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MIMESIS, NEMESIS AND THE MELODRAMA, 'THE SEARCH
FOR CERTAINTY IN THE EYE OF FATE':
A CONSIDERATION OF MELODRAMA AND
CURRENT AFFAIRS

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ABSTRACT

MIMESIS, NEMESIS AND THE MELODRAMA

by ADRIANN A SMITH

Melodrama, a type of theatrical performance existing from the beginnings of drama to today's Current Affairs programme, is the drama of the division between the Self and the Other as; the self and other people, (them and Us), or the Self and the ultimate Other (God).

Melodrama is also the drama of the Self against the exigencies of fate. While both Tragedy and Comedy each in their own way explore what it means to be human, Melodrama is the drama of being human in the world. Melodrama actualises the desire of the Self to make sense of what is happening in the world, and happening intrapsychically. (Hence the subtitle '**Melodrama Fiction and Faction The Search for Certainty In the Eye of Fate**'.) Melodrama is the exploration of the triumph of virtue over vice, of courage over disaster, of hope over experience. It is this polarisation within the Melodrama that gives it its Manichaeian character.

The psychological force which creates awareness of, and acting out of these divisions, is the dramatic impulse **mimesis**. The bridges between early drama and the Melodrama are ritual, and myth, embodied in their early written form, the epic. Classical eighteenth and nineteenth century Melodrama, with its presentation of a divided universe, is a motivating force in today's Current Affairs programmes. It infuses today's Current Affairs debates and documentaries as the accompanying video demonstrates.

In discussing the Melodramatic form I have considered polarisation and propitiation as psychological imperatives, with ritual representation as the structure for the primary dramatic form, and excess as the dramatic mode.

To demonstrate the existence of Melodramatic concepts and elements in Current Affairs programme I have analysed New Zealand produced pre-recorded television Current Affairs From TV One and TV Three for the two weeks 30th June - 7th July - 18th - 22nd August 1996. These weeks were chosen at random and the programmes broadcast during them analysed. My final analysis focused on *Holmes*, *The Tuesday Documentary*, and *60 Minutes*, TVNZ; and *Ralston*, *Inside New Zealand*, and *20/20 TV3*.

PREFACE

I chose to write my thesis on this subject of Melodrama because I felt that it is a mode that, as one of the great modes of dramatic representation, has a value stretching not only forward from the Melodrama of the eighteenth and nineteenth century stage to the novel, the play, the film and the television of today, but also stretching backwards into antiquity. After being introduced to the work of Peter Brooks *The Melodramatic Imagination* I began to consider Melodrama in a different light. Hitherto I had dismissed it as 'cheap fiction' or 'lurid drama' and given it no further consideration. But reading Brooks changed all that for me. I now began to see Melodrama with its division of the world into black and white, good and bad, as one of the major methods of representation. For me it became clear that Melodrama is the method used by novelists, dramatists and script-writers to represent what it means to be human in the world, whether in a complex work like Margaret Atwood's novel *The Robber Bride* or in a straightforward work like the film *While You Were Sleeping*.

Another impetus towards my choice of subject for this thesis was my profession. I am a journalist by trade, specifically a documentary maker for radio. My reading of Brooks gave me a new understanding of my own work; of the premises under which I was working and of the structures I was recreating. We had often referred in the newsrooms of Radio New Zealand to the 'ping-pong' structure of a documentary. I now understand that this division into opposing camps is the essence of Melodrama. Even the 'ping-pong' effect of first one side and then the other has its origins in the theatrical structure of the Melodrama where victory alternates between the good and the evil sides. Reinforcing my interest in the theatrical origins of my craft is my personal interest in Theatre.

In order to appreciate the pervasive power of the Melodramatic impulse, I felt it was necessary to put Melodrama into the context of its long history: beginning

with the beginnings of drama, in worship and ritual, and tracing that development to the Melodrama of the nineteenth century stage with its technical innovations. These innovations were in part as a result of scientific development, development that led to the world of film and television. I then narrowed my focus to look at the use of Melodrama in the area that is my special interest, the area of Current Affairs. I chose television Current Affairs because the features of Melodrama are most immediately visible in them. But always I returned to the work of Peter Brooks because it was the key to my new understanding of the role of Melodrama in the world of representation. While I generally accepted his understanding and definition of Melodrama, I did not always agree with its limitations. Brooks limits Melodrama to a form that arose in the eighteenth century but I do not believe that its history can be cut so short. The quality of Melodrama is an enduring one and has long been an important vehicle for the expression of the nature of the human condition and to a certain extent Brooks agrees for in his work *The Melodramatic Imagination* he makes the following statement:

'...Melodrama at heart represents the theatrical impulse itself: the impulse toward dramatization, heightening, expression, acting out. ... to conceive Melodrama as an eternal type of the theatre, stretching from Euripides to Edward Albee, is a logical step,...here I think the term may become so extended in its meaning that it loses much of its usefulness, at least for our purposes. When Euripides, Shakespeare, and Moliere all become Melodramatists at least some of the time, and when Tragedy becomes only a special subset of Melodrama, we lose a sense of the cultural specificity of the genre.' (p xv)

On the contrary my belief is that if we limit the use of the term **Melodrama** to a certain dramatic form originating in the late eighteen and early nineteenth century, and still used extensively by film and television in the twentieth, we limit our ability to name an important dramatic form that has existed along with Tragedy and comedy since the dawn of drama. In doing this we lose the ability to recognise the central role this type of drama has played, and continues to play, in

our understanding of, and expression of, our lives as human beings in the world. Hence, I contend, it is necessary as humans 'to conceive Melodrama as an eternal type of the theatre,' and I would argue that though we may indeed 'lose a sense of the cultural specificity of the genre.' we gain an understanding of the role of **Melodrama** in the cohesive functioning of humans in groups i.e. in the life of the tribe, be it early human, post-revolutionary France, nineteenth century Polynesia, or contemporary New Zealand.

Melodrama is the 'personalised' form of the epic (e.g. the Illiad) which is itself the 'nationalised' form of the myths of the fall and resurrection. The myths themselves are dramatic expressions of the foundations of religious belief, which is based on the need to 'make sense of' i.e. give meaning to the universe. Therefore Melodrama is in fact a 'true' *genre*. The word genre has a variable meaning depending on the discipline in which one is working. I am not using it only in the context of film criticism, but am applying the meaning of 'a set of family resemblances' across various media to the word genre in my use of it; so that within the family of dramatised works, which includes works of 'fact' and of 'fiction' and works in the media of stage, film, television and radio, I can see a family resemblances which create three types or genres of drama: comedy, Tragedy and Melodrama.

In common parlance the genre of Melodrama and Tragedy are often confused. Just as Bernard Shaw defined comedy as a play in which everyone gets married, it is considered equally apt to describe a play, or any other representation, film novel television documentary or news item, in which everyone dies as a Tragedy. But it is important to make the distinction between Tragedy and Melodrama. As Brooks says in Conclusion: Melodrama A Central Poetry the final chapter of *The Melodramatic Imagination* this distinction gives us a name for the most common form of dramatic representation, a form that while it covers unpleasant events is not in itself Tragedy.

'It is particularly the distinction from Tragedy that matters, because we are persistently surrounded by spurious claims for the tragic, by erroneous tragification of experience. The drama of virtue misprized and persecuted, of innocence wronged, is regularly presented as tragic. So is the drama of disaster, as Robert Heilman points out, the intrusion of natural cataclysm or absurd event, of the fall of public personages whose abrupt eclipse, or assassination, leads to their automatic classification as tragic figures. The relevant aesthetic in most of these instances may be less Tragedy than Melodrama.' (p 203)

But while I agree with Brooks that

'It is valuable to distinguish between Tragedy and Melodrama and to avoid the spurious tragification of experience,' and that 'it is useful to be aware of the limits of Melodrama as aesthetic and cultural form, of what it cannot accomplish as well as what it can', (p 205)

where I differ from him is in his assigning to Tragedy the role of being the only form of drama which

'generates meaning ultimately in terms of orders higher than one man's experience, orders invested by the community with holy and synthesizing power.' (p205)

And of being the only form which derives its cathartic impact from

'... the sense of communal sacrifice and transformation.' (p205)

I do not accept Tragedy as the only form of 'unhappy' drama that directs the audience/spectator/ viewer to a higher power or a sacred universe; as the only form that contains the notion of sacrifice and transformation; nor do I accept that Melodrama be relegated to merely the drama of the abyss in a *post sacred* universe. Brooks says that Melodrama

'.... cannot, in distinction to Tragedy, offer reconciliation under a sacred mantle, or in terms of a higher synthesis. A form for secularized times, it offers the nearest approach to sacred and cosmic values in a world where they no longer have any certain ontology or epistemology.'(p 205)

I disagree. It is true that the hero in Melodrama, as opposed to the hero in Tragedy, is not the site of personal degeneration. S/he is the embodiment of the human resistance to, is the 'virtuous' bulwark against, the forces that seek to destroy the human community. These forces are represented in dramatic form by either the vagaries of nature or the machinations of other humans, the villain(s), as the virtues are dramatically presented in the hero/heroine and their respective families and friends. As the dramatic form that represents the human consciousness of the self, in opposition to the forces of the world, the Melodramatic Impulse is concerned with making present the forces of evil and disharmony so that they can be overcome and a state of balance, (reconciliation) can be restored.

Brooks believes that Tragedy is no longer possible in a post enlightenment universe. He says

'The status of the Sacred as "wholly other" - In Rudolf Otto's phrase- as a realm of being and value recognized to be apart from and superior to man, is gone and is irrecoverable.'(p 17)

Therefore he says Tragedy too has gone. But as I trace the development of Melodrama in this thesis I will seek to show that the 'wholly other' exists not in Tragedy but in the Melodramatic form. The other of Tragedy, is the personal other, the split contained within the psyche. Therefore, not only is it possible for Tragedy to still exist in a post-enlightenment universe, but it is also possible that Melodrama as the descendent of the drama of the sacred, continues to be, a propitiation ritual and as such still has at least the vestige of its original transcendent power.. Brooks says of Melodrama that it

'Melodrama regularly simulates the experience of nightmare, where virtue, representative of the ego, lies supine, helpless, while menace plays out its occult designs. The end of the nightmare is an awakening brought about by confrontation and expulsion of the villain, the person in whom all evil is seen to be concentrated, and a reaffirmation of the society of "decent people."' (p 204)

That the Melodrama is a direct descendant of the propitiation drama of ritual is evident in the form which has tight storylines, limited characters and characterisation, specific perceptible, if not realistic causation, sustained rhythm and pressure towards confrontation, and a psychological emphasis on the casting out of evil.

Another attraction for me to the consideration of the Melodrama was the intense focus on performance. The expressive freedom given by the high performance quality of the Melodramatic mode allows room for the cosmic forces for good and evil, for human desires both lofty and base to be given expression. Whether that performance element is manifest in the display created by the spectacle scenery commanding(ed) the attention of the audience/viewer, or in the physicality of its acting style, with its gymnastic displays and use of heightened gestures, or the transparent emotionality, or the clear cut psychological and moral divisions, or the invocations of a magic and mystical world; for one of the strengths of the Melodramatic form is in its dramatic bravado. The Melodrama as a form is 'up front' It creates a world that is larger than life, and as such is close to the world of our dreams. Melodramatisation, which is essentially externalisation, then is the mode that allows the complex of ideas and situations, the hopes and fears inherent in the drama of disaster to be 'acted out', whether the method is ritual, or dramatic enactment or documentary representation.

Brooks, in his concluding chapter notes the applicability of **Melodrama** to the life of public figures and it is the drama of the public arena played out nightly on our radios and television that I wish to make the final consideration of this thesis.

But before considering the use of **Melodrama** in public life I wish to trace the development of the Melodramatic Impulse to its modern embodiment.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION: THE ENDURING QUALITY OF MELODRAMA

Though at first viewing it may not appear to be so, the Current Affairs programmes of the 1990s are direct descendants of the Melodrama of the eighteenth and nineteenth century stage. The derivation of the Current Affairs programme from the stage Melodrama, can be traced in several ways. Firstly there is a similarity of subject matter which is striking; as a form Melodrama's use on the stage was not restricted to the drama of fiction only, but also provided the basis for the drama of 'fact', a basis it continues to provide for the Current Affairs programmes of the 1990's. There is also a similarity of presentation style. I will deal with areas of style and content in chapters six and seven. But what is more important is, that there is a similarity of purpose in both the stage Melodramas and the Current Affairs programme, and it is on this similarity of intent that I wish to focus the bulk of this thesis.

To adequately consider the primary purpose of both the stage Melodrama and the contemporary Current Affairs programme, and to see how closely they are aligned, it is necessary to define the nature and purpose of Melodrama. Melodrama is one of the four main types of drama, Tragedy, Comedy, Melodrama and Farce. While the original purpose of all drama is unclear, what can be reasonably ascertained is that one of the original purposes of the Drama, at least for the Drama of Tragedy and Melodrama, was to make the world safe for human kind. It achieved this end by creating an agency for safety, through the provision of a vehicle in which the propitiation of the hostile forces, which rule the universe, could take place. In this the first drama, is close to ritual, and the point of separation is in fact unknown.

In order to understand just what constitutes Melodrama it is necessary to understand what I have called the Melodramatic Impulse. The Melodrama arises from the Melodramatic Impulse, which I will define as; the impulse to create a sense of safety, in an often hostile environment, through the separation of 'good' from 'bad'. Once this separation has occurred and the lines of division are clear the threatening forces can be overcome. Brooks says that

'...Melodrama regularly simulates the experience of nightmare, where virtue, representative of the ego, lies supine, helpless, while menace plays out its occult designs. The end of the nightmare is an awakening brought about by confrontation and expulsion of the villain, the person in whom all evil is seen to be concentrated, and a reaffirmation of the society of "decent people."'¹

It is this expulsion of all evil, in the person of the villain, that is the most important aspect of what has come to be called Melodrama. In the symbolic expulsion of the villain, all evil is subdued and expelled. Melodrama is about the fulfilment of desire, particularly of the desire for certainty. This need to set the world to rights, is a key characteristic of the use of the Melodramatic form, whether its purpose is fictional or factual. For example, the discussion of a crime, murder, rape, arson, in a television Current Affairs programme, with its examination and re-examination of the events, and its castigation of the villain, is motivated by the desire to rid the community of such a disruptive influence. In this, the item becomes a ritual, collective activity, whereby the trouble in a community can be brought to the surface, dealt with and expelled. Through this expulsion the community can expiate its own guilt, its collective contribution to the problem. As Brooks' says the world can once again be made safe for "decent people". Chapter five From Ritual to Melodrama, further examines the link between ritual and Melodrama.

¹ Peter Brooks *The Melodramatic Imagination* p.204

The development of the particular stage form, with its virtuous hero and its powerless and sometimes mute heroine, that we now know as The Melodrama, occurred at the end of the eighteenth century. Discussing the 'classical' Melodrama of the eighteenth and nineteenth century stage, Brooks says that the development of this theatrical form, The Melodrama, with its raft of signs, was a direct result of the adoption of the ideas of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment brought a rejection of 'superstition' and of ideas which could not be rationally proved, and thus swept away the older order of life, an order lived under the belief in the protection of a sacred mantle. But, he says, the consequence was, that in a world where there was no overarching certainty, human beings were left desperately looking for a belief system.² One method of regaining a sense of order, of safety, in the face of a universe that now appeared to have no meaning, was to return to older forms which offered explanation of the 'way of the world'. Thus in the search for a new moral order, the Romantic Movement focused on the power of myth (among other areas such as the experience of the 'sublime' through Nature,) as a way of expressing the intrinsic elements and conflicts in human nature. ³ The Melodramatic Impulse, with its division into good and bad, light and dark is central to the expression of myth and in the stories of myth, the epics of the heroes, the characters are writ larger than life. This aggrandisement of the hero assures the listener, spectator, that there are certainties, there are role models who can be emulated, and that by such emulation, such expression of certainty of the power of the 'good', the world can be made safe. In the classical stage Melodrama, says Brooks

² Peter Brooks *The Melodramatic Imagination* p.42

³ Charles H. Long *Mythology*, Encarta 1995

' the psychic bravado of virtue, its expressive breakthrough, serves to assure us again and again, that the universe is in fact morally legible, that it possesses an ethical identity and significance. This assurance must be a central function of Melodrama in the post-sacred universe: it relocates and rearticulates the most basic moral sentiments and celebrates the sign of right.'⁴

In the form of the Melodrama, 'pure' myth does not appear as a direct narrative that describes the origin of the basic elements and assumptions of a culture,⁵ but rather, is implied in the shape of the stories, and in the use of signs 'What we have is a drama of pure psychic signs-called Father, Daughter, Protector, Persecutor, Judge, Duty, Obedience, Justice-that interest us through their clash...'⁶ says Brooks rather than complex 'real' people. In observing the actions of these character 'types' we are observing characters that serve the same function as the representative characters of myth. Though, because they refer to another time and place and to the gods it is usual to see myths as aspects of religion only, in fact in the presentation of Current Affairs items, it is myth casting its shadow across the events, that determines the way in which the story is presented. For example in the item on Paea Wolfgram, the hero status of the Olympic silver medallist is enhanced by the use of the low level upward-angle shot of him arriving at Nukualofa airport in Tonga and descending the steps from the aeroplane. This shot placing him first, framed high in the doorway above the crowd, and then descending to their level recalls the ideas of any returning hero of myth. It also recreates images of a god descending, and of a triumphant king returning from battle. In some ways Paea Wolfgram is all of these things and the voice-over on the original item refers to him as both conquering hero and king.

Paea is chosen to play the role of hero. not just because of his victory, but because it surprised the world. He was the unknown person from a place most people had never heard of, written off as having little chance, just like the youngest son of

⁴ Brooks p.43

⁵ Charles H. Long *Mythology, Encarta*

⁶ Brooks p.35

folk-tale. And like that youngest son he has returned triumphant, to claim his rightful place in society. Now he is celebrated by the item voice-over as, 'a boxer who shuns brutality, who defies the popular notion that pugilism equals barbarism'. His return is celebrated not only with speeches and feasts in Tonga, but by a full length, thirteen minute, item on New Zealand television because he is one of us. Paea Wolfgram grew up in Auckland and has been studying law there. Not only is he a hero of one of our near neighbours, a hero of the Pacific, he is our hero too, and we can feel doubly pleased about this because it is here in New Zealand that his talent has been fostered. Writing of the power of the Melodrama Brooks quoted Walter Benjamin;

'it is from the "flame" of fictional representations that we warm our "shivering lives," and this is nowhere more true than in the most enduringly popular fictions that suggest that we do not live in a world drained of transcendence and significance, that the principles of superdrama are to be found near at hand..'⁷

Such a purpose is also one of the functions of the constructions of fact, the Current Affairs item, that we see daily on our television screens. In observing the punishment and removal of evil, or in sharing in the triumph of winners like Paea Wolfgram we are given a sense of the significance of life. The importance of myth to the Melodramatic impulse is further discussed in chapter four Myth, and Epic.

So the Melodramatic form of the 'classic' Melodrama of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries carried its heritage from the stories of myth and epic with their heroes, imprisoned virtuous heroines, and tales of strange, magical and distant places, to the nineteenth century. The technical developments of the nineteenth century stage, with its spectacular scenery drawn from Romantic images, became the basis of the 'realistic' visual representation of first twentieth century film, then television. Chapter six Melodrama: the Influence of 'Social Types' and the Spectacle Stage looks at some of these technical developments and discusses the relationship of their use to the ideas of Romanticism.

The Melodramatic form must be separated from the tragic, for these two forms are often confused. The tragic impulse is concerned with the concept of the 'fatal flaw', within the psyche of humanity. For the purposes of the drama, a particular flaw is shown embodied in the character of the protagonist. The corrosive effects of this flaw are triggered by an event and then the drama follows the subsequent moral decline of the personality as external forces further play upon this 'flaw'. Such a flaw can be representative of the flawed nature of the State as in the play *Othello*. The tragic is centred in the sense of the divided self. It is the drama that deals with the break-down of the individual personality. Robert Heilman, himself quoting Albert Camus says; 'In Camus's view, Tragedy is begotten by a period of fundamental crisis - "... the forces confronting each other in Tragedy are equally legitimate ... each force is at the same time both good and bad"' ⁸ Tragedy focuses on the conflict within the individual, on the necessity for making a moral choice. The cathartic emotions aroused within the spectator by classic Tragedy are pity and terror. The question posed in the mind of the spectator is 'what would I have done in this person's place, faced with this situation how would I too have acted?'

Melodrama leaves no room for such doubt. It is the drama of the external force. The enemy is clear. It is without. It is the villain. The cathartic emotion aroused by Melodrama is indignation. The spectator is raised to a pitch of accusatory displeasure at the villain's action. There is no question as to what is the 'right' action the enemy must be destroyed. This leaves no room for moral scruple. In Tragedy the protagonist destroys himself. In Melodrama the villain is destroyed by the hero. The Melodrama is the drama of fate, the drama of life lived in the world. In the Melodrama the forces that confront each other are sharply divided into good and bad. Melodrama presents what Heilman calls '... the less complex though no less painful world of victor and victims, of those who triumph and those who go down'⁹, The Melodramatic form then rests on a polarised view of the world where good and evil are clearly delineated. Thus the drama of disaster, often known as

⁷ Peter Brooks p.205

⁸ Robert Heilman *The Iceman, the Arsonist, and the Troubled Agent* p.7

⁹ *ibid.*, p.5

tragic, is in fact the Melodramatic Impulse at work. In its division into opposing camps, and with its clear cut issues Melodrama denies the existence of the shades of grey that make up everyday existence. It is this externalisation of moral states and the embodiment of them in separate characters, which makes the essential difference between Melodrama and Tragedy as literary and dramatic forms. I will consider the action of the Melodramatic Impulse more closely in the chapter on mimesis, chapter three, and discuss its early religious and cultural manifestations in the section on the Manichean in chapter five From Ritual to Melodrama.

There are arguments for and against the longevity of Melodrama as a form. As I stated in the preface I do not agree that it should be limited to a specific cultural form that appeared, originally in France, on the eighteenth century stage. The form of the 'classical' Melodrama follows this pattern. There is a the beginning a situation of peace which is then intruded upon, this intrusion includes an assault on virtue, usually in the person of the heroine, which shows the actions of the villain in the working out of 'evil', who attacks and often imprisons virtue. and by this means provokes indignation in the audience/viewer. The drama then depicts the rescue of virtue, and provides a satisfactory conclusion. The form provides a container for the psychological need to 'act out' disruptive concepts and actions in a 'safe' environment. It finds a means to present this acting out by resorting to excess in. Thus it establishes the mood of the dramatic moment, assisted by music and spectacle. In this form it is carrying out the ancient idea of the propitiation of the Gods through the identification of, and expulsion of evil which continues to be present in these representations For though I think Melodrama is an inadequate name for the dramatic process that is being employed in these constructions, as Melodrama carries with it the strong referral back to a certain style of performance, it is clear that it is the Melodramatic Impulse, with its separation of good and evil, which has given rise to a form for describing human experience that has a much longer history, than the limit of nearly two centuries that Peter Brooks would give it. In fact Brooks, himself as well as Heilman, Disher and Elsaesser all write about the constant nature of Melodrama. Like Tragedy, Melodrama is an ancient form. Teivas Oksala points the moment in

Western literature when the breakdown of the individual personality, the centre of Tragedy is first most clearly articulated but the example also shows the longevity of the Melodramatic form. Writing of Virgil's Epic the Aeneid. Oksala says:

'when Aeneas and Dido meet, their entire fate, their higher ego, is in the balance: one must be destroyed. Dido decides to kill herself when the hero, obeying the will of the gods, continues his journey. On her death Dido is a queen proud of her achievements and a woman whose heart is broken and whose inner world has collapsed. This is precisely the heart of the Tragedy, not the fact that the queen falls from on high.'¹⁰

This description of the fate of Dido clearly articulates the difference between Tragedy and Melodrama. The Tragedy is the collapse of the inner world of the queen. The events dictated by fate are the Melodrama in action. In the one story the working of the Tragic and the Melodramatic Impulse are present. Chapter four, and chapter five give a brief coverage of the ancient history and origins of the Melodrama.

It was after studying the use of Melodrama in fictional film and television, that I noticed the similarities between these works and television news and particularly Current Affairs. A breakdown of the elements of Melodrama lead me to observe Current Affairs more closely, and to note the manner in which it too could be broken down into the elements of Melodrama. To define what I mean by Current Affairs as distinct from news, I must first say that the boundary is somewhat blurred, but typically Current Affairs items are longer than news items, any item over three minutes would usually be considered to be Current Affairs. The longer time allows a discussion to take place and/or a scenario to be developed. As a general rule Current Affairs items tend to seek the reasons behind an event, rather than focusing only on the event itself. This loose definition means that I have included news extension programmes such as *Homes* and *Ralston* within the

¹⁰ Teivas Oksala *Virgil's Aeneid as Homeric, National and Universal Epic* in Lauri p.64

bracket of Current Affairs. And an immediate exception to the definition is apparent in the programme on Kaipara Harbour *Heartland* 22/8/96. There is no obvious argument being presented by the programme on the Kaipara. But the concepts being evoked, which are discussed further in chapters six, and seven Plots That (Continue) To Thrill, are based on a range of ideas about the 'scenic' and comparisons between the rural and the urban lifestyle that have their origins in the Romantic Movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Current Affairs often focuses on life-style and connections between people so programmes such as *Inside New Zealand* and *Heartland* are included in the selection of current affair programmes recorded.

The full list of programmes recorded is: *Tangata Pasifika*, *Waka Huia*, 20/20, 60 Minutes, Fraser, Holmes, *Inside New Zealand*, *Heartland*, *Tuesday Documentary*, *Assignment* and *Ralston*. I did not select programmes that did not contain a significant proportion of material that was produced by New Zealand television companies. The television samples were selected by recording all New Zealand produced Current Affairs screened in the two selected weeks of June-July and August 1996. The programmes were then examined to see what features of the Melodrama, if any were present in these programmes and extracts from the Current Affairs programmes selected. Those chosen were selected for the clarity with which they demonstrated the underlying features of the Melodrama. So for example the *Tangata Pasifika* programme of 18/8/96 which was a lead up to the elections in which Prime Minister Jim Bolger, fielded questions from journalists Samson Samasoni and Lualemana Tino Pereira on what the National Party could offer the Pacific Island community, was not selected. Although being a discussion on politics it contained the requisite element of conflict, the pace of the programme was slow and to be meaningful, the extracts would have had to be very long. The final item featuring the arrival home of the Tongan boxer Paea Wolfgram was also not used as this version was in slow motion overlayed with a sound track of Pacific Island singing. Although it clearly showed the hero status of Paea I decided to incorporate the same footage broadcast at normal speed with the 'actuality' music of the brass band that greeted him on arrival from the 60

Minutes programme of 12/8/96 into the video instead. So selection decisions were made on the basis of how clearly the extracts were able to demonstrate the features typical of Melodrama, given the restriction that they were short excerpts from longer items.

The features to be observed were :

- (a) clear division of participants into categories particularly categories representing socially approved attitudes (good) and attitudes less acceptable, or unacceptable in New Zealand in 1996 (bad) - the mimesis and ritual elements
- (b) representations of Melodrama 'types' the hero, the heroine, the villain - the presence of mythic elements
- (c) the presence of conflict in the item - the perseverance of ritual
- (d) the presence of ritualistic elements leading to the notion of a community ritual - ritual and propitiation
- (e) the retention of the attributes of the theatre of performance -mimesis, and the presence of stylisation in performance
- (f) the evocative use of scenery and music - the spectacle stage and the Romantic tradition.

The items included in the programmes on *Holmes*, *The Tuesday Documentary*, and *60 Minutes*, TVNZ; and *Ralston*, *Inside New Zealand*, and *20/20* TV3 were found to contain many of these features.

I then considered a body of nineteenth century stage Melodramas and selected those that presented similar themes to the themes selected for 1990s television Current Affairs programmes. The accompanying documentary video *The Melodramatic Impulse and Current Affairs* compares the selected extracts from the two

weeks of Current Affairs programmes, recorded off air from New Zealand television on TV One and TV Three in the weeks: 30th June to the 7th July & 18th -22nd August 1996, and excerpts from the nineteenth century Melodramas *The Factory Lad* 1834 *The Drunkard* 1847 and *London By Night* 1867. The extracts, presented by amateur actors and recorded on VHS video format with minimal lighting and costuming, have been selected to illustrate the similar use of the Melodramatic elements, within similar themes but in a different medium. The video is discussed in detail in chapter seven.

What I think is really important about the persistence of the Melodramatic impulse and the Melodramatic mode in these Current Affairs programmes is the wider role it plays in our everyday life. Writing about the development of the Melodrama in the nineteenth century Brooks says that it has come about as a result of the process of 'desacralisation'. He believes that, in what he terms a 'post-sacred universe'¹¹, a communal expiation of guilt is no longer possible, that community ritual is no longer effective, and that all sacralisation and all myth-making must be, be purely personal. One has only to watch the Current Affairs Melodrama taking place night after night on our television screens to doubt this. It is an interesting hybrid of the personal and the community ritual. Observed in the personal privacy of our lounges it is nevertheless a community, and a communal, response to the problem of disaster and 'evil' in our lives. The recordings are a public event, they take place in a setting that is at once both public and private, a television studio, but they are broadcast to a nation ready to receive them, a very public act. As such they are drawing on the traditions of not only the Melodrama, with its own debt to ritual and myth, but on the traditions and myths of religious ceremony itself, with their ancient functions of expiation and community building.

In order to understand how these traditions relate to the Melodrama and to Current Affairs it will be necessary to examine them in some detail, beginning with a discussion on the nature of art and artifice, and then a consideration of the

¹¹ Peter Brooks pp.15-17

act of the drama itself, the act of mimesis with a brief look at the concept of performance. A look at the functions of myth and ritual as they first impinge on the Melodrama is also necessary and then a review of the scenic traditions, and technical developments that influenced the dramatic form of Melodrama;- finally returning to the video I would like to consider the Current Affairs excerpts in some detail, and to discuss their ritual, mythical, performance and Melodramatic features.

Chapter Two

ART, AND IMITATION

In order to consider the value of works such as the ordinary television documentary, and to consider what wider functions it may have beyond imparting a set of information it is first necessary to review some of the ideas surrounding the concepts of 'art' and 'creativity'. Raymond Williams clearly expresses a commonly held notion about what type of work will qualify for the designation 'art'. He writes:

The fact is, I think, that aesthetic theory, ... has normally retained, in a curious way, the idea that the artist is specially inspired, which offers an easy but false solution to the problem of quality in art: ...we mean by art the work of those who are artists, that is specially inspired, and not the work of those who though they write, paint and compose are not artists, in that they are not inspired'

'This sounds very silly, spelled out, but we have all learned it, in effect. Secondly, the ideal of 'revelation', the discovery of a 'superior reality', has been similarly retained, and of course leads us to believe that the work of the artist is to make new discoveries about the world ('creative' equals 'new'). Yet this is a really disabling idea, in that it forces the exclusion of a large amount of art, which it is clearly our business to understand.'¹

Williams does not spell it out, but it is clear from this comment, that, if a test for the qualification of the label 'art', that is the concept of 'art' as understood to mean 'especially inspired', was applied to many works, they would not pass. It is

¹ Raymond Williams *The Long Revolution* Part One *The Creative Mind* p.29

certainly the case with most television documentary productions. But the concept of art can be understood to be something much broader than that. Art is concerned with the transformation of experience as practised by everyone, but where does the importance of the transformation of experience into art, lie?

The function of art

Raymond Williams speaks of the communicative nature of art,² and of the struggles besetting the artist, in any medium, who attempts to clearly transmit to others through their work, the personal concepts and visions they have about the universe. According to Williams part of the value of art lies in the fact that it is 'literally a way of seeing new things and new relationships'³. This broadening of vision which is considered to be a basic attribute of an artist is not the province of artists alone. The activity involved in seeing things in a new way, of seeing new things and new relationships, is practised 'not only by scientists and thinkers, but also, necessarily, by everyone.'⁴ Seeing new things and new relationships is part of the process of being human. As we develop a sense of self and other, we not only develop a unique perspective on the world but we literally create the world anew for ourselves, through our unique vision. We gain this vision by describing things to ourselves. What we see, we name, and what we can name, we can see. As we name new objects and concepts we attach them to older concepts and objects we have already described to ourselves. By this process of naming and assigning we gradually build up our world. It is a process of creating a world piece by piece where none existed before.⁵ 'We create our human world as we have thought of art being created', says Williams whose understanding is based on the work of J. Z Young. Williams writes:

² Williams p.34

³ *ibid.*,p.24

⁴ *ibid.*, p..24

⁵ Williams p..23

"The brain of each one of us does literally create his or her own world." This startling sentence, from Professor J. Z. Young's *Doubt and Certainty in Science - a Biologists Reflections on the Brain*, introduces clearly enough a new stage in the discussion. [on creativity] ⁶

'The central fact of this new account of the activity of our brains is that each one of us *has to learn to see*.' ⁷

This means that art is not something rarefied, practised only by a select few. Williams says:

'... the distinction of art from ordinary living, and the dismissal of art as unpractical or secondary ...are alternative formulations of the same error. If all reality must be learnt by the effort to describe it successfully, we cannot isolate 'reality' and set art in opposition to it...' ⁸

The importance of art lies in the fact that not only do we create our own world in the same way that an artist creates a work of art, by imposing a pattern on what would otherwise be random experience, but that through art we extend our understandings; for through considering the already ordered perceptions in the images created by artists, we are encouraged to expand our vision of the world.

Art, says Williams, is

'an extension of our capacity for organisation: a vital faculty which allows particular areas of reality to be described and communicated.' ⁹ Art is a multi-layered means of communicating an experience from one person to the another. It is through the medium of art, that 'the experience is actively re-created - not 'contemplated', not 'examined', not passively received, but by response to the means, actually lived through, by those

⁶ Williams p.16

⁷ *ibid.*, p.17

⁸ *ibid.*, p.37

⁹ *ibid.*, p.34

to whom it is offered.¹⁰ The communicative nature of art is as important as what is being communicated. The importance of the ability that each one of us has to create art exists not only in the fact that art gives us a personal means of being able to see the world through the process of describing it to ourselves, but that this art is part of the communicative equipment of the whole society. Art is one of the means by which experience can be shared, by which a personal and unique experience can be turned into a common, communal experience.¹¹

It is this sharing of personal experience, this creation of a common point of view that gives us an insight into the purpose of religious art, as the embodiment of meaning and values, and understanding of the world and the cosmos held in common by the community. This type of art, an expression of community understanding, created by the artist, that is closest to that elusive crossover point on the border between 'pure' religious expression i.e. ritual, and a secular expression which still contains the basic elements of ritual, the drama. In such art, as in religious ritual, 'The artist is not describing new experiences, but embodying known experiences.'¹² In our turbulent and multi-beliefed cosmopolitan societies of the West, the assumption that only art serving 'on the frontier of knowledge,' is 'true' art, is a legacy of the Romantic movement. But contrary to this commonly-held belief, ground breaking assertions of new ideas, and meanings, that is the strange and the unfamiliar, and/or the expression of tumult and change in society, is not the only 'true' art. It is true that one of the functions of art is to help people come to terms with their environment, and with the changes in their society. For as things change they must be re-interpreted and re-explained. Art helps to give meaning to society, and in so doing helps society give meaning to itself. But says Williams, while art may function on the frontier of change

¹⁰ Williams p.34

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.38

¹² *ibid.*, p.30

'particularly in disturbed and rapidly changing societies, yet it serves, also, at the very centre of societies. It is often through the art that the society expresses its sense of being a society. The artist, in this case is not the lonely explorer. But the voice of his community'.¹³

This representation of the central views and values of the community is one of the roles of Melodrama in its various manifestations; as an epic, as a nineteenth century stage play, as a film, or as a television documentary. Art that portrays the ordinary, the events of living a culture with which we are all familiar, art that is accessible, can still be great art. It is the ability of a work of art to give meaning to what changes, in relation to what remains in a culture, that is one of its most important aspects. This does not undervalue the skill of the artist in their particular medium, music, words, images, but adds to that skill a necessary skill of communication. 'The 'creative' act, of any artist, is in any case the process of making a meaning active, by communicating an organized experience to others',¹⁴ says Williams. It is the making of a meaning active that is the most important quality of a work of art, not necessarily the experimentation with form. This does not rule out such experimentation for the practising artist, but experiment alone is not the criteria on which the worth of a work of art can be judged for not all experimental art is necessarily great nor is all accessible art to be despised. 'Not all 'strange' art, by any means, is found valuable, nor is all 'familiar' art found valueless',¹⁵ says Williams. If a familiar form of art appears to have become drained of its power to convey meaning this is because of a mechanical use of the form, rather than an inherent fault in the form itself.¹⁶ Thus it is with the Melodrama. Brooks comments

¹³ Williams p.30

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.32

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.30

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.35

'That the term covers and, in common usage, most often refers to a cheap and banal Melodrama - to soap opera - need not decrease its usefulness: there is a range from high to low examples in any literary field,...At its most ambitious, the Melodramatic mode of conception and representation may appear to be the very process of reaching a fundamental drama of the moral life and finding the terms to express it.'¹⁷

What counts is not the choice of the form, nor even of the content, for the commonplace can carry as profound a meaning as the exotic; what counts most is the level of communication. One of the attributes of Melodrama is its accessibility as a means of communicating widely held meanings.' It is quite common for philosophers and scientists to restrict their discussion of art, ... to great and original works:'¹⁸ writes Williams. This he states disqualifies many works from classification as 'art'; but he goes on

'will this do? ... The disparity in value is not evidence of a fundamentally different practice and intention, especially since we find not only great art and bad art, but a range of infinite gradations between these, with no obvious line where a difference in kind can be drawn.'¹⁹

This broadening of the definition of the concept of 'art' asks us to reconsider many works, including every film, television show and nineteenth century Melodrama, which have been dismissed as non-art, as second rate. The Melodramatic form is capable of powerful presentations and interpretations of human behaviour. It may be that in some of those are some sophisticated assessments of and insights into human existence. It is certain that what ever 'value' is placed on the outcome, the process of the creation of these works was the process of 'artistic' creation. The same reassessment need to be applied to the

¹⁷ Brooks p.12

¹⁸ Williams p..29

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p..29

works created under the mantle of television Current Affairs. It is in the common place that much Current Affairs is set, but the value of the common place is that it holds a mirror up to ourselves and offers a chance of reassessment.

Art then, elaborates, and explains our culture to us. Through art we understand both what we do and why we do it. It is art that enables us to take our cultural institutions apart. In this sense television Current Affairs programmes fall into the category of art as Williams defines it. For these programmes are constantly reflecting on us, and throwing us, and our culture up for further reflection, presenting us to ourselves in new ways to be examined. In this they are following in the tradition of the Melodrama.

‘To see art as a particular process in the general human process of creative discovery and communication is at once a redefinition of the status of art and the finding of means to link it with our ordinary social life.’²⁰

This does not mean that the artist cannot imbue the work with deep original insights or even strange ideas and meanings of their own, or that the work must be facile or trite to be accessible. It is permissible for the artist to require the spectator to arrive at the meanings of the work after much thought, and through repeated viewings and readings. Multiple layering of meaning is permissible for communication to still take place, but the basis of judgement for the value of a work of art should not be its form alone or even the register of its content. It is through all art, including the common place art of the songs of the street and of the everyday television programme, says Williams that we are helped ‘to review the nature of our whole common life’²¹ Art teaches about ourselves, it is through art, through the images that art throws up to us, for us, and at us, the images developed by all art not just great art that we are able to reflect on who we are, as individuals and as a common culture. This art of necessity includes the slightest Melodrama concoction, the simplest or even most banal Current Affairs items, as

²⁰ Williams p.37

²¹ *ibid.*, p.39

well as works of deep insight, works of profound beauty of expression, for the basic element of all art is the act of communication.

' The abstraction of art has been its promotion or relegation to an area of special experience (emotion, beauty, phantasy, the imagination, the unconscious), which art in practice has never confined itself to, ranging in fact from the most ordinary daily activities to exceptional crises and intensities, and using a range of means from the words of the street and common popular stories to strange systems and images which it has yet been able to make common property.'²²

If the creation of art, the naming of experiences, and the construction of complex relationships from and between those experiences, in order to both represent them to ourselves and to others, that is, to construct a coherent reality, is inherent in the way we as humans think, Art, and the ability to be artists, is necessary for all humans as a matter of survival. The quality of what each individual produces in the way of art is less important than the fact of the production itself. Taussig writes that the origin of artistic creation, which is the psychological act of mimesis, lies not in the need for basic biological survival in difficult conditions, not in the need to 'live another year in the jungle'²³ but in the human need to create and express a 'social life, particularly the life of the imagination as expressed by the art, ritual and mythology of "primitive" societies?'²⁴ Because human survival depends on our ability to function as a group, Art, the life of the imagination which gives expression to the collective vision of the group, is a tool for survival.

²² Williams p.39

²³ Benjamin Hunnigher *The Origin of the Theatre* p.54

²⁴ Michael Taussig *Mimesis and Alterity A Particular History of the Senses Chapter Six With The Wind of World History in Our Sails* p. 83

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Art and Mimesis

While one of the attributes of mimesis is the power to copy, mimesis is more than superficial imitation. Williams stresses the importance of the need for the artist to cultivate the ability to live the experience in order to reproduce it:

'Since the meaning and the means cannot be separated, it is on the artist's actual ability to live the experience that successful communication depends.'²⁵

And what does he mean by the artist actually living the experience; he means the experience must have undergone the process of mimesis, undergone the vital process of being absorbed into the self to be recreated from there as the other.

'By living the experience we mean that,... the artist has literally made it part of himself, so deeply that his whole energy is available to describe it and transmit it to others'²⁶

This living through an experience in a manner which embeds the experience in the personality; an embedding which then enables the artist to create from the experience a personal reality which can then be recreated in some form and transmitted to, and once again be re-created by another, is at the heart of the mimetic faculty in action. An artist's communication of their particular experience then will be so effective that it becomes part of the experience of the spectator, giving them a new way of seeing things. This enhanced vision in the receiver of a work of art then, need not be only a way of seeing new things but can be also a new way of seeing old things, or even a succinct restatement of what they have always known. This restatement can produce work the Williams describes as embodying the 'common meaning of the society.'²⁷ Williams places the act of mimesis; this ability to split and to copy, to create our own reality, to understand the layers of meaning beyond surface appearance, this inspiration (literally a

²⁵ Williams p. 34

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.34

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.30

filling with breath, whose breath? the Divine), as clearly in the world of scientific discovery as in the world of art. He writes

'This vital descriptive effort- which is not merely a subsequent effort to describe something known, but literally a way of seeing new things and new relationships - has often been observed, by artists, yet it is not the activity of artists alone. The same effort is made, not only by scientists and thinkers, but also, necessarily, by everyone.'²⁸

This re-configuration of reality, this manipulation of image, (visual, aural, spacial or kinetic) this combination of old and new concepts, this Art is both artifact and artifice. This combination and recombination of images and events exists equally in all codes. The most fanciful surrealist set of images and the most seemingly 'realistic' presentation of news and Current Affairs are different only in the choice of combination and sequence of images. Each is equally a recombination of image; the news no more happened naturally than did the surrealist film. As Peter Brook in *The Shifting Point* says,

'It is obvious that styles exist in the sense that there are thousands of different codes, and not all codes are the same, and that at first sight some codes seem more real and some seem more artificial. , but if you put that[naturalism] side by side with the most artificial form, you find that there is no difference. Every single thing that we do passes through a form. Everything is stylized.'²⁹

This construction of works of artifice is practised at a 'public' level by makers of works of art for consumption by others, and is practised at a 'private' level by each of us as we continually construct and reconstruct our reality. It is this assemblage of concepts and images this recreation of the world for personal and public consumption that constitutes the daily working of the mimetic faculty in all of us. Taussig writes that;

²⁸ Williams p.24

'... reality is artifice yet, so it seems to me, not enough surprise has been expressed as to how we nevertheless get on with living, pretending - thanks to the mimetic faculty-~~that~~ we live facts, not fictions. ... Some force impels us to keep the show on the road ... Now the strange thing about this ... place between the real and the really made-up is that it appears to be where most of us spend most of our time ... We dissimulate. We act and have to act as if mischief were not afoot in the kingdom of the real and that all around the ground lay firm. That is what the public secret, the facticity of the social fact, being a social being, is all about.' ³⁰

Mimesis is the force at work in this effort of description, in the struggle to give description, the word, the signifier of the thought, the power 'to act as if it were indeed the real'³¹. Through the act of mimesis, of the faculty to split, distance and copy, art can articulate ideas and experiences that, under the circumstances of every day life, we are unable to talk about. These ideas and experiences can range from those of a profound religious quality to illicit desires, the wish to murder or seduce, or experiences that have the quality of nightmare. These ideas, which effect the every day fabric of community, either by demanding a focus on the suprahuman, (the divine) or by presenting disruptive ideas and actions for consideration, can be publicly and safely dealt with, either through ritual, or through transformation into 'fictional' representations in the performance of drama. So while theatre may have no practical purpose if judged by the standards of everyday life, within the bounds of its own activity it serves a necessary communal purpose of representing psychic and social 'truths'.

²⁹ Peter Brook *The Shifting Point - Forty years of theatrical exploration 1946-1987* pp. 184-185

³⁰ Michael Taussig *Mimesis and Alterity Introduction A Report To The Academy* p. xvii

³¹ *ibid.*, *Sympathetic Magic In A Post Colonial Age* p.254

'Here lies our first and most permanent tie between the theatre and art on one hand and religion and rite on the other. Everything which "does not belong," which serves no direct purpose in nature, which knows no function in society, which essentially escapes the intellect, belongs to the other side of life, to the "totally different," that has from primitive times been experienced as a supernatural force, usually leading into religion.' ³²

It is this existence of the "totally different" of the totally Other in both theatre and rite which tie them together. Both theatre and rite are centred in mimesis, which is the power of the self to live in both the Self and the Other; to live the real as if it were "really made up" and equally the made up as if it were really real.³³ The difference between the 'real' and 'the really made up', the problem of, 'for real' and 'for make believe', is an inherent problem for actors Peter Brook in *The Shifting Point* comments on this making real. He says that events that are dealt with in an unfamiliar way or contrary to the expected pattern can leave the audience, confused disappointed and frustrated. It seems that even 'make believe' can never be assumed to mean the same thing in every place.

³² Benjamin Hunringher *The Origin of the Theatre* p.53

³³ Michael Taussig *Mimesis and Alterity A Particular History Of The Senses Sympathetic Magic In A Post Colonial Age* p.255

'In one or two places, we came to a point that was very interesting, which was to see that even make-believe, in the sense of a story, can't be taken for granted. By that I mean that an actor takes for granted that if he steps into the circle and somebody trips him, and he falls, this will be received without question as the first step of a story. Or a young actor steps forward, and bends himself to walk like an old person. This is clearly the first step in a make-believe theme about an old man. Now since we were sometimes in places where there had never been any theatre at all meant that even that couldn't be taken for granted, because if somebody who's walking straight suddenly doubles up, he might genuinely at that moment have been taken ill, or he might be doing a strange movement for its own sake.

A very interesting thing is to strike a point where the mental habits have not been formed that accept the linear development of a story, so that, in fact, events are received as a set of disconnected impressions. Therefore, they are suddenly taken really for what they are. At that moment the values change, because at that moment one can see that maybe their only living value resides in what the sequence is building up to, while second for second they're not all that interesting. At that moment the actor senses that the story is nothing to lean on, because if, as the old man walking on, he does not produce something complete in its own right, the attentiveness of the people surrounding it will be in no way heightened. And if he hasn't created then and there, the actual difference between something *for real* and something *for make-believe*, the language of what's going on will never be fully entered into.'(my italics) ³⁴

For theatre performance, conjuring, make-believe, presentation, while highly constructed versions of reality are nevertheless founded on a set of conventions. If those conventions are unknown to the watchers they cannot enter into, cannot

³⁴ Peter Brook *The Shifting Point - Forty years of theatrical exploration 1946-1987* pp. 119-120

participate in the construction. No spirit can be created across the gap between performer and observer. No charge can be built up. It is this spirit created by the performance, the copying power of our psyche, the faculty of mimesis to which Taussig is referring when he writes:

‘I am struck with the way, ... mimesis is not only a matter of one being another being, but with this tense yet fluid theatrical relation of form and space with “presence” as an invented space of which the mine is the convulsive possession.’³⁵

It is the psyche power of mimesis, enhanced by the technical power of acting ability, or musical skill, or photographic, or electronic control of, and manipulation of light, that creates the third presence the “presence” to which Taussig refers, in the space between the performer, (presenter, film-maker) and the watcher (audience, viewer). The power of the mime, of mimesis is in ‘convulsive possession’ of a gap between these two people, (or groups of people), a gap which is not a gap, which is therefore an ‘invented space’ because it is full of the construct, the concept, persona, or character, being presented. The aspect of mimesis that drives the human to create these concepts, these personae and characters is the force that Taussig drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin names Alterity. The power of the creation of the persona in the gap is this power of seeing similarities between dissimilar things i.e. an actor imaging a cat, and of seeing at the same time the differences; for what is created, what is projected into the gap is not the Self, which does not have to be acted, but the Other.

³⁵ Michael Taussig *Mimesis and Alterity A Particular History Of The Senses* Chapter 3 Spacing Out p.34

` This is ... performative and physical, ... realist yet fanciful, ... Indeed it is startling. "the gift of seeing resemblances," writes Benjamin, "is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else." ... What does this say about thought, let alone the ability to discern resemblance? Doesn't it imply that thinking is, like theater, a configuration of very object-prone exercises in differentiated space., in which the thought exists in imagined scenarios into which the thinking self is plummeted? And what does such a compulsion to become Other imply for the sense of Self? Is it conceivable that a person could break boundaries like this, slipping into Otherness, trying it on for size?"³⁶

Is not this act of 'trying on Otherness' a description too of the work of an actor or presenter? Is not the work of constructing theatre and film an act of 'trying on Otherness?' The power in a television Current Affairs programme, exists then not only because the watcher choses to watch, but, because in choosing to accept the conventions of the medium; conventions like close-up, cut away shots, fades to black, linking scripts and the presences of a narrator, visible or not visible on the screen, they also choose to accept the act of mimesis, the present of the third presence filling the gap.

One of the most powerful of our human attributes is this ability to slip from one state of 'reality', (what we might call 'concrete reality') to the other reality, the reality of art, of construction, of make believe. Thus it is that while for many watchers, the Current Affairs of the nightly television programme are 'real' and while for the social commentators they are a 'construction' or a 'distortion' of reality, at one and the same time they are both, a 'real' representation of 'real' events and as much a construction of reality as any piece of theatre. Thus the 'place between the real and the really made-up' where according to Taussig we all live all of the time, has its concrete, (if one may use such a definite word when

³⁶ Taussig p.33

referring to a quality of spirit,) and “real” place, and usefulness, in the world, in the ‘world’ of art. For to return to Williams on this point,

‘To see art as a particular process in the general human process of creative discovery and communication is at once a redefinition of the status of art and the finding of means to link it with our ordinary social life.’³⁷

Taussig takes up that theme, the concept of the power of art, of the mimetic faculty in our everyday life, when he regrets that as a society we have become so used to the idea that we all create our own reality that such a notion has become prosaic. He surmises thus:

‘...I am often caught musing as to whether the wonder of the magic in mimesis could reinvigorate the once unsettling observation that most of what seems important in life is made up and is neither more (nor less) than, ... “a social construction.”’³⁸

Does the understanding that all presentation, whether of ‘truth’ or of ‘fiction’ is in fact a construction, but that the construction still contains embedded within itself, the old notion and the old vigour of magic, re-imbue the idea of the charm of the creation of images with its old power? I think it does. Both Williams and Taussig say the ability to construct images is an intrinsic mechanism of human survival. What is important then is to consider the psychic and social effect of the type of construction being employed. In other words what role does the form of this piece play in society, I believe that by continuing to employ the ancient form of the ritual, which is the construction springing from the Melodramatic impulse, that Current Affairs as well as ‘fictional’ theatre film and television, continues to

³⁷ Williams, p.37

³⁸ Michael Taussig *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* Introduction p. xv

make available to those who have moved outside of recognised religious ceremony a form for propitiation.

Chapter Three

MIMESIS AND PERFORMANCE

The first process in the development of all ritual, drama, and dramatic representation is the act of mimesis. In its literal sense the word mimesis means to mime but that idea is in itself complex; containing as it does the concepts of division and doubling, of the creation of images, and of conjuring. Mimesis is at the centre of exploration and paradoxically of humour, for it is the essence of play. Mimesis is the root of wonder and of awe; and the foundation stone of the sacred. Mimesis is the personal act of confronting the divided self, the hostile forces of 'fate' and the separation from the ultimate Other. Mimesis is central to any act involving the imaginative faculty for it begins with the dawning of human consciousness. Mimesis is at the centre of the awareness of the self in opposition to the awareness of the other. The awareness of the other may be in the sense of the divided self, awareness of the self and the alter ego; or of awareness of the self and other people; or awareness of the self and other of another group or tribe the tangible Other; or awareness of the self and the ultimate Other who is the godhead.

Mimesis is also the community action of recreating the divisive forces, both those that threaten from within the community, and those that threaten from the wider world. It contains the idea of magic, which has as its purpose, the control of the world, and of hostile forces, through the creation of tame images of these forces, images which can be manipulated. As a means of controlling the unpredictable universe, the act of mimesis is central to ritual, it is also central to Melodrama, which deals with a black and white, an essentially hostile universe.

Mimesis and Melodrama

To appreciate the power of Melodrama it is necessary to understand the everyday power of the imaginative and communicative faculty which is 'the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other.'¹ Michael Taussig values mimesis for 'the exuberance with which it permits the freedom to live reality as really made-up.'² This is a curious valuation, but central to any valuation of cognition beyond the everyday sensate. In his concluding chapter Taussig says

' Mimetic excess provides access to understanding the unbearable truths of make-believe as foundation. of an all-too-seriously serious reality, manipulated but also manipulatable.'³

What he appears to be referring to is the faculty that Williams has described as creating our own world piece by piece where none existed before⁴ a world which we then verify, by describing to one another. The process of this describing, the ability to make present to another, something that exists only in the chemical-electrical processes of our own brain, the process of the presentation, representation, recreation and manifestation, the process of mimesis, is at the centre of the human faculty for communication.

But also as the art of mime, of mimicry, of imitation, as pretence, show, spectacle; as the step that moves presentation into performance, into representation and transformation, mimesis is the basis of drama. As being beside oneself, stepping out of oneself, as possession and enlightenment, transcendence, as the art of becoming Other, of duality, of the two or more natures, as the presentation, representation, recreation and manifestation of the god, it is the heart of ritual. As being beyond, above and outside mundane reality, and getting to the heart of the matter, as the here and now, and the once and future, as the cracking of the

¹ Taussig p. xiii

² *ibid.*, *Sympathetic Magic In A Post Colonial Age* p.255

³ *ibid.*, p. 254

⁴ Williams p.17

surface of things; as split, and fracture, as both the revelation of depth, and the dazzle of reflected image, it is the faculty for being human.

'To put it plainly, much as I like expressing myself in images, to put it plainly: your life as apes, gentlemen, in so far as something of that kind lies behind you, cannot be farther removed from you than mine is from me. Yet everyone on earth feels a tickling at the heels: the small chimpanzee and the great Achilles alike.'-Frank Kafka,

"A Report to An Academy"

So what is this tickling at the heels to which Kafka's all too human ape would refer us all too apish humans to? I call it the mimetic faculty, the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other. The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power. In an older language, this is "sympathetic magic"⁵

For central to this thesis is the consideration of the profound affect Melodrama has on our everyday lives, in the effective, and affective way it enables us, through images of the internal Self and Other embodied in external symbols, to cut through the confusions of life. This everyday use of the imaginative faculty relates to Taussig's statement that we 'live reality as really made-up.'⁶ Or rather turning that statement about that we also live the really made up as real. In subsequent chapters I will show how Melodrama the archetypal genre is used on everyday television in Aotearoa New Zealand.

⁵ Michael Taussig *Mimesis and Alterity A Particular History Of The Senses* p.xiii

⁶ *ibid.*, *Sympathetic Magic In A Post Colonial Age* p.255

Mimesis the first experience.

Our first experience of mimesis, and the most easily described, is in play. Children playing families are simultaneously both themselves and the personage they are playing. A child playing the mother is both child and mother at the same time. They are simultaneously involved in and directing the play. If another child seeks to join the group the children already playing can drop out of their 'roles' to accept or reject the newcomer. If accepted the newcomer is then assigned a role e.g. 'you be the baby' the play expands to include both the newcomer and the new role.

But not only are the children playing aware of the two realities at once but also they are aware of the boundaries of the play. The tree-house is the house, the mud pie is the food, but at the same time 'real' food is available in the 'real' kitchen and when the 'real' kitchen is entered although the children may retain the names and the costumes of the 'role' and may tell the supervising adult, the 'real' mother who they are in the game and may continue in role, they are aware that the play does not extend into the 'real' activities of the 'real' kitchen.. The awareness of boundary between the concrete and the imaginative world; the development of the boundary between reality as really made up, and the really made up as real⁷, is first worked through in play. Writing of this clear knowledge of boundary in play, Benjamin Hunnigher says

⁷ Taussig *Sympathetic Magic In A Post Colonial Age* p.255

`play fences in an area of the imagination in which it creates absolute order, strictly guarded against anything which might disturb the *in-lusio*, the illusion. In every respect, the order it creates is contrary to the disorder of the imperfect world outside the play area: ... play is revealed to serve not only as pleasure but also as protection: it creates order to bring a certain part of the chaotic world under control. ... Protection manifests itself, for instance, in the play of the children. They play at "getting married," not to imitate what they have seen, but to recreate: in doing this, they organize and arrange things according to their own standard. ... Their play establishes some control over the adult world. That the function of play was originally protective is more especially seen in the play of primitive people, who as adults, of course, reflect in their games the problems of the mature life, the struggle for food and the preservation of life."⁸

It is this ability to live in two realities at once and to know the boundaries of each reality and to what extent these boundaries can be crossed and interwoven that sets the basis for later `play' both in the play of the theatre and the play of religious ritual.

Mimesis the heart of drama

It appears that once developed, the ability both to perceive and to traverse the boundary between Self and Other remains with us throughout life. Equally so does our fascination with its existence. For important in this boundary crossing is the gaining of control of the `spirit' of reality. In Western thought the `spirit' of reality is now more synonymous with the nature, intent or essence, of a concept or thing, than its soul or life, but even this restricted idea of the word still carries with it the ghosts of its older meanings; and it is through our `play(s)', our `recreations', that we attempt to fix the nature of that spirit, and also to fix the nature of our perceptions. And as will be later seen perhaps the `heart' of Melodrama is an attempt to `fix' the spirit of elemental forces. Taussig writes of

⁸ Benjamin Hunningher *The Origin of the Theatre* p.54

the theatrical nature of conjuring. He describes it as not only imitation 'not only a matter of one being another being,' but as a compelling performance. He writes of 'this tense yet fluid theatrical relation of form and space with "presence" as a invented space of which the mime is the convulsive possession.'⁹ It could be the mimesis of theatre which he is describing for in the theatre a similar process is occurring. The participants are creating, or re-creating, an Other, an other which in one sense they are also allowing to temporarily possess them, in as much as they 'become' the character or the persona. which they then project by means of acting, and/or presentation technique to the self of the receiver, the audience, viewer, spectator. This creation of/ possession by the 'character' is the 'strange mixture of activity and passivity involved in yielding-knowing, this bodily mirroring of otherness and even ideas,'¹⁰

Mimesis and the religious experience.

Mimesis with its concern with splits, the splitting of the divided self and of the Self and the Other is at the heart of religious experience. Hunningher says that the mimetic function had its origin in the 'charms' constructed, 'woven', by primitive humanity seeking to control the environment. 'The primitive somehow had to overpower the force maintaining or disturbing order in nature and to compel it to regulate time and tide so that man might live another year in the jungle'¹¹. The method of overpowering this force is ironically, to recreate it, to make it 're-appear' but under controlled conditions. This recreation under controlled conditions is the same process that Hunningher also describes in the play of children. This process is also described by Taussig, writing over thirty years later in 1993 of the image making of the shamans of the Cuna of Central America;

⁹ Taussig p.34

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.46

¹¹ Benjamin Hunningher *The Origin of the Theatre* p.55

'...animal -conjurings suggest to me that singing origins is ... to create that object through its soulful evocation -the jaguar,... -such that "calling them up" is to conjure with their image, hence their soul, and hence give birth to the real. I am suggesting, .. that the chanter is singing a copy of the spirit-form, and by virtue of what I call the magic of mimesis, is bringing the spirit into the physical world.'¹²

The animal, a jaguar in this case, is called into being, is evoked by the singing of the shaman and once evoked, is 'really' present in spirit. Of the chants Taussig says

'.. the *modus operandi* of Cuna medical chants [is that].... two mimetic movements are involved. One is the duplication in song of the spirits, detail by slow-moving detail, in songs that can last up to several hours. The other mimetic movement depends upon this invocation of the spirits because, since they duplicate the physical world, then to bring them forth by means of song is to mimetically gain control over the mirror-image of physical reality that they represent.'¹³

The first mimetic movement is the action of imitation, of duplication in another medium, in this case in the chant, of a 'picture', an 'image' a 'mirror' of the thing being recalled. The second mimetic action is the action of control, through control of the image. By recreating the image i.e. the 'spirit' of the jaguar the chanter gains control of it and perhaps of all physically existing jaguars, on behalf of the community. This may seem to have little to do with current Western ways of behaving but if we leave aside the continuing power of religion, both mainstream and alternative, in the lives of many Western people; and if we at this stage also ignore the role of dramatic works in our everyday existence, and simply focus on the working of our thinking processes, we can see that this ability to

¹² Taussig p.104

¹³ *ibid.*, p.105

create the 'real' by the evocation of its 'spirit' presence is the same force that Williams is describing when he says we all of us learn to see a thing by learning to describe it. It is only in describing something that we are able to know it, to give it a 'reality', for ourselves and communicate our 'reality' to others. It is this creation and communication of a 'reality' that gives us control over our world. The process of this description firstly to ourselves and then to others is the mimetic force at work within us distinguishing the Self and the Other to create our inner sense of boundary, and also with us as we constantly struggle with the 'creative' necessity of giving our thoughts form and through that form communicating them to others.

Returning to the religious, this act of mimesis, this act of the recreation of image, of copy, to give expression to the nature of this otherness is found not only in icons and idols, in statuary, and in the elaborate re-creation of a diverse spirit world of god, animal, spirits and images, but also in religious literature, even in those religions that frown on the literal creation of the image of the god. For example in the Judeo-Christian tradition the act of mimesis is present. Consider these extracts from Psalm 139

I

Yahweh, you examine me and know me,
you know if I am standing or sitting,
you read my thoughts from far away,
whether I walk or lie down, you are watching,
you know every detail of my conduct.¹⁴

Here the writer is aware of the Self (me) and the Other(Yahweh) and of the Other being in fact a part of the Self (you read my thoughts).

III

Where could I go to escape your spirit?
Where could I flee from your presence?

¹⁴ *The New Jerusalem Bible* p. 801

If I climb the heavens, you are there,
there too, if I lie in Sheol¹⁵

How can I escape from myself my Alter and from the complete Other the godhead(your spirit)says the writer. In the mention of Sheol, the underworld, there is the most complete concept of Otherness, and yet at the same time an illustration of the working of **mimesis**. If, the writer is saying, I become so divided, so divorced from myself that I become completely my other, my alter ego, and am condemned to Sheol, in some interpretations a world of misery or of shades, certainly a world of complete otherness, yet You(Yahweh) are still there. Here is a clear illustration of the divided universe and the divided self, of the polarisation of the forces of light and darkness, and of the possibility of redemption or reunion

VII

You know me through and through,
from having watched my bones take shape
when I was being formed in secret,
knitted together in the limbo of the womb.¹⁶

The fully united Self of both Self and Other is and has always been known to both the Self and the Other. As a fully conscious human being, the writer is saying, we are aware of our inner division and of the possibility of resolution. This concept of resolution is contained in the connotative meaning of the text, which suggests that in knowing the Self the Other has affinity with and loves, seek union with the Self.

IX

¹⁵ *The New Jerusalem Bible* p. 801

¹⁶ *ibid.*

God, how hard it is to grasp your thoughts!

How impossible to count them!

I could no more count them than I could the sand,

and suppose I could, you would still be with me.¹⁷

The writer is aware of the complete Otherness of the Other, (how hard it is to grasp your thoughts) and of the incorporation of the Other in the Self (you would still be with me) and of the interaction between the two. Mimesis can never be static for it is the constant movement between the Self and the Other, while there is a conscious awareness of both.

Mirror Images and Copies

An important aspect of mimesis is its quality of imitation. Taussig says when a shaman produces a copy i.e. when he conjures up the 'spirit' of an animal he is desiring to control the original by creating a copy, which shares its characteristics. Now says Taussig look at all the copies around us in the Western world. The creation of mirror images is not limited to indigenous people. When we too make copies we are desiring to share in the power of the originals. And though the Western world does not consciously remember this original purpose for making copies i.e. to control, a shadow of that purpose remains in our 'strangely familiar commonplace and unconscious habits of representation in the world'¹⁸ our pictures, records and videos, representations which not only signal the original to us but call up an idea of its power.

¹⁷ *The New Jerusalem Bible* p. 801

¹⁸ Taussig *Chapter 4 The Golden Bough: The magic of Mimesis* p.47



Figure 1 Classical theatre mask

For example in this little piece of computer art, the masks, the lights and the curtain, recall the notions of theatrical performance. They also call to mind general ideas of being in a theatre and our own personal experiences of theatre going. The lights speak of effect, illusion and illumination, and may also produce images of television and film in the mind of the reader. The concept of theatre-going may be associated with entertainment, but also with a fulfilling intellectual and emotional experience. It may recall times when theatre and film have been informative. The masks are pared down versions of the masks of classical Greek theatre. They recall that theatrical tradition and the civilisation that produced it. They recall the adaptations of the ideas of that civilisation through the Renaissance to the present day. For those who studied Greek they will probably recall the language.



Figure 2 Comedy Mask

The image can be taken apart leaving only the mask of comedy . This gives control over this image and to a certain effect gives a form of control over the notion of theatricality itself.

Referring to Walter Benjamin in his discussion of mimesis Taussig says that Benjamin writes of the mimetic machines of the twentieth century post-industrial society and notes how in watching television and film, reading books and listening to the radio we daily traverse the boundary between the 'real' and the mirror image of the physical reality that they represent. The shock of the idea here is that, in watching mimetic machines e.g. film and television, or even in considering images, sign, icons and symbols, we are engaging in the same activity as that engaged in by indigenous people, who through the shaman make and use magic or religious images. These images are mirrors, copies of the Other and give the shaman and the people control of the mysterious forces beyond every day rational control. But more than that even, Taussig writes

'Without hesitation Benjamin affirms that the mimetic faculty is the rudiment of a former compulsion of persons to "become and behave like something else." The ability to mime, and mine well, in other words, is the capacity to Other.'¹⁹

And again the importance of this ability to mime, this capacity to Other is the power that it gives. The images of television, and other media, may be produced by scientific and technical means but their real purpose lies elsewhere, in a desire to gain control over the unpredictable by its small scale reproduction. But says Taussig let us be critical about this. Familiar images are just that familiar. We speak of things as being second nature to us and what is second nature we take for granted. Yet says Taussig, it is the faculty of mimesis, the faculty to split, copy and represent, to perform, that in fact creates this second nature. We have created images of phenomena, of forces in order to control them and may now be confusing the image for the reality. No matter how often we capture the image of

¹⁹ Taussig, Chapter 2 Physiognomic Aspects of Visual Worlds p 19

the storm, in paint and canvass, or on video, no matter how often this image appears on the television screen, the real force is still out there mysterious and uncontrollable. Yet says Taussig

'I want to dwell on this notion of the copy, in magical practice, affecting the original to such a degree that the representation shares in or acquires the properties of the represented. To me this is a disturbing notion, ... because... once posited, I suspect if not its presence, the imitations thereof in the strangely familiar commonplace and unconscious habits of representation in the world about me.'²⁰

Taussig is suggesting that, in viewing images of originals, i.e. in paintings, photos, or videos for example, in such imaginative re-creatings of events, both on the part of the image makers and the image viewers in fiction and Current Affairs, and perhaps most especially in the images of advertising, the viewer is partaking of the power of the original event. Mimesis gives us a measure of security, and the ability through the mimetic practices and machines of civilisation to create an 'alternative' reality but it is important that we have an understanding of the deep rooted process that is at work here. A process akin to the conjuring of the shaman.

'As the nature that culture uses to create second nature, mimesis chaotically jostles for elbow room in this force field of necessary contradiction and illusion, providing the glimpse of the opportunity to dismantle that second nature and reconstruct other worlds-so long as we reach a critical level of understanding of the play of primitivism within the mimetic faculty itself.'²¹

²⁰ Taussig Chapter 4 *The Golden Bough: The magic of Mimesis* p.47

²¹ *ibid.*, Chapter 6 *With The Wind of World History in Our Sails* p 70

Magic

Defining magic Taussig refers to E.B. Tylor's concept that magic is a reverse of the normal process of the understanding of phenomena, instead of moving from fact to thought, from things to image, in magic the flow is reversed.²² Through creating a image of a thing, the thing itself is 'made present' to be understood and therefore controlled. This is indeed a reversal of the normal process where the object to be studied; artifact, plant, animal etc., is first acquired and then through patient observation known and understood. Though magic like art and ritual uses the association of ideas to establish a concept of the 'spirit' the Other in magic the boundary crossed is not from the Self to the Other, but from the Other to the self. The thought processes of division, boundary and association are the same processes as in everyday life but their direction is reversed. Through the chants, incantations and ritual movements of the shaman or priest the Other is created is made present, and can then palpably influence and interact with the self. The more dramatised the ritual the more concretely present is the manifestation of the Other. This extends from the perceived "presence" achieved in meditation and chanting, through the various degrees of "presence" produced by speech, or by readings, or by sacrifice, both actual or symbolic, to the actual "presence" through the bodies of actors. Magic deals with an attempt to understand forces that are not easy to confine. So by calling up a representation of the phenomena the force can be made present and therefore 'understood' in the sense of being in the power of the conjurer. This magic is the magic of the conjuring, of the calling up the mighty spirits of the animals, of the forces outside our control and by imprisoning them in a small space, by causing them to appear in a temple, or be re-created in the confined space of the stage, controlling them often by means of imprisoning their energy in an effigy. Magic is important element of the world of 'classical' Melodrama, according to Brooks

²² Taussig *Chapter 4 The Golden Bough: The magic of Mimesis* p.48

'There is a reassertion of magic and taboo, a recognition of the diabolical forces which inhabit our world and our inner being. Since these forces achieve no sacred status as wholly other, they appear, rather, to abide within nature and particularly, within nature's creature man. ... It is as if, coming out of the Enlightenment, man had to reinvent the sense of the Sacred from its source-but discovered it now skewed and narcissistically fascinated by its point of origin'²³

This world of magic is consciously evoked by the television item on those who have experienced the presence of their loved ones returning from the dead. But it is unconsciously evoked by the themes of Current Affairs themes which parallel the themes of the 'classical' Melodrama of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The primary structure of both the stage Melodrama and modern Current Affairs is of an initially peaceful situation into which a disruption (evil) comes. In the Melodrama this disruption is shown taking place on the stage. On the Current Affairs programme it has already taken place before the programme hits the air, but the original scene of peace is referred to. This is done implicitly, but graphically, in the item on Elaina where the video shows footage of an old city with beautiful buildings and peaceful fountains and then contrasts this with shots of a child (though the voice-over says children) begging in the traffic. There is then a further shot of a little boy with a damaged foot sitting (begging?) on the footpath. The third child shot, in between these two is of an untidy child with and adult. It is implied that both this child and the child on the footpath are also beggars but they may not be. The video plays on an assumed level of knowledge in the mind of the viewers. It assumes the viewers know about the communist regime in Romania and that they will connect the contrasts with the regime. That they will see the regime as the 'evil' which has caused children to beg in the streets in a city of beautiful buildings, where, because the country could afford such buildings the children should be happy and well cared for. The major theme of virtue suffering at the hands of evil is present in the plays from which the extracts in the video were chosen; *The Factory Lad*, *The Drunkard*, and *London By*

²³ Brooks p.19

Night. This theme is also present in the Current Affairs items on *The Rape Trial and Justice Morris*, *Elaina's Story* and *Harbottle*.

The 'diabolical forces' that are conjured up and controlled by the shaman, are the same forces given presentation and representation through the images on the television screen. They are represented in the 'classical' Melodrama by extensive use of sign. These signs include character type, gesture, costume, accompanying secondary characters, the scenery, the lighting the music and the objects that the characters use, give and refer to are all significant in the Melodrama. Brooks says:

'...the drama of the sign is played out across a whole scale, or staff, of codes ...a set of different registers of the sign, which can reinforce and also relay one another. Melodrama tends toward total theatre, its sign projected, sequentially or simultaneously, on several planes²⁴.

On the television screen the 'diabolical forces' are represented particularly by types of people. For example the shot of the picture of Harbottle zooming from medium close up to close up is designed to make clear that he is a villain. This focusing in, this holding him in the magnifying power of the camera lens indicates that he has been 'caught' and exposed as the incarnation of evil. This works because we have a set of images of 'mug shots' already in our heads and the video is recalling these to us. This is part of the magic of television. But there is magic at a deeper level here. It is the magic of having 'caught, imprisoned' evil in a image that can then be manipulated, seen by the world and therefore controlled, deprived of its power.

The scenery can also be used to evoke the images of 'good' and 'evil' forces. Consider the shots of Bucharest in the documentary item about Elaina. The camera pans the views of palaces and fountains. These images are dissolved one into another. Then come the images of the children. A child who is carrying another smaller child in busy city traffic, is obviously at risk. Children are signs of

²⁴ Brooks p.46

virtue in the 'classical' Melodrama. When the children in the traffic are shown, it is not just the practical situation of risk of physical harm that is being presented. Along with this concern, the image carries with it ideas about exploited, suffering, innocence, developed in the stage use of children in the 'classical' Melodrama, and carried over into television Current Affairs. Here the magic of television, the magic of the ability to recreate image and to present and control it, is the magic of controlling 'good' in the same way that the image of Harbottle is a control of 'evil'.

The use of the sign in the Melodrama may be simplistic even banal at times, but it relies for its power on that older use of symbol, the religious. In the symbol the power of the copy is intensified because it refers beyond the ordinary to the transcendent. Owe Wikstrom that

'Both art and religion are ... compelled to work with images and symbols.

Contrary to the sign, the symbol itself has a share in that to which it points. It points to a level of reality which otherwise is inaccessible, it opens up dimensions within man's own psyche that correspond to these levels and are inaccessible to conceptual knowledge²⁵

The way that some signs of the Melodrama, the approaching storm for example, refer to realities beyond the ordinary enables them to function as symbols of a larger reality and imbues them with mysterious, magical power. The power of these symbols is also invoked when they appear on the television screen in the form of Current Affairs.

In fact mimesis, the ability to pretend that we live facts not fictions is a 'fact' of our everyday lives. Taussig puts our ability to deal with the construction of the real inside our individual heads down to 'Custom' which he labels, 'that obscure

²⁵ Owe Wikstrom Ritual Studies In the History of Religions A challenge: for the psychology of religion in Heimbrock & Boudewijnse p. 65

crossroads where the constructed and the habitual coalesce,[which] is indeed mysterious.' ²⁶ Custom is the mechanism by which societies have developed methods, which can be passed on from generation to generation, of making the 'unreality' of personal experience mesh with the 'reality' of shared or communal experience. As the television nightly brings a range of drama, both fiction and documentary, into our lounges, in the act of watching TV we are involved in the act of mimesis. And this mimetic act is which is concerned with the very nature of the way we perceive the world, is applied to all the images projected by our television set.

Performance and Excess

The propitiation practised in Melodrama is more completely mediated by the action of the concept known as art, than is ritual which is more directly concerned with the propitiation of hostile forces. But the performance element in the Melodrama cannot be separated from the social and ritual elements, for ritual is concerned with the power of performance; ²⁷ stylisation has its origins in ritual. Excess and stylisation are intrinsic to the Drama. Performance begins in ritual, but even in its ritual beginnings performance has both the element of excess and the problem of 'making real'. In mimesis of theatre the a similar process is occurring. The participants are creating, or re-creating, an Other which they are then projecting by means of acting technique to the self of the receiver, the audience, viewer, spectator. It is this later transformation that takes place in theatrical Melodrama.

The desire for excess evident in religious and magical performance, the desire to dramatised, to act and to 'act out', to display, which underscores all performance, and which is an important part of the Melodramatic sense of excess, is given expression both in the stylised representation, and the heightened gestures of the acting style, and in the physical exuberance, the gymnastic displays and the feats of skill and daring, which are part of the performance values of the classical

²⁶ Taussig *Introduction* p. xv

²⁷ David Parkin *Ritual as spatial direction and bodily division* in de Coppet p. 17

Melodrama. This is desire for performance excess is inherent in the Melodramatic Impulse which is, intrinsic to the theatre and theatricality.²⁸

Performance itself is a difficult thing to define. It includes an element of imitation and an element of aggrandisement. There is the desire to make one's person larger than life; to take part in excess through props- e.g. stilts, costume, mask, gesture staging and voice. In performer there is the drive to say 'look at me look at what I can do, see how skilled I am.' Self-dramatisation is part of the 'spirit' of mimesis. It is part of the drive to affirm one's reality, one's existence, the existence of the Self through participating in excess. But performance also contains an element of making present, and of making plain. A performer playing a cat is not in fact making a real cat present, nor are they making a detailed representation of all the minute movements of a cat. Rather through the selective and bold presentation of some key details they are invoking the spirit of a cat for the watcher, because another significant element in performance is that it is not a solitary activity. Performance must be observed (even by the self in a mirror). Performance is the interaction between the performer and the observer. It is the context that is created in that space between.

Performance begins in ritual. Taussig writes of the excess of the shaman in conjuring up the spirits. For the shaman naming a animal or a 'god' is not enough to cause its spirit to be present; the image must be drawn fully, created through the enumeration of selected detail by detail. It is only then that the spirit will be given a substance for the listener, audience, congregation. Through selective repetition of detail a sense of imitation is achieved. In the calling up of the jaguar, the spirit of the beast is recalled by 'the abundance of detail in the chants.'²⁹ Taussig comments on the performance aspect of the shaman's ritual, that like the actor who 're-presents' a character, the shaman singer's task is '..... first and foremost that of having to create a copy,'³⁰ This piling of selected detail on selected detail creates a

²⁸ Brooks p.41

²⁹ Taussig Chapter 8 Mimetic Worlds, Invisible Counterparts p.108

³⁰ *ibid.*

strong image in the mind of the receivers. 'The excess hammers home this copiedness, bringing out the real through the detailing.'³¹

But even in such a serious matter as calling forth the spirit of the 'gods' there is playfulness, a sense of exuberance and of delight in excess for its own sake. The Cuna believe that the spirits delight in the pleasure of detail and excess.³² So within the excessive mode of spirit conjuring described by Taussig, at the heart of ritual itself is also the notion of play, play created both by the sheer humorousness of excess, and by the playful relationship created by the juxtaposition of the incongruous, by the notion of both in the 'real' and the 'unreal' each co-existing within the same time and space. This playfulness is achieved by the creation of 'another reality' in the space of the performance and is comparable to the playfulness of dramatic performance.

One aspect of the relationship between the action taking place in the drama, and the action involved in the conjuring of spirits, is the 'playful' nature of both activities. Taussig speaks the 'playful' nature of the performance element of spirit conjuring, with its elaboration of chants by the piling of detail upon detail simply because it is 'fun';

'Time and again the ethnography remarks on the abundance of detail in the chants.And lest one be carried away by excessively grim notion of the sacred, let us recall...how an unnamed Cuna chanter responded to Chapin on being asked, after chanting six chants about the Great Mother, Muu, "what purpose they served?"

... he replied with an amused chuckle; "Just play, It makes Muu feel good to hear about these things."³³

³¹Taussig Chapter 8 *Mimetic Worlds, Invisible Counterparts* p.108

³² *ibid.*, p.105

³³ *ibid.*, p.198

Theatre historian Benjamin Hunningher draws a direct connection between the mimetic action of drama and the mimetic action of play when he writes:

'Theatre is play- which defines it neither as real nor unreal, neither as wise nor as foolish, neither as good nor as bad.' ³⁴

It is in human play that the elements of performance are developed. Anthony Storr says of play itself

'In observing animals we may feel fairly certain that we can distinguish 'playful' activity from 'serious' activity. Yet, in what does the difference exist? One characteristic of play movements as opposed to serious movements is that the former are exaggerated and uneconomical. The motor patterns employed in play are those which the animal might use in serious contexts; but they are employed in the wrong order, on incompletely performed, or repeated over and over, or exaggerated so that they are inefficient. This is also the character of human play; for instance, in mock fights as opposed to real fights.' ³⁵

The exaggerated and uneconomical movements, used in the wrong order, repeated over and over, and exaggerated to the point of inefficiency, are not only the movements used by humans in mock fights, they are also the movements used in the drama in 'play-acting'. The use of such movement is seen particularly in the Melodrama which drew on the traditions of the popular fairground shows for the development of its emphasis on the physical aspect of performance. The earlier Melodrama in particular contained:

³⁴ Hunningher p.53

³⁵ Anthony Storr *The Dynamic of Creation* pp.154-158

'dumb-show, magic and illusion, and in particular, acrobatics. Melodramas were usually done in a mixed programme, including such arts as comic dancing and acrobatics, and, equally important, the same actors 'doubled up' in both. For Melodramatic acting is essentially a physical, indeed a violently physical, style dominated by athletic figures such as the ex-sailor T. P. Cooke, and O. Smith. Part of the related revolution in 'legitimate' acting styles was led by Edmund Kean, acrobatically trained in Richardson's travelling theatre and other troupes. Even death on the stage was, for the Melodramatic actor, energetic; 'exhibited by violent distortion, groaning gasping for breath, stretching the body, raising, and then letting it fall; or in the perilous rigid 'prat fall'. There is at least one account of a death so powerful that the actor was asked for - and gave - an encore.'³⁶

As an actor, I have an understanding of the pleasure for the performer of heightened style, and of polarised active plot or as Peter Brooks puts it:

'the importance of concept opposed to naturalism, its expression of emotion, in the pure histrionic form of dreams, its representations of the quintessentially dramatic.'³⁷

'If many later actors have looked back on Melodrama with nostalgia, it is because they recognised that, within the genre, "life" has become wholly "drama" and that this offers the actor an unrivalled opportunity for the uninhibited play with style. ...Melodrama at heart represents the theatrical impulse itself: the impulse toward dramatization, heightening, expression, acting out.'³⁸

³⁶ Louis James in *Was Jerrold's Black Ey'd Susan More Popular than Wordsworth's Lucy? Spectacle, performance and audience in nineteenth century theatre* in Bradley, James and Sharratt (Ed) *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film and Television 1800-1976* pp.11-12

³⁷ Brooks p. 9-10

³⁸ *ibid.*, p 48

he says. For the original aim of Melodramatic acting was to create a situation that was 'credible' by the accurate portrayal of the thoughts and emotions of the character says Louis James:

'Melodramatic acting was not as is conceived today, a set of unreal clichés, but to some extent an attempt at psychological realism. ... In Rede's 'analytic review', for instance, in Le Brun '*Grief* sudden and violent expresses itself by beating the head or the forehead, tearing the hair and catching the breath, as if choking; also by screaming, weeping, stamping with the feet, lifting the eyes from time to time to heaven, and hurrying backwards and forwards.' ³⁹

It was by making the emotion clear, that the moral implications of the piece could be easily discerned. The spectator was put in the privileged position of 'knowing' all there was to know about the character at the time. The character did not just act, the motivations for, and the history of their actions, was not left in any doubt. The clarity of emotion and motivation assisted the audience in their desire to identify with 'the good', as if the bearer of that office, was never in any doubt, and reject the evil. But such strong delineation of emotion also added to the performance, the entertainment value of the acting.

'Yet the nature of the gestures gives the acting a constant sense of *energy*. This is related constantly to the emotive inner structure of each scene, and to the other characters. The actors in Melodrama react to each other with the direct intensity of a magnetic field. Engel illustrates this with a picture of a character reacting backwards and forwards from a snake, and in Siddon's translation declares, 'the rule which subsists with respect to the desire which carries us towards an agreeable object agrees equally well with that which removes us from an unpleasant one'.⁴⁰

³⁹ James pp.8-9

⁴⁰ James pp. 11-12

With a work of art the experience of the artist becomes the experience of the viewer, the hearer, the audience, says Williams. The work of one of the great theorists of the theatre and acting, theatre director Constantin Stanislavski, was concerned with developing the means for the transmission of a powerful lived experience between actor and audience. It was his object that a performance should be so powerful that it enabled each individual in that audience to also 'live' along with the actors the experience being depicted on the stage. Stanislavski's instructions⁴¹ to the actor demonstrate how a performer can live the experience in order to transmit it and to transmit experience in order to 'live' it⁴² In this Stanislavski is following directly on the tradition of the Melodrama where the purpose of the elaborately detailed gestures was to communicate emotions.

'Thus inner impulses - the urge to action and the inner actions themselves - acquire an exceptional meaning in our work. They are our motive power in moments of creation, and only that creativeness which is predicated on inner action is scenic. By "scenic" in the theatre we mean action in the spiritual sense of the word.'⁴³

A key element of a successful performance is that it first attracts attention, and then creates a situation that is believable. This quality of 'believableness' is to the inner mimetic action of the self, the creation in the mind, of the spirit of the other, to which, Constantin Stanislavski is referring in Inner Impulses and Inner Action; Creative Objectives (1916-20) when he says

⁴¹ See Chapter One Mimesis p 15

⁴² 'Since the meaning and the means cannot be separated, it is on the artist's actual ability to live the experience that successful communication depends.' Williams *The Long Revolution* p.34

⁴³ Constantin Stanislavski Inner Impulses and Inner Action; Creative Objectives (1916-20) pp. 253-254

'In most theatres action on the stage is taken incorrectly to mean external action.' ... 'Scenic action does not mean walking, moving about gesticulating on the stage.' 'Scenic action is the movement from the soul to the body, from the center to the periphery, from the internal to the external, from the thing an actor feels to its physical form. External action on the stage when not inspired, not justified, nor called forth by inner activity, is entertaining only for the eyes and ears: it does not penetrate the heart, it has no significance in the life of a human spirit in a role.'⁴⁴

The qualities needed by an artist (in this particular case the actor) to achieve this 'living of the experience' are described by Stanislavski.

'a passive state kills all scenic action, it produces feelings for the sake of feelings, technique for the sake of technique. That kind of feeling is not scenic.

'Sometimes an actor practically luxuriates in inaction, wallows in his own emotions. ... he thinks that he is creating something, that he is truly living the part. But no matter how sincere that passive feeling may be, it is not creative, and it cannot reach the heart of the spectator, so long as it lacks activity and does not promote the inner life of the play.'

'... In order to invoke this creative experience on the stage the actor must keep up a continuous fire of artistic desires all through his part so that they in turn will arouse the corresponding inner aspirations, which then will engender corresponding inner challenges to act, and finally these inner calls to action will find their outlet in corresponding external, physical action.

⁴⁴ Stanislavski

'Need one point out that while the actor is on stage all these desires, aspirations, and action must belong to him as the creative artist, and not the inert paper words printed in the text of his part....'⁴⁵

Just as play is a serious business which readies the human being for real physical situations such as fights, so is the drama a serious business. For by rehearsing the dramatic situations that are desired or feared, drama readies the spectator for those situations, just as play prepares children for adult life. While not undervaluing the considerable physical skills involved in the action of the Melodrama, its primary intention is as psychic play. What the Melodrama rehearses is the cosmic drama of good and evil. This why says Brooks, the Melodrama is constructed of

'a rhetoric that can infuse the banal and the ordinary with the excitement of grandiose conflict. The universe must always show itself as inhabited by cosmic ethical forces ready to say their name and reveal their operation at the correct gesture or word. To figure such a world, rhetoric must maintain a state of exaltation, a state where hyperbole is a "natural" form of expression because anything less would convey only the apparent (naturalistic, banal) drama, not the true (moral, cosmic) drama.' Each character 'proffers to one another, and to us, a clear figuration of their souls, they name without embarrassment eternal verities. Nothing is *understood*, all is *overstated*. Such moments provide us with the joy of a full emotional indulgence, the pleasures of unadulterated exploitation of what we recognise from our psychic lives as one possible way to be, the victory of one integral inner force.'⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Stanislavski p.254

⁴⁶ Brooks p.41

It is this exalted rhetoric, this clear statement of types, of virtue and vice, of truth, justice and honour, as well as of dishonour, degradation, crime, evil and shame, that enables us, the spectator, to feel that the universe can be truly understood that '...the world can be equal to our most feverish expectations about it,...reality properly represented will never fail to live up to our phantasmatic demands upon it.'⁴⁷

But it is also important to consider the relationship of the exaggerated acting style of the Melodrama to the reason behind the development of what Brooks terms the 'dramaturgy of admiration and astonishment'

'The desire to express all seems a fundamental characteristic of the Melodramatic mode. Nothing is spared because nothing is left unsaid: the characters stand on the stage and utter the unspeakable, give voice to their deepest feelings, dramatize through their heightened and polarized words and gestures the whole lesson of their relationship. They assume primary psyche roles, father, mother, child, and express basic psychic conditions. Life tends, in this fiction, toward ever more concentrated and totally expressive gestures and statement.'⁴⁸

It is precisely because it is the continued expression of the drama of cosmic ethical forces the 'classical' Melodrama created the roles of hero, heroine, and villain display virtue active, virtue repressed and evil incarnate. Consider the images presented in the video. Many of the characters of Melodrama are recreated and distributed throughout Current Affairs programmes which are, like the stage plays, constructed 'realities'. Both the Current Affairs programmes and the plays are produced to a set of codes, a set of codes which come together, to create a composite whole. This whole can then be understood, and psychologically dealt with, by the viewers. Chapter one has already looked, at the creation of the king

⁴⁷Brooks p.40

⁴⁸ Brooks p.4

persona from the images of the Tongan boxer Paea Wolfgram. The extract shown comes from an item in the *60 Minutes* programme. The Paea presented in the *60 Minutes* item is a Paea posed for the occasion. The interviews with him are carefully lit, the shots deliberately set up and carefully edited one beside the other to present a whole that show the images the film-makers want. These are images of the victorious hero returning home. In the full twelve minute item this image is further developed to present the courteous, gentle giant. Paea is shown responding to the children in their requests for autographs. He is patient with their desire to touch him and reaches out towards them. He speaks on camera of being a gentleman and of his desire to be a good father and provide for his children. If he ever gets tired and annoyed by all the attention, the camera does not show it. It is a seamless image of a hero. In the same way the woman Jane from the *20/20* programme's item on *Harbottle*, the man convicted of killing a young girl, presents her as the perfect victim. She is shown being almost led back to the boarding house in which she lived with Harbottle. The camera follows her inside and then surveys a room half emptied. The implication is that these are the belongings Jane left behind when she fled from Harbottle. Jane is shown cowed, her posture is slumped, and distressed. Her voice is weak and at times husky and she cries on the camera. If there is a strong and capable Jane who was able to leave an abusive relationship she is not shown here. This is a simplified image. Jane is presented only as the victim, as the suffering and repressed image of virtue found in the stage Melodrama.

The point of such simplification is that it presents an easily recognised and polarised set of images. One of the reasons for this simplification is the need humans have for rehearsal, the need learn how to decide how to act in reality, by first rehearsing the event in play. So as well as providing information about the world around us and the events occurring in it, in the sense that they create a polarised larger than life set of images, drawing on the qualities of the Melodrama, Current Affairs programmes are play in a serious sense. By watching the representation of events on television Current Affairs the viewers are able, (as are the viewers of fictional stage Melodrama and screen soap operas,) to rehearse the

possibility of such eventualities occurring in their own lives; in other words they are able to play through them in their minds if not in the form of actual role play and gain a sense of preparedness for the real events should they occur.

'The few critics who have given serious attention to Melodrama have noted its psychological function in allowing us the pleasure of self-pity and the experience of wholeness brought by the identification with "monopathic" emotion, in Robert Heilman's phrase. Eric Bentley in particular has argued the importance of Melodrama as a concept opposed to naturalism, its expression of emotion in the pure histrionic form of dreams, its representations of the quintessentially dramatic.'⁴⁹

This concerned with taking our nightmare experiences and giving them voice through dramatic expression of manipulating and controlling them through the transforming power of dramatic performance enabled the Melodrama to deal with ideas that would be too 'powerful' for everyday presentation. Because of its ability to deal with the cosmic drama even after the Enlightenment had, supposedly, swept away superstition the Melodrama was able to often returned to the use of magic. It did this both the sense that the plot required the casting of spells, the intervention of charms and potions to bring about result, at the 'simple' level of 'practising' magic on the stage; and at the more complex level, in the sense that Taussig discusses magic, in the power of the excess, and exaggerated repetitions of the conjuring of spirits. This is the power of mimesis, using the polarised Melodramatic form, a form which can stand to be supercharged. So just as the reason for the detailed telling, of spirit conjuring, is to create the ability to call up the spirits of the Other and then defeat them through a superbly powerful Self so in the Melodrama by making the event larger than life the cosmic forces can be controlled, brought forth and dealt with. As Brooks says,

⁴⁹ Brooks p.9-10

'It is clear the affective structure of Melodrama brings us close to the experience of dreams ...with infantile narcissism, its indulgence in self-pity and grandiose emotional states, its exploitation of a childhood condition "when thoughts seem omnipotent, when the distinction between *I want to* and *I can* is not clearly made." Bentley is surely right that the force of Melodrama derives from the very origins of theatricality, of self-dramatisation,'⁵⁰

He is speaking here of the Melodrama of the nineteenth century novel, and theatre, but the analysis can also be applied to twentieth century Current Affairs. The projection of the forces of good and evil onto selected persons in the community provided a safe space for the dramatisation, the conjuring up in the space between the performer and the watcher of these forces. This is a space equivalent to the safe space provided by ritual in cohesive communities. Though they are not the 'real' experiences, though they have been changed, manipulated according to a set of conventions or codes, they are none the less powerful for that. In fact such manipulation, by providing control, provides space to consider and come to terms with these forces. While it would be too 'dangerous' for most of us, too psychologically confronting if not physically dangerous to invite a criminal into our lounges in the flesh, we are able to deal with the television image, and assess the meaning of the force embodied by that person for each of us.

⁵⁰ Brooks p.35

Chapter Four

MYTH, AND EPIC

Our awareness that there are forces both within and without us, that we can neither control nor understand, makes us fearful of the powers of destruction and disaster that lie around us. One way of dealing with these forces is to name them, for by naming them, we gain some measure of understanding of them, and some control over them. An ancient form of this naming is the telling of myths in the forms of narrative and drama known as the epics. This same method of approach to the inexplicable, through telling stories peopled with super-beings (either good or evil), is carried on in the stories of the Melodrama.

In the way that it invoked the resonances of myth, by using the traditional mythic types such as the hero, the heroine, and the villain and by telling its stories of strange events in exotic locations, the Melodrama continued to perform the same functions as those contained in the traditionally told myth. In the just same way as they were evoked in the classical Melodrama, these resonances of myth today are evoked by the 'players' in television Current Affairs programmes where we are also shown heroes, heroines and villains who through the power of being on television are placed at one remove from us. Those who are shown on television acquire the status of superior beings. There is, even in an age attuned to television, an aura of the exotic surrounding an appearance on television. Thus the 'real' people who appear in television Current Affairs can become containers for the 'playing out' of the drama between the major forces for good and evil that exist within us, and in the world. The reason we continue to use these archetypal forms to tell the stories of our daily lives is because, to use as Peter Brooks does, the words of Walter Benjamin:

‘it is from the “flame” of fictional representations that we warm our “shivering lives,”

The function of warming our lives is carried out fictions, often of domestic tales but which remain popular, says Brooks, because they are able to suggest that:

we do not live in a world drained of transcendence and significance, that the principles of superdrama are to be found near at hand.’¹

One of the earliest of such fictions, are the narratives of myth.

Myth

A brief definition of myth is that it is often a story of origins which deals with a time that is different from ordinary time, in the distant past, or in the dreaming for example, and/or with the actions of people who are different from us; the heroes. There are several main types of Myth. There is the cosmogonic myth; the myth of the beginning of things, which relates how the entire world came into being. At the other extreme, are myths describing the end of the world (eschatological myths) or the coming of death into the world. These myths often contain the idea of a divine judgement at the end of the world, a judgement which will finally divide the world into the good and the evil, a similar concept to the Manichaeism and Melodrama. There are the myths of the culture hero, a figure from the past who is responsible for the discovery of something of great value to the tribe; for example the mythic figure of Maui who fished up New Zealand and stole fire from his grandmother. There are myths of birth and rebirth telling how life can be renewed and the redemption myths which tell of the coming of an ideal society (millenarian myths) or of a saviour (messianic myths). There are also myths about the foundation of various cities. The story of Romulus and Remus and the foundation of Rome is such a myth. Another aspect of myth is that it uses symbolic language to embody what it means to be a member of a particular culture. Because of their ‘otherness’ myths are often seen as aspects of religion,

¹ Brooks p. 205

and may in fact be recalled in religious ritual but 'myth is broader than 'pure' religious observance and may throw light upon many aspects of individual, cultural and community life.'² It is this application to individual and community life which makes it an important element of the Melodramatic Impulse.

The epic

The first form of the shaping of myth to suit cultural needs occurred with the development of the epic. In the epic, myths are placed in a story form related to a particular culture. The epic embodies the Self and Other of mimesis in the framework of national characteristics. It is in the epic that the heroes, for example, acquire personalities. The epic is the nationalised, and personalised form of the myths of fall and redemption, of birth and death, winter and spring, which were celebrated in the ritual drama. It is also through the epic that we can have some knowledge of the religions and societies of the past.

But an epic is more than an historical narrative. In his introduction to *Religion, Myth, and Folklore in the World's Epic* Honko Lauri writes that an epic is a superstory.³ These super stories appeared perhaps simultaneously with the development of 'true' drama. Lauri says that epics are a composite creation of oral tradition, folk poetry and ritual. Also, says Lauri, 'Great epics are powerful repositories of myth, religious world-view, and history.'⁴ As a super story and epic is timeless. In a paper on Virgil's Aeneid as Homeric, National and Universal Epic Teivas Oksala examines the ideas that the Aeneid contains about peace and shows how these ideas give it a universal and contemporary applicability . Oksala writes:

² Charles H. Long *Mythology Encarta*

³ Honko Lauri *Religion, Myth, and Folklore in the World's Epic - The Kalevala and its predecessors* The Kalevala and the World's Epics: An Introduction p.3

⁴ *ibid.*, p.1

“The universality of the Aeneid can ... be tested by comparing its idea of peace with the principles of the United Nations, which ultimately aim at world peace, but which are constantly plagued by the practical question of who is to guarantee this world peace, i.e. who is to take charge of weapons. The Aeneid and the Ara Pacis entrusted Rome with the task. At this level of meaning the national and the universal epic are combined in the Aeneid.”⁵

So with its concerns about who is to be the enforcer of peace, the Aeneid considers a twentieth century concern. But its universal applicability is deeper than this, for in its picture of a city at war it depicts a deep human fear of destruction of community, and describes an experience, that is contemporary reality for many people.

“... The second book is dedicated to Aeneas’ narrative about the death struggles of Troy. ... But his narrative breaks away from its political-historical contexts and becomes the Tragedy of a city ravaged by war - always and everywhere. The universal meaning of the book of Troy is clear to anyone who has lived through world war or who in general considers this the biggest misfortune to befall mankind. Through its humane emphasis Virgil’s empathetic account becomes a protest against the madness of war.”⁶

The epic, which describes the lives of the heroes, those who are greater than ordinary mortals, demi-gods and super-people who are not ‘real’ historical individuals but composite beings created from the attributes that the culture considers superior gives the group a focus for their own aspirations. Having a hero to ‘re-member’- gives the cultural/racial group an image of its own worth, and distinctiveness. By their actions, the heroes of the epics define what a culture considers great about itself. In the contrasts between them and the people they come in contact with, journeying heroes define what it means to be a member of

⁵ Oksala p.64

⁶ *ibid.*

the culture that possesses the epic. Writing of the *Illiad* and the *Odyssey* Minna Skafte Jensen says

' The wandering of Odysseus (*Odyssey* 9-12) brings him to distant and strange peoples, to immortals, and even to the land of the dead thus defining by contrast what it is to be mortal as opposed to the immortal gods, what it is to be alive as opposed to the dead and what it is to be Greek as opposed to foreigners.⁷

The contrasts between those who are Greek, like the story teller, and those who are foreign are placed in a system that is roughly geographical, he says. In other words the farther away a place is, the more dissimilar is the culture of the population. For example:

' The Lotus-eaters, the Laestrygonians, and the Cyclopes ... illustrate three degrees of non-Greekness, as a foil to the Greek world of Odysseus with its norms and values, represented as sufficiently similar to that of the audience so as to be accepted as a older stage of the same culture ... The two general criteria for Greekness that stand out are diet and political organisation: city-state or not'.⁸

The parallel of these epics with the stories of the Melodrama and of Current Affairs is, that in both these forms too, we see presented stories of other lands. Like the epic of old one of the tasks of modern Current Affairs is to tell us what it means to be ourselves. For example, foreign disasters reassure us that it will not happen here because we are different from those people; we have better rules, safer procedures, more adequate emergency procedures. In 're-membering' a hero a people can compare themselves as they are today, with the way they were in the past. They can assess their current customs in the light of traditions. Yet the form

⁷ Minna Skafte Jensen *The Homeric Epics and Greek Cultural Identity* in *Lauri Religion, Myth, and Folklore in the World's Epic: the Kalevala and its predecessors* p.64

⁸ *ibid.*

is sufficiently flexible for the current narrator/writer to re-tell it using contemporary examples.⁹ It is this reworking of the epic from generation to generation that gives it, its usefulness.

Myth and Society

Myth is a basic element in Western civilisation, and is present as an element of most discourse. Greek mythical stories have become such an intrinsic part of Western art and thought that they have become part of common parlance particularly in such fields as psychology, the Oedipus complex for example. There is also the strand of European myth, the folk lore which gives a reverberating depth to ideas; we speak of a sleeping beauty for example, and recall not just the act of sleeping but the story. At the same time a tension between myth and rationality, which has long been a feature of Western thought, persists. This conflict has existed at least since the time of the classical Greeks. Aristotle for example was concerned to tease out the rational element from the mythic in the Greek myths of creation; his conclusion was that the two overlapped. During the enlightenment scholars tried to make sense of the seemingly irrational and fantastic mythic stories.

‘... the concern for myth, revived with new intensity, could be detected in almost all the newer university disciplines—anthropology, history, psychology, history of religions, political science, structural linguistics. Most current theories of myth emerged from one or more of these disciplines.’¹⁰

It was the British anthropologist Sir James Frazer, who first suggested the relation of myth to ritual in his work in *The Golden Bough* (1890). While R. R. Marett, felt that myth arose from people’s emotional responses to their environment. In his view, this response begins with rhythmic gestures that develop into dance and

⁹ Jensen pp. 35-36

¹⁰ Charles H. Long *Mythology, Encarta*

ritual, with narrative myth forming the oral part of the communal rites¹¹. Mircea Eliade, an historian of religion, said of myth that it is a way of expressing through the use of symbols, an intuitive knowledge of the nature of being, that is complete and coherent. Eliade believed that although myths may over the centuries become trivialised and debased, people can use them to return to the beginning of time and rediscover and re-experience their own nature.¹² Bronislaw Malinowski's view of myth is that it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief. It safeguards and enforces morality and contains practical rules for the guidance of the individuals in cultures.¹³ Joseph Campbell's theory of myth which he formulated in *The Masks of God* was that a consideration of myth worldwide showed 'a general theory of the origin, development, and unity of all human cultures.'¹⁴ Emile Durkheim in examining the relation of myth to society,

'drew on data from Australian aboriginal cultures.[he believed myths] express the way society represents humanity and the world, ... Myths and the rituals stemming from them sustain and renew these moral and other beliefs, keeping them from being forgotten, and they strengthen people in their social natures.'¹⁵

The resurgence of interest in the power of myth is an important contribution to the development of the classical Melodrama. The theatrical form now known as the Melodrama arose at the time of the Enlightenment, the first 'classical' Melodramatist was Jean Jacques Rousseau with his melodrama *Pygmalion*. At the same time as the popular stage was developing the Melodrama, the poets and scholars of the Romantic movement, (which is discussed further in chapter six) were turning

¹¹ Charles H. Long *Mythology*, Encarta 1994

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

'..... to the older Indo-European myths as intellectual and cultural resources.

Romantic scholars tended to view myth as an irreducible form of human expression: For them, myth, as a mode of thinking and perception, possessed prestige equal to or sometimes greater than the rational grasp of reality.¹⁶

From the Enlightenment on, myth appearing under the guise of popular stories in which Gods and heroes became ordinary domestic humans, was incorporated first into the work of poets and scholars, then into the dramas of the popular stage where it continued to function as a container for human situations and emotions, which could not be reduced to simple cause and effect relationships. For example there is the constant reworking of the type of the hero, which takes place both in the Melodrama and in television Current Affairs. The Epic hero stories of Odysseus escaping from the Cyclops or Theseus killing the Minotaur are no longer appropriate to modern circumstances but in a story for example of a brave tanker driver rescuing a child from a burning car we are invited to 'remember' the hero. Jensen says

'... the epic is there not only to give information on the past, but to keep the link between past and present. The importance of the past lies in its relations to the present¹⁷

Writing of the way an epic changes and develops over time he says that just as the language changes substituting new words for old so

'so the content changes for the sake of archaism and the desire to describe correctly the events of the heroic past.

Thus old and new coexist in an oral epic tradition. ... any single text preserves elements of widely differing ages, while constantly relating them to the special audience present at the performance.¹⁸

¹⁶ Charles H. Long *Mythology*, *Encarta* 1994

¹⁷ Jensen pp. 35-36

It is this constant reworking of the old stories to depict truths and situations in new ways that is the important link here. Commenting on the depiction of characters in soap opera Ien Ang says they do not seek to portray the 'unique experience of a single human character.'¹⁹ This is because as Ang says soap operas draw on the 'myths and fantasies which endows them with a strongly emotional appeal'²⁰. Lauri makes a similar judgement of the heroes of epics when he write 'The exemplary nature of the heroes is occasioned not only by individual psychology but by the culture. How could it be otherwise, at least in cases where the narrative derives its strength from group identity or the social context?'²¹ In other words we endow our heroes with qualities that we currently value. Myth therefore, has continued to be reshaped as the basis of television Melodramas and also as the underlying framework of television Current Affairs. That this is possible can be explained by the concept of the what Campbell refers to as the monomyth.²² He states that there is really only one story, the story of personal awareness, of individuation. This awareness involves the acknowledging of personal transgressions and the acceptance of personal responsibility, but the story telling of that journey takes many cultural forms. Thus are the stories of myth deeply embedded in both Current Affairs television as well as television drama. The stories of good and evil presented in the form of television Current Affairs are a manifestation of this monomyth in another guise. Consider two of the video examples. In his defeat of his opponent Tongan boxer Paea Wolfgram is the conquering hero. In her attack on the comments of Justice Morris Toni Allwood of Rape Crisis is the equivalent of the 'dragon slayer'. The manifestations of hero, heroine and villain in the excerpts on the video are discussed more fully in chapter seven.

¹⁸ Jensen pp. 35-36

¹⁹ Ang Ien *Watching Dallas Soap opera and the Melodramatic imagination* p. 64

²⁰ *ibid.*,

²¹ Lauri p16

²² *ibid.*,

²² Joseph Campbell *The Hero With the Thousand Faces* pp. 3-24

Ang says the appeal of the heroes of soap operas 'draws less on the bare facts of those situations [the exaggerated events of soap opera] than on the metaphorical role they play in the popular imagination.'²³ Yet how much more exaggerated are the events of *Current Affairs*. Murder, rape, abuse, theft, car chases and drugs busts are not usually part of most people's everyday life. But from their frequent occurrence on our television screen we would think they were as common experience for most of us as buying food. These events are chosen because they enable a programme to focus on heroic qualities and on the division between good and evil that is the basis of myth and Melodrama. Ang says

'Within the framework of a popular fiction form like soap opera, exaggerated events such as kidnappings, marital dramas and chance meetings with great consequences should ... be regarded ... as bearers of the Melodramatic effect';²⁴

Writing of the power of enduring popular fiction Brooks says that

Such fictions are both frightening and enlivening, suggesting the overt presence in the world of forces we sense within ourselves. We both want to believe, and yet cannot wholly credit, that we live on the brink of the abyss, the domain of occult forces which, for "bliss or bale," infuse an intenser meaning into the life we lead in everyday reality.²⁵

Originally Brooks was attributing this power, the power of making present the warring forces that exist in the human psyche to the Melodrama novels of Balzac, and Henry James. But this power of giving shape to elemental psychic forces is equally present in stage Melodrama and through its use of concepts of hero and villain to television *Current Affairs*, which as do the Melodrama novels and the Melodramas of stage and film also

²³ Ang in *Watching Dallas Soap opera and the Melodramatic imagination* p. 64

²⁴ *ibid.*,

makes the abyss yield some of its content, makes us feel we inhabit amidst those forces, and they amidst us.' ²⁶

Television Current Affairs also deals in the exaggerated, the chance and the unlikely. It is the same impulse, the Melodramatic impulse that is at work, and it is grounded on the same base as the soap opera, that of myth(s), with its concepts of birth and death, self and other, that also imbue the 'fantastic' adventures of the epics.

One of the reasons for the enduring appeal of myths and epics is the appeal they make to the human ambition to live to the maximum of our capabilities. Quoting Bowra on heroic poetry Lauri says

'The admiration for great doings lies deep in the human heart, and comforts and cheers even when it does not stir to emulation. Heroes are the champions of man's ambition to pass beyond the oppressive limits of human frailty to a fuller and more vivid life, to win as far as possible a self-sufficient manhood, which refuses to admit that anything is too difficult for it, and is content even in failure, provided that it has made every effort of which it is capable. (Bowra 1952:4)' ²⁷

There is too a similarity in the 'composition' of the great tales of the myths the Epics, and the construction of Current Affairs programmes. Neither is the work of one single person. Epics because they have passed through many hands and television Current Affairs programmes because it is impractical for them to be the work of one person, are both communal efforts. In both cases this communal construction adds depth to the force they have as means for assigning communal guilt, expelling communal evil, and restoring a sense of wholeness and health to

²⁵ Brooks p.205

²⁶ Brooks p.205

²⁷ Lauri p.16

²⁷ *ibid.*

the community. It is in this sense that the viewing of the Current Affairs re-telling of epic tales is a communal ritual.

Chapter Five

FROM RITUAL TO MELODRAMA

Arising from the mimetic impulse, and springing from the imperatives of polarisation, and propitiation, the dramatic formate of Melodrama begins in ritual. The function of ritual is to make the world safe by the propitiation of the hostile forces which threaten to engulf humanity. This same function is to be seen in both the 'classical' Melodrama and in twentieth century Current Affairs.

Polarisation as a structural device.

The Melodramatic form returns to its ritual origins by presenting the ideal, the 'good' or the 'fundamental self', an image of peace and tranquillity, as menaced by an external threat of evil. In ritual, evil is often exorcised by being placed upon a symbol that can bear the burden, either by itself defeating evil, or by being destroyed, as for example in the ritual the scapegoat of the Jews was destroyed by being driven into the desert to live or die at the hand of God. Through this ritual act the community is then cleansed of its sins. The Melodrama follows a similar process. The evil which has entered the place of 'good' of peace and tranquillity has then to be repelled and the status quo or greater happiness returned. The Melodramatic form places emphasis on external threat which can be identified and expelled. In dramatic terms the emphasis is therefore also on the external presentation of the threat. This presentation can be achieved through the use of spectacular effects, for example fire, water, or earthquake, and/or through the actions of the villain. These two devices, spectacular effects and actions that depict good and evil are often further intensified by speeches which externalise the states of mind of the various characters. Brooks writing of the polarised structure of Melodrama, points to its ritual quality:

'Melodramatic good and evil are highly personalized: they are assigned to, they inhabit persons who indeed have no psychological complexity but who are strongly characterized. Good and evil can be named as persons are named- and Melodramas tend in fact to move toward a clear nomination of the moral universe. The *ritual of Melodrama* involves the confrontation of clearly identified antagonists and the expulsion of one of them.'¹ (my italics)

The Manichaeon

Brooks also assigns to Melodrama the attribute of Manichaeism. He says:

' At the end of the play, desire has achieved its satisfaction, no shadow dwells, and the universe bathes in the full, bright light of moral manichaeism. Hence the psychic bravado of virtue, its expressive breakthrough, serves to assure us again and again, that the universe is in fact morally legible, that it possesses an ethical identity and significance. This assurance must be a central function of Melodrama in the post-sacred universe: it relocates and rearticulates the most basic moral sentiments and celebrates the sign of right.'²

The Manichaeon system of ordering the world, believed to have been developed from the pre-Christian Gnostic sect the Mandeans, is found in many belief systems, and certainly weaves in and out of the thought of the Christian church both ancient and modern. The universe of Manichaeism (or Gnosticism) is a completely divided universe of an upper world of the spirit and a lower world of the physical; the upper world created by God and the lower world by demiurge. It has a long and consistent history and in Western thought for example it was from Manichaeism that Saint Augustine converted to Christianity in the fourth century, and one of its most fully fledged Mediaeval flowerings was in the Albigensian

¹ Brooks p.16-17

² *ibid.*, p.43

Heresy of the court of Provence, the seat of the romance, the romantic lay and of courtly love.

Following the Manichaeian concepts of the separation of light and dark, spirit and body, the essential element of the poems of courtly love is that the loved object is desired, but she is because of her high status and her virtue, unattainable. She is to be worshipped from afar and courted with poems in her honour. The lover hopes to win her favours but it may also be that the lovers remain forever united only in spirit, bodily consummation of their love being denied them. The unconsummated union fitted the underlying belief of Manichaeism, that the spiritual world is always trying to escape from the physical. In human kind is found the amalgam of the spiritual and the physical. It is in humans that the two worlds meet. The human spirit, or soul, has been imprisoned in the body by Satan and therefore is always trying to escape from the body and join the world of pure spirit. The only hope of the human is to live a good life so that after death the soul can win freedom from material existence. The Manichaeians believed that in order to escape, the soul needs to build up a great life force. This life force is lost in low living, but is garnered in restraint and control of the body. The life force is especially present in the sexual organs, so the precious seed of these organs must be conserved. In addition to an individual needing to accumulate life force, every time a child is born another human spirit is condemned to being trapped in a physical body. So the Manichaeians eschewed marriage and procreation. Translated into the art of courtly love this meant that the art of desiring rather than achieving a union of love became the important element of a relationship. This concept of the mystical power of yearning resurfaced with the Romantic movement.

This manichaeism, the desire to see good as created by one being and evil by another, remains a strong strand in Christianity even though the heresy was repudiated by the official Church which maintained that God alone was the creator of all things. This leads to the origins of evil being clearly separated from God and displaced onto demiurge and thence to the devil, who is a being who

cannot create only corrupt, and onto the faulty nature of humanity, explicable by the doctrine of Original Sin. Such a faulty nature needs redemption, which is achieved through the sacrifice of Christ; a pure blameless victim who through His sacrifice reunites fallen human nature with the creative power of God. The Self and the Other are once more joined.

After the successive influences of the Humanists, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and the move to a secular world, the concept of an unfulfilled love lost something of its appeal. Events were now explained by science. Yet the need for the means of explaining 'good' and 'evil'; the divided human nature; the Self and Other of mimesis, did not disappear. '... by the end of the Enlightenment, there was clearly a renewed thirst for the Sacred, a reaction of desacralization expressed in the vast movement we think of as Romanticism.'³

The British Romantic poets Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley were influenced by the ideas of Neoplatonism; which like the Manichaeic system believed in a separation of the spiritual and the carnal. Derived from Plato's division of Idea and Matter, one of its tenets was the importance of mystical experience which reunites the individual soul with the Creator, the infinite, unknowable One. The Romantic poets maintained that this reunion can be achieved through the ecstasy of the experience of the Sublime in nature. These two strands, the dualist division of Manichaeism and Neoplatonism, and the idea of the saving power of the Sublime in Nature infuse the 'classical' Melodrama.

In 'simple' Melodrama the concept of the lady of courtly love, the 'white lady' reappears. The heroine is to be courted and in this case won by her adoring swain. The dangers encountered by the heroes of the stage Melodrama have all the hallmarks of the journey, and adventures, of a knight errant. There are physical dangers to be overcome, moral temptations to be resisted and other 'bad' knights to be jousting with and repelled. In the end the quest is won or the hero dies in the attempt, (and in dying still saves his lady fair). In saving the heroine the hero

³ Brooks p.15 (See also Romanticism Ch.6 this thesis.)

mends the tear in the fabric of the universe. Her safety shows that good will triumph and evil will be overcome. This triumph of the virtuous proves to the spectator that the moral universe is intact. It proves that as a society we can project evil from within ourselves, onto another being, the villain and then drive it out. This salvation of society through the projection and rejection of evil, this restoration of safety to the world on the stage, or on the television screen, assures the spectator that no matter what happens, that no matter in what guise evil rears its head, it can be dealt with and the world can be made safe. This means *there will be no uncertainty*, in the end the triumph of virtue will put all things to rights. This guarantee of certainty is the overarching desire of the Melodrama.

The warring of the opposing forces of the Manichaean moral universe and the ultimate triumph of virtue is presented in the ritual of the Melodrama. 'We may legitimately claim that Melodrama becomes the principle mode for uncovering, demonstrating, and making operative the essential moral universe in a post-sacred era...' ⁴ says Brooks. But while the drama of light and dark, body and spirit, is no longer carried out under the ostensible mantle of the sacred, it is nevertheless the same drama. Only in the 'classical' Melodrama the forces have human names, though they may not have human personalities

'. Good and evil can be named as persons are named- and Melodramas tend in fact to move toward a clear nomination of the moral universe. *The ritual of Melodrama involves the confrontation of clearly identified antagonists and the expulsion of one of them.*' ⁵ (my italics)

Ritual

Brooks' description of the Melodrama parallels Victor Turner's description of ritual and the social order. What is interesting to note is that in their respective writings on ritual and Melodrama Turner speaks of the drama of the ritual, and

⁴ Brooks p.15-16

⁵ *ibid.*, p.16-17

Brooks of the ritual of the Melodrama. Both are expressions of the dramatisation of the cosmic forces, the recognition of Self and Other, of the divided self and the Self and the universe, that wage war inside human consciousness.⁶ The visible statement of the warring forces in the figures of the hero and the villain is one method of purging society. The Sublime experience of Nature is another. The 'classical' Melodrama made extensive use of spectacular and wild scenery, (the side of Nature that accorded with the Romantic Idea of the Sublime), a production value that is present in today's film and television. The technical development of this scenery will be covered in chapter six and its use in television Current Affairs in chapter seven.

The polarisation within 'classical' Melodrama, the polarisation that gives Melodrama its ritual and propitiatory characteristic, can be found in contemporary religious expression and is traceable back to the earliest religious drama. Writing of the ritual studies of Victor Turner, Barbara Boudewijnse says

"Ritual performances", according to Turner, are "distinct phases in the social processes whereby groups adjust to internal changes and adapt to their external environment" (1967:200). ...In *Schism and Continuity* Turner [...] (1957:xvii). The social process which constitutes the social drama is divided into four major phases. (my italics) First a *breach* of regular norm-governed social relationships occurs. Following this a phase of mounting *crisis* supervenes. In order to limit the spread of breach, certain adjustive and redressive mechanisms are brought into operation. Following this third phase of *redressive action*, the final phase ensues, which consists either in the *reintegration* of the disturbed group or in the social recognition of irreparable *schism* (1967:91-2).⁷

⁶ See H. Barbara Boudewijnse *The ritual studies of Victor Turner. An anthropological approach and its psychological impact*, in Heimbrock & Boudewijnse *Current Studies On Rituals perspectives for the psychology of religion*

⁷ *ibid.*, p3

This description of the development and application of a ritual, a process within a culture, used to deal with a breach of the 'regular norm-governed social relationships' could equally be the brief outline of a typical Melodrama, the 'evil' enters the place of peace, a *breach* occurs, the evil is expelled but returns stronger, a *crisis* occurs, the hero sets out to defeat the villain *adjustive and redressive mechanisms* and finally peace is restored *reintegration of the disturbed group* or more usually, *irreparable schism* symbolised by in the Melodramatic form, the death of the villain. In the 'classical' Melodrama the victim is virtue, which is rendered mute and therefore prevented from acting. The suffering of the mute innocent victim, virtue, is the inevitable sacrifice offered to the Gods to atone for the breach in the social fabric. Virtue is the embodiment of 'good' suffering for the community. But the hero takes on the task of defeating the evil which has arisen in the community and driving it out. Thus the roles of atoner and avenger are separated and neither the hero nor the heroine need die for the good of the community, (though they may either one or both die,) but through their actions of suffering and avenging they put evil to flight.

The concept of a mute victim is present in many religious rituals for example the Passion readings: Mark 15:2-5

And the chief priest brought many accusations against him. Pilate questioned him again, 'Have you no reply at all? See how many accusations they are bringing against you!' But to Pilate's amazement, Jesus said nothing.⁸

This passage from Mark's gospel is highly dramatised, in fact the reading of the description of the Passion in any of the Gospels constitutes the playing out of a drama. It is, for instance, very difficult as a participant to know where the ritual ends and the drama begins. The two forms can co-exist and in fact be practised by the same persons, who will yet be aware of a difference. This has been my

⁸ *The New Jerusalem Bible* New Testament p.67

personal experience. For example these are the notes I made after I was the narrator in a reading of St Mark's account of the Passion on Good Friday 1996.

I think one of the essential differences between participating in a religious ritual experience, reading or speaking a text or moving through a series of movements, and acting is that I am not creating a character outside of myself. In reading any part of the passion. I do not become a narrator persona I remain the 'everyday me' reading. Equally those who read the part of Christ, or of the other people e.g. Pontius Pilate or even the congregation who read the crowd are never anyone except themselves.

The mimetic action that takes place in drama, when the actor creates the Other, the character, does not take place in the reading of the Passion. I think the reason is that all the people participating at the Good Friday ceremonies are taking part in a shared experience which is, and is about, what they 'truly' believe (though of course each person will believe in their own particular way). There is no element of pretence here. If you do not believe you simply do not attend.

Though I use all the techniques of voice production, of timing and inflection that I would use in playing a part when I read the Scriptures, I am not acting. I am me reading a vivid account, but I am not a character. One of the interesting things for me is that if I were to portray one of the same characters in a play then I would create an Other in developing that character.

I can only say that the difference between ritual and drama I believe, is in the belief of the participants. If the people saying the words consider themselves to be, just themselves carrying out actions, as they celebrate, or re-create events of cosmic significance, then it is ritual that is happening. If the participants believe by their actions they are making a character then what is happening is drama.

From ritual to drama

The first known extant 'dramas' appear to be directions for 'plays' or 'tableaux' within a religious ritual, e.g. the drama of Horus and Setekh from approximately 1,200 B.C. Drama is thought to have begun with rituals relating to nature, and writing of current rituals Hans-Gunter Heimbrock speaks of 'rituals related to nature such as funeral customs'⁹. The residue of just such ritual beginnings can be seen in Mummers plays, which are known to have their origins in pre-Christian Celtic fertility rites, with their focus on death and resurrection particularly in the context of the changing seasons.

Boudewijnse says that Turner '... defines ritual as "prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routines, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers"' (1967:19).¹⁰ The difficult moment to pin point is the moment when ritual ceases to be true ritual and becomes drama per se. David Parkin says that ritual is concerned with the power of performance. While the words of a ritual are important the movements and gestures are equally important and it is these movements and gestures that create the performance power of ritual. It is this concentration of power in performance that means that ritual 'full of spatial movement and gestural performance, could make the evolutionary transition to drama and theatre, based at first primarily on mime rather than on dialogue.'¹¹

The basis of the Melodramatic impulse can be seen operating in such dramatic ritual presentations as the early liturgical drama the 'Quem Quaeritis'. The women go to the tomb to seek the body of Jesus and are told by the angels that He is risen. The actions are presented by five or six 'actors' while the text is sung as an antiphon by first one side of the choir and then the other. Implicit in the four lines of text are the concepts of the death and resurrection of the new year and of

⁹ Hans-Gunter Heimbrock *Ritual and Transformation A psychoanalytic perspective* in Heimbrock & Boudewijnse *Current Studies On Rituals perspectives for the psychology of religion* p.39

¹⁰ Boudewijnse p.5

¹¹ David Parkin *Ritual as spatial direction and bodily division* in de Coppet *Understanding Rituals* p.17

the individual; explicit is the statement of the event of the resurrection of Jesus. The division of the people into women (body) and angels (spirit) visually presents the idea of the divided universe, the Manichaeism, which is reunited and redeemed in the person of Jesus. Again it is the same concept as the restoration of peace at the end of a Melodrama. As Brooks says

'At the end of the play, desire has achieved its satisfaction, no shadow deals, and the universe bathes in the full, bright light of moral manichaeism. Hence the psychic bravado of virtue, its expressive breakthrough, serves to assure us again and again, that the universe is in fact morally legible, that it possesses an ethical identity and significance'.¹²

The same division of the world into good and bad can be seen at work in a more dramatically developed piece, the late Mediaeval morality play 'Everyman'. The threat is external. Later in the play virtue in the form of Good Deeds, is found to be rendered mute. Brooks says of Melodrama that it 'regularly simulates the experience of nightmare, where virtue, representative of the ego, lies supine, helpless, while menace plays out its occult designs. The end of the nightmare is an awakening brought about by confrontation and expulsion of the villain, '¹³ in the case of the 'Everyman' drama, the confrontation and expulsion of the villain is achieved by Everyman's act of confession which frees Good Deeds. Because it centres on the internal division within the central character it may at first be supposed that Everyman is a potential Tragedy, but this is not the case. Everyman is an example of the Melodramatic Impulse which produces, the drama of propitiation and redemption.

That the Drama should be a direct development from ritual is not illogical. Raymond Williams writes that 'Human community grows by the discovery of common meanings and common means of communication.'¹⁴ Ritual celebration

¹² Brooks p. 43

¹³ *ibid.*, p 204

¹⁴ Williams p.38

is one of our common means of communication, the Drama is another. Speaking of the power of the arts which he calls 'ways of describing and communicating' Williams says that they are 'learned human skills, which must be known and practised in a community before their great power in conveying experience can be used and developed.'¹⁵ The inference for an understanding of the role of ritual in this process is, that it is in ritual that humans first discover the power of dramatic presentation, a discovery which is then transported to representations which are removed from the direct religious context, the theatre. But the theatrical presentation always retains the motivation of its ritual origins the sense of separation that humans experience between the individual I and the rest of the world. The ritual origins of the Drama can be most clearly seen in the form of drama known as Melodrama, with its definite division between 'good' and 'evil'.

Ritual a basic dramatic structure

Heimbrock says that through ritual, wherever it is found, humans try to express the sense they have of the split between themselves and the rest of the universe. Heimbrock allies that split to the earliest sense of division, the division that occurs when the human baby realises that it is separate from its mother, and suggests that in ritual it is the sense of that separation that is being recalled. He says of the holy meal, 'Religions by means of ritual eating reenact the infantile oral transitional mode, the longing for an unseparated unity between the self and its protecting and feeding cover, as well as the basic human recognition that there is a split between the subject and the cosmos.'¹⁶ The awareness, and dramatisation of that split is part of the process of mimesis, discussed in chapter three.

But, importantly for this discussion, Heimbrock describes ritual celebrations as 'a playful balance between active disposal of the world on the one hand, and getting in touch with the very other- with the 'not me' in its deepest religious meaning,

¹⁵ Williams p.38

¹⁶ Heimbrock p.39

i.e. with God - on the other hand,'¹⁷ The key word here is playful. This process of enacting the difference between the Self and the Other and then bridging that distance through enactment, is the same process that is used in the Drama. There is sufficient flexibility in the ritual to allow for playfulness, a concept that can include notions of levity and laughter but also as Hunningher says ideas of 'protection'; Of creating 'order to bring a certain part of the chaotic world under control'¹⁸ The other aspect of mimesis is the process of coming to terms with the split, through the act(s) of propitiation.

For it is not only the form of the Melodrama that has been derived from the ritual, it is also the psychic content. According to Victor Turner 'In Ndembu society, ..., ritual constitutes the primary means to uphold the bond between people and groups. ¹⁹ One of the functions of this ritual is

'that it enables the Ndembu to enact some of the tension and conflicts inherent in the structure of social life, ensuring continuity by pressing conflict itself into the service of affirming group unity'(1957:129).

...ritual portrays typical or stereotyped kinds of conflict:

"... The conflicts of society are the same as those dramatized and symbolized in its ritual. Because people are deeply concerned emotionally about such conflicts, they are moved when they see them ritually portrayed. And when they are ritually resolved, they feel emotional catharsis" (238-9).²⁰

The same impetus is behind the world of theatrical Melodrama which also presents 'typical or stereotyped kinds of conflict'; and behind the world of modern television Current Affairs. For example in the video there is the general conflict between good and evil, broadly painted in the 20/20 item on *Harbottle*, the man

¹⁷ Heimbrock p.39

¹⁸ Hunningher p.54

¹⁹ Boudewijnse p.3

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.5

who killed at least one child. He is depicted as purely evil and the people he has caused to suffer as purely innocent victims. Saying this does not condone the killing of children, but what is interesting about the item is that it is presented in very black and white terms, there are no explanations for his behaviour, no extenuating circumstances are presented. This item in fact becomes an example of stereotypical conflict. Another example is the more complex item from *Ralston* on the comments of Justice Morris at a rape trial. This item also presents conflict in a ritualised way by presenting the two participants, Toni Allwood from Rape Crisis and Peter Williams as adversaries. The effect of this drawing of clear lines of demarcation is to push the conflict out from the centre of the community onto a platform, in this case the television studio, where it can be examined, dealt with by a community functionary, the television interviewer and thus expelled from the community. By pushing it out from the centre of the community where it arose onto the television set the problem has been deprived of its power to hurt the community.

Ritual as used to express both the conflicts of social relationships, and the difficulties of the physical environment, can be understood as the desire to give order to disorder and thus give meaning to life. Henri Geerts in his paper on the theories of Turner and Peirce says of Turner's theory of the importance of ritual and symbol to the community, 'As far as the individual participants are concerned, the meanings of a ritual are pre-given. For the group the ritual is therefore the opposite of a unique event'.²¹ The concept of a 'fixed event' can also be applied to the expectations of an audience watching any form of drama that is known to them, but particularly to a Western audience watching a Melodrama. It is certain that the virtuous and the vicious will be clearly identifiable; it is equally certain that before the end of the drama evil will be defeated.

²¹ Henri Geerts *An inquiry into the meaning of ritual symbolism: Turner and Peirce* Heimbrock & Boudewijnse in *Current Studies On Rituals perspectives for the psychology of religion* p. 22

Propitiation: the psychological need for ritual

Describing the role of ritual Turner says that it functions best in communities that have a set of shared traditional values. H. Barbara Boudewijnse quoting the work of Victor Turner writes of his concepts of 'communitas' and of 'liminal' and 'liminoid' states²² Those experiencing a liminal state are the people outside the community, but soon to become part of it, adolescents for example who are about to be initiated into adulthood. These people go through proscribed ceremonies which integrate them into the community. While they are awaiting these ceremonies they may be set apart and a bond 'communitas' develops among them. Because these people are not yet part of the fixed community they are characterised by 'spontaneity, freedom, universality, openness',²³. The symbolic objects used to integrate these novices into full adult community are often natural, and related to the life of the community, for example to birth and death, or the cycles of planting and harvesting. The symbols of the ritual have meaning for the whole community, both as a total community, a collective meaning, and as individuals within the community, a personal meaning. But both meanings will be congruent and have shared aspects.

Turner also presented a related concept, the 'liminoid', which is found in large scale industrial societies, where religion is no longer a matter of belonging to the community, but of individual choice. Liminoid phenomena are like liminal but not the same. They tend to appeal to individual tastes and needs rather than being sanctioned by the whole of the community, and as these phenomena are no longer tied to the cycles of natural production, they can, like industrial products, be continuously generated.²⁴ Another important difference between liminal and liminoid activities is the role they play in the community. Liminal activities support the continuity of the social system, by integrating new members into the adult community. Liminoid activities on the other hand may be subversive and offer an alternative view. So, while both liminal and liminoid states are both

²² Boudewijnse p.10

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ Boudewijnse pp. 11-12

marginal, those in a liminal state are on the verge of being received into the full membership of the cohesive adult community, whereas those in a liminoid state lack a cohesive community into which they can be received.

The fundamental dramatic and psychic structures that underlie ritual, Melodrama and Current Affairs are the same. In his essay on The Meaning of Ritual In the Liturgy Heije Faber says

‘.. Where the community withers, as in our modern society, rituals decline. ... Rituals survive best in church services where the congregation is united in a central experience which is considered holy.’²⁵

But looking at the social institutions of theatre and television suggests not so much a decline in ritual as a transmutation. Writing of Turner’s work Boudewijnse says that in large scale industrial societies where there is religious pluralism or no religious belief at all :

‘ Symbols that once were central to the mobilization of ritual action, tended to migrate directly or in disguise, into other domains, aesthetics, politics, law, popular culture, etc. (1977b:36)..... some aspects of liminality had become detached from the religious domain and had become secularized, like music, art, dance, drama, sports, poetry, etc. He called these forms *liminoid genres*’²⁶

The relevance of this for the Melodramatic impulse, in theatre and in Current Affairs, is that both groups use symbols and ritual or ritualised activities to express their marginality, their separation from the group, and the beliefs of the group; in religious, terms their sin. But while in cohesive community groups the use of these symbols leads to a reunion with the group, in the non cohesive groups of modern society these same symbols, used to the same end, to express marginality

²⁵ Heije Faber The Meaning of Ritual In The Liturgy in Heimbrock & Boudewijnse *Current Studies On Rituals perspectives for the psychology of religion* p.53

²⁶ Boudewijnse p. 11

may acquire different meanings which may be valid for a sub-culture, or for a small group, or even purely personal.

If Current Affairs television is performing the same function that ritual has performed in the past, and continues to perform for some groups, that is, of expressing the sense of the split between the individual and the rest of the universe, does not this medium constitute a new ritual form? Turner, in his discussion of the liminoid state seems to be suggesting this very idea, that new ritual forms, like Current Affairs television, reduce the sense of marginality experienced by people in a modern industrial society. The shared ritual is no longer the ritual of the sacred place, but the ritual of participating in the common experience of witnessing the presentation of current events on television. This presentation is interpreted through the formula of the Melodramatic impulse; a formula that has its roots embedded firmly in the soil of ritual.

The creation of safety, through the propitiation of the Gods, which is the propitiation of the forces outside of us, the propitiation of the Other or Others which control the exigencies of our existence, is one of the main elements of ritual. It is also one of the main elements of Melodrama. Speaking of the classical Melodrama Brooks says that a 'satisfactory' end to the play, that is, one that leaves the audience feeling that all is right with the world. He says that though at first, 'evil will ...be articulated'²⁷ by this articulation it can then be recognised and defeated. The unambiguous presentation of virtue in the Melodrama 'serves to assure us, ... that the universe is morally legible, that it possesses an ethical identity and significance.'²⁸

Such a demand, to make the world 'morally legible', and to assure us of the ethical identity of the universe can be seen in the use of ritual. Writing of ritual H. Barbara Boudewijnse says that ritual mobilizes strong emotions in support of the social order. In this ritual activity is a parallel activity with the dramatisation of the Melodrama, for in both forms there is a dual function; both to show that an

²⁷ Brooks p43

²⁸ *ibid.*

ethical moral order presides over the seeming arbitrariness of fate, and that the same order, or entity, ultimately governs the lives of human beings. That therefore, eventually, the good will be rewarded and the wicked punished. But Turner says, and Boudewijnse repeats, that implicit in the rubric of ritual is the understanding that before order can be "restored" to the universe, an order that is observable in the way human beings obey the social norms of their society, '...violence must be done to his natural impulses. These must be repressed or re-directed'(235-6)

29

One of the qualities of ritual is its power to give expression to the dark, often illicit forces that if not dealt with, if not named and checked may destroy the community. 'Turner writes,

"...([Ritual]) must give expression to these illicit drives ... in order that they may be purged and exorcised"(236).' ³⁰

As such ritual has both the quality of exorcism and of healing.

"In ritual", Turner continues, "[...] The expression of conflict ([is]) allowed and sometimes even prescribed, to release energies by which social cohesion can be renewed.'³¹

This renewal of the social cohesion is the same process as that which takes place in the Melodrama and to which Brooks refers when he speaks of making the world 'morally legible'³² The catharsis of Melodrama depends on the emotion of indignation rather than the evocation of pity and terror as in Tragedy, but it is nevertheless purging. For in the Melodrama, a sense of order and cohesion is restored to the community through the expulsion of evil. Turner develops the concept of the power of ritual to produce social cohesion and transformation in

²⁹ Boudewijnse p.4

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Brooks p.42

his writing of *communitas* and in his comparison of what he terms liminal and liminoid states.

Faber agrees with Turner that one of the main functions of ritual is social cohesion he says that '...rituals have their basis in particular needs which are essential to human beings',³³ and he divides these needs into four groups. There is *The need for life to be structured*, and conversely *The need to be freed from a straitjacket*,³⁴ ...Faber says that

'It was Freud who again and again showed that ritual, as an essential element in religion, holds people in a straitjacket. ... But human beings have a deep-seated need for freedom, and rituals are always in tension with this need. In the tradition of the Enlightenment Freud emphasized the liberating effect of knowledge in a society which is kept in a state of tutelage.'³⁵

Then again there is the human

'*need for safety*. On the other hand ritual provides a certain sense of safety at points where life "breaks through the walls of the prison", particularly where human beings are being confronted with the irrational and therefore threatening aspects of the numinous. Fear of death, fear of demons, fear of unknown depths in sexuality, fear of the boundlessness of the divine, in short, the fear of loss of control as against Nothingness creates the need for rituals to exorcise these fears and to provide the person concerned with the safety of a firm structure. ...'³⁶

³³ Heije Faber *The Meaning of Ritual In The Liturgy* in Heimbrock & Boedewijnse *Current Studies On Rituals perspectives for the psychology of religion* p.45

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*

There is *The need for disclosure* which is basically a need to publicly express our sense of the mystery of life and our fear of being insignificant, of no account 'of being swallowed by Nothingness' as Faber puts it. In this disclosure of our neediness, we receive nourishment a sense of security and place. Faber's fifth need which is the need for *The fixed form of rituals*, is related to both the first need, a need for sameness and coherence and the fourth need, the need for psychic nourishment through disclosure of need.. Faber says that the fixed form of rituals is important because 'changing them puts the reliability of the mystery at risk. If we lose the old ritual we may also lose the navel-string to the world where we belong and which we need. *Then we fall into emptiness.*' (my italics) ³⁷ It is precisely this fear of a fall into emptiness that Brooks is describing when he says that in the absence of the sacred we are reacting to 'the vertiginous feeling of standing over the abyss created when the necessary centre of things has been evacuated and dispersed.' ³⁸ It is Brooks' thesis that the 'classical' Melodrama developed as a response to the loss of an overarching sense of the Sacred, that was one of the results of the Enlightenment. Brooks sees Melodrama as a response to the loss of tragic vision in the post enlightenment world. He says

'The status of the Sacred as "wholly other" - In Rudolf Otto's phrase- as a realm of being and value recognized to be apart from and superior to man, is gone and is irrecoverable. Of the *mysterium tremendum*, which Otto defines as the essence of the Holy, only the *tremendum* can be convincingly revived. This issue, in fact, is given a dramatization in M.G. Lewis' *The Monk...* in relation to the problem of guilt and its definition.'³⁹

In the Melodrama with its clear division of the world into good and evil, a sense of moral order is once again restored. But according to Brooks that sense of moral order is different from the order prevailing in a pre-Enlightenment society

³⁷ Faber *The Meaning of Ritual In The Liturgy* in Heimbrock & Boudewijnse *Current Studies On Rituals perspectives for the psychology of religion* p.45

³⁸ Brooks p21

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.17

with a sense of living under a sacred mantle. In the pre-Enlightenment world the moral order is achieved through the redemptive power of the Sacred, while in the post-Enlightenment world of the Melodrama order is achieved by assigning guilt to the wicked. The Enlightenment, says Brooks, was the time when the emphasis on rational scientific thought stripped away the overarching sense of the sacred. This removal of the sense of the sacred left a vacuum that was filled in part by the development of the structured ritualised world of the theatrical Melodrama. But it is not as clear cut as that. A discussion about the nature of that redemptive power that the sacred brings, is out of place here, but Brooks says of the classical Melodrama that it

'starts from and expresses the anxiety brought by a frightening new world in which the traditional patterns of moral order no longer provide the necessary social glue. It plays out the force of that anxiety with the apparent triumph of villainy, and it dissipates it with the eventual victory of virtue.'⁴⁰

The brief traverse of the place of myth, the epic, and of ritual contained in this thesis, however, gives a sense of the age of a system of moral order based on the assignment of guilt. Stemming as it does from one of our basic psychological impulses, and stretching back to the ritual and dramatic representation of ancient times, the Melodramatic impulse is much older than the 'classical' Melodrama. This impulse which is present, as Turner and Faber describe, in forms of religious ritual has been constantly reworked in the theatrical forms of Melodrama. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century it gave rise to the 'classical' Melodrama. In the mid nineteenth century as a response to improved communication of news, this form changed once again to develop the 'documentary' form presented on the spectacle stage in such productions as *The Battle of Waterloo*. The developments in staging which allowed such spectacles to be successfully mounted are discussed further in chapter six.

⁴⁰ Brooks p. 20

Stripping aside their settings and styles; works which are constructed in such a way as to represent a divided world, both the most exotic Melodrama and the most restrained twentieth century Current Affairs programme, if each works from the premise of the divided world of the virtuous and the vicious, and of the conflict inherent between them, are all motivated by the what Faber calls the fear of the 'fall into emptiness' and Brooks describes as the 'vertiginous feeling of standing over the abyss'. This is so whether they are realist dramas, fantastical constructions, or 'factual' presentations. The intent of all such works is to stave off a sense of the 'fall into emptiness', to dispel the idea that life is meaningless, through the mechanism of making the world intelligible, by assigning guilt. For example the excerpts on the video from the item about the Romanian orphan *Elaina* show the divided universe is present in several ways. The divide occurs between the haves and the have nots, (a) in Bucharest as demonstrated by the images of fountains and palaces, contrasted with the images of children begging in the traffic; (b) in images of Elaina being met by her new mother and given presents, being hugged and cuddled and shown pictures of her new home and her adoptive family, and the shots of the orphans crowded together in the orphanage, one adult to many (number unspecified) children, of rows of beds and cots, shot deliberately through the bars at the end of the bed to create the sense of containment and institutionalisation and of children's paintings and drawings some done directly on the walls, indicative of lack of space and lack of resources; (c) the implied contrast between the children in the orphanage and children here at home in well cared for in New Zealand, the shots of institutionalised orphans that nobody wants are designed to bring that to mind; (d) the injustice of a situation where there are children wanting homes, parents and a secure future and parents willing to adopt them, if only government rules and regulations could be got out of the way.

By projecting the division of the world, the sense of unfairness, of arbitrariness, and chaos, that we as human beings contain within our psyches out onto a tangible object and situation, we as individuals and as communities deal with our fear that the unpredictability of life will overwhelm us. To use the *Elaina* example

again; the plight of unwanted children is a world-wide problem and a problem that makes 'us' the community uncomfortable because we are powerless to deal with it adequately. An item such as the one on *Elaina* projects our personal 'quilt' and concern about the general situation onto a specific instance. It thus enables us to participate as a community in the rescue of *Elaina*. This gives us a sense of having accomplished something. Our worry about the plight of these children can now be decreased because we have seen one child, who is representative of all the children, re-housed. In this sense the item enables us to partake of a ritual purging of any individual guilt we may feel about the situation. This purging of guilt would apply to all stories about lost, abandoned, and badly treated children where an answer to their situation is offered. If we examine the situation objectively we can know that the rehousing of *Elaina* is unlikely to benefit any of the other children. But seeing *Elaina* rehoused makes us feel better and one of the key elements of the Melodramatic Impulse, and of ritual is that they operate largely at the feeling level. This particular item, *Elaina*, gives us a further ritual step we can take. As individuals we are absolved from the 'guilt' of not taking a child into our own homes because we can see that it is too difficult, because governments are getting in our way. Thus we are free to take no further responsibility for the plight of these children, while rejoicing in *Elaina's* good fortune.

Symbol

The power of the copy, of the image, of the symbol, is an effective element in both religious ritual and in the ritual of the Melodrama and its offshoots. The classical Melodrama was redolent with the use of sign. The use of sign and symbol, in modern current is a legacy of this 'classical' Melodrama where the scenery indicated mood, the costumes and the objects actors carried, or the animals that accompanied them indicated their moral status. Such images continue in today's Current Affairs. In the full-length item the shots of Paea Wolfgram with his wife and family reaching to touch the hands of the excited Tongan children who surround him, reinforce the voice-over that calls him a gentle giant, and his own words that in boxing he can still be a gentleman. The

three elements, but particularly the pictures of him relating to children produce a composite image of goodness. But the use of sign in Current Affairs, as in the 'classical' Melodrama is deeper than a mere pointing the way of moral status. Brooks says of the Melodrama:

'...the drama of the sign is played out across a whole scale, or staff, of codes ...a set of different registers of the sign, which can reinforce and also relay one another. Melodrama tends toward total theatre, its sign projected, sequentially or simultaneously, on several planes.'⁴¹

In Current Affairs too, the signs are often working at more than one level. There is the first level where signs act as fingers pointing towards a furthering of the action, so in that sense they are signposts but at the same time they can act on different level so they also point to 'a level of reality which otherwise is inaccessible,' and in this way each sign also functions as a symbol for it '... opens up dimensions within man's own psyche that correspond to these levels[of reality] and are inaccessible to conceptual knowledge.'⁴² Examples are the use of suffering children, the Romanian orphans for example, or women, the victims of Harbottle, or indigenous people, the aborigines in the item about euthanasia, as signs or rather symbols of innocence. It is the echoes that each of these elements carries that gives them their power. For example ideas of and about the innocence of children, the forbearance of women, and the harmonious life-style of indigenous people are contained within each of these images. By presenting such images on the screen and giving the viewer access to some of the common overtones that reverberate with such images, the programme makers also give the viewers access to the personal harmonics that they add to the projected image.

In addition such symbolic images enable the concepts of the cosmic struggle of good and evil, and of the inherently divided universe the clash of elemental

⁴¹ Brooks p.46

⁴² Owe Wikstrom *Ritual Studies In the History of Religions A challenge for the psychology of religion* in Heimbrock & Boudewijnse *Current Studies On Rituals perspectives for the psychology of religion* p. 65

forces, to be captured and encapsulated in domestic incident, and thus to be examined at a level that is generally able to be comprehended.

Quoting Tillich, Owe Wikstrom writes of the symbol and the sign, representations of or sign posts to the Other. Tillich says:

'it lies in the nature of things that the truth or a belief must be expressed symbolically since the transcendent, absolute or infinite, which is not a thing among other things, cannot be formulated in concepts. Both art and religion are therefore compelled to work with images and symbols.'⁴³

Both the Melodrama proper, and the Melodramatic Impulse in Current Affairs, use symbols as purveyors of meaning; symbols that often have had religious force in the past in their connection to the concepts of propitiation and redemption, and their implied identification with the key mythic roles of victim, people, hero, and fate or God. These major roles have been incorporated into the super-stories of myth, the epics. It is in re-awakening in the mind of the viewer, of the stories and images of myth, that the constructions of reality which are presented as the 'real' truth of Current Affairs programmes, are given their continuing power. An example of this reawakening is the image of the person who is larger than life, the super hero of disaster prevention, or of sports victory (Jonah Lomu). This person plays the same role in the mind of the modern viewer that the super-hero of myth played in the past. Though not all cultures share the same mythic stories, Odysseus is not Maui, (but both share attributes in common, god-like descent, and super-cunning for example), in all cultures there is a hero figure of myth who can be brought to mind when the super-hero of today appears on the screen. Today we may still enjoy stories about Super-man but we cannot believe in him,

⁴³ Owe Wikstrom *Ritual Studies In the History of Religions A challenge for the psychology of religion* in Heimbrock & Boudewijnse *Current Studies On Rituals perspectives for the psychology of religion* p. 65

(if that were ever possible) but we can and do believe in our current heroes, Jonah Lomu, (rugby) Paea Wolfgram, (boxing) Matthew Ridge (league).

Chapter Six

MELODRAMA: THE INFLUENCE OF 'SOCIAL TYPES' AND THE SPECTACLE STAGE.

The Melodramatic impulse is driven by the desire to confront and overcome the hostile forces of the universe. The particular dramatic form that became known as the Melodrama was the result of the conjunction of the technical developments in the art of scenery, the growing interest in social types which led to the development of sociology and psychology, the influence of the Romantic movement with the search for the sublime in nature, the influence of industrialisation, and urbanisation and the growing plurality of religious expression.

The connotations of the word [Melodrama] are probably similar for us all.

They include: the indulgence of strong emotionalism: moral polarisation and schematisation; extreme states of being, situation, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good, and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plotings, suspense, breathtaking peripety.¹

The development of theatrical Melodrama.

The Melodramatic impulse has travelled a long cultural history, from mimesis and magic, through myth epic and ritual to the theatrical development, which through the influence of the Romantic movement brought together the combination of emotive effects that we today know as 'the Melodrama'. While vital elements of this form are its mythic resonances and concern with psychological types I agree with Louis James that, 'There is nothing wrong in the intellectualisation of 'popular' cultural

¹ Brooks p.9-10

traditions' but '... we should be aware of what we are doing.'² It is therefore, not possible to properly consider the development of Melodrama and its application to the medium of film and television without considering the origins of the genre. And to consider the relationship of the physical, the value of 'performance' in relation to Melodrama it is useful to begin with a consideration of the origins of the word itself. Melodrama is an amalgamation of the words 'melo' meaning music and 'drama', - a play.

Since theatrical events have been recorded, (the earliest surviving script seems to be *The Triumph of Horus*, which included songs, and 'dramatic business' as well as speeches and was performed on and around the sacred lake at the temple of Edfu about 1200 BC,) most theatrical entertainments have included songs, mime gymnastics, and other displays of skill such as jugglers. (The French word for jugglers, *jongleurs*, also means a deceiver, one who put up a front or on a show.) Often these displays were presented at fairs and religious festivals before the main event and in the "intervals" between "serious" plays. But this does not mean they were a trivial or unimportant part of the performance; for such displays are an expression of the performance values that create the theatre, they are an intrinsic part of the nature of theatrical events. In the sixteenth century the physical received a boost in England with the arrival from Europe of the Comedia del 'arte who brought with them their form of mime, which was subsequently to become the harlequinade.

Displays of physical skill have always been popular especially with people whose own work involves great physical skill, verbal dexterity is more of an acquired taste popular with the literary classes. At its best non-dialogue (or low-dialogue), entertainment has always had very high performance values, values which today's television programmes like *Gladiators*, *On The Edge*, or *Circus of the Stars* ably demonstrates. These values are frequently incorporated into the theatre of dialogue, and of course into the film, which uses them in a variety of ways from clowning to fight scenes. (They are especially well developed in the spectacle and

² James p.3-4

action films of the nineteen thirties and forties e.g. the swashbuckling Errol Flynn as Robin Hood swinging from a chandelier to chandelier before landing on and demolishing the villainous sheriff of Nottingham.) They continue to exist in productions for their own sake, for the pleasure inherent in giving, and in witnessing a skilful physical performance, and as a substitute for dialogue. But as Disher says towards the end of the eighteenth century, when the Melodrama became popular with the middle and upper class audiences at the Theatres Royal when 'Fine speaking was no longer the all in all,' and '... By-play became important.'³; the substitution of action for words moved from the canvass entertainment for the 'hoi polloi' of fair ground crowds and audiences from the factories, to the gilt of the proscenium arch as fare for a 'a respectable' audience.'

'Profits accrued. Instead of being confined to booths at fairs, the people's entertainments needed permanent quarters. Paris had its Ambigu Comique and London its Saddler's Wells, which were so alike in character that one imported spectacles from, the other. ... Covent Garden and Drury Lane had secondary companies, recruited from the musick-houses, to play wordless after-pieces. ...the credit for inventing which, belongs to Rousseau. His *pygmalion*, ... 1775, is a brief sketch - mainly the sculptor's soliloquy as he amorously deliberates whether to disrobe Galatea with his chisel, while music, between each of his utterances expresses the state of his mind. At about the same time Georg Benda brought out at Gotha a version of *Ariadne Auf Naxos* in monologue form that gave the spoken words musical accompaniment. The French device was called melodrame, the German Melodrama ... Beaumarchais, in an outburst against the decline of song, wrote, "we shall have, instead of operas, melodrames".⁴

The substitution for dialogue in these works was imposed both from within, by the demands made by the piece and the performers own inclination for

³ Maurice Willson Disher *Blood and Thunder* p.49

⁴ *ibid.*

movement and gesture, and from without by the audience's desire for action, for spectacle. But there was a second external demand for movement and gesture imposed on the players whose work was eventually to become the 'melodrama'. An additional spur to the development of the Melodrama proper was the establishment of non dialogue theatres to avoid the patent or charter systems of France and England. This was a situation that had long plagued the professional theatre. If a play was not approved by the censor it could not be performed; (incidentally a system first introduced by the Christian church in the fourth century,) and theatre managers could be fined or imprisoned as vagabonds. So the actors invented ways of circumventing the law. Maurice Willson Disher details the process in *Blood and Thunder*.

'Strolling players ... invented the dodge of the ecriteaux, scrolls for people to read the dialogue that actors were forbidden to speak. These were lettered audiences though the theatres were at the fairs. The greater public then, not only could not read but demanded from any play that people should be able to follow the story without having to understand the words. No authority need be sought for this: it still so in humble "flicks". For such a very sound and sufficient reason the popularity of dumb-show had always existed. ... strolling players were forced to give the masses what they wanted. There had to be a new kind of acting that was akin to acrobatics, juggling animal's antics, and trick-riding. ⁵

This new kind of acting was to develop into the Melodrama.. Brooks says of the acting style of Melodrama as:

⁵ Maurice Willson Disher *Blood and Thunder* pp.48-9

'Melodrama handles its feelings and ideas virtually as plastic entities, visual and tactile models held out for all to see and to handle. Emotions are given a full acting-out, a full representation before our eyes. ... Nothing is *understood*, all is *overstated*. Such moments provide us with the joy of a full emotional indulgence, the pleasures of an unadulterated exploitation of what we recognise from our psychic lives as one possible way to be, the victory of one integral inner force.'⁶

Acting

A 'diction and an acting style equally inflated and unreal', a style of acting which is one of Melodramas most commonly recognised characteristics is often labelled as 'ham' acting. In part this style takes its origins from the need in the dumb-show to over-express feelings. But that is only part of the story. In its original conception Melodramatic gesture was not developed to present a consciously overblown style of acting to the audience. In his work *Melodramatic Imagination* Peter Brooks speaks of Melodrama as the 'text of muteness'. In *New Australian Cinema* McFarlane and Mayer add 'where words are not wholly adequate for the expression of meanings' and (again quoting Brooks) the 'Melodramatic messages must be formulated through other registers of the sign.' This intensity of emotion directs the audience's attention and leaves the spectator in no doubt as to the moral condition of the character. But it also engages the audience at a psychic level provoking an intense response. The excess of Melodrama was designed as an aid to identification with character and situation, enabling the audience to vicariously participate in the action by experiencing the range of emotions experienced by the sympathetic characters and thus attain a catharsis. In its original Greek conception catharsis was seen as a spur to moral or 'right' action. There can be no doubt as to the 'right' course of action where intensity of emotion is transmitted through 'overblown' gesture and stylistically presented depictions of 'right' and 'wrong'.

⁶ Brooks p.41

The development of this drama of excessive gesture coincided with, and was influenced by, an interest in character which was the beginning of the modern sciences of psychology and sociology. This expanding interest in these sciences, particularly as they were applied to classifying 'types' of people, applied to acting technique was a second major social influence that produced the distinctive 'style' of Melodrama.

'... The science of the expression of the passions also directly affected dramatic theory. Michael Booth quotes the theatrical periodical *The Prompter* of as early as 1735:

'every passion, has its peculiar and appropriate look, and every look its adopted and particular gesture'.

Louis James says that nineteenth century theories about the physical expression of emotion help us to see why Melodramatic acting was not, then as is conceived today, simply a set of unreal clichés, but was an attempt at psychological realism.

'As William James indicated psychological theories were remarkably close to Melodramatic acting styles.'

And he considers the work of Charles Le Brun whose

'*Conference ...sur l'expression generale et particuliere* (1698) ... was constantly translated, expanded and adapted: ... This influential little work analysed the passions from the basics extremes, such as 'Extreme Anger', to the subtler expressions such as 'Admiration', 'Esteem' and 'Veneration'. Of particular importance was the accompanying series of illustrations, showing how the face appeared under each emotion.'

Le Brun's work says James, appeared in handbooks for actors for example in his compact *The Road to the Stage* (1827) 'Leman Thomas Rede

'appended a 'celebrated analytic view of the effect of various emotions on the human frame which if not made a substitute for the actual passion will not be regarded with indifference by those really studying the Stage' The review is roughly based on Le Brun.⁷⁸

This says James

'helped to confirm theatre in its concern with the portrayal of passion. But, paradoxically, it also shaped Melodrama's concern with types. ... it is not too far a step from the typology of 'Affection' or 'Hatred' to the types of the hero, the heroine, or the comic man. Again, the conventions of Melodramatic characters must be seen against an age in which phrenology was a popular science, and in which the interest in classifying types' ranged from such popular series as Kenny Meadow's *Heads of the People* (1848) to Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851-64) and the beginnings of sociology.⁷⁹

In addition to this concern with the precise portrayal of every shade of emotion Melodramatic acting comes directly from the controlled precise acrobatic and dance tradition of the dumb-show. This

⁷ James pp. 8-9

⁸ James p. 8

⁹ *ibid.*, pp.8-9

allowed Melodrama to bring together two disparate dimensions: the concern with passion and movement and the demand for the romantic and the picturesque. The style is essentially balletic and operatic - writers and the acting profession such as Rede indicate the importance of dancing and singing for training the actor. The actor must study even the ways of moving gracefully on and off the stage. The gestures themselves are large and precise: Boucicault demanded that they be "distinct and deliberate. When you look at a person you do not turn your eye but you turn your whole head. If you want to point, do *that (with the arm straight out from the shoulder)* - the action must go from the shoulder." The action creates a picture and moves into tableau. "Another thing is, do not let your gesture be too short ... You do not know how long you can "rest upon a good one". It tires you but it will not tire the spectator"¹⁰

Melodrama and the rise of scenery

Along with the expansion in the popularity and 'respectability' of the theatre of action came the technical advances in lighting and scenery shifting of the nineteenth century which enabled the stage to create effects today associated with block buster films. Sea battles, sinking ships, burning castles and even exploding volcanoes were now not beyond its resources. The public loved it and came back for more :

¹⁰ James pp. 11-12

'As part of *The Critic* in 1779, Sheridan staged an ambitious theatrical sea-battle (using 'dry' effects). It seems that the type of the marine or naval scene was so familiar in the theatre of the day that he was confident he could mock its conventions. This he did brilliantly. This climactic Armada battle of Puff's play calls for fleets to engage and advance, and for the 'Spanish fleet [to be] destroyed by fire-ships, etc.'. If we try to envisage what happened in 1779, it should be in the knowledge that Drury Lane Theatre, was then served by Philippe de Loutherbourg, one of the greatest contrivers of stage illusion of all time. The Armada play in *The Critic* may have been parody, but the fun did not lie in a technically maladroit presentation. As A. C. Clinton-Baddeley has observed, 'Sheridan made the joke the other way round, burlesquing not with a minimum but with an excess of patriotic splendour.' Contemporary accounts refer to the battle as 'executed in the most masterly manner', and 'miraculous'. Cecil Price quotes the *London Evening Post* as saying: 'The deception of the sea was very strong, and the perspective of the ships, together with the mode of their sailing, truly picturesque.'

The emergence of nautical drama in the latter half of the eighteenth century can be partly accounted for in Puff's own words: 'Ay, this is always the way at the theatre: give these fellows a good thing, and they never know when to have done with it' (*The Critic*, Act II, Scene 2).'¹¹

From the beginning of the nineteenth century the spectacle stage and its effects went from strength to strength, and the tradition continues as strongly today enhanced by computer graphics. It had its beginnings in the sixteenth century. With the move of the theatre indoors in the late sixteenth century came the advent of elaborate and changeable scenery

¹¹ Derek Forbes *Water Drama* in Bradley, James and Sharratt *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film and Television 1800-1976* p. 93

'With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 came the development of scenery and illusion in the public theatres in England. The use of water on the stage in the form of hydraulic effects became fashionable. A theatrical fountain spouts as early as 1665, if we may go by *Dryden's* stage directions for *The Indian Emperor*. By 1692 *The Fairy Queen* requires cascades, side-fountains, and a central fountain 'where the Water rises about twelve Foot.' At about this time Henry Winstanley built a 'Water Theatre' in Piccadilly, to feature 'the greatest curiosities in waterworks, the like never performed by any'. The trick fountains, spouts, and mingled fire-and-water effects of Winstanley's Waterworks were used to create moving tableaux, a 'flying dragon', for example,'¹²

By the late eighteenth century this scenery had become more than a back-drop with spectacular moments provided by fire and water. Scenery had become intrinsic. Following Romantic ideas about place scenery set the 'mood' of the piece.

'The rediscovery by the Romantic movement of the delights of wild or unimproved nature was avidly taken up by the theatre. Ravines, ruins, windswept and misshapen trees, grottos, caves, pools, meandering streams, waterfalls, were the fashion, almost the obligation, on the painted scenery of appropriate Melodramas and pantomimes.'¹³

For in Melodrama where good and evil are externalised music and signs, especially in *mise-en-scene*, the scene itself becomes a sign e.g. a castle is at best mysterious, but often the site of evil, while a humble cottage will harbour the innocent.

¹² Derek Forbes *Water Drama* in Bradley, James and Sharratt *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film and Television 1800-1976* pp. 91-92

¹³ *ibid.*, p 95

So Melodrama comes to the stage with the development of advanced lighting, from oil-lamps and candles, through limelight and gas, which was capable of producing many different lighting effects, to the advent of electric lighting on the stage. The advances in lighting are supported with advances in pyrotechnics and plumbing which enabled Charles Dibdin to install a great tank with a capacity of between 45,000 and 50,000 gallons (the dimensions of the tank are unclear in Dibdin's writings) at Sadler's Wells Theatre. This enabled the presentation of such spectacular productions as *The Siege of Gibraltar*

'For his first aquatic production, *The Siege of Gibraltar* (1804), Dibdin seems to have used built-up scenery at one side only of the stage. The setting for the battle scene

'discovered to public view ... a Sheet of Water, ... with a representation of the Rock and fortress of Gibraltar on one side. and the mimic ocean. spreading itself (*Memoirs*, pp 61-2). Dibdin. put only the last scene fully on the water. The whole thing contained a variety of scenes and songs and was surprisingly close in character to the dramatised documentary, with lyrics, of today's; expository or political theatre. The playbills and advertisements for *The Siege of Gibraltar* drew attention to 'Real Ships' of sixty-four, seventy-four and one hundred guns, which

work down with the wind on their starboard beam and haul the wind their larboard tacks, to regain their situation ... The floating batteries take fire, some blowing up with a dreadful explosion, and others, after, burning to the water's edge, sink to the bottom; ... the gallant Sir Roger Curtis appears in his boat to the drowning Spaniards. The British tars for that purpose plunging into the water.

Dibdin. boasts of the employment of the Woolwich Dockyard Shipwrights to make the working models in exact imitation .. even to the slightest minutiae', while the sight of

the boats by which Sir Roger, Curtis is recorded to have preserved the lives of many of the drowning Spanish sailors, suddenly darting from the side branches of the water, into the heart of the mimic ocean with children for the sailors picking up other children, who were instantly seen swimming and affecting to struggle with the waves

caused 'the enthusiasm of the audience' (and, clearly, Dibdin. himself) to exceed 'all bounds' (*Bold letter extracts from the Memoir of Charles Dibdin*, pp. 60, 62).¹⁴

But equally, as Melodrama comes to the stage after the advent of the Romantic movement, the technical advances in lighting, plumbing and stage machinery were used to give concrete expression to the scenic idea that accompanied the ideas of the Romantic movement. Louis James says. 'The emergence of the Romantic movement and Melodrama in England were contemporary and connected in many ways'¹⁵ Put simply the Romantic movement sought to parallel the various moods and emotions of human nature with the various moods and scenes of nature 'herself' and 'nature was viewed with childlike simplicity, as being sympathetic to man' Therefore simple 'natural' scenes best expressed the 'essential passions of the heart'.¹⁶

Romanticism

Romanticism which in its literary form appeared around 1750 relied on imagination, a subjective approach, freedom of thought and expression, and an idealization of nature. The term romantic first appeared in 18th-century English and originally meant works that resembled medieval romances. Intellectual

¹⁴ Forbes p. 99

¹⁵ James p. 9

¹⁶ *ibid.*

inspiration for the romantic approach came from Rousseau who propounded both the cult of the individual and the importance of the freedom of the human spirit. Goethe in his historical drama *Götz von Berlichingen* (1773; trans. 1799), a historical drama of a 16th-century robber knight, celebrated revolt against political authority and inaugurated the *Sturm und Drang* (storm and stress) movement, a forerunner of German romanticism. In England the preface to the second edition of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800 was a key document outlining the themes of the Romantic movement particularly the importance of feeling and imagination to poetic creation.

Under the influence of the ideas of Romanticism a body of literature developed that emphasized content over form, and encouraged the development of complex and fast-moving plots, and allowed elements of the grotesque to be presented along with the sublime. In their choice of heroes, also, the romantic writers replaced the static universal types of classical 18th-century literature with more complex, idiosyncratic characters; and much drama, fiction, and poetry was devoted to a celebration of Rousseau's "common man." This was fuelled by a general idea that the life of simple country folk was better, purer, more noble than the life of those in the cities, contaminated as they were by pollution and corruption. William Blake, writing in the poem 'Milton' 1808, speaks of the 'dark Satanic mills' that were beginning to deface the English countryside; or Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, 1805 speaking of '... the close and overcrowded haunts/Of cities, where the human heart is sick.'

Along with the celebration of the 'common man' one of the great themes of Romanticism was the ideal of freedom. Clements cites these examples of Romantic Literature opposing oppression;

‘ In William Tell (1804; trans. 1825), by the German dramatist Friedrich von Schiller, an obscure medieval mountaineer becomes an immortal symbol of opposition to tyranny and foreign rule. ... Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley, ... wrote resoundingly in protest against social and political wrongs and in defense of the struggles for liberty in Italy and Greece. The Russian poet Aleksandr Sergeyevich Pushkin, ... attracted notoriety for his “Ode to Liberty” (1820); like many other romanticists, he was persecuted for political subversion and sent into exile.’¹⁷

Another important theme was ‘Nature’, an interest in nature and natural surrounding especially as they convey mood and/or moral tone to the work. The earliest literary work to deal with the ideas of unspoiled scenery and the innocent life of rural dwellers is ‘The Seasons’ 1726-30, by Scottish poet James Thomson. ‘Often combined with this feeling for rural life is a generalized romantic melancholy, a sense that change is imminent, that a way of life is being threatened’¹⁸ Thomas Gray’s ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ 1751, is an early example of such ‘melancholy’ literature. ‘The melancholic strain later developed as a separate theme, as in John Keats’s “Ode on Melancholy” (1820), or—in a different time and place—in the works of American writers: the novels and tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne, which probe the depths of human nature in puritanical New England, or the macabre tales and melancholy poetry of Edgar Allan Poe’¹⁹.

Coupled with the charm of unspoiled nature, was the lure of the exotic as romantic writers drew on the mysticism of the Middle Ages for themes and settings or chose strange and exotic localities for their works such as the highlands and islands of Scotland, Sir Walter Scott and MacPherson or the mystic East Coleridge ‘Kubla Khan’ 1797. This nostalgia for the Gothic past mingled with the power of nature and the tendency to the melancholic produced a fondness for

¹⁷ Robert J. Clements "Romanticism (literature)", *Encarta*.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

ruins, graveyards, and the supernatural as themes. The combinations of these themes is found in Wordsworth's 'Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey' (from the Lyrical Ballads), 'The Castle of Otranto' (1764) by Horace Walpole 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel' 1805, by Scott, and also in his historical novels, the Waverley series. 1814-25.,

The interest in the irrational and supernatural was reinforced by both the move away from eighteenth century rationalism and also by the rediscovery by scholars of folktales and ballads. The collection by the brothers Grimm are widely known as are the stories of Hans Christian Andersen, the latter based on ideas drawn from folklore. The interest in the idea of the doppelgänger (German for 'double') comes from these tales as does a resurgence of a variety of ghosts and spirits. The interest in the doppelgänger is related to the growing interest in psychology.

The concerns of poets, novelists and dramatists were paralleled by the concerns of visual artists who produced highly imaginative painting that often had a dreamlike or visionary quality.

'Whereas classical and neoclassical art is calm and restrained in feeling and clear and complete in expression, romantic art characteristically strives to express by suggestion states of feeling too intense, mystical, or elusive to be clearly defined.'²⁰

Romantic painters often chose nature, especially wild or exotic nature as their subject matter. They were concerned with depicting scenes that were likely to evoke subjective responses, scenes that evoked mood and called up the idea of the sublime in nature, scenes that appealed to the passion, scene that were mysterious, melancholy and redolent of the supernatural, the scenes of the Melodrama. Examples of the Romantic ideal expressed in visual work are the illustrations of Blake and the brooding, sometimes nightmarish pictures of the

²⁰ Romanticism (art), *Encarta*

Swiss-English painter Henry Fuseli, and the sombre etchings of monsters and demons by the Spanish artist Francisco Goya.²¹ So:

'Wordsworth's fascination with

Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside
As if a voice were in them The sick sight
And giddy prospect of the raving stream.
The unfettered clouds and region of the Heavens
Tumult and peace the darkness and the light

(*Prelude* Bk VI lines 631-5)

was given stage expression in a Melodrama such as *A Tale of Mystery*, with its evocation of 'the wild and mountainous country called the Nanto of Arpennaz; with pines and massy rocks...The increasing storm of lightning, thunder, hail, and rain becomes terrible.' The attraction to the strange and the wonderful that inspired Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) was felt by audiences at spectacle and gothic Melodramas.

Most important, the wild and strange setting ... was used both to give a sense of the wonderful, and to highlight the passions of the characters.²²

Musical Tradition

Music is an intrinsic element of the Melodrama. The use of music gives the Melodrama the first part of its name from *melos* the Greek for music. It intensifies the delineation of primary psyche roles. It marks the entrances of characters, important characters may have their own theme. It is particularly important in scenes without dialogue, mute areas of the text, and will establish the resonances of a scene as its name suggest. The tradition of music with movement was well established by the eighteenth century. It is found recorded as early as the church liturgical dramas performed by clerics from the 10th through the 13th century.

²¹ *Romanticism (art)*, *Encarta*

²² James p.10

These included plainchant and other music. In the miracle, mystery, and morality plays of the 13th-16th centuries, popular songs, chant, and instrumental music were used to accompany dances and processions and to heighten the dramatic or comic effect²³. Another strand of the musical tradition came from the court, in the form of the masque, a form of dramatic writing, featuring poetry, music, and dance, popular in 17th-century England. The actors wore masks and usually represented allegorical or mythical characters. The roots of the masque may be found in Italian and French pageants and masquerades, as well as in the English disguising, a performance descended from the practice of mumming and the art of the troubadours, in which actors spoke, sang, and danced based on allegorical or mythological subjects.

The tradition has developed into several forms, ballet, pantomime, opera, light opera or operetta, the musical, the music hall, and the play with incidental music or musical numbers.

So, though the original Melodramas, playing in the minor theatres which did not have licences to perform 'plays' as such, were supposed to be without dialogue, they were anything but silent. Music added atmosphere and songs made up for the lack of speeches 'Music was so important to Dibdin's *The Siege of Gibraltar* that he published the 'Book of Songs of this,[work] ... and of some of his later aqua-dramas and harliquinades.'²⁴

The Romantic attitude to music was of prime importance to the Melodrama. The first recognised melodrame, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Pygmalion* (1774), was

²³ *Music, Theatrical, Encarta*.

²⁴ Forbes p.99

'a monologue with action scored against violin music, and written with Rousseau's concept of the connection between music and human emotion in mind. Engel and Siddons wrote specifically about the relation of different kinds of music to dramatise gesture and theorised about how music reflected emotional states'.²⁵

The Melodrama's use of music has today been directly taken up by film and television. Music is a vital element in giving the correct resonance to a shot, music establishes for example, whether a scenic view is romantic or sinister.

'Virtue Triumphant' and 'Brutal Realism'

While Romanticism was one major philosophical and social force propelling the ideas of the Melodrama of the late eighteenth century, another force, according to Disher, was the concept of 'Virtue Triumphant' which reached its apex in the 'Victorianism' of the nineteenth century. 'Virtue Triumphant' was the social premium put upon virtue, wrongly attributed to Queen Victoria, but which nevertheless produced what we today call Victorianism. Though scathing of the idea he labels "Virtue Triumphant"

'it has always been interpreted to mean, not a universal contempt for worldly advantages, but the reverse - a belief that virtue, though held to be its own reward, is not so unprofitable financially as might be supposed; in other words, piety can be made to pay ... the millennium is not when men cease from self-seeking, but when all men know they cannot be rich, .. unless they heed the Ten Commandments. Since this is founded on the nursery teaching, "No pudding unless you're good" it satisfies the unthinking.'²⁶

Disher gives a detailed description of its development

²⁵ James p.10

²⁶ Maurice Willson Disher *Blood and Thunder* p.11

'In the background was a religious revival marked by ecstasy, and epilepsy that spread, as the eighteenth century advanced, throughout England. All western civilisation was acquiring a sense of moral responsibility like a reformed rake bringing up a family. ... Desire to be elevated was all that mattered. Sheer love of virtue caused a widespread desire to shed tears. ... There was a frenzy in England and France to make existence conform to the accepted moral pattern; Nature and morality were one, and evil was caused by interference with Nature.'²⁷

Here Jean Jacques Rousseau comes into the story. ...The first source of evil was inequality; from inequality came riches; of riches were born luxury and idleness; from luxury came the arts and from idleness the sciences.'²⁸

As the century progressed and the technical resources of the theatre increased the ability of the stage to portray lifelike scenes, and with this increased pictorial ability went the box office appeal of witnessing what Disher terms 'Brutal Realism'. The ideal moved from a characterisation of the sublime to degradation. Says Disher

²⁷ Disher *Blood and Thunder* p. 23

²⁸ *ibid.*

... Late Victorianism showed at its best in Sims. ... Early in the 'eighties his autobiography mentions, "I wrote a series of special articles 'Horrible London'." Plain records give them a place in the history of London. as the cause of "much excitement" to improve matters. For a dozen years his pen was engaged on the business of pleasure until chance brought it back to a play about waifs and strays-*Les Deux Gosses*, by Pierre Decourecelle, whose faithful representation of a hospital Ward was a triumph for realism at the Ambigu in the February of 1896. Sims and Shirley went at once to see it, wrote their English version which they called a "new and original Melodrama" partly because it left out the hospital - too daring an idea even for Sims-and staged at the Princess's on 21 May as *The Two Boys* for a single copyright performance. When thrown open to the public in the September it had the irresistible title of *The Two Little Vagabonds*. At the start there is a matrimonial quarrel. In the bitterness of his heart George Thornton apprentices his infant son, Dick, to a burglar. But the boy devotes his time to caring for a sickly companion Wally, who goes home with him when the Thorntons make it up; and now Dick's peculiar education comes in useful, for he rescues his father from a blackmailer's den, by helping him through a skylight. On their way home they cross a canal by the lock and open the sluice-gates; their pursuer, close upon them, misses his foothold, and is drowned. After that nothing remains except the deathbed scene of Wally for the sake of tidying things up. *Two Little Vagabonds* ran for the better part of a year, and was revived after two or three months. It was still more popular on tour. There was profit in realism, no matter how the term was interpreted.²⁹

²⁹ Disher *Melodrama Plots That Thrilled* Brutal Realism pp. 74-76

From Spectacle Stage to Television

Peter Brooks says of Melodrama that it '... can ... be located historically and culturally, ... there is a form, calling itself Melodrama, that comes into existence near the start of the nineteenth century, and ... this form, with its distinctive features is vital to the modern imagination'³⁰ Melodrama continues to affect the modern imagination for it is from the theatrical tradition of spectacle and physical skill with its concepts of naturalism and verisimilitude, that the popular cinema has sprang.

'It seems almost natural now that the staging concept of naturalistic spectacle should be carried into film which could do it better 'In the words of Montrose Moses the Melodrama 'has flourished on the screen because one of its chief characteristics was a dependence on variety of background, quick shifting from one place to another, water and land effect, three-dimensional situations which called into play all the athletic power of the players. These demands could be met and even amplified on the screen'.³¹ The stage had originally met the same needs with a clumsy and conventional staging method. The screen, with the fluidity and authenticity of the camera, could easily surpass the stage at its own game.'³²

It is this fluidity and authenticity of the camera that has enabled Melodrama to become the form of the cinema and television. The externalism of events and emotions fit the needs of film and video for easily accessible well composed picture and for variety through action. The theatrical tradition of spectacle and physical skill, coupled with the concepts of naturalism and verisimilitude was a tradition which had little need of verbally complicated plots,. This theatre needed a story on which to hang the action and the spectacle. And what was enthralling

³⁰ Brooks p. xv

³¹ M. J. Moses *The American Dramatist*, Pt. IV. P. 305

³² Nicholas A Vardac *Stage to Screen: Theatrical Origins of Early Film:: David Garrick to D.W. Griffith* p..20

on the stage was doubly effective on the screen e.g. *Intolerance, Orphans of the Storm*, adapted (circuitously) from the stage play *Les Deux Orphans*.

^ With another collaborator in 1874 he[Dennerly] wrote for the Porte-Saint-Martin *Les Deux Orphans* which for blood and thunder was the best version of the Babes in the Wood ever acted. It is a Melodrama of the eighteenth century in Paris, ... The evil Marquis de Presles has robbed Louise of her inheritance. Now she begs in the snow on the church steps. But she has faithful friends. Both Hennette, the other orphan who is her constant companion, and Pierre Frochard, the crippled knife-grinder, are resolved to protect her. When the helpless girls are sent to the Salpetriere, Pierre discovers that his brother, the wild, burly ruffian Jacques, holds the power of life and death over Louise. In the garret of La Frochard (their horrific mother) villain and hero draw their knives for the finest duel in the whole struggle of virtue against vice. Nobody protested. ... In New York a version "specially adapted" for the Union Square Theatre ... ran from the December of 1874 to the following June. Kate Clatxtoh, the blind orphan, bought the rights and toured the play until Hollywood turned it into a tale of the Revolution, *Orphans Of the Storm* and film-fans thought the play "" left out something"³³

Similar ideas, the ideas of virtue at first persecuted and repressed and then finally revealed, restored and rewarded are present in the stories chosen by television Current Affairs teams. Thus most television Current Affairs is essentially Melodramatic because it remains firmly connected to its 'high performance' antecedents. In *The Melodramatic Imagination* Peter Brooks writes that 'Melodrama tends, toward total theatre, its sign projected, sequentially or simultaneously, on several planes'³⁴ It was the advent of the spectacle stage, with its elaborate machinery that made the

³³. Disher *Plots that Thrilled* pp.72-73

³⁴ Brook p.46

construction of Romantic and 'romantic' vistas, denoting innocence and happiness, or high tower denoting villainy, technically possible.

The Melodramatic form and television

An important aspect of 19th century Melodrama was its documentary character. In this the Melodrama spectacular was the equivalent of the 'News at Six'.³⁵ This function was begun in the late eighteenth century when Nelson's victories and Napoleon's defeat were displayed in the Melodrama theatre.

'In the Dury lane season of 1793-4 Sheridan gave *The Glorious First of June*. Rapidly scrambled together, the piece was given less than five weeks after the actual battle. ... there is general understanding of the way in which the nautical drama of the time relates to the Napoleonic wars. Consistent victories were won by the British navy, in actions large and small, during a period of twenty-five years. (The army's record was not so good.) In an age without television or film, and with a journalism capable of being read only by a literate minority and very inadequately illustrated if illustrated at all, the stage played its part in attempting to put on show the exciting current events that audiences were eager to hear about and see. Theatres had a 'news-real' function.'³⁵

As Derek Forbes says the Melodrama theatre was performing the same function as the six o'clock news, as Holmes and Ralston do today. It was hurriedly put together 'rapidly scrambled' Forbes says, in the manner of most news bulletins, and it was bringing the events of the day to the people and in a form that they could comprehend. Instead of large navies there were representative ships, the action was taken apart and recreated in a form that was easy to follow and because there was no tedious waiting between engagements, it was all edited highlights from the event, it was exciting to view; but the viewer was safe in the

³⁵ Forbes p.94

theatre and could, if they chose, come and go at will, as today television viewer is safe and can participate by watching, or not, at the flick of a remote control. In addition Sheridan chose to dramatise the victory of the victorious service, the navy; the lack of success of the army is left unspoken. The triumph of the 'virtuous' England, over the 'evil' Napoleon is celebrated, because it makes exciting theatre, because it is what the people want to hear about and because it fits the Melodrama mould of the triumph of virtue. Describing Dibdin's 1804 production *The Siege of Gibraltar*, Forbes makes the same point; 'The whole thing contained a variety of scenes and songs and was surprisingly close in character to the dramatised documentary, with lyrics, of today's; expository or political theatre.'³⁶ The process used to created these theatrical pageants is the same creative and analytical process used to recreate news, news specials and Current Affairs items. It is the division of the event into opposing forces, the simplification of motive and incident, and the editing together of highlights to make a composite whole, which appears to be an intact and complete rendition of the full story.

The ability to translate news into spectacular theatrical pageant increased as the nineteenth century saw the development of methods of increasingly rapid communication. Jacky Bratton details the effect 'accurate and fast news reporting' and the advent of 'the special correspondent and the photographer at the front, and of the electric telegraph' had on popular art, and especially the Melodrama theatre where the 'concentrating, simplifying lens of popular art' which made events easy to perceive and understand 'was still needed to transmute the war for its audience'. Bratton's paper gives an idea of the scope of the works in production during one year, a volume of work that is on a par with television service documentary units. She writes 'During 1854 and 1855 at least twenty-five plays dealing in some way with the war with Russia were produced at, or licensed for, ten London theatres, chiefly Surrey-side or East End houses.' The scale of some of these works was considerable. It provided a spectacle equal to 'actuality' battle footage, or the 'live' coverage with action replays of a sports event. Discussing the success of *The Battle of the Alma* at Astley's in 1854 Bratton says:

³⁶ Forbes p. 99

'At Astley's the minor theatre tradition of domestic and nautical Melodrama was subordinate to the cultivation of specifically equestrian, military spectacle. The stage, measuring 75 by 101 feet, was one of the largest in London, and accommodated the horses who acted in elaborate dramatic pieces as well as going through circus routines in the ring below. The traditions of the establishment, and its large and expert audience, demanded that if London was to see in the flesh, living and moving, the Crimean battles presented to them in stills by the newspapers, Astley's was the place for it. In *The Times* on 8 September 1854 a reviewer hinted at the possibilities when he asked, 'shall we never have another equestrian classic like Mazeppa, or a military spectacle like *The Battle of Waterloo* - something that may effectively employ the really superb stud of Astley's for purposes of dramatic illustration?' as the reviewer wrote, Cooke, the manager of Astley's, was planning the amphitheatre's entry into the field of battle. It was in the Crimean plays which he staged that *the specific myths of this war took their dramatic shape*, (my italics) and the scenes and characters evolved from the old stock were finally fitted together into a particularised and integrated representation of events.

'The emotional effectiveness of *The Battle of the Alma* was the result of a skilled combination of staging, acting and writing. It opened at last on 23 October, employing not only the four hundred supers but also detachments of the '1st Royal Fusileers and the Band of the Coldstream Guards', and donating £60.10.6d to the benefit of the fund for the sick and wounded. All rivals were eclipsed. The audience response was almost hysterical; the press reports ecstatic.³⁷

³⁷ Jacky Bratton *Theatre of war: the Crimea on the London Stage 1854-5* in Bradley, James and Sharratt *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film and Television 1800-1976* pp.126-130

As Bratton says it is through representations such as Astley's play *The Battle of the Alma* that the myths of the current conflict, derived from the stock of the old myths as she says 'the scenes and characters evolved from the old stock', develop. Current events are always related to earlier events and to the cultural stories, the myths about such happenings. What is also relevant to the reception of a Current Affairs item by a modern audience is the nature of the audience response to the representation of the battle. Bratton quotes reviewers who felt the excited response of the audience was generated by the fact that 'they were responding to the presentation of events as if to the events themselves' a promise often made in television advertising for an event or a new receiver advertising which uses lines like 'colour so real' or 'be there with'. Bratton continues:

'the triumph of the drama had been its sense of actuality, its presentation, in a way which somehow transcended fiction and illusion, of the popular vision of the people and events portrayed.) Sophisticated observers of the Astley's Napoleon had scoffed at the simplicity of mind which made Colonel Newcome and his like exclaim how like the General Gomersal was; now they laughed at the cheering multitudes who had to be restrained from joining in the mock defeat of the Russians. But this excitement, generated not by realism, for the tinsel theatricality of the effects could very easily be demonstrated by those who cared to do so, but by the creation of an image of the event which became its reality in the popular imagination, was precisely what Astley's was about. For its audience, Gomersal speaking words by Amherst had been Napoleon; and this, for them, was the Battle of the Alma.³⁸

Bratton demonstrates these essential qualities of excess, simplification and focus; the honing in on the 'human' events (in this case the Crimea), of national or international importance which are otherwise too vast to be comprehended, features of audience identification which are still present in today's Current

³⁸ Bratton pp126-130

Affairs. Some of the other theatrical events that prefigure the 'news at six' are *The Battle of Waterloo* Astley's circus 1822, Fitzball's *Nelson* the Adelphi 1827, C.Z. Barnett's *The Loss Of The Royal George: or, The Fatal Land Breeze*, Sadler's Well 1840.³⁹

The body of the accompanying video is concerned with showing the comparisons in subject matter and presentation between the Current Affairs programmes of the 1990s and the Melodramas of the nineteenth century. Maurice Wilson Disher details several nineteenth century plays that would fit the idea of a 1997 investigative or human interest documentary. e.g. in England Richard Brinsley Peake's *The Climbing Boy; or, The Little Sweep*. The Olympic 1832, *The Factory Lad* John Walker, the Surrey 1834, *The Factory Strike; or, Want, Crime and Retribution*, the Royal Victoria (formerly the Coburg) G. F. Taylor, 1836, *The Drunkard's Doom; or, The Last Nail*, George Dibdin Pitt the Coburg 1832, and *Susan Hopley; or, The Vicissitudes Of A Servant Girl*, also by Pitt, the Surrey 1841. Consideration of the excerpts from the stage Melodrama in the video, shows that there is a direct relation between today's Current Affairs stories, and the Melodramas of the nineteenth century stage. Thus Melodrama continues on our television screens, not only in the easily recognisable form of soap opera, but in the less obvious form of Current Affairs. For example The subject matter of *The Factory Lad*, dealing as it does with the arrival of new technology, in this case steam powered looms, is the same subject as that handled by many a Current Affairs programme on factory closures and the laying off of workers displaced by new technology. One of excerpts is the scene outside the factory when Westwood, the owner is telling his men he will not be needing them as he means to use steam power instead 'Which will dispense with the necessity of manual labour and save me some three thousand a year.' he says. (This is pounds in 1834 today's equivalent perhaps 600 thousand dollars.) There were no programme items about layoffs and factory closures in the two weeks I recorded but it is a common theme.

³⁹ See also Forbes and Bratton in Bradley.

In America the 'documentary' emphasis of the Melodrama was on 'the demon drink' with for example, *The Drunkard*; or, *The Fallen Saved*, written for reformed hard drinking actor W.H. Smith. *The Bottle* based by T.P. Taylor on Cruikshank illustrations, the City 1847, and William W. Pratt's *Ten Nights In A Bar Room* the National, New York 1858, all being very popular.⁴⁰ That in the nineteenth century the plays about alcoholism related to the experience of both the performers and the audience is clear. Disher writes that the actors who performed the pieces had reason to know of the problems of drink 'which killed off many of their number like a plague - especially in the eighteen-thirties when young Grimaldi, Henry Kemble, Elliston, and Edmund Kean perished.'⁴¹

The plays were equally relevant and popular with their audiences who applauded this depiction of 'real' life.

'The very drunkards of the Bowery and the New Cut would roar their approval of a hero's speeches in favour of temperance. At a time when every man, woman, and child saw human wreckage staggering from pillar to post and falling with a crash of skull on pavements, audiences responded with feeling to the appeal of drink dramas.'⁴²

The Drunkard a play about the effects of alcoholism, especially on the family of the alcoholic, is one of the plays used in the video. Alcoholism and drug addiction, and their personal and social effects, are common subjects for contemporary Current Affairs programme. In the excerpt on the video the Drunkard's wife is shown reduced to abject poverty by her husband's drinking. 'Faint with hunger, sick, heart -weary with wretchedness, fatigue and cold.' She says. Visually her plight is similar to that of Jane in the Harbottle item. They both appear to have been reduced to poverty by the actions of the men they have become entangled with. Jane returns to the run-down boarding house she lived in with Harbottle,

⁴⁰ Disher *Blood and Thunder* p.186

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*,

Mary the Drunkard's wife is forced into miserable, cold accommodation. Another common theme, and one present in both these items, *The Drunkard* and *Harbottle* is the effect that the actions of the person who is caught in addiction or who has taken to crime, have on the children. Harbottle beat his own child and Edward, The Drunkard, rejects his child with a violent thrust away from him. Reflecting perhaps on just such depictions of domestic disintegration as those depicted by the play and the Current Affairs item, Michael Book in his introduction to *Hiss the Villain*, a collection of English and American Melodramas, calls the material of the Melodrama 'pathetic stories of domestic woe in city and country, violent stories of modern crime...' ⁴³ And it is on crime that the third stage play shown, *London by Night*, focuses. Crime is also the subject of the 20/20 documentary *Harbottle*. Indirectly crime is also the subject of the *Ralston* item selected though the primary focus is on the justice system, as it is in the court scene from *The Factory Lad* presented on the video.

In addition to these similarities of subject matter there is also a close relationship in style and performance, between the stage Melodramas and the Current Affairs items. In particular there is a clinging to the action orientated presentations of the Melodrama stage, and to the pictorial qualities of 'spectacular' scenery. These aspects are still present along with the concept of the divided universe and the power of the mythic, as underlying factors in so called 'objective' Current Affairs programmes for the need to present, and through presentation reconcile; the division between Self and Other is as old as human history. The next chapter examines with the aid of the accompanying video, examines this continuing tradition.

⁴³ Michael Book Introduction *Hiss The Villain - Six English & American Melodramas* p. 16

Chapter Seven

PLOTS THAT (CONTINUE) TO THRILL

The use of the Melodramatic impulse in Current Affairs programmes in New Zealand in 1996

That Current Affairs are based on the same premises as the 'classical' stage Melodrama, is most clearly seen in the three basic structures that both forms share. They are alike in Structure Purpose and Style.

Structure

Both Current Affairs and Melodrama depend for their structure on a world which is clearly divided between the forces of good and the forces of evil.

Purpose

Each share the purpose of 'redeeming' society through the performance of a collective ritual which identifies the presence of evil in the midst of the community and then symbolically, through dramatic enactment or television presentation, expels it.

Style

Each form uses a style of presentation which is exaggerated, deals in excessive expression of psychological and political states, and relies for its effects on the power of stylised gestures, and evocative music and scenery. Both these forms, Melodrama and television Current Affairs are working in the mode of heightened gesture and performance while appearing to be working within a tradition of 'realism' in that the works at first glance appear not to be a construction, but to deal with 'real people' in 'real situations', a point also made on the video.

The Video

While it is possible to discuss the various features of the Melodrama, to look at their provenance, and describe their workings within various genre, it is possible to be aware of the degree of similarity between the use of the Melodrama as a form between genres only when these genres are placed side by side. Accordingly I have produce an amateur video in which comparisons are made by juxtaposing extracts from both television Current Affairs and stage Melodrama. The video examines several feature of the Melodrama including the use of the written word, the presence of conflict, the roles of the participants, and certain stylistic features such as the use of gesture, camera angles, scenic ideas drawn from the Romantic tradition and the use of music.

Selection Criteria

As explained in chapter one, when selecting the programmes for written discussion, and to be included in the video, I selected programmes that contained a significant proportion of material produced by New Zealand television, and used those that demonstrated the underlying features of Melodrama with some clarity. Not all the programmes that were recorded demonstrated these features in a compact manner. For example while nearly all the programmes contained the element of conflict, in some the loose discussion format of the programmes made it difficult to encapsulate this feature in a short extract. For this reason this only one discussion programme has been used in the video.

So the accompanying documentary video *The Melodramatic Impulse and Current Affairs* compares the selected extracts from the two weeks of Current Affairs programmes, recorded off air from New Zealand television on TV One and TV Three in the weeks: 30th June to the 7th July & 18th -22nd August 1996. The full list of programmes recorded is: *Tangata Pasifika*, *Waka Huia*, *20/20*, *60 Minutes*, *Fraser Holmes*, *Inside New Zealand*, *Heartland*, *Tuesday Documentary*, *Assignment and Ralston*. All the Current Affairs extracts shown in the video were taken from these two weeks of Current Affairs. They are entirely typical of the Current Affairs

programmes shown every week and no particular selection as to which weeks to record was made. The excerpts from the nineteenth century stage Melodramas come from, *The Factory Lad* 1834 *The Drunkard* 1847 and *London By Night* 1867. The extracts, presented by amateur actors and recorded on VHS video format with minimal lighting and costuming, have been selected to illustrate the similar use of the Melodramatic elements, within similar themes but in a different medium. These plays were deliberately selected as they are close in subject matter to modern Current Affairs programmes.

The structure of the video is as follows:

The video begins with the role of a written script.

The first montage contains excerpts from a *20/20 programme* item on life after death, a discussion on Ralston about the comments of a judge in a rape trial, an item from *60 minutes* on Australia's Northern Territories euthanasia law, and an item from Holmes on a New Zealand woman's journey to Romania to bring back her adopted daughter after a seven year delay.

The montage is followed by a look at the use of titles and subtitles. Linking these pieces of documentary footage and the next section from a Victorian Melodrama is a piece to camera outlining the basic concepts of the world of the Melodramatic Imagination. The first extracts concentration on the notion of division. The examples compare excerpts from '*The Factory Lad*', the turning away of mill workers and Ralston the discussion of Justice Morris's comments. These are followed by illustrations of the 'hero' and 'heroine' types from both Current Affairs and Melodrama. The heroes are Paea Wolfgram the *Tongan Silver Medallist in Boxing 60 Minutes 12/8/96* and the rescue scene from '*London By Night*'. The video then demonstrates, 'suffering virtue', demonstrated by the attic scene from '*The Drunkard*', and from the interview in the *20/20 30/6/96* the documentary on *Harbottle* where his first wife who tells how he '*hit his own child*'. 'Struggles with the justice system' is illustrated by the discussion about Justice Morris, and by an extract from the courtroom scene from '*The Factory Lad*'. Struggles with justice is

a common theme of the Melodrama. The 'suffering families are shown in the scene outside the old house from the documentary on *Harbottle* which begins 'Why were you afraid?' to. 'twenty-one' and from 'The Factory Lad' the scene at home with the wife and child. The 'scenes of despair' are the Suicide scene from, 'London by Night' and the excerpt from *Harbottle* 'Something stopped me'. 'Courage' is another attribute of the hero, and in Current Affairs it is shown by *Philip Paxton* the *Comic with cerebral palsy* 'and courage'. The pathetic children figure in the Family scene from 'The Drunkard' and the scene in the orphanage in the item on Romanian children. The drunk scene and the philanthropist's arrival in 'The Drunkard' and the *boarding house Harbottle 20/20* each show scenes of 'degradation and redemption'. The 'happy endings' are the 'Father' scene from *London By Night* and the reunion with *Elaina in Romania*. The villains are Cribbs from the 'The Drunkard', *Harbottle* the man from the documentary on him on *20/20*. Following this a piece to camera comments on the 'reality' of Victorian Melodrama to its audience and compares it with today's Current Affairs. The video the focus use of gesture and camera angle highlighting its importance by representing a piece that was early presented in total, with the speech cut and a music overlay instead. This draws attention to the importance of camera angle and movement, an equivalent of the stylised gesture of the Melodrama stage. The video compares the use of the scenic on the spectacle stage of the nineteenth century with its use in television today and notes the continuance of the Romantic tradition. Comparisons are made between nineteenth century paintings and television Current Affairs shots of scenery. One shot around the Kaipara harbour is found to be almost identical in composition and subject matter to Friedrich's 1832 picture of the Large Enclosure near Dresden. comments on A final ex-citeau on the video points to the use of music throughout the documentary.

The areas of comparison made between the 'classical' Melodrama and television Current Affairs were:

- the presence of conflict in the item

- the presence of ritualistic elements leading to the notion of a community ritual
- clear division of participants into categories, particularly categories representing socially approved attitudes (good) and attitudes less or unacceptable in New Zealand in 1996 (bad)
- representations of Melodrama 'types' the hero, the heroine, the villain - the presence of mythic elements
- the retention of the attributes of the theatre of performance - mimesis and the presence of stylisation in performance
- the presence of the dramatic elements of the classical Melodrama
- the evocative use of scenery and music - the spectacle stage and the Romantic tradition

Structure

- the presence of conflict in the item

Conflict is the most important formal feature from the Melodrama, that remains with television Current Affairs programmes. The conflict centres on the confrontation of opposing forces. The representation of this struggle varies from the crude, where both villainy and virtue are starkly presented to a more subtle representation of conflict. The crude depiction of the confrontation of good and evil can be seen for example, in the 20/20 programme *Harbottle*, an extract of which is used the accompanying video. Here the villain is unquestionably presented as such and his victims are as equally obviously represented as suffering virtue.

A more subtle presentation of conflict is present in the discussion on *Ralston*, between Toni Allwood of Rape Crisis and lawyer Peter Williams. The argument about the suitability of the words used by Justice Morris at the end of a rape trial, shows the use of the Melodrama format in contemporary Current Affairs. There is a hero substitute in the figure of Toni Allwood, and sometimes also in the persona presented by Bill Ralston. The feature of repressed virtue appears in the evoked presence of the 'wronged' girl who was allegedly raped, and there are two definite villains Peter Williams and Justice Morris. Bill Ralston acts as devil's advocate thus alternating between hero and villain and producing the strong polarisation of opinions typical of the division into opposing forces of the 'classical' Melodrama.

The struggle between two clearly defined opposites, over an issue positioned firmly in the realm of virtue and vice, the issue of rape, creates the dramatic interest of the discussion, thereby producing a drama that is located within the Melodramatic impulse. The argument, as structured by Ralston, is designed, while not to entirely obfuscate the issue, to generate a great deal of heat and perhaps a little light. What is important in this item is how the two participants react to each other's statements. To that end Peter Williams is encouraged to be deliberately provocative and Toni Allwood to be emotional. The object of the exercise is to heighten the issue and also the television event, to strip bare the underlying emotions and deal with them in an excessive mode, a technique developed in the Melodrama.

But conflict is present in nearly all the selected items, and in many of those not selected for the video. The opening shots of documentary on *Elaina* for example, shown in the beginning montage of the video, set up **the concept of the divided universe** by deliberately showing us a city of contrasts, with empty palaces set beside pictures of street sellers of strings of garlic, and shots of children begging on the streets. The use of visual emphasis is employed to stress this concept of polarisation. There is an appeal to the emotions through the medium of gesture; shots of the children playing with the toys Zealand, the deliberate camera pan to

children's hands holding tight to the friendly adult, and/or the focus on the beseeching eyes of homeless children. These elements are then contrasted in the mind of the viewer with images of plenty, the palaces and fountains. This contrast is totally in the tradition of the Melodrama.. It is designed to create a sense of indignation, the dominant emotion evoked by the divided world of the Melodrama and to appeal to parental emotions.. The indignation arises in particular from a sense of the injustice of a system that will turn children out on the street at eighteen with no means of earning a living. There is also some indignation generated by the item towards the New Zealand government because it will not let willing New Zealand parents adopt such Romanian children.

- clear division of participants into categories, particularly categories representing socially approved attitudes (good) and attitudes less or unacceptable in New Zealand in 1996 (bad)

These categories are present in most of the selected items, Paea Wolfgram is clearly in the category of the good for example, but are most apparent in such sections as the third item in the montage, which is an extract from the item on euthanasia law of the Northern Territories of Australia. That it is also an item designed to produce immediate polarisation, the recognition of categories of good and evil, is clear from the designation by the programme presenters of the doctor who has assembled the euthanasia computer system, as 'the man they call Doctor Death'. The repetition of a currently popular derogatory nomenclature cues the viewer that they are not to remain disengaged from, and objective about the persons presented in this item . They can choose to agree or disagree with the ideas, the technology, and law that is being presented by the item but they are expected to form an opinion, and take sides. That the viewer is expected to disagree with the concept of euthanasia is cued by the extract from the Aboriginal spokesperson who says that euthanasia is not part of Aboriginal law or customary practice. In using this particular image, that of the Aboriginal spokesperson to present the opposition to the concept of euthanasia, the item is drawing on the 'classical' Melodrama tradition of the embodiment of virtue in the mouths of the

innocent and those untainted by the corruption of civilisation. The fourth item in the montage also draws on that tradition. The reunion of a mother with her long lost child, (even as in this case, with the child she has adopted and been prevented from taking home), is a classic subject of the Melodrama. The importance of the child in the Melodrama was that it was, along with innocent indigenous people, and animals, a symbol of innocence and virtue. 'Melodramas relied on ... foci for the emotions, innocent heroines, children, dumb figures - *A Tale of Mystery* concerns Francisco, a dumb man. They ... used animals - the dog of Pixerecourt's *The Hound of Montargis*, the extraordinarily trained horses of Astley and Ducrow'.¹ This springs from the Romantic ideas of 'innocence' for

'To find the appropriate expression for direct and powerful emotions, Wordsworth turned to rustic and to simple folk, including children, simple heroines silent outcasts such as the Leech Gatherer and the Cumberland Beggar; even to the delight of hostile critics, an idiot boy.'²

A clear pointed to the virtuous in the Melodrama was that it was in a state of repression. This can be expressed in a number of ways. One, as in the euthanasia item, is by the over-riding of, and suppression of, indigenous laws and customs by an oppressive alien culture another is by being denied its rightful home. So in the item about *Elaina*, the Romanian orphan the division between good and evil is made clear but using the Romantic device of showing not only her plight, but the plight of other children in the orphanage and on the street. The viewer is shown smiling faces but crippled limbs, large eyes in small faces, the prison-like bars of beds and cots, and small hands clutching eagerly at unaccustomed toys. The children are parallels of Wordsworth's silent outcasts for they are mute for us in two senses, we cannot understand their language so they cannot speak to us except in gesture, and they have no political voice.

¹ James p. 9

² James p. 9

Style

- the retention of the attributes of the theatre of performance - mimesis, and the presence of stylisation in performance

The Melodrama was essentially a theatre of performance. Originally wordless it relied on gesture and situation to convey its meaning. The place of gesture, of dumb show (mime), was central to the concept of the Melodrama. The mime element in the Current Affairs items is less obvious than in the extracts from the Melodrama but it is an important component of the whole effect. Current Affairs programmes are not 'simple' presentations of facts. They are carefully constructed sets of images designed to evoke a range of cultural resonances. As such they make conscious use of the faculty of mimesis. Just as the mimetic element in a Melodrama includes the acting of the actors, so in a Current Affairs programme it includes the acting of the presenters, who are in fact playing a role. In this role, as in the roles of Melodrama, there is a set of dedicated gestures which are considered relevant and expressive. The expressive use of gesture in the Melodrama was design to clarify the emotions. The concern was not only with what the actors were doing but with what they were feeling. Louis James writes of the actors relating to each other with 'the direct intensity of a magnetic field'.³ The development that expressive set of gestures was aided by the interest in classifying people into 'types', which could then be applied to acting technique. This concept of 'types' remains. It is present in the selection of 'types' of people as subjects for the Current Affairs items, and in the 'type' of people chosen as presenters. They are 'good' looking, youthful, friendly, yet authoritative. Their range of gestures is limited but has impact. They must smile, both to be friendly and to be convincing, they must maintain eye contact with the viewer, but not appear to stare at the camera, they may indicate, but must not use a large number of hand gestures or wave their arms wildly, if they did that they would be seen to be out of control. This strong emphasis on gesture and situation remains in today's Current Affairs,

³ James pp.11-12

only now it is expressed through the camera, the use of close ups, stills and pans, to direct audience eyes and to convey clearly to the viewer the emotions expressed by the participants, as opposed to the excessive gestures of Melodrama.

The camera itself is an aid to focus and to gesture. The close-up adds emphasis, aids involvement, and through a medium that ironically in the context of the quote uses electro-magnetism, creates in the close-up an intense, psychologically magnetic involvement with the viewer. The middle distance shot on the other hand creates an aura of detachment and increasing authority. This is why it is used to introduce an item, to set the scene give the viewer time to adjust and to accept what they are being shown. The camera has many movements. It pans for emphasis; high and low shots focus the vision and create an emotional impact. The video has a sequence from the item on the Romanian child Elaina, the sequence in the orphanage. The voice-over has been cut to demonstrate the power of the camera in directing the viewers' gaze, and by directing that gaze evoking an emotional response. Even without the commentary the emotional import of the sequence is clear from the movement and angles of the camera and also from the editing of shots. This reliance on the picture to tell the story comes from the mime element in the Melodrama.

In the item on the rape trial the placing of the participants is in the tradition of the Melodrama and the importance of gesture. It is not just the demands of television that cause the director to use the single double or triple mid-shot.. It would be entirely possible to shoot the discussion from a position that was more removed from the participants, as is done particularly at the beginning of political debates. Long shots give a greater sense of detachment, and therefore of logic, to the proceedings. But this is not the preferred position for the item on the rape trial. It is the demand of the Melodramatic tradition that makes the mid shot a preferred shot, for it is in mid to full close up that we the viewers are best able to follow the changes of facial expression and hand and upper-body gesture that indicate changes of emotion. In this position of close observation of these emotions the

viewers are drawn into the experience and participate in the shared emotional response which is a key element of the Melodrama

There was/is also in the Melodrama tradition the love of performance for performance sake. A wordless theatre made/makes great use of the physical talents of its performers, of their abilities in gymnastics, juggling movement and dance; in the wordless theatre the important aspects are the effects created by movement and by picture. Thus Melodrama plot was often slender serving as the basis for much stage business and as a framework for an emphasis on **physical action** which could see the introduction of acrobats or a ballet. Act II Scene 2 of *London by Night* calls for 'a rustic quadrille' which has no connection with the action to be performed and Scene 6 calls for a song. 'the entertainment of Melodrama with its combination of cheap sentiment, violent incident, and scenic thrills, was just what they [the audience] required.'⁴ This element has been preserved in programmes like the sports broadcast, or the item about extra-ordinary physical achievement. Paea Wolfgram, the Tongan boxer is a hero because of his achievement in a martial art. The sequences of his fight at the Olympics against the favourite the Cuban boxer Alexis Rubalcaba, which he won, his semi-final against the Nigerian which he also won and his final fight which he lost, but which earned him the silver medal are shown in the original item. Boxing provides evidence of physical skill, fast paced action, and the trill of the fight, it therefore fits neatly into the Melodrama tradition of action, of thrills and spills on the stage.

- the presence of the dramatic elements of the classical Melodrama

It is also useful to consider the way in which the formal dramatic concepts of the Melodrama have been embodied in the presentation of news and Current Affairs. The Melodrama is a drama which presents a initial situation of peace which is then intruded upon, shows the actions of the villain, provokes the resulting indignation, depicts the rescue of virtue, the contains within its form the psychological need to act out, and presents this acting out by resorting to

⁴ Michael Book *Introduction His The Villain -Six English & American Melodramas* p. 15

dramatisation in excess. It establishes the mood of the dramatic moment, through music and spectacle.

The plot in classical Melodrama, involves the intrusion of evil into a peaceful world. Initially this evil is repulsed only to gather strength and return. Evil then takes charge either through overt or veiled threats or by the generalised terror created by its actions. But at the end all events are linked and all mysteries solved. The workings of the world are made clear. The end of classical Melodrama is the time of the resolution of all mysteries. In the play *London By Night* for example, the drunken workman Dognose is revealed as the father of the girl he saves from drowning (shown on the video as a 'happy ending'), and her history is thus clarified and the villains are defeated. This focus on the intrusion of evil, and its subsequent defeat by the forces of good is also often the structure of the television documentary. Consider the extracts from the *20/20* documentary on *Harbottle*. The original item was an almost perfect example of the Melodrama format. The only difference between it and a 'classical' Melodrama play was that the intrusion of evil had occurred before the dramatic action commenced and was therefore reviewed in retrospect by the *20/20* documentary item rather than occurring in the course of the action as it would have done in a stage play.

But even from the limited sections selected for this documentary it is possible to deduce that the original documentary centres on *Harbottle's* intrusion into the lives of vulnerable people, and on the damage he does. In the full item he is accused of killing two small children, of beating his own child by his first wife, and of assaulting the tenants of a boarding house that he runs. His victims testify to the trauma he has caused in their lives. But in the end (not shown in the video) he is brought to trial by a vigilant police force, convicted of one murder and imprisoned. This investigation and imprisonment subsequently leads to the investigation of the second murder. This example of the enduring power of a plot based on the intrusion of evil, was not specifically selected from many weeks of viewing it was simply one of the programmes screened in the randomly selected weeks which were recorded.

The '**primal scene**' which sets in motion the events that are able to lead to the climax is another important dramatic element. This is the scene in which virtue is repressed, the scene in which the villain(s) shows their true intent. It is only then when all doubt about the meaning of previous events has been cleared that steps can be taken to free virtue to put things right. In *The Melodramatic Imagination* Peter Brooks speaks of that process as the moment when . . . 'In the drama of the recognition of the sign of virtue, virtue achieves an expressive liberation from the '**primal scene**' that repressed, expelled, silenced it, to assert its wholeness and vindicates right to existence.'⁵ In the accompanying video there are three examples of a 'primal scene'. Two occur in the item about the rape trial. The first takes place off camera in the court room when the alleged rapist is acquitted and the judge tells the jury that 'If every man stopped at the first no, life would be a lot less exciting.' That is a statement calculated to produce moral indignation, the key response to Melodrama, (rather than the pity and terror of Tragedy). The second primal scene when virtue is once again suppressed, this time on camera, is when Toni Allwood's (Rape Crisis), attempts to defend the right of a woman to say no at any stage of the encounter are virtually dismissed by Bill Ralston's remark 'we're dinosaurs you and I'. The virtue of Toni Allwood the virtue of representing 'wronged women' is silenced by Bill Ralston's remark. Another 'primal scene' occurs with the presentation of the woman Jane in the *20/20* programme's item on *Harbottle*. Jane is shown being almost led back to the boarding house in which she lived with Harbottle. The camera follows her inside and then surveys a room half emptied. Jane is shown cowed, her posture is slumped, and distressed. Her voice is weak and at times husky and she cries on the camera. Jane is presented as the suffering and repressed image of virtue, her ability to defend herself has been repressed first by *Harbottle* secondly by her presentation as a vulnerable weeping woman by the documentary makers. It is a parallel image to that found in the stage Melodrama.

⁵ Brooks p. 42

Choice of subject matter is also a dramatic element retained from the Melodrama. It is the choice of material that is unusual and strange that often provides the opportunity for psychological acting out and dramatisation in excess.

The first item in the video deals with the strange. The spoken text of the video comments on the role of the strange and the conflictual in the montage. Brooks says that in the absence of a pervasive communal religion, since the Age of Enlightenment, European society has been thrown back on the uncanny, the eerie⁶. In part this was based on a need to find a vehicle for the enactment of psychological states once the option of religious ritual and experience had been removed and in part as a result of the absorption of the concepts of the Romantic movement into the wider culture. Among the themes of this movement was an interest in the power of the irrational and the supernatural. Part of that interest was the redevelopment from old folk tales of the concept of the doppelgänger (German, for "double") the wraith or ghost of a living person seen usually shortly before the person's death. In a story about life after death and visits from beyond the grave, we are dealing with a resurfacing of these concerns. The story may be couched in modern scientific terms, and may purport to put the claims of those who say they have had visits from the dead to rigorous tests but the interest of the audience is more Romantic than scientific, it fits with Brooks hypothesis that since the eighteenth century the uncanny and the eerie have replaced the sacred in the popular mind. But it also goes deeper to the Romantic concern with self identity, and an awareness of the duality of human nature, a duality which is at the heart of Melodrama and is the foundation of mimesis. The concentration on images of the eerie gives a mechanism for the expression the 'acting out' of this sense of duality.

- the evocative use of scenery and music - the spectacle stage and the Romantic tradition

It was the reliance on picture that led the Melodrama to absorb the concepts of the expressive qualities of scenery promulgated by the Romantic movement.

⁶ Brooks p.19

There is in many Current Affairs items an emphasis on Romantic **spectacle scenery**. This provides a direct link between the stage of the nineteenth century, and the Current Affairs programmes of the 1990s. **The scenic** is clearly shown in the item about Kaipara Harbour, which as the video demonstrates is only partially about the lives of the people who live around it. It is also equally concerned with the spectacle of the place, the wild power of the scenery. This interest in the spectacular, with the power of nature, an interest of the Romantic movement, which received expression on the Melodrama stage continues to be a feature of today's television. The romantic painters strove to express,

' by suggestion states of feeling too intense, mystical, or elusive to be clearly defined. ... In their choice of subject matter, the romantics showed an affinity for nature, especially its wild and mysterious aspects, and for exotic, melancholy and Melodramatic subjects likely to evoke awe or passion.' ⁷

As can be seen from the video many of the television shots of the Kaipara are similar to subjects of the German Romantic painters, one is almost identical in subject and composition to the painting *The Long Enclosure at Dresden*. The commentary draws our attention to the beauty, the majesty, the 'uplifting' quality of the scenery, for concept of the nature as a site of 'sublime' emotions is derived from the Romantic movement and has become an enduring cultural theme.

The scenic qualities aimed for by nineteenth century set designers remain with today's television, in what appear to be 'realistic' Current Affairs shots. The opening shot of the item on Paea Wolfgram the Tongan Silver Medallist, shows coconut palms against a yellow tropical sky. The search for the 'perfect' location shot, later segments of the item are shot against the picturesque background of Nukualofa's markets. There are shots of sweeping Tongan beaches and roads through lush jungle. This approach is so common it is taken as normal, that the scenery should be displayed, yet it is a convention like many others.

⁷ Romanticism (art), *Encarta* 1995

But it is in a more subtle way, that a mere direct recreate of the subjects and compositions of Romantic painting, that this interest in the power of nature, has its most pervasive effect. The interest in nature coupled with an interest in the eerie led to a fascination with ruins. These two qualities were represented in the scenery of the spectacle stage discussed in detail in chapter 6. The eerie is evident in the 20/20, 30/6/96, item on Harbottle. The camera presents a distance shot of a deserted and derelict Hawkes Bay farmhouse, and, interspersed with cut-away shots of the women walking towards the house, tracks closer and closer to the 'scene' where the four year old boy William Berry was injured and died seventeen years previously. There are all the elements of gothic Melodrama, inclement weather, it is raining, desolate ruins and a murder. They are designed to produce a set of responses in the mind of the viewer as surely as the stage set of the nineteenth century were designed for 'effect'. The particular nature of those responses will vary from person to person but in general the scene evokes apprehension and a sense of lingering menace and evil.

Music is used frequently in Current Affairs for the same reason it was used in the Melodrama, to heighten the mood and reinforce the emotion. So Eric Clapton's 'If I saw You in Heaven' plays over breaks and credits, the item on visits from the dead, the documentary on Kiwiana uses an upbeat version of 'God Defend New Zealand' music from the police band and a hymn in Tongan support the story on Paea Wolfram. The item on Kaipara Harbour has music which uses a combinations of sounds designed to represent an idea of peace and tranquillity, appearing at the end of the video in the section from the Kaipara item that fades to the credits. In the item on *Lilaina* the sweet -sad sounds of the balalaika music, evokes an aura of the exotic, a common theme in the Melodrama. The music also reinforces the sense of sorrow at the plight of the Romanian children, a sense also established by the visuals.

The written scroll in the documentary asks 'P.S. Did you notice the music? It is the use of music that gives the name Melodrama.. The first melodrama was by Rousseau; violin music underscored and enhanced the performer's mood. Today

it still reinforced the mood even in news and Current Affairs. Throughout the documentary I have used music from nineteenth and early twentieth century composers, Dvorak Romance, Op11, and Sibelius Serenade no.2 G minor to enhance the mood. I have chosen these pieces for their emotional quality, a quality that I think reinforces the perception of Melodrama as an emotional experience. Thus in constructing this video documentary I have worked within the Melodrama idiom and in so doing pointed to the qualities of Melodrama, which are present in Current Affairs programmes.

Purpose

- representations of Melodrama 'types' the hero, the heroine, the villain - the presence of mythic elements

The hero. Traditionally he is the saviour, the one who overcomes all odds. A super person. The incarnation of the Godhead. In myth he is Odysseus, Herakles, or Christ. This person is more powerful than the rest of us and acts for us, to make the world safe. In the Melodrama his superhuman status had been reduced from that of a god to a human of extreme virtue. As can be seen in the video extract from *London By Night* the hero, who appears as resourceful and brave, demonstrates physical bravery, and thus his hero status by rescuing virtue. In this extract he pulls a woman from the river, preventing her from committing suicide by drowning. The hero of this Melodrama is the precursor of today's hero who is no longer a god or a super human. Today's hero is the human who performs an extraordinary act; the tanker-driver who rescues the child for example, not ordinarily a super-person, but able to act as one on this occasion, and thus convince us that the forces of the world, the blazing tanker, can be fought and overcome. Or he is the sports hero, larger than life in his winning ability. It helps if he is like Paea Wolfgram the Tongan boxer, in fact, bigger than the average person.

Paea Wolfgram as the large victor, fulfils all the requirements for the hero of myth. He, like most sports heroes has the attributes of youth, fine physique and

achievement in a combat sport. Like the heroes of myth he has challenged and defeated his opponent. He carries with him the resonances of gladiatorial combat. To be successful the gladiator must not only be brave, he must also be skilful, and the skill of a gladiator is acquired through long hours of practice. Ritual fights resulting in the ritual or actual death of one of the combatants were part of many ancient religious, they may have been a component of the sacrificial rite of the celebration of the Eleusinian Mysteries, the corn mysteries of Demeter.. Hunningher writes of 'the year king, or year priest known the world over who must perish in a duel with the champion or king of the next year for life to spring forth anew'.⁸ It is this aspect of myth and ritual that is re-enacted in the physical displays that were part of the 'classical' Melodrama. They continue to be part of modern television in the televising of sports matches, and of gymnastic events and entertainment shows such as *Gladiators* or *World Circus*.

There is another type of hero a different hero from the 'straight' hero of the stories of physical conquest. This hero is the expert who could 'cure' the villain, through medicine, or psychology, if the villain were willing to be cured. This is the hero of the stories of prison reformers. It is also the hero of the medical breakthrough stories. In this case the hero is directly dealing with and conquering the elemental forces, the micro-organisms and diseases of the immune system, that threaten to destroy us.

In the Melodrama the hero was both handsome in his person and virtuous. In Current Affairs this need for handsome virtue has for the most part been split, so a Current Affairs hero can be plain and virtuous; though a young hero like Jonah Lomu, is worth more screen time than an old one. However for the most part the person who is the subject of the item need not be handsome, as the need for the handsome is met by the presenters. The young and the glossy look, the look most favoured by television, the look of the Neil Wakas and Simon Dallows, is the current conception of how the hero should appear. Likewise their female

⁸ Hunningher *The Primitive Phase* p.58

companions are attractive and well presented. In this context the female presenters are an extension of the hero ideal.

The heroine in the 'classical' Melodramatic form was always the embodiment of virtue. Though the concept of what exactly defined virtue shifted, it was female youth that most clearly represented virtue. In theatrical Melodrama virtue is threatened because its nature is not recognised. The heroine, as virtue embodied, is silenced either because there is no-one to make a claim to, or because she is alone or imprisoned. In 'classical' Melodrama virtue may be literally 'cast out into the snow'. This virtue must continue to protest its presence even though it may appear to have been corrupted. **The heroine** in these contexts is the representative not so much of women, but of the idea of suffering or oppressed virtue, or of suffering humanity struggling under the burden of 'fate' This 'fate' can be personal bad luck or the calamity that befalls a community.

Female youth in Current Affairs programmes does not always directly represent virtue, there are stories of female glue sniffers who abandon their children for example, but even in telling the story of a woman who abandons her children the ideal of virtue is present in the background. The concept from the Melodrama overshadowing the figure of woman is as the representative of virtue. The status that the neglectful mother has fallen from is the status of virtuous wife and mother. Thus the concept of the 'fallen woman' present the lack of virtue but not the actual presence of evil as is true of the villain. In the item about the rape trial and the comments of Justice Morris at the that trial, the impingement on the woman complainant's virtue, is not that she had sex with the man, but that she was forced to have sex. Her virtue has thus been silenced by that force. The repression of her virtue is extended to involve the wider society because subsequently, the force used on her is condoned by someone who is part of the authority structure of society, and therefore should be speaking in defence of virtue's right to maintain itself In the video Toni Allwood's defense of the right of the woman to say 'no' is invoking the Melodrama concept of virtue remaining present in spite of all assaults, of virtue must continuing to protest its presence

even though it may appear to have been corrupted that is being invoked in the discussion of the rape trial.

Children also represent the imprisoned nature of virtue (or of the human race) This is particularly clear where the plight of women and children come together as in the case of domestic violence and child abuse or in institutional or political neglect.

The villian is the most easily recognised type from the Melodrama. He, it is usually a he, is a criminal, embezzler, or child murderer for example, or else a hopeless case, a drug addict or a 'shiftless drifter' who is unable to find work through his own (wilful) lack of application.

An important element in our response to Current Affairs items is the way in which they trigger memories of the stories and character of **myth**. It was the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer who articulated the idea myth and mythic modes of thinking that form a deep substratum in the scientific, technological cultures of the West,⁹ and considering the excerpts in the video shows just how pervasive this mythic thinking is. For example the story of Elaina with its shots of bars bare walls and pleading eyes is redolent with the echoes of imprisoned and suffering heroines. One such heroine was Andromeda, princess of Ethiopia who in Greek mythology was chained to a rock on the seashore, as a sacrifice to the sea monster who was ravaging the land. She was rescued by the hero Perseus, who slew the monster and claimed Andromeda's hand as his reward. Elaina is imprisoned in an orphanage. There are shots of a large impersonal building, of bare walls, and of the bars of cots and the ends of beds. The idea is that Elaina is in need of rescuing and she is to be rescued and given a new home in New Zealand. The idea of imprisonment is apparent in many Melodramas where the heroine, that is virtue, is imprisoned either literally, or as in the two Melodramas used as extracts in the video, by circumstances; in one case by the poverty

⁹ Charles H. Long *Mythology*, *Encarta*

resulting from her husband losing his job, *The Factory Lad* in the other by the poverty caused by her husband's drinking *The Drunkard*.

- the presence of ritualistic elements leading to the notion of a community ritual

In almost all Current Affairs programmes the world is divided, and the nature of that divide is made clear to the viewers. Viewers are then expected, in fact directed by the programme, to invest their sympathies with the side of right, the side of what Brooks calls 'the children of light'.¹⁰ The purpose of such identification is to give not only a material victory over the destructive forces that threaten our existence but also to give a moral victory. In this moral struggle Current Affairs is returning to the Manichaeon, to the world of the divided universe, where there are no shades of grey and one is aligned either with good or with evil. But whereas in the traditional stories the struggle is played out by warring angels, in today's world of Current Affairs the struggle is both represented on the screen by people who represent good and evil, and at the same time is carried out in the 'ethical mind'¹¹ of the viewer. This is the act of mimesis at work.

As we have already seen, mimesis is a complex idea, encompassing not only the concept of 'simple' miming but containing as it does the concepts of division and of doubling, as well as the concepts of the conjuring up, and creation of images. In the reproduction of images through the means of video tape and transmission and reception equipment, the television Current Affairs production team is engaged in a complex act of triple mimesis. When the elements of original selection of images to be filmed and the editing process are added to these procedure the mimesis within mimesis becomes very complex indeed. In its original force, Hunningher says the mimetic acts of the shaman had their origin in the desire of primitive humanity to control the environment and the hostile

¹⁰ Brooks p 22

¹¹ *ibid.*

forces that appear to rule it.¹² The method of controlling the hostile forces was (is) to recreate them, but under controlled conditions. It is precisely this creation under controlled conditions that occurs in the making of a television Current Affairs documentary, and I would venture to suggest for the same reason. A force that can be taken apart and reassembled on our television screens; that can be broken down into its component parts, and have each part further dissected and discussed, can be understood and by being understood can be controlled. This control is greatly enhanced by control of the 'image' of the force. For control of the image, of the thing or force that the shaman wishes to manipulate, is the first step in the control of the thing itself.

So the mimetic power of television must be seen, in several ways. There is the power to mime, to act a part, and there is the power to control events by dissecting, understanding, and recreating images of them. There is also the appeal of the 'spirit' (life-force or intrinsic nature) of the ghost, person or animal represented by television.

This 'spirit' can be viewed in two ways. Its most obvious manifestation, descending directly from the Romantic movement and the Melodrama is an interest in the 'uncanny' the world of ghosts and wraiths. But the motivation behind the Romantic fascination with the eerie is a persistent theme. In discussing the Melodrama Brooks speaks of 'a reassertion of magic and taboo, a recognition of the diabolical forces which inhabit our world and our inner being.'¹³ If we consider that the late twentieth century has moved away from such interests, especially in the world of Current Affairs, consider the example in the first montage, an item which cropped up in the Current Affairs programme 20/20 in a randomly selected week, the item on people who have seen, or felt the presence of people they loved who are now dead.

¹² Hunnigher p.54

¹³ Brooks p.19

The second type of appeal to the 'spirit' is less obvious, but it is still an important element in the mimesis of the television Current Affairs documentary. This is the creation of the image of the force we as a community desire to understand and control. For as Taussig writes if we can understand and create an image of a force, if we can imitate it we can create something that not only represented the force under discussion but also shares in its qualities. Taussig relates this not only to the charms produced by the shaman but to commonplace images in the everyday world from trademarks to television programmes.¹⁴ Thus the recreation of the force of evil in the images of Harbottle on the television screen give the viewer power over the presence of evil in life and the means, by watching the programme to symbolically and ritually expel the evil in their life by rejecting Harbottle. The ancient idea of the propitiation of the Gods through the identification and expulsion of evil continues to be present in these presentations.

For example the stories of degradation and redemption, mirror the **myths of fall and redemption**. In these type of stories a former, drug addict, criminal, or prostitute, tells their story and details the manner in which they were 'saved'. The video does not include a Current Affairs 'reform' story because in the two weeks recorded no New Zealand reform story was aired. The 'classical' stage Melodrama *The Drunkard* is presented. The *60 Minutes* of 18/8/96 (one of the programme recorded) did present an item about an American prison in Washington in which sex offenders are kept under preventive detention. The main part of the item was about the injustice of a law that allows detention for life after the statutory sentence has been served, but part of the item concentrated on the 'cure' of one of the inmates as part of the item He was encouraged to apologise to his victims on camera, as proof of his cure. The item contained an interview with the victims. It presented two attractive, articulate women who had been hurt but who were able to face the camera and describe the rape, talk about

¹⁴ Taussig Chapter 4 The Golden Bough: The magic of Mimesis p.47

the effects it had had on them and also about the process of their recovery, and their rebirth as functioning members of society.

There is a ritual significance in the role of the hero in both the Melodrama and in Current Affairs. The bravery of the hero is equivalent to the ritual bravery of the year king who saves the people from starvation by ensuring fertility. The difference is that in the Melodrama the hero is a personal hero, a distinct person who saves other distinct people rather than a cosmic hero who save the world. Thus does the Melodrama refit an old symbol onto a new need. This new need is the need for personal, rather than communal reassurance, and fits Turner's description of a liminoid state, a state of marginality in a non-cohesive culture. The hero of Current Affairs may be either a public - the sports hero, or a private hero - the tanker driver who rescues a child from a burning car; but in either case like the hero of Melodrama, he offers a personal example of hope. At the same time the communal echoes of redemptive myth linger, in Current Affairs, in the victory for the community of the sports hero, and in the pervasive effect of example of the individual rescuer. In Melodrama in the same communal hope for the widespread benefit to the community of the 'good' person.

Usually the hero is a perfect physical specimen but this is not always the case. There are heroes of myth who are physically disadvantaged. Odysseus was small and triumphed through his wits for example, and the video does contain an excerpt from the item about Philip Paxton, a man who at first does not seem to fit the hero model. A 'stand-up' comic, Philip Paxton has cerebral palsy, is gay, and a vegetarian, and uses all these 'differences' as part of his act. The element stressed in the video is that of courage, an important attribute of the Melodrama hero, for underlying the **courage of the hero** is the concept of the rebirth myth with its cycle of tests, trials and final victory. In these myths the hero wins victory over personal pain and suffering and usually over death as well, bringing rebirth or salvation to the community. These myths are often re-enacted in ritual ceremonies of initiation into full adulthood. By his courage Philip Paxton, in spite of being 'different' is transformed from being an outcast, (interviewer Cameron

Bennet says to him in the full item 'you're what, a social outcast. What makes you want to stand up ?...') into an accepted member of full society. Like the hero of myth he has won victory over personal pain, disability and discrimination, and through his courage in appearing in public, and acknowledging his difference, has won through the 'trial' of discrimination to become part of the wider society.

The theme of imprisonment of virtuous innocence present in the item about Elaina and the other orphanage children is another ritual element. Their plight is presented in such a way as to produce the response of indignation, the prevailing emotion of the Melodrama. The suggestion is that, like Andromeda these children are a sacrifice for the community. Like all victims of ritual sacrifice they are blameless, a condition ensured by their youth, but also present in the logical inference that they cannot be responsible for their plight.

Toni Allwood from Rape Crisis as 'virtue repressed' can also be seen in a ritual context. She is pitted against lawyer Peter Williams. The discussion is chaired by Bill Ralston. It would seem at first glance that issue is an intellectual one, a matter of justice and ethics. Leaving aside the problem of freeing even these words from an emotive connotation consider the discussion itself. Even in the small excerpts shown in the video it quickly becomes apparent that the issue is not being discussed dispassionately but from an emotional perspective. The combatants not only represent two sides of the argument they are also representative of the chief figures of the Melodrama. In his clever mocking responses Peter Williams can be allied with the heartless villain of many plays. Toni Allwood is in this case both the hero, the champion of suffering virtue and in her emotional struggle to represent the right of a woman to say 'no', repressed suffering virtue itself. There is also the suffering virtue of the girl herself. She is truly the virtuous mute character of the Melodrama. For various reasons her voice can never be heard. As such she is the representation of all those other voiceless women subjected to abuse and denied justice. Though she is never seen her presence is strongly felt throughout the argument, as is the presence of the other villain, not, interestingly, the man accused and acquitted of rape, but the judge at the trial who is accused of

making inappropriate comments. His importance lies in the fact that he is the representation of authority, of the class represented in the theatrical Melodrama as the rich and the propertied, the 'squire'. It is his position as the one who should be the defender of the weak that makes his apparent breach of ethics and good taste so heinous. Toni Allwood's ritual place is to represent the innocent victim, (the unseen woman) initially overwhelmed by evil and waiting for rescue by the hero. So she the heroine upholding the community values, and a sense of cohesion, as do the 'suffering' wives in each of the Melodrama excerpts but in this item she is also acting in a hero role as the defender of virtue.

Chapter Eight

CONCLUSION

Implications for Current Affairs

This study of the relationship between the Melodrama and television Current Affairs documentaries, provides an alternative to a focus on the accuracy of the factual reporting, as a critical basis for the interpretation of Current Affairs.

The lineage of both the Melodrama and Current Affairs, indicates that the claim of Current Affairs producers, to impartial objectivity in the selection and presentation of material, is not defensible. But given that Current Affairs has a wider function than reportage, this lack of impartiality is not necessarily undesirable.

If the primary aim of television Current Affairs documentary is the provision of a sense of certainty, an aim that is also applicable to ritual, and the nineteenth century Melodrama, the reporting of the facts becomes a secondary consideration. An understanding of the Melodrama form as the basis for the structure and function of Current Affairs programmes gives a context to the concept of 'the provision of a sense of certainty' as the underlying psychological purpose of the genre. For it is by explanation that the world is made safe. It matters little whether the programme is showing the world's mysteries in a science programme, or unmasking a villain by investigative journalism, the underlying object is that the rules which govern the universe should be laid clear. This exposure can then lead to knowledge and understanding. It is through this understanding that society will have control over an unpredictable world.

Given this primary aim of providing a sense of certainty, what is of most importance for the programme, is the establishment of a clearly delineated moral structure. The mechanism for establishing this moral structure is the mechanism of opposition.

As this thesis seeks to show, the world presented by Current Affairs television programmes is one of opposition. The opposition can be of ideas, or values, or beliefs. Most of the material used for Current Affairs programmes is selected because of this ability to demonstrate a type of opposition. This highly modified world, with its black and white oppositions, like the world of fictional Melodrama, bears only a passing relationship to the complex world of every day life, for the 'real' world of every day existence is made up of many shades, qualifications and extenuating circumstances, that interact with each other. When observing this contrast between the Current Affairs screen world with its moral blacks and whites and the world of life as it is lived with its moral variegations, we can draw the conclusion that Current Affairs is not the 'objective' exercise that it is often assumed to be. The Melodramatic Impulse with its imperative of division and its tendency towards simplification is an intrinsic element of human nature. Its presence as a major force in the presentation of Current Affairs means these programmes are not a wholly reliable source of 'the truth'. Therefore the purity of the espoused object of the programme makers, that is to accurately present 'the truth', must be placed in some doubt. Equally on the basis of this study one can conclude that the motive of the viewer of Current Affairs programmes, a motive often stated as a 'wish to know the facts,' is also in some doubt.

Current Affairs and Agendas

Clouding 'the truth' of 'real life' by simplifying it and placing it in the clear glow of the moral manichaeism of the world of the Melodramatic Impulse, has its effects not only on the motives behind the Current Affairs presentation, but also on the nature of the presentation itself.

Because it takes its form from the Melodrama and ritual, the structure of Current Affairs programmes must clearly show one side against another. The result of this polarisation is that Current Affairs is not 'simply' giving the viewer the information, and then letting them make up their own mind. What ever the intentions of the programme makers may be, the structure of the Current Affairs programme, a structure which relies on clearly delineated moral choices, means that it is setting the agenda for the viewers. This agenda setting means that Current Affairs programmes are not as reliable a guide to the rights, wrongs, and the complexities of a situation, as may be believed by both their viewers and their makers. This is not to cast a slur on either Current Affairs programmes, or on the makers of these programmes. People involved in their production think that they are presenting the facts as they do indeed occur. While they may be aware of the constraints the programme format imposes on them, they will probably be unaware of its origins. Understanding the format requirement of the Melodrama form enables programme makers, viewers and critics to be aware of the intrinsic oppositional structure of Current Affairs programmes. Once one is aware of the Melodrama structure that the presentation of participants in the roles of heroes and villains, is modelled on the Melodrama, it is possible to broaden the scope of the critical examination of the programme, and of its presentation.

However this awareness is unlikely to promote conceptual, or format changes in the researching, recording or presentation of Current Affairs. The longstanding appeal of the Melodrama form means that any move to radically change the structure and introduce a range of shades of opinion and point of view would not be widely popular. A format that works from the basis of division, cannot give logical examination to every event, and present every shade of meaning. Not only would that bring it too close to life, where things are often ambiguous, where the best course is not always obvious, but it would be too time consuming. In addition that degree of complexity and qualification is not what a community wants from Current Affairs programmes.

Current Affairs and Performance

The polarised structure employed in Current Affairs presentation is a complexly constructed reality bearing only slight relationship to the original footage. Any item selected for presentation in a Current Affairs programme is there, not only because the event 'made the news', but also because it contains the possibilities for conflict and division. Current Affairs is a constructed presentation in the same way as are film, fictional television, and theatre. Like any other form of constructed presentation, Current Affairs is driven by the dictates of performance. Performance, 'acting out', is also a vital element in all ritual,^{1, 2} and drama.^{3, 4, 5} But it is the Melodramatic form which gives 'acting out' the greatest scope by allowing, indeed legitimising, the heightening of gesture and mood.^{6, 7} Packaging and stylisation are part of the legacy of the Melodrama. This means that the elements which contribute to a compelling performance, those which will hold the audience, will be retained, and those that will repel the audience will be dropped. The dictates of producing a good performance mean that while a television Current Affairs item may be lively, it will also be limited in its scope.

The Problems of Stereotypes

Performance requirements also mean that the ordinary people who appear in these items, will be subconsciously compared by the viewer, with the Melodrama types of hero and villain. This comparison means that certain types of people, because of their features and their body language, are perceived as villains and

¹ Michael Taussig *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History Of The Senses*

² H. Barbara Boudewijnse *The ritual studies of Victor Turner: An anthropological approach and its psychological impact* in Heimbrock & Boudewijnse *Current Studies On Rituals perspectives for the psychology of religion*

³ Constantin Stanislavski *Inner Impulses and Inner Action: Creative Objectives (1916-20)*

⁴ Peter Brook *The Shifting Point - Forty years of theatrical exploration 1946-1987*

⁵ Taussig

⁶ David Bradley, Louis James and Bernard Sharratt (Ed) *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film and Television 1800-1976*

⁷ Peter Brooks *The Melodramatic Imagination*

others are perceived as heroes when they appear on television. This occurs whether their spoken contribution is positive, negative or close to neutral. When the wrong doer does not fit the stereotype then the deviation is often commented on in the voice over; for example they may be described as 'good-looking', which is usually an attribute of the hero. This is not (usually) done out of a conscious wish on the part of the maker of these programmes to manipulate, but a result of this comparison can be prejudice and stereotyping. The need to explain the deviation from the acceptable Melodrama format occurs because the Melodrama format has been absorbed by the viewer and become an unconscious set of performance expectations against which many constructed presentations are measured.

In spite of some of the problems that are inherent in the production and presentation of Current Affairs because of its origins in the Melodrama, it is unlikely that an understanding of the relationship between the Melodrama and Current Affairs will in anyway change the way Current Affairs is produced, or alter the format that programme makers use. What such an understanding can do is develop a critical approach to the genre that takes into account both the positive aspects and the difficulties of working within the Melodrama form. Because of the tendency for the Melodramatic Impulse to divide events into simple categories of good and bad, and to ignore the many shades of grey that exist, at its worst the Melodrama form can degenerate into propaganda where the villain is the enemy, and an incarnation of all that is evil. But at its best, the Melodrama form provides a framework in which the likelihood of gaining 'the best of all possible worlds' can be examined, without it appearing to be a ludicrous proposition that perfection can be attainable.

APPENDIX

- Control MUSIC Dvorak Romance, Op11 PLAY FOR 30 SECS THEN
HOLD UNDER
- Announce **Hello. I'm Adriann Smith and I'd like to introduce to you...**
- Control *Music up hold up under word roll*
- Written MELODRAMA

Current Affairs

&

The Melodramatic Impulse

Although at first glance it may seem unlikely the structure of television Current Affairs programmes 1990s is derived from a form of nineteenth century theatre the

MELODRAMA.

In particular it is based on two specific forms of Melodrama. The first form "Historical Events" recreated history in spectacular detail. The second "Real Life" covered stories of gruesome reality. (see thesis Ch 5 & 6) The dramatic form Melodrama depends on the concept of a divided universe, (thesis Ch 1-5) and on a concept of what Disher terms "Virtue Triumphant".

Melodrama is a world of sudden disasters and reversals of fortune.. It is a world of sudden disasters and reversals of fortune. It is a world of the virtuous and the vicious the heroic and the weak.

I have taken a selection of events from New Zealand Current Affairs events on TV One and TV Three in the weeks: 30th June to the 7th July & 18th -22nd August 1996, as examples.

- Control *Montage of faces then*
Opening montage excerpts from Current Affairs programme, life after death, rape trial, euthanasia, Romanian child.
- Written The fact that I am employing written linking script is itself taken from the Melodrama. Dialogue scrolls are discussed in more detail in the written thesis but;- these ecriteaux which reappeared in the silent cinema are with us still as titles and sub-titles.
- Control *Fade music under Opening titles from 'Kiwiana' (self music)*
- Control *Bring up music and hold under.*
- Announce Now lets consider in some detail the events presented in miniature in that opening montage. They cover the conflictual and the strange. The strange derives in part from the Romantic movement and will be dealt with briefly later, and in further detail in the written thesis. But its the conflictual that's the basic philosophical premise that underlies the world of the Melodramatic impulse. The world of light and dark. And it's in this choice and presentation of these subjects that today's Current Affairs programmes most resemble theatrical Melodrama. Take a look at the two following examples. The first from the 1832 Melodrama the Factory Lad, the second from TV Three's Current Affairs programme Ralston in July 1996.
- Written The Factory Lad John Walker Surrey 1832
- Control *Mill scene from 'The Factory Lad', Rape Trial judge 'Ralston'*

Announce In both these examples the emphasis is on division.

Melodrama, the drama of good and evil, is an ancient form as is written about by Maurice Willson Disher, Heilman and Brooks. Its either the drama of good and evil, or the drama of an at times uncaring universe against a weak human; so it is the drama of being human in the world. One of “philosophical” features of Melodrama is that good triumphs that evil is vanquished, that “virtue is triumphant”. In both Melodrama and Current Affairs there is

Control *Music hold under and bring up on ecriteaus.*

Written The Hero

Control *Rescue scene from London By Night*

Written London By Night attributed to Charles Selby.

Derived from Dion Boucicault’s play After Dark 1867 A play of crime, injustice attempted murder and reconciliation.

The hero has a modern counterpart

Control Fade music

Control *Tongan Silver Medallist 60 Minutes 12th August (self music)*

Written For good to triumph over evil there must first be

Control Bring up music and hold under

“Suffering Virtue,” (also called Virtue Repressed”

Control *Attic scene ‘The Drunkard’, Harbottle ‘hit own child’*

20/20.....30/6/96

Written There are struggles with the justice system and with justice itself

From The Factory Lad

Control *Rape Trial Judge Court Scene ‘The Factory Lad’*

Written There are Suffering Families

Control *Harbottle scene outside house “Why were you afraid?” to. “twenty-one”*

- Factory Lad scene at home with wife*
- Written Scenes of Despair
- Control *Suicide scene London by Night Harbottle "Something stopped me"*
- Written And courage
- Control *, C P Comic*
- Written There are Pathetic Children
- Control *Family scene 'The Drunkard'*
- Written The Drunkard 'W. H. Smith & A Gentleman' 1844
- Control *orphanage Bosnia*
- Written for Melodrama resonates with the emotions
- Written and scenes of degradation and redemption
- Control *The drunk scene and the philanthropist 'The Drunkard' boarding house Harbottle 20/20*
- Written For Melodrama is about the healing of division by over coming evil
So there are happy endings
- Control *Father scene London By Night Bosnia meeting Elaina*
- Written and of course there is The Villian
- Control *Cribbs 'The Drunkard, Harbottle 20/20'*
- Announce **Outdated as they may now seem. When those Melodramas were first presented to their audience they were seen as "real" depictions of "real life" and the audience had the same reaction to them as they do to today's television Current Affairs. So there's a strong similarity between the Current Affairs of today's television and the Melodrama of yesterday's stage; similarity in subject matter as we've seen with plays with titles like, *The Factory Strike; or, Want Crime and Retribution*, plays that pre-figure the investigative or human interest drama. There are also spectacular events like *The Battle of Waterloo* which unfortunately I do not have the resources to recreate.**

Control *Opening to Assignment Hong Kong*
 Written A 1990's version c.f the spectacular production
 Control *Play music Sibelius Serenade no. 2 G minor the hold under*

Announce But it is not just in its ethos or in its subject matter that today's Current Affairs programmes show their descent from the Melodrama of the nineteenth century. There are important performance and stylistic features that show their origins in that popular and accessible form. The gestures of the Melodrama were excessive, the better to show the emotion being displayed . Today's gestures, in Current Affairs programme, are in the camera, the close up, the lingering shot, the descendent of the tableau of the Melodrama, the purposeful pan which directs the audience's eyes.

Control *Play Elaina at orphanage scene minus dialogue, music underneath*
 Written Like the Melodrama television Current Affairs is primarily visual presentation that speaks to the emotions.

Announce The influence of the Melodrama can also be seen television's use of scenery, of the picturesque. The concept of the expression of emotion, of the inspiration of the sublime in nature, comes from the ideas of the Romantic movement, and infuses our use of scenery today. Compare these television shots and these pictures from the German Romantic painters.

Control *Heartland August 22nd Kaipara Harbour, German stills*

Announce over pictures

The expressive use of scenery was first developed on the spectacle stage of the nineteenth century. The magnificence of nature was one theme seen here in these paintings, The

Schmadriback Falls by Joseph Anton Koch and the Chalk Cliffs by Caspar David Friedrich. These paintings date from 1811 and 1810. Magnificence in nature is still a visual theme. Another theme in Romantic painting was the sense of the supernatural, of life beyond the grave. This is Friedrich's Abbey in the Oakwoods painted in 1810. The sense of the supernatural in nature may have passed but the sense of awe remains as does the feeling of reflection and transformation expressed on camera, and in print in this 1832 Friedrich picture of the Large Enclosure near Dresden. Another theme is harmony seen in Blechen's 1828 painting of View over Roofs and Gardens and again in these view of Kaipara Harbour. Also lingering from the Romantic vision is the sense of the fairytale of the fantastic, this is Kaipara; this is Shinkel Castle by a River Friedrich 1820.

Announce In subject matter, the use of adversarial form, in heightened gesture and picturesque scenery the Melodrama lives every day on our television screens, not only in dramas and soap operas, but in the form that we're inclined to think of as entirely factual, the form of television news and especially Current Affairs documentary.

Control *Kaipara Harbour fade to credits.*

Written P.S. Did you notice the music? It is the use of music that gives the name Melodrama. The first melodrame was by Rousseau; violin music underscored and enhanced the performer's mood. Today it still reinforced the mood even in news and Current Affairs.

THE END

Control *Roll credits*

Total duration 43'20"

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