

drama. The movement's most prominent figure was the poet T. S. Eliot, who in 1934 was asked by E. Martin Browne, a theater director working for the Anglican diocese of London, to compose some verses (later known as "Choruses from the Rock") for a diocesan stage production. This was followed by a commission from Browne and Canterbury Cathedral that resulted in the play *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), an explicitly religious play, which made Eliot famous as a playwright and which is arguably the best poetic drama written in modern times. Eliot later aspired to the writing of religious plays composed in verse about people in modern circumstances, partly because of the aesthetic challenge such a task presented, partly for the sake of propagating Christian faith in the modern world, and partly as an answer to existentialist playwrights. He wrote five of these, of which the most popular has been *The Cocktail Party* (1949). Others active in the revival of poetic religious drama have been Christopher Fry, Ronald Duncan, Henri Ghéon, and André Obey. However, the Belgian Michel de Ghelderode, who wrote perhaps the most forceful religious dramas of the century, chose not to use verse. Instead, he adopted a theatrical style somewhere between that of expressionism and absurdism, yielding works of strong religious and theatrical interest, including *Barabbas* (1929), *Chronicles of Hell* (1929), and *The Women at the Tomb* (1928).

During this period, Brecht was seeking a theater that synthesized both the aesthetic value of expressionism and the instructional value of naturalism. He sought a theater that was poetic, parable-like, didactic, and epic, portraying the large configurations of power while locating the dilemmas of the little person within these configurations. In his play, *Galileo* (1943), for example, he demonstrates how the authority of an institution supersedes the rationality of scientific truth. Garbed in papal vestments, the otherwise supportive prelate must force Galileo to renounce his discovery. To watch Brecht's Berliner Ensemble perform one of his plays was to watch a calm ritual unfold. The dramaturgy is antinaturalistic and yet captivating. Although there is controversy over the precise meaning of Brechtian concepts like "the alienation effect" (*Verfremdungs-effekt*) and "epic," the result was a certain spaciousness that allowed audiences to contemplate ideas that might form a basis for decisions in real life. Although Brecht, with his Marxist orientation, derided religious piety, his work seems to lie within a biblical tradition of prophecy in its analysis of an era and its denunciation of the destructive forces within society.

**PERFORMANCE THEATER.** An important result of the competition given to theater by film and television has been the recognition by innovative theorists and practitioners that theater is not necessarily an art of representation. Instead, leading innovators began to view theater as an art of performance that focuses upon the actuality of the performer's existence and the interaction between the performer, the other performers, and the spectators. There have been attempts to work from an aesthetic of actuality rather than one of imitation. This awareness, and the techniques of performance as-

sociated with it, tend to move theater in the direction of ritualization and thus bring to the surface one of its more important yet hidden connections with religion.

For this reason, it may be argued that there has been no more significant development in the relation between theater and religion in the twentieth century than the experimental theater movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The most influential exponent of this movement was Jerzy Grotowski, founder of the Polish Laboratory Theater. The notion of theater as religious ritual has become more explicit for many of Grotowski's successors. Peter Brook has acknowledged the inspiration of G. I. Gurdjieff, also a major influence for Grotowski. Inspired by yogans and dervishes, Gurdjieff's concept of theater was that of a spiritual quest employing movement and music to achieve enlightenment. Brook turned increasingly to an exploration of religious themes, including performance adaptations of Sūfī poetry and a spectacular dramatization of the Hindu epic, *Mahābhārata*. Brook's 1998 production about a Russian mnemonist, *Je suis un Phénomène*, implied, according to the *London Times*, "that the brain remains unknowable and exists in relation to yet more imponderable issues to do with friendship, God and death" (quoted in Moffitt, 1999, p. 164). Indeed, the intensity of such work necessitates the formation of quasi- or actual religious communities of performers who often abandon the role of entertainer in favor of both improving technical skills and finding an absolute immediacy of the performing gesture in a quest for a transcendent awareness.

One such troupe, Dzieci (Polish for "children"), founded by Grotowski disciple Matt Mitler in 1999, is "dedicated to a search for the 'sacred' through the medium of theater." Carrying this idea to pastoral lengths, Dzieci regularly visits patients in hospitals, where moments of nonverbal interaction result in therapy for the patient, learning for the performer, and transcendent awareness for both. In the course of developing a theater project inspired by Aldous Huxley's *Devils of Loudun*, the Dzieci troupe stumbled upon the idea of creating a Fool's Mass, which has become its signature piece, performed repeatedly in various church settings. The performers wear vestments not of priests but of medieval bedlam idiots who are called upon by circumstance to celebrate a Mass even though they do not know how. Moving easily between the sublime and the ridiculous, drawing its audience through laughter toward participation and contemplation, the work resists being categorized as either theater or religion, becoming both at once in an event experienced by many as transformative. As they stand beside these grotesque characters in prayer, worshippers begin to participate in the liturgy with new understanding.

**AFRICAN AMERICAN THEATER.** African American religion in the United States, unlike the religion of most white Americans, has made a direct artistic contribution to the theater, largely because worship in African American churches has retained a vigorous performance tradition. Narrative recitation in African American preaching, for example, is theatrical in