

RITUALISTIC ASPECTS OF AGNES OF GOD:

A DIRECTOR'S MISE-EN-SCENE

by

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A THESIS

IN

THEATRE ARTS

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of Texas Tech University in
Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Approved

/ Accepted

May, 1985

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my thanks to Dr. Michael C. Gerlach for his direction of this thesis and to the other member of my committee, Dr. George W. Sorensen, for his helpful criticism.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: DEVELOPMENT OF THE MISE-EN-SCENE

Whatever happened to the questions: "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" At the beginning of the computer age in the sixties, what was once a cry for identification within an increasingly mechanistic universe has now become, in the "automated eighties," but a whisper for spiritual survival. Happiness now tends to hinge on our ability to meet tangible needs and our capacity to reason. In such a materialistic society as today, people seem convinced that they possess all the answers. The role of the "question" and "wonder" itself has become but a ghost of uncertainty. Yet, the universe is ruled by equilibrium and, in negating the importance of the question, the answers, too, lose their effectiveness, thus creating an imbalance--a sin against the natural order. To be overly logical results in mechanization, just as being overly faithful results in superstition. To synthesize the two poles of faith and reason, one must begin with the acceptance of each: one must find the reason within faith, and the faith within reason. This is the basis of wisdom.

The director chose the play, Agnes of God, by John Pielmeier, for production because of its paradoxical qualities in dealing with these two poles of faith and reason. The problem in directing the piece seemed to lie in preserving the play's emphasis on the "unanswerable

question," while also making a directorial statement. In effect, the statement , or "answer," was intended always to return to the "question":

But for every miracle it explains, ten thousand more miracles come into being. We can only wonder if we are willing to question without finding all the answers.¹

The above words, as expressed in the play by Mother Superior, served as the kernel in the development of the mise-en-scene. To the director, the play was perceived as similar to the Zen koan, which is defined as "a riddle in the form of a paradox used in Zen Buddhism as an aid to meditation and a means of gaining intuitive knowledge."²

The director hoped to present a piece which would constantly challenge the spectator to arrive at decisions through a re-evaluation of his moral precepts. By questioning the action of the play, as well as the director's choice of the mise-en-scene, the spectator was forced to question his own actions and point of view. The spectator's system of beliefs was thus targeted.

While wishing to maintain the open-question quality of Agnes of God, the director was nonetheless bound by her own belief system and based the mise upon certain personal opinions regarding present existence. In referring back to the earlier mentioned term, "automated eighties," the key to our present state of existence emerges in the Greek "automatos," which means "self-acting."³ If, as Mother Superior states in the play, "what we've gained in logic we've lost in faith," were interpreted as meaning that reason has replaced religion, that the power of the mind has overrun the power of the spirit, then it follows

that our new "God" is man, himself. He is ultimately responsible for his actions; he is a "self-actor." This sentiment is echoed in the lines of Dr. Livingstone:

. . . my religion, my Christ, is this. The mind. Everything I do not understand is contained in these few cubic inches. Within this shell of skin and bone and blood, I have the secret to absolutely everything. I look at a tree and I think, isn't it wonderful that I have created something so green. God isn't out there. He's in here. God is you. Or rather you are God.⁴

If man is deemed the object of worship, as suggested by Dr. Livingstone's philosophy, then the new religion must be based on man's ability to create. Should not the new "high priest" then be the artist, whose function "is to provide what life is not?"⁵ Is it not the purpose of art to provide spiritual nourishment? With these questions in mind, the play seemed to represent to the director a statement regarding art. It was perceived as a piece of art regarding art; theatre questioning itself. To this end, the director chose to place Agnes of God within a mise-en-scene of theatre as ritual. Because the play deals with the placement of religion within man's life, the director, who regards theatre as a personal religion, wished to deal with the placement of theatre within life.

The director's approach thus became an exploration into the functions of theatre as seen through a sacred perspective. The process began with determining the relationship between theatre and ritual:

The form ritual takes is determined by the manipulation of symbols through action. It is in this way that drama is so closely related to ritual. Action on the stage is a representation of action in ordinary life which has already been given a meaning in its ritual form.⁶

The critical point regarding ritual is belief. In an age of skepticism, ritual is questioned. The director intended to raise questions by framing Agnes of God consciously within the ritual of theatre. By so doing, the action of the spectator in ordinary life was questioned through his re-evaluation of the action, the purpose of theatre. Theatre as ritual was deconstructed by this method of framing and reconstructed by expanding upon the frame. The traditional illusionistic approach to theatre, which the average spectator brings as "baggage" to a performance, was shattered by intensifying the play's theatricality and detailing its ritualistic aspects. The purpose of theatre was meant to be an important issue as it related to the spectator's beliefs.

In the "ritual," the actors' function was perceived as the "sacrifice" of their talent and craft for the benefit of the audience. The theme of sacrifice which runs through the play brought to the ritualized mise-en-scene the dimension of "Holy Theatre" to the production. The concept of a "Holy Theatre" has been the topic of inquiry by a number of noted theatre theorists, such as Antonin Artaud, Peter Brook, Jacques Copeau, and Jerzy Grotowski. Although differing on certain aesthetic grounds, they all share the common belief that Holy Theatre

. . . derives from its emphasis on catharsis, its belief that art can have a direct effect on its audience at the psychic level and that this effect is ultimately of a health-giving nature.⁷

In Holy Theatre "it is the individual participant's catharsis which makes communal catharsis possible."⁸ Thus, the actor sacrifices himself for the sake of the audience.

As Grotowski has said, "we are concerned with the spectator who really wishes, through confrontation with the performance, to analyze himself."⁹ This statement holds true not only in its actor/audience connotations, but is also valid in its application to the structure of Agnes of God. This very action of "spectator confronting performance" serves as the primary action of the play: Dr. Livingstone's catharsis which occurs as she confronts her own actions in dealing with Agnes. The following (psychoanalytic) definition of catharsis, according to T.J. Scheff in his book, Catharsis in Healing, Ritual, and Drama, then relates to the action of Dr. Livingstone within the play, as well as to the action of the spectator within the theatre:

[Catharsis] enables a patient to relieve and therefore resolve, earlier painful experiences which were unfinished under conditions that allow the patient sufficient distance from his own experiences to relive them safely.¹⁰

There is also within the play the concept of catharsis as it relates to the idea of "confession"--confession being an experience one undergoes who through absolution hopes to be "purified." At the end of the play, the Doctor states: "Was it to the simple end that not two hours ago this doubting, menstruating, non-smoking psychiatrist made her confession?"¹¹ Set within the theatricalized mise, this "confession" is made to the spectator, as it was two hours earlier that the performance began. Thus, the entire play may be viewed as the ritual of confession.

Because Dr. Livingstone served as the medium between the audience and the stage, she also symbolized the figure of the director. On one level, the character of Dr. Livingstone was perceived as recreating her

experiences concerning Agnes. She was, in fact, "directing" her own "film." The filmic image utilized by the playwright supported the idea of catharsis in the therapeutic sense:

Therapeutic catharsis is typically characterized by spontaneous physical trauma accompanied by images of past experiences replayed as though in a film.¹²

On a more personal level, as the Doctor was seen struggling to come to terms with herself via her involvement with Agnes, she also served to represent the director's process of self-examination in dealing with Agnes of God. Catharsis was thus perceived as operating on three levels: (1) the level of character, (2) the level of actor, and, (3) the level of director. If catharsis was effectively occurring on these levels, it was hoped that "communal catharsis" would then be possible.

The casting was a crucial element in the production, with the primary consideration being that the actresses chosen would epitomize the notion of "actor." What was sought was the type of actor who was "not concerned with what something is about (but) only interested in how he can act"--the type of actor who "in the process of learning to act becomes an 'actor,' who, in time feels himself to be something of an outsider in ordinary society and very much an insider in theatrical society."¹³ The director was looking for those who displayed certain qualities of being theatrical life-characters. These people constantly "use" their acting talents in everyday life. They comment on and even flaunt their "actor-ness." They regard life through a dramatic perspective and, for whatever reason, consider performance to be a necessity to them.

If the play's action was perceived as the conflict between faith and reason, then, on the metatheatrical level, the conflict was between the two approaches to acting: feeling and technique. These approaches may be translated into everyday life as emotion and intellect. To the director, the character of Mother Superior represented the individual ruled by faith and emotion. The actress chosen for the part needed to be one who approached acting via feeling. On the opposite side, Dr. Livingstone was a woman who upheld the supremacy of the intellect. The actress playing this role was cast according to her more technical approach to acting. For the two characters to communicate with one another, it became necessary for each of them to assume characteristics of the other. To this end, Mother Superior was challenged to use her powers of reason, while the Doctor resorted to more emotional tactics. The two actresses playing these parts were similarly stretched. The actress cast as Mother Superior was often given the key word, "control," during rehearsal, just as the key word for the actress playing Dr. Livingstone was "release." As for Agnes, representative of the individual caught between the two worlds of faith and reason, the actress needed was one who conveyed strong characteristics of both approaches. Her challenge lay in her method of choice-making.

In physical terms, casting was based on two criteria. As the director saw it, Dr. Livingstone and Mother Superior were worthy adversaries, or two sides of the same coin. The director did not wish to imply any sort of preference to either side and cast the two roles according to physical similarity in size and build. Agnes, however,

needed to be somewhat of a physical opposite. It was the director's intention to portray this "larger-than-life" character as physically larger than the other two characters. If she had been smaller, the director felt that her role as the unfortunate victim would have been marked from the play's beginning. The sympathy evoked from the audience for "that poor little thing" might easily have led them to see her as a one-dimensional, type-cast victim. The point to be made, however, was that her powerful physical presence cried out to an audience, "Account for me!" It was intended to be a statement regarding the implications of a society capable of producing such an individual. Dr. Livingstone states (Act II:5) "What kind of God can permit such a wonder one as her to come trampling through this well-ordered existence?"¹⁴

CHAPTER II

THE DESIGN

Returning to the idea of Holy Theatre, the design concept was "altar," defined as "any elevated place or structure upon which sacrifices may be offered or before which religious ceremonies may be enacted."¹⁵ The stage was considered a sacred place--the area of the actresses/priestesses. It was divided into three basic zones:

- (1) the upstage, or visible backstage area
- (2) the (raked) midstage acting area, or "platea"
- (3) the (floor-level) downstage "monologue" area

The upstage area was separated from the platea by three translucent plastic panels, stage left, center, and right. The space upstage of the left panel was Agnes' space, and the space upstage of the right panel was Mother Superior's. When not participating in a scene in the platea, these two actresses remained visible in their places behind the panels, facing upstage. Their presence upstage could be interpreted many different ways, with no wrong or right way intended. The audience was given the opportunity to question and choose. To the director, however, there were three main perspectives as based on the following criteria:

- (1) Agnes' singing of the mass
- (2) visible backstage
- (3) the Doctor's "film"

The first consideration mentioned referred directly to the text. The acting scenes were punctuated by Agnes' songs and by the Doctor's monologues. That these songs were arranged in strict adherence to the order of the Catholic Mass suggested that what was happening (upstage) was a worship service. This was a world of pure faith, as opposed to the Doctor's downstage area being a world of pure reason. Agnes and Mother Superior were directed to frame this worship service by genuflecting upon their initial entrance and by kneeling at the conclusion of the play. This direction was intended to reflect two actions. Within the context of the play these gestures, as performed by the characters, signified the beginning and end of the Mass. Placed within the ritualized mise-en-scene, the gestures, as performed by the actors, indicated the start and finish of their "sacrifice." The genuflection was intended to reflect more on character action, and the kneeling was meant to imply the actor's bow.

The upstage area, in terms of its function as the "visible backstage," reinforced the concept of metatheatre. Instead of the "out-of-sight-out-of-mind" attitude of audience towards characters who exit, the spectator was made aware of the actor's function. Being "offstage" was deemed as much a part of the actor's responsibility as his being "onstage." The alienation achieved by this device served to "distance" the audience from empathetic involvement with the play. Confrontation with the "play" was then reached indirectly via confrontation with the "theatre performance." By the same token, the actresses were made aware of their dual roles as actor and character.

As the Doctor was the point of reference for the audience, the upstage area was the point of reference for the Doctor. The panels served as "projection screens" on which she projected her "film." This film image was taken from the Doctor's opening monologue:

I remember when I was a child I went to see Garbo's Camille, oh, at least five or six times. And each time I sincerely believed she would not die of consumption. I sat in the theatre breathless with expectation and hope, and each time I was disappointed, and each time I promised to return, in search of a happy ending. Because I believed in the existence of an alternate last reel.¹⁶

She knew that she would also continue viewing her own "film" until she could reach a decision, until she could find the "happy ending." This decision, however, was left to the audience as the play ended with a question mark:

And I hope that she has left some little part of herself, with me. That would be miracle enough. (silence) Wouldn't it?¹⁷

The film image was visually incorporated quite graphically into the design through the use of the panels and their lighting. At the beginning of the play, Dr. Livingstone was directed to sit in the house as a member of the audience. The "film" began as Agnes and Mother Superior entered their upstage places to begin their "worship service." At this point, only the upstage areas were lit, and so provided a strong filmic quality to the action. When Agnes' first song, "Kyrie Eleison," was completed, the Doctor stepped up onto the stage and began her initial "rite," her monologue. The film image continued through the play as she frequently alluded directly to the screens. The image was vividly demonstrated once again in Act II:3. The Doctor states:

"I am not made of granite. I am made of flesh and blood . . . and heart . . . and soul."¹⁸ At this point, Agnes and Mother took their places upstage as the Doctor turned slowly from full front (center stage) to full back. She was looking at the "film." She then turned back to the audience and said, "This is it. The last reel. No alternative in sight".¹⁹

The use of the term, "platea," for the midstage acting area was to infer a connection with theatre in the Medieval period. Returning to the idea of the divine origins of theatre, the director drew upon the playwright's use of the Mass and references to the Middle Ages as a basis for the mise-en-scene.²⁰ The following quotation describes the medieval church stage as well as the mise approach used in Agnes of God:

Our stage is thus an open space containing an altar, and our auditorium those areas of the basilica surrounding this open space reserved to accommodate the worshippers.²¹

As the function of the medieval drama was to provide "a powerful dramatic statement on the Christian faith at its richest and most complex,"²² the function of Agnes of God was intended to provide a similar statement on artistic faith: to perceive Man as God's "work of art," who has the godlike ability to create is founded in the actor, who serves as the paradigm of being both creation and creator. Belief in the "soul" and reaffirmation of man's spiritual nature was approached through celebration of the artist's creative "spirit."

The parallel with medieval theatre continues, more specifically, in the similarity found between Agnes of God and the morality play:

Such plays were primarily concerned with ethics and the game upon which they were structured was that of war. They thus bear a close

resemblance to tournaments in which the princes in the lists are God and Lucifer and the prizes for which they joust are the souls of men.²³

Here the "princes in the lists" were Mother Superior and Dr. Livingstone "jousting" over the soul of Agnes: the war being one between faith and reason, mystery and manifestation, art and life. That Agnes represented the "sacrificial lamb" (Agnes of God = Agnus Dei = Lamb of God), who is eventually the target of the jousting, supports the contention set forth in Everyman that "this play of holy dying was most urgently a play about holy living, an ars viviente atque moriende."²⁴ Through the sacrifice of Agnes, the Doctor was "reborn" into a world of wonder. She had finally recognized the existence and necessity of the "unanswered question," the answers of which are founded in pure belief: "I want a reason. I want to believe that she was blessed."²⁵ The spiritual aspect of life had finally achieved equality with her rational methodology:

Philosopher and preacher thus join hands to propagate the message that the only existing reality is individual reality, and that in consequence every individual must be himself and become responsible for his own salvation.²⁶

Or, as stated in the Prologue to The Castle of Perseverence:

And God hath gevyn man fre arbitracion
whether he wyl him (self) save hys (soul).²⁷

The arena in which the two opponents were to meet, where the action of the "tournament" was to take place, was the midstage "platea." This was the area of the dialogue and was strictly defined by the rake and the panels. The scenes between Dr. Livingstone and Mother Superior, the Doctor and Agnes, or all three characters were

played exclusively on the rake and downstage of the panels. In this "acting area" lay the essence of the production. It was here that the upstage "worship service" broke from its religious underpinnings and moved into the world of theatre, as the "upstage actresses" moved from rite to representation when entering a dialogue scene. It was also here that the Doctor broke away from her commentary to enter the action of her "film."

The set pieces within the platea were defined strictly by function and symbol. Functionally, the only set requirements were a standing ashtray and a chair. By the omission of any sort of detail or realistic representation, emphasis was thrown upon, as in early medieval art, "symbolic or emblematic significance."²⁸ The chair came to symbolize the "patient's" chair, and, at other times, represented the chair of the "confessant." When seated in the chair, secrets were divulged. The ashtray, while being a physical focal point by its placement center stage and slightly downstage of the center panel, also served as a symbolic focal point in its figurative use as "altar." As the functional depository of the Doctor's cigarette ashes and butts, it was perceived symbolically as the site of "burnt offerings." This idea of the ashtray's thymelic considerations was reinforced by Agnes' referral to it, while under hypnosis, as representative of the wastepaper basket in which she deposited the baby. The absence of extraneous set decoration also served to stress the ultimate importance of the function of the actor and character as timeless entities. As in the early medieval liturgical dramas, "never were these figures allowed to appear against

a pictorially realistic background."²⁹ The stage was thus simplified and refined to the level of necessity and symbol.

The downstage area, which was reserved exclusively for the Doctor's monologues, mirrored the upstage area in that this world of rational thought was the complete antithesis of the upstage world of faith and belief. "Mirroring" was more especially evident in the rigidity found in the upstage "Mass" and the same respect for order used in the presentation of the Doctor's monologues. A rhetorical simplicity in the acting style of the monologues became a necessary approach in providing a balance with the ongoing upstage ritual. By avoiding the temptation to play these monologues in a naturalistic style, which would have "advertised" the passion inherent in the text, it was hoped that the audience would feel a stronger passion on their own terms. During the monologues, the Doctor was not to "illustrate" the text, but merely present it.

To achieve the effect of the altar "surrounded by space," the entire set was encased in black masking. The "void" created by this technique was theatricalized by the use of plastic for this masking. In this way, the emptiness was made tangible, and the feeling of cold sterility was conveyed. Sterility was noted as a major theme in the monosexual world of Agnes of God, which echoed sterility of a world devoid of art.

CHAPTER III

REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE

The rehearsal period lasted four and one-half weeks and was followed by a three-day run of the show. The rehearsal process began in a somewhat traditional manner. The first three days were devoted to reading and discussion. The script was then roughly blocked the following week, with the remainder of the rehearsal period spent in re-working and run-throughs.

During rehearsals, group warm-ups were discouraged by the director in order that each actress, individually, would discover her own method of the warm-up ritual. As it so happened, the two actresses portraying Agnes and Mother Superior naturally evolved into a mutual vocal warm-up. This was incorporated into performance to further project the idea of the actor's function and to reinforce the notion of ritual in theatre. Thus, the actresses were heard from offstage as the audience was entering. Warm-ups ended, houselights and pre-set lighting went out, and the play began. The two actresses then became the two characters needed by the Doctor to play in her "film."

As rehearsals progressed, the director became aware that she was, in essence, "becoming" Dr. Livingstone. As Mother Superior and Agnes were, initially, under the control of Dr. Livingstone, so all three actresses came to be instruments of self-examination for the director

in her exploration of the purpose and function of theatre, both publicly and personally. As the "film" progressed for the Doctor, the rehearsals progressed in a parallel fashion, in that it became increasingly difficult to ascertain who was in control of whom. The director came to share the sentiment expressed by the Doctor when she said:

But my memories, oh they come too easily. Sometimes they won't even let me finish a sentence. They come galloping out, mid-thought. I know if only I could finish the thought . . .³⁰

The cycle, which began for the director as "play-as-object" (just as the "film-as-object" was the premise for Dr. Livingstone), evolved to the point of rehearsal, with the director becoming totally consumed and absorbed into the production by the time of actual performance. No longer was the director an external factor of production, but rather its chief integral component. To support this concept, the Doctor entered, initially, from the audience and exited, finally, upstage into her self-made film. The other two actresses, having completed their function as characters, removed their habit veils and exited downstage and up the center aisle of the house.

As Agnes was approached via the avenues of faith and reason, the director likewise approached Agnes of God by the utilization of two techniques in the latter steps of rehearsal. The first technique was based on relaxation and concentration, representing the "rational" approach, reminiscent of the Doctor's use of hypnosis. Following the individual warm-ups, the actresses were instructed to lie on the floor, close their eyes, and focus on relaxing. They were to check their bodies for tension, isolate the tension, and mentally dispel it. The

director then "talked" the actresses through this process. Starting with the toes and feet and slowly working upwards throughout the entire body, the director suggested to the actresses that "air" was swirling through the particular area and replacing all tension. The repetition of certain key phrases was intended to create a hypnotic effect and to reinforce the "effortlessness" of the process. Key phrases used were:

- (1) Air is filling your (area), finding the tension and taking it away.
- (2) Air is swirling. Totally relaxed. Muscles sliding off of the bone. Sinking, sinking into the floor.
- (3) Totally effortless. You are doing nothing.

When the actresses were totally relaxed and concentrating only on the sensation of the "air" swirling through their bodies, the director introduced the idea of character. Again, starting with the feet, the actresses were told to "allow" their character's "energy" to replace the "air." Once the character "energy" had been allowed to replace the "air" in a particular area, that area was deemed the character's. The actress's body thus permitted the transformation to character body. Midway through the process, the actresses were told that when character energy had totally replaced the "air," they, in their own time, were to arise, retain the character, refer to one another only by character, and be prepared to begin the run-through in five minutes. During this time they were to explore their environment through the perspective of their character. The run-through completed, the director instructed the "characters" to lie on the floor, and she proceeded to talk them through the process in reverse. Character energy was displaced by the

"air." Notes were then given calmly and quietly as the actresses remained lying in this relaxed state. By using this method, the process of actor becoming character was explored to the point of character becoming actor.

The second technique, which was not implemented until the final dress rehearsal, represented the "faith" approach, and so was designed as a ritual conceived by the director. Twenty minutes before "Places," the actresses and director congregated around a small square table. The actresses were told to sit at the table and begin the relaxation exercise. As they were doing this, the director dimmed the lights in the room and placed four candles on the table--one in front of each person. The director then sat and lit her candle. Next, the actresses were told to open their eyes and focus only on the flame. The flame of the director's candle represented the play and was used to light the other candles, the individual flames of which symbolized each actress's character. When the actresses' particular candles were lit, they were asked to focus on its flame and perceive it as the "spirit" of their character. Each actress was to concentrate on her flame/character until, through total objectification, she believed that she possessed total power over the character. At this point of conscious control the actress was to blow out the flame and simultaneously "ingest" the character. The "leap of faith" required here was to believe in the "leap" of the character from external flame to internal spark. The actress was to use the flame/spark as her character point-of-reference, allowing the spark to grow as curtain time drew nearer and extinguishing

the spark at curtain call. After the character flames had been "transferred," the ritual ended with the actresses and director joining hands and, together, blowing out the director's candle, the flame of the play.

This ritual was performed formally at the final dress rehearsal and opening night. The following nights of performance the director chose not to lead the actresses through the ceremony, but simply placed and lit the "play candle" (at the prescribed time), and left the room. Upon returning, the actresses were found, each time, performing their own version of the formal ritual, individually.

The performance, itself, was thus set in the actresses' minds as an extension of the pre-performance ritual. By allowing the character to possess her body, the actress took on the role of "shaman," or "medium," whose function in performance was regarded as an act of self-sacrifice. Within the "play," where character dominated, this idea of self-sacrifice resembled theories set forth by Jacques Copeau, who

. . . felt that the actor should denude himself of his own personality in order to assume his role: the actor's self-sacrifice lies in his willingness to deny himself for the sake of achieving unity with his audience through a representation.³¹

Placed within the director's mise-en-scene of ritualistic theatre, however, dominance was shifted to the actor, and so, reflected slightly different views concerning the actor's sacrifice. These views were explored by Jerzy Grotowski who "called his performers 'holy actors' and thought of them as exemplary figures for whom performance was an act of self-sacrifice."³²

These two theories were combined by regarding character as both creation and extension of the actor. The character/creation "used" the actor for self-realization within the play, just as the actor used, within the total performance, the character/extension as his means toward self-discovery.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The seed of the director's mise-en-scene lay in the playwright's intention. To this extent, ritualistic aspects of the play were highlighted but not harshly stressed. The play came first in importance and was supported by the director's method of framing. This framing was never intended to override the play. If this had been allowed, then the "statement" would have implied too much of an "answer" rather than a "question." It was interesting to the director to note the many different analyses of the performance voiced by particular audience members. The director sensed that, because of these radically variable responses, the production had succeeded in raising pertinent questions and maintaining an open quality in regards to the "answers." In working with Agnes of God, the director discovered and revealed certain aspects of her system of beliefs pertaining to art and life, and hoped that the spectator was similarly challenged.

Agnes of God, while being a play concerned with the relationship between faith and reason, was metaphorically interpreted as representing the balance, or lack thereof, between art and life. The play thus became not only a statement about life (which is hopefully the intention of all art), but, more precisely, a conscious statement regarding theatre.

To the director, theatre is becoming more and more a luxury instead of a necessity, as man moves further away from his spiritual existence. The artist who says, "I can show you what it looks like, what it feels like, what it sounds like, etc.," is slowly losing ground to the rationalist who says, "I can tell you what it is." Society is moving into an era of "tangibility": anything which is not rationally accounted for is discredited. In Mother Superior's words there is "no room for miracles."³³ The idea of an unknown force larger than man and of a purely spiritual nature--the notion of "God"--seems to be in a position of obligatory tolerance. Who, or what, then, is an object of worship? Is it possible for man eventually to disclaim his very soul on the basis of its indefinability?

Perhaps history has in some way repeated itself and man once again lives in a type of Dark Age, spiritually. The director felt that Agnes of God delivered a similar message. Like the persecuted Christians during the Dark Ages, contemporary artists are suffering as the result of the current mania for the "machine." This is not to deny the fact that technology can improve the quality of life. It cannot, however, satisfy spiritual needs.

The mind which is capable of the conception and design of the intricate innerworks of the microchip, or the hydrogen bomb, is also the mind capable of producing a Mona Lisa or a Candida. In both cases, it is the creative spirit, the moment of "divine inspiration," which exists as the essence of quality. This very "creative spirit" is, to the director, the aspect of man's life which is to be celebrated and

worshipped; and it is the artist who bases his existence on this "spirit" that should be duly respected.

If, in fact, man presently lives within a somewhat unbalanced structure, a modern Middle Ages, then man may adopt two attitudes regarding his future. If he continues on this spiritually destructive path, the future is bleak. As stated by the Eastern philosopher Lao Tse: "When man loses his sense of awe, disaster follows."³⁴ On the positive side, perhaps man can look forward to a new renaissance, a new era which will celebrate the universality of man. In this new age, art and science will co-exist to bring quality to and respect for life. Hopefully, the poles of faith and reason--of art and life--will be synthesized.

ENDNOTES

¹John Pielmeier, Agnes of God (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1982), p. 62, lines 8-9; and p. 61, lines 28-29.

²American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd college ed., s.v. "koan."

³Ibid., s.v. "automatic."

⁴Pielmeier, p. 14, lines 27-33.

⁵Tom Robbins, Another Roadside Attraction (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), p. 4.

⁶Elizabeth Burns, Theatricality: A Study of Convention in the Theatre and in Social Life (London: Longman Group Limited, 1972), p. 218.

⁷Philip Auslander, "'Holy Theatre' and Catharsis," Theatre Research International, vol. 9, no. 1 (Spring 1984), p. 28.

⁸Ibid., p. 27.

⁹Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 17.

¹¹Pielmeier, p. 75, lines 9-12.

¹²Auslander, p. 17.

¹³Burns, p. 115; and p. 155.

¹⁴Pielmeier, p. 75, lines 12-14.

¹⁵American Heritage Dictionary, s.v. "altar."

¹⁶Pielmeier, p. 7, lines 4-10.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 75, lines 15-17.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 65, lines 25-27.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 65, lines 28-29.

²⁰Medieval references are detailed in Appendix A.

²¹Glynne Wickham, The Medieval Theatre (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), p. 37.

²²Sandro Sticca, ed., The Medieval Drama (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1972), p. xi.

²³Wickham, p. 105.

²⁴V.A. Kolve, "Everyman and the Parable of the Talents," in The Medieval Drama, Sandro Sticca, ed., p. 94.

²⁵Pielmeier, p. 75, lines 14-15.

²⁶Wickham, p. 108.

²⁷Ibid., p. 116.

²⁸Ibid., p. 20.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Pielmeier, p. 52, lines 11-14.

³¹Auslander, p. 24.

³²Ibid.

³³Pielmeier, p. 51, line 2.

³⁴Lao Tse, Tao Te Ching, 72:1.

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APPENDICES

- A. MEDIEVAL REFERENCES IN AGNES OF GOD
- B. NEWS RELEASE
- C. PROGRAM
- D. LETTER FROM AUDIENCE MEMBER

APPENDIX A: MEDIEVAL REFERENCES IN AGNES OF GOD

(1) Act I:2:

Doctor: Sister, I'm not with the Inquisition.

Mother: And I'm not from the Middle Ages.

(2) Act I:8:

Agnes: In medieval days nuns and monks would sleep in their coffins.

Mother: We're not in the Middle Ages, Sister.

(3) Act I:10:

Mother: What did we do? Burn a few heretics? Sell some indulgences? But those were in the days when the Church was a ruling body . . .

(4) Act I:10:

The section beginning with the Doctor's line, "Do you think the saints would have smoked, had tobacco been popular?" and continuing through to Mother's line, "There are no saints today" mentions particular saints from the Middle Ages.

(5) Act II:1:

Agnes' first song, "Basiez Moy," is written in Medieval French.

APPENDIX B: NEWS RELEASE

The logo for TTUT News Release features the letters 'ttut' in a stylized, lowercase, bold font. Below 'ttut' is the text 'texas tech university theatre' in a smaller, lowercase font. To the right of 'ttut' is the text 'News Release' in a large, bold, sans-serif font.

ttut News Release

texas tech university theatre

SUBJECT: AGNES OF GOD OPENS AT TTUT LAB THEATRE

CONTACT: RAY SCOTT CRAWFORD

FOR RELEASE: 24, February 1985

The two opposing worlds of religious mysticism and psychiatry come together in John Pielmeier's drama AGNES OF GOD. The mystery-drama, presented by Texas Tech University Laboratory Theatre, runs February 28, March 1 and 2 at 8:15 p.m. in the Agricultural Engineering Auditorium. Tickets are available at the University Theatre (742-3601).

AGNES OF GOD involves a young nun indicted for manslaughter of a baby found in the wastebasket of her room. Court psychiatrist, Dr. Martha Livingston, is assigned to determine the legal sanity of the young woman. The delicate balance between faith and reason, miracle and scientific fact is examined through the eyes of the nun, her Mother Superior, and the psychiatrist.

Director, Kerry Cole, MFA student, said, "This script provides strong connections between the ritual process surrounding both the theatre and the church."

"Theatre has a sacred origin because it started in the church. It (theatre) is a form of worship," said Cole.

Cole stated that she feels theatre has moved away from its original purpose of faith and worship, losing its specialness.

"Sometimes I think all theatre should be shut down. Then it would be an underground thing. . .it would mean something important," said Cole. "I'm making a statement that art and life cannot exist
more. . .

AGNES OF GOD (page 2)

without each other," Cole continued. "All three actresses are 'priestesses.' This play is their duty, they've been called. The actresses are presenting their 'gift,'" added Cole.

Scenery and costume designer for AGNES OF GOD is Renee Hoke. Dana Gloege assists the production as stage manager, and lighting designer is Roger Wyly.

The cast includes Tech seniors Stephanie Geyer as Dr. Martha Livingston; Teri Love as Agnes; and Susanne Barnard as Mother Superior.

AGNES OF GOD runs February 28, March 1 and 2 in the Agricultural Engineering Auditorium at 8:15 p.m. Tickets for AGNES OF GOD are available at the University Theatre for \$1.00 (742-3601).

APPENDIX C: PROGRAM (EXTERIOR)



February 28, March 1 and 2 - 8:15pm

Ag. Engineering Auditorium

Tickets - \$1.00

For Information call 742-3601

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY LABORATORY THEATRE

APPENDIX C: PROGRAM (INTERIOR)

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY LAB THEATRE

presents

A G N E S O F G O D

by John Pielmeier

Directed by

Kerry Cole

Scenery/Costumes Designed by

Renee Hoke

Lighting Designed by

Roger Wyly

Stage Manager

Dana Gloege

Original Music Composed by

Arch Hooks

Music Performed by

Arch Hooks and Chuck Platten

THE CAST

Doctor Martha Livingstone Stephanie Geyer
Mother Miriam Ruth Susanne Barnard
Agnes Teri Love

THE STAFF

Lab Theatre Director Dr. Michael Gerlach
Lab Theatre Technical Director Roger Wyly
Promotional Directors, Richard Herman, Cherrie A. Sciro
Kathryn Robinson, Ray Scott Crawford
House Manager Denae Baker

THE PRODUCTION STAFF

Assistant to the Designer Christi Jones
Program Cover Design Renee Hoke
Costume Crew Brenda Ropp, Patricia Groves,
Christi Jones, Lisa Kay Brewster, Teri Love,
Scot Purkeypile, Stacy Benson
Scenery Crew John Bachman, Margaret Clark,
Ellen Jensen, Randy Lutz
Lighting Crew Richard Burney, Skip Harless

SPECIAL THANKS TO Rebecca Beazley, Skip Harless, Laura
Mann-Dexter, Nanette Griffin (Millinery Credit), Diana
Herman, 387194, and Sister Catherine Abeyta, O.S.F.

There will be one intermission.

" . . . Here the ways of men part: If you wish to
strive for peace of soul and pleasure, then believe;
if you wish to be a devotee of truth, then inquire."
Nietzsche

"I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt
bountifully with me."

Psalm 13:6

APPENDIX D: LETTER FROM AUDIENCE MEMBER

3415 59th Street
Lubbock, Tx. 79413
March 3, 1985

Cast and Director of "Agnes of God"
Tech Laboratory Theater
Lubbock, Texas

Dear whoever-you-were: (I never got a program),

Silly moi! After nearly thirteen years of snobbishly eschewing Tech lab productions, (assuming they could nowhere near equal the quality of the New York drama on which I was brought up), I was astounded at last night's performance of "Agnes of God." I cannot imagine a more powerful and moving performance in any theater, professional or otherwise. This was a brilliant play (which I already knew it would be), brilliantly acted and directed (which I feared it would not be...) and I'm thrilled that I had the opportunity to enjoy it. I understand there was a problem with the programs, so I have no idea whom to thank for this marvelous experience. But thank you whomever, for providing this production and for opening this previously closed mind to the marvels that the Tech lab theater has to offer! Congratulations!

Yours truly,

Alice Marshall

Alice Marshall