

The Edge Spaces:
Intertwining Roles of Ritual and Performance

by

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INTRODUCTION

There are inherent limits and intersections between ritual and performance.

Despite substantial academic research, no scholar has been able to clearly define the ultimate relationship between these two. The simple fact that rituals are performative presents one way in which the two are intertwined. In the introduction to her book *Marriage Rituals Italian Style: A Historical Anthropological Perspective on Early Modern Italian Jews*, Roni Weinstein explains that performance and ritual intersect in the ways that participants distinguish ritual from their every day activities:

Ritualization is a mode of action that clarifies to the spectators they are witnessing an unusual event, which breaks the sequence of individual and communal life. Transcending routine draws borders within society, differentiating the sacred from the profane [...] Hence, the ritual mode of action overlaps other pursuits, such as body movement, theater and the performing arts, the division of space and time, [and] religious activity. (5)

Thus, the presence of several ritualistic elements in theater performances— for example, the spectators' common decorum, the universal understanding that stage and audience are extra-daily spaces, and the actor's behavior according to specific conventions—suggests a more intricate and complex dynamic. Weinstein also asserts that

Like theatrical events, rituals take place in the presence of spectators, who add their own interpretations and sometimes participate in the experience. [...] The written and spoken word [...] has no primacy over non-verbal elements, such as dance or music, which are performative acts. Hence the attention and

excitement that ritual evokes among spectators, even when they do not understand it or cannot formulate feelings and thoughts in words. (5)

In other words, ritual and performance overlap in their similar effect on the participating community. Nevertheless, a clear distinction between ritual and performance lies in the fact that theatergoers who witness a performance are not a group of believers united by faith, as is the case for those who participate in a religious ritual. The theatrical audience is an ephemeral community very different from a group of people who share a congregation and will meet again when the ritual is next performed.

My interest in this topic stems directly from a course I took in the fall of 2006 called “Intersections Between Ritual and Theater.” Taught by Professor Cláudia Tatinge Nascimento, the course introduced me to the academic field of performance studies, and I began research on what is now the first chapter of this thesis. Professor Nascimento encouraged us to incorporate our knowledge of ritual’s intersection with other fields into the course’s syllabus, which extended the course material to all types of performance. As the course progressed, we used existing theories of ritual and performance to begin to create a more clear vocabulary for the phenomena associated with the intersection. A semester of study left many unanswered questions and prompted me to further examine this connection, looking specifically to apply this theoretical vocabulary to performances and rituals that I had witnessed or in which I had participated.

The rich theory exploring ritual-performance intersections builds on an examination of how human beings are transformed through ritual. In the early 1900s,

French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep outlined three phases for what he called *rites de passage*: separation, transition, and reincorporation into society. These phases are the basis for scholarly work that follows in this vein, and constitute what I consider a ritual experience in the following chapters. In the 1960s, anthropologist Victor Turner's *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* and later *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* built on this tripartite structure to explore the correspondence between these phases in ritual and performance, emphasizing ritual's role as an agent of social change. Expanding on van Gennep's phases, Turner wrote that the *separation* phase

clearly demarcates sacred space and time from profane or secular space and time (it is more than just a matter of entering a temple—there must be in addition a rite which changes the quality of *time* also, or constructs a cultural realm which is defined as “out of time,” i.e. beyond or outside the time which measures secular and routines). It includes symbolic behavior—especially symbols of reversal or inversion of things, relationships and processes secular—which represents the detachment of the ritual subjects [...] from their previous social statuses. (*From Ritual to Theatre* 24)

Although separation typically includes the physical demarcation between the place one leaves and that which one enters, most important is that, in the process, participants feel detached from linear time. In this change in the quality of time, the separation phase links a ritual's performance to other kinds of performance.

Romanian religion scholar Mircea Eliade calls this shift an experience of *original time*:

The sacred time periodically reactualized in pre-Christian religions [...] is a mythical time, that is, a primordial time, not to be found in the historical past, an original time, in the sense that it came into existence all at once, that it was not preceded by another time, because no time could exist *before the appearance of the reality narrated in the myth [of origin]*. (72)

The relation to original time in a ritual connects it to the experience of the original participants. Following this thought, Eliade argues that “every creation, every existence begins in time; before a thing exists, a particular time could not exist [...] it is for this reason that every creation is imagined as having taken place at the beginning of time” (76). Because original time is thought of as “strong” and ideal, man seeks to return to it through ritual: “This ritual reactualizing of the *illud tempus* in which the first epiphany of a reality occurred is [...] not merely the commemoration of a mythical (and hence religious) event; it *reactualizes* the event” (Eliade 81). Using this theory of original time, I will explain in Chapter One the connection of a Christian service performed today with its first performance.

The separation from daily space and time leaves participants open to *transformation*, the second phase in van Gennep’s structure. During this intermediate phase, which van Gennep also called “margin” or “limen”—Latin for “threshold”—“the ritual subjects pass through a period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo which has few (though sometimes these are the most crucial) of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent profane social statuses or cultural states” (Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 24). Turner elaborates on the *liminal phase*, describing it as a period of “anti-structure,” in which “the liberation of human capacities of cognition,

affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints [is] incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles, and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate group” (44). He ultimately explains liminality in this way:

when persons, groups, sets of ideas, etc., move from one level or style of organization or regulation of the interdependence of their parts or elements to another level, there has to be an interfacial region, or, to change the metaphor, an interval, however brief, of *margin* or *limen*, when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality where everything, as it were, trembles in the balance (*From Ritual to Theatre* 44)

In other words, the lack of structure afforded by the liminal phase leads to the participants’ altered state; such a state allows participants to undergo transformation.

The liminal phase also provides an opportunity for *communitas*, defined by Turner as a collective experience of extreme unity. Fundamentally, *communitas* is

a relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals. These individuals are not segmentalized into roles and statuses but confront one another [...] Along with this direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities, there tends to go a model of society as a homogeneous, unstructured *communitas*, whose boundaries are ideally coterminous with those of the human species. (*The Ritual Process* 133)

During this phase, the transformative phase, participants may be stripped of previous social status and other tying obligations. Exposed and vulnerable, the participants

transgress their individuality and bond as a community. The liminal phase gives all participants the same boundaries and possibilities in space and time, which contributes to the efficacy of the ritual by encouraging communal experience.

Moreover, the liminal phase usually demands the group's engagement in *flow*. It is important that the entire group be engaged in flow to experience transformation. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi writes extensively about this element in his book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Conditional to *communitas*, flow consists of complete immersion in an activity, resulting in a feeling of extreme focus from which a participant can derive pleasure:

We have seen how people describe the common characteristics of optimal experience: a sense that one's skills are adequate to cope with the challenges at hand, in a goal-directed, rule-bound action system that provides clear clues as to how well one is performing. Concentration is so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant, or to worry about problems. Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted. An activity that produces such experiences is so gratifying that people are willing to do it for its own sake, with little concern for what they will get out of it, even when it is difficult, or dangerous. (71)

Once an individual reaches flow, she will find it difficult to reach again with the same level of focus. A succession of flow states requires a more focused concentration each time; because of the resulting intense satisfaction that flow grants participants, they are eager exert greater effort to continue in this state:

In our studies, we found that every flow activity, whether it involved competition, chance, or any other dimension of experience, had this in common: It provided a sense of discovery, a creative feeling of transporting the person into a new reality. It pushed the person to higher levels of performance, and led to previously undreamed-of states of consciousness. In short, it transformed the self by making it more complex. In this growth of self lies the key to flow activities. (74)

The suspension of daily life in the liminal phase allows for flow, which in turn guarantees the participants' satisfaction in this kind of engagement.

The third of van Gennep's phases, *reincorporation*, returns ritual participants to society—but with a “new, relatively stable, well-defined position in the total society. For those undergoing life-cycle ritual this usually represents an enhanced status, a stage further along life's culturally prefabricated road” (Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 24). This change in social statuses is often accompanied by a return to the daily life space:

This may take the form of a mere opening of doors or the literal crossing of a threshold which separates two distinct areas, one associated with the subject's pre-ritual or preliminal status, and the other with his post-ritual or postliminal status. (*From Ritual to Theatre* 25)

In performing the physical return from the ritual realm to daily life, the participant re-enters the social sphere, transformed. Through the three phases—separation, transformation and reincorporation—ritual can transform social statuses, and thus, the community as a whole.

Using these theories—Arnold van Gennep’s phases of a ritual, Turner’s theories of liminality and *communitas*, and Csíkszentmihályi’s theory of flow—this thesis will present three case studies of the intersections of ritual and performance as viewed through a religious ceremony, an ethnographic dramatic text, and a second dramatic work based on found text. In my first chapter, I will bring these theories together and relate them to my experience of the Compline service at Christ Church in New Haven. I will speak about this musically based Christian service and how it intertwines aspects of ritual and performance. As a spectator and a listener, I will analyze music’s ability to push the service through van Gennep’s ritual phases and Turner’s expanded theory of liminality. I will also explain how the service evokes a sense of original time. Moreover, I will discuss how Turner’s liminal phase acts as a vehicle to achieve *communitas* and flow in Compline, and the importance of the experience of flow to one’s engagement in the ritual. Drawing from this, in Chapter Two I will use Turner’s theory of liminality to analyze S. Ansky’s *Dybbuk*, a play about spirit possession. I will look closely at how the author presents the twentieth century’s declining Eastern European Jewish community in this play filled with symbols of loss of traditions. I will also discuss how the author’s ethnographic research facilitated the recreation of these traditions through theater. In light of this research, I will examine the progression of van Gennep’s ritual phases of dybbuk possession in the play. My third chapter will focus on the way the conflict between individual and social organization effects the manifestation of van Gennep’s phases in Charles L. Mee’s *Big Love*. I will return to Csíkszentmihályi’s definition of flow when in my conclusion I apply these theories to my experiences of the intersections

between ritual and theater from the perspective of a participant at a religious event and my experience as a singer and actor. More specifically, I will utilize my current understanding of ritual and performance theories to discuss my experience in First Communion, as a singer in Wesleyan University's medieval and renaissance choir, Collegium, and as an actor in the Wesleyan Theater Department's production of Charles L. Mee's *Big Love*. I hope to contribute to the ongoing questions in regards to the distinctions and similarities in ritual and performance engagement.

CHAPTER ONE:
THE INTERSECTION OF MUSIC, RITUAL AND PERFORMANCE IN THE
COMPLINE SERVICE

Whether supporting part of a rite or serving as a connector between different sections of a ritual, music has been present in ritual for centuries. In addition to adding to the splendor of transformative rituals, music can help to create a setting for liminality, the transformative second phase of a ritual that results in a heightened state of being. In quoting from *Tra le solecitudini*, the 1903 papal instruction on sacred music, James Frazier argues that

Sacred music [. . .] helps to increase the beauty and splendor of the ceremonies of the Church, and since its chief duty is to clothe the liturgical text [. . .] with suitable melody, its object is to make that text more efficacious, so that the faithful may through this means be the more roused to devotion. (15)

In other words, the performance of music in ritual ceremonies supports the biblical text via melody, engaging the listeners in the service and in turn reminding them of their dedication to their faith.

This music-induced attraction to the text that Frazier points out certainly holds true for the music in the last component of the Divine Office,¹ the Compline service: the beauty of the music causes a heightened experience that affects both singers and observers. Although the several parts of the script to Compline change weekly, the specific formula of music and text is repeated at each service. Regardless, Compline merges music and ritual so early in the service that they cannot be separated from each other. In this service, the naturally performative quality of music makes the

ritual itself more performative, and the rhythmic nature of music further engages both doers and spectators. As a composition with the aim of reaching a higher power through song, the music in Compline is the central focus of the service: it enables a liminal experience for both singers and observers that allows them to transcend their everyday experience. Moreover, the songs thus become representative of a recreation of the original time in which they were produced and sung, allowing for the flow of performance. This chapter will discuss music's power to push Compline through Arnold van Gennep's phases, focusing specifically on Turner's expended liminal phase as a vehicle for promoting flow and *communitas*. Because music is inherently performative, its presence within a ritual, as in the Compline service, enables the intersection of ritual and performance.

Compline follows an ancient service order focused around biblical psalms that allows for music to reinforce the text. The service's framework is explicitly laid out in the *Rule of St. Benedict*, a guide for monastic living compiled by St. Benedict in the first half of the sixth century (Harper 73) in which the author "established the daily organization and running of a monastery, concerning himself with the smallest details of daily life" (Yudkin 142). While the *Rule* included detailed instructions for the daily operations in a monastery, it stressed, above all, the importance of the monks' duty to participate in the many parts of the Divine Office:

At the time of the Divine Office, as soon as the signal is heard, let every one, leaving whatever he may have in hand, hasten to the church with the utmost speed—and yet with seriousness, so that there be no occasion for levity. Let nothing be preferred to the work of God. (143)

Indeed, a monk's day was planned entirely around the services, and he was expected to exemplify his piety and devotion to his faith in the response to the worship call. Designed for sung prayer and consisting mostly of reading Psalms aloud, the Office functioned mainly to provide "a forum for the recitation of the psalms" (145), though each of its parts differed in content (Harper 74). Compline, which derives its name from the Latin word *completa* (or "finished"), was the last of the eight Hours of the day. Performed before bedtime, it focused on protection and contemplation and emphasized spiritual peace before sleep (Yudkin 145). The service usually lasted about half an hour and took a very specific order:

Compline, the bedtime service, begins with a group of three psalms and continues with a hymn. A reading follows and then a short responsory. The canticle for Compline is *Nunc dimittis* (Luke II, 29-32), which requests eternal peace. Compline [. . .] ends with prayers and the "Benedicamus Domino."
(145)

Although this formula has changed somewhat over the 1,500 years of the service's existence, the modern service follows a similar basic structure that stems directly from this original order.

Compline's presentation through sung music both compliments and strengthens the structure of the service, creating less of a recitation of psalms and more of a presentational event. This combination of text and music creates a balanced and pleasing structure that generates a compelling delivery of text. In his book entitled *Music in Medieval Europe*, Jeremy Yudkin comments on this importance of music to the structure of the service:

The Psalms are chanted to recitational formulas and are framed by antiphons.

The prayers and readings are recited to simple formulas. The hymns, with their metrical poetic texts, are usually set to syllabic or slightly neumatic [sic] melodies, the same music serving for each stanza of the poetry. (146)

Because of Compline's strong anchor in Christian tradition, the text for the service is drawn almost entirely from Biblical passages, and the structure of the service is based partially on these texts. While the psalms used are indeed important, Nocent adds that they should be "highlighted by distinctive music" (132). Using music as the presentational form of the psalms helps connect each smaller event to the larger event of Compline as a service; as Yudkin writes: "it is music that articulates and gives palpable form to the many disparate items in the service" (199). This specific structure of paired music and text allows for little fluctuation in repeatability and sets the standard outline for the ritual's performance.

The Compline service at Christ Church in New Haven, Connecticut, exemplifies the performative nature of this religious ceremony. At Christ Church's Compline, the theatrical use of the church's space combines with the service's musical presentation to reveal the ceremony's unmistakable performative quality. Although Compline is typically performed as the last Hour of the day, it is the only one of the eight parts of the Liturgy of the Hours performed at Christ Church, allowing the participants to focus solely on the music for this service. My personal account of Christ Church's Compline service records my perceptions of the performative quality of the ritual:

Upon arriving at Christ Church, the only thing I know is that I am attending some type of Christian service. As the bells begin to toll at the church, I

become aware that it is time to enter the space. It is evident that the inside of the church is a place apart from the happenings of daily life; I am struck immediately by the lack of light, and as my eyes begin to adjust and I come out of my momentary blindness, I begin to notice the strong and heavy smell of incense hanging in the air. At the foot of the altar and on the ground of what would usually be the priest's performance space, multi-colored candles are scattered in a seemingly random order as if placed there by an over-zealous youth group. I walk to my seat on the center aisle and observe the new space in which I am sitting and about which I know very little: the exquisite architecture of the church is barely visible in the dim lighting, but I can just make out the outline of the walls and the old stained glass windows. The difficulty I experience in making out visual detail in the space indicates to me that this service will not appeal primarily to my sense of sight. On the altar lie several more candles, the pattern of which somehow illuminates the tabernacle just to the point where I can see the outline of Jesus. While the pattern may be unintentional, this is my first realization of performative aspects within the church—the light from the candles serves as a type of stage lighting, which may prove to be effective once the service begins.

The bells suddenly stop and for the brief moment of silence I pause, unsure of what to expect next. I need not wait long, as the silence is brief; almost immediately, I hear a choir of voices which begins softly and eventually becomes the only sound heard in the church. As the music begins, the shuffling and whispering of the diverse group of spectators sitting in the church ceases.

The choir is hidden in an alcove directly to my left in the church, so aside from the spectators, there are no bodies in the assumed performance space. I know where the choir is only because I can see the very dim shadow of a conductor; otherwise, it seems that the church is suggesting to the community that the choir is made up of the voices of angels and is singing from heaven. The beautiful music from the choir and the complete silence in the rest of the church coupled with the darkness and the smell of the incense offer me a comfortable anonymity, an opportunity to settle into myself. I fall in and out of awareness as I fluctuate between struggling to hear the words and losing interest in them. I hear pieces of familiar biblical language, but the combination of the words is foreign to me and it is difficult to make out the words. The familiarity of the Lord's Prayer in the service jolts me out of the comfort of the service for a moment, but ultimately causes me to become more engaged; after hearing jumbled words for most of the service, hearing this piece of text with which I am so familiar because of my own Catholic upbringing helps me cease to struggle to hear the words and become content with the beautiful harmony of the music. In my slipping in and out of awareness, I am shaken from my semi-aware state several more times during the service by disturbances not of the space: a truck's horn from the outside, a group of people talking while they walk past the church. These are the momentary reminders of the temporality of this service and of the world into which I will return when the service ends. The cantor sings a piece alone, and soon after, there is complete silence. Although it is at first unclear as to whether or not the choir will continue

singing, the service is over. There are several more seconds of silence before the shuffling begins again. I stand and exit the space.

I was able to engage my theoretical knowledge of the intersection between performance and ritual in my experience of this service. In thinking about Compline, I recognized the profound effect of music on the audience and on the other elements of the service. During my visit to Christ Church, music created a heightened sense of awareness also reinforced by other elements. In his article “Musical Interaction in Ritual Events,” J.H. Kwabena Nketia argues that a combination of different aspects of a service facilitate ritual transformation, which is heightened by the presence of music:

since the symbolic transformation that takes place in ritual is constituted by action which draws on sound, kinesic [sic] and visual codes, music which heightens the intensity of emotion generated by a rite or integrates the aural, the kinesic [sic] and the visual similarly enhances the ritual process. (12)

Nketia’s observation is very applicable to Christ Church’s service in that the combination of “[kinesthetic] and visual codes,” i.e. the lighting and other appeal to the senses, is made more effective by the presence of music in the service.

The order of the service at Christ Church differs slightly from the standard order in that it is drawn from the Sarum Rite collected in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*. As it is an Episcopal church, it is bound by church law to use a combination of the template for Compline found in this book and the traditional Benedictine formula. Both the rules that have been followed for centuries and the sheet music used in the service constitute the ritual’s script. The definition of a script I use here is

“enactments or symbolic expressions that are intended to model or represent the form of an ideal performance” (Jankowiak and Palmer 250). The presence of this formula-script sets the tone for the performative and ritual aspects of the service: it prescribes guidelines for performance and ensures that the pattern will be carried out in the same way each time. While sheet music offers a weekly variant in specific detail, it enables the singers to perform within the structure proposed by the formula-script. As part of the script, music creates both a performative channel to deliver the sacred texts and a medium of delivery that affects the listener, producing an experience more satisfying than hearing text alone. In participating in the action of delivering text, the choir transforms into an agent of the ritual, and is thereby analogous to actors performing onstage. While the text constitutes the script for the ritual, the music engages the audience by delivering the text efficaciously. Ultimately, the combination of live music, other ritualistic elements of the service, and the space brings life to the text.

A concerted appeal to the senses establishes the sacred space for the performance of the Compline ritual. In his book *The Sacred and the Profane, the Nature of Religion*, Mircea Eliade suggests that “it is not the infinite variety of the religious experiences of space that concerns us but, on the contrary, their elements of unity” (63). The choice of lighting in the church contributes to this necessary unity. The moment I entered the space, I was very aware of the lack of light: although I had entered from the darkness of the night outside, the church was even darker, lit only by candlelight. This choice of which areas to light created a theatrical effect which showed the observers where to visually focus and set the “fixed point, the central axis

for all future orientation [in the space]” (21) about which Eliade writes. The use of candles rather than incandescent light offers a clear separation from daily life, and indicates to observers that sight is not the most important sense to employ while experiencing this service. Additionally, the dim light provides anonymity, which the director of the choir describes as “crucial to the experience of the service” (Lehman), as it allows for personal reflection without the worry of onlookers. The aroma of incense is also essential to this separation from daily life. The use of heavy incense during the service sets the space apart as sacred; smelling the incense triggered in me memories of other liturgical celebrations. This sensory memory put me into a place of reverence for the space and helped me recognize its sacred nature. Lastly, the positioning of the choir in the space is a strong aural appeal. Whereas the separation of the choir from the rest of the congregation during religious services is not unusual, the seemingly disembodied singing seems suggestive of angelic voices and is yet another indication that one does not need to see to truly experience this service. Because Compline is heavily based on the experience of music, one needs only to be able to hear the sounds in the church, not to see the choir producing the sounds. The combination of visual, olfactory, and aural elements in Compline unify the ritual experience and underscore the power of music as a performative and religious vehicle.

Although the church’s acoustics make the music resonate beautifully, it is sometimes very difficult to understand the words in the service. During the time when the music was written, the text was the most important part of the service; music served as the presentational medium for the Psalms. The choir members at

Christ Church claim that the stories of humankind's struggle presented in the liturgical text evoke personal images for those in the congregation, and are eager to admit their belief in the power of the text to elicit response. Because of their ardent belief in the text's message, the musicians make every effort to articulate the words in the space; even when they are unable to make the words clear, choir director Robert Lehman still believes that "the meaning comes through. The underlying impact of the words is there." There are two possible outcomes of textual understanding in the service. First, the visitors' struggle to hear the words could lead to a discord of elements and ultimately block the flow of the service. On nights when the ritual runs efficaciously, however, it could establish flow and the visitor could make out the general meaning of the words even if she does not understand each specific portion of text.

As depicted above, an effective performance of Compline results in flow. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi points out that "flow and religion have been intimately connected from earliest times" (76). In this service, flow is the product of a harmonious coexistence of performance and ritual. It is also the aspect of the service that makes the ritual more appealing. The effectiveness of the ritual is presented in its ability to "help participants and spectators achieve an ordered state of mind that is highly enjoyable" (72). For example, in an interview with several members of Christ Church's Compline choir, the singers referred to the "musical click" they experience on some nights during the service. During this "click," the quality of their singing is very good and they are able to function as a single unit with little effort (Lehman). The singers are more engaged in the service when the "click" occurs, and during

these nights they feel that the spectators are able to better connect to the service as well. The director claims that the measure of the quality of the musical experience is the amount of silence at the end of the singing: when the choir feels the musical “click,” the congregation takes longer to stand and exit the space. This “click” during the service resembles flow “resulting from a structured activity” (Csíkszentmihályi 71). According to studies done by Csíkszentmihályi, flow activities provide

a sense of discovery, a creative feeling of transporting the person into a new reality. [They push] the person to higher levels of performance, and [lead] to previously undreamed-of states of consciousness. (73)

His description of the state of the body and mind caused by flow is consistent with the description of the “click” described by the choir members. This connection between a “click” and satisfaction is clear for Csíkszentmihályi, who asserts that “what we call religion is actually the oldest and most ambitious attempt to create order in consciousness. It therefore makes sense that religious rituals would be a profound source of enjoyment” (76). On the nights when the musicians experience musical flow, it is because they are pushing themselves to excel. Their enjoyment of the ritual is apparent in its transmission to the congregation, as those who are engaged in the service take longer to disengage from the service, proving that they have enjoyed it as well. Because flow depends on a powerful performance, the singers must constantly challenge themselves. Once flow is achieved at a high level of performance, the choir must work harder each subsequent time to achieve the flow state. Csíkszentmihályi explains that doing the same thing at the same intensity for a long period of time causes restlessness and dissatisfaction, which makes people want to enjoy themselves

again. This impels them to push themselves harder and to find new ways of using what they already know (74). Based on Csikszentmihályi's assertion, it follows that achieving flow again requires that the members of the choir constantly challenge themselves, whether this be by working with music that presents a higher level of difficulty or by raising their expectations of themselves. The choir members describe the experience of flow as a "high" (Lehman) and say that once they experience it, they are constantly trying to replicate the feeling. A successful enactment of the performance of *Compline* lies in the hands of the choir: when it powerfully produces a harmony of all elements of sound, the flow state can be passed onto the larger congregation and produce a community.

When the choir's flow passes into the congregation, it enables *communitas*. *Communitas* applies to the intense feeling of cohesiveness of the community that a ritual produces. *Compline*'s temporary community slips into what Turner calls "ideological *communitas*," the group's connection through an interaction of being together instead of doing together, when both singers and the rest of the congregation feel connected to one another: "'Flow' may induce *communitas*, and *communitas* 'flow' [...] Here it is not team-work in flow that is quintessential, but 'being' together, with 'being' the operative word, not 'doing'" (*From Ritual to Theatre* 48). The musical delivery produced by the singers in *Compline* creates a community devoid of social structure where performers and receivers have different functions within a collective purpose, allowing for openness to ritual transformation.

The performative nature of ritual in *Compline* also lies in the balance of sound and silence. In its ability to structure the delivery of the performance and, as a result, the

audience's experience of the ritual, this balance guides the listeners through three transitions in this ritual. The way that music is delivered is equally important to the timing of the delivery, as this balance moves and elicits a response from the listeners. As Thomas Clifton articulates, "the significance of silence is therefore contingent upon a sounding environment; in the resulting collaboration silence articulates the sound, while sound confers a specific character on the silence" (164). Like the silence that follows the ringing of the bells at the beginning of Compline, sound and silence compliment each other. The tension created by the opposition of sound and silence determines the length of a ritual, which according to Nketia "may [. . .] depend on the duration of the different rites, the intervals that separate them and the amount of time devoted to music-making" (110). In the case of the Compline service, the balance of the "time devoted to music making," or sound, and "intervals that separate them," or silence, within Arnold van Gennep's ritual phases determines the duration of the performance. In the Compline service, music and a lack thereof lead the transitions through the three phases of separation, transformation, and reincorporation for both the choir and for the congregation.

As the beginning of this process, the separation phase removes the spectators from the daily world. Before the singing begins, the bells calling the congregation to the church signify that it is time to begin the separation from daily life and enter the church's sacred space. This signal is a remnant of Benedict's ancient call to worship: as the first connection in this process to the Benedictine rules, the bells indicate the beginning of the Compline ritual. The short silence that follows the bells and precedes the singing is important to the realization of music as an enabler of this extra

daily experience, as “silence [. . .] receives meaning only by contrast with noise” (Jackson 294). During Christ Church’s Compline, the first short silence between the ceasing of the bells and the commencement of the singing serves as an indicator of the aforementioned start of Compline. As a transition in the ritual, it acts as a moment of uncertainty for the congregation: it is a short build up and a gap resolved only when the singing begins. This silence is “time pure and undisturbed, that in which there is opportunity and no event” (Bennet 61). As argued by the same author, the relation of music to silence is of a kind that is universal. More generally it is the relation of being to void. [...] In void all irrelevancies and impediments have been cleared away and the negative conditions favouring creation established. [...] Void can [...] be understood as potentiality. (61)

Compline’s silence between the end of the bells and the beginning of the singing offers a moment of emptiness to be filled by sound. This first void is full of potential for the type of noise that will fill it, and as such its success depends on its length. If the moment lasts too long, the talking of curious visitors will inevitably fill it, as Victor Bennett explains:

If the pause is too long, if it is not strictly calculated in time, or if a strong rhythm has not been previously established, it is likely that the life of the music, or to put it the other way the potentiality of the silence, will ebb away and leave the listener disappointed and irritated. (65)

However, because the choir’s singing quickly follows this silence in Christ Church’s Compline, the brevity of the stillness in this moment is well justified. Additionally, in the way that it prepares the spectators for the next step in the ritual, silence

“represents the quality of purity in [time]” (61): it acts as a cleansing agent for the service, so that it can start anew each time. The silence also creates an anticipation long enough to satisfy curiosity so that conversation does not ensue. It follows, then, that the bells’ ceasing induces the congregation to be silent. In this brief transitional moment, the spectators can “feel the tension that precedes [the music], when performers and audience alike are preparing themselves for what is to come” (63).

This tension is

constituted by the yearning that exists between potency and act, for there in the silence the work is pent up and finds its opportunity of becoming. So affecting is that tension that the opening of the work, no matter how tremendous, can only seem by comparison a relief. (64)

The relief of the tension sets forth the transition into what Victor Turner describes as the liminal phase:

This is the fact that when persons, groups, sets of ideas, etc., move from one level [...] to another level, there has to be [...] an interval, however brief, of margin or *limen*, when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance. (*From Ritual to Theatre* 44)

As a transition in the ritual, the liminal phase allows for transformation within the community; in this phase, the engagement in flow and *communitas* can change the listeners’ experience. Although silence in this transitional phase interrupts the sound and may seem disruptive, it is a necessary transition into this liminal, or transformation, phase: “Liminal phenomena tend to be ultimately eufunctional even

when seemingly ‘inversive’ for the working of the social structure” (*From Ritual to Theatre* 54). The use of the word “potentiality” in Turner’s description of liminality shares the same meaning of the term in Bennet’s description of void; thus, the potentiality of the void *becomes* the liminal. After the listener becomes habituated to the sound of song in the Compline service, the singing is very much like a void in sound that needs to be refilled. At Christ Church’s Compline, the noises that interrupt the service then become the being that disrupts the void, the music that interrupts the silence of accepted sound. There are “plenty of other familiar sounds, such as coughing, striking matches and slapping newspapers. This is the setting into which modern invention has released music” (Bennett 63). In this sense, sound and silence build on each other as new sounds fill the voids created by the habituation of the listener to the previous sound.

The ritual begins to slip out of the liminal phase and into reincorporation with the first recitation of familiar text. Whereas the psalms change from week to week in the service at Christ Church, there are certain components of the aural score that always remain the same: the Lord’s Prayer, the Kyrie Eleison (“Lord have mercy”) and the *Benedicamus Domino*, which is always sung by the cantor, are consistently a part of the service and become for the performers both points of relaxation and jolts of reality. With the introduction of each successive familiar text, the participants are reminded more of the daily world into which they will soon reincorporate. The choir members, who are naturally more familiar with the text, claim that for them the cantor’s singing of the *Benedicamus Domino* is the real indication that the service is coming to a close (Lehman). The reincorporation is final when, after the second and

final moment of silence in this progression of the ritual, they hear the shuffling feet of the disbanding community. During the service, the musicians are in control and use precisely timed moments of silence and sound, gauged by their feeling of readiness to start together. The service's final moment of silence operates in a very similar way to the silence at the beginning of the service. In the beginning, the silence connects to the liminal phase of the ritual and as such has the potential to further engage the spectators; conversely, the second silence serves to disengage them from the remnants of the service and indicates the service's end. The music "passes out of being into silence [...] This is the destiny of music, universal and inexorable in its operation" (Eliade 65). This too is the direction of the ritual: at the point of the second silence, the ritual ends. Because music was the element that caused an elevated sense of awareness and being, its conclusion puts an end to this heightened sensation and forces spectators to hear outside noise. As they hear each other in the space they come to realize their lost anonymity. In this way, the second silence finishes the service and provides the final breaking off point from the ritual for both the spectators and the participants so that reincorporation can occur. The duration of the last silence is determined by the community as a whole, as the exact amount of time it will take for them to move and break the silence at the end of the service depends on their readiness to reincorporate. Simply, this silence stops the music.

The periods of silence in the Compline service assist in the recreation of original time. According to Bennett, it is not just the reproduction of the music that makes for recreation of original time (63): if this were the case, one would be able to restore this time any time the music was played. Rather, silence represents original time because

it represents “the silence out of which the music was born” (63). Silence in Compline’s performance, like the moment between the noise of the bells and the start of the singing, allows the music to go back to the time in which it was originally performed. In this sense, one is able to experience the birth of music as people experienced it when it was first sung. As the silence is a period of rebirth and renewal, the first moment of silence consecrates the space anew (Eliade 32) before each Compline service. During this moment, the space becomes sanctified again (52). In the perspective of the choir members, in their singing of Compline they are “part of a historical tradition of over one thousand years” (Lehman). For them, singing in the service is fulfilling because they sense that they are a small part of a tradition that has been and will continue. Eliade describes the experience of sacred time in a ritual context as

a primordial mythical time made present. Every religious festival, any liturgical time, represents the reactualization of a sacred event that took place in a mythical past, ‘in the beginning.’ (68)

Singing not only gives the musicians a sense of belonging to tradition, but also symbolically recreates the sacred time that has followed the tradition from the beginning. In performing this service, the choir members ensure that the tradition of the ritual will not be lost, linking the performance of the ritual to its survival.

Although music plays a large part in the enactment of Compline, to assume that music alone constitutes this ritual would be incorrect. Rather, music is the aspect of Compline that links ritual and performance: “Within the liturgy music functions as a form of applied art. It is music and as such can be judged on its artistic value. But

alongside this it is equally liturgy. Demands that one makes of liturgy in general apply also to its music” (Kock 12). Ultimately, Compline’s music is the tool by which flow is obtained; through flow, the congregation is receptive to receiving the tradition of this music.

CHAPTER TWO

FOLKLORE AND RITUAL IN ANSKY'S DYBBUK

The amount of research that goes into a play often determines the extent of a playwright's familiarity with its subject. Despite S. Ansky's temporary departure from the Jewish faith, in the early twentieth century the author and ethnographer conducted an extraordinary amount of research in preparation for his most celebrated play, *The Dybbuk*. Not surprisingly, many of the details Ansky used to ground the play were rituals and folktales passed down through oral tradition, which he believed provided an important link between the past, present, and future (Roskies xxiv). Drawing on this extensive research, Ansky creates a fictional community in *The Dybbuk* that represents the potential consequences of the loss of the Eastern European Jewish culture's tradition and history. The author draws from Jewish ritual and folklore to present a community that is in a liminal place: not thriving but not yet dead. *The Dybbuk*, which Ansky also titled *Between Two Worlds*, suggests an extra-daily space as it explores the characters' experiences of liminality while between life and afterlife. Although it tries to survive by clinging to its roots, this once-flourishing fictional community is doomed to die off without a future generation to carry on its traditions.

Ansky's fervent interest in the preservation of Jewish history and culture led him to conduct ethnographic studies of Jewish folklore, artifacts, and history. Born in Russia in 1863, Ansky was a great student of the Torah before rebelling against Judaism and becoming a political radical. Later inspired by Yiddish writer I.L. Peretz, he unexpectedly developed an intense interest in Jewish culture. From 1911-

1914 the Russian government commissioned him to conduct ethnographic expeditions throughout the country to preserve, record, and study the many and varied traditions of Eastern European Judaism. Before the expeditions were cut short by the outbreak of World War I, Ansky and his team traveled from one village to another in search of the lost treasures of Jewish faith and culture; Ansky's believed that "Yiddish tales, legends and the like must be collected among old folks who carry the past with them in unadulterated form" (Roskies xxiii). During these extensive expeditions, he compiled thousands of photographs, folktales, folk songs, wax cylinders of Jewish folk music, historical documents, manuscripts, and sacred objects (xxiii). In light of these discoveries, his *The Dybbuk* is "the product of centuries of Jewish beliefs and storytelling—it is the product specifically of Jewish mystical thought and Hasidic culture" (Konigsberg 23). During these expeditions, the author found Jewish folklore to be the source of Jewish cultural renewal and from this realization was able to regain a sense of excitement and cultural pride (Roskies xxii). Ansky became fanatically devoted to Jewish life through his quest to preserve the culture.

Ansky's inclusion of many cultural motifs discovered during his research for *The Dybbuk* brings to light the author's fear of losing the Jewish past. He believed that each person who dies without passing down tradition takes a piece of history with him, leaving no story for the future generations: "With every old man who dies, with every fire that breaks out, with every exile we endure, we lose a piece of our past. The finest examples of our traditional lives, our customs and beliefs, are disappearing" (xxiv). Ansky believed Jewish culture to be embodied by those

members who carried out its traditions and felt a sense of urgency to record it before it vanished permanently. During his expeditions, the author realized that oral tradition is crucial in passing down belief systems. He saw it as a way to “bridge present and past, the intellectual and the folk, this world and the next” (xxiv). In order to record many of these traditions, Ansky created an in-depth questionnaire that broached topics about the Jewish life cycle and included questions about what happens to a soul after a person dies; whether or not people have heard of a dead person being judged at a Rabbinical Court; and even how and why an evil, wandering spirit called a dybbuk enters a body and what it does there (Neugroschel 55). According to David G. Roskies, Ansky already had *The Dybbuk* in mind while interviewing these people:

Questionnaire in hand, Ansky had already conceived *The Dybbuk*. The romantic plot, the mystical setting and the historical landscape were all born en route from one godforsaken shtetl to another [...] the folktales about dybbuks that he collected in the field offered a “realistic” way of bringing all strands of the story together. Through a stunning orchestration of Jewish folk motifs and mystical lore, Ansky rescued for a secular (and largely non-Jewish) audience a most compelling version of a life that was about to vanish. (xxv)

The various motifs present in Ansky’s interviews and compilation of folktales are the basis of his play’s story, help keep this history alive for a wide audience, and inform his other writings. The wealth of history and cultural expression Ansky found during his expeditions led him to appreciate its importance and fear its extinction.

Among the stories that Ansky collected was one that embodies this fear of cultural loss. This folktale, a legend about a grave of a bride and groom, appeared as a recurring folkloristic theme on his journey. Each time he encountered this same story, it followed that the townspeople would show Ansky the gravesite of a bride and groom murdered on their way to the wedding canopy and buried in front of the synagogue. This folktale, Roskies argues, suggests a “historical analogue to the young couple cut down in the prime of life” (xxv). The image of this gravesite features prominently in the second act when Leah, the young bride-to-be, claims extreme closeness to the murdered couple:

Awake and asleep, I have often felt them with me; they are as close to me as my own flesh and blood. (*Thoughtfully*) A young and handsome couple on their way to the bridal canopy, looking forward to a long and beautiful life together, and in a flash all was over—evil people with axes hacked the bride and groom to death. They were buried in one grave so that they would be together for all eternity. And at every wedding, as we dance around their grave, they join in the festivities. (25)

In this passage, Leah’s monologue relays to the audience the story Ansky heard so often during his expeditions. Her actions in the play seem to embody the dead couple’s struggle. The folktale functions as a metaphor for Leah’s current unhappiness: like the murdered couple, she and Khonon could have been very happy had she not become engaged to another man and had Khonon not died upon hearing about it.

Because of the inevitable differences in each version, the folktale in Joachim Neugroschel's *The Dybbuk: A Haunted Reader* is slightly different from the story Leah relays to Frade. In Neugroschel's version, the couple escapes the massacre at the synagogue only to find themselves stuck on a boat in the middle of the river with Cossacks still pursuing them. Realizing that the Cossacks could kill only one of them, they decide to drown together to avoid life without each other. As in Leah's version of the tale, the bride and groom are buried in the same grave so that their souls are joined together (101). The folktale relates more concretely to Leah and Khonon at the end of the play: just as the couple decides that one cannot live without the other and that they must die together, in the last act of *The Dybbuk* Leah steps outside the protective circle to allow Khonon into her soul, realizing that her heart too is united with his and that she cannot live happily without him:

Return to me, my bridegroom, my husband. I will carry you in my heart, and in the still of the night you will come to me in my dreams and together we will rock our unborn babies to sleep. (49)

In accepting Khonon into her soul, the two lovers merge and Leah dies. Ansky metaphorically links them to this folk tale, and in doing so relays a message about the Jewish loss of tradition: just as the Jews "saw themselves symbolized in the murdered bride and groom and unable to carry on their family and their generation," an audience could see the same concept in the story of Leah and Khonon (Neugroschel 99). The couple's inability to carry on their generation together emphasizes Ansky's concern that without the transmission of traditions from one generation to the next, they would disappear. This love plot, Ansky insists, "holds the seeds of its undoing.

If the gentile invasion—like the Khmielnitsky rebellion—kills Jewish bodies, then the new romantic love force...can annihilate the soul of the community and the community itself” (Zipperstein 21). Ansky’s portrayal of the murdered bride and groom folktale represents Leah and Khonon’s alliance and is a metaphor for the Jewish dilemma of losing the remnants of their culture as a whole.

Part of the risk of losing Jewish identity was in the fact that “living Jews” must respect the relations between the dead and the living. Because Sender causes Khonon’s death by breaking the agreement he made with the young man’s father Nissen ben Rivke, there is no blood relative to say the mourner’s Kaddish on Nissen ben Rivke’s behalf. Consequently, the Rabbinical Court rules that to restore the balance, Sender must say Kaddish for both Khonon and his father, “just as if they were his own relations” (Ansky 43). Sender sets in motion a chain of events that leads to Leah’s death, which then implies that her father will have no one to say Kaddish for him:

It is here the collective that loses. It is the rebbe who miserably stumbles and cannot perform his requisite tasks; it is Leah’s father, the greatest failure of all, who will die with no one to chant kaddish over him, with his daughter dead, and with the blame on his shoulders for the death of the son of his closest friend. (Zipperstein 22).

Because of Sender’s disregard for the promise he made, his family line will expire and he will be deprived of an important Jewish ritual when he dies. Similarly, Ansky seems to suggest that the Jewish people’s disregard for the preserving and passing

down their cultural heritage will cause them to die out without another generation to say Kaddish for them.

The second title of Ansky's play, *Between Two Worlds*, highlights the state of liminality strung throughout the play. Firstly, as a rite of passage, Leah's wedding is a liminal event. As the wedding is an unstable transition from singlehood to marriage, the preparations leading up to it become extra daily events. Placed in such a liminal, vulnerable state, Leah's body is receptive to host Khonon's spirit within it. Through her possession he achieves the purification necessary to transform and enter into Leah's soul; only then can they consummate their marriage. The second way in which the relevance of liminal states is stressed is in relation to time. The importance of the liminal hour is first introduced when Leah tries to reason with her grandmother to let her invite Khonon to the wedding. She reminds her of a piece of folklore that Frade had told her: "Grandma, you told me that at midnight dead souls pray in the synagogue. They come to say the prayers they could not recite in their lives" (24). This moment is the first of three in which Ansky establishes that Jewish folklore considers souls to exist during midnight. The second occurs when Khonon is exorcised as the clock strikes midnight: as an indication that midnight is liminal, the clock's chime pushes Khonon out of Leah's body. The third and final reference to midnight as a liminal hour happens just before Leah dies and lets Khonon enter her soul. Her reference to being together in "the still of the night" (48) emphasizes the importance of fulfilling their betrothal and implies that being together on a liminal plane is better than life without each other. Lastly, Khonon's wandering soul is in a liminal state between dead and living. In such an unstable state, he possesses Leah in

the form of a dybbuk, clinging to her body because he loves her and cannot rest in peace without her. The Messenger explains this to Leah after the beggar's dance, before she persuades Frade to let her go to Khonon's grave: "There are also souls who belong nowhere, who find no peace anywhere; they take possession of another person's body in the form of a dybbuk, and in this way they achieve their purification. (*He leaves, Leah is astounded*)" (26). Because his mission on earth has not been finalized, Khonon cannot leave Leah behind. In achieving purification through his possession of her, the transformative part of the ritual is effective for both Leah and Khonon because it leads to the realization of their wedding in the sense of communion.

For Yevgeny Vakhtangov, the heightened state in which the beggar's dance leaves Leah and its similarities to dybbuk possession make the moment of possession in the text open to interpretation. In his production of the play with the Habimah Theater, Vakhtangov chose the dance scene as the one in which the dybbuk invades Leah's body, making the beggars "[Khonon's] representatives on earth and the means by which his soul enters Leah" (Fishman 51). To visually represent this choice, he added more beggars to "allow them to dominate the stage" (51). While Vakhtangov's choice may have worked in his production, Ansky's text indicates that the dance should prepare Leah for possession rather than operate as the exact moment of possession. Frade's distressed return from inviting the dead to the wedding demonstrates Ansky's intention:

GITTEL: Did she cry long at her mother's grave?

FRADE: (*Shakes her head*) Don't ask what happened there; you're better off

not knowing. I'm still trembling! (29)

Directly after this conversation, Leah runs to the grave of the murdered bride and groom and, in a man's voice, accuses her betrothed of being a murderer. At that moment, the Messenger says, "A dybbuk has entered the body of the bride" (29). Frade's reaction to what transpired at the cemetery coupled with the subsequent announcement that a dybbuk has entered Leah's body makes it clear that the author intended the possession to occur *at* the grave, and the preceding dance to foreshadow the dybbuk's entering of the bride's body.

Khonon's possession of Leah's body as a dybbuk transforms her rite of passage from that of marriage to one of death. While the first two phases of a ritual—separation and transformation as described by van Gennep—are realized while Leah is living, the bride can only accomplish the third phase, reincorporation into society, by passing from the world of the living into the realm of the dead. Such impossibility adds to Ansky's insistence on the theme of decay and loss of Jewish traditions and culture; when Leah dies, the collective loses because there are fewer people to carry on the tradition. In the play, the moment that corresponds to van Gennep's separation phase is that when the beggars dance on Leah's wedding day. Their dance builds wildly, preparing the bride for dybbuk possession. Near the end of the dance, the half-blind woman refuses to let go of Leah. Ansky uses animated language to explain exactly how the dance should affect the bride:

(the old woman won't let go, pleading) More! More! (They dance, the old woman gasping for breath and screaming) More! More! (Gittel pulls the old woman into the yard with force; she returns and she and Bassia lead Leah to

the porch and seat her on a bench; the servants remove the tables and lock the gate.

FRADE: You're as white as a sheet, Leah'le. Are you tired? (23)

Ansky's language in the stage directions foreshadows the oppressive nature of dybbuk possession in the next two acts. The old woman's refusal to let go of Leah is analogous to Khonon's clinging to the bride-to-be's body during the exorcism segment described later in the play. Ansky purposefully uses the image of the old woman gasping for breath to foreshadow Khonon's later struggle to keep hold of Leah just before the rabbis succeed in casting him out. That Gittel must forcibly wrench the old woman from Leah also indicates the difficulty they will have in pulling Khonon's soul from Leah. The trance-like state in which the dance leaves her and her defending of evil spirits after the encounter emphasizes Leah's altered condition. It also signifies that even after the rabbis exorcise the dybbuk, Leah will feel a connection to her possessor so strong that she will be unable to detach herself from the experience. The dance makes Leah vulnerable to dybbuk possession, and Ansky's vivid language relates the ritual wedding dance very closely to Khonon's possession of Leah in the following two acts.

The transformation phase of the rite of dybbuk possession alters Leah physically and mentally while also purifying Khonon so that he can incorporate himself into Leah's soul. It begins at Khonon's grave when his soul jumps into Leah's body and starts to use it as his own. Upon Leah's return from the grave, she is noticeably altered, as evidenced by her uncharacteristic behavior and the male voice that emanates from within her:

LEAH: *(Tears off the veil, jumps up, pushes Menashe away, and cries out)* You are not my bridegroom! [...] *(Tears herself away, runs to the grave, spreads her arms)* Holy bride and groom, protect me! Save me! *(She falls; people run to her and lift her up; she looks around wild-eyed and cries out, not with her own voice but with that of a man [Khonon])* Ah! Ah! You have buried me! But I have returned to my promised bride and will not leave her! *(Nahman goes to Leah; she shouts at him)* Murderer! (29)

Although Frade has alluded to it, this is the first time that the audience sees a clear change in Leah. In jumping into her soul, Khonon creates a union between them, trying to simulate the bond of marriage even though he is dead. The transformation is twofold in that it changes both the possessor and the possessed. Because of the sacred promise that Sender made with Khonon's father, Leah and Khonon are intimately joined. When their union cannot happen on earth, they are forced to join by other means. The transformative phase ends when the rabbi exorcises Khonon's spirit from Leah. While Khonon holds onto Leah very strongly, he begins to lose strength when the rabbi blows a shofar. With each subsequent sound from the horn, Khonon loses more of his hold on Leah's body until he has no choice but to release her:

LEAH (DYBBUK [*Trembles violently*]): Recite the mourner's Kaddish for me.

My time has come!

REB AZRIEL: Sender! You say the Kaddish!

SENDER: *Yisgadal ve-yiskadash shmei raboh.* May His great name be magnified and sanctified throughout the world which He has created according

to His will. (*The clock strikes twelve*)

LEAH (DYBBUK [*Jumps up in fright*]): Aah—aah! (*Falls on the sofa in a faint*). (46)

The clock strikes midnight as Khonon exits Leah's body. Just as the shofar has been weakening him, the clock's striking midnight is the final force that pushes Khonon out of Leah's body and subsequently finishes the transformative phase. The liminal time allows the ritual to progress to the reincorporation phase: at this hour between one day and the next, the transformation for both characters completes, and Khonon's soul is purified and released.

Because of Leah and Khonon's otherworldly bond, they can never fully detach from each other; in turn Leah cannot reincorporate herself into her worldly community while alive. While Leah sits inside the protective circle after Khonon has been exorcised, she feels a void and longs for him to be close to her again. Khonon then reveals his purpose in leaving her body:

KHONON'S VOICE: I broke every barrier, surmounted death, reversed the law of ages. I struggled with the strong and wrestled with the mighty and the pitiless. And when my strength finally failed me, I left your body to enter your soul.

LEAH: (*Tenderly*) Return to me, my bridegroom, my husband. I will carry you in my heart, and in the still of the night you will come to me in my dreams and together we will rock our unborn babies to sleep. (48)

Just as this exchange applies to the Jews' inability to carry on their generation, Leah's line implies that she and Khonon can only exist in the liminal plane and not on earth.

It is only in this unstable time, “in the still of the night” (48), that Leah and Khonon can fulfill their destiny together. Because she is unable to be with Khonon in life, she must die and become part of the Jewish community as a ghost: she and Khonon complete the terms of their betrothal in death. This reincorporation as a ghost adds to the idea of decay and cultural loss; when Leah dies, the collective loses because there are fewer people to carry on the traditions. Although Leah enters into the play’s rituals as a living person, she can only reincorporate into her community and be with Khonon as a ghost.

Ultimately, Ansky’s *The Dybbuk* uses liminality to show the unstable position of the Eastern European Jewish community during the author’s lifetime. Using folklore and tradition, the play emphasizes the author’s fear that the culture he cared so much about would soon die off. The loss of the murdered bride and groom presented in the folktale acts as the thread in Leah and Khonon’s relationship and is parallel to the disappearance of Jewish culture for all Eastern European Jews. As a call to action for the audience, *The Dybbuk* conveys the importance of rescuing a dying culture. Spectators are urged to take part in their cultures and carry on tradition. In its presentation of rituals and the passage of traditions to various characters, in the twentieth century *The Dybbuk* itself became an instrument for the transmission of tradition and culture. The ritual elements described and evoked within *The Dybbuk*’s text drive the play toward the same conclusions as the performance of *Compline*: similar to *Compline*, liminality serves to transform the participants. Moreover, both *Compline* and *The Dybbuk* recall an older, mythical time, and thus become agents of cultural transmission.

CHAPTER THREE

RITUAL AS SOCIAL COMMENTARY IN CHARLES L. MEE'S *BIG LOVE*

Years ago, Charles L. Mee's work would have been somewhat of an anomaly in the American theater community. Mee is a playwright with a love for putting "pieces of the world on the stage without smoothing out the rough edges, running it through [his] interpretive frame, or making it smooth and easy to listen to" (qtd. in Erin B. Mee 88). Inspired by Max Ernst's Fatagaga pieces toward the end of World War I, Mee's plays are collages of various found texts. He also distributes his plays free of charge at his website, www.charlesmee.org.² In her book *A Director Prepares*, Anne Bogart argues that "new myths are needed to encompass who we are becoming" (3):

National and international cultures as well as artistic communities are currently undergoing gigantic shifts in mythology. Technological and corporate revolutions have already changed the way we communicate, interact, live, make art and our ethics and values. The myths of the last century are now inadequate to encompass these new experiences. We are living in the space between mythologies. It is a very creative moment, brimming with possibilities of new social structures, alternate paradigms and for the inclusion of disparate cultural influences. (3)

To meet this demand for modernization of narrative, Mee's plays juxtapose ancient and modern sources to refashion early dramatic texts in light of contemporary conflicts. Mee's plays often build off of a classic base in Greek myths or familiar stories and say "something about the world we live in today" (85). In *Big Love*, a loose adaptation of Aeschylus's *The Suppliants*, Mee creates a world with some

similarities to our own, but with many hyperboles that comment upon our world. Ritualistic elements, such as wedding music, invade the world of the play in attempt to impose a wedding ritual on its events. In doing so, traditional ritualistic elements establish a cultural foundation while simultaneously subverting and suppressing the non-conventional elements of the play as presented by the characters. *Big Love* introduces a conflict between individual and social organization that affects the realization of van Gennep's ritual phases.

Set in the liminally evocative "long, long golden twilight," Mee's *Big Love* portrays a story of fifty sisters who flee from Greece to escape from marriage to their fifty cousins. Representative of the fifty women are Thyona, Olympia, and Lydia, who seek asylum at an Italian villa. Bella, the villa owner and family matriarch, and her son, Piero, are reluctant to take them in. When the fifty men led by Constantine, Oed, and Nikos arrive at the villa, they exit with Piero to try to reach a compromise. As wedding preparations develop—for instance, the arrival of the wedding gifts, guests, the wedding itself—it becomes clear that the women have no way out of this commitment. Piero confirms this assumption when he says

Your cousins will marry you
whether you want to marry them or not.

None of you has a choice. [...]

The wedding will take place today.

The arrangements have been made.

Thyona, who is most adamant about her independence and refuses to marry Constantine, proposes and forms a pact with her sisters that the women will kill all

the men on their wedding night. When the ceremony finishes, the women slay the men until the stage becomes a virtual bloodbath; simultaneously, Lydia and Nikos, who have fallen in love with each other, make love downstage. After the murders, Thyona notices Lydia with Nikos and accuses her of treason, after which Bella conducts a trial. After hearing both sides of the women's arguments, including Thyona's justification for the murders and Lydia's own defense of her breaking the pact, Bella rules "not guilty" on all counts. She reasons that although the murders were horrible and wrong, her family shares the blame with them because when the sisters came to ask them for help, the family failed them. Also part of her ruling is that Lydia cannot be condemned for choosing love:

So Lydia: she cannot be condemned.

And that's the end of it.

And as for you,

there will be no punishment for you either,

even though you may have done wrong,

there will be no justice.

For the sake of healing

for life to go on

there will be no justice.

After a lengthy description of the importance of sympathy, a receiving line is formed and Nikos and Lydia walk down the line while the guests kiss and congratulate them; Lydia throws her bouquet and her garter; a hundred flashbulbs go off and the couple exits up the aisle looking

frightened, maybe even filled with foreboding—

in fact, they both look shellshocked and devastated.

Much of the dialogue in *Big Love* represents a tension between conventional and non-conventional social expectations. This dramatic tension gains body in Mee's contrasting of traditional performative elements, such as those in weddings, and urban interference. One of the examples of such friction is the polarity created by the presence of wedding elements and the brides' refusal to marry. The tension created by this dichotomy leads to a suppression of the disagreement by loud sound. Another example is the women's discussion about men and the flaws of the patriarchy. As Lydia argues that people have a "capacity for goodness" that they are not always able to reach, the stage directions indicate that

As the speech goes on,

it is joined by the sound of a helicopter overhead

which grows louder and louder,

drowning out Lydia's words even as she goes on shouting them

until the helicopter is deafening

and the wind is whipping everyone around so they have to fight to stand up.

Because Lydia's comments do not agree with the wedding's agenda, the war-like sound of the helicopter drowns out her speech. Mee jolts the audience by suggesting a family of sounds that spectators have not yet experienced in the play. Furthermore, the helicopter sound provides a direct contrast with the classical music played until this point—and the noise is overwhelming the only sound in the piece that is not musical. Although Lydia must strain herself to continue speaking, the volume of her

voice increases; when the helicopter no longer drowns out her voice, Stanley's "Trumpet Tune" layers over the aircraft's noise to further suppress her text. The final sound, a voice from inside the helicopter, combined with the aircraft's proximity to the ground creates a chaotic third layer that leaves Lydia no choice but to stop speaking:

A loudspeaker says:

"STAND BACK, STAND BACK.

STAND AWAY FROM THE HELICOPTER." [...]

[Lydia] is on the ground toward the end of this speech,

her head lifted up to the sky as she shouts her words

until

finally, she is hunkered down on stage,

her hands over her head;

the helicopter engine is turned off,

and the noise recedes,

and Stanley's Trumpet Tune concludes.

The moment Lydia stops struggling to speak, the noise stops, a statement that her words are "unacceptable" in this world. The image of Lydia screaming over the noise is a heightened gesture contrasted with the next moment of relative realism, when the sisters face the fact that the men have found them. The men's arrival brings the sound that censors the women's radical views.

Instead of following one specific cultural or religious wedding rite, Mee's *Big Love* uses culturally referenced sound bytes generally associated with weddings to

evoke the idea of that ritual, though he never explicitly describes the specifics of the ceremony he proposes. The author presents a wedding's traditional elements in an unexpected order, blending elements of ceremonies and receptions, such as ceremonial music, the receiving of gifts, a cake, and the bride's dance with her father and her groom. Additionally, the visual elements appear worn. These choices come together to give the world of the play a disheveled tone and make the wedding—usually a happy rite of passage—into a traumatic experience.

The dialogue between wedding music and action in the beginning of *Big Love* establishes wedding rituals as the world of the play. The piece begins with a blackout and

Full volume: wedding processional music:

the triumphant music at the end of Scene 13, Act III,

of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*

as Lydia, the first sister to whom the audience is introduced, walks up the aisle in her torn, wrinkled wedding dress, bouquet in hand. As she steps out of her clothing and walks into a bathtub, the music shifts:

Now, quietly, sweetly, restfully,

Pachelbel's Canon in D

is heard

Instead of a gradual introduction into the world of this play, the blackout followed by loud wedding music jolts spectators directly into *Big Love's* idyllic Italy. Even for audience members with no prior knowledge of the plot, the first several bars of the wedding processional music clarify that this ceremony will play an integral role in the

piece. This idea is reaffirmed by the tranquil transition into “Pachelbel’s Canon,” another piece of music commonly used at weddings. Extravagant music often associated with ceremonies is called for twice before text is spoken, demonstrating that music supports the wedding rituals, which are key interpersonal mechanisms in this world. The image of Lydia walking down the aisle in wedding dress further supports the importance of the ritual in the play. However, the recognizable image is discernibly skewed: instead of appearing excited and ready for her wedding, Mee’s Lydia is a disheveled, exhausted bride who slowly sheds her clothing, “her arms thrown back out of the tub as though she were crucified.” This distorted image contrasts directly with the calm music typically played at the beginning of a wedding ceremony, indicating that this ritual in Mee’s *Big Love* will differ from a stereotypical picturesque wedding image. Because of its association with weddings, the music Mee uses hints at ritual and conformity; the image of the disheveled bride coupled with traditional music illustrates the tension between conventionality and non-conventionality that is so integral to the understanding of this piece. Furthermore, after Lydia sheds her clothing and immerses herself in a bath, she speaks to Giuliano, a resident of the villa, while still in the bathtub. Their conversation lasts only as long as it takes for Pachelbel’s Canon to end, demonstrating the ritual music’s impact on the events in the world of this play:

The conversation ends just a few moments
before the end of the 4:58 of the Pachelbel Canon in D;
Giuliano leaves, and
she weeps and weeps while the music finishes.

The emphasis on a set duration of this conversation is important to the way that the play operates, as it indicates the specificity with which these characters function. Moreover, Lydia's weeping further develops Mee's image of an unhappy bride. The introduction of Lydia's two sisters, Olympia and Thyona, visually shows Lydia and her sisters' emotional state. When Clarke's "Trumpet Voluntary" interrupts Lydia crying in the bathtub, the music deflects the focus from Lydia and onto her two sisters entering:

Suddenly, Clarke's Trumpet Voluntary announces the entrance
of two more young women in wedding dresses:

OLYMPIA and THYONA.

Their wedding dresses, too, are of course white,
but in different styles,
and in varying states of disrepair—
torn or dirty or wrinkled.

Olympia carries the broken heel of a high-heeled shoe,
and she walks, up and down, in a single shoe.

The women enter without ceremony,
dragging in a huge steamer trunk,
struggling with it.

Or else they have a matching set of luggage,
eight pieces or more, that they wrestle onto the stage,
and they peel off, one by one, exhausted or exasperated with the luggage,
giving up on it.

Similar to Lydia's entrance, the ceremonial music contrasts greatly with Mee's description of the women as disheveled and disoriented. "Trumpet Voluntary" sounds almost comical as the background for the image of struggling and exhausted women in filthy wedding dresses. Still, the wedding music continues as if the orchestrator of this world hopes that the women will adhere to the grandeur it suggests. The music in this scene sets in motion the play's many wedding rituals and establishes that their elements try to cover up any deviation from social expectations.

The theme of ritual music as censor also appears in two self-inflicted abuse sequences. First, because the sisters' reaction to the brothers' insistence is so violent and socially unacceptable, Bach's "Sleepers Awake," a piece often used in wedding processions, plays loudly over their action. The physicality becomes increasingly more violent, until the sisters throw themselves to the ground in a "choreographed sync." Thyona leads her sisters in reaction to Constantine's forceful view of traditional marriage:

Throwing herself to the ground over and over,
 letting her loose limbs hit the ground with the rattle of a skeleton's bones,
 her head lolling over and hitting the ground with a thwack,
 rolling over, bones banging the ground,
 back to her feet
 and throwing herself to the ground again in the same way over and over.

At the same time, Thyona screams that men are "liars" and "parasites," and she soon recruits Olympia and Lydia to join her. As this moment's intensity grows, the women

each scream their own opinions about men and romantic relationships, none of which are remotely the same:

THYONA

Men who speak when they have nothing to say!

These men should be eliminated!

These men should be snuffed out! [...]

OLYMPIA

I don't think it's wrong

for a man to love me

to like to touch me

and listen to me

and talk to me [...]

LYDIA

I think it's wrong

to make sweeping judgments

write off a whole sex

the way men to do women.

In addition to shouting over each other to have their opinions heard, the sisters must also fight against the music, which gets louder as their speech continues. As they finish, the music stops and the drained women sit:

the women work themselves, still in choreographed sync,

to a state of total exhaustion

until one by one, they sprawl out on chairs, panting.

Tired from self-inflicted abuse, the fight to be heard, and the emotional purging, the women collapse. In response, the men work themselves into a similar choreographed movement as soon as Lydia runs away from Nikos' kiss. All while throwing themselves to the ground repeatedly, the three brothers discuss the difficulties of being a man in their society and the ways that they have never measured up. Charpentier's "Te Deum" plays at full volume over the men's speech, creating a chaotic and overlapping purging effect. While the sisters seem to communicate with one another through sharing their contrasting views, the men compliment each other's on the social pressures of being a man and the double standards of machismo associated with these expectations:

OED

You should have gone to your dad
 you think no one could understand
 but you can talk about these things
 to other men [...]

CONSTANTINE

How do the women
 handle men like this?
 they diet too much
 they hate themselves
 they blame the men
 the men hate them
 it's a vicious circle

it's a vicious circle
so fuck these women
fuck these women [...]

NIKOS

I said to my dad
I don't want to do this
this isn't me
I felt so ashamed

As in the women's scene, when the men finish speaking, the sound stops:

the music is drowning out all the speech
and finally, it comes to an end.

Silence.

The men stand panting, embarrassed, looking at one another.

Constantine and Nikos are weeping.

The men are embarrassed when they realize that they have breached a social norm by revealing their feelings and crying in public. They shove one another back and forth to try to reclaim their manliness fit the social pressure to conform to gender stereotypes. The music that "accompanies" this moment seems, as usual, in direct contrast to the characters' feelings; this further emphasizes the wedding elements as a censor.

Mee interrupts the action of the women's and men's sequences by introducing wedding elements, such as gifts and wedding cake, to indicate that the ceremony is drawing nearer. One example is the end of the women's men-bashing sequence when

Giuliano comes in with a cart piled high with wedding gifts.

Bella enters with him,

also carrying gifts.

The wedding presents have come

now that everyone knows where to find you.

These stage directions show the play's use of contrasting events. In bringing in the wedding gifts directly after the sisters' speech, Mee does not allow the audience any time to process the seriousness of what the sisters say. He contrasts these two moments to indicate that despite the women's resistance, the wedding arrangements are happening around them. In light of the community's excitement about the delivery of wedding gifts, Mee seems to invite spectators to forget the women's attempt to escape social convention. Similarly, when the men finish talking about pressures to conform to gender norms and the difficulty of being a man, the scene shifts to Eleanor and Olympia bringing in the wedding cake:

Constantine finally leaves--pushing Nikos on his way out.

Nikos hustles to catch up to Constantine, and gives him a shove.

Constantine shoves back. They leave shoving one another back and forth.

Eleanor enters, with Olympia helping her,

carrying a huge wedding cake.

ELEANOR

Let's put it here, dear,

over here.

The arrival of the cake is a more urgent sign that the wedding arrangements are progressing, as the cake's perishability indicates that the ceremony will happen soon. Thus, wedding arrangements move forward with each interruption, demonstrating the strength of tradition over the women's desire to break away from it.

Slow music supports the accompanying action for the first time in two separate slow dances between the self-inflicted abuse scenes. Mee indicates that the first dance between Leo and Lydia is a father/daughter dance, as Lydia compares Leo to her father:

LYDIA [to Leo]

Still.

You remind me of my father.

So kind and gentle.

So full of enthusiasm.

Music.

Handel's Air from Water Music, Suite No. 1.

Lydia and Leo dance,

a long, long, slow, intimate, heartbreaking father/daughter dance.

The others are all silent,

respectful of the moment.

They stand watching.

Differently from how the ritual of the father-daughter dance appears in a traditional wedding reception, this scene takes place before the marriage. Because Lydia remains the most conventional of the three sisters, her actions are more in sync with

the music than her sisters' actions in the play. The language used to describe her dance—"long, long, slow, intimate, heartbreaking"—and the way that the music seems to fit harmoniously with the tone of the moment brings a feeling of completion and wholeness for the first time in the piece. This feeling of harmony is mirrored in Lydia's dance with Nikos. When the two are left alone to talk and soon come to the conclusion that it's "so awful to fall in love," the music nudges them to remind them that love can be good:

The heartbreaking music of the Largo
from Bach's "Air on the G-string"
and after a moment

Lydia and Nikos dance—a long, long, sweet dance

The sudden introduction of music jolts Nikos and Lydia into the idea that the two of them could be falling in love. Mirroring the father daughter dance, the moment allows Lydia to psychologically transfer her love for Leo to Nikos. The act of dancing becomes parallel to the act of giving Lydia away. In the moment Lydia begins to dance with Nikos, she is transferred from her "father" to her future husband. She promises herself to him, regardless of the pact she makes with her sisters later on. The sequence of dances foreshadows that Lydia will not kill her husband.

The victory of tradition over breach of conventionality is clear in the build up of wedding elements. While the sisters often reject social expectations in favor of speaking their opinions, the growing visual and aural ritual presence shows them that entering marriage is more powerful than their will to escape it. With each new element, the sisters visually see the wedding closing in on them. The most extreme

example of this is the introduction of the wedding cake after the men's self-abuse sequence. Because a cake is often the last element to prepare for, its introduction indicates to the sisters the real proximity of the wedding. This is confirmed by Piero's assertion that

I ordered the cake [...]

The wedding will take place today.

The arrangements have been made.

Because the sisters know that the ritual is close and that the weddings will happen, they vow to murder the men soon after they are married. Although the wedding is the ultimate undermining of these women's beliefs, they use it as a means to the murders.

In the women's subversion of the wedding as a tool of deception, they generate a conflated wedding-murder ritual. In his book *Marriage to Death: The Conflation of Wedding and Funeral Rituals in Greek Tragedy*, Rush Rehm posits that there is a "significant link" between marriage and death in drama, and that "the juxtaposition proves so forceful that one ritual seems to engender the other" (4). What "accounts for the mutual attraction of two such disparate events," he explains, is that "both weddings and funerals mark important rites of passage from one social biological circumstance to another" (4). He also points out that

the confusion between such apparently antithetical events holds out enormous possibilities for creative manipulation, and we find the interplay between weddings and funerals exploited time and time again in art, literature and drama. Frequently the two rites are simply juxtaposed, joining areas of human experience that—in a better world—would be kept distinct. (3)

In this way, Mee's wedding and death are interrelated. They operate in tandem to create a larger ritual that defines one in terms of the other. The wedding begins with several of the elements introduced throughout the play: wedding music plays while the brides and grooms enter in wedding dress and feed cake to each other.

Unsurprisingly, this ceremony begins to degenerate almost immediately:

The wedding music begins at full volume:

Wagner's "Wedding March" from Lohengrin.

In stately fashion

the grooms enter in a line, wearing tuxedos [...]

And our three brides take their places

and they are followed by their

47 (or several more) sisters, all in wedding dresses,

who enter in a stately manner.

Finally,

Eleanor cuts the wedding cake

and hands a piece of cake to Olympia

who feeds it to Oed,

crushing it playfully into his mouth;

he smiles at this,

takes her in his arms

and dances with her.

Lydia does the same with the cake with Nikos,

and they dance.

Thyona does the same,
but mashing the whole piece of cake all over Constantine's face.
Constantine retaliates by picking Thyona up
and shoving her head-first into the wedding cake.
She recovers and wrestles him head-first into the cake. [...]
The music segues into the exuberant party music
of Handel's "Arrival of the Queen of Sheba" from Solomon.[...]
others have moved into throwing themselves to the floor
and throwing themselves down on top of one another
or throwing one another to the floor
and them jumping on the one who lies there.

The wedding's traditional beginning becomes hyperbolic, then grossly exaggerated, and finally conflated with the murders. The lapse into violence worsens as the women begin to savagely use the elements that have been subverting them, like Thyona throwing Constantine into the cake, in order to begin the bloodshed. Whereas the ritual has constrained them until this point, the women take control of its own elements to orchestrate the progression of events. In performance, Rehm argues, the slippage of one ritual into another is an opportunity to better understand a play's relationships:

when a tragic wedding gets confused with a funeral, when either ritual is perverted or twisted by the events of the play, we should attend very closely. In the theater, something of a dramatic moment has been signaled, and an emotional plumb line is sounding the audience. Through language,

image, and action, the play draws on memories and associated thoughts of those who celebrated their own wedding or that of a son, daughter, or relative, who shared with their kind the grief over loved ones whom they buried, or who looked ahead to a time when the marriage or funeral ritual would mark the key transition in their own lives and the lives of their families. (7)

The wedding-murder conflation in leads to an examination of the audience's collective memory of these events, as the wedding and murder share formative qualities as personal and communal rites of passage. At the point when the rituals transition from elements that resemble wedding to those of a mass murder, the women can successfully kill the men and gain their freedom.

In making a pact with her sisters, Thyona initiates an alternative rite of passage that demands both a wedding and a murder. Evoking Arnold van Gennep's separation phase, the new rite begins just before the wedding as Thyona convinces the women to murder their fiancés:

THYONA

We have a pact then.

Not one groom will live through his wedding night,
not one.

Are we agreed?

LYDIA

Yes.

OLYMPIA

Yes.

Eleanor enters.

ELEANOR

I'm going to help you girls get dressed
for the wedding.

This pact detaches the women from their community and from their old state of resignation to prepare them for a transitional phase, where they experience a new, more goal-oriented state. The transformation phase begins with Eleanor's entrance and continues through the wedding and murders, which Mee suggests should be extremely violent but

Not these things necessarily, but things like these, things as extreme as these:
one groom lying across two chairs—his head on one, his feet on the other,
dropping bowling balls on his stomach and letting them roll to the floor [...] while others have moved into throwing themselves to the floor
and throwing themselves down on top of one another
or throwing one another to the floor
and them jumping on the one who lies there

As a rite of passage, the macabre wedding provides a liminal space for transformation instead of remaining as the dominant ritual in itself. This combined wedding-murder ritual transforms the characters in several ways: during the wedding, the men and women are transformed from single to married and the murder changes the men's bodies from living to dead. Additionally, committing these murders transforms the women from captive to free, from innocent to guilty, and from married to single

again. In this phase, the wedding and the death “intermingle to such an extent that the two rites become inseparable” (Rehm 4). The transformative phase comes to an end with the end of the music and the violence:

A little before the music ends,
all the violent action on stage has subsided. [...]

People lie or sprawl, exhausted.

Piero enters—with Giuliano—
a cup of espresso in his hand,
and walks among the bodies,
in shock and dismay.

Bella enters from the other side.

People begin to stir.

Before the women can be reincorporated into society, the community must forgive them through a trial. After Thyona tries to justify the murders and Olympia understands the gravity of what they have done, Bella announces her judgment:

What else could you have done?

You women made your own laws because you had no others to protect you.

This was your social contract. [...]

For the sake of healing

for life to go on

there will be no justice.

Now, Piero, it will be your job

to keep all this out of the hands of courts and judges.

That much you can do.

And now,

you girls,

alone in the world,

what will you do?

I have to tell you, I wish you would stay on here with me.

I would take you in and care for you

as my own daughters.

That would make me happy.

In forgiving the women and inviting them to stay, as the community's representative Bella reincorporates the women into the community. This reincorporation is contingent on the women's willingness to act as members of their community:

The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis à vis others of a clearly defined and "structural" type; he is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions. (Turner, *The Ritual Process* 95)

Although the women are changed by the murders, their reincorporation implies that they must their change their behavior. In inviting to the women into her community, Bella's subtext suggests that this forgiveness is conditional on their adhering to the rules of the society. Following the rules of the trial as yet another communal ritual, the women successfully free themselves of their oppressors and can join the society.

The end of the play shows the stagnancy of *Big Love*'s community. After Bella judges the sisters,

Here comes, immediately, at full volume,

Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" from *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Lydia and Nikos

kiss

and a hundred flashbulbs go off for a wedding picture.

A receiving line

is instantly constituted,

and Lydia and Nikos make their way down the line—

all the guests kissing the bride and shaking the groom's hand

and talking among themselves and fussing with their clothes. [...]

Lydia and Nikos, the bride and groom,

exit up the center aisle to the music.

Nikos's clothing is disheveled,

and he looks sheepish and uncertain,

even frightened, maybe even filled with foreboding—

in fact, they both look shellshocked and devastated—

as Nikos exits up the aisle with Lydia.

While the rest of her sisters become part of the community and form a receiving line, Lydia's wedding completes and the play comes full circle. Still, the tension between tradition and breach of social expectations continues to be present. Nikos and Lydia exit through the aisle looking "disheveled," the same word choice used in the first

scene of the play to describe Lydia's clothing while walking down the aisle. However, this exit shows a traumatized couple, and not simply "somewhat disoriented" as Mee describes Lydia during her entrance. Although many events have occurred in the span of the play, the recession is the same as the procession as it indicates that the play's events seem to have accomplished nothing. Similar to the transformations in both *Compline* and *The Dybbuk*, the *Big Love*'s conflated wedding to murder ritual functions to change the women's social statuses via liminality, ultimately resulting in the women's freedom and integration into a new society. In using ritual as the oppressive "world of the play," Mee's *Big Love* comments on the inadequacy, and potential uselessness, of conventional ritual in what Anne Bogart calls our current cultural mythological shift.

CONCLUSION

As I have presented in this project, the ways in which ritual and performance intersect are multiple. My purpose in applying the theories of Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, and Mihály Csíkszentmihályi to ritual, performance, and dramatic text was to further investigate how ritual and theatrical performances often intersect and affect participants. The application of these theories in the examination of my own experiences as a participant in a religious ceremony from my childhood; as a singer in Wesleyan University's medieval/renaissance choir, Collegium; and as a performer in the Wesleyan Theater Department's production of *Big Love* lead me to new insight in regards to this link.

Similar to a place of worship, a performance's space sets the event apart from daily activities; this separation provides the participants with a different relationship to time than they experience in daily life. Both theatrical performances and religious ceremonies require specific behavior from their participants, one that begins at the moment they enter the space. In my experience of my First Communion, I remember vividly the reverence connecting the sacred space to the ceremony. Looking back, I cannot help but note how the congregation's careful attention to dress code and decorum fits Turner's and van Gennep's ritual theories. On that special day, the ritualized use of space and time was supported by my community's decorum; thus, the ritual and its older participants provided the young initiates with the appropriate conditions for their transformation, through receiving the sacrament, into more active members of the Catholic church. My account of that day is as follows:

I am eight years old, and I arrive at my Catholic grammar school one Sunday in April for my First Communion. I am wearing the white eyelet communion dress my mother has picked out for me, tiny white shoes, and a wreath of white flowers on my head instead of a veil, at my mother's insistence: "Veils are for brides, not kids. Princesses are always happier with crowns." I feel beautiful and very grown up, and am excited to receive the most important sacrament in my religious community. Upon our arrival at the church, I notice that a classmate of mine is wearing a dress without sleeves, which is explicitly against the ceremony's dress code. Immediately, I feel overdressed and want to go home. Nevertheless, my mother takes me by the hand and leads me into the church to meet my second grade class with whom I will be receiving the sacrament. My sadness quickly returns to excitement when I see my friends lined up in their beautiful white dresses outside the church. As the congregation rises, we enter the church's sacred space and process down the aisle toward the tabernacle where the bread is stored, hands reverently folded and heads bowed, and sit in the first several rows. The church is beautifully decorated; the statue of Mary is covered in flowers and the priest wears brightly colored vestments for this important occasion. As the ceremony progresses, I feel special and increasingly excited to be here, and I walk back to my front row doing one of the coveted two readings from the bible feeling satisfied and proud of myself. The reverence with which everyone in the congregation treats this service helps me to understand this event's importance to our religious tradition and makes me feel more connected with my parents, who received this

sacrament when they were my age, and my sister, who would receive it the following year. After eating the bread for the first time, I walk back to my seat and remain standing while we wait for the rest of the congregation. When everyone has returned to their seats, we turn to the back of the church so that our families can see us and sing together a song called “We Are Children of the Lord” with accompanying hand gestures. The priest concludes the mass and I process out of the church to meet my family and friends, who congratulate me and take the photos that will become the palpable document of my transition into a more involved member of our religion.

Similarly to my understanding as a scholar of Compline’s sacred space, that day the church appeared as a space set apart from life’s daily happenings because I could understand the reverence required for this ceremony simply by observing the comportment of the other church members. Additionally, I knew that undergoing this process would approximate me to my older family members, who in their turn had received communion when they were young. I can also liken this experience to my finding that the singers in Compline experience a return to what Mircea Eliade calls “[the] original time” as they seek to reproduce, through the repetition of a longstanding tradition, the first time this service was performed. Interestingly, both in the sacrament of Communion and a theatrical performance, specific attire is required. Thus, in participating in this religious rite, I carried out a ritualized performance.

An experience of flow leading to a shared feeling of *communitas* creates a more transformative experience for an actor and a religious community’s participant. The

members of the Complaine choir commented on this when they described a musical “click” in their singing; as a singer in Wesleyan’s Collegium choir, I have experienced both flow and *communitas* in a choral setting:

It is Wednesday evening in the spring 2006 semester and I am standing in Collegium, Wesleyan’s medieval renaissance choir of which I am newly a part. We have just opened our music binders to Tallis’ *Lamentations*, our most difficult piece of music. As we are only several weeks away from the concert and last week’s three-hour class was spent working exclusively on this piece, our director expects this rendition to be nearly perfect. Her high expectations of us cause us to be very aware of our performance. I have spent hours learning this music on my own, but it is so difficult that I bury my face in my binder to be sure I am singing the right notes. The music’s arrangement is often in five or more parts and switches tempo quickly; one lapse in attention can easily throw off the delicate balance of sound.

We begin together. For the first time, the music sounds stunning. Instead of taking time to settle into singing together, we are somehow moving together from the start. The changing dynamics feel so beautiful and appropriate to the music’s tone, and the five sections of the ten-minute piece seem to connect effortlessly to each other. Instead of the usual scattered breaths, we begin and end each section flawlessly and in unison. Miraculously, the most difficult series of ten notes that I often stumble over passes by without any trouble. I feel locked into the music differently than I ever have, and begin to lower my binder so that I am looking at the music less intently and only casually

following the notes. I begin to notice the feeling of communal sound: it seems as if we are singing with one voice instead of singing individually. Instead of the usual communal understanding of the hierarchy of musical knowledge and talent within the choir, I feel as if my singing is on the same level as those who sing better than I do. I feel simultaneously hyper of the way we are singing and unaware of how much time has passed; only when I hear “qui console tuream,” a part of the song that is very familiar to me, do I realize that we are nearing the end. The power of this section is so different from the preceding sections, but we meet the difficulty together and with surprising ease, the dissonance with a beautifully executed polyphonic chord. “Stunning,” says our professor, a word she uses rarely.

The moment of musical unity while singing or physical unity while performing evokes a communal experience of flow, making the event engaging and enjoyable for both performers and spectators.

Ultimately, van Gennep’s ritual frame—consisting of separation, transformation, and reincorporation—is applicable to either a performance or a religious ceremony, or an intersection of the two. In *Compline*, these phases compose the entire ritual, beginning at the call to worship, passing through a long transformative liminal phase, and ending with the completion of the music. The main characters in S. Ansky’s *The Dybbuk* undergo these three phases as Khonon approaches his promised bride during the beggars’ dance, possesses Leah’s body, and is exorcised from it—a narrative that ultimately changes the wedding rite into a passage to death. In Charles L. Mee’s *Big Love*, the three different phases stipulated by van Gennep are present in the wedding’s

collapse into murder ritual. The following account records my experience of these phases while playing Thyona in *Big Love*:

“We have a pact then. Not one groom will live through his wedding night. Not one,” I say. As Thyona in Charles Mee’s *Big Love*, I have just forged the murder pact with my sisters. Because of our unique knowledge that the wedding will be a means to the murder, the confirmation of this pact allows my sisters and me to separate from the other characters’ agendas. I step into my giant petticoat and a chorus member puts the enormous, ill-fitting gown over my head so that I can walk into the aisle where the ceremony will begin. I hear ceremonial music: this is my to walk down the aisle. Edward Bauer, the actor playing Constantine, kisses me and pulls me under the wedding arch. The wedding guests cheer and throw rose petals. We are married: our fulfilling this ritual allows me to move to the murder, which will be the transformative part of this ritual. We walk to the top of a staircase and watch the other two couples go through the same ceremonial motions. When they arrive in their respective positions on the other staircases, the music switches into exuberant party music. As the cake rolls into the center of the space, we take our dresses off in the aisles in recognition of the ceremony’s end and are in our clothing again for the party. Really, this is just so I move well enough to get my hands on Edward’s neck. The other two couples crush cake into each other’s mouths. I smash it into Edward’s face and walk away from him; we wrestle, each of us trying to get the upper hand, and eventually I manage to slap him. The music stops. Edward removes his shirt and stands; I remove my shirt as well. As he

throws his shirt past my body, the death sequence begins. Our abstract, physicalized murder doesn't look like violence but certainly implies it. My opportunity to reach for Edward's neck presents itself when he crumples to his knees. I reach and squeeze, he struggles against me; we fall to the ground, my arm around his neck all the time. Precision in this moment is of the utmost importance because of the potential danger involved in the staged murder. If I move the right way, I know that each piece of our intricate puzzle will flow and we will safely and convincingly carry out this action; if not, one of us could be seriously hurt. There is a dual awareness involved: in one sense, the adrenaline I feel prompts me to strangle Constantine until he isn't struggling any more. In another sense, though, I am an actor concerned for my friend's safety. My knowledge of this duality causes me to concentrate intently. I am hyper aware of my right arm, the place that Edward will pinch if I am squeezing his neck too hard. In these forty or so seconds, I trust him to tell me if he isn't safe. I am aware of our bodies in relation to the other bodies in the space and anything potentially harmful strewn across the stage. Edward's spasms get increasingly more violent the longer I hold on, and then they start to wane. Although I still feel him breathing against me, I know that his character is dead now, and mine is free. In what seems like a moment, the freedom that I have been working toward via my character is accomplished. I stand and take in the destruction around me, noticing the transformation of the space from clean to devastated, and begin looking for my sisters.

I am aware that my experience of van Gennep's three ritual phases in my performance was aided by my experience of flow during the murder sequence, which in turn is informed by Victor Turner's theories about the use of space and time in a ritual. In short, even in a theatrical performance it is flow that connects these different phases of a ritual, through the actor's change in perception and engagement in extra daily time and space, as discussed by ritual scholars Turner and Eliade. In this way, entering a state of flow is most important for actors and ritual participants alike. My clearer understanding of the similarities between ritual and performance has furthered my ability to approach a character as well as her relationship with others; such knowledge has furthered my ability to look for the specific conditions necessary to experience flow while performing. While playing Thyona in *Big Love*, I realized the hyper-awareness involved in the murder sequence. Necessary to carrying out this action was an intense concentration and a precision that I could only obtain through a critical engagement in my performance. Thus, in the necessary engagement of the participant to generate compelling action in theater, acting is a flow activity. This project is my first attempt at applying these theories to my craft.

Notes

¹ The Divine Office, or Liturgy of the Hours, is the official series of daily prayers for the Christian Church. There is a different service for each of the eight canonical hours; the rules for these services are prescribed in a medieval manuscript called the *Book of Hours*.

² The online distribution of Mee's plays makes the text somewhat difficult to cite.

For the full text of Big Love, please see

http://www.charlesmee.org/html/big_love.html.

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