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István Fazekas:

The Dramatic Power of Language

Approaches to Active Understanding

Abstract

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István Fazekas

The Dramatic Power of Language

Approaches to Active Understanding

Language and dramatic plot

Language is constantly changing. Words are often altered in terms of content and meaning. Shades of meaning appear, and the relationship between text and context is reshaped to a certain extent from time to time. As a result, the text – not necessarily its content, but, by all means, its dynamics – must be regularly re-examined and reinterpreted, reconsidered in terms of spoken language. Occasionally, foreign works must be re-translated. George Steiner cannot be disputed when he states, ‘Language – according to one of the cardinal principles of certain schools of semantics – is a perfect model of Heraclitean flux’ (Steiner 2009, 17). Naturally, changes in the meaning of words and expressions also affect the evolution of language for the stage. After all, a term of praise might even become insulting. What was effective can become affected, and, naturally, the reverse can happen.

Hans-Georg Gadamer stressed that, in spoken language, objective understanding is always ‘a function of knowledge’ (Gadamer 2001, 11). Therefore, a thorough exploration of a text’s integrity, as well as its peculiarities of content, is always possible, given a grammatically- and philosophically-inspired understanding. Without wishing to compete with Gadamer’s crystal-clear language philosophy methodology and his thoroughness that strives for completeness, we must add that, when it comes to stage language, his statement does not entirely cover the reality. It is an indisputable fact that occurring of speech is meaning; thus, an occurrence of language is an ‘occurrence of meaning’ as well. Yet, if we state that language is meaning, we must also state that the language of

drama is active meaning, clearly manifested in the stage performance. This perception-inducing system of symbols is determined, in effect, by the intersecting points fundamental to theatre, stage, community and drama. In this manner, an occurrence of language onstage is primarily a human activity generating perception; although, on the stage, language is just one of the media in use. Therefore, in this case, intellectual-cognitive activity is the most defining condition of reception, but it is not an indispensable one (Heller 2020, 263–265). One provocative example of this is when, in a medieval mystery play presented in the national language, an exorcism scene retains the form of the exorcism ritual; hence, for the average audience, an incomprehensible language is heard (Warning 1974, 74). Yet, everyone understands the act of exorcism independent of the content of the muttered Latin words. At the same time, the compilation of sounds in the religious language (with a grain of salt) becomes dramaturgically charged, embodying the intensity and quality of emotions collected so far, to the point where it facilitates understanding of the work as a whole.¹ Truly, this dramaturgy, organically suited to the drama's tension, draws spectators into the narrative, guiding them into the story so far that 'the corporeal human becomes a spiritual one' (Czakó 1987, 134). This twist is crucial in order to awaken in the viewer *empathy* in the word's original sense – identification that seeks resolution while recognising the unsolvable nature of the problem, the co-joined feelings of fear and pity. As to its genesis, Aristotle wrote the following: "Ἔστιν μὲν οὖν τὸ φοβερὸν καὶ ἐλεεινὸν ἐκ τῆς ὄψεως γίνεσθαι, ἔστιν δὲ καὶ ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς συστάσεως τῶν πραγμάτων, ὅπερ ἐστὶ πρότερον καὶ ποιητοῦ ἀμείνονος."² And before continuing any further, allow me to bring this up to date with an observation worth examining from multiple standpoints!

The expression ποιητοῦ ἀμείνονος is the *genetivus proprietatis* (i.e., the ability to bear or convey properties) in the verbal arrangement of words, which, from my standpoint, European translators have not concentrated upon adequately.

1 Reflections of this phenomenon are also discernible in modern drama literature. Their role here, too, is to expand the dramaturgical background and to delineate the contours of the referenced past more strongly. In the stage play *Csíksomlyói passió* by Balogh Elemér and Kerényi Imre, Pilate speaks thus: 'This already constitutes crimen laesae majestatis, / Ut quisquam tributum praetendat caesaris' (Balogh and Kerényi 1983, 857).

2 I have re-translated certain chapters of the Greek text of *The Poetics*, which was justified on account of the variety of opinions on theatre and drama – as well as the fact that the traditional theatre model, in a certain sense, has become a barrier to text interpretation in recent centuries. The original Greek text can be read here: https://www.greek-language.gr/digitalResources/ancient_greek/library/browse.html?text_id=76&page=10

For instance, János Sarkady, the best-known Hungarian translator of *The Poetics*, renders the quoted passage thus: 'Fear and pity may come about from the drama's spectacle, but also from the plot itself. The later is more advantageous, and this suits the good poet.' A remark is justified here. The expression ἐκ τῆς ὄψεως not only includes creation through spectacle. It also refers to how sheer spectacle is not the only determinant in the provocation of pity and fear; indeed, it is the manner of how we regard the given spectacle. To explain, a well-written drama is not borne simply out of spectacle; it also guides our manner of seeing. At the same time, it is important to note that, besides the generously handled *genetivus proprietatis*, instead of 'more advantageous', a more exact translation of πρότερον would be 'primary in nature' or 'higher in importance'. Therefore, Aristotle taught us that fear and pity can be evoked by the drama's spectacle, but also by the plot itself, and the latter is of higher importance and typical of better poets. But what are we to understand as plot? And what did Aristotle understand it to mean?

Dramatic plot and stage business

The dramatic plot is a concentration of existence, just as stage business is a compromised form of real action (Ruszt 1960, 15). From this it follows that stage business in itself is not action, only a portion of true action, insofar as it is coherent with the plot's unfolding and the conflict's catching sparks. Hence, the plot is that, in which and through which tension is created, through which the opposing sides in the struggle acquire force, and through which these forces sooner or later collide once and for all. Stage business is the artistic representation of the dramatic plot, and its *sine qua non* conditions are the actor's transformation and the drama's language becoming a living factor. The primary medium and means of all of this is language itself. Thus, we may say – while, at the same time, supplementing Gadamer's language philosophy – essentially, the dramatic plot and the stage business are most readily identified with language. That is why Aristotle expressed that awakening feelings of fear and pity simultaneously through plot itself is the trait of superior poets.

Some representatives of liberal trends in modern drama analysis argue with the thesis of a relative union between language and plot as it applies to Greek tragedy. Thorwald Dethlefsen expressly states, 'Tragedy has no plot. That is what distinguishes drama from modern tragedies (e.g., Shakespeare and Schiller) [...]

Tragedy lacks the intention to show anything. That is why we may not speak of performers in the strict sense of the word. After all, they perform nothing at all. They merely speak. This is also why tragedy is far removed from people today. A dramatic story and performance are precisely what they expect from the theatre' (Dethlefsen 1997, 35). Let us see if this statement is more serious than it appears! For what is he saying? It just so happens, for example, in the final scene of *Antigone*, Creon enters with the corpse of Haimon in his arms. No dramatic action or stage business whatsoever, in spite of his wailing in the meantime, 'Oh, woe is me! I now see the curse of a wrathful god has smote me on the head, casting me into a labyrinth from which there is no escape.' According to the postmodern concept of drama analysis, this speech only illustrates something not presented onstage. Yet, I believe one can easily see that it requires spiritual masochism for someone to wish to identify with this viewpoint. That is, the point under debate is not constructive criticism; rather, it displays an alienation from language itself. This standpoint is risky, because those who are alienated from language are ultimately alienated from humanity. Such a concept leads one to view even the unnatural as natural. According to the proponents of this view, anything could happen on the stage, although nothing can happen there besides the actual drama itself. Drama, whose most fundamental medium and means is language. How does Aristotle continue the train of thought quoted above? Here is his following statement: 'δεῖ γὰρ καὶ ἄνευ τοῦ ὄρα̃ν οὕτω συνεστάναι τὸν μῦθον ὥστε τὸν ἀκούοντα τὰ πράγματα γινόμενα καὶ φρίττειν καὶ ἐλεεῖν ἐκ τῶν συμβαινόντων· ἅπερ ἂν πάθοι τις ἀκούων τὸν τοῦ Οἰδίπου μῦθον.' That is, even without spectacle (καὶ ἄνευ τοῦ ὄρα̃ν), the story comes together, so that those who hear (ἀκούοντα) what happened shudder and also feel pity (καὶ φρίττειν καὶ ἐλεεῖν) at the event they have lived through upon hearing (ἀκούων) the tale of Oedipus. This is not the same as the phenomenon that John Austen expressed as executing something performatively through the act of speaking (Austin 1990, 33). This is something entirely different! It is precisely what József Ruszt formulated in this manner: '[Delivery of] the role's text, speech itself, is most essential act of existence on the stage – better still, it is the continuous process of action' (Ruszt 1960, 16).

On the basis of all this, we may establish that the most important dramaturgical tool is language itself, and – as noted above – dramaturgy that is organically suited to the dramatic tension draws viewers into the story. Identification with the protagonist in crisis makes the receiver a participant in the plot, and if the

receiver is drawn into the epicentre of dramatic tension, initiation occurs. Initiation is none other than active interpretation of what is spoken onstage – while maintaining some degree of distance. Undoubtedly, then, by this means, ‘we appreciate the thought process behind the text, the strength and quality of the impetus (the intellectual or emotional content) that shapes and evokes thoughts, and the momentary will of the speaker through the composed words’ (Ruszt 1960, 35). First, the initiated viewers are ‘in the drama’. By all means, the tension they experience can even affect their sense of self. Second, due to the auditorium’s (at least simulated) differentiation from the stage, viewers maintain a distance from the life circumstances of the drama, which is necessary in order to live out the situation. In view of this, Miklós Almási formulated one of his basic tenets, which states, ‘*The punctum saliens* for the understanding of theatre and the dramatic form is that the situation exists for the viewer and the collective audience – that each event or twist will have an effect on individuals who see and understand it’ (Almási 1966, 28).

The play’s text and the play’s living speech – that is, the active meaning’s form as recorded in writing – becomes a living reality through the actor’s performance. Thus, by virtue of the stage production, the initiated viewer becomes part of the drama, which is born before their eyes and perishes eternally, irrevocably. After all, the next performance can never be a perfect copy of the previous one. That is because language has no manifestations that exist ‘in and of themselves’, independent of contingency; for, word and thing, sight and matter, tradition and subjectivity, past and present – all essentially exist in unity (Retiu 2001, 179). Partially with regard to this, we find in Manfred Pfister’s book *Das Drama* the opposite: that we define the nature of drama in the Aristotelean conception – that is, Aristotle’s definition is overly narrow. With communication theory as a starting point, we arrive at the conclusion that ‘the intrinsic melding of multimedia in dramatic text disrupts the traditional, institutionalised separation of theatre and literature studies’ (Pfister 2001, 24–25). Pfister’s ‘melding of multimedia’ expands the text, which, in essence, incorporates elements of the production as well. Hence, it is invested with unlimited influence. That is how the ‘dramatic text as super-sign’ comes into being (Pfister 2001, 41). Although, to be completely objective, was the text not a ‘super-sign’ for Aristotle as well?

Pfister equated the essence of communication with the dramatic plot. For him, the drama’s plot could include everything that constituted a communicative sign on the stage. The actor and the stage (encompassing the lights, the sound, the noises and the music) are understood as conveyors, sending viewers verbal and

non-verbal codes over visual and aural channels (Pfister 2001, 20-21). In his view, the various code types 'assume a hierarchy, with the text becoming an iconicising super-sign' (Pfister 2001, 41). From this, Pfister draws into the concept of drama forms previously excluded for the most part – for example, *commedia dell'arte* scenarios, certain forms of street theatre, both epic and absurd dramas, happenings and ritual theatre (Pfister 2001, 41–45). Erika Fischer-Lichte firmly rejects Pfister's drama theory in terms of her basic principle – namely, that the literary substratum and the multimedia aspect, present in the codes and channels activated audio-visually, give dramatic texts a dual layer. She regards the relationship of drama and theatre as two different types of artistic communication, and eliminating the distinction impedes any complex investigation of precisely this relationship (Fischer-Lichte 1984, 137–173).

The dramaturgical link between language and time

Gadamer stresses that what makes linguistic articulation possible is already present in the language. After all, words give meaning to things, and only through language can things be understood. In this manner, the exemplary representative of modern-day hermeneutics unintentionally comes close to Heidegger's concept of existence. Here is how he summarises his language philosophy: 'comprehensible existence – language' (Gadamer 2001, 13). The question of the connection between time and being is always an existential one, and perhaps it is not difficult to see how, on the basis of Gadamer's logic, this also has to do with how language and time are linked.

According to Aristotle, time is the material aspect of motion. Yet, like action, this is not merely movement. Instead, related to this, there exists hidden in our consciousness a 'counting soul' that deals with processes that have occurred and awaits their continuation. 'It is a question, if there were no awareness and no soul, whether time would exist or not. For, in the absence of a being that could count, that which is counted could not exist. Consequently, numbers would not exist either' (quoted in Anzenbacher 1993, 100).

By all means, a pre-condition of time is the subject that perceives its passing. 'The following considerations would make one suspect that time either does not exist at all or barely and in an obscure way. One part of it has been and is not, while the other is going to be and is not yet. [...] Time is made up of these. One would naturally suppose that what is made up of things which do not exist could

have no share in reality. [...] But of time, some parts have been, while others have yet to be, and no part of it is, though it is divisible' (quoted in Azenbacher 1993, 100). Saint Augustine resolved this paradox, that of time, by examining it from the side of the subject that 'summons it into being': 'But what now is manifest and clear is that there is neither future nor past. Nor is it right to say, "There are three times: past, present and future." But it might be right to say, "There are three times: a present of past, a present of present, and a present of future." For these three times do somehow exist in the soul. Otherwise, I would not see them: present of past, memory; present of present, sight; present of future, expectation' (Augustine 1987, 365).

An analysis of the philosophical understanding of time is beyond the scope of the present paper, so further dissection of the quality of time is superfluous. What must be clear for us is that we interpret the stage's time and the plot's time in a different manner than we perceive the duration of the running time. The stage's time and the plot's time can only be interpreted in an atmosphere of 'initiation' and only by those who, on the basis of practical experience, have gained an intellectual-spiritual sense of objective time's tangibility – to be exact, the sense of passing away. Of course, one is able to indicate stage time with light and sound cues, but only if we are made aware of the plot's time with at least minimal linguistic signs. Within Greek tragic poetry, we can easily trace this type of endeavour – to make the plot's time, the stage's time and the running time (at least mostly) of equal duration. Aristotle clearly pointed out that this tendency was the result of the development of a serious genre: 'Tragedy endeavours, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit; whereas, the epic action has no limits of time [...] though, at first, the same freedom was admitted in tragedy as in epic poetry' (Aristotle 1974, 14). Clearly, the harmonisation of plot time, stage time and running time is one of the most effective dramaturgical techniques and, without a doubt, one of the hardest dramaturgical tools to implement. Yet, the distinct portrayal of multiple planes of time can be just as effective and momentous. The effect and appropriateness of how time is handled depends exclusively on what is demanded in order to develop the dramatic conflict powerfully, accurately and authentically.

Plot time and stage time are the so-called dramaturgical time. Primarily, language serves to make its presence felt – but besides language, any dramaturgical tool can be used. A blackout after a monologue or dialogue can give us the sense of a second, a night or a longer period in the future; however, we can

also turn back into the past. It all depends on how the succeeding speech continues, or the situation as revealed in the linguistic content of the next dialogue. If in a scene – particularly one with only minor characters onstage – many people speak heatedly about an irrelevant matter, and it does not advance the plot; then the plot's time, in relation to the running time, will seem much longer – and the stage's time even longer. When the plot's time, the stage's time and the running time are actually in synch, then, too, subjective time remains – insofar as spectators will always live out a particular piece of stage business according to how close they are to the wellspring of the dramatic conflict.³ If something disturbs them (e.g., a confusion in understanding), the disturbance can make the scene slower or even faster depending on where the viewers have grounded themselves emotionally at that point in the play.

Language, space and dramaturgy

The illustration of space onstage (or in the reader's imagination) is a representation tool just like the portrayal or suspension of tension (Almási 1966, 42–49). Even in the case of the most realistic depictions, the set pieces are allegorical and symbolic. In every case, they manipulate the spectators and, through language, draw them not only into the space onstage, but also into the territory of the dramatic plot. If the set does not indicate the magnitude of the plot's territory with strong contours, then the stage speech will primarily define it, whereby the tools of dramaturgy and stage tech can only be effective accompaniments. This is well illustrated, for example, by József Ruszt's signature version of *Othello*, as well as Iván Kamarás' portrayal of the protagonist therein. However, it is the language of the drama that circumscribes the territory of the drama's plot. Indeed, the dramaturgical space is the force-field upon which the tensions arise, swell, flare up and catch sparks. The drama's language always designates the active dramaturgical space. If the set aligns with this, then the stage space is harmonious; if this sort of alignment is lacking, then the elements are contrasting or explicitly at odds.

³ The plot's time and the stage's time can be easily distinguished – if, for example, they present a vehicular journey onstage, and it occurs to the viewer that making the journey from A to B would actually last several hours. Onstage, it will mean one or two minutes in terms of the plot, but then several hours in stage time. The stage's time – depending on what happens in the meantime – can be longer or shorter than the running time.

Language and identity: the diction of heroes as linguistic self-representation

Sense of identity is only possible through language. Personal identity, which significantly distinguishes the individual from everyone else, demands a sort of constant inner monologue (Assman 2018, 43) wherein the ego speaks 'its own tongue'. In fact, it is nothing other than a voiceless (or only rarely audible) 'dialect' of the mother tongue that, outside of self-definition, is organically linked to the community. If this inner monologue is problematic, so will be the person's identity within the community. In German Egyptologist Jan Assman's book, entitled *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination*, he postulates that all identity types are cultural formations (Assman 2018, 129–141). He expands the I-identity and We-identity dichotomy into a three-fold division, distinguishing within the 'I' an individual and a personal identity. This is very important, because, ultimately, drama does this, too. The true conflict always plays out within the dramatic hero, in whom the crisis of identity takes shape. The most powerful motor of the drama's plot becomes the clash of individual and personal identity.

Naturally, the discipline of drama theory has not ignores how individual destiny and the community's destiny are united through language either. Consequently, the mother tongue, in the socio-linguistic sense, is none other than a community's historical experience. What happens to a people can be expressed in its language. Indeed, fateful questions are echoed in every single word, expression and linguistic change. That is why when the language is endangered, so is the identity of the community; and where the language that binds the community ceases, the history of the community also comes to an end. Therefore, the local oral traditions are far more important from the aspect of identity, even more so than the aspect of maintaining the language, although the two are deeply interwoven. These traditions, within a community that undergoes crisis and weathers it, sooner or later appear in the post-crisis literary output. Andreas Kotte clearly showed this when he wrote: 'With *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, Homer attempted to overcome the dark centuries mythically, noting it down as poetry, which the classic Greek singers and rhapsodists codified as local verbal tradition.' (Kotte 2020, 29).

Crisis of identity bears the same conflicts as a poorly remembered identity. When, instead of brave self-understanding, superstitious fear imbues a language,

self-definition becomes distorted; thus, an act assumed to be heroic may easily be horrifying. We may be witness to this in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the first play of his *Oresteia* trilogy, where the curse on the Atreus clan results in a negative identity within the family community. The family members' identification with the family is buttressed and ensured by 'the deed' with which they commit violence on the other members of their generation: Atreus kills his brother Thyestes' children and serves them to him (*Agamemnon*, 1095–1097, 1217–1222, 1590–1602). Agamemnon sacrifices his older daughter Iphigenia on the altar of Artemis so that good winds will accompany them on the way to Troy (*Agamemnon*, 205–247). When Agamemnon returns home from Troy, Clytemnestra kills him in the bath with an axe to avenge her daughter; and, finally, Orestes avenges his father's death by killing his mother (Fischer-Lichte 2001, 28). Obviously, it is not true that, as a result of the ancient curse, the Atreus clan has no choice but to kill their relatives. Their bad understanding of identity on account of the curse becomes the reason why, when it comes to a decision, they repeatedly choose the violent option. Erika Fischer-Lichte clearly demonstrates that, in every case, the perpetrator – Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Orestes – makes a conscious decision before committing murder, and that is why Aeschylus placed special emphasis on these situations. Let us take a glimpse at the decision Agamemnon is faced with. He has two options: abandon the campaign of revenge against Troy or sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia:

*Silence. Then steps Agamemnon forth,
first of the blood, the elder by his birth.
'A hard thing this if our obedience fails;
No less hard for a father – for a trail
of a daughter's blood across the altar poured
tracked by my child-red hands for ever more.
But tell me what's the course free of ill?
I can't turn deserter,
a general double-crossing troops he promised a bounty-day.
If virgin blood will stop the winds,
they're bound to want to urge her blood.
May it be well. There is no other way."*

(*Agamemnon*, 205–217)

Mimesis and history writing – language and dramatics

In *The Poetics*, Aristotle made references in relation to how dramatics and its dramaturgical tools turned up in history writing, too, by necessity – that is, if the plot were suited to arousing feelings of fear and pity simultaneously. In one place, he writes: ‘As, in the serious style, Homer is pre-eminent among poets – for he alone combined dramatic form with excellence of imitation – so he too first laid down the main lines of comedy, by dramatising the ludicrous instead of writing personal satire. His *Margites* bears the same relation to comedy that *Iliad* and *Odyssey* do to tragedy’ (Aristotle 1974, 11). It is obviously no accident that, in a few cases, Greek tragedy is the dramatisation of history sung by none other than Homer. Sophocles, when he wrote *Ajax*, envisioned the story’s conflict primarily on the basis of Homer’s description. Also, the language of *Iliad* significantly aided in the recognition of the proper dramatic means. After all, the ‘life of a language’ only appears to be an ‘exterior’ life. If it demonstrates dramatic power, then there is drama in it – it only needs to be uncovered! Above all, drama is a heuristic medium. (This is also related to why certain novels, short stories, novellas and narrative poems are easy to dramatise.) In the following – especially in light of what has been covered so far – I wish to show, in the interest of promoting dramatisation, how we must analyse a text in which we can clearly recognise the presence of dramatic conflict. After all, the playwright/dramaturge must know everything about history writing – both from the history and the language aspects. As the topic of my demonstrative analysis, I selected the well-known Biblical text corpus which deals with David’s adultery with Bathsheba, his murder of her husband Uriah, and the prophet Nathan’s conversation, revealing the crimes.

Illustrative analysis – dramatising the history of David’s sin

According to one point of view, the structure of the two books of Samuel from the Old Testament is primarily defined by a particular view of history that considered the reign of David a partial fulfilment of earlier promises given to Israel and the patriarchs. David’s assuming the throne signified a turning point in both Is-

rael's history and the fulfilment of God's plan of redemption (Dietrich 1997, 228–249). The story of the reign and ascension to the throne of a leader of a band of mercenaries comprises a dense literary unit. Rost's opinion of it is thought-provoking – namely, that in this organic mass of text (which, in terms of history writing, has modern features as well), the so-called 'throne succession' narrative is dominant (Rost 1982, 121). The overture to this string of chronicles is the relation of the tale of the dissolution of Bathsheba's marriage.

The basic context and tangible background of the story is the war against the Ammonites, which systematically binds together Chapters 10–12 of 2 Samuel and is related, in part, to Chapter 9. It is hardly debatable to say that the story-complex primarily presents David, the *homo politicus*. In the interest of expanding into a mosaic state and solidifying Judeo-Israel's personal union, he was capable of nurturing faithful alliances with his internal rival Mephibosheth and his foreign enemies: Hanun, son of Nahash, and his crew of vassals. At the same time, it sketches how David, at the height of power, increasingly embodied the model of an Eastern autocrat, practically abandoning the role of the charismatic commander typical of him up to that point. Together with resigning his duties as a war leader, it is as though he shed his perspicacious caution and strategic cunning which had strongly characterised him till then. Due to all this, his private sphere, although drawn in bold contours, becomes apparent. Exposed to us is the portrait of a man who is guided primarily by his feelings and deepest secrets, not by his wise insights.

The plot begins with an establishment of time and schedule that is debated to this day. Clearly, this downbeat does not commence the story in an *ad hoc* or *l'art pour l'art* fashion; instead, it is called for by the literary style (or the extreme, burning tension that defines it). After all, it is relevant if we interpret the series of events in terms of content. Staring from the $\text{לָעַתְּ לַמֶּלֶךְ הַפְּלִאֲמִי}$ expression, Garsiel argues at length that the kings' marching into battle never followed a set schedule. He feels that these words refer to the return of the messengers sent out earlier (Garsiel 2018, 231). Only he neglects two things. The first is that the infinitive construct form of לָעַת is *qal* (the simplest). Thus, when Garsiel translates it as *hiphil* (the causative form), it is a little free. Secondly, and more importantly, this is actually the opening sentence of a historical novel, in which the $\text{לָעַתְּ לַמֶּלֶךְ הַפְּלִאֲמִי}$ expression is none other than the special *locus a fictione* version – especially suited to the preposition – which, in this genre, is practically an obligatory feature in stories that unfold a dramatic conflict, precisely in the interest

of strengthening the appearance of authenticity. The sentence uses the convention attribute to make it more obvious that David should have been among his soldiers at that time. This is bravura writing. The protagonist is not even on the scene yet, and the reader is already confronted with his greatest flaw. The author of the Scripture, as Schultz also noted, 'does not hide the royal family members' characteristic weaknesses' (Schultz 2014, 116). Nor does the writer hesitate when it comes to realistic representation – not withholding, for example, that David, the former pastor boy who became king, was certainly corrupted by power. Using irony to introduce this is a powerful tool, which runs to the end of the story in an extraordinarily disciplined manner.⁴

The composition leading up to the complication is a bit like an absurd drama, an exercise in randomness, although there is nothing absurd in it. Beginning with Chapter 11 of 2 Samuel, the main character in every scene is David: David and Bathsheba (vers. 2–5), David and Uriah (vers. 6–13), David and Joab (vers. 14–25), David and the Lord (vers. 27), and David and Nathan (2Sam 12:1–12). The writing gets to the point, free of artifice – as though, besides the spoken and the speakable, there is nothing unspeakable. The sweeping flow of text not only provides a historical portrait, but is also indicative of the sinful overflow of David's desire. He lounges about, he rises, he strolls, he sees a beautiful woman bathing, he learns about her, sends for her and sleeps with her. The woman conceives and is sent away. Later, she sends a message: I am pregnant. There is no dialogue, nothing contrived, only the bare plot. Yet, by the time we get to Bathsheba's message, we are already at the flashpoint of one the greatest bone- and heart-crushing sins: adultery, which, among Israelites at that time, was more heinous than homicide. (Perhaps that is why Uriah's status as a Hittite is raised to an *epitheton ornans*.) The king was not only the highest legal forum in Israeli society – much rather, the king had special rights and privileges. Nonetheless, there were limits to those special rights and privileges. He was not allowed to commit a crime, especially not adultery.

4 In the work cited, Garsiel indicates a series of ironic instances as literary characteristic of this short story introducing the theme of adultery. The keeping of the prescribed rituals (vers. 4c) is paired with the crude transgression of moral law (vers. 4b). Uriah does not follow the king's order (vers. 8–9), and yet his disobedience is explained by his extraordinary faithfulness (vers. 11). David questions and speaks about peace and well-being (Shalom – peace, welfare, health; vers. 7). Meanwhile, he is doing everything to deprive Uriah of his peace and his marriage. Finally, there is a remark that suggests it is David's policy not to risk the life of a single man (vers. 20), but he joyfully receives the news of a few men's death as long as Uriah is among the fallen (vers. 25).

In the next phase of the story, the consequences of David's sin are introduced. From the perspective of writing for the stage, the first half of the initial sentence introducing vital power mistaking its purpose, אֶת־אֲוִרְיָה הַחֲמָיִי, וַיִּשְׁלַח דָּוִד אֶל־יוֹאָב שָׂרְיָה אֲלֵי is especially important. After all, from the continuation, it becomes clear – especially for those who know what follows – that David has no remorse at all for his lechery. In fact, the adulterous man is calculating, his emotions fretting over the story's complications. Essentially, it is the beginning of his identity crisis. David, the straightforward man, tries to hide his sin of adultery. At first, he believes that an apparently trifling *pious fraud* is allowed to be overlooked. In truth, ordering Uriah home and sending him to his wife is not a snare, but a seemingly benevolent gesture/trick, which – either because Uriah suspects something or he truly is faithful – does not succeed. The sin kept in secret grows rank. David set a trap, got the husband intoxicated, but he remains unbending even when inebriated, holding himself to the strict regulations of the frontline even on the home front. This awakens in David the ungodly thought which the *Book of Wisdom*, found in the Alexandrine cannon, expressed later about such cases: ἐνεδρεύσωμεν τὸν δίκαιον ὅτι δύσχωρηστος ἡμῖν ἐστίν – that is, 'Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us' (*Wisdom*, 2:12).

The beginning of the part about the now ungodly David shows, with ingenuous literary means, the base treachery, paving the way for the tragic resolution: 'And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, "See ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die." And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that the valiant men were. And the men of the city went out and fought with Joab: and there fell some of the people of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also' (2Sam 11: 14–17). Now, several commentaries argue that, by morning, the intent to murder had taken shape in David, and he decided to be rid of Uriah once and for all, וַיִּבְרָךְ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן – that is, 'by the sword of the sons of Ammon' (2Sam 12:9). Nevertheless, whether this is a case of *dolus directus* (in criminal law terms, a deliberate intention to kill) is still up for question on account of the following:

a) According to the actual content of the letter, Uriah has a chance of remaining alive, since his death is not guaranteed by sending him to the frontline and

leaving him on his own (he could win honours, be captured escape, etc.), it is only more likely.

b) David sent the letter by Uriah, who, no matter how devoted he is to him, is still in the position to get to know the contents of the letter.

c) Considering that Uriah is in the practice of flouting commands (after all, when he did not go home, he failed to disobey the orders of the highest commander, the king), this would give David a simple opportunity to liquidate Uriah.

On the other hand, *dolus eventualis* is when a possible intent to kill can be construed as likely. In the portion of the text dramatised as a dialogue, it reveals that Joab immediately suspects something of the sort. After the losing battle, the wily general gives this command to his messenger: 'When thou hast made an end of telling the matters of the war to the king, and it so be that the king's wrath arise, and he say unto thee, "Wherefore approached ye so nigh unto the city when ye did fight? Knew ye not that they would shoot from the wall? Who smote Abimelech, the son of Jerubbesheth? Did not a woman cast a piece of millstone upon him from the wall, that he did die in Thebez?" then say thou, "Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also"' (2Sam 11:19–21). Joab predicted David's outrage because of the defeat, and, although he did not know the motive, he recognised the intention regarding Uriah's death. That is how he knew that news of his death would placate the king. It is a great, eternal question in law history. When soldiers in war are sent to the frontline as punishment, can it be interpreted as intent on the part of the commander from a criminal law point of view? (Dangelmaier 1893, 46) Can we say, in this case, that it was *dolus specialis*, where the aim undeniably confirms the intent; although otherwise, with regard to the possibility of the outcome, the essence of the order was *dolus indirectus*? Can we claim this despite the fact that law history, in numerous cases, has refuted the argument that the presence of a purpose in and of itself should prove actual responsibility for the result? (Hacker 1224, 38–53) And why are these questions relevant to our theme? When it comes to legal fault, undoubtedly, an individual's responsibility can be measured in some manner. The legal system defines the crime and establishes the consequences. Punitive sanctions – even in the case of applying rules that originate from God – are always entangled with life's interrelations in accordance with the logic of legal norms. Yet, life is enmeshed in such an extensive network of sin (whether related to moral, spiritual or biological considerations) that law can barely tie all the strands in one knot. In a legal sense, the narrative being examined raises two grandiose

and tightly interwoven questions: 1. Is David an indirect perpetrator of murder? (determination of *dolus directus* and *dolus eventualis*) 2. Did David consider the order given in the letter to be participation in murder? (determination of *dolus indirectus*) The next chapter of the history writing under analysis will provide answers to much of this.

The ancient law of Israel was plainly religious law. The legal system rested mainly upon the basis of religion. Meanwhile, there was a complementary relationship between the legal apparatus and worship, both jointly legitimising godly revelations (Horst 1956, 49–75). In this relation – paying attention to the sociological peculiarities of Israeli society (see Kessler 2011, 66–76) – the rape of a woman was not simply a crime, but an existential deconstruction as well, since such an abuse – as, for example, a pre-marital sex life – ruined society’s judgment of the woman. Hence, when such a thing occurred, the perpetrator was required to pay compensation to the woman’s father and marry the woman (Deut 22: 28–29). If it involves a woman that is engaged who defends herself – since here another man’s rights are affected – the rapist had to expect the penalty of death (Deut 22: 25–26). In Israeli society, adultery was one of the most serious crimes, as it endangered society to the same considerable extent that it offended God’s law. Thus, holding someone responsible for it could not be omitted. The apodictic and casuistic laws related to this were in total agreement (Alt 1953, 278–332). Hence, it is evident that David wished to cover up this misdeed and did everything in the interest of warding off the question of responsibility for the sin.⁵ Thus, with David, the sin of adultery becomes a crime that is kept secret – if you like, a sort of secret crime.⁶ This type of secrecy, however, is not born out of ignorance, it is deliberate. David is the active subject of the verb סָתַר.

In the closing scene, Nathan’s fable is a parable of jurisdiction. His method is to present the situation through the most clearly true-to-life story possible, in which the individual can pass judgment upon himself – without recognizing that it constantly applies to himself. This is precisely why his delivery style is a delib-

5 Already in Genesis, Chapter 3 – the tale of the expulsion from Paradise – in the framework of a story mythological in nature, the refusal to assume responsibility for sin comes under debate when they try to shift responsibility for wrong behaviour. Adam accuses Eve of indulging in the forbidden fruit, which she gives to him. Eve holds the snake responsible for enticing her to defy the prohibition. In general, they seek in others the cause of their own sinfulness, and if it is not possible to evade, they try to hide the misdeed.

6 With its paradigmatic character, the story refers to how denial spreads – that is, the habit of passing on responsibility – and makes it clear that such behaviour will not find acceptance with God.

erate imitation of a trial (Karasszon 2002, 142).⁷ David receives Nathan's address as a trial discussion of an event (and a scenario with the poor and the rich living side by side in the city) that could be utterly commonplace. The king, as 'the supreme legal forum' (Karasszon 2002, 142), is not at all astonished by the outline of the case. It is the type of dramaturgical tool that makes a prose text perfectly dramatic. The scene would hold up on the stage as well with no alteration.

At the same time, rhetorically speaking, the parable is a classic trial argument. Nathan begins: נִשְׁבֵּי אֲנָשִׁים הָיוּ בְּעִיר – *exordium* and *propositio* in one (Cicero 2012, 362–371). That this is still a sort of parable is indicated by the בְּ prefix (there is no definite article, so he speaks of a city 'chosen at random'), but it is not explicit. The prophet's fact-conveying speech is fascinating and upsetting, and one can feel from its unnerving sentences that it is not motivated by knowledge or mudslinging – not even the intention to unmask David. Inspiration from God makes every word burn like poetry. It is a perfect implicit allegory: in the text, there is no lexical trace of the hidden thought, that the rich man could be identical to David; and the greatest playwright could be envious of the closing – that is the וְאֵלֶּיךָ אֶלְלִי expression (although a modern version of the text would rule out the *silluk*), which is a palpable *interruptio* in the rhetorical sense. From this, we can tell that Nathan would have continued his accusation with וְאֵלֶּיךָ הַשִּׁבְעָה, if David had not interrupted. The author of the chronicle wrote this dialogue, crackling with dramatic tension, with David interrupting and impulsively proclaiming his verdict. Thus, not only will the realisation and judgment of God carry annihilating power, but David's admission of guilt, given as a reply: לְיְהוָה. With David's interruption and his judgment born out of sincere outrage, as well as his answer given upon being confronted with God's judgment, the author suggest that David did not truly consider himself Uriah's murderer up until this point. Clearly, it is no accident that the prophet emphasises וְאֵלֶּיךָ הַשִּׁבְעָה בְּכִי עָקוֹן. David hid his sin of

7 Karasszon István notes: 'According to Chapter 14 of 2 Samuel, Joab, in an attempt to convince David to call home Absalom, who had been exiled for fratricide, came up with a test, whereby he sent to David a woman who laid before the king this complicated legal case, in which one of her children killed the other. 2 Samuel (14:7) beautifully describes the local proceedings conducted according to the law, and that murder called for the death penalty. Thus, the local court was justified in their verdict on the case, and if there had been no other complication, the sentence would have been carried out. However, the criminal is the family's last offspring. That is why, in Israel, the ruling judge had to face two possible options, both considered shameful: either kill off a family or leave the fratricide unpunished. In this complicated case, the king had jurisdiction; otherwise, the matter would not have come before him. From the story, it is possible to draw this conclusion: the king was truly the 'supreme legal forum' (Karasszon 2002, 142).

adultery. That he actually committed murder (as Noll also referred to in in one of his works⁸) is hidden from him. The text presents this psychologically, as well as how people continually at the mercy of their emotions stray again and again into the dead end of secret sins. From the point of view of our theme, the parable's great lesson is that failure to recognise personal sin, or keeping it a secret, can easily end up wounding other people's lives. The secret sin can also swell to the point where the sinner shrinks with fear from the world. David's downfall – similar to the collapse of Oedipus – horrifies the audience, but it is also suffused with the spirit of compassion.

Conclusion

On the basis of what I have sketched here, perhaps I have succeeded in showing clearly that the discipline of drama theory is not a pendant of aesthetic philosophies. That does not mean, however, that one should not use methods and categories from philosophy and aesthetics in certain cases. The most fundamental genre rules for constructing drama are eternal laws, although we may also declare – with the agreement of Brecht and Dürrenmatt – that there is no universal principle of drama construction. There is history writing, dramatics, dramatic conflict and language – the latter being a means of drama just as much as its medium. No matter how much we know about them, drama may be merely a work of art. On top of that: heuristic. Because of that, without true talent, no one can become a playwright or dramaturge. Yet, talent itself is not enough for the creation of art, since those who do not know the language better than palm of their hand will never be able to evoke dramatic power in text written for the stage. With all this in mind, by nurturing talent and providing guidance, in all certainty, we can revive our drama literature and theatre arts.

⁸ Nathan proclaims three well-circumscribed punishments: 1. The sword will never depart from David's house. 2. The Lord will take his wives before his eyes and give them to his neighbour, who will lie with them in broad daylight. 3. The son that David sired with Bathsheba will certainly die. Each of the punishments is linked to a concrete cause. 1. Because David despised the Lord and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be his own. 2. Because he always acted secretly. 3. Because he gave the enemies of the Lord an occasion to blaspheme. Noll points out that David's second sin, the murder of Uriah, is mentioned two times in the third line of the announcement of the punishment. In Verse 9, however, it is not directly levelled at him until David's outburst in the first half of Verse 14. From Nathan's answer, it is completely certain that David will be punished for the murder. Since Nathan replied that 'The Lord hath taken away thy sin; thou shall not die!', it means that the Lord will not kill David for the rape of Bathsheba. The suffering for his sin will come about through the declared punishment to be meted out to his family. The death of the child to be born will be reparation for the death of Uriah.

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