

# ○ OF BROKEN POTS AND DIRTY LAUNDRY

## THE JEREMIAH *LEHRSTÜCKE*

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Rescued from the realm of magic, prophetic performances are construed as theatricalised communications. Theatre, however, is a complex art with a flexible form and many systems of signification at play. Reading three performances from the book of Jeremiah alongside Bertolt Brecht's experimental *Lehrstücke* (Learning Plays) with which they resonate, we shall note how word and gesture can subvert as much as confirm each other.

The biblical prophets are exceptional figures who engage in a range of extraordinary activities. Although they are popularly understood to be foretellers, prediction, which is indeed part of their repertoire (1 Samuel 2.27-34 and 4.11), is only one of their many miraculous feats. A thumb through Joshua to Kings will introduce the reader to an anonymous 'man of God' who withered the arm of King Jeroboam with a word (1 Kings 13.4-5), the prophet Elijah who called down fire from the sky (2 Kings 1.9-12), his successor Elisha who purified water with a single throw of salt (2 Kings 2.19-12), and whose bones retained power even after burial (2 Kings 13.20-21). Stories of this kind, whilst theologically oriented,<sup>1</sup> remind us that 'miracle-working is part of the essence of the phenomenon [of biblical prophecy]' (Sawyer 1993: 14).<sup>2</sup>

However, the prophets are primarily understood to be spokesmen<sup>3</sup> not wonder-workers: *forth*-tellers rather than *fore*-tellers<sup>4</sup> for Yahweh their God. Many of their eccentric activities, which are often linked to oracles and sermons, appear to have a communicative function. So it is that Zedekiah dons iron horns and in the presence of the king of Judah declares, 'With these you will gore the Syrians and make an end of them' (1 Kings 22:11), a message which proves to be false; Ahijah tears his cloak into twelve pieces, giving ten to King Jeroboam with the words, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "See, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes"' (1 Kings 11: 29-31); and Elisha instructs King Joash to shoot an arrow, whilst placing his hands on the king and declaring, 'The Lord's arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram! For you shall fight the Arameans in Aphek until you have made an end of them' (2 Kings 13.15-17).

Evidence from the neighbours of ancient Israel suggests that mimetic practices of this kind were believed to have effective power, altering or influencing the events they signified. This phenomenon, dubbed 'sympathetic magic',<sup>5</sup> was believed by James Frazer to result from a 'mistaken conception of the association of ideas' (Frazer 1994: 32).<sup>6</sup> Generally speaking, biblical scholars prefer to explain the link between prophetic act and coming event in terms of the personal will of Yahweh; thus if the biblical prophecies were at all effective, 'their results were not attained through mysterious impersonal forces alone, but through prayer and personal intercession' (Lindblom 1962: 54). This provides exegetes with a useful rule by which they may distinguish between 'magic' and 'religion', theologically weighted by Wheeler Robinson's aphorism, 'Magic constrains the unseen; religion means surrender to it' (cited in Stacey 1990: 234).<sup>7</sup>

Separated from the practice of magic, the function of prophetic performances, or ‘symbolic actions’ as they are often called, is explained theologically: although they are comparable in form to magic, they are in fact no more than emphatic or symbolic modes of communication,<sup>8</sup> akin in style to street theatre (Carroll 1986: 297). The prophets themselves are performers, not practitioners, and so submit to the will of a deity-director – ‘Yahweh Himself stood behind the prophets and worked through them’ (Lindblom 1962: 54). The divine director’s influence is absolute to the point of ventriloquism.

This model, replacing the magical with the theatrical, presumes the existence of a knowable, pre-constituted ‘will of Yahweh’ waiting to be mediated by the messenger-prophet. The following three dramas, all taken from the book of Jeremiah, trouble the simplicity of this paradigm. Superficially, they offer an explanation for the destruction of Jerusalem – the earthly ‘seat’ of its patron god Yahweh – in 586 BCE: that the residents of Judah and Jerusalem received ample warning about the consequences of their apostasies through these and other communications. But performance is a complex art in which gesture can either uphold or subvert text or script – a phenomenon explored, if not exploited, by twentieth-century dramatists such as Bertolt Brecht – and such ideas of a simple univocality prove inadequate for the narratives as they now stand.<sup>9</sup>

## **BREAKING THE MOULD: JEREMIAH 19**

The formal similarities between a prophetic jar-breaking narrated in Jeremiah 19, and a mainstream theatrical performance, can lead to an easy ‘domestication’ of the event. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible reads, ‘Thus says the Lord: Go and buy a potter’s earthenware jug. Take with you some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests, and go out to the valley of the son of Hinnom at the entry of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you’ (19.1).<sup>10</sup> Then, following ‘a rather wordy harangue’ (Bright 1965: 133) detailing the wickedness of the inhabitants of Judah, which apparently ranges from apostasy to the burning of children (19.3-9), ‘the Lord’ continues, ‘Then you shall break the jug in the sight of those who go with you, and you shall say to them: Thus says the Lord of hosts; So I will break this people and this city’ (19.10-11).

We can readily identify a playwright-director (Yahweh, ‘the Lord’), a stage (‘the Potsherd Gate’ with the Valley of Hinnom, a local tip, as a backcloth), a performer (the addressee, an unnamed prophet, presumably Jeremiah), a theatrical ‘prop’ (the ‘earthenware jug’), and an audience (the ‘elders of the people’ and ‘senior priests’, representatives of Jerusalem’s ruling classes). The minimalism and stark symbolism suggest that it borders on the experimental, but the clear demarcation between performer (with production team) and spectator means that it actually challenges few formal expectations of the genre, and would have made little impression upon a Jerusalem avant-garde, had one been around at the time. As an example of theatre, it is reassuringly familiar.

The majority of scholarly interpretations conform to this ‘theatricalised’ articulation of events, regarding the use of drama as adding nothing but emphasis and urgency to the message. Thus Brueggemann describes the jug-breaking as ‘hyperbolic’ and ‘necessary to penetrate the complacent self-assurance of Judah that “it can’t happen here”’ (Brueggemann 1998: 176), and Lundbom describes it as a message ‘made more vivid by the decanter in Jeremiah’s hands’ (Lundbom 1999: 842).

This is a simple, unidirectional model of communication with the performer active as sender, and the spectator passive as receiver. It is a model that, in the words of theatre theorist Keir Elam, results in one of ‘the weakest forms of bourgeois spectacle’ (Elam 1980: 34). But even though ‘many a West End or Broadway comedy has operated successfully on this principle’ (34), there is good reason to consider more closely the reality of the audience’s presumed passivity and to suggest that, in actual fact, the audience is unavoidably involved in the performance. It is, of course, the audience who by laughing at comedy brings about its success, or by keeping silent during tragedy, confirms its gravity. But at a more basic level, it is the audience who buys a ticket and so initiates the whole event.

It is the exchange of money for goods which implies that the passive spectator is nevertheless the exploiter rather than exploited.<sup>11</sup> And it is this aspect of the theatrical ‘contract’ that the writer-director Bertolt Brecht, aware that the ‘commodification’ of entertainment demands commercial success, blames for inhibiting innovation (Brecht 1957). Noting a reciprocal relationship, he comments, ‘this apparatus [a term he uses to denote all the means of theatrical production: the technological, the promotional, and the entity that owns all these] is conditioned by the society of the day and only accepts what can keep it going in that society’, and concludes, ‘an innovation will pass if it is calculated to rejuvenate existing society, but not if it is going to change it’ (cited in Mueller 1994: 80). This, in turn, has a rebound effect with the status quo in the arts, both reflecting and perpetuating a status quo in society. Thus even in the most familiar, so-called ‘bourgeois’ theatre, the audience, by its very passivity, profoundly implicates itself in the onstage activities.<sup>12</sup>

Although Jeremiah’s audience-by-invitation has not paid for the pleasure, and is presumably not expecting to see a crowd-pleasing, door-slamming farce, it is nevertheless interesting to examine its relation to the production, and the nature of its purported passivity. We must immediately recognise that, if we understand the audience to be the recipients of a specially prepared message, the audience has in some way ‘initiated’ the event insofar as it has been brought about with the audience in mind. Unlike modern commercial theatre, however, which is brought about to please its audience and to edify rather than challenge, the jar-breaking is designed to call the audience’s very existence, formed as it is from representatives of the people and clerics of Jerusalem, into question. Thus the spectators might be indicted by the radical message, ‘thus I will break this people and this city’, preceded by the list of accusations, but as recipients of a message, albeit tailored for them. Since we are still working with a basically ‘bourgeois’ model, they are not fully implicated or involved in the performance.

Little change then has been made to the reading of this narrative in terms of form: as the unidirectional delivery of a message. But the message regarding ‘this people’ and ‘this city’ addressed to its representatives already blurs the distinction between witnesses and participants. Called to be present at a dramatised destruction of their own existence as a ‘people’ and ‘a city’ amid the earthenware shards surrounding the Potsherds Gate, the spectators already seem to be less observers than participants in a microcosmic enactment. If this seems a little forced, it should be pointed out that the NRSV translation cited earlier provides separate verbs in the opening command, ‘Thus says the Lord: ... *buy* a potter’s earthenware jug. *Take* with you some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests’, (my emphasis) and in doing so adds to the Masoretic Text, which has only one verb and reads, literally: ‘Go and buy/ get [the Hebrew word

*qnb* allows either] a potter's earthenware jug and some elders of the people and some senior priests... ' The instruction now seems like a list of ingredients in a recipe for disaster: 'you will need one jug, brown, clay; one score of chief priests; an ounce of elders... ', thus making explicit the integral and representational aspect of the ruling class's presence at this performance. The event begins to look less like a last minute homily than an inaugural ritual, confirming, if not instigating, the coming destruction.<sup>13</sup> And the elders, no longer the passive recipients of a message, are (unwittingly) caught within the dramatised disaster.

## MOULDING A MESSAGE: JEREMIAH 18

Jeremiah's pot breaking is preceded by a more familiar narrative in chapter 18: 'The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." So I went... and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he re-worked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him' (18.1-4). Favoured by evangelicals, it is a narrative which has made its way into songs about the personal miracle of spiritual maturation, '... break me, melt me, mould me, fill me...' (SOF: 510), despite its communal message and the violent destruction it portends – 'Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as the potter has done?'<sup>14</sup>

The pattern of command, 'Come, go down to the potter's house', followed by confirmation, 'So I went down to the potter's house', resembles the recognised form of a symbolic action narrative.<sup>15</sup> On this particular occasion, however, the story riffs upon the genre by positing the prophet as spectator-commentator, rather than as actor-messenger. In effect, the presumed 'theatrical' model of communication is obscured, resulting in the story's frequent exclusion from the lists of prophetic dramas.<sup>16</sup>

For Brecht, a definition of theatre should be able to withstand the loss of the primacy of the performer, or a qualitative change in the spectator: from passive consumer to active commentator. In fact, motivated by his ambition to break the cycle in which art both reflects and perpetuates the cultural and political status quo, Brecht sought out what would now be called the 'interactive' potential of theatre.<sup>17</sup> Between 1929 and 1932, he collaborated in a series of performances known collectively as the *Lehrstücke*, best translated as 'Learning Plays'. Not only did these plays attempt to challenge the prevailing political system, turning on the tension between the good of the individual and the good of the collective, they also interrogated the prevailing form and production of theatre which, as we have seen, he believed both confirmed and continued the greater system. By exploiting a gap between the 'intentions' inscribed in a performance, and the audience's acceptance of those intentions, Brecht hoped to avoid a 'shallow harmony' between spectator and stage, whilst engineering a form of engagement in which no single point of view could be accepted without testing.

Brecht's first play to earn the title '*Lehrstück*' from the outset was *The Decision* (1930), taking as its theme the 'rational self-sacrifice of an underground agitator' (Brecht 1997: xiv). *The Decision* was not written to be performed for an audience 'outside' the event; rather, it was intended 'exclusively for the instruction of the performers' (Brecht 1997: 347), taking the form of a court of inquiry in which four agitators make their case to the Party, played by a mass chorus. The agitators explain that, while conducting Communist propaganda in China, they were compelled to shoot the youngest comrade. As they justify their deed, they each take it in

turn to play the Young Comrade in a variety of political situations, always ‘grouping as three confronting one’ (Brecht 1997: 63). Thus, throughout, the line between performer and spectator is in continual motion.

*The Decision* is sometimes criticised for being little more than an apology for Stalin’s purge trials, and a crude call for a literal self-sacrifice to the communal requirements of revolution. However, Roswitha Mueller argues that the theoretical tenets it proposes regarding such matters as the effective cessation of labour, and the use of ‘underground’ agitation ‘are not meant to dominate the play as eternal truths’ (Mueller 1994: 90) and that Brecht, aware of their faulty, time-bound nature, opens them up for discussion. In ‘Tips for the rehearsal of *The Decision*’, its composer, Hanns Eisler, suggests that, ‘it is very important that the singers should not treat the text as self-evident, but should discuss it during rehearsals. Each singer has to be quite clear about the political content of what he is singing, and should criticise it’ (Brecht 1997: 346). To confirm the sincerity of these egalitarian intentions, all participants were expected to fill in a questionnaire asking whether they thought the piece was ‘politically instructive’.<sup>18</sup> Theatre is thus made a training ground, or laboratory even, for the new society Brecht believes is about to break in. And it is the form, not the content, which he considers to be of the greatest significance: the continual breaking and realigning of roles of performer and spectator, the openness to resistance and reinterpretation.

It has been usual for Jeremiah to play king, to be ‘Yahweh’, but in chapter 18 he must concede that role and become a spectator. The consequent separation of the prophet from his preferred posture, his mime of the divine, whilst remaining the official ‘voice’ of the deity, brings about a number of disjunctions that confound ‘active’ and ‘passive’ articulations of the event. For example, cut adrift from the *enacted* ‘message’, the *spoken* message no longer remains part of a simple, unidirectional presentation, but is situated outside the action and so must be configured as a reading of it. The traditionally passive position of the spectator is now taken by the unmistakably active place of the interpreter. Conversely, the traditionally active role of the performer is now fulfilled by the wholly unsuspecting passivity of a potter. But this formal reconfiguration of roles gives rise to a still more profound rift in the figure of Yahweh, resulting in an emerging gap between the words and deeds of the deity.

Initially converging to suggest a simple active-passive hierarchy, word and deed, act and comment, agree that the potter represents Yahweh as ‘doer’, and the clay, a malleable, ‘done to’ Israel: ‘Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done, says the Lord?’ (18.6). But left unqualified, script and gesture put the deity in a position of irresistible privilege, with no motivation other than whim.<sup>19</sup> However, the descent into a theology of caprice is avoided by the provision of a rationale based on Israel’s tendency to rebel, here caricatured by a national confession: ‘We will follow out our plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of our evil will’ (18.12). Thus Israel’s apostasy is cited as licence for Yahweh’s crushing and remoulding intervention.

Common wisdom suggests, however, that when a pot in progress spoils or turns out misshapen it is generally the fault of the potter, not the clay. Clay may range from wet to dry, rough to smooth, but never does it fight back; it can only respond to the craftsman’s skill. Thus this attempt to steer theologically clear from creating a God of caprice suggests, however unintentionally, the

dangerous possibility that Yahweh, represented by a not so infallible potter, might be not quite so absolute, lacking the necessary skills of his trade as patron of a city and people.

No longer adequately understood as a simple, 'rhetorical' device, the drama is unable to provide a comforting theodicy for the catastrophic collapse of Jerusalem. It is a place for trying out, a court of enquiry in which key figures implicated in the events of 587 BCE can take on different roles, active-passive, representative-interrogative, in an attempt to understand and survive the disaster.

## SARTORIAL SEMANTICS: JEREMIAH 13

The drama of Jeremiah 18 is narrated in the first person and from the point of view of the spectator-interpreter. Similarly, Jeremiah 13 tells its story in the first person: 'Thus says the Lord to me' (13.1). Yet the command that follows, "'Go and buy yourself a linen loincloth'", indicates that the prophet is not now the spectator, but as is usual the actor. In this new role he is directed to "'... put [the linen loincloth] on your loins, but do not dip it in water'" (13.1), an odd request perhaps,<sup>20</sup> but not particularly implausible. However, as they go on, the instructions do begin to stretch credulity, requiring the prophet to "'take the loincloth that you bought and are wearing, and go now to the Euphrates, and hide it there in the cleft of a rock'" (13.4), then "'after many days'", to "'go now to the Euphrates, and take from there the loincloth that I commanded you to hide there'" (13.6); the whole performance ending with the unremarkable discovery, 'But the loincloth was ruined; it was good for nothing' (13.7*b*).

What seems unlikely about this narrative is the fact that the river Euphrates is about four hundred miles from Jerusalem, a distance which, according to Ezra 7.7-9, takes four months to complete. Jeremiah's two return journeys then would occupy him for more than a year.<sup>21</sup> These logistics alone make the performance seem improbable, but they render it ineffective as a performance, too. How are the citizens to know about the events enacted at the Euphrates? If by report, then the drama is redundant: the prophet could have stayed home and simply told a story. And if it is unlikely that the prophet made the journey himself, it seems even more unlikely that he took an audience with him.

To overcome these problems commentators have suggested that Jeremiah 13 records either a dream, or a vision.<sup>22</sup> The narrative, however, has none of the usual markers to support these suggestions. Instead, it is punctuated throughout by confirmations that the instructions were indeed followed: 'So I bought a loincloth, according to the word of Yhwh and put it on my loins' (13.2), through to, 'So I went to the Euphrates, and dug, and I took the loincloth' (13.7*a*).

An alternative and now preferred suggestion is that the Euphrates would itself have been designated symbolically, either by a river neighbouring Jerusalem,<sup>23</sup> or a marker in its streets (Carroll 1986). Although this makes the presence of spectators entirely plausible, it should be noted that there is in Jeremiah 13, in contrast to Jeremiah 19, no reference of any kind, anywhere, to an audience. Of course, one may simply argue that the narrative infers, requires even, an audience to make sense. But as it stands in this first person account, the actor alone is the spectator of his own drama. The effect of this solipsistic stance, apart from turning the performance into something suspiciously like a private ritual, is a reinforcement of the textuality of the performance: without wanting to retreat from the argument so far, there is one other audience discernable within Jeremiah 13: the reader.

Brecht's better known 'epic theatre' (his term for the plays *Mother Courage*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and so on) was designed to bring about a change in the attitude of the spectator, from passivity to critical productivity, by 'defamiliarising'<sup>24</sup> the norms of social behaviour and exposing them as contingent and historical. The *Lehrstücke* differ by radicalising this stance. Not interested in representing the structures of capitalism, the 'Learning Plays' attempt rather to erase them, breaking down the central contradiction between producer and the means of production in theatre itself by rejecting both a fixed text and an actor-spectator separation.<sup>25</sup> They are practical exercises in which the principles and strategies of a new kind of society are practiced. Fredric Jameson likens the form, with its exclusion of the public and rotation of parts, to 'a master class, but one which does not necessarily have a master director present either' (Jameson 1998: 63), and 'an infinite rehearsal in which every alternative can be tried out and debated'. The text and its performance blur into an 'enlarged discussion' (64) in which theory and practice are united in performance.

Not including the prophet as his own spectator, the audience of Jeremiah 13 is the reader. As if to acknowledge this, the 'readings' of more than one actively engaged spectator are already embedded in the text. Interpretation begins in 13.9, but rather than a close-fitting, point-for-point account of the event, there follow three rather impressionistic, though not mutually exclusive, commentaries. The first, in 13.9, suggests that the ruined loincloth signifies Yahweh's intended humbling of his people, whereas in 13.10, it represents Judah's self-induced decay: 'This evil people who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own will... shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing'. Then, finally, in 13.11, it symbolises the intimacy of the people's relationship with their god, 'For as the loincloth clings to one's loins, so I made the whole house of Judah cling to me.'

Now gathered into the text, the interpretations become part of an event to which subsequent readers are the audience. Since none exhausts the significance of all the elements – no reference is made to the river Euphrates, or the 'after many days', or the burial – and none fits quite perfectly, subsequent readers are goaded into offering their own interpretations. Origen read Jeremiah 13 as an allegory of supersessionism, the loincloth-Israel set aside by God in favour of the Gentile Church (Lundbom 1999: 671); Calvin, as the record of a vision-based sermon (Holladay 1986: 396). Moving ahead, twentieth-century commentators, eager to solve its riddles, offer their own 'final' explanations: it is a real event from the career of Jeremiah presenting Yahweh's answer to Judah's pride (Holladay 1986: 398); a 'symbolic gesture' in the Jeremiah tradition forming a replication of the entire national history of Judah (Brueggemann 1998: 127); or most probably a post-exilic parable 'of a prophetic insight of the historical Jeremiah' (McKane 2000, p 292). And Jeremiah and his loincloth no longer appear as a polished and completed performance with a single, direct message, or a theological ventriloquist act, the prophet perched on the divine right arm, but 'an infinite rehearsal in which every alternative [historical and fictional] can be tried out and debated': a blurring of act and text in never ending discussion.

## CONCLUSION

Prophetic symbolic action narratives are not so easily tamed by the subordination of the magical. Though domesticated by the more rational 'magic of theatre' paradigm, they nevertheless continue

to defy theological reduction, always retaining something of the pre-rational and ritualistic, always interrogating as much as delivering theological truisms.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Read as witnesses to the power of God: the rationale given to Moses' miracle of turning his staff into a snake, 'so that they may believe that the Lord... has appeared to you' (Exodus 4.4-5), becomes a paradigm for all of the miraculous acts of the prophets. This said, Stacey notes that 'The element of caprice that exists in some cases suggests that the actions ought to be disowned as instrumental magic' – one thinks of Elisha cursing, with gory effect, the boys who tease him, in 2 Kings 2.23-24 for example – but, he continues, 'the fame of the agents ensures that they are accepted as part of the authentic Hebrew tradition' (Stacey 1990: 249).

<sup>2</sup> While precedence is given to the words of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, the inclusion of their predictions and visions indicate that they too were involved in the miraculous. Thus Sawyer confirms that the distinction between the narrative and 'Writing' prophets is 'one of degree, not of kind' (Sawyer 1993: 16).

<sup>3</sup> And *spokeswomen*. Though few have made it into the canon, there were indeed female prophets, Deborah (Judges 4.4) and Huldah (2 Kings 22.14) for example.

<sup>4</sup> A now clichéd distinction set out by Lindblom (1962: 1). Blenkinsopp observes some of the difficulties in clearly identifying the (historical) work and role of the prophet (Blenkinsopp 1996: 26-30).

<sup>5</sup> A term made popular though not coined by James Frazer to describe a worldview which recognises a sympathy between like things – the 'Law of Similarity' – or things which have been in contact – the 'Law of Contact' (Frazer 1994: 26).

<sup>6</sup> Frazer traces an evolution of this 'association of ideas' from magic, 'a spurious system of natural law' (26), through religion, to science. For discussions of Frazer's influence in the study of Old Testament, see Stacey 1990, and Jeffers 1996.

<sup>7</sup> This whole approach depends upon a rather crude understanding of magic and a distinction between magic and religion that was assumed predominately in the west. Carroll defies Frazer's evolutionary magic-religion distinction and argues that magic lies at the heartland of all religion. At the same time, Carroll manages to re-inscribe something of Frazer's evolutionism by suggesting that later Yahwist writers transformed the 'primitive magic of early prophecy into the account of the rational activity of the prophet as spokesman of Yahweh' (Carroll 1979: 59). It is perhaps better to consider texts such as Deuteronomy 18.9-14, the Bible's most explicit ban of magical practices, as less a later denial of earlier, 'primitive' practices than an 'ideological consensus to edit out magic and divination as theologically unsound' (Jeffers 1996: xiii). This 'editing out' seems to be a treating-as-foreign, rather than a treating-as-primitive (Jeffers 1996: 259).

<sup>8</sup> This still predominant view is summarised by Stacey: 'Prophets normally declaimed oracles, but sometimes, in order to make their message more impressive, they performed dramatic actions to accompany the oracle. The oracles and the dramatic actions pointed to future events, and, once the word had been spoken and the action performed, the fulfilment must inevitably come to pass. The idea of actions inevitably bringing about fulfilment suggests a magical procedure and indeed prophetic drama does have the appearance of magic, but the theology is Yahwist. The prophet is not coercing the deity but submitting to his will' (Stacey 1990: 4).

<sup>9</sup> Though the narratives are set before the fall of Jerusalem, the texts were formed by a complex process greatly influenced by the events that followed the disaster.

<sup>10</sup> All biblical citations are from the NRSV, unless obviously reconfigured to make a particular point.

<sup>11</sup> A characteristic of passive consumption noted by Walter Benjamin (Mueller 1994: 80).



- 12 With this comforting reciprocity in place, expected and so anticipated by both parties, any disruption  
can have dire consequences, as witnessed by the several stories of audiences storming stages and  
theatres being closed down.
- 13 There is plenty of evidence of pot breaking as a recognised method of execration. See Pritchard 1955:  
328, and for a more general discussion on ‘curse tablets’, Graff 1997.
- 14 It is often suggested that the act of remoulding in Jeremiah 18 makes for a more hopeful representation  
than the pot-breaking in Jeremiah 19.
- 15 A genre recognised to have a loose form (Fohrer 1965; Stacey 1990). Confirmation is a recognised  
element that is not always present. It is, for example, absent from the otherwise exemplary Jeremiah  
19.
- 16 Fohrer, who delineated the form, remains unpersuaded by the fact that the narrative otherwise fits  
his template.
- 17 ‘Instead of sharing an experience’, he writes, ‘the spectator must come to grips with things.’ He hoped  
to challenge the ideological function of theatre with a radically new kind of play, which would in  
turn impact upon the economic base of theatre, and as part of a ‘knock-on’ effect, the whole social  
order.
- 18 Question three, for example, asks, ‘To which lessons embodied in *The Decision* do you object polit-  
ically?’ (Brecht 1997: 346).
- 19 Or maybe the sensual pleasure of clay between divine fingers?
- 20 Less odd, however, than the command in Jeremiah 27.2: ‘Make yourself a yoke of straps and bars,  
and put them on your neck.’
- 21 Placing this performance in competition with the protracted ‘epics’ of Ezekiel.
- 22 So thought Calvin (Holladay 1986: 396).
- 23 The usual suggestion being that there was a Palestinian river or place called Perah a few miles north  
of Jerusalem (Bright 1965: 96).
- 24 The function of the *Verfremdunseffekt*, often translated ‘the alienation effect’.
- 25 Brecht recognises that the audience’s role as passive consumer is that of exploiter. However, he also  
recognises that the audience is exploited by the system of bourgeois theatre, the ‘helper’ of that society.

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