THE GROTESQUE CROSS: THE PERFORMATIVE GROTESQUERIE OF
THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

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ABSTRACT

Jonathan Chambers, Advisor

In this study I argue that the crucifixion of Jesus is a performative event and this event is an exemplar of the Grotesque. To this end, I first conduct a dramatistic analysis of the crucifixion of Jesus, working to explicate its performativity. Viewing this performative event through the lens of the Grotesque, I then discuss its various grotesqueries, to propose the concept of the Grotesque Cross. As such, the term “Grotesque Cross” functions as shorthand for the performative event of the crucifixion of Jesus, as it is characterized by various aspects of the Grotesque. I develop the concept of the Grotesque Cross thematically through focused studies of representations of the crucifixion: the film, *Jesus of Montreal* (Arcand, 1989), Philip Turner’s play, *Christ in the Concrete City*, and an autoethnographic examination of Cross-wearing as performance. I examine each representation through the lens of the Grotesque to define various facets of the Grotesque Cross.
For Drs. Chetty and Rukhsana Dutt, beloved holy monsters

&

Hannah, Abhishek, and Esther, my fellow aliens
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, in instructing catechumens, wrote, “The dragon sits by the side of the road, watching those who pass. Beware lest he devour you. We go to the Father of Souls, but it is necessary to pass by the dragon.” No matter what form the dragon may take, it is of this mysterious passage past him, or into his jaws, that stories of any depth will always be concerned to tell…

Flannery O’Connor

_Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose_

I will spare you tales about the dragons, but tell you of the brave and kind who walked alongside me on my passage. First and foremost is my advisor, Dr. Jonathan Chambers. I could go on at length about his patience and insight, the breadth of his knowledge and how generous he is with his time, but the best tribute I can give this good teacher is that I am a stronger writer and scholar for having taken this journey under his guidance. It has been a privilege to be one of his students and I look forward to a time when I can be a teacher, artist and advisor of his caliber. I am grateful for my friend Dr. Scott Magelssen who was a co-conspirer during the early stages of this project. His infectious enthusiasm and unreserved encouragement about my topic gave me the courage to tackle this “big idea” dissertation. I also want to thank my committee members Dr. Eileen Cherry-Chandler, Marcus Sherrell, and Charles Kanwischer. The combined diversity and experience of these three scholar-artists is tremendous, and I am honored to have received their feedback, thoughts and ultimate approval of this project. To Karen Barker, Jeff Barker, and Robert Hubbard I will always be grateful: they helped me formulate a vision for being not just
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heartening, calming reminders that God can and will surprise us. Many thanks to my brother-in-law Justin Elder who not only proof-read pages for me at the drop of a hat, but delighted me with his eagerness to learn more about “intramundane grotesqueries.” Over the last few years, Kaitlyn Kielsmeier, Emily Celizic, Kristen Genson, Leigh Keylock and Esther Fidelia Dharmakasih worked hard to keep my academic, social and spiritual lives integrated, healthy and full of laughter. They were joined by Captain and Deb Shaffer and Jenny and Dan Harpster, friends who provided a parental presence during my time in Bowling Green. You are all true friends and I am so blessed by you.

And finally, I want to express my immense gratitude to my family, amongst which I include my friend, Kimberly Bright: my parents, Drs. Chetty Sevanand and Rukhsana Dutt; my grandmother, Fatimah Sheikh; and my siblings Hannah, Abhishek and Esther. Over the course of this project, my experience of these amazing people has been truly grotesque: I saw the worst of me as it was embraced by the best in them; horror at myself always melded with wonder at the grace I was being given, fear of the unknown always countered by fascination that their human hearts could be so big. Hannah, thank you for your tenacious forgiveness; Abhishek, for your inspiring, radical compassion; Esther, for your cheer and crocheted gifts; and Naanijaan, for your unending optimism. Kimberly, you made me laugh on days I thought I could not smile. Thank you for devising creative strategies that motivated me through the tough phases of this project. And how do I begin to acknowledge my parents? They taught me the tenets of my faith, but they also gave me freedom—to explore, to fail, to find my way. My entire life as a scholar, artist and person of faith has been conditioned by the wisdom and courage of their choices, and by their continued joy in me. Daddy and Mama, you made me brave to tango with my dragons. I am truly grateful and blessed among daughters. Grace and peace on you always.
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INTRODUCTION

“Where do you stand?
What is your statement?
What is it you’re trying to say...?
For some it’s simply something to wear around your neck
Just a chain. Jewelry
Is it decoration?
Is it an icon
Or proclamation?
An icon of what?”

The words in the epigraph are the opening lyrics of Grammy award-winning singer and song-writer, and my childhood heart-throb, Michael W. Smith’s song, “Cross of Gold,” off of his 1993 album, Change Your World. As a kid, this song was my banner, my call to arms. After meditating on the lyrics, my ten-year-old mind analyzed and made a conclusion about what the song was about: the cross means something. And if you weren’t going to make a “stand” or a “statement,” if you didn’t know what you were trying to say, you probably shouldn’t wear the cross. I knew what I was trying to say: “I am a Christian! You should know it!” I was going to represent.

By the time I had learnt the meaning of the word “cliché” things had changed. The burden of what I perceived as “representing” my religion began to wear on me.
I told myself that I was no longer wearing crosses to proclaim my identity as believer in Christ, I was wearing crosses because—and I remember saying this to my pastor-father—“I appreciate their aesthetic value, that’s all.” I began to distance myself from the “religious cross,” and what I thought was the cliché of wearing a cross to proclaim a Christian identity. I decided to stop wearing a gold cross. Every Christian lady in my church wore a gold crosses. Instead, I collected and wore (just for aesthetic purposes, of course) crosses made of every other material I could find—pewter, granite, glass. I even made one out of M-Seal, an Indian-brand plumbing-sealant that smelled horrible but looked and felt like porcelain when it dried. I painted it a pearlescent pink and blue. It was pretty and no one other than me ever knew that it was made of plumbing sealant. I carried that sacrilege-tinted secret, strangeness, with me, whenever I wore that cross.

It was several years before I recognized my approach to wearing a cross as performance or a performative, and still more before my scholarly work in theatre helped me name the strangeness that surrounded the plumbing-sealant cross, to see it as grotesque. This grotesquerie however, extends beyond that particular object, the cross I made as an adolescent; it permeates the background, the theology and drama of the image-event the object represents—the cross of Jesus.

The crucifixion of Jesus is the primary object of this study. I argue that the crucifixion of Jesus is a performative event and this event is an exemplar of the Grotesque. To this end, I first conduct a dramatistic analysis of the crucifixion of Jesus, working to explicate its performativity. Viewing this performative event through the lens of the Grotesque makes evident various grotesqueries, suggesting the concept that I propose here, the Grotesque Cross. As such, the term “Grotesque Cross” functions as shorthand for the performative event of the crucifixion of Jesus, as it is characterized by various aspects of the Grotesque. Through the study that follows, I work
to develop the concept of the Grotesque Cross thematically through focused studies of representations of the crucifixion, examining each representation through the lens of the Grotesque. Ultimately, proposing the Grotesque Cross and working to articulate its nature and significance is the over-arching enterprise of this present study.

Viewed broadly, this is a study of the Grotesque in Christianity. I use the capitalized term, “Grotesque” when referring to the cultural, artistic, and philosophical concept and its associated theories.¹ This is to differentiate it from “grotesque,” which can be used variously as an adjective, noun, or verb; this is generally made apparent in syntactical context. For example, part of my study involves examining the crucifixion through the lens of the Grotesque to reveal the grotesquerie of the cross (where “grotesquerie” signifies the behavior of the Grotesque), but I also illustrate that the presence of the Cross grotesques art and performance structures.

The study of the Grotesque in Christianity is limited here by an analysis a single grotesquerie that occurs, indeed shapes, biblical theology and narrative—the cross of Jesus. The religious and symbolic history of the cross precedes Christianity. For most practicing Christians however, specifically, mainstream Protestants, the significance of the cross is founded on the belief that Jesus is the son of God (hence, Christ, or anointed or messiah), and that he offered himself as a sacrifice in order to save humankind from the penalty of its sins. In doing so, he took the place of a sacrificial lamb, which by Mosaic Law, would have been ceremonially killed to atone for the sins of an individual. Therefore, the crucifixion of Jesus, and the shedding of his

¹ In Grotesque, Justin Edwards and Rune Graulund use of the term, “Groteskology” to refer to the body of theory on the Grotesque, but it is unclear whether they coined this term themselves. Indeed, other than one appearance it the table of contents, they barely use the term themselves. In this study, I will adhere to the phrase “theories of the Grotesque.”
blood during that procedure, served as the ultimate atonement for all humankind, thus making available to the human race forgiveness from sins.

At the risk of being reductive, I would argue that for the followers of Jesus, the cross is nothing without the crucifixion. Writ broadly, the cross is the crucifixion of Jesus. As with many over-used icons, the symbolic, political, and even religious significance attributed to the cross often glosses the origin and function of the referent actual. For example, the cross is commonly used as a symbol of God’s love, and as the logo of institutions such as the Red Cross and England’s football (soccer) team. For those who have been alienated by the Christian church, the cross represents church-endorsed oppression. However, what I refer to as the “referent actual” would be, in the case of Christianity, the cross as the instrument and site of an ancient Roman method of torture and execution by which Jesus died.

This study will focus on the cross of Jesus, not just as a heavily-loaded image and symbol that has taken on numerous meanings and functions, but as the site of a physical and mystical event. In other words, I will focus on the physical reality of the crucifixion of Jesus, and its direct implications on the Christian philosophy of salvation wherein Jesus’ death atones for the sins of the human race (the mystical). To this end, in this study “cross” and “crucifixion” often function synonymously, since the image of the cross will always be layered with the (physical and mystical) event and work of the crucifixion. To make this doubling apparent, I use the term, “Cross,” capitalized. In other words, “Cross” functions as shorthand for the layered image-event-work of the crucifixion of Jesus. The distinction between “a cross” and “the Cross” also comes into play when discussing this image-event. The simple shift in article points to the difference between an inanimate object (a cross) and the animated event-performativity of the Cross of
Jesus.² I have designed this study in such a way that the performativity of the Cross, and the concept-definition of the Grotesque, are explicated along the course of my investigation. However, introductory descriptions of both are in order here. I begin with the Grotesque.

As noted by almost every writer who approaches the Grotesque, the concept and practice eludes definition. Gathering various ideas and explorations of the aesthetic and literary Grotesque into his treatise, On the Grotesque: Strategies of contradiction in Art and Literature, Geoffrey Harpham is quick to point out:

Grotesqueries both require and defeat definition: they are neither so regular nor rhythmical that they settle easily into our categories, nor so unprecedented that we do not recognize them at all. They stand at a margin of consciousness between the known and the unknown, the perceived and the unperceived, calling into question the adequacy of our ways of organizing the world, of dividing the continuum of experience into knowable particles. (3)

The very marginality and transient nature of that which is found to be grotesque is what leads to an uncertainty and inability to label and categorize—an uncertainty which, to the adult mind, is cause for anxiety (4). Furthermore, its multiple facets are featured/weighted differently depending on the scholar. For example, Wolfgang Kayser discusses the nocturnal, dark, and terrifying aspects of the Grotesque, while Bakhtin emphasizes its chaotic and restorative nature.

When seen in art and architecture, the Grotesque is a structure of estrangement; the familiar is made alien and the world as it would normally appear is subverted, pulled out of its usual contexts and re-presented, re-fused in terrifying, sudden and startling new ways (Kayser 184). Kayser describes how the intertwining of the familiar (human) with the unfamiliar

² I expound upon the performativity of the Cross in Chapter One.
(nocturnal creatures such as bats, snakes, toads) leads to the alien, the contradictory and thus, the Grotesque.

Geoffrey Harpham examines the Grotesque in art and literature to propose it as a strategy of contradiction. His analyses of the grottesche, an ornamental form that incorporates human, floral, and animal elements, undergirds his discussion of the relationships between centers and peripheries, concepts of liminality, marginality (marginalization) and the accompanying tensions and anxieties that arise when boundaries are blurred. While several theorists of the Grotesque investigate this feature, Geoffrey Harpham’s discussion on the subject is particularly helpful since he models how examining form and structure, as well as themes and metaphors in art works, may reveal various aspects of the Grotesque.

Harpham’s discussion of the grottesche in relation to the Grotesque in On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature covers the greater part of a chapter. In an attempt to distill the discussion down to working points pertinent to my investigation, I identify five consequences of the Grotesque as they relate to centers and margins: (1) the Grotesque (represented by art and ornamentation literally in the margins around paintings) can exist independently of the center, and can even detract from the center. This independence is what destabilizes the center (34); (2) the Grotesque can provide an alternative center, and one that invites questions, a search for meaning; (3) the Grotesque calls attention to the act of artistic creation independent of any meaning or belief, for example, literal centers and margins or the composition of gargoyles (44); (4) the Grotesque margin/border/ornament can make conflicting points or speak to multiple functions at one time— this results in a feeling of doubleness and ambivalence (42); and (5) “All Grotesque art threatens the notion of a center by implying coherencies just out of reach, metaphors or analogies just beyond our grasp” (49).
Harpham insists that the Grotesque occurs not just in practices and conventions but can also be described in terms of the emotions it evokes: laughter, horror, fear, astonishment, and disgust. The grotesque object thus arouses a response that is a combination of opposing responses (laughter and fear, or astonishment and revulsion), which also sheds light on another feature of the Grotesque—ambiguity and contradiction. Harpham’s enterprise regarding the Grotesque Cross is important; if one can identify the presence of the Grotesque by its effects, the grotesqueries of the Cross (and the Cross in representation), becomes all the more evident.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s conceptualization of the Grotesque is rooted in his studies of Renaissance folk culture, and gathers into itself an associated theory of the carnivalesque. The carnivalesque is an important aspect of the Grotesque Cross. A historical phenomenon as well as a literary mode, Bakhtin’s ideas on the carnivalesque are scattered through his studies Dostoevsky’s Poetics and Rabelais and his World. Closely associated with the Grotesque, the carnivalesque does in literature, what carnival festivity did in medieval folk life. The commonalities between the two concepts of social carnival and literary carnivalization are what Bakhtin identifies as “the carnivalesque”: an attitude or mode by which restrictive hierarchical structures are made topsy-turvy, resulting in liberation, laughter, renewal, and community. The carnivalesque speaks to a world turned upside down; an important perspective from which new thought and dialogue are made possible. Therein lays the potential of carnivalesque: it is not merely ecstatic; rather, it is generative.

Revulsion and release; disruption and restoration; and horror, fear, and astonishment are all tropes of the Grotesque that come into play in the crucifixion of Jesus. I offer a detailed description of the process of the crucifixion to Chapter One, but suffice it to say that the crucifixion was horrific. It involved flayed skin, tortured breathing, the smells of dried blood,
sweat and urine, insects landing on open sores, gored open flesh, and groans of agony from a broken body. This is the crucifixion; this is the Cross. However, the Cross is more than just violence and destruction. For a believing audience, and in context of the entirety of the biblical story, enfolded in this horrific persecution scenario is the fulfillment of a promise of redemption and reunion between God and humankind. In this fulfillment, the performative nature of the Cross emerges, making it a performative grotesque. By “performative” I mean an act of discourse that enacts belief (for a believing community, the crucifixion of Jesus effects a social, physical, and metaphysical change).

This study is borne out of an on-going pursuit as a scholar-artist working in the intersection of religion and theatre. I contend that in order to innovate Christian drama and performance, it is vital to revisit biblical narrative and doctrine in light of contemporary performance theories. This study demonstrates a methodology for approaching the Bible as a source text for drama. Viewing the Bible through the lens of the Grotesque offers new insight into the images, symbolism, doctrine and mythos of this ancient text at large, and to the cornerstone event of the crucifixion specifically.

In his 1947 publication, Conscience on Stage, Harold Ehrensperger discussed the dynamics, indeed the struggle, between the theatre and the church. He forwarded the idea that a life lived to its fullest (which, according to Ehrensperger is a life lived under the guidance and power of God) was essentially dramatic, bearing storied aspects of conflict, crisis and perseverance. Thus, to bring drama into the church was to bring life into the sanctuary. In revisioning the biblical narrative and performance, I see myself as part of a larger community of artists, who, guided by Ehrensperger’s principles, seek to bring life into the 21st century sanctuary, but to do so in way that advocates good theatre and sound Christian theology; that is,
a theatre which is aesthetically bold, poetic, and non-proselytizing, and theology that celebrates the beliefs and doctrines of the Christian story without succumbing to anxiety over mystery of the divine.  

The study of representations of the crucifixion revisits an event that is not only a critical milestone in the Christian narrative, but is widely performed in commercial and religious plays, movies, musicals, reenactments, and represented in religious practices such as communion, the stations of the cross, *Tenebrae* (Good Friday) services, and crossing one’s self. The Grotesque’s particular aptitude for making the familiar strange (and vice versa) offers a valuable re-visioning of the crucifixion event. I have already witnessed this through the scholar investigation that guides this present study. I can only imagine that the enterprise will be fruitful in terms of performing the Cross and innovating its future representations. Furthermore, while both theatre and film scholars have addressed the personage of Jesus or his thematic potential (Christ-figures) on stage and in film, a study on this momentous performative event of the crucifixion of Jesus has not, to the best of my knowledge, been undertaken by performance scholars.

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3 The larger scholarly and artistic endeavor gestured to by this particular project is in itself a reaction to the heavy-handed church drama that I witnessed as a youth. As such, the goal of re-visioning biblical texts in order to innovate Christian theatre is a reformative one. I am not alone in this task. My formal entrée into the possibilities of re-visioning and staging biblical texts as source-material for an incarnate representation of the Bible was under the aegis of theatre artists and teachers Jeff Barker and Karen Bohm Barker (Northwestern College, IA).

4 The publications, *Imagining the Divine: Jesus and Christ-figures in Film*, *Divine Images: The History of Jesus on Screen*, *Cinematic Savior: Hollywood’s Remaking of the American Christ*, and *Jesus of Hollywood* by Roy Kinnard, Lloyd Baugh, Stephenson Humphries-Brooks and
As noted above, while this is primarily the study of contemporary performances and representations of the Cross, it is also a study of the Grotesque in performance. In endeavors devoted to developing the theories of the Grotesque, scholars have drawn extensively from art and literature, but less so from the arena of performance. For example, Kayser, Harpham, Bakhtin, and Adams all discuss the grotesque at length, but all also approach it primarily through case studies of literature, architecture, and painting. Ralf E. Remshardt’s *Staging the Savage God: The Grotesque in Performance* is unique in that it undertakes a book-length examination of the Grotesque as a visual mode represented in theatrical practices through history. However, the broader realm of performance such as representational practice, performance in everyday life and film are all absent from his study. Even when focused in performance contexts, the vastness that is the Grotesque is often limited to dark comedy, shock-effects, freakery, and horror, or conflated with the absurd and the abject. I do not dispute that these occurrences are examples of the Grotesque in performance. In fact, in that laughter, horror, and the physical body are central motifs in the Grotesque, it is inevitable that it such manifestations (as those mentioned above) would emerge as somewhat representative of the Grotesque in performance. My study furthers its possibilities for performance by uncovering the mythic and symbolic potential of the Grotesque, here, by considering it alongside the sacred.

Wilson Yates, writing in *The Grotesque in Art and Literature: Theological Reflections* reads mythic significance in the “margins,” which Harpham describes as the realm of the grotesque:

Adele Reinhartz respectively are a testament to this. Similarly, *Signifying God* by Sarah Beckwith, *Christ in the Drama* by Fred Eastman and *The On-stage Christ: Studies in the Persistence of a Theme* by John Ditsky are examples of theatre-centered scholarship.
The grotesque moves us to the boundary and, if we do not flee, points us to that world of mythos. It places us on religious ground, moving us to religious myths that carry insights about the nature of human existence; about its foibles and follies, its goodness and its evil; about its forms of oppression and liberation, estrangement and wholeness. (46)

Going beyond dark comedy, horror, the absurd, and freakery, I consider the Grotesque alongside the mythos of the sacred: spirituality, mystery, sin, alterity, monstrosity, grace, and transformation. Seeing the Grotesque in a specifically religious, performative event (the crucifixion of Christ), and examining this event repeated in contemporary performance and representations, allows for re-viewing and re-articulation the Grotesque. For, while this is primarily the study of the Cross and select representations of the Cross, it also allows for observations regarding how the Grotesque is enunciated in the arena of performance. This in turn contributes to discourse on a specifically theatrical Grotesque (as opposed to “the grotesque in art and literature”). In sum, my proposal and development of Grotesque Cross contributes to theories of the Grotesque, as well as contemporary Christian performance.

Methodologically speaking, I begin by conducting a dramatistic analysis of the crucifixion of Jesus, articulating how it functions as a performance act. In order to render a multi-faceted illustrative introduction to the Cross, one that has historical, theological, theoretical and artistic weight, I conduct the analysis of this image-event using an interdisciplinary network of critical writings on history, theatre, performance studies, cultural studies, and Christian (specifically, Protestant) theology. Having explained how the Cross functions as performance and explicated its performativity, in the remainder of the study I turn to viewing this performance through the lens of the Grotesque by conducting three focused readings of select representations
of the crucifixion. Each representation is an exemplar of Grotesque, and therefore fecund for further defining the Grotesque Cross.

The studies serve a dual purpose: they bring philosophical and artistic specificity to the concept of the Grotesque Cross, and provide illustrations of the Grotesque Cross “at work” by examining how it grotesques the performance/object of study (I describe these case studies further below). For organizational purposes, I gather a variety of associated characteristics under three main Grotesque themes: (1) the Grotesque body and ambivalence; (2) margins, metamorphosis and disrupted boundaries; and (3) monstrosity. In this way, I focus each of the three studies on the Grotesque Cross thematically. I conclude the study by summarizing my discoveries regarding the significance of the Grotesque Cross for religious practice, contemporary Christian performance, and for further study.

Before proceeding, I must offer a disclaimer regarding the methodology outlined above. In the face of my attempts to organize this study thematically, some grotesqueries insistently bled-through various categories, at times erupting vehemently, and at other times elusively shimmering through a section. My attempts to contain them to the chapter for which they were “meant,” proved not only difficult but also artificial. For example, the carnivalesque seems to have permeated through the entire study, manifesting in discussion on disruptions, the body, and monstrosity. At the risk of being accused of navel-gazing, I attribute this to the meta-nature of the investigation: discourse involving the Grotesque folds into itself, refusing closure. The Grotesque resists categories, “calling into question the adequacy of [my] ways of organizing” (Harpham 4). I concluded that the thematic distinctions that I have defined above, while necessary, are ultimately arbitrary – if not actually counter-intuitive – to the behavior of the Grotesque. The result of this is seeming “messiness” as themes and grotesqueries recur.
Following this introduction, I turn to Chapter One, “The Crucifixion of Jesus: A Performance Act, A Performative Event.” The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the crucifixion of Jesus as performance, and then articulate how it functions as performance act. To this end, I treat the crucifixion of Jesus as a performance, conducting a dramatistic analysis of the event. My discussion of the author, content, locale, and time period (who/what/where/when) are designed to provide the given circumstances of crucifixion generally, and the crucifixion of Jesus specifically. The first set of dramatistic queries elicits discussion on history of Roman crucifixion, Roman and Judean perceptions of the crucifixion in ancient times, and a medical/forensic examination of the process of crucifixion. The discussions of why and how the crucifixion was performed turns to issues of performativity. I draw from historical, cultural, theological, and performance studies texts to analyze the performative nature of the crucifixion of Jesus. I identify three main ways in which the Cross functions: the crucifixion of Jesus served a rhetorical function on behalf of the Roman Empire, a mystical/theological function, and, incorporating the Grotesque, a carnivalesque function. The rhetorical function describes the use of crucifixion as a performance of power and domination by the Roman Empire. Before entering into the discussion of the theological work of the Cross, I outline the performance studies framework and theorists who shape my discussion of performance act and performativity. I then summarize Christian doctrines in order to explicate the work done by the death of Jesus.

In the three chapters that follow, I offer analyses of select representations of the crucifixion. As noted above, these studies serve not only as exemplars of the Grotesque Cross, but also provide a venue to further discuss its characteristics. In these studies, the history and/or cultural tradition of the performance-objects are secondary to how it represents the phenomenon of the Cross in relation to the Grotesque.
The first of these is Chapter Two, entitled “The Grotesque Body and Jesus of Montreal,” where I turn to Denys Arcand’s 1989 film, Jesus of Montreal. Of the several films that treat the crucifixion of Jesus, I’ve chosen Jesus of Montreal because in representing the crucifixion of Jesus, this particular film expresses themes pertinent to the Grotesque Cross, specifically notions surrounding the Grotesque body.\(^5\) The film offers multiple crucifixion scenes by which I define and explore three facets of the Grotesque body upon the Cross: the Baffling Body, the Abject Body, and the Funny Body. My discussion of “the Baffling Body,” considers the nature of Jesus as a grotesque. In the next section, I draw from feminist theorist Julia Kristeva to examine the abject aspects of the Grotesque. I follow this discussion with a consideration of the “other side of the coin”; that is, the funny, redemptive and restorative characteristics of the Grotesque as they are manifested through the representation of the Cross in Jesus of Montreal.

In Chapter Three, “Metamorphosis in the Margins: The Work of the Grotesque Cross as seen in Christ in the Concrete City,” I conduct a close, textual analysis of Christ in the Concrete City by Phillip Turner. Again, while there are several plays that take as their subject the life and crucifixion of Jesus, I focus my study by turning to the representations that are exemplars of The Grotesque Cross.\(^6\) My analysis of Christ in the Concrete City relies heavily on Harpham’s

\(^5\) For example, The Robe (Henry Coster, 1953), Ben Hur (William Wyler, 1959), King of Kings (previously titled, Shadow of the Cross, Nicholas Ray, 1961), and Jesus (Sikes and Kirsch, 1988)—as well as more “revisionist” depictions—The Last Temptation of Christ (Martin Scorsese, 1988), Jesus Christ Superstar (1973), and Monty Python’s The Life of Brian.

\(^6\) For example, Messiah by Steven Berkoff, Son of Man by Dennis Potter and the musicals, The Cotton Patch Gospel, Jesus Christ Superstar and Godspell. One of the oldest extant scripts on
writings of the Grotesque as a strategy in art. As such this chapter is focused on discussions related to the Grotesque’s play with and around “the margins of existence”; that is, it tendency to cause disruptions in systems of order via metamorphosis, de-centering, and doubleness. Whereas in Chapter Two, I work towards describing the Grotesque Cross by examining how the Cross of Jesus of Montreal is grotesque, in Chapter Three I operate on the assumption that, in representing the crucifixion of Jesus, Turner incorporates the Grotesque Cross into his art-work, thereby activating the “function and activity” of this grotesque within his text. In this chapter, I examine how the presence of the Cross works to grotesque the text by causing disruptions in systems of organization.

In Chapter Four, “Holy Monsters: The Grotesquerie of Wearing the Cross,” my thematic focus is the Grotesque trope of monstrosity, and the associated concepts of alterity, alienation, and estrangement, in relation to the Cross. While the previous two case studies featured traditional modes of performance (theatre, film) in their illustration of the Grotesque Cross, this chapter turns to a representational practice, a discursive and dynamic performance in everyday life, namely, wearing the Cross. The practices of Holy Communion (Eucharist) and devotional crucifixion reenactments offer equal potential both as representational practices and in their expression of the Grotesque; however, both Eucharist and crucifixion reenactments have been widely studied from theological, anthropological, and performative perspectives. For example, Anril Pineda Tiatco and Amihan Bonifacio-Ramolete have examined crucifixion reenactments in Cutud, Philippines, not just as religio-cultural practices but as social drama.7 Likewise, Michal the crucifixion of Jesus is the crucifixion cycle of the York Corpus Christi Plays (circa mid-fourteenth century).

Kolbialka and William Cavanaugh have examined the practice of Eucharist in their respective studies. In *This Is My Body: Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages*, Kolbialka conducts a historiographic study of the practice, tracing the changing perspectives regarding the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the development of the doctrine of transubstantiation. In *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics and the Body of Christ* Cavanaugh examines the state practice of torture in Argentina during the Pinochet regime to articulate how the church practice of the Eucharist embodies a practice of the political. The practice of wearing the Cross however, has not, to the best of my knowledge, been explored for its performative and enunciative possibilities; I look to it, rather than crucifixion reenactments or the Eucharist, in my examination of the Grotesque in the performance of the Cross. I acknowledge that discourse over the practice of “Cross-wearing” is complicated by the vast extent to which the crosses are used in non-religious, other-religious, commercial, and even parodic enterprises. For the sake of this study, Cross-wearing pertains to those for whom the crucifixion and sacrifice of Jesus has personal spiritual resonance.

Given that Cross-wearing is practiced near-globally, and over several centuries, examining the historical and cultural traditions of cross-wearing is beyond the scope of this study. Rather, and with the intention of focusing on the Grotesque, I limit myself to examining the *phenomenon* of Cross-wearing. To this end, my methodology in this chapter shifts in this chapter to encompass an autoethnographic approach to wearing the Cross. By “autoethnographic” I refer to the process of describing and examining social and cultural behavior and practices through the historical, cultural, biographical lens of the self. My focus is

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8 I draw from Carolyn Ellis, Norman Denzin, and H.L. Goodall, Jr. in my understanding of process and purposes of this methodology. Specific titles are included in the bibliography.
not to produce a personal narrative, but to investigate a cultural experience by analyzing a personal experience, here the embodied practice of Cross-wearing. I rely on performative writing techniques to convey the scope of this project. Seen as a whole, the three representations of the crucifixion which I examine as I describe the facets of the Grotesque Cross inscribes a trajectory through theatrical/representational forms, from mediated (the film, *Jesus of Montreal*), to live performance (the stage play, *Christ in the Concrete City*), to the embodied (the storied, autoethnographic self).

I end this study at large with a brief conclusion in which I synthesize the findings of my explorations of the Grotesque Cross in *Jesus of Montreal, Christ in the Concrete City*, and the practice of Cross-wearing. I also share a few associated observations and discoveries made during the course of this investigation. I briefly address the importance of recognizing the grotesquerie of the Cross by considering the intersection of the Grotesque and postmodernism, specifically as these theories pertain to Christian discourse.

This study occurs within an interdisciplinary network of varied theoretical and archival sources. The texts which are drawn upon throughout the study and listed in my bibliography fall under four main categories: writings on the Grotesque, historical and forensic documentation of the crucifixion, performance studies and theatre theory, and Christian theology, narrative and doctrine. By and large, my review of their contents is worked into my analyses on an “as needed” basis, a method advocated by Harry Wolcott in *Writing Up Qualitative Research*. Regarding the religious texts, I primarily rely on *The English Standard Version* and *New Living Translation* of the Bible. The *English Standard Version* is a contemporary literal translation. Words and phrases were weighed alongside Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew, and chosen with the purpose of retaining the nuances and style of the source text. The New Living Translation is
based on contemporary translation theory; it aims to translate *thoughts*, rather than words, and uses everyday language and phraseology. As noted above, I approach The Bible as a performance text open to textual analysis. By this approach, considerations of accuracy or historical validity of the Bible are near irrelevant in this study. The singular context in which I presume upon the historical reliability of biblical texts occurs in Chapter One. The Synoptic Gospels are some of the only extant writings that describe the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory Boyd make a case for the historical reliability of the Synoptic Gospels in *The Jesus Legend*, and I operate on their contention that the Synoptic tradition provides a reliable portrait of the historical Jesus.

The Grotesque points to the margins: images and bodies that have been pushed out of the center of structured, legitimized worlds. Ironically, I find that it is the physical reality of the crucifixion of Jesus, the cornerstone event of the Christian faith, that has been sanitized and marginalized in contemporary Christian, specifically Protestant, practice. Performance proposes a remedy for this. In *The Religious Film: Christianity and the Hagiopic*, Pamela Grace contends that performances of the crucifixion alleviates the “loss of reality” that accompanies theological and sermonic approaches to the crucifixion (Grace 7). The study presented here is founded on this shared contention, that the physical reality of the crucifixion is necessary to revitalize and innovate Christian religious performance and practice. In this, the multi-faceted lens of the Grotesque proves invaluable. I begin my investigation, in Chapter One, by dramatistically analyzing this cornerstone event of this ancient story, the crucifixion of Jesus.
Examining the elusive history of crucifixion has been undertaken by several scholars in the past; indeed, my study has benefitted by the exertions of historians such as Martin Hengel, Gerard Sloyan, and Gerald Samuelsson, among others. As such, attempting a comprehensive history of crucifixion here would be redundant. More importantly, it would be unnecessary to the task at hand, which is to uncover the grotesquerie of the Cross. As I noted in the Introduction, I consider crucifixion, and the crucifixion of Jesus in particular, a performative event, in that it is a discursive act, and one that enacts change for a believing audience. While the majority of my study is directed towards unpacking how this event and its representation are exemplars of the Grotesque, the focus of this present chapter is on the crucifixion of Jesus, with a view to explicating how it functions as a performance act. In order to analyze this complex and multivalent event, what I undertake in this chapter is a condensed dramatistic analysis of the Cross. In other words, I will explicate the “who, what, where, when, how and why” of this performance. Based on a form of analysis devised by literary critic Kenneth Burke, dramatistic analysis is essentially an artificial construct. The framework is useful in organizing literary and dramatic analysis, but there is often an overlap between the different areas of investigation. In order to avoid redundancy and maximize the efficacy of this analysis, I have shaped the discussion as follows. My discussion of the author, content, locale, and time period are designed to illustrate the cultural and historical context of crucifixion generally, and the crucifixion of Jesus specifically. My discussion of why and how the crucifixion was conducted encompasses
the slight shift to the performative nature of the crucifixion itself to answer the questions, “how is the Cross performative?” and “what does it perform?”

**Who Performed Crucifixion?: Historical origins of crucifixion**

The answer to “Who performed/authored the crucifixion of Jesus?” is enfolded in the history of crucifixion writ large, as well as the presence of the Roman Empire in Judaea in 1st century CE. Scholars and theologians may take issue with me citing the Roman Empire as the sole “authors” or performer of the crucifixion of Jesus. For instance, practitioners of the Christian faith might refer to the crucifixion of Jesus as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, and thus, insist upon a Divine hand in the authorship of the event. Others might point to the authorial role played by the Jewish leaders of the synagogue in Jerusalem, in bringing the event to pass. I agree that the designation of author is complicated. Nevertheless, the physical act of the scourging and crucifixion of Jesus was authorized by the Roman prefect over the province of Judaea, Pontius Pilate, and executed by Roman soldiery according to the practices of the time. As such, they can in many respects be considered the authors of the crucifixion of Jesus.

In as much as the Romans are given authorial credit for the crucifixion of Jesus, a few factors must be noted concerning Roman crucifixion in the ancient world. First, Jesus’ manner of death would not have been considered unique in its time. Archaeologist Vassilios Tzaferis, points out that according to various ancient literary sources, the Roman Empire crucified tens of thousands of people. Furthermore, crucifixion was not indigenous to the Romans: Many people erroneously assume that crucifixion was a Roman invention. In fact, Assyrians, Phoenicians and Persians all practiced crucifixion during the first millennium B.C. Crucifixion was introduced in the west from these eastern cultures; it was used only rarely on the Greek mainland, but Greeks in Sicily and
southern Italy used it more frequently, probably as a result of their closer contact with Phoenicians and Carthaginians. (Tzaferis)

In fact, the first reference to execution by suspension (in this case, impaling and display of the victims) dates back to the 9th century B.C.E., and is attributed to the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser.

The transition from impalement to crucifixion, as it was used by the Romans, begins in 332 B.C.E. under Alexander the Great (Kass, Crucifixion). The Latin historian, Quintus Curtius Rufus, records that Alexander had two thousand Tyrians hung on crosses along the shoreline of Tyre (Samuelsson 195). Crucifixion eventually made its way into the lexicon of Roman punishments during the course of the Punic Wars (15). Even having distinguished Roman crucifixion from its originating source “material” developing a historical portrait of it is a near-impossible task; the history is complicated by a reliance on literary sources.

Martin Hengel, author of Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross, gathers pre-Christian texts which refer to the history and procedures of crucifixion. A near comprehensive survey of crucifixion literature, it is also an important source for most historians and theologians examining crucifixion in the ancient world. Wolfgang-Kuhn and Gunnar Samuelsson, historians who follow Hengel, contend that a linguistic analysis of the texts used by Hengel reveal the flexibility of both Greek and Latin terms. For example, synonymous terminology is used to refer to a variety of tortures, including impaling, hanging, and crucifixion as it is understood today. Furthermore, the punishments described by early historians such as Josephus and Seneca often gather the suspension of bodies ante-mortem and post-mortem under the umbrella term, “crucifixion,” thereby creating some confusion regarding whether their records refer to the hanging of live victims or their dead bodies. After studying Hengel, Kuhn and Samuelsson’s texts, my foregone conclusion is that not all references to “crucifixion” refer
to crucifixion as is it known today; thus, accruing a history of Roman crucifixion remains an elusive task. That said, despite the contested nature over the textual history of the crucifixion and the elusiveness of the physical evidence, one common, undeniable feature emerges: all the punishments that are gathered under the term “crucifixion” involve the suspension and public display of the bodies of the victims. Whether to beams, nailed to crosses, or impaled on poles, crucifixion has always involved an element of display by the dominating party, and thus, bears rhetorical and performative import.6

Roman law usually spared citizens from being crucified, reserving this penalty for foreigners, slaves, military enemies, and violent criminals (Hengel 23). Hengel points out that Roman statesman Cicero deemed crucifixion to be “the most shameful, painful and abhorrent of all executions” and Roman jurist, Julius Paulus, listed it as the worst of all capital punishment followed by death by burning and death by wild beasts. Procedurally, however, the Roman form of crucifixion was open to improvisation:

Crucifixion was a punishment in which the caprice and sadism, of the executioner was given full rein. All attempts to give a perfect description of the crucifixion in archaeological terms are therefore in vain; there are too many different possibilities for the executioner. (Hengel 25)

Details about possible improvisations can be found in Seneca’s writings. He notes that prisoners could be crucified in various postures (he specifies upside down), or have further mortifications inflicted on their bodies, such as having a stake driven through the genitals and into to the cross.

6 I will return to this concept below, under the dramatistic query, “How was the crucifixion of Jesus performed?”
Historian, Josephus also makes notes of the improvisational element in Roman crucifixion. Describing the situation after a revolt in Judaea he writes, “the soldiers out of rage and hatred they bore the prisoners nailed those they caught in different postures for the sport of it, and their number was so great there was not enough room for the crosses and not enough crosses for the bodies” (Sloyan 15). While there was no immutable protocol for crucifixion, Seneca notes that the variations were made by the Romans in order to maximize the pain caused.

At the time of the crucifixion of Jesus in the first century C.E, Judaea was territory of the Roman Empire. While Judaea retained some autonomy as a kingdom, Jesus was crucified at the sentencing of the Roman procurator based in the Roman province of Judaea. Thus, we can assume that crucifixion of Jesus bore the characteristics of similar events by the same author, the Roman Empire. It was an adaptation, not an original work, featuring developments intended to maximize pain caused to the receiver. It was systematic, nevertheless, it varied from crucifixion to crucifixion; and it featured the sadism and cruelty of the individual executing it.

**Where and When?: The Cultural Context for the Crucifixion of Jesus**

A simple answer to where and when the crucifixion of Jesus took place can be found in the passage above: Jesus was crucified in Judaea in the first century C.E. The purpose of this analysis, however, is dramatic. It is imperative to consider the significance of the time and location of Jesus’ crucifixion to ultimately establish the cultural context in which Jesus was crucified. To this effect, I note that Jesus was crucified in Judaea, at a time when Judaea was occupied by a foreign power. In light of this elaboration, the factors governing the cultural context are multiple: one has to account for the ancient Jewish perspectives towards crucifixion,
the Roman stance, and the interaction between these two cultures. Since the cultural context of any performance ultimately has bearing on how it performs (i.e., it’s performativity) and how it is received, in this section, I will look closer at these factors. I will first portray how crucifixion was culturally contradictory even to the Romans. I will then offer a summary of the ancient Jewish perspectives towards crucifixion, to ultimately suggest that despite how mundane crucifixions had become in this time and place, Jesus’ crucifixion was unusual in many aspects, and would have appeared so to its viewers.

“Crucifixion was well-known to the Jewish people in the Imperial provinces,” so notes David Chapman in *Ancient Jewish and Christian Perceptions of Crucifixion*; this demonstrates the ubiquitous presence this particular torment had on the community and landscape into which Jesus was born (69). I noted one example of Roman aggression towards the Jews above. Josephus records other examples of the widespread use of this punishment on the Jewish populations. For example, after Quinctilius Varus quelled a minor revolt in Jerusalem, he scoured the countryside for insurgents, and then conducted a mass crucifixion of two thousand Jews in 4 B.C.E. (71). Chapman also points out that Jerusalem’s procurator, Pontius Pilate, became notorious for his actions concerning the crucifixion of Jesus “between two (presumably Jewish) brigands just outside of Jerusalem (the Holy City itself)”; the account is significant enough to have been noted variously by Josephus and well as other Latin historians (78).

These three events, as well as others, not only give evidence of Roman oppression in conquered Judaea, but also speak of a contradictory attitude toward crucifixion. On one hand, the Romans considered crucifixion barbaric; its use on any individual other than a slave made the perpetrators no better than barbaric themselves. And yet, Romans used this method extensively on the non-slave population of Judaea. Sloyan offers an interpretation of this hypocritical
behavior on the part of the Roman procurators: “decreeing crucifixion for rebellious Jews on the wide scale was Rome’s way of saying that it considered this proud people no better than a slave population” (19).

The Jewish perception of crucifixion is likewise, complicated. First, there is the legal perspective, which poses a challenge for scholars. Mosaic Law does address the issue of capital punishments by suspension; a passage from Deuteronomy, or Deravim, is the one most cited on this subject:

If someone has committed a crime worthy of death and is executed and hung on a tree, the body must not remain hanging from the tree overnight. You must bury the body that same day, for anyone who is hung is cursed in the sight of God. In this way, you will prevent the defilement of the land the Lord your God is giving you as your special possession. (*New Living Translation*, Deut. 21.22-24)

Almost every aspect of this passage is contested by translators and contemporary scholars: Which crimes were worthy of execution? What was the nature of “defilement”? Was the “hung” here a corpse or a live person? The only uncontested portion of this passage is that the person who suffered the punishment of hanging was accursed before God, and that bodies hanging overnight would defile the land. The Mosaic dictates regarding execution by suspension remaining obscure, Chapman turns to another source. He looks at how the law was interpreted by ancient Jewish communities; this interpretation is evidenced in their practice of execution.

From records of practice it would appear that the law discussed above covered all capital punishments that involve suspension, including but not limited to crucifixions as discussed in this study. Furthermore, it seems that “tree” is used generically to reference wooden stakes, and thus covers impalement, hanging a victim on a simple stake, and also crucifixion on a cross
(Chapman 117). The verb sequence in a passage referring to a hanging suggests treatment of the body of the executed convict. Therefore, it appears that suspension in punishment scenarios usually occurred post-mortem. The convicted person would be executed (stoning was the most popular form used in ancient Jewish communities), and then the body would be hung. One notable exception is recorded. The tyrant, Alexander Jannaeus, used hanging as the form of execution—in his case, 800 hundred Jews who fought against him on behalf of Demetrius III of Syria. Even though these executions were contrary to the Deuteronomy passage quoted above, this incident appears to have been justified in a recently deciphered Temple Scroll; the punishment for a traitor who deserts his people for Gentiles is hanging upon a tree to die (Sloyan 21-22). Ultimately, the fact that Jannaeus’ actions did not set a norm seems to indicate that for the Jews, execution by this method remained complex, especially from a legal perspective.

The popular response to Roman crucifixion as it occurred around the time of Jesus’ death was simpler. Chapman suggests a few “themes” or categories which would have been recognized by ancient Jews. Most notable are the ‘Crucified Brigand’, the ‘Crucified Rebel,’ the ‘Crucified Martyr,’ and the ‘Crucified Innocent Sufferer.’ There is evidence that shows that the populace was in support of aggressively suppressing brigands (213). This does not seem to hold true for the crucifixion of nationalist zealots, Jewish martyrs, and crucified innocents. Indeed, by the time of Jesus’ birth, anti-Roman sentiment was rife. There is every reason to suppose that the population’s response to the crucifixion of other Jews was one of sympathy. Chapman suggests, “the relatives and friends of the crucified rebels, as well those Jews who revolted alongside them would have taken a much more compassionate stance toward men who, while seeking to rid their
nation of Roman hegemony, died such a pitiable death” (71). By this speculation, compassion rather than disdain or even apathy for crucified victims would be the response to Romans crucifying a Jew. There are references to the shameful and horror of crucifixion in many ancient Jewish accounts. Chapman writes:

The dread of the cross, undoubtedly associated in part with the painfulness of such a death also could be due to the social implications of being suspended naked to public view… The immediate family of a crucified person is directed in rabbinic case law to leave town until the body can no longer be recognized. (215)

In sum, one would assume that from both the legal and popular perspectives extant at in 1st century Judaea, the crucifixion of Jesus should have been cause for ire amongst the population of Jerusalem. This however was not the case.

The dramatistic contexts of the “when” and “where” of Jesus’ crucifixion attains sharper focus in the days preceding the death of Jesus: Jesus was brought before Pilate in the Holy City of Jerusalem during the Passover, the day before the Sabbath. Thus, religious calendar and a place of pilgrimage are dramatistic elements in the death-scene of Jesus. Jerusalem would have been thronging with devotees and pilgrims, a veritable tinderbox. Therefore, any Roman action against a Jew would have had to have been conducted under a perfect façade of legality and as a

7 The comparison here is between the general Jewish population and the Jewish historian, Josephus. Josephus had Roman patronage. According to Chapman, Josephus’ tone while conveying the consequences of Jewish revolts is either one of observer’s ambivalence or a pro-Roman sentiment.
civic necessity (Sloyan 24). It was into this volatile situation that the chief priests presented Jesus before Pilate and demanded that he be crucified. Pilate, finding no basis for a civil charge, refused but acknowledged the possibility that Jesus might have committed a religious crime warranting punishment. However, when given the permission to “take him away and crucify him [themselves],” the priests do not (John 19.6). It is possible that Pilate’s words were uttered in ignorance of Jewish custom, but Sloyan suggests that it is far more likely that the offer was issued sarcastically, with Pilate knowing that the priests, restrained by the Mosaic precept, could not take action themselves (23). Textual accounts (across all four synoptic gospels) of Jesus’ trial indicate that the Jewish leaders – chief priests, their officials, and religious elders – insisted that Jesus be put to death, specifically by crucifixion (*New Living Translation*, Matt. 27.21-23, Mark 15.13, Luke 23.20-21, John 19.6-15).

In my discussion below, I will address possibilities that provoked the Jewish leaders of the time to want to execute Jesus.⁸ What is significant now is that the execution that was chosen had bearing within the time and location in which it occurred: Jesus was crucified to death by the Roman authorities at a time when anti-Roman sentiment was prevalent. He was crucified in a city where, by religious tradition, a person hung—whether on a cross, a tree or stake—is cursed in the sight of God. Gospel evidence indicates that this accursed method of death was insisted upon by local religious authorities. It also indicates that in the face of social standards and rabbinic case law, Jesus’ mother and aunt (and also some of his disciples and friends) remained at the site of his crucifixion (*New Living Translation*, John 19.25-27). All these factors point to a scenario atypical of what one would expect given historio-cultural context. In terms of my

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⁸ I will discuss this when I address the question “why was the crucifixion of Jesus performed?”
endeavor to assess the crucifixion of Jesus as a performance, I would have to conclude that the
given circumstances of Jesus’ crucifixion are not in keeping with the event that was ultimately
performed. In other words, despite how wide-spread crucifixions were in the given cultural
context, the same context would have made Jesus’ crucifixion stand out as an oddity. Apart from
any religious or mystical import, the circumstances of Jesus’ death were complex, mysterious
even. I surmise two possible reactions witnesses to this event would have had. They would either
chalk up the anomalies to the capriciousness of the Roman executors, or register that the
 crucifixion being performed before them was mysterious, uncanny, or at the very least a tragic
oddity.

What is Crucifixion?: Procedural context for the crucifixion of Jesus

An accurate account of the process of crucifixion in antiquity is complicated by two
factors. Archaeological evidence for this ancient method is elusive. Wood and rope that would
have been used are degradable and, since iron was highly valuable, nails would have been
collected and reused instead of being left in the bodies. Moreover, since crucifixion was usually
reserved for the disenfranchised of the empire, the likelihood of proper burial of the bodies was
small, and thus, chances of the preservation and consequent examination of human remains
severely limited (Kass, Crucifixion). Of the tens of thousands of crucifixions that are recorded to
have been executed in Judaea, a single set of remains of a crucified victim has been discovered to
date.

Found in 1968 at Giv’at ha Mivtar near Jerusalem, the remains of a Jewish man in his
early twenties were found in an ossuary inscribed with the words, “Yehohanan son of Ezekiel.”
The family tomb, traditional burial, and the fact that Yehohanan’s body was reclaimed after his
crucifixion suggest that he was from a wealthy family, perhaps even one of prominence. Yehohanan’s remains date to the Second Temple period (second century B.C.E to 70 A.C.E), and osteological studies show that he was 24-28 when he was crucified. The excavation of his remains not only offered scientists and archaeologists the first opportunity to study Roman crucifixion methods (and their effects on the human body) with hard physical evidence, but also demonstrated that nails were indeed used in crucifixion (Tzaferis). I discuss Joseph Zias and Eliezer Sekeles’ 1985 re-examination of the remains below.

Despite the meager physical evidence as to the actual process of crucifixion, and the physiological toll it takes on the body, I pursue this line of inquiry because it is essential to understanding the Cross as grotesque. The centrality of the body is one of the most evident intersections between the Cross and the Grotesque; knowing the certainties, probabilities, and possibilities of what happens to the body during crucifixion is essential. Thus, like historians before me, I begin with textual accounts and forensic extrapolations of the event to sketch the physical process of crucifixion in Roman-style crucifixion.

Crucifixions generally began with the scourging of the condemned, executed by soldiers. The Roman *flagellatio* was a feared punishment in which the condemned was tied to a column and whipped with a *flagrum*. The Roman flagrum consisted of three or four thongs tied to a handle; pieces of bone or rounded bits of lead (plumbatae) were tied to the end of each tail of the *flagrum*. Since Roman law did not govern the maximum number of lashes a victim could receive, a condemned man could actually be scourged to death (Zugibe 22). The physiological effects of flagellation with this type of multi-tailed whip are akin to any rib injury, but multiplied exponentially. Rib fractures would of course make breathing very painful, but since a single rib fracture can lead to 125 milliliters of blood-loss, the accumulated damage of a continued
scourging leads to heavy hemorrhaging, including bleeding into the chest cavity. Laceration and bruising of the lungs result in partial or complete collapse of the lung (pnuemothorax). Further blood-loss from the stripped open flesh on the back, legs and buttocks usually weakened the condemned considerably, and homeostasis, the body’s tendency to correct imbalances (in this case, the loss of blood volume), would have led to extreme thirst. As noted above, there was no regulating the severity of the scourging; however, men condemned to crucifixion, and not just flagellation, were scourged a little less severely so as to extend their suffering on the cross. Weak from blood-loss, thirsty and in agony from the lacerations on their body, the man condemned to crucifixion (the crucarius) would then have to carry the crossbeam (patibulum) on to the crucifixion site, where the vertical beam or stipes would already be mounted in the ground (Zugibe 48). The actual hanging is where the science of torture comes in.

Yehohanan’s remains provided physical evidence that nails were indeed used in crucifixions conducted by the Roman empire, which only left the specifics of where and how the nails were used to secure a grown human body to a cross (Tzaferis). In his technical treatise The Crucifixion of Jesus: A Forensic Inquiry, Frederic Zugibe gathers archaeological, medical, and experimental data to postulate the most likely and anatomically viable scenario for Roman crucifixion procedures. He suggests that the condemned man was nailed to the crossbeam with spikes through either the bones of his wrist or the upper palm. Such a wound would sever the median nerve, creating a disabling and painful condition, causalgia, in which excruciating and continuous pain shoots up the arm. Based on medical studies of injured soldiers, Zugibe suggests that this pain is the most agonizing a human can experience. Causalgia is exacerbated by movement and heat—both conditions that the crucarius would be subject to (92). The victim could additionally be secured with the use of ropes.
After the condemned was affixed to the crossbeam, it was hoisted and attached to the vertical beam or *stipes*. The feet were possibly placed one on top of another and nailed to the upright beam with a single nail about 7 inches long. An alternate possibility for the placement of the victim on the cross is based on the Yehohanan’s remains. Zias and Sekeles’ examination of these remains reveal that the victim’s arms were bound to the cross beam with ropes, his legs made to straddle the vertical beam, and nails were driven through the heel bones (see fig. 1).

![Fig. 1. The proposed reconstruction of the position of the crucified upon a cross, “The Crucified Man from Giv’at ha Mivtar” (Sekeles 27).](image)

Pierre Barbet, author of *A Doctor at Calvary*, speculated that this position, with arms outstretched, and weight of the body dragging on the torso would create a hyperextension of the chest cavity which made respiration difficult. He surmised that long hours of suspension would lead to eventual cause of death—asphyxiation. This conclusion seems to have been accepted widely for decades, though recent medical experiments have disproved Barbet’s conclusion
Zugibe proposes that the cause of death is cardiac and respiratory arrest—the eventual result of extreme hypovolemic shock (from loss of blood volume that began during the flagellation) and traumatic shock (from injuries of the hanging and extended excruciating pain). David Ball, in his study of the Gospel record of Jesus’s crucifixion in light of his medical training, proposes that Jesus died of a cardiac embolism or a ruptured heart. I will discuss this in greater detail below. What is given, from the textual record as well as evidence from Yehohanan’s remains, is that legs of the crucified victim were sometimes broken. The fracture of a single femoral bone can lead to blood hemorrhage of almost two liters; breaking both legs would cause massive hypovolemia. Zugibe concludes that soldiers would deliver this final blow to crucified victims who had suffered “enough,” thus hastening their death by traumatic loss of blood (107).

I turn now to the task of describing the crucifixion of Jesus, based on a synthesis of the details offered in the synoptic Gospels (Matt. 26.36–46; Mark 14.32–42; and Luke 22.39–46), the textual record summarized above, as well as forensic and experimental data. To begin, biblical tradition narrates that Jesus’ suffering or “The Passion,” didn’t just begin at the flogging prior to the crucifixion, but the night before—when Jesus spent the night praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. I include the events of that night here for two reasons. First, based on interpretation, they might have had repercussions on Jesus’ physical condition prior and during the crucifixion. Secondly, the Passion informs us of the central character, Jesus’ physical, emotional and spiritual condition. Since my contention throughout is that the crucifixion is
performance, this is relevant in that it speaks to Jesus’ agency in this performance. Jesus perceived a purpose in his impending death. In spite of his fear and anguish, Jesus was a willing performer.

All three Gospels state that Jesus spent the night before he was crucified awake, in prayer. However, Jesus is also recorded to be in terrible anguish, so much so that he began to sweat drops of blood:

He walked away, perhaps a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed this prayer: “Father, if you are willing, please take away this cup of horror from me. But I want your will, not mine.” Then an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened him, for he was in such agony of spirit that he broke into a sweat of blood, with great drops falling to the ground as he prayed more and more earnestly. (The Living Bible, Luke 22.41-44)

Some translations such as the one above state that Jesus actually sweat blood, while others translate this to say his “sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood” (New Living Translation, English Standard Version). However, the likening of sweat to blood is retained in all translations of this passage; an occurrence significant enough to raise the question of whether or not it is possible to sweat blood. Scholars and Bible historians alike have spent much effort to explain away the sweating blood phenomenon as a literary nuance that does not translate. Zugibe however, points out that there not only is a medical explanation for such a phenomenon but its occurrence in the life (near-death) of Jesus is logical and has significance that should not be explained away. Called hematohidrosis, this rare condition occurs when an individual is under extreme stress or fear:

Hematohidrosis also known as hematidrosis, hemidrosis and
hematidrosis, is a condition in which capillary blood vessels that feed the sweat glands rupture, causing them to exude blood, and occurs under conditions of extreme physical or emotional stress [...] Acute fear and intense mental contemplation are the most frequent causes, as reported in six cases in men condemned to execution, a case occurring during the London Blitz, a case involving fear of being raped, a case of fear of a storm while sailing. (Patel and Mahajan 30-31)

Assuming a believer’s perspective, Jesus was in anguish because he was aware of the agony to come. From his view, he was a few hours away from the physical torment of crucifixion as well as the spiritual burden of atoning for the sins of the world. In light of this perspective, it seems entirely possible that in contemplating the events to come he would have experienced the “acute fear and mental contemplation” which would have triggered hematidrosis.

While this condition leaves no sign of trauma, the after-effects are two-fold: it leaves the subject extremely exhausted and, due to the rupture and hemorrhaging of the blood capillaries, the skin becomes fragile and tender. Therefore, Jesus began his suffering of the crucifixion event itself under extreme mental and emotional duress, perturbed to the point that he experienced hematidrosis, which left him physically exhausted (think of a person after an anxiety-attack has passed); his head made extremely sensitive to every infliction of violence that was to come the next day. Even if his sweat was not actually blood, a bout of diaphoresis profuse enough that the sweat would “[fall] to the ground” demonstrates that Jesus experienced fear and anxiety severe enough to trigger the autonomic system’s flight-or-fight response (Zugibe 13).

Jesus was arrested shortly after this episode and taken before the Jewish high council, the Sanhedrin. Though few details are given, Gospel records indicate that he was beaten and mocked
by the Sanhedrin guards while in their custody. He was then taken to praetorium or court of Pontius Pilate, sent to Herod Antipas, then sent back to Pilate before Pilate finally tried, convicted, and sentenced Jesus. Giving in to the demands of the high priests and the gathered crowd, Pilate sentenced Jesus to be crucified and then handed him over to his soldiers, who began the *flagellatio*.

Zugibe speculates that Pilate, trying to appease the gathered Jewish leaders, would have had Jesus flogged to the full extent of Jewish law—forty lashes at least. The Romans traditionally used a lead-tipped *flagrum* for scourging. Gospel evidence details that Jesus was scourged (*New Living Translation Bible*, John 19.1). If he were scourged with the traditional Roman *flagrum*, each lash would have ripped into Jesus’ back, shredding the flesh along his back and legs, fracturing ribs, causing bruising of the lungs and blood-loss. While such an extended flogging for one already condemned to crucifixion seems unwarranted, Jesus collapsing on the way to Golgotha suggests that he was beaten severely enough that hypovolemic shock set in long before he was even nailed to the cross. The rib-fractures he sustained would have initiated pleural effusion (fluid gathering in the lungs), and he suffered from extreme thirst.

Jesus was then crowned with braided branches of thorns and handed a reed that was to be his scepter. The thorn-shrub was most likely the Syrian Christ thorn (*Ziziphus spina-christi*), a plant indigenous to Jerusalem. It is important to note that each puncture of the sharp, closely spaced thorns would have been sensed more keenly and painfully due to the after-effects of *hematridrosis*. While this crowning was a mark of humiliation and mockery, Zugibe insists that further physiological effects on Jesus should be noted: the incessant stabbings over the head would have led to the irritation of the trigeminal nerve, the nerve branch that supplies the surface of the head. This irritation, when unalleviated, leads to a condition called *major trigeminal*...
neuralgia, the effects of which are far worse than “merely” the pricking of thorns into the scalp. He offers the example of how a toothache stimulates and triggers the same nerve-branches, and if not treated, the pain can elevate into paroxysms of stabbing pains. Jesus, experiencing trigeminal neuralgia from the pricking of the thorns, suffered explosive bouts of lancinating pains which would subside and recur intermittently (33-34). His head would have felt even tenderer; the slightest movement would have been painful. Soldiers took the reed “sceptre” from Jesus and beat his head with it (Matt. 27.30, Mark 15.19). Then the patibulum was hoisted onto Jesus’s shoulders—50-75 pounds of rough-hewn wood on his lacerated flesh (Kass, Crucifixion).

Following this was the trek to the crucifixion site—Golgotha, a hilly area just outside the city gates of Jerusalem, about a half mile from Pilate’s courtyard.

St. Francis of Assisi’s, “Stations of the Cross,” commemorates three incidents where Christ collapses. However, in his post-flagellation condition, Jesus would have been in hypovolemic shock and stumbled and collapsed constantly (Zugibe 48). Each fall would have triggered another jolt of trigeminal neuralgia, and the heavy patibulum crashed down on him again and again. In an interview, David Ball theorizes that one of these falls results in the patibulum compressing his rib-cage and bruising Jesus’ heart—a very serious injury which led to his eventual cause of death (Kass, Crucifixion). The centurion in charge of the crucifixion was responsible for keeping the crucarius alive for the actual crucifixion; fearing their victim would not make it to his prescribed destination, the soldiers seized a man from the crowd, Simon of Cyrene, who was visiting from the country, and forced him to carry the patibulum. Jesus made it to Golgotha still alive, and was crucified at nine in the morning, with nails through his hands and feet (Mark 15.32). The nails through each palm and the feet trigger causalgia (Zugibe 100). As it
gets hotter with the maturing day, these pains would have gotten worse. As hypovolemia increased, Jesus would have grown increasingly parched.

While Zugibe’s and Ball’s experiments reveal that respiratory distress was not a consequence of crucifixion (apart from the pleural effusion or collapsed lung sustained during the scourging), vocalization is definitely impaired. Any student engaged in vocal performance knows voicing or making sound is impossible without sufficient diaphragmatic compression. So too with the crucified victim; the weight of the crucarius’s hanging body prevents the diaphragm from rising sufficiently to exhale. During the time that he hung on the cross, Jesus is recorded as speaking seven times. Each time, he would have straightened himself up by straining down on his nailed and injured feet, lifting his body enough to voice his words—making every utterance an agonizing feat in and of itself. The words, “Father, forgive them,” transpiring from such contortion, take on added meaning when considering these factors.

Jesus died after hanging on the cross for six hours. Zugibe’s theory is that Jesus died from compounded systems failure, writing, “If I were to certify the cause of Jesus’s death in my official capacity as Medical Examiner, the death certificate would read as follows: Cause of Death: Cardiac and respiratory arrest, due to hypovolemic and traumatic shock, due to crucifixion” (Zugibe 135). Ball on the other hand reads the Biblical description of the death of Jesus closely and literally as he posits his theory for the cause of death:

By now it was noon, and darkness fell across the whole land for three hours, until three o’clock. The light from the sun was gone—and suddenly the thick veil hanging in the Temple split apart.

Then Jesus shouted, “Father, I commit my spirit to you,” and with those words he died. (New Living Translation, Luke 23.44)
“Shouted” is key here, as well as the fact that Jesus in not just conscious, but lucid. Ball suggests that if Jesus were close to death by hypovolemic shock, he would have fainted. Instead, he was cognent enough and oxygenated enough to “shout” his final words. All translations of this passage point to Jesus shouting or speaking “in a loud voice.” Furthermore, Ball insists that in that moment, Jesus knew that his death was imminent—he felt it coming—and that was why he took one last agonizing breath and shouted his last words. Such a catastrophic event, that could be felt and anticipated, would be cardiac trauma (Kass, Crucifixion).

As noted above, Ball contends that when Jesus collapsed on the way to Golgotha, the 50-75 pound patibulum would have crashed down with him, compressing his ribcage. This would have bruised his heart, causing a blood filled hematoma in the pericardium. The cardiac stress induced by the crucifixion posture and low blood-volume would have induced the heart to pump faster, causing the bruise to bulge further until an aneurism occurred. The sensation would have been comparable to a heart attack and Jesus would have known that his death was imminent.

Ball’s hypothesis for the cause of death gains further elegance, to draw upon a scientific use of the term, when considered alongside the events that occur right after Jesus dies. The Gospel of John relates an eyewitness account: after Jesus died a soldier pierced Jesus’ body in the side, “bringing a sudden flow of blood and water” (New International Version, John 19.34-35). Ball insists that the medical significance of this occurrence is incalculable. An aneurysm would have cause the heart wall to burst and blood would have accumulated in the pericardial sac (cardiac tamponade). Ball explains this phenomenon further:

Ordinarily, there is approximately 30 cc of clear fluid in the pericardial cavity. However, due to the stress of the terminal events of the crucifixion (with congestive heart failure and decreased venous return to the heart resulting from
hypovolemia and hyperinflation of the lungs), there could have been 100 cc or more of pericardial fluid present. (Ball 80)

Blood, or any other fluids, would not normally have flowed out of the dead body of Jesus. When the soldier pierced Jesus’ side, puncturing his heart, the pressurized blood and pericardial fluids flowed out.

In the midst of his detailed and meticulous forensic analysis of the crucifixion of Jesus, Zugibe conducts a swift and candid critique of Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*, noting the medical and historical inaccuracies. While there are several note-worthy remarks, there are two that I think worth mentioning here. First, that Gibson’s rendition of this event neglects the mental and spiritual suffering Jesus experienced at Gethasame—suffering that had tangible physiological repercussions. Secondly, that Jesus—experiencing the pain of trigeminal neuralgia, pneumothorax, fragility from hematidrosis, and the incessant, agonizing blots of pain when his median and plantar nerves were served—would have screamed.

The dramatistic analysis that I have conducted on crucifixion thus far works towards unpacking the various theatrical elements that constitute this performance. Viewing crucifixion “as a performance” is easily facilitated by the presence of the given circumstances (specific time, place and historio-cultural setting), the players, the author, a relatively set procedure, which allowed for improvisation (this could be considered staging and blocking), and an audience. All these have presence at a crucifixion, making crucifixions theatrical—horrifying, and immediate, public theatre. However, while my claim is that crucifixion is performance, I also suggest that the crucifixion of Jesus, specifically, is a performative: a discursive, speaking act that has
affective force, which causes social (and, for a believing audience, spiritual) change. My analysis below works towards explicating these two claims.

As I turn to answer the dramatistic questions of how and why the crucifixion was carried out, I will shift the scope of my analysis, from the physical event to the rhetorical, metaphorical and mystical ways in which the crucifixion functions. Shifting the study thus is in service of explicating my assertion I make in the Introduction: that the crucifixion of Jesus is a performative grotesque. Exploring issues of performance and performativity first, I have identified multiple ways in which the Cross functions: the crucifixion of Jesus served a rhetorical function on behalf of the Roman Empire, a spiritual/theological function and, incorporating the Grotesque, a carnivalesque function. The former two will conclude my dramatistic analysis of the crucifixion, while the latter initiates my exploration of the Grotesque Cross.

**How was Crucifixion Performed?: Performing Power and Parodic Exaltation**

Crucifixion, in the hands of the Romans, undergoes a shift from punishment to performance. This in part can be inferred from the telling double-standard reflected in their attitude toward crucifixion: they spoke of it with horror and disgust, always attributing its origins to barbarian “others” (Roman historians point to the Greeks and Thracians), and yet they used it extensively as if it were a necessary evil to maintain peace and facilitate trade (Sloyan 18). Roman control was established in the Mediterranean region by 1 B.C.E. It was around this time, crucifixion began to be used more extensively, particularly in the wake of rebellions. One such example is the mass crucifixion following the Servile Wars. Six thousand slaves who survived

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9 i.e., how it functions from a Christian theological perspective.
the war were crucified along a 120-mile stretch of road from Capua to Rome in 71 B.C.E. (Kaff, *Crucifixion*). Conversely, crucifixion was rarely used on Roman citizens; the extent to which crucifixion was used in the conquered (foreign) territories, suggests that it was not just a method of execution. Rather, it was performed rhetoric, communicating a directive to the conquered populations of the empire. The embodied nature of this rhetoric further suggests that crucifixion could be considered ritual.¹⁰ All rituals however are embodiments of ideas. The question then is what ideas did the Romans perform through ritual?

In an interview for a documentary, *Crucifixion*, theologian and historian Daniel Smith-Christopher insists that one cannot understand the crucifixion unless it is understood as the communication of horror. He uses a first-person perspective to relay the Roman Empire’s message that was enacted through crucifixions: “Don’t try to rebel against us or you will end up like this. Don’t try to oppose us. Don’t try to destabilize us. Don’t believe that you have a hope of overcoming our mighty armies” (Kaff, *Crucifixion*). Crucifixion thus could be read as a ritual that embodied the consequence for resisting the Roman Empire, a punishment. In order to further define and understand this punishment-ritual, I considered it alongside performance studies scholar Dwight Conquergood’s reading of state-endorsed executions. In “Lethal Theatre: Punishment, Performance and the Death Penalty,” he makes this contention:

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¹⁰ Richard Schechner synthesizes concepts from Emile Durkheim and Catherine Bell to offer a description of ritual as performance: “[Durkheim] insisted that although rituals may communicate or express (religious) ideas, rituals were not ideas or abstractions, but performances enacting known patterns of behavior and texts. Rituals don’t so much express ideas as embody them. Rituals are though-in/as-action” (57).
Executions are awesome rituals of human sacrifice through which the state dramatizes power and monopoly on violence [...] The ritual frame is elastic enough to encompass conflict and chaos, yet sufficiently sturdy to channel volatile forces and disruptive tensions into an aesthetic shape, repeatable pattern.

(342)

Roman execution by crucifixion meets Conquergood’s description only partially. In terms of “repeatable pattern,” the Romans had the ritual of crucifixion down to a science, or perhaps more accurately, a dance. It was rehearsed, choreographed, and yet had room for improvisation. Furthermore, they had a trained troupe prepared to perform. Crucifixions were executed by groups of five soldiers: the exactor mortis or centurion, and the quaternio, four soldiers under his command (Zugibe 56). As a whole, the crucifixions were immeasurably performance-ready. However, execution rituals, as Conquergood describes them above, are meant to “act out” the abstraction of Justice, so that all the “interlocking rituals of criminal punishment—arrest, detention, interrogation, trial, conviction, incarceration, execution—are performed so that citizens can see “justice done”’” (Conquergood 343). This is where Conquergood’s ritual vision of execution begins to seem irreconcilable with the Roman crucifixion.

First of all, the extended process of flogging and hanging-until-death suggests that crucifixion was not just a judicial procedure, but a form of torture. Consider further the effect of crucifixions on the living populations. Not only were the victims subject to the public, presentational nature of the act, but its presence permeated their landscape: elevated, mutilated bodies lined public highways and skirted towns, a permanent forest of upright beams lay just outside the city gate. The very absence of bodies on these beams would be terrifying, ghosting
the past victim, while simultaneously foreshadowing the next. If crucifixion was torture for the
dying, it was extended, everyday trauma for the living.

It would appear that in the hands of the Romans, crucifixion became a gruesome
burlesque of the “holy” ritual of enacted justice. The humiliation and public nature of the
crucifixion process was calculated to instill fear in the conquered populations of the empire, and
doing so lent solidity to other great abstractions—power and subjugation. Crucifixion was a
performance of domination, a ritual which enacted terror and portrayed pain as the promised
outcome for rebellion. However, there is also irony latent in the form of this execution method
that speaks to parodic and mimetic intentions of this performance.

In “Crucifixion as Parodic Exaltation,” Bible scholar and historian, Joel Marcus examines
the interplay between Roman culture and Roman executions in order to consider the purpose of
elevating the victim in crucifixion processes.11 In his discussion, he first addresses the Greco-
Roman fixation with matters of rank, explaining that they were expressed in vertical terms,
“high” and “low.” The ubiquity of rank was such that it was encoded into Roman law (77). This
raises the question as to why the favored mode of execution for such a hierarchical society would
be one “raised up” the criminal/victim. While admitting to the practical advantage of elevation

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11 In his study, Marcus examines mimesis in Roman punishments, citing from Florence Dupont’s
article, “The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster.” According to
Dupont, mimesis “here is distinct from the Greek sense of representation. Rather it conveys
mimic buffoonery, comic doubling, and mirroring which were fundamental components of
Roman culture” (Dupont quoted in Marcus, 80).
Marcus suggests that the ironic incongruity was purposeful (78):

This strangely exalting mode of execution was designed to mimic, parody and punctuate the pretensions of insubordinate transgressors by displaying a deliberately mirror of their self-elevation. For it is revealing that the criminals so punished were often precisely people who had, in the view of their judges, gotten above themselves—rebellious slaves, for example, or slaves who had insulted their masters, or people of any class who had not show proper deference to their emperor […] or imperial rule. (78)

Marcus refers to the parody of exaltation as an unmasking in a “deliberately grotesque manner.” He proceeds to points out that this mimetic reading of crucifixion is a prime illustration of Michel Foucault’s analysis of execution as a “penal liturgy designed to reveal the essence of the crime” (79). While I may remain ambivalent as to whether crucifixions were technically punishments (as opposed to torture), Foucault’s “penal liturgy” is certainly a closer description of Roman crucifixion than Conquergood’s ritual enactment of justice.

More to the point, the preamble to the crucifixion of Jesus, as recorded through in the Synoptic Gospels, followed a similar parody of elevation, if not a more intricate version. In fact, the royal robe, the crown of thorns, the inscription, which read “The King of the Jews,” and the soldiers who mockingly genuflected to Jesus, all bear witness that this particular crucifixion was

12 Marcus draws from Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. In a footnote, he also notes that the title from, which he draws this reference is fittingly called, “The Spectacle of the Scaffold.”
a performed mimicry of kingship. None of the participants actually paid homage to Jesus as King, they played it. Not long after the death of Jesus, however, the horror and parody of this performance would be co-opted and subverted; the emblem of the cross would become the banner under which early-Christians were called to gather. Smith-Christopher suggests that for Christians to adopt the cross as their symbol was to say, “we won’t be intimidated” (Kaff, Crucifixion). While I am not convinced of the declarative intent he suggests, I contend that for knowing and believing audiences, the crucifixion of Jesus performs very differently than it did in its original iteration.

A contemporary reader familiar with the two thousand-year history of Christianity would immediately see through the sarcasm and mockery of Jesus’ kingship to the irony of a biblical reality. Marcus, referring to the soldiers, Pilate, Herod and all other performers in the mock coronation, says, “These characters’ actions and words point toward a truth unknown to them: royal garments and crowns rightfully do belong to Jesus […] Jesus’ exaltation comes precisely through his enthronement on the cross” (74). The performativity of the crucifixion gains further complexity. From the “authorship” of the Romans it is already two-fold: a persuasive, presentational gesture demonstrating the power of the Roman Empire, as well as a parody of the “crime” of resistance or social elevation. The irony of the biblical truth, and Marcus’ contention, may best be explicated through an investigation of why the crucifixion was performed.

**Why was the Crucifixion Performed?: Atonement as Performance**

Gerard Sloyan offers two immediate causes for why Jesus was sentenced to be crucified. The most apparent reason is that Pilate must have become convinced that Jesus posed a real threat to the “peace of the empire” (20). The second reason appears to me more convoluted.
While the charges brought against Jesus pertained to his religious disputes and blasphemy charges, Sloyan argues that there was little likelihood that religious dispute was the immediate cause of Jesus’ death. Instead he claims that Jesus’ open opposition of the power class in Jerusalem is the cause:

The current high priest, Caiaphas and his power broker father-in-law Annas, heartily despised by the people as agents of the Caesars acting through the prefects since the death of Herod the Great, seem to have brought on Jesus’ execution. The Galilean evidently spoke against the temple consistently: not the institution of blood sacrifice, any more than the prophets had done, but its perversion by irreligious men who worshipped chiefly at the shrine of their continued exercise of power. The Gospel evidence is that it was they who managed to silence him by playing on the fears of a cruel Roman functionary that he might have a potential uprising on his hands. (27)

Examining the crucifixion of Jesus for its performative functions, however, requires a more distant vantage point—one that allows an over-arching, “meta-view” of the biblical narrative. This reading considers the mystical and theological functions of Jesus and his death from the perspective of a believing audience. To this purpose, I attempt to describe in the simplest terms, the sequence of events that necessitates the crucifixion of Jesus according to the Protestant doctrine.

The drama here is between the Divine and humankind. Wayne Grudem, author of Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine, summarizes this story when he says that, “the history of the human race as presented in scripture is primarily a history of [humankind] in a state of sin and rebellion against God, and God’s plan of redemption to bring
[humanity] back to himself...sin separates man from God” (490). Grudem also offers a definition of sin as “any failure to the moral law of God in act, attitude or nature,” explaining that sin can be pride or selfishness, anything that is the antithesis of the love of God. In Chapter Four, I offer a closer look at Original Sin and how, theologically, the Fall affects all of humankind. For now, suffice it to say that once sin entered the story and the world, a division was created between God (holy) and humanity (sinful). In this context, if the dramatistic question, “why was crucifixion of Jesus performed?” were put to Grudem, his answer would be found in his introduction to the chapter, “The Atonement” in which he says, “[T]he love and justice of God were the ultimate cause of the atonement” (569).

God’s justice requires atonement, which Grudem defines as “the work Christ did in his life and death to earn our salvation” (568). Insisting that God was under no moral obligation to save anybody, he points to biblical texts that attest to angels not being spared for their sins. However, God’s justice is countered by his love for his created humanity. In his love, he provided a means that would spare humankind from the consequences of its sin. God sent Jesus to be a propitiation, “that is, a sacrifice that bears God’s wrath” so that God becomes “propitious” or favorably disposed towards humankind. The consequences of human sin are paid by Jesus’ death on the cross (568).

There are a plethora of reasons for why Jesus, as the incarnate son of God, is the one being who could perfectly and completely pay the penalty for sin; still more reasons for why he had to suffer a painful death. Most of these are beyond the scope of this study.¹³ Suffice it to say that Jesus’ sacrifice of himself was acceptable to God, since he was seen as holy in the eyes of a

¹³ Grudem delves into this in the chapter, “The Doctrines of Christ and the Holy Spirit” (529-68).
holy God. This also answers some questions as to particularity of crucifixion as the chosen method of death. Jesus’ death via crucifixion involved the shedding of blood, thus operating metonymically within the Mosaic sacrificial system, which required that blood be shed to cover sin.

Jesus’ shedding of *his* blood (instead of a sacrificial animal) imputes righteousness to believers, i.e., though they are still sinful, God chooses to see Jesus’ righteousness instead of the human’s sinful nature (hence the metaphorical concept of “being washed clean” by the blood of Jesus). Grudem points out that the blood-shed perpetuated by the crucifixion is significant: “scripture speaks so much about the blood of Christ because its shedding was very clear evidence that his life was given in judicial execution (that is, he was condemned to death and died paying a penalty imposed both by an earthly judge and by God)” (579). The penalty being paid in full, God can be favorably disposed toward humankind again without violating his own righteousness or justice. Seen thusly, the Crucifixion had to be performed because there were functions that had to be fulfilled, work that he did via his death on the cross. This is what I refer to as the performativity of the Cross, or what Jesus performed by his crucifixion. Before I delve into this, I want to briefly reiterate how I am using the terms “performance” and “performativity,”

**Performance, Performativity and the “Work” of the Cross**

In *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, Richard Schechner provides a definition of “performance,” drawing from several scholars, and approaching it from various perspectives. He cites Erving Goffman’s definition from *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* where performance is defined as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (Schechner 29). To this he adds a
consideration of venue (as in, where a performance occurs),” to point out that, unlike paintings, “performance takes place as action, interaction and relation” (30). Both of these definitions connote action, or something *done*. In fact, Schechner points out that another simple definition of “perform” is “to get things done according to a particular plan or scenario,” thus evoking the concept of how performance does work, accomplishes a task. (42). “Interaction” and “relation” suggest that the activity mediates, or is between two parties. At the risk of over simplifying, “performance” is about the act/event, while “performativity” refers the affective force of the performance (i.e., the changes wrought by the performance act). Within this framework, the crucifixion of Jesus is resoundingly performative, and Jesus himself performs variously.

According to Christian doctrine, Jesus was sent to “get things done according to a specific plan or scenario,” he was sent to atone for the human race, and redeem them by his death on the cross. It is interesting to note that in Christian doctrines of salvation, Jesus’s death on the cross is often referred to as “work”; Grudem, keeping company with several New Testament writers, refers to it as “work on the cross” or “work that the Father sent him to do” (569). Additionally, Jesus’ crucifixion is performative, affecting change in several venues (interactional): it *placated* the wrath of God (against sin), it *preserved* God’s righteousness, it *redeemed* humanity from their sin, it *demonstrated* God’s love, and it *restored* humankind to its creator; in sum, Jesus *suffered* in “our” stead.

The crucifixion subverts the parody of exaltation, by making real Jesus’ elevation to kingship. The apostle Paul explains the biblical teaching by which Jesus is made “King of Kings”; having been humbled in his earthly ministry and life, Jesus is glorified because his perfect obedience led him to perform the work of the Cross:
And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. (English Standard Version, Phil. 2.8-11).

In this way, The Cross monopolizes and subverts the “spectacle of the scaffold”: the execution of Jesus becomes his public performance of redemption, which in turn leads to his coronation. The doubling here is intricate and complex— it is *a carnivalesque*—a parody turned topsy-turvy on itself. Intricate as the dynamics of this performance may be, it is also *a propos* for a grotesque. Furthermore, the carnivalization here is intertwined with the performative, public nature of the Cross, a factor that the Apostle Paul seems to have recognized and noted in his analysis of the work of the Cross. In a letter to the church in Colossia, he writes:

> He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (New International Version, Col. 2.14)

Since Jesus’ death by crucifixion disarmed the legal (Mosaic) system by which an individual was culpable for their sins, his public death performed the public, symbolic crucifixion of that same

14 I offer a summary of the carnivalesque in my Introduction.

15 “Doubleness” is a characteristic of the Grotesque. I elaborate on this in Chapter Two.
system (“nailing it to a cross”). Paul also points out the spectacular nature (as in pertaining to spectacle) of the crucifixion. In being made a spectacle of, but still “triumphing” over death by his elevation to kingship, Jesus performs a reversal of his death-sentence. This makes a spectacle of the earthly authorities who sought to put an end to him by nailing him to a cross. This symbolic crucifixion is the final discursive move enacted by the Cross as a performance act.

In sum, the performativity of the Cross is two-fold. The first is enacted by the authors of Jesus’ crucifixion, the Roman Empire. This performance is political and draws upon the language of power, parody and domination. Jesus himself performs the second; this is the performative act of atonement and redemption. It also encapsulates a carnivalization of the first (Roman) level of performance, and as I will elaborate in the coming chapters, is a carnivalesque grotesquerie by its own right.

In the Introduction to this study, I made the claim that the Cross of Jesus is a performative grotesque. I have explained in this chapter how the Cross functions as performance, and explicated its performativity. Through the remainder of this study, I turn to viewing this performance through the lens of the Grotesque, to argue for its grotesquerie. To that end, the next three chapters offer analyses of select representations of the crucifixion. As objects of study, each representation provides a venue in which to explore and clarify a set of grotesque themes, beginning with the centrality of the body in theories of the Grotesque.

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16 In Chapter Two, I elaborate on how this move is an example of the carnivalesque.

17 Recall that “Grotesque Cross” is essentially shorthand for how the Cross is an exemplar of the Grotesque.
CHAPTER TWO. THE GROTESQUE BODY AND JESUS OF MONTREAL

This chapter elaborates upon the assertion I make in Chapter One, i.e., that the act-object of the Cross is a performative grotesque. In this chapter, I consider the physical body of Jesus at the moment of crucifixion, the nature of Jesus as God-Man, and the way both are represented in the movie, Jesus of Montreal (1989). The purpose is to further illuminate the grotesquerie of the Cross by looking closely at one Grotesque characteristic—the grotesque body.

The centrality of the body—in literal and figurative ways—is one of the most pervasive themes in Grotesque theory and scholarship. The Grotesque is concerned with humanity and human nature, especially the mysterious, ambivalent and disenfranchised aspects of the species. When seen in the arts, therefore, the body is an important site on and around which discourse concerning the Grotesque is enacted. Whether the body is being treated literally or symbolically, realistically or fantastically, or as animal or divine, it becomes a canvas for Grotesque mediations and revelations. A similar observation can be made of the crucifixion of Jesus: whether in literature, drama, art, sculpture or the reality of the Cross and its implications for a believing audience, this object-act does not exist apart from the body of Jesus.

Since the scope of my study concerns itself with how the Grotesque is manifested in the crucifixion of Jesus, the overlapping trope of the body, specifically the body of Jesus, requires close examination. In terms of the crucifixion of Jesus, his body is not just the site on which this particular act of physical violence is enacted; the body of Jesus is also the means by which the redemptive work of the Cross, as prescribed by biblical doctrine, is completed. However, when viewed through the lens of the Grotesque, this act also reveals certain characteristics of the Grotesque, thereby illuminating further facets of what I am calling the Grotesque Cross.
In order to conduct such a viewing, I turn to a representation of the crucifixion in film, *Jesus of Montreal* (Denys Arcand, 1989). The purpose of this chapter is to look closely at key moments in *Jesus of Montreal*, in order to shed light on the grotesquerie concerning the body of Jesus and crucifixion of Jesus, thereby inscribing the concept of the Grotesque Cross with further definition and dimensionality. I organize these facets thematically as the Baffling Body, the Abject Body, and the Funny Body; bafflement, abjection, and laughter are all tropes of the Grotesque. As in the previous chapter, I will summarize the theoretical scope of the trope under consideration, and then examine key moments or sequences in the movie that exemplify these tropes and specifically prove representative of the Grotesque Cross. First, however, I offer a synopsis of *Jesus of Montreal*.

Directed by Denys Arcand, *Jesus of Montreal* is a Canadian, French-language film, set and filmed in Montreal, Quebec. The movie is not quite a contemporary retelling of the life and death of Jesus. Instead, it follows a group of actors who are recruited to perform an updated Passion Play for the Montreal Basilica. While at first, the story centers on the director and lead actor, Daniel Coloumbe, as he goes about rewriting, casting, and producing a very unorthodox Passion Play, soon parallels begin to emerge between the characters of *Jesus of Montreal* and biblical counterparts such as Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of Jesus, various disciples, and Pontius Pilate. The most significant parallel is between Jesus Christ of the Bible and Daniel. As the story moves forward, the parallels shift from glimpses of recognizable characters moments to less-subtle manifestations of the same.

The movie opens in a theatre where the lead character, Daniel (Lothaire Bluteau) waits to greet an actor friend after a staged version of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Daniel, who has just returned to Montreal after being gone for years (although no one knows where he has been or
what he has been doing), quietly tells his friend that he already has a new role in an upcoming show—that of Jesus. Daniel has been hired by Fr. Leclerc to direct and perform in the annual Passion Play. In scenes reminiscent of Jesus gathering his rag-tag group of disciples, Daniel begins recruiting an unlikely set of actors: Constance, Fr. Leclerc’s secret mistress whose resume consists of her role in past Passion Plays; Mireille, a commercial film actress who has to sleep with directors in order to be cast; Martin, a voice-over actor for pornography movies; and Rene who, by his own admission, does not get cast often because he is too picky about scripts. Rene agrees to be in the Passion Play, but only if he gets to perform the famous, “To be, or not to be” soliloquy from *Hamlet*. As Daniel begins updating the script, he gathers information from recent archaeological discoveries and non-biblical sources. The professor who assists him does so with an air of secrecy, stating that he has not published his findings because his research was funded by the Catholic Church. The nature of these findings comes to light during the first performance of Daniel’s updated Passion Play.

Elaborately costumed and set on the sprawling hillside surrounding the Basilica, the play combines biblical accounts of Jesus’ teachings with unorthodox accounts of the Jesus that historical accounts offer, as well as the recent archaeological findings. For example, one of the Stations is the reenactment of the archaeological dig where the 1969 excavations of the crucified victim were found. Daniel plays the part of the mild-mannered but enigmatic Jesus while the other actors switch out between costumes and run from station to station ahead of the migrating audience. The first performance of the play, as rendered in the movie, offers glimpses of Jesus walking on water, his teachings to the crowd, Jesus before Pontius Pilate, Jesus tied naked to a tree and whipped, and Jesus crucified. The audience is enraptured by the performance, but Fr. Leclerc is visibly upset.
In the days following the opening performance, the play gets favorable reviews from theatre-critics and radio talk-show hosts. It is at this points that stronger parallels between the Passion Play cast and Jesus and his disciples begin to emerge. Fr. Leclerc confronts Daniel about the changes to the script, rebuking him for the extra-biblical claims he made, especially those pertaining to the origins of Jesus. Mireille asks Daniel to accompany her to an audition for a beer commercial. Daniel agrees to go, but is increasingly disgusted by what the actors are made to do. Two young ladies, who were previously seen singing a Catholic hymn in the cathedral, dance and lip-sync in tiny bikinis. Mireille did not know she had to wear a bikini and is in jeans and an oversized sweatshirt. When the auditioners demand that Mireille take off her clothes anyway to display her body, Daniel interrupts the auditions and begs her not to obey. What follows is an unmistakable parallel to the story of Jesus driving out the money-lenders and merchants from the temple in Jerusalem. Daniel upturns tables, breaks filming equipment, and chases the casting directors and test audience out of the theatre.

That night, Daniel is arrested for the damages and taken into custody. Daniel negotiates the trial and his session with a court psychiatrist with his customary calm solemnity. He earns the approval of the judge and is soon dismissed. Right after the hearing, he is approached by an entertainment lawyer who offers Daniel a chance to make it big in the industry, but Daniel is not interested.

Returning to the Basilica, he finds his cast facetiously resisting Fr. Leclerc’s attempts to take over directorship and return them to the original script. Over a “last supper” of pizza, the actors decide to disregard the Fr. Leclerc’s orders and perform the play as usual. While at the crucifixion station, the security guards of the Basilica interrupt the performance and attempt to
evict the actors from the grounds. In the midst of the conflict, the cross Daniel hangs on is pushed over and Daniel crashes to the ground, the heavy cross beam smashing down on his head.

Mireille and Constance rush Daniel to St. Mark’s Hospital where the hospital is packed. The staff seems ambivalent to Daniel’s critical condition and say that he’s just going to have to wait like all the other patients. While Constance rushes around begging for a doctor to come see Daniel, he sits up on the gurney and says he is feeling better. Despite protests from the ladies, Daniel stumbles out of the hospital. The ladies follow helplessly as he takes and elevator down to a Montreal Metro subway platform. Here, Daniel delivers an impromptu prophetic-sermon that closely parallels an apocalyptic declaration given by Jesus (Mark 13, ESV Bible). Daniel speaks directly to the people waiting on the platform, and also grieves over a billboard advertisement featuring his actor friend from the Dostoevsky play in the opening scene. All the while Daniel’s condition deteriorates, and he seems increasingly under duress. He collapses with his head in Mireille’s lap on the now empty subway platform.

This time, when the ambulance arrives, Constance begs the medics not to take them back to St. Mark’s. Instead, they are taken to Jewish General Hospital where everything is pristine, efficient, and the staff all speaks English. Daniel is declared brain dead. Without much ado or interval, the doctor asks Constance whether Daniel has relatives; he wants permission to extract Daniel’s organs. The doctor explains that Daniel, as a healthy thirty year-old with type-O blood, is a “god-send.”

In the next scene, Daniel lies outstretched in an operation theatre, his arms extended in cruciform position. He is still on life-support when the surgical staff begins the harvesting process. There is a glimpse of his beating heart and then the lifeline on the monitor goes flat. There follows short clips of three different organ recipients, ending with a woman in a Spanish-
speaking country who can now see because she has Daniel’s eyes. The movie ends with the radio hosts once again asking and speculating on who the real Daniel Coulombe was, the lawyer gaining permission from the actors to set up a theatre in memory of Daniel, and the two young choir-woman/bikini-clad dancers reprising Quando Corpus Morietur, this time as buskers on the empty subway platform.

**The Baffling Body**

In *The Grotesque in Art and Literature: Theological Reflections* James Luther Adams and Wilson Yates assert that one of the major human problems that religion speaks to is that of bafflement—bafflement over the nature of the world, life, and human identity within the world. To this end, humans devise various theories, philosophies, and methods designed to offer adequate explanations of reality and experience. As a theory, or way of knowing, the Grotesque sets itself apart, in that it “offers that which is inexplicable, that which denies and turns upside down the propositions of our worldview and moral codes,” and therein lays the sense of bafflement: “not knowing—indeed, of not knowing how to start knowing” (51). Yates and Adams suggest that when Wolfgang Kayser describes “suddenness and surprise” of an encounter with the Grotesque, what he is speaking to is this very experience of confusion. However, while most theories and methodologies seek to unravel the unknown and prepare it for interrogation, Grotesque art and imagery present chaos and mystery as a norm of sorts. In fact, religion and the Grotesque are both oriented in such a way that mystery is an intrinsic and requisite feature of the existing world, and both are concerned with the mystery of human nature. One might expect therefore, that the Grotesque Cross, which witnesses the intersection of religion and the Grotesque, to be doubly baffling. I will limit the perplexity here by examining the subject of the
Cross: Jesus, his personage and body. After considering the body and nature of Jesus in terms of mystery and bafflement, I will then turn to key moments in *Jesus of Montreal* which prove illustrative of what I call here, the Baffling Body. As I begin, I would like to remind the reader of an issue that I brought up in the Introduction. Namely, that the agency of the Cross and redemptive work of Jesus (the object of this study writ large) is inextricably tied into faith-narratives and Judeo-Christian doctrine. Therefore, this present line of inquiry is best initiated via theological doctrines of the nature of Jesus as the Christ, rather than documentations of the Historical Jesus.

In *Systematic Theology: Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Wayne Grudem summarizes biblical teachings on the nature of Christ. First of all, biblical scripture insists upon the complete humanity of Jesus: a human body, mind, emotions—including weaknesses and limitations—are accounted for in the Bible (540-2). The Bible also insists that Jesus was fully divine; Grudem sifts through passages that not only make this claim, but narrative evidence which points to Jesus’ divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, sovereignty, and immortality. Additionally, Grudem emphasizes the doctrinal importance of the virgin birth in making possible the unity of full deity and full humanity in one person (530). Jesus, as he interchangeably talks about himself, was both “son of God” *and* “son of Man.” This phenomenon is explained through Chalcedonian Christology, and forwards a stance on the nature of Jesus which was adopted by Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox branches of Christianity in 451 A.D. (556). Grudem summarizes the conclusions of the Chalcedonian Definition:

> It taught us that Christ definitely has two natures, a human nature and a divine nature. It is taught that the divine nature is exactly the same as the Father. And it maintained that the human nature is exactly like our human nature, yet without
sin. Moreover, it affirmed that in the person of Christ the human nature retains its distinctive characteristics and the divine nature retains its distinctive characteristics (“the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved”). Finally it affirmed that, whether we can understand it or not, these two natures are united together in the open person of Christ. (557-8)

Like the animal-man chimeras on cathedrals, Jesus remains a juxtaposition of God and human: both natures meet in him. I maintain that it is a juxtaposition because, in spite of the unification in the personage of Jesus, fundamental differences between the divine nature and the human nature are preserved. One nature does not overshadow the other, nor are they blended together so completely that previous forms lose their attributes. For example, Jesus by human nature was about thirty years old; by his divine nature, he existed eternally (Luke 3.23, John 1.1, *ESV Bible*). Interstitiality is one way to describe this nature: an everlasting “in between” where Jesus is an entity of two worlds. This concept gains further clarity when Jesus is considered in terms of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Grudem offers a Venn diagrammatic representation to elucidate this (see fig. 2). The larger circle is the Holy Trinity consisting of Father (F), Son (S), and Holy Spirit (HS) as the three persons of the single Christian divine. The smaller circle contains the entirety of the “chimera” Christ: his divine nature (intersects with the Trinity) and human nature (outside of the Trinity) together comprise of the person of Jesus. In a literal sense, based on the diagram, Jesus is an entity of the margins, however, not limited to the margin but occurring in and around it.
Fig. 2. Diagram depicting the nature of Jesus according to Chalcedonian Christology (Grudem 558).

I realize I am distilling highly complex doctrines down to page-length scans. However, even when examined and considered thoroughly, the truth (as seen by this scholar) is that there is nothing simple about the doctrinal nature of Jesus Christ. Systematic Theology and Christologies attempt to frame and organize doctrine, even to the point where graphic representations of the Trinity and Jesus can be rendered. They offer definitions that are seemingly contradictory, and posit an epistemology that is anything but neat and systematic. I am not suggesting that Christian theology and doctrine is illogical or merely faith-based; the work of more than a dozen apologists and philosophers would invalidate the statement in a twinkling. What I argue here is that nature of Jesus, with its layers, intersections and doublings, eludes any sense of transparency. In other words, there is no describing the nature of Jesus without admitting to a sense of bafflement or mystery.
Eleventh Century Benedictine monk, Anselm of Canterbury, recognized that the paradoxical nature of Jesus was essential for the Christ, an argument he lays out in his treatise, *Cur Deus Homo?* ("Why the God-Man?"). Rather than superficially resolve the mystery, he postulated the term, "God-Man," holding both aspects of Jesus’ nature together: Jesus Christ was the requisite God-Man. Akin to Anselm’s “God-Man,” *Jesus of Montreal* gives us a “Daniel-Christ”: Daniel is not simply an actor portraying Jesus but, as the story proceeds, seems to become Jesus Christ himself. *Jesus of Montreal* represents the grotesqueries of Jesus and of the crucifixion in its portrayal of its baffling main character, Daniel Coulombe. In the following paragraphs, I will detail how Daniel embodies the baffling body.

First of all, Daniel himself is of mysterious origins. Implicit in several opening scenes is that Daniel had studied acting at a conservatory (which is where he met Constance), but after concluding his studies he left Montreal and had only just returned. After meeting with Fr. Leclerc, Daniel heads out to find Constance. Wan of face, and more than a little disheveled, he blends in with the homeless men standing in line at the soup kitchen where Constance works. While Constance recognizes him and greets him warmly, their first conversation is far from revelatory, quite the opposite, in fact:

Constance: How long were you away?

Daniel: I wasn’t counting.

Constance: Things have become so corrupt around here.

Daniel: Will you work with me?

Constance: Where are you living?

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17 This necessity is enfolded in the complexities of the doctrine of Salvation, which, besides being beyond the scope of this present study, is not entirely relevant here.
Daniel: Around.

Constance: You can stay with me.

Daniel: Ok. (Arcand, Jesus of Montreal)\(^{18}\)

While Constance accepts Daniel’s cryptic replies complacently, as a viewer it is impossible not to pick up on how little Daniel says about himself. The mystery surrounding where he has been and why he has returned is brought front and center after the first hugely successful performance of Daniel’s revised Passion Play (referred to by a character as “the Passion on the mountain”).

Spreading the word about the new play, a radio show host and television talk show hosts rave about the play and the “hot new director, Daniel Coloumbe.” The scene consists of short shots flashing back and forth between the different announcers:

TV HOST: Daniel Coulombe took first prize at the Conservatory.

RADIO HOST: He’s self-taught. Never went to theatre school.

TV HOST: …the most gifted actor of his class…

RADIO HOST: …spent his youth travelling all over…

TV HOST: …who stayed here but was never noticed…

RADIO HOST: …Got back recently in the underground…

TV HOST: …was offered this play by chance…

RADIO HOST: …worked on his Passion for years… (Arcand, Jesus of Montreal)

While each make their assertions quite confidently, the back and forth arrangement of shots makes the discrepancies in the history of Daniel rather evident, thus, underscoring the obscurity of his background. Additionally, Daniel does not seem to have any family. Constance confirms

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\(^{18}\) Dialogue throughout this chapter is transcribed from subtitles of the Quebecois French original. Occasionally, when the dialogue is in English, the transcription is my own.
this at the end of the movie when Daniel lies in a coma and the doctor request permission to harvest his organs. She specifically says that he is alone, he only has his friends, and that he lived with her and Mireille.

The movie is somewhat unrelenting in underscoring Daniel’s mysterious autonomy. Even after Daniel’s death, the radio show host hounds Constance, to ask, “I heard that he travelled. Do you know where exactly?” to which Constance replies that she is not sure. Parallels between Jesus and Daniel are abundant in the movie, however the mystery of whom he is and where he came from remains distinct. The notable absence of a biological family and obscured personal history only emphasizes Daniel’s strangeness compared to the people around him. It is more than a passing contemporary parallel of the mysterious Biblical Jesus. Having first been hinted at, and then brought up repeatedly, the mystery of Daniel’s origins only gains momentum through the *Jesus of Montreal* narrative, and remains unresolved at the end. Where Jesus’ mysterious nature is underscored by the Bible and doctrines, Daniel’s is emphasized by the script of this film. As such it stands out as intersection with, rather than a parallel to, the nature and personage of Jesus, making Daniel Coloumbe, likewise, baffling.

While this shared, important trait is one way of noting the baffling body (and the grotesquerie implied), an uncanny, mystical example can be noted by tracing how Daniel’s life begins to blur into the life of Jesus. I noted above that there are several parallels between Daniel and Jesus: Daniel’s quietly charismatic nature, his ability to draw people to him, the way he quietly tackles confrontation (with the exception of one case), and his kind and compassionate nature are all characteristics that can be noted in accounts of the biblical Jesus. However, in each of these examples, Jesus and Daniel are two distinct characters who mirror each other. Daniel,
however, becomes a baffling body when the lines between this thirty year-old, French Canadian actor and the Jesus of the Bible begin to blur.¹⁹

¹⁹I would like to offer a note about my reception to the film, as well as the high degree of ambivalence associated with this topic of the relationship between Jesus Christ and Daniel Colombe. Even a summary of reviews and articles on Jesus of Montreal explain the events in two distinct ways. The first explanation suggests that it is a modern re-telling of the Passion narrative. According to this rendering, the film offers us a vision of what Jesus in contemporary (1990’s) Montreal would appear as—a lesser known actor, with a band of other misfit actors, together with whom he upsets the local religious hierarchy. A second take suggests that as an actor, Daniel became so completely involved in his role as Jesus Christ, that he carried it into his “real” life. According to this interpretation, Daniel’s violent outburst at the auditions, the way he challenges the triumvirate of priests at the second performance, and his calm resistance of the entertainment lawyer, are merely instances of Daniel performing Jesus in his everyday life. There is a much smaller delegation (consisting mainly of film bloggers and religion in the arts critics) who proffer a third perspective, whereby the events of in the film are unreservedly fantastical, or “mystical” if you will. The stance I maintain here aligns closest with this third category; in recognizing the mystery, bafflement and blurred boundaries, I receive the inexplicable events of Jesus of Montreal as an example of the grotesque at play in the production and narrative. My observations are admittedly subjective, and influenced by my first viewing of the film, they reflect my discoveries I made and queries I had as a first-time viewer. Having heard that the film received a mixed response, especially from the Christian community, I went into the viewing without any expectation that the movie would adhere to the biblical narrative. Still, I got so caught up, incensed even, by the Passion Play within the movie. Looking back, I
The first time this blurring occurs it is marked by someone else’s response to Daniel. During the first performance of the Passion play, Daniel, performs as Jesus. During a monologue, a collage of snippets of Jesus’ teachings, Daniel walks close to the audience, addressing them directly when a girl suddenly bursts into the playing area and falls at Daniel’s feet. She clings to his knees and then around his neck:

GIRL: Lord, I love you. Jesus, I belong to you. Forgive me, Jesus. I’m Yours. Forgive me.

GUARD: You’re disturbing the actors.

GIRL: I’ve sinned. Speak to me, Jesus. Sweet Jesus.

GUARD: Enough!

(Arcand, _Jesus of Montreal_)

Her outburst is earnest and desperate. Throughout this display, Daniel stands quite still, looking a little stunned. The girl however is completely unaware of any breach in her behavior.

I had mistakenly assumed that main subject of _Jesus of Montreal_ was the revising, writing and performance of the Passion Play on the mountain. It was not until the audition scene that I realized that the movie was perhaps, not really, about the Passion Play. Confronted by Daniel’s sudden transformation from an extremely soft-spoken, mild-mannered man into a furiously indignant and terrifying force, I caught a glimpse of “Jesus in the temple.” After a swift, sharp mental reorientation, I viewed the rest of the movie scrutinizing everything Daniel said and did with a specific question in my mind: “Is this Daniel or is this Jesus?” Now, even after several viewings, I contend that _Jesus of Montreal_ displays the gradual blurring of boundaries between Daniel and Jesus, thus making the grotesquerie evident.
In that moment, it is as if Daniel is Jesus to her. Even after she is half-dragged, half-carried her back to the rest of the audience, she shows no signs of embarrassment at her actions. In fact, during the Garden of Gethsemane scene, she calls out to “Jesus” warning him that the soldiers of the high priests were coming for him: “watch out Jesus! I know them! Watch out.” It is easy to explain away this behavior as someone so caught up in a performance that she lost grip on reality. From this point onwards, however, events in Daniel’s life begin to coalesce with events that took place in the life of Jesus. To this point in the film, the narrative was about an actor-director gathering a cast and putting on a revised version of the Passion Play; but from here on out, Daniel’s life begins to look like Jesus’ final days. Seen in this light, the young woman’s inability to separate the actor from the character he’s representing is a propos: her fervent outburst of devotion should be considered dramatic foreshadowing of the coming of Daniel-Christ, making her the John the Baptist of Jesus of Montreal. Three events develop this idea.

The first event is the beer commercial audition scene which I noted above. In this scene, Daniel lives and experiences Jesus’ outrage as it is described in the Gospels. The Book of Matthew records, “Jesus went into the Temple area. He threw out all those who were selling and buying things there. He turned over the tables that belonged to those who were exchanging different kinds of money” (English Standard Version, Matt.21.12). In the film, Daniel accompanies Merielle to the auditions, which happen to take place in a theatre—the same theatre where The Brothers Karamazov performance (from the opening scene) was staged. In fact, the set of the interior of the shabby, dilapidated cottage forms an incongruous backdrop as auditionees lip-sync and gyrate to the jingle for “Appalache, the beer of the young.” While Jesus was outraged to witness the temple being used for business instead of worship, Daniel’s outrage is precipitated by how the actors are mistreated in, of all places, a theatre—a space that should be
their metaphoric, spiritual home. His anger and actions, while terrifying in their magnitude, are righteous and justified. Furthermore, Daniel’s actions are Christ-like in that they are done in service of the people dear to him.

His outburst, however, does have legal consequences. Later that night, during the Passion Play performance, he is charged with assault and destruction of property, and taken into custody. This leads to the second shared experience: Jesus before Pilate (New Living Translation, Matthew 27). Daniel’s “Pontius Pilate,” is a wry, district-court judge. As did Jesus, Daniel does not offer any defense of his actions and his calm demeanor elicits the judge’s goodwill.

The third event which Daniel shares with Jesus is being tempted by Satan in the context of Jesus of Montreal; Satan is a suave entertainment lawyer, Richard Cardinal. Cardinal’s goal is to make a franchise out of Daniel. The scene is intricately suggestive of Satan’s second attempt at tempting Jesus as recorded in The Book of Matthew:

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,‘ He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” (Matt. 4.4-7)

Cardinal closely follows this modus operandus. He first gets Daniel alone; a trick he pulls off very subtly by convincing Constance and Mireille that Daniel’s trial will take a long time, and not to wait for him. He then takes Daniel to a restaurant located on the observation deck of a Montreal skyscraper; the city sprawls out beneath them. Walking with Daniel down the hall to the restaurant, Cardinal describes how Daniel could to gain fame, money, a house in Malibu, a theatre company—anything; all Daniel has to do is allow Cardinal to represent him. Both here and in the audition scene, one may read deeply into Arcand’s critical commentary on the
commodification of art, and artists. At its simplest, however, this scene shows Daniel once again experiencing the travails and testing that form key moments in the life of Jesus. As each of the events describe above proceeds, so does the uncanniness of the synonymous moments in these two life-stories. This finally climaxes in the final hours of Daniel’s life, where the boundaries between the two identities crumble completely. If thus far, Daniel was living a life like Jesus’, in his death, he died as a Christ.

The “crucifixion” that leads to Daniel’s death occurs during the third performance. Despite Fr. Leclerc’s announcement that they were not allowed to perform that night’s show, the actors get into costume and make-up, push past the security guard who tries to stop them, and go out to the grounds to perform. Daniel is mounted on a cross with the other actors in character nearby, when several security guards enter and precipitate an altercation with the audience. Daniel is still tied tightly to the cross, elevated slightly over the scene and watches the jostling and shouting that is going on around him. He actually sees the two struggling men charging in his direction and calls out a warning, but it is to no avail. The cross falls forward, crushing Daniel underneath; there is sudden and complete silence for a moment. As the ambulance carrying him, Mireille and Constance drives away, Rene turns to Martin and says sadly, “Remember my premonition? Doing tragedy is dangerous.” (Arcand, *Jesus of Montreal*)

In a sense, Daniel dies on that cross. When he regains consciousness, he seems strangely altered. Of course, his appearance is horrifying and pitiful, characterized not just by his injuries, but he still has crucifixion scene make-up on: crisscross wheals of make-up blood on his neck and chest are visible through his loose tunic shirt, real bloods and fake blood are mingled on his face, and he is barefoot. But Daniel is also no longer himself. Medically, the signs of trauma and shock are apparent, however, there is something else; he is awash with emotion that is strangely
akin to prophetic fervor. The intensity of sorrow, desperation and longing emanating from him is painful. Braced between Mireille and Constance, he smiles sadly at them and says, “Life is hard to bear, huh? People aren’t happy. That’s why, the reason. The great events… even theatre…all in search of happiness. The source of life is hidden. I was…forsaken by my father” (Arcand, *Jesus of Montreal*).

Taking the elevator down to the subway platform, Daniel goes backwards, essentially looking up at the ladies behind him. The force of his emotion, seem to propel his movements and are such that Mireille and Constance cannot stop him; they follow him helplessly as he delivers a tearful and heart-wrenching final exhortation:

DANIEL: These buildings…these great structures…not a stone will be left…some day. When you see the abomination of desolation…if you are on the plains, flee to the mountains. If you are on the balcony don’t go inside for your things. If you are on the road, don’t return home. Woe to those who are with child. Pray that your flight will not be in winter. If anyone says to you, “Here is Christ,” or “There…,” believe it not. False Christs. False Prophets. The powers of the heavens shall be shaken. Not the day, nor the hour. You know not when…the Judgment…watch! (Arcand, *Jesus of Montreal*)

Daniel’s speech consists of excerpts from a conversation Jesus had with his disciples about the end times:

Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to
him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the
sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” And Jesus answered them, “See
that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the
Christ,’ and they will lead many astray […] So when you see the abomination of
desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place then let
those who are in Judaea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop
not go down to take what is in his house, and let the one who is in the field not
turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those
who are nursing infants in those days! … Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here
is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it.” (Matt. 24.1-5, 15-20, ESV)

Is this Daniel, or is the Jesus? Nowhere does the elision of the two seem more complete than at
this moment. This is not just because of what Daniel says. The similarities of the two texts are
evident, of course. However, it is important to note how Daniel speaks. Essentially, he delivers
this rendition of the above passage as if the words are his own. There is a clear distinction
between his comportment here and from when he performs as Jesus during the Passion Play.
There, he is gentle, calm, and enigmatic. Here, he’s almost frantic. As Daniel speaks, he goes up
to the waiting passengers in the metro station and looks earnestly into their faces, touches their
hair, and grips their arms or shoulder. He thrusts his bloody and tear-blotched face close to
theirs. All his movements are intimate and earnest. There are some awkward shrugs and
grimaces but, for the most part, the people on the platform are entirely captivated by him. Some
have compassion written on their faces. And no one pulls away from him. As Daniel holds onto
one gentleman, the man holds onto him as well.
The words, the intimacy, the earnestness and sorrow, all blend Daniel into the Jesus described in prophetic (Old Testament) and Gospel accounts. As I explain in Chapter One, the doctrine of salvation is based on the premise that God loves humankind so much, that rather than see it perish, he had his son (and via the Trinity, himself) atone for the sins of all. Daniel’s unbridled outpouring of concern and sorrow becomes a depiction of a love so pathetic, consuming, anguished and glorious; he is the Daniel-Christ, a baffling non-possibility that nevertheless is presented in *Jesus of Montreal*.

The religious symbolism of Daniel’s name also supports this assertion. Almost trivial in comparison to the rest of the narrative and dramatic action, nevertheless, “Coulombe” is French for “dove,” one of the few physical manifestations of the Holy Spirit that the Bible describes. This further imbues Daniel-Christ, with another aspect of the Christian deity. Daniel collapses right after the subway scene, and never regains consciousness; I will consider his final act as Christ—his “body broken” for the benefit of others, within my discussion of the Abject Body and the Funny Body.

While mystery is a necessary characteristic and bafflement a natural response evoked by grotesqueries, neither are without purpose. Both religion and the Grotesque attest to the limitations of the current theories of understanding reality, and the finitude of human perception. In recognizing the limitations of our systems of understanding and perception, our attention hone in on other aspects of human nature and the world (Yates 52). Unable to resolve the mystery of the God-man or the Daniel-Christ, we are left to consider just the action, the work that is done by the Daniel-Christ or the God-man.
The Abject Body

Both Daniel and Jesus accomplish the work they do by their death; their baffling bodies on their respective crosses eventually become corpses on crosses. As such, understanding the grotesquerie of the body on the Cross mandates apprehending and making sense of corpses, Jesus’ specifically and Daniel’s as a representation. To this end, I turn to the works of Julia Kristeva in order to examine this particular facet of the grotesque body, the elision of the Grotesque with the abject.

A feminist philosopher and literary critic, Kristeva’s complex *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* has influenced numerous disciplines. Kristeva’s construction of the abject is phrased in terms of processes: the expulsion and rejection of the Other. For the purpose of this study, I will focus on Kristeva’s reflections on the interstitial nature of the abject: composites, ambiguities, and the transgression of boundaries. As does the Grotesque, the abject does not adhere to rules or categories; instead it is characterized by “the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). According to Kristeva, the abject represents both the breakdown of meaning and the reaction to such a loss. This breakdown occurs when the boundaries (that are normally used to define an understanding of the world and the self) are transgressed. As such, abjection is about transgression; it is that which “disturbs identity, system, order” (Kristeva 4). Corpses exemplify Kristeva’s notion of abjection because they represent the breakdown of distinctions—not only between life and death—but the distinction between subject and object, and self and other. The symbolic order is threatened and this leads to a loss of meaning:

[In the corpse], I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away. The corpse seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost
of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. (4)

Bearing no life, but having physical presence for the living, corpses make apparent the disintegration of the boundary between life and death. A body on a cross was either a corpse, or soon to be a corpse. This includes Jesus. I first consider the corpse of Jesus on the Cross, and how it manifests characteristics of the abject.

For all intents and purposes, Jesus was a corpse the moment he was sentenced to be crucified. Crucifixion was not just a punishment or an execution; recall from Chapter One that crucifixion was designed to torture the victim and traumatize the “audience,” making it a performed deterrent against insurrection. The crucifixion process could be considered a public demonstration of corpse-making: live bodies were taken and worked on such that they devolved into corpses. Then the corpses were left up to hang, usually for days, often until they were no longer recognizable (Chapman 117).20 Corpses lined the Appian Way, topped countless hills across the Roman Empire and, in place of sentinels, were posted just outside the city gates. When seen through the lens of the abject, crucifixion becomes a process of abjectifying the population by making death present on a large scale. By this light, the corpses manifest a rupture in the symbolic order (here, life and death) on an immense scale, “death infecting life” in viral proportions.

Kristeva further defines the abject by discussing its relationship with crime:

20 Jesus’ situation was unique: having been crucified on the afternoon before the beginning of the holy festival of Passover, his body as well as those of the thieves who were crucified with him, were taken down before sunset.
It is thus not cleanliness or heath that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite…Any crime because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility.

(Kristeva 4)

“Fragility of the law” here is the fragility of an entire way of life. An entire culture was violated and dispensed of, and corpses on crosses abjectified the living by pointing to the futility of their religion, culture, resistance or local law in the face of the Roman oppression. If the abject disturbs “identity, system, order,” the public display of corpses speaks loudly, as if to say, “we Romans do not respect your identities, your systems, your orders. Your borders, rules, bodies will be transgressed.” As a body executed under Roman law, the living corpse of Jesus was first of all implicit in this abjectification. The presence of his corpse on the Cross points toward two other manifestations of the abject.

First, from a theological standpoint, Jesus was indeed a corpse “without God” (4). Describing the nature of atonement, Grudem details the different sufferings endured by Jesus. The pain he endured on the cross falls into two categories: “physical pain and death” and “the pain of bearing sin” (572). The latter, Grudem describes this as “God imputed our sins to Christ; that is, he thought of them as belonging to Christ […] The physical pain of the crucifixion and the pain of taking on himself the absolute evil of our sins were aggravated by the fact that Jesus faced this pain alone” (573). As the sin-bearer for all humanity, Jesus was, for the first time in all eternity, cut off from God. God being absolutely holy could not continue in communion with Jesus who “became sin,” and so God abandoned Jesus for a time (574, English Standard Version,
2 Cor. 5.21). Jesus alludes to this when he cries out from the cross, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (English Standard Version, Matt. 27.46). Therefore, Jesus on the cross was a corpse, and one completely alone, cut off even from God—abject.

The grotesque body of Jesus is abject in yet another way: Jesus as a corpse threatens the very notion of divinity. Having claimed familiarity (and unity) with God, the corpse of Jesus represents a breach in the identity of the Divine. His followers believed him when he said he was God. Therefore, to view his corpse was to behold either the death of God or the rupture of Jesus’ identity (i.e., Jesus was a liar). Either perspective would have dire, abjectifying implications on their identities and lives. Here, the abject grotesque body (corpse) of Jesus threatens constructs of divinity and identity.

The abject grotesque body of Jesus also features the rupture of physical boundaries. As do corpses, the horror of the breakdown and transgression of boundaries can also be represented by bodily fluids, particularly those which are expelled from the body (Kristeva 71). For example, vomit, menstrual fluid, and excrement contain the horror of abjection because they represent the disturbance between inside and out, subject and object. As such, gaps in the body through which such fluids are expelled become the sites for the abject; the frailty of boundaries are represented by corporeal orifices. As an interface between the inside and outside, orifices such as the vagina and anus represent the horrors of the abject, boundaries of the body that are transgressed in the evacuation of bodily filth and fluids.

Margaret Miles, author of “Carnal Abominations: The Female Body as Grotesque,” offers a perspective that adds to Kristeva’s illustration above, and the discussion of the grotesque body of the crucified Jesus. Miles examines historical literary and pictorial devices to demonstrate how, according to the collective male perspective, women’s bodies and behaviors
have been figured as grotesque (Miles 88). Women’s bodies—being imminently penetrable from within (birth) and without (sex), could be considered the personification of the Grotesque. As opposed to the closed, self-contained body of males, or the virtuous bodies of virgins, the female body was the “permeable body that produces juices and smells” (92). At first, it seems impossible, infelicitous even, to discuss the body of Jesus in such a specifically gendered iteration of the grotesque. However, I contend that Jesus on the cross was feminized by the acts and atrocities of the crucifixion, in that his body was permeable and penetrated variously.

I will refrain from reprising the list of physical assaults the crucified victim was made to undergo. Consider simply the results of the flogging and crucifixions: fluids (blood, sweat, tears, vomit, urine, feces) that were normally contained in organs and vessels were made to transgress their boundaries, flowing out of the body or into parts of the body where they did not belong. Jesus’ body is penetrated by thorns and nails. And, in a final coup de force, there is one final penetration. After Jesus died, a soldier pierced his body in the side, “bringing a sudden flow of blood and water” (NIV, John 19: 34-35). The spear wound in his side forms yet another transgressed boundary expelling fluids. In the historio-cultural landscape of the time, Jesus on the cross could be considered the ultimate abject body: a penetrated, permeable, feminized corpse. Jesus of Montreal captures the Abject Body of Jesus in a simple, albeit vivid way, by the sheer recurrence of crucifixion corpses.

There are two types of corpses in Jesus of Montreal: Daniel playing crucified Jesus, and the corpse of crucified Daniel, himself. In the film, the crucifixion of Jesus scene is depicted quite thoroughly as part of the very first performance of the Passion on the mountain. The actors stage it quite graphically. Daniel is stripped completely naked, tied to a tree and “flogged.” The costume-blood wheals which run all the way down his body look painful and fresh. But they are
perfectly crisscrossed. The strange juxtaposition of pain and precision makes Daniel’s body look grotesque. He is then “nailed” to the crossbeam while it lies on the ground. Martin then picks him up (naked body, crossbeam and all) and throws him over his shoulder, in the process turning Daniel’s buttocks and crack straight into the shot for a moment. Martin and Rene hoist the crossbeam into metal brackets on the vertical beam and, grabbing Daniel by the waist and legs, adjusting him so that assumes the position depicted in Nico Haas’ article, from 1970 (see fig. 3). The camera zooms in closer and pans up so that the Montreal nighttime skyline becomes the backdrop of this crucifixion scene (see fig. 4).

Fig.3. Drawing of the contorted crucifixion position proposed by Nico Haas, “Anthropological Observations on the Skeletal Remains Found at Giv’at ha-Mivtar,” *Israel Exploration Journal.* (20:1/2) 30.

Fig.4. Daniel mounted on the cross in the position proposed by Haas. Photograph still from the film, *Jesus of Montreal* (Arcand,1989).

Here, Daniel embodies the first corpse of *Jesus of Montreal*. The film shows at least three different instances of him performing this scene: the second performance occurs after Mireille’s
attempt to audition for the beer commercial, and third crucifixion and corpse is presented at
during the banned performance. Each time Daniel performs the crucifixion of Jesus, he manifests
the abject as a corpse.

However, Daniel’s own death involved two crucifixion scenes, and hence, his body
appears as a corpse twice. The first death overlaps with his performance of Jesus. Daniel is
performing Jesus on the cross, and then he himself “dies” under the cross. I treated this scene
earlier in this chapter, but recall the moment of silence after the cross comes crashing down. The
audience, actors, guards all share in that moment of abjection, confronted by Daniel’s “corpse.”
Daniel’s second crucifixion takes places at the Jewish General Hospital after he collapses on the
subway platform. It is at the hospital, in the final moments before his death that Daniel, as did
Jesus, becomes the penetrated body.

After Daniel is pronounced brain-dead, Mireille and Constance ask to go see him.
Mireille remarks that he looks like he is sleeping. Here, barely moments after pronouncing him
brain-dead, the doctor lurks closer to Constance and, standing right behind her shoulder and says
in her ear, “I’m going to ask you something. Give us his body.” Constance does not react.
Looking as if she is numbed by shock and grief, she dully agrees. During a sudden and heavy
storm, the final crucifixion of Daniel begins, ironically, in a theatre of sorts. He is shown lying
on the operation theatre table with his arms spread out and restrained (see fig. 5). The surgical
staff gathers around him, and soon the boundaries of Daniel’s body are transgressed. A long
incision is cut down the length of his chest, becoming the orifice through which Daniel is
emptied of his heart, kidneys, eyes and blood. In the course of a couple hours, Daniel goes from
an enigmatic leader to an empty corpse.
Fig. 5. A comatose Daniel strapped to the operation theatre table in a crucifixion posture. Photograph still from the film, Jesus of Montreal (Arcand, 1989).

But the viewer is not allowed to dwell on the strange horror of this moment. The shot cuts to Daniel’s organs being carefully packaged in ice and transported out to other hospitals. A few short scenes later, in a bright white hospital room, a doctor smiles down into the camera and says, “Mr. Rigby, you have a beautiful, new, thirty year-old heart. What do you say?” Mr. Rigby does not say anything. His eyes open slowly and he smiles.

Daniel’s death has passed in a heartbeat; herein lays a perfect illustration of the crossroads at which the abject and the Grotesque part company. For where the abject dwells in the loss of meaning, and fear of broken boundaries, the Grotesque finds laughter and life. Why then do I devote pages to describing a grotesque body in terms of the Grotesque?
The abject is a very real experience of the Grotesque, but it is not finite. Mikhail Bakhtin, writing in *Rabelais and his World* notes, “The grotesque body is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed, it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body… [it] outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body” (317). As grotesque bodies, the crucified Jesus and the Daniel-Christ of *Jesus of Montreal* stay true to this. They “outgrow” their own abjection, to bring life to others: the former through spiritual redemption, and the latter through biological redemption. In a sense, the Cross disarms the Kristevan “power” of horror; making the corpse on the Cross a (mere) momentary elision between the abject and the Grotesque. By this, the abjection of a grotesque body of the Cross is like one side of a perpetually spinning coin; it appears and disappears, held in flux by the other side—the ridiculous, comic and life-giving aspects of the grotesque.

The pull away from absolute abjection is necessary, and begins with the life-giving deaths mentioned above. However, the Grotesque demands more than that. Laughter, *in the face* of horror, is vital to the grotesque. As Harpham points out, “Where we cease altogether to laugh, we cease altogether to have the grotesque,” (464). In the short section below, I discuss the comic aspects of the grotesque body and the ways in which *Jesus of Montreal* exemplifies the Funny Body.

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21 Within Kristeva’s oeuvre, her writings on the monstrous-feminine are perhaps, more akin to the Grotesque (than the abject) in that they feature a coming together of “horror, pathos and laughter” (Kristeva 131-4, Edwards 31). However, even Edwards and Graulund admit to this laughter being “destructive” and again as “apocalyptic,” which to me appears completely contradictory to a Bakhtinian sense of carnivalesque laughter (34-35). I explicate this below in my discussion on The Funny Body on The Cross.
The Funny Body

Admittedly, the abject is presenced so heavily in the crucifixion that it seems impossible that one would perceive any kind of humor. And yet, laughter is the key to understanding, even recognizing the Grotesque and its effect on people (Yates 24). In order to perceive recognize the Funny Body on the Cross, it is helpful to ascertain the nature of laughter associated with the Grotesque.

In *Grotesque*, Justin Edwards and Rune Graulund offer a survey of the relationship between the Grotesque and laughter. After pointing out the numerous forms that laughter can take (alienating, hysterical, light-hearted, cathartic, regenerative, mocking, etc.) they draw from literary critic Andrew Stott to explain how the defamiliarization, which is characteristic of the presence and work of the Grotesque, prompts laughter:

> [Grotesque laughter] Is roused by juxtapositions, disjunctions, ambiguities, deformities, hybridities, exaggerations, caricatures, or disorders, This incitement to laughter is in part linked to the movement between the real, the grotesque realism of the body, and the unreal, the bizarre distortions of the ‘real’ body through exaggerations and caricature. (94)

Chaucer, Jonathan Swift, and Neville Coghill are cited as some masters of grotesque laughter. Their texts predominantly feature scatological and body (and bawdy) humor and are rendered through witty dialogue and satire (96-9). Stott’s analysis above also hints at grotesque humor’s association with the bizarre and the absurd.²²

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²²In his short monograph, *The Grotesque*, Phillip Thomson differentiates between terms and modes that relate to the Grotesque, such as “absurd” and “bizarre.” Similarities abound, and
A second major form of grotesque laughter is associated with Bakhtin’s theories of the
carnivalesque. Rooted in his studies of Renaissance folk culture, Bakhtin recognizes the social
and philosophical potentialities of laughter. He differentiates between carnival laughter borne out
of medieval grotesque realism, and its post-Renaissance expressions. In the latter, the absurdity
of the grotesque incites terror and evokes a sense of alienation (Bakhtin 19). Carnival laughter
however is regenerative and exuberant. It is this carnivalesque laughter that Bakhtin venerates
for its potential to subvert restrictive, totalizing systems and powers. Bakhtin asserts, “In folk
grotesque, madness is a gay parody of official reason, of the narrow seriousness of official
‘truth.’ It is festive madness. In Romantic grotesque, on the other hand, madness acquires a
somber, tragic aspect of individual isolation” (39). Furthermore, according to Bakhtin, the
liberation of the human spirit and a return to communal bodies appear to be the distinctive,
positive function of carnival laughter:

It was the victory of laughter over fear that most impressed medieval man. It was
not only a victory over mystic terror of God, but also a victory over the awe
inspired by forces of nature, and most of all over the oppression and guilt related
to all that was consecrated and forbidden. (100-1)

Yates offers a helpful distillation of Bakhtin’s thought process and ultimate purpose in defining
the carnivalesque functions of the grotesque:

In the redefining of the body and its processes; in reintegrating body and self, the
individual body with the collective body, and the communal body of the people
with the body of the cosmos; an accent in the ongoing link of birth, death,

Thomson suggests the differences occur mainly in terms of formal pattern (the absurd has no
formal pattern) or degree (the Grotesque is more radical and aggressive than the bizarre).
regeneration, and the metaphorical body of the community, Bakhtin is attempting to uncover a liberating and healing antidote to official culture... to enter into the carnival body, to experience grotesque realism and its laughter, exuberance, and joyful abandon is to recover that which has been lost. (Yates 25)

Gathering these concepts together, I contend that the Funny Body is the grotesque body conditioned by carnival laughter, absurdity, and the bizarre. As such, The Funny Body causes joyful disorder and subversion (chaos is not a cause for fear). Secondly, it has the potential for renewal, and so death is not a threat to it. Absurdity, ridiculousness, and the bizarre evoked by a Funny Body will be characterized by joy, rather than alienation or mockery. I contend that even on the cross, Jesus is a Funny Body. Or rather, he is a Funny Body because of the Cross.

Through the crucifixion, he embodies the characteristics of the Funny Body or perpetuates the outcomes of carnival laughter.

In Chapter Three I will explicate how the Cross construes a carnivalesque restructuring of the Mosaic legal system. For now, suffice it to say that as a Funny body upon the Cross, Jesus disrupts existing systems of higher authority. This rupture, so far from being fearful is cause for joy in that it offers redemption to humankind, and is regenerative in that it leads to restoration of the relationship between God and his creation. Furthermore, the liberation wrought by the Christ-Funny Body does pertain to the condition of the human spirit; the Cross leads to liberation from the bondage of sin, the fear of death and punishment

Additionally, the Funny Body of Jesus fulfills Bakhtin’s requisite for truly carnival laugh: it restores an individual to community. This is represented in the apostolic biblical texts as the followers of Jesus are urged to remain united, and are collectively called his “church” or his “body.” (e.g. 1 Cor 1.23, ESV). However, the church is also referred to as the Bride of Christ,
a title which is symbolic of the intimate, loving relationship and potential reunion of Christ with his followers. Seen thusly, the Funny Body not only promulgates an individual’s return to community, it makes way for the body’s union with the larger cosmic entity, the divine (i.e., Bakhtin’s “reintegrating body and self, the individual body with the collective body, and the communal body of the people with the body of the cosmos”).

Finally, the Funny Body presents itself as absurd or bizarre. I have mentioned how crucifixion was considered utter profanity in it historical context. Even decades after the death of Jesus, the phenomenon—the Son of God crucified as a criminal, and redemption provided through an ignominious hateful death by crucifixion—remained absurd. So far from trying to make sense of the absurdity, or explain it away, the apostle Paul extols it:

Scripture says, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and thwart the cleverness of the clever.” Where is the wise person to be found? Where the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God turned the wisdom of this world into folly? Since in the wisdom of God the world did not come to know God through wisdom, it pleased God to save those who believe through the absurdity of the preaching [Christ crucified]. (1 Cor 1:18-21)

Theologian and cultural critic, Harvey Cox participates in a similar discourse regarding the peculiar picture Jesus as Christ presents in society. While Cox’s investigation lays in the intersection of Christian theology and the mid-twentieth century resurgence of festival, fantasy, and carnival culture, he asserts that the current secularized, post-Christian epoch may have more in common with the earliest period in Christian history (than the eons during which Christendom
flourished). In his chapter, “Christ as Harlequin,” Cox attempts to explain how the emergent cultural iconography of “the harlequinesque Christ, his pathos, his weakness, his irony” makes sense now as it did for the earliest believers who perceived and reveled in the oddity and absurdity of a crucified savior:

The clown in constantly defeated, tricked, humiliated and tromped upon. He is infinitely vulnerable, but never finally defeated. In representing Christ as a clown [we] sense that the painted grin and motley suit carry these multiple meanings and more...Only by learning to laugh at the hopelessness around us can we touch the hem of hope. Christ the clown signifies our playful appreciation of the past and out comic refusal to accept the specter of inevitability of the future. He is the incarnation of festivity and fantasy.” (141-2)

Centuries of political hegemony of the Christian West have all but erased the satire, irony, and ridiculousness at the heart of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, if one stops and scrutinizes the Cross, the body on it is a Funny Body.

The Funny Body in Jesus of Montreal is portrayed in several ways. I described one manifestation above: after the final crucifixion of Daniel, the film does not end with his lifeline on the monitor going flat, but with Mr. Rigby waking up and smiling. In death, Daniel brings life and joy, thus subverting the fear and finality associated with death. The aspect I will explore

23 Cox’s short survey of this period and culture references art, theatre, and popular culture:

Picasso’s harlequins, magicians and acrobats from Federico Fellini films, Beckett’s vagabonds from Waiting For Godot, The Clowns (ballet), and Gunter Grass’s character, Oscar Mazereth from his novel, The Tin Drum. He makes particular note of talented clowns that have “blessed” the era, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton and Marx Brothers (139-40).
below concerns absurd and bizarre aspects of the Funny Body. I will look closely at a certain scene to demonstrate how Daniel’s Funny Body upon the cross is rendered absurd and bizarre during the Passion Play. Rene instigates the first instance.

When Rene agreed to work with Daniel, he posited one serious request, almost a stipulation; that he be allowed to perform the famous soliloquy from *Hamlet* since he had always wanted to be Hamlet and “may never get a chance.” The moment during which he makes the request is humorous, but quickly forgotten. Daniel’s merely remarks that it would be difficult but “we’ll see.” Rene seems satisfied with that and the cast moves on to rehearsal and then the first performance.

After the powerful and moving rendition of the crucifixion during the first performance, the audience walks away from the actor, Daniel hanging on the cross. The mood is somber and the audience quietly shuffles into a dark tunnel lined with torches. The silence is heavy. And then, Rene speaks, “To die. To sleep. No more.” He proceeds through a large portion of Hamlet’s soliloquy (from *Hamlet* Act 3.1), and the audience is enraptured. While Rene’s performance is monologue sincere and simple, a knowing audience recognizes the context of his absurd request earlier in the film. To see it come to fruition within the Passion Play is humorous. For a viewer of the film, laughter eases the gravity of the death scene. The absurdities of the Funny Body continue in the second crucifixion scene as *Jesus of Montreal* gives us a Daniel who climbs himself down from the cross.

As I noted, Daniel is arrested during the second performance of the Passion Play. The detectives who arrive to arrest him actually follow along with the audience to several stations and watch the play. After most of the audience is led away to the tunnel for *Hamlet* scene, the detectives approach Daniel who is hanging on the cross, still pretending to be dead.
(one of the detectives carefully prods him in the knee) 24

BASTIEN: Mr. Coloumbe? Mr. Coloumbe?

(Daniel raises his head slowly)

BASTIEN: I’m Detective Sergeant Bastien of the Montreal Police. Meet my partner, Marcel Brochu.

DANIEL: (nodding at Brochu) Bon jour.

BASTIEN: Would you mind coming with us? I’ll read you your rights

(Daniel begins contorting himself slightly, twisting his arms out of the ropes binding him to the cross piece).

Christ, I forgot it again.

(Brocho pulls out a laminated card and begins reading off it)

BROCHU: Mr. Coloumbe, you are suspected of…(hesitates)

BASTIEN: Making threats, aggravated assault, vandalism amounting to $110,000. (Arcand, Jesus of Montreal)

By now, Daniel has one arm free. He removes the title-board which hangs around his neck and hands it down to Det. Bastien. As Brochu continues to read him his rights, Daniel undoes his other arm and then reaches down to Bastien who helps Daniel down from the cross. The action is akin to child gingerly jumping off a tree branch into the arms of a waiting adult.

BASTIEN: Ok?

DANIEL: Ok. Can I remove my make-up?

BASTIEN: Sure, but we’ll go by the rules.

(standing behind him, Brochu begins to handcuff Daniel)

24 The descriptions of non-verbal action in the parentheticals in the scenes are mine.
BROCHU: I wanted to tell you, I really liked the show.

DANIEL: Thanks.

BROCHU: Sure makes you think. Sorry to miss the end.

DANIEL: You can come back.

BROCHU: Yeah.

Here, Daniel does not just let himself down from the cross, but rather does so while calmly claiming authority over the authority-figures. He hands them his properties, braces himself on their shoulders, and invites them back for another performance. All the while, he is stark naked, covered in make-up blood. The authorities are hesitant and flustered, while Daniel remains sweet and gracious. The absurdity and humor of this moment subverts the horror of the crucifixion scene and, in a subtle, carnivalesque move, the fear of systems of authority.

Finally, the Funny Body defeats death and the fear of death, offering instead a promise of regeneration. This of course is depicted in the body of Daniel “going on,” past his death as elements in other people. But the film also underscores this truth, hidden in the music of the end credits. Two young ladies on the metro platform sing the last verse (two sets of rhyming couplets) of the *Stabat Mater*. It sounds like a dirge, and they sing it solemnly. The text, however, is surprisingly contrary to the melody and tone; it forsakes the fear of death, instead choosing praise and heavenly paradise:

While my body here decays
May my soul Thy goodness praise,

While my body here decays,
May my soul Thy goodness praise,
Safe in Paradise with Thee.
Safe in Paradise with Thee. (“Stabat Mater”)

Examining the Grotesque body on the cross is revelatory of the Grotesque Cross. The body on the Cross speaks to the persistently confounding (baffling) nature of the crucifixion as it is tied to the mystery of the nature of Jesus. The ambivalence is purposeful, pointing to the work of the Cross. Here we see the reality of the abject, but witness how it is held in flux; the grotesque body on the Cross insists upon laughter and regeneration. In this chapter I worked towards a concept of the Grotesque Cross by examining how the Cross of Jesus of Montreal is grotesque. In the next chapter, I further define the concept by examining how the presence of the Cross works to grotesque the text/performance/narrative which it inhabits.
CHAPTER THREE. METAMORPHOSIS IN THE MARGINS: THE WORK OF THE GROTESQUE CROSS IN CHRIST IN THE CONCRETE CITY

In Chapter Two, I defined some significant characteristics of the Grotesque Cross by examining key moments in the film Jesus of Montreal. In the process, I elaborated on aspects of the Grotesque Cross pertaining to issues of the grotesque body, namely ambivalence, abjection, and the carnivalesque-funny body. My project in this chapter is similar in that I use a representation of the crucifixion of Jesus to further illustrate the concept of the Grotesque Cross. Here, however, I will focus on tropes that are all related to the Grotesque’s play with and around “the margins of existence”; that is, its tendency to cause disruptions in systems of order via metamorphosis, de-centering, and doubleness.

In On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature, Geoffrey Harpham seeks to sketch the character of the grotesque by examining its function and activity in art and literature. In this chapter, I not only draw from his discoveries, I borrow from his methodology. In other words, I sketch the character of the Grotesque Cross by examining its function and activity in art; in this case, the play script, Christ in the Concrete City. To this end, I focus on key moments of the play text, as well as the narrative and biblical structures the text seeks to represent. Since this chapter deals with performativity—how the Cross as a grotesque functions or performs—certain themes will seem familiar, having been introduced in the Chapter One, under the dramatistic question of “Why was the crucifixion performed?: Performativity of the Cross.” I beg the reader’s indulgence at the redundancy; I not only return to but also elaborate on those topics, explicating specifically grotesque functions of the Cross.
In my Introduction, I summarized Harpham’s findings in his analysis of *grottesche* art, narrowing it down to five “strategies” or functions. My project in this chapter is closely organized by these strategies. As such, I begin each section with a short discussion of the Grotesque characteristic Harpham identified, elaborate on how the Grotesque Cross activates this in the biblical narrative, and conclude with a discussion of how Turner represents this grotesquerie in *Christ in the Concrete City*. I organize these ruminations under the headings The Cross and Doubleness; The Cross Decentered; and Metamorphoses, Mutations and the Carnivalesque Disruptions of the Cross.

*Christ in the Concrete City* was first produced in 1953 by the New Pilgrim Players, the professional theatre company of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain (Turner 3). The play is essentially a dramatization of the Passion narrative. However, Turner’s script neither attempts nor suggests a historical reproduction of a first century A.C.E. event. Indeed, far from attempting a historical, representational recreation of the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus, Turner relies on a number of presentational conventions. He tasks a six-person cast to portray the entire host of individuals from the original event, mandates an extremely minimal set with no curtains, and suggests that the costumes typify the “dress of the modern-world—boiler suits, laboratory coats and the like” (8). The dialogue follows Chamber theatre conventions where most of the lines remain in narrative mode, rather than dramatic. Furthermore, the actors not only step in and out of multiple roles, but also come together at times to function as a chorus, providing exposition, commentary, and a fair amount of self-reflexive critique and contemplation. The title of the play itself cues in a contemporary setting, where “concrete city” is not a specific locale but a general setting as well as a metaphor for the human condition. Turner presents this multi-layered image in the opening lines:
MAN 4: Christ in the concrete city

MAN 1: In the city square of the heart

The heart of the city,

Stands the arrogant, soot and sin stained,

Uncompromising bronze bulk of the Black Prince,

Self’s effigy, which dominates the heart

MAN 2: Beside it, white clad, watches

The Christ.

MAN 1: And the hurrying, rain huddled, job-harassed

Unknowing passers-by in the lamplight

Make choice of the one of the other

Before the last bus of all takes them home

MAN 3: And that is the subject of this play.

Not that incident

But the truth contained in the frame of that incident.

Calvary in your backyard. (Turner 9)

These opening lines offer not only an example of the choral arrangement of voices that Turner constructs throughout, but immediately presents what is simultaneously the inciting incident and major conflict of the play—the rupture between God and human self. However, before delving into this further, I offer a short synopsis of the action of Christ in the Concrete City.

Immediately after the opening lines, Man 4, the self-proclaimed narrator, lays out the meta-frame for the crucifixion narrative. He begins by reciting the opening lines of the Bible to evoke the creation narrative, swiftly covering the creation of humankind in God’s image, its
rebellion against God, and the origin of sin. Other chorus-members join in to point out the origin of sin, and impending death, as the reason that Jesus was incarnated, which is to redeem humankind from the consequences of its rebellion against God. Indeed, in the space of two pages of script, the chorus verbally inscribes highly condensed but recognizable thumbnails on the doctrines of God, sin, and salvation that lead to Jesus’ death on the cross. This meta-narrative is woven throughout the rest of the script, as chorus members address the audience directly and implicate themselves and the audience in the action of the biblical drama of Christ’s arrest, trial, flogging, and crucifixion. The audience is invited to recognize themselves as characters and throughout, and are “reminded” of times when they felt, acted, or thought the same as the characters in crucifixion narrative.

The Passion narrative portion begins with the day before the crucifixion—“So down to the last night, the day before the crucifixion, on a certain Thursday, where we take up the story in a garden of the suburbs of the royal city of Jerusalem”—and closely adheres to the biblical sequence of events described in Chapter 1 (Turner 17). Actors slip into roles as various disciples, griping about being told to stay awake and pray while Jesus goes off on his own. In his absence, the disciples marvel at the agony and fear that seems to have suddenly afflicted Jesus. Soon Jesus is betrayed, captured, and taken away to be tried by Caiaphas. After a lengthy trial scene, Jesus is taken to the governor of Judaea, Pontius Pilate. Pilate offers to release Jesus but the crowd chooses Barabbas. Jesus is then flogged while two women cringe over how the sight of blood which makes their stomachs turn:

MAN 2: Back stripped for the lash.

MAN 1: Flesh waits.

MAN 2: Cat raised.
ALL EXCEPT MAN 4: And whines down with a slash.

WOMAN 1: I can’t bear the sides of blood. It turns my stomach.

WOMAN 2: There, there dear; you needn’t look. You’ll be all right in a minute.

MAN 1: The crack of leather on flesh.

MAN 1: Bruised flesh waits. (Turner 33)

The Chorus then describes Jesus being crowned and robed, and then gathers around him, saying words of mock adulation. What follows is the procession to Calvary, during which Jesus collapses and Simon of Cyrene is coerced into carrying the cross. Jesus is nailed to the cross, as the soldiers executing the crucifixion call out their actions step-by-step. Mary, the mother of Jesus, draws near to the cross asking for permission to approach her son, and then Jesus dies. The narrative proceeds into and ends with the Easter story, where Mary Magdalene announces that Jesus is gone from the tomb. The actors reassemble into a chorus one last time to declare:

MAN 4: Christ is risen indeed, and goes before you into Galilee.

MAN 1: Your Galilee, The Galilee of the modern industrial city.

Of the neon lights and multiple stores.

MAN 2: Where you jostle Christ on the pavement Among the plate-glass windows. (Turner 58)

In the balance of the chapter I argue that in representing the crucifixion of Jesus, Turner has inscribed a grotesque (the Grotesque Cross) into Christ in the Concrete City; as such, the effects of the “function and activity” of this grotesque are evident in it. I begin my argument by
turning to Harpham’s finding that the Grotesque can make conflicting points or speak to multiple functions at one time, which results doubleness (42). Harpham’s conceptualization of doubleness stems from his study of grottesche ornamental art; specifically, his observations regarding gargoyles in church architecture.

The Cross and Doubleness

Following Harpham’s lead, in the following section, I look closely at the grotesque doubleness of gargoyles, and suggest yet another facet of the grotesque function of gargoyles. For the sake of simplicity, I gather this third facet under the term “multiplicities” of gargoyles/Grotesque rather than “tripleness”. The purpose of this reading is to ultimately explicate the function and activity of the Grotesque in the Christ in the Concrete City. As such, the multiplicities of gargoyles offer a helpful parallel framework.

Gargoyles are “architectural grotesques”, stone carvings of fantastical, animal-mixtures. As ornamental features, gargoyles could be expected to serve solely decorative purpose:

   By ornament we generally signify art with decorative rather than significative function; we mean art that doesn’t represent existing or possible subjects, and so does not generate the kind of meaning that is made by connecting art to reality, representations to things represented. In Montaigne’s terms, ornament does not occupy the “best spot,” but rather fills in “empty space”—a border, a frontispiece, a table leg, the surface of a musical instrument, a pilaster. (36)

Gargoyles indeed seem to occupy “empty spaces” atop ridgepoles and outer corners of medieval cathedrals. However, in Romanesque and Gothic architecture, gargoyles are also waterspouts. Designed to keep rainwater from running down the outer walls of a cathedral, they prevent
mortar from being eroded. To perform this function, they are often given the shape of creatures with elongated throats (Benton 8; see fig. 6).

![Gargoyles on the south-west façade of Notre-Dame de Paris. Photograph courtesy of J. Albertos.](image)

Fig. 6. Gargoyles on the south-west façade of Notre-Dame de Paris. Photograph courtesy of J. Albertos.

This aspect of functionality makes the gargoyle a creature of margins: it sits astride two categories, ornamental and functional. If they did not function as waterspouts, and were merely stone carvings of monsters adorning cathedrals, they would be called chimeras (Benton 10). Instead they are simultaneously, and equally, both: an item for decoration and an architectural gutter-spout. From their inception, gargoyles have a doubleness to them. Whether enfolded in

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25 In his discussion of gargoyles, Harpham does not account for the architectural functionality of gargoyles as waterspouts. His discussion of the doubleness begins with and focuses on the ornamental-significative dynamic surrounding gargoyles. Thus, Harpham’s “doubleness” and the way I use it are similar, but slightly offset. I begin with the functional-ornamental doubleness,
the conceptualization and creation, or propitiated via a shift in perspective, grotesques have multiple functions and may be read multiply. Consider this inversely: that the presence of a grotesque may be identified by the doubleness surrounding an artifact, image, or artistic representation. I argue that such is the case in the crucifixion of Jesus writ large, and thus, bleeds into any representation of the Cross, including *Christ in the Concrete City*. To this end, I begin by parsing out the doubleness of the Cross in *Christ in the Concrete City*.

In the Preface to his play, Turner states that he attempts to “portray the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ from three points of view.” He does this by incorporating three plots, or “levels of action” (7). The first is a representation of narrative on a historical level, by which Turner tries to capture the participants, locations, and timeline of the historical crucifixion of Jesus:

MAN 4: In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar

Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, Herod tetrarch

of Galilea, Philip of Ituria, and Lysanius tetrarch of Abilene;

Annas and Caiaphas being High Priests.

MAN 3: Jesus-bar-Joseph, as he was known in the village set out from Nazareth… (16)

Another notable example is when Turner introduces Pilate prior to the scene of Jesus’ trial:

MAN 4: God’s mills grind on. The Christ,

MAN 1: interrogated

MAN 2: struck in the face,

MAN 4: Now is led through the early morning streets of Jerusalem where the

and add the significative function further in the discussion below, thus eventuating in the

“multiplicities” of gargoyles/Grotesque.
shops are hardly open, to the grandiose, white-pillared palace of Pontius Pilate, Roman Governor of the occupied territory of the Judaea, there to await the convenience of the commander of the forces of occupation[…]

WOMAN 1: *(eagerly)* The prisoner, do you think he’ll hang?

MAN 1: Of course, he’ll hang. Caiaphas sentenced him didn’t he? All regular and official. All Pilate’s got to do is say “yes.”

WOMAN 1: And he wouldn’t dare do anything else. He knows which side his bread is buttered.

MAN 1: He’s nothing but a rubber stamp. A ruddy Roman rubber stamp, that’s what. But where is he?...Trust a Roman to keep us waiting.

WOMAN 2: Military governor? Military aunty Fanny! Why doesn’t he hurry up?

WOMAN 1: Perhaps his lordship is having his morning bath, or powdering his Roman nose. (29-30)

In the dialogue above, Turner incorporates several pieces of information which are supported by the historical archive: the Roman occupation of Judaea, the religious authority of Caiaphas as high priest, and the ill-will engendered by Pontius Pilate during his time as prefect of Judaea. In this manner, Turner offers historical thumbnails throughout his text.

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26 Historian Flavius Josephus critiques Pilate for deliberately offending the religious sentiments of the local population during his time as prefect of Judaea. He is recorded to have been summoned to Rome in 36 CE to stand trial for cruelty and oppression (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Pontius Pilate”).
Turner describes the second perspective as “one of universal significance, speaking timelessly to all mankind” (7). To be specific, what he is describing is the spiritual narrative, or redemptive work that is intertwined with, and carried out when, Jesus was crucified. In other words, for Turner, the act of Jesus dying on the cross has meaning and significance beyond that historical and physical event; it is universal and timeless. A vivid example of this second level surfacing amidst the historical narrative occurs immediately after Jesus’ trial before Pilate. Pilate, washing his hands, exonerates himself of having any part in the execution of Jesus. Jesus’ accusers claim responsibility, saying, “His blood be upon us, and our children” (36). At first glance, the scene that follows appears to be catalogue of the “sins” or actions that caused the (historical) crucifixion of Jesus, but Turner’s arrangement of the dialogue suggests further complexity:

MAN 4: The sin of Pilate,

MAN 3: Cowardice and political time-serving.

MAN 4: The sin of Caiaphas,

MAN 2: Spiritual pride and ecclesiastical time-serving

MAN 4: the sins of the soldiers,

And of the crowd.

MAN 2: Brutality.

WOMAN 1: The lust for blood,

WOMAN 2: And blind following the majority.

MAN 4: These sins are not museum specimens, impaled on pins in glass

To be examined at leisure by those interested in religion.

MAN 2: Strange reactions of long ago people
In far away places.

MAN 4: Far from it. They are the sins
Of Acacia Avenue and Laburnum Grove;
Neat, semi-detached sins
Of respectable citizens
Living in respectable rows (37).

The scenario switches between the two levels, a zooming out (universal perspective) and
zooming back in (historical narrative). The “sins” of Pilate, Caiaphas, the soldiers and the crowd
do indeed play a role in the historical crucifixion of Jesus but juxtaposed as they are in the
dialogue, they offer archetypes of sins on a universal, timeless scale: cowardice, political time-
serving, pride, brutality, and the dangers of blindly following a crowd. This catalogue of sins
thus presents the necessity for the redemptive performance of the Cross, which forms part of
Turner’s second level of action. The interweaving of the second level into the first, as exampled
in the scene above is typical of the script as a whole. Indeed, the second level is inextricably
intertwined into the first level of action. It is this feature that points to the doubleness of the
Cross in Christ in the Concrete City.

In the Introduction to this study, I sought to clarify my use of “cross” and “Cross”. The
former is an object upon which a victim is crucified. The latter, “Cross,” encapsulates the event-
work of the crucifixion of Jesus; it holds together the physical event of crucifixion and the work
of redemption that happens through its execution. One can examine the history of the crucifixion
of Jesus apart from its religious context (Turner’s first level), but from the spiritual perspective,
the death of Jesus on a cross and its redemptive function (Turner’s second level) are one and the
same thing. This is the event that Turner seeks to represent in Christ in the Concrete City. Thus,
Turner’s second level of action is from its inception, entirely about doubleness. In emphasizing the first two levels of action in his text, Turner (perhaps inadvertently) makes apparent the doubleness of the crucifixion of Jesus, making the Cross the primary grotesque in the script.

There is, however, a third level of action in *Christ in the Concrete City*, which is the personal perspective. Turner contends that the crucifixion and resurrection events have personal significance, “speaking intimately to the individual in the secret places of his own soul, and urging him to action here and now” (7). Turner presents this idea towards the beginning of the script in the form of expository dialogue:

MAN 1: This play deals with something that happens now.

MAN 2: In the lives of each of us. In the brief light and warmth of human existence, between the darkness of birth and the coldness of death, while the Big Dipper roars down its ultimate slope,

MAN 3: The Son of God is crucified

Both by us, and for us.

MAN 2: And because this is so,

None of us can stand acquitted. (15)

Through the balance of the text, this third level manifests as musings, confessions, and rants. For example, in a scene where Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciples’ struggle to stay awake and pray along with Jesus elides into a personal confession of human escapism in the face of terror and the anxieties of the unknown:

MAN 3: Always that same awful prayer, over and over again.

And the sweat gleaming on his brow, and falling
like drops of blood. I am afraid.

MAN 1: We desire to escape into sleep.

MAN 2: From the terror

MAN 2: From the agony.

MAN 1: Which we do not understand.

MAN 4: And yet again, being in agony, he prostrates himself,

and prays, “Father if this cup cannot pass without

my drinking it, thy will be done.”

MAN 1: We desire to escape into sleep.

MAN 2: Because we are caught up in something bigger than ourselves. (18)

This added level, layered on top of the first two, is fecund for grotesquerie. Once again, a consideration of how gargoyles function as grotesque art is a useful entry-point to explore this concept.

In terms of church architecture, gargoyles had pedagogical importance, especially for the illiterate. Unable to read biblical and theological texts that convey the dangers of unseen evils, gargoyles reminded the parishioners of the presence and dangers of demons:

Gargoyles and chimeras, which fall into the same class as drolleries, are intended to ward off demons on the assumptions that demons, being only human, will be frightened by the same things that frighten us. But they also represent the demonic forces themselves, contrasting with the divine order of the cathedral …Gargoyles scale the cathedral down to human size; they may even be felt to represent the human element itself. They demonstrate that
incoherence and disorder, too, have been attended to, and that motely has a
place in the grand scheme. (Harpham 42)

Thus, the multiplicities of the Grotesque finds its parallel in the multiplicities of gargoyles. They are ludicrous and fearful: their terrifying aspects, scowling faces are frightening; they are also fantastical grotesques—animal-mixtures, sometimes winged—and therefore, clearly not real. As grotesques, they are created by breaking rules and melding together animals. As such, they are and speak to impending chaos. But as gargoyles perched on cathedrals (an edifice to the Christian sense of order and dominance over evil), they portray that chaos has been controlled (44). Having been put to work as conduits for the disposal of waste, they declare that demons and monsters have been subjugated. In this manner, gargoyles play a significative function.

Harpham asserts that such behavior in the Grotesque speaks to the metaphorical relationship between the ornament and the item or structure it decorates: in the hands of the Grotesque, both become equally readable. The text may become ornament for illuminations, and cathedrals pedestals for gargoyles. If gargoyles, ornaments on cathedrals, can become functional and significative, then marginal features in any representation can swap places with central themes. Alternatively, both may be read to have equal agency. Everything is thrown into mystery and possible doubt. Rather than subside into anxiety or despair over the impending chaos, Harpham’s advice is to pursue unity, whilst allowing for the Grotesque, arguing, “the interpreter must, whether he finds [unity] or not, pass through the Grotesque” (43). I contend that by

27 It may be helpful to note that Harpham is intentional in his use of “significative” rather than “symbolic.” Gargoyles in themselves are not symbolic of evil. Their conception as amalgams (chaos) in conjunction with their location on cathedrals (order), together offers a representation chaos being controlled by order. Thus, gargoyles become significative.
incorporating the third level of action, Turner pursues unity in the midst of the grotesquerie perpetuated by the Cross of his script. Whether he intended this or not is debatable; nevertheless the third level of action demonstrates engagement with the grotesqueries I have described above. The first two levels have already portrayed an intertwined doubleness that problematizes any possibility of a single center (main plot) and a neat margin (side-story). Thus, Turner’s third level could be considered his pursuit of unity. He does so by providing a personal (interpretive) experience through the first and second levels of the crucifixion narrative.

Turner conveys the personal by using language and references contemporary to the time and place in which he wrote (Great Britain, in the 1950’s). His frequent use of second personal pronoun, “we” and phrases such as, “you and I” not only implicate the viewer in that narrative, but also personalizes the content. Portraying humankind’s pride, and disdain for the Divine, Turner construes an absurd liturgy of sorts:

MAN 1: Glory to man in the highest

For man is the maker of gadgets.

Hail to the unholy

Who gives us that which we wish to get…

MAN 3: I am the god with the Indiarubber face,

Your grandfather in heaven,

Behold and worship my avuncular benevolence

MAN 1: Thou are the god who disguisest thyself

As a vegetable marrow at the harvest festival.

WOMAN 1: And as Santa Claus at the Kiddie’s festival of Christmas.

MAN 2: Thou art Mars, god of war,
To whom we turn,

During the period of the national emergency.

Here, the facetious liturgy to humankind and the desire for a recognizable, comfortable divine point to the causative pride and rebellion, similar to that which caused the Fall (which, in Christian doctrine, eventuated the need for a savior). In this way, Turner implicates the viewer-reader in the story writ large. In the synopsis to *Christ in the Concrete City*, I noted that Turner begins with the Genesis account of the creation and the Fall. Recurring references to the Fall contribute to the third-level of action, speaking of the personal agency and activity of individuals (in relation to the first two levels of action) while simultaneously drawing attention to the grotesquerie inherent in what Wilson Yates calls the “myth of the Fall.”

In his introduction to *The Grotesque in Art and Literature: Theological Reflections*, Yates intricately argues for and demonstrates how the Grotesque interplays with three of the over-arching Christian myths: the myth of Creation, the myth of the Fall, and the myth of Redemption. Yates asserts that as creatures of the Fall, humankind is a fallen, distorted version of the essential perfection in which it was originally created. He points out a parallel to Lucifer, a fallen angel; both humankind and Lucifer are deformed embodiments of their former selves. Accordingly, evil is not a separate force but identified as “distorted good” (55). Yates proceeds to describe what this new grotesquerie, fallen humankind, looks like:

We are unable to accept ourselves as we have been created, seeking to become more than we can become and or to be less than we are called to be. The litany is well-known: we deny and distort our own power, knowledge and virtue, claiming for them an absoluteness; we deny our own mortality and death as finite boundaries of our existence; we deny the unity of creation and fall into alienating
dualisms of body and spirit, male and female, the individual and community; we deny the ambiguities of life, seeking a way of being that is controlled and perfect.

We twist the fabric of our existence justifying the violation and alienation we visit upon ourselves and others. (55-56)

Yates goes on to point out that the language that describes humans in the post-fall state is also the language used to describe forms of the grotesque: distortion, exaggeration, twisted, and broken. These elements of human distortion erupt to the surface briefly in Turner’s script. During the course of Jesus’ trial before Caiaphas, the by-standers marvel at Jesus’ silence before his accusers and judges. The chorus gathers to ponder what the charges against would look like if they were on trial, and admit to raising up a “God in the image of self” (26):

\[
\begin{align*}
MAN 1: & \text{Let us fall to our prayers.} \\
& \text{O Lucifer, son of the morning,} \\
& \text{Image of man on the mirror of God} \\
ALL: & \text{We worship and adore thee} \\
MAN 1: & \text{This is the sort of God we like.} \\
WOMAN 1&2: & \text{This is the sort of God we can worship.} \\
MAN 3: & \text{His face is our face.} \\
MAN 2: & \text{Because we made his face to our image. (Turner 28)}
\end{align*}
\]

Knowing they should reflect the image of God and deigning to do so, the chorus (here representing the third, personal level of action) reveals how they distort the image of the Divine itself, altering it to suit their wants. In insisting upon the presence of the Fall in his representation of the Cross, I believe Turner makes a space for the individual (reader) to consider their own distortions and brokenness as a vital part of the Cross narrative.
By way of the third-level of action, Turner wades into the thick of anachronism, effectively portraying doubt, guilt, and fear as they manifest in the mundane: slipping out the back door when a preacher comes to visit, escaping into “too much beer,” or the “study of comparative religions” (20-21). The presence of the historical, spiritual and personal, all woven together is jarring, enlightening, alienating, and, at times, absurd. But ultimately, the third level works through the immensity of the historical first level, the eminence of the theological second level (and the grotesque doubleness of both together), to offer an imminent, personal rendering of the Cross. By this, the viewer is made present and given agency in the representation of the Cross.

At the risk of frivolity, I contend that the Cross in Christ in the Concrete City is Turner’s gargoyle: an amalgam of three narrative levels, which can be read variously and provides multiple functions. Where Harpham’s gargoyle has ornamental, utilitarian, and significative functions, Turner’s representation of the crucifixion illuminates the Grotesque Cross as multiply historical, spiritual, and personal. All in all, the construction of the text (through the intertwined three levels) is demonstrative of the multiplicities inherent in a rendering of the Grotesque Cross. Indeed, the grotesqueness of the multiple levels of action bleeds into the very dramaturgy and structure of the text, manifesting grotesqueries of form. For example, the first level of action, the historical event of the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus, takes a relatively large narrative and renders it for representation by a cast of six actors. This necessitates a good deal of compression in re-telling the story, a fact that Turner acknowledges as he describes his process: “I have taken large liberties with the Gospel narrative, finding myself forced to compress violently, and even in some cases, to put phrases on lips where they do not belong, in order to get facts into the play” (7). The violent compression in the act of creating this script is revelatory. There is physicality to
it; the forcing together of disparate elements, and “putting phrases on lips where they do not belong” is reminiscent of the disconcerting animal-human, human-plant hybrids in *grottesche* art. Moreover, the dialogue in the script is largely self-reflexive about this move:

MAN 3: Sometimes we are Pilate.

MAN 2: And Caiaphas

MAN 3: And the crowd

MAN 2: On a certain Friday and Sunday, round about the year thirty.

WOMAN 1: And sometimes we are plain you and me, on New Year’s Eve at a party, or wherever it might be. (15)

Both the self-reflexivity and the double-casting (or triple-casting, as it might be), serve one function broadly speaking: they disrupt the possibility of discrete characters, both between different characters and the characters and self. The notion of “us” as readers and “them” as characters (participants) in the gruesome story of the trial and execution of Jesus Christ is superseded by a playwriting style that erases such distinctions.

Disrupted boundaries and shifting margins are also the common themes in the second and third primary sections of this chapter: The Cross Decentered, and Metamorphoses, Mutations and the Carnivalesque Disruptions of the Cross. Before proceeding to those sections, I must first offer a summary of Harpham’s discoveries regarding how the Grotesque works to disrupt systems of organization.

As noted in the Introduction, Harpham conducts a historiographical analysis of artwork inspired by the *grottesche* style. His observations on centers and margins stem from a close study
of frescoes and architectural ornamentation, particularly the wall and ceiling paintings in the Vatican loggias (see fig. 7).  

28 “Ornamentation” here takes on synonymous function, standing in for art that features intertwining of humans and vegetation, plant and animals, animals and humans, as well as fantasy creatures and monsters. This style was predominantly used for decoration purposes rather than as the subject of a painting. In fact, when seen in art, the grotesque/grottesche style is literally marginal to art. Whether as fantasy chimeras or plant-human-animal amalgams, both forms appear marginal to structure (stone chimeras on cathedral towers) or composition (the profuse, swirling borders of illuminated manuscripts), and are meant to exist as decoration.
Fig. 7. *Grottesche* ornamentation on a pilaster in the Vatican Loggia, featuring the melding of plant, animal and human elements. Detail engraving by Marcello Ferraro.

An incongruous pairing of Raphael’s Bible-themed main panels, and the flanking *grottesche*-inspired (pagan) ornamentation of Giovanni da Udine informs Harpham’s vital observations on the Grotesque and margins (48). He contends that:

> [grotesqueries] stand at a margin of consciousness between the known and the unknown, the perceived and the unperceived, calling into question the adequacy of our ways of organizing the world, of dividing the continuum of experience into knowable particles. (3)

Yates explicates this further, pointing out that grotesqueries defy the categories normally used to make sense of things. Hence logical, physical, and ontological systems are not dispensed with, but distorted in the presence of and by that which is grotesque (Yates 30). Boundaries that organize these systems (by which we define and structure our world, and our understanding of it) are not dispensed with entirely. Rather, they begin to shift. I will trace the presence of disrupted systems, and shifting boundaries below, in the section “Metamorphoses, Mutations and Carnivalesque Disruptions of the Cross.”

Of Harpham’s findings regarding the Grotesque as strategy of contradiction in art, I have described one function above, which is, the Grotesque can make conflicting points or speak to multiple functions at one time, resulting in a feeling of doubleness (42). The strategies that I focus on in the next sections pertain to how the Grotesque’s ability to decenter and destabilize.
To be specific, the Grotesque, represented in Harpham’s study by ornamentation literally in the margins around paintings, can exist independently of the center, and can even detract from the center (see fig. 8).

Fig. 8. Marginal illuminations of chimeras, from *The Luttrell Psalter*.

This independence is what destabilizes the center (34). Furthermore, the Grotesque can provide an alternative center, and one that invites questions. In the section below, I consider how the Cross as a grotesque elicits the decentering and destabilizing characteristic of the Grotesque, and how Turner’s treatment of the Cross in *Christ in the Concrete City* marks this.
The Cross Decentered

In my discussion of doubleness in Turner’s script, I noted that the Cross is the primary grotesque in *Christ in the Concrete City*. “Primary” normally would imply a sense of centrality, a spot lit image-event in a work of art; this does not hold true for the crucifixion of Jesus, where the image, event, and work of the Cross are always intertwined. In other words, the crucifixion of Jesus, being a grotesque, would trouble the notion of a stable center. This holds true in the source narrative (the biblical story), as well as a representation of the Cross; the Grotesque Cross grotesques its own representation.\(^{29}\) Once again, we can trace this grotesquerie by examining for evidence that the Grotesque is at work in the art. Here it can be traced by the sense of ambivalence concerning the death of Jesus.

When considered only as an historical event, the crucifixion narrative is sorrowful and even a cause for anger: his mother weeps, his friends are left bewildered and lost, and the reader bemoans Pilate’s lack of preventative action. Zoomed out to the overarching narrative of the biblical story, Jesus’ life and death on earth can appear as just the fulfillment of prophecy. More so, it becomes a source of relief and joy as Jesus’ death is closely followed by his resurrection. As such, the centrality of the death of Jesus is skewed by the flanking (marginal) events: the Fall of humankind which necessitates the crucifixion, as well as the resurrection and prophesied return of Jesus as king. Consider the implication of such a decentering in light of my study in Chapter One. There, I detailed the physical violations Jesus suffered; the physical reality of the event, his crucifixion, is tremendous. And yet, the believer is asked to consider the horrors of the

\(^{29}\) In an effort to avoid redundancy, I direct the reader to Chapter One on the performativity of the Cross.
Cross and immediately, if not simultaneously, receive the joys of it.\textsuperscript{30} Ambivalence is the key outcome of such a construct.

Likewise, Turner’s representation of the Cross, elicits ambivalence by evoking a variety of responses. For example, Turner takes time detailing the trial scene, the flogging, and the long walk to Golgotha. He incorporates anachronistic references to war crimes, Nazi concentration camps, and the Gulag archipelago (47-8). He scripts Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross as well:

\begin{quote}
WOMAN 2: May we come closer, sir?
MAN 1: Have you any special interest in the condemned?
WOMAN 1: I am his mother.
MAN 1: (Taken aback) Oh, I see! But—madam—would it be wise?
I mean...(unable to put into words what he wants to say)
WOMAN 1: He is my son.
\end{quote}

In providing recognizable and, in some cases, more contemporary examples of human isolation and pain, as well as the maternal devotion of Mary, Turner makes this scene evocative. The sorrow is relatable and, thus, immediate for the reader. Significantly, with the very next line, Turner moves on to Easter morning and the resurrection immediately following the death of Jesus:

\begin{quote}
MAN 4: He took Jesus down from the cross, wrapped him in linen, and laid him in a tomb, rolling a stone across the entrance
WOMAN 1: (Eagerly) And early on Sunday morning, when the women went to the tomb…
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{30} This is particularly characteristic of Reformed theological tradition (Sloyan 3).
WOMAN 4: Oh yes, when they got there, the found the stone rolled back and the body gone. And a young man or an angel or something there. Isn’t that right? (Turner 55)

In this manner, the reader is swept from the moment of horror and mourning, quite rapidly, into the joy and triumphs of the resurrection narrative. Thus, the crucifixion of Jesus is decentered in Turner’s rendering as well.

Taking Harpham at his word, the decentering in both these narratives is not without purpose. Indeed, Harpham’s entire project is to point to the Grotesque as a strategy in art. He contends that in destabilizing the center, the Grotesque can provide an alternative center, and one that invites questions, a search for meaning. In apprehending the Cross of Jesus, I myself experience the polarity of these responses (horror and joy) with weirdness that I would describe as part shame and part wonder: how could such a cruel and perverse death ever be a source of joy to anyone, let alone thousands of people over two millennia?

This particular “search for meaning” has occupied religion historians and theologians since the death of Jesus. The Apostle Paul’s writings are the first expositions on the relationship between the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Gerard Sloyan’s The Crucifixion of Jesus: History, Myth, Faith is a contemporary example of this search; his discussion on the centuries of debate over doctrinal mysteries occupy several pages. The Grotesque, however, encounters mystery and accepts it as a part of its form, not a puzzle to be solved. Harpham contends that the Grotesque “occupies a gap or an interval, it is the middle of a narrative of emergent comprehension…the paradigm crisis is the interval of the Grotesque writ large” (18-20).

This temporal aspect of the Grotesque becomes evident in the ambivalence of the Decentered Cross: somewhere alongside the construction of the literal events of the crucifixion
of Jesus, there occurs a spiritual, transformative one. Both can be read equally during the “somewhere alongside;” making the ambivalent interval the paradigm crisis of the Grotesque Cross. Harpham’s conclusions to his analysis of the loggias points to another grotesque visioning that proves helpful:

The act of comparing a bit of ornamental whimsy to one of the world’s greatest paintings is itself instructive: only the concept of the grotesque could bring them together. And together they teach us that the Grotesque is embodied in the act of transition, of metonymy becoming metaphor, or the margin swapping places with the center. It is embodied in a transformation of duality into unity, of the meaningless into the meaningful. (Harpham 71)

To a believer, Jesus’s death as a discrete central event is meaningless and pathetic. Seen as Grotesque, which is “embodied in the act of transition” (painful death transitioning into resurrection and life), it acquires meaning and significance.

**Metamorphoses, Mutations and the Carnivalesque Disruptions of the Cross**

The Grotesque lies in the margins created by distorted and shifting systems. If the Cross is a grotesque, as I contend it is, it would occur in the margins “created by distorted and shifting systems.” In the following section, I conduct a brief investigation of the organizing systems surrounding the Cross. In other words, I will explicate which margins were mutated or shifted to allow for the event-work of the Cross. My purpose is to identify what the Cross disrupts and how it perpetuates the metamorphoses of the margins. I consider Turner’s *Christ in the Concrete City* alongside this discussion to show how a representation of the Cross also manifests this grotesquerie.
Close to the beginning of the text, Turner introduces language that is suggestive of disruptions:

MAN 4: From the beginning God has interfered.

Our story is the drama of God gate-crashing the petty concerns of men (10)

“Interfered” and “gate-crashing” both draw attention as reminiscent of the work of the Grotesque. Taking Turner’s word choice as deliberate, I considered the “beginning” that Turner references here, in order to determine how and what God was “gate-crashing.” Indeed, a clear system does emerge at the time of the Fall: it comprised of the divide between holiness/wholeness (God) and brokenness/sin (humanity). Turner’s accusation that God “interfered” seems to imply that God, in maintaining and pursuing a relationship with humankind post-Fall, disrupts the boundaries between holiness and sinfulness. “From the beginning” suggests an ongoing behavior; the simplest way to trace this interference is by considering the covenants God establishes with humankind. Once again, the scope of my study requires me to distill theoretically and historically complex concepts and doctrines; here, that act of distillation concerns covenants and the manner in which they metamorphose.

First of all, a covenant is “an unchangeable, divinely imposed legal agreement between God and man that stipulates the conditions of their relationship” (Grudem 515). I mentioned the Mosaic Covenant in Chapter One. It is one of the six covenants that are recorded in the Bible: The Abrahamic, the Mosaic, the Priestly, the Deuteronomic, the Davidic, and the New. Scholars including Yates make a convincing argument for God’s relationship with Adam being the first covenant. The biblical text shows that God gave Adam and Eve “a binding set of provisions” that defined the relationship between them: “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of
the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall
die” (*English Standard Version*, Gen. 2:16-17) (Grudem 516). Fully understood, “death” here is
extensive. It covers physical, spiritual, and eternal deaths (516).

According to the stipulations of the first covenant, Adam and Eve (and all of humanity
through them) earned eternal separation from God. The situation, while sad, speaks to a system
that is clear and simple. However, it loses its stability when God “interferes.” He pursues the
relationship he started with humankind, ultimately establishing the Mosaic Covenant. The
Mosaic covenant was an agreement between God and the Israelites. It was a set of detailed laws,
which included a sacrificial system; animals and birds which fit certain criteria (age,
unblemished plumage, etc.) were set apart and offered as sacrifices to pay for the sins of the
people. As noted in Chapter One, the sacrifices functioned merely to hold God’s justice-seeking
wrath at bay, while the law as a whole served as a custodian of the people, restraining their sin.
According to this system, an individual was culpable for their sins before God; and an individual
was incapable of saving themselves according to the law; and the law, while not wrong, was not
sufficient to save people from the justice of God (Grudem 521).

The Mosaic Covenant eventually morphs one last time, making way for the New
Covenant. The New Covenant can be best summarized through a prophetic passage from the
biblical book of Jeremiah, written as a first person declaration from God, and recorded by
Jeremiah:

“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new
covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant
that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring
them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke…“I will put my law
within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people…For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jer 31:31-34)

The New Covenant is embodied and fulfilled by the sacrificial death of Jesus.

When seen through the lens of the Grotesque, the entire sequence which I described above is replete with grotesquerie. The Fall divides humankind from God, but instead of abandoning humankind, God disrupts this divide, and pursues relationship through covenants. Next, a set of boundaries (laws and regulations) are established by the Mosaic Covenant, but these boundaries also mutate to allow for the New Covenant. Then, in the shifting margins between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant, the Cross emerges. The Cross marks (and simultaneously is) the final grotesque disruption: The crucifixion of Jesus results in the specifically carnivalesque restructuring of the Mosaic legal system.

In the Introduction I summarized the carnivalesque, noting in particular the ways in which it presents the “world, turned upside down.” Jesus’ redemptive work not only occurs within the impasse created by the Mosaic Law, it carnivalizes the system, simultaneously satisfying it and subverting it. As the perfect sacrifice Jesus met the requirements of the law, and then rendered it obsolete (the Cross initiates the New Covenant). Ruth Coates, author of *Christianity in Bakhtin* explicates this carnivalesque nature of the Cross:

Indeed, Christianity, at its inception, may be viewed as nothing other than the materialization of God and a degradation, debasement of the Old Testament world-view. In the incarnation, heaven is brought down to earth; ahistorical, metaphysical truths enter into the realm of the spatial and temporal limitation, and are thereby divested of their power to distance and to terrify the believer…The
‘high, spiritual, ideal, abstract’ philosophy of the Temple Judaism is transformed by Christ into a carnivalesque, experiential philosophy. (133)

The incarnational aspect of the Cross that Coates notes above, is captured in Turner’s portrayal of the crucifixion of Jesus. As soldiers nail Jesus to the cross, they speak:

MAN 2: One blow
MAN 3: Hammer blow on the nail head
MAN 4: The right hand of God transfixed for our sins
MAN 1: Left hand, sergeant.
MAN 3: Left hand, sir.
MAN 2: Palm open, the point of the nail in the palm.
MAN 4: The open palm of the free-giving hand of God
MAN 3: One blow
MAN 2: One blow
MAN 1: Hammer blow on the nail head
MAN 2: Hand nailed to the wood
MAN 4: God’s open arms, transfixed in beseeching. (Turner 50)

In this scene, Man 4 plays Jesus. His enunciation of phrases such as, ‘the right hand of God,” “the free giving hand of God,” “God’s open arms” suggests that Turner is deliberate in pointing to the incarnated God on the Cross. Ultimately, Turner begins his representation of the Cross with a God who gate-crashes and interferes in the drama of humankind, who then becomes an “God who is a person, breaking and entering our lives,” and then, in a carnivalesque coup de force, ends up on a cross, beseeching on behalf of humankind (28). At the risk of
oversimplifying, Turner’s rendition of the Grotesque Cross portrays a God whose engagement with humankind is characterized by the Grotesque.

Turner’s treatment of the crucifixion in *Christ in the Concrete City* makes evident various attributes of the Cross as a grotesque. As such the text becomes an ideal object by which to illustrate the grotesqueries in and around the margins of order and meaning-making. It offers the perspective that a personal experience of the Cross is not marginal, but intertwined with the historical and theological functions of the Cross. *Christ in the Concrete City* maintains an ambivalence response to the death of Jesus, but in doing so, re-inscribes the transitional, metaphorical potential of the Cross. Finally, *Christ in the Concrete City* points to the disruptive nature of the Cross.
CHAPTER FOUR. HOLY MONSTERS: THE GROTESQUERIE OF WEARING THE CROSS

In this chapter, I continue and conclude my analysis of the Cross, through the lens of the Grotesque, by focusing on the theme of monstrosity. As are most aspects of the Grotesque, “monstrosity” is a multiplicitous and varied term. The nature of monsters as chimerical (i.e., amalgams of constitutive beings) makes them creatures that exist on the margins and between discrete categories. As such, monstrosity not only evokes responses such as fear, anxiety, and ambivalence, it gathers into itself closely aligned concepts of alterity, otherness, and estrangement, which are also frequently mentioned in association with the grotesque. While my focus in this chapter is on grotesque monstrosity, themes from the previous chapters, such as the rupture of systems of organization and the grotesque body, are invariably manifest. Also as in those chapters, the object of study is a performed and performative representation of the crucifixion of Jesus. Here, however, I move away from the performative grotesque cross as manifest within cinematic and theatrical representation, and look instead to the representation as an everyday, embodied practice, specifically, Cross-wearing.\(^{31}\) In other words, in this chapter I examine Cross-wearing as a performance with performative potential. My contention is that the performative act of wearing a Cross makes evident the (monstrous) grotesquerie of the Cross, making Cross-wearing an exemplar or testament to the Grotesque Cross.

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\(^{31}\) As noted in the Introduction, I examine this act as it is performed by those for whom the crucifixion and sacrifice of Jesus has personal spiritual resonance, hence “Cross-wearing” as opposed to “cross-wearing.” The occasional use of the phrase, “cross-wearing” is deliberate, and the purpose will be apparent from the context.
As I noted in the Introduction, this chapter will feature a methodological and tonal shift. Guided by the perpetually discursive and body-specific manner in which the Grotesque manifests itself, I feel it is a propos to examine the grotesquerie of the crucifixion as it has and is filtered, sometimes jarringly so, through my understanding and my body. Thus, as I offer an autoethnographic account of my historical and contemporaneous experiences as a Cross-wearer, I will reflect on my personal Cross-wearing, and bring that journey alongside this current inquiry. This is more than an exercise in self-reflexivity. My purpose is to consider an alternative interpretation of the act, where Cross-wearing is not just a performance of religious identity, but also a representation of the grotesquerie of the Cross. Following the exhortations of performance scholar and practitioner, Tami Spry, the autoethnographic inquiry that follows is a “interweaving of narrative and theory” (Spry 713). The narratives emerge from my engagement with the questions singer/song-writer Michael W. Smith presented to me as a child, “why do you wear the cross? What is it you’re trying to say?” As I think through my responses to these questions, I draw on a network of theories designed to explore the monstrous Grotesque including cultural studies, performance and theatre theory, and theology. I have further shaped this inquiry into a piece of performative writing. Before I explain why, allow me to clarify what I mean by “performative writing.”

Performative writing is often characterized by its attempt to convey the intricacies of the discourse via its inscription on the page and through the use of language, enacting rather than simply stating or describing. In her article “Performing Writing,” Della Pollock offers a helpful overview of the concept by defining six “excursions” into performative writing. In sum, it is evocative (it uses language to convey worlds and experiences to the reader); metonymic (it is representative of a whole idea, object or person or experience; it does not aspire to be
summative); subjective (in this case, subjective describes the focus on “performed relationships between or among subjects”); nervous (unable to settle into clear, linear discourse, performative writing “anxiously crosses various stories, texts, intertexts” and traverses spatial and temporal borders); citational (it tends towards pastiche, and portrays its indebtedness to previous writing); and consequential (something new happens as a result of the writing; thus, unlike rhetoric, the consequences depend on the audience-reader and cannot be preemptively gauged) (Pollock 80-95). Above all else, Pollack insists upon the ability of performative writing to restore language to the arena performance and “corporeal history” (74). Thus, by locating it on the body, it is similar to oral history and some types of ethnography. Working to analyze personal experiences in order to understand cultural experiences, performantive writing is imminently corporeal, historical, and discursive. All these are features shared by the Grotesque. As such, it is a useful form for communicating the findings of my project.

Through this study thus far, I have worked to convey the sheer performativity of the Grotesque in its ability to have an effect on the scholarly and artistic landscapes it inhabits; indeed, it should come as no surprise that the characteristics of performative writing should bear a marked resemblance to the behavior of the Grotesque, especially in terms of it being evocative, metonymic, nervous, and citational. The enterprise of this final chapter required analyzing an embodied discursive practice (wearing Crosses), by describing the activity of the Grotesque (the Grotesque Cross), through an autoethnographic lens (personal historical experience). This chapter also attempts to relay my experiences as I encountered and engaged with the theories of the Grotesque, as well as my shifting theologies and thoughts on the Cross. I have attempted to convey the “lived intertextuality” of my various roles in life: daughter, pastor’s child, Indian girl/woman, and theatre artist and scholar. With all these at play in the context of my enterprise,
performative writing offers an “important, dangerous and difficult” but ultimately generative intervention into representing the complexities of the project I have undertaken (75).

To be clear, my purpose here is not merely to convey a personal experience or narrative. Rather, I analyze my experiences as a self-conscious Cross-wearer to excavate the interaction between the monstrous Grotesque and the Cross of Jesus. Cross-wearing variously evokes, reveals, or initiates the monstrous grotesqueries associated with the Cross of Jesus. In the previous chapter, I argued that the presence of the Grotesque Cross might be noted by the grotesque activity it perpetuates in the art/performance/narrative landscape that it inhabits. The piece below witnesses my excavation of the experiences and moments when the Grotesque Cross around my neck metaphorically declared its presence. The narrative sketches below are my tactic to evoke these moments so that they might be held up for analysis. To that end, they are interspersed with theorized writing by which I explicate how those moments revealed the aspects of monstrous Grotesque or its activity. The piece of performative writing that comprises the balance of this chapter, which I have titled, “This is My Body. Why is it Wearing A Cross?” is loosely chronological in that I begin with my narratives that present my experiences as a young Cross-wearer and then move forward through time. As such, the theoretical discussions in Part 1 and Part 2 are indeed products of hindsight analysis. Parts 3 and 4 convey a burgeoning and more contemporary awareness of the intersections between the crucifixion of Jesus and the Grotesque.

As a piece of performative writing, “This is My Body. Why is it Wearing A Cross?” is a journey through discovering and making sense of Cross-wearing. As such, I have shied away from signposting my argument in a traditionally academic manner. Instead, micro-narratives, abrupt transitions between theory and story, temporary cliffhangers, and seemingly random
confessionals are woven through the theoretical contemplations to convey my dialogic, discursive, and experiential process of discovery.

The piece below is divided into five parts: Preamble; Part 1: Grotesque Shrines and Portents; Part 2: The Cross-wearer as Alien; Part 3: Evil, Estrangement and Unmasking the Demons Within; and Part 4: Holy Monsters, which serves as an Epilogue. The Preamble is a brief memoir that introduces the recurring question that frames this piece: “This is my body. Why is it wearing a Cross?” Parts 1 through 3 and the Epilogue all work towards answering this question, and in the process explicate an aspect of monstrosity. With the exception of the Preamble, all the parts loosely follow a pattern. They begin with an autobiographical sketch of some sort: creative non-fiction prose, personal narrative, an account of family histories, renditions of inner-monologues, and poetic meditations are all forms that I have used. Around my late teens I began to cognitively process complex philosophies by engaging in dialogue with them—sometimes in my head, sometimes out loud, sometimes by playing devil’s advocate on a topic with unsuspecting (usually Sunday-school) classmates. I have incorporated some of these dialogues as well. The sketches then transition (sometimes jarringly so) into theoretical considerations surrounding the moment.

Since this piece is about the monstrous grotesque, it seems prudent to offer some background on the etymology of “monster.” The word is derived from the 12th century monstrum, meaning “divine omen, portent, sign.” The French root, monere means, “to warn.” Both were used in the context to abnormal animals and humans, wherein such creatures were regarded as signs or portents to impending evil (“monster,” Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology). In the early 14th century, “monster” was used to refer to malformed animals or creatures afflicted with birth defects. Only later in the same century was the word used to refer to
imaginary animals such as centaurs, griffins, and other chimerical fantasies. In the 1520’s “monstrous” began to be applied to largeness. The Old English monster Grendel was an aglæca, where “aglæc” is related to terms for calamity, distress, or terror. Thus, it can be seen that “monstrosity”, especially as I have drawn it in to my present discourse, extends to more than frightening creatures. Monstrosity can portend or “points to” something; the term covers deformations, abnormalities, largeness, and amalgamations.

The beginning of Part 1 will seem familiar as I reprise a passage from the Introduction to this study, Michael W. Smith’s song and his question that prompted my self-awareness as a Cross-wearer. In this section I consider portentousness and largeness as facets of the Grotesque Cross. I look back on a childhood experience as a Cross-wearer that prompted the query as to what the Cross around my neck was a portent to, or sign of. I draw from Jack Santino’s concept of “spontaneous shrines” to discuss how Cross-wearing makes the wearer a shrine, and how this is portentous. Next in this section I recall a conversation with a Catholic classmate, which brings the relationship between the crucifix and the bare-Cross, such as the one I wore, further into focus. Rather than doctrinal differences, the relationship between the two emblems points to how the Cross functions as a portent. In Part 2, adolescent conversations surrounding my Cross-wearing reveals inter-cultural gaps and identity crises, leading to discussion over alterity and alienation. I consider monstrous “deformations” metaphorically to convey the experience of living in margins of identity, specifically national and religious identity. Part 2 outlines the process by which Cross-wearing led me to accept the grotesque experience of monstrosity and being an alien as my norm.

My narrative in Part 3 also begins with a reprise of a passage from the Introduction, namely, the story the plumbing-sealant cross that I made, and my insistence that I could wear a
cross simply for aesthetic purposes. This section introduces my awareness of theories of the Grotesque, and marks a crisis provoked by the song, *John Wayne Gacy, Jr.* by Sufjan Stevens. Steven’s song prompts the suggestion that the listeners, the universal “we,” are not that different from John Wayne Gacy Jr. This section is the most labyrinth-like as I attempt to evoke my original experience through the writing. This experience occurred in the intersection of hearing the song, processing Steven’s horrifying contention, and then discerning a Kayserian grotesque interpretation almost simultaneously. To this end, I script an inner-monologue and an imagined dialogue with Grotesque theorist Wolfgang Kayser through the narrative of hearing and processing the lyrics of the song. This, in the original experience and as it is conveyed here, prompts an investigation into Original Sin and its relation to monstrosity, inner demons, and Kayserian estranged worlds, and how that has bearing for the Cross-wearer. Part 4 is an epilogue of sorts. It describes how, for a believing audience, the Cross initiates transition and metamorphosis, turning a believer into a “holy monster.” “Monstrosity” in Part 4 refers to chimerical creatures, amalgams. Thus, *This is My Body. Why is it Wearing A Cross?* is part of my larger critical enterprise, to develop an understanding of the Grotesque Cross.

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(Preamble)

“On the night that Jesus was betrayed, he took the bread and giving thanks . . .”

I wonder how many times I have seen my dad perform communion; I wish I had counted. I loved watching him do it. I remember his hands as he held up the bread and then tore it. As a child, I remember feeling special because those hands that held the bread, I got to hold them when we crossed streets.

“This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me . . .”
I remember feeling silence, as if a ring around where he stood got small and tight. And it was just him and the body of Christ, and the rest of us got to watch. He has a beautiful voice; when he did benedictions and communion, it would begin to soar a little, almost like he could barely hold on to it. Eventually, I memorized the words and could mouth them along with him.

“This is my body…”

_THIS IS MY BODY. WHY IS IT WEARING A CROSS?_

**Part 1: Shrines and Portents**

“Where do you stand?

*What is your statement?*

*What is it you’re trying to say...?*

For some it’s simply something to wear around your neck

*Just a chain. Jewelry*

*Is it decoration?*

*Is it an icon?*

*Or proclamation*

*An icon of what?”*

The lyrics quoted above are the words of Grammy award-winning singer and song-writer, and my childhood heart-throb, Michael W Smith. From the song, “Cross of Gold,” off of his 1993 album, _Change Your World_. As kid, this song was my banner, my call to arms. After meditating on the lyrics, my ten-year-old mind analyzed and made a conclusion about what the
song was about: The cross means something. And if you weren’t going to make a “stand” or make a “statement,” if you did not know what you were trying to say, you probably shouldn’t wear the cross. I knew what I was trying to say: “I am a Christian! You should know it!”

It turns out that 1993 might have been a good year to be Christian in Bombay.

The bombing of a mosque, the Babri Masjid, led to a flare-up of communal tensions at the end of December of 1992. The tensions subsided for a short time, only to erupt into brutal Hindu-Muslim riots in the January of the new year. According to the Srikrishna Report, the death toll from the riots was 900 (Srikrishna). I was not in India during these events; I was a middle-schooler living in Illinois. The only reason I heard of the riots at the time they happened was because my father had travelled to India for dissertation research. The terror and shock of those days intruded into my idyllic existence—but only for a few hours until we received word that after landing in Bombay, my father immediately made his way south. My father graduated in the spring of 1993 and accepted a pastoral position at a church in Bombay. We arrived in Bombay at the burst of a monsoon, a few months after the riots had subsided. While the physical aftermath of the riots was almost erased, the stories, gossip, and tension manifest in the city gave glimpses of the horror of those days. Since the tensions were largely between Hindus and Muslims, I naively assumed that being Christian in India was safest.

My youthful interpretation of the situation was short-lived. Stories of Christians being persecuted in regions of northern India and Pakistan became weekly fare. In 1999 an Australian Christian missionary, Graham Staines, was burned to death while sleeping in his car. His sons, Timothy and Phillip were with him in the car. They were younger than me, and on Christmas vacation, the night they were burned alive. Had my parents sent us to the Christian boarding
school nestled in the lush hills of Ooty, they would have been our school-mates. But my parents kept us with them, in the monstrous mega-city of Bombay.

At no other time or place in my life did the intersecting ideas of monstrosity—revulsion, portents, dread, deformity, and the divine—weave so inextricably than they did those first few years in Bombay. Smith’s challenging query – “tell me why you wear that cross of Gold” – looked very different India-side than it did States-side (Smith, *Cross of Gold*, 1993). In the States, I believed that representing my faith was important because people often treated religion with a degree of privacy, or even embarrassment. But in India, I was part of crowd of openly Hindu, Muslim, Christian (Catholic and Protestant), and Buddhist worshippers. Some were devout, some were nominal, and some were radical fundamentalists. Regardless, religion was public, social, and communal. Whatever the consequences, people wore their religion on their sleeves, or to be more literal—on their heads, foreheads, and around their necks. In India, the Cross was not a symbol in a vacuum; it was one in a landslide of religious objects. “Tell me why you wear that Cross of Gold”: the question was the same, but it seemed to me that the answer had to change.

Whether worn around the neck, tattooed into the skin, or traced on the forehead in ash, Cross-wearers do more than just bear a simple design of two intersecting lines on their bodies. They carry with them a sign, a symbol, a story and a history. Wearing a cross around the neck is particularly significant when considered alongside other neck-hanging associations: millstones, lynching, and leashes. The Cross lays against one’s chest; whether made of cold metal or some other material, the item has physical presence against the skin, as well as proximity to the biologically important and emotionally acclaimed organ—the heart. According to religion scholar and theorist Catharine Bell, the embodied nature of bearing the cross in such a way is the
foundation of ritual, thus making the wearer, the ritual agent (Bell 93). In wearing a cross, the ritual agent wears a miniature replica of an execution instrument.

Though mute, this ritual nevertheless says something through the embodiment of a symbol or performative act. At its simplest, the Cross commemorates the death of Jesus. However, a cross is the instrument by which Jesus and hundreds of others were executed. Essentially, argues Bell, a Cross-wearer evokes the manner in which the execution took place. Imagine if you will, in an adjacent time and place: a tiny mahogany electric chair on a cured leather strap, or a string of lethal injection syringes, tastefully done in silver with Australian crystal accents. Performed this way, the Cross starts getting heavy, becoming a loaded act that re-presents more than death, but the violence of that death. The Cross around my neck pointed to the violent execution of an innocent man.

In “The Personal, and Public: Spontaneous Shrines, Emergent Ritual” Jack Santino elaborates on the concept of “spontaneous shrines,” temporary memorials that were made on sites of violence or accidents. He insists that such “spontaneous shrines” are more than memorials to the victims. They commemorate the deceased individual but also speak forth, suggesting and attitude towards a public or social issue. For example, a spontaneous shrine of flowers and a photograph at the site of terrorist bombing does not just mark the death of the victim. In naming and giving him or her a face, it lays responsibility, insisting on the culpability of the perpetrator (Santino 130-1). Summarizing Santino’s ideas, I would define a spontaneous shrine’s two main features as: 1) that it be public, usually on the physical or symbolic site where the death occurred, and 2) that it carry out the two-fold performative function—commemoration and declaring culpability (of the perpetrator of the death).
By Santino’s concept of spontaneous shrines, a Cross-wearer could be considered a perambulatory spontaneous shrine. A worn cross commemorates the death of Jesus; but also, *by wearing a cross*, the wearer becomes the site of this shrine. Moreover, a Cross-wearer (as opposed to someone wearing a cross) claims faith in the teachings and atonement of Jesus. When I wear the Cross, I inevitably, publicly confess that Jesus died *because of me.* In this way, I am implicated in the violence and perversity of the execution of Jesus. I commemorate his death, the site and manner in which he died, and I claim culpability. In Chapter One, I detailed how the body is made grotesque generally by its being deformed and broken. In Chapter Two, I explicated the grotesqueries of the body on the Cross: its ambivalence, abjection and funniness. The ritual of wearing a Cross does not just represent Jesus’ death; it re-presences his broken, grotesque body, *on my body.* As such, as a Cross-wearer am not just a perambulatory shrine, and a shrine to the Grotesque Cross, but also grotesque myself.

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*“Hephzibah, you’re Catholic.”*

(I had to listen carefully to hear the upward inflection on the end of the statement to realize that I was being asked whether or not I was Catholic, not being informed that I was. It’s a typical Bombayism, substituting conjunctions and prepositions for inflection.)

*“Hephzibah, you’re Catholic?”*

*“No, no. I’m Christian.”*

*“Oh, I’m Christian too.”*

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32 I will elaborate on this assertion in the next section of this chapter.
“Yes, well, I’m Protestant.

“But why are you wearing a cross?”

“Oh, Protestants are Christians.”

“You believe in Jesus.” (Insert question mark, translate: You believe in Jesus?)

“Yes.”

“Ah, ok, ok. (Pointing to a crucifix around her neck) I’m Catholic too!”

(I opened my mouth to protest (because I’m a Protestant) when I looked at the cross she was pointing out. It’s different from mine. Her cross had an engraved Jesus on it. Mine was blank. Her Jesus was still on the cross! Mine was…missing?)

I would eventually learn that there was no such thing as a “Protestant Cross” and a “Catholic Cross”: one was a bare cross, and the other—bearing a representation of Jesus’ body (corpus) affixed to the cross—was a crucifix. The presence/absence of the corpus prompts the idea of metaphorical “space” between the two. Seen simply from a denominational stand point, the “space” between the crucifix and the bare cross is rife with doctrinal differences and traditional vicissitudes regarding the use of crucifixes and crosses. When seen through the lens of the Grotesque, however, the space between the cross around my neck and the crucifix worn by my classmate, Diana, becomes revelatory of the monstrous Grotesque. Seen together, the corpus on one Cross, its absence on the other, evokes a monstrous facet of the Cross: its portentousness.

A crucifix has the corpus affixed to the cross. Thus, it captures and represents the moment of Jesus’ execution and death, and bears witness to his sacrifice and the grotesquerie of his death. A bare cross is a cross that speaks of Jesus’ egress: he was on the cross and now he is not. The bare cross bears witness to the crucifixion, but also hearkens forward to the narrative
that followed, as well as the prophetic portion of the biblical narrative—that which is to come.

The Nicene Creed summarizes this:

*For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;*

*he suffered death and was buried.*

*On the third day he rose again*

*in accordance with the Scriptures;*

*he ascended into heaven*

*and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*

*He will come again in glory*

*to judge the living and the dead,*

*and his kingdom will have no end.*

The ritual of Cross-wearing is thus simultaneously commemorative (looking back), but also prophetic (hearkening forward). When the (bare) cross marks the spot where Jesus *is no longer,* it insists upon the eschatological perspective—“looking forward” to the rest of the narrative. In other words, insisting upon looking forward speaks to the portentous nature of the bare Cross.

For a believing wearer, it reaffirms the biblical mystery of Jesus death *and* his resurrection. This is more than just awaiting the second-coming of Jesus. It also implies an exhortation theologically referred to as the “Perseverance of the Saints.” Christ-followers are urged to continue to follow in the teachings of Jesus even in his absence, *in anticipation* of his return (Heb.10, *English Standard Version*). The Cross is monstrous because it *portends*—it is an omen, or a sign of change (chaos) to come. Jesus is no longer on the cross, but he’s alive and will come again. The second coming of Jesus, as recorded in the Bible, is much anticipated by the faith-
community. However, it is not without chaos and—if read literally—actual monsters (Rev. 12:1-4, English Standard Version).

**Part 2: The Cross-wearer as an Alien**

“*Hephzibah, you’re Catholic.*” (Mentally insert question mark. Also, I’m ready this time.)

“No, I’m Protestant. That’s kind of like Catholic. We’re both Christian but different in that...” (She doesn’t really care about the denominational differences.)

“But your name is “Dutt!”

“Yes...”

“Well, “Dutt” is a Bengali name. You must be Hindu!”

“No, no! I think my grandmother named my dad “Dutt” because —“

“So, you’re dad is Hindu! Your mother is Christian?”

(I should have just stopped trying to explain. Instead I heard myself say . . .)

“Actually, she used to be Muslim.”

*I could feel every eye on in courtyard as it turned towards me.*

I had been a day scholar at St. Mary’s Convent School in Ville Parle, Bombay for about a month. This was shortly after we had returned to India in 1993. I had learned that Catholics were Christians, and that in Bombay, Catholicism was practically synonymous with Christianity. Everything was new, and a little scary. For example, our father had been taking my older sister Millie and me to school, but eventually he taught us how to get from Ville Parle to Seven
Bungalows using the BEST (Bombay Electric Supply and Transport) public bus system. Getting on the wrong bus meant getting lost in Bombay. Maybe it was youthful exuberance, but I do not remember being nervous about any of that. But suddenly, I had to defend my name! And it had something to do with my religion. Worse, I had accidentally convinced my classmates that I was the product of a Hindu-Muslim marriage, which made it all the more confusing to everyone that I wore a Cross. It was beginning to look like people did not know what Protestants were, or that we were (in my mind, the ”real”) Christians. Now, I was worried. I knew we were new, but was something wrong with my family?

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The Oxford English Dictionary defines “monsters” as:

Originally: a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance. Later, more generally: any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening.

Now rare in Med. because of its pejorative associations: A malformed animal or plant; a fetus, neonate, or individual with a gross congenital malformation, usually of a degree incompatible with life.

This rather generic summary contains the two most significant themes that perpetually emerge in scholarship on monsters in grotesque art and literature. First, that monsters are strange enough to be startling (they are scary), and second, they are mutations of natural or familiar forms.

Extending these characteristics to the metaphysical sphere, that which is monstrous is fearful because it is stands out as different (from the reader/viewer) and that they portend disturbances or aberrations in the way things should be. Wolfgang Kayser further specifies that the Grotesque
monsters features hybrid forms in which humans, plants, and animal are blended with no regard to the “laws of statics, symmetry or proportion” (21). Whether presented as marvels, mockery, or terrors, monsters are chaos-beasts that inhabit the margins between systems of order. If this sounds akin to the characteristics of the Grotesque writ large, it is because there is an intersection. In his introduction to *Cromwell*, Victor Hugo cautiously alludes to a synonymy between “monstrous” and “grotesque,” saying, “the aesthetics of grotesque are to a certain extent the aesthetics of the monstrous” (quoted in Dukore 683).

Most scholarship on the monstrous grotesque examines art and literature that emerge out of the classical and medieval periods. The monsters represented in *The Odyssey*, Romanesque and Gothic architectural ornament, the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch and Francis Goya, and the Middle English, *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, are the most frequently treated. Revealed in each work, of course, are the boundaries being transgressed by the monster being portrayed, as well as the latent anxiety of the time and culture producing the representation. For example, reptilian forms are common in early church architecture. Hearkening back to Eve’s run-in with Satan and the consequential Fall, this monster speaks of religious transgressions. Occasionally, the monsters rendered in art and architecture are funny instead of frightening. Rendered as such, they are meant to elicit contempt and ridicule for transgressive behaviors or bodies (Edwards 46). Roger Hazelton, in “The Grotesque Theologically Considered” extends the idea of harm and threatened systems to a spiritual realm:

The images of dragons, gargoyle, or devils symbolize the presence of self-destroying potentialities in being. They body forth the threatened-ness of human existence, whether in terms of moral temptation, spiritual failure, or physical
catastrophe. Encroaching evil, natural or human is their recurring theme. (Adams 78)

In sum, representations of monstrosity in art, literature, and performance, distills down to concerns about identity: how is it formed, perceived, and then presented. Most often the presentation of a monstrous identity is *in contrast* to the reader’s/viewer’s sense of self.

In a contemporary sociological perspective, the concept of identity is a complex and shaped by a plethora of dynamics such as personal history, family characteristics, and political and social contexts. Beverly Tatum, writing in “The Complexity of Identity: Who am I?,” analyses and explains how “otherness” is recognized and labeled saying, “the parts of our identity that do capture our attention are those that other people notice and reflect back to us.” Thus, a person can process a sense of self only by their relation to others, both similar others and different others. This is complicated further by the dynamics between dominant groups and subordinate groups; where “the norm” is determined and regulated by the hegemony (Tatum 5-7).

Descriptions of the monstrous creatures in Medieval-Early Modern texts were indeed conveyed from the hegemony of western, Christendom and therefore used to convey demarcations of difference and otherness (Edwards 45). It is easy to reduce the representation of monstrosity to a matter of hegemonic fear and oppression of the subordinate other. However, monsters problematize an “easy” dichotomy between western Christian dominant versus eastern pagan subordinate. Mandeville’s travel stories offer clear examples of this complexity. His travelogues feature hybrids of human and non-human creatures, some of whom were truly gruesome and others, while appearing gruesome and non-human, were in their behavior human and God-loving. Edwards and Graulund suggest that in writing these hybrid-monsters,
Mandeville was deliberately forcing European readers to “reconsider their sense of self, their own distance from monstrosity…and to question the stable limits of humanity, bodies, and communities” (Edwards 46).

This has some bearing on Tatum and a sociological concept of identity-formation: non-monsters stay within the seams of order, be it race, religion, physicality, nationality, gender and sexuality; whereas monsters defy the boundaries of these systems. As do members of a subordinate group, monsters are recognized by the contrast they present to the norm. However, monsters manage to problematize even the boundaries of privileged and other, drawing attention to themselves by the ripples they cause when simply by existing in the interstices. If, according to Tatum’s dictate, identity can be formed when a person is able to point to something and say, “I’m not that,” then monsters, who live in the margins, are unable to identify themselves. Real life socially-hybrid monsters suggest the possibility of an ultra-Other, a perpetual alien. I was eleven when I realized I was an alien-monster.

**Things my Parents Taught Us: Lessons from the First Monsoon**

“No! Don’t drink that!”

“Take your shoes off at the door, even if they say you don’t have to.”

“Our Muslim neighbors, they don’t eat pork.”

“Our Hindu neighbors, they don’t eat beef.”

“Don’t stare, my darling. I know it’s sad but we can’t help them all.”

“. . . you’ll get lost. So hold each others’ hands and don’t let go.”

“Don’t put your feet up on furniture, it’s disrespectful . . .”

“It doesn’t matter that she was wrong. You have to respect your elders.”
“Catholics aren’t drunks! That’s just a stereotype!”

“Make sure the water is boiled and filtered before you drink it.”

“If you want to get on the bus, you will have to push your way in.”

“. . . hand it over with your right hand.”

“. . . receive it with your right hand.”

“Don’t react to the catcalls. Just keep walking. Eyes straight.”

“Be aware of your surroundings. Watch for pickpockets.”

And on days we were sad, or homesick and felt left out:

“It’s good practice.

*After all, this word is not our home.*

*You kids are lucky you got to learn this early . . .

*And besides, you’re not alone.*”

“Friends, this world is not your home, so don’t make yourselves cozy in it.”

*(1 Pet. 2:11-12, *The Message*)

Looking back, I realize how deliberately and carefully we were initiated into the overwhelmingly rich tapestry of Indian culture. We were taught the boundaries because the boundaries mattered; not knowing them could get one in to trouble, or cause us to be accidentally disrespectful. Learning the boundaries also made me realize my monstrosity. As noted above, I was eleven when I noticed the ripples my monstrosity created; and true to Tatum’s experience, I saw the ripples because they were reflected back to me by my classmates, neighbors, and
teachers and, other than my immediate family, relatives. Moreover, the ripples confirmed that I was always “in-between.” My junior-high self-identity looked something like this:

I was Indian, but I didn’t know much about being Indian.

I was a child, but I was a pastor’s daughter (and thus had to be on my best behavior)

I was young, but bigger than everyone else my age.

I was female, but I was tall, opinionated and preferred the company of boys.

I was Indian, but really bad at Math.

I wasn’t Hindu. I wasn’t Muslim.

My last name was Dutt, but I was Christian.

I looked like those around me, but I spoke with an accent.

I was Christian, but not Catholic.

With the exception of sexuality, I was an alien in every cultural category that seemed to have weight in my new landscape.

In *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, Kearney examines how human identity is and outlook in the world is shaped by a triumvirate of ideas surrounding strangers, gods, and monsters. In his chapter “Aliens and Others,” Kearney begins with what he perceives as an obstacle to discourse regarding the Other, discerning between “enabling and disabling forms of alterity” (67):

What is needed, if we are to engage properly with the human obsession with strangers and enemies, is a critical hermeneutic capable of addressing the dialectic of Others and aliens. Such a hermeneutic would have the task of soliciting ethical decisions without rushing to judgment. That is without succumbing to overhasty
acts of binary exclusion. . . we need at crucial moments to discern the other in the alien and the alien in the other. (67)

Kearney’s goal is to develop a hermeneutic of justice and action, and to this end he draws from Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, and Paul Ricoeur.33 While I agree with the need he perceives and he constructs an intricate and convincing argument, I nonetheless suggest a “simpler” hermeneutic that allows a vision of the “the other in the alien, and the alien in the other.” This other version is one that, by its very structure, disallows “acts of binary exclusion,” the Grotesque vision of monstrosity.

In a brief essay, “Of a Monstrous Child,” Michel de Montaigne describes a baby who was being taken around the French countryside to be displayed as a freak attraction. Montaigne, completing a description of the deformations that made the child “monstrous,” makes a statement that instigated a specific paradigm of writing on the Grotesque, one which focused on alterity, monstrosity, and brokenness: “What we call monsters are not so to God who sees in the immensity of his work the infinity of forms he has comprised in it” (Montaigne 539). For Montaigne, that which is monstrous is quintessentially human; there is no true incongruity. By Montaigne’s contention, the human impulse to marginalize difference and alterity reveals a paradox, one that Harpham recognizes and articulates as the paradox of the Grotesque: to really understand the Grotesque is to cease to regard it as Grotesque (Montaigne 539, Harpham 103-4). Montaigne’s assessment also points to the role religion can play in the perception and response to of monstrous deformations and otherness: religion is either the normalizing system within

33 Kearney borrows from Kristeva’s psychoanalytical readings of the uncanny in Strangers to Ourselves, deconstruction and justice in Derrida’s On Hospitality, and Ricouer-Levinas discourse over hermeneutics and Otherness.
which the Grotesque functions (shifting boundaries, destabilizing), or the Grotesque is the condition of humanity within a God’s eye-view. Even though I could not recognize it or name it, the latter condition is what made sense for my eleven-year old, Cross-wearing self.

Perhaps it was the invincibility/optimism of youth, or faith or logic, but eventually I internalized my parent’s encouragement and exhortation that feeling alien was, within our Christian worldview, the norm. Of all the lessons we were given about the country and people around us, the one that made sense of us, was based/connected to the thing that hung around my neck. It can be rendered in a simple dialectic:

I am Christian + Christians are (meant to be) aliens = I am an alien (and that’s ok!)

My identity was “I am a Christian-Alien.” It did not matter where I was, or which language it was I speaking with an accent, or which hand it was I held my fork in, I was going to be an alien. My classmates regarded me with fascination and often approached me; but, as their curiosity sated, they would eventually wander back to comfortable and familiar conversations. My monstrosity disturbed their mundane. This would continue through high school and—since I ended up in a tiny college in a rural county of Iowa—was exacerbated during my undergraduate years. Wearing a Cross reminded me that the alienation was normal, it would comfort me, and sometimes I would even feel proud that I was an alien. The Cross around my neck became a badge that marked my Alien “race.”

_Confession, on a Feast Day_

“Hey, Millie! Guess what? I took communion today!”

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34 Even as I talk about alterity here, I realize that I was privileged. I _chose_ the badge I wore.
“What?!!! You took Catholic communion? You’re not supposed to!”

“Why not? I’m Christian.”

“It’s for Catholics only!”

“Nothing happened.”

“I’m going to tell mummy!”

“Don’t! Sr. Maria Goretti already scolded me, ok?”

(Silence from my sister.)

“So, what did you do.”

“I stood in line and when it was my turn, I cupped my hands like this—“

“Did anyone see you?”

“Ya, everyone. Sister Maria Goretti glared at me. I thought she wasn’t going to give me the chip—”

“Wafer. So what did you do?”

“Nothing, I just stood there. And then she gave it to me.”

“What did it taste like?”

“Um…I don’t know.”

“What? How could you not—“

“It got stuck to the roof of my mouth. I was trying to peel it off with my tongue and then it was gone before I could taste it.”

“That’s so weird.”

“I know, they should just give regular bread like normal Christians.”
Wearing a Cross became a performance of my alterity in three ways: I accepted and declared that I was an alien in this world, therefore the monstrous margins were home . . . for now. This may hardly seem like alterity to a western reader, but in Bombay, where Christians are the minority, wearing a cross was performative: it marked my otherness amongst the religious majorities of Hindus and Muslims. At the same time, the cross around my neck occasioned remarks even from my Catholic schoolmates and teachers. It became clear that I was not “like the other Christians” since I did not cross myself after prayers, celebrate feast days, know any saints (let alone pray to them), and—apart from one incident—waited in the classroom with my non-Christian classmates while the other girls took communion.

India eventually ceased to feel alien to me; however, I always remained a foreigner in some aspect or the other. But I think I was proud of my alterity, or at least, committed to it. I realized I was going to be different from most of the people around me most of the time. If I could not be like them, all I could do was make sure they knew who I was. I got really good at answering questions provoked by the Cross I wore. It was a litany of sorts. I still remember it:

“Well, actually I’m not Catholic, I’m Protestant.

Yes, I know Dutt is a Hindu name,

No, my dad is not Hindu, he’s Christian.

Dutt is just a family name. I’m Christian.

... Yes, Protestants are Christians too.”
Part 3: Evil, Estrangement and Unmasking the Demons Within

By the time I entered high school, I told myself that I was no longer wearing crosses to proclaim my identity as believer in Christ, I was wearing crosses because—and I remember saying this to my father—“I appreciate their aesthetic value, that’s all.”: “Sorry, Mr. Smith, but I don’t need the world to know I am a Christian.” I am sure growing fears about misrepresenting my faith and my family played a role, but I began to distance myself from the “religious cross,” and what I thought was the cliché of wearing a cross to proclaim a Christian identity. I decided to stop wearing a gold cross. Every Christian lady in my church, as well as most Catholics, male or female, wore gold crosses, giving it a patina of boring religiosity.

Even while rejecting the religious significance of crosses, I remained fascinated with the object. I would walk through stores and markets looking for crosses. I collected and wore (just for aesthetic purposes, of course) crosses made of every material (other than gold) that I could find—pewter, granite, glass. I even made one out of M-Seal, an Indian-brand plumbing sealant that smelled horrible but looked and felt that porcelain when it dried. I sat the dining table and painted it a pearlescent pink and blue. It was pretty and no one other than me ever knew that it was made of plumbing sealant. Every time I wore it, I was aware of what it was; I carried that sacrilege-tinted secret with me whenever I wore that cross. It would be years before I could give name to that feeling of strangeness, recognizing the uncanny, or the Grotesque in that moment, and still a few more years before I learned that such a feeling was more than an emotion; it was a symptom, a sign, a hearkening. Wolfgang Kayser, had he been there, would have defined it for me in a heartbeat:

“Hephzibah, what you are experiencing, is the Grotesque.”
“The Grotesque? Geez, Mr. Kayser tell me more…”

Read next to Harpham and Bakhtin, the Kayserian grotesque seems relatively simple. He summarizes his theories towards the end of *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, condensing it down to four characteristics: (1) the Grotesque is a structure, and one that speaks of alien, estranged worlds. Unlike the strange worlds of fairytales and fantasy, the grotesquely estranged world is “our world which has to be transformed,” such that familiar and normal elements are rendered unfamiliar; (2) it is the expression of an incomprehensible force (3); it is a play with the absurd; and (4) the creation of the Grotesque (in art) is an attempt to “invoke and subdue the demonic aspects” of the world (184-8). He also states that it can be recognized in moments of suddenness and surprise, and moments filled with ominous tension.

By Kayser’s estimation, Cross-wearing as a performance of the Grotesque should express “incomprehensible force,” feature a play with the absurd, and invoke *and* subdues the demonic aspects of the world. Furthermore, if the Grotesque speaks of the estranged world, and the Cross is grotesque, then the Cross evokes strangeness, and estranged worlds. The artist-performer wears this estrangement, carrying it with her or him. Kayser seeks an even more specific nature of grotesque estrangement, asking:

But who affects the estrangement of the world, who announces his presence in the overwhelming ominousness? Only now do we plumb the final depth of horror that is inspired by the transformed world. These questions remain unanswered.

Apocalyptic beasts emerge from the abyss; demons intrude upon us. (185)

The Cross-wearing performer, according to Kayser, is implicated in the horror and ominousness inspired by the estranged and transforming worlds of Grotesque art. If Kayser had told my sixteen year-old cross-wearer self any of this, I would have resisted:
“It’s just a cross, Wolfi. It’s pretty. It doesn’t say anything about demons, or horror--”

“Ah, but blink, and look again. What changed because of it? What sinister, ominous truths emerge as you wear that cross upon your chest? What are you afraid of now?”

“I’m not afraid! If anything…it’s just a little weird that I’m wearing a sacred symbol that’s made of toilet sealing stuff.”

Cross-wearing/cross-wearing for me remained untroubled all the way through college. I “met” Kayser my first year in graduate school, when I first encountered the Grotesque while studying the directing innovations of Vsevelod Myerhold. I soon encountered Bakhtin, and carnival and learned how clowns could actually have discursive, carnivalizing functions. At first, the Grotesque was just fun.

**In the crawl space with Calvin and Wolfgang**

I’m on the sidewalk, part of a trickle of students making our way to campus early on a spring morning. I have headphones on and am listening to a batch of new songs, freshly downloaded on my brand new iPod Nano. A new song starts. It is delicate and sweet, almost like a lullaby. The intricate guitar strumming is soon accompanied by wavering quirky-mellow vocals. I recognize the voice of Sufjan Stevens. It’s not particularly suited for a brisk walk to school so I reach down to skip the track when a funny phrase filters through my outward focus, and is cognitively processed.

*He dressed up like a clown for them*

*With his faint paint white and red*
I glance down at the display scanning the track information; going by the title, the song is about someone called John. I let the track play, tuning in to the lyrics this time.

*He'd kill ten thousand people*

*With a sleight of his hand*

*Running far, running fast to the dead*

*He took off all their clothes for them*

I yank the headphone out of my ears, and look down at the display. I hear myself read the title out loud: “*John Wayne Gacy Jr.*”

You know that feeling you get—when you are watching a movie and you know something bad is going to happen, and you are scared and you do not want to watch, but you cannot change the channel—

(Enter Kayser)

“Yes, Hephzibah, that’s the Grotesque.”

— that feeling creeps out my heart, down my arm and makes me hit rewind. I put the headphones back in.

*His father was a drinker*

*And his mother cried in bed*

*Folding John Wayne's T-shirts*

*When the swing set hit his head*

*The neighbors they adored him*

*For his humor and his conversation*

*Look underneath the house there*

*Find the few living things*
Rotting fast in their sleep of the dead

Twenty-seven people, even more

They were boys with their cars, summer jobs

Oh my God

Are you one of them?

Later that evening, I ask my friend Jeremy, a Sufjan Stevens aficionado, what he thinks of the song:

“Oh, it’s so creepy. I know Sufjan enjoys weirdness and dissonance, but that song . . .”

“Ya, but what do you think it means?”

(Jeremy looks at me strangely.)

“It’s about John Wayne Gacy Jr. The serial killer.”

My serial killer factoids are limited to Jeffery Dahmer and Hannibal Lector. I make Jeremy tell me more. The song actually covers the situation closely. I am shocked, horrified . . . but fascinated. I recognize the Grotesque.

Over the next few days, I chain-listen to the song, always hitting rewind before it comes to its end.

He dressed up like a clown for them

With his face paint white and red

And on his best behavior

In a dark room on the bed he kissed them all

He’d kill ten thousand people

With a sleight of his hand
**Running far, running fast to the dead**

I think about the juxtaposition of the sweet, lullaby-like melody with the chilling narrative of kidnap, rape, and serial murder . . . and corpses buried in the crawl space. I recognize the Grotesque.

*He took off all their clothes for them*

*He put a cloth on their lips*

*Quiet hands, quiet kiss*

*On the mouth*

I wonder why Stevens would sing this song. Why this serial killer? I finally gather the nerve to Google the name, “John Wayne Gacy Jr.”. Sitting alone in the graduate student computer lab, I begin to read: names and ages of his victims, his methodology, etc. So many missing people, over so many years! How could someone be so twisted? How could he still smile? I feel so sad for those boys. I think:

*“Gross, gross, creepy monster-man! I wish I hadn’t ever heard that song!”*

I had not thought that my life had been particularly sheltered—as child in Bombay, I had seen and smelled death and decay first-hand. Horror-stories of religious riots, church-burning, dowry-deaths in our neighborhood were everyday fare for us. But this new knowledge . . . I could feel it being carved into my being.

*“The grotesque will change your world. It transforms. Alienates”*

*“Not now, Kayser...”*

Sitting there in that dark lab, feeling scour—ed and angry at Sufjan and Wolfgang—the song in my ears draws to an end. I’m not going to rewind it this time. I reach up to pull out the headphones when suddenly, I hear Sufjan Stevens take a breath and speak-sing something I had
not heard before:

\[
\text{And in my best behavior} \\
\text{I am really just like him} \\
\text{Look beneath the floorboards--} \\
\text{“Wait, was that the next song? No.”} \\
\text{(I hit rewind, and then fast forward through most of the track.)} \\
\text{And in my best behavior} \\
\text{I am real—ly—just—like—him} \\
\text{(That’s how he sings it. One syllable at a time, as if he can’t get them out.)} \\
\text{Look beneath the floorboards} \\
\text{For the secrets—I have—} \\
\text{(Even with the volume turned up, I have to strain my ears to hear the last word.)} \\
\text{— Hid.} \\
\text{“No. No way. How could Sufjan be like John Wayne Gacy Jr.?”} \\
\text{(I’m floundering as the last few lines sink, and simmer…and a glimmer of} \\
\text{comprehension surfaces: “It’s not Sufjan. Not just Sufjan.”)}
\]

I blinked and something changed. The Grotesque is the estranged world.

\[
\text{“Welcome to the world, Hephzibah.”} \\
\text{This time, Kayser is fresh in my memory from a recent reading.} \\
\text{“But who affects the estrangement of the world? Who announces his presence in} \\
\text{the overwhelming ominousness? Apocalyptic beasts emerge from the abyss!} \\
\text{demons intrude upon us! And yet, these questions remain unanswered! So tell me,}
\]
Hephzibah, what sinister, ominous truths emerge as you wear a cross upon your chest? What are you afraid of now?”

All I have is another question.

“In my best behavior
am I real—ly—just—like—him?”

(Pause.)

“Kayser, what if . . . what if the abyss is within us? What if the demons aren’t intruding, but were always there?”

Look beneath my floorboards . . .

“Dang it, I’m going to have to think about Sin, aren’t I?”

“Ya.”

**Enter Calvin (a.k.a. “Original Sin,” “Total Depravity” and other bad words)**

I have already discussed, in terms of a Christian mythos, why Jesus had to be crucified: the crucifixion of Jesus, and the shedding of his blood during that procedure served as the atonement for human sin, thus making available to the human race, the forgiveness from sins. Seen in terms of causality, and from the Christian point of view, the Cross exists because of human sin. For the sake of clarity, I am going to own this: the Cross exists because of my sin. In the melee of Kayser’s questions and Stevens’ terrifying insinuation (“I am really just like him”), a consideration of original sin become vital to an analysis of the representation of the crucifixion.

Of all the “church fathers”—the scholar-theologian-philosophers—who took up questions regarding evil, Calvin was the one who returned to the *Book of Genesis* in order to locate the
Amelie Oksenberg Rorty offers a succinct distillation of Calvin’s assertion in *The Many Faces of Evil: Historical Perspectives*:

The outward form of Adam’s Fall was his disobedience; the inward motion was faithlessness and pride along with the ingratitude and ambition that follow it. Once the human soul estranged itself from God, its original nature became depraved. No longer “in the image of God,” it suffers the death of the spirit . . . Although human nature was corrupted by a natural process, it was man’s own disobedience rather than God’s will or an evil force that brought about his fall. (109)

I will abstain from a discussion of original sin in general, and especially avoid a polemic on the perceived “unfairness” of it. However, on the premise that Calvin’s doctrine is an accurate analysis of this phenomenon, it is helpful to zoom in on the relationship between original sin and the Grotesque, specifically the monstrous Grotesque.

First, Original Sin resonates with Kayserian terrors, including terrors that creep out of human nature. Kayser examines several such motifs in literature. In the chapter, “The Grotesque in the Twentieth Century” he sets out to draw parallels between the Gothic literature of the time, and the “genuine grotesques” of eighteenth century authors such as Jean Paul, Bonaventura, Hoffman, and Poe:

The similarity is confirmed by a glance at the various motifs, subjects, and techniques embraced by the two schools: the family curse, incest, homecoming, omens, and fate . . . These abysses are the same as the ones we have previously discussed: the problematic nature of the artist, the nocturnal aspects of the soul, the ominous magic of love and death, and the satanic nature of crime. (141)
Several of the motifs mentioned above appear as characteristics of original sin, albeit in extrapolated form. For example, nocturnal aspects of the souls and ominous magic speak of internal monsters that creep out of the darkness, hiddenness, and the insidiousness of original sin’s rootedness within the human condition. The motif of family curses and fate gathers into itself the shared concept of an instigating “outside” power that is beyond the control of the individual, and one that affects the lives of players across generations (“an expression of an incomprehensible force”). Having inherited it as a family curse, I am now subject to original sin and it “continually bears new [sinful] fruit” becoming Kayser’s intruding demons, and beasts that emerge from the abyss (Rorty 191).

Secondly, original sin is symptomatic of the monstrous grotesque. That is, the manifestations of original sin are indicators of the monstrous grotesque—deformity, perversions, fusions of unlike forms. Creations of God, previously pure and made in his image, are “corrupted” by original sin and thus, “post-Adamic depravity is diffused into all parts of the soul.” Calvin asserts that sin is not our nature but its “derangement” saying, “as it was the spiritual life of Adam to remain united and bound to his Maker, so estrangement from him was the death of his soul” (121). And death is followed by decay.

. . . Look beneath the floorboards
When I wear the Cross, I forsake relying on comparisons such as, “I am not as bad as,” or the option that I am basically good; instead, I (pro)claim the monstrous grotesquerie of me. The Cross around my neck performs again, this time, a metaphorically architectural function. It becomes the floorboards—beneath which is my essential, depraved nature. When I wear the Cross-as-floorboards, I point to something hidden within me. The focus is not on how the depravity makes me feel, but the depth of it. Like the Roman grottos, this sin is buried through
time, and generations: I am the abyss from which emerges the demons and darkness, fruit of sin. Once again, the ability of the worn Cross to speak of such core myths as Original Sin, and human nature is strong evidence of the grotesquerie of this performance. It describes a grotesque characteristic, its capacity to enliven and “engage our mythic sensibilities” (Yates 44).

Yates points out that the grotesque image is a primary example of a reality that speaks through a mythic language by drawing on image, metaphor, and narrative. It does so in such a way that it evokes ideas, feelings, and intuition. Since mythic language is the language of imagery that embodies symbolic ideas, the Grotesque, in its use of mythic language becomes a “symbolic form of reality” (43):

As such a symbol, the Grotesque engages us in participating in that to which it points. If it points to a manifestation of evil, we can experience that evil. If it points to an experience of ecstasy, we can experience something of that ecstasy. We enter another world of experience and for the moment live within its meaning…the mythic character of the grotesque and its capacity to enliven at some level our mythic consciousness links us to our archaic past as a human race. In this process we are drawn into a world of primary experience beneath the layers of rationality to the level of mythic reality (44).

In the passage above, Yates makes two vital arguments that are relevant here. First, grotesque images/art/performances engage the viewer-audience on an experiential level. This particular characteristic of grotesque—its capacity to enliven the mythic consciousness—draws core

35 Yates draws from Ernst Cassirer’s *Language and Myth*, where discursive language is the language of objective description, (of science), and mythic language is the evocative language of poetry and religion (44).
human myths to the fore. For Bakhtin, the Grotesque offered insight into myths of birth, death, authority, and heresy. For Kayser, and the facet of the Cross discussed here, the Grotesque evokes myths of the evil, estrangement and human nature, Original Sin and the myth of the Fall being specifically Judeo-Christian iterations of these myths. Thus, when I wear the Cross I point to and experience my estranged cosmos. The presence of the Grotesque Cross on my corporeal surface is a performative gesture to my spiritual state which, dismembered from the perfection of God and fused with the fruit of the Fall, is a monster of my original form. Kayser says that the grotesque instills a fear of life instead of a fear of death. It is no wonder then, that wearing a cross should be a terrifying act, because representing the crucifixion as I wear the Cross says loudly, for all to hear,

*On my best behavior, I am really just like him.*

Thus, Kayser is right: the world seen this way, is terrifying because here, at the core of my identity, “there be monsters.” When I wear the Cross, I speak of and unmask my monstrous self.

**Part 4: Holy Monsters (Epilogue)**

_Tell me why do you wear that cross..._

Smith’s question turned out to be pertinent and persistent for me. It has been nearly twenty years and I can still ponder the multiplicities and possibilities of this performance space, the Cross upon my body. The retrospective mandated by this project, prompted another recent discovery. I found that through the years, this performance occasionally elided with matters of self-representation and self-identity. To some extent, this is _a propos_. However, the times the Cross was heaviest to wear, were the years when I first naively and then unconsciously made
Cross-wearing a task of representing my faith, or representing my identity. The reason being, the vision of the “self” I attempted to represent was flawed. Seen through the grotesquerie of the Cross, I am actually monster. Yes, cross-wearing could be a performance of the self, a declaration of beliefs, and a stance one takes in an increasingly secular world, but performing it thus is fraught with pitfalls if the performer forgets, even for a second, that he or she is a monster. Not just an alien on this earth, but an actual chimera.

Throughout the course of this study, I have discussed the performativity of the Cross variously, and with some redundancy. However most of my observations have revolved around how the crucifixion functions in terms of atonement: the crucifixion moves a believer from one place (a place of condemnation) to another place (a place of restoration). Seen thusly, the change wrought is external, albeit on a metaphysical realm. However, there is something in the mystery-fraught/grace-wrought death of Jesus on the Cross that initiates a metamorphosis in the believer. The Cross makes, what I call “Holy Monsters.”

**Shots with Alice**

I’m at a bar downtown. It’s one of my first Halloweens as a graduate student. After four years at my Christian college in the cornfields, this is still new to me. My friend, Ian sets down two shots of vodka, cracks his knuckles and asks me what we should drink to. I look up at him.

He’s in full Alice Cooper make-up and garb. I think, as I have often thought before, that he maintains his curly, shoulder-length hair and wardrobe that consists entirely of black t-shirts and 80’s jeans just so he can be Alice every Halloween. A silver cross hangs on a necklace outside his shirt. Another on a string of beads on his wrist.

“*Well...?*”
“I don’t know.”

I mumble.

I am little worried about doing the shot because I haven’t done many. But mostly, I’m looking at the cross and wondering why he’s wearing it, wondering what he thinks it means. Wondering why I’m at a bar with Alice Cooper wannabe, black spider-leg cracks radiating from his eyes and trailing from his mouth. A cross around his neck. A couple days earlier, a gentleman at church had affectionately called Ian a “loose cannon.” Ian’s tired of waiting.

“Oh then,” he raises his glass and, in voice that resounds through the entire bar, yells,

“To the Glory of God!”

He clinks his glass against mine, and downs the shot.

“It is common usage to call “monsters” an unfamiliar concord of dissonant elements: the centaur, the chimera are thus defined for those without understanding. I call “monster” all original inexhaustible beauty.” (Alfred Jarry, “Les Monstres”)

****

I contend that the New Testament teachings written after the crucifixion point to a mystical conflation between Jesus, and a believer who accepts him as Christ. For example, in a letter to the church in Galatia, he says, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2.20, English Standard Version, emphasis mine). Again, in a letter to the church in Corinth he says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new
creation. The old is gone, the new has come!’ (Cor. 5:17, *English Standard Version*, emphasis mine). In a passage that makes note of the carnivalesque methodology of God (in his choosing crucifixion to bring redemption), Paul points out that the ‘inverse’ unification is true as well:

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are . . . And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption. (*English Standard Version*, 1 Cor. 1, 28-31, emphasis mine).

Within this faith tradition, the ideas of ‘Christ in us’ and ‘I am in Christ,’ are metaphoric of the extreme intimacy of the relationship Jesus has with the believer. And yet, the phrases ‘being reborn,’ and ‘in Christ,’ evoke tremendous grotesque imagery: the fantastical, the disruption and revulsion in the act of birth, and the melding of bodies. Jesus and the believer become part of each other—a chimera.

This is not biological: becoming a believer does lead to a ‘23 chromosomes Jesus, 23 chromosomes me’ DNA mutation. Nevertheless, biblical teachings insist upon a cessation of a hermetic ‘self’ and instead point to a ‘new creation’ (metamorphosis) that features the incongruent juxtaposition of human and non-human (monstrous hybrid). As noted in the Introduction and referenced throughout my study, hybrids in art generally provoke a fearful response. Edwards and Graulund summarize this:

Monstrosity and grotesquerie merge in the hybrid forms that disrupt the borders separating the categories of ‘human’ and ‘non-human’ . . . such figures foreground the limits of the human body, policing the margins of human
classification, but they can also engender fear, rather than the stability, through frightening depictions of what happens when the boundaries of classification give way to monstrous hybrid figures. (Edwards 39-40)

The boundaries that are ruptured when holy monsters are made leads to a loss of a discrete self. This is indeed a cause for anxiety and pain, and has a theological counterpart. Twentieth century theologian A. W. Tozer uncompromisingly discusses the rigors and agony a follower of Jesus usually encounters.

In a short series of essays called *The Pursuit of God: Finding the Divine in the Everyday*, Tozer addresses the how the Cross continues to perform even past the crucifixion and resurrection, and into the on-going lives of believers. What he refers to as “the interior journey,” is here akin to the metamorphosis that I mentioned above. Indeed, it appears to be as a perquisite for hybridization. In stark and intensely visceral terms, Tozer points out that a life of unity with God requires a painful process of tearing the “veil of self-life”:

> There must be a work of God in destruction before we can go free. We must invite the cross to do its deadly work within us . . . Let us remember that when we talk of rending of the veil, we are speaking in a figure. The thought of it is poetical, but in actuality there is nothing pleasant about it. In human experience that veil is made of living spiritual tissue. It is composed of sentient, quivering stuff of which our whole being consist, and touch it is to touch us where we feel pain. To tear it away is to injure us, hurt us, make us bleed. (Tozer 21)

Holy monstrosity can only be achieved through the violence of metamorphosis. Whether physical or spiritual, any metamorphosis bears witness to the disruption of boundaries, placing the metamorphosing subject in the margins of organizing systems.
Such marginalization or chaos would normally be cause for anxiety, revulsion and even fear (this anxiety is akin to that elicited by certain aspects of postmodernism as well). Thus the question here is, “why am I not afraid?” Or, to state it another way, how can I lose my “self,” become a hybrid and still be safe, content, and even joyful being a “mere” chimera-monster with Jesus? Typically contradictory, the Grotesque itself offers an answer. Unlike the anxieties caused by postmodern disruptions, grotesque disruptions exude creative energy and exuberance. Drawing from Baudelaire and Hugh Kenner, Harpham points out that this force is abundant and explosive, but ultimately manifests itself through the creation of something else, something which defies existing templates and boundaries. He goes on to quote G. K. Chesterton’s assertion in the 1903 biography of the Victorian poet, Robert Browning: “Energy and joy are the mother and father of the grotesque” (8). The Cross makes new creations which are hybrids of the divine (Jesus as Christ) and the mundane (me); this is what I call holy monsters.

Pursuing Harpham’s line of thought a little further, it becomes apparent that time and transition are part of the process. I discussed the temporal aspect of the Grotesque in Chapter Three. It warrants mentioning again here. Harpham argues that one of the premises of the Grotesque when seen in art and literature (and as I contend, in performance) is that it “occupies a gap or an interval.” It is “in process” or transitional:

In other words, in order to achieve grotesqueness, it suffices to abridge an evolution, to attach a creature to another phase of its own being, with the intervening temporal gap so great that it appears that species’ boundaries, and not mere time has been overlapped. (14-5)

In performative terms, grotesqueness can be achieved in the enactment of a metamorphosis. As such, the process of creating of holy monsters bears witness to the Grotesque Cross instigating
such a moment of flux where boundaries shift in order to attach an individual “to another phase of its own being” (14). For, through the performance of the Cross, I am at once a “new creation,” (*English Standard Version*, Cor. 5.17) but I am also, *becoming* like Christ. The holy monster is a conflation of Christ and me (by virtue of Christ-in-me), *but also*, when seen through the temporal gap that Harpham describes, a hybrid of “me now” and “me as I will be someday,” that is, restored to communion (and union) with the Divine.

In a sense, the Cross around my neck performs its final function as a metaphoric lens that can capture, or allow for a visioning of this flux. Resting on my body, it presents “me now.” But the worn Cross, as an emblem of the image-event-work of the crucifixion of Jesus, evokes “me as I will be.” In other words, the Cross around my neck is a lens through which a viewer can see the holy monster.

I am not me.

I am Christ-in-me.

The Cross I wear says, “Draw near. See the real me”

*This* is my body.

*****
CONCLUSION

The dripping blood our only drink, the bloody flesh our only food:

In spite of which we like to think

That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood

Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good.

T.S. Eliot

“East Coker,” *Four Quartets*

The world premiere of *We Are Insubstantial* was performed at the Contemporary Music Composers Forum at Bowling Green State University on February 26th, 2015. Written by composer Samuel McKnight, the title of the instrumental piece is indebted to the stanza quoted above (McKnight). The performance featured eight vocalists, a pianist, a percussionist and a violinist performing an adaptation of the Eucharist liturgy of St. Andrew’s Church in Moscow, Russia. I listened from the audience as the harmonies created by the instrumentalists and vocalists shifted from consonance to dissonance and then back again. The text as spoken by the performers occasionally dissipated into stark, non-verbal repetitions of sounds, most of which were familiar: the disturbing sibilance of a group of people saying “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,” the jarring wave of sound that occurs when an assembly begins and ends the same sentence at different times, and guttural sounds and hisses that are inevitably part of the performance of the Eucharist-text. In a personal interview after the performance McKnight shared that the concept for his work piece was inspired by a particular mass he attended. The timbers of the voices, repeated sibilance, the sharp sound of the bread
breaking (represented in McKnight’s piece by the singers voicing the phoneme, “kuh”)—all these sounds falling upon his ears during the service made him hone in on another physiological sensation, a tugging he felt within his body. McKnight attributes the latter sensation to a spiritual experience. Recognizing that the physical and mystical were intertwined, *We Are Insubstantial* was his attempt to represent the interplay of the two as he experienced in it that moment. For me, as a viewer-witness, McKnight’s piece seemed to presence a human, dissonant element in what “should be” a transcendent, ritualistic representation of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This ultimately allowed for an alternate harmony, one in which there is movement between dissonance and consonance. All in all, the performance offered itself as an unanticipated capstone experience to the project presented here: that the Cross of Jesus is replete with grotesqueries, and this will inevitably bleed into forms of its representation.

I began this study in somewhat of a scientific mode. By this, I mean that I proposed a hypothesis—that the crucifixion of Jesus could be read as grotesque—which I could only test by following through with the analytical procedure I outlined in my prospectus. This in itself was cause for anxiety; the elusiveness of the Grotesque as a theory, in combination with the vagaries of Christian doctrine, and the immense possibilities of performance resulted in a constantly shifting discursive landscape. A larger concern, however, was whether my hypothesis would hold up in the face of in-depth research into the three areas I mentioned above. While my preliminary research seemed to suggest that the Grotesque was a favorable lens through which to view the crucifixion, there was a sense of trepidation that underscored the early stages of this study. I was assured of the strong intersection between the Grotesque and performance, but there existed a possibility that the Grotesque would prove infelicitous to a study of the Christian mythos. Here at the end of this process, I find that not only did the Grotesque remain congenial
to a re-visioning of the Cross, but this viewing has evidenced that the Cross is grotesque in multiple and varied ways. Even assessed superficially, the crucifixion can be seen to gather into itself a ream of juxtapositions and contradictions: the conjoining of beauty and ugliness, punishment and grace, horror and relief, and the gruesomeness of the broken body of Jesus as a conduit to the mystery-wrought function of grace. Summarizing the findings that emerged in my studies of *Jesus of Montreal*, *Christ in the Concrete City* and my autoethnographic study of Cross-wearing, I now offer a detailed rendering of the Grotesque Cross.¹

The Grotesque Cross is characterized by the grotesquerie of the body on it, the body of Jesus who, for a believing audience is also Christ. The ambivalent, marginal status of Jesus as the God-Man conditions the Grotesque Cross, thus the Grotesque Cross remains insistently baffling and mysterious, where “mystery” is a characteristic, not a puzzle to be solved. The Grotesque Cross remains in flux, utter abjection of one side held in an uneasy balance on the other by its potential to regenerate and restore to an extent that the horror of death itself is diminished. The Grotesque Cross is carnivalizing. It works to subvert authoritative structures by participation in the requirements of those systems, and moves individuals from isolation to community. The Grotesque Cross portrays a God whose engagement with humankind is characterized by the Grotesque: disruption, metamorphosis, and decentering become strategies that lead to redemption and the integration of the personal/mundane with the community/Divine.

¹ Even while offering a “detailed rendering,” I am fully cognizant that my project here might be only partial, or even just a beginning. The Grotesque Cross is most likely to have other facets that are yet to be discovered or discussed by me as I continue this work as well as by other scholars.
The Grotesque Cross is inscribed in history, but also timeless, symbolic and mythic. Finally, the Grotesque Cross is and perpetuates a paradigm crisis by which holy monsters are made.

Before I conclude, I want to briefly present three other discoveries that were made in the course of this project. To discuss them at length is beyond the scope of this concluding passage, but since they offer the beginnings of further lines of inquiry, I wanted to pose thumbnails of these observations. The first pertains to the role of a theatre scholar in an interdisciplinary field, particularly that of biblical study. When I was young, I used to confuse the words, “hermetic” and “hermeneutic.” Interestingly, biblical hermeneutics does tend to the hermetic, becoming the realm of theologians and biblical scholars. It was the interdisciplinary examinations of the forensic and medical scholars such as David Ball and Fredric Zugibe, which offered unexpected models for the methodology my project required. Zugibe’s work in particular bears witness to an individual of science and medicine integrating his knowledge of forensics with textual analyses of the Bible. His project was a model for an unabashedly interdisciplinary approach that eventually proved revelatory, not just of the crucifixion, but of the biblical text and the physical aspects of the grotesque body. It is important to also note that Zugibe is not just a physician, he is a forensic examiner. His work requires him to takes apart human bodies, sift through the fibers of muscle and strands of tendon and fold back layers of skin; and yet, he then steps back and still sees a person. This is evidenced in his scholarship and writing. This process is not just commendable. Requiring analytical dynamic of zooming in and then back out to the larger picture, I contend that such a process is a necessary one for dealing with the intricacies of Grotesque, especially as the Grotesque elides into the flexible landscape of performance and performativity. It seems that the blending of hermetic and hermeneutic becomes necessary, a grotesque mode for interdisciplinary work of the performance studies scholar-artist.
Secondly, this study offered ample opportunity to witness how the grotesquerie of the Cross is inextricable from its performativity. When I first proposed discussing the performative nature of the crucifixion, I expected it to only occupy a portion of my first chapter. Writing about the grotesquerie of the Cross, however, revealed the unavoidable slipperiness between the Grotesque Cross “as” something and the Grotesque Cross “as doing” something (revealing/decentering/disrupting). Perhaps this speaks to the metamorphoses in the margins within the Grotesque Cross itself. Ultimately, the profound performativity of the Cross offered a point of clarification that may prove useful for artists who work in the intersection of religion and drama: this may seem like a passé observation, but the performativity of the Cross is distinct from the Cross as a subject of performance. This means that the crucifixion of Jesus need not be relied on as a subject matter for Christian performance, as it often is. The mysteries of the incarnated body, the relationship between laughter and authority, the abjection-regeneration flux and holy monstrosity are all themes that are evoked by the Grotesque Cross and have the potential to enliven performances on or about the crucifixion of Jesus.

My final observation pertains to the relationship between postmodernism, the Grotesque, and Christianity. Postmodernism offers some tropes that are immensely fruitful for a Christian epistemology and worldview. One such example is the return of forms of knowledge that were repressed by Modernism (mystical and prophetic knowledge). However, postmodernism’s insistence that metanarratives be dismantled created, in my scholarly and artistic perspective, an irreconcilable rift between the two. During the course of the study I presented here, I found the Grotesque Cross to be the bridging factor. It is the Cross as carnival that allows for a fruitful, reconciliatory dialogue between Christianity and postmodernism. Andy Crouch, editor of Regeneration Quarterly summarizes this complex dialogue neatly:
The cross is what guarantees the Christian gospel against the critiques of postmodernism, specifically the one that says that all metanarratives oppress. The gospel is a metanarrative; it claims to tell the truth about the world. The problem of most stories is that they tell the truth in a way that benefits someone. But the cross of the story in which the other is met by the non-other; God becomes the other and then endures the full experience of marginalization. (76)

The carnavalesque moves of incarnation and the crucifixion (of the Christian deity) participate in the (required) Christian metanarrative, while simultaneously preempting metanarrative oppression.

Although it is a major world religion today, Christianity began in the crypts. It seems strangely a propos that the Grotesque, which had its beginnings in the grottesche art of the Roman grottos, would find resonance in this formerly “underground” faith. Ruth Coates remarks that V. N. Turbin, an associate of Mikhail Bakhtin, reported Bakhtin to have said, “The gospel, too, is carnival” (Coates 126). This proved to be a persistent theme throughout my investigation. Since the gospel emerges from the perfomative work of the Cross, I am confident in claiming the same of the Grotesque Cross. The Grotesque Cross is carnival.
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