OF OTHER WORDS: AN INTERTEXTUAL SEMITOIC ANALYSIS OF C.S. LEWIS STAGE ADAPTATIONS

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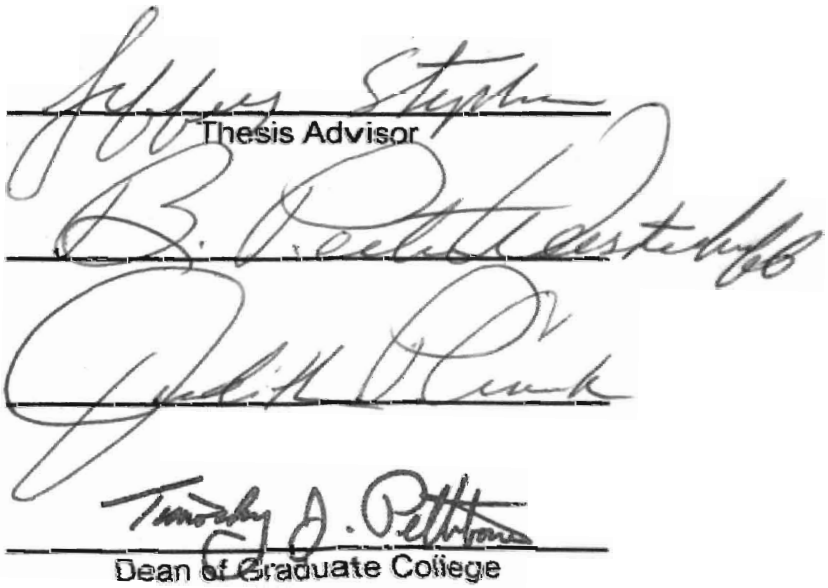

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I: INTRODUCTION

Intertextuality, the dependence of one text for another, grows exponentially in semiotic study at the turn of the twenty-first century. Intertextual interpretation becomes particularly challenging in regards to reading theatrical performance. Here, a source work may be magnified, extended, exaggerated and/or significantly altered by a seemingly endless number of adaptive artists. One could suggest that performance represents intertextuality's central issues like the reader's role in creating an adapted fabula's meaning, the author's claim to inherent ownership of his/her source work.

The issue concerning author/reader roles echoes an ongoing debate between traditional and postmodern perspectives: each position pursues meaning production, though with different, sometimes polar, methods. The recent republishing of C.S. Lewis's *Narnia Chronicles* raises questions for Christian reading and intertextual authority. Publisher HarperCollins nearly re-released Lewis's children's books with addenda to omit any Christian imagery/allegory from the narrative in order to compete with the more secular *Harry Potter* series. Though HarperCollins eventually deferred to mounting criticism from many Lewis purists, the issue typifies a continued discourse concerning adaptors and adjusters and their desire, regardless of intent, to alter the author's texts. This conflict also epitomizes an increasing risk that any adaptation, be it

republishing or theatrical production, may potentially alter or detract from the Lewis's Christian teaching.

J. K. Rowling's innovative *Harry Potter* provokes a series of imitations, each trying to capitalize on the author's appeal to children's and adults' sense of fantasy. A recent endeavor by HarperCollins seeks to counter (or at least capitalize on) the *Potter* craze by republishing C.S. Lewis's classic *Narnia Chronicles* since *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; *Prince Caspian;* and their sequels have appealed to multiple generations of young and old readers through vivid fantasy and accessible Christian allegories.

On the surface, Rowling's stories of an enchanted boarding school for budding wizards possess numerous parallels to Lewis's tales of Narnia and its mythical inhabitants. Both series originate in Great Britain. Hogwart's School for Wizards (where Harry Potter, Hermione and the rest of Rowling's magical initiates study sorcery) can be reached by platform 9¾ at Paddington Station. Likewise, the wardrobe that whisks Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy to the magical world of Narnia resides at the Kilns, a cozy Oxford estate.

A second parallel, and the most apparent, is the profuse use of magic by both Rowling's and Lewis's characters. In Narnia and at Hogwart's, power is defined by one's supernatural dominion over the laws of nature. Headmaster Dumbledore, one of the most prestigious wizards in Rowling's world, uses magic to such an extent that he has reached an age

of well over two hundred years. Aslan the lion, creator and protector of Narnia, is so supernaturally proficient that he bites his thumb at death, resurrecting himself after a grisly murder at the hands of the White Witch.

Magic is so crucial to Rowling's and Lewis's creations that it provides a third affinity: in both narratives, characters are defined and omnisciently appraised by their acceptance or rejection of mystical forces. Rowling dubs those incapable and/or unwilling of accessing the supernatural "Muggles," a derisive term among her enlightened magicians and sorcerers. Similarly, Lewis divides his child adventurers into two camps: those who embrace the magical land of Narnia and its denizens and those who embrace banality and its consequences. Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy's cousin, Eustace (until he is transformed into a dragon *and saved by means of* enchantment) calls Reebicheep, the Dawn Treader, and the whole of Aslan's magical world, "rubbish." Also, as Peter and Susan age, maturity obstructs their memories of Narnia and its inhabitants.

Finally, the events in Rowling's and Lewis's narratives (like the majority of children's novels) force their child protagonists to change in positive ways. Young master Potter has already gone from an apprentice who could barely levitate a feather to a burgeoning master sorcerer. Likewise, almost all of Lewis's child adventurers have been spiritually enhanced by their time with Aslan. Edmund, formerly a selfish and traitorous youth, is now a noble and courageous king. Eustace, the

embodiment of skepticism and defiance, becomes a model of enlightenment and graciousness.

But regardless of Rowling's and Lewis's stylistic correlations, *Harry Potter* is a work of fiction whose chief purpose is to facilitate whimsy in its readers: it is a story, and the lessons derived from its unfolding plot and characters are incidental, residual. The *Narnia Chronicles*, on the other hand, exercise a dual use of fantasy and allegory. Indeed, one of Lewis's fellow Inklings (a small band of Oxford professors and writers), J.R.R. Tolkien, described *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as an allegory (Griffin 309). The message of Jesus Christ and Christian virtue are inseparably interwoven into the fabric of Lewis's stories. For example, the creation of the world is paralleled with the creation of Narnia in *The Magician's Nephew*, the struggle of virtue vs. temptation is paralleled with Edmund's treason and redemption in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and, most important, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ parallels Aslan's sacrifice and subsequent resurrection in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Walsh 146).

The definite presence of Christian subtext in Lewis's children's books makes HarperCollins' reconfiguration of the *Narnia Chronicles* controversial to the author's Christian readership. Although keepers of Lewis's spiritual legacy like Simon Adley, managing director of the C.S. Lewis Company, denied the potential for exploitation in HarperCollins' latest venture (Olsen), others did not share the same sentiment. C.S.

Lewis scholars, fans and family friends recently expressed shock when a leaked memo from a HarperCollins subsidiary suggested the publisher's new Narnia books and merchandise subverted their longstanding affinity with Christian imagery/theology (Grossman Online). Mounting dissension was eventually addressed by Lewis's stepson and heir, Douglass Gresham (who, ironically, has historically renounced any addenda to the *Narnia Chronicles*): "The Christian audience is less in need of Narnia than the secular audience, and in today's world the surest way to prevent secularists and their children from reading it is to keep it in the Christian or Religious section of the bookstores or to firmly link Narnia with modern evangelical Christianity" (Grossman Online).

Gresham's pursuit is one of moderation: to refrain from flooding the *Narnia Chronicles* readers with a torrent of Christian allegory that could drive potential believers away from Lewis's more inspiring and apologetic works such as *Mere Christianity* and *Surprised by Joy*. In the process, however, Gresham and HarperCollins sought to strip the *Narnia Chronicles* of its inherent meaning by potentially reducing it to a form without content. So, from a reading loyal to Christianity and Lewis's original works, republishing the author's stories in this manner may have extracted from the narrative the very quality that makes it unique among all other children's fantasies.

This debate correlates to intertextual discourse as HarperCollins' and Gresham's interpretation compromises Lewis's authorial agency. The

omissions proposed in republishing *The Narnia Chronicles* render Lewis's original, spiritually didactic desires superfluous, and that interpretation remains an exclusive domain of subsequent readers.

The way that the above becomes specifically germane to theatrical discourse is the increasing adaptation (in certain secular Christian venues) of Lewis's works. Nearly every fictional narrative, and even Lewis's semi-autobiographical *A Grief Observed*, has been mounted for performance despite Lewis's belief that "plays should be plays; poem, poems; novels, novels; stories, stories..." (Griffin 360). Lewis's sharp distinction between narrative forms prompts potential investigation into the stage adaptations of the author's works. An intertextual semiotic inquiry into Lewis adaptations may be applied to the interaction of religion and the postmodern, deconstructive theatre. The study will investigate what factors (whether religious, theatrical or other) contribute to the process of adaptation to performance reading in regard to Lewis's works.

Nevertheless, staunch Lewis purists may find it difficult to prove HarperCollins' republishing "blasphemous." C.S. Lewis persistently defended the primacy of form over content in his works. Lewis admitted on more than one occasion that the inspiration for *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was not a pursuit of Christian allegory, but a picturesque image in his mind's eye:

> *The Lion* began with a picture of a faun carrying an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood. This picture had been in my

> mind since I was about sixteen. Then one day, when I was about forty, I said to myself: 'Let's try and make a story about it'. (*Of Other Worlds* 42)

Even in his correspondence with children Lewis writes, "I think the idea of making some difference is right: but of course what matters in books is not so much the ideas as how you actually carry them out" (*Letters to Children* 34-35).

Despite his preference for form over content, for narrative style over subject matter, Lewis also acknowledged the overt allegory in the *Narnia Chronicles*. Much of his correspondence with juveniles and adults alike addressed the exact meaning behind the characters and events of the *Narnia Chronicles*. Whether the *Narnia Chronicles* began as a fantastical model for Christian allegory or not, Lewis eventually admitted that New Testament virtue and salvation were an inseparable facet of his stories. In fact, Lewis is so concerned with protecting the content in the *Narnia Chronicles* that he perpetually declined offers to adapt *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to television, radio and film during his lifetime. When actress and playwright Jane Douglass petitioned to adapt Aslan, Narnia and its inhabitants for a film, Lewis replied, "Aslan is a divine figure and anything approaching the comic (anything in the Disney line) would be to me simple blasphemy" (Griffin 360). Lewis rejected Douglass and others on more than one occasion, never sacrificing what he believed to be the integrity of his creation: "I believe that plays should be plays; poems,

poems; novels, novels; stories, stories; and certainly the book that you mention is pure narrative" (Griffin 360).

Over twenty years after Lewis's death, the first adaptation of his works was staged. On 19 November 1984, the first production of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was presented at Westminster Theatre, London, followed by six nation-wide tours and six sequels corresponding to the Narnia narratives. Since that time, almost all of Lewis's principal works, including essays, biographies and theological fantasies, have been adapted for the stage. The current conflict between ardent, conservative Lewis scholars and HarperCollins represents a larger, perpetual realm of inquiry: with each adaptation comes a risk that Lewis's meaning, his evangelical potency (representative of the author's theology and bound to Christian allegory and doctrine) will be lost in the transformation of form. In particular, Lewis's deeper theological works, traditional epistles and narratives are at the greatest risk of losing their evangelism because adapting such works for performance often proves difficult given their unique styles. The correlation between changing the form and, thus, the "meaning" of Lewis's works, presents a significant challenge to would-be adaptors, especially those who desire to retain the author's persuasive appeal.

Lewis's works, and hence adaptations, are subjects of rich and diverse meaning, rendering them ideal for semiotic analysis. In semiology, a transmitter (in this case, Lewis) sends a signal/sign or signal set (novel)

by means of a channel (prose) derived from a source (Lewis's inspiration and its development) to a receiver (reader) that is deciphered into a message (impact and interpretation) to create meaning (for further semiotic discussion see Chapter Two). Stage adaptations alter this communicative model in many ways. Foremost, theatre alters the relationship of signs/signals themselves by dispersing meaning into multiple channels (Bogatyrev 43); prose becomes dialogue and stage directions; novel becomes drama. This alteration transforms Lewis's completed, material source work into a processual discourse. The new dramatic text is now only one of many factors that contribute to performance. Another performance factor that alters (at the least in form) Lewis's meaning is the performer. Prose sends Lewis's meaning to the reader/receiver. In performance, however, an actor filters and shares Lewis's role as transmitter:

> The oral folklore phenomenon like the phenomenon of the actor is inseparable from the person who performs it. The hearer of such a phenomenon/novel, cannot isolate the artistic phenomenon, as such, from the author and reciter. (Bogatyrev 46)

According to Bogatyrev, the performer becomes just as crucial to deciphering a narrative's meaning as its author. The performer/transmitter dynamic illustrates a larger form alteration; the dispersal of the author's meaning (signals/signs and/or signal sets) within multiple fields: "In the

theatre the number of fields from which theatrical signs, such as costume, scenery, music and so forth, are drawn, is at times larger, at times smaller, but always is a multiple" (Bogatyrev 41). Whereas Lewis remains a singular sign source (read "field") in the novel, performance receives signs and sign sets from any number of practitioners and disciplines. So, multiple fields increase the likelihood of divergent spectator (receiver) interpretation, regardless of an adaptation's faithfulness to Lewis's "meaning."

So, theatrical adaptation changes Lewis's sign "meaning" in at least two ways; the adapted work alters Lewis's source text; performance cannot wholly transcribe a dramatic text's signs. Nevertheless, Lewis's source work(s) can still be used as a qualitative means of performance assessment. Adaptations can be appraised by their faithfulness to Lewis's original work and their capacity to transmit the author's signal(s)/signal sets, despite a drastic alteration of form. Although an adaptation cannot exclusively be measured by its faithfulness to Lewis's source work, it is a factor for intertextual and semiotic analysis. Therefore, the study seeks to decipher the sign relationships, if any, between source work and adapted performance in order to contribute to the ongoing discourse regarding intertextual agency.

II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

A study of Lewis, his works and their produced meaning in relation to their subsequent adaptation correlates to semiological trends regarding

intertextuality. The inquiry advances existing knowledge of Lewis and his literary contributions by uncovering the relation between the produced meaning in the author's works and their subsequent affinity with Christian allegory and doctrine. Christian spectators, including congregations, advocacy and special interest groups and other organizations require ideological support from sources like Lewis to reinforce theistic hegemony (in the Gramscian sense of intellectual and/or cultural controlling bodies---see Chapter Three). Those hegemonic signals, most emphatic in Lewis's narratives, can be deciphered from a study of the author's work. Hegemonic signals are crucial to the study of Lewis-based productions since congregations and other like-minded groups require source work faithfulness for ideological reinforcement. This is particularly germane to the discipline of theatre because, as with most postmodern theory, the impetus of adaptation is the audience who benefits from it faithfulness to the source work.

The body of knowledge obtained from this study will contribute to the next step in the investigation: measuring performative signs/sign sets in Lewis adaptations and their relationship to each source work's produced meaning (read hegemony reinforcing signals). This endeavor is unique to the "typical" semiological investigation in a variety of ways.

First, the investigation isolates those signals that reinforce theistic hegemony and assesses each adaptation based on its faithfulness to Lewis's own ideological (an assemblage of self-assuming worldviews) and

theological contributions. So, the study quantifies a performance's produced meaning (whether it reinforces theistic hegemony amongst Lewis fans) and qualifies it via correlation to ideological signals Lewis's source works express.

Second, the investigation extends semiotician Anne Ubersfeld's concept of the performance/text intersection:

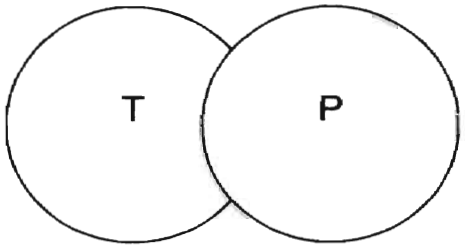


Diagram 1.1 (5)

According to Ubersfeld's *Reading Theatre*, the diagram exhibits signal sets in the text (T) and performance (P); the intersection representing those signals found in both sets. To clarify, the structuralist/classical practitioner would attempt to increase the text/performance intersection so the signal sets were identical, (see Richard Hornby's *Script into Performance* for a comprehensive study of a structuralist approach to theatre) but Ubersfeld contends such pursuit is an impossibility:

> The totality of the visual, auditory and musical signs created by the director, set designer, musician and actors constitutes a meaning (or a multiplicity of meanings) that goes beyond the text in its totality. (5)

Ubersfeld's diagram, however, begins with the processual dramatic text and it does not account for its dramatic source. A study of Lewis's semiotic adaptation may quantify the intersection of signal sets between Lewis's work, the processual dramatic adaptation and its performance. So, the process may be expressed with some variety:

Diagram 1.2

In this case, Lewis's source work (S) and a dramatic text (T) share a signal set intersection, the totality of which may/may not be expressed in the text's performance (P) intersection.

While this diagram demonstrates the source to text to performance process, it does not provide a visual expression of hegemony reinforcement crucial to signal measurement in adaptive performance. Thus, another expression of the adaptive process might appear as follows:

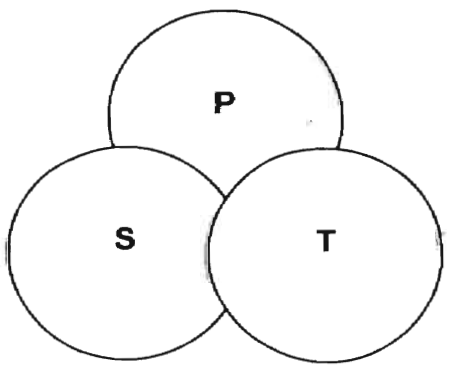


Diagram 1.3

This diagram more clearly demonstrates the signal set dynamics in the adaptive process. The majority of signal intersections are deciphered with relative ease; source (S) intersects with text (T); performance (P), text (T) and source (S) simultaneously intersect; text (T) intersects with performance (P). The intersection that requires greatest scrutiny is that of performance (P) and source (S). Seemingly, the intersection of these sets would be superfluous as performance (P) represents signal's source (S) via text (T). In other words, Diagram 1.3 best exhibits an intertextual model for theatrical discourse since all signal sets receive more equal agency over one another. If proven applicable, the model then advances current intertextual analysis.

However, Ubersfeld's character discussion might provide another explanation: "The textual character we discover is never alone. It is already accompanied by the set of all discourses already held about it" (73). To compare, the reader/spectator who perceives/expects Prince Hamlet to be gaunt and young (when the Queen dubs her son "fat"—V.2.230—and the role's original performer was thirty-seven-year-old Richard Burbage) is responding not to text, but outside (and perhaps more biased) discourse. Likewise, signal sets expressed by a theatre practitioner or perceived by a spectator found in Lewis's source work but not part of any signal set in text (T) is conducive to an existent source (S) and performance (P) intersection. Whether this intersection represents

hegemony, expectant in Christian spectatorship via Lewis's source signals, or other factors alien to Christian hegemony will be investigated during the course of this study.

Further, by analyzing applicable semiotic components and their adherence to/deviation from Lewis's intended meaning, the investigation can hypothesize what semiotic factors (signal, transmitter, channel) contribute most to the production of meaning, both in the author's original work and in its adapted performance. The hypothesis may then serve as a model to those adaptors who desire strict adherence to Lewis's "intended" narrative signals.

Finally, the study will uncover the relationship, if any, between the produced meaning in Lewis's works and their stage adaptations. By investigating the relationship between "intended"/produced meaning, a more comprehensive relationship can be drawn between a given piece of literature and its dramatic counterpart. Thus, the benefits of each form (original and adapted) can be measured for future transmitters who seek to signify (direct, act or design) a given work or adapt the work themselves.

III. METHOD OF APPROACH

The field of inquiry will limit itself to adaptations of Lewis's theological fantasy *The Screwtape Letters* and bereavement litany, *A Grief Observed*. *The Screwtape Letters*, a series of epistles written from senior to junior demon, pertains to the fictional spiritual battle over a single

human soul from his tempter's perspective. In his correspondence with nephew Wormwood, Screwtape reveals the perversion of natural pleasure, the folly of mankind's temporal and finite perception and, indirectly, God's (the "Enemy") compassion towards all creation. *A Grief Observed* is a first person, non-fiction account of Lewis's grieving process after losing his wife Joy to a long suffering, painful cancer. The work tracks Lewis's search for understanding a seemingly sadistic God and his eventual acceptance that, while reconciliation with Joy is forfeit, eternity will supercede the author's need to meet his wife again.

The impetus for restricting the study to these works is based on two rationales. First, both narratives contain rich symbolic and apologetic signals infused with Christian allegorical images and motifs: they are unashamedly and indisputable homiletic recitations. Second, the works possess non-traditional narrative forms and, thus, retain the greatest potential for performative alteration. Whereas many adaptations from text to performance rely on traditional fictional elements (already engendered plot, climax and exposition), Lewis's *A Grief Observed* and *The Screwtape Letters* are more atypically configured (epistle and essay) and require significant transformation.

In order to measure the impact of Lewis's source signals, a series of analyses must occur. First, an investigation of each work's reception will be collected and studied as it relates to Lewis's produced and accepted meaning within secular theistic hegemony in the United States. Initial

reviews and critical writings will also be explored during this portion of the study.

Performance analysis will center on David Payne's Rising Image Productions, a Christian touring company that exclusively produces Lewis adaptations. Payne's productions present multiple contributions to the study. Payne serves as artistic director for the single largest and longstanding Lewis based touring company in the world. Rising Image has traveled and performed extensively across the United States and Great Britain since 1992. Also, Rising Image has adapted Lewis texts from all the author's prose forms; Payne has adapted and performed fictional narratives (*The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*; *The Magician's Nephew*), biography (*Shadowlands*, *In Search of Joy*), essay (*A Grief Observed*) and theological fantasy (*The Screwtape Letters*). Moreover, Rising Image is reputed to be not only the acme of Lewis adaptors but also a paradigm in Christian spectatorship by critics in and out of the medium. Finally, Payne is a practicing Christian, with investiture in hegemonic reinforcement.

Finally, adaptive analysis will conclude with a comprehensive evaluation of several subjects. A study of both productions' signs/sign sets will be compared to its intended meaning (i.e. production concept—as it relates to the semiological elements of signal, transmitter, channel) and to Lewis's narrative signals. In each case, a semiotic analysis of the given production should result in a hypothesis regarding the adaptation of

Lewis's works: whether faithfulness to Lewis's source signals are crucial in the adaptation or whether each theatrical sign/sign set becomes isolated in the transformation process and, thus, how each theatre practitioner can increase/decrease the potential to display a work's "intended" meaning via stage production.

II: SEMIOTIC THEORY AND INTERTEXTUAL PERFORMANCE STUDIES

Semiotics, at minimum, methodically analyses units or signs to reveal produced meaning and uncover the manifold relationships between performitive senders (practitioners) and receivers (spectators). A semiotic pretense sees performance as sign proliferator. As per Chapter One, Bogatyrev's "fields" are isolated analytic channels that marry during performance to facilitate meaning (41). Under a communicative lens, Keir Elam distinguishes semiotic fields as sources (dramatist, text, director, actor, set, lighting and costume designer, composer, stage manager) and transmitters (physical dynamics, voice, scenery, lighting sound, spectator contact) to reinforce theatre's potential complexity (37). In fact, the boundary between source and transmitter often blurs during performance and the number of semiotic fields are only limited by an object or event's capacity to produce meaning for a spectator, suggesting exponential, perhaps infinite, signs and sign sets. The apparently infinitesimal semiotic fields may be attributed to spectator engagement (reading and response) with the performance: each spectator engages with a performance in varying and multiple ways.

Moreover, the performance as semiotic medium does not sequentially signify units of meaning. Instead, the theatre's semiotic multiplicity is joined by simultaneity: signs and, thus meaning, are irregularly dispersed via fields. What Elam calls "density" (46) challenges

the would-be semiotician to devise an analytical method that accounts for theatre's "multilinear" and "integrated" (Elam 44) transmission, in addition to its sign alteration (Bogatyrev 43) and, most complex, its replacement and mixture of signs. Jindřich Honzl exposes semiotics' substitutive property: "And much to our amazement, we are discovering that stage space need not be spatial but that sound can be a stage and music can be a dramatic event and scenery can be a text" (Honzl 76). Performance quantification invites numerous theories, each attempting to address theatre's unique expressive spectrum.

Predominantly, semiotic theories begin with sign division. In the semiotic precursor "The Icon and the Absurd," Jan Kott distributes signs into semantic modes; literal signs denotate (18); mimetic signs evoke a real object/event through suspended disbelief or verisimilitude (18); symbolic signs are underscored by a code that designates meaning (18). For Umberto Eco, the sign relationship becomes a function series, expressed as inferred icon (p]q), equivalence (p=q) and replacement (pz→q) (17-18).

In Elam's chief theoretical contribution, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*—with extensions of C.S. Pierce, Kott and others—the author divides signs into icon, index and symbol (22-23). Elam's icon bridges the "sign-vehicle" (transmitter) and signified (meaning) by way of representation: "An icon is a sign which refers to the object it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own, and which it possesses" (qtd.

Pierce in Elam 21). Elam further extrapolates on Pierce by conforming to the theorist's icon allocation—image (i.e. "figurative painting"), diagram and metaphor (21). Indexical signs relate sign-vehicle and signified with cause/effect contiguity, including the physical connection of "a sailor's rolling gait" or "a knock on the door points to the presence of someone outside it" (21-22). In other words, the spectator assumes a whole from a demonstrated part; marching signifies military; chalk and blackboard signify school. Finally, the symbol's association is attributed to abstract governance, such as linguistic signs or language (22).

Further reference to Elam's text uncovers another recurring semiotic subject: the code. Chapter One's communication model influences Elam's own code breakdown, which explicitly distinguishes code from theatrical system:

> The terms/system/(i.e. of signs) and /code/ are often employed as synonyms, with reference to language and other semiotic mechanisms, in order to indicate at once the ensemble of signs or signals together with the internal rules governing their combination and the rules responsible for assigning semantic content to the units in question. This terminological habit has frequently led to confusion as to the different kinds of rule involved in the production of meaning. In so complex a communicational situation as theatre, it is

useful to distinguish between various kinds of semiotic law at work. (49)

Borrowing from Eco, the system, "a repertory of signs," differs from the code in that the system's meaning network is "differentiated," whereas the code accrues transmission through correlation (49-50). Anne Ubersfeld extends Elam's correlative notion and divides code into the linguistic (visual and audio), socio-cultural (mores, verisimilitude, psychology, etc.) and strictly theatrical (blocking, acting, etc.), each serving to codify performance for the spectator (20).

Elam's numerous contributions to semiotics are primarily adaptive; Elam joins the "show not tell" nature of performance with Eco's ostension (29-30); Michael Kirby's "diachronic discontinuity" answers theatre's multiplicity and simultaneity question with functional structure (45); Elam understands convention and other underlying decorums as residual to Eco's "overcoding" (53). Nevertheless, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* is by no means void of originality. Primarily, Elam's conception of theatrical communication as an interplay of source, transmitter, channel, receiver, message, destination and, of course, noise renders a liberating, if distilled, lexicon for both theorist and practitioner (35). Specifically, the treatment of "extra-textual" noise ("late arrivals, malfunctioning of equipment and, within limits, the forgetting of lines by actors") as "a different level of action" rather than as an opaque, abstract reception concept serves pragmatic semiotic application in theatre (88-89).

Also, Elam's actantial model, with Lion (incarnated thematic force), Sun (sought value), Earth (Sun recipient), Mars (opponent), Scale (sun arbitrator/proliferator) and Moon (universal reinforcer), sheds light on the classical text (127-128). This model, while undeniably "questionable" (129) for comprehensive application, fosters fabula (story) reinforcing script analysis. Finally, the "dramatalogical score" proffers penetrating, if daunting, textual deconstruction and, in Elam's own words, "aims to provide a more precise instrument than those traditionally adopted for the anatomy of language, action, character, interrelationships and the very construction of the fictional world in the drama" (185).

Building on Elam's foundation, Anne Ubersfeld's *Reading Theatre* posits an interesting turn on the actantial model. In addition to the intertextual diagrams reconstructed in Chapter One, Ubersfeld adapts Algerdis Greimas's Structural Semantics, designating actants (event producing subjects) in dramatic interaction:

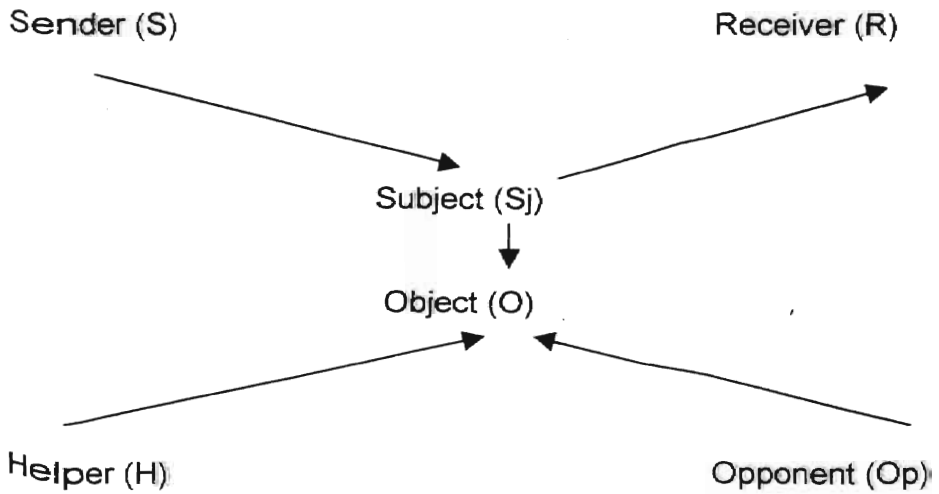


Diagram 2.1 (38)

Each element/actant uniquely contributes to the unfolding fabula; the sender (S) is an "abstract" and "living element" (character, idea, value) that incites events (42); the receiver (R) is a spectator identified element that serves as a driving force or inspiration for the subject (Sj), "the person or thing whose success in overcoming obstacles moves the text along" (44-45); Helpers (H) are Sj allies, but may serve as opposition or may even be former opposers (40); opponents (Op) are merely obstacle producers, principally for the Sj and are expressed as Op vs. Sj or Op vs. Sj for object/mutual desire (49). The object (O) is an actant that serves the concrete or abstract interest of R and is by far Ubersfeld's most dense actantial element:

> The object of the subject's quest can very well be an *individual* (an amorous conquest for example), but what is at stake in this quest always goes beyond the simple individual because of the links that are established between the subject-object unit (one that is never isolated) and the other actants. (45)

In many respects, Ubersfeld's model is not unlike Elam's, each featuring a driving fabula engine (Lion/Sj), aspiration (Sun/O), receiver (Earth/R), adversary (Mars/Op) and assistance (Moon/H). However, Ubersfeld's emphasis on actant interaction better reflects

theatre's multilinear quality and is more applicable to non-traditional dramatic texts.

Elam's theories are expanded upon in Susan Melrose's *A Semiotics of the Dramatic Text,* which aptly represents the prevailing trends and tone of performance study in the last decade with regard to semiotics. Melrose's work persuades textual deconstructionists and semioticians to transcend linguistic emphasis and universal quantification via several paradigms. First, Melrose insists meaning is not deciphered from isolated theatrical units or signs: meaning occurs in a bridge—movement from one sign to another (16). This does not assume meaning resides in an interpretative "purgatory", awaiting the impossibility of an isolated signifier. Rather, Melrose asserts meaning may only be consummated in the process of moving from one sign to another, that deciphering requires action. Melrose extends her performance "dynamic" in response to the recurring multiplicity and simultaneity issue:

> [...] our semiotics must take note of one fact of theatricality: what in part makes theatre work is its capacity for creating those events which enable us to experience the blur where one system *insinuates* (emphasis added) itself into another, with which it might be logically at odds; the blur where two options—and not one—from a given system, are simultaneously made available, to confound the notion of systematic choice itself, as an explanation of modes of

> cultural practice. What we need to observe is that a major communicative *function* of theatre lies precisely in this blurring of reasonable communication. But can we not say the same for any number of esthetic practices? (28-29)

Melrose intimates that transmitter isolation proves difficult precisely because it runs contrary to the nature of theatre: it is negligent as performance meanings are in fact produced by the united congress and/or mutual reciprocity of what she dubs "systems" (e.g. costumes, lights, music, scenery, acting, etc.) (28).

For Melrose, theatre is a "complimentary" discipline, iconoclastic to compartmentalized interpretation (68). *A Semiotics of the Dramatic Text* ousts astringent, isolated analysis in favor of realizing Eco's conception of linguistic composition: "A phoneme is no doubt an abstract position within a system, and it acquires its value only because of the other phonemes to which it is opposed" (*Language* 23). There is truth in the old maxim "a dog...is not a cat." So, Melrose's conception of produced meaning suggests that signs receive identity, become vivid, only as they are juxtaposed against signs from other systems/transmitters. This synergy, however elementary, is often overlooked in other semiotic performance models and cannot be underestimated.

Second, Melrose describes all actants, concrete or abstract, as relative, subject to cultural and social diversity. To this end, the author seeks an inclusive, though pluralistic, expressive interpretative model:

> At this point the difficulties should be clear: how to set about elaborating a discourse, a number of currently valid procedures for a local and historically specific approach to writing for use in one or another dramatic theatre practices, where the emphasis is placed not on a conventional globalising hermeneutics (without needing to exclude this pleasurable game of meaning-production), but rather on writing-in-use as somatico-actional potential, and as potential for what I want to call the theatre psycho-soma. (201)

Melrose's "psycho-soma" are in fact "everyday practices" (read: "insignificant") rendered significant through the performative medium (201). Melrose's deliberately amorphous "psycho-soma" adapt to many circumstances, as the qualifier "everyday" is itself highly incognate. Also, the process of turning the peripheral to the evident by no other means than performance placement is not unlike the Russian formalist "ostranenijia" ("making strange") in that an object or subject is separated from its usual regard/status. The process emerges whenever theatre artists alter or transform simple practices into the emphatic, the metaphorical: "psycho-soma" render theatrical from common, intriguing from mundane.

Even a cursory discussion of semiotics would be incomplete without addressing spectatorship. Elam defines the ideal spectator as one

who employs "dramatic competence," supplementing theatrical understanding with "generic and structural principles of the drama" (98-99). David Ball describes this competence as a technique with which to read performances as events existing in time and space that relate to and derive from a specific dramatic text (4).

Additionally, an ideal spectator exercises the capacity to "impose order upon a dramatic content whose expression is in fact discontinuous and incomplete" (99). The spectator role is crucial; meaning-production, the principal end of semiotic process, is only possible via interpretation or the spectator's engagement with and response to performance. Elam observes the spectator's tendency to assume "every detail is an intentional sign," interpreting and, in some cases, imposing pre-existent meaning where it may or may not exist (9). Indeed, Elam suggests the spectator's belief in the pre-existent demarcates performance from another expressive medium or media:

> Unlike other possible worlds, which come into (conceptual) being when they have been fully specified or at least (as in the case of the novel) partially described and located, the dramatic world (W_D—addition added) is assumed by the spectator to exist before he knows anything about it. The W_D is conventionally 'discovered' *in medias res*, prior to the specification of its properties, and only in the course of its representation do its peculiar characteristics, the identity of

its individuals, its chronological and geographical properties, its 'history', etc., emerge. (111)

So, the spectator assumes the pre-existence of a dramatic world and fabula, with or without interpretation, engagement. However, a semiotic perspective asserts that without reading and response, meaning and, consequently, the performance become un-deciphered and, to an extent, irrelevant.

Coupled with the myriad cultural, intellectual, social and other factors that impact individual interpretation, I tend to agree with Elam's notion that each new spectator's interpretation (and thus performance) becomes a new subject for discourse. So, the volume of discourses become multiplied by the number of spectators. In this respect, those factors that effect spectatorship become important subjects of semiotic inquiry.

Jĭrí Levý sets the precedent for performitive ideology (world views that act as their own assumptions about how culture and society function) and spectatorship in his 1940 essay "The Translation of Verbal Art." He ascribed ideology the power to emphasize for the spectator certain meanings over others: "The reader grasps the work of art through his own epoch and the values emphasized are those ideologically and aesthetically more relevant to him at his point in history" (222). Elam extends Levý's supposition by juxtaposing the Greek man (seen in tragedy) against the Elizabethan dramatic figure and contemporary

portraits of humanity, revealing that even dramaturgy, theatre's textual "means of production," is ideologically influenced (108-109). However, Herbert Blau's "Ideology and Performance" insinuates the greatest implications of mystifying socio-cultural forces:

> The less we can depend on the appearances of things or approach anything like a consensus on what they mean, then the more likely it is that in the intangibility of political process, as in the immateriality of performance, what happens in the world will be repeated, signified in established ways. (456)

Blau implies that ideology acts as an interpretative social force, a lens that blurs events before and after performitive representation. But reducing ideology to obfuscating agent discounts this concept's dual capacity to reveal or de-code social forces. Often, ideology clarifies or "frames" objects (in this case, performance signs) as much as it may blur them.

Appropriately, Melrose calls for a semiotic model that demystifies ideological discourse and that discredits the pretense of "universality". The author praises the "local" and "relative potential of performance" (68). Theatre that empowers expressive differentiation, based on culture, ethnicity, religion and other factors serves its users (spectators) more than the notion of comprehensive discourse masked by ideology (for further discussion—see Chapter Three). For Melrose, the quality of performance is measured in its capacity to instill relative sublimity in local spectators, to

expose ideology in presenting myriad worldviews (219). In other words, Melrose asserts no objective measure exists for a single performance, that "good" may only be measured on a local or relative level.

The preceding discussion all bears upon semiotics' role in intertextuality, which Patrice Pavis defines as the idea "that a text is comprehensible only through the interplay of texts that precede it" (*Dictionary* 188); it is an underlying dialogue between the drama and previous, obviously impacting, and contributive works. Naturally, intertextuality correlates with a previous text's contributive margin—the source work to adaptation relationship among the highest in volume. That is, adaptive works often mirror signs pre-existing in their source. But according to Marvin Carlson, intertextuality is relatively comprehensive to all spectatorship:

> This complex recycling of old elements, far from being a disadvantage, is an absolute essential part of the reception process. We are able to "read" new works, whether they be plays, paintings or musical compositions, or for that matter any new signifying structures that make any claim to artistic expression or communication at all, only because we recognize within them elements that have been recycled from other structures of experience which we have experienced earlier. ("Haunted Stage" 6)

Carlson also reflects that the process of "recycling" is a recurrent and prevailing theatrical convention, "muted" only with "the rise of realistic drama" (7).

Bogatyrev reinforces Carlson, observing the oral paraphrase of epic poetry in folk theatre:

> By comparing with the source from which it was taken, we can clearly ascertain within the variant its original features, conditioned by the structure of the language, the religious, social, and economic life, and by the art, both "high" and "folk" art. (55)

"Original features" is the operative, for Bogatyrev is not simply referring to linguistic structure (grammar, syntax); he cites the religious, social and economic as lateral transference elements. Likewise, Ubersfeld discounts the isolation of performance text in interpreted meaning: "The textual character we discover when we read is never alone. It is already accompanied by the set of all the discourses already held by it" (73). For Ubersfeld, the adaptive actant serves to connotate previous experience or interpretation, whether the subject is historical (real) or imagined (82).

Intertextuality, compounded with the notion of ideology, reveals several points. First, the adapted source work cannot be disregarded when seeking performitive meaning in production. Second, the dramatic text's source work informs, whether consciously or unconsciously,

spectator interpretation. Finally, a given spectator's ideological influence will impact both source work engagement and performance interpretation.

Semiotic analysis attempts to separate and measure the stage performance's myriad (and perhaps infinite) units or signs and their interplay. Sign divisions are predominantly rooted in linguistic theory. However, intricate systems or codes render signs and sign sets readable for the theatrical spectator. Semiotic analysis often employs one or more actantial models that uncover constituent fabula apparatus. Recent turns in Semiotic discourse emphasize sign synergy, the meaning produced when one sign or sign system blurs into another. Additionally, many semiotic scholars have increasingly advocated the importance of relative spectatorship, that theatrical reading which acknowledges ideological and local influence on interpretation. The application may specifically pertain to semiotic intertextuality, the process of reading a performance whose dramatic text is derived from another source (i.e. novel, poem, historical event). Semiotic intertextuality, coupled with ideological discourse, assumes that source works cannot be disregarded when interpreting an adapted performance.

III. CHRISTIAN SPECTATORSHIP AS RELIGIOUS HEGEMONY

Christian spectatorship (dramaturgy and performance apparatus oriented with contemporary theology) has often been aesthetically and religiously marginalized in the United States, Canada and Great Britain by those critics, practitioners and scholars that do not adhere to its didactic application:

> Stranded in the wilderness of a largely secular culture, many Christian thespians consider themselves guardians of a spiritual power source—a potentially incendiary one. On the one hand, devout or inspirational theatre seems to have the power to galvanize believers and witness to the skeptical. On the other hand, drama as a whole may distract the faithful from a God-centered life. And the broader theatrical culture seethes with vice and nihilism—or so it can seem. (Wren 21)

Wren acknowledges theatre's persuasive power. However, the writer also realizes that performing in a seemingly confrontational, pluralistic environment may prove more spiritual harm than good for its largely theistic practitioners. The "flak on two fronts" (Wren 21) Christian spectatorship seeks credibility in theistic and postmodern circles: both are intuitively opposed philosophical arenas that subsequently divide and embitter many evangelical performers and discourage other potential practitioners. The notion of philosophy subverting Christian spectatorship

may prove difficult to accept for individuals unfamiliar with the proposed conflict. Nevertheless, understanding Christian spectatorship and its relation to semiotic analysis is germane to artists like David Payne. An overview of Christian spectatorship also represents the debate over aesthetic discourse between theology and postmodern deconstruction.

J.M. Buckley defines the Christian as an individual who "endeavors to govern life by the precepts of Christ" (33). This definition implies an infallible, universal order for believers whose principal spiritual root derives from "inspired" texts or other Christ-centered teaching. David Sire suggests that order manifests itself in a personal, omniscient creator or God:

> The Word (in Greek *logos*, from which our word logic comes) is eternal, an aspect of God himself. That is, logicality, intelligence, *meaning* (emphasis added) are all inherent in God. It is out of this intelligence that the world, the universe, came to be. And, therefore, because of this source the universe has structure, order and meaning...Knowledge is, therefore, possible because there is something to be known (God and his creation) and someone to know (the omniscient God and human beings made in his image). (30)

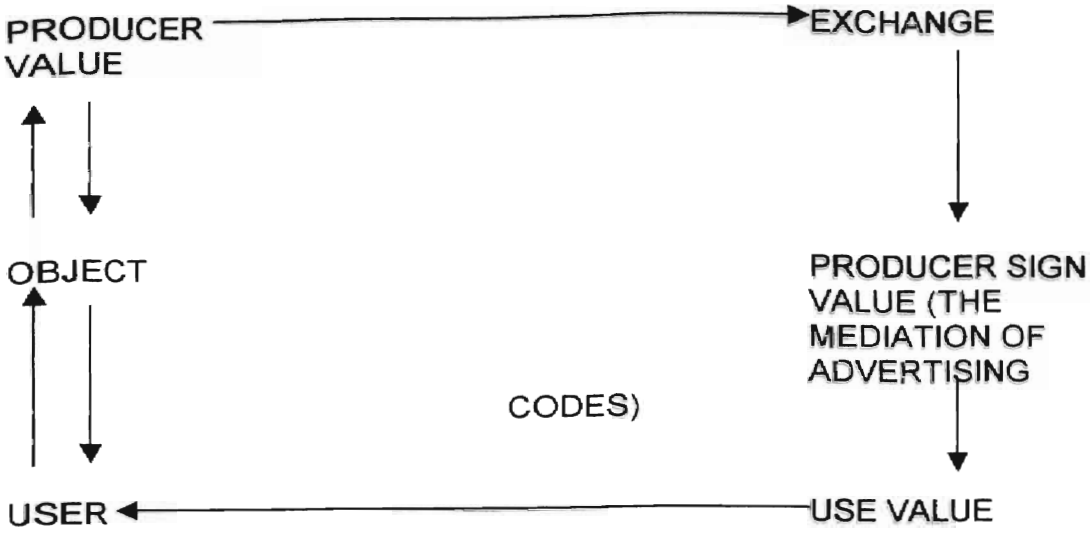
Sire characterizes God (and hence Christ) as the source of pre-existing knowledge dispensed to believers via worship, devotion and practice (all encompassed in the Christian "faith").

Conversely, through an admittedly Christian lens, Sire describes postmodernism as a philosophy that espouses that the thinking process begins with the individual, refuting the concept of pre-existing knowledge (178). Postmodernism "denies" foundational knowledge, "de-centers" self-authenticity (Gottdiener 240) and, as a result, dispels God's necessity; lacking objectivity, the universe has little need of a self-proclaimed singular, omniscient origin. So, theistic universality is replaced with differentiation, the new "trinity," according to J. Michael Hogan, of "race, class and gender" (62).

This discussion's operatives are "necessity" and "differentiation": these criteria reveal theology and, thus, Christian spectatorship through a fresh (though deconstructive) view. Deconstruction and other potentially irreconcilable metaphysical issues like evolution, nihilism, new age movements and "avant-garde" aesthetic discourse supplant secular Christianity in American and British culture. Although there is no single, unified definition of secular Christianity, it is widely regarded by its practitioners as a theology addressing the needs of a contemporary spiritual constituency, emphasizing equality, community and pragmatic faith among believers in addition to answering the aforementioned philosophical challenges. Divorced from objectivity, however, secular Christianity folds into the manifold sub-cultures vying for power in the social collective.

To this extent, Antonio Gramsci's social theory provides a postmodern deconstructive context for secular Christianity. In particular, Gramsci's notion of "hegemony" and "intellectual" reveal secular Christianity's struggle in a pluralistic society. Gramsci's hegemony "has to do with the way one social group influences other social groups...some concept of the general interest is promoted" (Sassoon 13-14). Hegemony traditionally refers to civic "consent" of the masses where "general direction is imposed on social life" in exchange for autonomy and security: this exchange is the "apparatus of state coercive power" (Gramsci *Notebooks* 12).

Though Gramsci never explicitly defines "intellectual," his descriptions and discussions distinguish the subject as a social position requiring mental activity. Gramsci notes though, that not all intellectuals reach their potential: "All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say; but all men do not have the function of intellectuals in society" (121 *Prince*). Because of their seemingly inherent need, many intellectuals often exercise leadership in the social collective and, according to Gramsci, are "differentiated" as "organic" and "traditional" (Sassoon 14). Organic intellectuals "perform tasks essential to the reproduction of a particular society" (Sassoon 14): they are pragmatic and immediately necessary. From a Marxist perspective, organic intellectuals fulfill the producer role in M. Gottdiener's hegemonic value model:



(Diagram 3.1:181)

In the preceding diagram, the producer creates the idea of pre-existing need in the user by superimposing exchange value on objects. The producer, the organic intellectual, insinuates its own social necessity by creating objects (not necessarily physical) and rendering said objects indispensable: "...objects involved in the everyday life of social groups are used because they perform some practical function" (Gottdiener 180). Gottdiener's object value analysis further corresponds to Gramsci's notion of organic intellectuals as producers who facilitate their own need by forming recurring relationships and hierarchies with user/supporters: every "social class" creates groups that give "homogeneity" (118 *Prince*). Gramsci's "homogeneity" is based, in part, on the concept of organic intellectual leadership reinforcing itself through value systems that secure the producer/user dynamic:

> [...] politically powerful not only because of its position within economic structure but also because it is the carrier of certain values which, though certainly expressions of its experience in the world of work and everyday life, become detached as images, projections of its practical outlook. (Adamson 177)

So, Gramsci distinguishes class divisions according to the producing, organic intellectuals and the using, supportive, dormant intellectual. Traditional intellectuals derive "function" from "earlier historical periods," unnecessary for current society "but who continue to exist" (Showstack 14).

Gramsci's hegemony and intellectual underscore the theorist's chief contribution to Marxism: regardless of intent, classical Marxism gives insufficient weight to non-economic factors like ideology (an assemblage of self-assuming worldviews) and culture in the "reproduction of social relations" (Adamson 175). In Marxist fashion, Gramsci overtly separates society into groups, yet his quantifications account for the manifold differences (instead of singularly economic) inherent in culture and ideology.

Cultural and ideological differentiation account for myriad worldviews and their power dynamics provide a rich context for aesthetic discourse. Gramsci "demystifies" religion in "The Study of Philosophy and of Historical Materialism":

> The problem of religion is intended not in the confessional sense but in the lay sense of unity of faith between conception of the world and a conforming norm of conduct: But why call this unity of faith "religion," why not call it ideology or actually, "politics." (Gramsci *Prince* 61).

Further, Gramsci articulates that religious intellectuals or "ecclesiastics" were once organic (in material control over society), holding "a monopoly of a number of important services" (*Notebooks* 7). But this analysis implies religion's material monopoly, now diminished, and renders ecclesiastics traditional intellectuals (unnecessary). This conclusion invites new cultural and ideological ownership claims to historically religious services, including performative expression.

Theatre historian Oscar G. Brockett reinforces this notion in "Power, Censorship and Validation": "In the Middle Ages, it was usually the Church that had the power to validate or invalidate art" (8). Brockett understands prohibitive censorship as "a battle over which a groups' values and standards should prevail," regardless of spiritual or material motivation" (1). He extends this notion by implying that ideology circulates in aesthetic censorship: "This is one crucial point I would like to make: there is always an unstated, often unexamined relationship among power, validation and censorship...the power to suppress or marginalize" (7-8). Brockett's statement concerning the Middle Ages is later qualified when the historian cites corporations, foundations and government (all

delegating material control) as chief validations of aesthetic discourse: religion is absent from this "triad," as marginalized, immaterial, and unnecessary (9).

Even secular Christianity has incidentally adopted the hegemonic and ideological label:

> Whereas these communities [the Church] certainly do not possess the scale which Gramsci envisioned as he developed his political theories critiquing Italian and Russian Marxism, they do provide paradigmatic of his ideals of cultural hegemony in practice. (Denman 113)

In his treatment of secular Christian communities, Denman even characterizes the National Endowment for the Arts debacle regarding Karen Finley as hegemonic conflict between the Christian Coalition and subversive artists (111). The preceding discussion implies that while contemporary validating agents like corporations influence religion, the reverse does not hold true. And Donald Whittle notes that, at its worst, conscious Christian dramaturgy "resembles a socialist/other politically governed play—it is committed to propaganda" (110). So, evangelism drives Christian spectatorship: performance remains one of many avenues for persuasive, spiritual discourse. As a result, Christian spectatorship receives criticism and is associated with religion more than theatrical discourse.

Under a hegemonic lens, secular Christianity must answer Gramsci's challenge to religion's survival in Western civilization:

> A religion or a certain church maintains its own community of faithful people (within certain limits of the necessity of general historical development) to the extent to which it keeps alive its faith in a permanent and organic way, tirelessly repeating the apologetics, battling at all times and always in similar arguments and maintaining a hierarchy of intellectuals who give the faith at least the appearance of dignity of thought. (*Prince* 72)

Note Gramsci's description of living faith as "permanent," "organic" and repeated "tirelessly": in this sense, faith becomes a producible object for theistic intellectuals and believing users. Faith is given material quality, use, and thereby reestablishes religion's necessity and its intellectual practitioners potential to be distinguished organic. It would seem that the lack of tangibility renders faith necessary and consequently insures religious power.

Christian spectatorship, as an expressive medium of material apparatus (text, scenery, actors, etc.), fits Gramsci's description of "object faith". Understanding Gottdiener's theory regarding meaning (read metaphysical object) production in the social collective clarifies the former contention:

> The question raised by a semiotics of objects is: in what sense can I say meaning resides in the material world? The answer: by *no* sense, as long as I do not take human subjects into account. More specifically, people are the bearers of all meaning, either in the isolation of personal use or as the product of complex social processes of group interaction. (172)

This statement may be elaborated on by suggesting "personal use" meaning in fact derives from the "complex social processes of group interaction": Gottdiener himself shortly concedes that collectives are the singular bearers of meaning (172). In context, the church as collective produces object faith for believing users, subsequently insinuating metaphysical need (necessity) via self-reinforcement, an example being Christian spectatorship.

Donald Whittle observes, despite Christianity's transcendent overtones, God and theatre share a degree of material concord: "...they are both concerned with 'incarnation': making the word flesh, the invisible visible and representing the interpretation of two worlds" (109). Additional reference to Gottdiener supports Whittle's statement; religion possesses theatrical ownership via transformation, breathing life into text via performance. Admittedly, Christian spectatorship is a marginalized theatrical medium. Nevertheless, its "modification" of performance apparatus to reinforce secular Christian doctrine (and hence faith

production) "transforms primary use value" and "encodes the object as a sign belonging to a sub-culture" (Gottdiener 181). So, Christian spectatorship gains conscious differentiation of practice and content from other performance mediums.

IV: SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF *WEEP FOR JOY*

Weep for Joy, performed and adapted by David Payne, is a dramatic retelling of C.S. Lewis's *A Grief Observed*, the author's autobiographical search for meaning after losing his wife, Joy, to illness. The source text pulses with a sense of immediacy since the reader treads (in the present tense) through the widower's grief process moment-by-moment. The author speaks to the reader in confidence while seeking understanding, absolution and hope. Indeed, one might ascribe to the reader journeyman status as Lewis wanders, sometimes aimlessly, sometimes with bitter remorse, through a spiritual wasteland in the guise of writer/storyteller. Likewise, the reader is led toward the destination of reconciliation with God, mortality and an ever-hopeful future (described in *Weep for Joy* as a land of "illusory dreams") alongside Lewis. So, even in a narrative of inner spiritual turmoil, the apologist's persuasive essence strains towards evangelism and Christian coercion.

Payne's adaptation—though somewhat divergent from Lewis's source text—remains ancillary to the notion of religious compulsion via a portrait of the author's bereavement. As with *A Grief Observed*, *Weep for Joy* concerns the fabula of a specific man in the universal circumstance of loss. Overall, the performance features both Lewis's loss of spouse and faith and the author's consequential struggle, first by defying God and longing for Joy, then in restoring hope and, subsequently, discovering his wife's eternal presence in heart and mind. Payne answers the challenge of

transforming what is essentially an essay into drama by adding a character, Joy herself (Evelyn O'Neal), for the spectator's reading. The resulting interchange between Lewis and his wife (deceased from the performance's onset) draws the audience into the narrator's grief process and heralds a theological reconciliation.

From a semiotic perspective, *Weep for Joy*'s performance space (among other sign systems) crucially contributes to fabula reception. The stage, a collapsible composite of platform and stair units used for all Payne's touring productions (including *Target Practice*—see Chapter Five)—painted in a neutral, opaque gray, flecked with texture evoking black specks—contains three levels for potential action yet no back wall, flat or scrim. The first level, along downstage right, offers little more than a plateau stair; a "step" towards other spaces customarily used for brief scenes requiring little action and causing any physical expression, however negligible, to be perceived as dynamic. The somewhat larger upstage right level (the space's highest performance altitude) provides the greatest relative distance between audience and performers, often signifying intimacy for the character interactions.

The stage right space functions as sign "dyad" to stage left for several reasons. First, Payne never ventures into stage right space unless accompanied by co-star O'Neal with one notable exception. This notion reinforces the next "dyad" function, stage right as communication hub, and the area where *Weep for Joy*'s characters most often interact. During Act

One, the space contains the dramatic world's most obtuse communicative channels; a British letterbox (coated in eye-catching red that vividly juxtaposes against the gray stage); a British phone booth (also red); a bench, designating public and informal setting (specifically a park). Indeed, the simple red letterbox's (unique to Great Britain) capacity to convey a foreign locale speaks greatly for semiotic discourse. The sign serves as icon, representing one of Great Britain's institutions and, hence, the entire society. All scenic apparatus function as channel between Lewis and his wife-to-be Joy; Joy first contacts Lewis via phone; Joy sends letters to Lewis and checks for return correspondence via post; Joy and Lewis's first meaningful face-to-face conversation occurs on a park bench. In each case, Joy draws her future spouse out of Lewis's home (encompassing the entirety of stage left) and into parks, church buildings and even hospitals, increasing the couple's mutual bond. Indeed, the scenery's spare design shows an almost expressionistic flavor, a dramatic world seen through Lewis's perception.

If *Weep for Joy* coincides with *A Grief Observed* by constructing the performance through Lewis's lens (narrative inclusion, among other factors, also supports the idea), stage right adopts an outsider or "Other" status. The space becomes unfamiliar territory for Lewis and, subsequently, the spectator. Principally, stage right signifies the "Other" simply because it is not Lewis's comfortable and familiar stage left home. Also, Lewis exercises comparatively less agency (read control) on stage

left; Joy's hospitalization and—though not shown implied—death occurs on stage right; new stimuli (Joy's first phone call to Lewis, her first visible signs of illness, etc.) occur stage right. In each stage right sequence, Lewis must rely less on himself and more on the compassion and understanding of his wife and God.

Act Two replaces earthly letterbox, phone booth and bench with the more spiritually oriented cistern (filled with holy water) and podium. These apparatus designate communicative channels to God, icons of spiritual discourse. All are metaphorically associated with corporate worship, Christian ritual and God. However, each performance apparatus's capacity to confront Lewis with God's benevolence and omniscience transcends the scenic element's conventional use in the Christian worship setting. Likewise, the couple prays for Joy's recovery at the cistern (now by physical metaphor an altar), reaching out to God through images that Lewis dubs "merely links" to something else. Moreover, Lewis's eventual spiritual reconciliation, despite Joy's long-suffering battle with cancer, signifies via the author's solitary return to cistern and podium, a clear step for the widower in moving beyond himself and towards communication with the outside world and God.

Regardless of intent, Payne's production uses several distancing devices that underscore *A Grief Observed*'s discursive quality. In addition to the performance's episodic structure and narration, sound and lighting equipment are clearly visible (the last two dismissed as pragmatic

requirements given Rising Image's adaptive space needs). These factors simultaneously subvert emotional empathy and attempt to guide the spectator to a sort of intellectual religious coercion. These distancing devices disrupt the performance's (via Payne and O'Neal's realistic acting style and their treatment of the space as a "real" environment) attempts toward verisimilitude and, thus, emphasize an appeal to the spectator's intellect, what to think rather than how to feel about Lewis's spiritual defiance and eventual restoration.

While distancing somewhat prevents the audience from experiencing Joy's death in the same manner as Lewis, narrative commentary (via sound design) and flashbacks strike an intuitive understanding between performer Payne and audience. Narrative passages clarify Lewis's internal logic for abandoning his faith while episodes featuring Joy serve as a reminder of its inspiration. So, Payne by no means presents the spectator with a tragic figure of Greek antiquity but facilitates a dramatic environment that galvanizes a mental bond between the drama's chief actant and spectator.

Deferring to Ubersfeld's actantial model fosters an intriguing analysis of *Weep for Joy*. In review of Chapter Two (see page 22), Ubersfeld's actantial theory posits a universal fabula system, featuring Sender (who incites action), Subject (primary action participant), Object (Subject's principal interest or desire), Receiver (Object recipient), Helper(s) (Subject ally/allies) and Opponent(s) (Subject detractor(s)). One

may assume *Weep for Joy*'s Sender is God; God allows Joy's death; God incites the circumstances leading to Lewis's faith abandonment; God pervades Lewis's internal debate; God is the only being in the dramatic action with the capacity to control Lewis's actions. This last idea sets Lewis as Subject, and rightly so, for it is he who principally engages in the fabula's conflicts and circumstances. Though Sender and Subject are easily established, the remaining actants prove more divisive. Given that Lewis concludes the fabula with reconciliation, one could suggest that, even subconsciously, reestablishing a relationship with God is the author's aspiration (read Object) all along. The fact that Lewis acknowledges God's existence and omnipotence, even while acknowledging his own faith abandonment, reinforces this notion. Receiver as Lewis's own spiritual well-being coincides with the reconciliation/Object concept for it is via restoring the soul's health that Lewis returns to the state of "joy" (a transparent entendre) he holds prior to his wife's death. The Opponent entropy, wearing a mask of mortality and cancer, sets off Lewis's self-destructive path and detracts from Lewis's spiritual reconciliation, a role balanced by the healing and hope of time as Helper (more will be disclosed on time's semiotic contribution to performance below).

The actantial model accomplishes more than imposing *Weep for Joy*'s compelling theatrical forces into arbitrary compartments. Ubersfeld's actants reveal manifold dramatic components not otherwise accessible. For example, the Sender (God)/Subject (Lewis) relationship, when

underscored by actantial theory, provides fresh emphasis to a crucial passage in *A Grief Observed* that is not only extracted but extended in *Weep for Joy*. Lewis's notion of God as divine surgeon, a well-meaning yet harmful being who "operates" for the benefit of the sinner/patient, regardless of requests (in the form of prayer) mirrors the Sender's control over the dramatic action; both have a unique capacity to incite the dramatic world's compelling circumstances. Also, while *A Grief Observed* displays an author's malaise, a wandering spirit whose course is uncharted, *Weep for Joy* (a dramatic performance) requires more defined theatrical structure. In particular, the actantial model provides a dramatic grid by which Lewis's (as dramatis personae) polarity and progress may be gauged. Finally, Ubersfeld's concept quantifies the fabula, reinforcing aesthetic distance and providing a basis of discursive departure.

The actant and Subject Lewis, portrayed by Payne, is among the performance's most complex sign systems. This inference permeates the spectator, since, as stated earlier, *Weep for Joy* tells one man's story. Lewis's prevailing surface actants include dialectic between fantasy and reality, the widower's manifested turmoil and reconciliation with God as divine surgeon and loss of wife. Lewis simultaneously suffers from a conscious and subconscious romanticism, a tendency to impose "ideal" traits on his deceased wife that Joy never possessed. The psychological state often causes Lewis strife with family and friends.

During the Subject's opening sequence, Lewis admits how difficult accepting reality proves and how "fantasy" perpetually tempts in a guise of escape: when his brother concedes Lewis's predilection towards fantasy, the author humorously retorts, "There's no need to agree with me Worny." The one-sided exchange (for all Worny's lines occur only in Payne's imagination) reveals Lewis's principal character contradiction, an unwillingness to regard existence outside his own psychological and spiritual lens. After Joy's funeral, Lewis submits to the spectator that he is not given to emotion, only to shortly rail against God's apparent injustice. This evokes another contradiction between Lewis's perception and reality.

Weep for Joy personifies reality as God. Indeed, Payne describes God's sway over mortals as "momentously real" with a tone of awe and bitter surrender, signifying one of the dramatic world's recurring conflicts. In fact, one could suggest all of *Weep for Joy*'s (like *A Grief Observed*) central clashes oscillate between Lewis and a God who manifests himself in the Subject's numerous one-sided conversations.

Besides Lewis's discord concerning fantasy and reality, the author (in another parallel to *A Grief Observed*'s narrator) accuses God of lacking compassion for his "patients":

> But suppose that what you are up against is a divine surgeon whose intentions are wholly good. The kinder and more conscientious he is, the more inexorably he will go on cutting. If he yielded to your entreaties...all the pain up to

> that point would have been useless...If there is a good God, then these tortures are necessary. For no moderately good Being could possibly inflict or permit them if they weren't. Either way, we're for it. What do people mean when they say 'I am not afraid of God because I know He is good?' Have they never been to a dentist? (*Weep for Joy* Act Two)

Expectedly, this directly transcribed passage strikes a similar nerve in reader and spectator; either case makes listener or reader a fellow conspirator to Lewis's revelation with poignancy. Indeed, the spectator and reader welcome the sequence's conclusion in humorous release, given its theological implications. And, regardless of the spectator's opinion, Lewis's character becomes transparent—a hurt man lashing out at the source of his pain:

> 'Because she is in God's hands.' But if so, she was in God's hands all the time, and I have seen what they did to her here. Do they suddenly become gentler to us the moment we are out of this body? And if so, why? If God's goodness is inconsistent with hurting us, then either God is not good or there is no God: for in the only life we know He hurts us beyond our worst fears and beyond all we can imagine...Sometimes it is hard to say 'God forgive God'. Sometimes it is hard to say so much. But if our faith is true, He didn't. He crucified Him. (*Weep for Joy* Act Two)

sequence magnifies Lewis's loss and compels the audience to empathize with the Subject.

Payne's decision to embody, to signify Joy at all, differs from her evident non-presence in *A Grief Observed*. The adaptive choice to include Lewis's wife offers several semiotic implications. Specifically, O'Neal's behavior as Joy contradicts Lewis's romantic ideal of his deceased wife, accentuating the author's spiritual deterioration: Lewis's grief and love make it impossible for him to accurately remember Joy. To this end, the spectator more easily understands Lewis's subsequent self-denunciation when the author berates himself for surrendering to sentimentality. Since the spectator follows this "sentimentality" from origin (Joy) to conclusion (Lewis's self-denunciation), the audience mirrors Lewis's attitude. This differs from *A Grief Observed* where the reader may only guess at the cause for Lewis's romantic idealization of Joy.

Weep for Joy's dramatic time alternates between an unfolding present after Joy's passing and a past depicting her marriage to Lewis, illness and imminent death. Both times overlay so that a present Lewis finds peace just as the past Lewis loses Joy and begins a path towards despair. So, the spectator simultaneously (to an extent) experiences a present reminiscing and a past that hopes in vain. By means of this structure, Payne transforms and transcribes, producing faithful alteration.

The adaptation's manipulation of dramatic time captures Lewis's apologetic essence; the performance constructs a plank-by-plank

argument via episodic flashback juxtaposed against a narrative present. Specifically, the spectator engages with Lewis as actant producing Subject and subsequently finds credence for the author's behavior in a contiguous past sequence: flashbacks "defend" Lewis's former state of being. For example, Payne begins the performance in relative peace as he reflects on his first encounters with Joy, encounters that are simultaneously performed in the past dramatic time and present stage time. Later, Payne's behavior grows increasingly despondent (with short tones and sudden, uncharacteristic outbursts) and the performer risks estrangement (from local pastor and family members) until the spectator views O'Neal's depiction of Joy's physical deterioration.

In one of the performance's final episodes, the audience examines a content Lewis just before seeing wife and husband praying at the cistern, forgiving and understanding and accepting of God's decision regardless of outcome. Also, Payne provides the actant system Lewis with a kind of Brechtian historicization, a character's capacity to examine and retract behavior, further deferring to *A Grief Observed.* The author/performer notes a rather defiant journal entry (a prop that will become Lewis's eventual manuscript) and comments, "that was a yell," manifesting character development and narrative progression.

But the majority of Lewis's behavior is, in fact, a response to the role of God in *Weep for Joy*, which cannot be underestimated. Besides inciting Joy's illness and thus proliferating the dramatic action's central

argument via episodic flashback juxtaposed against a narrative present. Specifically, the spectator engages with Lewis as actant producing Subject and subsequently finds credence for the author's behavior in a contiguous past sequence: flashbacks "defend" Lewis's former state of being. For example, Payne begins the performance in relative peace as he reflects on his first encounters with Joy, encounters that are simultaneously performed in the past dramatic time and present stage time. Later, Payne's behavior grows increasingly despondent (with short tones and sudden, uncharacteristic outbursts) and the performer risks estrangement (from local pastor and family members) until the spectator views O'Neal's depiction of Joy's physical deterioration.

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events, the Sender sign system poses the adaptation's principal theological questions. What must be understood from the outset, however, is that neither Payne nor Lewis attempt to depict the objective and universal Yahweh. Rather, *A Grief Observed* and *Weep for Joy*'s heavenly father represents the God of Lewis's mind: a construct representing divine surgeon (previously discussed). When Lewis remarks, "So this is what God's like," he refers to self-revelation, not divine dispensation.

This does not suggest, however, that Lewis or Payne advocate the agnostic prescriptions of modernism, existentialism, nihilism or post-modernism. God is real in the narrative and dramatic world but the human perception of a deity (specifically Lewis's) often blurs. Ultimately, God functions as iconoclast to Lewis's spiritual lens and reveals the author's fragility by toppling his faith like a "house of cards." This notion actually co-opts, rather than refutes, theism. Lewis, in *A Grief Observed* and *Weep for Joy,* quickly submits that metaphysical uncertainty insures deity: God defies limits and once defined, ceases to be God. This notion suggests a theological stance that, at first glance, seems intellectually counter-intuitive, that one may only be certain of God's uncertainty. In fact, Lewis (and consequently Payne) contends that there exists no mortal certainty of deity and that this fact actually allows for immortal, eternal and Godly existence.

The semiotic relationship between God and Lewis in *Weep for Joy* represents classic theatrical displacement. Payne portrays both Lewis in

behavior and dialogue and God in the author's reaction. God's personality is unfurled via Payne's portrayal of Lewis's response. Subsequently, the performer's psychological journey and progression mirror a change in God's aura. God is sadistic as Lewis defies, and benevolent once the widower transcends bereavement. Also, Payne often speaks to the audience as God, creating an interesting spectator bifurcation. Although Payne does not directly impose God status on the spectator, the audience may assume the role of implied confidant and deity. The sign system simultaneously separates the spectator into finite and infinite, unknowing and all-knowing being. Also, the process heightens the audience's awareness of their "omniscience" since, like God, they observe and pass judgment upon Payne and his spiritual struggle.

Rising Image's *Weep for Joy* features C.S. Lewis's spiritual defiance and restoration as originally found in *A Grief Observed*. Payne's intertextual adaptation emphasizes and heightens Lewis's distinct viewpoint of his bereavement process via space manipulation, narrative distancing and realistic performance. *Weep for Joy*'s dramatic world reflects Lewis's loss of control and underscores the author's spiritual concerns. The adaptation uses episodic structure, including Brechtian historicization, to detach the spectator from Lewis's skewed though understandable state of mind. However, Payne and O'Neal's realistic portrayals develop empathetic investiture for the audience. From an actantial perspective, Payne's adaptation successfully transcribes the role

of God as omniscient surgeon into performance. By this process and others, the spectator may come to understand and answer the source text's and play's mutual theological questions. As a result, Rising Image thoughtfully maintains Lewis's persuasive, evangelistic message.

V: SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF *TARGET PRACTICE*

Rising Image's *Target Practice* features an elder, professorial demon (Daemon, portrayed by David Payne) instructing the young and impetuous Fectious (Evelyn O'Neal) on the art of temptation. The production (25 January 2003 at the Wichita Theatre, Wichita Falls, Texas) attempts to capture the "Hell" developed by C.S. Lewis in *The Screwtape Letters*. This source work concerns a series of epistles (letters of instruction) from senior demon Screwtape to his nephew Wormwood.

On the surface, the fiction's subject—one human soul's conversion, spiritual growth and eventual salvation—appears bland; an entire narrative devoted to an everyman's religious journey seems difficult to make provocative. However, the unique treatment of this material marks *The Screwtape Letters* as one of Lewis's most well received and acclaimed books. In it, Lewis filters the human, Christian condition through the aberrant lens of a hostile observer. As a result, the often-confounding notion of celestial warfare, including angels and demons, becomes accessible to the "average" Christian reader. Says Lewis scholar Chad Walsh: "Like so many of Lewis's tales, it is a great story. We have an everyman whose goal is heaven, but he leads so quiet a life that his pilgrimage is hardly visible except to demonic eyes and their acute vision" (Walsh 24-25).

"Everyman" becomes operative to Walsh's observation of Lewis's work as the notion assumes a sign system in *The Screwtape Letters*

whereby the reader identifies with Wormwood's mortal "patient" yet simultaneously views said character through the eyes of Hell, thus becoming more aware of their own intangible, but no less real, spiritual battles. This narrative process mirrors the crux of James Elkin's *The Object Stares Back*: "If I am looking at an inanimate object, it has a certain presence—it looks back and again I can understand that as the echo of my gaze. I see and I can see that I am seen, so each time I see I also see myself being seen" (70). In this passage, Elkins reveals the distortion of "seeing". The "echo" that an inanimate object reflects, in fact, originates in the observer. Similarly, a Christian reader of *The Screwtape Letters* perceives (or rather imposes) their own spiritual struggles in Wormwood's "patient" because the narrative echoes the reader's own mental processes.

Payne's adaptation significantly deviates from Lewis's source work. One reason for such alteration lies in part with the intellectual density *of The Screwtape Letters*. Lewis uses mouthpiece Screwtape to discuss deep spiritual issues like the nature of time, origin of subjective thought and power of contradictory language on the human mind (all of course sifted through a demonic perspective). Naturally, conventional time constraints of performance compel Payne to simplify and reduce Lewis's fiction to its salient spiritual qualities. The result is an intertextual adaptation with significant merits and glaring flaws.

Target Practice's spectator demographic offers rich semiotic study. The venue (Wichita Theatre, Wichita Falls Texas) bills the performance as "family entertainment": one might suggest this qualifier serves as subconscious code for the play's target audience, since an apparent majority of the spectators at the performance in question are white, middle-class church attendees (most dressed for corporate worship). The audience's relative homogeneity corresponds to a passage from Susan Bennett's *Theatre Audiences*: "The event of the community theatre is able to act as social affirmation of a particular group of people" (102). "Particular" serves as operative to the present discussion. Bennet says theatre that appeals to a specific group may legitimize or give agency to that group. In this case, *Target Practice* provides Christian teaching and entertainment, affirming its church-going spectatorship's social agency, its right to exist and express.

Additionally, ethnographer and performance theorist Frank Coppieter's "Performance and Perception" suggests the audience's spiritual homogeneity may ultimately affect each spectator's decoding. Coppieter's article concludes one's relationship with "the rest of the public" (read church congregation) affects the spectator's "perceptual process" which is a "form of social interaction" (47). The author states social dynamics may influence de-coding that in turn reinforces social dynamics. That Payne's production caters to a specific social group—secular churchgoers—may make each spectator in that group complicit in

perceiving the performance as ideological reinforcement. In other words, it is as if the church (or at least its social dynamics) has subconsciously reassembled without a formal call to assembly. To this end, Rising Image's deviation of performance space (the production company primarily appears in church buildings) may appear insubstantial, as, regardless of venue, the spectatorship remains relatively consistent.

The Wichita Theater itself produces the greatest changes between Rising Image's typical venue and the performance. For example, prior to performance, pre-show music plays in the house; the tunes, all instrumental Doors covers by George Winston (including "Wishful Sinful," Light my Fire," "Summer's Almost Gone," "I Can't See Your Face in my Mind," "Riders on the Storm" and "Spanish Caravan") seem at odds with the worship settings usually associated with Rising Image Productions. Also, a closed grand drape provides a solid surface for projected advertisements (not unlike a megaplex movie theater) of Chinese Acrobats and *Peter Pan*; both register as "family entertainment" but appear somewhat removed from Payne's openly religious performances. Finally, admission ($10.00) and a proscenium arch with raised stage diminish the production's worship appeal by creating a clear division between performers and spectators.

Wichita Theater's artistic director, Dwayne Jackson, prefaces *Target Practice* with an announcement that attempts to mask the chasm between actors and audience and tries to imbue the performance, if not

with worship, at least "fellowship." After formally inviting spectators to the Wichita Theater's entire season and reminding the audience of Rising Image's mailing list, Jackson offers a half price admission for any person who "brings someone from church" to tomorrow's performance. Again, the artistic director's assumption regarding *Target Practice*'s audience presupposes a specific spectatorship (in this case middle class Christians as they presumably do not work on Sunday afternoon). Jackson's offer also presumes the audience is composed of regular churchgoers.

Target Practice's spatial dynamics signify the harsh, material-minded Hell of Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*. An opaque scrim covers the backstage walls and masks offstage sightlines, providing the single scene with a mimesis that visible lighting instruments shortly dispel. At first glance, focus immediately shifts to the space's power position, a platform (the relative highest plastic) containing a charcoal colored throne backed by a devil head complete with cut-out eyes and razor sharp horns. The piece provides several indices (signs that causally connect with objects—see Chapter Two). First, any seated character (usually Daemon) increases in visible mass and, hence, dramatic potency due to the throne's size and height. Often Daemon uses the piece to force his demonic apprentice into submission; the throne organically (and at times comically) reinforces this process. Also, when the throne does not serve as chair, the plastic's hollow eyes signify a ubiquitous Satan ("His Vileness"), a being who constantly "watches" his charges for chances to

terrify and punish. To this end, the throne references *The Screwtape Letters*' pecking order in Hell, an unhealthy hierarchy juxtaposed against heaven's unilateral spiritual equality.

The spectator's gaze shifts from the throne to a center stage, human-sized cage that rests on a turntable. As one may presume, the cage serves as punishment sign for apprentice Fectious. Indeed, the young demon begins the performance trapped in her cage for losing a human soul to God. Daemon releases the junior fiend but periodically re-imprisons Fectious for insubordination, incompetence and general failure. Daemon compounds the torture by spinning the cage; oscillation speed matches the degree of Fectious's infraction. Two additional, miniature cages hang from metal pedestals; one contains the gooey remains of Pussance, Fectious's demonic predecessor. The piece signifies the literal "dog-eat-dog" mentality of *The Screwtape Letters*' cannibalistic fiends. Lewis presents Hell as the ultimate material (meat) market, where everyone and everything are regarded as soulless objects that seek to consume one another. Pussance's cage evokes this notion and reinforces the brutality of Payne's demons. The other cage remains empty, causing the audience to wonder if the apparatus is reserved for Fectious should she fail in her diabolic duty.

The three-sided stage includes few other plastic signifiers save a large downstage left Oriental gong and small steel stool. Both pieces are warped and illustrate the environment's twisted nature. Sound design

heightens the scenery's deliberate, non-terrestrial ambiguity. Thunder, lightning, sounds of a steel factory and a piercing alarm jolt the spectator out of the theater's (and thus earth's) safety and into Payne's rendition of Lewis's Hell.

Payne's Daemon dresses as demonic Pantalone of *Commedia del' arte* fame; he wears a comical red beard, hood and dark cloak. Evelyn O'Neal plays a ribald Arlechino to Daemon's Pantalone, complete with wild hair and multi-colored bodysuit. One should understand the parody of *Commedia*, a theatrical institution unto itself, rife with iconic significance, goes largely unnoticed by the majority of the performance's spectators. Nevertheless, Payne and O'Neal do manage to communicate the archetypal relationship between Pantalone and Arlechino, that of tyrant-master and trickster-servant. It should be noted these costumes are severely "debased" versions of their *Commedia* counterparts. Daemon's hood and cloak possess an oily, shimmering blackness: Fectious's costume resembles a patchwork of tatters. As a result, the pair appears a dark mockery of Pantalone and Arlechino.

Likewise, Daemon and Fectious's relationship signifies a diabolic mirror of the traditional *Commedia* master and zanni (respectively Daemon and Fectious). Pantalone acts from vice; Daemon from incarnate evil. Arlechino perpetually escapes beatings at the hands of a wrathful master; Fectious barely (but not always) evades torture from her sadistic tutor. In addition, Daemon, like Pantalone, physically contacts Fectious

principally out of violence. Like Arlechino, Fectious becomes a punching bag—an object—to her malicious master. The notion of zanni as master's object extends to sexual flirtation in *Target Practice*: Daemon tickles, teases and sometimes fondles his helpless apprentice. This behavior raises a recurring question of Christian spectatorship: Does Payne and O'Neal's performance make them as Christians complicit to Daemon and Fectious's sexual deviancy, sin? For the most part, the performance's spectators exercise enough "dramatic competence" (for more on this concept see Chapter Two) to differentiate between performer and character.

In true *Commedia* form, the pair's master and servant roles reverse when Fectious tricks Daemon. Specifically, when the demons engage in role-playing (imitating a mortal married couple), Fectious guiles Daemon into portraying a wife, complete with falsetto voice and wig. During the sequence, Fectious reverses her former submissive position by teasing and screaming at a now tethered (by circumstance) master. The process mirrors Arlechino's manifold tricks where Pantalone becomes inadvertently duped into various calamities. Daemon loses his authority over Fectious while "playing housewife" to his pupil's husband, resembling those *Commedia* sequences where Pantalone becomes more servant than master after suffering Arlechino's tricks.

In *The Screwtape Letters*' preface, Lewis reveals his fictive interpretation of celestial beings (principally demons):

> It should be (but it is not) unnecessary to add that a belief in angels, whether good or evil, does not mean a belief in either, as they are represented in art and literature. Devils are depicted with bats' wings and good angels with birds' wings not because anyone holds that moral deterioration would be likely to turn feathers into membrane but because most men like birds better than bats. They are given human form because man is the only rational creature we know. Creatures higher in the natural order than ourselves, whether incorporeal or animating bodies of a sort we cannot experience must be represented symbolically if they are to be represented at all. (*Screwtape* vii)

The statement initiates several semiotic observations. First, Lewis concedes that the reader's (and subsequently the spectator's) expectations influence the embodiment of a being that seems inherently intangible, invisible to human eyes. Second, that the embodiment conforms to the reader's (or spectator's) pre-existing attitudes (read ideology) towards good and evil, desirable and undesirable. In the case of *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis's demons use intellect and the "red-tape" protocol of Hell to signify the masking of their inner beastliness. They predominantly exhibit animalistic, cannibalistic and intuitively violent behavior with momentary bouts of hostile tolerance for themselves, each

other and, indeed, all of God's creation. Towards the narrative's conclusion, Screwtape reveals his true affection for nephew Wormwood:

> Rest assured my love, my love for you and your love for me are as like as two peas. I have always desired you as you (pitiful fool) desired me. The difference is that I am stronger. I think they will give you to me now, or a bit of you. Love you? Why, yes. As dainty a morsel as ever I grew fat on. (*Screwtape* 126)

Screwtape's description of Wormwood as a "dainty morsel" may explain Payne's "meat market" Hell, a place that values consumption over compassion (even for one's own family). To this end, Lewis's Hell exhibits the ultimate bureaucracy, mired by hierarchy, hopeless red tape and a ruthless (and at times lethal) pecking order. Lewis's infernal interpretation regarding the celestial underworld renders an interesting point of departure for the author's dense, theological discourse. That is, Screwtape and Wormwood's dire machinations gain immediacy via brutality. Since they are spiritual predators in search of human prey, Lewis heightens their hostility and, hence, his own discussion of human temptation and transgression; no reader wants to become a "dainty morsel" for dark appetites.

Payne's Daemon and Fectious, however, seem less threatening and, thus, less immediate to the spectator. The pair engages in manifold humorous sequences; their relationship demonstrates more comedic

timing than dangerous temptation. As a result, their attempts to scare the audience, to reinforce Christian teaching, flounder: spectators are too busy laughing.

Besides Lewis's primary characters, Payne reconfigures *The Screwtape Letters*' lexicon. Lewis strives to create the warped lens by which his demons view mortal life. Screwtape, Wormwood and the rest of Hell use a skewed dictionary of terms when referring to God, Jesus Christ and other theological subjects. For example, Screwtape calls each human soul a "patient"; Satan becomes "our father below." God is sometimes given the begrudging title "Creator" but more often appears as "Enemy." The lexicon offers a glimpse into demonic perspective and reinforces the notion of spiritual warfare.

Payne extends the concept of warfare with his own stage lexicon. In *Target Practice*, Daemon instructs Fectious on Hell's appropriate nomenclature. In it, "assault fiends" and "assault squads" refer to tempters, demons. The renaming shifts the sign Hell of the *Screwtape Letters* from an endless bureaucracy to military superpower, including spiritual reconnaissance. Payne's choice provides particular relevance to the spectator since, at the time of performance and this writing, the United States is waging war against terrorist organizations and rogue nations. Ironically, however, Payne exchanges the term "Enemy" (God) for "Overlord." *Target Practice*'s fiends are more likely to concede God's unilateral metaphysical supremacy; perhaps the choice is a "tactical move"

but the motivations for the terminology remain ambiguous throughout the performance. The production's title derives from Daemon dubbing humans "targets." Likewise, whereas Screwtape and Wormwood freely use the term "Christian" in their correspondence, Daemon goes to great lengths to refer to Christians as "tainted targets." Finally, Payne exchanges Lewis's "our father below" for "His Vileness" (capitalized as a title of authority), on the surface, a more menacing sign symbol. Nevertheless, like Daemon and Fectious's *Commedia* roles, "Vileness" eventually evokes more laughter than fear from spectators, ultimately compromising the performance's persuasive power by making Satan, the source of demonic temptation, less threatening, comical. The term provides Payne and O'Neal opportunity to add various unflattering (to human ears) adjectives to Satan's "official" title, including loathsome, horrible and conniving. So "Vileness" signifies the differences (humorously) rather than hostility between demons and mortals.

Target Practice's most theatrical departure from Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters* resides in the production's combination of Christian discourse with musical sequences. The fact that Daemon and Fectious sing and dance to communicate seems counterintuitive to Lewis's vision of hell. Indeed, Screwtape's is the only voice in Lewis's work and the demon's opinion of music seems transparent:

> Music and silence—how I detest them both! How thankful we should be that ever since our Father entered Hell—though

> longer ago than humans, reckoning in light years could express—no square inch of infernal space and no moment of infernal time has to be surrendered to either of these abominable forces, but all has been occupied by Noise...We will make the whole universe a noise in the end. (*Screwtape* 91)

Payne compensates adaptive license by introducing music as one of Fectious's numerous antics, one that mentor Daemon abhors. However, the contradiction persists when Daemon uncharacteristically joins in with Fectious's singing and initiates several musical moments himself.

As one might imagine, the newly established musical convention does not enhance *Target Practice*'s fabula, ideas or characters. In fact, similar to the *Commedia* relationship, musical interludes detract from the play's integrity. Several performance signs reveal an imposition; Payne forces songs onto the fabula. For example, Payne's half-spoken, half-singing renditions and choreographed gestures and stage-crosses betray reluctance or inability to fully commit to musical performance.

The content of each song addresses a specific Christian issue. The first musical sequence, "S-I-N," reinforces Daemon and Fectious's affection for spiritual transgression. As it is the production's initial underscored moment, the abrupt transition from dialogue to song jars spectators out of the previously established dramatic world. "Get Wise," the production's second song, represents the only musical sequence in

Target Practice that wholly advances the plot without aid from dialogue; in it, Daemon warns Fectious about the power Christianity wields over the human soul. Due to the song's content, "Get Wise" most closely resembles Screwtape's advisory epistles to Wormwood ("But are you not being a trifle naïve" *Screwtape* 4). Next, Daemon sings (another transparent sign contradiction since the elder demon repeatedly expresses distaste for the act) "Global Night Out," another piece of Hell jargon meaning Halloween. Of all the production's musical sequences, "Global Night Out" appears the most imposed and least significant (relevant sign producing) to the performance. In this composition, Daemon sings about the assembly of demons at various rites during All Hallows Eve. The song directly and fundamentally fails to resemble any narrative segment in *The Screwtape Letters* and also does not reveal any of *Target Practice*'s individual central ideas of temptation or spiritual warfare. It does not advance the fabula in any perceptible way.

The final song, "Sink or Swim," exhibits the musical element's overriding incompatibility with not only Lewis's source work but also its adaptive performance. Performed by Fectious, the song recounts the biblical story of Noah and references the perils (in this case death) of "sinful" living. In this sequence, Fectious's characterization shifts from a zany and ambitious servant to sultry sex kitten. The composition's lyrics and accompaniment presumably motivate O'Neal's sharp behavior shift. But, as stated, the song imposes itself onto a performance already

struggling to maintain continuity and any vestige of coercive power. Daemon's disgust/participation in each musical sequence and Fectious's silly/sexy transformation confuse more than persuade.

A final comparison between Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters* and Rising Image's *Target Practice* emerges when one observes each fabula's underlying worldviews (read ideology) and purpose therein. As stated, Lewis uses Screwtape, an invisible being to mortal eyes, to realize other intangible challenges to Christianity: those beliefs the author finds ideologically problematic are conversely found desirable by demon Screwtape and register "sinful" or "tempting."

For example, Screwtape (and hence Lewis) views several modernist notions (those in contrast with traditional theism) counter to God's eternality (perpetual existence):

> ...It is far better to make them live in the Future...It is unknown to them, so that in making them think about it we make them think of unrealities. In other words, the future is, of all things, the thing least like eternity...Hence the encouragement we have given to all those schemes of thought such as Creative Evolution, Scientific humanism or Communism, which fix men's affections on the Future...fear, avarice, lust and ambition look ahead.
>
> (*Screwtape* 63)

This narrative segment reveals a subtle and persuasive logical progression. Lewis begins with spiritual temporality, extends to modernist concepts like Communism (which Lewis—a Christian amongst Marxist dons in the mid-twentieth century—would have vested interest in critiquing) and concludes in moral denunciation. But the ideology masks itself in the sinister (but no-less persuasive) writings or signs of one fiend to another. An additional rebuff may be found when Screwtape speaks on the "philosophy of Hell":

> [It] rests on recognition of the axiom that one thing is not another...What one gains another loses...with beasts the absorption takes the form of eating; for us it means the sucking of will and freedom out of a weaker self into a stronger. "To be" means to be in competition. (*Screwtape* 74)

Screwtape's analysis must prove divisive for the modernist reader as what Lewis implies Christianity's alternative to perpetual competition. No doubt this notion still challenges *The Screwtape Letters*' reader's sense of duty to either self or others.

Overall, Payne's adaptation deviates from *The Screwtape Letters* by failing to challenge the Christian audience's existing value system. Instead, *Target Practice* reinforces the Christian beliefs of the status quo. For example, a clear distinction of challenge/reinforcement derives from the differences between Wormwood's "patient" and Fectious's "targets." In

The Screwtape Letters, Wormwood attempts to connive and corrupt a single, thirty-something male who lives with his mother (a circumstance alien to most of Rising Image's spectators). The "patient" only converts after a long process of self-examination and proper counsel and becomes equally dissuaded by both agnostic and Christian relationships alike during his journey. Such a case suggests that salvation often proves perilous and requires personal study and effective, rigorous evangelism from positive influences. Contrary to Lewis's prescription, Fectious's "targets" achieve salvation rather painlessly. Fectious loses her first soul, a consummate alcoholic, to a deathbed confession. Her second "target," a lifelong atheist with a penchant to verbally defy any evangelistic overture (invitations, prayer, etc.) becomes a faithful Christian after merely hearing his daughter sing a Bible school song. Although *Target Practice*'s examples of successful souls encourage spectators, these spiritual portraits do not overtly initiate evangelism or self-reflection. Lewis warns his reader against spiritual sloth, but Payne inadvertently supports complacency.

Another example of Payne's capitulation to reinforcement of Christian hegemony occurs when Daemon and Fectious review Hell's current "Top Ten List for Sins." Several of the sins listed (specifically pride and gossip) seem already taboo to Rising Image's spectatorship (no self-respecting Christian would engage in gossip or at least not admit so). However, *Target Practice*'s treatment of other sins like divorce may

impose a pariah status to anyone touched by this process. Admittedly, divorce does not find favor in Biblical scripture. However, Daemon and Fectious's jibes, jokes and fiendish glee in mocking the subject nearly equate divorce with blaspheming the Holy Spirit (an unforgivable trespass according to the gospels), thus stifling the production's evangelistic outreach. Those spectators that have experienced divorce are unlikely to respond favorably to Payne's adaptation after viewing the the "Top Ten List for Sins."

Perhaps the only sequence of Payne's adaptation that possesses Lewis's apologetic Christian teaching while exhibiting performative prowess relates to Daemon and Fectious's discussion of sexual pleasure. It is no small coincidence that this discourse deviates the least from *The Screwtape Letters*' prerogative on sex. In Lewis's work, Screwtape reduces sexual gratification to another primal competition and resents the bond associated with said act:

> His real motive for fixing on sex as the method of reproduction among humans is only too apparent from the use he has made of it. Sex might have been, from our point of view, quite innocent. It might have been merely one more mode in which a stronger preyed upon a weaker—as it is indeed, among the spiders where the bride concludes her nuptials by eating her groom. But in the humans the Enemy has gratuitously associated affection between the parties

with sexual desire...the whole thing, in fact, simply one more device for dragging in Love. (*Screwtape* 75)

Payne directly extracts the notion of sexual predator/prey when Daemon instructs Fectious on the proper "warping" of sexual pleasure. Lewis's ideas appear via dialogue when Daemon tells his protégé to encourage the predator/prey dynamic in each "target's" relationships: Payne efficiently captures Lewis's hypothesis when Daemon states, "The more they have, the less they are." Payne's concept effectively echoes Lewis's distinction between sexual pleasure based on competition (that does not "fill") and love (that does).

Target Practice—Rising Image's adaptation of C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*—prompts significant semiotic study. In an attempt to reduce Lewis's narrative to its most compelling and persuasive elements, while still entertaining, David Payne reinforces but does not challenge his Christian spectatorship. For example, Payne and counterpart Evelyn O'Neal mimic the *Commedia* Pantalone and Arlechino in their portrayal of mentor Daemon and pupil Fectious. While the relationship resembles Lewis's pecking order of Hell, Payne and O'Neal's comedic approach fails to capture *The Screwtape Letters*' danger and immediacy. Also, Rising Image's insertion of music seems counterintuitive to Lewis's concept of Hell and confuses more than enlightens spectators.

However, *Target Practice* does signify *The Screwtape Letters* concept of materialism. Like Lewis, Payne sees demons as inherent

consumers of humans and each other. This notion extends to Payne's adaptation of Lewis's concept of sexual temptation as a predator/prey dynamic. Though *Target Practice* never reaches its source works' intellectual or spiritual heights, neither does Payne contradict Lewis's theology. To this end, Rising image does supplant its position as an ideological reinforcer of Christian spectatorship.

VI: CONCLUSION

Intertextuality remains a challenging pursuit for semiotic discourse. Methods of adaptation and, consequently, the dependence level of a dramatic text and performance for its source seem as varied as the number of intertextual practitioners. In regards to Lewis adaptations, several factors appear significant to intertextual study. Principally, a hegemonic Christian spectatorship or sub-culture plays a crucial role in the adaptation and reception of dramatic representations of Lewis's narratives. In other words, the probable religiously oriented spectatorship of Lewis adaptations may influence the intertextual process as much as those who actually produce these works.

Specifically, this study uncovered the role of semiotic conversion, transferring signs from a source to an adaptation, in Rising Image Productions' *Weep for Joy* and *Target Practice*. Results provoked several questions concerning the performative motivations for adapting Lewis's works and the interplay of hegemonic reinforcement and evangelistic teaching in Christian spectatorship. The study has also rendered significant semiotic fields for further inquiry. These include the dynamic between fictive and dramatic structure, the role of performative substitution (whereby a material performance apparatus represents

multiple fabula components) and actantial similarities between sources and adaptations.

The study isolated several contributive factors in the adaptation of Lewis narratives. Foremost to the process of intertextual discourse are the differences between a source and adaptation's narrative conventions. Regarding Rising Image's adaptations of Lewis's *A Grief Observed* and *The Screwtape Letters*, the length of the respective source work significantly influenced the transference of signs from one signal set (novel) to another (performance). In the case of *Weep for Joy*, virtually all sign sets were re-represented, in one form or another, from *A Grief Observed*. Indeed, several sign sets (like the physical representation of Lewis's wife Joy) were magnified from those corresponding sign sets found in the source work. This procedure may be attributed to the fact that *A Grief Observed* is a comparatively short narrative. At only sixty pages, the source compels would-be adaptors to not only enlarge existing sign sets but also produce new ones.

A corollary to this paradigm may be taken from Rising Image's adaptation of *The Screwtape Letters*, *Target Practice*. Here, David Payne was forced to "sift" a two-hour performance from over two hundred pages of potential sign sets. The constraint results in a production where much of the source's evangelical potency is un-represented and those sign sets that do transfer often seem incomplete or confusing.

An adaptive factor specifically germane to Lewis's performative transference is the role of spectatorship in intertextual study. In particular, Rising Image's Lewis adaptations are inextricably tied to a Christian sub-culture that relies on spiritually centered performance to reinforce its own social homogeneity. This homogeneity, more explicitly characterized in Chapter Three as a group of believers' inherent dependence on Christian doctrine, emerges in intertextual study as a shared code of performance reading. Secular Christian spectators use a relatively homogenous de-coding process, based on religious doctrine, that naturally affects theatrical practitioners (in this case Rising Image) production (encoding) procedure.

As stated in Chapter Two, performance signs become meaningful when compared to other—not necessarily performative—systems. In the present case, Christian spectators render meaning from Rising Image's *Weep for Joy* and *Target Practice* when each performance combines with a pre-existing doctrinal de-coding system. This process posits a new implication for intertextual study when married to Susan Melrose's concept "hypostasis". According to Melrose, hypostasis represents the process of reading all signs from a "fixed" and "objectified" viewpoint (9). That Melrose suggests hypostasis may be used as a unilateral interpretative tool makes this notion especially applicable to intertextual study. The idea that a spectator may rely on a fixed system whenever deciphering narratives, regardless of form (i.e. novel, performance, dramatic text)

presumes that Christians may interpret Lewis's source works and Rising Image's subsequent adaptations with a similar, if not identical, ideological lens.

Of course, Christian doctrine merges with dramatic competence (as discussed in Chapter Two) during performance. The coupling of these ideological and performative reception systems illustrates another crucial factor in adapting Lewis's works for spectator reading. As stated in Chapter Two, theatrical performance inherently multiplies a fabula's transmitters, senders, channels, receivers and, thus, signs. This contrasts with the reading of a novel like *A Grief Observed* or *The Screwtape Letters* since, in these works, the author exercises more control over the reader's line-of-thought. The reading and interpretation of written narrative does not characteristically include the multiplicity or simultaneity of theatrical performance. This medium allots greater interpretative agency to the spectator/reader. To this end, the present study contributes to the increasing primacy of the spectator's role in performative reading.

The preceding resolution, however, also possesses intertextual application, especially concerning Christian spectatorship. To clearly understand the spectator's importance in the adaptation of Christian narrative, one must recall Chapter Two's discussion of dramatic competence. In this portion of the study, it was noted that whenever a sign system appears discontinuous or incomplete, the reader automatically imposes order to produce meaning. The origins of a spectator's imposed

order are, of course, manifold. Nevertheless, based on the acquired data concerning Christian spectatorship, one may presume that ideological factors, such as spiritual doctrine, may "fill in the gaps" of an incomplete and discontinuous performance for the spectator. That is, when a performance seems incapable of addressing a reader's interpretative questions, ideology functions as a framing device for its user.

The notion relates to the study's conclusion regarding source/dramatic text/performance intersection. Chapter One features the following diagram:

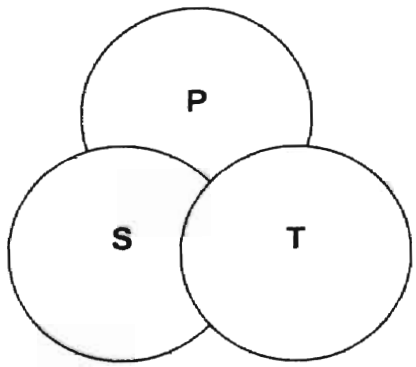

Diagram 6.1

As stated, the diagram attempts to reconcile the intersecting signs of source (S), dramatic text (T) and performance (P). According to the study's introduction, this model includes intersection SP, which presumes the existence of a sign set not occurring in intersection ST or set T but still exhibited in performance P.

A crucial venture of the study was to discover the identity or nature—if one exists—of this particular sign set. Based on research of

semiotics and Christian spectatorship and analysis of the adaptations *Weep for Joy* and *Target Practice*, one may infer this sign set represents an audience member's imposed ideological order, informed by religiously oriented engagement (not necessarily straight reading) with a source text. In other words, intersection SP coincides with a spectator's ideologically influenced relationship with a source work prior to performance reception. Again, one must note the relationship need not require the receiver to read (in the non-semiotic sense) a source work; just so the receiver has some contact with the sign set. This engagement then fills in the gaps of P's discontinuous or incomplete sequences. That is, the reader replaces a performance's sporadic moments of irreconcilable chaos with an order provided by previous source work contact. So, one may then suggest that the intersection SP is the exclusive domain of the spectator. S/he produces the meaning of this sign set/intersection via combing prior with present reception. In the case of Christian spectators, hypostatic, religious ideology unilaterally influences the reception of both source and performance. However, with or without hypostasis, the proceeding conclusion reveals further reinforcement for reader primacy in performance studies.

The study has, of course, also yielded several research subjects for additional intertextual scholarship. These issues primarily pertain to the process of sign conversion from one narrative medium to another. The first area of inquiry concerns the substitutive function of performance

apparatus as it relates to transferred or adapted signs. Substitution was defined in Chapter Two as the process whereby a given performance apparatus may signify another; space signifies music, actor signifies scenery. This event posits rich intertextual merit. Like multiplicity and simultaneity, substitution transfers interpretative agency from source author to adaptive artists and eventually spectators. What remains to be investigated are the factors contributing to the assignment of source signs to corresponding substitutive performance apparatus. What ideological, performative or other factors—if any—compel the adaptive artist to re-code a specific source sign into a scenic apparatus as opposed to, say, costume or lighting?

Another area of inquiry for intertextual study relates to the application of actantial models in semiotic discourse. Chapter Two discussed actantial methods and their use in deciphering the meaning and designating the subject origin of narrative events. Although the discussion did conclude actant transfer was possible from one narrative medium to another, the study's application on Rising Image's *Weep for Joy* found a breakdown in the sign conversion between the source work and performance. The dissonance between *A Grief Observed* and *Weep for Joy*'s various event-producing subjects spurs a potential examination of the relationship between source and adaptive actants. What adaptive factors significantly and predominantly alter actant roles from one fabula form to another? Indeed, such a study might prompt the formation and

application of an exclusively intertextual actantial system of analysis. Such a system would prove an invaluable resource to semiotics concerning intertextual adaptation.

The study of Rising Image's *Weep for Joy* and *Target Practice* has strengthened the position that source works remain relevant to the semiotic reading of adapted performance. In both analyses, the adaptive artists' capacity to re-represent the author's "intended" meaning directly corresponded to the production's overall success in reinforcing Christian hegemony and exercising evangelical potency. Though it by no means solves the ongoing debate regarding author/reader roles in sign reception, the investigation does reconcile the interplay of deconstructive and religious influences within C.S. Lewis adaptations. Both performative factors, seen as ideological tools by the study, aid the Christian spectator in interpreting the myriad signs of Rising Image's Lewis adaptations. Hopefully, the realization of combining postmodernist and religious spectatorship may contribute to curtailing the future alteration of Lewis's works, whether by Lewis detractors, Christians or other parties.

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