...] Seit der zweiten Zerstörung des Tempels.' (*MK*, p. 182). But despite the presence of humour, the play does not appear to critique the idea that persecution and estrangement are an integral part of the Jewish psyche. Again, it seems to me that religious allusions serve to reinforce rather than attack the essentialist construction of the Jew as 'forever a victim'.³¹⁸

4.3 *Foreshadowing the Holocaust*

A similar tendency to posit victimhood as an essential part of Jewish identity can be observed at the end of the play, when 'Frau Tod', an 'angel of death'-type figure reminiscent of the personifications of death in medieval morality plays such as *Everyman*, visits the flophouse. Before joining forces with Hitler, because he is 'als Täter, als Sensenknabe, als Würgeengel – ein Naturtalent' (*MK*, p. 194), Frau Tod quotes from the prophetic Book of Ezekiel (20:47) to warn Herzl of the horrors which lie ahead for Europe's Jews:

Armer Schlomo, wenn Sie wüßten, was kommt! [...] Und Gott, der Herr, sprach: Feuer wird an dich gelegt werden. Jeden grünen Baum und jeden dürren Baum wird es in dir verzehren. Seine lodernde Flamme wird nicht erlöschen. Alle Gesichter sollen von ihr versengt werden, vom Süden bis zum Norden.
(*MK*, p. 202).

³¹⁷ On self-mockery in Jewish humour, see Eliezer, *Jewish Humour*, p. 7.

³¹⁸ Steyn, *The Jew: Assumptions of Identity*, p. 5.

Here, the Hebrew Bible quotation links Jewish suffering past (for the context of the Book of Ezekiel is the exile in Babylon) and *future*, its ominous images of incineration pointing forward to the gas ovens of Auschwitz. Atmospherically, this quotation is enormously effective, for the disturbing, grandiose imagery of the apocalypse startlingly interrupts the whimsical comedy which pervades much of the rest of the play, evoking a powerful sense of dread which allows the historical horror of the Holocaust to break through. However, Tabori's redeployment of biblical prophetic writing as an augur of the Holocaust is troubling, because it creates a sense of fatefulness which tends to undermine notions of free will and moral responsibility. Furthermore, by implying that the Holocaust has been the chief destiny of the Jewish people since the origins of Judaism itself, it sets 'the Shoah as the founding moment of Jewish history and as the framing identity for the Jew', a common phenomenon in Holocaust discourse which, as Juliet Steyn argues in *The Jew: Assumptions of Identity*, has the effect of essentialising Jewish identity. Steyn, who attacks stereotyped conceptions of Jewishness, fiercely rejects 'the ways in which unpredictable historical events and historical processes can retrospectively get fatally trapped in interpretations of destiny', and urges that 'it is important not to interpret the past through what we now know to be the future.'³¹⁹ Arguably, then, the dramatic irony which is pivotal to *Mein Kampf* as a whole, whereby the spectator views the period *before* Hitler's rise to power with the knowledge of the atrocities which were to happen *later*, is deeply flawed, for it fosters a fatalistic and therefore skewed perspective on German-Jewish history.

I now want to turn my attention to the way in which borrowings from religious festivals, rituals, prayers and other practices are also used to create a sense of menace which allows the horror of the Holocaust to break through, focusing on the final act of *Mein Kampf*, which sees tensions between Herzl and Hitler finally erupt in anti-Semitic brutality. Ironically, this act is set on Yom Kippur, the most sacred and solemn date in the Jewish calendar. Tabori specifies in his stage directions that there is 'eine feierliche Stimmung' (*MK*, p. 195) as the flophouse is commandeered by Hitler, his new henchman, Himmlischt (obviously a reference

³¹⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

to Heinrich Himmler) and ‘[s]ieben Tiroler Lederdeppen’ (*MK*, p. 195), who proceed to paint the walls brown. Tabori subverts the symbolism of Yom Kippur by having the Nazis wear white gowns, recalling the white garments symbolising purity which are normally worn by Jews during this festival. While it is unlikely that the average non-Jewish spectator would appreciate this irony, the white gowns also evoke ominous associations of another notorious historical manifestation of racial supremacism, the Ku Klux Klan, an example of the skilful way in which Tabori deploys imagery with multiple meanings. Because Herzl will not reveal what he has written about Hitler in his book, Himmlischt savagely kills his beloved pet hen, Mizzi. With grotesque echoes of Kapparot, the Jewish ‘chicken-swinging’ ritual normally performed on the morning preceding Yom Kippur, Himmlischt dangles Mizzi’s strangled corpse from his hands before butchering it and, in yet another brutal corruption of Jewish ritual, cooking it in a pronouncedly non-kosher manner, describing each bloody step of the ‘recipe’ like a kind of macabre celebrity chef (‘Blut, viel Blut, wenn’s richtig blutet, ist es gut. [...] Das Fleisch mit dem Blut, in einer Blutsauce schmeckt es gut.’ *MK*, pp. 200-1). When the henchmen have finally disappeared and Hitler has been led away by Frau Tod, Herzl mournfully recites Kaddish over Mizzi’s corpse. Finally, Herzl is urged by Lobkowitz to eat the hen – another transgression of religious codes, for Yom Kippur is in fact a day of fasting – in order to fortify himself for the years of hardship that lie ahead. The ceremonial way in which the hen is eaten demonstrates echoes of the Jewish Passover Seder, with Mizzi replacing the sacrificial paschal lamb,³²⁰ but for a Gentile audience it is probably more likely to evoke associations of the ritual remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice, the Eucharist.

The savage murder of Mizzi clearly serves as another augur of the Holocaust. The hen is frequently associated with Jewishness in Tabori’s work,³²¹ and,

³²⁰ Haas, *Das Theater des George Tabori*, pp. 160-168. However, Haas’ description of the murder of Mizzi as an ‘Inversion des Passah-Rituals’ overlooks the many other Judaic and Christian rituals which are invoked during this act.

³²¹ See Strümpel’s discussion of the hen motif in Tabori’s work in *Vorstellungen vom Holocaust*, p. 153: ‘Bereits in *Die Kannibalen* findet sich eine Anspielung von vergleichbarer Bedeutung. In “Schrekingers Klause”, dem Lokal, das der SS-Mann nach dem Krieg eröffnet hat, gibt es die Spezialität “Brathähnchen vom Rost”. Der Beruf des Hähnchenbraters gibt symbolisch die Antwort auf die Frage: “Vater, was hast du im Krieg gemacht?” [...], denn sein Vater hat Juden vergasen und im Verbrennungsofen vernichten lassen. In *Weisman und Rotgesicht* macht Vater Weisman

paraphrasing Heinrich Heine, Herzl overtly makes a link between the massacre of the bird and the massacre of Europe's Jews: 'Wenn ihr beginnt, Vögel zu verbrennen, werdet ihr enden, Menschen zu verbrennen' (*MK*, p. 201). On one hand, this helpless, unintelligent animal could be seen as a rather offensive choice of symbol for Jewish victims of the Holocaust. On the other hand, however, this bizarre symbolic way of prefiguring the Holocaust gains power from its refusal either to attempt a realistic re-enactment of the atrocity, or to succumb to sentimentality, reflecting Tabori's belief that the scale of the Holocaust is beyond both naturalistic representation and tears. Yet at the same time the stomach-turning, visceral qualities of the bloody murder and consumption of Mizzi can be seen as an attempt to remove the Holocaust and its victims from the realm of abstraction, reflecting Tabori's view that remembering should be a process which is not purely intellectual, but involves all the senses: 'Unmöglich ist es, die Vergangenheit zu bewältigen, ohne daß man sie mit Haut, Nase, Zunge, Hintern, Füßen und Bauch wiedererlebt hat,' he claimed.³²² The echoes of religious rituals of remembrance such as the Passover Seder and the Eucharist hint at parallels between Tabori's theatrical memory-work and sacred anamnetic practices.³²³ These parallels serve to legitimise Tabori's provocative way of remembering the Holocaust, and the ceremonial atmosphere created by the religious borrowings help to imbue the macabre humour with an undertone of sombreness.

But while Tabori draws on the power of sacred rites to create the impression that his theatre of remembrance is not flippant, but is fundamentally respectful towards the victims of the Holocaust, he avoids placing a limit on the suffering experienced by detaching these ritual elements from the messages of hope and redemption which they originally conveyed. Thus whereas Yom Kippur is the 'Day of

seiner Tochter Ruth den Vorschlag, eine Hühnersuppe zu kochen. Darüber empört sie sich: "Kein Huhn", denn: "Vögel sind heilig."

³²² Tabori, *Unterammegau oder Die guten Deutschen*, p. 202. Cf. the argument put forward by Désirée Bourger in her doctoral thesis that the ritualistic, quasi-cannibalistic acts of eating which feature in plays such as *Die Kannibalen* and *Die Ballade vom Wiener Schnitzel* (1996) as well as *Mein Kampf* reflect Tabori's belief that the only way of 'digesting' or coming to terms with the past is to recall it in a very corporeal way. Désirée Bourger, 'Unverdaute Trauer. Das Kulturthema Essen in George Taboris Holocaust-Dramen', Doctoral thesis (Georg-August Universität Göttingen, 2002 <<http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/diss/2006/bourger/>>, accessed February 2008.)

³²³ Cf. Feinberg, *Embodied Memory*, p. 202.

Atonement', on which Jews repent and atone for the sins of the last year, in *Mein Kampf* it is the day on which the greatest crime of the twentieth century is prefigured. Similarly, Kapparot, the Jewish custom which cleanses one from sin by symbolically transferring them to the chicken, is parodied here by one of the architects of the Final Solution. The echoes of Passover and the Eucharist in the mock-ritualistic 'sacrifice' of Mizzi are also clearly ironic. Jeffrey Carter defines religious sacrifice as 'any sacrifice where one or more of the central parties is believed to be, or to represent, an agent of the supernatural realm',³²⁴ but Mizzi's death is absolutely devoid of transcendental significance. It does not perform a salvific function in any secular sense, either, for it is just a foretaste of the bloodshed to follow; the spectator will be aware that Herzl will presumably only be 'passed over' until the destroyers come to power. Therefore the religious references also evoke a bleak, ironic recognition of the absolute failure of religion to prevent the atrocity.

The sacrilegious travesties of Judaic rites carried out by Himmlischt point towards the almost complete annihilation by the Nazis of Jewish culture and tradition in Europe. But as we have seen, these references to Judaism are intermingled and even conflated with allusions which appeal to the cultural horizon of non-Jews. Not only the themes, therefore, but also the motifs of *Mein Kampf* reflect the fact that Tabori writes for a predominantly Gentile audience. I have already mentioned the strong Eucharistic resonances of the slaughter and consumption of Mizzi. I now want to focus on the parallels which are drawn between Herzl and Christ. Though ostensibly set in the days leading up to Yom Kippur, the play as a whole reverberates with echoes of the events of Easter Week, which imbue Herzl's persecution by Hitler and his followers with Christological resonances. For example, the first scene is set on a Thursday and begins with the sound of a cock crowing, recalling Peter's denial of Jesus on Holy Thursday and therefore prefiguring the betrayal of Herzl by the man he tried to love, Hitler, and also by his mistress, Gretchen, who eventually turns into a 'Hitler-Mädchen' (*MK*, p. 195). (Of course, the sound of the cock also prefigures the killing of the hen at the end of

³²⁴ Jeffrey Carter, 'General Introduction', in Jeffrey Carter (ed.), *Understanding Religious Sacrifice: A Reader* (London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 1-11, p. 4.

the play.) In the third act, Herzl washes Hitler's feet, recalling Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet after the Last Supper, and in the final act, Herzl himself explicitly compares his ordeal to the Crucifixion:

Herzl

Das Hilfreichste wäre, euch zu sagen, ihr könnt mich mal, und euch damit grünes Licht zu geben zu meiner Kreuzigung. Aber zum einen ist die Vorstellung einer bösen Zunge auf meinem Unterleib recht unangenehm, und was die Kreuzigung betrifft, nun ja, Märtyrertum kann natürlich attraktiv sein, wer hätte nicht gern, daß die Welt ein oder zwei Tränen vergießt... *Zu Gretchen* ...aber was soll's, wenn das Ende nicht glücklich sein kann, soll es wenigstens zum Kichern sein.
(*MK*, p. 201)

The effect of these Christological parallels is to complicate the Jew/Christian dichotomy. We are reminded, perhaps, of the historical fact that Jesus himself was a Jew, and the portrayal of Herzl as more Christ-like than the Christian figures in the play challenges the stereotype of the Jew as the 'killer of Christ'. The manner in which an icon from the culture of the oppressor is expropriated to represent Jewish suffering might be considered provocative were it not for the fact that it has already featured in the work of some major twentieth century Jewish writers and artists. For example, Marc Chagall's *White Crucifixion* (1938) depicted a Jew on a cross, surrounded by disturbing images of a Jewish pogrom, and Elie Wiesel's autobiographical novel *Night* (1958) deployed imagery of the Crucifixion to evoke his experience of the 'death' of God in a Nazi concentration camp.³²⁵ Like these works, *Mein Kampf* demythifies the imagery of the Crucifixion, just as it does its borrowings from Judaic myth and ritual, and therefore it does not provide consolation for Nazi atrocities by imbuing Jewish suffering with some kind of redemptive significance. In Tabori's case, the demythification is performed through irreverent humour, with Herzl refusing any ennoblement of his suffering, and belittling 'martyrdom' as little more than a means of arousing some sympathy. It could be argued that Herzl's deflation of suffering is characteristically Jewish: Robert Alter contends that Jewish humour has a tendency to 'domesticate' myth

³²⁵ Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), pp. 61-2. See also Karl A. Plank, 'Broken Continuities: *Night* and *White Crucifixion*', *Religion Online*, <<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1069>>, accessed February 2008.

and to shrink pain to 'a world of homey practical realities'.³²⁶ An example of such 'domestication' of the imagery of Christian martyrdom can also be found earlier in the play, when Herzl retells the Passion narrative as a 'Jewish mother joke', based on the comic stereotype of the interfering Jewish mother. Claiming to have met Christ's mother on the road to Calvary, he tells Gretchen:

Ich sagte zu ihr, frag sie, wenn du mir nicht glaubst, ich sagte zu ihr:
Geh, tu etwas, er schafft es nie hinauf bis zum Hügel, der arme Kerl
kann ja kaum auf den Beinen stehen. Da drängte sie sich nach vorn,
um ihm mit dem verdammten Kreuz zu helfen, aber er wehrte sie ab
und zischte durch zusammengebissene Zähne: Misch dich nicht immer
ein, Mutter!
(MK, p. 177)

A very similar deflation of the Crucifixion also occurs in *Goldberg-Variationen*, when the director Mr. Jay demands that his long-suffering assistant, Goldberg, play Christ on the Cross. Invoking the familiar joke that Jesus was a 'nice Jewish boy' ('Was macht ein netter jüdischer Junge an einem Kreuz?' jeers Mr. Jay³²⁷), here again Tabori provocatively portrays a very Jewish Christ. Mr. Jay demands that Goldberg plays Christ as 'ein mächtig aufs Märtyrtum versessener Masochist', who, asked by one of his crucifiers if it hurts, replies 'Nur wenn ich lache'.³²⁸ The play thereby simultaneously pokes fun at the valorisation of suffering at the centre of Christianity, at the theatricality of the Crucifixion, and at the aestheticisation and mystification of pain which characterised avant garde theatre's use of Christological symbols.³²⁹ It was shown in the previous chapter that Botho Strauß' *Groß und klein* and *Die eine und die andere* also demythify the Crucifixion and comment on its theatrical qualities. Yet Strauß' play demonstrates some 'piety' towards and indeed nostalgia for the 'grandeur of emotion' represented by the Crucifixion; for a Jewish playwright such as Tabori, such a longing for extreme human experience and emotion is out of the question.

³²⁶ Robert Alter, 'Jewish Humor and the Domestication of Myth', in Harry Levin (ed.), *Veins of Humor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 255-67, pp. 256-7.

³²⁷ Tabori, 'Die Goldberg-Variationen', p. 343.

³²⁸ Ibid., pp. 342-3.

³²⁹ Cf. Annette Pankratz, 'Crucifixions in Contemporary Drama: Berker, Berkoff, Bond, Brenton, McNally and Tabori', pp. 183-96.

4.4 Theological notions: The idea of God, theodicy and the Holocaust

In the previous sections I showed that religious signs are very often deployed by Tabori to explore themes which cannot be described as specifically religious. In the following two sections I will demonstrate that at some moments *Mein Kampf* does probe – generally in a very playful, and I would suggest even facetious way – the meaningfulness and relevance of certain religious myths, doctrines and values. I will begin in this section with the play’s humorous treatment of theology. I use the term ‘theology’ here in its narrowest sense, meaning ‘God-talk’; that is, ideas about the existence and nature of God. These theological ideas are raised primarily in the play’s portrayal of the relationship between Herzl and Lobkowitz, which parodies the relationship between the Jewish people and their God. Lobkowitz, the failed kosher chef and self-proclaimed ‘God’, is a hysterical buffoon whose garbled biblical quotations belie his claim to omniscience; whose supposed omnipotence is undermined when he returns from a bar after being beaten to a pulp by just one aggressor (another reminder of *Waiting for Godot*, in which Estragon claims at one point to have been beaten up); and who demands Herzl’s unquestioning faith, but offers no grounds and no rewards for this faith. His self-aggrandising pronouncements tend to be ridiculous parodies of rabbinic and biblical texts: ‘Ich habe eben ein paar neue Gebote erfunden, erstens: Ein Gott ist genug, und der bin ich,’ he tells Herzl in the opening scene. ‘Zweitens: Kannst du deine Eltern nicht ehren, ruf sie wenigstens einmal die Woche an. Drittens: Bevor du deines Nachbarn Weib begehrt, überzeuge dich, daß sie keine behaarten Beine hat’ (*MK*, p. 145). He reduces the miracles described in the Hebrew Bible – the parting of the Red Sea, for example – to little more than cheap magic tricks (‘Ach ja, kein übler Trick, was? Dreißigtausend Ägypter ersoffen.’ [*MK*, p. 146]), and he petulantly insists on being addressed as ‘Herr’, violently lashing out at Herzl whenever this display of reverence is not forthcoming. The deeply agnostic Herzl plays along with Lobkowitz’s delusions of grandeur, but half-heartedly hopes in the meantime that by writing his book he will rediscover, amidst the pervasive scepticism of Vienna, the ‘real’ God:

Herzl

Ein Skorpion sticht mich in die Leber, jeden Morgen neu zu beginnen,
jeden Morgen schüttelt mich der Wunsch, daß dieses Buch ein
tägliches Gebet sei, was mich zurückhält, ist ein heidnisches Kichern,
während ich Seinen Namen kritzle. Sein Name ist unaussprechlich in
Wien, zur Blasphemie verkommen, er wird nur noch, vergeblich,
erwähnt als Seufzer oder Fluch oder als Beschwörung, HERRGOTT
NOCH AMOAL oder ACH GOTTCHEN oder ...
(MK, p.148)

The fact that Tabori's play does not portray God Himself,³³⁰ but rather a figure who believes himself to be God, takes the edge off its parody of theological notions somewhat. It enables the 'farce' to make teasing sideswipes at certain doctrines – in particular the Judaeo-Christian concept of God as all-good, all-knowing and all-powerful – without directly attacking or rejecting God Himself. In this respect *Mein Kampf* recalls the film *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979), whose protagonist is not Jesus Christ but someone who is mistaken for the Messiah, and which therefore cleverly manages to poke fun at aspects of Christianity without attacking its core beliefs outright.

This element of ambivalence notwithstanding, God-like figures (if not necessarily God Himself) are frequently caricatured as clownish failures in Tabori's theatrical texts.³³¹ In the English version of *Die Kannibalen*, God is referred to as a 'born loser' for whom '[e]verything has gone wrong [...] from the very first day: the weather, the lights, the people and now this appalling breakdown' [i.e. Auschwitz].³³² Similarly, *Goldberg-Variationen* plays on the *theatrum mundi* trope to draw parallels between the inept, erratic director Mr. Jay and the Hebrew God, the central joke being that, like the botched rehearsals directed by Mr. Jay, God's reign as Creator and Ruler of the universe has been characterised by one disaster after another. Like the 'heruntergekommene Götter' which feature in Strauß' theatrical texts, then, the idea of God which emerges from Tabori's comedies (however indirectly) is that of a figure which is no longer able to command the

³³⁰ Again in this chapter, I use the masculine pronoun because God is referred to as male in Tabori's theatrical texts.

³³¹ See Haas' discussion of images of God in Tabori's theatre in *Das Theater des George Tabori*, pp. 186-189.

³³² George Tabori, 'The Cannibals', in Robert Skloot (ed.), *The Theater of the Holocaust: Four Plays* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), p. 253. Tabori has not offered any explanation as to why these lines were omitted from the German version.

credibility or respect of former times. But whereas in Strauß' work the degradation of God is attributed largely to the rationalism, materialism and progressivism of modern life, *Mein Kampf* explores the idea that it is the Holocaust, above all else, that has undermined theological notions and exposed God as a failure. In so doing, *Mein Kampf* addresses one of the most fundamental (and one might add, rather well-worn) theological problems: theodicy, or how the Judaeo-Christian idea of God as the benevolent, omnipotent, omniscient Creator and Ruler of the universe can be reconciled with the experience of suffering and evil. The apparent discrepancy between the theological concept of God and the atrocities of the twentieth century is highlighted in the play by the way in which Lobkowitz's promises of love and protection to Herzl – e.g. 'Wenn du lernst, mich zu fürchten, brauchst du niemanden in den Kaffeehäuser zu fürchten.' (*MK*, p. 146) – ring hollow against both his failure to save Herzl and Mizzi from the brutality of the Nazis, and against the audience's chilling awareness of the even greater historical atrocities to come. Lobkowitz's failure to help Herzl not only challenges traditional Judaeo-Christian ideas about the nature of God, but also undermines the specifically Judaic belief that a 'covenant' exists between God and the Jews. It must be added that the ironic recognition that the supposedly 'chosen' people have suffered greatly throughout history is hardly original; as Feinberg points out, it forms the basis of a very old Jewish joke.³³³

Birgit Haas, who provides one of the more detailed analyses of the place of religion in Tabori's theatrical texts, argues that *Mein Kampf* demonstrates an 'antireligiöse Tendenz'.³³⁴ However, this neglects the fact that *Mein Kampf* avoids taking an altogether clear position with regard to the theological problems which it raises. For example, the play's apparent allegorical mockery of God for failing to prevent the Holocaust is counterbalanced somewhat by Lobkowitz's response when asked by Herzl where he was when Mizzi was killed: 'Ich war hier, die ganze Zeit hier, aber du hast vergessen nachzuschauen' (*MK*, p. 203). This could

³³³ Feinberg, *Embodied Memory*, p. 259. Steven Lipman tells the joke as follows: 'Dear God, for five thousand years we have been Your chosen people. Enough! Choose another people now.' Steven Lipman, *Laughter in Hell: The Use of Humour during the Holocaust* (North Vale, N.J.: Aronson, 1991), p. 140.

³³⁴ Haas, *Das Theater des George Tabori*, p. 156.

be interpreted either as a genuine attempt to salvage some possibility of the existence of a benevolent, omnipotent and omniscient God, or as a *parody* of typical theological justifications for God's failure to intervene against evil. In either case, Lobkowitz's response is very reminiscent of the theodicy offered by the prominent Jewish theologian Eliezer Berkowits, who, in *Faith after the Holocaust* (1973) put forward the doctrine of *Hester Panim* ('hiding of the Face') to explain God's failure to save the Jewish nation. This doctrine appealed to the classic free will argument, suggesting that at certain times God hides Himself from view, allowing human beings to act freely.³³⁵

A version of this free will argument is invoked earlier in the play, when Frau Tod is asked by Herzl about the nature of death, the afterlife and God:

Herzl

Und über Gott, wenn Sie mir meine Indiskretion verzeihen, wie ist Er?
Ich meine, ist Er nett?

Frau Tod

Du lieber Gott, so viele Fragen und nur eine Antwort. Wie alles andere hängt das von Ihnen ab. [...]

Freiheit ist etwas Schreckliches, den Stein den steilen Hang hinaufzurollen und wie er immer wieder herunterrollt, ein Ganztagsjob, aber das ist der Welten Lauf, es liegt immer an einem selbst, den Schwarzen Peter jemand anderem, zum Beispiel Gott, zuzuschieben, hilft gar nichts. Was soll ich über ihn sagen? Wenn Sie nett zu Ihm sind, wird Er nett zu Ihnen sein, der Rest ist Kommentar.

(MK, p. 193)

Frau Tod's assertion that human beings are condemned to be free and therefore solely responsible for their own actions alludes to Albert Camus' parable of the absurdity of the human condition in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and her contention that one should not blame God for human problems echoes Jean Paul Sartre's concept of 'bad faith'.³³⁶ Yet her response also demonstrates echoes of the ethical values promoted in the Talmud ('That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary.' Shabbat 31b), and it avoids the resolutely atheistic position of these Existentialist thinkers, leaving open the possibility that God does exist, but does not intervene in human affairs.

³³⁵ Eliezer Berkowits, *Faith after the Holocaust* (New York: KTAV, 1973).

³³⁶ See Chapter 2 of Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen, 1977), pp.47-72.

On one hand, then, *Mein Kampf* explores the idea that Nazi atrocities have rendered certain theological notions a farce. On the other hand, however, the play neither fully denies nor fully affirms the possibility that God exists. In this respect, it echoes the ‘God-haunted’ dramas of Beckett, in which ‘the God whose hypothesised existence can never be entirely relegated fails to meet expectations,’ as Mary Bryden puts it.³³⁷ But Tabori’s comedy achieves nothing like the stark, desolate impact of Beckett’s exposure of the existential, ontological and metaphysical anxieties and longings which have been left by the decay of religious certainties. Nor does it manage to shock or unsettle audiences into looking again at the meaning of religion in the contemporary world, as Botho Strauß’ theatrical texts do. Instead, Tabori’s play deals with very familiar theological problems which are unlikely to provoke new insights into religion, and his treatment of the discrepancy between religious doctrines and the horrors of the twentieth century is characterised by facetious irony rather than a compelling sense of loss, longing or metaphysical distress.

4.5 *Religious values*

Paradoxically, given its concern with traumatic issues such as anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, Tabori insisted that the fundamental theme of *Mein Kampf* is love: ‘Grundsätzlich geht es um die Liebe. Auf verschiedenen Ebenen,’ he maintained in one interview.³³⁸ The play invokes various types of love, including the dubious divine love between God and the Jews, and the sexual love between Herzl and Gretchen, but its main focus is the brotherly love, or what is referred to in Christian theology as *caritas*, that Herzl shows for Hitler. Describing the play as ‘a Great Love Story: Hitler and His Jew’³³⁹ – yet another provocatively fatuous epithet –, Tabori claimed that its treatment of brotherly love was of theological significance:

Wenn man die Heilige Schrift Ernst nimmt, was ich, je älter ich werde, tue, dann ist es ganz klar, dass die jüdische Bible und die christliche Bibel wollen, dass man den Feind liebt wie sich selber. Das ist die

³³⁷ Mary Bryden, *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God*, p. 127.

³³⁸ Palm and Voss, ‘... so viele Ichs, so viele Figuren ...’, p. 58.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

theologische Ebene, wo die extremen Polaritäten die Versöhnung – das ist nicht das richtige Wort –, die Liebe, das Vergeben, die Verzeihung üben.³⁴⁰

Mein Kampf examines the soundness of the religious precept that one must love one's enemy in a rather tongue-in cheek manner by putting it to the test in one of the most adverse situations imaginable. Judaism has been negatively characterised by Christians throughout history as an 'eye for eye, tooth for tooth' (Exodus 21:24) religion of revenge;³⁴¹ Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is perhaps the most famous dramatic character based on this stereotype. However, as Tabori correctly pointed out in the interview cited above, the ideal of brotherly love forms the cornerstone of Jewish as well as Christian ethics: Christ's injunction to 'love your enemies' (Matthew 5:44) can be seen as a reformulation of one of the Torah's most important commands, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18). *Mein Kampf* reminds us that Judaic and Christian values are fundamentally similar by having his stereotypically Jewish character, Herzl, embody the *caritas* which has so often been perceived by Gentiles as the very essence of Christianity. Tolerant, humble, and forgiving, Herzl steadfastly loves and takes care of Hitler even though he receives nothing but abuse in return. Indeed, Herzl exhibits *caritas* in conspicuously Christ-like ways: apart from the Christological parallels evoked through the allusions to the events of Easter Week, the Passion and the Crucifixion, the moral aphorisms which Herzl stoically repeats – such as 'In einem Streitgespräch gewinnt immer der Verlierer' (*MK*, p. 145) and 'Besser gewürgt als Würger' (*MK*, p. 166) – seem to be pastiches of Christ's teachings on 'turning the other cheek' (Matthew 5:38 – 42).

Many of Tabori's theatrical texts confront high ethical ideals with the reality of human evil, particularly as manifested by the Holocaust. For example, *Nathans Tod* (1991), conceived as a riposte to *Nathan der Weise* (1779), confronts Lessing's celebration of tolerance with the atrocities which have since been committed against Europe's Jews. Similarly, *Der Großinquisitor* (1992), based on a section of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, suggests that Christ's

³⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 58.

³⁴¹ See Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb, *Anti-Semitism in Germany: The Post-Nazi Epoch since 1945* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1997), p. 121.

teachings take an over-optimistic view of human nature. However, *Mein Kampf*'s treatment of this confrontation is probably most similar to *Die Kannibalen*; indeed, Tabori acknowledged that '*Mein Kampf* ist *Kannibalen* heute.'³⁴² In *Die Kannibalen*, Onkel, who resembles the biblical figure Moses in several respects,³⁴³ advocates basic ethical principles amid the degradation of Auschwitz, refusing to join his fellow prisoners in eating the flesh of their dead friend, Puffi, even though this offers the only possibility of survival. This play has been interpreted by many as an exposure of the redundancy of religious values against the context of the Holocaust. For example, Markus Roth contends that 'Die Grundwerte der Religion, die zum Teil auch die Onkels sind, werden bloßgestellt als sinnentleerte und wertlose Kategorien angesichts von Auschwitz', and that the play mocks '[d]ie Unfähigkeit der Religion angesichts des Holocaust'.³⁴⁴ *Mein Kampf* could also be interpreted as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the religious precept that one must love one's enemy, which not only exposes the naïve idealism of religious teachings (Herzl's aphorism 'Besser ein Gejagter als ein Jäger' is met with Lobkowitz's sardonic response, 'Sagen die Scheißjäger' [*MK*, p. 170]) but also, perhaps, raises the controversial idea that principles of non-retaliation helped to facilitate the Holocaust. After all, Herzl's kindness only results in him becoming the first victim of Hitler, leading him in the end to the sad conclusion that 'Ich war zu dumm zu wissen, daß manche Menschen Liebe nicht ertragen können' (*MK*, p. 202).

Yet it is by responding to Hitler's cruelty with love that Herzl resists degradation. Similarly in *Die Kannibalen*, Onkel's refusal to eat Puffi can be interpreted as a 'metaphor for resistance and human dignity', as Feinberg puts it.³⁴⁵ While Roth is correct to suggest that Tabori's plays address the breakdown of religious values during the Holocaust, it seems to me that they nonetheless enshrine these values and imply that they are worth holding on to. Like Onkel, whose guiding principle is 'Die einzige Methode, Gänsen zu widerstehen, ist die, einer Gans so unähnlich

³⁴² Palm and Voss, ' "... so viele Ichs, so viele Figuren ... "', p. 60.

³⁴³ Feinberg, *Embodied Memory*, p. 205.

³⁴⁴ Markus Roth, *Theater nach Auschwitz: George Taboris Die Kannibalen im Kontext der Holocaust-Debatten* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 116.

³⁴⁵ Feinberg, *Embodied Memory*, p. 206.

wie möglich zu bleiben,³⁴⁶ Herzl's adherence to the ideal of brotherly love means that he emerges from his relationship with Hitler with dignity. Onkel's and Herzl's attempts to uphold basic Judaeo-Christian ethical principles against all odds are celebrated in these plays, and these figures are valorised as bastions of humanity and moral integrity. (The fact that Onkel was inspired by Tabori's own father gives further support to this view. Tabori claimed with some admiration that his father held on to his impeccable manners even in Auschwitz, uttering the words 'Nach Ihnen, Herr Mandelbaum' on entering the gas chamber.³⁴⁷) However, Tabori offers no easy answers to the problem that Herzl's actions are both noble and yet, as a survival strategy, extremely unpragmatic.

In programmatic statements, Tabori provocatively claimed that everybody – Jew and Gentile alike – has an inner 'Hitler', that '[m]an kann einen Hitler nur bewältigen, wenn man diese Züge in sich erkennen läßt', and that *Mein Kampf* arose out of the need to confront 'der Hitler in mir'.³⁴⁸ His work is often applauded and sometimes criticised for complicating distinctions between Holocaust victims and perpetrators. For example, Feinberg maintains that Tabori challenged 'the taboo which secured Jews the status of flawless martyrs, [...] calling into question the Jewish monopoly on suffering and victimhood'.³⁴⁹ Similarly, Thomas Rothschild argues:

Es bleibt einigen Juden, meist Künstlern oder Publizisten, vorbehalten, sich der Sentimentalisierung der Juden zu widersetzen und darauf zu insistieren, daß sie, nicht anders als Deutsche, in all jenen Rollen existieren können, die seit je die Literatur bevölkern: als Opfer und als Täter, als Helden und als Schurken, als Liebhaber und als Intriganten, als Weise und als Trottel. George Tabori ist unter diesen Juden der wohl radikalste – jedenfalls in Deutschland und Österreich.³⁵⁰

However, it is not at all clear to me that *Mein Kampf* does achieve a blurring of victim/perpetrator categories. In fact, leaving aside the bizarre aspect of the plot

³⁴⁶ George Tabori, 'Die Kannibalen', in Tabori, *Theaterstücke I* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1994), pp. 1-74, p. 39.

³⁴⁷ Feinberg, *Embodied Memory*, p. 200.

³⁴⁸ Tabori, quoted in Andres Müry, 'Es ist mein Hitler. Ist Hitler in mir', *Rheinischer Merkur*, 29 April 1988.

³⁴⁹ Feinberg, *Embodied Memory*, p. 267.

³⁵⁰ Thomas Rothschild, 'Die Wunde versteht das Messer. Juden auf Taboris Bühne', in Jan Strümpel (ed.), *Text + Kritik: George Tabori* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1997), pp. 4-9, p. 4.

which suggests that a Jew was in some way Hitler's unwitting accomplice, the play establishes a quite straightforward binary opposition between noble Jewish victim and cruel Nazi perpetrator. Hitler is a grotesque caricature with no redeeming features, to whom, presumably, few spectators would be able to relate, while the charm and integrity of Herzl, who stoically refuses to fight hatred with hatred, is continually highlighted. Far from exploding taboos, such a depiction of the Jew as superior in almost every way to his persecutor is a classic trope in Jewish discourse.³⁵¹ In this chapter I have tried to show that religious motifs play a major role in asserting the superiority – intellectually as well as morally – of Herzl over Hitler. Hitler makes only one biblical allusion: a jumble of misquotations and Christian motifs which transmutes Christ's message of peace into one of violence and destruction: 'Pflugscharen zu Schwertern! Aus den Tränenkanälen des Krieges wächst das tägliche Brot für die Nachwelt!' (*MK*, p. 154). I have shown that, in contrast, Herzl's wit, intelligence and erudition are explicitly linked with the biblical and rabbinic traditions of Judaism, while his moral integrity is firmly rooted in traditional religious wisdom. Furthermore, Tabori relies heavily on Christological motifs to generate sympathy for Herzl as a noble, innocent victim and a champion of *caritas*. That is to say, the play models a stereotypical Jew as a Christ-figure in order to valorise him as superior to his Gentile aggressors, and even, perhaps, to make him appealing to Tabori's predominantly Gentile spectators.

Conclusion

Ever since he burst onto the German-language theatre scene making close-to-the-bone jokes about the Third Reich and the Holocaust, the question 'Darf man denn das?' has been posed repeatedly in critical discussions of Tabori's work.³⁵² In this

³⁵¹ Nahum Goldmann claims that 'One of the great phenomena of Jewish psychology, which goes a long way towards explaining the extraordinary endurance of our people despite two thousand years of dispersion, lies in having created a thoroughly ingenious defence mechanism against the politico-economic situation acting upon them, against persecution and exile. This mechanism can be described in a few words: the Jews saw their persecutors as an inferior race.' Goldmann adds that in his own home town, 'Every Jew felt ten or a hundred times the superior of these lowly tillers of the soil: he was cultured, learned Hebrew, knew the Bible, studied the Talmud – in other words he knew that he stood head and shoulders above these illiterates.' Nahum Goldmann, *The Jewish Paradox*, trans. Steve Cox (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978), pp. 12-13.

³⁵² Feinberg, *Embodied Memory*, p. 208.

chapter I have argued that although *Mein Kampf* may seem at first blush to demonstrate a typically postmodernist exaltation of scepticism, one of the principle functions of religion in the play is to act as a source of authority which defends the legitimacy of the 'farce'. Even where they are subverted, travestied and demythified, the inherent gravitas, ceremonialism and grandiosity of certain biblical and religious motifs lends a portentous undercurrent to the farce. Furthermore, religious motifs are used to celebrate the moral and intellectual superiority of the archetypal Jew, Herzl, and to generate respect for him as a noble, innocent victim of the Nazis. Thus while Tabori may appear to have offended the 'Holocaust etiquette' by making a comedy about the Holocaust, in fact religion plays a major role in ensuring that the 'farce' respects what Des Pres regards as key elements of Holocaust etiquette: that the enormity of the event not be obscured, and that the dead not be dishonoured.

5. 'Der letzte Ort für Metaphysik': Werner Fritsch's

theatre theory

Werner Fritsch's theoretical and programmatic writings continually refer to religion in their attempts to redefine theatre's potential in the late capitalist, virtual age. For example, they highlight the performative affinities between theatre and religion, affirming the old notion that these two dimensions of human activity are closely related. One of these texts declares that contemporary theatre's task is to fill the metaphysical vacuum that has been left by the decline of organised religion. Elsewhere, theatre's ethical significance is compared to that of the Last Judgment. But despite the fact that religion would appear to be a major source of inspiration for Fritsch's theatrical project, the secondary literature has barely attended to the theme. Instead, criticism has been focused on two principal areas: on Fritsch's 'Erinnerungsheimarbeit' – his 'remembering' of the National Socialist period as it was experienced in the rural Oberpfalz region where he himself was born and reared;³⁵³ and on the distinctive language of his theatre, which renders the earthiness of German dialect into a highly allusive, lyrical, and arguably rather mannered style.³⁵⁴

This chapter interrogates the place and significance of religion in Fritsch's programmatic. The main aim is to assess whether the key objectives and strategies of his theatrical project as a whole really are defined by religion, or whether in fact religious allusions perform a more superficial, rhetorical role. I begin in section 5.1 by discussing Fritsch's cultural pessimism and his utopian redefinition of theatre as 'der letzte Ort für Metaphysik' (*H*, p. 229) in the putatively secular Western world. In section 5.2 I examine Fritsch's stated aim of recuperating theatre's specific ontological features and thereby turning it into a site

³⁵³ Christine Dössel, 'Der Erinnerungsheimarbeiter', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 28 February 2004.

³⁵⁴ The extent to which Fritsch's language has become a focus of attention is demonstrated by the titles of the three major studies of Fritsch which have been published to date: Anna Opel's *Sprachkörper. Zur Relation von Sprache und Körper in der zeitgenössischen Dramatik – Werner Fritsch, Rainold Goetz, Sarah Kane* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2002); Stefan Pokroppa's *Sprache jenseits von Sprache. Textanalysen zu Werner Fritschs Steinbruch, Fleischwolf, Cherubim und Chroma* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2003); and Lisa Marie Küssner's *Sprach-Bilder versus Theater-Bilder. Möglichkeiten eines szenischen Umgangs mit den 'Bilderwelten' von Werner Fritsch* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2006).

of resistance against many of the social, cultural, economic and technological realities of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. I am concerned in this section to show how religious allusions are used to valorise theatre, and to evaluate the validity of the parallels which Fritsch repeatedly draws between the ontology of theatrical performance and that of liturgy. Finally, in section 5.3 I examine the ritual features and ethical goals of Fritsch's theatre, and I investigate whether it is in Fritsch's aim to redeem spectators from cycles of human brutality that the most genuinely religious qualities of his project lie.

5.1 'Furcht und Hoffnung': Cultural pessimism and utopianism

Fritsch's main programmatic texts take an extremely dim view of the postindustrial West. They paint a drastic portrait of a spiritually and artistically bankrupt, media-saturated consumer culture on the brink of environmental catastrophe, in which the prevailing ethos is 'immer dann weiterzuzappen, wenn es ernst wird' (*H*, p. 227). Fritsch draws several dubious parallels in these texts between contemporary life and the horrors of the Third Reich. In his acceptance speech for the 1993 *Hörspielpreis der Kriegsblinden*, for example, he warned that 'ein ökologischer Holocaust' was underway, describing German cities as 'Abgaskammern' and modern farms as 'Tier-KZs'.³⁵⁵ In a manifesto entitled 'Jenseits dieses Jahrtausends – Furcht und Hoffnung, die Welt betreffend und das Theater' (1999), he evokes disturbing associations of the train tracks that led to Nazi concentration camps as he laments the existence in today's mediatised world of 'Geleise, die mit teuflischem Genie gelegt sind auf Totalkontrolle der Gedanken wie der Gene hin'.³⁵⁶ Similarly, in 'Hieroglyphen des Jetzt – Theater Sprache Hörspiel Film' (2000), Fritsch attacks 'der Terror der Television' (*H*, p. 230), and compares the inane cultural homogeneity it produces to the nazification of German society during the Third Reich: 'Im Fernsehen ist die Gleichschaltung Programm:

³⁵⁵ Werner Fritsch, 'Rede zur Verleihung des Hörspielpreises der Kriegsblinden 1993', in Hans-Jürgen Drescher and Bert Scharpenberg (eds.), *Werner Fritsch: Hieroglyphen des Jetzt. Materialien und Werkstattberichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), pp. 189-93, p. 190 and p. 191.

³⁵⁶ Werner Fritsch, 'Jenseits dieses Jahrtausends – Furcht und Hoffnung, die Welt betreffend und das Theater', in Werner Fritsch, *Aller Seelen. Golgatha. Stücke und Materialien* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 135-38, p. 137.

die um den Globus gejagte Junk-Litanei aus Talkshow und Tagesschau' (*H*, p. 234).

Fritsch's use of the Holocaust as a metaphor is clearly hugely problematic. Beneath the drastic rhetoric, however, there is nothing very original about the cultural conservatism expressed in these texts, and indeed the attacks on the power of television are already beginning to seem outmoded, given that the Internet and other digital media now seem poised to usurp its cultural dominance. There are echoes of Theodor Adorno's critique of mass culture, of Jean Baudrillard's media theory, and of Botho Strauß' critiques of technology, consumerism, mediatisation and the slide into mediocrity of contemporary language and experience. But whereas Strauß' theatre is pervaded with resigned despair, Fritsch's response is more optimistic. His manifestoes assert that theatre has the potential to elicit utopian transformations by becoming a 'Gegenraum' (*H*, p. 234): a place that is the antithesis of certain aspects of contemporary life, an idea which recalls the paradox expressed in Adorno's *Ästhetische Theorie* that 'Kunst ist die gesellschaftliche Antithese zur Gesellschaft'.³⁵⁷ In order to become this antithesis, claims Fritsch, theatre must revive its 'jahretausendealte, ureigene Qualität' (*H*, p. 227), concentrating on what makes it stand apart from the mediatised instead of attempting to emulate mass media forms.³⁵⁸ According to Fritsch, recuperating theatre's ontological specificity partly entails abandoning realism, psychologism, and the conventions of the 'well-made-play' (*H*, p. 228), all of which are staple elements of mass media entertainment, and concerning itself instead with metaphysics. In so doing, Fritsch envisages that theatre will fill the vacuum that has been left by the decline of traditional religious practices: 'Theater ist, seit der Gottesdienst an Bedeutung verloren hat und an Wahrhaftigkeit, in unserer Gesellschaft der letzte Ort für Metaphysik – durch das Fleisch und Blut der Menschen und die Materialität der Requisiten beglaubigt' (*H*, p. 229).

³⁵⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Ästhetische Theorie', in Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (7; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 7-388, p. 19.

³⁵⁸ This is not to suggest that Fritsch is hostile to other media forms *per se*. He himself is a filmmaker and has won several prestigious awards for his radio-plays, including the 1993 *Hörspielpreis der Kriegsblinden* for the monologue *Sense*, and the 2006 *ARD-Hörspiel des Jahres* for *Enigma Emmy Göring*.

Thus whereas Strauß' plays follow in the traditions of the Theatre of the Absurd, confronting spectators with the anxieties and longings which have been left by religious decline without offering any solutions, Fritsch's programmatic recall those of the avant gardists who sought to offer remedies within the theatre for the perceived spiritual bankruptcy of modern life. His rejection of realism; his concern with the metaphysical dimensions of human experience; his antagonism towards contemporary civilisation; his Nietzschean conviction that solutions for the present are to be found by returning to theatre's supposed roots; and his stylisation of theatre as a surrogate religion are all themes which played a major role in avant garde ideology and practice since its very beginnings in the Symbolist movement, as we saw in Chapter 2. The belief that theatre should provide relief from the mediated world by recuperating its specificity has also played an important role in twentieth century theory and practice.³⁵⁹ The following section focuses on what, exactly, Fritsch regards as the original, specific features of theatre's ontology, and it interrogates how his programmatic texts attempt to invest these features with religious significance.

5.2 *'Das Theater des Jetzt': Recuperating theatre's specificity*

In 'Natalität versus Fatalität', a manifesto written to accompany the premiere of his monologue *Das Rad des Glücks* (2005), Fritsch entitles his envisioned utopian theatre 'das Theater des Jetzt', and he describes it as follows:

Das Theater des Jetzt findet überall dort statt, wo zwei oder drei im Namen eines Denkens, das weder den Logos noch den Körper, geschweige das Jetzt ausklammert, also im Sinne des poetischen Denkens synthetisch ist, eines Denkens, das vernetzt statt verletzt, zusammen sind.

(*N*, p. 13)

Taking its cue from this statement, the following analysis of the ontological features of theatre which are enshrined by Fritsch is divided into the following three (to various extents overlapping) categories: (1) Language ('der Logos'); (2)

³⁵⁹ See Balme's discussion of 'die Frage nach medialer Spezifität' in *Einführung in die Theaterwissenschaft*, pp. 152-3.

physical co-presence and ‘liveness’ (‘der Körper’; ‘das Jetzt’);³⁶⁰ and (3) community (‘wo zwei oder drei [...] zusammen sind’).

5.2.1 *Language*

As a reaction to today’s image-dominated culture, Fritsch advocates a theatre which inspires the imagination by eschewing all unnecessary visual stimuli. This demand that theatre should be stripped back to its bare essentials recalls the ‘poor theatre’ advocated by Jerzy Grotowski and the ‘empty stage’ favoured by Peter Brook. However, whereas deliterarising theatre and searching for pre-linguistic forms of communication were major preoccupations for these avant garde forerunners,³⁶¹ Fritsch wants to reposition language at the very centre of theatrical performance. This also differentiates him from many of his contemporaries. According to Hans-Thies Lehmann, a non-hierarchical use of signs is one of the key principles of contemporary postdramatic theatre.³⁶² Fritsch, by contrast, retains the traditional dramatic hierarchy within which language is accorded the highest position, and he refers to the Bible in order to defend this hierarchy: ‘Im Anfang war das Wort’, he rather grandly proclaims in ‘Natalität versus Fatalität’ (*N*, p. 8), adopting the opening sentence of St. John’s Gospel as the central tenet of his ‘Theater des Jetzt.’ Here we find one of many instances in Fritsch’s manifestoes in which, echoing the ‘natural supernaturalism’ of the Romantics, religious vocabulary is translated into a secular context, yet nonetheless conveys something of its original grandeur and numinosity. The biblical allusion suggests a parallel between the theatrical text and the divine act of Creation, and this serves to exalt Fritsch’s project and to invest it with a hint of the sacred.³⁶³

One of the many interesting paradoxes of Fritsch’s theatre is that, while most of his plays are set in the deeply Roman Catholic Bavarian milieu in which he

³⁶⁰ I borrow the neologism ‘liveness’ from Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999).

³⁶¹ Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre 1892-1992*, p. 131.

³⁶² Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater*, pp. 146-9.

³⁶³ David Jasper and Stephen Prickett note that this parallel between divine and artistic creation was a particularly prominent Romantic motif, and that Romantic literature was ‘almost obsessive’ in its re-writing of this opening passage of the Fourth Gospel. David Jasper and Stephen Prickett (eds.), *The Bible and Literature: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) p. 83.

himself grew up, his programmatic desire to purge theatre of superfluous visual stimuli and to transform it into a 'Tempel des Textes' (*N*, p. 11) demonstrates a distinctly Protestant ethos. It brings to mind the austere iconoclasm of Reformers such as John Calvin, Andreas Karlstadt and Huldrych Zwingli, who despised the opulence and visual emphasis of Catholicism, and sought to create instead a 'religion of the ear' which focused on the Word. But Fritsch's theatre differs from the liturgical traditions of both Protestantism and Catholicism in that, rather than affirming the 'Gospel truth' (or any other absolute truths, for that matter), its language aims for an openness of meaning – verging at times on the opaque – which gives free rein to the subjectivity of each spectator.

Curiously, Fritsch's enshrinement of language's potential to liberate the imagination invokes film, one of the very media forms against which he seeks to assert theatre's specificity. He claims that the poetic qualities of his language prompt each spectator to create his/her own imaginary 'film' in the 'cinema' of the mind. This is conceived as a quasi-political gesture, a blow struck in defence of freedom against a culture in which homogeneity and univocality – what Fritsch calls 'Eineindeutigkeit' (sic; *N*, p.9) – prevail: '[J]eder muss im Kino seines Kopfes [sic] seine Hollywood Vorstellung realisieren', he writes, 'und all dies ist Millionen Mal humaner, als die Phantasie von Millionen Menschen mit einer einzigen Vorstellung auszulöschen' (*N*, p. 12). It is possible to detect echoes here of Symbolists such as Mallarmé, who like Fritsch believed that language took precedence over all other elements of theatre, and that this language should be poetic, multivalent and mysterious rather than rationally intelligible.³⁶⁴ The idea that a work should elude fixed meanings is also a crucial element of poststructuralist thought, of course,³⁶⁵ and as such it informs the aesthetics of much postdramatic theatre. Lehmann shows that a key way in which postdramatic works pursue this elusiveness of meaning is through an 'Entzug des Sinn-Thesis', but in contrast to Fritsch, the postdramatic retreat of synthesis tends not to be located within language alone, but takes place across all the signs at theatre's

³⁶⁴ Daniel Gerould, 'The Art of Symbolist Drama: A Re-Assessment', in Daniel Gerould (ed.), *Symbolist Drama* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1985), pp. 7-34, p. 7.

³⁶⁵ See for example Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cocogni (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989).

disposal.³⁶⁶ Later in this chapter I will consider some of the difficulties arising from Fritsch's attempt to use the collective process of theatre to generate heterogeneous, individual responses.

5.2.2 *Physical co-presence and liveness*

As I have already suggested, many theorists and practitioners would take issue with Fritsch's contention that language is the cornerstone of theatrical communication. It is more widely agreed that, as the semiotician Marco de Marinis puts it, there are 'two basic conditions that any theatrical event must fulfil in order to be included in the class [theatrical performance]: (1) physical co-presence of sender and receiver, and (2) simultaneity of production and communication'.³⁶⁷ Although Fritsch's programmatic texts prioritise language, they also embrace these basic conditions of theatrical performance, and celebrate them as what makes theatre stand apart ontologically from the mediatised. Thus whereas Mallarmé and Maeterlinck felt that the materiality of theatre hinders its ability to communicate the invisible dimensions of human experience, Fritsch shares Artaud's view that 'metaphysics must be made to enter the mind through the body'.³⁶⁸ The Eucharistic resonances of his reference to 'das Fleisch und Blut der Menschen' cited earlier in this chapter promote this view by hinting at an analogy between theatrical performance and the way in which mystery is made flesh during Christian liturgy. In 'Natalität versus Fatalität', allusions to St. John's Gospel are appropriated to assert theatre's potential to materialise the metaphysical. These allusions suggest a parallel between the way in which the theatrical text is 'made flesh' by the actor and the props, and the doctrine of the Incarnation, which states that God – or the 'Logos' – was made flesh and blood through the person of Christ. Here, Fritsch is following a long artistic tradition of looking at the Incarnation as the ultimate model for the concretisation of the invisible.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁶ Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater*, p. 142.

³⁶⁷ Marco De Marinis, *The Semiotics of Performance*, trans. Áine O'Healy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 137.

³⁶⁸ Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, p. 77.

³⁶⁹ For a more in-depth discussion of the parallels between theatre and the doctrine of the Incarnation, see Max Harris, *Theatre and Incarnation* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1990).

Religious allusions are similarly exploited to valorise the liveness of theatre – the fact that it is ‘Nur-Jetzt und Nur-Hier’ (*H*, p. 232) – over mediated communication. The mediated is repeatedly associated with death in Fritsch’s writings on theatre. For example, television is depicted as being full of ‘Moden und Methoden, die Zeit, die unser Leben ist, totzuschlagen mit Talkshows, Softsex und Seifenopern’, and the virtual world is compared to a ‘Vampir am Kehlkopf’ (*H*, p. 227). In contrast, the intense sense of being-in-the-moment supposedly cultivated by theatre enables ‘eine Auferstehung aus der Alltagsgruft im Schädel’. ‘Ist das Theater ein Bollwerk gegen den Tod?’ Fritsch asks. ‘Durch zwei Stunden gemeinsames Jetzt? Ist dann Christus mitten unter uns?’ (*H*, p. 234) The fact that Fritsch leaves these questions unanswered is revealing. Doctrines about Christ’s triumph over death and his ‘real presence’ in liturgy are referenced, and lend prestige to Fritsch’s programmatics, but no real commitment is expressed to them. Later in this chapter it will be shown that Fritsch’s theatre is in fact not at all interested in creating an encounter with Christ, and that its chief aim instead is to create an encounter with the self.

I want to pause briefly at this stage to consider the validity of the antithesis which Fritsch repeatedly draws, with the aid of religious allusions, between theatre and the mass media. Fritsch’s view that live performance represents a site of resistance against mediatisation, and indeed consumerism, by virtue of its very ontology finds resonance in a good deal of contemporary theatre and performance theory. For example, Peggy Phelan’s much discussed *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993) argues that live performance resists the ‘economy of reproduction’ because it ‘cannot be saved, recorded, documented or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations’, and that ‘performance’s independence from mass reproduction, technologically, economically, and linguistically, is its greatest strength.’³⁷⁰ However, as Philip Auslander complains, attempts to defend the integrity of the live against the ‘corrupt, co-opted nature of the mediated’ very often descend into vague, sentimental clichés and mystifications about the ‘magic’, ‘authenticity’ and

³⁷⁰ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 146 and p. 149.

‘energy’ of live performance.³⁷¹ This accusation could certainly be levelled against Fritsch, who continually draws tendentious parallels between theatre and religion in order to lend mystique to theatre’s basic characteristics. (Tellingly, Fritsch neglects to point out that liveness and co-presence are characteristics which theatre also shares with more mundane, non-sacral forms of performance, such as football matches or pop concerts.) Auslander launches a compelling challenge against the binary opposition drawn by figures such as Fritsch between the live and the mediated by highlighting the ways in which ‘live’ performance is increasingly replicating and incorporating mediatisation. For example, giant television screens are used at sports events and rock concerts, and theatrical performances often incorporate film, video, music recordings and computer technology. There is some discrepancy between Fritsch’s theory and his practice in that he himself has incorporated this technology into plays such as *Es gibt Sünde im Süden des Herzens* (1993), *CHROMA. Farbenlehre für Chamäleons* (2000) and *Hydra Krieg* (2002).³⁷² Even the widespread use of microphones in the theatre introduces a degree of mediatisation into an apparently live event, and therefore complicates the assumption that theatre is an entirely unmediated form of communication. We could develop this idea further by observing that mediatisation has encroached into liturgy and other religious practices, too. For example, video, recorded music and digital presentations have been used in religious ceremonies. Moreover, religious worship has been broadcast in the West since the very beginnings of radio and television, and can now be watched on the Internet. Admittedly, listeners and viewers cannot fully participate in a sacrament such as Holy Communion, but broadcasts of liturgy are nonetheless felt to be capable of attending to the spiritual needs of those who cannot physically attend, such as the sick and the elderly.³⁷³

³⁷¹ Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 39 and p. 55.

³⁷² In most of these cases, however, this technology is incorporated so that it may be criticised. In *Hydra Krieg*, for example, computer and television images are used to portray the experience of mediatisation and virtuality as disorientating and alienating, and, like Strauß’ *Groß und klein*, the play is punctuated with failed connections – in this case Internet breakdowns – which suggest that the paraphernalia of the communication age inhibits real communication. See my discussion of Fritsch’s use of technology in ‘"Der letzte Ort für Metaphysik"? Das Theater von Werner Fritsch’, in David Barnett, Moray McGowan, and Karen Jürs-Munby (eds.), *Recherchen 37: Das Analoge sträubt sich gegen das Digitale? Materialitäten des deutschen Theaters in einer Welt des Virtuellen* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2006), pp. 46-55.

³⁷³ See Stephen Oliver, ‘Media, Worship on the’, in Paul F. Bradshaw (ed.), *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), pp. 311-13.

Such developments undermine the underlying implication in Fritsch's manifestoes that liveness and co-presence constitute fundamental, immutable ontological affinities between theatre and religious rituals, and that these affinities make theatre uniquely suited to filling the spiritual void left by the decline of 'Gottesdienst'.

5.2.3 *Community*

Another supposedly essential feature of theatre celebrated by Fritsch in his programmatic texts is the sense of community it evinces by bringing together 'flesh and blood' actors and spectators in the here and now. Again, religious allusions draw a parallel between theatre and religion and thereby exalt this feature. In the theatre, suggests Fritsch, '[m]ehr als drei Leute sind versammelt im Namen einer künstlerischen Vision' (*H*, p. 229), another very Romantic statement which echoes Christ's promise to his followers, 'Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them' (Matthew 18:20). However, Fritsch's statement posits art rather than religious faith as that which builds bonds between people. Again, too, it is suggested that the communality of theatre places it in binary opposition to the mass media. The mediatised world is characterised as an atomised one in which people spend 'Nacht um Nacht hinter geschlossenem Vorhang, ohne Eifersucht auf das Leben draußen, [...] jeder Zap-Philipp Herrscher über den Erdkreis in der Monade seiner Bude' (*H*, p. 233), an extremely negative portrait which neglects to mention that the virtual world in fact teems with an almost endless array of on-line communities. In Fritsch's analysis, however, theatre is extolled as one of the few remaining places which has the potential to bring people from diverse social backgrounds together (see *H*, p. 230). As well as the feeling of community felt among spectators, Fritsch suggests that theatre generates intense moments of connection between actors and spectators, in that 'das Jetzt der Schauspieler' is fused with 'das Jetzt der Zuschauer' (*H*, p. 233).

As we saw in Chapter 2, the desire to stimulate community in an individualistic age has been a persistent theme in theatre and performance since the beginning of the twentieth century. The claim that live performance can build community in a

way that mediated forms cannot is also commonplace in contemporary performance studies, but again, Auslander raises some serious questions about its validity. Firstly, he convincingly argues that a sense of community arises primarily from the experience of being a member of an audience, and that the question of whether the performance is live or mediated is secondary to that. For example, Auslander suggests that

[t]he crowd gathered in the town square of a small city adjacent to Atlanta to watch a big-screen simulcast of the opening ceremonies of the 1996 Olympic Games [...] constituted a community in all the same senses as the audience attending the live event a few miles away. Since most of the people gathered in the town square were neighbours, not merely people drawn together to attend an event, the experience was arguably more genuinely communal than that of the audience attending the live performance.³⁷⁴

Auslander also takes issue with the idea that live performance creates a sense of community between performer and spectator by highlighting the fact that live performance almost always entails some kind of *division* between performer and spectator. Auslander suggests that even Grotowski, one of the most famous practitioners to pursue 'communion' between actor and spectator, did not manage to achieve this sense of community, and that he eventually abandoned theatre altogether because the separation between actor and spectator is insuperable. Auslander contends that, because of this inherent actor/spectator division, theatre actually makes us aware of the *thwarted* desire for community in a way that mediated performances do not:

Whereas mediated performance can provide the occasion for a satisfactory experience of community within the audience, live performance inevitably yields a sense of the failure to achieve community between the audience and the performer. By reasserting the unbridgeable distinction between audience and performance, live performance foregrounds its own fractious nature and the unlikelihood of community in a way that mediated representations, which never hold out the promise of unity, do not.³⁷⁵

³⁷⁴ Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 56.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

A good example of how mediated performance might offer better conditions for community-building than live theatre is the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* phenomenon. Audiences all over the world ‘participate’ in regular midnight screenings of this unapologetically kitsch film by performing communal and ritualistic-seeming, though at the same time ironically self-aware, responses, such as dressing up like the film’s characters; singing along with the songs; joining in with the dialogue; chorally commenting on the action; dancing and performing actions with ‘props’ which they have brought with them to the cinema.³⁷⁶ Thus audiences of the film appear to have initiated and achieved the shift from individualistic passive observance to *communitas* and collective participation that was such a major goal for avant garde figures such as Grotowski. Of course, the sense of community is strengthened by *Rocky* fans’ shared love of this cult film. Auslander observes that ‘[i]t is surely the case that a sense of community may emanate from being part of an audience that clearly values something you value’, though he somewhat cynically adds that ‘the reality of our cultural economy is that the communal bond unifying such an audience is most likely to be little more than the common consumption of a particular performance commodity.’³⁷⁷

Leaving aside the question of the extent to which consumerism may underpin contemporary forms of community, what is really interesting for our present purposes is that collective participation in the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* evolved of the audience’s own accord during screenings of the *film*, and not during live performances of the stage musical. It would appear that this is largely to do with the keen awareness of the distinction between audience and performance which is generated in live performance. Susan Purdie argues in her analysis of the ritualistic aspects of the *Rocky Horror* phenomenon that in the theatre, the audience normally defers to the authority of the actors, and feels that it is inappropriate to do anything which might disrupt the performance. She finds that ‘it is the film and not stage showings which elicit more extreme “secular ritual” behaviour’ because ‘a

³⁷⁶ See the description of the audience participation in Susan Purdie, ‘Secular Definitions of “Ritual”: The *Rocky Horror* Phenomenon’, in Shimon Levy (ed.), *Theatre and Holy Script* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), pp. 171-90, pp. 175-7.

³⁷⁷ Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 56.

film performance provides an ordering framework for the event, a focusing sequence to which to respond; but at the same time it leaves the audience in a free equality'. At a live performance, by contrast,

we audience normally expect the performers to be in control, to know what is to be done and to be watched while they do it. Although the actors' live presence can seem like an aid to the generation of 'ritualized communitas', I suspect that in most cases it produces a clumsy and inhibiting confusion in the audience. Actors in any artificially invented 'secular ritual' cannot easily be both in communion with the audience and in directing authority over them. We, the audience do not know what we are to do, and we feel that any initiative we take ourselves is likely to be improperly disruptive.³⁷⁸

In the previous few paragraphs I contested Fritsch's view that the live co-presence of actors and spectators makes theatre uniquely suited to generating community. I now want to turn to the issue of the deliberate multivalency of Fritsch's plays, which raises questions about whether Fritsch really offers spectators respite from the individualistic culture of which he is so critical. It has already been shown that Fritsch is determined to avoid 'Eineindeutigkeit', and to offer each spectator personal freedom of interpretation and experience: 'in der Vorstellung sind, sowie der Vorhang aufgeht, die Gedanken frei' (*H*, p. 233), he insists. It seems, then, that Fritsch wants it both ways: both to cultivate unique subjectivities as a corrective to mass media 'Gleichschaltung, and to build community as an antidote to contemporary atomisation. As we saw in Chapter 2, the conflict between individuality and collectivity has cropped up again and again in modern theatre and performance, with Artaud and Grotowski, in particular, proclaiming antagonism towards Western individualism yet, paradoxically, also embracing values such as self-liberation and self-realisation. Lehmann suggests that this tension is also prominent in postdramatic theatre, which, like Fritsch, seeks to realise the paradox of a 'Gemeinschaft der unterschiedenen, singulären Phantasien'.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁸ Purdie, 'Secular Definitions of "Ritual" ', p. 189

³⁷⁹ Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater*, p. 142.

I will not attempt to answer the very thorny question of whether it is possible in principle to reconcile the apparently conflicting aims of fostering community and stimulating individual subjectivities. Instead, I want to point out some of the crucial differences between the kind of communities which Fritsch seeks to generate and the religious communities which are created and/or sustained by religious rituals such as liturgy. Fritsch wants to promote a community that arises from a special sense of the live, physical co-presence of actors and spectators rather than from commitment to shared beliefs or even meanings. But even if an intense sense of physical togetherness is enough to create what Victor Turner called 'spontaneous communitas', it does not establish a sense of collective identity which could outlast the duration of the performance. Thus Fritsch's theatre could create only a very transient 'theatrical community'; that is, a community which dissolves shortly after the performance finishes, at the latest, and which therefore offers only temporary reprieve, if any, from the alienation which supposedly characterises modern life.³⁸⁰ As I pointed out in Chapter 2, liturgy and other traditional religious rituals in the West help to promote a more durable sense of social solidarity, because they act out and affirm shared beliefs, values and meanings, or what Durkheim called 'collective representations'. In fact, it is presumably due to this shared ideological and emotional commitment to collective representations that religious worship can stimulate a sense of community even when it is broadcast. Stephen Oliver notes that 'many individuals have attested to the powerful feeling of being united with a vast throng of unseen worshippers by means of radio and television',³⁸¹ which again undermines Fritsch's view that live performance is uniquely suited to offering respite from the alienation of modern life.

³⁸⁰ I borrow the term 'theatrical community' from Fischer-Lichte, who in turn borrowed it from Matthias Warstat, *Theatrale Gemeinschaften: Zur Festkultur der Arbeiterbewegung 1918-1933* (Tübingen & Basel: Francke, 2004). It denotes 'a temporary community, as transitory and ephemeral as any performance. It exists, at best, throughout the whole course of the performance and dissolves, at its latest, at its very end. Moreover, it is a community which is not based on common beliefs and shared ideologies – not even on shared meanings; it can do without them. For it comes into being through performative means.' Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre*, p. 58.

³⁸¹ Oliver, 'Media, Worship on the', p. 313.

It should also be remembered at this point that the collective representations which are affirmed in religious rituals derive their legitimacy from a force which is perceived to be greater than the individual: 'By pointing to something greater than themselves, the people who participate in the ritual establish legitimacy for the ritual they are performing, recognize the power of the force or vision, and recognize themselves as a community,' explains Robert Lavenda.³⁸² This is not to suggest that the traditional rituals of organised Western religions rule out the possibility of individual, subjective religious experiences, or that the symbols they use always communicate entirely clear, well-defined meanings. This is clearly not the case. However, the interpretation of private experiences tends to be shaped by the communal religious beliefs.³⁸³ While religious symbols may be somewhat mysterious – indeed an aura of mystery may account for much of their emotional and aesthetic appeal –, there is nonetheless a strong sense of shared commitment to the higher truths which they point towards, as Elizabeth Nottingham notes:

[It] is not hard to understand that the sharing of common symbols is a particularly effective way of cementing the unity of a group of worshippers. It is precisely because the referents of symbols elude overprecise intellectual definitions that their unifying force is the more potent; for intellectual definitions make for hairsplitting and divisiveness. Symbols may be shared on the basis of not-too-closely-defined feeling.³⁸⁴

In contrast, Fritsch's surrogate 'Gottesdienst' deploys symbols and signs which are supposed to be given fluid, heterogeneous, idiosyncratic interpretations within the unique consciousness of each individual spectator. Fritsch's highly relativistic emphasis on the unique subjectivity of each individual spectator actually has more in common with 'alternative' spiritualities which have burgeoned in the West over the last thirty to forty years, such as yoga, reiki, aromatherapy, homeopathy and so on, than with traditional Western religious practices. As discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the sociologists Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead refer to such alternative spiritualities as 'subjective-life' spiritualities, because instead of promoting 'conformity to external authority' as traditional, congregational

³⁸² Robert H. Lavenda, 'Rituals', in Karen Christensen and David Levinson (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Community: From the Village to the Virtual World* (3; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), pp. 1176-77, p. 1177.

³⁸³ See Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context*, p. 18.

³⁸⁴ Elizabeth Nottingham, *Religion: A Sociological View* (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 19.

religious forms do, they posit the subjectivity of each individual as ‘a, if not the, unique source of significance, meaning and authority’.³⁸⁵ I am not suggesting that Fritsch is a ‘New Age’ dramatist, but Heelas’ and Woodhead’s assertion that traditional Western religions do not ‘cultivate unique subjectivities’³⁸⁶ is illuminating for the present analysis of Fritsch’s endeavour to fill the void left by ‘Gottesdienst’. It highlights the fact that, though Fritsch sets out to create a ‘Gegenraum’, his theatre actually demonstrates the same ‘massive subjective turn of modern culture’ (Charles Taylor³⁸⁷) which Heelas and Woodhead link to the rise of subjective-life spirituality in the West. This ‘subjective turn’ has its roots in Romanticism, but can also be seen to correspond with the late capitalist emergence of an ‘experience economy’,³⁸⁸ and without doubt it is bound up with the modern processes of individuation and atomisation for which Fritsch seeks to offer solutions.

5.3 Theatre as dream and ‘Jüngstes Gericht’: Ethico-therapeutic aims and ritual features

Deploying a surface/depth paradigm that has been severely unsettled by postmodernism, Fritsch’s programmatic texts contrast the superficiality of the mass media, which are compared at one point to ‘eine Autobahn,’ – another image with ominous Nazi connotations – ‘konstruiert, um von dem Terrain unterhalb der Schädeldecke, das zu uns führt, abzulenken’, with theatre’s ability to explore deeper, uncharted dimensions of human experience:

Ich gehe lieber barfuß in einer Landschaft, die der Wildnis meines Bewußtseins entspricht. Der Weg ist steinig. Die Steine sind schön. Unterwegs sein, wo es noch keine Landkarten der Seele gibt. Finsternis, alle heilige Zeit etwas Licht der Blitze.
(*H*, p. 229)

The image of bare feet on a stony path in this passage evokes a religious pilgrimage, but the journey on which Fritsch wants to take his spectators is not

³⁸⁵ Heelas and Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution*, pp. 3-4.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³⁸⁷ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 26.

³⁸⁸ Heelas and Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution*, pp. 172-3. See also Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Alcuin Academics, 2005).

towards God, but into hidden parts of the psyche. Again, we see that, for all the heavy-handed religious references, his theatrical aims, like those of Grotowski and Artaud, are focused on achieving the 'little transcendences' which revolve around secular, individualistic values such as self-discovery, rather than the 'great transcendences' which involve 'other-worldly' forces, and towards which traditional Western religions are oriented.

According to Fritsch, real insights into the self are only to be developed by exploring the side of the psyche which rational thought cannot reach: the unconscious. Echoing the work of Strindberg and the Expressionists, most of Fritsch's theatrical texts deploy dream-play structures as a means of expressing unconscious experience, and Fritsch explicitly sets out to emulate in the theatre the functions which the dream is supposed to perform for the individual, exploding '[d]ie ganzen emotionalen Verkrustungen, die Verkrüppelungen durch den Terror der Technisierung', and thereby confronting us with what civilisation forces us to repress.³⁸⁹ The repressed material which Fritsch is most concerned to uncover centres on the traumas of the Third Reich. Another one of the paradoxes of Fritsch's work, then, is that while he claims to be implementing a 'Theater des Jetzt', thematically, almost all of his plays are fixated on the German past. Bringing yet another religious concept into play, one of his manifestoes compares theatre to the Last Judgment, because it forces people to face up to the sins of the past: 'Theater heißt: in der jüngsten Geschichte uns wenigstens als Gestalten in Geschichten zu erkennen. Ist Theater nicht immer Traum – vom Jüngsten

³⁸⁹ Irma Dohm, 'Mythologische Landschaft Oberpfalz: Werner Fritsch im Gespräch mit Irma Dohm. Zu *Fleischwolf*', in Hans-Jürgen Drescher and Bert Scharpenberg (eds.), *Werner Fritsch: Hieroglyphen des Jetzt. Materialien und Werkstattberichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), pp. 114-22, p. 122. Fritsch's conception of theatre as dream reverses the analogy made by Freud, who suggested in *Die Traumdeutung* (1900) that the dream is an ur-theatre in which the psyche is author, performer as well as spectator and even critic. See Eli Rozik, 'Dreams and Theatre', in Dennis Kennedy (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Theatre and Performance* (1; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 388-9. Fritsch's reference to hieroglyphs in the manifesto 'Hieroglyphen des Jetzt' also evokes Freud, who used the term to describe the pictographic language of dreams. In modern theatre and performance, the term 'hieroglyph' is primarily associated with Artaud, who used it to describe a universal, non-logocentric theatre language which he hoped would usurp the dominance of the dramatic text; see Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater*, pp.142-3. Given that both Freud and Artaud were trying to convey the idea of a non-linguistic, or at least not primarily linguistic, mode of communication, Fritsch's use of the term 'hieroglyph' is puzzling, for as we have seen, his theatre prioritises the linguistic dimension of theatrical performance.

Gericht?’ (H, p. 228) Here we find yet another rhetorical question which insinuates, but does not definitively assert, that theatre has religious significance. The powerful imagery of Christian eschatology conveys the idea that Fritsch’s theatre provides a momentous, even fearsome confrontation with German history which offers the possibility of hope and salvation. However, as his preoccupation with the unconscious might suggest, Fritsch does not in fact aim to call people to account before God, as the Last Judgment of traditional Christian doctrine does, but rather to enable them to come to terms with the past in a secular, psychotherapeutic sense.

The analogy which is drawn between theatre and the Last Judgment also serves to suggest that Fritsch’s explorations of the unconscious have an ethical import which transcends the self. I argued in the previous chapter that Tabori also demonstrates a tendency to appeal to religion in an effort to defend the ethical legitimacy of his ‘memory-work’. Before examining the precise ethical aims of Fritsch’s treatment of German history, I want to point out that, for Fritsch, theatre’s ethical significance is bound up not just with the themes that it addresses, but also with its ontology. This is another view that is often put forward by contemporary theorists and practitioners who seek to endorse the value of live performance. According to Lehmann, it is particularly prominent among postdramatic practitioners, whose attempts to assert theatre’s ethico-political significance tend to rest on the basic mechanics of theatrical performance and perception rather than on any particular thematic concerns:

Es ist die Struktur der medial vermittelten Wahrnehmung, daß zwischen den empfangenen Einzelbildern, vor allem aber zwischen dem Empfangen und dem Aussenden von Zeichen kein Zusammenhang, kein Ansprache-Antwort-Verhältnis erfahren wird. Theater vermag allein mit einer *Wahrnehmungspolitik*, die zugleich eine *Ästhetik der Ver-antwortung* heißen könnte, darauf zu reagieren. Anstelle der trügerisch beruhigenden Dualität von Hier und Dort, Innen und Außen kann es die beunruhigende wechselseitige Implikation von Akteuren und Zuschauern in der theatralen Bilderzeugung in den Mittelpunkt rücken und so den zerrissenen Faden zwischen Wahrnehmung und eigener Erfahrung sichtbar werden

lassen. Eine solche Erfahrung wäre nicht nur ästhetisch, sondern darin zugleich ethisch-politisch.³⁹⁰

It must be remembered that Fritsch's theatre is a 'Tempel des Textes' which retains a significant role for the author, whereas Lehmann's analysis suggests that postdramatic practitioners place sole responsibility for theatre's ethical role onto the production. Nevertheless, Fritsch's writings do argue that the liveness and physical co-presence of theatre foster a special sense of social exchange which makes a deep emotional and moral impact on spectators, thereby opening up the possibility of utopian transformations. Paradoxically, Fritsch's contention is that theatrical representations of suffering, though (normally) fake, possess an authenticity and directness which even real pain, once electronically mediated, cannot match. For Fritsch, 'das oft nur übermittelte Leiden' (*H*, p. 227) is incapable of disrupting the apathy of passive, detached viewers. Recalling Baudrillard's writings on the 'hyperreality' of contemporary life,³⁹¹ Fritsch characterises the mass media as an amoral 'Wurzelwerk elektronischer Synapsen aus Signifikantenketten, die die Signifikate wie die Sinne strangulieren' (*H*, p. 233), and bemoans the fact that, with digital technology becoming ever more sophisticated, even documentary evidence of the Holocaust has begun to lose its authenticity:

Bilder können digitalisiert werden, die Dokumentaraufnahmen, die für uns und die Generation vor uns ganz deutlich gesagt haben, es hat Auschwitz gegeben, es hat Bergen von Toten gegeben, die werden für die nächste Generation in keiner Weise mehr eine Verbindlichkeit haben.³⁹²

In contrast, 'das lebendige Weitererzählen dieser geschichtlichen Tatsachen'³⁹³ in theatrical performance is supposed to cultivate a compelling sense of authenticity and therefore personal implication in the crimes of the past, a view which seems to correspond very closely to the postdramatic 'Ästhetik der Verantwortung' described by Lehmann. It could be objected that Fritsch's and Lehmann's contention that mediatised forms lack an 'Ansprache-Antwort-Verhältnis' neglect

³⁹⁰ Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater*, pp. 469-71.

³⁹¹ See for example Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations* (New York: Sémiotext(e), 1985).

³⁹² Stefan Wörner, 'Schritt vor, Schritt zurück!', *taz, die tageszeitung*, 25 February 1998.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

the fact that the mass media are becoming increasingly interactive, but I do not intend to address the question here of whether mediated forms of interactivity are more or less ethical than the sense of social exchange which is supposedly produced in the theatre.

Returning now to the themes addressed in his theatre, Fritsch's main ethical aim in invoking the repressed traumas of German history is to force spectators to recognise their own (also presumably repressed) capacity for brutality, in order that this capacity is not unleashed in the 'real' world. Christ's injunction, 'Sieh zu, daß nicht das Licht in dir Finsternis ist' (Luke 11:35), prefaces Fritsch's monologue *Sense* (1992),³⁹⁴ but in fact it could be described as the moral imperative which inspires Fritsch's whole project. His programmatic texts are pervaded with biblically-resonant imagery of a conflict between darkness and light, blindness and insight, but whereas in the New Testament it is Christ who is 'the light of the world' (John 8:12), in Fritsch's theatre moments of illumination are to be achieved by immersing oneself in the 'darkest' episodes of human history:

Die Unbestechlichkeit des eigenen Blicks gegen Verblendung. Das Zugehen auf die Totschläger in Geschichte und Gegenwart, des Zusammenhangs zwischen eigenem Herzen und historischer Mördergrube eingedenk.

Vielleicht ist für den Anfang, das Sichversenken in fremde Finsternis als augenblicklang auch eigne, im Angesicht der alle Dunkelheit von der eignen Person wegschiebenden Feigheit allüberall, die einzige Quelle des Lichts. Ist dies nicht der Anfang der Aufklärung? Ist dies nicht für den Anfang Aufklärung genug, sich im Licht der Kunst der eigenen Finsternis bewußt zu werden?³⁹⁵

The paradox that art generates enlightenment by pointing out darkness exhibits more strong echoes of Adorno, who argued that 'Kunst [...] setzt dem omnipotenten Zeitstil des Neonlichts Konfigurationen jenes Verdrängten Dunklen entgegen und hilft zur Erhellung einzig noch, indem sie die Helligkeit der Welt

³⁹⁴ Werner Fritsch, 'Sense. Monolog', in Fritsch, *Es gibt keine Sünde im Süden des Herzens. Stücke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), pp. 215-44, p. 217.

³⁹⁵ Fritsch, 'Rede zur Verleihung des Hörspielpreises der Kriegsblinden 1993', p. 192.

bewußt ihrer eigenen Finsternis überführt.³⁹⁶ However, the psychotherapeutic aspects of Fritsch's aims suggest a distinctly instrumentalist approach to art which runs counter to Adorno's argument for the autonomy of art in his *Ästhetische Theorie*: 'Ich verstehe auch mein Schreiben letztlich als Erlösungs- oder Heilungsprozeß, daß man dort, wo die größten Wunden sind, ansetzt mit seiner Arbeit und versucht, das geistig zu läutern, zu heilen und umzupolen', explained Fritsch in one interview.³⁹⁷ Fritsch's conception of theatre as therapy is clearly heavily indebted to Freudian psychology. Echoing Freud's thesis that that which has been repressed will perpetually return – a cyclical pattern which stands in sharp contrast to the teleological view of human history which is invoked with the references to the Last Judgment –, Fritsch suggests that bringing the repressed past into consciousness in the theatre will help prevent these traumas from being repeated in the world outside the theatre.³⁹⁸

Fritsch's aim of transforming spectators in a way that impacts on lived reality clearly demonstrates the privileging of efficacy over entertainment which Schechner regards as the defining characteristic of ritual. However, this returns us yet again to the problems posed by Fritsch's insistence on cultivating unique subjectivities, for it is difficult to see how his relatively well-defined ethico-therapeutic goals can be reconciled with his desire to allow each individual spectator complete freedom of response. Leaving aside this problem, Fritsch's view of theatre as a dark, painful but ultimately therapeutic process is one that has informed a good deal of the work discussed in this thesis. The basic objectives of Fritsch's Holocaust memory-work parallel those of Tabori, who as we have seen is also indebted to Freudian ideas about the necessity of confronting repressed

³⁹⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), pp. 23-4.

³⁹⁷ Fritsch, quoted in Norbert Otto Eke, ' "Im Kopf die Toten verwesen nicht". Werner Fritschs "Theater des Todes" ', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 125 (2006), pp. 64-81, p. 79. The original source is the programme to the premiere of *Wondreber Totentanz*, Staatstheater Darmstadt, 1998, p. 25.

³⁹⁸ See *N*, pp. 14-15: 'Falls die Zeit Zyklus ist, und nicht Pfeil, der uns – auch von der Zukunft her, deren Möglichkeit, auf eine lebenswerte Weise auch nur für die Generation unserer Kinder, stattzufinden wir Tag um Tag durch unsere Blindheit nolens volens unterbinden – eines Tages ins Herz trifft, heißt das im Klartext, dass der Geist von Auschwitz, wenn wir ihn nur vergessen wollen, auf die eine oder andere versteckte oder offensichtliche Weise wiederkehrt: als schlimmstmögliche Nutzung der unsichtbaren Installation Überwachung und Gedankenkontrolle, die rings um uns angelegt ist und bereits praktiziert wird.'

traumas. However, Fritsch's programmatic texts demonstrate the inflated, quasi-mystical rhetoric of which Tabori was extremely sceptical. His stylisation of theatre as a surrogate religion echoes the manifestoes of 'holy' theatre practitioners such as Artaud and Grotowski, but like these forerunners, Fritsch's project owes much more to the concepts, strategies and aims of psychoanalytic psychotherapy than it does to traditional religious notions, beliefs and values. Thus even if his theatre does meet Schechner's contentious definition of ritual, it is ritual which embraces the core principles of secularity.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that religious allusions play a predominantly rhetorical role in Fritsch's theoretical and programmatic texts, and that the main aims, strategies, concepts and values of his theatrical project are ultimately secular. That is to say, Fritsch is not calling for a revival of traditional religious beliefs or practices in the theatre. Instead, religious material is detached from much of its original religious meaning, and is exploited to defend the significance of Fritsch's theatre. Atmospherically, religious allusions imbue Fritsch's project with a sense of solemnity, sacredness and prestige, and they help to assert the integrity, purity and ethical superiority of theatre over today's vast array of media alternatives. Furthermore, religion represents something that is antithetical in many ways to modernity, and so it is invoked to reinforce the idea that Fritsch is creating a 'Gegenraum' to contemporary culture by replacing materialism with spirituality (though in Fritsch's case, this is a spirituality of the self), and rational or empirical knowledge with non-rational, quasi-mystical insights. The parallels which are repeatedly drawn between theatre and religion in Fritsch's programmatic texts imply that theatre is in a unique position to fill a perceived metaphysical vacuum in today's world, but I have found these parallels to be rather superficial. Fritsch emphasises certain performative affinities between theatre and liturgy, such as physical co-presence and liveness, but he largely neglects what is arguably a more important element of liturgy: the shared beliefs, values and 'higher' meanings which they affirm. The next chapter turns to Fritsch's theatrical texts themselves. It examines the role played by religious signs in the pursuit of the programmatic

objectives outlined in this chapter, and it assesses whether Fritsch's plays demonstrate a stronger interest in the actual meaning of religion, or whether here too religious elements serve primarily as decorative flourishes.

6. 'Ist ohne Gott unsere Natur / Totschlag nur / und Tortur?'

Fritsch's *Wondreber Totentanz* and *Aller Seelen*

Wondreber Totentanz. Traumspiel (1995) and *Aller Seelen. Traumspiel* (2000), two explorations of the National Socialist past set in or at least near his native Oberpfalz, are prime examples of the 'Erinnerungsheimarbeit' for which Fritsch is best known. They both demonstrate the extremely religious – arguably even religiose – quality which is also characteristic of Fritsch's theatre, for religious elements pervade virtually all semiotic levels, from the titles, characters and language, to aspects of the *mise en scène* such as stage decoration, costumes, music and lighting. In fact, the religious signs are too numerous to deal with exhaustively in a single chapter. In discussing the place and significance of religion in these theatrical texts, therefore, this chapter focuses on some representative examples, devoting special attention to the question of how religious signs are deployed to realise the programmatic aims discussed in Chapter 5. I begin in section 6.1 with an overview of the plots and structures of these plays, briefly drawing out the similarities and differences between Fritsch's dream-plays and those of the most famous exponents of the form, Strindberg and the Expressionists. In section 6.2 I discuss Fritsch's key themes. I want to investigate here the extent to which Fritsch's plays demonstrate a real thematic interest in religion itself, and the extent to which religion is mined for images and symbols to explore subject matter which, though possibly 'metaphysical', is not specifically religious. Finally, in section 6.3 I interrogate the role played by religion in Fritsch's evocations of a pre-industrial, pre-secular, and in *Wondreber Totentanz* also liturgically-styled, 'cosmos' which functions, according to Fritsch, as a 'Gegenraum' to contemporary Western culture.

6.1 Plot and structure: The dream-play and the 'Film des Lebens'

Wondreber Totentanz is a densely textured, multileveled theatrical reworking of Fritsch's earlier radio-play, *Isidor Isidor* (1993), and novel, *Stechapfel. Legende* (1995). It interweaves a number of narrative threads and therefore, like much postdramatic theatre, it lacks the kind of linear 'plot' which can be easily synthesised. The framework of the play – what Fritsch refers to as 'die sichtbare

Ebene' (*WT*, p. 141) – is the funeral Mass of Irmgard, a young woman who has been killed in a terrorist attack while on honeymoon in Egypt (one of many references to Egypt in this play). Her widowed husband, Isidor, is present at the funeral, but he is in a coma and near to death himself as a result of the attack. On a second level, *Wondreber Totentanz* is a dream-play depicting the memories and fantasies which flash through Isidor's unconscious in his final moments of life: 'Vielleicht findet ja das ganze Stück in seinem Kopf statt', observes Fritsch in an introductory note (*WT*, p. 143), inevitably recalling Strindberg's comment in his famous prefatory note to *A Dream Play* that 'one consciousness reigns above [...] all – that of the dreamer'.³⁹⁹ As well as the echoes of Strindberg, however, Isidor's unconscious thoughts, which are interspersed associatively with scenes from the funeral ceremony, evoke the aesthetics of cinema, in that they resemble flashbacks.⁴⁰⁰ *Wondreber Totentanz* appears to take as its inspiration the conceit of Pier Paolo Pasolini, a writer and film-maker greatly admired by Fritsch,⁴⁰¹ that nearness to death prompts the mind to construct a 'montage' of the truly significant moments of life.⁴⁰² Demonstrating again that his work is heavily influenced by one of the very media forms in resistance to which he claims to reassert theatre's specificity, the 'film of life' device crops up in various guises in several of Fritsch's plays.⁴⁰³ However, the conceit – a reformulation in cinematic terms of the cliché that our life flashes before our eyes just before we die – is explicitly invoked only in Fritsch's preface to *CHROMA. Farbenlehre für Chamäleons* (2000), which imagines the 'film' which might have played in the unconscious of the famous actor Gustaf Gründgens just before he dies:

³⁹⁹ Strindberg, 'A Dream Play', p. 19.

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. Jörg Lukas Matthaei, 'Von der Wortkulisse zum Film in Worten', in Drescher and Scharpenberg, *Werner Fritsch: Hieroglyphen des Jetzt*, pp. 203-07, which discusses the ways in which Fritsch translates cinematic devices into the theatrical medium.

⁴⁰¹ See Werner Fritsch, 'Der Schatten des Sophokles. Flüchtigtes zu Zeichen und Winden des Pier Paolo Pasolini', in Drescher and Scharpenberg, *Werner Fritsch: Hieroglyphen des Jetzt*, pp. 253-65.

⁴⁰² Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, trans. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 242: 'Death effects an instantaneous montage of our lives; that is, it chooses the truly meaningful moments (which are no longer modifiable by other possible contrary or incoherent moments) and puts them into a sequence.'

⁴⁰³ As well as the two plays under discussion here, the 'film of life' conceit can be detected in *Cherubim* (1987), *NICO. Sphinx aus Eis* (2001) and *Das Rad des Glücks* (2005), three monologues in which the imminence of death prompts a montage-like flood of memories. See Sinéad Crowe, ' "Der Tod schneidet den Film des Lebens": Life-Writing in the Theatre of Werner Fritsch', in Julian Preece, Frank Finlay, and Ruth J. Owen (eds.), *New German Literature: Life-Writing and Dialogue with the Arts* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 401-16.

Der Tod schneidet den Film des Lebens. Und klebt die entscheidenden Bildfolgen aneinander. Sicher sind die Sequenzen, die man in diesem Zustand sieht, anders belichtet. Eine wichtige Frage ist, ob auch die Perspektiven Einstellungsgrößen Farben Geschwindigkeiten Optiken andere sind.⁴⁰⁴

As well as portraying Isidor's own personal 'film of life', which is mostly made up of scenes of his post-war Oberpfalz childhood and his love-affair with Irmgard, on a third level *Wondreber Totentanz* explores the collective memories of the local community, focusing on the atrocities that were committed in this part of the Oberpfalz during the Third Reich, particularly in the concentration camp at Flossenbürg. These horrors are depicted mostly by means of personal accounts of this period, which are told, with echoes of Greek tragedy, by two choruses: a 'Chor der Toten I', made up of 'die in der Erde begrabenen, eher deutschen Toten' and a 'Chor der Toten II', made up of 'die im Feuer verbrannten, eher jüdischen Toten' (*WT*, p. 140).

Aller Seelen also appears to conflate the dream-play form with the idea of a film of life. The central figure is Christa, now an old, dying woman, and the play depicts her nightmarish memories of the monstrous acts that were committed around her family home near the Slovenian border during and just after World War II. The play is divided into three sections, each of which is set on All Soul's Day in three consecutive years. In the first section it is 1943, and Christa's father, Lazarus, is murdered by Wehrmacht soldiers for harbouring partisans on his farm. In the second section, 1944, Christa is incarcerated along with her family and neighbours in a concentration camp, where they are forced to labour in a quarry. (Though the concentration camp is unnamed in the play, its proximity to the quarry suggests a strong resemblance to Flossenbürg.) In the final part of the triptych, Christa, having survived the concentration camp, takes refuge with a German soldier, Wolfi, and his family. However, the peace is disturbed by the arrival of former concentration camp prisoners who wreak vengeance by murdering Wolfi.

⁴⁰⁴ Werner Fritsch, 'CHROMA. Farbenlehre für Chamäleons', in Fritsch, *CHROMA. Farbenlehre für Chamäleons / EULEN:SPIEGEL. Deutsche Geschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: edition suhrkamp, 2002), pp. 7-78, p. 11; sic.

Critics have been quick to point out the Strindbergian and Expressionistic qualities of Fritsch's theatre.⁴⁰⁵ But while Fritsch certainly shares with these antecedents a preoccupation with unconscious experience, it is important to note that his dream-plays do not treat the key Expressionist trope of quest. Fritsch's central figures are not seekers. Therefore, although the episodic scenes which comprise *Wondreber Totentanz* and *Aller Seelen* superficially resemble 'stations', they do not represent stages of a journey towards religious or spiritual transfiguration. Thus while these plays exhibit certain stylistic traits of Expressionism, particularly with regard to their ecstatic and quasi-mystical qualities, it is Botho Strauß' depiction of Lotte's religious struggle in *Groß und klein*, despite its avoidance of almost any of the pathos of Expressionism, which is truer to the thematic traditions of Expressionist drama.

6.2 Themes and motifs

The themes treated in *Wondreber Totentanz* and *Aller Seelen* against the context of the Third Reich are of an unapologetically weighty nature. They include the cyclical character of history; revenge, remembrance and the possibility of redemption; and the contradictions of the human soul: its capacity for both immense love and terrible cruelty. It is in meditating on such great matters that Fritsch's aspiration to provide a refuge for metaphysics is perhaps best realised. Fritsch makes great use of religious motifs in his engagement with such metaphysical (as well as existential and ethical) issues. However, it is my contention that he does not give these themes a religious treatment, in that he does not reflect on the meaningfulness and relevance of specifically religious responses to them. To illustrate this point, sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.2 below will focus on Fritsch's deployment of Christian motifs of death and human 'fallenness', showing that these resonant images are exploited without their religious meaning being explored. In section 6.3.2, however, I identify one theme which can be described as specifically religious: theodicy, a theological problem which has been explored in a number of the modern theatrical texts already discussed in this thesis.

⁴⁰⁵ See for example Opel, *Sprachkörper*, p. 51, and Teresa Grenzmann, 'Zigeunermutter Courage; Minetti macht's', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 May 2005.

6.2.1 *Motifs of death*

Ironically, given that one of Fritsch's programmatic aims is to turn theatre into a 'Bollwerk gegen den Tod', death is an almost constant presence in *Wondreber Totentanz* and *Aller Seelen*, as the titles themselves would suggest. This presence manifests itself in a multitude of ways, including grisly depictions or descriptions of murder; figures who are dying or who come back from the dead; settings such as cemeteries and crematoria; and – the focus of this section – allusions to those aspects of religion which deal with death, such as eschatology, funerary rites and biblical narratives involving death.⁴⁰⁶ There are a few, relatively fleeting, points at which these plays reflect on the mystery of death itself. For example, in the opening scene of *Aller Seelen*, Lazarus invokes a kind of naïve folk superstition as he tries to describe to his young son what follows death: 'Die Stern – da wohnen die Toten', he explains. '[...] Die schauen auf uns!' (*AS*, p. 13). Later, the play encourages us to imagine for a moment what the process of dying might be like: 'Im Augenblick des Todes steht alles in Weißglut, wie im Augenblick zuvor von Gott erst erschaffen', asserts Lazarus' devout aunt, Philomena (*AS*, p. 64), who comes back from the dead after she is murdered in the concentration camp. (The Beckettian intertwining of beginnings and endings here is just one of many motifs of cyclicity, as will be shown in section 6.2.2 below.)

On the whole, however, while the motifs of these plays would suggest a morbid preoccupation with death, grappling with the significance of mortality *per se* is not, in fact, a major theme. Fritsch's focus lies instead on imagining what the dead – in particular those who were murdered during the Third Reich – would have to say about the past. The intention is to develop a fresh perspective on German history by giving a voice to those who were irrevocably silenced. Where Fritsch's 'Film des Lebens' conceit posits death as the event which gives each individual

⁴⁰⁶ In *Wondreber Totentanz*, these Judaeo-Christian motifs of death are mixed with allusions to the elaborate funerary practices and beliefs of ancient Egypt, a culture in which, as the priest presiding over Irmgard's funeral explains, 'Die wußten um den Tod' (*WT*, p. 148). The religio-mythic syncretism of *Wondreber Totentanz* will be considered in more detail in other sections of this chapter.

life its final narrative, his treatment of history takes as its premise the idea that it may be the dead who have the most valuable insights into the past: ‘Wird Geschichte / nicht von den Toten allein / verstanden? / Sind nicht im Falle des Kriegs / die Erzählungen Überlebender / Geschichtsfälschung von vornherein?’ asks the priest presiding over the funeral ceremony in *Wondreber Totentanz* (WT, p. 148), echoing the familiar maxim that official historical narratives are unreliable because they are always written by the victors. A similar emphasis on the importance of remembering the past from the perspectives of the dead can be found in the work of a number of major contemporary European playwrights, including Heiner Müller, who described theatre as a ‘Totenbeschwörung’ and a ‘Dialog mit den Toten’,⁴⁰⁷ and Tadeusz Kantor, in whose ‘Theatre of Death’ the return of the dead was a recurring motif.⁴⁰⁸ Some striking parallels can also be drawn with George Tabori’s *Jubiläum* (1983), in which Jewish victims of the Holocaust rise from their graves and confront the audience with the horrors that they endured.⁴⁰⁹

In general, then, the many religious motifs of death in Fritsch’s theatrical texts do not reflect a thematic interest in exploring religious beliefs about death and the afterlife. Instead, these motifs are reinterpreted within the secular, this-worldly context of uncovering forgotten pasts. For example, the biblical connotations of the name ‘Lazarus’ are metaphorical only. They are not deployed as part of a meditation on Christ’s defeat of death, but instead point to the fact that this figure rises from the dead within Christa’s dreaming unconscious. Similarly, while this play refers in its title to the Christian feast day on which the faithful pray for the souls of those who are in Purgatory, Fritsch does not reflect greatly in any depth

⁴⁰⁷ Wolfgang Heise, ‘Ein Gespräch zwischen Wolfgang Heise und Heiner Müller (1986)’, in Heiner Müller, *Gesammelte Irrtümer 2: Interviews und Gespräche*, ed. Gregor Edelmann and Renate Ziemer (Second edn.; Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1996), pp. 50-70, p. 64.

⁴⁰⁸ On Kantor’s Theatre of Death, see Krzysztof Miklaszewski, *Encounters with Tadeusz Kantor* (London: Routledge, 2002). On the influence of Kantor on Fritsch’s theatre see also Klaus Dermutz, ‘Umschmelzung gesprengter Fragmente – Zu einigen Motiven im Werk von Werner Fritsch’, in Drescher and Scharpenberg, *Werner Fritsch: Hieroglyphen des Jetzt*, pp. 40-51, and Norbert Otto Eke, ‘"Im Kopf die Toten verwesen nicht". Werner Fritschs "Theater des Todes"’, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 125 (2006), pp. 64-81, pp. 71-5.

⁴⁰⁹ George Tabori, ‘Jubiläum’, in Tabori, *Theaterstücke II* (Frankfurt am Main: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1994), pp. 49-86.

on religious ideas about the afterworld: his remembrance of the dead focuses on their experiences in *this* world.

Another religious motif of death which is prominent in both of the plays under discussion here is the dance of death, a ceremonial form which Kantor's Theatre of Death also frequently invoked.⁴¹⁰ In medieval and baroque religious iconography, the dance of death typically showed death, usually depicted as a skeleton or a corpse, dancing with various representatives of society, and it had a didactic function: to warn that death is inevitable irrespective of social standing, and that therefore everyone should prepare to meet their Maker and Judge.⁴¹¹ Fritsch claims that *Wondreber Totentanz* was inspired by the eponymous fresco painted on the ceiling of the chapel near his childhood home,⁴¹² but the motif is largely removed from its religious context. In a scene of sentimental utopianism at the end of the play, the choruses of the dead dance with each other – and not with a personification of death –, Germans and Jews finally reconciled as they talk about their horrific experiences during World War II and the Holocaust. The function of Fritsch's version of the dance of death here is not to warn spectators about the need for spiritual preparation for the world to come – indeed, it will be shown at a later point that Fritsch's dancers expressly *reject* belief in the existence of heaven or God – but to bear witness to the sufferings of those who died during the Nazi regime. Fritsch's appropriation of this religious iconography invests his play with ceremonialism, and, like Tabori's religious borrowings, this helps to defend the gravitas and ethical legitimacy of his memory-work. However, like several other modern dramatists, including Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Horváth, Brecht, Manfred Hausmann, and Rolf Hochhuth, Fritsch secularises the motif in that he jettisons its original religious message of 'Rechenschaft nach dem Tod'.⁴¹³

⁴¹⁰ See Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1999), p. 120.

⁴¹¹ See Gert Kaiser, 'Einleitung: Der tanzende Tod', in Gert Kaiser (ed.), *Der tanzende Tod: Mittelalterliche Totentänze* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1983), pp. 9-69.

⁴¹² Petra Wilgenbus, 'Nachwort', in Werner Fritsch, *Es gibt keine Sünde im Süden des Herzens. Stücke*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), pp. 289-302, p. 292.

⁴¹³ Johann Bauer, 'Totentanzadaptionen im modernen Drama und Hörspiel: Hofmannsthal, Horváth, Brecht, Hausmann, Weyrauch und Hochhuth', in Franz Link (ed.), *Tanz und Tod in Kunst und Literatur* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1993), pp. 463-88, p. 487.

Fritsch's rendering of the dance of death in *Aller Seelen* does not pursue the religious objectives of the medieval original either. Its chief function here, where it appears in conjunction with numerous biblical allusions, is to exalt a secular ideal of love. In the second part of the triptych, Christa dreams that the risen Lazarus takes part in a dance with friends and family members during her wedding to her lover, the partisan Stephan. Entitled 'Liebe ist gewaltiger als der Tod', one of several allusions to the Song of Songs,⁴¹⁴ this scene takes up the old theme of the symbiosis of love and death. But where Jewish and Christian theological traditions have generally read the Song of Songs as an allegory of God's love for Israel, the Church, or the individual believer, Fritsch uses the religious allusions to celebrate and indeed sacralise *human* rather than divine love. There are some echoes of the *memento mori* message of the medieval dance of death when Death himself makes a brief appearance, citing a *Volklied* to warn about the transitoriness of life – 'Freut euch des Lebens, / solange noch das Lämpchen glüht' (*AS*, p. 43) – but this scene decisively rejects Christian ideas about what lies beyond the grave. It subverts its allusions to Genesis to suggest that, in a brutalised, seemingly God-forsaken world, it is only human love that can offer the possibility of transcendence:

Engel

Adam und Eva haben Gott vergessen –
in die Stauden hineingekrallt
und Äpfel gefressen.

Judith

Ja, das Paradies ist nirgends mehr
außer in mir, Engel!
(*AS*, p. 39)

This scene offers secular consolation for mortality, and even, to some extent, for the barbarity of Nazi Germany: 'Christus hat sich ewig gefreut, / daß im Steinbruch der Stechapfel / so schön blüht', Philomena tells the dancing lovers (*AS*, p. 39), invoking the thorn apple as an emblem of the love that manages to flourish even in the bleak surroundings of the concentration camp quarry. The difference from Strauß' *Groß und klein* is vast. Whereas Strauß uses religious

⁴¹⁴ Cf. Song of Songs 8:6: 'Place me like a seal over your heart, / like a seal on your arm; / for love is as strong as death, / its jealousy unyielding as the grave. / It burns like blazing fire, / like a mighty flame.'

motifs to throw into relief the blandness and emotional flatness of contemporary existence, Fritsch exploits their ‘grandeur of emotion’ to dramatise the polarities of human nature: its potential for all-conquering love but also, as the next section shows, monstrosity. The problem with using religious motifs to make wartime rural Germany the site of such extreme human experience, however, is that it tends to mythologise the Third Reich, an issue I will also address in the following section.

6.2.2 *Imagery of the Fall*

By raising the wartime dead, Fritsch confronts the spectator with German history from the perspectives of those who have suffered the very worst in human savagery. His dead figures’ versions of history evoke a world in which barbarism is pervasive and few, if any, are entirely innocent; in a rather crude simplification of Fritsch’s basic message, the words ‘Alle sind schuld’ were emblazoned across a metal gate, ironically echoing the Nazi concentration camp slogan ‘Arbeit macht frei’, in Johann Kresnik’s 2000 production of *Aller Seelen* at the Thalia Theater, Hamburg. *Wondreber Totentanz* and *Aller Seelen* make the familiar point that the Nazis had all too many willing executioners: ‘Überall wo man auf sie getroffen ist, / hat man sie über den Haufen geschossen, / hat man ihnen mit der Schaufel das Hirn herausgehaut. / Nicht etwa im KZ. / Im Keller, in der Küche, in der Kirche’, asserts the sadistic concentration guard Geigenbauer as he is forced by US soldiers to exhume a mass grave in one particularly grotesque scene (*AS*, p. 57). More provocatively, however, these plays also complicate distinctions between perpetrators and victims. Taking up a theme which is of deep autobiographical significance to Fritsch, whose own grandparents were murdered by liberated concentration camp prisoners on All Soul’s Day 1945,⁴¹⁵ both of these plays depict former victims of the Nazis performing monstrous acts of retribution. Thus in *Aller Seelen* the German soldier Wolfi is murdered in cold blood by former concentration camp prisoners, and in *Wondreber Totentanz*, Samuel, a former

⁴¹⁵ Fritsch, ‘Der Schatten des Sophokles’, p. 264. *Aller Seelen* also draws on the personal experience of director Johann Kresnik, who as a small child witnessed the murder of his father by partisans; see Matthias Heine, ‘Im Rausch erscheinen ihm Gartenzwerge’, *Die Welt*, 17 April 2000. This intertwining of collective history and personal experience represents another echo of Kantor, whose treatments of Polish history usually drew greatly on his own childhood memories; see Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater*, p. 118.

Jewish prisoner of Flossenbürg, wreaks indiscriminate revenge by murdering Isidor's father and raping his mother.

One of the most persistent images with religious connotations deployed in Fritsch's engagement with the atrocities of the Third Reich is the viper ('Kreuzotter'), a creature which is referred to several times in *Aller Seelen* and almost obsessively in *Wondreber Totentanz*. As discussed in the previous chapter, Fritsch insists that the language and imagery used in his work resist univocality. Therefore, the viper functions as an ambiguous symbol whose resonances constantly shift. For example, the first part of *Aller Seelen* refers to the relatively positive connotations of vipers in Bavarian folk superstition, which holds that a milk-fed viper brings the blessings of deceased ancestors (*AS*, p. 15).⁴¹⁶ In *Wondreber Totentanz*, vipers become emblems of sensuality when they are compared by the choruses to the tongues of the kissing lovers, Isidor and Irmgard (*WT*, pp. 178-9). Yet despite Fritsch's determined effort to promote fluidity of meaning, it can hardly be denied that, in Western culture, the symbol of the serpent is associated first and foremost with the Bible. Even for the non-religious spectator, the dominant association evoked by the image of a snake is likely to be one of the most familiar biblical myths: the narrative in Genesis of humanity's fall from innocence to sin. The viper is explicitly linked with the notion of a lost paradise at several points in Fritsch's texts, thereby emphatically triggering this biblical association. Again, however, these religious references serve a metaphorical purpose only, in that the Fall is invoked as a metaphor for the total collapse of civilisation during the Holocaust, rather than as an explanation for human evil. Just one example from *Wondreber Totentanz* will suffice as illustration. In the following excerpt, the concept of 'paradise' is invoked ironically to underscore the dreadful conditions of Flossenbürg, where prisoners were so desperate for food that they were reduced to eating snakes:

Chor der Toten II

Und Gott nur geben kleines kleines Paradieses
in dieses Zeiten
Nur geben Kreizotter in Steinbruch

⁴¹⁶ See Hans Biedermann, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, trans. James Hulbert (New York: Facts on File, 1992), p. 311.

Fleisch für Hunger
in Kerper von des Todes leben.
(*WT*, p. 186; sic⁴¹⁷)

Imagery of the Fall – Western culture’s central myth about the universal corruptibility of human nature – helps to communicate Fritsch’s view that German society was universally tainted by the depravity of the Third Reich. Atmospherically, due to its long association with the Devil in both Jewish and Christian theology, the serpent motif helps evoke a chilling sense of pervasive evil. A troubling effect of Fritsch’s use of the imagery of the Fall, however, is that it contributes towards what Norbert Otto Eke refers to as ‘eine entlastende Mythisierung des Bösen’.⁴¹⁸ Though Fritsch’s work exhibits a form of natural supernaturalism, whereby religious motifs are reinterpreted within a secular frame of reference, motifs of the Fall nonetheless have the effect of mystifying evil, and thereby of obscuring the complex material and social factors which led to Nazism.

Just as Fritsch does not examine religious responses to death in his work, so he does not investigate in any depth religious responses to human wickedness: the doctrine that salvation is achieved through God’s grace, for example, or that Christ’s sacrifice redeemed humanity from its sins. *Aller Seelen* does refer to the Christian belief in the Second Coming of Christ in the title of one of its final scenes, ‘Der jüngste Tag’ (*AS*, p. 59), which depicts the birth of Wolfi’s child and reflects on the profound ambivalence of generating new life in a world so full of cruelty. But, again, the religious allusion is given secular meaning, for the hope expressed by the victims of Nazism who stand by and watch as the child is born is not that Jesus Christ will come to raise the dead and destroy evil. Instead, echoing

⁴¹⁷ The Jewish chorus’ language, which Fritsch describes as ‘Krematoriumsesperanto’ (*WT*, p. 141), is characterised by ellipses, staccato rhythms and awkward, non-standard grammar, syntax, vocabulary and pronunciation, which is supposed to convey their trauma. A major problem with this artificial language, however, is that it ‘others’, alienates and depersonalises the victims of the Holocaust, defining their identity solely in terms of their suffering. It was criticised by many reviewers for being kitsch and even tasteless. For example, Gerhard Stadelmeier complained that ‘so kommen die jüdischen Toten noch einmal unters Räderwerk: umgebracht in Klischees. Die Sprache der Figuren im *Wondreber Totentanz* offenbart nichts. Sie verklebt’s im Schwulst’. Gerhard Stadelmeier, ‘Im Disneyland der Schuld’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 January 1998. See also Franz Wille, ‘Gespenster der Gegenwart’, *Theater Heute*, 3 (1998), pp. 4-11, which criticised the way in which ‘Kunstgewerbe fließend in die Geschmacklosigkeit übergeht.’

⁴¹⁸ Eke, ‘Im Kopf die Toten verwesen nicht’, p. 77.

Hannah Arendt's philosophy of 'natality', which used birth as a metaphor for the ability of each individual to begin something new,⁴¹⁹ it is simply that the next generation will be different (*AS*, p. 65).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the utopian aims of Fritsch's project do not appeal to traditional religious models of redemption, but are based instead on the psychotherapeutic paradigm which holds that repressed traumas recur until they have been properly confronted. The danger that the horrors of the past will be continually repeated is symbolised in the two plays under discussion here by recurring patterns and motifs of repetition and circularity which jar with the teleological view of human history which underpins the biblical motifs deployed in the play. In *Wondreber Totentanz*, for example, the younger generation have the same names as their parents; Otto, a young neo-Nazi brutalised by his experiences in the *Bundeswehr*, exemplifies the resurgence of anti-Semitism in contemporary Germany; the bloodshed of World War II is echoed in terrorism in contemporary Egypt; and the play is prefaced with quotations from Heraclitus' philosophy about the cyclicity of the universe (*WT*, p. 141). However, probably the most striking, and most frequently occurring, motif of circularity in this play is the image of the viper swallowing its own tail. Here we find the meaning of the viper shift again as it becomes the ouroboros, the ancient mystical (and according to Carl Jung, archetypal) symbol for the cyclical nature of things. Again, I will focus on just one example by way of illustration. In a scene entitled 'Ozean aus Licht', Elsa, a young woman who is trapped in an abusive relationship with Otto, encounters a viper with its tail in its mouth as she bathes in a lake. In the biblical tradition, water is associated with spiritual rebirth, but there seems to be no hope for a new beginning for Elsa. Instead, the lake becomes a site of reincarnation – another non-Christian myth based on a cyclic understanding of time – as Elsa transforms into one of her previous incarnations, a malevolent pirate. Picking up the ouroboros and holding it high over her head, she asks in desperation, 'Wie komm ich nur heraus / aus diesem fürchterlichen Kreislauf, / Kreuzotter, weißt du es? / Weißt du als einzige den Weg/ zurück ins Paradies?' (*WT*, p. 195). Here again, the viper

⁴¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 9.

motif is associated with the expulsion from paradise, but this biblical association is conflated with a pagan pattern of eternal return to symbolise the post-war generation's continued entrapment in cycles of violence and hatred. This imagery is extremely portentous, arguably rather sententious, and, more problematically, it suggests a fatalistic outlook on human cruelty which undermines basic concepts of moral responsibility.

In the foregoing discussion I have attempted to show how Fritsch's theatrical texts both exploit some of the original biblical associations of the symbolism of the Fall, and try to open this symbolism up to other, non-religious meanings. I would suggest that the image of the viper never totally loses its biblical feel, but by overlaying it with other, shifting associations, Fritsch attempts to stimulate the imagination of his spectators. Fritsch explained in one interview that he wanted to exploit the inherent 'energy' of such religious symbols, while at the same time 'purging' these symbols of the doctrine that they once promoted:

Es geht darum, mit Symbolen zu arbeiten, die seit mehreren tausend Jahren da sind und ebensolang zur Unterdrückung des Denkens, der Empfindungen und der Sexualität eingesetzt werden. Durch meine Arbeit will ich gleichzeitig von ihrer Energie profitieren, sie jedoch umpolen. Andererseits gehen wir allmählich dieses Symbolkosmos verlustig. Nennen wir meine Verwendung die Reinigung der Symbole von dem, was der jahrhundertlange Mißbrauch derselben an Schlacke angelagert hat. Sie sollen purgiert werden durch eine poetische Verwendung.⁴²⁰

This statement demonstrates quite clearly that it is the aesthetic or emotional *effect* of religious signs more than the belief-system from which they stem that interests Fritsch. Indeed, Fritsch is remarkably dismissive here of what he sees as the restrictiveness of religious doctrine, demonstrating what is arguably a typically postmodern resistance to any belief-system which might inhibit the freedom of one's own unique subjectivity.

⁴²⁰ Jörg Lukas Matthaei, ' "Das Theater ist der letzte Ort für Metaphysik". Gespräch mit Werner Fritsch über sein Schreiben fürs Theater und die beiden Lustspiele *Die lustigen Weiber von Wiesau* und *Es gibt keine Sünde im Süden des Herzens*', in Werner Fritsch, *Die lustigen Weiber von Wiesau. Stück und Materialien* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 166-82, p. 170.

6.2.3 *Theodicy*

In the previous two sections I argued that Fritsch's work mines the Judaeo-Christian tradition for its resonant images of death, love and human corruptibility, but that these images are usually detached from what religious doctrines actually have to 'say' about these aspects of human experience. One specifically religious theme which is addressed by *Wondreber Totentanz* and *Aller Seelen*, however, is theodicy: the (arguably rather elementary) theological problem of how faith in God as the benevolent, omniscient and omnipotent Creator and Ruler of the universe can be reconciled with suffering and evil of such magnitude. This problem is raised in the very opening lines of *Wondreber Totentanz*, in which we find yet another variation of the viper motif, as the priest conducting Irmgard's funeral ceremony tells the congregation, in a rather turgid antiphonal style, about a dream he had the night before:

Geistlicher

Heut nacht hatte ich im Traum
alte Heiligenfiguren zu spalten.
Als die Axt in den Kopf einer Gottvaterfigur fuhr,
kroch eine Kreuzotter heraus.
Und ich fiel im Bann dieses Traumgesichts auf die Knie
und betete:
Kreuzotter, die vor Gift im Kopf Gott vergißt
und doch Gott ist.

Chor der Trauergemeinde

Kreuzotter, die doch Gott ist.

Geistlicher

Kreuzotter, aus deren Augen Feuer stiebt von Zeit zu Zeit, aus deren
Rachen Blitze züngeln.

[...]

Und Gott war die Schlange,

Chor der Trauergemeinde

... und die Schlange war Gott.

Geistlicher

Und Gott schluckte die Schlange.

Chor der Trauergemeinde

Und die Schlange schluckte Gott.

(*WT*, p. 143-4)

Here, the snake represents a dualistic force. The sinister image of a poisonous creature with fire flickering out of its eyes evokes the identification of the serpent with Satan in biblical theology, yet at the same time, the serpent is identified with

God. The Judaeo-Christian idea of a benevolent God is challenged, for the message communicated in the priest's dream seems to be that if God does exist, He/She must contain at least as much evil as good, given the presence of so much cruelty and suffering in the world.

Subsequently in this play, juxtapositions of religious elements with depictions of savagery serve to expose the absolute failure of traditional religious beliefs and values in Nazi Germany. For example, the rosary is recited while Samuel rapes Isidor's mother and attempts to set fire to German refugees who he has trapped inside a church (*WT*, pp. 190-1). In *Aller Seelen's* concentration camp, Judith is forced to satisfy the commandant's sado-masochistic desires by whipping him with a belt engraved with the grotesque SS slogan, 'Gott mit uns' (*AS*, p. 55), and Geigenbauer forces the camp choir to sing 'Stille Nacht Heilige Nacht' on Christmas Eve while they watch fellow prisoners being hanged (*AS*, p.52). In a grotesque degradation of the sacrament of communion in the first part of *Aller Seelen*, Lazarus' neighbour Erwin is forced by partisans to swallow pages of *Mein Kampf*:

Paul

Auffressen, sag ich!

Milan

Das ist doch die Offenbarung für dich!

Paul *reißt einige Seiten raus, knüllt sie zusammen:*

Der Leib Christi!

Milan

Schießt morgen das Scheißpapier gleich mit in aller Herrgottsfrüh!

(*AS*, p. 28)

As well as travestyng the Eucharist, this episode evokes strong associations of those biblical passages in which the prophet literally consumes the Word of God (Ezekiel 3 and Revelation 10). The biblical trope in which 'the physical presence of the "word" is powerfully felt, not merely as a cerebral event to be understood, but also to be taken into the body physically' is brutally subverted here to expose distance from the word of God.⁴²¹ Moreover, the juxtaposition of the sacred and the scatological is shocking, and it lends Fritsch's memory-work a visceral quality

⁴²¹ Robert Detweiler and David Jasper, *Religion and Literature: A Reader* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), p. 40.

which recalls Tabori's view that when we remember past traumas, we must do so 'mit Haut, Nase, Zunge, Hintern, Füßen und Bauch'.

'Ist ohne Gott unsere Natur / Totschlag nur / und Tortur?' agonises the priest in *Aller Seelen* (AS, p. 41), echoing Dostoevsky's warning in *The Brothers Karamazov* that if God is dead, anything is permissible. Conversely, however, the position insistently put forward elsewhere in these plays is that it was human savagery and hubris which 'killed' the Judaeo-Christian idea of God. For example, in one of *Wondreber Totentanz*'s Flossenbürg scenes, a doctor surgically removes the idea of God from the brain of a priest who has dared to preach that National Socialism goes against 'Gottes Politik' (WT, p. 147). It is hinted here that the Third Reich, with its ruthless pursuit of scientific innovation and control of nature, is a pathological embodiment of modernity, in which man assumes the role of God. This idea is also explored in *Aller Seelen*, where an equally ghoulish concentration camp doctor proclaims: 'Alles Verkrüppelte, alles Minderrassige wird von diesem Planeten verschwunden sein. Das Handwerk des Herrgottes beherrschen wir bald besser als er selbst!' (AS, p. 51)

In the dance of death at the end of *Wondreber Totentanz*, Elias Ackermann, a member of the Jewish chorus of the dead, alludes to the biblical book of Job – the first great work to explore the theodicy dilemma⁴²² – as he tries to make sense of the atrocities he has experienced:

6. Toter aus dem Chor der Toten II: Elias Ackermann

Wie Hiob keine Antwort Gottes Gegenwart ist die Antwort Wieso hat das passiert [...] Es gibt keinen Gott mehr Keinen Gottglauben in Himmel Gerechtigkeit Gottes und Verzeihung Gottes [...]

Kein Mensch kann begreifen daß Gott Quellen der Gerechtigkeit Ich kann nicht begreifen daß Gott so strafen sein Volk Ohrfeigen in Ordnung wenn Volk nicht folgen Aber rausnimmt ein Aug und abhacken Füße ist schwer zu glauben Gott liebende Vater

So Folgen für nix.

(WT, p. 210)

Unlike Job, Elias Ackermann receives no consolation, because God, symbolised by the frail old Jewish man Samuel, is Himself portrayed as one of the victims of

⁴²² See Ibid., p. 83.

the Holocaust: ‘Und ich jetzt sein zuricke in Kirche aus Holz / Und ich sein zuricke in Lager wo ich stirbt / Wo ich verbrennt in Asche’ (*WT*, p. 212). The play ends with overblown pathos: Samuel/God dies in the arms of another concentration camp prisoner while a Jewish lullaby is sung in the background. There are echoes here of Elie Wiesel’s *Night*, in which the hanging of a young child in Auschwitz is identified with the death of God.⁴²³ Previous chapters of this thesis demonstrate that *Wondreber Totentanz* also follows in a relatively long dramatic tradition of portraying God as a figure who is moribund, enfeebled or in some other way unfit for the modern world. I have shown elsewhere that Botho Strauß’ dramas portray God as a social outcast, and that Tabori depicts God as a clownish ‘loser’, but Fritsch’s extremely sentimental handling of the theme is perhaps most reminiscent of Wolfgang Borchert’s similarly overwrought depiction in *Draußen vor der Tür* of the post-war God as a lachrymose old man in whom nobody believes. But while the two plays under discussion here suggest that faith is impossible after the Holocaust, it was shown in Chapter 5 that Fritsch sets out to offer within the theatre compensation for what Weber called ‘die Entzauberung der Welt’. The following section examines how Fritsch’s attempts to create a ‘Gegenraum’ in today’s techno-rational, disenchanting society paradoxically rely very heavily on borrowings from the very religious traditions which are supposed to have collapsed.

6.3 Creating a ‘Gegenraum’

Wondreber Totentanz’s and *Aller Seelen*’s focus on the kind of difficult, weighty themes described above can be seen as one way of resisting a culture in which, according to Fritsch, we are normally encouraged ‘immer dann weiterzuzappen, wenn es ernst wird’. The wish to return to theatre its supposedly original solemnity represents another similarity with the avant garde practitioners discussed in Chapter 2; we are particularly reminded of Artaud’s desire to recover a ‘serious theatre’ to supplant ‘our longstanding habit of seeking diversions.’ In the previous section I suggested that religious motifs play an important role in generating an atmosphere of solemnity, contributing towards a tone which one reviewer

⁴²³ Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), pp. 61-2.

described as ‘ernst und hoch’,⁴²⁴ and thereby heightening the impression that Fritsch’s plays are profound, melancholy meditations on the traumas of the past and on the dark side of human nature. In what follows, I consider some of the other ways in which religious motifs are used in Fritsch’s theatrical texts to resist or offer relief from the realities of contemporary life. In section 6.3.1, I investigate Fritsch’s portrayal of provincial life, arguing that religious motifs help to create a primitivist antidote to the techno-rationality which dominates contemporary culture. But while Roman Catholic motifs play an important role in evoking a pre-secular ‘cosmos’ which is shot through with a sense of the sacred, I argue that the play actually exalts an apparently pre-Christian (and arguably somewhat New Age-y) spirituality of nature. In section 6.3.2 I focus on the use of liturgical elements in *Wondreber Totentanz*. Again, I find that their primary function is to generate a vague atmosphere of sacredness as relief from the quotidian, but that there is little real interest in exploring the meaningfulness of the traditional content of liturgy.

6.3.1 ‘Schau auf deine Provinz!’ Bavarian folk religiosity, primitivism and Fritsch’s spirituality of nature

In *Wondreber Totentanz* and *Aller Seelen*, Fritsch heeds closely the advice given to him when he embarked on his writing career by his fellow Bavarian, Herbert Achternbusch: ‘Schau auf deine Provinz!’⁴²⁵ These theatrical texts, like much of his writing, evoke a distinctive ‘cosmos’, as Fritsch himself calls it,⁴²⁶ which is supposedly inspired by the Oberpfalz of his childhood, but which might strike many spectators as decidedly archaic. Its pre-industrial rural landscape and the magico-religious worldview of its peasant inhabitants prompted one theatre critic to ask, ‘Wie lange ist dieser Fritsch schon tot? Dreiig Jahre? Siebzig Jahre?’⁴²⁷ In this cosmos, religion – specifically, a regional folk variant of pre-Vatican II Roman Catholicism – is at one level simply ‘there’ as a social fact, something that

⁴²⁴ Judith von Sternburg, ‘In den Verliesen der Seele’, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 24 February 2004.

⁴²⁵ Herbert Achternbusch, ‘Postkarte Herbert Achternbusch, 05.02.1976’, in Drescher and Scharpenberg, *Werner Fritsch: Hieroglyphen des Jetzt*, p. 15.

⁴²⁶ Matthaei, ‘“Das Theater ist der letzte Ort für Metaphysik”’, p. 168.

⁴²⁷ Simone Meier, ‘Alle Körpersäfte dieser Welt’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25 March 2004.

inflects the consciousness, language and cultural traditions of Fritsch's figures. The priest is at the very hub of the community; Catholic rites – 'Beerdigung; Beichte; Kommunion; Hochzeit' (*WT*, p. 141) – mark the passage through life; every household has a 'Herrgottswinkel' (*AS*, p. 24) and recites the Rosary; elderly virgins are awarded a 'Jungfernschein' (*AS*, p. 26); and religious allusions suffuse the local dialect. This is not to suggest that Fritsch's figures are primly pious, however, for religious references are often juxtaposed to comic effect with the bawdy humour of many of the characters, one of the many ways in which Fritsch tries to keep the earthy and the transcendent yoked together in his work. It should also be noted that the provincial Catholicism of Fritsch's figures is heterodox, mixing an almost medieval cult of the 'Muttergottes' with deep superstition (e.g. 'Jedes Muttergottesbild, hab ich Angst gehabt, fällt herunter und bedeutet deinen Tod, Lazarus!' exclaims Lazarus' wife, Anna [*AS*, p. 17]) and local mythology (e.g. **Philomena**: 'Die Muttergottes, hat es geheißten, / soll stammen aus Mürrzschlag / in der Herzgegend. / Da hätt sie zuwenigst übernachtet allweil' [*AS*, p. 41]).

Again, the difference from Strauß, whose work is often seen as a seismographic rendering of the current cultural climate, is stark. Fritsch's treatment of the theodicy theme does acknowledge that the pre-secular world depicted in his plays is about to be eradicated, but his work does not encourage us to reflect on the consequences of secularisation today. Whereas Strauß challenges the supposedly complacent secularity of his audience by startlingly dragging religious motifs into the present and thereby stimulating reflections on their contemporary significance (or lack thereof), religious signs are so excessive in Fritsch's plays that they tend to be swallowed up by the archaic, quasi-mystical atmosphere they help to generate.

Fritsch's theatrical texts also differ from those of Franz Xaver Kroetz, another Bavarian playwright who has been labelled a 'Heimarbeiter' by the press,⁴²⁸ in that they do not employ religious motifs as part of an examination of the socio-

⁴²⁸ Anon., 'Texte mit Pausen', *Der Spiegel*, 7 June 1971.

economic realities of contemporary provincial life.⁴²⁹ Neither do they critically examine the real social and psychological influence of religion on provincial life in the manner of *Volkstück* dramatists such as Ödön von Horváth or Marieluise Fleißer, who attacked the hypocrisy and small-mindedness which religion can prop up. Instead, following a long literary tradition of invoking 'die Provinz' as a 'Gegen-welt',⁴³⁰ Fritsch's religiose provincial cosmos is invoked first and foremost as a place which is in binary opposition to the postindustrial, technologically-advanced, globalised urban centres in which his plays are usually performed.

This opposition is partly aesthetic, as we can see if we focus on the language of Fritsch's peasant figures for a moment. Fritsch describes the style of language in his Oberpfalz plays as 'Tonbandrealismus', which implies a documentary approach (and invokes yet another media form which Fritsch's project purports to resist). But, paradoxically, Fritsch insists that his form of 'realism' is *not* a faithful replication of southern German dialect, and that it has 'nichts mit dem Protokollieren von Tonbändern zu tun'.⁴³¹ Instead, the language is a mixture of imitation and artistic creation which is very reminiscent of Pasolini's aestheticisation of Friulian dialect in his films and poetry.⁴³² Its inventiveness, lyricism and resonance are supposed to be an antidote to contemporary German, which, according to Fritsch, has been rendered flat, bureaucratic and homogeneous by global consumer capitalism. Religion, in particular the Bible, is used by Fritsch as one of the aesthetic sources which contributes to the beauty of the speech of most of his figures.⁴³³ In other words, religious motifs and patterns are exploited

⁴²⁹ See for example the discussion of Kroetz's use of religious motifs in *Bauern Sterben* (1985), in Moray McGowan, ' "Die Stadt ist der Metzger": The Crisis of Bavarian Peasant Identity in Franz Xaver Kroetz's *Bauern sterben*', *German Studies Review*, 19/1 (1996), pp. 29-40, p. 36.

⁴³⁰ Norbert Mecklenburg, *Erzählte Provinz: Regionalismus und Moderne im Roman* (Königstein: Athenäum, 1986), p. 64.

⁴³¹ Werner Fritsch, 'Tonbandrealismus oder die Metrik des Mündlichen', published in the Bayerisches Staatsschauspiel programme to its 2005 production of *Das Rad des Glücks*, pp. 3-4, p. 3.

⁴³² See Sam Rohdie, *The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), p. 47.

⁴³³ Not all of Fritsch's figures speak in this very lyrical style. It has already been shown, for example, that the language of the Jewish chorus of the dead in *Wondreber Totentanz* has a harsh, discordant quality.

for their sheer linguistic beauty, rather than for their potential to develop critical insights into the forces which mould provincial society:

30 Prozent sind [...] die Sprache der Bibel, 30 Prozent die Sprache der Gegend mit Elementen wie der Inversion des Böhmischen und dann eben 30 Prozent die Verfahrensweisen der modernen Literatur. Die Strukturen dieses Sprachgemenges benutze ich wie eine Metrik: daß ich die Wortfolge dann umstelle, wenn ich die Hebung an der Stelle brauche. Nicht die authentische Satzstellung ist das oberste Gebot, sondern mein Ohr. Nicht die Grabschrift der Grammatik ist die letzte Wahrheit, sondern mein lebendiger Atem. Diese Freiheit, das sind die restlichen 10 Prozent, die den Text abheben lassen und das Neue ausmachen, das so noch nie da gewesen ist.⁴³⁴

As well as exploiting religious elements for their aesthetic value, Fritsch's plays demonstrate a romantic-primitivist fascination with pre-modern cultures, whereby the naïve magico-religious worldview of the figures is valorised as a sensibility which stands in opposition to the instrumental rationality which dominates contemporary culture. Fritsch's primitivism is of a 'hard' quality, in that it recognises the physical hardship of pre-industrial life. Given that his themes centre upon the dark side of human nature, his peasant figures are clearly not idealised as morally pure 'noble savages'. Nevertheless, his plays do seem to be in thrall to the pre-rational consciousness of the figures and their keen sense of the sacred. At the same time, it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that Roman Catholic rites and paraphernalia which will probably seem arcane to many spectators, such as rosaries and Virgin Mary statues, are also being exploited in Fritsch's work, at least partly, for the thrill of the exotic. (Such 'Binnenexotik' is another recurring trait of literary representations of the provinces, according to Norbert Mecklenburg.⁴³⁵) Nevertheless, Fritsch's primitivism represents another strong affinity with the twentieth century avant garde, which extensively borrowed religious, mythical and tribal ritual material because it 'embodies an alternative value scale', as Christopher Innes puts it.⁴³⁶ It also suggests another influence of Pasolini, whose work celebrated sacred, pre-rational subproletarian or peasant

⁴³⁴ Fritsch, 'Tonbandrealismus oder die Metrik des Mündlichen', p. 4.

⁴³⁵ Mecklenburg, *Erzählte Provinz*, p. 65.

⁴³⁶ Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, p. 10.

cultures in the south of Italy, and later in the developing world, as antagonistic to bourgeois civilisation.⁴³⁷

Fritsch's evocation of a 'backward' region on the periphery of Europe is intended to challenge the homogenising tendencies of modernisation and globalisation: 'Zum einen geht es auf jeden Fall um das Bewahren von Vielfalt, auch als Widerstandspotential gegen die globalisierende Gleichmachung', he explained in one interview.⁴³⁸ Paradoxically, however, his work tends to locate the universal within the local, making his cosmos the site of fundamental human conflicts and thereby effacing its regional specificity. The religio-mythic eclecticism of *Wondreber Totentanz*, in particular, appears to reflect the typical primitivist assumption that the various myths and symbols of all pre-modern cultures are just different expressions of certain universal or archetypal truths about the human psyche. For example, the lovers at the heart of the play, Isidor and Irmgard, are themselves devout Catholics, but they also have an archetypal quality which transcends any particular belief-system: 'Liegen wir nicht engumschlungen seit Jahrtausenden?' Irmgard asks Isidor (*WT*, p. 203). The blending of Christian and Ancient Egyptian motifs in the representation of these characters emphasises this sense of the archetypal. For instance, Irmgard, who seems to resemble a Jungian archetype of the sacred feminine, is associated at some points in the play with the Egyptian goddess Isis but at other points with the Christian 'Muttergottes'. Parallels are also drawn between Isidor and Osiris, the Egyptian god of the dead, who was killed and dismembered by his brother and rival, Seth. In Fritsch's surreal treatment of the myth, Isidor dreams that parts of his body are scattered across the Oberpfalz landscape, where they metamorphose into natural phenomena, until Irmgard, like Isis in the Egyptian myth, reunites the body parts of her lover (*WT*, p. 202).⁴³⁹ The effect of this blurring of religious and mythic motifs is to reduce further the cultural specificity of the play and to invest it with a cosmic quality. This religio-mythic eclecticism represents yet another echo of

⁴³⁷ See Rohdie, *The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini* and Pia Friedrich, *Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), both of which include in-depth discussions of Pasolini's romantic primitivism.

⁴³⁸ Matthaei, "'Das Theater ist der letzte Ort für Metaphysik"', p. 169.

⁴³⁹ On Egyptian myths about Isis and Osiris, see Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), pp. 118-23.

twentieth century avant garde theatre, and a parallel might also be drawn with alternative spiritualities such as New Age and the relativistic, ‘pick ‘n’ mix’ manner in which they raid the world’s cosmologies. Rather than provide a more detailed analysis of Fritsch’s syncretistic borrowings from Christian and pagan cosmologies, however, in the following I am going to focus on how both of the theatrical texts under discussion here exalt a supposedly primitive unity between mind, body, spirit and nature. My main aim is to show that, despite the prevalence of Christian motifs, the spirituality which is actually promoted in Fritsch’s work is an apparently pre-Christian spirituality of nature.

Like Pasolini’s characters, who according to Pia Friedrich exhibit a ‘natural religiosity filtered from time to time through popular Christian forms’,⁴⁴⁰ many of Fritsch’s peasant characters demonstrate a powerful intuitive connection with their rural environment which gives the impression of being even more deep-rooted than their Catholic beliefs. In *Wondreber Totentanz*, for example, Isidor experiences profound feelings of communion with nature, particularly in moments of sexual ecstasy. Take for instance the following excerpt, in which the choruses describe how Isidor feels himself physically merging with the elemental landscape around him as he kisses Irmgard:

Chor der Toten I/Männlich

Irgendetwas reißt Isidor durch Isidor durch.
Er spürt,
wie sich sein Blut zuckend hineinpumpt in den letzten
Löwenzahn:
Grün erschafft,
Gelb hervorruft
und Weiß zeugt im Wind.
(*WT*, p. 179)

The physical interpenetration of human being and nature which is imagined here is clearly supposed to be diametrically opposed to modern humanity’s alienation from nature;⁴⁴¹ indeed, Fritsch contends in the preface to *Wondreber Totentanz*

⁴⁴⁰ Friedrich, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, p. 100.

⁴⁴¹ Cf. Opel, *Sprachkörper*, pp. 57-8: ‘Was die Figuren Isidor und Irmgard angeht, so sind diese in den Chorgesängen des *Wondreber Totentanzes* durch ein Verhältnis zu ihrer Umwelt charakterisiert, das vormoderne Vorstellungen von einem Ineinander von Mensch und Natur aktiviert. Nicht ein

that the unspoilt countryside depicted in the play has been all but destroyed: ‘Die Natur ist eigentlich eine tote: Noch einmal wird sie beschworen. Es stirbt nämlich eine ganze Lebenswelt auf dem Land’ (*WT*, p. 141). Fritsch’s figures’ bond with their unspoilt rural environment is not only physical, but also metaphysical, for their *Weltanschauung* is characterised by a strong awareness of the presence of the spiritual in the natural world. For the child characters, this takes the form of a naïve, quasi-pantheistic sense of divine presence in natural phenomena: ‘Warum wohnt Gott im Johanniskraut, Vater?’ the young Isidor asks his father (*WT*, p. 150). Such childlike wonderment at the natural world is echoed in a very similar exchange which takes place between father and son as they gaze up at the night sky in *Aller Seelen*:

Junge

Wie sind die Stern Milch?

Lazarus

Wie lauter Sonnenblumen sinds, die Stern.

Oder sind wie lauter Äpfel aus Gold –
und die Nacht ist ein ewig großer Baum.

(*AS*, p. 13)

Here, Lazarus’ pre-modern sense of the interconnectedness of all things enables him to see a link between the familiar material phenomena of the Oberpfalz landscape – its sunflower fields and its apple trees – and the mysterious heavenly realm.⁴⁴² This episode strikingly recalls the work of the neo-Expressionist artist Anselm Kiefer, in which the sunflower is a recurring motif. Drawing on the sixteenth century mystic Robert Fludd’s ideas about the correspondences between microcosmos and macrocosmos, which held that each plant on earth has an equivalent star in the sky, Kiefer’s paintings exhibit a holistic sensibility by suggesting an analogy similar to the one drawn by Fritsch between the glittering

wissenschaftlich aufgeklärtes Konzept des Menschen als anatomischem Wesen bestimmt dieses Verhältnis, sondern ein aus der Frühzeit überliefertes Wechselverhältnis zwischen der Natur und dem menschlichen Körper. Der Körper ist in diesem Denken kein klar abgegrenzter und abgrenzbarer Organismus, sondern ein durchlässiges Gehäuse, das prinzipielle für alle Metamorphosen offen ist, ein Resonanzraum der Weltordnung.’

⁴⁴² Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-6: ‘In der Erfahrungsdimension der ländlichen Bevölkerung ist die vormoderne Einheit von Himmel und Erde noch lebendig. [...] Das Himmelszelt, weit entfernt und abstrakt, wird greifbar und konkret im metaphorischen Vergleich mit den Dingen aus der nächsten Umgebung. Himmel und Erde spiegeln sich in diesem Denken ineinander, untrennbar verbunden.’

black seeds of the sunflower and the stars.⁴⁴³ In fact, many other parallels could be drawn between Fritsch and Kiefer, particularly with regard to the violent, melancholy, spiritual, and arguably borderline kitsch qualities of their work, as well as the manner in which they both use a range of mythological, religious and other esoteric material in their engagement with the traumas of German history. However, these parallels cannot be followed up in this thesis.

In *Wondreber Totentanz*, the motif of Jacob's ladder is appropriated to evoke the notion of union between heaven and earth. In the original biblical narrative (Genesis 28: 10-12), Jacob encounters God in a dream vision, in which he sees a ladder connecting heaven and earth, with angels ascending and descending. In *Wondreber Totentanz*, however, the motif is divorced from the Judaeo-Christian concept of God. Instead, echoing the use of religious motifs to sacralise human love in *Aller Seelen*, Jacob's ladder is reinterpreted so as to locate the heavenly within earthly relationships, for it is adopted as a metaphor for the moment of transcendence which Isidor experiences when making love to Irmgard in a field of shimmering wheat:

Isidor

Du kommst trotz der Feuchte im Stroh zum Liegen.
Jedes Korn keimt einzeln im Körper auf.
Jedes Korn kommt einzeln durch die Jakobsleiter
meines Körpers:
der rote Faden zwischen Diesseits und Jenseits.
Bis das ganze Feld geerntet ist,
bekommen wir,
in deinen Augen der Himmel,
in den meinen die Erde,
Cherubimflügel.
(*WT*, p. 203).

The ideal of fusion with nature is another aspect of Fritsch's work which can be traced back at least as far as Romanticism, through Expressionism (see for example the work of Expressionist artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and Emil Nolde, who, according to Colin Rhodes, 'relied upon a holistic vision that saw

⁴⁴³See Anselm Kiefer, ' "This dark light that falls from the stars ..." Interview by Anselm Kiefer with Bernhard Comment', in Germano Celant (ed.), *Anselm Kiefer* (Milan: Skira, 2007), pp. 293-335, p. 294.

nature as a vital, organic system with which ecstatic communion was desirable⁴⁴⁴) and up to the New Age movement, which promotes holism as an alternative to the fragmented, disconnected character of modern society.⁴⁴⁵ Fritsch does not just *depict* his figures' sense of organic wholeness, but also seeks to trigger in his spectators an intense feeling of physical and spiritual connection with nature. The physical side of this connection is generated through the very sensual descriptions of lush, unspoilt rural landscapes which recur in Fritsch's theatrical texts. Take for example the following extract from *Wondreber Totentanz*:

Chor der Toten I/Männlich

[...]

Das Wasser riecht nach im taugesprenkelten Gras
verfaulenden Äpfeln.

Es gischet über Granitblöcke,
die moosig grün sind und gekrönt von Farn
oder krüppeligen Kiefern;
es strudelt milchig in Kaskaden.'

(*WT*, p. 179)

Given that a good deal of critical attention has already been paid to the concrete, physical qualities of Fritsch's language, it will not be discussed any further here.⁴⁴⁶ Instead, I want to concentrate in the following paragraphs on how, echoing his programmatic interest in materialising the spiritual and *vice versa*, the natural world evoked in Fritsch's theatrical texts also seem to resonate with metaphysical meaningfulness, in the manner of the symbolic landscapes of Romantic artists such as Caspar David Friedrich.

A distinctive feature of virtually all of Fritsch's theatrical texts is that certain motifs of nature – in addition to vipers, these include sunflowers, dandelions, frogs, trout, buzzards and various other types of plants, trees and animals – persistently recur. While on one hand these natural phenomena are an everyday part of the rural landscape evoked in most of his work, on the other hand the insistent way in which they recur hints at a deeper, metaphysical significance. The exact symbolic meanings which these motifs are supposed to convey, however, are

⁴⁴⁴ Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), p. 137.

⁴⁴⁵ David Tacey, *Jung and the New Age* (Hove: Brunner-Routledge, 2001), pp. 10-11.

⁴⁴⁶ See for example Stefan Pokroppa, *Sprache jenseits von Sprache* and Opel, *Sprachkörper*.

often deliberately elusive. Leaving aside the obvious biblical resonance of the snake, it may be possible for the spectator who is *au fait* with the more arcane areas of Christian iconography to read religious meanings into some of the other nature motifs; for example, the fish is one of the earliest symbols of Christ, while the dandelion has been used within Western religious art as an emblem of Christ's passion.⁴⁴⁷ However, Fritsch insists that his nature motifs are not supposed to communicate clear meanings, religious or otherwise. For him, the phenomena of nature are inherently multivalent, and therefore resistant to the 'Eineindeutigkeit' which he despises: '[Das] Rot eines Distelkopfes [kann] heute Liebesglück bedeuten und morgen Todesgefahr', he states.⁴⁴⁸ Thus for example the resonances of the most frequently repeated motif in *Aller Seelen*, the sunflower, seem to change constantly. We have already seen how in the opening scene the sunflower symbolises the interconnectedness of heaven and earth. Elsewhere, the starkly contrasting colours of this flower seem to convey the human duality of light and darkness which is Fritsch's central thematic preoccupation. Elsewhere again, the sunflower has sexual resonances: 'Du bist a Sonnenblum – / und ich ihr Stengel!' Engel tells his wife Judith when he dances with her in the play's 'dance of death' (p. 42), while towards the end of the play the poignant image of sunflowers hanging their heads beside a World War II battlefield is compared to 'eine Kompanie Engel' expressing its sorrow at humanity's degeneration (*AS*, p. 63).

'[M]ein Theater ist ein Ort wie ein Naturraum,' asserted Fritsch in one interview, adding

Die Zeichen sind nicht auf Eindeutigkeit aufgerichtet, sondern auf Vieldeutigkeit. Es soll im Idealfall das Friedliche des Spaziergehens haben, daß man sich frei ergehen kann und sich einen eigenen Gedanken und Gefühlen, angeregt durch die Umgebung, hingeben kann. Das wäre für mich eine Utopie von Kommunikation, von Kunst. Daß man solch einen metaphysischen Naturraum schafft in der Arbeit.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁷ Jack Tresidder, *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols in Myth, Art and Literature* (London: Duncan Baird, 2004).

⁴⁴⁸ Fritsch, quoted in Opel, *Sprachkörper*, p. 74. The original source is Fritsch, 'Distelkopf im Wind an der Wondreb', programme to the premiere of *Wondreber Totentanz*, Staatstheater Darmstadt, 1998, pp. 7-10, p. 10.

⁴⁴⁹ Matthaei, ' "Das Theater ist der letzte Ort für Metaphysik" ', p. 179.

Clearly, the metaphysical quality of his nature motifs lies for Fritsch not in the fact that they convey specific metaphysical ideas (let alone theological ones), but in the fact that their supposedly inherent openness of meaning arouses human ‘Gedanken und Gefühle’. Thus while the theme of the presence of the spiritual within the material world contains echoes of religious thought – in particular the Catholic sacramental principle, which holds that ‘the created, finite, material reality is revelatory of the divine and communicates God’s presence on our behalf’⁴⁵⁰ – Fritsch’s representations of nature are not intended to reveal anything about the traditional Judaeo-Christian idea of God or how He/She acts in the world. Instead, Fritsch’s landscapes are spiritual in the sense that they stimulate the unique subjectivity of the spectator. As discussed in previous chapters, this emphasis on cultivating the subjectivity of the individual is another trait which the spirituality practiced by Fritsch’s theatrical texts shares more with contemporary alternative spiritualities than with traditional Judaeo-Christian spirituality.

6.3.2 Liturgical elements in *Wondreber Totentanz*

The funeral ceremony which forms the framework of *Wondreber Totentanz* is supposed have a syncretistic flavour, incorporating ‘alle freigesetzte Elemente des Totenrituals durch Zeiten und Kulturen’ (*WT*, p. 141), such as the narration of stories about the life of the deceased, the re-enactment of specific episodes from her life and, echoing ancient Egyptian funerary practices in particular, the use of sarcophagi and life-sized statues of the deceased.⁴⁵¹ Here, however, I want to focus on elements of the Roman Catholic Mass, the ritual form which the ceremony depicted in *Wondreber Totentanz* most closely resembles. The ceremony is led by a Catholic priest; its language replicates the patterns of liturgical prayers, homilies, and antiphonal chants; and, despite Fritsch’s programmatic insistence that his theatre is a ‘Tempel des Textes’, *Wondreber Totentanz* also replicates many of the non-linguistic elements of Catholic liturgy. Thus for example not just the stage but also the entire auditorium is decorated so as to resemble the interior of a Catholic church. The spectators’ seating resembles pews, the acoustics replicate the echoey

⁴⁵⁰ Susan K. Wood, ‘The Liturgy and Sacraments’, in James J. Buckley, Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, and Trent Pomplun (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 463-76, p. 340.

⁴⁵¹ See Bridget McDermott, *Death in Ancient Egypt* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2006), p. 195.

sounds of a church, pictures of saints hang on the walls, and liturgical vestments, incense, candlelight, organ music, hymns, crucifixes, communion wafers, and church bells are among the many other elements of liturgical ‘scenography’ that feature.⁴⁵²

But while *Wondreber Totentanz* heavily deploys the externals of liturgy, it engages very little with the traditional religious content of the Mass, which Peter and Linda Murray summarise as the ‘commemoration of Christ’s sacrifice of Himself for the redemption of mankind from its sins.’⁴⁵³ The incantatory and antiphonal style of language which features in *Wondreber Totentanz* may be reminiscent of liturgy, but it does not deal with the ideas that are traditionally communicated in liturgy: it has already been shown, for example, that the priest preaches his own dreams rather than the Word of God. Similarly, non-linguistic elements such as candles, incense and bells are detached from the symbolic meanings they express in liturgy,⁴⁵⁴ and are exploited primarily to create a mood of mystery, solemnity and numinosity. In other words, like much postmodern performance, which tends to favour sensation over thought – the theatre of Robert Wilson is a notable example⁴⁵⁵ – Fritsch tries to replicate the feel of liturgy, but he does not stimulate his spectators to reflect on the beliefs which liturgy traditionally expresses.

⁴⁵² Of course, the ways in which stage directions are realised may vary from performance to performance, and, as indicated earlier in this thesis, it is possible for a particular production to exaggerate or to play down the religious *mise en scène* of a theatrical text. However, it is worth pointing out that Thomas Krupa’s premiere production of *Wondreber Totentanz* at the Staatstheater Darmstadt in 1998 – the only production of this play to date – followed the religious aspects of Fritsch’s scenographic instructions remarkably closely. Thus stage and auditorium were decorated to resemble a church, and those liturgical costumes and props mentioned above, such as liturgical vestments, candles, crucifixes, incense etc., featured prominently. See Lisa Marie Küssner’s description of this production in *Sprach-Bilder versus Theater-Bilder. Möglichkeiten eines szenischen Umgangs mit den "Bilderwelten" von Werner Fritsch*, pp. 111-124.

⁴⁵³ Peter Murray and Linda Murray (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 183.

⁴⁵⁴ The traditional symbolic meanings of these liturgical elements vary according to the specific ceremony that is being celebrated, and so will not be explained in further detail here. For an explanation of liturgical symbolism see Paul Bradshaw, *The New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (London: SCM Press, 2002).

⁴⁵⁵ See Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'Passage to the Realm of Shadows: Robert Wilson's *King Lear* in Frankfurt', in Jacqueline Martin and Willmar Sauter (eds.), *Understanding Theatre: Performance Analysis in Theory and Practice* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995), pp. 191-211.

As well as using liturgical motifs to produce a frisson of the sacred, it would seem that *Wondreber Totentanz* attempts to replicate the feeling of liturgical community, given that the stage directions instruct that spectators sit in pews as if they themselves are part of the funeral congregation, thereby unsettling the 'fourth wall' which traditionally separates audience from performance.⁴⁵⁶ It is possible that the strong sensory stimulation provided in *Wondreber Totentanz* by devices such as rhythmic incantations, music, candlelight, burning incense and so on intensifies a sense of physical closeness which helps stimulate what Durkheim referred to as collective 'effervescence', or what Victor Turner called 'spontaneous communitas'. However, as has been pointed out many times in this thesis, it is unlikely that feelings of community based primarily on physical co-presence could outlast the duration of the performance. Moreover, it seems unlikely that the play could elicit in its spectators a genuine shift, however short-lived, from appreciation of the depicted liturgy to a sense of communal involvement in the liturgy, because the average contemporary spectator probably has little lived experience of liturgical community which could be reactivated within the theatre. Liturgical motifs are more likely to be appreciated on an aesthetic or even exoticist level than to create bonds between spectators and actors. By contrast, Erika Fischer-Lichte argues that in twentieth century political performances such as the Soviet mass spectacles or the German *Thingspiele*, borrowed liturgical motifs and patterns succeeded in creating community, even though they were detached from much of their original religious meaning, because audiences were *used to* participating in liturgical communities. According to Fischer-Lichte's analysis, audiences' reflex response to liturgical triggers, even when these were redeployed in secular, political contexts, was to recreate these communities:

It is often forgotten that the people, though illiterate, were quite able to occupy a space in an ordered formation, to immerse themselves in an atmosphere created by a particular use of light, sound, smell or images, and to respond to it by establishing an emotional bond between all

⁴⁵⁶ Küssner notes in her description of Thomas Krupa's production of the play, however, that 'die szenische Raumlösung von Pia Janssen sieht zwar die von Fritsch offerierte Möglichkeit einer physischen Einbeziehung der Zuschauer als Mitglieder der Trauergemeinde im Betgestühl des Kirchen/Bühnenraumes nicht vor, spiegelt jedoch in der frontalen Sitzordnung der Gottesdienstteilnehmer auf der Bühne die reale Publikumssituation und erreicht so den gewünschten Effekt auf mentaler Ebene.' Küssner, *Sprach-Bilder versus Theater-Bilder*, p. 112.

those present in the space, and thus, to bring forth a community – not as a ‘utopian abstraction’, but as a lived experience – composed of highly heterogeneous individuals. It was, in fact, religion that accomplished such a ‘miracle’. People acquired this capacity by participating in the rituals of the orthodox liturgy.⁴⁵⁷

Whereas these political performances in the first half of the twentieth century were able to tap into the audience’s lived experience of liturgy, Fritsch is working under the assumption that ‘Gottesdienst’ is all but defunct in contemporary society, as we saw in the previous chapter. The church building which provides the setting of *Wondreber Totentanz* is in a state of ruin (*WT*, p. 143) – another echo of the landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich, perhaps –, creating an ironic recognition that the religious ritual it depicts has lost significance in the ‘real’ world. Yet we have seen in this chapter that the play tries to generate compensatory feelings of sacredness and community by borrowing very heavily from the very religious practices which have supposedly lost all meaning.

It has already been shown in this thesis that the privileging of religiosity as a matter of feeling rather than faith has its roots in Romanticism, and that it has been a recurring feature of modern theatre at least since the Symbolists. Such experientialism is also widely held to be another prominent feature of contemporary alternative spiritualities, which can be seen to exemplify the spirit of postmodernity in that they tend to reject the codified beliefs of traditional organised religions in favour of titillating, exotic experiences of sacredness.⁴⁵⁸ As the philosopher Herbert Schnädelbach put it in an article in *Die Zeit*, in which he expressed doubts that German culture of the 2000s was exhibiting a genuine ‘Wiederkehr der Religion’ as so many commentators had rather excitedly claimed, such postmodern spiritualities generally demonstrate very little interest in traditional religious ‘Inhalte, Verheißungen und Zumutungen’. Instead, he suggested, there is currently a growing demand for

Religiosität als solche, das heißt [...] eine unbestimmte, aber wohltuende und den profanen Alltag bereichernde Erlebnisqualität; der *Spiegel* fand dafür die unübertreffbare Formulierung: ‘das Gefühl des

⁴⁵⁷ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*, p. 101.

⁴⁵⁸ Stephen J. Hunt, *Alternative Religions: A Sociological Introduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 133.

Glaubens'. [...] Man nennt das auch 'Spiritualität' und bleibt ebenso undeutlich. Wer es so nennt, meint damit ein Kontrastprogramm zu unserer profanen, von technischen und ökonomischen Zwängen beherrschten Alltagswelt. [...] Hier geht es nur um die Ergänzung des vertrauten Erlebnisspektrums um eine weitere Facette: neben Job, Hobby, Sport, Urlaub, Beziehung nun auch noch Spiritualität, zum Beispiel Bikermessen mit Zehntausenden von Motorrädern oder Seglertagesdienste für ganze Sportboothäfen.⁴⁵⁹

I would suggest that *Wondreber Totentanz*'s treatment of liturgy caters to just such a demand for religiosity as 'Erlebnisqualität'. Liturgical elements commodify sensations of mystery and sacredness as a 'Kontrastprogramm' to the prosaic, rationalistic quality of contemporary life without demanding a real engagement with, let alone commitment to, the more substantive dimensions of religion: its 'Inhalte, Verheißungen und Zumutungen.' (Though whether spectators are actually swept away by the transmundane, numinous atmosphere of Fritsch's theatre, or whether in fact his 'pseudorituelles Brimborium' simply irritates, as Franz Wille complained in his review of *Wondreber Totentanz* in *Theater heute*, is presumably a matter of taste.⁴⁶⁰) This points up the irony again that, despite Fritsch's claims to provide a 'Gegenraum', his theatre is in fact very much a product of its time.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that, although religion is extremely prominent as motif in Werner Fritsch's theatrical texts, specifically religious themes – apart from the rather well-worn theodicy question – are of relatively little concern. *Wondreber Totentanz* and *Aller Seelen* refer to the religious crisis caused by the Holocaust, and they appear to demonstrate an undercurrent of nostalgic regret that the pre-secular, pre-rational 'cosmos' they evoke no longer exists (or at least only exists in increasingly marginal forms) in the world outside the theatre. But they also attempt to compensate for 'die Entzauberung der Welt' by detaching religious motifs from their original theological content and exploiting what Fritsch vaguely refers to as their original 'energy'. Signs from the very religious traditions which have supposedly decayed are exploited to generate a mood of sonorousness,

⁴⁵⁹ Herbert Schnädelbach, 'Wiederkehr der Religion', *Die Zeit*, 11 August 2005.

⁴⁶⁰ Wille, 'Gespenster der Gegenwart', p. 11.

sacredness and possibly even community which offsets the perceived triviality, rationalism and atomisation of contemporary Western culture. The irony is that by manipulating religious elements in order to create a 'Gegenraum', Fritsch practises a form of individualistic, experiential spiritual consumerism which reproduces several features of the postmodern culture that he purports to resist.

7. Conclusion

The starting point of this study was the observation that religion – understood here primarily in terms of its principal European historical forms, Judaism and Christianity – plays a prominent role in some important contemporary German-language theatre and drama, but that it has been largely ignored by the criticism. I sought to redress the imbalance somewhat by examining the place and significance of religion in a selection of theatrical texts from the 1970s to the 2000s. The picture which has emerged is complex and highly variegated. I have found that various ‘dimensions’ of religion are invoked, across various elements of theatre, from its themes, forms, language and characters to aspects of its *mise en scène*, and that they serve a broad range of aesthetic, theatrical and dramaturgical ends, some of which have very little to do with religion itself. Some of the works considered could be described as quasi-religious, and in certain cases, religion informs basic underlying notions about the nature and role of theatre in contemporary society. I have tried to contextualise the selected works’ treatment of religion by investigating the extent to which they are rooted in the traditions of modern theatre and drama, and the extent to which they reflect prevailing contemporary socio-cultural attitudes towards religion. The first part of this concluding chapter summarises the key arguments and findings of this study. The second part will reconsider the issue of the putative ‘Wiederkehr des Religiösen’ with which the thesis opened in order to identify some possible directions for future research.

7.1 *Recapitulation*

One thing that is shared by the very different contemporary works considered in this thesis is the assumption that organised religion has lost almost all credibility and social significance. Botho Strauß’ theatrical texts depict postindustrial Western society as a disenchanted one in which the Judaeo-Christian heritage survives, for the most part, only in a set of empty clichés: what Adorno, in reference to Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame*, called ‘Kulturmüll’. George Tabori also treats religious signs as cultural vestiges which are no longer capable of giving

human existence meaning. The traditions of Judaism shape the cultural identity of Herzl, the agnostic Jewish hero of *Mein Kampf*, but they do not command his faith. Even Werner Fritsch's plays, which evoke a pre-modern, pre-secular 'cosmos' modelled on the remote part of Bavaria where he grew up, are shot through with an ironic acknowledgment that the Roman Catholic beliefs and practices of his peasant figures are now as close to extinction as the pre-industrial rural environment which they inhabit.

I also identified basic similarities in these dramatists' treatment of the degradation of the Judaeo-Christian idea of God. Strauß depicts God as a social misfit who has been displaced by German society's devotion to rationality and technological progress. In Tabori's and Fritsch's work, it is the Holocaust which has made it very difficult, if not impossible, to believe that God is omniscient, omnipotent and benevolent. But whereas Tabori portrays God as a buffoon and a 'loser' to comic effect, Fritsch's *Wondreber Totentanz* contains a rather overwrought, literalist depiction of the death of a frail old God after Auschwitz.

It was shown in Chapter 1 that there is nothing very original about the assumption that twentieth century Europe has undergone a process of secularisation. I have argued that the facetious irony which characterises Tabori's treatment of this familiar idea does not develop any new perspectives on religion, and that Fritsch's attempt to generate compensatory quasi-religious feelings within the theatre obscures the real meaning of religion in contemporary life. Strauß, by contrast, is the one playwright who challenges what he sees as our complacent secularity, forcing us to think again about the implications of the supposed loss of religious meaning in Western culture. Unsettling juxtapositions of religious elements with quotidian reality evoke a sense of something once present but now wholly lost to us, and suggest a link between secularisation and the banality of contemporary existence. I also identified moments in Strauß' theatrical texts at which religious signs are blasted out of their familiarity as cultural leftovers, generating moments of startlement which open up the possibility of developing fresh insights into the contemporary meaningfulness and relevance of religion. At these moments, Strauß uses visceral images of blood, rape and sadomasochistic violence to suggest that

the decline of religion has left powerful, and indeed self-destructive, human desires for orientation, meaning and transcendence. He draws on the traditions of Expressionist drama to depict the search for spiritual meaning in a cold, materialistic world, but his plays lack the pathos and the utopianism which are usually associated with high Expressionism. Instead, Strauß' plays suggest that the longing for transcendence can now no longer be fulfilled, nor rationalistically explained away. This resigned metaphysical despair recalls the dramas of Beckett, or indeed Georg Kaiser's *Von morgens bis mitternachts*, which though often regarded as a prototypical *Stationendrama*, in fact seems to mock pre-emptively the ecstatic quasi-religiosity of Expressionism.

In contrast to Strauß, Tabori's treatment of religious signs generally evokes no great sense of spiritual loss or longing, and in fact religious elements are often deployed amid a *bricolage* of other cultural allusions to explore themes which cannot be described as specifically religious, such as constructions of Jewish identity, anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. But while Tabori's plays are usually held to demonstrate the standard postmodern attitude of playful scepticism towards religion, along with other 'grand narratives', I argued that religious material very often serves as a source of authority in *Mein Kampf*. Firstly, religious allusions are used to celebrate the moral and intellectual superiority of Herzl over his anti-Semitic aggressors, which contravenes Tabori's stated aims of blurring group distinctions and attacking essentialist constructions of Jewish identity. Secondly, certain religious allusions are exploited for their portentous, apocalyptic qualities, which interrupt the whimsical comedy of the play and allow the historical horror of the Holocaust to break through. I contended that this is problematic, in that it fosters a fatalistic perspective on German history. Thirdly, echoes of religious rituals of remembrance, such as the Passover Seder and the Eucharist, serve to defend the ethical legitimacy of this controversial memory-work. I showed that Tabori is keen to emphasise that his 'farce' does not make jokes about painful themes purely to entertain, but to achieve certain serious psychotherapeutic aims, and that religious allusions are frequently used to convey this impression of underlying seriousness.

Fritsch's theoretical and programmatic texts stylise theatre as a surrogate religion, claiming that it has the potential to fill the spiritual void left by the decline of traditional religious practices. In that Fritsch seeks to offer solutions for the perceived spiritual bankruptcy of modern life, his work can be located within the traditions of the twentieth century avant garde. The religious vocabulary which pervades his programmatic texts is particularly redolent of the manifestoes of figures such as Artaud and Grotowski, whose pretensions to 'holiness' were mocked by Tabori in *Die Goldberg-Variationen*. However, in my discussion of Fritsch's programmatic I problematised his reiteration of the old idea that theatre and religious rituals share fundamental affinities, and I argued that the primary function of religious allusions is to impart his project with prestige and a patina of sacrality. In fact, Fritsch's fundamental concerns have little to do with religion. Instead, like those of Artaud, Grotowski and indeed Tabori, they are based on secular, psychotherapeutic ideas about the value of confronting repressed material.

By the same token, the prevalence of religious motifs in Fritsch's theatrical texts generally does not signify a real interest in exploring the meaningfulness and relevance of religion itself. Even in those cases where his themes do overlap with the great themes of the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition, such as love, evil and the possibility of redemption, Fritsch generally does not probe the meaning or relevance of religious responses to these themes. Instead, echoing the 'natural supernaturalism' of the Romantics, religious signs are detached from much of their original, theological meaning and reinterpreted in a secular context. At the same time, however, their supposedly inherent 'energy' is exploited in order to create a quasi-religious mood of sonorousness, sacredness and perhaps even *communitas* which is supposed to offset the perceived superficiality, banality and alienation of life outside the theatre. In Fritsch's theatre, then, the audience is offered religiosity as a sensation, but it is not required to commit to (or even to engage in any depth with) specific religious beliefs. This thesis has demonstrated that this attempt to graft religiosity as feeling onto the core principles of secularity has a long list of antecedents in modern theatre and drama, from the aestheticised religiosity of the Symbolists to Grotowski's effort to turn theatre into a 'secular sacram'. Parallels were also been drawn with contemporary 'alternative' spiritualities such as New

Age. It was argued that, while Fritsch set out to create a 'Gegenraum', the individualistic, experientialist type of religiosity which is practised in his work actually reproduces several features of the postmodern consumer culture of which he is so critical.

7.2 Into the twenty-first century: Suggestions for further research

This thesis opened with the observation that many theatre critics heralded a 'return' of religion to German-language theatre of the 2000s. I have clearly shown, however, that religion has long been a source of interest or at least inspiration for some important contemporary dramatists. Over the course of this study, I have been able to make only brief references, where relevant, to a few examples of twenty-first century 'religious' theatre and drama. Further research is required, then, to develop a clearer picture of how the place of religion on the German-language stage of the 2000s relates to the predominantly late twentieth century works that I have analysed, and to determine whether there have been substantial changes in the ways that religion is being treated.

It would be particularly constructive, I believe, to assess whether and how the major role played by religion in world events of the 2000s and the current changing perspectives on religion, such as the growing currency of the notion that Europe may be entering a post-secular age, have altered the themes, forms, aesthetics and programmatics of contemporary drama and theatre. Has there, for example, been a questioning of the assumption that religion is little more than moribund – though still aesthetically and atmospherically stimulating – 'Kulturmüll'? Has there been a shift away from the ersatz religiosity which, as this project has shown, has dominated much modern European theatre, up to and including the work of Fritsch? Does German-language drama and theatre of the 2000s attempt to develop significant thematic insights into religion in a way that, with the notable exception of Strauß, most of the dramatists discussed in this thesis do not? There are some indications that this may well be the case. Several of the productions cited by critics as exemplifying the 'return' of religion to German theatre centred either on exploring the contemporary relevance of the Ten

Commandments, or on examining the nature of religious belief in today's world. For example, the question which Johan Simons' production of *Die Zehn Gebote* set out to explore was, according to its programme, 'Was können wir im Jahr 2005 noch über die Zehn Gebote sagen?'⁴⁶¹ Ulrich Seidl's *Vater Unser* was advertised by the Volksbühne Berlin as a sociological and psychological exploration of 'wie Glaube funktioniert.'⁴⁶² Lukas Bärfuß' *Der Bus* – a *Stationendrama* which bears some striking similarities to Strauß' *Groß und klein*, as indicated earlier in this thesis – 'will sehen was passiert, wenn jemand glaubt', according to *Theater heute* critic Franz Wille.⁴⁶³ Lutz Hübner's *Gotteskrieger*, which explores the mentality of a religious fundamentalist, was performed at the Maxim Gorki Theater as part of a series of 'Glaubenswerkstätten': performances, lectures and debates on the theme of belief. In March 2005 the Münchner Kammerspiele also held a weekend of performances, lectures, workshops and debates based on the theme 'Glaubenskriege: Ich bin der Herr, dein Gott'. Thus, while the twenty-first century has not seen a return of religion *per se*, it is possible that a more widespread thematic interest in reassessing the meaningfulness and relevance of its more *substantive* aspects – its beliefs and values, or 'Inhalten, Verheißungen und Zumutungen', as Herbert Schnädelbach puts it – has emerged.

In an editorial for *Die deutsche Bühne*, Detlef Brandenburg suggested that disillusionment with '[der] ethisch[e] Relativismus, [der] ökonomisch[e] Materialismus und [die] intellektuell[e] Beliebigkeit' of postmodernity has awakened in the theatre 'eine tiefe Sehnsucht nach "Haltung", nach Positionsbestimmung.'⁴⁶⁴ Gerhard Stadelmeier of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, however, takes a rather more sceptical view. 'Wenn also die Zeiten härter and kälter werden, reagiert das deutsche Theater typisch deutsch: mit Trübsinn und

⁴⁶¹ Koen Tachelet, 'Zehn Geschichten, Eine Gemeinschaft', in the programme to the Münchner Kammerspiele's 2004 production of *Die Zehn Gebote*, pp. 5-7. Other productions exploring the Ten Commandments in recent years include Christoph Marthaler's adaptation of Raffaele Viviani's *I dieci Commandamenti* at the Volksbühne Berlin in 2001, and Johann Kresnik's *Die Zehn Gebote* at the Bremer Friedenskirche in 2004. For a more detailed comparison of these productions, see Katharina Keim, 'Glaubensfragen? – Zur Wiederkehr des Religiösen im deutschsprachigen Theater heute: Versuch einer Bestandsaufnahme'.

⁴⁶² 'Vater Unser. Ein Theaterstück von Ulrich Seidl' <<http://archiv.volksbuehne-berlin.de/volksbuehne-berlin/cgi/vbbNav.pl?fID=B12&pID=412>>, accessed May 2006.

⁴⁶³ Franz Wille, 'Seltsame Heilige', *Theater heute*, 3 (2005), pp. 4-7, p. 7.

⁴⁶⁴ Detlef Brandenburg, 'Editorial', *Die deutsche Bühne*, 6 (2005), p. 3

Metaphysik,' he writes, opining that German theatre of the 2000s is primarily interested in religion as a 'groß[er] Stoff' which supplies a highly marketable sense of profundity and meaningfulness:

Die Bühnen, lange Jahre mit wenig mehr als sich selber beschäftigt, tun nun so, als griffen sie nach den großen Stoffen, die da draußen vor der Tür katastrophal gehäuft herumliegen.[...] Der Messias nämlich – mit oder ohne Mission – ist neben dem Arbeitslosen oder dem Kapitalismusopfer die zweite Top-Figur der Saison.⁴⁶⁵

Perhaps, then, the difference between Tabori's and Fritsch's exploitation of religious motifs and that of the post- '9/11' spate of 'religious' plays is not as substantial as it might at first seem. More scholarly attention needs to be paid to the much neglected topic of religion and theatre in order to determine whether there has indeed been a decisive and lasting shift away from a primarily instrumentalist, aesthetic and experientialist fascination with the externals of religion towards a genuine interest in addressing the 'Gretchenfrage': 'Wie hast du mit der Religion?'⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁵ Gerhard Stadelmeier, 'Der Messias trägt Rot', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 August 2005.

⁴⁶⁶ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust. Eine Tragödie* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1964), p. 102.

8. Bibliography

The following is a select bibliography which lists only those works referred to directly in the text.

8.1 *Primary material*

8.1.1 *Published theatrical texts*

BÄRFUSS, LUKAS, 'Der Bus (Das Zeug einer Heiligen)', *Theater Heute*, 3 (2005), pp. 44-57.

BECKETT, SAMUEL, 'Endgame: A Play in One Act', in Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 89-134.

---, 'Waiting for Godot', in Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works*, pp. 7-88.

BORCHERT, WOLFGANG, *Draußen vor der Tür*, ed. P.B. Salmon (London: Harrap, 1963).

BRECHT, BERTOLT, 'Der Aufstieg des Arturo Ui', in Brecht, *Werke Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, ed. Werner Hecht, et al (7; Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1991), pp. 7-115.

---, 'Der gute Mensch von Sezuan', in Brecht, *Werke*, ed. Werner Hecht, et al (6), pp. 175-281.

---, 'Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe', in Brecht, *Werke*, ed. Werner Hecht et al (3), pp. 127-234.

---, 'Leben des Galilei', in Brecht, *Werke*, ed. Werner Hecht et al (5), pp. 7-115.

CLAUDEL, PAUL, *Der seidene Schuh*, trans. Hans Urs von Balthasar (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1983).

FRITSCH, WERNER, 'Es gibt keine Sünde im Süden des Herzens. Höllensturz', in Fritsch, *Es gibt keine Sünde im Süden des Herzens. Stücke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), pp. 9-92.

---, 'Cherubim. Monolog', in Fritsch, *Es gibt keine Sünde im Süden des Herzens*, pp. 93-138.

---, 'Sense. Monolog', in Fritsch, *Es gibt keine Sünde im Süden des Herzens. Stücke*, pp. 215-44.

- , 'CHROMA. Farbenlehre für Chamäleons', in Fritsch, *CHROMA. Farbenlehre für Chamäleons / EULEN:SPIEGEL. Deutsche Geschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: edition suhrkamp, 2002), pp. 7-78.
- , 'Hydra Krieg. Traumspiel', in Fritsch, *Schwejk?/Hydra Krieg. Stücke und Materialien* (Frankfurt am Main: edition suhrkamp, 2004), pp. 107-182.
- , *Nico: Sphinx aus Eis. Monolog* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004).
- GENET, JEAN, *The Blacks: A Clown Show*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (London: Faber and Faber, 1967).
- , 'The Maids', in 'The Maids' and 'Deathwatch', trans. Bernard Frechtman (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), pp. 33-100.
- , *The Balcony*, trans. Barbara Wright and Terry Hands (London: Faber and Faber, 1991).
- GOETHE, JOHANN WOLFGANG, *Faust. Eine Tragödie* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1964).
- HOCHHUTH, ROLF, *Der Stellvertreter. Ein christliches Trauerspiel* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1970).
- HORVÁTH, ÖDÖN VON, 'Glaube, Liebe, Hoffnung. Ein kleiner Totentanz in fünf Bildern', in Horváth, *Kommentierte Werkausgabe in Einzelbänden*, ed. Traugott Krischke and Susanna Foral-Krischke (6; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986).
- KAISER, GEORG, *Hölle, Weg, Erde* (Potsdam: Kiepenheuer, 1912).
- , *Die Bürger von Calais. Bühnenspiel* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005).
- , *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005).
- KIPPHARDT, HEINAR, *Joel Brand: Die Geschichte eines Geschäfts. Schauspiel.* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1965).
- STRAUß, BOTHO, *Kalldewey. Farce* (Munich: Hanser, 1981)
- , 'Groß und klein', in Strauß, *Trilogie des Wiedersehens / Groß und klein. Zwei Theaterstücke* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982), pp. 125-260.
- , *Der Park* (Munich: Hanser, 1983).
- , *Das Gleichgewicht. Stück in drei Akten* (Munich: Hanser, 1993).

- , *Unerwartete Rückkehr* (Munich: Hanser, 2002).
- , 'Die eine und die andere', published in the Berliner Ensemble programme to its 2005 production of the play, pp. 9-55.
- STRINDBERG, AUGUST, 'Miss Julie', in Strindberg, *The Plays*, trans. Michael Meyer (1; London: Secker & Warburg, 1964), pp. 99-162.
- , 'A Dream Play', in Strindberg, *A Dream Play and Four Chamber Plays*, trans. Walter Johnson (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), pp. 17-86.
- , 'To Damascus, Part 1', in Strindberg, *The Plays*, trans. Michael Meyer (2; London: Secker & Warburg, 1975), pp. 27-110.
- TABORI, GEORGE, 'The Cannibals', in Robert Skloot (ed.), *The Theater of the Holocaust: Four Plays* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).
- , 'Die Goldberg-Variationen', in Tabori, *Theaterstücke II*, trans. Ursula Grützmaker-Tabori (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1994), pp. 291-346.
- , 'Die Kannibalen', in Tabori, *Theaterstücke I*, trans. Ursula Grützmaker-Tabori (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1994), pp. 1-74.
- , 'Jubiläum', in Tabori, *Theaterstücke II*, pp. 49-86.
- , 'Mein Kampf' in Tabori, *Theaterstücke II*, pp. 143-204.
- TOLLER, ERNST, 'Die Wandlung. Das Ringen eines Menschen', in Toller, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. John M. Spalek and Wolfgang Frühwald (2; Munich: Hanser, 1978), pp. 7-63.
- VILLIERS DE L'ISLE ADAM, AUGUSTE, *Axël*, trans. M. Gaddis Rose (London: Soho, 1986)
- WEISS, PETER, *Die Ermittlung. Oratorium in 11 Gesängen* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1969).

8.1.2 Other primary material consulted: Prose, poetry and films

- BLAKE, WILLIAM, 'Laocoön', in David V. Erdman and Harold Bloom (eds.), *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965).
- BROOKS, MEL, *The Producers* (USA, 1968).
- CAMUS, ALBERT, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (London: Penguin, 2000).

- CHAPLIN, CHARLIE, *The Great Dictator* (USA, 1940).
- CURTIZ, MICHAEL, *Casablanca* (USA, 1942).
- DOSTOEVSKY, FYODOR, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Peaver and Larissa Volokhansky (London: Quartet, 1990).
- JONES, TERRY, *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (UK, 1989).
- LEVY, DANI, *Mein Führer: Die wirklich wahrste Wahrheit über Adolf Hitler* (Germany, 2007).
- SHARMAN, JIM, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (USA, 1975).
- STRAUß, BOTHO, 'Marlenes Schwester', in Strauß, *Marlenes Schwester. Zwei Erzählungen* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980), pp. 7-42.
- , 'Theorie der Drohung', in Strauß, *Marlenes Schwester. Zwei Erzählungen*, pp. 43-109.
- , *Paare, Passanten* (Munich: Hanser, 1981).
- , *Rumor. Roman* (Munich: Hanser, 1982).
- , *Die Widmung. Eine Erzählung* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984).
- , *Die Fehler des Kopisten* (Munich: Hanser, 1997).
- TABORI, GEORGE, *Meine Kämpfe*, trans. Ursula Grützmaker-Tabori (Munich: Hanser, 1986).
- YEATS, W.B., 'The Second Coming', in Yeats, *Collected Poems*, ed. Augustine Martin (London: Vintage, 1992).
- WIESEL, ELIE, *Night* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982).
- WILDER, BILLY, *Some Like It Hot* (USA, 1959).

8.2 Essays, manifestoes and interviews by the studied dramatists and theatre practitioners

- ARTAUD, ANTONIN, 'Letter to André Gide, 10 February 1935', in Claude Schumacher (ed.), *Artaud on Theatre* (London: Methuen Drama, 1989). pp. 144-6.

- , 'Theatre is First Ritualistic and Magical ...' in Schumacher, *Artaud on Theatre*, pp. 123-5.
- , 'The Tragedy *The Cenci* at the Folies-Wagram', in Schumacher, *Artaud on Theatre*, pp. 148-9.
- , *The Theatre and its Double*, trans. Victor Corti (Montreuil: Calder, 1995).
- BARBA, EUGENIO, 'The Theatre's New Testament. Interview with Grotowski', in Eugenio Barba (ed.), *Towards a Poor Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1975), pp. 27-53.
- BRECHT, BERTOLT, 'Kleines Organon für das Theater', in Brecht, *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, ed. Werner Hecht, et al. (23; Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1993), pp. 65-96.
- DOHM, IRMA, 'Mythologische Landschaft Oberpfalz: Werner Fritsch im Gespräch mit Irma Dohm. Zu *Fleischwolf*', in Hans-Jürgen Drescher and Bert Scharpenberg (eds.), *Werner Fritsch: Hieroglyphen des Jetzt. Materialien und Werkstattberichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), pp. 114-22.
- DRIVER, TOM, 'Interview with Samuel Beckett', in Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (eds.), *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 217-23.
- FRITSCH, WERNER, 'Jenseits dieses Jahrtausends – Furcht und Hoffnung, die Welt betreffend und das Theater', in Fritsch, *Aller Seelen. Golgatha. Stücke und Materialien* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 135-38.
- , 'Hieroglyphen des Jetzt – Theater Sprache Hörspiel Film', in Hans-Jürgen Drescher and Bert Scharpenberg (eds.), *Werner Fritsch: Hieroglyphen des Jetzt. Materialien und Werkstattberichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), pp. 227-35.
- , 'Rede zur Verleihung des Hörspielpreises der Kriegsblinden 1993', in Drescher and Scharpenberg, *Werner Fritsch: Hieroglyphen des Jetzt. Materialien und Werkstattberichte*, pp. 189-93.
- , 'Der Schatten des Sophokles. Flüchtiges zu Zeichen und Winden des Pier Paolo Pasolini', in Drescher and Scharpenberg, *Werner Fritsch: Hieroglyphen des Jetzt. Materialien und Werkstattberichte*, pp. 253-65.
- , 'Natalität versus Fatalität: Einige Gedanken zum Theater des Jetzt im Kontext der Inszenierung von *Das Rad des Glücks*', published in the Bayerisches Staatsschauspiel programme to its 2005 production of *Das Rad des Glücks*, pp. 8-15.

- , 'Tonbandrealismus oder die Metrik des Mündlichen', published in the Bayerisches Staatsschauspiel programme to its 2005 production of *Das Rad des Glücks*, pp. 3-4.
- FUCHS, GEORG, *Die Revolution des Theaters* (Munich: Müller, 1909).
- GENET, JEAN, 'A Note on Theatre', *Tulane Drama Review*, 7/3 (1963), pp. 37-41.
- GROTOWSKI, JERZY, 'He Wasn't Entirely Himself', in Eugenio Barba (ed.), *Towards a Poor Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1975), pp. 85-93.
- , 'Towards a Poor Theatre', in Barba, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, pp. 15-25.
- HEISE, WOLFGANG, 'Ein Gespräch zwischen Wolfgang Heise und Heiner Müller (1986)', in Heiner Müller, *Gesammelte Irrtümer 2: Interviews und Gespräche*, ed. Gregor Edelmann and Renate Ziemer (Second edn.; Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1996), pp. 50-70.
- MATTHAEI, JÖRG LUKAS ' "Das Theater ist der letzte Ort für Metaphysik". Gespräch mit Werner Fritsch über sein Schreiben fürs Theater und die beiden Lustspiele *Die lustigen Weiber von Wiesau* und *Es gibt keine Sünde im Süden des Herzens*', in Werner Fritsch, *Die lustigen Weiber von Wiesau. Stück und Materialien* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 166-82.
- PALM, REINHARD and VOSS, URSULA, ' "... so viele Ichs, so viele Figuren ..." Interview mit George Tabori zu seiner Inszenierung von *Mein Kampf* im Akademietheater Wien, Juli 1987', in Wend Kässens (ed.), *Der Spielmacher. Gespräche mit George Tabori* (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 2004), pp. 53-67.
- STRAUß, BOTHO, 'Die Distanz ertragen. Programm eines Wiederanfangs – Rudolf Borchardt und die Entstehung von Vergangenheit', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 May 1987.
- , 'Die Erde – ein Kopf. Dankrede zum Büchner-Preis 1989', *Die Zeit*, 27 October 1989.
- , 'Der Aufstand gegen die sekundäre Welt. Bemerkungen zu einer Ästhetik der Anwesenheit', *Die Zeit*, 22 June 1990.
- , 'Anschwellender Bocksgesang', *Der Spiegel*, 8 February 1993.
- , 'Der Konflikt', *Der Spiegel*, 13 February 2006.
- TABORI, GEORGE, *Unterammergau oder Die guten Deutschen*, trans. Ursula Menck-Adriani (Frankfurt am Main: edition suhrkamp, 1981).
- , 'Die Heiterkeit der Verzweiflung', *Theater heute*, 4 (1991), pp. 71.

WIRNER, STEFAN, 'Schritt vor, Schritt zurück!', *taz, die tageszeitung*, 25 February 1998. (Interview with Werner Fritsch.)

8.3 *Secondary material*

8.3.1 *On Symbolism, August Strindberg, and Expressionism*

CARLSON, HARRY, *Strindberg and the Poetry of Myth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

DEAK, FRANTISEK, *Symbolist Theatre: The Formation of an Avant Garde* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

DENKLER, HORST, 'Ernst Toller: *Die Wandlung*', in Manfred Brauneck (ed.), *Das deutsche Drama vom Expressionismus bis zur Gegenwart. Interpretationen* (Bamberg: Buchner, 1971), pp. 52-63.

FURNESS, R.S., *Expressionism* (London: Methuen, 1973).

GEROULD, DANIEL, 'The Art of Symbolist Drama: A Re-Assessment', in Daniel Gerould (ed.), *Symbolist Drama* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1985), pp. 7-34.

HENDERSON, JOHN A., *The First Avant Garde 1887-1894: Sources of the Modern French Theatre* (London: George G. Harrap & Co, 1971).

HERN, NICHOLAS, 'Expressionism', in Ronald Hayman (ed.), *The German Theatre: A Symposium* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1975).

MCGUINNESS, PATRICK, *Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

PASCAL, ROY, *From Naturalism to Expressionism: German Literature and Society, 1880-1918* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973).

SAMUEL, RICHARD and THOMAS, R. HINTON, *Expressionism in German Life, Literature and the Theatre, 1910-1924* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1939).

SCHÜRER, ERNST, 'Provocation and Proclamation, Vision and Imagery: Expressionist Drama between German Idealism and Modernity', in Neil H. Donahue (ed.), *A Companion to the Literature of German Expressionism* (New York: Camden House, 2005), pp. 231-54.

8.3.2 On Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski

AUSLANDER, PHILIP, ' "Holy Theatre" and Catharsis', *Theatre Research International*, 9/1 (1984), pp. 16-29.

BLOŃSKI, JAN, 'Grotowski and his Laboratory Theatre', *Dialog*, Special Edition 1970, pp. 142-50.

HAYMAN, RONALD, *Artaud and After* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

HYDE, GEORGE, 'Poland', in Ralph Yarrow (ed.), *European Theatre 1960-1990: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 182-219.

KOTT, JAN, 'Why Should I Take Part in the Sacred Dance?' in Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford, *The Grotowski Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 132-38.

KUMIEGA, JENNIFER, *The Theatre of Grotowski* (London: Methuen, 1985).

PUZYNA, KONSTANTY, 'A Myth Vivisected: Grotowski's *Apocalypse*', in Schechner and Wolford, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, pp. 86-104.

SAVARESE, NICOLA, '1931: Antonin Artaud Sees Balinese Theatre at the Paris Colonial Exhibition', *The Drama Review*, 45/3 (2001), pp. 51-77.

SCHECHNER, RICHARD, 'Introduction: The Laboratory Theatre in New York, 1969', in Schechner and Wolford, *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, pp. 112-15.

WELLWARTH, GEORGE E., *The Theatre of Protest and Paradox* (New York: New York University Press, 1965).

WETZSTEON, ROSS, 'Theatre: Two by Grotowski', *Village Voice*, November 27 1969.

8.3.3 On Samuel Beckett and the Theatre of the Absurd

ADORNO, THEODOR W., *Versuch, das Endspiel zu verstehen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973).

BALDWIN, HELEN L., *Samuel Beckett's Real Silence* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981).

BRYDEN, MARY, *Samuel Beckett and the Idea of God* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1991).

---, 'Beckett and Religion', in Lois Oppenheim (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in Samuel Beckett Studies* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 154-71.

BUNING, MARIUS, 'Samuel Beckett's Negative Way: Intimations of the "Via Negativa" in his Late Plays', in David Jasper and Colin Crowder (eds.), *European Literature and Theology in the Twentieth Century: Ends of Time* (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 129-42.

BUTLER, LANCE ST JOHN, ' "A Mythology with which I am Perfectly Familiar": Samuel Beckett and the Absence of God', in Robert Welch (ed.), *Irish Writers and Religion* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1992), pp. 169-84.

CORNELL, NEIL, 'The Theatre of the Absurd (1945-1975)', *The Literary Encyclopedia* <<http://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=12>>, accessed April 2008.

ESSLIN, MARTIN, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Third edn.; Harmondsworth: Penguin 1985).

GRAVER, LAWRENCE and FEDERMAN, RAYMOND (eds.), *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 1-38.

LAMONT, ROSETTE, 'The Metaphysical Farce: Beckett and Ionesco', *French Review*, 33 (Feb. 1959), pp. 319-28.

TYNAN, KENNETH, 'Mortal Fools Without a Lord', *The Observer*, 3 June 1962.

8.3.4 On Botho Strauß

ADELSON, LESLIE A., 'Subjectivity Reconsidered: Botho Strauss and Contemporary West German Prose', *New German Critique*, 30: West German Literature (1983), pp. 3-59.

BAUMGART, REINHARD, 'Ein Engel aus Remscheid-Lennep', *Die Zeit*, 6 October 1978. (Review of *Groß und klein*.)

---, 'Das Theater des Botho Strauß', *Theater heute*, 11 (1984), pp. 16-23.

BERKA, SIGRID, 'Botho Strauß ', in Matthias Konzett (ed.), *Encyclopedia of German Literature* (2; Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000), pp. 913-6.

- CALANDRA, DENIS, *New German Dramatists: A Study of Peter Handke, Franz Xaver Kroetz, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Heiner Müller, Thomas Brasch, Thomas Bernhard and Botho Strauß* (London: Macmillan, 1983).
- EMRICH, ELKE, ' "Der Mensch verliert das Bild vom Menschen". Wahnsinn und Gesellschaft in Botho Strauß' *Groß und klein*', *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter*, 87 (1983), pp. 225-41.
- HENSEL, GEORG, 'Ausführliche Erkrankung eines Engels', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 December 1978. (Review of *Groß und klein*.)
- HERWIG, HENRIETTE, *Verwünschte Beziehungen, verwebte Bezüge: Zerfall und Verwandlung des Dialogs bei Botho Strauß* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1986).
- HINCK, WALTER, 'Tribunal und Diagnose. Zum Theater der Gegenwart', in Walter Hinck, Lothar Kühn, and Walter Pape (eds.), *Drama der Gegenwart. Themen und Aspekte* (Schwerte: Katholische Akademie Schwerte, 1987), pp. 7-26.
- IDEN, PETER, 'Statt Krieg haben wir das', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 December 1978. (Review of *Groß und klein*.)
- IGNEE, WOLFGANG, 'Szenen einer Nicht-Ehe', *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 11 December 1978. (Review of *Groß und klein*.)
- KAFITZ, DIETER, 'Die Problematisierung des individualistischen Menschenbildes im deutschsprachigen Drama der Gegenwart', *Basis. Jahrbuch für deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur*, 10 (1980), pp. 93-126.
- KRAUSE, WERNER, 'Die Zwischenwelten des Botho Strauß', *Spectaculum*, 52 (1991), pp. 254-58.
- LEHMANN, HANS-THIES, 'Mythos und Postmoderne: Botho Strauß, Heiner Müller', in Albrecht Schöne (ed.), *Kontroversen, alte und neue* (Tübingen: Niemayer, 1986), pp. 249-55.
- MCGOWAN, MORAY, 'Unendliche Geschichte für die Momo-Moderne? Rezeptionskontexte zum märchenhaften Erfolg der Stücke von Botho Strauß', *TheaterZeitSchrift*, 15 (1986), pp. 88-106.
- , ' "Die schwache Stimme in der Höhle unter dem Lärm". Gedanken zur Büchnerpreisrede von Botho Strauß (1989) und zur Politik des Unpolitischen', *Weimarer Beiträge*, 40/2 (1994), pp. 190-202.
- REICH-RANICKI, MARCEL, 'Gleicht die Liebe einem Monolog', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 September 1977.

- SCHAUBERGER, SEBASTIAN, 'Permanenz der Urbilder. Mythische und biblische Anspielungen bei Botho Strauß', Doctoral thesis (Universität Bielefeld, 2000 <<http://bieson.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/volltexte/2003/169/>>, accessed July 2007).
- SCHMIDT, CHRISTOPHER, 'Sprache, die sich Körper sucht', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 29 January 2005. (Review of *Die eine und die andere*.)
- SCHMIDT-MÜHLISCH, LOTHAR, 'Saarbrücken ist auch in Agadir', *Die Welt*, 11 December 1978. (Review of *Groß und klein*.)
- SCHMIEDING, WALTHER, 'Platonow und *Groß und klein* – ein Vergleich', *Bühne und Parkett* 1(1979), pp. 15-17.
- SCHNEIDER, IRMELA, 'Myth and Mythology in the Drama of Botho Strauß', in W.G. Sebald (ed.), *A Radical Stage: Theatre in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s* (Oxford: Berg, 1988), pp. 31-51.
- SCHNEIDER, MICHAEL, *Den Kopf verkehrt aufgesetzt: oder Die melancholische Linke. Aspekte des Kulturzerfalls in den 70er Jahren* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1981).
- STADELMEIER, GERHARD, 'Eiskälte wie von Eiscreme', *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 19 February 1979. (Review of *Groß und klein*.)
- STEIN, PETER, 'Ein Autofahrerfaun. Das ist doch etwas Schönes. Ein Gespräch mit Peter Krumme', in Michael Radix (ed.), *Strauß lesen* (Munich: Hanser, 1987), pp. 172-87.
- TÜRCKE, CHRISTOPH, 'Auferstehung als schlechte Unendlichkeit. Theologisches bei Botho Strauß', *Frankfurter Hefte*, 4 (1982), pp. 50-56.
- VOM HOFE, GERHARD and PFAFF, PETER, 'Botho Strauß und die Poetik der Endzeit', in Michael Radix (ed.), *Strauß Lesen* (Munich: Hanser, 1987), pp. 37-63.
- WILLE, FRANZ, 'Seltsame Heilige', *Theater heute*, 3 (2005), pp. 4-7. (Includes reviews of *Die eine und die andere* and Lukas Bärfuß' *Der Bus*.)
- WINKELMANN, CHRISTINE, *Die Suche nach dem großen Gefühl. Wahrnehmung und Weltbezug bei Botho Strauß und Peter Handke* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990).

8.3.5 *On George Tabori*

- BAYERDÖRFER, HANS-PETER and SCHÖNERT, JÖRG (eds.), *Theater gegen das Vergessen. Bühnenarbeit und Drama bei George Tabori* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1997).

- BAYERDÖRFER, HANS-PETER, ' "Born Losers Comparing Notes" – Bible Quotation and Drama Construction in George Tabori's Plays', in Shimon Levy (ed.), *Theatre and Holy Script* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), pp. 82-98.
- BOURGER, DÉSIREE, 'Unverdaute Trauer. Das Kulturthema Essen in George Tabori's Holocaust-Dramen', Doctoral thesis (Georg-August Universität Göttingen, 2002 <<http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/diss/2006/bourger/>>, accessed February 2008).
- EKE, NORBERT OTTO, 'George Tabori', in Alo Allkemper and Norbert Otto Eke (eds.), *Deutsche Dramatiker des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2000), pp. 382-402.
- , 'Das Schreckliche und das Komische. George Tabori und die Shoah', in Pól Ó Dochartaigh (ed.), *Jews in German Literature since 1945: German-Jewish Literature?* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 567-86.
- FEINBERG, ANAT, *Embodied Memory: The Theatre of George Tabori* (Iowa City: Iowa Press, 1999).
- GUERRERO, CHANTAL, *George Tabori im Spiegel der deutschsprachigen Kritik* (Cologne: Teiresias Verlag, 1999).
- HAAS, BIRGIT, *Das Theater des George Tabori. Vom Verfremdungseffekt zur Postmoderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000).
- HÖYNG, PETER (ed.), *Verkörperte Geschichtsentwürfe: George Tabori's Theaterarbeit/ Embodied Projections on History: George Tabori's Theater Work* (Tübingen: A. Francke, 1998).
- HÖYNG, PETER ' "Immer spielt ihr und scherzt?" Zur Dialektik des Lachens in George Tabori's *Mein Kampf. Farce*', in Peter Höyng (ed.), *Verkörperte Geschichtsentwürfe: George Tabori's Theaterarbeit / Embodied Projections on History: George Tabori's Theater Work* (Tübingen: A. Francke, 1998), pp. 129-50.
- KUNNE, ANDREA, 'Die Apokalypse als "Farce" in George Tabori's *Mein Kampf*', in Elrud Ibsch and Ferdinand van Ingen (eds.), *Literatur und politische Aktualität* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), pp. 283-97.
- LIESSMANN, KONRAD PAUL, 'Der Versöhnungskünstler', in Andrea Welker (ed.), *George Tabori: Dem Gedächtnis, der Trauer und dem Lachen gewidmet* (Weitra: Bibliothek der Provinz, 1994), pp. 237-40.
- , 'Die Tragödie als Farce. Anmerkungen zu George Tabori's *Mein Kampf*', in Jan Strümpel (ed.), *Text + Kritik: George Tabori* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1997), pp. 81-89.

- MALCHOW, TIMOTHY B., 'George Tabori's *Jubiläum*: Jokes and their Relation to the Representation of the Holocaust', *The German Quarterly*, 72/2 (1999), pp. 167-84.
- MÜRY, ANDRES, 'Es ist mein Hitler. Ist Hitler in mir', *Rheinischer Merkur*, 29 April 1988.
- PANKRATZ, ANNETTE, 'Crucifixions in Contemporary Drama: Berker, Berkoff, Bond, Brenton, McNally and Tabori', in Michael Hensen and Annette Pankratz (eds.), *The Aesthetics and Pragmatics of Violence: Proceedings of the Conference at Passau University, March 15-17, 2001* (Passau: Karl Stutz, 2001), pp. 183-96.
- PETERS, SIBYLLE, 'Die Verwandlung der Schrift in Spiel. George Taboris Metaphysik des Theaters: *Die Goldberg-Variationen*', in Bayerdörfer and Schönert (eds.), *Theater gegen das Vergessen*, pp. 270-82.
- POTT, SANDRA, ' "Ecce Schlomo": *Mein Kampf* – Farce oder theologischer Schwank?' in Bayerdörfer and Schönert (eds.), *Theater gegen das Vergessen*, pp. 248-69.
- ROTH, MARKUS, *Theater nach Auschwitz: George Taboris Die Kannibalen im Kontext der Holocaust-Debatten* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003).
- ROTHSCHILD, THOMAS, 'Die Wunde versteht das Messer. Juden auf Taboris Bühne', in Jan Strümpel (ed.), *Text + Kritik: George Tabori* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1997), pp. 4-9.
- SCHOLZ, STEFAN, *Von der humanisierenden Kraft des Scheiterns. George Tabori - Ein Fremdprophet in postmoderner Zeit* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002).
- STRÜMPEL, JAN, *Vorstellungen vom Holocaust. George Taboris Erinnerungsspiele* (Göttingen Wallstein, 2000).
- WELKER, ANDREA, *George Tabori. Dem Gedächtnis, der Trauer und dem Lachen gewidmet. Portraits*. (Vienna: Bibliothek der Provinz, 1994).

8.3.6 *On Werner Fritsch*

- ACHTERNBUSCH, HERBERT, 'Postkarte Herbert Achternbusch, 05.02.1976', in Hans-Jürgen Drescher and Bert Scharpenberg (eds.), *Werner Fritsch: Hieroglyphen des Jetzt. Materialien und Werkstattberichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), p. 15.
- CROWE, SINÉAD, ' "Der letzte Ort für Metaphysik"? Das Theater von Werner Fritsch', in David Barnett, Moray McGowan, and Karen Jürs-Munby (eds.),

Recherchen 37: Das Analoge sträubt sich gegen das Digitale? Materialitäten des deutschen Theaters in einer Welt des Virtuellen (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2006), pp. 46-55.

---, ' "Der Tod schneidet den Film des Lebens": Life-Writing in the Theatre of Werner Fritsch', in Julian Preece, Frank Finlay, and Ruth J. Owen (eds.), *New German Literature: Life-Writing and Dialogue with the Arts* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 401-16.

DERMUTZ, KLAUS, 'Umschmelzung gesprengter Fragmente – Zu einigen Motiven im Werk von Werner Fritsch', in Drescher and Scharpenberg, *Werner Fritsch: Hieroglyphen des Jetzt*, pp. 40-51.

DÖSSEL, CHRISTINE, 'Der Erinnerungsheimarbeiter', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 28 February 2004.

EKE, NORBERT OTTO, ' "Im Kopf die Toten verwesen nicht". Werner Fritschs "Theater des Todes" ', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 125 (2006), pp. 64-81.

GRENZMANN, TERESA, 'Zigeunermutter Courage; Minetti macht's', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 May 2005. (Review of *Das Rad des Glücks*.)

HEINE, MATTHIAS, 'Im Rausch erscheinen ihm Gartenzwerge', *Die Welt*, 17 April 2000. (Review of *Aller Seelen*.)

KÜSSNER, LISA MARIE, *Sprach-Bilder versus Theater-Bilder. Möglichkeiten eines szenischen Umgangs mit den "Bilderwelten" von Werner Fritsch* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2006).

MATTHAEI, JÖRG LUKAS, 'Von der Wortkulisse zum Film in Worten', in Hans-Jürgen Drescher and Bert Scharpenberg (eds.), *Werner Fritsch: Hieroglyphen des Jetzt. Materialien und Werkstattberichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), pp. 203-07.

MEIER, SIMONE, 'Alle Körpersäfte dieser Welt', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25 March 2004. (Review of *Jenseits*.)

OPEL, ANNA, *Sprachkörper: Zur Relation von Sprache und Körper in der zeitgenössischen Dramatik - Werner Fritsch, Rainald Goetz, Sarah Kane* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2002).

POKROPPA, STEFAN, *Sprache jenseits von Sprache: Textanalysen zu Werner Fritschs Steinbruch, Fleischwolf, Cherubim und Chroma* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2003).

STADELMEIER, GERHARD, 'Im Disneyland der Schuld', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 January 1998. (Review of *Wondreber Totentanz*.)

VON STERNBURG, JUDITH, 'In den Verliesen der Seele', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 24 February 2004. (Review of *Bach. Traumspiel*.)

WILGENBUS, PETRA, 'Nachwort', in Werner Fritsch, *Es gibt keine Sünde im Süden des Herzens. Stücke*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), pp. 289-302.

WILLE, FRANZ, 'Gespenster der Gegenwart', *Theater Heute*, 3 (1998), pp. 4-11. (Review of *Wondreber Totentanz*.)

8.3.7 Other works on drama, theatre, ritual and performance

AHRENDTS, GÜNTER and DILLER, HANS-JÜRGEN (eds.), *Theatre and Religion* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1997).

ALLAIN, PAUL, *Gardzienice: Polish Theatre in Transition* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997).

ANON., 'Texte mit Pausen', *Der Spiegel*, 7 June 1971. (Article on Franz Xaver Kroetz.)

AUSLANDER, PHILIP, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999).

BALME, CHRISTOPHER, 'Grotesque Farce in the Weimar Republic', in James Redmond (ed.), *Farce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 174-84.

---, *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

---, *Einführung in die Theaterwissenschaft* (Second edn.; Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2001).

BARISH, JONAS, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981).

BAUER, JOHANN, 'Totentanzadaptionen im modernen Drama und Hörspiel: Hofmannsthal, Horváth, Brecht, Hausmann, Weyrauch und Hochhuth', in Franz Link (ed.), *Tanz und Tod in Kunst und Literatur* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1993), pp. 463-88.

BENTLEY, ERIC, *The Life of the Drama* (London: Methuen, 1965).

- BIAL, HENRY, 'Ritual', in Henry Bial (ed.), *The Performance Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 87-8.
- BRANDENBURG, DETLEF, 'Editorial', *Die deutsche Bühne*, 6 (2005), p. 3. (Article on the 'return' of religion to German theatre in the 2000s.)
- , 'Schwerpunkt: Theater und Religion', *Die deutsche Bühne*, 6 (2005), p. 5.
- BROOK, PETER, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin, 1990).
- BUCHWALDT, MARTIN, *Ästhetische Radikalisierung. Theorie und Lektüre deutschsprachiger Theatertexte der achtziger Jahre* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007).
- CHAMBERS, E.K., *The Mediaeval Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903).
- CORNFORD, FRANCIS M., *The Origin of Attic Comedy* (London: Edward Arnold, 1914).
- DE MARINIS, MARCO, *The Semiotics of Performance*, trans. Áine O'Healy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).
- DOBROV, GREGORY, 'The Dawn of Farce: Aristophanes', in James Redmond (ed.), *Farce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 15-31.
- DÖSSEL, CHRISTINE, 'Vater unser. Glaubens- und Religionsthemen erobern die deutschen Bühnen', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14 October 2004.
- , 'Leben ist Glaubenssache', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 1 February 2005. (Review of Lukas Bärfuß' *Der Bus*.)
- ELAM, KEIR, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (Second edn.; London: Routledge, 2002).
- ELIOT, T.S., 'A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry', *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964), pp. 31-45.
- FISCHER-LICHTE, ERIKA, *Geschichte des Dramas 2: Von der Romantik bis zur Gegenwart* (Tübingen: Francke, 1990).
- , *The Semiotics of Theater*, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).
- , *Kurze Geschichte des deutschen Theaters* (Tübingen: Francke, 1993).
- , 'Passage to the Realm of Shadows: Robert Wilson's *King Lear* in Frankfurt', in Jacqueline Martin and Willmar Sauter (eds.), *Understanding Theatre:*

- Performance Analysis in Theory and Practice* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995), pp. 191-211.
- , *Geschichte des Dramas 1: Von der Antike bis zur deutschen Klassik* (Tübingen: Francke, 1999).
- , *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2005).
- FRIEDRICH, RAINER, 'Drama and Ritual', in James Redmond (ed.), *Drama and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 159-224.
- GABOR, OLIVIA G., *The Stage as 'Der Spielraum Gottes'* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006).
- GRAHAM-WHITE, ANTHONY, *The Drama of Black Africa* (New York: Samuel French, 1974).
- GRUND, STEFAN, 'Im spirituellen Vakuum – ein übler Zustand', *Die Welt*, 29 January 2005. (Review of Lukas Bärfuß' *Der Bus*.)
- GUICHARDNAUD, JACQUES and GUICHARDNAUD, JUNE, 'The Glory of Annihilation: Jean Genet', in Peter Brooks and Joseph Halpern (eds.), *Genet: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1979), pp. 98-113.
- HAAS, BIRGIT, *Modern German Political Drama, 1980-2000* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003).
- HARDISON, O.B., *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in The Middle Ages: Essays in the Origin and Early History of Modern Drama* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1983).
- HARRIS, JOHN WESLEY, *Medieval Theatre in Context: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1992).
- HARRIS, MAX, *Theatre and Incarnation* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1990).
- HARRISON, JANE ELLEN, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912).
- , *Ancient Art and Ritual* (New York: Henry Holt, 1913).
- HEINE, MATTHIAS, 'Tschüß, du Jugend ohne Gott', *Die Welt*, 11 October 2004. (Article on the 'return' of religion to German theatre of the 2000s.)
- HENTSCHEL, INGRID and HOFFMANN, KLAUS (eds.), *Scena: Beiträge zu Theater und Religion*, 2 vols. (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004-5).

- HUNNINGHER, BENJAMIN, *The Origin of the Theatre: An Essay* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961).
- INNES, CHRISTOPHER, *Modern German Drama: A Study in Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
- , *Avant Garde Theatre 1892-1992* (London: Routledge, 1993).
- KEIM, KATHARINA, 'Glaubensfragen? – Zur Wiederkehr des Religiösen im deutschsprachigen Theater heute: Versuch einer Bestandsaufnahme', *Jahrbuch für internationale Germanistik*, 2 (2005), pp. 79-102.
- KLOTZ, VOLKER, *Bürgerliches Lachtheater. Komödie – Posse – Schwank – Operette* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987).
- KNOWLES, DOROTHY, *French Drama of the Inter-War Years, 1918-39* (London: George C. Harrap & Co., 1967).
- LAVENDA, ROBERT H., 'Rituals', in Karen Christensen and David Levinson (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Community: From the Village to the Virtual World* (3; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), pp. 1176-77.
- LEHMANN, HANS-THIES, *Postdramatisches Theater* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1999).
- LUKÁCS, GEORG, 'Zur Soziologie des modernen Dramas', in Lukács, *Schriften zur Literatursoziologie*, ed. Peter Ludz (Neuwied: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1972), pp. 261-95.
- MALKIN, JEANETTE R., *Memory-Theatre and Postmodern Drama* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999).
- MARCOUX, J. PAUL, 'Georges Feydeau and the "Serious" Farce', in James Redmond (ed.), *Farce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 131-43.
- MCGOWAN, MORAY, ' "Die Stadt ist der Metzger": The Crisis of Bavarian Peasant Identity in Franz Xaver Kroetz's *Bauern sterben*', *German Studies Review*, 19/1 (1996), pp. 29-40.
- MIKLASZEWSKI, KRZYSZTOF, *Encounters with Tadeusz Kantor* (London: Routledge, 2002).
- MILNER DAVIS, JESSICA, *Farce* (London: Methuen, 1978).
- MURRAY, GILBERT, *The Four Stages of Greek Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912).

- NELLISON, MONIKA, 'Pilgerfahrt als Passionsgeschichte', *Die Welt*, 31 January 2005. (Review of Lukas Bärfuß' *Der Bus*.)
- NIETZSCHE, FRIEDRICH, 'Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik', in Nietzsche, *Werke*, ed. Karl Schlechta (1; Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1979), pp. 21-134.
- PHELAN, PEGGY, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993).
- PIKULIK, LOTHAR, KURZENBERGER, HAJO, and GUNTERMANN, GEORGE (eds.), *Deutsche Gegenwartsdramatik*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987).
- PURDIE, SUSAN, 'Secular Definitions of "Ritual": The *Rocky Horror* Phenomenon', in Shimon Levy (ed.), *Theatre and Holy Script* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), pp. 171-90.
- RATHGEB, EBERHARD, 'Wenn wir Todesraben krächzen', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 31 January 2005. (Review of Lukas Bärfuß' *Der Bus*.)
- ROZIK, ELI, 'Dreams and Theatre', in Dennis Kennedy (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Theatre and Performance* (1; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 388-9.
- , 'Religion and Theatre', in Dennis Kennedy (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Theatre and Performance* (2; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 1127-9.
- , 'The Ritual Origin of Theatre – A Scientific Theory or Theatrical Ideology?' *The Journal of Religion and Theatre*, 2/1 (2003), pp. 105-40.
- SAVONA, JEANNETTE L., *Jean Genet* (London: Macmillan, 1983).
- SCHECHNER, RICHARD, 'Believed-in Theater', in Corina Caduff and Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (eds.), *Rituale heute: Theorien - Kontroversen - Entwürfe* (Berlin: Reimer, 2001), pp. 181-90.
- , *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002).
- SCHÖSSLER, FRANZISKA, *Augen-Blicke: Erinnerung, Zeit und Geschichte in Dramen der neunziger Jahre* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2004).
- SCHWARTZ, REGINA M., 'Tragedy and the Mass', *Literature and Theology*, 19/2 (June 2005), pp. 139-58.
- SEBALD, W.G. (ed.), *A Radical Stage: Theatre in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s* (Oxford: Berg, 1988).

- STADELMEIER, GERHARD, 'Der Messias trägt Rot', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 August 2005. (Article on the 'return' of religion to German theatre in the 2000s.)
- SZONDI, PETER, *Theorie des modernen Dramas* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966).
- TACHELET, KOEN, 'Zehn Geschichten, Eine Gemeinschaft', published in the programme to the Münchner Kammerspiele's 2004 production of *Die Zehn Gebote*, pp. 5-7.
- TURNER, VICTOR, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969).
- , *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974).
- UBERSFELD, ANNE, *Reading Theatre*, trans. Frank Collins (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).
- VAN GENNEP, ARNOLD, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).
- VOLKSBÜHNE BERLIN WEBSITE, 'Vater Unser. Ein Theaterstück von Ulrich Seidl' <<http://archiv.volksbuehne-berlin.de/volksbuehne-berlin-cgi/vbbNav.pl?fID=B12&pid=412>>, accessed May 2006.
- WEBER, RICHARD (ed.), *Deutsches Drama der 80er Jahre* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992).
- WICKHAM, GLYNNE, *The Medieval Theatre* (Third edn.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
- YOUNG, KARL, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933).

8.3.8 On religion and its place in art, literature, culture and society

- ABRAMS, M.H., *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).
- AGAMBEN, GIORGIO *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).
- ANON., 'Editorial', *Literaturen. Das Journal für Bücher und Themen*, 12 (December 2005), p.1.

- BAUMAN, ZYGMUNT, 'Postmodern Religion?' in Paul Heelas (ed.), *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 55-78.
- BENAVIDES, GUSTAVO, 'Modernity', in Mark C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 186-204.
- BERGER, PETER, *A Rumour of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (London: Allen Lane, 1970).
- BERKOWITS, ELIEZER, *Faith after the Holocaust* (New York: KTAV, 1973).
- BERWALD, OLAF and THUSWALDNER, GREGOR, 'Vorwort', in Olaf Berwald and Gregor Thuswaldner (eds.), *Der untote Gott. Religion und Ästhetik in der deutschen und österreichischen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Köln: Böhlau, 2007), pp. 1-6.
- BRADSHAW, PAUL, *The New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (London: SCM Press, 2002).
- BROCKELMAN, PAUL, *Cosmology and Creation: The Spiritual Significance of Contemporary Cosmology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- BRUCE, STEVE, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- , *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).
- CARTER, JEFFREY, 'General Introduction', in Jeffrey Carter (ed.), *Understanding Religious Sacrifice: A Reader* (London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 1-11.
- CASANOVA, JOSÉ, 'Religion, European secular identities, and European integration', *Eurozine*, 29 July 2004 <<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2004-07-29-casanova-en.html>>, accessed July 2004.
- DAVIE, GRACE, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- , *Europe: The Exceptional Case. Parameters of Faith in the Modern World* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2002).
- DE LANGE, NICHOLAS, *Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- DEWEILER, ROBERT and JASPER, DAVID, *Religion and Literature: A Reader* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

- DILLON, MICHELE and WINK, PAUL, *In the Course of a Lifetime: Tracing Religious Belief, Practice, and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
- DURKHEIM, EMILE, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. James Ward Swain (New York: Free Press, 1971).
- FISH, STANLEY, 'One University Under God?' *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 7 January 2005.
- FLANAGAN, KIERAN, 'Introduction', in Kieran Flanagan and Peter C. Jupp (eds.), *Postmodernity, Sociology and Religion* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 1-13.
- GEERTZ, CLIFFORD, 'Religion as a Cultural System', in M. Banton (ed.), *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London: Tavistock, 1966), pp. 1-46.
- HABERMAS, JÜRGEN, RATZINGER, JOSEPH, and SCHULLER, FLORIAN *Dialektik der Säkularisierung. Über Vernunft und Religion* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2005).
- HABERMAS, JÜRGEN, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion. Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005).
- HEELAS, PAUL, 'Introduction: On Differentiation and Dedifferentiation', in Paul Heelas (ed.), *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 1-18.
- HEELAS, PAUL and WOODHEAD, LINDA, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005).
- HERVIEU-LÉGER, DANIELE, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. Simon Lee (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).
- - -, 'The Role of Religion in Establishing Social Cohesion', *Eurozine*, 17 August 2006 <<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2006-10-02-hervieuleger-it.html>>, accessed August 2006.
- HULME, T.E., 'Romanticism and Classicism', in Herbert Read (ed.), *Speculations* (London: Routledge, 1936), pp. 111-40.
- HUNT, STEPHEN J., *Alternative Religions: A Sociological Introduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).
- , *Religion and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2005).

- JAMES, WILLIAM, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).
- JASPER, DAVID and PRICKETT, STEPHEN (eds.), *The Bible and Literature: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).
- JEFFREY, DAVID LYLE (ed.), *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1992).
- KAISER, GERT, 'Einleitung: Der tanzende Tod', in Gert Kaiser (ed.), *Der tanzende Tod: Mittelalterliche Totentänze* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1983), pp. 9-69.
- LUCKMANN, THOMAS, 'The Paul Hanly Furfey Lecture, 1989: Shrinking Transcendence, Expanding Religion?' *Sociological Analysis*, 51/2 (1990), pp. 127-38.
- MCGUIRE, MEREDITH B., *Religion: The Social Context* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Thomson Learning, 2002).
- MCLEOD, HUGH, *Secularisation in Western Europe, 1848-1914* (Houndmills: Macmillan 2000).
- MURPHY, DANIEL, *Christianity and Modern European Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997).
- MURRAY, PETER and MURRAY, LINDA (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- NESTI, ARNALDO, 'The Mystical Option in a Postmodern Setting: Morphology and Sense', *Social Compass*, 49/3 (2002), pp. 379-92.
- NOTTINGHAM, ELIZABETH, *Religion: A Sociological View* (New York: Random House, 1971).
- OLIVER, STEPHEN, 'Media, Worship on the', in Paul F. Bradshaw (ed.), *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), pp. 311-13.
- OTTO, RUDOLF, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Munich: Beck, 1987).
- PARTRIDGE, CHRISTOPHER, *The Re-enchantment of the West (2: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture; London: T & T Clark International, 2004).*
- POLLACK, DETLEF, *Säkularisierung – ein moderner Mythos? Studien zum religiösen Wandel in Deutschland* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

- POLLACK, DETLEF and PICKEL, GERT, 'Religious Individualization or Secularization? Testing Hypotheses of Religious Change – The Case of Eastern and Western Germany', *British Journal of Sociology*, 58/4 (2007), pp. 603-32.
- ROOF, WADE CLARK, 'Religion and Spirituality: Toward an Integrated Analysis', in Michele Dillon (ed.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 137-48.
- RUETHER, ROSEMARY RADFORD, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997).
- SCHNÄDELBACH, HERBERT, 'Wiederkehr der Religion', *Die Zeit*, 11 August 2005.
- SMART, NINIAN, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (London: HarperCollins, 1996).
- SMITH, JONATHAN Z., *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* (London: HarperCollins, 1996).
- STEINER, GEORGE, *Nostalgia for the Absolute* (Toronto: CBC, 1974).
- TACEY, DAVID, *Jung and the New Age* (Hove: Brunner-Routledge, 2001).
- TYLOR, EDWARD, *Primitive Culture* (London: Mowbray, 1903).
- WALTER, TONY and DAVIE, GRACE, 'The Religiosity of Women in the Modern West', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 49/4 (1998), pp. 640-60.
- WOOD, SUSAN K., 'The Liturgy and Sacraments', in James J. Buckley, Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, and Trent Pomplun (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 463-76.
- WILSON, BRYAN, *Religion in a Secular Society* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966).
- , *Contemporary Transformations of Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976).
- ŽIŽEK, SLAVOJ, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001).
- , *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

8.3.9 *Miscellaneous*

ADORNO, THEODOR W., 'Ästhetische Theorie', in Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (7; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 7-388.

---, *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978).

ALTER, ROBERT, 'Jewish Humor and the Domestication of Myth', in Harry Levin (ed.), *Veins of Humor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 255-67.

ARENDT, HANNAH, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

BAUDRILLARD, JEAN, *Simulacra and Simulations* (New York: Sémiotext(e), 1985).

BERGER, PETER L., *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997).

BERGMANN, WERNER and ERB, RAINER, *Anti-Semitism in Germany: The Post-Nazi Epoch since 1945* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1997).

BERMANT, CHAIM, *What's the Joke? A Study of Jewish Humour Through the Ages* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986).

BIEDERMANN, HANS, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, trans. James Hulbert (New York: Facts on File, 1992).

BOHRER, KARL HEINZ, *Plötzlichkeit: Zum Augenblick des ästhetischen Scheins* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981).

CAMPBELL, COLIN, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Alcuin Academics, 2005).

CAVALIERO, GLEN, *The Alchemy of Laughter: Comedy in English Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

DES PRES, TERRENCE, 'Holocaust Laughter?' in Berel Lang (ed.), *Writing and the Holocaust* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988), pp. 216-33.

EAGLETON, TERRY, *After Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2003).

- ECO, UMBERTO, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cocogni (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989).
- ELIEZER, BEN, *Jewish Humour* (London: Prion, 2003).
- FREUD, SIGMUND, 'Die Verdrängung', in Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Anna Freud (10; Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1991), pp. 248-61.
- , *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten und "Der Humor"* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1992).
- FRIEDRICH, PIA, *Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Boston: Twayne, 1982).
- GLASER, HERMANN, *Kulturgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (3; Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1989).
- GOLDMANN, NAHUM, *The Jewish Paradox*, trans. Steve Cox (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978).
- HEIDEGGER, MARTIN, 'Das Ding', in Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. 1. Abteilung: Veröffentlichte Schriften 1910-1976*, ed. Walter Biemel (7; Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), pp. 165-88.
- HOCHWALD, ABRAHAM, *The HarperCollins Book of Jewish Humour*, trans. Anne Moellers (London: HarperCollins, 1996).
- KIEFER, ANSELM, ' "This dark light that falls from the stars ..." Interview by Anselm Kiefer with Bernhard Comment', in Germano Celant (ed.), *Anselm Kiefer* (Milan: Skira, 2007), pp. 293-335.
- LANDMANN, SALCIA, *Der jüdische Witz. Soziologie und Sammlung* (Freiburg: Walter Verlag, 1988).
- LIPMAN, STEVEN, *Laughter in Hell: The Use of Humour during the Holocaust* (North Vale, N.J.: Aronson, 1991).
- MCDERMOTT, BRIDGET, *Death in Ancient Egypt* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2006).
- MECKLENBURG, NORBERT, *Erzählte Provinz: Regionalismus und Moderne im Roman* (Königstein: Athenäum, 1986).
- PASOLINI, PIER PAOLO, *Heretical Empiricism*, trans. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
- PLANK, KARL A., 'Broken Continuities: Night and White Crucifixion', *Religion Online* <<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1069>>, accessed February 2008.

- RHODES, COLIN, *Primitivism and Modern Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994).
- ROHDIE, SAM, *The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (London: British Film Institute, 1995).
- SARTRE, JEAN PAUL, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen, 1977).
- , *Anti-Semite and Jew* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995).
- SONTAG, SUSAN, *Styles of Radical Will* (London: Vintage, 1994).
- STEYN, JULIET, *The Jew: Assumptions of Identity* (London: Cassell, 1999).
- TAYLOR, CHARLES, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

