Allison Hedges
University of Maryland, U.S.A.

Staging *Lamentations* and *Triumph*

New Methods of Understanding Two Ancient Egyptian Dramatic Texts

Abstract

Archaeological evidence for the content, context, and intention behind ancient Egyptian dramatic texts is extremely limited. In rare instances, performance iconography can provide clues. On the walls of the Temple of Horus at Edfu, illustrations of dramatic scenes appear in relief alongside the text of what translator H. W. Fairman entitled *The Triumph of Horus*. Dating to approximately the second century BCE, the Edfu text represents a dramatic reenactment of the legendary battle between the gods Horus and Seth for the Egyptian throne, a tradition attested on royal documents more than fifteen hundred years earlier. For this reason, Fairman and others have dubbed *The Triumph of Horus* the oldest play in the world. In 2019, theatre students at an American university performed a new staging of *The Triumph of Horus* as well as another dramatic text, *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys*, as translated by R. O. Faulkner and edited by Miriam Lichtheim. The intention was to determine if embodied practice could reveal new ways of understanding and transmitting knowledge about ancient Egyptian dramatic performance. This article will discuss the development, rehearsal process, and outcome of this production, incorporating research methodology from the field of performance studies.

Performance, Religion and Spirituality vol. 4 no 1, pp. 39-61
https://openjournals.utoledo.edu/index.php/prs/index ISSN: 2637-4366

Introduction

In December of 2019, theatre students at the University of Maryland, College Park, performed a new adaptation and staging of the ancient Egyptian drama *The Triumph of Horus* with a prologue featuring another ancient Egyptian piece, *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys* (Hedges 2022). I served as director and dramaturg, adapting the script from English translations published by H. W. Fairman (1974) and Miriam Lichtheim (1980), respectively. The production served as one research component of my doctoral dissertation on the historiography and performance of ancient Egyptian drama. With this study, my intention was to help create a more significant space for ancient Egypt in the larger conversation of theatre history and begin to establish a place for ancient Egyptian dramatic texts in the early theatre history canon. *The Triumph of Horus* is perhaps the best candidate for inclusion at present. The text is complete, and though performances are rare, it has been produced in modern times more than once. Our production, however, attempted to answer another important research question. Can embodied practice teach us new ways of understanding these dramatic texts, as well as new ways of transmitting knowledge about ancient Egyptian theatrical performance?

Only a handful of dramatic texts have survived from ancient Egypt, most of them fragmented and far removed from their original context. Best known among these, perhaps, are the Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus, dating to the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2055-1650 BCE), and the Shabaka Stone, dating to approximately 710 BCE during the reign of King Shabaka of the famed Nubian dynasty (Geisen 2012, 21; Lichtheim 1973, 51). Both items, studied extensively over the last century, are currently housed by the British Museum (EA10610,1-5 and EA498, respectively).[1] But *The Triumph of Horus*, also known by theatre historians as the Edfu Drama, is a different case. The original hieroglyphic inscriptions are still visible on the western enclosure walls of the Temple of Horus at Edfu in the south of Egypt (see Figures 1 and 2). One may visit the site today and observe them *in situ*. Another unique aspect of the Edfu text is that the hieroglyphs are accompanied by images sculpted in sunken relief on the temple walls, illustrating the characters and action in each scene. These images combined with traditional ancient Egyptian funerary iconography proved extremely useful in staging both dramas.

In antiquity, performances of *The Triumph of Horus* took place annually within and outside of the temple, in celebration of the Festival of Victory during the Ptolemaic era of Egypt's dynastic history, sometime between the first and third centuries BCE (Fairman 1974, 27). The temple's late date and exceptional state of preservation have rendered this particular text more accessible and legible than others. However, the date and context of these inscriptions also render them debatable as an authentic example of Egyptian drama. The Ptolemaic dynasty, last of the autonomous (but not indigenous) kings and queens of ancient Egypt, descended from Ptolemy I Soter, Macedonian general in the army of Alexander the Great. Ptolemy inherited the rule of Egypt as a satrap in the wake of Alexander's untimely death in 323 BCE (Lloyd 2000, 389). Construction of the Temple of Horus began in Edfu under Soter's grandson, Ptolemy III Philadelphus in 237 BCE, and was completed under Ptolemy XII Auletes (father of legendary Queen Cleopatra VII) in 57 BCE (Wilkinson 2000, 205).

The Festival of Victory served as a renewal ceremony for the Egyptian king, and the irony of that king having been a Ptolemy of Greco-Macedonian descent is not lost on scholars of the material. The Ptolemies were masters of diplomacy who manipulated the Egyptian people to their full political advantage, conflating Greek and Egyptian art, religion, and

customs to appease the native Egyptian as well as the increasingly hegemonic Greek population (Lloyd 2000, 401-402). Therefore, it is quite easy to argue that *The Triumph of Horus* owes its dramatic nature and theatrical qualities to a classical Greek influence. But it would be wrong to make that assumption. While certain aspects of the play might reflect Greek theatrical tradition, such as the inclusion of a chorus, the similarities end there. Its repetitious and formulaic dialogue, mythic sequence, and the ritual reenactment of a battle are more reminiscent of ritual dance-dramas from ancient Mesopotamia, India, and indigenous America (see Malekpour 2004; Mee 2010; Leinaweaver 1968).

Fig. 1. The great pylon at the entrance to the Temple of Horus in Edfu. Photo: Allison Hedges.

The extant material evidence for theatrical activity in ancient Egypt is invariably connected to performative rituals of worship or political ceremony (the latter usually wrapped up in the former). But what does it mean when a text, or ritual, is *performative*? This term appears often in the literature on ancient Egyptian drama across both Egyptology and theatre history. It is a tricky word to use. Much like the word *drama*, *performative* has more than one definition and various forms of usage. In the theatre, *performativity* might indicate the capacity for dramatic performance or verbal expression in a piece of literature, a speech, a folktale, or a sacred rite. In the field of performance studies, the word is directly related to speech act theory as introduced by philosopher J. L. Austin, such as the "performative utterance" that is a "perlocutionary act" (Austin 1975, 94-108), and its sociological applications. This use of *performativity* is more commonly seen in Egyptology and related disciplines. However, Egyptologist Robyn Gillam points out that "while this approach certainly has some value in the analysis of Egyptian material, its most interesting application is to magic or 'effective' utterance, a category of speech-act…of central importance in Egyptian cultic and other religious activities" (2005, 149). An example of this is a spell that works its magic only when spoken aloud, otherwise it is rendered useless, or a commemorative ritual that renews a king's power after his death. In this instance, *performativity* implies that there is transformative power in the words spoken or in the rituals performed—even in the representation of an event on tomb or temple walls (Gillam 2005, 149-150). By virtue of the performance, a lasting physical or spiritual effect takes hold.

Fig. 2. The courtyard and hypostyle hall, where festival performances took place. Photo: Allison Hedges.

The desire to be "effective of utterance" seems to recur in ancient Egyptian literature. A prominent example is a passage from a Middle Kingdom stela erected by Pharaoh Neferhotep I (ca.1740-1729 BCE), which recorded a performance that took place during the

annual celebration of the mysteries of the god Osiris at Abydos.[2] William Kelly Simpson provided the following English translation:

> I am his son, his protector. He gives me the inheritance of one upon the earth. I am a king, great of strength, effective of utterance. He who defiles me shall not live. My opponent shall not draw breath. (Simpson 2003, 344)

Why was being "effective of utterance" significant for the pharaoh in this instance? I propose that one reason might have been the performative context in which this phrase was used. With his now standard translation, frequently used by Egyptologists, Simpson did more than relay the meaning of the Egyptian text; he relayed their purpose. The stela documented the pharaoh's direct participation in the ritual renewal of the cult statue of Osiris by taking on the role of Horus, Osiris' son and rightful heir (Neale 2016, 17). A dramatic reenactment ensued, "in which actors attack the god's vessel and are driven off" (Simpson 2003, 339-340).

Much of the material evidence in question correlates to the worship of Osiris and the mythology surrounding him; therefore, an exposition of this major deity is necessary to begin any discussion of ancient Egyptian drama. The earliest mention of Osiris and his fate appears in the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom pharaohs, as far back as the twenty-fourth century BCE.[3] Osiris was the legendary first pharaoh of Egypt who was murdered and dismembered by his own brother, Seth, the god of chaos, who sought the throne for himself. Seth scattered the pieces of his brother's body throughout Egypt. The goddess Isis, queen and loving wife of Osiris, recovered the pieces of his body and carefully reassembled him with linen bindings. Together with her sister, the goddess Nephthys, they brought him back to life. Taking the form of a bird of prey, Isis alighted on top of Osiris and with him conceived a son and heir, Horus, the falcon god of the sky. Horus would live to avenge his father by defeating Seth in battle and taking his rightful place on the throne as the eternal living pharaoh. Osiris became god of the dead and one with all the departed pharaohs of Egypt (Gillam 2005, 55). Over time, he came to be associated with the souls of the deceased (Griffiths 1970, 36; Gillam 2005, 55). His story became the foundation of the ancient Egyptian view of the afterlife and the development of their funerary practices.[4] During the Ptolemaic period, a festival in honor of Osiris was held during a specific month every year—the month of Khoiak (*kꜣ ḥr kꜣ*) or "soul upon soul" in English (Allen 2000, 108)—and for that reason some scholars refer to the annual event as the "Osirian Khoiak Festival" (Gillam 2005, 57; see also Mikhail 1983). In celebration of this festival, a series of reenactments dramatized major events in the life, death, and resurrection of the god.[5]

Some versions of the story tell of an ages-long struggle between Horus and Seth, who still believed himself the true heir, and a divine tribunal led by Geb that would determine the outcome. Geb ended their battle by splitting the rule of Egypt in two, granting Horus the rule of Lower Egypt to the north, and Seth the rule of Upper Egypt to the south.[6] This provided an origin story for the two lands and the two crowns (Murnane 2003, 22-23). Ultimately, the kingdom united was granted to Horus, son of Isis and Osiris.

It is the punishment of Seth that plays out in *The Triumph of Horus.* The play was performed for the Festival of Victory, an annual celebration at the Temple of Horus in Edfu that commemorated the battles between Horus and Seth, with Horus's ultimate triumph by means of the hunt. The final showdown manifests in the form of a hippopotamus hunt and

harpoon ritual, in which Seth is the doomed hippopotamus. This harpooning ritual goes back nearly five thousand years to the early dynastic period in Egypt (Fairman 1974, 34), yet another indication that this play was most likely performed there long before the Ptolemaic period. References to such a feast appeared on the Palermo Stone, one of the oldest extant records from ancient Egypt, as well as the Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts (Fairman 1974, 34-35).

History of *The Triumph of Horus*

Edouard Naville first discovered the hieroglyphic inscriptions now known as *The Triumph of Horus* on the walls of the Edfu Temple and published his findings as *Textes relatifs au Mythe d'Horus recueillis dans le Temple d'Edfou* (Texts related to the Myth of Horus collected in the Temple of Edfu) in 1870. Émile Chassinat subsequently studied them and published his preliminary translations in *Le Temple d'Edfou* (1918), which opened the door for the next generation to go several steps further. In 1935, Herbert Walter Fairman began publishing an extensive translation and analysis of the Temple of Horus inscriptions, which he titled at that time "The Myth of Horus at Edfu" (Fairman 1935). Fellow Egyptologist Aylward Manley Blackman joined him on this project and together they published the next three installments of "The Myth of Horus at Edfu" in December of 1942, 1943, and 1944.

The Edfu inscriptions contained references to specific characters, dialogue, and even stage directions. Observing these common elements of literary drama, Fairman concluded that "in form it is a play and falls easily and automatically into acts and scenes without any manipulation of the reliefs or their order" (Fairman 1974, 19). In 1974, Fairman became the first scholar to publish these texts as a complete play in English verse, entitled *The Triumph of Horus*: *An Ancient Egyptian Sacred Drama*. A review of the work appeared in the *Educational Theatre Journal* in October of 1975, calling it "the oldest play in the world" and "an unusual and much welcome addition to any drama collection" (Theodore 1975, 434).

The first full-scale theatrical production of Fairman's *The Triumph of Horus* took place at the Padgate College of Education in England under the direction of Derek Poole, Principal Lecturer in the Department of Drama in Education and Theatre Crafts, with Derek Newton, Head of the Department of Drama, serving as producer. They developed the production in close consultation with Fairman himself, whose daughter Jennifer was a Padgate student at the time (Newton and Poole 1974, 59).

The Padgate production was large and elaborate, with a cast of nearly seventy actors, all Padgate students. They performed the play in an auditorium on a proscenium stage. Newton and Poole chose to rehearse intensively over a two-week period immediately following the end-of-term exams, putting the students through a rigorous schedule compatible with a professional production. The schedule, however, was where any similarity to "real-world" theatre practice ended for the students. "The play was felt to be a reversal of all their drama in education training," write the creative team of their young cast (Newton and Poole 1974, 61). "There was no question of being able to use modern methods of actor involvement" (61). Newton and Poole looked to the English folk drama tradition of the Medieval period for inspiration as "a staging method of basic ritual drama" (71). They also consulted Fairman's images of the Edfu temple walls and studied them closely to create a "silhouette as near as possible to the scene shown on the original reliefs" (69). The Padgate production faithfully

followed Fairman's script, editing nothing from the original. The full play lasted one hour and ten minutes (72).

Today, *The Triumph of Horus* lives primarily as an instructive piece, occasionally performed in classrooms or on college campuses as part of a course assignment on ancient Egyptian civilization. Egyptologist Robyn Gillam first staged *The Triumph of Horus* with her undergraduate students at York University in Toronto in 1998, in the context of a new course entitled "Egypt in the Greek and Roman Mediterranean" (Gillam 2005, 138). She describes the process and discusses the intentions and outcomes of this and subsequent projects in her 2005 book, *Performance and Drama in Ancient Egypt*. Unlike Newton and Poole, Gillam did not ask the students to memorize and recite Fairman's text exactly as written, but instead gave them the opportunity to create their own scripts based on the published translation. Gillam points out that "the rewriting of the materials is an essential part of the process of understanding and re-presentation that facilitates the learning process" (2005, 140). As such, the scripts they used were condensed, making for a shorter performance of approximately twenty-five minutes (141) and "reflecting the different allocation of time and attention span between twenty-first century university students and ancient Egyptians" (140).

This does not mean, however, that the full cast of characters as originally set down by Fairman was not represented in Professor Gillam's presentation. *The Triumph of Horus* at York University faithfully featured the King and Queen of Egypt, dressed appropriately in traditional Greek garb as would have been the custom of the Ptolemies, with multiple priests and a large chorus in addition to the central figures of the gods (141-142). The students took on the responsibility of all technical aspects of the production, such as costumes, masks, and props, which photographs suggest were quite elaborate (141, fig. 10). The performance took place in the Vari Hall Rotunda, a "well-let indoor public space with a high volume of pedestrian traffic" (141), suggesting that this was not a ticketed event but one easily accessible and visible to passers-by. The class distributed handouts with lines for any audience members who wanted to join in the cheering and chanting, evoking the participatory nature of the original ancient Egyptian performances (141).

The 1998 production of *The Triumph of Horus* was not the last time this play was presented at York University under the direction of Professor Gillam. She has continued to engage her undergraduate students with this and other performance-based assignments, including reenactments of public rituals such as the Funeral Procession of the Apis Bull (Gillam 2005, 143-44). According to Gillam:

> *The Triumph of Horus* was the most "theatrical" and most tightly structured of our performances. It was also one in which the instructors played a highly interventionist role. Later activities have moved away from this model and have tended to emphasize process over product. (142)

In *Performance and Drama in Ancient Egypt*, Gillam discusses the many benefits for students who participate in these reenactments: honing their critical reading and writing skills and learning different ways to solve the puzzle of an ancient hieroglyphic text, gaining access to knowledge that might otherwise seem very inaccessible to students (2005, 144). "It can also be argued," she writes, "that from a scholarly perspective these student performances provide some valuable insights into the texts and the performances they record" (144).

Two notable Egyptologists in the United States have incorporated performances of *The Triumph of Horus* into their college courses as well. Peter Piccione, Associate Professor of Ancient Egypt and Near Eastern History at the College of Charleston, South Carolina, incorporated the play into the final project assignment for his course, Survey of Ancient Egypt, in the Spring of 2000. In lieu of the final exam, Professor Piccione gave his students the opportunity to collaborate on staging a play entitled "The Victory of Horus: A Sacred Drama of Ancient Egypt," based on Fairman's text (Piccione 2000). The students directed the play themselves and gave a public performance on April 20, 2000, in a courtyard before Randolph Hall at the heart of campus. The event was covered by local media outlets and professionally recorded for posterity.

Stuart Tyson Smith, professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, has integrated Fairman's play into his course in ancient Egyptian religion for more than ten years, along with other reenactments of performative temple rituals. In small groups, his students stage these performances themselves as part of their final projects and present them to their peers in an outdoor venue on UCSB's campus (Stuart Tyson Smith, conversation with the author on February 24, 2021). They use an abridged version of Fairman's script compiled by Professor Smith, who has distilled Fairman's forty-two pages into six manageable pages of accessible English with a brief introduction that provides the necessary context (Smith 2000).

I have demonstrated that I am by no means the first person to attempt to stage Fairman's *The Triumph of Horus*. But I believe that my approach to this piece was quite different from that of my predecessors. They are primarily Egyptologists, with the exception of Padgate's creative team, and as such prioritized the instructional value of performing the play from an Egyptological perspective. Being a scholar of ancient Egypt myself, the same intentions drew me to Fairman's play in the first place. But as a theatre historian and theatre practitioner, what became even more important to me was locating the artistic integrity in the piece—its potential as an emotionally compelling and transportive experience for the audience—that might transcend ritual drama and become what the Western world calls *theatre*. Performance as research (or PAR, as it is known in the American field) is a growing subdiscipline in the United States that acknowledges and applies the valuable contributions theatrical practice can make to scholarship (see Riley 2013). It is an increasingly useful tool in the study of theatre history. PAR serves as an alternative to traditional modes of historiography because it utilizes what creative arts researcher Estelle Barrett calls "multiple intelligences in the production of knowledge" (2007, 2), and opens up new avenues of inquiry that can break down cultural and disciplinary barriers.

The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys

To expand the scope of my experiment, I decided to incorporate another ancient Egyptian dramatic text into our production. Catalogued as Papyrus Berlin 3008, indicating its current location in the papyri collection of the Berlin Museum, *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys* is a performative funerary text from the Ptolemaic period, roughly contemporary with *The Triumph of Horus*. It is difficult to explain this text, however, without first discussing the earlier, longer festival text from which *Lamentations* may have derived—"The Songs of Isis and Nephthys"—and its association with the ancient annual celebration of the mysteries of

Osiris. Egyptologists may know this text as the first seventeen columns in the Bremner-Rhind Papyrus, currently housed by the British Museum (EA10188, 1-5). The text dates to the Late Period in Egyptian history (664-332 BCE). Raymond O. Faulkner translated it into English and published it in 1936 as "The Songs of Isis and Nephthys," but it has also been called the "Festival Songs of Isis and Nephthys" or the "Stanzas of the Festival of the Two Kites" (Wickett 2010, 150). The "Songs" were traditionally performed by two young women serving as priestesses, who portrayed the goddesses Isis and Nephthys in a dramatic reenactment of a pivotal scene in the story of Osiris. During the Ptolemaic period, this was one of four key episodes in the celebration of the mysteries of Osiris during the month of Khoiak (Gillam 2005, 101-108).

This episode focused on the burial of the body of Osiris—a form of the god called Sokar, represented by a diminutive mummiform figure made from a grain mold that is built in advance of the festival—and the preparation of Osiris for resurrection (Mikhail 1983, 98). Oftentimes in the literature, this sequence is referred to as the Festival of Sokar (Mikhail 1983, 98-103). According to Egyptologist Louis B. Mikhail, "after Isis has collected the members of Osiris, the body is laid down in the Sokarian [shrine] under the protection of the god of the dead, where Osiris is nourished and prepared for the moment of ascension, which begins by laying his body into the bark of Sokar" (1983, 100-101).

The "Songs" represent a crucial moment in the celebration. In combined force, the sister-goddesses are searching for Osiris, calling him forth into his house (the Osiris temple enclosure) to make his body whole again, and grant him power over his enemies. The text of the "Songs" lays out specific yet limited instructions for preparation and performance of the ritual drama, translated as follows by Raymond Faulkner (1936, 122):

> The entire temple shall be sanctified and there shall be brought in [two] women, pure of body and virgin, with the hair of their bodies removed, their heads adorned with wigs, [.....] tambourines in their hands, and their names inscribed on their arms, to wit Isis and Nephthys, and they shall sing from the stanzas of this book in the presence of this god.[7]

The text also indicates that Isis initiates each lament, as primary mourner, while Nephthys as secondary mourner echoes that lament, as in a liturgical "call and response" mode (Faulkner 1936, 121-22; Wickett 2010, 152, 154). They begin by singing in tandem:

> O fair Stripling, come to thine house;
> For a very long while we have not seen thee.
> O fair Sistrum-player, come to thine house;
> O thou who dwellest in—*lacuna*—after thou didst desert us.
> O fair Stripling who didst depart untimely. (Faulkner 1936, 123)

An abbreviated version of "The Songs of Isis and Nephthys" appears in *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys* as featured in our theatrical production. The English script we used for this piece came from the third volume of Miriam Lichtheim's *Ancient Egyptian Literature* series, in which she edited and published an older translation of the piece by Raymond Faulkner, who also translated the "Songs" (Lichtheim 1980, 116-21). Unlike the "Songs," however, *Lamentations* is brief (about six minutes long) and had not, to my

knowledge, been staged in a modern context before—certainly not in the context of a full-scale theatrical production, and not in the United States. In 2004, Robyn Gillam directed her students in reenactments of the episode of the Festival of Sokar that featured "The Songs of Isis and Nephthys" for a public performance on the York University campus in Toronto, as part of their final assignment in her course on ancient Egyptian religion. Two young students portrayed the titular characters, "with the names of the goddess written on their arms," as indicated in the original text (Gillam 2005, 144). This is the only other modern instance, of which I am aware, when the staging of a ritual drama closely related to *Lamentations* took place (see Gillam 2005, 142 and 147, fig. 12).

This particular piece was not meant for the general public but for the gods, the deceased, and the priests (Faulkner 1980, 120). While the "Songs" honored Osiris as representative of all souls of the deceased for the annual festival, the *Lamentations* invoked Osiris for the funerary rite of one deceased individual, in this case a woman named Tentruty (Lichtheim 1980, 116). The dramatic ritual took place in the inner sanctum of the temple before the image of Osiris. The brief instructions for preparation and performance laid out on this text are similar to those written on the Bremner-Rhind Papyrus, with a few notable differences. The two women are not required to be virgins but should be women "with beautiful bodies" (Faulkner 1980, 120). They should be seated on the ground, each holding a jar of water in her right hand, an offering loaf of bread in the other hand, and their heads should be bowed (Faulkner 1980, 120). Another more obvious difference is its title, which might indicate that the *Lamentations*, as opposed to the "Songs," were not sung but more likely recited, and to great emotional effect.[8]

While doing field research for her 2010 book, *For the Living and the Dead*, Arabic language and literature scholar Elizabeth Wickett spent time with a group of Egyptian women who serve as professional lamenters in the southern region surrounding Abydos, Luxor, and Edfu. According to Wickett, the language and structure of the ancient songs and lamentations echo in the funerary laments she has witnessed in modern-day Egypt. She explains:

> The lamenters proclaim their desire to be with the deceased and urge his return. This is a rhetorical strategy that creates pathos and provides an inkling of the relationship believed to exist between lamenter and deceased during the funerary ritual. Other stylistic features of the ancient laments also are discernible: the creation of dialogue and the conventions of multiple voicing and shifting perspectives. (2010, 166)

Until recently, Papyrus Berlin 3008 was the only published copy of *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys*. But in July of 2021, Egyptologists Andrea Kucharek of the University of Heidelberg in Germany and Marc Coenen of the University of Leuven in Belgium published a comprehensive volume dedicated to all the known extant papyri inscribed with *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys*, including Pap. Berlin 3008. They provide brand new translations of these papyri with extensive commentaries, descriptions, and transliterations of the ancient Egyptian language in which the *Lamentations* were written. Most of the papyri originate from the Late and Ptolemaic periods in Egyptian history when it was not uncommon to use a cursive version of the hieroglyphs called "hieratic" for texts such as these.

Thanks to this latest contribution to the literature on these texts, far more details have come to light about the content, context, language, and even the nature, potentially, of

performance. Pap. Berlin 3008, for instance, features "vignettes" at the bottom of some of its pages—drawings indicating the position, stance, and gestures that Isis and Nephthys might have taken in each sequence. For example, Kucharek and Coenen describe the scene in "Vignette 4" as follows: "Two squatting females are depicted underneath column 5. Each holds a vase in the left hand and a loaf [of bread] in the right. The captions identify the woman to the right as 'Isis'…the left one as 'Nephthys'" (2021, 49).

I chose to incorporate the *Lamentations* into our production for a few specific reasons, both academic and artistic. The first was simply to put "page to stage" and embody the text. A number of scholars have referenced the *Lamentations* as a ritual drama, or a dramatic ritual, but it has never been edited, published, and performed as a play in the way that *The Triumph of Horus* has. So, naturally, I wanted to explore its theatrical potential. I wanted to put it on its feet and see what it might look like, especially *sound* like, if performed live. The second reason was to allow for a significant female role in addition to Isis: her sister, Nephthys. The third reason was to provide our modern American audience with important context for *The Triumph of Horus*. The ancient Egyptians who attended and participated in the performance of the *Triumph* during the Ptolemaic period needed no introduction or explanation for it. My audience needed a quick informative, yet aesthetically pleasing, lesson in the myth of Osiris. At the start of the performance, I had the actor playing the Lector Priest enter the space first and tell the story of Osiris to the audience. This introduction led directly into the first passage of the *Lamentations*, also spoken by the Lector Priest.[9] It reads:

> Recitation of blessings made by the Two Sisters in the house of Osiris-Khentamenti, the great god, lord of Abydos, in the fourth month of Inundation, day 25, when the same is done in every place of Osiris, at every feast of his. (Faulkner 1980, 116)

The Lector Priest goes on to explain exactly what effects this performance should have on all participants, including the performers, the gods, and the deceased.[10]

> To bless his *ba*, steady his body, exalt his *ka*, give breath to the nose of him who lacks breath. To soothe the heart of Isis and Nephthys, place Horus on his father's throne, and give life-stability-dominion to Osiris, the justified. It benefits the doer as well as the gods. (Faulkner 1980, 116-117)

In our production, the *Lamentations* served as a prologue to the *Triumph*, conveying the depth of Egypt's grief over the loss of Osiris, and sounding the call for justice that Horus would soon answer, defeating once and for all his father's murderer, Seth.

The Production Plan

In developing this production, I intended to incorporate the historiographical research I had already begun conducting on ancient Egyptian theatre into the performance of these two dramatic texts. Early on I could not say exactly what that was going to look like. I knew that I did not want to stage our version of *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys* and *The Triumph of Horus* with modes of traditional Western theatre in mind, but with what I believed were modes of traditional *Egyptian* theatre in mind—or the closest approximation that I could make with the knowledge I had gathered up to that point.

For instance, I wanted the *Triumph* to be as participatory as possible, engaging the audience as onlookers at the Festival of Victory, much as Robyn Gillam had done in Toronto. In antiquity, the performances of this drama would have played out in a participatory mode, evoking a sense of the ancient Egyptian festival context. I also wanted a procession to either kick off or close the performance—a procession in which audience members would be invited to join and participate with the actors. The play takes place, theoretically, in the courtyard of the Temple of Horus in Edfu, an outdoor venue. Indoors, the courtyard environment could be created to a certain extent with the use of projection and lighting, and the audience would sit around the action of the play as though they were gathered in the temple's hypostyle hall to witness the event. To allow enough space for a sense of this environment, to be as true to the ancient Egyptian experience as might have been possible, I requested the Dance Theatre in The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center for our production: a wide, open, and flexible space where a relatively large audience (at least one hundred people) could comfortably sit or even stand around a central performance area.

The experimental performance series, or "Second Season," of the University of Maryland's School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies (known by the university community as "TDPS") sponsored my production, and as such I was obliged to work under certain restrictions. First, my budget could not exceed two hundred dollars. Second, the entire presentation could be no longer than thirty minutes. Third, I had a maximum of sixty hours of rehearsal time with the students to prepare for the show, hours to be scheduled as I saw fit.

I soon learned of two more restrictions that would affect my production. First, I could not use the Dance Theatre, but I could use the Cafritz Foundation Theatre, a smaller "black box" performance space. Second, as was the custom of the experimental performance series, I would share the evening with another thirty-minute production, which in our case took the first act of the evening, while our production took the second act. For my purposes, the only downside of this arrangement was the configuration of the space and its relation to the audience seating area, which had to suit both productions. Third, the only performance dates available to me were over the first weekend of December 2019. This drastically reduced the amount of time I had to work with the students in the way that I had hoped to. Within the year, however, I would be grateful for this decision on the part of the production office. Within a few short months, every live production in the TDPS 2020 performance schedule would be canceled. I now look back on those December performances with relief and gratitude. At the time, however, I had to scramble to meet the challenges of these new limitations.

The Rehearsal Process

These ancient Egyptian dramatic texts are less like traditional Western plays and more akin to what theatre professor Tawnya Pettiford-Wates calls "Ritual Poetic Drama" (2017). Pettiford-Wates writes, "the modality here is a story that is impelled to reveal itself, the artist being the vessel that brings that story to life" (2017, 111). As such, I was adamant from the very beginning that our rehearsal process be as collaborative and organic as possible. I wanted to avoid imposing my preconceived notions of what this performance should look like, with the exception of whatever the original text dictated. I did not want to tell the students where to go on stage, how to act their roles, or how to interact with one another. Drawing from my own training and experience as an actor, director, and drama-in-education facilitator, I

planned to use theatre games and improvisational exercises to guide the students toward creating their own sense of how these iconic figures of ancient Egyptian religion might move, sound, and interact with one another. I wanted to give them the artistic and intellectual freedom to make these discoveries on their own, at least in the beginning. This devised approach, in my opinion, was going to be the most effective and authentic way to lead the students into fully embodied practice, and toward the insights that might emerge about the material from that practice.

This was, however, a somewhat risky approach. Usually, devised pieces are collaboratively written by the actors, who bring their own life experiences to the development of the play script as well as the staging of the performance. These students had little to no prior knowledge of ancient Egypt or experience with ancient Egyptian forms. Another factor that is essential to any devised work is *time*. It takes time, patience, and a long-term commitment from everyone involved to successfully build an organic collaborative piece. Accomplishing this within three months of rehearsal, meeting twice each week for only two hours at a time, was certainly going to be a challenge. An extended period of time is even more vital to the preparation of a devised production when you are not working with seasoned professionals who have experience with this kind of practice. The fact that I was working with student actors, some of whom were taking on their first role in any kind of production, meant that I was going to have to adjust my expectations—and ultimately my methodology—in order to achieve success.

Before the actors could make any significant contributions in rehearsal, they needed to learn a great deal about ancient Egyptian history and culture, especially the context of these two dramatic pieces. So I decided to devote the first month of rehearsals to nothing but reading and interpreting the texts in their published forms, while giving the actors foundational knowledge of ancient Egypt to help them develop their characters as they saw fit. This required a substantial amount of dramaturgy on my part, which included supplemental reading assignments, lectures, images, and videos for the actors to study. In this way the project became more than putting on a show; it essentially became a course in and of itself. Having engaged them intellectually with ancient Egypt, I then undertook a number of improvisational exercises with the students in rehearsal, to help them visualize ancient Egypt, to explore sound, scent, energy, movement, vocal techniques and improvised interactions with one another in character to engage them physically and emotionally with the piece.

Spoken Words

I worked with the two actors portraying Isis and Nephthys on voice and movement, in particular, which I felt were crucial to the type of performance they were undertaking. Here is one example of the vocal exercises I asked them to practice in preparation for the *Lamentations*. Standing opposite one another, leaving four or five feet of distance between them, they took turns speaking one line of their dialogue to the other, at an easy and comfortable volume, as though they were having a conversation. Then I asked them to take one step back, increasing the distance between them slightly, and repeat the process. They continued to take one step away from one another after each dialogue exchange, until they were far enough apart that they were forced to project and to speak more clearly so the other person could understand them. They spoke the same line of dialogue through each repetition

so that they could notice the incremental changes in how they were using their voices and bodies to speak the words as they moved farther and farther away from one another. Once I felt they had reached a distance comparable to how far they might be from the audience on stage, I asked them to remain standing where they were, and to try the next exercise: speak the same line of dialogue, but this time speak very slowly, as if they were talking in slow motion. I could tell they felt self-conscious doing it this way, but I assured them the speed was just right, in fact, for *Lamentations*. After trying it a few more times, one of the students remarked that they felt "more religious, more ceremonial," like the way priests might speak to the congregation at a Catholic mass.

In addition, I thought it might be helpful for the actors to hear a little of what the original language might have sounded like, and maybe even have them recite a bit of it in performance, if they were comfortable doing so. Not having a copy of the original ancient Egyptian text, I had only the English translation to work with. But with my limited knowledge of the language, the help of Raymond Faulkner's hefty dictionary (1962) and James Allen's Middle Egyptian grammar (2000), I took the opening line for both Isis and Nephthys, "Come to your house," and set about translating it back into ancient Egyptian.[11] Naturally, I was not going to rely solely on my own devices; I consulted a few of my Egyptological colleagues who are far more skilled at deciphering the language than I am.[12] Together we came up with the following:

> *mỉ r pr.k*
> (*mỉ* = Come; *r* = to; *pr* = house; *.k* = your[s])[13]

I wrote it out for the actors as "Mi-reper-ek." They were very happy to take this line and run with it. Since there is no way to know exactly how the line would have been pronounced in ancient Egyptian, they experimented with different pronunciations and settled on what felt most natural to them, which sounded like "mee-repair-ek," pronounced as one word, with both "r" sounds rolled, as in Spanish. The Egyptian line became part of our script. Isis and Nephthys began their lamentations with this line, each repeating it twice in tandem (indicated in Kucharek and Coenen 2021, 31), almost like a chant, before shifting to "Come to your house," letting the English version take over. The emotional effect of this one line spoken in performance was quite remarkable.

Thanks to the recent publication of the excellent new translations and extensive commentaries by Andrea Kucharek and Marc Coenen, I have confirmed that this is indeed the first line of the hieratic script on the original papyri. In their 2021 volume, Kucharek and Coenen published approximately seven copies of *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys* (Pap. Berlin 3008 included), compiled from twenty-six different fragments of papyri located at eight different institutions across Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States. "Come to your house" (*mỉ r pr.k*) is the first spoken line in each of them, preceded by the phrase *ḏd mdw* (translated as "Words to be recited") followed by *ỉ ỉn ꜣst ḏd.s,* "Spoken by Isis, she says…" (150-151); or *ḏd mdw ỉn ꜣst ḏd.s*, "Words to be recited by Isis, she says…" (151).

Following the close of the production I surveyed all of the actors about their experience, and they almost unanimously agreed that their biggest challenge had been coming to terms with the text. It was difficult for many of them to learn the scripts, which is quite dense even in English, and to speak the words aloud in a meaningful way. One method that was ultimately quite effective was to take the text, line by line, and put it in their own words as

they understood them, in their vernacular, to help them understand the context, find the intention behind the words, and ultimately, learn the lines more efficiently as a result of the exercise. This proved especially fruitful for our lead actor playing Horus, a first-year theatre major who was taking on his first leading role. In one of our earlier rehearsals, my assistant director, Dr. Fraser Stevens, and I worked one-on-one with the actors playing Horus and Isis to tackle the opening sequence of *Triumph*. Introduced by the Lector Priest, Horus speaks the following lines upon his entrance:

> I cause Thy Majesty to prevail against him that is rebellious toward thee
> On the day of the melée.
> I put valour and strength for thee unto thy arms
> And the might of my hands into thy hands. (Fairman 1974, 80)

Based on his knowledge of the myth of Horus and the background story of Osiris and Seth, the actor put a new passage forward. It went something like this:

> Seth, for everything you've done to my family, for all the trauma,
> all the pain you caused my father, my mother, and me,
> I swear to you on this day I will make you pay!

The change in this young man's demeanor and diction while he spoke these lines was remarkable. The tone of his voice deepened and expanded in volume. He stood up straighter and held his arms out as though he were growing in size. Channeling his own understanding of the context and using his own words to speak the lines allowed him to more fully embody the figure of Horus. Once he had established that connection, he was ready to speak Fairman's text with the same emotion and emphasis. The result was an emotionally compelling reading. He went home that evening with an assignment to complete before the next rehearsal: do the same exercise with every passage in the scene.

The actor playing Isis worked through the opening passages of *Lamentations* in a similar fashion. Isis begins the piece addressing Osiris with the following passage as translated by Faulkner:

> Come to your house, come to your house!
> You of On, come to your house.
> Your foes are not! (1980, 117)

The actor came up with her own interpretation of this passage and wrote the following:

> Come here, this place is yours
> You are of On, it is part of you, you are part of it.
> Your enemies are not here.

Taking another cue from Robyn Gillam, my earliest ideas for the presentation of both pieces included a script made up entirely of the students' own words and interpretations of the text as written in English. After all, what they had in hand were translations from ancient Egyptian, not the original hieroglyphs or hieratic script. Furthermore, the performances in antiquity at both Abydos and Edfu were most likely enacted from memory and repetition rather than a prescribed text. Once we began rehearsals, however, I came to the realization that I would be asking a great deal more of my student actors than was reasonable with such a

Fig. 3. An adoration pose from the script of gestures, illustrated by Allison Hedges after Fairman (1974, 87, fig. 8).

limited amount of time to learn the material. The "translation" of a few passages for the purposes of rehearsal proved useful as preparation exercises, but that would be the extent of it. The English translations by Faulkner and Fairman would remain as they were, and the students agreed to memorize them as written.[14] However, if I could not induce the students to create their own script, I could still induce them to find their own movements across the stage and their own voices within the characters.

Embodied Words

In their book *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches*, theatre educators Sharrell D. Luckett and Tia M. Shaffer define the work of devised theatre as a "process in which the actors create their own script or performance based on an idea, picture, theme, object, or some other form of inspiration" (2017, 24). Taking a cue from Luckett and Shaffer and applying devising techniques to our own project, I began to consider that the detailed images sculpted into wall reliefs in the Temple of Horus at Edfu might serve as an alternative script for *The Triumph of Horus*, as well as a guideline for staging and characterization.

Fig. 4. "Mourning Isis," Ptolemaic Period (332-30 BCE). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accession no. 12.182.23b. Image: Public Domain/Open Access Policy.

My assistant director, himself an experienced theatre practitioner, aided me in developing what he called a movement "grammar"—creating a "script" of sorts using specific movements or *gestures* and positions as suggested by the images that accompanied the original text, as illustrated in Figure 3. In this way, the students effectively began learning the play not by studying the lines or reading the dialogue but by *embodying* the scene—mimicking the gestures the figures are making in the "script," and exploring movement within these gestures and within the transitions to tell the story.

Fig. 5. Madeline Lomvardias as Isis mourning Osiris in The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys. *Photo: David Andrews/University of Maryland.*

For *Lamentations*, I incorporated two new gestures: the ancient Egyptian female mourning pose, illustrated by Figures 4 and 5 (a pose often seen in funerary iconography), and the familiar adoration pose assumed by Isis and Nephthys on either side of a central image or symbol of Osiris, as illustrated by Figure 6. Two key lines from the Bremner Rhind Papyrus (featuring the "Songs") refer to a specific action taken by the actor-priestesses in performance (Wickett 2010, 155). They are:

> Mine arms are extended to greet thee.
> Mine arms are upraised, are upraised to protect thee.
> (Faulkner 1936, 129)

Fig. 6. Madeline Lomvardias as Isis (left) and Maddie Osterman as Nephthys (right) assume the traditional adoration pose, flanking an imaginary symbol of Osiris (projected onto a screen in performance). Still shot from video footage of rehearsal, courtesy of the University of Maryland School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies.

What began as an experiment became a successful rehearsal strategy. The students responded positively to the new movements and gestures right away. More importantly, in doing so they began to let go of their individual personas and started to embody their characters. This was fascinating to watch. The movement and gestures were stiff and stilted at first but they had *purpose*. They were specific and compelling. The actors continued to practice each gesture, each pose, and began to practice moving their body from one pose into the next, as illustrated by Figure 7. Then they tried moving through the space at the same time, using the movements, first stopping, pausing, and starting again. As they walked randomly around the space using the gestures, we pulled each of them out of the exercise one by one to watch the others and observe the differences in them.

Taking on these gestures and fluidly shifting between them, the students were no longer moving like twenty-first century Americans. Their modern quirks and affectations fell away. Eventually we began every rehearsal with a warm-up comprised of this movement grammar. They became familiar enough with the gestures to move effortlessly from one to the next, both at random and repetitiously, along with ancient Egyptian-themed music, which we eventually used in the final performances. The gestures were an almost instantaneous way for them to shift from their everyday lives as college students into the mindset and physicality of their ancient Egyptian characters.

We began to stage the opening sequence of *The Triumph of Horus* with this script of gestures in mind, directing the actors to retain the exaggerated rigid movements, holding strictly to the “grammar,” as it were, until the gestures became automatic and the actors began to relax into a more natural flow and carry themselves with ease through the space, as seen in Figures 8 and 9.

Fig. 7. Actors use the script of gestures to locate their characters’ movements in rehearsal. Photo: Allison Hedges.

I encouraged them to consider the stylistic differences between classical Greek art and ancient Egyptian art and the cultural differences reflected, particularly in stance and gesture as depicted in sculpture. Greek poses are often relaxed, gestures fluid, lines soft and asymmetrical.

While Egyptian poses are erect, gestures exact, proportions carefully diagrammed, and lines symmetrical, reflecting the power of order over chaos, the careful observance of hierarchy, and conformity in style with very little room for individualistic expression in the depiction of human figures and the gods. In performance studies this is often described as the difference between representation and presentation. Egyptian ritual drama generally falls into the latter category. Rituals and recitations were to be performed and spoken correctly in a very specific manner in order to be efficacious.

Outcomes and Conclusions

Here is an overview of the responses I received from my survey of the actors and their experiences working on the production. The vast majority found that the movement exercises we practiced had the strongest impact on their character development. One student who is a trained dancer identified "shapes and patterns" through mimicking the ancient Egyptian gestures from the temple wall reliefs that "informed weight bearing and transition walks," while another likened it to "walking through honey." The vocal exercises had the strongest impact, ultimately, on their performance for an audience. The most difficult part of the production for them was learning, memorizing, and understanding the texts, while the aspects of the rehearsal process that they felt taught them the most about ancient Egypt were the articles, discussions, and images.

Fig. 8. Kevin Romeo Ortiz as the god Thoth adopts a pose on stage from the script of gestures. Photo: David Andrews/University of Maryland.

In addition, I gave them a list of seven terms—*ritual*, *ceremony*, *play*, *pageant*, *chant*, *spell*, and *concert*—and I asked them three concluding questions. Based on their experience working on our production, I asked them first to identify which of these terms they felt best described *The Triumph of Horus*. The responses I received were, in equal measure: "ritual," "ceremony," "play," "pageant," and "all of the above." Next, I asked them to identify which of these terms they felt best described *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys*. Seventy-five percent of them answered "ritual," while the remaining twenty-five percent answered "chant." Interestingly, not one of them chose "play" for this particular piece. Finally, I gave them a new list of six terms: *ceremony*, *theatre*, *worship*, *entertainment*, *storytelling*, *and dance.* This time I asked, "In your opinion, which of the following terms best describe ancient Egyptian drama?" Sixty percent answered "ceremony," twenty percent answered "worship," and the remaining twenty percent, "all of the above."

Of Egyptian funerary laments, both ancient and modern, Elizabeth Wickett writes that "lament performance was rooted, then as now, in the oral tradition, and these mere fragments serve to reveal the continuity of these ancient performance conventions" (2010, 166). In this way, the "Songs" and *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys* represent a long oral tradition that is still evident in Egypt today. It is certainly possible that written documents bearing these texts once existed in the earlier periods of Egyptian history, and are now lost to antiquity. But I am more inclined to believe that they were not written down, because such documentation was not necessary for the continuation of this aspect of ancient Egyptian

culture. Those who performed the dramas, priests and priestesses in particular, were trained to perform them in a specific way, learning and repeating each utterance and gesture. I believe the same could be said of earlier ritual reenactments of the battle between the forces of Horus and the forces of Seth, including the annual hippopotamus hunt represented in *The Triumph of Horus*. In the Late and Ptolemaic periods of Egyptian history, with an unprecedented influx of foreign rulers and immigrants bringing foreign customs with them, it became necessary to write these dramas down. But these pieces of dramatic literature as they exist today were certainly never meant to be read in silent contemplation; they were meant to be spoken aloud. They were meant to be embodied. And therefore, to interpret and understand them to the full extent possible—to identify the "effective utterance"—they must be performed.

I hope for an opportunity to do a production like this again with a new group of actors who can bring a fresh perspective and a different set of skills and experiences to these texts—preferably professional actors with training in theatrical forms outside of the Western sphere. There is still data to be parsed from the research I have already undertaken, and more work to be done on these and other ancient Egyptian dramatic texts in the archaeological record. My work has raised the inevitable question of whether or not the ancient Egyptian dramatic texts called *The Triumph of Horus* and *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys* might indicate a theatrical tradition in ancient Egypt comparable to that of ancient Greece or to later forms of Western theatre. To this I cannot yet give a definitive answer. It is safe to say, however, that ritual drama was performed for the sake of the ritual—what the ritual was meant to achieve and nothing else. The spectator-participants attended the performance not necessarily to be entertained or to appreciate the artistry of the text or the performers. They attended to take part in the ritual and to receive the benefits that the ritual would grant them. Having reviewed the available evidence on the matter and after having staged *Lamentations* and *Triumph* in a full-scale theatrical setting, I can say for certain that these were indeed theatrical performances that served a larger ritual purpose. Yet they represent more than ritual drama. I believe they belong to a uniquely *Egyptian* theatrical tradition that emerged during the traditional Pharaonic era, before the Late and Ptolemaic periods. (For a larger discussion of this tradition, see Hedges 2022.)

Fig. 9. Brian Wilson as Horus delivers the opening speech in The Triumph of Horus, *with Isis (Madeline Lomvardias) looking on. Photo: David Andrews/University of Maryland.*

Finally, I have made an observation throughout the course of this project that I think is worth noting. Performative ritual *becomes* theatre when staged out of its original context, performed by actors for a modern live audience. Regardless of whether *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys* or *The Triumph of Horus* were once meant to be performative ritual dramas, they have now become theatre for our practical and pedagogical purposes in the twenty-first

century. This is because the ancient Egyptian performative, ritualistic, religious, and political aims of these dramas no longer exist in our current context, and as such they are no longer rituals. They are not performed by priests, but by actors imitating priests, and as such the utterances and gestures have lost their effectiveness. But they remain dramatic performances. They are *theatre* which serves a new purpose.

Notes

1. The quintessential publication on both of these texts as evidence of ancient Egyptian drama is Kurt Sethe's 1928 study, *Dramatische Texte zu altaegyptischen Mysterienspielen* (Dramatic texts on ancient Egyptian mysteries). Christina Geisen conducted a more recent comprehensive study of the Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus in English (2012). The Shabaka Stone has appeared in a number of English publications, including James Henry Breasted's "The Philosophy of a Memphite Priest" (1901) and the first volume of Miriam Lichtheim's *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (1973, 51-57).
2. The Neferhotep stela's current whereabouts are unknown (Simpson 2003, 339), although it was well documented before its disappearance by Egyptologists Auguste Mariette in 1880 (231-34) and James Henry Breasted in 1906 (332-36).
3. Plutarch recorded what is now the most well-known (and extensively Hellenized) version of this tale in the early Roman period (ca. first century CE). John Gwyn Griffiths provided an exemplary translation and detailed commentary of the original work in *Plutarch's de Iside et Osiride* (1970).
4. See Mark Smith (2009) for an explanation of why the Osirian reward of eternal life was, even at its earliest mention, intended for all Egyptians, as opposed to the pharaoh alone.
5. The archaeological record attests to the annual celebration of the mysteries of Osiris as far back as the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2055-1650 BCE). It took place most famously at the Osirian cult center of Abydos. The religious context and a faint similarity to the pattern of life, death, and resurrection found in the story of Jesus inspired theatre historians to correlate this dramatic event to early liturgical dramas performed in the Medieval Catholic Church, dubbing it the "Abydos Passion Play." See "Theatre History, Theatrical Mimesis, and the Myth of the Abydos Passion Play" by Alan Sikes (2015).
6. The ancient Egyptians gauged "Upper" and "Lower" by the direction of the flow of the Nile River, which flows from south to north. Hence the Delta region sits in the north near the Mediterranean Sea.
7. Brackets are Faulkner's; the first set surrounding "two" indicates his restoration of the text, and the second set indicates lacunae in the original material.
8. For a more detailed discussion of emotionality in the performance of recitation and song in the context of ancient Egyptian secular music, see "The Artists behind the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs: Performance and Technique" by Heidi Köpp-Junk (2015).
9. In the original text, these and the following lines are instructions for the priest and priestesses; they would not, in fact, have been recited in performance. I chose to have our actor playing the Lector Priest read them aloud as an introduction, to orient the audience toward the ritual aspect of the scene.

10. In Pap. Berlin 3008, the penultimate line reads: "…and give life-stability-dominion to the Osiris Tentruty, born of Tekhao, called Persis, the justified." For the purposes of our production, I removed the name of the deceased from our script and left the focus on Osiris the god.
11. With thanks to Dr. David Silverman, my Middle Egyptian professor at the University of Pennsylvania.
12. My special thanks to Egyptologists Jane Hill, Beth Ann Judas, and Melinda Nelson-Hurst for their expert guidance in the reverse translation.
13. The second person masculine singular suffix pronoun, preceded by a mark (usually a dot) at the end of the modified noun. See the Middle Egyptian grammar by James Allen (2000, 48-51).
14. I believe this speaks to the traditional Western theatrical training our American undergraduate students receive. The customary modern approach in American high schools and colleges is to follow the strict instructions of a director, to learn and rehearse one's prescribed text and blocking by rote. Many young theatre students are naturally uncomfortable with troubling that approach. This information, in and of itself, warrants a separate study.

Works Cited

Allen, James P. 2000. *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Ancient Hieroglyphs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Austin, J. L. 1975. *How To Do Things With Words*, 2nd ed. Edited by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. First published in 1962.

Barrett, Estelle. 2007. "Introduction." In *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, edited by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, 1-13. London: I.B. Tauris.

Blackman, A. M., and H. W. Fairman. 1942. "The Myth of Horus at Edfu: II. C. The Triumph of Horus over His Enemies a Sacred Drama." *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 28 (December): 32-38.

Blackman, A. M., and H. W. Fairman. 1943. "The Myth of Horus at Edfu: II. C. The Triumph of Horus over His Enemies a Sacred Drama (Continued)." *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 29 (December): 2-36.

Blackman, A. M., and H. W. Fairman. 1944. "The Myth of Horus at Edfu: II. C. The Triumph of Horus over His Enemies a Sacred Drama (Concluded)." *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 30 (December): 5-22.

Breasted, James Henry. 1901. "The Philosophy of a Memphite Priest." *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 39: 39-54.

Breasted, James Henry. 1906. *Ancient Records of Egypt.* Vol. 1, *The First to the Seventeenth Dynasties*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Internet Archive.

Chassinat, Émile. 1918. *Le Temple d'Edfou*. Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale.

Fairman, H. W. 1935. "The Myth of Horus at Edfu: I." *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 21 (September): 26-36

Fairman, H. W. 1974. *The Triumph of Horus: An Ancient Egyptian Sacred Drama*. London: B. T. Batsford.

Faulkner, R. O. 1936. "The Bremner-Rhind Papyrus: I. A. The Songs of Isis and Nephthys." *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 22 (2): 121-40.

Faulkner, R. O. 1962. *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*. Oxford: Griffith Institute.

Faulkner, R. O., trans. 1980. "The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys." In *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, edited by Miriam Lichtheim, 3: 116-21. Berkeley: University of California Press. First published in 1934.

Geisen, Christina. 2012. "The Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus: A New Edition, Translation, and Interpretation." PhD Diss., University of Toronto. ProQuest (3666270).

Gillam, Robyn. 2005. *Performance and Drama in Ancient Egypt*. London: Duckworth.

Griffiths, John Gwyn. 1970. *Plutarch's de Iside et Osiride*. Cambridge: University of Wales Press.

Hedges, Allison T. 2022. "Spoken Words, Embodied Words: A New Approach to Ancient Egyptian Theatre." PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park. ProQuest (29163157).

Köpp-Junk, Heidi. 2015. "The Artists behind the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs: Performance and Technique." In *Sex and the Golden Goddess II – World of the Love Songs*, edited by Hana Navratilova and Renata Landgráfová, 35-59. Prague: Czech Institute of Egyptology, Charles University in Prague.

Kucharek, Andrea, and Marc Coenen, 2021. *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys: Fragmentary Osirian Papyri, Part 1*. Charlottenlund: Museum Tusculanum Press.

Leinaweaver, Richard E. 1968. "Rabinal Achí: Commentary and English Translation." *Latin American Theatre Review* 1 (2): 3-53.

Lichtheim, Miriam, ed. 1973. *Ancient Egyptian Literature*. Vol. 1, *The Old and Middle Kingdoms*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lichtheim, Miriam, ed. 1980. *Ancient Egyptian Literature*. Vol. 3, *The Late Period*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lloyd, Alan B. 2000. "The Ptolemaic Period (332-30 BC)." In *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, edited by Ian Shaw, 388-413. New York: Oxford University Press.

Luckett, Sharrell D., and Tia M. Shaffer, ed. 2017. *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches*. New York: Routledge.

Malekpour, Jamshid. 2004. "The Origin and Development of the Ta'ziyeh." In *The Islamic Drama*, 32-71. London: Frank Cass.

Mariette, Auguste. 1880. *Catalogue général des monuments d'Abydos: découverts pendant les fouilles de cette ville*. Paris: Impr. Nationale. https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/mariette1880a/0016.

Mee, Erin B. 2010. "*But Is It Theater?* The Impact of Colonial Culture on Theatrical History in India." In *Theater Historiography: Critical Interventions*, edited by Henry Bial and Scott Magelssen, 99-109. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Mikhail, L. B. 1983. *Dramatic Aspects of the Osirian Khoiak Festival*. Uppsala: Institute of Egyptology, Uppsala University.

Murnane, William J. 2003. "Three Kingdoms and Thirty-four Dynasties." In *Ancient Egypt*, edited by David P. Silverman, 20-39. New York: Oxford University Press.

Naville, Edouard. 1870. *Textes relatifs au Mythe d'Horus recueillis dans le Temple d'Edfou*. Geneva: H. Georg.

Neale, Helen. 2016. "The Neferhotep Stela, Revisited: Kingship, Authority and Legitimacy in the Abydos Stela of Neferhotep I." MRes Thesis, Macquarie University.

Newton, Derek, and Derek Poole. 1974. "The Production of 'The Triumph of Horus'." In Fairman, *The Triumph of Horus*, 59-76.

Pettiford-Wates, Tawnya. 2017. "Ritual Poetic Drama within the African Continuum: The Journey from Shakespeare to Shange." In *Black Acting Methods: Critical Approaches*, edited by Sharrell D. Luckett and Tia M. Shaffer, 106-22. New York: Routledge.

Piccione, Peter A. 2000. "Survey of Ancient Egypt: A Social History." HIST 270.001, Spring 2000, College of Charleston (website). Accessed August 10, 2022. piccionep.people.cofc.edu/hist270/index.html.

Riley, Shannon Rose. 2013. "Why Performance as Research? A US Perspective." In *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances*, edited by Robin Nelson, 175-87. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sethe, Kurt. 1928. *Dramatische Texte zu altaegyptischen Mysterienspielen* [Dramatic texts on ancient Egyptian mysteries]. Leipzig: J. C. Heinrich.

Sikes, Alan. 2015. "Theatre History, Theatrical Mimesis, and the Myth of the Abydos Passion Play." *Theatre History Studies* 34: 3-18.

Simpson, William Kelly, ed. 2003. *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 3rd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Smith, Mark. 2009. "Democratization of the Afterlife." In *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, edited by Jacco Dieleman and Willeke Wendrich, Los Angeles, June. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/70g428wj.

Smith, Stuart Tyson. 2000. "The Triumph of Horus." UCSB Center for Middle Eastern Studies. Accessed August 10, 2022. https://stsmith.faculty.anth.ucsb.edu/courses/Triumph.pdf.

Theodore, Terry. 1975. "Reviewed Work(s): The Triumph of Horus, An Ancient Egyptian Sacred Drama by H. W. Fairman." *Educational Theatre Journal* 27 (3): 434-435.

Wickett, Elizabeth. 2010. *For the Living and the Dead: The Funerary Laments of Upper Egypt, Ancient and Modern*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Wilkinson, Richard H. 2000. *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Acknowledgements

This paper comes from my doctoral dissertation entitled "Spoken Words, Embodied Words: A New Approach to Ancient Egyptian Theatre," completed in April of 2022. I presented an earlier draft of this paper under the same title at the Virtual Annual Meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt in April of 2020. I would like to thank The Graduate School of the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Maryland, College Park, for granting me the Ann G. Wylie Dissertation Fellowship, and the chair of my dissertation committee, Franklin J. Hildy, for his support and guidance on this project. Finally, I am sincerely grateful to the cast and crew of the December 2019 production of *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys* and *The Triumph of Horus* at the University of Maryland School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies—especially Dr. Fraser Stevens as Assistant Director, Dr. Christen Mandracchia as Technical Director, and the young actors who bravely took on these unique and challenging roles.

About the Author

Allison Hedges completed her PhD in Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park, with a specialization in theatre history. Her dissertation, entitled "Spoken Words, Embodied Words: A New Approach to Ancient Egyptian Theatre," encourages collaboration between theatre practitioners, theatre historians, and Egyptologists for a more holistic understanding of the ancient Egyptian theatrical tradition. Dr. Hedges received her BA in Theatre from New York University, and her MLA in Ancient Studies from the University of Pennsylvania, where she focused on Egyptology. Her adaptation and staging of *The Lamentations of Isis and Nephthys* with *The Triumph of Horus* at the University of Maryland marked the first full-scale theatrical production of both pieces in the United States.