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Intelligent Design (after Julie Taymor): Opposing Darwinism in The Crystal Cathedral's *Creation: Once Upon All Time*

by

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In her fascinating book *Narratives of Human Evolution*, anthropologist Misia Landau argues that scientific theories, especially that of evolution and natural selection, are first and foremost narratives, and like all stories they are shaped by the culture and background of the storytellers. In other words, evolution is not only a scientific theory; it is also a narrative of the origins of life on Earth, and by extension, humanity. Likewise, the teaching of evolution has become another narrative. Like all good stories it has protagonists and antagonists and conflict.

Jane Goodall has linked the history of the theory of evolution to popular entertainment and theatre in her excellent *Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin: Out of the Natural Order*. Goodall contends that, during the nineteenth century, in England and the United States, while museums focused on "natural order," popular entertainment focused on "missing links," freak shows and evolutionary throwbacks.¹ The notion that there was an ape-like species in human evolutionary history resulted in the performing of the "missing link" via these presentations, performances and entertainments. Whereas clergymen may have railed against Darwin, the popular imagination found humor and entertainment, treating evolution as "a common joke."² And yet, as Goodall notes, "This is not to suggest that such entertainments were theory driven, but rather that they reveal how popular curiosity often operates in the same areas as scientific study."³ In other words, popular performance centered on evolution in the nineteenth century was centered on the figure of the "ape ancestor" as object of curiosity and humor.

¹ Jane Goodall, *Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin: Out of the Natural Order* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 2-3.

² Goodall, p. 5.

³ Goodall, p. 2.

Goodall observes that Darwin's and P.T. Barnum's careers "ran parallel."⁴ Barnum took the ideas that Darwin proposed and turned them into a source of mass entertainment. By the end of the nineteenth century, both science and show business were involved in "the culture of exhibition," with Barnum's popular culture parodically reproducing the high intellectual culture of the museum.⁵ The popular culture may have ultimately been more influential in shaping the popular understanding of evolution, even to this day. As Goodall concludes, "The dialogic shift between the popular stage and the world of ideas was mischievous, yet it was often insightful."⁶ But by the early twentieth century the debate over evolution was reduced to "verbal controversy," and was no longer a site for popular performance and exhibition.⁷

In the second great period of debate between Biblically-based ideas of creation and the idea of evolution which began in the nineteen-eighties in the United States under President Reagan, with the advent of the mandated teaching of scientific creationism and court cases opposing such mandates, we see a re-emergence of the difference between the elite realm of academics and court cases and the popular entertainment. This time, however, it is the anti-evolutionary side that is focusing on theatricality and the epiphenomena of science to advance their agenda: museums with animatronic displays, Christian planetariums, and anti-evolution dramatic performances, to name but a few. *Answers in Genesis*, for example, has opened the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, near Cincinnati, which features computer generated visual effects and animatronic dinosaurs and humans interacting in the same scenes. The displays in the museum are more Disney than Natural History. Biblical creation is presented as mass entertainment, *pace* Barnum.

Since Barnum and company were so successful at advancing the idea of evolution in the popular imagination through mass entertainment, the religious right in America is now using the same tactic aiming for the same result. Seeing the exhibits in Barnum made concrete the reality of evolution and from experience came belief. Christian mass entertainment about

⁴ Goodall, p. 7.

⁵ Goodall, p. 26.

⁶ Goodall, p. 6.

⁷ Goodall, p. 219.

creation attempts to follow the same paradigm: visual experience makes belief. Seeing the exhibits in the Creation Museum, or the interaction between angels, dinosaurs and Adam and Eve in *Creation*, as described below, is designed to make concrete the reality of intelligent design and creationism and from that experience will come belief. In the twenty-first century the mainstream museums still focus on "natural order," but the popular culture (at least Christian-based popular culture) is now focusing not on "missing links," but on "creation science" and the role of God in the development of life on Earth. This view is most prominently on display in *Creation: Once Upon All Time*, an anti-evolution theatrical production at the Crystal Cathedral in Southern California.

Mainstream theatre in the United States in the twentieth century has portrayed the story of the fight over the truth of evolution as the struggle of progressive, independent thinkers espousing natural selection against narrow-minded, Bible-thumping creationists. From high school and college favorite *Inherit the Wind* to the more recent *The Great Tennessee Monkey Trial* by Peter Goodchild, which draws from the transcripts of the 1925 Scopes trial, to the most recent *Darwin in Malibu* by Crispin Whittell, contemporary drama's construction of the debate on evolution versus creationism is a text-centered, intellectual enterprise.⁸

Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee's *Inherit the Wind* (1955) is a fictionalized version of the so-called "Scopes Monkey Trial" in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925, taking much poetic license with the story and characters. It also, however, primarily served as a warning against McCarthyism. Goodchild's play, commissioned by Los Angeles Theatre Works to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Scopes trial is an actual docudrama, taken from the transcripts of the actual trial and touring in its initial run with a celebrity cast (including Ed Asner, John deLancie, Tom Bosley, Michael Lerner, James Cromwell and Sharon Gless) to 24 cities, including Vanderbilt University in Tennessee.⁹ *Darwin in Malibu* is a British play that had its American premiere in Burbank in May 2006, in which Darwin finds himself living on a shack on the beach in Malibu in the present day with a young woman while Bishop Samuel Wilberforce and Thomas Huxley argue about evolution. While Darwin has mellowed with age,

⁸ Steven McElroy, "Now Arguing Near You: The Evolution Drama" *New York Times* 12 October 2005: B4; Daryl H. Miller, "Dude, Evolution's first debate lives on" *Los Angeles Times* 8 May 2006: E2.

⁹ See McElroy and Tricia Olszewski, "A 'Monkey Trial' Still Being Aped" *Washington Post* 3 February 2006, C1.

Wilberforce and Huxley demonstrate that the positions they held in the 1860s are the same positions staked out today by creationists and modernists.

In all of these plays, the reality of evolution is a given and the creationist position is constructed as, in the words of William F. Buckley, "standing athwart history yelling, 'Stop.'" All of these dramas also rely upon the drama of argument, dialogue and impassioned speech. They do not rely upon spectacle or stunning visuals to achieve their effects. In fact, *The Great Tennessee Monkey Trial* began life as a radio play, and despite the histrionics of the performers, it remains a verbal, not a visual, exercise. As with Goodall, from the evolutionist's point of view remains rooted in a "verbal controversy."

Although Evangelical Christianity has long been associated with the anti-theatrical prejudice in the United States that can be traced back to the Puritans, numerous performance groups, theatre artists, drama-based ministries and theatrical pieces have emerged from this movement within America, responding to such social issues as abortion, homosexuality, and the role of religion in public life. From *Hell House*, performed annually in October at Trinity Church in Cedar Hill, Texas, a Dallas suburb, to *The Great Passion Play* of Eureka Springs, Arkansas, written by Gerald L.K. Smith, a notorious anti-Semitic preacher who spoke in favor of deporting Jews and blacks, in the 1960s and still performed annually today, to the annual pageants at the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, *The Glory of Christmas* (begun in 1981) and *The Glory of Easter* (begun in 1984), evangelical dramas are exactly what their names suggest: an opportunity to evangelize through theatre, celebrating belief while trying to convert non-believers.¹⁰ Such dramas are often either over-earnest (and often inaccurate) recreations of Biblical events or modern morality plays, cautioning against the dangers of non-belief. And they are successful. Over two million people have seen the two holiday pageants at the Crystal Cathedral, and even though the performance of *The Great Passion Play* consists of amateurs lip-

¹⁰ *Hell House* is an annual Halloween "haunted house," but rather than the traditional scares of murderers and supernatural creatures, the Cedar Hill performance event centers on showing a girl dying from a botched abortion, an unhappy gay man dying from AIDS, a boy who commits suicide, Satanists who sacrifice babies, and an underage girl who drinks at a party and is raped as a result, all of whom go to hell. The purpose of the house is encouraging those who attend to follow a strict Christian life and give themselves over to Jesus. The amateur-created piece is documented in the film *Hell House*. Keenan Roberts, the pastor of Abundant Life Church in Colorado, now sells "Hell House Outreach Kits," which contain the script, a manual for producing the event, a video of the Abundant Life version, and a sound effects CD for \$208.00 to churches all over the United States ("Halloween Hell Houses, Judgment Houses, etc." *Religious Tolerance.Org*, 3 November 2004. http://www.religioustolerance.org/hallo_he.htm. Accessed 5 October 2005). For information on the Arkansas play, see Stephanie Simon, "Acting on Faith in Arkansas" *Los Angeles Times*. 22 September 2005: A1; A33.

syncing to a recording made in the sixties five nights a week from April to October, it is one of the nation's best attended outdoor dramas, "topping even famed Shakespeare festivals."¹¹

The Evangelical right has a history in the United States of using drama and theatre in order to evangelize and convert the non-believer. A more recent phenomenon is the practice of using popular performance practice to argue against evolution. Ken Ham, for example, a former Australian biology teacher and director of "Answers in Genesis," gives hundreds of presentations to school children a year, using dinosaur puppets to encourage the students "to reject much of geology, paleontology and evolutionary biology as a sinister tangle of lies."¹² The puppets' message: God created the universe in six days, 6000 years ago and they were in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve.¹³ This presentation marks the first use of the Barnum model for the presentation of anti-evolutionary model.

A much larger puppet show, clearly modeled after the success of Julie Taymor's *The Lion King* was created and performed at the Crystal Cathedral. *Creation: Once Upon All Time* was written, produced and directed by Carol Schuller Milner, daughter of Robert Schuller, the pastor of the Crystal Cathedral perhaps best known for his "Hour of Power" broadcasts on television. It was part of the church's 50th anniversary celebration of the founding of the ministry.¹⁴ The production ran from 9 June 2005 to 17 July and was then extended to 4 September. The music was scored by Jeff Atmajian, a Hollywood scorer who orchestrated John Debney's score for *The Passion of the Christ*.

In a sermon delivered on May 29, 2005, Milner related to the congregation the origins of the project. In 1992, she states, she was listening to Christian music at home and heard a voice saying, "How can you say there is no God when all around you Creation calls?"¹⁵ Although admittedly the words and voice were actually from the song she was listening to, Milner

¹¹ Stephanie Simon, "Acting on Faith in Arkansas," *Los Angeles Times* 22 September 2005: A1, A33.

¹² Stephanie Simon, "Their Own Version of a Big Bang" *Los Angeles Times* 11 February 2006: A1.

¹³ Simon, "Their Own A16.

¹⁴ Note – the celebration is of the founding of the ministry, not of the Crystal Cathedral itself, which was built in 1980.

¹⁵ Robert A. Schuller, "The Message – Once Upon All Time: Creation" *Crystal Cathedral Ministries*. 29 May 2005. www.hourofpower.org.hk/data/readdata100/readeng-183.html. Accessed 6 October 2005.

presents the experience as being divine in origin.¹⁶ She states she realized, "'There is supposed to be a *Glory of Creation!*' And I could see it happen in the Cathedral."¹⁷ When she told her father, he told her that he had been "trying for three years to get somebody to do this story. We have a *Glory of Christmas*, and a *Glory of Easter*, we need a *Glory of Creation to complete the trilogy of our faith*" (emphasis mine).¹⁸ As Schuler's words indicate, the origins of *Creation: Once Upon All Time* were rooted in the desire for a third spectacular performance that presents Biblical events to the congregation at the appropriate time of year.

Whereas the Easter and Christmas pageants were presented at the seasonally appropriate time of year, the creation pageant (which has been presented only once, it has not been revived in the summer of 2006) was presented in the same summer that a lawsuit was proceeding against the Dover (PA) Board of Education challenging the board policy of requiring science teachers to read a statement challenging evolution and encouraging exploration of intelligent design, and the same summer that the Kansas State Board of Education, with a conservative Christian majority, held a series of hearings in Topeka on how to teach the origins of life, and the same summer that was the 80th anniversary of the Scopes Trial.¹⁹ In short, evolution was being challenged throughout the United States by those in favor of teaching creationism or intelligent design.²⁰ The Crystal Cathedral planned a play that would complete a "trilogy of faith" – in other words, it is faith-based theatre.

¹⁶ The song was Brian Doerksen's "Creation Calls," which contains very similar lyrics ("How could I say there is no God / When all around creation calls?" (Brian Doerksen, "Creation Calls Lyrics" *Higher Praise Lyrics and Chords*. <http://www.higherpraise.com/lyrics1/CreationCalls.htm>. Accessed 22 July 2006). (See also Schuler).

¹⁷ Schuler.

¹⁸ Schuler.

¹⁹ For a fair and accurate account of the Dover, PA case, see Gordy Slack, *The Battle over the Meaning of Everything* (San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons, 2007).

²⁰ Although Creationism and Intelligent Design are not necessarily the same thing, the author is purposefully conflating the two as they are both points on the same continuum. There are, in fact, a variety of Creationists, from "Young Earth Creationists," who believe in a strictly literal Biblical interpretation, and that the world and universe are less than 10,000 years old, "Old Earth Creationists," who believe all life was created by God in more or less its present form, but that the world and universe are ancient, "Gap Creationists," who believe that there is a large temporal gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, explaining the difference in age between the world and the life in it, "Day / Age Creationists," who believe that each of the Biblical "days" of creation correspond to a geological epoch, "Evolutionary Creationists" who believe that God uses evolution to guide His creation, and "Intelligent Design Creationists" who believe that the "facts" of biology indicate the presence of a creator. Although many Intelligent Design advocates claim not to be creationists, Michael Shermer effectively argues that Intelligent Design is, in fact, religiously based, noting, "It is not coincidental that almost all Intelligent Design Creationists are Christians" (*Why Darwin Matters*, New York: Times Books, 2006. p. 88). In the case of

Working with Michael Guillen, the former scientific consultant for ABC, Milner developed the concept and worked on the script. Guillen, states Milner, "helped me make it scientifically irrefutable."²¹ One might ask why a piece of theatre must be "irrefutable," but in this case it is apparent that Milner wanted to create a work of faith that could also be used as an argument in favor of intelligent design. It had to appeal to audiences. Unlike the evolution based dramas, which, as noted above, rely on language and dialogue to convince, Milner decided to create an "experience-based" spectacle.

An Imax-size screen occupies the rear of the stage. The production begins with a picture of a large city, and then the camera flies away from the city to an idyllic lake, where the lights come up on a small fishing boat. The audience is introduced to "Gramps" (Robert Munns) and "Michael" (Thomas Ernst, Skylar Millicano and Timothy Milner, alternating in the role), his grandson, as they fish. They discuss the beauty of the environment when Gramps remarks, "It never ceases to amaze me that someone made all this." Michael insists on evolution, the big bang and scientific explanations for natural phenomenon. Gramps explains that "you'll miss a lot of beauty" if you don't believe, and tells Michael the story of creation. Gramps is clearly the voice of experience and knowledge. Michael is the younger generation, interested in science and dinosaurs and yet meant to be understood as not knowing "The Truth" and easily distracted by his secular teachers.

As the lights fade on the framing story, the bob on Michael's fishing line, shown on the screen, is transformed into the planet Earth. The camera then pulls back, and via computer-generated imagery the earth shrinks and the solar system, the galaxy, and eventually the universe shrink to nothing on the screen. We are the in the presence of "The Presence," Milner's name for God, which is never seen, but voiced by a chorus. Dancers with glow sticks then appear in the aisles and on stage as the screen bursts into light. The program informs that they

Kitzmiller et. al. versus Dover Area School Board, the decision in the Dover, PA Intelligent Design case, Judge John E. Jones III, himself a conservative Christian appointed by President George W. Bush, wrote in his ruling, "that ID cannot uncouple itself from its creationist, and thus religious, antecedents" (quoted in Shermer, p. 104). Jones's ruling was that the teaching of ID is a violation of the Establishment Cause, which is commonly interpreted to separate Church and State. In short, as Intelligent Design is, as Judge Jones has noted, Creationism in a fancy tuxedo, this essay will make no distinction between the two and use the terms interchangeably except for the express purpose of discussing the response of "Young Earth Creationists" to the claims of "Creation: Once Upon All Time."

²¹ Schuler.

represent "quantum irregularities that lead us to subatomic particles. These collect and merge, allowing light to escape. Let there be light! (Genesis 1: 2-3)."²²

A spectacular version of creation is played out combining computer-generated imagery on the screen, recorded music, live dancers and performers on stage and aerialists and wire performers above the heads of the audience. (In fact, more than one reviewer compared the production not only to *Lion King* but also to Cirque du Soleil. The *OC Weekly* titled its review "Church du Soleil.")²³ The Presence calls out for things to be created and, to a song called "Quarks and Nebula," the universe is created. The "Star Archers" make the stars, and a storm creates the Earth. Then, Lucifer, represented by an aerialist, literally falls from the Heavens to the face of the earth (the stage).

On the Earth, a primordial fish puppet, complete with fangs and bioluminescent appendages, moves across the stage, under the Ocean. It emerges onto "land." A pteranodon (an actor with wings and beak) flies on wires, circling above the stage. A giant Tyrannosaurus Rex, operated by seven puppeteers, emerges out onto the stage and menaces the audience. The giant dinosaur then collapses and dies, and out of his carcass emerge a parade of modern animals – gorillas, rhinos, kangaroos, a tortoise, an elephant, a panda bear, etc. – who fill what is now the Garden of Eden and playfully engage the nearby audience. Interestingly, some critics saw the emergence of the animals from the corpse of the dinosaur as representing the reality of macroevolution.²⁴ Adam and Eve emerge out of streams of fabric as aerialists, although they are given voice by a second set of earthbound actors. The aerial Adam and Eve come together in an aerial ballet, ending in what is hinted at as an act of procreation. Other than Gramps and Michael, the first act is mostly wordless.

The second act opens with Lucifer as "the Lord of the Earth," plotting against Adam and Eve. He is joined by other fallen angels, all male (in marked contrast to The Presence, which has a distinctly feminine aspect, not least of which as the chorus which performs the Voice is mostly female). Eve sings of her love and devotion to the Presence, but is then immediately seduced by

²² *Creation: Once Upon All Time* program. n.p.

²³ Daryl H. Miller, "Crystal Cathedral takes it from the beginning" *Los Angeles Times* (11 June 2005): E4; Jeremy Rosenberg, "Church du Soleil." *OC Weekly* 10.48 (August 5-11, 2005); The Orange County Register.

²⁴ Bill Hoesch, "The Crystal Cathedral's 'Once Upon All Time: Creation.'" *Institute For Creation Research*. 29 August 2005. www.icr.org/index.php?module=news&action=view&ID=26. Accessed 6 October 2005.

Lucifer. She offers the apple to Adam. The Presence then casts them out of Eden, the scenic aspects of which then vanish, as Adam and Eve begin to wander. Crying out in their grief and despair, they are comforted in the last scene, entitled "Angelic Promises," in which a chorus of angels sings to them promising future redemption and restoration when God sends his son.

The vision of post-Edenic Adam and Eve fades to black as the audience is returned to Michael and Gramps. Michael concedes that Gramps' story has converted him: "I'm thinking that your belief is bigger, your story is stronger, your faith is more inviting than my doubt." In short, the pageant of creation played out before him has made Michael a believer in intelligent design instead of Darwinian evolution, the result also intended for the viewing audience. It is, as Goodall notes about Barnum's displays of Darwin's evolution, a mischievous undercutting of evolution, but also insightful.

Michael Guillen, Ph.D., the show's science advisor and namesake of Michael, notes that "the intention of this production was to depict the story of creation in the most accurate way that we could imagine, embracing the truth from both the Bible and science."²⁵ In other words, the show utilizes the language of both science and the Bible and the visuals of *The Lion King*, Cirque du Soleil, and contemporary music concerts and multimedia theatre to present an argument for intelligent design. It is a mischievous pastiche of such theatrical productions, but in being so it promotes creationism and disparages evolution. Milner herself (along with Schuler) reject a literalist interpretation of Genesis, but does embrace intelligent design: "I really love the intelligent design concept," she states, "I think that it's a beautiful concept. I think it allows for a lot of possibilities."²⁶

Interestingly, the play was ballyhooed by creationists and intelligent design advocates as not being Biblical enough. Jim Pamplin of the Creation Science Fellowship, writing a review for *Answers in Genesis*, a young Earth creationist organization, argues that the narrative of creation as presented in the Crystal Cathedral does not follow the order of creation as outlined in the Bible, conflicting with Genesis 1 and Exodus 20, in which the Earth was created before the sun as part of a literal six day process. Pamplin holds special scorn for the scene in which modern animals emerge from the dead body of the T-Rex:

²⁵ Quoted in Rosenberg.

²⁶ Quoted in Sandi Dolbee, "Lavish 'Creation'" *San Diego Union Tribune* 16 June 2005.

In Scene 7, *Creation* portrays death *before* Adam's sin, another anti-biblical teaching. In this scene, a Tyrannosaurus Rex collapses and an elephant 'evolves' from its corpse. As the AiG [Answers in Genesis] website often declares, such animal death before Adam conflicts with scripture.²⁷

He concludes:

Like so many in the church who compromise regarding the book of Genesis, writer/producer/director Carol Schuller Milner (daughter of the church's pastor) sadly forces long ages, evolutionary thinking into Genesis 1 – like stuffing a stepsister's big ugly foot into Cinderella's glass slipper. It doesn't fit. It won't fit. It cannot fit. The two are mutually incompatible.²⁸

By blending aspects of natural science (quantum physics, continental drift, etc.) and Biblical creation, Milner attempts to create a piece that may be more convincing to the non-believer. In fact, however, by attempting to please two masters, some assert, as Pamplin does, she has pleased neither. Specifically, Pamplin's concern is that this production, in a church, by well known and respected evangelical Christians, makes it more difficult to teach Young Earth Creationism. Likewise, from the other side, the *Los Angeles Times* review notes that, "There's nothing here, really, to agitate either the religious-minded or science-oriented communities" because everything is "rather vague."²⁹

That assertion is not entirely true, however, according to critics. Bill Hoesch, a researcher in geology for the Institute for Creation Research, also critiqued the show, finding it "a disappointment," and arguing, "*Creation* empties the Genesis account of most of its essential truth claims, injects it with naturalistic science, and then presents it as truth."³⁰ Hoesch, a Biblical literalist and young earth creationist was "grieved to see so many deviations from scripture."³¹ Hoesch, however, was not the target audience for Milner, whose intent was to keep the production, in Miller's sense, "rather vague:" "One of my goals was to try and create an

²⁷ Jim Pamplin, "Creation: Once Upon All Time – A Review." *Answers in Genesis*. 11 June 2006. www.answersingenesis.org/docs2005/0611play.asp?vPrint=1. Accessed: 6 October 2005.

²⁸ Pamplin.

²⁹ Miller, "Crystal" E4.

³⁰ Hoesch.

³¹ Hoesch.

environment where the ethereal and the tangible could dwell upon a supernatural, spiritual heaven," she notes.³²

The way in which she does this is through multi-media, contemporary performance practice. Atmajian composed a Hollywood-style soundtrack reminiscent of John Williams or Jerry Goldsmith. The T-Rex theme is especially suggestive of Williams's work on *Jurassic Park*. The music is mostly instrumental. Out of 22 songs, only five contain vocals, sung by Adam and Eve, a chorus and the angels. Lucifer has lengthy monologues, but the other Fallen angels are both comic and creepy. Aerialists and acrobats, giant puppets, special effects, the largest screen in the West, and all the lasers light shows, smoke machines and explosions of a popular rock concert use the materials of secular mainstream culture to advocate intelligent design. One might add to Michael's speech at the end that Gramps' faith is also "cooler," as it has tremendous eye candy to impress the audience. This message is the ultimate one for the audience – the Biblical account must be correct because it has better special effects than *Inherit the Wind*. Jeremy Rosenberg argues that even calling God "The Presence," makes *Creation* more "George Lucasian," and the production aims to take belief in ID to the prequel trilogy generation.³³

We might contextualize and interpret *Creation* in several ways. First, it is an example of the growing phenomenon of "Jesutainment," in which Evangelical religion embraces the structure and form of popular culture, but not its content. Instead, the content is centered on Christ. The best known example of this is Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, which was designed to appeal to the believer and non-believer alike, and certainly did very good box office. The proliferation of Megachurches and their Christ-centered entertainment are another example – from Christian rock concerts to the use of acrobats to tell the story of Jesus at New Life Church in Colorado Springs. The growing expectation in megachurches is that Christian culture not only can but must be entertaining as well as biblically-based.

Second, one might view *Creation* as a communal celebration of "rejected knowledge" in James Webb's sense. While Webb was writing about the occult community and the then-growing New Age movement, the description could also apply to the intelligent design / creationism movement: "a rejection of reason, a resurrection of faith," coupled with "an

³² Quoted in Rosenberg.

³³ Rosenberg.

underground of rejected knowledge" that the true believer, who knows the "truth," embraces.³⁴ This knowledge that is rejected by the mainstream intellectual community becomes the cornerstone of a faith-based interpretation of the physical universe in opposition to rationalism, materialism, science and technology. The purpose of *Creation* is to create (or reinforce) a sense of community among those who believe in ID or creationism. Much as in other aspects of the Evangelical movement, which creates its own version of mainstream elements for Christians, such as dating services, coffee, fiction, music, etc., *Creation* is theatre for the believer, theatre that embraces knowledge rejected by the secular and scientific communities.

Third, *Creation* places theatre in the service of a conservative (both politically and religiously) religious agenda. From a theoretical standpoint, in a reversal of Aristotelian values, as in *Glory of Christmas* and *Glory of Easter*, since the plot is already known, value is placed on the spectacle. In *Easter*, Jesus is resurrected with a laser beam from "Heaven" that explodes the rock covering the tomb, eliciting huge applause from the audience. In both *Easter* and *Christmas*, pageants of animals cross the stage, Roman soldiers ride real horses, angels fly in on wires over the heads of the audience, large choreographed dance numbers fill the stage to Broadway-style music, and Bible stories are recreated with state-of-the-art special effects. Like Michael, the audience is meant to be "wowed" by these effects, and come to belief. It is not the logical argument, scientific proof or factual evidence that causes one to reject evolution for intelligent design; it is the spectacle itself that is cause for conversion. Just as one is expected to walk out of *Lion King* singing along and remembering one's favorite moments, one is expected to walk out of *Creation* doing the same, and believing along the way. Like *Lion King*, *Creation* was also surrounded by souvenir marketing. After seeing the show one could buy t-shirts, sweatshirts, the original soundtrack, posters, and other memorabilia. This aspect is true for the two holiday spectacles at the Crystal Cathedral as well.³⁵

Fourth, we might note that all of the legal battles surrounding evolution and intelligent design are in the arena of education. Right wing Christians influence local school boards to include intelligent design, or to at least "teach the controversy." The battle over ID is not just a religious or scientific one; it is, at heart, an educational one. *Creation* uses puppets,

³⁴ James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1976), p. 9-10.

³⁵ The souvenir program for *The Glory of Easter*, for example, notes, "The Crystal Cathedral Book and Gift Center offers a unique assortment of *Glory of Easter* gifts for your family. Videotapes and the original soundtrack of the *Glory of Christmas* are also available" (n.p.).

human/media interaction and music to teach intelligent design. We might note that in American popular entertainment, puppets are first and foremost an educational medium. *Sesame Street* teaches through puppets, as do a number of other children's television programs, and live action versions of popular programs (i.e. *Dora the Explorer Live!*, *Sesame Street Live!*, *Spongebob Squarepants Live!*, etc.). Just as Ken Hamm uses dinosaur puppets in his presentations to children in order to refute evolution, *Creation* might be construed as an educational puppet show, designed to entice children, already used to learning valuable life lessons on thought and behavior from puppets, into embracing the concepts of ID. Unable to win in the arena of scientific publications or the courts, the religious right has turned to popular culture and mass entertainment, hoping to mimic the success of Barnum in disseminating in a believable manner the ideas of Darwin to a popular audience. Creationists attempt to use the very technique that made evolution a reality in the popular imagination to make creationism a reality in the popular imagination.

Fifth, we might see *Creation* within the larger context of the appropriation of mainstream culture by the intelligent design movement. ID believers have developed their own journals to publish articles proving the scientific reality of ID. Textbooks which follow the style and presentation of mainstream textbooks have been published that advocate for ID. And *Creation* employs the style and presentation of mainstream musical theatre aimed at families (such as *The Lion King*) in order to move the debate into the mainstream.

Sixth, *Creation* also occupies a unique place because of the site of its presentation. In many ways *Creation* is also preaching to the converted, so to speak. It was performed in a church, in the Crystal Cathedral's main space where all services are also held. Thus, the actual performance was in a sacred space where the other two dramatized narratives presented annually, Christmas and Easter, are taken directly from the Gospels. *Creation* is the first drama to be performed in the Crystal Cathedral with extra-Biblical and non-Biblical material. However, by being performed in a sacred space where all other performances are literally Gospel truth, the authority of the space and the other narratives are added to the weight of *Creation*. If a viewer believes the other two, he or she should believe this narrative, too. *Creation* is not only mass culture aimed at convincing the non-believer, it is Christian culture aimed at confirming and celebrating the believer.

Lastly, in terms of theatre history, we might also see *Creation* as a Taymoresque return to medieval mystery plays, in which the Bible serves as source material, albeit anachronistically updated for didactic purposes. Gene Fendt posits two types of religious drama: "the literally religious," which has as its subject matter, theme and overall content things religious, such as *The Bacchae*, *Doctor Faustus* and mystery plays, and "the figuratively religious," which are allegorical and didactic, serving to educate the audience, such as *Everyman*.³⁶ *Creation: Once Upon All Time* serves as a fusion of the two: it is meant to be taken literally and also figuratively. It represents a dramatization of the Biblical narrative of creation along with a didactic piece to refute evolution and encourage an embracing of Christian belief. It does so by relying upon spectacle, music, and special effect, including giant and fantastic puppets modeled after the theatre of Julie Taymor, resulting in a very different type of intelligent design. If, as Misia Landau asserts, that evolution is a narrative shaped by the culture and context of the storytellers, then creation, and *Creation*, are also a narrative (and a performance) shaped by the theatrical culture and context of the storytellers. If, as Jane Goodall asserts, that early debates on evolution were literally enacted within the popular culture by producers such as Barnum, and were influential in convincing audiences of the reality of evolution, then *Creation* is emblematic of a movement within creationism and ID to use the same techniques to reassert the reality of Biblical creation.³⁷

³⁶ Gene Fendt, *Is Hamlet a Religious Drama?* Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999. p. 180.

³⁷ The original version of this essay was presented in Chicago at the 2006 Association for Theatre in Higher Education conference as part of a panel on Right Wing Theatre. The author would like to thank David Jortner, Whitney, the anonymous readers for *JR&T*, and Debra Bruch for their insights, questions and comments in the reshaping of this essay.

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