ABSTRACT

THE BREAKDOWN OF THEODICY AS A CROSS-GENRE EVENT IN POST-SHOAH TRAGEDY, USING THE FRAMEWORK OF RON ELISHA’S TWO

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This thesis exists in two parts, practical and written. The practical element was the direction of Ron Elisha’s play Two. The second part is this written thesis, which focuses on developing a critical framework for this play and others of its kind. Included in the written thesis will be an establishment of this critical framework, a structural analysis of Two, and an application of the aforementioned critical framework to the text of Two. Finally, a study of the application of this critical theory from a directorial standpoint will be undertaken, with special attention paid to the use of dramatic action as an expression of the changing nature of religious belief.
The Breakdown of Theodicy as a Cross-Genre Event in Post-Shoah Tragedy,
Using the Framework of Ron Elisha’s *Two*

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Theatre
by
Paul Wayne Wilson II
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
2004

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Chapter I:
Establishing a Critical Framework for the Breakdown of Theodicy as a Cross-Genre Phenomenon in the Play Two

The subject matter herein is an exploration of the “death of God” as it exists, simultaneously, as a philosophical construct, a literary motif, and as a performative, semiotic event. The assertion here is that the “death of God” (which is a metaphorical phrase denoting the uprooting of an individual or group theistic conceptualization) is embedded in forms that are story-driven, narrative, and ultimately dramatic in structure. Ron Elisha’s play Two, in both text and performance, will be the example through which this structure is explored.

Two provides a basis through which the death of God is seen as a crisis on both the subjective/individual and the socio-religious levels. The two sole characters of the play deal with many of the significant theodicies of Jewish and other continental thinkers, as a progression in which theodicies first collapse in the face of tragic suffering, and are reconstructed as the characters develop a framework for a continued existence. Two is an exploration of language, worldview, and personal circumstances. A particular, text-internal vocabulary (primarily in the use of foreign language and metaphor) is developed

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¹ The edition of Two used for both the production and the thesis is from The Dramatic Publishing Company, revised, 1990.
by the characters which reflects a discussion much broader than the individual stories of
the two characters, but which is still linked, as a point of origin and return, to the stories
and their telling within a dramatic framework. This will be explored in the next chapter.

With an initial performance and publication date in 1985, the text and subsequent
performances are significantly removed from the events of Germany from 1937 to 1945,
so that they allow for a much clearer discussion of the present issues that have emerged
since the tragic, historical moment of the Holocaust. That Two is a work of fiction, or at
least, fictionalized by the dramatic process, further opens the play to a discussion that is
both critically relevant to a reader, and emotionally relevant to an audience member in
the present day.

It is necessary first to construct the definitive basis of this study, by clarifying the
concepts of theodicy and theism as religio-philosophical ideas inextricably linked to each
other, then placing them within the context of this argument. Theodicy, in this instance,
will rest upon four assertions: that God exists (which is implicit in the concept), that God
is omnipotent, that God is an ultimate expression of goodness and benevolence, and that,
at the same time, evil exists (Pinnock 3). The crux of this definition lies in the fact that
ever appears, though separate from God as a theistic entity, as part of a lasting “theodicic”
paradigm.

An explanation of theism is, perhaps, appropriate to the reader, as the concept is
presently going through a great deal of redefinition in the wake of increased intercultural
awareness and globalization. It is sufficient to say here that the “theism” discussed is
derived from the Judeo-Christian paradigm, which is in turn derived from the books of
the Torah and subsequent interpretations up to the present day.
I take the proposition “God exists”… to be logically equivalent to “there exists a person without a body… who is eternal, is perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and the creator of all things.” I use “God” as the name of the person picked out by this description.

(Swinburne 8)

As a direct argument to this assertion, Graham Oppy has questioned the validity of a triune definition of God which seems to him, contradictory in and of itself.

I do not think that one ought to say that "God exists" is logically equivalent to "there exists a person without a body... etc". For, in saying this, one is committed to the view that if, for example, (i) there exists a person without a body who is eternal, perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, very (but not quite perfectly) good, and the creator of all things; but (ii) there is no person without a body who is eternal, perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and the creator of all things, then God does not exist. This seems to me to be an odd view to take; in the circumstances described, it seems to me that it would be more natural to say that God does exist, but that he is not quite as we imagined him to be.

(Oppy 468)

Within a Judeo-Christian paradigm (a term which is used here in the most general sense), the idea of God as a sentient being, conscious and active in the affairs of human beings, is implicit in theism. While the point of this study is not to argue the existence of God, but rather, the phenomenon of changing views of God within certain parameters, it is assumed here that the starting point of this exploration lies in this sort of theism.
described by Swinburne, and that the most immediate problem with such a definition is encapsulated in the idea of God’s goodness as apprehended by Dr. Oppy. This theism is dismantled, and the problem approach through the discourse of the two characters.

These changing views of God are, in short, the breaking down of Swinburne’s framework as embodied in the character Chaim, the discussions between Chaim and Anna of Oppy’s problem, and the establishment of new frameworks for the ontology of God, each particular to the individual character. The problem of evil is summed up in the circumstance Chaim describes, in which, while in Auschwitz, he prayed for his own brother’s death: “How could I believe in a God who would answer such a prayer?”

It should be apparent that the terms theodicy and theism have a certain overlap, and that a breakdown in one conceptualization, in the case of Two, is inevitably a breakdown in both. This breakdown generally occurs as a problem of tenability in the wake of suffering or destruction. Thus, there is a distinct experiential element to the breakdown of theodicy/theism. This breakdown is shown in greater detail by Sarah K. Pinnock, who pinpoints her analysis of “dissatisfaction with theodicy,” in her text, Beyond Theodicy.

…four issues recur repeatedly and figure prominently in contemporary reflection [of theodicies]. The first two issues are “theoretical” ones concerning: (1) the explanation of the origin of evil, as a cosmological and anthropological question and (2) the justification of suffering, exposing God’s reasons for allowing suffering. In contrast, evil and suffering also raise difficult “practical” issues, namely: (3) how a person can cope and

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2 The primary concern here is with the concept of theodicy, how it is constructed, how it is subverted, and how it is re-constructed. Hereafter, the term “theism” will be excluded in this discussion, unless there is a treatment of the elements which solely make up this definition of the term.
even find meaning in the face of suffering and (4) how to alleviate or resist suffering by means of individual or collective action. (Pinnock 2)

Pinnock’s division of these issues is highly applicable to the argument at hand, as the text of the play deals with both the theoretical and practical issues in both metaphoric and dramatic, narrative forms. Implicit in the problems of theodicy, proposed both by Pinnock and Elisha, is the idea of a theistic God: as sentient and benevolent, as some way involved in human affairs, and, more broadly, as an *a priori* creator of human circumstances. The idea of God as omniscient, omnipotent, and all-good (and, at times, the very definition of that good) is at the heart of the play’s dramatic conflict, as shall be seen in Chapter 2.

This study will focus on the form of modern tragedy (namely, that of Raymond Williams and the “tragic victim”) as its dramatic model, using Ron Elisha’s *Two* as a structural focus. Not only will the different theodicies of the play be noted and analyzed as dramatic moments, but they will also be illuminated as the primary force of dramatic progression, shown in the interchange of two figures expunging and re-establishing the idea of God in different theodicic paradigms.

It is important to note that there is, in Elisha’s text, no arrival at a set theodicy, but instead, a process by which the two characters alter the usage of the concept. This progressive alteration could be described as “forward motion,” upon which the dramatic structure of both the text and the idea of the death of God are reliant. *Two*, therefore, is ultimately an exploration of the breakdown of variant theodicies. It will be argued in a later chapter that there is no textual conclusion to this exploration, except possibly in death (a further proof of the play’s tragic nature).
Theodicy, in all relevant cases, is dependent upon a theistic framework, in which the very idea of God is both theocentric and anthropomorphic. God is, in short, completely conscious of, and, as are human beings, in some way involved in the large scope of human affairs, even to the point of being the ruler of history. “Theodicy is ‘theocentric’ in orientation, in the sense that it attempts to stop the gaps in knowledge of God and God’s acts, making it plausible that theistic beliefs are true” (Pinnock 11). The question for the realities of Elisha’s characters, and the dramatic thrust of the play, then, is finally the level of accountability which both humans and God share in historic events and personal beliefs, and how this generates or limits action (which is, again, purported to be the basis of drama).

Elisha’s purpose as a playwright, to explore the death of God through the medium of drama, and the idea central to this study, occurs in a more general or traditional philosophical framework. The construction of the critical framework’s philosophical matrix lies in the works of two philosophers who are the “historical bookends” to the pro and con arguments of theism before World War II: Wilhelm Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) and Wilhelm Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900).

The questioning of a first cause appeared in Germany, at first indirectly, in the works of Hume and Kant. The questioning of significance of cause to effect a priori brought about a very questioning of the meaning of human experience. Furthering this question, and even bringing the very assertion of meaning into doubt, were the works of Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. But even then, Nietzsche’s declaration that “God is dead” (c.f. *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Twilight of the Idols*) reached its culmination around 1900, more than 30 years before the rise of Nazi Germany.
The death of God (which will be revealed in the next section as a breakdown of a theodicy) and the motional aspect of this event or state cannot be ignored if the critical analysis of Two is to be complete. As the breakdown of theodicy, as a philosophical construct, relies heavily upon the idea of story (perhaps a more general narrative format than most drama), so it is both personalized and universalized in its dramatic form. The affective relationship between character and audience becomes the necessary vessel through which the death of God is transmitted as an idea. The use of metaphor, explanation, and personal admission (“confession”), becomes a dynamic quality, giving the issue a tenable immediacy.

The Breakdown of Theodicy as a Philosophical Construct

It is important to note that the conceptualization of “theodicy” is now often reserved for the theological realm. Leibniz’s Theodicy, however, treats the term in an almost purely philosophical realm. Leibniz provided his support of theodicy in a summary form, the first syllogism of which is seen below.

Objection: Whoever did not choose the best is lacking in power, or in knowledge, or in goodness. God did not choose the best in creating this world. Therefore: God has been lacking in power, or in knowledge, or in goodness. Answer: I deny the minor, that is, the second premise of this syllogism… (Leibniz 194)

Leibniz goes on to counter several points, namely, on whether evil can exist in a perfect world, whether human nature is predominantly good or evil, and whether both God and
humans can act with free will\textsuperscript{3}. Leibniz’s process is that of debunking a series of purportedly logical equations, and in so doing, he is invoking that same construct of logical, secondary to his to a faith-based assertions, to prove his own arguments. Herein is the significant separation of theodicy from a purely theological realm, that is, the invocation of philosophical tools to construct an argument either in favor of or against theodicy.

While Leibniz himself disagrees with the apparent enigma of a perfectly good God creating a world in which evil exists, he is one of the first to respond to this “problem of evil” on a philosophical level.\textsuperscript{4} Such a treatment of theodicy, absent from the \textit{necessity} of belief set down by Augustine of Hippo in his conceptualization, can only be seen as a changing historio-philosophical progression, which occurred at the dawn of the modern age, beginning with the German Enlightenment (\textit{Aufklarung}). During this time occurred the modernization of theodicy. The familiar philosophical figures involved were primarily German in ethnicity, and dating from 1646-1900. These philosophers, as mentioned before, included Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche. Certain similarities and conclusions (most notable of Leibniz and Nietzsche) will no doubt enhance a reading/viewing of the play.

Leibniz’s major contribution to the discussion at hand is the idea of theodicy and how it relates to theism. His defense of certain claims which occur from a non-theistic perspective, reveal a discussion of the nature of God that applies from the Enlightenment to the present day. The objections to the theologically dominant ideology of Leibniz’s time were as follows.

\textsuperscript{3} It is of note that, while Leibniz sites the \textit{felix culpa} of Adam (original sin) which created in turn the possibility of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, this is merely a supporting argument (195).

\textsuperscript{4} Leibniz was a Christian philosopher, as was Hegel, whose philosophy of history obviously influenced Marx and other philosophers.
[First Objection:] Whoever does not choose the best is lacking in power, or in knowledge, or in goodness. God did not choose the best in rating this world. Therefore, God has been lacking in power, or in knowledge, or in goodness. [Prosyllogism:] Whoever makes things in which there is evil, which could have been made without any evil, or the making of which could have been omitted altogether. God has made a world in which there is evil; a world, I say, which could have been made without any evil, or the making of which could have been omitted altogether, Therefore, God has not chosen the best… [Second Objection:] If there is more evil than good in intelligent creatures, then there is more evil than good in the whole work of God. Now, there is more evil than good in intelligent creatures. Therefore there is more evil than good in the whole work of God… [Eight Objection:] He who cannot fail to choose the best, is not free. Therefore, God is not free. (Liebniz 194-197, 202-204)

A large part of the arguments which Leibniz refutes is quoted here, as it is not just the content of the objections and prosyllogism, but the structure of them, that is applicable to Two. The sense that Leibniz’s Theodicy functions, in many ways, as a dialogue (with assertion and justification, followed by rebuttal), and, more succinctly, as a loosely structured philosophical dialogue (similar to what is found in the dialogues of Plato, albeit without the assignment of “lines” and assertions to certain historical figures), then there is an inherently dramatic element, that essential human action of communication, and the portrayal of a mental progression, which is inherent in the process of drama.

Also, this particular quotation serves to deepen further the explanation of objections to writing on theodicy from an atheist (or at least a non-theist) perspective.
theodicy and the “problem of evil” which have occurred in modernity.

The influence of Hume, Kant, and Hegel, are perhaps much less concrete, but nonetheless important to the argument at hand. It is sufficient to say the following: Hume, Kant, and Hegel deal with experiential philosophy (summed up in the idea of cause and effect). Hume and Kant focus largely on experience as knowledge (epistemology), and whether knowledge is more valid through experience (that is, *posteriori*, deductive, empirical derivations) or through reasoning (*a priori*, rationalist derivations). Hegel’s contribution was to make historical progression⁵ a significant part of the experiential equation by emphasizing how historio-cultural and massive social changes effect the individual and group views of the world and the very idea of experience.

Rooted in the modernist idea of experience is the debunking of *first cause*, and the rise of an empirical way of looking at experience. If the meaning *a priori* behind experience is eliminated, then it must be that the presence of God in historical progression (that is, a manifestation of causes and effect on the socio-cultural level), is also eliminated. To clarify, that elimination is not of the being of God as an ontological object, but the elimination of the active, moral aspect of a God who is in judgment over human beings and is the ultimate author of human history: God-as-meaning. The implications of the elimination is the breakdown of a punishment/reward morality, and the destruction of a presumably divine arbitration of the concept of justice.

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⁵ This idea of historical progression is invoked herein as well, as the death of God cannot necessarily be “deconstructed” into the component parts of philosophical construct, literary motif, and semiotic, performative event. It must instead be treated as a progression in and of itself, answerable both to the reasonings of each individual writer in the process and alteration of the creative act, and answerable to the particular point in history when the idea is discussed.
From Philosophical Construct to Literary Motif

The contribution of Friedrich Nietzsche brings the death of God to the merging of a philosophical construct and literary motif. Nietzsche embraced the *construct as story*, first in the instance of the madman in *The Gay Science*, then as the title character of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. It is important to note that, throughout Nietzsche’s philosophical work, this idea was subject not only to a progression of reasoning (and was itself a progression), but was also subject to the changing motivations of an author in need of both an ultimate grasp of divine (un)truth, and a flexible literary motif. But to recognize the oft-quoted statement that “God is dead” seems at the same time to recognize the work of Nietzsche, and to oversimplify it. As Walter Kaufman says of his own biography on Nietzsche,

> The second chapter seeks to show how Nietzsche’s literary style reflects a way of thinking – indeed, a method which has philosophic significance. And the third chapter offers an interpretation of Nietzsche’s conceptions of ‘The Death of God and the Revaluation’; for the proclamation that ‘God is dead’ marks the beginning, just as the revaluation is generally considered the end, of Nietzsche’s philosophy.” (Kaufman xiv)

It seems that the placement of the death of God within the realm of motif helps to dynamize the idea in a way that a purely philosophical aphorism cannot. Inherent in the idea of motif is both a visual and intellectual event, and visual events can be set into motion in the mind of the reader. “Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours and cried incessantly, ‘I seek God! I seek God!’”
And, pronounced by a character in a story-setting, it furthers this dynamization. It may be noted here that there is the “incessant” crying of a voice that is given a place and an arguably metaphoric image (the lantern). When other characters are added to this story format, there is further dynamization, in the process of reaction and the potential for realization of the truth/untruth of the statement.

As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter…The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. “Whither is God?” he cried. “I’ll tell you. We have killed him – you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? … God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him…What was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us?”… Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw the lantern on the ground, and it broke and went out…It has been related further that on that same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his requiem aeternam deo. Led out and called to account, he is said to have replied every time, “What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?

(Nietzsche, Gay Science, § 125)

The addition of an audience and its reaction (essential both to the narrative storyline, and to what will later be described as the “performative event”), further dynamizes the motif, but does not necessarily make the connotation of the motif more
persuasive, e.g., when one reads of the crowd’s reactions, one is not himself necessarily persuaded to act in any such way.

The death of God is not a metaphysical event for Nietzsche. There was no literal God who died at some point in historical time. The death of God is first a realization, not yet wholly believed by the bearer of such knowledge, as seen in the madman of *The Gay Science*

The arguments in much of *Two*’s dialogue are markedly similar to the processes of those two Nietzsche texts. Communication about God in Elisha’s text occurs most often through symbolism (as the king in a game of chess, as letters in a foreign language, etc.), and questioning (is God present among any of these symbols or foreign words? and “How can I believe in a God who would answer such a prayer?”).

God had been a theistic symbol (if not since Augustine then before) and Nietzsche deals another blow to the idea with a seemingly enigmatic statement, one book later:

> Ah, where in the world have there been greater follies than with the pitiful? And what in the world hath caused more suffering than the follies of the pitiful? Woe unto all loving ones who have not an elevation which is above their pity! Thus spake the devil unto me, once on a time: "Even God hath his hell: it is his love for man." And lately, did I hear him say these words: "God is dead: of his pity for man hath God died." (II.25)

Of special note is the extension of this motif into something indicative of an active moment: “of his pity for man hath God died” as opposed to “God is dead.” It is inherently philosophical: Nietzsche himself walked a thin line between philosophy and a literary fiction that is imitatively scriptural. It is literary in that it maintains the motif:
“God is dead.” Now, in II.25, there is an affective addition: a verbal diction which denotes an action: “of his pity for man hath God died.” It is now as much moment as it is image, and the moment of altered time, the action, is separated in some way from the actual time, causing a shift in the Zarathustra’s audience’s perception of reality (Beckerman). There is at least, with the verbal addition, the suggestion of a motion, something marked by time, and this is an inherent necessity in what will now be defined as performative.

The Semiotic and Performative

In a discussion of the performative, an exploration of the semiotic is also necessary, as both the concepts (semiotics and performativity) are often interlinked in the present idea of performance; the presence of the object and the sign, whether read or viewed, is, when a human performer is absent, the performative act in which the viewer/reader is caught up in the apprehension of the signifier (States 11-12). Be it a written word, a spoken word or phrase, or a physical symbol, each sign becomes, when apprehended by a reader/audience, an “interpretant,” or mental effect based upon the very relation between the subject (viewer) and the object (viewed) (Silverman 14-15, and Peirce I.303).

The sign is a representation of an object (Peirce 11.143-144), and it is only through representation that an object enters into human consciousness and can become significant (that is, move from a signifier, which is the thing to be interpreted, to the signified, which is the interpretation). The act of representation will here be defined as performative, in that it is synonymous with Schechner’s idea of the framing of the object.
It is only when this framing is intentional on the part of an outside agent (someone other than the subject), when the object is presented, then apprehended by the subject, that the act of framing and that apprehension combine to make up what will be defined as performance. [Move on to quote Schechner about framing, Phelan about presence, but continue to assert that the performative only becomes performance only when it is intentionally framed and apprehended. The act of writing is performative, but the presentation of the writing (as on a chalkboard), along with the apprehension of that writing, is performance.]

When thinking about the phrase “death of God” or “God is dead,” there is already a semiotic event occurring. Most readers, in approaching these previously cited passages of Nietzsche, will have both a preconceived notion of “death,” and of “God.” When “God is dead” is separated into “God” and “dead,” it becomes clear that each word is iconic, that is, a sign which, according to Peirce, generates a mental image (Silverman 21). These signifiers (the mere words “death” and “dead” “God”) are given a connotation by the reader, but initially create mental images which have been influenced by one’s culture, language, and belief structure. This connotation is usually indexed based upon prior experience which are related to images of “God” or “death/dead.” Unless one has seen God personally, or is so familiar with and moved by a particular image of God that he always equates that image with the very idea of God, then one cannot say that any particular indexing of the word “God” occurs. For example, for Nietzsche’s madman (Gay Science §125) to say, “Whither is God?” is something without logic for many readers (and for the crowd gathered around the madman). It is not

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6 A note of interest, which will be dealt with in a later chapter, is that, while the matrix of God-as-icon satisfies most of Peirce’s and Freud’s criteria, in Hebraic cultures, laws against “graven images” limit the
without an affective quality, however, as the very word God may have a certain value to the reader (Saussure 123) which is projected in the mind as a particular image (Peirce 11.158). One could argue that this is not as strong a relationship as if the word “God” were “indexed to” a particular image. Thus, a statement such as “whither is God?” loses a certain affective power, as there is no arbitrary mental image of God. To return to the argument between Swinburne (8) and Oppy (468), if one is to say that, in stating the existence of God, “there exists a person without a body,” then there is a paradox in terms of Peirce’s iconic image. And if God does have a body, as Oppy insinuates, then who has seen it so that it has become an index to the word “God?” Again, the subjective, or even the cultural relationship to the word “God” is affective, but any indexing or valuation must be incorporated from outside the subjective-experiential realm, by use of iconography, color, ritual, or a person, color, ritual, etc. that has some psychological significance to the individual (Silverman 52). Now, the question “Whither is God?” takes on a different meaning, one that may question meaning by the juxtapositional nature of the phrase that says, where is this person without a body?

“We have killed him – you and I. All of us are his murderers...God is dead. God remains dead.” There are probably stronger experiential values applied to the terms “killed,” “murderers,” and “dead.” It is forcibly personalized -- “we have killed him” and “all of us are his murderers.” The ultimate result, had the madman ceased his speech here, may have been one of greater semiotic significance, but lesser affective connection. How does one kill God? There seems to be a logical fallacy, but, nonetheless, it is an accusation, one to which an audience (the crowd) may respond.

The imagery is then strengthened, and turned into something more widely

iconic nature of God, moving its influence into linguistic and metaphorical spheres.
experiential, and ultimately more grotesque. “What was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us?” There is arguably an indexing between the words “knife” and “blood.” And the image, taken as a whole, is probably, from a subjective standpoint, more universal than any others discussed beforehand. It is completely reasonable to presume that the vast majority of the audience (crowd) would have used a knife at some point in their lives. And the vast majority, if not all, would have seen blood before. The use of a knife in the act of sacrifice (something familiar to Nietzsche’s audience, if only through biblical reference) is an act which is literally a spilling of “blood.” Some (butchers, cooks, etc.), if not many others, would have been required to use a knife to draw blood deliberately, e.g., to kill an animal. How much stronger now is the image for this fictional crowd, that it has now been forced to index “knife” and “blood” with “murderers” and “dead,” and “dead” with “God?” Nietzsche’s madman has organized the signs into a paradigm:

knife → blood (“bled to death”) → murderers → we → dead → God

Whether any of the crowd chooses to believe the madman’s statements or not, it does give them pause. “…and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment.”

The madman is later recounted to have said, “What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?” Here, a more linguistic argument may be appropriate. If one sees a church as the “house of God” (that is, a place where God is present), then there is an inevitable connection between the words “tombs,” “sepulchers,” “church,” and “God.” Funerals often take place in churches, though the “tombs” themselves may or may not be in churches, depending upon the station of the individual. “Sepulchers,” however, are often in churches. Thus, the following paradigm is presented:
The semiotic framework is set for Thus Spoke Zarathustra. “Once did people say God, when they looked out upon distant sea…” (I.25). In this author’s opinion, this is Nietzsche/Zarathustra’s recognition that God is a problematic concept, as God is not seen. Zarathustra then makes such statements as “God is a thought” and “God is a conjecture.” Here Nietzsche is placing the idea of God’s nonexistence (?) in a more logical and less semiotic context. “Thought” and “conjecture” are abstract terms, so abstract, in fact, as to limit indexing or valuation. However, Nietzsche then returns to the semiotic with II.25. “Thus spake the devil unto me, once on a time: ‘Even God hath his hell: it is his love for man.’ And lately, did I hear him say these words: ‘God is dead: of his pity for man hath God died.’” The words “devil” and “hell” have some values that are probably generally recognizable in western cultures: devil/red and hell/fire. A further semiotic paradigm can be made, if one is to do a parallel reading of the “God is dead” sections of The Gay Science and Zarathustra.

How, then, does the semiotic significance of the death of God in Nietzsche’s work relate to the performative? First, it is necessary to establish a difference between performance and performative. What is called “performative” (literally “having the qualities of performance”), is much broader than what has traditionally been called theatre, drama, or even performance. To use the case of Nietzsche, one reads of highly dynamic events that include a central figure (the madman or Zarathustra) and a fictional audience (the laughing crowd listening to the madman, or Zarathustra’s followers and those who listen to his sermons).
The reading of a text is performative, as there is apprehension of the material, which Phelan calls presence (146). For example, a reader can apprehend the performative aspects of a written text – the progression of plotline, the interaction between characters, the isolation in a particular space, the sense of altered time the reader has during the act of reading – and that would be, on an experiential level, performative, as the “enactment takes place in a mental space” (States 12). What makes it not performance is that the reader can return again and again to the exact same text; what changes is merely the apprehension. This is not to say, however, that performances do not have performative elements. An example is this: if a character on stage (assuming one is performing a play) writes on a chalkboard, creates a symbol, or paints a picture, and the audience is left to interpret that writing, symbol, or painting, then the audience is experiencing a performative element of a performance.

The act of writing on a chalkboard is a highly relevant example, as it is one of the primary actions of Two. The act of writing is performative, but the presentation of the writing (as on a chalkboard), along with the apprehension of that writing, is performance. There is a framing on two levels: physical, as the chalkboard is a space in which one writes for another (that is, the chalkboard literally has a frame), and mental, because the chalkboard is iconically linked to the idea of observation by another. The performative chalkboard session becomes performance when there are three elements: the act of writing on the board, which is “self-conscious framing” (Schechner 28), the reading of it by an other (Phelan’s idea of “presence”), and the apprehension of meaning (signification) by that other.

Things which can be analyzed semiotically, finally, can be considered
performative in the most general sense, and can also be a part of a performance. There is no doubt that Two is a performance; it follows many of the conventions of what is traditionally called theatre. That it is seen as a performance by an audience, as opposed to a text read by the reader, further dynamizes the performative elements, and gives the play a more “realistic” experiential nature. But because it is performance, it is inherently ephemeral – no two performances will ever be alike, and a performative element will never be presented in the exact same way twice.

The following chapters seek to answer, by using this critical framework for the breakdown of theodicy, the following questions: How does the dynamization of the death of God occur differently for a reader than for an audience member? What are the significant overlaps between the performativity of reading and the performativity of performance? How can the death of God performed? What does the process of drama change or illuminate in presenting the idea of death of God to an audience? In essence, how does the death of God go from philosophical construct, to literary motif, to sign, to performative event, to performance? The manner in which Two is apprehended as a text is the subject of the following chapter, in which the theory constructed here is applied directly to Elisha’s work. Following, in the third chapter, will be an analysis of performance possibilities. Finally, an analysis of the actual rehearsal and performance as process will be undertaken, using the observances of this author as director.
Chapter Two

Structure of *Two*: Breakdown and Rewriting of God as Forward Strategy

Undertaking a structural analysis of Elisha’s written text will allow for the illumination of the piece’s dramatic progression. This dramatic progression exists in two parts, divided not by two acts, but by the characters’ realization of the importance of certain issues. The first of these is the realization of each person’s past, the revelation that Anna was a member of the SS, and that Chaim prayed for his own brother’s death (a prayer which was, in his perception, granted by God). Concordant to Chaim’s past experiences is the breakdown of theodicy: “How can I believe in a God who would answer such a prayer?” (50) The rewriting of God by the two characters, using symbol and word (spoken and written), makes up the dramatic progression of the second act, and culminates in the climactic realization: that God exists.

The course of action exists on three important levels, each qualified by the temporal aspects of reading, viewing, and reflecting. The time-relation is maintained in the relationship between the text/performance and the reader/audience. The act of reading, while altering time (that is, in Beckerman’s terms, isolating events in time and space, by creating a focus of the reader/audience’s consciousness), is a repeated state, enacted at different times, dictated entirely by the will of the reader to read. The act of viewing, within the framework of a theatrical performance, is dictated temporally by the act of performance, separated from the audience. (That is, an audience member does not have the ability to control focus and the sense of altered time, as he does not dictate when a performance occurs.) The sense of altered time is not developed by the act of reading, but rather by the actors, designers, director, and the rest of the production team, in
manipulating the focus of the audience of the audience member, and the intensity of that focus, using conventions particular to the performance act.

Finally, the mnemonic act of reflecting upon a performance seen in the past is more akin to reading than the present act of viewing a theatrical event. For the reader and the reflector, things isolated in time and space (the events in the plot of a book, the memory of performed events) can be fragmented, manipulated, and deconstructed; essentially the reflector/reader has the ability to negotiate time, space, and causality on his own terms, focusing upon that which he wants, actively.

These three states exist in a performance of Two. The ultimate effect of these three phenomena create a dynamic in which the audience member is more of an active participant, in which their own values are engaged, and an answer to Chaim’s questions of God are ultimately debated with each audience member. In other words, active discourse occurs in the minds of the audience.

These different relationships of apprehension between reader/viewer and text/performance are similar to the examples of the previous chapter, but more complex in that they are placed within different points of a temporal matrix. The performative, semiotic event is different, depending upon whether such an experience is relegated into the categories of past (linked to the process of reflecting), present (linked to such events as the viewing of a performance or performative event), or subject-controlled (shifting) temporal values (as in reading).

All three of these temporal values denote Beckerman’s “isolation in time and space,” but with different forms of isolation which alter the sense of control exercised by the subject (the one experiencing the semiotic, performative event).
The following analysis (with special attention paid to the elements of dramatic build, climax, and realization) was developed by the director and the two actors during the rehearsal process. Three questions were asked of the actors which became the driving force behind this process.

1. What are the constructs, motifs, and signs that move the play forward?
2. How do certain visual and auditory elements (such as music, chess, competition, teaching, language, and Jewish-ness) function as linchpins of the plotline?
3. Where is the play going? (What is the plotline? or How is the play able to end?)

In collaboration with the designers, two questions, prior to the rehearsal process, were asked, and which will be dealt with as an addendum to the plot analysis.

1. What are the particular visual images that translate into “God” and “death of God”? To what is “God” signified? To what is “death of God” signified?
2. What are the extra-textual comparisons that can be made that will assist in a literary and (eventually) visual interpretation and understanding of the forward motion of the play?

These questions rotated around the idea of translation: In the most basic sense, Anna does not understand Hebrew, so Chaim must teach her how to translate it. Anna does not understand a certain philosophical point, so Chaim uses metaphor. Chaim does not understand the nature of Anna’s need, so she must enter into the act of translation in order to make Chaim understand enough that he will continue to teach her.

It should be noted that “metaphor” is used here to denote an artificial construction
of a sign. This artificial construct, in order to be metaphor, must be recognized for its artificial nature by both the giver and receiver of the metaphor. If it is metaphor, it must have more than a literal connotation.

Expository information in the first scene reveals an initial conflict between Chaim and Anna, noted by a misapprehension of metaphors: for Chaim, to learn Hebrew is to come closer to God, and for Anna, to learn Hebrew is to escape (and thereby enter Palestine). Already there is a confusion of terminology that spurs on the plot in its need to be satisfied. The idea “Hebrew” is signified by “escape” for Anna, though Chaim, from the beginning, seems to think it signifies “Jewishness” for her (Elisha 2). It becomes apparent throughout the play that Hebrew signifies “God” for Chaim. “Chaim: Very important letter, aleph. Very important. First letter of God’s name. Numerical value, one” (Elisha 16). From the beginning, it is apparent that the forward-thrusting argument of the play is that of the modicum of signification (primarily, in the use of metaphor), mediated by Hebrew, music, and the idea of God.

Chaim, in the next scene, enacts several tactics to keep Anna from attaining her goal of learning Hebrew. In order to be functional as his post-Holocaust self, Chaim insists that he also teach Anna to play the violin. The music serves not only to maintain Chaim’s post-war role (as a music teacher), but also serves to distract Anna from questions concerning the past, and from her attention to her own “Hebrew-speaker-as-Jew” paradigm, which he ascribes to her. It could also be argued that, while music was part of his pre-Holocaust self (as shown in the second act), it is signified for him as something other than God (the secular, an earthly pursuit).

But the music becomes a metaphor in and of itself, oscillating in its purpose and
antecedent to fit the particular arguments of the characters throughout the play. In this scene, it primarily works as a declaration of dominance for Chaim: he asks for a level of proficiency in Beethoven that he cannot provide, then makes references which indirectly link Anna to Wagner and the Nazi regime. “You like Beethoven? (She doesn’t answer.) …I had precisely the same response when they asked me about Wagner” (19), and then, after she has attempted to play, “Beethoven, I take it, is not your favorite composer…On that score, at least, you’re even: I doubt he would have considered you his favorite musician” (20, emphasis added). When she insists upon learning Hebrew, he then teaches the second letter, she asks how to spell his name, and he becomes markedly angry when she spells it incorrectly (21). This, perhaps, reflects the disagreement over the use of metaphor, in which Chaim asserts himself as the sole authority. Nothing can be misappropriated, nothing can be misrepresented (placed out of the context in which his assurances are dominant), and nothing can be misspelled.

A certain level of Hebrew has been taught, and two key signs are in place: the names of the characters, “Anna” meaning “full of grace, mercy, and prayer…like a plea to God (18), and “Chaim” meaning “life” and “lives” (20, 29). When Anna argues the point of the “deaf mem-sofit,” trying to gain some ground in her ability to discuss on a metaphorical level, Chaim replies by asserting his own authority in the manner in which Hebrew will be taught, concluding with, “If that is not in accord with your needs and ideas, you are free to go” (22). Chaim has not only limited her in what she can ask of him (“needs”), but in her ability to use language on a metaphorical level. Anna then tries again to asserts her ideas, and states that her sole purpose is to use Hebrew to get into Palestine. She is, in her own words, “a refugee” (23).
The third scene concerns mainly their conflicting worldviews; Anna’s is practical and political, and Chaim’s is philosophical. Here, the very constructs each character uses to attain goals come into conflict. It became apparent to the actors and director at this point that the through-line of action, which allowed each scene to progress, was a combination of Anna’s insistence and Chaim’s tactic changes. In essence, Chaim eventually leads him to a point where Chaim must confront the past: in an attempt to avoid Anna’s questions, Chaim is eventually trapped in a situation where he must answer the most crucial question, “Why are you an atheist?” This is foreshadowed by Anna’s refusal to give up the argument in which metaphors are dismantled (“Why do I need an umbrella only when it rains?”) and Chaim’s inability to continue this argument until he has won (“It’s getting late”). Rising action is provided by Chaim’s increasing inability to maintain security in a world which he has created, a world seen on both the physical level (his solitude, his apartment) and the mental level (his metaphors, his teaching style).

The fourth scene provides another metaphor which, from the point of this scene to the climax of the play, becomes key for the characters’ understanding of God. This metaphor, “Shachmaht” (chess), becomes important in the minds of the characters from the first moment of the scene, after the radio is turned off (27).

Chaim: You play shachmaht?

Anna: Sorry?

Chaim: Shachmaht – chess. Do you play it?

Anna (shrugging): I used to…many years ago.

Chaim: Fascinating game…the forces of darkness against those of light.

Anna (approaching the board as he makes a move thereon.) You…play
against yourself.

Chaim: Yes. Such pastimes are always far more pleasureable when one is pitted against an opponent of one’s own calibre.

Anna: But…I don’t understand. How can one play oneself? (Elisha 28)

What is brought into question in this scene is why Chaim is playing this “shadow of a game” (playing with no opponent but himself). This is typified by a question that may at first seem a joke (as it comes hard upon one of Chaim’s puns): “Tell me – are you, by any chance, and anti-semite?” (30) This gives support to Chaim’s misassumption about what Hebrew is for Anna.

A marked tactic change occurs when Chaim, in the fifth scene, attempt to merge Hebrew and music: “Since, in my opinion, both your Hebrew and your music stand in need of a certain degree of…refinement, I thought we might try combining the two” (30). Here, Chaim uses this Hebrew-music hybrid so that Anna will play Hatikvah. Chaim then plays the same song, with a proficiency of one who has mastered the violin, and one who is familiar with the song. In this instance, the significant of music is hope. He then confronts her about the question at the end of the previous scene. “Why didn’t you tell me you were a gentile? I began to suspect when you asked me if I was an anti-semite. No Jew would ever have to ask another Jew that question” (31). He is again insisting upon his misassumption.

To the actors and director, a key choice on the part of the playwright became apparent; throughout this scene, the characters do not answer each other’s questions. “Who are you?” and “What has the Jewish quota to do with you?” both asked by Chaim, are never answered by Anna. Similar questions, such as “Is it guilt you feel?” are also
unanswered. Anna is ultimately unable to answer “What is a Jew?” and Chaim only reveals the answer after he has left: “A Jew is whatever he happens to be suffering from at the time the question is asked” (39). The importance of this lies in the symbolic paradigm he has constructed for Anna: Hebrew → Jew → suffering.

Anna uses the chess metaphor in her own defense: “If I were your opponent at chess, I’d do the best to hide the motives behind each of my moves. Your only certainty would be my desire to beat you.” Anna is now invoking that competition theme in which Chaim has previously used to gain authority and dominance. When Chaim says, “You already know the motives behind all my moves,” Anna quickly responds with, “Do I?” At this point, Anna has gained a certain level of mobility in her use of metaphor, so much so that Chaim must change the rules of the game, thus bringing about the riddle that must be solved in order for Anna to become a Jew.

A question arose at this point in the discussion, which the actors and director had articulated earlier in the rehearsal process, during the first reading. One of the presumed “problems” of the text was that Anna’s position was perpetually untenable. It seems, from the very beginning, that Chaim suspects something is going on with Anna. It was assumed by the company that many people would guess early on that Anna had some connection to the Nazi Party. Even when Anna completely refuses to reveal who she is, Chaim allows her to return, and her continued returns are necessary for the dismantling of his constructed world of isolation, a dismantling which Chaim resists. Why then, does Chaim allow Anna to return? These question could only be answered in the rehearsal process, and it is enough to say here that two possibilities existed. The first is that Chaim is unaware of the dismantling process being linked to Anna’s visit (a solution which the
rehearsal process revealed to be untenable). The second is that Chaim wants in some way to be free from his past and present torment, and that, while he resists to alleviate the painfulness of the dismantling, Chaim actively seeks to include Anna in his life, if only on his own terms.

The next scene includes a spiking of dramatic intensity, as well as the framework for the next act. This sixth and final scene of the first act begins with Chaim inebriated from schnapps. Chaim is vulnerable, emotional, and unable to enforce his opinion with the pedagogical logic of the previous scenes. He tells Anna to leave him alone, and she refuses, until he tells her why he is upset and drunk. He has no power to force her to leave, or at least, none that he is willing to use at the moment. The chess metaphor becomes central to this scene, taking on the metaphoric value it will maintain for the rest of the play. He insists upon playing chess, and Anna must, in order to find out why he’s upset. Anna wins the white piece, allowing her to move first; Chaim marks this as “appropriate” (42). He then mentions his “no king” rule, and Anna questions the purpose of such a game. It then becomes apparent that the kings are a signifier of God.

Anna: Sure, I can move, but to what end? I mean, if there isn’t… (*The light suddenly dawns.*)

Chaim: I used to believe that the existence of God gave our lives – gave the world – some meaning. That if you took away the king, we could still do all we had done before, but that it would have no point. There was no way of “winning.” Then I discovered that even if there were a king, winning in its *self* had no meaning. One’s left hand might as well play one’s right hand…Then I discovered
there was, in fact, no king...Shachmaht – the king is dead...So you see, I –Rabbi Chaim Levi – am an atheist. (43)

Chaim is revealing the chess king/God metaphor, and expanding upon the idea of “the forces of darkness against those of light/right hand-left hand” metaphor. Winning is, essentially, living. Chaim’s nature is revealed as split. He, in his own paradigm, is that darkness, and that darkness is his denial of God. His behavior has lost meaning, his life (“winning”) has lost meaning. Anna questions why his behavior does not reflect his loss of God, but cannot perceive that the isolation and drunkenness are parts of a behavioral change. This moment in the text is key, as it marks an admission of the death of God.

Anna becomes angry, trying to awaken him from his self-pity, but instead incites his curiosity when she blurts out the word *muselman*. At that point, Anna is trapped into admitting that she was also in Auschwitz, and that she was a member of the SS. The level of shock exhibited by Chaim can only be one of a person who has guessed at the truth, but has not realized the extreme nature of it. Anna insists that she is not running away, and that what she has said has always been the truth. Then, she admits that Hebrew for her is synonymous with escape, an assertion that Chaim only now, ironically, believes. The repetition of the word “truth” is coupled with her accidentally striking him. He returns the blow with an attack which builds in violence with the passing train. He is, in effect, wiping the slate clean, giving her a disproportionate measure of violence which allows her the right to return. She has done nothing to him directly, but there must be some measure of equal fault (or at least, a fault which will at first keep him from turning her in to the authorities). She rises from the floor to write *ani yehoodiah* (“I am a Jewess”), and then he screams at her to leave. She does so, and the first act ends.
The stage is literally set for the dismantling of Chaim’s self-deceptive isolation. A change in his perception of her must take place. The signifier of Hebrew is not Jew, the signifier of Anna is Jew. If his truth is to come out, it will be the entire truth. The following five vignettes show the process of God’s death during Chaim’s stay at Auschwitz. Anna returns to plead her case, and demands that Chaim speak of the past. In demanding to know why Chaim is an atheist, Anna opens a floodgate of emotion which drives the next few scenes.

The first of these scenes is marked by the denial of family: Chaim prays for his own brother to die, so that he himself might be relieved of bearing the burden of two people. In Chaim’s mind, the prayer is answered, as Chiriq is beaten and left for dead while Chaim is ill. The question, “How can I believe in a God who would answer such a prayer?” (50) is paradoxical, and shows the nature of Chaim’s conflicted existence. Not only is meaning lost, but the mechanism for reinserting meaning into one’s life is faulty – the paradox of a non-existent God answering a prayer is the cusp of an ontological crisis onto which Chaim attaches the meaning of his life and work (God $\rightarrow$ meaning). The internal conflict is revealed as a moral crisis: God signifies both good and evil, but how can there be a significant relationship between good and evil?

In the second scene of this act, Chaim narrates how hunger and need escalate to group violence, when an act of pity spurs on group brutality (pity $\rightarrow$ brutality). The train which divided each scene in the first act now gains metaphorical power; the act of group violence took place on a train. The train overshadows Chaim’s life, both physically and metaphorically (brutality/violence $\rightarrow$ train). The sound of the train has become a part of his life’s routine. The relationship between pity and violence is what Chaim refers to as
“a game” (51), hence, *pity → brutality → game → winning* (in a previous scene) → *life* (“Chaim”). The violence that occurred was not German against Jew, but Jew against Jew, and is an inevitability in his own life.

The next vignette (third scene) is the shortest, and gives a hint as to Chaim’s aspirations and activities prior to the war. He was a violinist. His proficiency as a musician helped to save his life in Auschwitz, while others were dying. He was incapable of sharing in the suffering of others, because of a particular ability. “One day, I smashed my violin. I couldn’t play anymore. I swore I would never play again. I broke that vow in your presence, when I played the ‘Hatikvah’” (52). Here, Chaim begins to direct some aspects of his speech towards a present tense, towards Anna. He broke a vow because of her, and that vow was never to play again. The breaking of that vow was a song which means “hope.” Chaim, in this monologue, and nowhere else in this sequence of vignettes, acknowledges Anna’s presence, and admits to a change occurring within himself. Before the floodgate opened, he was maintaining only part of the signified of *Chaim*, music (what he *does* as opposed to what he *is*). He was maintaining, in short, only part of his self, letting the rest decay. This change he notes to Anna is a movement towards that dismantling of his post-Holocaust world, through hope.

The fourth scene, in which Chaim describes the futility of a good act, is an admission that violence and death can occur even in the midst of an attempt to help another (*help → violence*). Chaim accidentally kills a pregnant woman. “The blow I had delivered to help save her life had taken it instead” (53) is a truly subversive paradigm. It is important to note that there is an attempt on the part of the women, and Chaim, to turn violence towards a good end. However, the futility of that attempt is marked as yet
another bit of violence which is one Jew harming another.

The fifth and final scene of the vignette sequence is a description of the boy Absalom, and explores the importance of one life over another. The idea of Absalom’s eyes, watching but not speaking, seems to haunt Chaim, like a “smouldering ember” that “reproaches every beat of my heart” (54). The line “if only I had died, instead of him” is a strong testament to Chaim’s guilt over the acts of violence of which he himself was a part. This account is paralleled by the “Absalom story” of the first act, about the death of a biblical figure (a metonymy, perhaps, for the death of one’s religion). Chaim wants to signify death with himself, though the signified of his name is life.

This series of monologues shows, progressively, both the death of God and its implications for Chaim. The idea of good and evil are swept away, as violence against one’s own people is perpetrated, and acts of aid are turned into life-ending events. What Chaim has constructed in these monologues is a world of twisted metaphors and juxtapositions, in which there is no allowance for good and evil in a dualistic relationship. The “perfectly good” being of Swinburne’s theodicy cannot exist in that world.

Ultimately, three alternatives exist: to remain in the world without God, to construct a new world to fit the parameters of Chaim’s (and Swinburne’s) theodicy prior to the war, or to construct a new God/world paradigm in which there is both a recognition of the past, and hope for the future, with a degree of peace and liveability in the present moment.

It is difficult to determine how much time has passed between the fifth and sixth scenes of the second act. The period, which the company guessed to be at least a week, would have to be sufficient for Chaim to adjust to a new relationship with Anna, in which
ideas can be exchanged more freely, and communication about things other than Chaim’s past sufferings can take place.

Immediately, a new dynamic is seen. Chaim is testing Anna’s Hebrew vocabulary—he is actively teaching her the language. At the same time, Anna is drawing a map of Palestine, in which the present moment, or “the situation as it stands” (55), is displayed. They are able to communicate on a much more egalitarian level, as can be seen by Anna’s retorts of “Are you listening to me?” and “That may be the answer to yours, but this, this is my answer.” At the same time, the actors noted that Anna is beginning to understand Chaim better, and to gain some level of sympathy. A reordering of signifieds is taking place.

What is perhaps most striking is that the two characters’ ideas begin to merge. The pace of this scene is very fast in parts, as they are able to finish each other’s sentences. There is an understanding here that was not present previously. Chaim, furthermore, is actively trying to help her. At the same time, Anna tries to plead the case that “all hope, in the final analysis, resides in God” (56), or, God → hope. To Anna, that hope is embodied in the partitioning of the state of Israel. For Chaim, the answer is not so simple. Chaim proves his point so well, that Anna must agree.

Anna: And people are still dying…

Chaim: For me and for you…you see – in the camps, we weren’t troubled by such…niceties. There was no good, no evil…

Anna: No right or wrong…

Chaim: No wisdom, no foolishness. Only one distinction…

Anna: Between life and death.
Chaim: To the left…

Anna: Or to the right…

Chaim: The Selection…the only morality – then and now – is that of survival.

Anna: Then the SS were no worse than anyone else. (60)

Chaim then shows the link between the spelling of the words *shaddai* (“Almighty”) and *shed* (“Devil”). “‘Shaddai’ – the Almighty. God. A Being of Infinite goodness. ‘Shed.’ The Devil…A part of that infinitely good Being” (61). The problem of evil is not solved, in this sense, but significant progress is made – the problem of Chaim’s paradox of belief is recognized.

After these two important realizations – *shaddai/shed* and that “the SS were no worse than anyone else” – Anna must confront, in the seventh scene, the possibility that she may be caught by Allied authorities. She decides to, as the actress put it, “throw herself into the hands of Fate.” Chaim is again drunk, if only slightly, perhaps portraying his difficulty in dealing with things that are progressively becoming clear to him. The drunkenness may also be necessary for him to do what he does in this scene – he lets go of the threat of turning her in. She, however, does not accept his offer of the card, as she protests, she is “not brave, just hopeful” (64). This act of forgiveness on the part of Chaim is, arguably, a rabbinical act. The act of hope on the part of Anna, is however undoubtedly a Jewish act.

The eighth scene shows that Chaim is actively fighting for Anna’s survival. He has lied to the authorities repeatedly, and is willing to make her Jewish. Anna comes in with two gifts, chocolate and scripture. In using the scriptural references, she is
comparing Chaim to Jonah, and urging him to forgive himself, and recognize his capacity to love and care for others. It is an act of love on Anna’s part, though one that, ironically, is a source of pain for Chaim. The actors noted that, for perhaps the first time, Anna interrupts Chaim, instead of the opposite.

This long scriptural reading brings the play to its climax: there is a terrible reality that Chaim must face, that God heard his prayer, and that, by deduction, God exists. The proof of this is “when he [God] killed Chiriq” (69). Chaim must recognize and come to terms with the double signification of God. Anna insists that Chaim must interact, must take responsibility, and in so doing, ultimately become part of the world. She returns in the end to the right hand/left hand metaphor, which demands a fluxuating process of signification. Perhaps people who committed acts of violence during the war did not know any better, but they should have. All people are responsible for the violence and the fate of the world.

In the ninth scene, the last one in which Anna appears, she is forced to say goodbye, as the authorities have located her. She presents her solution to the riddle, which is different from Chaim’s: “there are no others,” each person embodies both good and evil, as does God. Each person is responsible for the fate of the world. “To suggest that good is a part of being human but that evil is not is to suggest that none of us is human. It is a short step from that suggestion to the gates of Auschwitz” (74).

In the tenth and final scene, it becomes clear that Chaim is leaving his isolation, but that his destination (his decisions, his personal philosophy) are still uncertain. “as to my destination – perhaps Nineveh…God willing, I will find my way” (75). However, there is now the will to find a purpose that is outside of his previous isolation. He seems
to believe in God, though that view is not what it was. “…the men in grey suits, who sat in there offices, and drafted declarations and signed resolutions, and whose every stroke of the pen meant a thousand lives this way or a thousand lives that way. If ever I take an image of God with me to the grave, that will be the image” (76). God now has a new metaphor, clothed not in black or white, but in grey. It is clear that the process of becoming a part of the world will continue, and that Chaim’s previous world, built after his suffering in Auschwitz, has been completely dismantled. His model for God no longer works in the larger world, so he must search for another. What that image is, there is little hint. It is sufficient to say that God is going through an ongoing process of being rewritten by the one who experiences him.
Chapter Three

The Breakdown of Theodicy as Dramatic Act

This chapter will deal with the staging problems, ideas, and challenges which occurred both during the pre-production and the rehearsal and performance processes. As in the first chapter, the focus will be placed on the breakdown of theodicy and the reassignment of God into the character’s worldviews.

With the analysis of the forward strategy of the play, what became apparent to the actors was the directorial thrust of the piece, that the expulsion and re-insertion of God into the play’s framework were the key elements of climax and resolution. The integration of production concept, staging questions, performance preparation, and audience response will be dealt with here, in so much as they illuminate this directorial concept and its level of success.

In initial production discussions, I presented the following production matrix which encapsulated my vision of the play: “God died in the crematories of Auschwitz, where human beings discovered the true extent of their own evil. God must be re-written in strictly human terms. God and humanity are both good and evil. The coexistence of good and evil is necessary for the survival of the human race and of God.” We decided early on that Two is not so much a tragedy as it is a philosophical dialogue which uses tragedy as a medium. To underscore that this search for the survival of the self and God is not concluded in the play, I included in the initial production statement this quotation from Elie Wiesel’s Dawn.
In the concentration camp I had cried out in sorrow and anger against God and also against man, who seemed to have inherited only the cruelty of his creator. . . So many questions obsessed me. Where is God to be found? In suffering or in rebellion? When is a man most truly a man? When he submits or when he resists? Where does suffering lead him? To purification or bestiality? (12)

These are the questions I wanted to impart to the production team, as I felt these would be similar to those of an audience member after seeing the performance. As all things in this play pointed not to whether, but to how, one believes in God, I believed the primary goal should be to make the audience ask the same question.

This chapter will approach, then, theodicy breakdown and reassignment as performance, how these two events were developed in concept, rehearsal, and performance. In order to do so, I will approach the play again from a structural standpoint.

The first moments of the play provide an excellent framework which I felt would acclimate the audience to the philosophically dialogic style of the piece. The existential questions “Who are you? Where are you from? What do you want?” immediately place an audience in a mode in which questions must be asked. In keeping with this idea, I insisted that the point where Anna’s entrance occurred be kept in total darkness for the first few moments, so that the audience is forced to ask those questions as well. Chaim is, essentially, talking to something that is not yet there. When one hears a female voice come out of that darkness, saying, “Money is no object. There isn’t much time,” then stepping into the light with, “you must help me,” it becomes clear that whoever is coming
into this environment is desperate, and is trying to push action forward as quickly as possible (and in so doing, increasing the tempo of the scene).

The conflict of varying verbal tempos, Chaim’s slower and more repetitive, and Anna’s fast and to the point, came into being during the first rehearsals. This conflict of vocal patterns served to unsettle the audience, and relay that there was a level of frustration and misapprehension between the two characters. The fastness of Anna’s voice was linked then to the sound of the fast trains, sometimes overwhelming conversation, inevitably forcing its way into small gaps in conversation, inevitably intruding on the slower pace of Chaim’s voice.

With the interplay of light and shadow, and the varying vocal tempos, I attempted to develop the idea that Anna was invading Chaim’s world, intruding upon it with such speed and insistence that he is compelled to acquiesce and allow her to stay, at least during their first meeting. Anna’s desperation and bravery is a source of curiosity, if nothing else, underscored by his line, “You look hungry.”

The conflict also foreshadows the inevitability of something being revealed. Having assumed that the audience would guess at Anna’s background (at least that she was a Nazi), that thing “being revealed” was the reason behind Chaim’s atheism. Of course, at this point in the play, the audience would know nothing about his faith, except that he has a certain degree of cynicism toward it. But the audience would note the imbalance, and assume that it was significant. The structure of the play, and that presumed guesswork by the audience also serves to point attention away from her Nazism to the more significant matter of onto-theology.

During the first meeting with actors, we had a read-through, then we discussed the
idea of translation that Chaim would be teaching Hebrew not only to Anna, but also to the audience. What was more, Chaim’s would perceive certain implications to the language, and would share those. As a result, certain staging issues would arise, that would not allow either of the characters to block the chalkboard for any given length of time. This also led to a significant non-realistic blocking decision – that of moving the chalkboard to various locations on stage for each scene. The mobility of the chalkboard would allow for emphasis of key ideas, and metaphorical movement patterns (such as Chaim rounding the board as he describes the water cycle).

Inherent in the act of translation is several key power systems: the first is that Chaim holds a type of knowledge that Anna (and most of the audience) does not have. The second is that he is able to vary and limit the pace of the transmission of such knowledge. The third is that he can manipulate and distort that knowledge on a metaphorical level. In this way, Anna and the non-Hebrew speaking members of the audience are synonymous to each other – they are observers of the performative act of teaching. Chaim is able to construct first his terms of education, then his worldview, then his God, using tools which the others (observers) cannot use. The audience must go through that same process as Anna, in developing a framework for discussion with Chaim. Only through a mastery of that knowledge can one refute Chaim’s claims – an act which Anna is capable of doing only after the end of the first act.

The production team employed the moveable chalkboard as a framing device for the breakdown of theodicy, however, several other items were also used, on a metaphoric basis, to represent Chaim’s crisis of faith. Those were the violin and the chessboard.

The violin is used as a testing device for Anna, through which Chaim can assert
dominance and distract from that to which the Hebrew lessons will eventually lead. For Anna, it is at first an obstacle, then, in the second act, a mode of expression of solidarity with Chaim (as she plays “Hatikvah”). The significant use of the violin which is used to frame Chaim’s belief is in the scene when he combines Hebrew lettering with musical notes to make Anna play “Hatikvah.” If she does not recognize the song with the first few notes, and is unable to play it, Chaim will know that Anna is not Jewish. However, there is a deeper meaning behind the violin and the song as he plays it in that scene – it is a representation of a past in which he had hope, and which describes also the hope of the post-Holocaust Jew. In order to highlight and extend this metaphor, we employed, instead of the sound of a violin, and the skill necessary to play it, a pre-recorded human voice. This implied a more personal and immediate value to the song played, and in combination with the dimming of light, served to represent music not necessarily played, but music in Chaim’s mind. That Chaim can play the song beautifully and that Anna could not further represents Anna’s inability to understand Chaim’s present situation. That the hope represented by the song is gone is represented by Chaim’s use of the bow in accusing Anna of lying to him, tapping it on the table and brandishing it as a potential weapon against her. The ultimate decision to do away with the string-less bow did take away from that metaphoric impact, but was done for practicality reasons.

The chessboard is more immediately linked to the breakdown of theodicy, in that it is used as a direct metaphor for Chaim’s inner life, and the death of God. His playing of the chessboard, and his distracted attention as he talks to Anna (as in the scene when the chessboard is first used), is representative of a preoccupation with something that Anna cannot at first apprehend. Chaim notes that chess is “a fascinating game, the forces of
darkness against those of light.” The chessboard, while a dualistic expression of good and evil, is a unity, like Chaim’s mind, in which the dialectic nature of his past can be played out, with the chief figures being his faith in God and his acts of violence and despair. The king figure comes to represent God, and was highlighted onstage with the following blocking choices.

Chaim: [Leans back in his chair.] I used to believe that the existence of God gave our lives – gave the world – some meaning. [Picks up the white king from the top of the radio, stares at it.] That if you took away the king, we could still do all we had done before, but that it would have no point. There was no way of “winning.” Then I discovered that even if there were a king, winning in itself had no meaning. One’s left hand might as well play one’s right hand…[Putting the white king down, next to the black, on top of the radio.] Then I discovered there was, in fact, no king…Shachmaht – [slams the white King down with his hand] the king [pause, looks to Anna] is dead…So you see, I –Rabbi Chaim Levi – [leaning back again] am an atheist. (43)

This is the first significant mention of God by Chaim, outside of the mention of the letter aleph as the “first letter of God’s name” in the first scene.

The act of violence on the part of Chaim essentially wipes the moral slate clean and shatters the power framework of the first act, which portrays Chaim as reserved and dominant. (As I told the actor, this is the tabula rasa on which things are rewritten.) In order for both the characters to exist in the same space, in light of the atrocities to which
Anna was a party, Chaim must show his own capacity for violence, thus introducing the fact that he was also guilty of atrocities in the past. The “confession vignettes,” as we called them, were Brechtian in their written style, taken out of the context of the play’s time, and presented, in my opinion, as much to the audience as to Anna. With this in mind, only one moment was specified in which Chaim would talk to directly to Anna, as opposed to staring downwards or into the general vicinity of the audience. This moment was held until the lights faded, and was, “I broke that vow in your presence, when I played the ‘Hatikvah.’”

Each of these moments were emphasize by their stillness. I rarely allowed Chaim the opportunity to move or gesture in these scenes, as I wanted the intense concentration of the characters on the words spoken to reflect what I perceived as the “model listener” (an idea drawn from readings of Umberto Eco, in which a person is able to perceive not only the framework and style of a text, but also be directing into a framework of interpreting that text to the utmost emotive effect). If the characters focus and thus frame the words in the context of stillness, I told them, the audience, if emotionally connected to previous moments in the play, would be apt to do the same.

Also framing these moments was the marked absence of train sound cues, and the very slow dimming and rise of lights. This further set off the vignettes as separate from the play’s previous time flow. The ultimate result attempted was to set these moments off not only as “confessional” but also philosophical. These key moments needed to be somewhat slow, and involve intense concentration on the part of the audience in order for them to understand the reasons behind the breakdown of theodicy in Chaim’s mind. These vignettes are essential parts of a philosophical dialogue within the play, that is not
so much between Chaim and Anna as it is between Chaim and the audience.

Chaim moves from a linguistic context of God to one much more personal, using his own past as a moral framework in which he begins to come to the reality of God as both good and evil. Recounts of his past in a moral context are underscored by non-realistic lighting changes. This past reveals that even acts of goodness did not automatically lead to good results during the Holocaust.

As the play progresses, and Chaim and Anna work to build his new world (a world in which the hope of escape exists for Anna, a marked moral reversal to the stories of Chaim’s past), there is a greater cooperation between the two characters, and Anna begins to use the chalkboard as a framing device for her own “lessons” to Chaim. By the final three scenes of the play, the audience was seeing an intentional reversal of roles, highlighted by blocking choices which placed the chalkboard in similar “teaching positions” as scenes in Act One, with Anna taking the place of Chaim, often mimicking his gestures and stances at the chalkboard. Chaim, in contrast, is now seated, as Anna was in the first act. However, many of the positions in which the two characters find themselves are more open than in the first act. What is more, the speed of delivery is not as inconsistent between the characters as it was in the first act, except in the final scene with Anna, during which she is teaching Chaim, using his name.

One significant return to the blocking of the first act is Chaim’s final major lesson at the chalkboard, during which he rewrites his paradigm for God in the moral context of a post-Holocaust world. This is the “Shaddai/’Shed” paradigm, in which Chaim declares God to be a being that embodies both absolute good and absolute evil. ([writes on the board the word “Shaddai’”] ‘Shaddai’ – the Almighty. God. A Being of Infinite

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goodness. [Circles the shin and daled.] ‘Shed.’ The Devil…A part of that infinitely
good Being.” In the midst of this idea, the moral framework of the play then rests on
one’s ability to survive. The chalkboard is the frame for a statement which only seems
possible in the face of the previous moral reversals of Auschwitz.

The use of biblical verse in the third-to last scene, in which Anna compares
Chaim to Jonah, is another framing device similar to the chalkboard. In order for its easy
transition to the audience, however, the actress made it clear that Anna had the verses
memorized from the beginning, and would be able to continue reciting them, despite
Chaim’s refutations. In this way, Anna is also able to do something both highly dialogic
and highly theatrical – change her emphasis of the verse to argue back at Chaim. She is
returning Chaim to a methodology of his previous faith in God, that of biblical exegesis.
But in doing this, Anna is applying a biblical scenario directly to his past, is allowing him
the opportunity to see that his prior beliefs are in fact compatible with the
“Shaddai/Shed” paradigm. God did listen to Chaim, when he answered the prayer to kill
his brother. As a result, God must exist within this new paradigm. Chaim’s
unwillingness to accept this possibility lies, perhaps, in his unwillingness to accept
himself as a being capable of both good and evil in such extreme degrees. This explored
further in the final scene with Anna.

This second to last scene utilizes the chalkboard, with Anna in the position of
teacher. She writes “Rav Chaim Levi” and uses it as a proof that Chaim, based on their
previous word games, is a just man, a teacher, and one who survived (and is therefore
moral). Her concluding words were staged in such a way that a rare instance of intimate
physical contact was achieved. “[grasping his hands, shaking them to emphasize each
Rav Chaim Levi, there are no other, saint and devil, victim and executioner…

They are us. All of them us.” Anna’s final conclusion is a dramatic expression of a syllogism that directly refutes the previously-held theodicy that:

\[ P^1: \text{God is the embodiment of both absolute good and absolute evil.} \]

\[ P^2: \text{Human beings are derived from God.} \]

Therefore: Human beings, in some way, embody both good and evil.

Anna’s final words are “To suggest that a members of the SS is not human is just as dangerous a suggestion that a Jew is not a human being. It is a short step from that suggestion to the gates of Auschwitz. [There is a banging on the door. Anna and Chaim embrace. Blackout.]” These words are spoken onstage with the two characters in the closest possible proximity to each other, suggesting both an intimacy and an equality to their positions. To say that various aspects of good and evil “are us” is to lessen the significance of such pronouns as “I” and “you,” suggesting a sameness in both of the characters.

The final scene returns to the use of words as a forefront, underscored by the clear business of Chaim packing to leave. That he himself does not speak places the scene again out of the logical time of the play, and allows for a final reminder that the importance of the piece lies not in the histories of the characters, but in the ideas which they presented. As Chaim touches the violin, he makes the final decision to leave the space, thus opening it up for the interpretation of an audience.
Chapter 4

Placing *Two* in a Socio-Historical Moment

The purpose of this chapter is to place *Two* in a broader context than previously developed, showing it to be a text responsive to particular outside forces in theology, history, psychology, and literature. With this goal in mind, it is necessary to inform the reader that only a cursory overview can be provided, and that the ultimate end is to place the text, as a piece of theatre, in its appropriate context. Thus, questions of response and direct correlation will be asked, and certain conclusions will be drawn which deal with only a handful of key ideas and texts.

These texts show that while *Two* is a play that uses the Holocaust, and is ultimately framed within Elisha’s Jewish mind, it’s implications have to do with a progression of thought and culture that is not specifically Jewish, but instead more universal, affecting continental thinkers.

The central idea to be treated in this chapter is, as in the rest of the thesis, the breakdown of theodicy. Several key facts need to be recognized in order to focus this analysis. The first is that the idea of the death of God does not come directly from the Holocaust, but preceded it, in the form dictated in chapter one, by over a century. The death of God as philosophical construct, literary motif, and semiotic/performative event was an outgrowth of objections to theodicy occurring as early as the mid 17th century. Finally, while the Holocaust was not the starting point of this phenomenon, it changed and expanded the argument, so that it became a problem not particular to any one people in particular, but one that affected the whole of modern and post-modern thought. “New eras are created by historical catastrophes…” writes Michael D. Ryan, “Uncertainty, an
acute sense of the transitoriness of life, an urgent need for a whole new departure of personal and social existence – all this, intermixed with bitterness, cynicism, or resignation, characterized the consciousness of those who felt that the events of history had closed the gates of one epoch behind them and left them to find their way in a strange and threatening world.” It is clear that, from this perspective, historical catastrophes underscore the development of thoughts concerning society and the individual, and the ultimate purpose behind them.

Or, possibly, as Derrida argues, the idea of purpose moves to maintain cultural cohesion.

Derrida argues that Western metaphysics has always organized itself around a central transcendental signified, but that this signified changes constantly – thus the Monad, center of neo-Platonism, yields to God, center of Christianity, which in turn gives way to consciousness, center of Romanticism, etc… Each of these privileged signifieds derives its value and meaning from its place within a larger structure, a structure which moreover antedates it. (Silverman 33-34)

If that is so, then the Holocaust was an historical moment which underscored a more sweeping and general change, and was itself a specification of a larger cultural event, manifested in a violent propaganda of racial cleansing. The twisting of the philosophical tenets of Heidegger and Nietzsche by Nazi thinkers to justify genocide was a convoluted process. In the end, the Holocaust, regardless of how one interprets cultural purpose, only served to underscore what had been happening on a cultural level since the mid 17th century. “For many, the problem of finding a new rationale has been aggravated by the
death of their personal God. After Auschwitz many Jews did not need Nietzsche to tell them that the old God of Jewish patriarchal monotheism was dead beyond all hope of resurrection” (Rubinstein 227).

Chaim’s final vision of God, New York City’s men in grey suits, lording over a bureaucratic empire, reveals that the world which Chaim is going to enter has seen the same breakdown of purpose as he has. The world has moved on, and now, so must Chaim move into this new paradigm. To leave matters there is to support the idea of a world in which the supreme being is one capable of inspiring hope for the future, and destroying that hope in the murdering of innocents like Chiriq and Absalom. Instead, the conclusion of the play denotes a journey beginning for Chaim, the end of which is uncertain. “As to my destination, perhaps Nineveh.” This may denote Chaim’s willingness to rewrite God within a Jewish cultural paradigm. He is concerned now not only with religious precepts connected to the Jewish people, but is now committed in some way, “To the Jews, as a Zionist.”

The Jonah reference is worthy of special note, as it seems to encapsulate Chaim’s emotional process in the play. He, as Jonah, moves from being engulfed in the events of the Holocaust, to being dislocated from his religious faith and people. “From the belly of hell, cried I,” Anna reads, and Chaim did indeed cry from Hell for his brother’s death. The breakdown of Chaim’s pre-Holocaust moral framework results in his anger when the world, especially Germany, is capable of “returning to normal,” acting largely, in his mind, as if the atrocities of Auschwitz never happened. God’s lesson in smiting the gourd is parallel to Chaim’s understanding the ability to forgive not only his oppressors, but himself, for sins committed under the most extraordinary of circumstances.
Through his relationship with Anna, Chaim has exploded the positioning of God in a worldview, merging the idea of evil and suffering with the idea of a perfectly good deity. But, in light of this new philosophical difficulty, Chaim is willing to engage it with an international and interreligious perspective – note, firstly, that his God is no longer Jewish, but belongs, for better or worse, to the entire world.

Where then does that leave Chaim who is, by Anna’s assurance and his own admission, still a Jew?

When one accepts the new situation, one is forced either to reject Jewish religious practice or to find a new rationale for continuing to fulfill that sector which remains meaningful. As Tillich suggested, we live in an age of “broken symbols.” The problem of the symbolic content of Judaism in our time is to find a viable basis for continuing to maintain Jewish religious practice after its rational validations have become altogether transparent to us. (Rubinstein 229)

The final words of Chaim in the play, along with Rubinstein’s analysis and the religious background of Elisha, point to an emotionally unsettling reality – that Chaim may still ultimately reject God, evil while in the midst of embracing his Jewishness. His view of this newly written deity is, after all, far from positive. In any case, Chaim is, by the end of the play, willing to face that reality.

If then, the death of God has attracted speculation from various backgrounds and cultures, from Liebniz and Nietzsche to Tillich and Spong, to Rubinstein and Wiesel to Swinburne and Oppy, there can be no doubt that the theoretical problem of God, inherent in Two, is still immediate and worthy of attention on many fronts.
This serious attention to the problems of theodicy are as old as the Enlightenment, and frame modernity as it questions the need for religious institutionalism, in a world in which, as Rubinstein says, “belief continues to decline, while religious communities continue to expand” (227). Religion is, in light of the nonbeliever, relegated either to obsolete practice or culturally necessary metaphor: “Religion is the way in which we share our predicament; it is never the way in which we overcome our condition” (Rubinstein 263).

But while it is impossible, in this or any study, to solve the quandary of the late modernist God, one is capable of noting the interchange between modernist and postmodernist thought, focusing on the discourse of those who remember the Holocaust (or those for whom the Holocaust is an accessible historical event) and those attempting to rewrite, and thereby reinsert God into a post-modern paradigm.

The re-thinking of God's reality presently occurring across all the major forms of post-modern theologies cannot be located in either the apophatic or the apocalyptic trajectory alone. Rather an adequate contemporary naming of the Divine reality, in our contemporary period, may be found, above all, in the very otherness and difference of those forms invented by the marginalized voices through whom God manifests Godself with an interruptive, Othering power reminiscent of honesty to life as it happens in history and read through the central prophetic and apocalyptic biblical narratives and Greek tragedy alike. The Hidden-Revealed God and the Comprehensible-Incomprehensible God have never been closer in theological self-understanding. It is that conjunction, I believe, that will
free both the apocalyptic and the mystical-apophatic trajectories of post
modern theologies to find one another once again, and in so seeing the
other, find a new, further disclosure of the unfathomable Mystery of God
as the Incomprehensible and Hidden One. (Tracy 7)

Or, in the words of Robert Inchausti, “When the ‘I’ of our solitude experiences the
solitude of every other person, this experience of shared ‘aloneness’ activates a
wellspring of compassion that inspires us to sacrifice and service” (2).

Perhaps, in the midst of formalized verbal debate, Elisha is suggesting that,
instead of embracing ideas of what God is not (apophaticism) or what God is
(revelationism), it is necessary for the Jewish, or the human, person to rewrite God. This
rewriting is accomplished through the discourse of human action, in which choice is the
primary mechanism of this writing. What form this action takes is as unique as the
individual, and therefore not able to be encapsulated in an institutional faith, or even in a
collective morality. God, in this post-modern context, is as ineffable as the results of
self-identification. By exploding the framework of theodicy, the dependence of God
upon revelation and natural law, and a perhaps defunct modern paradigm in which
regression is possible, Elisha is able to show God not in a positive light, but as a form in
motion, a plasticity written by Chaim after the end of the play, and in turn, by his
audience.

Seeing these actions on stage allow for an audience to reflect upon them as action
(as opposed to reflecting upon them as written word). This action is the medium of
interpretation inherent in the process of drama. The process of rewriting, as the discourse
of action, is central to this particular play, making it the key element upon which the
audience will reflect.
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