

“Hell is Other People”:
Exploring the Audience-Actor Relationship
in Hell House Performances

by

Lily Haje
Class of 2013

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in Theater

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	2
WELCOME TO HELL HOUSE: AN INTRODUCTION	
Impressions.....	3
How I Got to Hell House.....	6
Defining My Terms and Scope.....	8
“DID YOU KNOW THIS WAS HAPPENING IN AMERICA?”	
An Overview of the Traditional Hell House.....	10
A Brief History.....	12
The Hell House Today.....	16
Les Frères Corbusier and Secular Representation.....	17
THEORETICAL BLUEPRINTS FOR PERFORMANCE	
The Particularities of the Hell House Performative Model.....	21
The Theatre of Cruelty, The Theatre of Evangelicals.....	25
Audience Reception and the Autopoietic Feedback Loop.....	29
CONCLUSION	
Performing Persecution.....	35
APPENDIX: FIRE + BONE.....	
	37
WORKS CITED.....	56

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks are due to the following people, without whom this project would not have been possible:

To my mentor, Professor Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento, for your support on all things theatrical, intellectual, and sometimes medical. I am endlessly grateful for all that you have taught me and the long, late hours you put in to help with this essay and with FIRE + BONE.

To the entire Theater Department for guiding, challenging, and trusting me over the last four years.

To Professors Yuri Kordonsky and Ron Jenkins for preparing me for this project.

To Kris McQueeney for somehow making the logistics of FIRE + BONE work, and for giving me chocolate when I most needed it.

To the Religion Department and my advisor, Ron Cameron. Without you I would have no subject matter.

To the cast and crew of FIRE + BONE for bringing my vision to life and warming up a cold house. I am amazed by all of you.

To the Core Company at Orchard Project for your willingness to spend hours reading martyrdom confessionals, and your sense to make me stop, for late night swimming and letting me play with you.

To my fellow thesis writers, may we never see the inside of the Fishbowl again.

To my friends and Wesleyan family—especially Zach for keeping me sane and The Wolf Pack (Dahlia, Bobby, Jordan, Sara) for going crazy with me.

To my parents for your limitless love and support, for giving me my worldview and letting me challenge it, for embracing what I do, and for everything else.

To Robert Duke, Mimi Stauber, and Tim Brownell for making me love theater in the first place.

WELCOME TO HELL HOUSE: AN INTRODUCTION

Impressions

You are standing in line with hundreds of people—some drunk, some very sober, many teenaged. Everywhere there is noise. It comes from the ticket booth, the food stands, and the bumping, bustling crowd that surrounds you. At last, you reach the front of the line. You are loaded onto the flatbed of a pickup truck—it is a lot like a hayride—and driven into the darkness, away from the crowd.

The truck stops outside a large structure and you are led inside. A figure in a long black robe and the distorted, garish mask of a demon awaits. He is your guide, both frightening and protective giving instructions and cackling ghoulishly. He leads you into a classroom where students sit in rows of desks, smiling and chatting in rows, except one boy, in black, alone in the back of the classroom, a demon hovering over his shoulder. The teacher calls him to the front of the class. Students mock him as he fumbles through a presentation. The devil tells him he knows what to do. He leans down. Get a gun from his backpack. Everyone screams. He points the gun to his head and shoots. BANG, the lights turn red. Two more demons appear and drag the boy's body toward a trap door. He screams for help, but no one hears him. He disappears.

Your guide pushes you forward through a door. Suddenly, you are in the middle of a rave. A girl stands awkwardly, alone. Some boys approach her. They offer her drugs, which she accepts. They dance. Your guide pushes you forward once again. You are now in a teenaged girl's bedroom. There are stuffed animals, posters, a pink bedspread, and on the nightstand, a framed picture of Jesus. The

girl from the rave enters the room crying. She is followed by a demon. The demon mocks her, asking if she will report the rape, reminding her that she doesn't remember it; she doesn't even remember how many men there were. Anyway, she should be used to it, after what her father used to do to her. The demon looms over her as she picks up the picture of Jesus. What did her God ever do for her? Wouldn't it be easier to end her suffering? The girl throws the picture on the ground. The glass cracks. She reaches into the nightstand and pulls out a razor blade. The crowd gasps and covers their eyes. Violently she slits her wrists. Instantly, she is dead. The demon drags her off to Hell.

Next room. A man lies in a hospital bed, dying of AIDS. His female friend leans over him, begging him to accept Jesus before it is too late. He refuses. God made him gay—it was not his choice. There is a flurry of activity among the doctors and nurses as a girl is brought in screaming on a gurney. She has taken the abortion pill; her pants and the bed are completely soaked in blood. A doctor begins to remove the mutilated fetus, plopping bloody pieces of meat into a container. The woman next to you faints and must be escorted outside. In his final moments, the gay man refuses Christ and the hovering demons step forward. In her final moments, the pregnant girl cries out for God. In a puff of smoke, an angel, a teenager in a bright white robe, appears and put a protective arm over the girl. The demons cannot have her.

You move on to the next scene. There is family violence, occult sacrifice, and a giant drunk driving accident. Finally you arrive in a dark room. The familiar faces of dead teenagers greet you as they wait outside two gold foil-covered doors.

The doors open, light floods the room, and a voice echoes through the space. This is God. One of the actors steps forward. She had been a good Christian in life and she may step through the doors into heaven. The rest are not so lucky. God tells them that they had many opportunities to accept him in life and chose not to. The doors swing shut as the dead scream. Another door opens and you all pass through it.

The air is thick with smoke; the space cast in a dark red light. Heavy metal pounds in your ears. From the walkway upon which you stand, you can see down into a pit. Beneath sheets of glass, the sinners struggle for escape. Others are tied up, hanging in the air, begging for help. Demons, their black and white faces stark against the red light, stand around them, laughing and torturing them. Welcome to hell. The lead devil looks towards you. His voice is distorted. Laughing, he tells you that you are all his now. Not so fast: another door opens. An angel appears, backlit in a white robe, as choral music replaces the dissonant noise. You still have a choice to make.

You move into the next room. It is the opposite of what you have just left. Gone are the special effects of hell, replaced with a bare, well-lit room. You are crowded in with your fellow audience members, looking at a space stripped of all the expected trappings of a theatrical event. A plainclothes minister stands before. It is decision time. Having experienced sin and hell, are you ready to dedicate, or rededicate, yourself to Jesus Christ? If you are, there are a whole bunch of good Christians waiting to pray with you, just on the other side of that opposite door.

You have to choose now though—there is another group coming along right behind you. 5-4-3-2-1-1

How I Got to Hell House

I first confronted the Hell House in a class in the Wesleyan Religion Department and studied its production as an anthropological oddity rather than a theatrical event. The topic of conversation leaned towards the offensive content of the performance texts, rather than the aesthetics of the productions. Hell Houses were the perfect example of how fanatical, militant, and “problematic” America’s religious right had become.

Growing up in liberal family in a liberal city, I had very little exposure to the culture and aesthetic of American Red States. Christian practices, never mind Evangelicalism, was something that happened elsewhere. That, of course, was not true—my so-called secular worldview stemmed from the same Western Christian roots that birthed the likes of Jerry Falwell and the Westboro Baptist Church.² Yet, that world seemed completely foreign to me. Coming of age during the Bush-era gave me a fragmented image of America. First and foremost, I was a New Yorker, bonded with other coastal dwellers in trying to claim some kind of American identity. In between the coasts were the Red States, The Bible Belt, Flyover Country, or whatever brush-off term was currently popular. The heart of the country was utterly foreign to me and its citizens stood to be the nearby other that ought to be most ridiculed and feared.

¹ *Hell House*, DVD, directed by George Ratliff (2003: Mixed Greens Media).

² Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003)

Inevitably, my understanding of the United States and the world came to change. As I studied Christianity and theory of religion, my scorn for believers faded away. I learned to confront individual arguments, sift my way through disparate ideologies and practices, and engage with worldviews different from my own. Even now though, the fanatical and conservative American Christian right remains a mystery to me. The hate-filled rhetoric and moralizing of Westboro Baptist and its fellow organizations is an obstacle to my critical understanding. When studying religion, one is taught that when sympathy is impossible there must still be an effort to understand the subject and its ideologies. From within my worldview, the strict morality and militant proselytizing of certain evangelical groups remains incomprehensible. As a student of theater and religion, I see the evangelical Hell House as the perfect example of an ideology that I cannot wrap my head around. This ambivalence about the foundation and purpose of this kind of Hell House makes the evangelical production a perfect site for my discussion on audience reception and the creation of the shared theatrical event.

It was out of this ambivalence that I started to explore the world of Hell Houses. Out of the sea of information about the productions launched by countless church groups across the country, several facts became clear: Hell Houses reify the bounded communities that create them³; they can deeply offend believers and non-believers alike; and to many, they are fascinating

³ John Fletcher, "Tasteless as Hell: Community Performance, Distinction, and Countertaste in Hell House." *Theatre Survey* 48, no. 02 (2007): 324

theologically, politically, and theatrically.⁴ Among those intrigued by the Hell House were secular theater companies and communities, which led to a several secular stagings of Hell Houses, some satirical and some sincere.

While these secular artists could accurately and thoroughly recreate the semiotics of an evangelical Hell House performance, they could never affect the same experience. This is because their very act of not believing changed their output and their relationship to the audience, just as their audience's overall lack of faith altered their response. The identities of both performer and spectator, as well as their perceptions of each other in performance, ultimately affect the ritualization of performance as much, if not more, than the content of the performance itself.

Defining My Terms and Scope

I should preface my discussion of the religious and theatrical performances of Hell Houses by acknowledging that there is no single definition for either theater or ritual, especially given the inherent overlap between the two fields— theater has roots in ritual, while ritual is always theatrical. Yet, a scholarly analysis that aims at intellectual progress should depart from each term's definition and a discussion of how ritual and theater meet and differ.

Theater is an art form based in live performance, often though not always scripted, requiring the presence of at least one actor and one audience member in the same space and time. On the other hand, theater is perhaps most easily

⁴ Ann Pellegrini, "Signaling Through the Flames": Hell House Performance and Structures of Religious Feeling ." *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (9 2007): 920

defined by what it is not—it is not dance, music, fine art, performance art, or a religious rite, though it may take from any of those disciplines and practices. In *Drama, Stage, and Audience* J.L. Styan states, “Drama has its own discipline, one which is not an extension of ... literature. While it borrows from a dozen other arts, it owes allegiance to none.”⁵ Theater itself is live, differing from other art forms in its requirement for a lived, social experience:

“The pivotal point of these processes is no longer the work of art, detached from and independent of its creator and recipient, which arises as an object from the activities of the creator-subject and is entrusted to the perception and interpretation of the recipient-subject. Instead, we are dealing with an event, set in motion and terminated by the actions of all the subjects involved – artists and spectators.”⁶

Like theater, ritual is an event. In this case, however, the semiotic text—the sacred symbols and corresponding actions of the rite—support the construction of a link between individual and world through bodily repetition.⁷ In *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, Ronald L. Grimes uses Clifford Geertz’s idea of the “model of” and “model for” to define ritual as both the expression of preexisting rites and the process through which such rites are learned.⁸ Geertz defines religion as both a “model of” and a “model for” reality in his influential essay “Religion as a Cultural System.”⁹ Religion, and by extension its rituals, provide

⁵ J.L. Styan, *Drama, Stage, and Audience* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 5

⁶ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A new aesthetics*. (London: Routledge, 2008), 22

⁷ Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 42-3

⁸ *ibid*, 60

⁹ Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," In *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton, 1-43 (London: Routledge, 1966), 7

its practitioners with a blueprint of how the world should work while also showing how the world has worked. Each symbol that makes up the “pattern of meaning” for a society is created out of an understood reality and then goes on to order perceptions of reality.¹⁰ Remembered or constructed narratives provide instruction for future action. Though Geertz writes specifically about religion and religious ritual, his terms can be applied to other forms of ritual—for example, secular rituals also seek to instill an emotional response and create or reify the desire for intended action.

In this essay, I discuss the Hell House as a work of theater rather than Hell House as a religious ritual. There are certainly elements of ritualization that affect the performance of Hell Houses, but I will be focusing of the aesthetics of the Hell House as a performance, rather than as a religious rite. As such, the theories with which I am working focus on the performative, and my exploration is based in form rather than ideological content.

“DID YOU KNOW THIS WAS HAPPENING IN AMERICA?”¹¹

An Overview Of The Traditional Hell House

Hell Houses are an evangelical Christian response to Halloween’s haunted houses. They are designed to scare visitors not with monsters, but with scenes about sinful acts and thus prompt spectators’ conversion or rededication to

¹⁰ *ibid*, 3

¹¹ personal interview with Alex Timbers in: David Savran, “Liberte, Fraternite, Corbusier!: An Interview with Alex Timbers,” *TDR: The Drama Review*, 2010: 50

Christianity. While Hell House productions are often elaborate, the premise and structure of these events are rather straightforward.

In a typical Hell House, a demonic guide leads small groups of audience members through a maze of rooms while offering gleefully cruel commentary. In each room there is the performance of a different story of sin against God; the subjects of each story range from rape, abortion, gay marriage and extra-marital sex to drug abuse, domestic violence, and suicide. The underlying thread is that the sinful acts are always connected to the doubting or denouncing of Christ. In each story, the sinner invariably dies and at the end of the scene demons immediately appear to drag the character off to Hell. After making their way through these rooms, the audience members arrive in Hell. Here, the familiar faces of the actors playing “Rape Guy” or “Suicide Girl”, along with many others, are seen suffering for all eternity.

It is at this moment in a Hell House performance that the audience is asked to accept Jesus as their Savior so that they may pass into heaven and on to the area where church members wait to pray with them. If they decline, they must leave the Hell House. The final scene of a Hell House performance varies from one production to another—in some an actor playing Jesus may swoop in and lead the audience to heaven, in others the audience may witness Christ bleeding on the cross, while in others still, the theatrical elements are stripped away.¹²

¹² Ratliff, *Hell House*

A Brief History

Conceptually, the Hell House draws upon the aesthetics of the haunted house, Halloween, and horror films, as well as the traditions of religious performance and the theatricality of the American evangelical movement. Though the full lineage of the Hell House is complicated to trace, it is easy to locate its direct predecessor: in 1972, Jerry Falwell hosted a “Scaremare” at Thomas Road Baptist Church.¹³ Scaremare, which continues today, leads the audience through a house of destruction that features depictions of gruesome plane crashes, mutilated corpses, and lots of blood. The experience of the Scaremare house is not specifically religious, nor does it engage with the ideas of sin or salvation. However, when one leaves, one is asked to accept Jesus. The goal of Scaremare is somewhat different from that of the Hell Houses discussed here, which seek to convert visitors in the moment. Scaremare is in large part a moneymaking operation, designed to take “harvest time back from the devil.”¹⁴ Regardless, it was out of this initial desire to reclaim Halloween for Christianity that the Hell Houses I discuss in this essay developed into something more specifically concerned with Heaven, Hell, and the salvation of the soul.

While the relationship between Christianity and theatricality has a long historical tradition, there is one historical reference in particular that can help us better understand the ongoing, present impetus for Christian moralizing theater. Commonly used as the key example or starting point for Christian theater, the

¹³ Liberty University, *Scaremare*, 2013, <http://www.liberty.edu/scaremare/>

¹⁴ Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4

mystery play cycles of England, and specifically in York, prove an interesting counterpoint to the Hell Houses of today. Performed as a part of Corpus Christi celebrations, those mystery play cycles told the biblical story from Creation to Judgment Day in a series of short plays performed by the town's craft guilds.¹⁵ Corpus Christi is a feast day that became the Christian midsummer celebration, in much the same way that the Hell House provides a Christian alternative to Halloween festivities. Mystery plays became the major highlight of Corpus Christi's celebration, often taking over twelve hours to be performed in totality.¹⁶

The cycle was made out of a series of short plays, each performed by a different craft guild on a wagon that moved through the town "halting at a series of 'stations' at which audiences had assembled, a performance of each play being given at each station."¹⁷ Though this structure is opposite to that of a Hell House—in which one audience leaves a room as another group enters it—the dramatic effect is similar. In mystery cycles each wagon brings a completely new stage picture to a small section of a larger collective audience, just as a small groups of audience shuffle through each room of the Hell House. The audience members are able to get close to the performers, individualizing their own experiences as the actors engage directly with "the spectators at their feet."¹⁸

Just as in a Hell House performance, the staging of mystery play cycles created an individual reception of the material while also turning the audience

¹⁵ Richard Beadle, "Introduction," in *York Mystery Plays: A Selection in Modern Spelling*, ed. Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King, ix-xxx (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), x

¹⁶ *ibid*, vxii

¹⁷ *ibid*, xxvi

¹⁸ Styan, 113-4

into a collective witnesses: “The proximity of players and audience meant that although the latter could not influence the course of events, they were none the less implicated to bear witness.”¹⁹ As a small group present for a particular performance, an audience shared a particular knowledge—both of the biblical story and of the performers’ work—and carried it with them long after the event ended. Just as most spectators at a Hell House already know what is considered sinful, the audience members at a mystery play were familiar with the biblical stories and found community in the retelling of that information. Of course, the goal of both these forms of theater is not only to create bond, but also to instill virtuous, religious feeling.

Such response is not accomplished through Bible stories and moving wagons alone, but rather through the phenomenological product received by the audience. Just as the evangelical Hell House mixes the intensity of what is imagined to be an actual “bloody abortion” with demon guides in outlandish masks, medieval mystery plays explored scale and style. J. L. Styan describes the latter experience as “spectacle with simplicity, symbolism with realism, grandeur with familiarity.”²⁰ For example, in one moment an actor might lean down and engage directly and naturally with an audience member, while in the next God might descend on to the wagon platform.²¹

The similarities between the two forms of performance extend to design choices: in a Hell House the actors playing demons wear ghoulish masks, and in

¹⁹ Beadle, “Introduction,” xxv

²⁰ Styan, 113-4

²¹ Beadle, “Introduction,” xx

the mystery plays all the supernatural characters did too. In the mystery plays, all the actors playing God, angels, or devils “had their facial features concealed, either by mask or visor, or by full face-painting.” The color of the mask indicated the character’s virtuosity or lack thereof—“gold for God, red for angels...black masks or head-pieces for devils, demons, and the damned souls in Hell.”²² The design choice of masking supernatural characters works not only to distance and heighten the presence of the divine, but also to give the audience specific and concrete images to relate to: as a medieval spectator, you would be prompted to choose if you would rather wear “the radiant masks of the saved or the tormented masks of the damned”?²³ Similarly, present day Hell House visitors are asked to choose a side—they can either accept Jesus and go to Heaven or join those suffering in Hell.

There is another way in which medieval mystery plays and today’s Hell Houses are remarkably similar. In the case of ambitious evangelical Hell Houses, much of the year goes in to planning and producing for each October. Money is made, but money is also spent, and the whole Church community has to rally around the cause. This was also true in medieval York, where “the cycle was an immense undertaking for the city, both financially and in terms of the manpower required to mount it.”²⁴ Though the onus for financially supporting the performance has shifted from government to church, the responsibility of

²² Richard Beadle, "Masks Mimes and Miracles: Medieval English Theatricality and its Illusions," in *From Script to Stage in Early Modern England*, ed. Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel, 32-42 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 34

²³ *ibid*, 37

²⁴ Beadle, "Introduction", ix

reifying religious sentiment and strengthening the Christian community that could thrive throughout the calendar year remains true to date.

The Hell House Today

In its current form, the Hell House became prominent in the popular consciousness in the late 1990s and early 2000s.²⁵ Such increase in awareness and popularity is largely the result of the work of two Evangelical groups: Reverend Keenan Roberts from the New Destiny Church of Colorado; and the Trinity Assemblies of God Church in Cedar Hill, TX. Roberts is generally credited with having created the Hell House in its current form and he certainly developed it as a marketable good with the creation of the “Hell House Outreach Kit.” Roberts’ website publicizes the kit—which includes not only a script (and extra scenes for additional fees), but also instructions for how to handle the media, a CD of prerecorded special effects, and advice on set construction, costumes, and props, complete with a video that details what the kit’s final product should look like.²⁶ In the kit, Roberts claims a “33% salvation and rededication decision rate.” Though available for purchase by anyone, it is clear from the website that Roberts’ target market is other churches and Christian groups. For Roberts, Hell Houses are not just about creating an alternative to haunted houses or entertaining an audience, but a matter of life and death:

“Through the vehicle of drama, [the Hell House] vividly communicates to all witnesses that there is a spiritual battle

²⁵ Pellegrini, 913

²⁶ New Destiny Christian Center of the Assemblies of God, *The Hell House Outreach Kit*, 2005, http://www.godestiny.org/hell_house/HH_kit.cfm

raging each day that they live. That battle is for the eternal destiny of their souls, and if they choose to follow the world's pathway of sin, the results will be a very real hell on earth as well as an eternal hell. Sin and rejection of God's truth always bring devastation and destruction."²⁷

The second aforementioned popular Hell House is the one presented annually by the Assemblies of God Church in Cedar Hill. The church originally gained notoriety for including a scene based on the Columbine shooting shortly after the incident, prompting George Ratliff to make the church the subject of his acclaimed documentary, *Hell House*. Ratliff's documentary, which provides most of the descriptive information on Hell Houses in this paper, follows the congregation of Cedar Hill from their original script writing meetings through the closing night of the production, and includes interviews with both creators and audience members. The Cedar Hill congregation attracts an enormous crowd of believers and non-believers to their Hell House annually, claiming that over 15,000 of the 75,000 visitors it attracts each year choose to dedicate themselves to Jesus.²⁸

Les Frères Corbusier And Secular Representation

As previously noted, Reverend Keenan Roberts' Hell House Kit is available for purchase by anyone, not just church groups. In 2006, New York-based experimental and decidedly secular theater group Les Frères Corbusier acquired the rights to perform Roberts' Hell House at St. Ann's Warehouse, a

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Ratliff, *Hell House*, 1:06:11-1:06:26

theater venue in DUMBO Brooklyn. Directed by the company's artistic director Alex Timbers, Les Frères Corbusier presented the script as stipulated by the kit, without changing the text or adding commentary, and in the same gory style as an evangelical Hell House. Yet, their performance became a critique of the evangelical Hell Houses and their practitioners.²⁹ What I wish to underscore here is that even as the content of the performance stayed the same, the spatial context and the relationships between actor, audience, and content fundamentally changed.

The single greatest point of distinction between the evangelical Hell House and Les Frères Corbusier's production lies in the intentions of each group of performers and the audience's awareness of that intention. While the evangelical Hell House tries to convert non-believers, Timbers' production sought to educate its spectators. As stated in the program, "This authentic depiction of a Hell House is meant to educate and inform about a particular religious movement, not to endorse any specific ideology."³⁰ Rather than representing sin and the evangelical battle for souls, this production presented a representation of the performance. One reviewer went to far as to describe it as such: "The performers play evangelical church members who are themselves playing demons and sinners as straightly as possible."³¹ The audience was two steps removed from the narrative content of the evangelical Hell House: the

²⁹ Ben Brantley, "A Guided Tour of Hell, With an Appearance by Satan," *The New York Times*, October 14, 2006

³⁰ *Hell House* program, as cited by Pellegrini, 927

³¹ James M. Cherry, "[Review] Hell House. By Keenan Roberts. Directed by Alex Timbers. Les Freres Corbusier. St. Ann's Warehouse, New York City. 24 October 2006." *Theatre Journal* (The Johns Hopkins University Press: 2007), 518

fictive stories of the evangelical script were played within the fictive world of a Hell House performance. It became a performance about performing the evangelical Hell House. The New York audience safely watched secular performers enact religious belief as they staged the stories of the Hell House.

What is key to my analysis is that the audience could recognize that Les Frères Corbusier's performance was a depiction of a Hell House, and not a "real" one. For the creators themselves, the challenge was to follow the original Hell House as closely as possible. The only element of the Hell House kit that was intentionally not present in their production was the prayer room at the end of the performance because they considered its inclusion "inappropriate and disrespectful,"³² Though Les Frères Corbusier openly acknowledge that they are not evangelicals and believe the Hell House to be a "theatre of hate," the company's goal was to create an experience open to the individual interpretation of the audience. As Timbers states:

Ultimately, if you went in wanting to see irony, it was an irony fest. If you went in wanting sincerity, it was sincere. There were these drunk bachelorette girls who thought it was hilarious, and Ugg-wearing hipsters who thought it was really ironic, and 50-year-old Latino men who were, like, weeping, because they were evangelicals. It was a Rorschach test.³³

For Rev. Keenan Roberts, who attended the production, the flaw in the performance "was not that it lacked sincerity, but that it needed more 'intensity.'"³⁴ It is not simply that the audience was aware that Les Frères

³² interview with Timbers, Savran, 50

³³ interview with Timber, Savran, 50-1

³⁴ Pellegrini, 930

Corbusier's performers were playing a religious fervor that they did not have, but it was also the case that their performances were not rooted in the urgency of religious fervor. Of course, lacking an evangelical worldview does not mean that an actor cannot convince the audience otherwise, nor does it mean that an actor cannot deliver an "intense" performance. It does, however, alter the output the audience receives in some way or another. That difference in performance, paired with the audience's expectation of that difference, affects the course of the theatrical event.

In the case of the religious version of the Hell House performance, the goal is to save souls by instilling the fear of God into the audience. This objective is accomplished by pushing the audience to confront the very "real" worlds of hell and heaven as proofs of an ongoing battle for the salvation of souls. For evangelical actors, what one sees at a Hell Houses is the representation of what actually exists around us, albeit unseen. As Anne Pellegrini puts in in her discussion of the methodology of these evangelical performances, the Hell House differs from the haunted house because its subject matter is revealed to be factual instead of fictive: "the devil is neither allegory nor projection of the unconscious; he is real and he is coming for you."³⁵

For the believers engaged in a production of the evangelical Hell House, this sentiment goes a step further: not only are the supernatural forces depicted in the Hell House real, they are active in the theatrical process. As one of the Cedar Hill participants stated, "We can only portray so much with make up and

³⁵ Pellegrini, 915

corny lines and soundtrack, but God does the difference.”³⁶ In short, evangelical stagings of Hell Houses create a space in which participants hope God may intercede and do His work while and even if demons actually surround spectators and players alike.

Les Frères Corbusier’s production, presented by non-believers to a largely non-believing audience, subverted the original evangelizing message and revealed the absurdities of the Hell House narrative. If it created any fear, it was one of Christian evangelism and not of a vengeful God. That said, a ritual was still in operation. Both actors and audience members agreed to engage with the Hell House’s new proposed reality for the duration of the piece. New York spectators did not storm out if or when offended by the production’s proselytizing content and instead commonly took on the role of the evangelical believers. Similarly, the actors playing a demon or school shooter did not approach these roles with irony, but attempted to recreate the sincere performance of the fearful Christian.³⁷

THEORETICAL BLUEPRINTS FOR PERFORMANCE

The Particularities Of The Hell House Performative Model

A key facet of the Hell House is that it is inspired by and follows the model of a standard Halloween haunted house. This parallel has two implications for all Hell Houses, regardless of the intentions or beliefs of the creators: the goal of the Hell House is to scare and/or entertain the audience through a gory and frightful

³⁶ Ratliff, *Hell House*

³⁷ Brantley

aesthetic; and the audience is placed directly into the Hell House, sharing the space with the performers. This makes the Hell House a piece of immersive theater, the scholarly term for theatrical productions in which the audience is inserted into the world of the performance. This insertion allows the audience to not only observe the character, but also experience the conditions of the play's world firsthand.³⁸

For Hans-Thies Lehmann, there are three specific manners in which this model of performance affects the audience's reception of the work. First, immersive theater operates as an "event" in which each audience member "can no longer simply 'face' the perceived" but must engage with the performance directly, inhabiting and exploring a shared space with the actors.³⁹ Such an approach creates an experience "that does not match the experience of others."⁴⁰ This assessment means that each viewer's response to the Hell House will be different not only because of the identity and worldview that each brings into the space, but also because of the choices her or she is free to make during the performance. This freedom during the performance heightens the importance of individual agency and responsibility, which are, of course, at the foundation of the Protestant faith out of which Hell Houses were born.

In addition to referring to immersive theater performances as events, Lehmann posits that they constitute a "shared space" in which "the spectator

³⁸Myrto Koumarios and Cassandra Silver, "Dashing at a Nightmare: Haunting Macbeth in Sleep No More," *TDR*, Spring 2013: 168-9

³⁹ Rosemary Shevlin Weiss, "[Review] The Sleep of Reason," *Theatre Journal* (The Johns Hopkins University Press), December 1987: 519

⁴⁰ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 106

cannot help but become a ‘participant’ for the other visitors.”⁴¹ By entering the space, one agrees both to observe and be observed by others; he or she is not only witnessing the performance, but is also being witnessed by others.⁴² Rather than being a part of an anonymous seated mass, the individual self is publicly active in and acted upon by the performance. In the position of participating as actor and spectator simultaneously, one becomes hyper-aware of one’s own body, movements, and responses, as well as those of the group. If the intention of the evangelical Hell House is to convert or prompt rededication to Jesus, creating this heightened awareness in the audience is essential to the creation of a communal context that invites for public declarations of faith. Like religious conversion, immersive theater becomes a series of public actions, at times more communal or personal but always under the scrutiny of others. In the Les Frères Corbusier Hell House, the audience still witnessed to each other’s presence, but in this case they shared an outsider’s identity. The audience was made more clearly foreign to the world of the Hell House through their physical proximity to the action.

The third category of performance described by Lehmann that is applicable to my analysis of Hell Houses is that of “site-specific” theater. According to Lehmann, site-specific theater takes place in preexisting non-theatrical spaces (“a factory floor, an electric power station or a junkyard”) that then become active participants in the work.⁴³ This is not generally the case for

⁴¹ *ibid*, 123

⁴² Pellegrini, 918

⁴³ Lehmann, 152

Hell Houses: oftentimes the architectural structure in which the Hell House is performed is erected temporarily and for that purpose, so it does carry another layer of preexisting context into the performance.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, a Hell House accomplishes many of the same effects as traditionally site-specific theater. The Hell House does not generate in its audience or performers the expectations usually associated with a traditional theatrical venue. Lehmann states that, “What is mainly staged through site-specific theatre is also a level of *commonality* between performers and spectators. All of them are *guests of the same place*.”⁴⁵ This is true of Hell Houses staged in new or preexisting structures because the performative space is foreign to both actor and spectator—neither is transgressing into the other’s space, be that the stage or the audience. The ephemeral and extra-daily nature of the Hell House’s architectural structure make spectators and performers members of the same community. Because the space is equally new and/or familiar to both, the audience becomes an ally or peer of the actor and the role the actor is playing.

Conversely, when Timbers stage his Hell House at St. Ann’s, he chose to use an actual theater for the performative space. Though the venue was transformed into a series of rooms, the audience nevertheless understood the kind of space they were entering and, as a result, the nature of the experience they were going to have. The rules and rituals of attending the theater applied,

⁴⁴ The Hell House kit includes building instructions and the building is shown in *Hell House*

⁴⁵ Lehmann, 152

which helped frame the offensive content as a removed fiction that could be enjoyed as ridiculous.

The Theatre Of Cruelty, The Theatre Of Evangelicals

In 1938, Antonin Artaud published *Theatre and its Double*. Within this collection of essays, Artaud laid out his vision for a Theatre of Cruelty, calling for a drastic overhaul of the modern drama of his day, in favor of an austere, challenging, imagistic aesthetic, closer to what he imagined to be the realm of ancient ritual than theater based on dramatic texts. For Artaud, this cruelty did not necessarily refer to violence or pain. Instead, his definition of cruelty meant “strictness, diligence, unrelenting decisiveness, irreversible and absolute determination.”⁴⁶ In his two manifestos and several letters on the Theatre of Cruelty, Artaud breaks down the elements of his vision for performance, suggesting the use of giant puppets and spectacular lighting to create a highly experiential and kinesthetic event for the collective audience.

While the Hell House and the Theatre of Cruelty may be radically different in tone and intention, many of the key aspects Artaud underscored in his writings apply to and can help us better understand the theatricality and effectiveness of the evangelical Hell House. Both forms of performance try to put their audiences into “a deeper, subtler state of perception” through which spectators undergo an emotional, rather than intellectual, impact.⁴⁷ Though Artaud does not share the evangelicals’ desire to use this state to prompt

⁴⁶ Antonin Artaud, *Collected Works 4* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1974), 77

⁴⁷ *ibid*, 70

conversion, many of the theatrical techniques and tools that he outlines in his manifestos could be used to the benefit of a proselytizing mission.

“Resort to mass theatre, thereby rediscovering a little bit of the poetry in the ferment of great, agitated crowds hurled against one another”⁴⁸

Rather than interested in provoking individual and likely varied reactions, Artaud longed for a theatrical event that would prompt spectators to experience a sense of community and thus to illicit their collective response. Such an audience responds as a singular organism, much like the congregation in an evangelical church where each individual feeds off the religious fervor of the collective. For certain evangelicals, Hell Houses provide a space for a kind of communal reaction that can be paralleled to audience’s response to the theatrical experience imagined by Artaud. As John Fletcher argues in his exploration of evangelical countertaste, ““such jeremiads...succeeded in reviving the audience’s sense of themselves as a Christian community [and created] a need to pull back from the doomed, dystopian world.”⁴⁹ Fletcher goes on to argue that the Hell House’s fire-and-brimstone approach to evangelizing succeeds in fomenting a collective response from believers not only because they believe the content, but because of its “tactical tastelessness.” The fact that nonbelievers are offended by the experience “shores up the boundaries between the world and the heavenly colony,” reifying the collective identity of the group.

⁵⁰ Unlike the audience members at an evangelical Hell House, who are already

⁴⁸ *ibid*, 65

⁴⁹ Fletcher, 322

⁵⁰ *ibid*, 324

bonded, either by their faith or their active rejection of what is being presented as truth, the New York audience came to Timbers' Hell House for a wide variety of reasons. As such, they were not as prepared to form a unified organism or community.

*"A genuine physical language, no longer based on words but on signs formed through the combination of objects, silence, shouts, and rhythms"*⁵¹

The power of the evangelical Hell House comes from how it produces sensory experience rather than on the beauty of the text. The actors themselves admit the general weakness of the script when they refer to its many "corny lines", though they ultimately attribute the success of a production to God, not aesthetics.⁵² What is stunning to observe in footage of Hell House performances is not just the moral zealotry of the evangelical practitioners, but also the intensity of the audience's sensory experience, particularly in the more gruesome scenes. In the room where hell is portrayed, the screams of writhing sinners, either tied up or pinned under glass, are accompanied by saturated red light and thick fog, which creates a smell that makes the audience covers their noses. There is grating, pounding ambient noise, and demons with starkly painted faces roaring overhead.⁵³ One reacts to the scene's soundscape and imagery, and not to the precise meanings of its text and words—one knows it is hell because that is how it feels, not because that is how it is described. The reaction is kinesthetic, not intellectual. For Ratliff himself, the place where the

⁵¹ Artaud, 96

⁵² Ratliff, *Hell House*, 1:06:11-1:06:26

⁵³ *ibid*, 1:15:46-1:16:28

sources of the audience's reaction became most apparent was in the scene about a school shooting: "The whole scene is so violent that you forget everything that makes it like a bad high school play."⁵⁴ The experience elicits a physical response that will later shape a believer's verbal articulation of evangelical teachings. The Hell House audience's physical reaction of violent scenes is parallel to Artaud's desire for his Theater of Cruelty: "In our present degenerative state, metaphysics must be made to enter the mind through the body."⁵⁵

*"Choose themes and subjects corresponding to the agitation and unrest of our times."*⁵⁶

Artaud calls for a performative event that speaks to the heroic scope of human existence. Instead of the daily-life narratives explored by psychological realism, he favored themes and subjects that could be considered "universal, cosmic."⁵⁷ For the makers of Hell House, there is nothing more urgent or epic than the sacred battle for the salvation of souls. Artaud argues "the audience will believe in the illusion of theatre on condition they really take it for a dream, not for a servile imitation of reality."⁵⁸ This may be why the Hell House is often ineffective for those who do not believe in the teachings of the evangelical church, and why the Les Frères Corbusier production did not illicit the same level of response as its religiously motivated counterparts: it is "an inauthentic

⁵⁴ "Devil on My Shoulder," Narrated by George Ratliff, This American Life, May 24, 2002, <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/213/devil-on-my-shoulder>

⁵⁵ Artaud, 76

⁵⁶ *ibid*, 94

⁵⁷ *ibid*, 94

⁵⁸ *ibid*, 65

reality vulnerable to ridicule.”⁵⁹ For those who do believe, though, there is nothing false about the story these performances tell—says one Hell House actor, “It’s a reality haunted house.”⁶⁰ The battle that these evangelicals perceive is waging on around them every day is nevertheless urgent and grand: “beneath its feel-good facades, the world without Christ is irredeemably hellish.”⁶¹

*“Do away with stage and auditorium, replacing them by a kind of single, undivided locale”*⁶²

To facilitate a communal, phenomenological experience, Artaud wanted to place the audience in the midst of the action of the play. Just as the Hell House inserts the audience into its worlds of sin, Artaud imagined audience and actor sharing a space so that the performance’s “visual and oral outbursts over the whole mass of spectators.”⁶³ Artaud’s ideal performative space is kin to the site-specific works to which Lehmann refers to, except that the French actor placed emphasis on the effect that such communal space could have upon the audience, rather than the preexisting identity of the space.

Audience Reception and the Autopoietic Feedback Loop

Performance requires both actor and audience to exist. This essential truth about the theater has major implications for the Hell House. If the audience is necessary, then the audience has agency and the ability to shift the

⁵⁹ Fletcher, 318

⁶⁰ Laura Garcia as quoted in: Kim Kozlowski, "Churches Use Pagan Day to Send Message," *The Detroit News*, October 31, 2002

⁶¹ Fletcher, 325

⁶² Artaud, 73

⁶³ *ibid*, 65

nature of a performance. If theater is what exists between actor and spectator, the two must work off of one another to create the performance event. Erika Fischer-Lichte phrases it thus:

“Performance ... requires two groups of people, one acting and the other observing, to gather at the same time and place for a given period of shared lifetime. Their encounter—interactive and confrontational—produces the event of the performance.”⁶⁴

Fischer-Lichte calls this generative connection between audience and actor the autopoietic feedback loop, which is constructed by the behaviors of the actors and audience and which creates the actual theater event. This feedback loop is constantly in flux, changing as the audience responds to the actors’ performances and the actors respond to the audience’s reactions. If the feedback loop is the basis of theater, it “identifies transformation as a fundamental category of an aesthetics of the performative.”⁶⁵

The feedback loop and the transformations it creates make performance dynamic and volatile. Through their embodied presence and participation in the feedback loop, audience members become co-subjects of the performance.⁶⁶ This means that with each new audience, the performance event must change. Theater is often considered a repeatable fiction. We memorize lines, score blocking, and establish the best way to tell the same story night after night. Nevertheless, as Fischer-Lichte states, “each so-called repetition deviates from the previous one ... not only as a result of the shifting conditions and humors of

⁶⁴ Fischer-Lichte, 38

⁶⁵ *ibid*, 50

⁶⁶ *ibid*, 32

the actors but also due to the autopoietic feedback loop.”⁶⁷ Theater is compelling because of the unpredictability created by the feedback loop.

The centrality of the autopoietic feedback loop to theater has major implications for Hell House performances. If the way an audience receives a performance affects not only their own response but also the very fabric of the performance itself, then the make-up of the audience, believers and non-believers, and their ideological relationships to the performers, becomes an active part of the event.

Evangelical productions count on the presence of believers who want to reify their beliefs and community, but audiences also often include swaths of outsiders, coming for a laugh. Each night the number of willing participants will change, and “the proportion of responsive and resistant spectators” is central to the quality of the feedback loop.⁶⁸ At a performance of the Les Frères Corbusier Hell House there might have been an audience highly responsive to the production, stimulating the feedback loop, but the response would like have been to the concept of the piece or the entertainment of the campy gore, rather than a willingness to engage with the semiotic or intellectual material of the performance and its text. Of course, a response does not need to be positive to alter the feedback loop, but the perception of the audience cannot be ignored.

While the audience’s perceptions of and reactions to a performance help constitute the autopoietic feedback loop, it is important to note that no audience member is consciously in control of the feedback loop. Instead, with each

⁶⁷ *ibid*, 51

⁶⁸ *ibid*, 59

individual “neither fully autonomous nor fully determined by others, everyone experiences themselves as involved and responsible for a situation nobody single-handedly created.”⁶⁹ This situation creates several conditions: the audience is given personal agency while remaining a part of the group that experiences the affect of the feedback loop, and a single concrete creator is absent.

If one perceives the transformations in performance, but does not know to attribute those transformations to the autopoietic feedback loop, there is a vacuum in which a primary mover ought to exist. As Fischer-Lichte points out, “the ‘first’ perception in a performance is already the result of previously generated meanings, whether they are purely subjective or based on cultural codes.”⁷⁰ This applies not only to the content out of which the autopoietic feedback loop emerges, but also to the understanding of the feedback loop itself. For the evangelical Christians who believe that God intercedes on behalf of their productions the transformations from the feedback loop can act as proof of that intercession.⁷¹

The preexisting worldviews of the audience and the actors set the tone for the feedback loop. Because the actors and many of the audience members at an evangelical production believe in the God portrayed in *Hell House*, the feedback loop reifies that claim and creates an atmosphere conducive to religious feeling. At the Les Frères Corbusier production, the actors were not

⁶⁹ *ibid*, 165

⁷⁰ *ibid*, 152

⁷¹ Ratliff, *Hell House*, 1:06:11-1:06:26

believers, at least not in this particular brand of Christianity, and neither were most of the audience members. Equipped with this knowledge, the audience perceived the piece as satire, and so it became satirical.

“While the processes of perception and the generation of meaning can be described as subjective, they are not solipsistic. Instead, they contribute to the autopoiesis of the feedback loop. They draw on the actors’ and spectators’ attention back onto themselves, whether through physical articulations (sensations and emotions) or via the perceptible actions that these perceptions cause.”⁷²

This process of subjective perception influences, and is influenced by more than just the performer and spectator. These two co-subjects tease out meaning from the theatrical event, but this occurs in relation to the specific time, space, and atmosphere of the performance.

Fischer-Lichte defines atmosphere as a general impression of the space of the performance, which cannot be traced back to any one object or entity but instead exists in “the interplay of elements” and surrounds the audience.⁷³ This atmosphere crackles with the liveness of the feedback loop and binds audience and actor together in the immediate present. As such, atmosphere evokes sentiment and community, but is also susceptible to the subjective interpretation of the audience—the gore and heavy metal that read as campy in Timbers’ production is harrowing at Cedar Hill. Performer and spectator come together in a shared space to create a moment of potential liminality. If the relationships between people and with space are conducive, a transformation will occur.

⁷² Fischer-Lichte, 150

⁷³ *ibid*, 115-6

Individual transformation, specifically conversion, is the goal of the evangelical Hell House. The autopoietic feedback loop creates the potential for the necessary liminality, which has the potential to spark lasting change in the spectator. Though the transformation brought on by performance is usually temporary—upon leaving St. Ann’s Warehouse the audience of the Les Frères Corbusier Hell House would likely have returned to their preexisting worldviews without having been permanently changed by their willingness to play along with the premise of the performance—it is possible that an individual will be permanently altered by a theatrical event. This is the hope of the evangelicals, but the feedback loop is difficult to control:

“Whether the experience of the concerned subjects – caused by the destabilization of the self, the world, and its norms – leads to a reorientation and lasting transformation depends on each individual case. Spectators could also dismiss their transitory destabilization as silly and unfounded when leaving the auditorium and revert to their previous value system.”⁷⁴

Ultimately, conversion is outside the control of the Hell House practitioners.

They can tell their truth in a shared space with a potentially compelling aesthetic, but it is the individual spectator that must interpret the event for his or her self. When the Hell House ends, each audience member is asked to accept Jesus.⁷⁵ The creators of the production attempt to condition the desired response through performance, but the choice remains the responsibility of the individual, as influenced by the collective experience.

⁷⁴ *ibid*, 179

⁷⁵ Ratliff, *Hell House*, 1:17:46

CONCLUSION: PERFORMING PERSECUTION

In exploring the Hell House, its processes and results, one of the things I was most struck by was the self-identification of evangelicals as a marginalized, endangered people. The content of the performance is offensive and persecutory towards historically oppressed groups, specifically the gay community.⁷⁶ At the same time though, the process of putting on a Hell House is seen as reinforcing “the boundaries between the world and the heavenly colony” in order to protect that community.⁷⁷

It is not just in the rationale for performing the Hell House that one sees this narrative of Christian persecution. In the iteration of the school-shooting scene that occurred the year before Ratliff shot his documentary, just after Columbine, the school-shooting scene featured a heavy-handed illusion to Cassie Bernall. Though the actual facts of the story are, unsurprisingly, unclear, Cassie became the first martyr of Columbine. She had recently converted to Christianity when the shooting occurred. When the shooters entered the library, they found Cassie hiding under a desk. They asked her if she believed in Jesus, and when she insisted that she did, they killed her. In the days after the shooting, Cassie’s story was compared to such famous martyrdom confessionals as *The Passion of Perpetua* and the narrative was shaped to fit the form of the

⁷⁶ Pellegrini, 920

⁷⁷ Fletcher, 324

early Christian martyrology.⁷⁸ That year at Cedar Hill, that story was included in the school-shooting scene.⁷⁹

Throughout my thesis process, I kept coming back to the same questions: Where does this kind of religious conviction come from? How can I understand this person without assuming insanity on their part? In my written portion, I have tried to make sense of the Hell House, whose practitioners seem fanatical as they lash out at others. In my creative portion, I approached the topic of martyrdom. I adapted several martyrdom confessionals into a piece of immersive theater, which I then directed. My goal was to make sense of the seeming insanity of that kind of cruelty to self. I hoped to understand the inner workings of the martyrs mind through the employment of a shared space. While I cannot say that I succeeded in that regard, I did learn to spend time with those texts without discarding them. Perhaps what is necessary is not to understand one's subject—that may not always be possible—but instead to witness to them. Both the Hell House and martyrdom confessionals require an audience to relay a message and have meaning. That message may be incomprehensible, but the act of listening to it can be a worthwhile experience in and of itself.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 172-196

⁷⁹ "Devil on my Shoulder"

APPENDIX

FIRE + BONE

Adapted by Lily Haje

CHARACTERS (alphabetically by first name)

Bobby Sands: an IRA prisoner who died on a hunger strike

Hannah Senesh: an early Zionist and WWII paratrooper. She was captured, tortured and executed by firing squad after refusing to give up information

Ignatius of Antioch/Vibia Perpetua: two early Christian martyrs sent to the wild beasts in the arena by the Romans

Marguerite Porete: a 13th century Beguine mystic burnt at the stake by the Catholic Church for her involvement in the Heresy of the Free Spirit

Nidal Shadouf: a Palestinian freedom fighter and suicide bomber, teenaged

Reem Saleh Riyashi: his mother, another Palestinian jihadist

SECTION 0.

a.

Through the windows of a house, figures are seen moving. They flash in and out of view, half visible. Gradually, they fade away. The door to the house swings open. The audience enters. The house is empty, still. A scream. Slowly the actors emerge from inside the walls of the house. They float to their first scene, bringing the audience with them.

SECTION I.

a.

Bobby Sands lies in bed with his eyes closed, somewhere between asleep and awake. There is a thin white sheet over him. He is mouthing, muttering, whispering text. He may move his head or body some, but motion is difficult and the sensation of the sheet against his skin weighty and unpleasant.

Bobby: Ár nAthair, atá ar neamh, go naomhaítear t'ainm, go dtaga do ríocht, go ndeintear do thoil ar an dtalamh mar a deintear ar neamh. Ár n-arán laethúil tabhair dhúinn inniu, agus maith dhúinn ár gcionta mar a mhaithimid do chách, agus ná lig sinn i gcathú, ach saor sinn ó olc. Áiméin (Our Father, who art in heaven hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen)

He repeats this twice, growing louder and more animated. He is tossing and turning and shouting by the end. Then there is a moment of silence. He lies completely still. Slowly, he opens his eyes.

Bobby: It was an orange, it was bitter.

He looks over at the bedside table without moving his head. On it are a Bible, a book by Kipling, a journal, a small box, and a tray overflowing with food. Slowly, he begins testing himself: blinking his eyes, moving his mouth, turning his head, feeling out his body. When ready, he takes a deep breath, and slowly begins to move an arm. Delicately, he moves the sheet off his body. Preparing himself, he moves his body upright, sitting at the edge of the bed with his feet on the floor. Every movement is calculated to expend as little energy as possible. He looks at the table, he sweeps the tray off and on to the floor. He reaches for the box and retrieves a small, hand-rolled cigarette and matches. He lights it, breathes in, and closes his eyes.

Bobby: The luxury of the Block! *(looking down at the food and then to the audience)* jam with the tea today? You seem more in need of the food than my good self. The March winds are getting angry.

He looks to the window and makes up his mind to cross to it. He steadies himself on the bed and nightstand as he rises. He puts on the bathrobe hanging from a nearby hook and shuffles across the floor to lean on the window ledge.

Bobby: There was no priest in last night. Do you hear the curlew passing overhead? Such a lonely cell, such a lonely struggle. I'm not cold and I'm still getting some smokes -- decadence, well sort of, but who's perfect. Bad for your health.

He opens the window and tosses the butt of the cigarette out. He turns back to the bed, leaving the window open. As he walks, he trips and falls. He lies still for a moment before trying to get up. To the audience.

Bobby: One of you lads give me a hand?

Someone helps him up and to the bed, where he sits. He gets the journal off the bedside table and writes

Bobby: I have felt the loss of energy twice today, and I am feeling slightly weak. *He tosses the journal and pen to the side. As he continues to speak, he grows stronger and rises, preaching to the audience, rallying the crowd.*

Bobby: I have decided to mass all my energy and thoughts into consolidating my resistance. That is most important. Nothing else seems to matter except that lingering constant reminding thought, 'Never give up'. No matter how bad, how black, how painful, how heart-breaking, 'Never give up', 'Never despair', 'Never lose hope'. Let them bastards laugh at you all they want, let them grin and jibe, allow them to persist in their humiliation, brutality, deprivations, vindictiveness, petty harassments, let them laugh now, because all of that is no longer important or worth a response.

His words hang in the air as he collapses back onto the bed. There is a ringing sound coming from the bathroom, which he now faces. There is fear on his face now, but also a resolute strength.

Bobby: There is a certain Screw here who has taken it upon himself to harass me to the very end and in a very vindictive childish manner. It is one thing to torture, but quite a different thing to exact enjoyment from it, that's his type.

To the audience

Would you mind helping me again? Just to the bed.

He sits on the bed delicately. Something draws his attention to the bathroom. He looks at the door, gathers his courage and steps forward. Exits to bathroom.

b.

Hannah Senesh stands at an easel on the porch. She is painting a landscape. She is looking out at the world as though painting what she sees, but the painting is of war torn Hungary, not Mt. Vernon Street. Speaking is difficult for her; she is out of practice. When she does speak words, it is strangely, rhythmically, and almost in song. She cuts in and out of vocalization, as though she is being muffled by a pillow.

Hannah: (Now –)

Now I'd like to say (something)

Something more than mere words,

More dappled than color,

More musical than rhythm or rhyme,

Something a million people haven't already said or heard.

Hannah turns to the audience, eyes wide. Her voice is gone, the rest is only breath. She comes up close to them, breathing the words into their ears, needing to get this message out.

Just something.

All about the land is silent, listening,

The forest is gazing at me, expectant.

The sky watches me with a curious eye.

Everything is silent. And so am I.

The message is out, her breath depleted. She draws in a breath and lets out a wail, a wordless song, and moves into the house towards the kitchen.

c.

A man in drag stands in front of a mirror. This is Ignatius of Antioch. He wears a long white dress and a heavily painted face. He is beautiful.

Ignatius: I am going through the pangs of being born.

(to an audience member) Greetings in Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, from Ignatius, the “God-inspired,” would you mind getting my zipper?

Audience member unzips the dress and Ignatius steps out

You are a credit to God. You deserve praise and success and are privileged to be without blemish.

It is as a prisoner for Jesus Christ that I greet you. Only give me a moment to prepare myself. You can easily do what you want to *(Ignatius gestures around the room, inviting the audience to sit or poke around in his closets)*, whereas it is hard for me to get to God unless you let me alone.

Do not please men, but please God, just as you are doing. If you quietly let me alone, people will see in me God’s Word. But if you are enamored of my mere body, I shall, on the contrary, be a meaningless noise.

Ignatius now turns to the mirror. Tenderly begins to remove his makeup. Pauses. Looks up. Quickly lowers head into prayer.

I pray that I may have the strength of soul and body so that I may not only talk of it, but really want it. I shall be a convincing Christian only when the world sees me no more.

Wheels around in chair. Menacingly to the audience, shouting

Nothing you can see has real value. The greatness of Christianity lies in its being hated by the world, not in its being convincing to it.

Steps forward towards audience during next line, stumbles and falls into a praying position. He is like a little child kneeling beside his bed, hoping to keep the monsters at bay in the darkness

Let me be fodder for wild beasts. I am God’s wheat and I am being ground by the teeth of wild beasts to make a pure loaf for Christ.

He rises again, grinning into the faces of the audience

What a thrill I shall have from the wild beasts that are ready for me! I hope they will make short work of me. I shall coax them on to eat me up at once and not hold off, as sometimes happens, through fear. And if they are reluctant, I shall force them to do it.

He turns back to the mirror, continues to clean his face, his red lipstick is the last thing to go.

I would rather die and get to Jesus Christ, than reign over the ends of the earth. That is whom I am looking for – the One who died for us. That is who I want – the One who rose for us.

His face is clean, he rises and takes a simple shirt and pants out of a dresser. He puts them on. Now he is robust, certain.

Sympathize with me my brothers! Do not stand in the way of me coming to life – do not wish death on me. Do not give back to the world one who wants to be God's. Let me get into the clear light and manhood will be mine.

He exits the room.

d.

A woman stands in a garden. She is weeding plants up against the fence and looking out over it. She is Marguerite Porete, a Beguine and martyr in the heresy of the Free Spirit. The following movements are stylized and fluid, this is a dance.

There are seven stages of grace.

She pushes against the fence, testing it

One. The soul is removed from Sin.

She uproots a large weed.

Two. Detachment from created things.

She throws the weeds over the fence

Three. The soul does nothing for God, possesses no will.

She slides down the fence to sit

Four. The soul is unencumbered from the Law of the Virtues.

She crawls/rolls into the center of the garden,

Five. This soul takes no account of shame, honor, poverty, wealth, anxiety, ease, love, hate, hell or paradise.

She hits the ground, flails, raising herself up to standing

Six. This soul has become nothing. It wills everything and it wills nothing.

She spins madly, looking out at the audience/eye level at first, and then gradually moving her gaze upwards to heaven. She spins until –

Seven. This soul is the not understood.

She loses balance and stumbles/falls

Her last name is Oblivion, Forgotten.

She is on her back, looking up at the sky. She closes her eyes and seems to sink into the earth.

e.

Living Room. There is a large stack of cardboard boxes in the center of the room and projections of the martyrdom videos on the walls. Reem and Nidal stand facing the pyramid of boxes. The audio from the videos fluctuates during the scene, when it gets to loud, both cover their ears and fall to the floor.

Nidal: Is this it?

Reem: Surely Allah will defend those who believe; surely Allah does not love any one who is unfaithful, ungrateful.

Nidal: Those who show no mercy will be shown no mercy.

Reem: The day will come when we will be the masters of the world.

They begin to unpack the boxes, which are full of cardboard, cables, and torn cloth. Canvas, knitting, tiny toy soldiers. When everything is unpacked and set up, Reem settles into a chair-like structure and begins to knit – it is a baby-sized suicide bomber jacket.

Nidal: (to audience) In places like this, the call is loud: Come to jihad, come to jihad, come to martyrdom...

Reem: Leave them alone and help me. Don't talk to strangers.

Nidal: (a little whiny) But everyone is a stranger here.

Reem: (smacks him across the head lightly) "We have enjoined on man to be dutiful and kind to his parents. His mother bears him with hardship and she brings him forth with hardship."

Nidal: (to audience) There is a story: A man from Yemen migrated to Madinah to be with the Prophet. The Prophet asked him, 'Do you have any relatives in Yemen?' He answered, 'My parents.' 'Did you ask their permission?' the Prophet

asked. On his replying that he did not, the Prophet told him, 'Go back to them and ask their permission. If they agree to it, go on *jihad*. Otherwise stay and serve them.'

I didn't ask. Now I don't have to.

For a moment Nidal watches Reem knit. Then he stands up and exits to Marguerite's Room. Reem hears him leave, looks up.

Reem: I will not be the last. The march of resistance will continue until the Islamic flag is raised, not only over the minarets of Jerusalem, but over the whole universe.

Reem exits to the kitchen.

SECTION II

a.

Bobby Sands enters the bathroom. There is a scale under the sink. He looks at it as though eyeing an opponent. In one movement, he reaches down, pulls it into the center of the floor and stands on it. He looks up at the ceiling. Slowly, he lets himself look down at the scale –

64 kilograms. I've no problems

In one motion, gets of scale, kicks it under sink, and turns to the door. When he tries to go through the door, he is flung back into the bathroom and turned to face the scale. Weighing motion repeats all the way through with each of the following lines. Each time he is flung back into the room a little more violently and the sequence happens a little more quickly with a little more at stake.

63 kilograms, so what?

62 kilograms. I feel very good

61 kilograms, going down

60.8 kilograms. I have no medical complaints

I feel alright. 60 kilograms

59.3 kilograms

58.75 kilograms

58.5 kilograms. I feel alright.

58.25. No medical complaints

58.25. No complaints of any nature.

57.7

This time there is no resistance when he tries to leave and he stumbles out. Heads downstairs.

b.

Reem enters kitchen from living room. She begins taking out plates, cups, and food. Hannah arrives. She stands at the doorway, watching. Reem feels her presence and turns. The two women stare at each other across the room.

Reem: I convey this message to the Israeli army high command, which bombards my sons day and night: We, the martyrdom-seeking women of Palestine, mothers as well as girls, are waiting impatiently for them to come.

Hannah: I'm convinced that Zionism is Jewry's solution to its problems and that the outstanding work being done in Palestine is not in vain.

Reem: I hoped that the shredded limbs of my body would be shrapnel, tearing Zionists to pieces, knocking on heaven's door with the skulls of Zionists.

Hannah: Anti-semitism is an illness that can neither be fought against with words, nor cured with superficial treatment

On this line, Hannah steps forward, for a moment it seems that there will be an altercation. Reem, nods towards the fridge. The two women begin preparing food together. It is tense but not violent. They look through the fridge, discarding the foods they deem unclean

Reem: Forbidden to you is that which dies of itself

Hannah: Every animal that has a split hoof not completely divided or that does not chew the cud is unclean for you; whoever touches [the carcass of] any of them will be unclean.

Reem is preparing to make cheeseburgers

Hannah: No!

Reem: *(pointing to the wine glasses Hannah has gotten out)* Intoxicants are an abomination of Shaitân's handiwork. So avoid all that abomination in order that you may be successful.

Hannah acquiesces. Each goes about their preparations.

Hannah: I am so close to you – and yet so far.

Hannah reaches into the freezer and pulls out a container of bacon. The two women look at it.

Both: Swine

The two look at each other. Reem takes the container, looks at Hannah, and drops it in the trash. The two smile.

Hannah: When I was fifteen I was a vegetarian. I thought, I will give it a six-month trial period and if my views don't change, I will remain one. I did not last three months: mother wouldn't allow it.

Reem: Mothers know - whoever is driven to necessity, not desiring, nor exceeding the limit, no sin shall be upon him; surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

Hannah: It is difficult because I am alone. If only I had someone with whom I could talk freely – if only the entire burden were not mine, if I could talk to you. I consciously and strongly feel I am a Jew, and am proud of it.

Reem: In every Palestinian home, a time bomb awaits.

Hannah: Even today, in its mutilated form, Palestine is big enough to be an island in the sea of seemingly hopeless Jewish destiny, an island upon which we

can peacefully build a lighthouse to beam its light into the darkness, a light of everlasting human values, the light of the one God.

Reem: I swore by Allah that I would turn my body parts into a fire to burn the occupation soldiers, if they moved towards my house, if they moved even an inch into my beloved Gaza Strip.

Hannah: The external world is bellicose and stormy, filled with bloodshed and destruction, purposeless. The inner world is at peace. I wear a placid mask. I am a soldier.

Reem: It is time.

The women begin to carry the food into the dining room. Reem goes first. Hannah lags behind –

Hannah: I would like to wear my Jewishness with pride and always be able to believe and trust in God. There are times I cannot, and at such times I attempt to force myself to believe completely, firmly, with total certainty. I wonder, though, if anyone exists who has never doubted? Yet, I don't think it is possible to have complete faith until after one has known some doubt and considerable deep meditation.

c.

(Ignatius continues transition out of drag, then goes to dining room to make punch)

d.

Nidal pauses outside the door to a second floor bedroom, his eyes closed.

Nidal: Everything you want, everything good, is in the garden – is in Paradise. There are rivers: rivers of milk, rivers of honey, rivers of wine. There is everything.
And for a shahid, there are 72.

Nidal enters the room. He sees Marguerite lying in a trance on the bed. She moves fluidly, but as though controlled by some other force – she is the annihilated soul. He is clumsy and uncertain. Neither knows who the other is. To him, she is one of the promised houri. To her, he is a vision of God.

Marguerite: Beloved, what do you want of me? I contain all that was, and that is, and shall be, I am filled with the all.

She floats to stand facing him

Nidal: And those foremost will be foremost. They will be reclining, face to face, on thrones woven with gold and precious stones.

He steps forward towards her

Marguerite: Tell me, beloved, what you want of me -- I am Love, who am filled with the all: what you want, we want, beloved -- tell us your desire nakedly

As she speaks, their hands come up and touch. Once they do, their dance begins – on and around the bed. Yes, this is a sex scene of sorts, but still innocent, an exploration

Nidal: They will have fruit from which they may choose ... wide, lovely eyes, like preserved pearls, a reward for deeds that they used to do.

Marguerite: Lover, you have grasped me in your love, to give me your great treasure, which is divine goodness.

Nidal: And those on the Right Hand, who will be those on the Right Hand?

Marguerite: Take of me all you please -- if you want all of myself, I'll not say no.

Nidal: In long-extended shade, by constantly flowing water, and fruit in plenty. They will be on couches or thrones raised high. Verily, We have created for them maidens of equal age, loving them alone. For those on the Right Hand.

Marguerite: O Lover of gentle nature, you are to be much praised, and thus I must not hold silent about your beauty and goodness. Willing pure nothingness purifies the heart, which makes me climb so high

Nidal: They will be those nearest to Allah in the Gardens of Delight.

They facing away from each other, touching. When he says "Allah" the spell breaks for her – this is not who she thought it was. Seeing her recoil, he recognizes her to. She screams, he spits. He runs out of the room and she runs into the bathroom, where she crumples in front of the mirror.

Marguerite: This soul is so shamed and humbled by the enormity of sin... her sin; that she becomes less than nothing. This soul takes no comfort, nor has affection or hope in any created being. This soul cannot be taught.

SECTION III.

a. (First loop this scene is silent)

Dining Room. Ignatius stands at the head of a long table. Nidal enters and begins to prepare the table. Ignatius goes to the side table and begins to make punch in a

large bowl. It is a complicated process of measuring and re-measuring, straining and restraining. Marguerite enters to help Nidal. Reem and Hannah enter carrying bowls of food. When the table is set, they all take their positions behind their chairs, whispering to themselves. Bobby enters. On Ignatius' cue they all take their seats. Their text overlaps, building into a conversation—

Ignatius: Do not please men, but please God.

Reem: Masters of our world.

Nidal: Come to jihad, come to jihad, come to martyrdom

Hannah: I consciously and strongly feel I am a Jew

Bobby: Wretched men, born of a risen generation

Marguerite: This soul is the not understood.

Out of this babble, new words emerge.

Ignatius: How very much I've tried my best to give you a good life. But in spite of all of my trying a handful of our people, with their lies, have made our lives impossible. And we are sitting here waiting on a powder keg.

They begin to move around the table, engaging with each other and the audience as they prepare themselves for the final act.

Reem: I don't think it is what we want to do with our babies--I don't think that's what we had in mind to do with our babies. It is said by the greatest of prophets from time immemorial: "No man may take my life from me; I lay my life down."

Nidal: The world suffers violence, and the violent shall take it by force. If we can't live in peace, then let's die in peace.

Marguerite: We've been so betrayed. We have been so terribly betrayed. But we've tried and as... if this only works one day it was worthwhile.

Ignatius: So my opinion is that you be kind to children and be kind to seniors and take the potion like they used to take in ancient Greece and step over quietly because we are not committing suicide; it's a revolutionary act.

Silence. All look at Ignatius. The pact is initiated

Ignatius: We can't go back; they won't leave us alone. They're now going back to tell more lies, which means more congressmen. And there's no way, no way we can survive.

Bobby: Well--some--everybody dies. Some place that hope runs out because everybody dies. I haven't seen anybody yet didn't die. And I'd like to choose my own kind of death for a change. I'm tired of being tormented to hell, that's what I'm tired of. Tired of it.

Hannah: I tried to give it to you. I've laid down my life, practically. I've practically died every day to give you peace.

They drink. The poison works its way through their bodies

Hannah: And you still not have any peace.

The text again overlaps as they feed each other the punch. It grows grotesque, becomes a fight. The pace builds until it is frantic, chaotic, then it stops. Silence. Everyone but Ignatius runs from the room. He falls into his chair.

SECTION IV.

a.

Nidal is in the kitchen, cleaning. Bobby enters, carrying food and dishes from the meal. They scrape and wash the plates, put away leftovers, and clean the kitchen.

Bobby: What did they promise you?

Nidal: They said they'd stand by my parents, rebuild their home, give them money.

Bobby: Ay, I remember that. The priest came to weigh me up psychologically for a later date. I tried to diffuse any notion of that.

Nidal: So that's how you feel towards them.

Bobby: I will be sorry to leave the boys, but I know the road is a hard one and everything must be conquered. Yourself?

Nidal: I feel normal

Silence.

Nidal: I didn't tell my parents. If I'd told my mother she would not have let me leave the house.

Bobby: My heart was very sore because I knew that I had broken my poor mother's heart, and my home is struck with unbearable anxiety.

Nidal: Why did you do it?

Bobby: We must bear witness to both right and wrong, stand up and speak out.

Nidal: It's not suicide - it's martyrdom. It's better than everything.

Bobby: No, All men must have hope and never lose heart. But my hope lies in the ultimate victory for my poor people. Is there any hope greater than that?

Nidal: I did it for those who were killed

Bobby: for Gerard and Kevin, the young lads and girls still at school

Nidal: I had problems with the teachers. I used to go to school and run away.

Bobby: I may be a sinner, but I stand -- and if it so be, will die -- happy knowing that I do not have to answer for what these people have done to our ancient nation.

Nidal: Would you do it again?

Bobby: It is unavoidable. It has been forced upon me by years of stark inhumanity.

Nidal: In the end there'll be peace

Bobby: We are wretched men, born of a risen generation.

Bobby gags into the garbage can, the smell of the food being too much. Nidal hands him a wash cloth

Nidal: OK?

Bobby: The body fights back sure enough, but in the end it is the mind. The mind is the most important.

Bobby nods at Nidal and goes out to the porch. Nidal finishes cleaning alone.

b.

Leaving the dining room, Marguerite runs up the stairs. She gets to the top but then stops, turns and moves back down the stairs as Hannah, standing at the bottom, begins to sing.

Hannah:

Blessed is the match consumed

In kindling flame
Blessed is the flame that burns
In the secret fastness of the heart
Blessed is the heart with strength to stop
Its beating for honor's sake
Blessed is the match consumed
In kindling flame

As Hannah sings, Marguerite begins to dance. It is a remembering of being burnt at the stake, but it is not pained or scared. It is as though the two women are seeing their deaths from the outside as they circle each other on the stairs, neither able to exit at either end. The song repeats. Hannah sings, Marguerite hums; both do a dance of sorts. The two come together in the middle of the stairs, making true contact for the first time. They speak in rhythm, words overlapping musically with one another.

Hannah:
Could I meet one who understood all...
Without word, without search,
Confession or lie,
Without asking why,

Marguerite:
O Emerald and precious gem,
True diamond, queen and empress,
You give everything from your fine nobility,
Without asking from Love her riches,
Except the willing of her divine pleasure.

Hannah:
I would spread before him, like a white cloth,
The heart and the soul...
The filth and the gold.
Perceptive, he would understand.

Marguerite:
Thus is this right by righteousness,
For it is the true path
Of Fine Love, whoever wishes to remain on it.

Hannah:
And after I had plundered the heart,
When all had been emptied and given away,
I would feel neither anguish nor pain,
But would know how rich I became.

Marguerite:

O deepest spring and fountain sealed,
Where the sun is subtly hidden,
You send your rays, says Truth, through divine knowledge;
We know it through true wisdom:
Her splendor makes us completely luminous.

They break from their dance together, and each fly off the stairs, Marguerite down to the porch, Hannah up to Perpetua's bedroom.

c.

Ignatius picks himself up. His clothes are dirty, his hair a mess. Now begins his transition into Perpetua. He walks through the house, listening.

d.

Reem stands alone in Ignatius' Room. She explores. She picks up a piece of clothing/fabric and it becomes a baby. She sings to it. Suddenly, a bomb. The baby disappears.

Reem: When night falls (or it is evening), keep your children close to you for the devils spread out at that time. But when an hour of the night elapses, you can let them free. Close the doors and mention the Name of Allah, for Shaytaan (Satan) does not open a closed door.

She prepares the room for Ignatius' arrival.

SECTION V.

a.

Marguerite stands swaying on the porch. Slowly, her swaying turns into a dance. She is floaty, flighty, and birdlike. A mix of fluid soaring motions and quick, nervous changes.

Bobby enters the porch from the house. He stands in the doorway watching her, enchanted. She moves to the sound of his voice. Aware of him, but not dancing for or with him.

Bobby:

I arose this morning as the Screw came,
He thumped my door heavily without speaking,
I stared at the walls, and thought I was dead,
It seems that this hell will never depart.
The door opened and it wasn't closed gently,
But it didn't really matter, we weren't asleep.
I heard a bird and yet didn't see the dawn of day,
Would that I were deep in the earth.
Where are my thoughts of days gone by,
And where is the life I once thought was in the world.

My cry is unheard and my tears flowing unseen,
When our day comes I shall repay them dearly.

As his text ends, so does her dance. They sit together on a bench. He lights a cigarette, she continues moving, not going anywhere but not quite still. He speaks to her, a charming Irishman. Flirting but not meaning anything by it. He as much a father to her as anything else. She a mother to him, as much as anything else.

Bobby: The birds were singing today. One of the boys threw bread out of the window. At least somebody was eating! I was lonely for a while this evening, listening to the crows caw as they returned home. Should I hear the beautiful lark, she would rent my heart. Now, the odd curlew mournfully calls as they fly over. I like the birds.

Marguerite: This soul is like the eagle, because this soul flies high, indeed, very high, higher than any other bird because she is feathered by Fine Love. She sees more clearly the beauty of the sun, the rays of the sun, and the splendor of the sun, and the rays, which feed her with the marrow of the high cedars.

They are silent for a moment, near tears.

Bobby: Well, I must leave off, for if I think more about the birds my tears will fall and my thoughts return to the days of my youth.
They were the days, and gone forever now. But I enjoyed them. They are in my heart

He stands to go inside

Bobby: Good night, now.

He is turned to the door, about to enter, when something makes him turn around. Marguerite has also stood up. Suddenly, she bolts into the house. Without even really meaning to, he takes off after her.

b.

Perpetua enters bedroom/dressing area. Reem is standing by the mirror, ready to assist. She stares in the mirror. Takes off her shirt and pants. Brushes her hair. Sees audience staring, softly:

Perpetua: Why can you not even allow me to refresh myself properly? For I am the most distinguished of the condemned prisoners. Would it not be to your credit if I were brought forth on the day in a healthier condition?

Reem comes forward and touches Perpetua's face. Brushes her hair, pins it back, goes to get Perpetua's dress (the one Ignatius entered in at the beginning). She is

silent as Perpetua speaks. She is her protection against whatever darkness gathers.

Perpetua: I had a vision. I walked through rough and broken country. I came to the amphitheater out of breath. I looked at the enormous crowd. But no beasts were let loose on me. Then out came an Egyptian of vicious appearance. My clothes were stripped off, and suddenly I was a man. Next there came forth a man of marvelous stature. He was clad in a beltless purple tunic and wore sandals made of gold and silver. He carried a wand and a green branch on which there were golden apples.

Hannah enters and joins the other two women, becoming a part of the picture Perpetua creates.

He said: 'If this Egyptian defeats her, he will slay her with the sword. But if she defeats him, she will receive this branch.' Then he withdrew. We drew close to one another and our fists began to fly. He tried to get hold of my feet, but I kept striking him in the face with my heels.

I was raised up into the air and I began to pummel him without touching the ground.

Then when I noticed there was a lull, I put my two hands together linking the fingers of one hand with those of the other and thus I got hold of his head. He fell flat on his face and I stepped on his head.

The crowd began to shout and sing psalms. I walked up to the trainer and took the branch. He kissed me and said to me: 'Peace be with you, my daughter!' I began to walk in triumph towards the Gate of Life.

When I awoke. I realized that it was not with wild animals that I would fight but with the Devil, but I knew that I would win the victory.

As she tells of the vision, she dresses herself in preparation. She begins to see her opponents in the "darkness" surrounding her. She fights them off with her words and movements. She ends, triumphant and beautiful, standing on top of her chair, staring down the audience imperiously. Then, the three women exit the room, walking in a processional down the stairs and outside.

c.

Nidal is alone in the living room. He is agitated, angry. Suddenly, he sweeps everything off the coffee table. He begins to run around the room, knocking things over, taking sheets from the pull out bed and the curtains and the rugs to build shanty-like structures. It is as though he is trying to catch/fight off some unseen being in the room. He is turning the living room into a Palestinian refugee camp. The chaos comes to a halt. He turns to the audience.

Nidal: This is where we have to stay.

He turns away and goes back to work, putting on the finishing touches. Then he goes into a drawer and pulls out a bag of GI Joe toys. He begins arranging them around the room, all over the windowsills, the "tents", the floor. When he is done, he looks at what he has done. Quietly he goes to sit in his tent, unmoving. Marguerite and Bobby enter. All exit together

SECTION VI.

a. (ONLY TAKES PLACE IN SECOND LOOP)

The actors all enter a bare room with a bowl of water and hanging lights. This is a warmer space; it is a garden. They explore the space, acknowledging each other and the audience. They sing a wordless lullaby, healing their wounds. In turn, each one goes to the bowl of water, washing away the dirt on their hands and faces. When they are finished, they all go to sleep, still singing. The song stops. They wake up. See each other. A door swings open and they exit together.

End of play.

WORKS CITED

- Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. *Bible Believers*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987.
- Artaud, Antonin. *Collected Works 4*. London: Calder & Boyars, 1974.
- Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.
- Attisani, Antonio. "Acta Gnosis." *The Drama Review*, Summer 2008: 75-106.
- Beadle, Richard. "Introduction." In *York Mystery Plays: A Selection in Modern Spelling*, by Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King, ix-xxx. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- . "Masks Mimes and Miracles: Medieval English Theatricality and its Illusions." In *From Script to Stage in Early Modern England*, by Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel, 32-42. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Brantley, Ben. "A Guided Tour of Hell, With an Appearance by Satan." *The New York Times*, October 14, 2006.
- Castelli, Elizabeth A. *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Cherry, James M. "[Review] Hell House. By Keenan Roberts. Directed by Alex Timbers. Les Freres Corbusier. St. Ann's Warehouse, New York City. 24 October 2006." *Theatre Journal* (The Johns Hopkins University Press), 2007: 517-519.
- Chidester, David. *Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, The People's Temple, and Jonestown*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003.
- Cyril C. Richardson, ed. *Early Christian Fathers*. New York: Touchstone, 1996.
- "Devil on My Shoulder." Narrated by George Ratliff. This American Life, May 24, 2002. <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/213/devil-on-my-shoulder>
- Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 1959.
- Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *The Transformative Power of Performance: A new aesthetics*. London: Routledge, 2008.
- . *Theater, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theater*. London: Routledge, 2005.

- Fletcher, John. "Tasteless as Hell: Community Performance, Distinction, and Countertaste in Hell House." *Theatre Survey* 48, no. 02 (2007): 313-330.
- Fornes, Maria Irene. *Fefu and her Friends*. New York: PAJ Publications , 1990.
- Geertz, Clifford. "Religion as a Cultural System." In *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, by Michael Banton, 1-43. London: Routledge, 1966.
- Ghosh, Bobby. "Inside the Mind of an Iraqi Suicide Bomber." *TIME Magazine*, June 26, 2005.
- Goldberg, RoseLee. *Performance Art from Futurism to the Present*. New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2001.
- Grimes, Ronald L. *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*. University of South Carolina Press, 1995.
- Grotowski, Jerzy. *Towards a Poor Theatre*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Harding, Susan Friend. *The Book of Jerry Falwell*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Musurillo, Herbert Anthony, ed. *Acts of the Christian Martyrs: Early Christian Texts*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Kirk, Brian. "Christian Haunted House: Scaring the "Hell" Out of Teens?" *Patheos*. 10 20, 2011. <http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Christian-Haunted-Houses-Brian-Kirk-10-20-2011> (accessed 12 12, 2012).
- Koumarianos, Myrto, and Cassandra Silver. "Dashing at a Nightmare: Haunting Macbeth in Sleep No More ." *TDR: The Drama Review*, Spring 2013: 167-175.
- Kozlowski, Kim. "Churches Use Pagan Day to Send Message." *The Detroit News*, October 31, 2002.
- Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theatre*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Les Freres Corbusier. *Les Freres Corbusier: Hell House*. 2006. <http://lesfreres.org/hellhouse/main.html> (accessed 12, 9, 2012).
- Liberty University. *Scaremare*. 2013. <http://www.liberty.edu/scaremare/> (accessed March 30, 2013).

- New Destiny Christian Center of the Assemblies of God. *The Hell House Outreach Kit*. 2005. http://www.godestiny.org/hell_house/HH_kit.cfm (accessed 12 10, 2012).
- Pellegrini, Ann. "'Signaling Through the Flames': Hell House Performance and Structures of Religious Feeling ." *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (9 2007): 911-935.
- Porete, Marguerite. *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. Translated by Ellen L. Babinsky. New York: Paulist Press, 1993.
- Proudfoot, Wayne. *Religious Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.
- Hell House*. Directed by George Ratliff. 2003.
- Saltz, Rachel. "On the Trail of a Martyr (Sneakers Suggested)." *The New York Times*, July 21, 2009.
- Savran, David. "Liberte, Fraternite, Corbusier!: An Interview with Alex Timbers." *TDR: The Drama Review*, 2010: 39-53.
- Schechner, Richard. *Performance Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Senesh, Hannah. *Hannah Senesh: Her Life and Diary, the First Complete Edition*. Translated by Marta Cohn. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004.
- Signore, John Del. "Hell House." *Gothamist*. 10 2, 2006. http://gothamist.com/2006/10/02/hell_house_1.php (accessed 12 11, 2012).
- Styan, J.L. *Drama, Stage, and Audience*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- Swift, Mike. "A Visit to the Cedar Hill Hell House." *The Austin Atheist*, 12 2007: 1-3, 5.
- The Bobby Sands Trust. "The Diary of Bobby Sands." *PBS Frontline*. 1983. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ira/readings/diary.html> (accessed March 14, 2012).
- The Rev. Jim Jones, et al. (The Peoples Temple cult). *The Jonestown Death Tape (FBI No. Q 042) (November 18, 1978)*. 1978.
- Turner, Victor. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: PAJ Publications, 1982.

Weiss, Rosemary Shevlin. "[Review] The Sleep of Reason." *Theatre Journal* (The Johns Hopkins University Press), December 1987: 518-520.