

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF PETER BROOK'S
CONCEPT OF "HOLY THEATRE" AS APPLIED
TO SAMUEL BECKETT'S HAPPY DAYS

by

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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EPIGRAPH

SHORT ONE TO THE CUCKOO

W. H. Auden

No one imagines you answer idle questions
--How long shall I live? How long remain single?
Will butter be cheaper?--nor does your shout make
 husbands uneasy.

Compared with arias by the great performers
such as the merle, your two-note act is kid-stuff:
our most hardened crooks are sincerely shocked by
 your nesting habits.

Science, Aesthetics, Ethics, may huff and puff but they
cannot extinguish your magic: you marvel
the commuter as you wondered the savage.

 Hence, in my diary,

where I normally enter nothing but social
engagements and, lately, the death of friends, I
scribble year after year when I first hear you,
 of a holy moment.

Atlantic, August 1972

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to develop a coherent description of Peter Brook's prescriptive concept of the "Holy Theatre" and to analyze its application to Samuel Beckett's play Happy Days, inasmuch as Brook singles it out in The Empty Space as a text exemplifying the "holy."

Brook calls "Holy Theatre" the "Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible." Such a theatre must also supply the conditions which make possible the perception of the "invisible." "Holy Theatre" accomplishes its aim chiefly by constructing a myth-based ritual, which provides both a sense of form and of occasion.

The author of this study applies the criteria for "Holy Theatre" to Happy Days in three areas: the functioning of "true symbols" in the language of the play; a consideration of "ritualized" elements in the action of the characters, their interaction, the action or movement of the play itself; and the sense of "form" and "occasion" provided by the staging devices employed in the play.

The investigator concludes that the concept of "Holy Theatre" has found embodiment in at least one dramatic text, contingent upon the text's presentation of a "true ritual" forged by myth. Certain implications for further study are suggested.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When Peter Brook graduated from Oxford's Magdalen College in 1945, he had the good fortune to move immediately into an atmosphere already predisposed toward theatrical excitement. The immediate postwar period saw an almost incredible resurgence of interest in serious theatre; the intolerable pressures of wartime desperation were over, and people once more had the leisure for, and inclination toward, serious theatre. The theatre responded with classic revivals: Peer Gynt, Olivier's Oedipus and Richard III, and John Gielgud's production of The Importance of Being Earnest. This was also the era which gave birth to Fry's The Lady's not for Burning, Giraudoux's The Madwoman of Chaillot and Amphitryon 38, and it was the heyday of Barrault and Jouvett. Brook himself tells us that wartime theatre was "the romantic theatre, the theatre of colours and sounds, of music and movement . . . like water to the thirst of dry lives." But Brook also reminds us that the postwar theatre did not differ greatly from wartime theatre: "this was a theatre of colour and movement, of fine fabrics, of shadows, of eccentric, cascading words, of leaps of thought and of cunning machines, of lightness and all forms of

mystery and surprise--it was the theatre of a battered Europe that seemed to share one aim--a reaching back towards a memory of lost grace."¹

Brook entered this backward-looking but glittering arena with substantial if not infallible credentials. His precocity at Oxford had already attracted attention; and if his talents were more promising than proven, the theatrical world he entered offered him opportunity to test his skills and move into an exciting milieu which was about to become electrifying. What type of person was this new college graduate who moved so quickly into the London theatre scene? What raw material had the theatre to shape and in turn be shaped by?

Charles Marowitz, a sometime colleague of Brook, succinctly characterizes the impact Brook had had at Oxford:

'It was as if he'd come up by public request,' recalls a contemporary. 'Rather like a high-pressure executive arriving to take over a dying business.' But he was an unprepossessing youth and the dying business wasn't interested in his talents. Short, stubby, mole-like and frizzly haired, he was unable to penetrate the cliques which ran the university. His ambition was already formed. He was going to be a film director, and his subsequent involvement in the theater was seen only as a necessary preliminary to a filmic career.²

1. Peter Brook, The Empty Space (New York: Avon/Discus Books, 1969), p. 39.

2. Charles Marowitz, "From Prodigy to Professional, as Written, Directed, and Acted by Peter Brook," New York Times Magazine, November 24, 1968, p. 92.

Indeed, Brook himself admits that one of the heaviest influences on his early style was the cinema: "For the first 10 or 15 years, I was working in the theatre with the outlook of a film director. Directing a play was a matter of creating images. And it was only very gradually that the actual nature of theatre form became clear."³ While at Oxford, Brook actually had made a film version of Sterne's Sentimental Journey, using mostly ersatz equipment, and antagonizing the authorities of his college when he began using college grounds for locations. Even at this early stage of his development, Brook's genius for improvisation was evident. So was his brashness, as Marowitz points out:

It was while shooting "Sentimental Journey" that Brook, desperate for plushy interiors, obtained an interview with John Gielgud, then playing "Love for Love" at the Haymarket Theater. For reasons no longer clear to Gielgud, he allowed the scalene-shaped undergraduate to use his theater in the afternoons, and a friendship was forged that has remained solid for 25 years.⁴

Despite Brook's ingenuity, brashness, and the friendship of John Gielgud, the reviews of that film were painfully tolerant, at best.⁵ But the film did open Peter Brook's talents to the public, and those talents have been revealed increasingly ever since.

3. Marowitz, "Prodigy to Professional," p. 108.

4. Ibid., p. 94.

5. Ibid.

In 1945, Brook did a London production of Pygmalion and caught the attention of Sir Barry Jackson, then director of the Birmingham Repertory Company and "one of the few enlightened impresarios to have operated in the prewar English theater."⁶ This encounter led to an association which proved highly beneficial to Brook, for when Jackson took over the Stratford Memorial Theatre, he asked Brook to join him. Brook's first production at Stratford was Love's Labour's Lost, and once again Marowitz describes the aftermath: "The critics hailed him as 'the legitimate successor to Komisarjevsky'" and "Brook solidified his reputation as a Wunderkind."⁷ The effect of this period is best described by Brook himself:

When I first went to Stratford in 1945 every conceivable value was buried in deadly sentimentality and complete worthiness--a traditionalism approved largely by town, scholar and press. It needed the boldness of a very extraordinary old gentleman, Sir Barry Jackson, to throw all this out of the window and so make a true search for values possible once more.⁸

During this period, too, Brook began friendships with other stage notables including Paul Scofield and Alec Guinness. These associations were to have a profound effect on Brook as a director for many years to come. As each of the stars Brook knew became a

6. Marowitz, "Prodigy to Professional," p. 94.

7. Ibid.

8. Brook, The Empty Space, pp. 41-42.

"name," he naturally gravitated toward a Brook production. During this entire time, it was said that "a typical Brook production starred actors like Gielgud, Olivier, or the Lunts and represented a balance between ingenious production choices and the natural tendencies of his star performers."⁹ Gielgud sheds some light on Brook's skill: "If I agree to work under a director, I always try to do what he tells me, unless I feel strongly that he is not helping me at all, in which case I would probably resign from the part. Working . . . with Peter Brook . . . I have been especially happy in past years."¹⁰

In 1949 Peter Brook, appointed director of productions at Covent Garden, formed some strong opinions: "After two years' slogging, I came to the conclusion that opera as an artistic form was dead."¹¹ Brook's opinion of that art form has not mellowed with the passage of years, despite subsequent returns to the opera with his productions of Faust and Eugene Onegin at New York's Metropolitan Opera House during the fifties. In 1968 Brook still maintained that "Grand opera, of course, is the Deadly Theatre carried to absurdity. Opera is a nightmare of vast feuds over tiny details; of surrealist anecdotes that all turn round the same assertion: that nothing needs

9. Marowitz, "Prodigy to Professional," p. 106

10. John Gielgud, Stage Directions (New York: Random House, 1963), p. 6.

11. Marowitz, "Prodigy to Professional," p. 96.

to change. Everything in opera must change, but in opera change is blocked."¹² One can see in Brook's observation the early roots of some of his strongest principles of theatre: the need to change and to adapt.

During the fifties Brook continued to direct at Stratford and to do independent productions as well. He also became associated with H. M. Tennents, Ltd., theatrical producers who had "done a great deal to raise the standards and advance the prestige of the English theatre."¹³ Among Brook's colleagues at Tennents were Anthony Quayle and, once again, John Gielgud. Perhaps another strong influence on Brook was beginning to emerge, namely association with talented colleagues and artistically-oriented companies.

Success was the hallmark during this period of Brook's work, as a contemporary critique clearly illustrates:

Peter Brook, at the age of 26, is outstanding among the younger generation of British producers. He is unique in his range of talent and its multiplicity, indicated in the success of such diverse productions as Dark of the Moon, Vicious Circle, Measure for Measure and Ring Around the Moon. Mr. Brook has a remarkable sensibility for the shape of the play, for the control of lighting, colour, music, and significant properties and welding them into a whole. His taste has a bizarre and exotic strength, and he is not inhibited, like Guthrie, by allegiances to naturalism, or by an excessively

12. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 16.

13. Richard Findlater, The Unholy Trade (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1952), p. 44.

English liking for understatement. He has a talent for securing an astonishing unity of effect without sacrificing the individual parts (as Olivier sometimes does). But he lacks intuitive sympathy with the players, and except when directing crowd scenes fails to fire his company or give them great confidence in the success of his production. (Mr. Guthrie's actors usually feel that they are making theatrical history.)¹⁴

The Brook of this period was still very much of a film director, as Findlater noted: "Although he does not skimp the verse, he places visual effects first, and the unity that he secures is primarily in the appearance and pace of the play, and less in the acting and speaking."¹⁵ But Findlater did acknowledge the growth of Peter Brook in his craft, and prophesied a future which has apparently come true:

Mr. Brook has matured rapidly during the last three years, and an early brashness has already been replaced by a selective, disciplined sense of the appropriate and the unexpected. His 1950 production of Measure for Measure, for which he designed sets and costumes, was remarkable for a simplicity of effect which gave a new unity to the play and made a brilliant use of the permanent set. It showed a theatrical genius which must help to change the face of the theatre in the next ten years if it is harnessed to the right wagon.¹⁶

In the last several comments one already begins to see the threads of Brook's emerging style as a director. For example, there

14. Findlater, The Unholy Trade, p. 107.

15. Ibid., pp. 107-108.

16. Ibid., p. 108.

is his lack of "intuitive sympathy" with his actors, a factor which probably left Gielgud content but which must have chilled lesser stars.

Certain characteristics in Brook's personality and physical appearance may perhaps explain this chilling effect. Charles Marowitz makes the point as he characterizes his first meeting with Brook:

"One was immediately impressed by two things: his eyes which are lethally blue and permanently incandescent, and his mind, which cruises gently over many topics and then fastens onto an idea like a bird of prey devouring delectable fauna."¹⁷ This predatory imagery also characterizes Brook's directing style, again captured by

Marowitz:

When he listens, it is with the attention of a tape-recorder. He has a maddening tendency to be overexplanatory and London is full of actors who will tell you they never understand a word he says. It is true that his approach is relentlessly intellectual, and often coldly so. He admits that his way of approaching a play is often with a view to solving a technical problem. His fascination with Seneca's "Oedipus," which was suggested to him by Kenneth Tynan, was the challenge of bringing to life a text which was conceived wholly to be spoken.¹⁸

Interestingly enough, even the coldly intellectual approach has its pitfalls which underscore the fallibility of the coldest intellect.

Marowitz points out almost gleefully: "The 10-foot golden phallus that was solemnly unveiled at the close of that performance [Seneca's

17. Marowitz, "Prodigy to Professional," p. 105.

18. Ibid.

Oedipus] was a throwback to an earlier Brook whose avowed aim was 'to disturb the spectator' at any cost. No amount of rationalization could justify the staggering irrelevance of that gesture."¹⁹ Nevertheless, it does provide another insight into the technique of Peter Brook at this particular stage of his development.

Marowitz, who has worked with Brook and observed his style at a much later date (1963) than Findlater, corroborates the latter's analysis of Brook's approach to actors:

Brook has the ability to inspire actors into bestowing a performance as if it were a personal gift. I remember during the "Lear" rehearsals, when a rowdy chorus of knights was emitting the crowd sound peculiar to small-part actors, how Brook took them to one side for a private consultation. By emphasizing their own positions, i. e., that of somewhat unimportant actors in a larger, more meaningful context, he managed to give them a sense of their own importance. Each was encouraged to choose a name for himself, and then together, they discussed the character of the knights that might attend on Lear. This done, they then launched into the same scene with a conviction and clarity of purpose which, apart from transforming the scene, managed to bring the rehearsal chandelier crashing down onto the stage.²⁰

Out of these descriptions of Brook's directing style emerges the kernel of the present-day Peter Brook, a man deeply concerned with ensemble rather than with stars. Several influences seem to be at play here: his work with repertory, his wide-ranging freelance efforts, and a gift for shrewd analysis of precisely what makes a good

19. Marowitz, "Prodigy to Professional," p. 105.

20. Ibid., p. 106.

company. His allegiance to the Royal Shakespeare Company, his small experimental groups at the Aldwych, his admiration for Grotowski's small company in Poland, as well as his own instrumentality in founding the International Center for Theatre Research--all these facts clearly demonstrate that Brook has found the type of milieu in which he can most comfortably create. But what concerns us here is the why of the situation. What caused a successful director of highly commercial ventures in the fifties to take the path to a small, experimental company? Perhaps it was a "taste of honey," as Marowitz seems to suggest: "The . . . director was no longer the captive of the star system or the wily tool of commercial managements. In the interim, Brook had accepted a directorship of The Royal Shakespeare Company and, for the first time, his outsize talent was harnessed to a permanent company of actors as geared to epic undertakings as Brook himself."²¹

Brook had tasted great and early success but had been wily enough to resist succumbing to it. Marowitz mentions in passing that Brook lived and worked in Paris during the early years of the New Wave, and this comment is significant.²² In 1959 Brook verbalized a skepticism that has also been his artistic salvation:

21. Marowitz, "Prodigy to Professional," p. 96.

22. Ibid.

The artist who has made a success realizes intuitively that his position is based on certain characteristics in his work for which he was accepted in the first place. He realizes that these characteristics have brought him the praise of his circle--and he finds that what his tiny circle praises also makes money. There is no conflict, only reassurance. How can he turn his back on money when all the people he admires confirm that it is truly earned? It takes an unusually independent spirit to venture further.²³

But Brook did venture further, and Marowitz synthesizes the move in saying that:

His early incandescence emitted more heat than light, but at the point where most prodigies begin to flicker and fade, he was provident enough to flee the London scene and refuel. After demonstrating his facility at mounting high-powered commercial productions, he ditched his public persona and began the arduous inner calisthenics that turn a prodigy into a professional.²⁴

If Brook's departure from London was flight, the accompanying calisthenics were indeed arduous--and impressive: more opera, Broadway musicals, naturalistic American drama, films, stints as ballet critic and theatrical producer, music, painting, absorption with the dramatic theories of Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski. This background has led to Brook's being labeled an "eclectic,"²⁵ and the

23. Peter Brook, "Oh For Empty Seats!" (January, 1959), The Encore Reader, ed. Charles Marowitz, Tom Milne, and Owen Hale (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1965), p. 70.

24. Marowitz, "Prodigy to Professional," p. 62.

25. James Roose-Evans, Experimental Theatre (New York: Avon/Discus Books, 1971), p. 80.

term has not always been intended as a compliment. Marowitz summarizes: "It was this endless variety . . . which, for a long time, earned him the reputation of a dilettante, a label he has not yet completely shaken off."²⁶ But no label, no pejorative reference, can negate the richness and variety which Peter Brook's "eclectic" experiences give to his work as director and as theatrical theorist and experimenter.

Brook's "eclectic experiences" have led him to make certain demands and posit certain assumptions. He prefers to function as producer as well as director, since the producer for Brook seems to exercise the most sweeping control over the work:

The producer is working with three elements: his text, his audience, and his medium, and of these only the first is constant. It is his primary duty to discover every intention of the author and to transmit these with every possible means at his disposal. As the theater develops, as its shape and geography, its machinery and its conventions change, so production style must change with it. There is no perfect interpretation of any play, nor is there any final one: like a musician's interpretation, its existence is inseparable from its performance.²⁷

Brook sees the text in a way which has brought protest from certain playwrights: "The text itself can never be sacred . . . the entire work of producing a play proceeds from the study of its text."²⁸

26. Marowitz, "Prodigy to Professional," p. 96.

27. Toby Cole, and Helen Krich Chinoy, eds., Directors on Directing (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1963), p. 423.

28. Findlater, The Unholy Trade, p. 99.

Findlater further clarifies Brook's position on the function of the producer in relation to the text:

His relations with the author, in producing new plays, are important. He is, as Norman Marshall puts it, 'the author's first critic,' and also, in the words of Peter Brook, 'the servant of the author's intentions.' But this does not mean that any author, dead or living, is his master. Textual sanctity is impossible, and the author is not the final authority.²⁹

But if the text is not "sacred," it is still far from meaningless. It serves as the guide, the form, and the key to production. Brook continues:

There is always a point when the producer finds that he has suddenly caught on to the essential style of the work, and when this has happened, he will have the key to every detail of the treatment. The style will govern how the actors will have to walk, and in what postures they will sit; whether they will speak with conscious artificiality, with tongue in cheek, or with sincerity; whether they must speak at a high tempo regardless of everything else, or whether they can play at the speed that they feel to be true.³⁰

Charles Marowitz, for nearly a year a close collaborator with Brook in the "Theatre of Cruelty," still sees the control Brook exercises as producer and director as less than legitimate. Speaking of Brook's production of The Tempest, Marowitz protests:

As with the "Marat/Sade," Brook used text [sic] for his own private purposes and at the expense of the original work. That is why Brook works best with second-rate material. (His production of "Titus Andronicus," for instance, was a milestone in English theater.) Essentially, he is not interested in

29. Findlater, The Unholy Trade, p. 99.

30. Ibid., p. 100.

"interpreting" material, but in converting it to his own uses. Often these uses are more rewarding than the material's original intentions, but when confronted with a play with its own integrity--be it "Oedipus" or "Marat/Sade"--the surface glitter of a Brook production is often subverted by the niggling doubt that a faithful interpretation of the author's work would have been profoundly more impressive.³¹

Yet, at least with new plays, Brook finds a very real problem which perhaps partially explains his apparent use of the text "for his own private purposes."

It is said, repeatedly, that masterly plays lie around the country unread. This is rubbish; there has seldom in history been such a vested interest in finding scripts--by managers, actors, directors--by the small theatres, by the few art theatres, by the television people. In fact, talent has never had such an easy opening. Let anyone write a play with a glimmer of ability and with a quarter of a sou's worth of talent and it is almost inconceivable that he won't be snapped up at once.³²

Even if all available texts were brilliant and ripe for immediate production, further evidence casts substantial doubt on the validity of Marowitz's criticism of Brook's treatment of dramatic texts. In his Preface to Anouilh's Ring Around the Moon, Brook relates some of his difficulties in finally producing that play. Among his major concerns was finding a translator capable of doing justice to Anouilh's text:

This matter of adaptation is one of our greatest nightmares. Although Shakespeare is almost improved in German, and

31. Marowitz, "Prodigy to Professional," p. 112.

32. Peter Brook, "Oh For Empty Seats," p. 68.

Chekhov is wonderful in French, our language is somehow as insular as our people, and it fights viciously against translators. Every season, plays successful abroad fail in London, their flops have a monotonous regularity, and although the cause is at times the producer or the cast, mostly it is in the change of language. When a play is written in a realistic style, the problem is acute but not insuperable. It is then a question of finding the conversational equivalent, the parallel idiom, colloquialism for colloquialism, slang for slang. But Anouilh is a stylist, he has a manner and a way of phrasing in which much of his charm lies. To translate Anouilh is no matter of matching *chit* with *chat*: it demands re-creation, a re-shaping of ideas into phrases that have an English elegance and grace.³³

Brook spent months trying to convince Christopher Fry to do the translation, but Fry refused because of other pressing commitments. Brook shelved plans for production because he felt that only Fry had the gift for verse drama which any translation of Anouilh's play demanded. During an arid period in his own writing, Fry consented to work for Brook, and the latter's reactions are almost as lyrical and incisive as Anouilh's text.

The moment Christopher Fry began work on the script we all breathed more freely. But although the quality of the writing seemed guaranteed, the success of Anouilh's play was still much in the balance. Anouilh writes plays for performance rather than for paper. His literary quality is that of theatre literature, the elegance of his dialogue appears when it is spoken by comedians in the rhythm of a comic scene. His first play, Le Bal des Voleurs, was called a *comédie-ballet*, and he conceives his plays as ballets, as patterns of

33. Peter Brook in the Preface to Jean Anouilh's Ring Around the Moon (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), pp. 5-6.

movement, as pretexts for actors' performances. Unlike so many present-day playwrights who are the descendants of a literary school, and whose plays are animated novels, Anouilh is in the tradition of the commedia dell'arte. His plays are recorded improvisations. Like Chopin, he pre-conceives the accidental and calls it an impromptu. He is a poet, but not a poet of words: he is a poet of words-acted, of scenes-set, of players-performing.³⁴

Not only has Brook exhibited a deep sensitivity to the words, he has also obviously evinced an even deeper concern for the mood those words create. This concern was so complete that even the right subtitle worried him. But his was not the concern of a mere amateur semanticist, Brook's final comment here seems to capture his estimation of the place of the text in the total theatrical experience:

When the scenery was designed, the actors at work, the scenes beginning to come to life, we realized that an English audience might have difficulty in catching the style of the play. After all, the commedia dell'arte is little known here, the idiom is unfamiliar. We had to find a sub-title to make it all clear. But what? A comedy? A farce? A ballet? They all had the wrong connotations. Then Fry found the answer. 'Call it a "Charade with Music"' he suggested. So the reader, too, would do worse than to keep this description in mind, and read this play with sense of theatre and imagination alert. The written play is Anouilh's shorthand for a play performed, and the reader should try to animate the characters until he has them playing and dancing round the ferns and under the twinkling lights of a winter garden. The reader must be his own producer and stage his own charade. Believe me, it's an enchanting game.³⁵

While Brook is in no way willing to acknowledge the sacredness of the text, he does number it among the three primary concerns of

34. Brook, Preface to Ring Around the Moon, p. 7.

35. Ibid., p. 8.

the producer. What is perhaps more significant is the sensitivity he displays toward the text, and the awareness he summons that a text is "shorthand for a play performed." Yet it is inextricably entwined with the other two of Brook's production concerns: his audience and his medium. One critic has distilled this relationship that Brook sees between the text and the audience when he wrote:

What he found was Marat/Sade, and Peter Weiss, a man who wrote in what Brook calls "the language of the theater." For both, that is a very precise argot. "There are people who think the word 'language' must mean grammar, words, literature," Brook says. "One talks about 'the language of cinema,' 'the language of paint,' and in the theater we talk about 'the language of theater.'" For all its precisions, anything goes in that language so long as it grabs the theatergoer by the heart and brain and shakes, batters or bruises him into some new and preferably unsettling self-knowledge.³⁶

Peter Brook's own words pinpoint the closeness between author and producer-director when he speaks of his own collaboration with Weiss in the Marat/Sade. Reddy quotes Brook in his reviews of Marat/Sade:

The author had an extraordinarily complex and daring vision, and one that was very hard for him to put down on paper. The nearest he could get was the title, which reflects a complex stage machine we had to recapture. And I think that what we do on the stage, for better or worse, is exactly what the author himself was seeing on the stage of his mind, seeing in his vision. This is why I am very jealous of any attempt to divide his work from mine. I feel that any

36. Joseph Reddy, "Sanity from the Asylum," Look, February 22, 1966, p. 110.

criticism of the production is a criticism of his play, and that any praise of the production is a praise of his vision.³⁷

Brook has already demonstrated a very real concern for "a complex stage machine," or part of the "medium" of theatre. Again Brook demands a unity when he says that "the work of producer and designer is indivisible."³⁸ Brook extends his view in answer to an interviewer's question:

How then do you deal with other disciplines--costumes or sets or choreography or music?

They grow outwards. We can go for a long, long time (for there's an enormous distance to go) with just the actor and the problem of the actor and what his material is. Actor, actor-director, actor-director-author is virtually complete. . . .

Here everything has to come from, to grow out of, central soil.³⁹

Brook often serves as his own designer, demonstrating the validity of his "indivisibility" argument. His production of A Midsummer Night's Dream utilized a set which resembled a white handball court, boasting two doors, four ladders, trapezes, a platform high above the stage floor and a gigantic red ostrich plume which later becomes Titania's couch as she lies asleep and falls victim to

37. Reddy, p. 110.

38. Findlater, The Unholy Trade, p. 101.

39. Peter Brook, "A Talk with Peter Brook," American Theatre '69-70, Vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), pp. 17-23.

Oberon's stratagem. Despite the apparent incongruity of the setting, critic Tom Prideaux maintained that

All this gear, however, as the Dream advances does help to display, even to elevate and apotheosize the actors and focus attention on their poetic magic. Spoken from a high trapeze, Oberon's "I know a bank where the wild thyme blows" rings compellingly, and as Puck, played by daredevil John Kane, leaps from a catwalk and grabs a rope high over the stage, you are convinced he is the fellow who could girdle the earth in 40 minutes.⁴⁰

Even Harold Clurman, not always a Brook afficionado, makes this concession:

Extravagant, gimmicky? Certainly, but does not Shakespeare say "All this derision shall seem a dream and fruitless vision"? The lovers' awakening is marked by the ringing of an alarm clock openly displayed by one of the "property men" on the upper stage. When an actor needs a "prop" (such as a calendar) it is thrown to him from the overhanging platform. Brook's motto here is Shakespeare's "And those things do best please me that befall preposterously."⁴¹

Prideaux succinctly crystallizes the method in Brook's apparent madness by saying that "Demonstrably, Brook's staging makes the actors stand out, as they did in the no-scenery Shakespeare theater. And in addition he creates an environment conducive to marvels."⁴²

But before overstressing the lesser part of Brook's medium, perhaps one should turn to the greater, the actor, as Prideaux has

40. Tom Prideaux, "A Circus in the Forest of Arden," Life, February 26, 1971, p. 12.

41. Harold Clurman, "Theatre," Nation, February 8, 1971, p. 188.

42. Prideaux, p. 12.

suggested. For even that "environment conducive to marvels" has only one function: to make "the actors stand out." Once again, Charles Marowitz paints a portrait of the "ideal" Brook actor, based on his observations of Brook at work in the Theatre of Cruelty:

A good Brook actor is one who does not grow too attached to his performance and is prepared to scrap effects lesser actors would be delighted to achieve. A bad Brook actor is one who likes things set quickly and makes for short cuts. A rehearsal period with Brook is a labyrinthine odyssey through self and sense. The ideal is always the light at the end of the tunnel, and the tunnel is endless. 'The work of rehearsal,' he said during "King Lear," 'is looking for meaning and then making it meaningful.'⁴³

Part of the relationship which Brook as director builds with his actors cannot be defined, only described. Despite Brook's coldly intellectual approach to a production and his tendency to be over-explanatory, Marowitz readily admits:

When Brook is peeved by some actor's inadequacy, his Cheshire-cat smile plays around the corners of his mouth, his blue eyes twinkle and he makes you feel you are his oldest and most treasured friend. Nor is it entirely a directorial ruse. Something warm and compelling emanates from the man that makes an actor want to please him, and the kind of result produced from such a motive cannot be compared with the mechanical results produced by directorial cliches like: Make it brighter. Give it more. Have fun with it.⁴⁴

Moreover, Marowitz gives a clue to the development in Brook's total approach to directing, embracing his dramatic style, focus, and

43. Marowitz, "Prodigy to Professional," p. 106.

44. Ibid.

and the type of actor he deals with. All of these changes seem to be a highly relevant indicator of Brook's developing dramatic theory.

Brook's preoccupation with improvisation and a collective approach to theatre is fairly recent. . . . It was during a Theater of Cruelty season in 1964, the period of his involvement with the ideas of Antonin Artaud, that Brook gradually came to change his sense of priorities. . . .

During this period, Brook and I worked together daily; I, preparing exercises, and he making stranger and more ambitious demands on his actors every day During these sessions, John Roberts, then general manager of The Royal Shakespeare Company, remarked: 'How extraordinary to see Peter Brook surrounded by 20-year-olds.' And it was true. For the first time in a long time, Brook had forsaken the stellar heavyweights with whom he was usually associated and now, instead of polishing up results, he was spending an average of 45 hours a week exploring means.⁴⁵

This shift in focus is more than a mere flight from the star system to utilization of unknown actors, from the West End to repertory. In the process Brook has become concerned with questions about the theatre which had not concerned him in his earlier days when theatre was merely a necessary, albeit bothersome, training ground for the filmic career he had elected to pursue. Nor is he the producer-director of glittering West End productions, international operas, legitimate hits, or classics at The Royal Shakespeare Company. He is not even the willing imitator of certain theorists whose work has intrigued him, e. g., Brecht, Artaud, and Grotowski. He is a man whose ideas are still evolving, to be sure; but he is also a man who is

45. Marowitz, "Prodigy to Professional," p. 106.

striking out and exploring on his own. And those explorations are indeed fascinating, as Brook suggests:

At the Theater of Cruelty, 90 per cent of our work was on the actor--the actor in relation to the audience and in relation to each other [sic]. Now it's all swung the other way round and what interests me is the exact relation of actor to audience, in relation again to the physical conditions that surround them.⁴⁶

In Brook's Round House production of The Tempest, another unusual set consisting largely of mobile scaffolding, ladders and perches, was a precursor of the style of A Midsummer Night's Dream as it was done on the Broadway stage. There were "safe" and "dangerous" areas for the audience. Those who wished to be removed from the action of the play were given the option of sitting on benches and seats around the walls of the auditorium. Others could choose to be in the midst of the action by sitting on the scaffolds and ladder rungs within the set itself. Brook explained it this way:

The audience as a whole could feel that it was being respected either as a forthright or as a timid creature, and that seems fundamental to me. Personally, I find it meaningless when a provocation to an audience takes the form of assaulting everybody in the house. The psyche, the kick-state of each member of an audience is so subtly different that no one can really treat the audience as a whole. The assault that can make one apparently passive member of the audience respond marvelously can absolutely close the possibility of participation in another. Real audience participation demands a climate of enormous confidence and security, spreading into the audience the very thing one tries to achieve in a working group of actors where one knows that things only flow when there

46. Marowitz, "Prodigy to Professional," p. 108.

is great security through hard work on the part of all the members. More than anything else, participation depends on making an audience feel in a totally natural relationship to the performer.⁴⁷

Charles Marowitz criticized the production thus: "From an environmental standpoint, 'The Tempest' was an interesting exercise, but as an experimental version of Shakespeare's work, an attempt to grapple with its underlying themes, the production was confused and aimless. . . . Questions of sense and intention got swamped in performance dynamics."⁴⁸ Marowitz reasoned that "As much as he gives lip service to the collaborative approach, his productions are often concretizations of his own abstract thought with actors being used as objects. Brook may be aware of the point of the experiment but his actors are moved like pawns."⁴⁹ Harold Clurman saw Brook's actors as more than "pawns" in Midsummer:

This then is a director's rather than an actors' triumphal occasion, except to the extent that the actors are his enthusiastic coadjutors. . . . Thinking back on these earlier--always interesting--productions, my feeling is that while King Lear was most gravely committed to an interpretation of its text (though not altogether satisfactory to me as such) and Marat-Sade so devoted to directorial virtuosity that its substance became subservient to it, A Midsummer Night's Dream is archetypal of Brook's talent at its most gratifying.⁵⁰

47. Marowitz, "Prodigy to Professional," pp. 108-110.

48. Ibid., p. 110.

49. Ibid., pp. 110-112.

50. Clurman, p. 189.

In his comments on the Marat/Sade, Brook has already expressed his opposition to any attempt by a critic to determine credits (to the writer, the director, and the actor) in a production.

Clurman's further exploration of the conflict over credits prompts him to suggest a solution:

This production [A Midsummer Night's Dream] will undoubtedly inspire ambitious theatre folk, but will it not also turn them to much frivolous imitation, more manner than matter? And why does the new stagecraft one hears so much about apply itself mainly to old texts and not evolve new ones? We are constantly required to determine how the classics have been "treated" rather than to judge an organically created work. The marriage of writing and stage work into a true unity has chiefly occurred in recent years only in such productions as Brecht's Mother Courage. But consummations of this sort are likely to occur only when true total theatres are established; where writers, directors, actors, designers are partners who speak together on subjects about which they harbor strong mutual feeling.⁵¹

Brook himself has revealed his own penchant for total theatre. In 1970 he helped to create the International Center for Theatre Research,⁵² with which he became associated. The group, composed of many talents and many nationalities including actors, directors, designers, writers, and composers from England, France, the Orient, and the United States, is rehearsing texts in Japanese, ancient Greek, Spanish, Arabic, and Persian. Even the site of their work has been removed to Persia. In an interview Brook described the concept behind such a group: "The principle of what we're doing is that we're

51. Clurman, p. 189.

52. For treatment see Brook, "A Talk," pp. 17-23.

trying to evolve something from the seed. We're not trying to add things together but to make conditions in which something can grow. We have a very small nucleus. We are attempting to start with the least departmentalizing possible. . . ."⁵³

Brook's current view of theatre seems to be an organic one in which he sees theatre as a creature growing from the seed. He balks at rigidly separating and "departmentalizing" the work of writer, actor, or director. Although he has become an experimenter, his training has been largely in the commercial West End and in repertory at Stratford. In these distinct theatres Brook sees no disparities. The man whom Richard Findlater has described as having accepted the restrictions of the proscenium stage and turned them into positive advantage⁵⁴ continues to explore the limitations of theatre and crash through them. The realization of an organic vision of theatre apparently makes Peter Brook able to penetrate the barriers of theatre.

Brook has said:

I believe that a healthy theatre has three divisions: a national classic theatre kept alive by a continually revitalized tradition; a boulevard theatre kept alive by its zest, its gaiety, by diffusing a sense of happiness and fun through music, colour and laughter for their own sakes; and also an avant-garde. Through the easy passage of the artist to big commercial success we have lost the avant-garde. In music,

53. Brook, "A Talk," p. 17.

54. Findlater, The Unholy Trade, p. 69.

there are serial composers, electronic composers, concrete composers, working far ahead of their time, yet opening the way for the broad middle stream of their art to follow. In painting, there are action painters, experiments in every form of shape, surface and abstraction. Where is the vanguard of the theatre? Where can one see disastrous experiments from which authors can develop away from the dying forms of the present day? To face new audiences we must first be in a position to face empty seats.⁵⁵

Brook has himself displayed that willingness. He has experimented, and in those experiments he has had his share of successes and failures, but he continues as an innovator. When asked how long his International Center for Theatre Research experiment would continue, Brook replied, "Well--as long as possible. . . . Forever."⁵⁶

This tenacity, which has manifested itself in Brook since his early childhood, has become one of his driving demons in the theatre.

Charles Marowitz tells us ". . . I was reminded of Peter's preoccupation with "The Tempest," which he has directed at least four times. 'Why again?' I asked him before his last production at Stratford. 'I didn't get it right last time,' he said. He has just produced it again in an experimental version at London's Round House."⁵⁷

"I didn't get it right last time" would be a fair characterization of Peter Brook's total approach to theatre. Although he disagrees

55. Brook, in Marowitz et al., The Encore Reader, pp. 73-74.

56. Brook, "A Talk," p. 23.

57. Marowitz, "Prodigy to Professional," p. 62.

that there is only one way of achieving true theatre, he does admit right ways. This conviction stems from the effect his breadth of experience in all forms of theatre has had upon his probing mind. Commercial successes in the West End and on Broadway, experience in grand opera, a long career in government-subsidized repertory theatre, and experiments in the avant-garde, have all contributed to his "eclectic" approach to theatre--seen through the visual mind of a film-maker. But from the eclecticism has grown an urge to unify the diverse facets of theatre and to find one of the "right" ways of approaching theatre. "A right way" depends on the joint efforts of writer, producer, director, actor, and audience--Brook calls it the "Holy Theatre."

Chapter 1 has been devoted to the background and personality of Peter Brook because it would seem essential to know something of his artistic development and beliefs before exploring his concept of the "Holy Theatre."

CHAPTER 2

A CHARACTERIZATION OF "HOLY THEATRE"

Peter Brook begins a chapter in The Empty Space with "I am calling it the Holy Theatre for short, but it could be called The Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible; the notion that the stage is a place where the invisible can appear has a deep hold on our thoughts."¹ In Chapter 2 the author of this study will explore Brook's intriguing statement in an effort to characterize the Holy Theatre by investigating the "invisible" and determining those conditions which are necessary to make it "visible." From this investigation will emerge a clearer picture of what Peter Brook envisions as a "Holy Theatre."

Implicit in Brook's statements about the invisible seems to be a Platonic "world of forms" which exists apart from any overt manifestation of those forms. Scholastic philosophers would probably refer to them as "essences," which have a being apart from any "existence" in which they are manifest. These essences incorporate an element of wish-fulfillment, a way of bringing-into-existence-that-which-is-not, but for which there may be a need at any given moment. Brook's example is drawn from the grim need which existed in post-war Europe:

1. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 38.

Walking along the Reeperbahn in Hamburg on an afternoon in 1946, whilst a damp dispiriting grey mist whirled around the desperate mutilated tarts, some on crutches, noses mauve, cheeks hollow, I saw a crowd of children pushing excitedly into a night club door. I followed them. On the stage was a bright blue sky. Two seedy, spangled clowns sat on a painted cloud on their way to visit the Queen of Heaven. "What shall we ask her for?" said one. "Dinner," said the other and the children screamed approval. "What shall we have for dinner?" "Schinken, Leberwurst . . ." the clown began to list all the unobtainable foods and the squeals of excitement were gradually replaced by a hush--a hush that settled into a deep and true theatrical silence. An image was being made real, in answer to a need for something that was not there.²

The phenomenon which Brook experienced in Hamburg was being repeated throughout Germany in 1946, and the physical hunger for food played no part in the other experiences. Nor was it a mere intellectual longing for the theatre of lost grace which had fled with the dropping of the bombs of World War II:

There was nothing to discuss, nothing to analyse--in Germany that winter, as in London a few years before, the theatre was responding to a hunger. What, however, was this hunger? Was it a hunger for the invisible, a hunger for a reality deeper than the fullest form of everyday life--or was it a hunger for the missing things of life, a hunger, in fact, for buffers against reality?³

In answer to his own question, again Brook posits a world of forms which exists separately from physical manifestations of those

2. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 39.

3. Ibid., p. 40.

forms. He recalls the sacred and mythic origins of theatre and begins to flesh out the skeleton of what he means by the "holy":

We musn't allow ourselves to become the dupes of nostalgia. The best of the romantic theatre, the civilized pleasures of the opera and the ballet were in any event gross reductions of an art sacred in its origins. Over the centuries the Orphic Rites turned into the Gala Performance--slowly and imperceptibly the wine was adulterated drop by drop.⁴

At this point it is useful to examine the Orphic Rites briefly and apprehend whatever connection they may have had with a "holy theatre." Benjamin Hunningher traces the origin of the Orphic mysteries to ancient fertility rites and year-dramas which were eventually dedicated to Dionysus, god of wine and fertility. In the rites Dionysus was set upon and devoured by the Titans, only to be reborn again because his heart was eaten by Zeus, who begat him again on Semele.⁵ But the rites are only important for the purposes of this study because, in their more refined second stage of development, theatre grew out of them.

What is more significant is the fact that Hunningher's research has yielded useful data concerning the theatrical nature of both the early Orphic mysteries and the later Dionysiac rites:

A comparison yields striking similarities: in the first place, both cases are mass movements, community expressions in

4. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 40.

5. Benjamin Hunningher, The Origin of the Theater (New York: Hill and Wang Dramabooks, 1961), pp. 30-31.

which theatrical elements are manifest. Either a whole tribe worked itself up into a frenzy, or a group, which with or without initiation ceremonies stood open for everyone to join. A second similarity is the wild and frenzied dance born of this ecstasy, a dance in each case with an extremely pronounced portraying character, on the one hand reflecting emotional tension, on the other indicating by mimesis the forces so stirring to the emotions. It appears from this that not only do the forms run parallel, but that the aim is identical: in both cases ecstasy aims at communion, union with the Invisible, the metaphysical Power, the Deity.⁶

Hunningher provides further information about the primitive rites which eventually developed into theatre. Primitive man found he "must concentrate all his force and power to obtain the rapture which will overmaster the deity and secure for him the communion for which he hungers," and "this very ecstasy aroused by the rites leads into portrayal, the core and primary characteristic of dramatic art."⁷ Ultimately Hunningher's investigations revealed that "Beside the difference in rite and ritual, there is for every man the play-instinct, the instinct of homo ludens seeking his pleasure in imitation of what exists."⁸

But if play was pleasurable, it was certainly not frivolous:

It is true, at any rate, that play fences in an area of the imagination in which it creates absolute order, strictly guarded against anything which might disturb the in-lusio,

6. Hunningher, p. 40.

7. Ibid., p. 41.

8. Ibid.

the illusion. In every respect, the order it creates is contrary to the disorder of the imperfect world outside the play area: the contrast is so obvious that it seems willed and purposed. With that observation, play is revealed to serve not only as pleasure but also as protection; it creates order to bring a certain part of the chaotic world under control. Though still far from any practical purpose in everyday life, it acquires with this a certain social or perhaps more psychological function.⁹

Play, or the play, served a social and psychological function in primitive societies: imposing order on chaos. The order imposed by the structure of the play made that chaos seem easier to explain or control. It is not surprising, therefore, that theatre should have found its firmest roots in religious myth and ritual. As Hunningher explains, "Everything which 'does not belong,' which serves no direct purpose in nature, which knows no function in society, which essentially escapes the intellect, belongs to the other side of life, to the 'totally different,' that has from primitive times been experienced as a supernatural force, usually leading into religion."¹⁰

Primitive man felt a need to deal with the invisible, to explain and control it; play grew up to fill that need. Religion followed as a structure to explain the essentially non-intellectual, non-social character of play. But the need was broader and deeper; play was

9. Hunningher, p. 12.

10. Ibid., p. 11.

more than a mere superstitious charm against the unknown, as Hunningher again verifies:

As an idea, "play" may escape the meshes of rational definition, but as phenomenon we see it everywhere, always a satisfaction to the human urge for pleasure and recreation. It is apparent that from it in spiritual activity the metaphor, for example, has developed and with that, the entire potentiality for abstract thought, which in turn indicates that not only religion, but also man's entire spiritual life, is unthinkable and impossible without play. Play releases man from the limits of matter. In stage-play, pleasure lies in imitation, originally of external and tangible existence. By the same metaphoric road, this imitation can reach the entire breadth and depth of human emotion. The theater and the rite meet again in such imitation; in primitive cultures, in fact, they are one and the same.¹¹

Brook is on solid ground when he sees theatre as a response to basic human needs. Those needs are the same ones which motivate man to seek metaphor, myth, order, religion, and eventually a god to combine these elements into one entity. Certainly these needs are what must be at the base of any theatre which is identified as "holy." It is at this same idea which Antonin Artaud, from whom Brook derived much of his theory, was aiming when he wrote in The Theater and Its Double: "Its [theatre's] object is not to resolve social or psychological conflicts, to serve as battlefield for moral passions, but to express objectively certain secret truths, to bring into the light of day

11. Hunningher, pp. 11-12.

by means of active gestures certain aspects of truth that have become buried under forms in their encounters with Becoming."¹²

Those "secret truths" of Artaud, the "metaphor" of Hunningher, the religious myth of primitive man, the "Orphic Rites" and "hunger" of Brook are all, apparently, synonymous. They constitute the stuff of which the "invisible" is made. They are the Platonic world of forms made visible in the "illusion" which Hunningher says is created in the area of play. Echoing Hunningher's ideas, Artaud describes the in-lusio:

The theater will never find itself again--i. e., constitute a means of true illusion--except by furnishing the spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism, pour out, on a level not counterfeit and illusory, but interior.¹³

Artaud expressed the necessary connection between theatre and invisibility when he titled one collection of his theatrical essays The Theater and Its Double. Nicola Chiaromonte relates:

The literal meaning of "double" is 'an immaterial body that reproduces the image of a person.' It is a term used in sorcery. In Artaud's letter to Jean Paulhan informing him of the title he had chosen for the book, Artaud explained: 'While the theatre "doubles" life, life "doubles" the true theatre, which has nothing to do with Oscar Wilde's ideas on

12. Antonin Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), p. 70.

13. Ibid., p. 92.

the subject. The title refers to all the "doubles" of the theatre I think I have found in these last years: metaphysics, the plague and cruelty.' So the "double" of the theatre, i. e., its origin and ultimate cause, is not life, which, fascinated by its reflection in art, imitates art (as Wilde suggested). It is rather the incorporeal or transcendent essence of existence and its ultimate meaning. In the theatre it takes on a body, fills a space, and receives the gift of expressive gesture and of speech, while in real life it remains completely obscure and dispersed.¹⁴

So the "double" of theatre is invisibility itself, and the theatre gives visible form to "the essence of existence and its ultimate meaning."

Brook undoubtedly agrees with Artaud's idea of "the double."

His analogy with music perhaps best summarizes the nature of the invisible which has been discussed here.

We are all aware that most of life escapes our senses: a most powerful explanation of the various arts is that they talk of patterns which we can only begin to recognize when they manifest themselves in rhythms or shapes. We observe that the behaviour of people, of crowds, of history, obeys such recurrent patterns. We hear that trumpets destroyed the walls of Jericho, we recognize that a magical thing called music can come from men in white ties and tails, blowing, waving, thumping and scraping away. Despite the absurd means that produce it, through the concrete in music we recognize the abstract, we understand that ordinary men and their clumsy instruments are transformed by an art of possession. We make a personality cult of the conductor, but we are aware that he is not really making the music, it is making him--if he is relaxed, open and attuned, then the invisible will take possession of him; through him, it will reach us.¹⁵

14. Nicola Chiaromonte, "Antonin Artaud," Encounter, 28 (August 1967), 46.

15. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 38.

Having examined the nature of the "invisible," it is not enough to stop and ponder the discoveries. Since the Holy Theatre makes the invisible visible, we must examine the means to that end. Brook himself is deeply concerned with means, and he has said, "A holy theatre not only presents the invisible but also offers conditions that make its perception possible."¹⁶ Brook has already indicated that the sacred origins of dramatic art have been reduced and adulterated, that the holy has become the Gala Performance. What precisely does he see as the root of the problem? Why is the theatre apparently no longer holy? Diagnosis must precede treatment and cure.

Brook suggests that the gross reductions of sacred art have simply become too small to be meaningful. The trappings of theatre have become a substitute for its heart. When the trappings are removed, nothing is left to provide the means for making the invisible visible. Man has come to confuse the trappings with the real thing, the heart of theatre:

The curtain used to be the great symbol of a whole school of theatre--the red curtain, the footlights, the idea that we are all children again, the nostalgia and the magic were all of a piece. Gordon Craig spent his life railing against the theatre of illusion, but his most treasured memories were of painted trees and forests and his eyes would light up as he described the effects of trompe d'oeil. But the day came when the same red curtain no longer hid surprises, when we no longer wanted--or needed--to be children again, when the

16. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 51.

rough magic yielded to a harsher common-sense; then the curtain was pulled down and the footlights removed.¹⁷

When the post-war theatre stopped reaching back to its memory of a lost grace, when the pre-war romantic theatre was no longer needed to soften or shut out the harshness of reality, and when new theatre men began to discard the trappings that had become the substitute for the real heart of theatre, disillusion set in. Brook entered the theatre at that critical time, sharing in the disillusion. But instead of merely regretting the loss or stubbornly clinging to a decayed structure that had been theatre, Brook investigated and formulated some conclusions:

Certainly, we still wish to capture in our hearts the invisible currents that rule our lives, but our vision is now locked to the dark end of the spectrum. Today the theatre of doubting, of unease, of trouble, of alarm, seems truer than the theatre with a noble aim. Even if the theatre had in its origins rituals that made the invisible incarnate, we must not forget that apart from certain Oriental theatres these rituals have been either lost or remain in seedy decay.¹⁸

The theatre had lost its sense of ritual; that is, the rituals continued to exist, but no longer held the same meaning which they originally had. The magic was gone. When the red curtain and other trappings were removed, man had lost a sense of their significance and had used those trappings in lieu of the things which they had

17. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 40.

18. Ibid., pp. 40-41.

represented. In this loss of meaningful ritual, the holy theatre has also been lost. And the loss of a sense of ritual is by no means common to theatre alone, as Brook points out:

The actor searches vainly for the sound of a vanished tradition, and the critic and audience follow suit. We have lost all sense of ritual and ceremony--whether it be connected with Christmas, birthdays or funerals--but the words remain with us and old impulses stir in the marrow. We feel we should have rituals, we should do 'something' about getting them and we blame the artists for not 'finding' them for us. So the artist sometimes attempts to find new rituals with only his imagination as his source: he imitates the outer form of ceremonies, pagan or baroque, unfortunately adding his own trappings--the result is rarely convincing. And after the years and years of weaker and waterier imitations we now find ourselves rejecting the very notion of a holy stage. It is not the fault of the holy that it has become a middle-class weapon to keep children good.¹⁹

The loss was a significant one because an essential element of theatre had been removed. Artaud pointed out that "the theatre is, first of all, ritual and magic, tied to forces, and founded on a religion and on effective beliefs whose efficacy manifests itself in gestures, and is directly linked to the rites of the theatre which are actually the exercise and expression of a spiritual need for magic."²⁰

The whole notion of ritual is fundamental to the concept of making the invisible visible; and since that is Brook's primary concern

19. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 41.

20. Chiaromonte, p. 48.

in Holy Theatre, an examination of the nature of ritual might be appropriate here.

Harvey Cox, in The Feast of Fools, characterizes ritual thus: "Ritual is social fantasy. It is very similar to celebration and in some ways is indistinguishable from it." Further, Cox comments on the function of ritual: "Ritual provides both the form and the occasion for the expression of fantasy. It is through ritual movement, gesture, song, and dance that man keeps in touch with the sources of creativity. Ritual appeared along with myth²¹ in man's development, and springs from the same sources. In ritual, men 'act out' the reveries and hopes of the tribe. Ritual humanizes space as myth humanizes time."²²

Rituals themselves come to assume the meaning which they portray, as Mircea Eliade points out in Cosmos and History when he says that "rituals and significant profane gestures . . . acquire the meaning attributed to them, and materialize that meaning, only

21. Cox quotes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969) Jane Harrison's statement that "myth is the dream-thinking of a people, just as the dream is the myth of the individual," p. 68. René Wellek and Austin Warren in Theory of Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1956) maintain that myth is "narrative, story, as against dialectical discourse, exposition; it is also the irrational or intuitive as against the systematically philosophical; it is the tragedy of Aeschylus against the dialectic of Socrates" (pp. 179-180).

22. Cox, pp. 70-71.

because they deliberately repeat such and such acts posited ab origine by gods, heroes, or ancestors."²³ And so it was with theatre: the ritual actions of the stage lost their original connections with the mythic past and took on their own meanings. The ritual became the action it had once portrayed. Naturally, to an audience for which the ritual activity of the stage had no mythical analogue, the ritual itself would eventually cease to be meaningful. This phenomenon was occurring in the theatre when Brook entered it not long after the Second World War.

Eliade also makes the connection between ritual action and the "holy," and in so doing clarifies what Brook means when he calls for a return to a Holy Theatre which has somehow been lost:

To summarize, we might say that the archaic world knows nothing of "profane" activities; every act which has a definite meaning--hunting, fishing, agriculture; games, conflicts, sexuality--in some way participates in the sacred. As we shall see more clearly later, the only profane activities are those which have no mythical meaning, that is, which lack exemplary models. Thus we may say that every responsible activity in pursuit of a definite end is, for the archaic world, a ritual.²⁴

When the acts of theatre lost their definite meaning and because they no longer manifested a sacred invisibility, the myths which forged the ritual of theatre could no longer be understood by audiences or

23. Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), pp. 5-6.

24. Ibid., pp. 27-28.

even by the practitioners of theatre arts, then theatre lost its participation in the holy and became profane. And the situation is by no means unique to theatre, as Eliade points out that "the majority of these activities have undergone a long process of desacralization and have, in modern societies, become profane."²⁵ When a ritual loses its vitality and its meaning, the whole structure in which it exists atrophies. Brook calls this the "Deadly Theatre," and sees it as typical of most of the modern theatre. Harvey Cox provides a good description of the process:

Ritual becomes ideology when it is used to throttle creativity, to channel religion or fantasy into safely accepted molds. Organized religions in periods of decline, nations anxious to enforce patriotism and obedience, individuals who feel they may be losing a grip on themselves--all become self-conscious and meticulous about ritual proprieties. Enforced ritual, handed down from above, chokes off spontaneity and petrifies the spirit. True, like the Nazi rituals, it may temporarily bring a kind of sick order to a deranged society, or it can produce a spurious appearance of unity in a church. But this order and unity are bought at a terrible price. Freedom, hope, and joy are sacrificed and what remains is the empty shell of calcified gesture. When ritual is used as a vehicle for promulgating an ideology, the ritual is prostituted and the ideology soon withers.²⁶

"Enforced ritual" is the malaise which Brook sees attacking the modern theatre. Though he includes all components of theatre in

25. Eliade, Cosmos, p. 28.

26. Cox, p. 71.

the guilt--actors, writers, directors, technicians--Brook uses a striking example to illustrate the kind of atrophy which has set in:

I once saw a rehearsal at the Comedie Française--a very young actor stood in front of a very old one and spoke and mimed the role with him like a reflection in a glass. This must not be confused with the great tradition, say, of the Noh actors passing knowledge orally from father to son. There it is meaning that is communicated--and meaning never belongs to the past. It can be checked in each man's own present experience. But to imitate the externals of acting only perpetuates manner--a manner hard to relate to anything at all.²⁷

But ideological ritual is not the only obstacle to maintaining a holy theatre. If the spirit of theatre is ossified by ideological ritual and deprived of its growth and vitality, another type of ritual divorces theatre from its historical roots and deprives it of the catholicity it must have if it is to be meaningful to any but a small coterie of the elite. Cox delineates this danger: "Ritual becomes idiosyncratic when it ceases to be shared by a group or to emerge from historical experience, when it becomes the property of just one, or of just a few people."²⁸

Herein lies the danger of taking some of the prescriptions of Artaud too seriously or literally. Artaud adopts the Balinese theatre as one of his models, and describes what he considers to be one of that theatre's particular virtues: "The drama does not develop as a

27. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 12.

28. Cox, p. 72.

conflict of feelings but as a conflict of spiritual states, themselves ossified and transformed into gestures--diagrams."²⁹ Yet what is to make the audience a party to these "ossified" spiritual states? How is the spectator or even the participant to read the "diagrams"? It is precisely this fascination of Artaud's with the esoterica of Oriental theatre which leads one to doubt the efficacy of some of his proposals. Highly stylized rituals are barely intelligible in any but the most primitive of even the Oriental cultures, as witness the Noh plays of Japan. How then does the contemporary audience return to the primitive and create a meaningful ritual? How does one apprehend the kind of ritual which Artaud describes, and of which he does not seem sure himself?

Here is a whole collection of ritual gestures to which we do not have the key and which seem to obey extremely precise musical indications, with something more that does not generally belong to music and seems intended to encircle thought, to hound it down and lead it into an inextricable and certain system. In fact everything in this theater is calculated with an enchanting mathematical meticulousness. Nothing is left to chance or to personal initiative. It is a kind of superior dance, in which the dancers were actors first of all.³⁰

Fortunately Brook does not seem to have been confused by Artaud's metaphors and his fascinations with the esoteric. Peter Brook has distilled the prescriptions of the French visionary:

29. Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, p. 53.

30. Ibid., pp. 57-58.

Yet in the desert one prophet raised his voice. Railing against the sterility of the theatre before the war in France an illuminated genius, Antoine Artaud, wrote tracts describing from his imagination and intuition another theatre--a Holy Theatre in which the blazing centre speaks through those forms closest to it. A theatre working like the plague, by intoxication, by infection, by analogy, by magic; a theatre in which the play, the event itself, stands in place of a text.³¹

In summary, theatre was holy from its beginnings because it provided the means of manifesting the invisible--a ritual through which man could enact all of the mysteries sacred to his race: love, awe, reverence, hatred. In this ritual play, the myths of the race could be shown. As the rituals became the acts which they portrayed, they lost their contact with the sacred invisibility and became profane. As the rituals became rigid and formalized, they atrophied and so did the entire structure of theatre. What had been sacred because it was meaningful lost its holy character as it lost its meaning. Ritual became mere trapping, and as the trapping fell away or was removed, only hollowness remained. Characterizing the phenomenon, Brook proposes the next task:

In the theatre, the tendency for centuries has been to put the actor at a remote distance, on a platform, framed, decorated, lit, painted, in high shoes--so as to help persuade the ignorant that he is holy, that his art is sacred. Did this express reverence? Or was there behind it a fear that something would be exposed if the light were too bright, the meeting too near. Today, we have exposed the sham. But

31. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 44.

we are rediscovering that a holy theatre is still what we need. So where should we look for it? In the clouds or on the ground?³²

The first temptation might be to suggest that one not look for a new ritual at all because the whole concept that ritual can be meaningful is outmoded. Harvey Cox would disagree:

Although traditional religious rituals may be declining in some places, ritual itself, as symbolic movement and the patterned enactment of fantasy, has not. But ritual has fallen on evil days. It has moved in two directions, toward the ideological on the one hand and the idiosyncratic on the other. Both represent perversions of the essential human significance of ritual.³³

There is an essential connection between Brook's Artaudian demand that the "play, the event itself, stands in place of the text" and Cox's belief that ritual itself has not outlived its usefulness. The ritual is the event which will return theatre to its "holy" function, because ritual is the force which changes a text into an event. Mircea Eliade points the way toward making ritual meaningful: "Objects or acts acquire a value, and in so doing become real, because they participate, after one fashion or another, in a reality that transcends them."³⁴ Of necessity this study must proceed from prescriptions and metaphors describing Holy Theatre to a practical consideration of the nature of ritual necessary to effect a return to that theatre.

32. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 58.

33. Cox, p. 71.

34. Eliade, Cosmos, pp. 3-4.

Harvey Cox speaks of a "liberating ritual" and, like Peter Brook, uses a musical analogy to explain it:

A liberating ritual is one that provides the formal structure within which freedom and fantasy can twist and tumble. It provides the person with a series of movements in which he is given access to an enormous wealth of human feelings. But these feelings now become the material for his own escapades in creativity. The best analogy to a liberating ritual may still be the jazz combo or dixieland band. The chord structure and rhythm conventions provide the base from which spectacular innovations and individual ad libs can spin out. Without such a structure, the music would deteriorate into cacophany. With it, the individual players not only climb to musical peaks, but often they stimulate each other to explore unexpected vistas of sound.³⁵

Seemingly, then, a formal structure is necessary before freedom or liberation can occur. Man needs a base from which to work, a form which keeps theatrical experience from degenerating into "cacophany." Peter Brook is aware of this problem when he writes: "Of course, today as at all times, we need to stage true rituals, but for rituals that could make theatre-going an experience that feeds our lives, true forms are needed."³⁶ Harvey Cox identifies what those "true forms" or "liberating rituals" must be:

Ritual is "embodied fantasy." The word "body" is important. It indicates that in ritual fantasy is not merely mental. Gesture and movement are also important. The word "body" also signifies a historical and social location. Our body places us. It came from our parents and through it we touch, punch, caress, and pass life on to the future. Likewise in ritual, fantasy feeds

35. Cox, p. 75.

36. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 41.

back into history, touches other men and reaches toward the future. It does not simply zoom into the ether. In fantasy, our physical body is left behind and an imaginary body, often differing markedly from the physical one, takes over. Thus, one of the things "fantasy therapy" does is to help the client integrate these two bodies. It does so, however, not by chopping the fantasy body down to size, but by letting the fantasy body infuse and transform the physical one. Fantasy "connects" and performs its function only when it is embodied.³⁷

Artaud, too, has given primacy to the body in his search for a new theatre. The French theorist speaks of a "language of theatre" which is actually far more than words alone: "I say that the stage is a concrete physical place which asks to be filled, and to be given its own concrete language to speak."³⁸ That concrete language transcends words and takes in the utilization of theatre space to create a new type of language: "For me the theater is identical with its possibilities for realization when the most poetic results are derived from them; the possibilities for realization in the theater relate entirely to the mise en scène³⁹ considered as a language in space and movement."⁴⁰ And it is precisely to account for the need for a language that takes in

37. Cox, pp. 73-74.

38. Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, p. 37.

39. Artaud uses mise en scène to mean all the means of expression used in the theatre. He describes this (The Theater and Its Double; p. 46) and calls it "the pure theatrical language" (p. 69).

40. Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, p. 45.

space and movement that Artaud speaks of "the theater and its double."

The role of that double is described this way:

It is certain that this aspect of pure theater, this physics of absolute gesture which is the idea itself and which transforms the mind's conceptions into events perceptible through the labyrinths and fibrous interlacings of matter, gives us a new idea of what belongs by nature to the domain of forms and manifested matter. Those who succeed in giving a mystic sense to the simple form of a robe and who, not content with placing a man's Double next to him, confer upon each man in his robes a double made of clothes--those who pierce the illusory or secondary clothes with a saber, giving them the look of huge butterflies pinned in the air, such men have an innate sense of the absolute and magical symbolism of nature much superior to ours, and set us an example which it is only too certain our own theater technicians will be powerless to profit from.⁴¹

The "double" which Artaud refers to is an alchemical "alter-ego," the spiritual "form" of which the action taking place on stage is only the physical representation. This "double" is referred to as "archetypal,"⁴² and as such echoes the words of Eliade. Eliade sees all ritual or religious actions losing their immediate character and becoming archetypes for actions or gestures created "in illo tempore" by a god, hero, or ancestor.⁴³ In the archetype is an echo of Cox's idea that true ritual celebration requires "a set of common memories

41. Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, p. 62.

42. Ibid., p. 48.

43. Eliade, Cosmos, pp. 27-34.

and collective hopes."⁴⁴ To synthesize, there is in all these concepts the common thread of a "reaching back" toward something. This "something" is the Platonic world of forms manifested physically in archetypal representation through a ritual, which takes place here and now. Not only does this set of relationships tend to re-establish Brook's original thesis that a Holy Theatre is possible and necessary, but it even echoes Brook's own words describing the theatre after World War II: "a reaching back towards a memory of lost grace."⁴⁵

A ritual, then, which reaches back toward the roots of man's "common hopes and collective memories" and makes them visible as archetypal representations is the "liberating ritual" which theatre needs to make it holy. This is Artaud's mise en scène or "language of theatre." Harvey Cox provides an analogy to give a clue to the kind of ritual or language which must be found:

If ideology and idiosyncrasy represent perversions of ritual, what is authentic ritual? Here an analogy from the field of linguistics may help. The comparative study of languages indicates that a language, in its vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, provides a formal structure for expression. Any language will have certain built-in assumptions in its structure, but no language really "says" anything as such. It provides the speaker who really commands that language with the opportunity of saying anything he chooses. Paradoxically then, we must speak within a language, even when we criticize its assumptions. A language, at one and the same

44. Cox, p. 14.

45. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 39.

time, imposes a structure on us and allows us to rebel against and criticize the structure. Even James Joyce, who grossly violated the rules of grammar and boldly invented new words, did so using the structure of the English language, of which he was a master. He had to assume that his readers would know English, if only to be able to take notice of his violations.⁴⁶

Peter Brook has worked within the language of theatre as it now exists and has found that language capable of "true communication" at times. He does, however, qualify his statement:

It is only when a ritual comes to our own level that we become qualified to deal with it: the whole of pop music is a series of rituals on a level to which we have access. Peter Hall's vast and rich achievement in his cycle of Shakespeare's 'Wars of the Roses' drew on assassination, politics, intrigue, war: David Rudkin's disturbing play Afore Night Come was a ritual of death: West Side Story a ritual of urban violence, Genet creates rituals of sterility and degradation. When I took a tour of Titus Andronicus through Europe this obscure work of Shakespeare touched audiences because we had tapped in it a ritual of bloodshed which was recognized as true.⁴⁷

Brook does not go on to reveal what has made each of these plays, for him, an authentic ritual. He offers a valuable clue, if only a negative one. In speaking of those who oppose his methods in the search for a Holy Theatre, Brook says:

They are not searching for a holy theatre, they are not talking about a theatre of miracles; they are talking of the tame play where 'higher' only means 'nicer'--being noble only means decent--alas, happy endings and optimism can't be ordered like wine from cellars. They spring whether we wish it or not from a source and if we pretend there is such

46. Cox, p. 75.

47. Brook, The Empty Space, pp. 42-43.

a source readily at hand we will go on cheating ourselves with rotten imitations. If we recognize how desperately far we have drifted from anything to do with a holy theatre we can begin to discard once and for all the dream that a fine theatre could return in a trice if only a few nice people tried harder.⁴⁸

The "source," a key concept for Brook, is precisely what he is seeking in his own theatrical experiments. And because that source has been obscured, Brook describes the magnitude of his task:

All the forms of sacred art have certainly been destroyed by bourgeois values but this sort of observation does not help our problem. It is foolish to allow a revulsion from bourgeois forms to turn into a revulsion from needs that are common to all men: if the need for a true contact with a sacred invisibility through the theatre still exists, then all possible vehicles must be re-examined.⁴⁹

Brook had been fascinated for some time with the theories of Antonin Artaud, France's inspired madman of theatre. The whole concept that there could be a language greater than mere language alone nagged at Brook's consciousness:

Is there another language, just as exacting for the author, as a language of words? Is there a language of actions, a language of sounds--a language of word-as-part-of movement, of word-as-lie, word-as-parody, of word-as-rubbish, of word-as-contradiction, of word-shock or word-cry? If we talk of the more-than-literal, if poetry means that which crams more and penetrates deeper--is this where it lies? Charles Marowitz and I instituted a group with the Royal Shakespeare Theatre called the Theatre of Cruelty to investigate these

48. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 43.

49. Ibid., p. 44.

questions and to try to learn for ourselves what a holy theatre might be.⁵⁰

The concept of a Theatre of Cruelty is, of course, pure Artaud, for whom it had as its goal the realization of "the theater whose only value is in its excruciating, magical relation to reality and danger."⁵¹ Such a theatre would be "excruciating" and "cruel" because it would penetrate to that world of forms and provide what "the public is fundamentally seeking through love, crime, drugs, war, or insurrection"--and that is "admittedly or not, conscious or unconscious, the poetic state, a transcendent experience of life." Such a theatre would "restore to the theater a passionate and convulsive conception of life, and it is in this sense of violent rigor and extreme condensation of scenic elements that the cruelty on which it is based must be understood." Artaud continues: "This cruelty, which will be bloody when necessary but not systematically so, can thus be identified with a kind of severe moral purity which is not afraid to pay life the price it must be paid."⁵² It is a theatre, then, which pierces the sham and distinguishes the Double from the real thing. It is a theatre which uses the ritual to find the archetype. It is a theatre which is cruel because

50. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 44.

51. Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, p. 89.

52. Ibid., p. 122.

it lays bare the essential form of that which is being represented in the theatre: man at his most basic, naked, human level.

Artaud had some very specific prescriptions for his Theatre of Cruelty, with respect to both content and form.⁵³ Brook and Marowitz did not slavishly emulate Artaud's directives, as Brook points out: "We used his striking title to cover our own experiments, many of which were directly stimulated by Artaud's thought--although many exercises were very far from what he had proposed. We did not start at the blazing centre, we began very simply on the fringes."⁵⁴ A diary of the experiment might read "what was the very least he [an actor] needed before understanding could be reached,"⁵⁵ then, how to "communicate his invisible meanings."⁵⁶ Brook was very insistent that the meaning must be communicated rather than simply apprehended by the actor, as one might surmise from his original statement about "the empty space":

I say 'shown' because an actor making a gesture is both creating for himself out of his deepest need and yet for another person. It is hard to understand the true notion of spectator, there and not there, ignored and yet needed. The actor's work is never for an audience, yet always is for one. The onlooker

53. See Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, pp. 93-100 and 122-132.

54. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 45.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid., p. 46.

is a partner who must be forgotten and still constantly kept in mind: a gesture is statement, expression, communication and a private manifestation of loneliness--it is always what Artaud calls a signal through the flames--yet this implies a sharing of experience, once contact is made.⁵⁷

In an attempt to establish that contact, the Theatre of Cruelty experimented with such devices as communicating meaning with nothing more than the tapping of a fingernail or a wordless cry. Members experimented with silence and with ritual as repetitive patterns. Brook even presented a production of Hamlet in which Hamlet threw Ophelia onto the knees of the audience while he swung over their heads on a rope. Brook's premise was this:

For centuries, unrealistic speech has been universally accepted, all sorts of audiences have swallowed the convention that words can do the strangest things--in a monologue, for instance, a man stays still but his ideas can dance where they will. Vaulting speech is a good convention, but is there another? When a man flies over the audience's head on a rope, every aspect of the immediate is put in jeopardy--the circle of spectators that is at ease when the man speaks is thrown into chaos: in this instant of hazard can a different meaning appear?⁵⁸

Not only did Brook develop a strong concern with experimenting to find different possible meanings in the text because of altered presentational situations, but he also became concerned with the value of shock upon the audience. The shock, of course, is to force deeper realization from the audience; this is Artaud's concept of "dissonance."

57. Brook, The Empty Space, pp. 46-47.

58. Ibid., pp. 47-48.

Artaud has stated: "Whereas, in the digestive theater of today, the nerves, that is to say a certain physiological sensitivity, are deliberately left aside, abandoned to the individual anarchy of the spectator, the Theater of Cruelty intends to reassert all the time-tested magical means of capturing the sensibility."⁵⁹

Naturally, the concern with the value of shock also led to an investigation of the role which the audience plays in the dramatic event. In early ritual the audience as such did not exist, as Martin Esslin notes:

The theatre had its origin in ritual, religious and secular. In this ritual, whether it was a war dance or a hunting dance or a fertility rite or a human sacrifice designed to placate the angry gods, the whole tribe participated. Men, women, and children danced and sang and there was no separation into performers and spectators. It was only later that the secular spectacle was divorced from the religious ritual and the performer from the audience.⁶⁰

For Brook and his Theatre of Cruelty the role of the audience was the one which made it difficult to apply Artaud's principles to dramatic performance: "Artaud applied is Artaud betrayed; betrayed because it is always just a portion of his thought that is exploited, betrayed because it is easier to apply rules to the work of a handful of

59. Artaud, The Theater and Its Double, p. 125.

60. Martin Esslin, Reflections: Essays on Modern Theatre (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1969), p. 206.

dedicated actors than to the lives of the unknown spectators who happened by chance to come through the theatre door."⁶¹

Thus, while the presence of an audience is necessary for an act of theatre, their role is not so easily defined or managed. Brook concluded: "None the less, from the arresting words 'Theatre of Cruelty' comes a groping towards a theatre, more violent, less rational, more extreme, less verbal, more dangerous. There is a joy in violent shocks: the only trouble with violent shocks is that they wear off. What follows a shock? Here's the snag."⁶²

Despite the difficulties, however, Brook felt he was on the right track. Using shock or other forms of "cruelty," Brook applied the dicta of Artaud in quest of the holy. Brook explains: "Artaud maintained that only in the theatre could we liberate ourselves from the recognizable forms in which we live our daily lives. This made the theatre a holy place in which a greater reality could be found."⁶³

A peculiar modern phenomenon, *The Happening*, offers a clue to the holy which Brook pursued:

The simple fact is that Happenings have brought into being not the easiest but the most exacting forms of all. As shocks and surprises make a dent in the spectator's reflexes, so that suddenly he is more open, more alert, more awake, the possibility and responsibility arise for onlooker and performer alike. The instant must be used, but how, what for? Here, we

61. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 49.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid., p. 48.

are back to the root question--what are we searching for anyway?⁶⁴

In this passage quoted Brook has arrived at the crux of "holy theatre." It makes the "invisible visible," but it also does more; it "offers the conditions which make its perception possible." Brook points out:

All religions assert that the invisible is visible all the time. But here's the crunch. Religious teaching--including Zen--asserts that this visible-invisible cannot be seen automatically --that it can only be seen given certain conditions. The conditions can relate to certain states or to a certain understanding. In any event, to comprehend the visibility of the invisible is a life's work. Holy art is an aid to this, and so we arrive at a definition of a holy theatre.⁶⁵

What are these conditions? Obviously shock alone is not enough. Even full audience participation in the theatrical event falls short of success in making possible the conditions for the perception of the invisible because the audience must have some direction for its participation. Brook continues, "The Happening could be related to all of this, but the present inadequacy of the Happening is that it refuses to examine deeply the problem of perception. Naively it believes that the cry 'Wake up!' is enough; that the call 'Live!' brings life. Of course, more is needed. But what?"⁶⁶

64. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 50.

65. Ibid., p. 51.

66. Ibid.

Certainly perception is crucial to the event, but there also must be an awareness on the parts of all the participants that they are about to enter the holy and therefore must bring all their perceptive faculties into play. It is this awareness which must be present to complete the experience of a Holy Theatre, as Brook explains:

The man who puts on a dinner jacket for the opera, saying, 'I enjoy a sense of occasion', and the hippy who puts on a flowered suit for an all-night light-show are both reaching incoherently in the same direction. Occasion, Event, Happening--the words are interchangeable. The structures are different--the opera is constructed and repeated according to traditional principles, the light-show unfolds for the first and last time according to accident and environment; but both are deliberately constructed social gatherings that seek for an invisibility to interpenetrate and animate the ordinary. Those of us who work in theatres are implicitly challenged to go ahead to meet this hunger.⁶⁷

The challenge can be met only by retaining a clear idea of what a holy theatre is about. Essentially, a holy theatre makes the invisible visible by giving form to non-rational truths or phenomena which have a hold on men but which can only be expressed in play. As the play takes definite form and is repeated, it becomes ritual--the "social fantasy" and "celebration" of a people. The ritual celebrates the myths or "dream-thinking" of the people. But the ritual can be meaningful only if the people possess a sense of occasion--an awareness of the symbolic nature of the ritual they will perceive and a willingness to interpenetrate that ritual.

67. Brook, The Empty Space, pp. 51-52.

An example of holy theatre will serve to crystallize the concept and illustrate its operation. Peter Brook provides limited help, since he does not specify where the "holy" resides--or rather, he sees it present in a number of elements which make up the theatre. Brook himself chooses to seek for the "holy" in the director-actor-audience relationship.⁶⁸ What he hopes to achieve is "a new Elizabethan relationship--linking the private and the public, the intimate and the crowded, the secret and the open, the vulgar and the magical. For this we need both a crowd on stage and a crowd watching--and within that crowded stage individuals offering their most intimate truths to individuals within that crowded audience, sharing a collective experience with them."⁶⁹ But Brook also admits it is possible to find the "holy" in other situations: Grotowski, for example, sees it in the director and actor, with minimal concern for the audience. Brook says that for Grotowski, the theatre "cannot be an end in itself; like dancing or music in certain dervish orders, the theatre is a vehicle for self-study, self-exploration; a possibility of salvation. The actor has himself as his field of work."⁷⁰ Finding holiness in Jerzy Grotowski's "Poor Theatre" in Poland, Brook writes:

68. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 55.

69. Peter Brook, Preface to Jerzy Grotowski's Towards a Poor Theatre (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), p. 14.

70. Brook, The Empty Space, pp. 53-54.

Here there is a similar relation between actor and audience to the one between priest and worshipper. It is obvious that not everyone is called to priesthood and no traditional religion expects this of all men. There are laymen--who have necessary roles in life--and those who take on other burdens, for the laymen's sake. The priest performs the ritual for himself and on behalf of others. Grotowski's actors offer their performance as a ceremony for those who wish to assist: the actor invokes, lays bare what lies in every man--and what daily life covers up. This theatre is holy because its purpose is holy; it has a clearly defined place in the community and it responds to a need the churches can no longer fill.⁷¹

Brook also sees Merce Cunningham and his dancers as exemplars of the Holy Theatre:

When they improvise--as notions are born and flow between them, never repeating themselves, always in movement--the intervals have shape, so that the rhythms can be sensed as just and the proportions as true; all is spontaneous and yet there is order. In silence there are many potentialities; chaos or order, muddle or pattern, all lie fallow--the invisible made visible is of a sacred nature, and as he dances Merce Cunningham strives for a holy art.⁷²

Brook finds a third source of the "holy" in the plays of Samuel Beckett:

Beckett's plays are symbols in an exact sense of the word. This audience laughs and cries out--and in the end celebrates with Beckett; this audience leaves his plays, his black plays, nourished and enriched, with a lighter heart, full of a strange, irrational joy. Poetry, nobility, beauty, magic--suddenly these suspect words are back in the theatre once more.⁷³

71. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 54.

72. Ibid., p. 52.

73. Ibid., pp. 52-53.

Because of the difficulty of examining the Poor Theatre of Grotowski or the dancing of Merce Cunningham, the investigator will look closely in Chapter 3 at what Brook calls "the most intense and personal writing of our time,"⁷⁴ the plays of Samuel Beckett. Notably the focus will be on Happy Days, since Brook himself singles it out for special mention as "Holy Theatre."

74. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 53.

CHAPTER 3

SAMUEL BECKETT'S HAPPY DAYS

AS "HOLY THEATRE"

Peter Brook has called Holy Theatre "the theatre-of-the-invisible-made-visible." The "invisible" refers to that Platonic "world of forms" which contains the hopes, fears, and aspirations of the tribe; the forms which Artaud has called "the true precipitates of dreams." A theatre which shares in this "sacred invisibility" is, ipso facto, a "holy theatre." The common accounts of that "sacred invisibility" are the stuff of which myths are made; these myths are made visible by the staging of "true rituals"--that is, through honest physical re-presentation on the stage. But a Holy Theatre must do more than stage the "holy"; Brook says it must "offer the conditions which make its perception possible." These conditions include "form" and "occasion."

At its most basic, "form" is simply the structure of a play. Martin Esslin calls form "a set of rules or prescriptions handed down through habits of craftsmanship, academic teaching, or critical practice."¹ In the theatre of the avant-garde there has been a

1. Esslin, Reflections . . ., p. 3.

tendency to what Esslin calls "form smashing" and Esslin finds this valuable because "chords that grated on the ears of one generation may be tolerable or even beautiful to those of a later age."² "Form smashing" is analogous to Peter Brook's search for "true forms," as Esslin points out in a reference to Absurdist and other avant-garde drama:

Each play of this type has to find its own, rigidly formal pattern, which must inevitably arise from and express the basic conception of the play. Much of the tension and suspense in this kind of drama lies in the gradual unfolding of its formal pattern. Hence its formal pattern must embody the very essence of the action. And so, in the Theatre of the Absurd, form and content not only match, they are inseparable from each other.³

Esslin acknowledges that the origins of any new form may be arbitrary, "but once the arbitrary step has been taken, it [creating a new form] sets up its own framework of by no means arbitrary rules which are dependent on the psychological and perceptual basis of the experience involved."⁴ The "psychological and perceptual basis of the experience" is the concern of Brook's "sense of occasion," the second requisite for the perception of the "holy." Brook calls "occasion" a "deliberately constructed social gathering that seeks for

2. Esslin, Reflections . . ., p. 3.

3. Ibid., p. 196.

4. Ibid., p. 5.

an invisibility to interpenetrate and animate the ordinary."⁵ In his own discussion of "occasion," Esslin refers to John Cage, Merce Cunningham's musical director, who sees "occasion" as a "frame around reality."⁶ By looking through this frame, people will suddenly see reality as they have never seen it before--and this seems to be precisely what Brook means when he says that a Holy Theatre should provide the conditions which make perception of the "holy" possible.

"Form" and "occasion" are essential to a Holy Theatre, then, as the means of "making the invisible visible" through the staging of "true rituals." The Holy Theatre must provide a sense of "form" and "occasion" if it is to reveal to the people the Platonic "world of forms," which have been buried outside the range of everyday experience or which have been obscured by the very commonality of everyday experience. In a sense, the Holy Theatre removes the "trappings" which have come to be confused with the "genuine;" it rejects the "Gala Performance" in favor of the "Orphic Mysteries." The Holy Theatre accomplishes its aims in a very special language, something which both Brook and Artaud have called "the language of theatre."

5. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 52.

6. Esslin, Reflections . . ., p. 214.

In Chapter 3 the author of this study will examine Samuel Beckett's Happy Days in relation to the "form" it manifests and the "occasion" or event it provides for staging "a true ritual." The present chapter will embody a consideration of "form" and "occasion" in Happy Days from three particular vantage points: the functioning of true symbols in the language spoken by the play's two characters; elements of true ritual discernible in the structural elements of the play (each character's action, the characters' interaction, and the action or movement of the play itself); and the sense of occasion provided by the staging devices in Happy Days. The purpose of this investigation is to discover in concrete form the characteristics which Peter Brook has ascribed to a Holy Theatre.

Samuel Beckett's Happy Days presents only two characters, Winnie and Willie. Winnie, "a woman about fifty . . . blond for preference," is buried to her waist in the sand at the apex of an "expanse of scorched grass rising centre to low mound." Before her on the mound she has a parasol and a large black shopping bag containing, among other things, toothbrush, comb, mirror, a bottle containing some red medicine, and a gun. Her only non-verbal activity during Act I consists in using these artifacts and in craning around to look at Willie, who lives in a burrow behind her own mound of earth.

Willie is "a man about sixty." Although not wedged into the earth like Winnie, he displays even less energy and movement. He is seldom seen except as a head rising behind the mound or as a pair of hands holding a yellowed newspaper. Willie's motion is apparently restricted to crawling on all fours. He speaks perhaps two dozen words, interspersed in the running torrent which makes up Winnie's monologue about "the old days" and "the old ways," as well as commonplaces about their present mode of existence. Winnie's speeches are punctuated by pauses to handle her possessions and by silences of varying duration.

The historical time and geographic locale of the play are unspecified. Stage directions call for "blazing light" which apparently never dims, creating perpetual day. The only sounds apart from Winnie's incessant chatter and Willie's laconic interjections are a piercing bell to mark periods of waking and sleeping, and a small music box which plays the waltz duet "I love you so" from The Merry Widow.

In Act II the characters' situation remains relatively unchanged except that Winnie is now buried up to her neck. Even her head is immobile, and her entire activity consists of eye movement, changes in facial expression, and her running monologue. The parasol and bag remain before her on the mound, though she can now only look at them and remark upon them. Willie finally appears once near the end of the

act and attempts to crawl up the face of Winnie's earth mound. When he fails to scale it, they stare at each other wordlessly and the curtain falls.

Language itself is, of course, 'an arrangement of symbols, which represent thoughts, feelings, states of mind. Beckett uses language in Happy Days to underscore the central image of the play: the passage of time. Winnie's fragmented speech, interrupted by bits of business and silent pauses, gives the impression of discontinuity, of time passing even as she speaks what might be construed as merely rambling lines were the pauses not so deliberate and so carefully timed. But through indeterminate time Winnie prattles on, more for her own benefit than for anyone else's. In this context language serves as a buffer against time. It fills the sometimes interminable spaces between one ring of the bell and the next. And through Winnie's speech the audience learns of her need to verbalize:

Ah yes, if only I could bear to be alone, I mean prattle away with not a soul to hear. (Pause.) Not that I flatter myself you hear much, no Willie, God forbid. (Pause.) Days perhaps when you hear nothing. (Pause.) But days too when you answer. (Pause.) So that I may say at all times, even when you do not answer and perhaps hear nothing, Something of this is being heard, I am not merely talking to myself, that is in the wilderness, a thing I could never bear to do--for any length of time. (Pause.) That is what enables me to go on, go on talking that is. (Pause.) Whereas if you were to die --(smile)--to speak in the old style--(smile off)--or go away and leave me, then what would I do, what could I do, all day long, I mean between the bell for waking and the bell for sleep? (Pause.) Simply gaze before me with compressed lips. (Long pause while she does so. No more plucking.) Not

another word as long as I drew breath, nothing to break the silence of this place. (Pause.) Save possibly, now and then, a sigh into my looking-glass.⁷

While it sounds as if the efficacy of the language depends on Willie's presence, Winnie's later speech reveals much more: Willie's existence (for Winnie) depends on her verbalizing, on her speaking to him. In Act II, when Winnie's body is buried to the neck and her motion is accordingly restricted to facial expression and speech, she again addresses Willie:

(Pause.) Say it is a long time now, Willie, since I saw you.
 (Pause.) Since I heard you. (Pause.) May one? (Pause.)
 One does. (Smile.) The old style! (Smile off.) There is
 so little one can speak of. (Pause.) One speaks of it all.
 (Pause.) All one can. (Pause.) I used to think. . . (pause)
 . . . I say I used to think that I would learn to talk alone.
 (Pause.) By that I mean to myself, the wilderness. (Smile.)
 But no. (Smile broader.) No no. (Smile off.) Ergo you are
 there. (Pause.) Oh no doubt you are dead, like the others,
 no doubt you have died, or gone away and left me, like the
 others, it doesn't matter, you are there.⁸

From an apparent dependence on language to communicate with Willie, Winnie has come full circle: the language gives reality to Willie's existence. As G. C. Barnard points out: "She inverts the familiar 'Witness' theme . . . which is also a nice distortion of Descartes' formula into 'I talk therefore you exist.' She will even

7. Samuel Beckett, Happy Days (New York: Grove Press, 1961), pp. 20-21.

8. Ibid., p. 50.

accept that he may be dead, like all the others, but still he is there because she is talking to him."⁹

In Happy Days, language demonstrates the passage of time, it serves as a buffer against time, and it gives existence or reality no matter what changes time may have wrought. Samuel Beckett himself noted this time-speech interrelationship in his notebook when he directed a production of Happy Days in Berlin in 1971: "Relate frequency of broken speech and action to discontinuity of time. [Winnie's] time experience incomprehensible transport from one inextricable present to the next, those past unremembered, those to come inconceivable."¹⁰

Beckett's use of fragmented language and of brief bursts of speech punctuated with pauses of various length gives a certain strength to the play. The pauses are far from being "dead spots"--indeed, they are vital pockets which often carry far more energy than the relatively banal dialogue. In each of these lapses of language one has the impression that perhaps the characters will do something about their situation besides merely talking. Each pause, therefore, contains potential energy like a coiled spring.

9. G. C. Barnard, Samuel Beckett: A New Approach (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1970), p. 123.

10. Ruby Cohn, "Beckett Directs Happy Days," Performance, 1, No. 2 (April 1972), 113.

In Happy Days Winnie speaks a language which is devoid of content, although she herself finds some utterances especially significant:

(Pause.) It is no hotter today than yesterday, it will be no hotter tomorrow than today, how could it, and so on back into the far past, forward into the far future. (Pause.) And should one day the earth cover my breasts, then I shall never have seen my breasts, no one ever seen my breasts. (Pause.) I hope you caught something of that, Willie, I should be sorry to think you had caught nothing of all that, it is not every day I rise to such heights.¹¹

Yet by using such banal language and then underscoring it through the mouth of his major character, Beckett is making a statement about language in terms stronger than mere words. When one considers the desperate situation in which the characters find themselves and then realizes that all Winnie can do is to talk about it, one becomes aware that Beckett is really using language against language. Language becomes one of the major preoccupations of the play, although it is the least efficacious means the characters can employ to extricate themselves from their situation. And if Winnie's overuse of language does nothing to alleviate her condition, how much less useful is Willie's crawling in a silence punctuated occasionally with almost monosyllabic replies?

11. Beckett, Happy Days, pp. 38-39.

By her language Winnie has deluded herself into thinking that each day shall have been another happy day, yet, ironically, it is language which helps sustain the delusion and gives to the delusion a semblance of reality. After posing a long series of questions about the correct grammatical form to use--"them" or "it"--when referring to one's hair, she finally elicits a solitary "it" from the long-silent Willie. Winnie responds: "(turning back front, joyful.) Oh you are going to talk to me today, this is going to be a happy day! (Pause. Joy off.) Another happy day."¹² And as long as she can continue to sustain the delusion with language, Winnie will continue in some strange way to be "happy."

The language of Happy Days is multi-levelled: it conveys meanings which are beyond the literal sense of the language, beyond the precise meanings of the words. Peter Brook has acknowledged Happy Days as a prime example of Holy Theatre; Beckett's use of language in the play must be one of the reasons. In the play Brook has found the answer to his question: "Is there a language of actions, a language of sounds--a language of word-as-part-of movement, or word-as-lie, word-as-parody, of word-as-rubbish, of word-as-contradiction, of word-shock or word-cry?"¹³ Brook has seen

12. Beckett, Happy Days, p. 23.

13. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 44.

Beckett's as an affirmative answer. This view is one reason why

Brook sees Beckett's Happy Days as Holy Theatre:

There are two ways of speaking about the human condition: there is the process of honest inspiration--by which all the positive elements of life can be revealed, and there is the process of honest vision--by which the artist bears witness to whatever it is that he has seen. The first process depends on revelation; it can't be brought about by holy wishes. The second one depends on honesty, and it musn't be clouded over by holy wishes.¹⁴

Brook continues that "Beckett expresses just this distinction in Happy Days. The optimism of the lady buried in the ground is not a virtue, it is the element that blinds her to the truth of her situation. For a few rare flashes she glimpses her condition, but at once she blots them out with her good cheer."¹⁵ In the language of Beckett's Happy Days, for Brook the "holy" resides in "word-as-lie" or "word-as-contradiction" or "word-as-parody." Winnie, using her own words, gives the lie to her situation, and Beckett has revealed that her words become a parody of her situation. Through the language of the play the audience realizes the contradiction inherent in her speech. With the realization of this contradiction, the audience has succeeded in penetrating the situation and apprehending the truth. The language of the play has pierced through to the world of forms, which underlies human activity, and in so doing has participated in the "holy" by

14. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 53.

15. Ibid.

transcending the literal level, just as all "true symbols" must. As Mircea Eliade has put it: "But if the word is lacking, the thing is present; only it is 'said'--that is, revealed in a coherent fashion--through symbols and myths."¹⁶

Earlier in this study Eliade's observation was noted¹⁷ that rituals recall actions performed "in illo tempore;" that is, they stretch back to a time when the actions had more than symbolic meaning and were meaningful performances of gods, heroes, or men. In harking back to a prior time, rituals participate in a sacred invisibility and assume a holy character. Strong elements of ritualized action occur in Beckett's Happy Days in the actions of each of the characters, in their interaction, and in the action or movement of the play itself.

Winnie, the play's central character, is occupied with ritualized actions during much of the play. Although day and night have ceased to exist for her and Willie, she wakes at the sound of a bell and begins all the trivial activities which one associates with rising in the morning:

(Gazing at zenith.) Another heavenly day. (Pause. Head back level, eyes front, pause. She clasps hands to breast, closes eyes. Lips move in inaudible prayer, say ten seconds. Lips still. Hands remain clasped. Low.) For Jesus Christ sake Amen. (Eyes open, hands unclasp, return to mound. Pause. She clasps hands to breast again, closes eyes, lips move

16. Eliade, Cosmos, p. 3.

17. See page 48, footnote 43.

again in inaudible addendum, say five seconds. Low.) World without end Amen. (Eyes open, hands unclasp, return to mound. Pause.) Begin, Winnie. (Pause.) Begin your day, Winnie.¹⁸

Despite our learning as the play progresses that it seems futile to pray since no one answers, Winnie continues the habit at several points in Act I and even into Act II, when she is buried to her neck. Prayer, as such, has ceased, but she begins with "Hail, holy light."¹⁹ More significantly, Winnie is not repeating actions which are meaningless to her, for she continues in Act II: "Someone is looking at me still. (Pause.) Caring for me still. (Pause.) That is what I find so wonderful. (Pause.) Eyes on my eyes."²⁰ Though who the "someone" is never becomes clear, it is obvious that Willie is not the one. He is living behind the mound, and his eyes could hardly be on hers. Winnie is not even sure that he is still alive. Yet even for Winnie the ritual calls to mind some invisibility, vague though it may be.

After her waking ritual, Winnie continues to perform other actions which have the force of ritual. For long moments she rummages in her bag and extracts toothbrush and toothpaste, a small mirror for inspecting her gums, her glasses for reading the fine print on the toothbrush, a handkerchief to clean her glasses, and a small

18. Beckett, Happy Days, p. 8.

19. Ibid., p. 49.

20. Ibid., pp. 49-50.

bottle of "red medicine" to restore her color.²¹ And again in Act II, when she is no longer able physically to use the objects which have made up her morning ritual, she remarks several times about the bag's continuing presence and finally concludes: "It's things, Willie. (Pause. Normal voice.) In the bag, outside the bag. (Pause.) Ah yes, things have their life, that is what I always say, things have a life."²²

Winnie's speech and movement patterns have also become ritualized in her handling of her belongings, in this case her toothbrush and toothpaste:

(Pause. Tender smile as she turns back front, lays down brush.) Poor Willie--(examines tube, smile off)--running out--(looks for cap)--ah well--(finds cap)--can't be helped--(screws on cap)--just one of those old things--(lays down tube)--another of those old things--(turns toward bag)--just can't be cured--(rummages in bag)--cannot be cured--(brings out small mirror, turns back front)--ah yes--(inspects teeth in mirror)--poor dear Willie--(testing upper front teeth with thumb, indistinctly)--good Lord!²³

Though Albert Bermel comments on these rituals and concludes that she "through small, trivial motions proves she is alive,"²⁴ the motions are not trivial for Winnie. Even Mr. Bermel would agree that proving

21. Beckett, Happy Days, pp. 9-14.

22. Ibid., p. 54.

23. Ibid., p. 9.

24. Albert Bermel, "Beckett Without Metaphysics," Performance, 1, No. 2 (April 1972), 122.

"she is alive" is a rather important matter. These ritualized actions are her contact with "illo tempore," a time when the actions mattered and really meant what they now only signify.

Winnie's awareness of the past makes her ritual behavior more significant, since "meaningful" ritual depends on the participant's awareness of what the ritual signifies. Whenever she speaks of death or the passage of time, Winnie speaks metaphorically inasmuch as neither phenomenon apparently has any further meaning for her. She says to Willie: "Whereas if you were to die--(smile)--to speak in the old style--(smile off) . . . "²⁵ or again, "That is what I find so wonderful, that not a day goes by--(smile)--to speak in the old style--(smile off)--hardly a day without some addition to one's knowledge however trifling, the addition I mean, provided one takes the pains."²⁶ The references to death and the passage of time as "the old style" recur at least eight times in Act I. Yet death apparently can occur: Winnie remarks several times during long silences from Willie that he is probably "dead, like the others."²⁷ Time also passes: Winnie can run out of medicine and cosmetics,²⁸ she speaks of her

25. Beckett, Happy Days, p. 21.

26. Ibid., p. 18.

27. Ibid., p. 50.

28. Ibid., p. 9.

parasol being restored to her "tomorrow,"²⁹ and at the beginning of Act II the sand is deeper about her.³⁰ But speaking of both is still "the old style," even though she continues to behave as if the passage of time were significant. In this chapter we will consider later the "holy" function of time; however, Winnie does behave ritualistically toward time and toward changes which imply the passage of time.

Winnie also clings ritualistically to the old saws about conventional learning. When she speaks of "some addition to one's knowledge," she is referring to the less-than-startling discovery that her toothbrush has bristles of "fully guaranteed. . . genuine pure. . . hog's. . . setae."³¹ To arrive at this bit of knowledge, she has spent interminable amounts of time squinting at the handle of her brush: with the naked eye, through her glasses, and finally through her glasses and a magnifying glass. Although she quotes half-remembered lines of poetry, she can reassure herself with: "One loses one's classics. (Pause.) Oh not all. (Pause.) A part. (Pause.) A part remains. (Pause.) That is what I find so wonderful, a part remains, of one's classics, to help one through the day. (Pause.) Oh yes, many mercies, many mercies."³²

29. Beckett, Happy Days, p. 39.

30. Ibid., p. 49.

31. Ibid., pp. 17-18.

32. Ibid., pp. 57-58.

Willie appears in the play much less than Winnie, but he also performs his ritualistic actions. Forgetting to "slip on his drawers," he still wears his boater with a "club ribbon" settled on his head at a "rakish angle."³³ Several times during the play the back of his head appears over the mound, and his hands clutch a "yellowed newspaper" from which he reads such items as "His Grace and Most Reverend Father in God Dr. Carolus Hunter dead in tub."³⁴ Later he reads from the same newspaper: "Opening for smart youth. . . . Wanted bright boy."³⁵ His manifestations of stage behavior, e. g., his mole-like presence, his limited utterances, and his animal-like locomotion suggest a different, perhaps more childish, mode of existence than Winnie's. However, Willie also needs to remind himself of things which might have taken place "in illo tempore," when he was still a "smart youth" or a "bright boy."

In his most significant bit of ritual Willie finally appears at the end of Act II. Though Winnie had given him up for dead, he ultimately crawls out from behind her mound of earth "dressed to kill--top hat, morning coat, striped trousers, etc., white gloves in hand."³⁶ The

33. Beckett, Happy Days, p. 14.

34. Ibid., p. 15.

35. Ibid., p. 48.

36. Ibid., p. 61.

incongruity of his appearance is inescapable, but the ritualistic significance of his action is by no means incongruous. He climbs the mound toward Winnie's face--and toward the gun which she has left next to her on the mound. He fails in his attempt to scale the hillock, but his ritualized action and symbolic dress leave little doubt about what he was seeking.

Winnie's and Willie's life together is ritual which has become pathetic. Their language has already revealed that Winnie somehow needs Willie's presence to reassert her own existence; she speaks, therefore he is. But they fulfill the ritual of a stale marriage with almost pathetic fidelity. Winnie calls to Willie shortly after she wakes; when he fails to respond she continues with her morning ritual. When she finally wakens him (accidentally) by hitting him with a discarded medicine bottle, he takes up his ritual of reading the newspaper. She reminds him to put his drawers on, though no one could possibly care. He has to be told how to apply Vaseline to his sore bottom. All the little minutiae of married life seem oddly incongruous in their situation, but Winnie and Willie attend to them with ritualistic faithfulness. Yet the couple's actions are revealing of something more than a stale marriage; Beckett has created more than a grim domestic comedy. Three episodes are especially telling.

The first episode occurs at the end of Act I. Winnie has made much of deciphering the legend on the handle of her toothbrush as

"genuine pure hog's setae." When Willie appears, Winnie asks a question concerning the inscription--but not the expected one: "What exactly is a hog, Willie, do you know, I can't remember." Willie replies: "Castrated male swine. . . . Reared for slaughter."³⁷ This response is delivered by Willie as he crawls on all fours to Winnie, who has just invited him to "let me feast on you."³⁸

A second occurrence in Act II reveals that Winnie may be conscious of their peculiar relationship. As Willie appears "dressed to kill," Winnie remarks:

(Mondaine.) Well this is an unexpected pleasure! (Pause.) Reminds me of the day you came whining for my hand. (Pause.) I worship you, Winnie, be mine. (He looks up.) Life a mockery without Win. (She goes off into a giggle.) What a get up, you do look a sight! (Giggles.) Where are the flowers?³⁹

Albert Bermel has noted: "A young man pays court with flowers; flowers are sent to the dead."⁴⁰ Again Beckett employs ritual on more than one level at a time; the ritual actions of Willie and Winnie evoke awareness of a larger human ritual--courtship and funeral customs--to provide a deeper insight into the nature of their relationship.

37. Beckett, Happy Days, p. 47. Cf. Albert Bermel's treatment of this scene in "Beckett Without Metaphysics," Performance, 1, No. 2 (April 1972), 123.

38. Beckett, Happy Days, p. 46.

39. Ibid., p. 61.

40. Bermel, p. 125.

A third highly significant element of ritual occurs at the end of the play. After his aborted climb up the mound, as Winnie first taunts him and then expresses fears, Willie utters the monosyllable "Win." Stage directions continue: "Pause. WINNIE's eyes front. Happy expression appears, grows."⁴¹ Winnie sings her music-box waltz, they stare at each other for a long moment, and the curtain falls. Beckett has presented a ritual action which he does not explain: Willie's "Win." Was it merely a term of feeble endearment when he failed to touch Winnie's face? Or was it a concession that she was victorious because he failed to reach the revolver on the mound next to her face? Given the weight of evidence about their relationship, the audience knows what Willie had in mind for Winnie. Beckett has constructed his play like the ritual enactment of a myth; element piles on element, ritual upon ritual. In the end the meaning is clear because the myth is known. Just as the audiences of ancient tragedies knew the inevitable resolution of the conflict because they knew the myth from which it sprang, so do Beckett's audiences know the resolution of his plays because they know the myth or "invisibility" upon which Beckett's plays are based.

Because of their ritualistic character, Beckett's plays provide a much firmer and more conventional structure than might be apparent

41. Beckett, Happy Days, pp. 63-64.

at first glance. In Happy Days, for example, there is little stage movement: Winnie is embedded in the earth and Willie, when he does appear can do no more than crawl on all fours. There is an action in the sense of an increase in dramatic tension over the presence of the revolver and its potential employment. Dialogue and ritual actions reveal the situation in which the characters find themselves and suggest how they arrived at such a state. Winnie and Willie have been living a married life which has become little more than a process of noting the passage of time and trying to cope with the passage of time. One day is indistinguishable from the next because the activities or inactivities of each day are like those of any other. Winnie is clearly dominant verbally though she is less mobile than her husband. Willie has accepted his fate in silence, while Winnie has deluded herself into believing that each passing day is another "happy day." But there is an alternative to merely waiting out a miserable existence until the end comes, and Winnie even provides some conventional foreshadowing. As Winnie rummages in her bag early in the play, Beckett's stage directions reveal that she "turns to bag, rummages in it, brings out revolver, holds it up, kisses it rapidly, puts it back, rummages, brings out almost empty bottle of red medicine, turns back front, looks for spectacles, puts them on, reads label."⁴² In one brief but

42. Beckett, Happy Days, p. 13.

evocative gesture, Winnie reveals that she has a gun and holds it with a certain affection. But the foreshadowing does not end there.

Winnie returns to her bag later, and the stage directions point out:

(Pause. She turns to look at bag.) Perhaps just one quick dip. (She turns back front, closes eyes, throws out left arm, plunges hand in bag and brings out revolver. Disgusted.) You again! (She opens eyes, brings revolver front and contemplates it. She weighs it in her palm.) You'd think the weight of this thing would bring it down among the . . . last rounds. But no. It doesn't. Ever uppermost, like Browning. (Pause.) Brownie . . . (Turning a little towards WILLIE.) Remember Brownie, Willie? (Pause.) Remember how you used to keep on at me to take it away from you? Take it away, Winnie, take it away, before I put myself out of my misery. (Back front. Derisive.) Your misery! (To revolver.) Oh I suppose it's a comfort to know you're there, but I'm tired of you. (Pause.) I'll leave you out, that's what I'll do. (She lays revolver on ground to her right.) There, that's your home from this day out. (Smile.)
The old style!⁴³

Again, in a highly economical scene dramatically, Winnie has revealed her own contempt for the weapon, how she happens to have it, and also revealed the possibility that it might be a "comfort"; moreover, she has left the gun out for possible future use. Not only is the gun present for the remainder of Act I, but the stage directions for Act II reveal: "Bag and parasol as before. Revolver conspicuous to her right on mound."⁴⁴ The revolver remains conspicuous throughout the act, so that when Willie appears and Winnie asks: "Is it me

43. Beckett, Happy Days, p. 33.

44. Ibid., p. 49.

you're after, Willie . . . or is it something else?"⁴⁵ the audience is aware that the play has reached a climax. Suspense is raised as Winnie exclaims, "Don't look at me like that! (Pause. Vehement.) Don't look at me like that! (Pause. Low.) Have you gone off your head, Willie? (Pause. Do.) Out of your poor old wits, Willie?"⁴⁶ And the barely audible "Win" signals a resolution: they will continue as they have because Winnie can no longer reach the gun, and Willie has none of the old "jizz" left for climbing the mound and reaching it himself. Winnie and Willie stare at each other during the long pause before the final curtain. As Bermel says, "they confront one another, smiles gone, disguises off, barriers down."⁴⁷ Winnie and Willie have penetrated the ritual to the "invisible" truth behind it, and so has the audience. The audience can now realize the method in Beckett's structuring of the play: it is not, as Patrick Murray suggests, Beckett's way of "poking fun at accepted notions about the nature of dramatic form, rather as Wilde did in The Importance of Being Earnest."⁴⁸ The simple fact is that another act would be redundant. Winnie would probably be buried past her mouth in sand and unable to

45. Beckett, Happy Days, p. 63.

46. Ibid.

47. Bermel, p. 125.

48. Patrick Murray, The Tragic Comedian: A Study of Samuel Beckett (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1970), p. 67.

speak; Willie would be either more enfeebled or dead. But their essential situation would not have changed: they would still be trapped in another one of the "happy days."

Speaking of Beckett's images and symbols--the ingredients of true ritual--Peter Brook maintains: "We get nowhere if we expect to be told what they mean, yet each one has a relation with us we can't deny. If we accept this, the symbol opens in us a great and wondering O."⁴⁹ And this "wondering O" is a sign that the audience has penetrated an invisibility of its own by participating in a true ritual. And Brook describes the "holy" result:

This is how Beckett's dark plays are plays of light, where the desperate object created is witness of the ferocity of the wish to bear witness to the truth. Beckett does not say 'no' with satisfaction; he forges his merciless 'no' out of a longing for 'yes' and so his despair is the negative from which the contour of its opposite can be drawn.⁵⁰

Samuel Beckett's Happy Days meets the criteria established for Holy Theatre in its use of ritual. The characters' actions, their interaction, and the structural progression of the play contain definite elements of ritual operating on different levels: to delude the characters, to reveal to the characters their delusions and enable them either to continue the delusions or act to eradicate them, and to allow the audience to pierce the delusions in order to arrive at an

49. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 53.

50. Ibid.

understanding of the invisible. Once the audience has arrived at the invisibility, it has achieved Artaud's "transcendent experience of life." A "holy" experience has been achieved.

Referring to Winnie, Ronald Hayman has written: "We see her cleaning her teeth, filing her nails, putting on lipstick and adjusting her hat, rather like the joke about the Englishman putting on a dinner jacket to eat all by himself in the desert."⁵¹ Unknowingly Hayman has also supplied a description of "occasion," the next point for investigation in this study. What was so ludicrous about the Englishman was not his surroundings, but rather his solitude. Had there been at least one other person to share his meal with him, it might have been perfectly logical to dress for dinner if the occasion called for celebration or formality. Peter Brook has called "occasion" a "deliberately constructed social gathering that seeks for an invisibility to interpenetrate and animate the ordinary." While the Englishman in the desert might have been seeking "an invisibility to interpenetrate and animate the ordinary," there was no "social gathering" to save his conduct from becoming ludicrous. Samuel Beckett's Happy Days provides both the "social gathering" and the "invisibility."

The performance of a play is, by its nature, a social gathering. Brook himself has said: "I can take any empty space and call it

51. Ronald Hayman, Samuel Beckett (London: Heinemann, 1968), p. 58.

a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged."⁵² Though Brook readily admits that such an occurrence is not normally what is meant by theatre,⁵³ the phrase of interest here is "whilst someone else is watching him." Not only is a spectator necessary "for an act of theatre to be engaged," but the spectator must also be aware that he is witnessing a theatrical event: this is John Cage's "frame around reality." Some sign must be given that what is being seen by the spectator is more than an ordinary happening from life; there must be a heightened sense of awareness on the part of the spectator lest the experience be lost to his perception. On the other hand, there must be something to connect the event with the spectator's life or else it will be dismissed as irrelevant or too abstruse. This paradox of defining an "occasion" with reference to theatre is also the dilemma. Beckett has resolved the dilemma in Happy Days.

Beckett's task is not to establish that his play is a "social gathering"; audiences in the theatre can be expected to know that. But he does need to point to the "invisibility" which will "interpenetrate and animate the ordinary." This study has already been concerned

52. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 9.

53. Ibid.

with how the invisible is made manifest in the ritual elements present in the dialogue and the action. But it still remains to consider how Happy Days "interpenetrates and animates the ordinary."

First, Beckett sets his play on an "expanse of scorched grass," with a "backcloth to represent unbroken plain and sky receding to meet in far distance." Winnie is "imbedded up to above her waist in exact centre of mound . . . sleeping, her arms on the ground before her."⁵⁴ Though the setting is bleak and indeterminate as to period and exact locale, it is unmistakably the earth. Winnie and Willie are humans who dwell on the same planet as do all the members of the audience. Should there be any misconception on the part of the audience, Winnie reminds them periodically that "Tis only human . . . Human nature"⁵⁵ or "Ah well, natural laws, natural laws, I suppose it's like everything else, it all depends on the creature you happen to be."⁵⁶ For to miss Winnie's and Willie's humanity would be to miss the essential pathos of their situation: why Winnie is in the earth and not on it, and why Willie crawls instead of walking erect. When one begins to see the strangeness of their situation, the next penetration of an invisibility can occur.

54. Beckett, Happy Days, p. 7.

55. Ibid., p. 22.

56. Ibid., p. 34.

Winnie and Willie live in an endless noon of "blazing light."⁵⁷ Night and day have ceased to be periods of light and darkness; they are now indistinguishable except by a signal from a piercing bell.⁵⁸ Time and death have become "the old style" because, though both exist, they no longer have a meaning. Like night and day, they are indistinguishable from the eternal present and meaningless life.

Winnie clings to her little rituals; indeed, her rituals are nearly all she has; she engages in them very deliberately. Beckett's stage directions occupy as much of the text as does the dialogue; nothing is accidental. Ruby Cohn comments on the meticulous care with which Beckett rehearsed every nuance of action and dialogue when he first directed Happy Days in 1971: "Beckett in the theater seeks to deepen the concentration of his written text. . . he choreographs the actor's every movement."⁵⁹ Ironically the movements are utterly commonplace. Winnie's everyday chores, e.g., brushing her teeth and combing her hair, Willie's reading his paper and pulling up his drawers--these actions are so matter-of-fact that, as Brook says, "the audience wriggles, squirms, and yawns, it walks out or else invents and prints every form of imaginary complaint as a mechanism

57. Beckett, Happy Days, pp. 7-8.

58. Ibid., p. 8.

59. Cohn, "Beckett Directs," p. 111.

to ward off the uncomfortable truth."⁶⁰ And the truth is that while the audience has been saying, "this is trite" or "we all do those things," the "uncomfortable truth" has taken hold: "Winnie and Willie are us!"

Beckett's characters in Happy Days are "Everyman" who performs the commonplaces and speaks trivia like every other man. But they have become entrapped by their commonplaces and their trivia, and if they have, so has "Everyman." Willie has abjured speech and almost every other form of human activity; Winnie has clung desperately to all her rituals. Willie has contemplated ending his pointless existence but has asked Winnie to talk him out of it. When he does try to take some definitive action in Act II, he fails. Winnie has talked herself into believing that no matter what happens, "it shall have been another happy day. So far."

It is no accident that Winnie is buried in earth or sand. The hour-glass metaphor is a strong one. As Act II begins, she is embedded more deeply than she was in Act I. If there were an Act III, she would either be covered over by the sand, or perhaps the glass would be inverted, and she would have to begin the same process again. In either case, it would not matter; her situation has been established within the two-act structure of the play. And her situation is the situation of "Everyman."

60. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 53.

Beckett has constructed in Happy Days a world in which happiness is bittersweet, at best. He has embodied in the dramatic form a meaningful ritual which, by providing a sense of "occasion," enables an audience to penetrate an invisibility and become party to the "holy." We understand that the characters' happiness is bittersweet, why it is so, and most important, that we are the characters. It is our understanding which is important. Although the experience of Winnie and Willie is far from being merely "happy," an analysis of the play has made it possible to understand Peter Brook's final comment:

Sadly, it is the wish for optimism that many writers share that prevents them from finding hope. When we attack Beckett for pessimism it is we who are the Beckett characters trapped in a Beckett scene. When we accept Beckett's statement as it is, then suddenly all is transformed. There is after all quite another audience, Beckett's audience; those in every country who do not set up intellectual barriers, who do not try too hard to analyse the message. This audience laughs and cries out-- and in the end celebrates with Beckett; this audience leaves his plays, his black plays, nourished and enriched, with a lighter heart, full of a strange, irrational joy.⁶¹

We celebrate because we have penetrated a painful truth and accepted it. The "joy" is the ultimate product of a theatre which is truly "holy."

61. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 53.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

The author's intention in this study is to investigate the concept of "Holy Theatre" in the dramatic theory and practice of Peter Brook. Since Brook has been said to have "altered the course of both the English and American theater," his theories are significant ones for any serious student of the drama. His productions at Stratford, in London, and in New York have attracted wide popular and critical attention, making Brook worthy of consideration as a significant influence on the contemporary theatre.

Chapter 1 considers the background of Peter Brook and the influences in his professional life, in order to place him in a proper historical and artistic perspective. After graduating from Oxford in 1945 with the intention of pursuing a filmic career, Brook entered the world of theatre in post-war London. Having already produced his first film while an undergraduate at Oxford, Brook began directing for the theatre as an avenue for approaching film directing. Brook became an immediate popular success and attracted the attention of Sir Barry Jackson, then the director of Stratford's Royal Shakespeare Company. Jackson was an innovator interested in shattering some of

the traditions which had made Stratford productions dull, and he invited Brook to become associated with him at the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Brook's continued success at Stratford and in London brought him the acquaintance of stars like John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier and the Lunts. He directed productions featuring each of these stage notables. In the process he furthered his own theatrical career. In rapid succession Brook worked for the leading producing agencies in London and received an appointment to direct productions of opera at Covent Garden and in New York.

At the height of his success, with critics and audiences alike hailing him as a "Wunderkind," Brook withdrew to live in Paris and observe the resurgent French theatre. At this time Brook became interested in such dramatic theorists as Antonin Artaud and the "New Wave" of playwrights and directors. Brook himself became much more of a theorist and experimenter after the Paris hiatus. Although he continued to work with star-ranked performers, he also began to form small experimental groups within the permanent repertory company at Stratford. Brook still maintained an interest in cinema with films like Lord of the Flies, but the corpus of his work became concentrated in the theatre.

Brook did more than stage unconventional productions of Shakespeare; he investigated the communal dramatic workshop of

Grotowski in Poland and the Becks in New York. Eventually, with Charles Marowitz and a company from Stratford, he created an experimental group of his own to investigate the premises of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. Most recently Brook has been associated with the International Center for Theatre Research in Persia, experimenting with new dramatic forms and directing techniques.

The key term to describe the theory and practice of Peter Brook is "eclectic." He draws extensively on his research and observation of others' techniques. Brook's background in all types of theatre--the West End, Broadway, repertory, the opera--has been distilled into a style that is uniquely Brook's. Because of his own training and interests, Brook often incorporates musical direction and theatrical design into his own role as producer and director. His own predilection lies in exploring and exploiting the director-actor-audience relationship, and from this construct has grown Brook's theory of the "Holy Theatre."

In Chapter 2 the author of this study extrapolates a definition and characterization of "Holy Theatre" from the writings of Peter Brook and other pertinent sources. Brook calls "Holy Theatre" the "Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible." In this statement Brook posits a Platonic "world of forms" which must somehow be revealed on stage. The forms, transcendent truths basic to man's existence, become hidden by the banality of daily existence. Artaud calls these

forms "the truthful precipitates of dreams" and says that in them man pours out "his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism." At first inspection such forms or truths as Artaud mentions may seem to have little to do with anything "holy." The "holiness" in the "Holy Theatre" resides in the fact that such a theatre reveals a "sacred invisibility"--man's nature, and it makes no difference how pleasant or ugly that invisibility may be. Primitive man, for example, created rituals to re-enact and make visible the myths which he used to account for the great mysteries of his life, among them creation, regeneration, death, love, or time. Out of this ritual-building and myth-making came religious worship and a concept of the "holy" as opposed to the "profane." "Holy" actions not only fulfilled a function in themselves, but they also recalled actions performed "in illo tempore" by gods, heroes, or ancestors, to paraphrase Mircea Eliade. By extension, actions in the theatre are "holy" when they have not only a literal meaning but also reveal deeper truths about human beings. In returning to those deeper truths, man seeks and finds a form of self-justification and holiness; he seeks to be reborn with all his humanity intact. As Eliade says: "In short, through the reactualization of his myths, religious man attempts to approach the gods and to participate in being; the imitation of

paradigmatic divine models expresses at once his desire for sanctity and his ontological nostalgia. "¹

Brook demands more of the "Holy Theatre" than making the "Invisible" visible; he asserts that a "Holy Theatre" also "offers the conditions that make its perception possible." Providing those "conditions" demands a return to "meaningful ritual" which can act out or embody the truths subsumed by the "sacred invisibility." Ritual provides the "form" and "occasion" which make possible man's perception of the "holy." The "form" is the way in which a play embodies the "invisibility" it purports to reveal; "occasion" is that which makes the audience aware of the symbolic nature of the ritual they will perceive and creates in the audience a willingness to interpenetrate the invisibility embodied in the ritual.

"Holy" is an apt title for the theatre called for by Brook. Holiness is implicit in a medium which penetrates the surface of life to explore and reveal deepest truths about the human condition. Such penetration is, after all, exactly what religious rites do when they seek to reveal the deepest truths about the relationship between man and his gods.

Brook has cited at least three embodiments of the "Holy Theatre": the dancing of Merce Cunningham and his company, the

1. Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p. 106.

efforts of Jerzy Grotowski and his experimental theatre group in Poland, and the plays of Samuel Beckett. Because of the impracticality of dealing with the first two examples in a study of this nature, the author chose to examine the works of Samuel Beckett as a concrete example of "Holy Theatre." In Chapter 3 the author analyzes Beckett's Happy Days because Brook himself has singled out this particular work as a paradigm of the "holy."

In Happy Days, a play in two acts written in 1961 originally in English, Beckett presents a married couple, Winnie and Willie, who lead a bizarre existence on "an expanse of scorched grass." Winnie is embedded--first to her waist, then to her neck--in the center of a mound of earth. Willie, on the other hand, can be mobile by crawling around on all fours; he lives in a burrow behind Winnie's mound. Winnie's action during the play consists of speech punctuated by prescribed silences or pauses and by her "fussing" with a bag of her possessions: toothbrush, comb, and a revolver, among others. Willie speaks only occasionally, and is fully visible only at the conclusion of the play.

The author of the study seeks to determine how "true form" and "true occasion" manifest themselves in Happy Days by examining the functioning of "true symbols" in the language spoken by the two characters, by examining what can be considered "ritualized" in the action of the characters and of the play itself, and by seeking a

manifestation of "occasion" in all the staging devices of the play. The purpose of the author's investigation is to determine how the "Holy Theatre" manifests itself concretely in one specific play.

The language in Happy Days does contain "true symbols," which are indicative of Brook's "Holy Theatre." Winnie's references to the past and her commentary on her present mode of existence stimulate in the audience an awareness of the true nature of the characters' plight: they are not merely trapped physically in a burrow or a mound of earth, but are rather trapped in the process of life itself. Winnie's references to "the old style" and her lapses into carefully timed pauses indicate the passage of time. The banalities of Winnie's speech and Willie's silence symbolize the monotony and stagnation of their lives. Winnie uses speech to reassure herself of her existence, and eventually indicates that Willie continues to exist for her--whether he is dead or has gone away--simply because she continues to speak to him. The very fact that Winnie speaks incessantly is in itself a significant symbol. John Killinger points out: "Speech, among primitive peoples, was considered an important aspect of man's power over nature. If he knew the name of a god or a tree or an animal, he had at least in some measure attained a dominance over it."² Winnie's speech is symbolic of her pathetic attempt

2. John Killinger, World in Collapse: The Vision of Absurd Drama (New York: Delta, 1971), p. 91.

to dominate a universe which has literally entrapped her. Moreover, her speech has a true ritual significance because it reaches back into "invisibility" by recalling primitive man's attempts to control a hostile universe.

The action of the characters contains definite elements of ritual: Winnie's concern with brushing her teeth, taking her medicine, and reading the fine print on her toothbrush; Willie's reading items from his newspaper or handing back to Winnie the parasol with which she has grazed his head. All of these are the ritualized actions of human beings in general and help an audience to identify with Beckett's characters. Winnie's very cheerfulness in the face of her dire plight is a "liberating ritual," which transmits itself to an audience and puts them in contact with the "holy." Speaking of cheerfulness, Wayne Shumaker has pointed out:

If based on organic euphoria--a simple consciousness of vitality superior to inconvenience or temporary frustration--cheerfulness tends to express itself in sheer exuberance of language and incident. . . . The total effect is that of fulfillment, hence cheerfulness. The life principle shows itself stronger than the death principle, and the spectator leaves the theater heartened for the resumption of his daily responsibilities.³

Shumaker's statement characterizes Winnie's cheerfulness perfectly. She reminds herself that each day shall be another "happy day." She

3. Wayne Shumaker, Literature and the Irrational: A Study in Anthropological Backgrounds (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), p. 192.

smiles long smiles to help fend off the truth of her situation. Her language becomes a torrent of words as she busies herself with the little incidents of her toilette. Despite her straitened circumstances, she does impart to the spectator a feeling that the life principle is stronger than the death principle. It is no wonder, then, that Brook can say:

The audience laughs and cries out--and in the end celebrates with Beckett; this audience leaves his plays, his black plays, nourished and enriched, with a lighter heart, full of a strange, irrational joy. Poetry, nobility, beauty, magic--suddenly these suspect words are back in the theatre once more.⁴

Beckett has succeeded in creating a "meaningful ritual," which reveals to men some deep truths about themselves and their condition. This revelation is Cox's "liberating ritual" because it frees modern man from ignorance about himself and explains some aspects of his life, just as fertility dance rituals explained to primitive man the blind forces which made his crops grow.

Beckett's staging devices, the total theatrical environment which he creates for his characters to inhabit, provide the sense of "occasion" necessary for the audience to perceive the "holy" in the "Holy Theatre." Winnie's placement--centered in the earth mound--firmly roots her in this world as a fellow human. Her attachment to all her possessions--the trivial props of everyday life--strike a

4. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 53.

sympathetic chord in members of the audience, who have probably employed some of those very props before coming to the theatre. Winnie's use of language, pauses of varying length, and her gradual sinking into the earth call to mind the passage of the same time which is running out for every member of the audience just as surely as it is for Winnie. The inevitability of time running is vividly underscored by the ringing of a "piercing bell" to signal periods of waking and sleeping. The bell rings twice to open each act, and the second ring is a briefer one to jar Winnie fully awake. Each time Winnie begins to doze during a period designated for waking, the bell rings again. Further underscoring of time passage is provided by Winnie's putting on and removing her hat, although there are times when she cannot put it on and other times when she cannot take it off. A significant aural metaphor is provided by the music box's playing "The Merry Widow Waltz," and by Winnie's occasionally humming along. The most striking visual image is the presence of the revolver on Winnie's mound through most of the play, and the gun's function is not resolved even by Willie's unsuccessful attempt to scale the mound. Beckett has created a genuine "frame around reality," which creates in the audience a willingness to interpenetrate the invisibility embodied in the ritual. As John Killinger observes:

Happy Days, by this interpretation, would perhaps betoken the radical circumscription and limitations upon human movement

and freedom today, because its primary character, Winnie, lives immured to her "diddies" in a mound of earth and conducts her toilette and all her daily affairs without ever budging an inch from the spot where she began the day. Winnie is not elderly like Nagg and Nell, and she is not reduced to their level of whining, simpering irrationality. She reads toothpaste labels and newspapers and carries on rational conversations, and these facts heighten the fearfulness in us because of the similitude between her situation and ours. Perhaps we, too, Beckett is saying, live in a universe thus radically delimited. "Another heavenly day," ejaculates Winnie as the play opens--and perhaps our joy in existence is just as ironic as hers.⁵

The "similitude between her situation and ours" is the type of realization Brook had in mind when he called for a sense of "occasion" as a hallmark of the "Holy Theatre." Beckett has provided that sense in Happy Days.

While Peter Brook is ultimately speaking of total theatre as implied in the director-actor-audience relationship, he does have a strong prescription about the task of the playwright:

An author today can easily cheat himself if he thinks that he can 'use' a conventional form as a vehicle. This was true when conventional forms still had life for their audience. Today when no conventional forms stand up any more, even the author who doesn't care about theatre as such, but only about what he is trying to say, is compelled to begin at the root--by facing the problem of the very nature of dramatic utterance.⁶

Since Brook has singled out the dramatic writing of Samuel Beckett, and since this study has demonstrated that Beckett's Happy Days

5. Killinger, p. 77.

6. Brook, The Empty Space, p. 35.

meets the criteria for "Holy Theatre," some general observations on the nature of Beckett's "holy" play are appropriate here.

Happy Days is a tightly-structured play despite the appearance it presents that "nothing is happening." It is precisely the "nothing" which provides the action of the play--Winnie and Willie are waiting for something while their time runs out. Although childish idioms abound--Winnie's sand mound and Willie's crawling on all fours--Happy Days is really an evocative adult play. It is a statement of suffering rooted where most of us live most of the time, in a world of fewer and fewer absolutes. The ambiguous world in which Winnie and Willie live is the same world in which the audience lives, only in the play the trappings are stripped away to reveal its bare form or essence. Winnie and Willie are "Everyman" and as Colin Duckworth has observed:

Willie's voice punctuates Winnie's ecstatic words. Pure music with a covert allusion to the emptiness of human aspiration. Both their lines have gone alongside each other already during the act as unrelated fragments, but now, at the very end of the movement, they come together and make their point with deep and stinging pathos.⁷

The "very end of the movement" is silence, for at the end of the play Winnie and Willie "look at each other. Long pause." They are silent as the curtain falls. In this final action Beckett ultimately

7. Colin Duckworth, "Beckett's Dramatic Intensity," New Theatre Magazine, XI, No. 3 (n. d.), 22.

pierces the "invisible," making it visible. He reveals what for him is the core of human existence.

When Peer Gynt strips the onion of self and finds nothing at the centre the discovery is a symbolic self-judgment, but Beckett's "nothing" is the ultimate reality; it is "nothing" because nothing can be said about it; it lies beyond the level at which "words fail."⁸

Implications for further study are manifold, and the author of this study will suggest only a few. One fruitful pursuit would be an examination of other plays of Samuel Beckett, or any other contemporary plays, with a view toward applying the characteristics of "Holy Theatre" as a means of ordering the often-puzzling structures comprising current drama. Further, it might be useful to discover whether contemporary theatre is returning to the "holy," to its mythic and ritual origins. Happy Days alone presents numerous possibilities for further study. It is a rich play to explore in terms of the density and texture of its language as well as its silences, for what it says and what it leaves unsaid. Finally, Beckett's use of time and space in Happy Days provides a challenging area for investigation which has only been touched upon in the present study.

8. Anonymous, "The Core of the Onion," Times Literary Supplement, December 21, 1962, p. 988.

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