

## Beyond Theatre and Incarnation

TREVOR HART

### The Incarnation and the Fleshiness of Theatre

THE CENTRAL AND MOST striking claim of the Christian faith is that God's own eternal Word or Son became flesh and dwelled among us, playing out his distinctive part on the stage of human history. Whatever else it means, this claim compels Christians to reckon much more seriously with the nature and significance of the "flesh" in question than has sometimes been the case. According to the mainstream of christological understanding in Scripture and creeds alike, the enfleshing in question was permanent rather than temporary. Our own creaturely nature, having once been assumed into union with the person or *hypostasis* of the Son, and having fully shared in the drama of human birth, life, action, suffering, and death, was not now set aside in the way that an actor may legitimately step out of character upon leaving the stage at the end of a performance. On the contrary, this creaturely nature remains forever bound up with the Son's own identity as such, more substantial now than it ever was by virtue of its resurrection and ascension (taken back "into heaven" to the Father's right hand to use the inevitably mythological categories of kerygma and liturgy), modifying the very being of God himself in the process.<sup>1</sup>

1. Despite the qualifications that need to hedge such a claim, and despite the proper insights and concerns attaching to theological notions of divine "immutability," that

Such a radical conjunction between Word (*Logos*) and flesh (*sarx*), in which the uncreated Lord of heaven and earth himself now so penetrates our humanity with the fullness of his own being as henceforth to be identified with it and identifiable as one of us, prohibits any attempt on our part to ascribe to the flesh any merely fleeting or illustrative significance, as though it were a stepping stone to be left behind in the bid for a meaning or reality with which, finally, it has nothing to do. That the Word himself has become flesh means that, for creatures like us—ones possessed of both body and “soul”—no such discarnate reality is either available or even desirable. Whatever encounters and intercourse we take ourselves to have with “spiritual” or non-material entities are in any case earthed securely and without loss, in one way or another, in our amphibious entanglement in the realm of space-time materiality.<sup>2</sup> Hitherto this observation might have been merely empirical, perhaps even (as in various forms of dualism and idealism) resented and resisted, fuelling eschatological hope for an eventual escape from the unseemly limits of our inconvenient situation in the body. But God himself has appeared among us, clothed with his own “fleshy” mode of being and showing no sign of sloughing it off again at the earliest opportunity. As a result, both the craving for engagement with a pure *Logos asarkos* and any aspiration on our part towards eventual personal disembodiment (a phrase arguably now rendered oxymoronic in the context of a theological anthropology at least) are seriously flawed. To be human is to be wedded inexorably to and part of a material creation, even if our humanity will not submit to any accounting conducted in material terms alone. The assumption of Jesus’ resurrection body as a permanent feature in the triune life of God compels such an acknowledgment and forces a re-evaluation of the significance of the flesh: for God and for us.

With the incarnation, we might say, a decisive new significance is bestowed upon the flesh, for us and for its primordial maker and newest inhabitant; and we are bound to attend to it henceforth with a new curiosity and expectation. Not any or all “flesh”—in the first instance at least—but the very particular instantiation of it has no being except as

---

notion, when philosophically rather than biblically derived, and in the form in which it is sometimes presented and understood, seems to me finally to be incompatible with the radical implications of christological orthodoxy for our thinking about God.

2. “Humans are amphibians—half spirit and half animal. . . . As spirits they belong to the eternal world, but as animals they inhabit time.” Screwtape in Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 44.

the form of God's own unique dwelling among us, now as one of his own creatures. Language falters here, and so it should. How could it be otherwise? The humanity of Jesus, which is God's *own* humanity, the presence among us humanly of the one through whom all things were made in the beginning, resists our attempts to capture and to speak meaningfully of it in the terms of everyday discourse, subverting and renewing those terms even as we use them. And thereafter, *all* flesh must appear differently to us, inasmuch as it falls now within the penumbra of the claim that here God has made our "flesh" his own in a radically new manner and with universal redemptive intent and accomplishment.

Taking seriously the economy of the flesh, then, is *de rigueur* for Christians in their approach to the world in all its complex reality, visible and invisible. That which God has made his own through a supremely costly and risky venture,<sup>3</sup> and drawn bodily into the celebration of his own eternity, clearly has a premium and price surpassing human understanding. Nevertheless, we must strive to grasp it and to respect it in our own ascriptions of value and worth to the phenomena of creaturely experience. And, although the "flesh" (Heb. *bāšār*, Gk. *sarx*) of biblical and patristic testimony refers to our creatureliness as a whole, and thus in human terms to our material form in its integral union with the "invisible" realm of persons, meanings, and values etc.,<sup>4</sup> it certainly *includes* our embeddedness as "ensouled bodies" in the material cosmos, together with all its glorious messiness and unavoidable earthiness. "Flesh" in the more familiar and precise sense, therefore, is something Christians can neither neglect nor decri, but must grapple with and take seriously as a reality laden with value and significance deeper and more considerable than that with which we may, from time to time, choose to invest it.

It may seem needless to say that the arts are bound up with the economy of flesh, despite the persistent idealism that has occasionally plagued Western aesthetics. It is clear enough that a work of art is always more than its physical manifestation in clay, egg tempera smeared on wooden substrate, vibrating strings or air forced through tubes, soaring stonework, or whatever the chosen medium might be. Unless there is indeed

3. On the sense in which God may properly said to have put himself at "risk" in the incarnation and atonement, see helpfully Lewis, "Kenosis and Kerygma."

4. See Bratsiotis, "bāšār;" Schweizer and Meyer, "sarx." For a careful analysis of the uses of *sarx* and *sōma* (body) in fourth and fifth century christological discussion see "A Neglected Aspect of Athanasius's Christology" in Dragas, *Athanasiana*. Cf. Dragas, *St Athanasius Contra Apollinarem*.

something more than sensory presentation alone allows (some value or meaning or pattern apprehended by imagination), we should hardly be inclined to identify any object as “art” at all. But to identify this non-material imaginative surplus as the true “work,” something contained complete in “the mind of the maker,” seems problematic on empirical grounds alone, let alone in light of the sort of theological considerations we have just addressed.<sup>5</sup> The true work of art, as the product of a fully human engagement with the world, is necessarily implicated in the world of the flesh. Rather than seeking to resituate us in a world of pure “spirit” or “idea” by capturing our attention, art at its best draws us more fully and profoundly into a material cosmos already fully charged with spirit and meaning.<sup>6</sup> Among the arts, theatre and drama—more fully even than the dance or opera—has a peculiarly close and incorrigible relation to the stuff of human flesh and blood. As a form centered on the presence and action of actual bodies performing in the presence of an audience in real time and space, theatre is more than usually resistant to the bid for complete abstraction which has sometimes seized artistry of other sorts. As Max Harris notes, though “the human body may generate arbitrary sign systems of gesture, movement and expression, the body on stage is not, like the word ‘corpus’ or a particular configuration of paint, an arbitrary signifier of human being.”<sup>7</sup> Here, the relationship between signifier and signified is much more complex and ambiguous, a fact that has a good deal to do with theatre’s peculiar power as art. Taking “flesh” in both its broader and more narrow senses, therefore, “(w)hatever may be true of other art forms, . . . the theatre is irredeemably fleshy.”<sup>8</sup>

### A Proper Dwelling Place for God

First published more than twenty years ago now, Harris’s work *Theater and Incarnation* remains one of a small handful of books to engage with the phenomenon of theatre in a sustained and serious manner from a

5. Perhaps the most familiar version of aesthetic idealism is that of R. G. Collingwood in *The Principles of Art*. For a discussion of Collingwood’s influence on the attempt by Dorothy L. Sayers to sketch a distinctly Christian aesthetic grounded in the dogma of the incarnation, see Hart, *Making Good*, chapter 12. Cf. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, 26–34; Sayers, “Towards a Christian Aesthetic.”

6. See Hart, “Through the Arts.”

7. Harris, *Theater and Incarnation*, 38.

8. *Ibid.*, 39.

theological standpoint and, so far as I am aware, the only one to do so with the incarnation as its central doctrinal motif. Given the suggestive resonances between theatre's irredeemable "fleshiness" and faith's most distinctive claim that the meaning of our humanity and of the wider creation itself is to be found finally in the dramatic "enfleshment" of God's own Word in the *theatron* of human history,<sup>9</sup> one might perhaps have expected more in the intervening decades by way of an effort to pursue some of Harris's core insights and observations further.<sup>10</sup> Also surprising is the paucity of allusions to, let alone actual engagements with, his work or the issues at the heart of it in other contributions to this volume. Whatever the reason for this relative neglect, it is a pity, because despite some interesting and important work published in the field in the last decade or so, *Theater and Incarnation* remains by far the best example to date of a genuine conversation between theatre and theology. Of course there are, as with any book, no matter how well conceived and written, points at which one might have hoped for something more or different in the precise execution, and there are certainly lines of further enquiry to be picked up and pursued. What I propose to do in this essay, therefore, is to give the reader some sense of the burden of concern that drives and informs Harris's book and to attend to a few points at which it might prove fruitful to press beyond the range of his own consideration.

The starting point for Harris's reflections lies in his recognition of resonances, to which I have already alluded, between the logic of the incarnation (a concept compressing the dynamics of what is already a highly "dramatic" and "theatrical" event) and the peculiar challenges and opportunities afforded by the attempt to stage meaningful theatrical performance. In addition, one might mention the long and uncomfortable history of Christian suspicion, hostility, and indifference shown variously to theatre arts in general.<sup>11</sup> This persistent "antitheatrical prejudice" had

9. The familiar image of the world stage is appropriated by metonymy in 1 Cor 4:9: "(W)e have become a spectacle (*theatron*) to the world, to angels and to mortals."

10. Harris appears in the bibliography but not the name index, for example, of Kevin Vanhoozer's major 500-page contribution to the area. See Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*. Vanhoozer's focal concern is, to be sure, the nature of doctrine and the uses of Scripture, but Harris's work already directs us wisely to the inseparability of a "theatrical hermeneutic" from considerations of Christology as such, and encourages treatment of the incarnation not simply as a central plotline within a drama cast in other terms, but as a way of framing the drama as a whole. A brief critical engagement with Harris (and Vanhoozer) is to be found in Joshua Edelman, "Can an Act be True?"

11. See Harris, *Theater and Incarnation*, 68–72. For a thorough account see Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*.

its provenance early in patristic reactions to the vulgar “spectacle” of ancient Rome’s equivalent to reality TV (in which, quite apart from the moral and spiritual dubiety of many of the carefully staged “happenings,” it should be remembered that Christians often fared rather badly), conveniently theorized in terms of Plato’s (perfectly reasonable, but lop-sided) worries about the negative impact of certain sorts of theatre on its audiences and actors. Puritan heirs to this cheerless tradition of nay-saying had conveniently in their sights some of the more earthy and bawdy excesses of the form, such as the *Comedy of Manners*, which exploded onto the stage in 1660 with the Restoration of Charles II to the English throne after eighteen years of enforced prohibition by Cromwell’s republican regime. But they, too, sought a broader theoretical ground for urging Christian avoidance of theatre, appealing to the lexicon, for example, to establish that “play-acting” was an accepted definition of the New Testament’s *hypokrinomai/hypokrisis* (feigning or “hypocrisy”), one of the very things Jesus himself had been at pains to condemn. The silliness and partiality of such arguments mounted as a case against theatre as a whole is easy enough to see, but we should not underestimate the impact they have had on Christian sensibility over the last 450 years.

In direct response to such sweeping views (and to less clearly articulated impressions and attitudes derived from them), Harris proposes that the incarnation and theatre may actually be shown to function as paradigms of one another, inasmuch as “the idea of the Incarnation is through and through theatrical, and . . . the theatre, at its most joyous, occupies common ground with the Incarnation in its advocacy of . . . ‘the good gift of [our] humanity.’”<sup>12</sup> His angle of approach to this interlacing of the theological and the theatrical is first to consider the doctrine of revelation, both in its guise as a virtual *alter ego* of the doctrine of the incarnation itself (the enfleshed Word himself *is* the fullness of God’s self-disclosure to us) and in its more familiar linkage to the written script—the Bible—that “bears witness to God’s acts of grace” in “the theatre of [His] covenant.”<sup>13</sup> Then, in the latter chapters, Harris suggests that theatre endorses the value of the “flesh” of our creaturely space-time existence and thus resonates with the incarnation’s witness to the same as “a proper dwelling place for God and therefore for humankind.”<sup>14</sup> In what

12. Harris, *Theater and Incarnation*, viii. The cited phrase is from Karl Barth whom Harris adopts as an occasional theological interlocutor and unexpected witness for the defence throughout the book.

13. *Ibid.*, 7. Again, as it happens, the brief citation is from Barth.

14. *Ibid.*, ix.

follows, I will attend chiefly to the first of these parts, leaving numerous important and worthwhile themes for a more sustained response to the book on another occasion.

### Revealing Script, Transforming Performance

Harris traces a likeness between the modes of God's self-revealing action and the ways that theatrical texts typically become the bearers of meaning in performance. Texts, he reminds us, do not impress determinate meanings upon pliant and passive readers. Instead, as so-called reception theories of reading associated with Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauss, Stanley Fish, and others are at pains to point out, texts anticipate and solicit responses of one sort or another from those who pick them up and read them, and the meanings that arise in the process are always in part the product of what readers bring with them to texts, as well as what they find there.<sup>15</sup> Literary texts such as novels and poems are prone to higher levels of "incompleteness" in this regard than texts of some other sorts—telephone directories, tenancy agreements. They deliberately engage the reader's imagination to make a constructive contribution to the fictional worlds they generate,<sup>16</sup> suggesting rather than specifying meaning in a prescriptive way, and thus leaving themselves open to a variety of possible interpretations and imaginative elaborations. Texts, we might say, remain inert physical artefacts until, in the act of reading, they become the generative source of meanings courtesy of the dynamic process we call interpreting or, in a telling phrase, "making sense" of what is to be found on their pages.

If Harris rather underestimates the extent to which this is true of other literary works, he is nonetheless surely correct to insist that dramatic texts in particular are manifestly incomplete as works of art, providing only the verbal cues and clues for a radical transformation, which performance alone is able to provide.<sup>17</sup> Thus the playwright typically solicits rather less immediately from the imagination of the audience than a novelist does from his or her reader, calling precisely upon the mediation of the actors to "flesh out" further the world of the work and to draw

15. For a useful and relative brief overview see Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 74–90.

16. On the imaginative construction of fictional worlds and the imaginative projection of "worlds" attendant upon works of art see helpfully Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, 57–69; Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 122–50.

17. Harris, *Theater and Incarnation*, 1.

upon more than words alone in exploring, constructing, and showing possible meanings. The resulting circumstance is complex, though, and certainly does not make meaning in the theatre straightforward or easy to grasp. On the one hand, a snatch of dialogue which on the page remains potentially ambiguous is bound to have a particular construction placed upon it by its utterance now with a particular vocal inflection, and taken up into a larger, multi-layered “language” of bodily deportment, action, and movement all occurring within a carefully “staged” set of spatial and temporal relationships. Of course, all this compels us to hear and to feel the significance of the words in one particular way rather than a host of other possible ways. Of necessity, with enfleshment of the word comes particularity rather than abstraction.

And yet while a particular reader is quite likely to read the same novel as essentially “the same novel” even upon repeated revisiting, picturing characters, places, and events in substantially the same way, an individual theatergoer is far more likely to be confronted by a rich variety of different performances of the same drama by attending different productions, to the point that he or she may feel almost as though a quite different play is being staged, despite the underlying continuity represented by the script. Performance transforms text. Furthermore, while words may “come alive” for us when clothed in the flesh of an actor’s particular rendition of them, words are not the only sort of language available or at work in the theatre, and where languages of other sorts are concerned, the movement is not always identifiably in the direction of hermeneutic determinacy. In his proposal for a “theatre of cruelty,” Antonin Artaud sought to exploit to the full the power of theatre’s physicality to communicate depths of meaning that were, he held, independent of words. Western theatre as a whole was, he believed, too much in the thrall of words and those aspects of our humanity bound up identifiably with words, and had shown far too little concern for the significance of “everything . . . specifically theatrical in theatre”—the unique communicative force of music, dance, gesture, voice inflexion, architecture, lighting, décor, plastic art, and so on.<sup>18</sup> One need not subscribe to the metaphysic undergirding Artaud’s insistence on all this,<sup>19</sup> nor share his

18. Artaud, *Theatre and Its Double*, 28.

19. For an account of Artaud’s convictions concerning the primal cosmic forces (some of them very dark) to which the “body-language” or physical poetry of theatre was, he believed, naturally rather than merely conventionally wedded, see Harris, *Theater and Incarnation*, 42–44, 123–28. Cf. Artaud, *Theatre and Its Double*, 64–67.



confidence in the pre-linguistic purity (i.e., undefiled by language and its constructs) of an experiential-expressive substrate composed of such theatrical elements, in order to grant the basic point that theatre “speaks” with a voice made up of more than words alone. Indeed, some of its most dense and hermeneutically resistant utterance is to be found not in dramatic texts but precisely in what is “specifically theatrical in theatre.” It is this that can leave an audience gasping for breath and wondering at the power and the mysterious surplus of meaning that remains to be accessed, even when the most detailed critical dissection of all the available words has been carried out.

How, then, does all this bear upon an understanding of the modes and means of God’s revealing of himself? In several ways, all centered on the claim that in the incarnation of the eternal Son of the Father we have, in effect, the “performance” through enfleshing of a previously discarnate Logos or Word, and thus its transformation into something possessed of new force and depth for humankind. Let’s begin, though, with the putative analogy between theatrical script and the Scripture which the church in some sense identifies as Word of God in textual form. We can perhaps already sense the difficulties and complexities with this analogy given the above. The incarnate Word does not, after all, *perform* this script, which is instead an attempt to capture the gist of his performance after the event.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, if Scripture is to be a script for performance, then it can only be so for the church rather than Christ himself, but even this is less than satisfactory as a model once one pursues the suggestion very far.<sup>21</sup> It is of the essence of a metaphor, though, that it should not offer wholesale correspondences so much as suggestive links between two terms, being characterized precisely by high levels of difference. And here we can limit ourselves with impunity to the following suggestion ventured by Harris: if God’s own Word, in communicating himself to us most fully, does so not by a download into our inner lives of digitized ideas or purely “spiritual” data, but by taking flesh and making truth concrete and particular and “earthy,” addressed as much to our senses as to any other part of our

---

Artaud’s eventual descent into insanity counsels caution, perhaps, to those who would dismiss his claims as speculative and wholly unfounded.

20. Harris rather sidesteps the awkwardness at this point by stepping back from the issues of temporal sequence: “As a play script bears testimony to a past or future performance, so, Barth would suggest, the Bible bears witness to God’s acts of grace in ‘the theatre of his covenant.’” Harris, *Theater and Incarnation*, 7.

21. Wesley Vander Lugt pursues this further in *Living Theodrama*.

humanity, might it not be the case that the written form of God's Word (i.e., the Bible) is naturally prone to interpretation in ways which take this same "irredeemable fleshiness" seriously? That is to say, might its meanings be accessed most fully and powerfully when we read it in a manner that seeks ever to clothe it again with flesh, rather than abstracting from it principles, facts, ideas, and other more intellectually "hard-edged" bits and pieces readily systematized into bodies of doctrine, moral teaching, and the like? Our concern is for more meaning and truth to be broken out of God's Word rather than less, and perhaps also for greater intellectual humility and a willingness to acknowledge and to live with mystery where it presents itself and lies infuriatingly beyond our intellectual and imaginative reach, as that which presents itself bound up with the inherent contingencies and ambiguities of the flesh so often does.

Narrative theology insists on attending to the storied dimensions of particular biblical texts and to Scripture as a whole, considered as a single overarching narration of the character of God in his dealings with Israel and, through Israel, the whole of creation. Furthermore, narrative theology draws attention to the action and drama shot through the pages of the Bible, and by doing so has gone some way, perhaps, to rekindling an imaginative disposition towards it, reinvesting the biblical story with the "flesh" of imagined particularities rather than transmuting it instead into a series of bloodless abstractions. Ignatian spirituality, of course, has a long history of this sort of thing, encouraging the reader consciously to embellish the biblical text which is, as Auerbach reminded us long since, like most theatrical scripts, mostly "replete with background"; in other words, it is devoid of precisely the sort of detail that imagination craves and needs in order to appropriate and make sense of what is offered to it.<sup>22</sup> This is nowhere more fully the case than in the Gospels. What did Jesus look like? In what tone of voice should we imagine him having delivered a particular bit of dialogue? What was going on with body language as he spoke? And so on. Lest anyone complain that to ask and answer such questions is to go beyond the reach of what Scripture permits and to incline in the direction of a particular "construction" of the text, it suffices merely to observe that we cannot help doing so, having in our mind's eye and ear *some* version of what we read or hear read. The only question is whether we do so consciously—and thus with a self-critical awareness of other possible ways of imagining things—or permit

22. See Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar," in *Mimesis*, 3–23.

some long since sedimented and habituated way of seeing, hearing, and feeling the text to reign unchallenged as the “authorized version.”

It is this sort of thing that Harris advocates when he suggests the need for a “theatrical imagination” and a “theatrical hermeneutics.” A good piece of literary criticism carried out on a dramatic text will, he suggests, seek precisely to make good “the weakness and helplessness of the written word,” animating the text in the act of interpreting it. Likewise, the sensitive reader of Christian Scripture, as one committed to the conviction that God revealed and reveals himself most fully by taking flesh, must seek to do no less.<sup>23</sup> So, dealing with the Johannine account of Jesus’ first “sign” at Cana in Galilee and his curt “reproach” of Mary, as most commentators have tended to view it (and to seek to justify it), Harris invites us to make some adjustments to our habituated ways of reading and imagining the encounter.

Envisage Jesus turning to his mother with a grin on his face, a twinkle in his eye and a full cup of wine in his hand, and saying with good humour, “My good lady, what’s that to us? I’m not on call right now!” (This is a colloquial but fair paraphrase of the Greek). If Mary were then to laugh, looking at her son with love and full confidence in his ebullient generosity, the exchange would have an entirely different flavor and would lead more naturally into the miracle that follows.<sup>24</sup>

My point here is not to concur with Harris’s particular reading, but simply to endorse the principle on which he arrives at it. Biblical texts will often “come to life” in a wholly new way if we attend to them with the expectation born of faithfulness to a Word who is himself known only as he “takes flesh,” and an imagination primed and open to receive new meanings rather than resting content with the imagined *textus receptus*.

Replete with background, biblical texts so often cry out for the *poetic* work of imaginative construction and reconstruction, lending themselves, in an “incompleteness” directly analogous to that of the theatrical script, to a variety of different possible “performances,” more than one of which may well be wholly fitting and appropriate for particular readers on particular occasions. The idea that a biblical text has a single authoritative meaning that must trump all others seems to me to be born of a reductionist mindset, which fails to celebrate the richness and depth

23. Harris, *Theater and Incarnation*, 12. The citation is appropriated from R. E. Palmer.

24. *Ibid.*, 25.

of meaning invested by God through the imaginative labors of authors and readers alike. If more than one interpretation can be shown to be a legitimate possibility when a text is situated in its canonical context, and when other relevant critical considerations have been taken on board, it seems more faithful to the text's presumed authority to hold each of them in tension with the others rather than presuming to elevate one of them. After all, the acknowledgment that several different ways of "playing" *King Lear* or *Measure for Measure* are possible and equally rich in their exploration of the territories of human meaning does not lead inexorably into the quagmire of critical relativism. It is still perfectly possible to prefer one "reading" of these plays to others (and to articulate persuasive grounds for doing so) and, more to the point, to make the judgment (if relevant) that a particular rendition is not just "different," but badly done or unfaithful to the relevant traditions of performance.

### Gesturing towards the Stage

Where Harris leaves us, on this particular issue at least, is facing the persuasive suggestion that an approach to biblical texts armed with a "theatrical imagination" sensitive to and able to summon into the mind's "eye" the sensory richness of action staged in real time and space, is likely to do fuller justice to these texts as a means of God's continual address to us than the more purely "literary" approach to which we are accustomed. But why stop here? Might one not go further and suggest that, whereas in the Temple and the synagogue it may have sufficed perfectly well for the divine Word to be read aloud and made concrete within the mind's eye of its more imaginative hearers, in the congregation of those whose faith is in *the Word made flesh*, a different liturgical possibility presents itself for consideration? If, as Harris insists throughout his book, the divine Word presents itself most fully not as text or utterance but in the flesh and blood realities of an embodied existence, surely we ought to consider whether a natural and proper mode of the rehearsal and interpretation of this same Word in its form as Scripture might lie in actual embodied performances of those portions of the biblical text that lend themselves naturally to it. In other words, instead of just reading portions of text aloud and letting them hang in the air, why not act them out in the midst of our worship, granting them (albeit temporarily) a particular lodging within the dynamics of time and space, specific "body language"

and inflection of voice. What I have in mind would be rather different from the way Christian drama “sketches” are occasionally deployed in church merely to “illustrate” a text already read (and probably soon to be interpreted in a torrent of words from the pulpit). Instead, it would itself be a primary mode of the Word’s careful reiteration and re-presentation in the congregation gathered around it, with all the semantic force of that “flesh” that Christian faith holds to be the Word’s most natural and fulsome abode. We ought not to expect any sermon subsequently to be able to distil the meaning of such performance satisfactorily into words for us. To expect or desire this would be indeed to miss the point, that the meaning would be cast in the “language” of a particular embodied performance itself, existing at many levels to which words alone cannot aspire to take us. Something along these lines seems to be the natural conclusion of the case Harris begins to build with regard to a distinctly Christian hermeneutic, though he does not himself drive it home.

Of course, such a suggestion raises all manner of challenging hermeneutical considerations, but most if not all of them seem simply to be sharper versions of issues arising already in the treatment of the biblical text as “text” to be read and heard. That the issues of meaning and interpretation present themselves more forcefully and vividly in relation to embodied performance seems to be an argument *for* rather than *against* the idea, potentially driving us further and deeper into the semantic surplus of the texts as we grapple with them together. More theorizing and down-to-earth practical reflection would obviously be needed before moving to act on such a suggestion, and there is not scope for that here. But it seems worthwhile, in a volume of this sort, at least to air a thought that, while it goes identifiably beyond *Theater and Incarnation*, seems to be entirely consonant with its vision and to build on the basic theological and theatrical insights its author so helpfully brings into conversation.

## Bibliography

- Artaud, Antonin. *Theatre and Its Double*. Translated by Victor Corti. London: Calder, 1993.
- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953.
- Barish, Jones. *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.

- Bratsiotis, N. P. "bāsār." In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, 2:317–32. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975.
- Collingwood, R. G. *The Principles of Art*. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.
- Dragas, George. *Athanasiana: Essays in the Theology of St. Athanasius*. London: n.p., 1980.
- . *St. Athanasius Contra Apollinarem*. Athens: Church and Theology, 1985.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983.
- Edelman, Joshua. "Can an Act be True? The Possibilities of the Dramatic Metaphor for Theology within a Post-Stanislvskian Theatre." In *Faithful Performances: Enacting Christian Tradition*, edited by Trevor Hart and Steven R. Guthrie, 51–72. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007.
- Harris, Max. *Theater and Incarnation*. 1990. Reprint. Eerdmans, 2005.
- Hart, Trevor. *Making Good: Creation, Creativity and Artistry*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014.
- . "Through the Arts: Hearing, Seeing and Touching the Truth." In *Beholding the Glory*, edited by Jeremy S. Begbie, 1–26. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000.
- Lewis, Alan E. "Kenosis and Kerygma: The Realism and the Risk of Preaching." In *Christ in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World*, edited by Trevor Hart and Daniel Thimell, 70–91. Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1989.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Screwtape Letters*. London: Bles, 1941.
- Sayers, Dorothy L. *The Mind of the Maker*. London: Methuen, 1941.
- . "Towards a Christian Aesthetic." In *Our Culture: Its Christian Roots and Present Crisis*, edited by V. A. Demant, 50–69. London: SPCK, 1947.
- Schweizer, E., and R. Meyer. "sarx." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel, 7:98–151. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971.
- Vander Lugt, Wesley. *Living Theodrama: Reimagining Theological Ethics*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2014.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005.
- Walton, Kendall. *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic*. Reprint. Carlisle, UK: Solway, 1997.