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- 24 David Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse*. Westview Press, 1998. \$35.00.

Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo is a serious philosophical and theological reflection on the human condition in the light of politically motivated forms of radical evil and oppression in our time, including the Holocaust, Rwanda, and Sarajevo. Throughout the book, as David Toole reflects on this subject, he refers his thoughts to a staging of Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* by Susan Sontag in Sarajevo during the summer of 1993. Like Beckett's characters Vladimir and Estragon, Toole finds himself situated in an "undecidable" zone somewhere between seeing life as meaningless (nihilism), meaningful only as art (tragedy), or meaningful only in Christ (apocalypse). With Susan Sontag as his model, Toole argues that no matter what anchors one's ultimate vision of life in the face of suffering and death, it is important, above all else, to stage the play, even as the bombs are flying all around the theatre. If suffering and dying are our plight, at least we can die well.

Toole has many conversation partners, and they all contribute important pieces to the story that he tells. Alasdair MacIntyre begins the story, jousting at Nietzsche's monumental war on reason with the tiny toothpicks of his Thomistic "logos." According to Toole, MacIntyre's mistake is that he tries to beat Nietzsche on his own ground, that is to say, on ground ultimately defined by a metaphysic rooted in conflict.

From MacIntyre, Toole turns to other critics of Nietzsche, who, like MacIntyre, try to peg Nietzsche as a radical nihilist: notably, Michael Gillespie, Martin Heidegger, and John Milbank. He concludes that, in the end, all of these thinkers misread Nietzsche by seeing him as a nihilist. They do this in order to set off their own work of salvaging liberalism (Gillespie), Being (Heidegger), or Christian charity (Milbank).

In fact, according to Toole, all of these thinkers share with Nietzsche the conviction that "nihilism has become our 'normal condition.'" (p. 51) Then, to the reader's surprise, Toole asserts that, like MacIntyre, Gillespie, Heidegger, and Milbank, Nietzsche was not content to live as a "normal nihilist." (p. 51) Nietzsche also wanted to escape this predicament of meaninglessness. The way that he accomplished this was through a "metaphysics of tragedy" that attempted to justify the world as art.

Toole conducts a masterful tour of Nietzsche's Dionysian vision of a city of reason poised on the edge of the abyss, propped up by an Apollinarian order designed to keep the "other," the abyss, tamed or banished. Ultimately, of course, this fragile order cannot keep the

Dionysian stranger outside the gate of the city. The subversive appearance of this Dionysian stranger within the city occurs through tragic art. This appearance is, for Nietzsche, a hopeful insertion into history of the "god of chance" that at least creates the possibility that things might "be otherwise." This subversion of order does not leave everything destroyed. "Rather the subversion was itself a re-ordering, one that always privileged the presence of the other." (p. 109) According to Toole, Nietzsche's metaphysics of tragedy "involves first the bifurcation of the world into the same and the other and then the championing of the other over against the imprisonments of the same" (p. 148)

With this theme in mind, Toole turns to Foucault and the "politics of tragedy." Similar to Nietzsche's tragic welcoming of the abysmal other into his metaphysics of tragedy, Foucault's political vision is predicated on "welcoming the other into the very heart of public life." (p. 133) Using Foucault as a fulcrum, Toole shifts the reader's attention from the transformation of suffering and meaninglessness through art, to their transformation through a tragic praxis of resistance to "the totalizing power of reason." (p. 145) According to Toole, Foucault wants to "disturb the comfort of familiarity and provoke an awareness of the other's existence." (p. 149) As Toole sees it, Foucault inaugurated a "plurality of resistances" against the hegemony of the "same" and its "other," releasing subtle forms of discursive resistance, subjugated knowledges, and muted memories of protest that now form a "silent murmur in our culture." (p. 185) From Foucault, the reader learns that resistance is 1) "a discursive phenomenon," 2) "embodied in a local knowledge," 3) "launched from a countersite," and 4) "dependent upon the popular memory, the popular history, of a subordinate group." (p. 185) From here it is only a short step for Toole to Sontag's theatre troupe, staging Godot in Sarajevo as the city burns.

At the same time, however, Nietzsche's tragic metaphysic and Foucault's tragic politics are only a short step from a "metaphysics of apocalypse and an apocalyptic politics." (p. 205) Following John Howard Yoder, Toole argues that the strangeness of the "apocalyptic style," which is rooted in the strangeness of the biblical text, bespeaks the metaphysical strangeness of the world itself. This is similar to the strangeness of Nietzsche's Dionysian vision of the world. The difference is that it is no longer the abyss and the insertion of chance into history that define this strangeness and provoke a politics of resistance. Rather, it is the strangeness of God and the odd insertion of incarnation and crucifixion into history that generate a way to resist the "Powers" (Wink).

With this in mind, Toole discusses forms of resistance discovered by observing the Jesus of New Testament faith, forms of resistance that display this apocalyptic "style." Jesus told parables that voiced the counter-discourse or "hidden transcript" of the apocalyptic vision. Jesus was an itinerant preacher, "link(ing) together previously unrelated subordinate groups." Jesus cast out demons and healed lepers, which subverted the body politic by creating a community "that

refused to be founded upon the exclusion of the other." Jesus welcomed outcasts into table fellowship, institutionalizing as a part of daily life the confusion of the center and the margins. Jesus entered into Jerusalem riding on a donkey, a "calculated symbolic challenge to the Powers." (pp. 235-252) Most important, Jesus modeled a profound form of "revolutionary subordination," showing the weak, who had "no strategic space" from which to act, how to develop "tactics" of resistance that became "an art of conforming to an order as a means of evading it." (Cf. the crucifixion, the martyrdom of the saints in the Colosseum who prayed as the lions bore down on them, etc.) This ultimate tactic of resistance involved playing the power game "improperly," which "ruined the game, even though the game went on." (p. 256)

In the end, Toole concludes that "apocalyptic politics is, like its counterpart tragedy, a politics of dying." (p. 261) If one lives according to the tragic vision, Godot does not arrive, but at least the world is not lost. It is transfigured in art and in the politics of tragic resistance through which the abysmal other and the god of chance are unleashed into a reason-bound history. If one lives according to the apocalyptic vision, on the other hand, "Godot will finally arrive," and tactics of resistance are bent toward God's final appearing. According to Toole, no matter which of these two visions we have, it is crucial that we stage the play, that we opt for something more than the "normal nihilism" of our culture.

This is a good book, at times compelling to read. Its unevenness is more than overcome by the passion and vision of the writer that keep the reader engrossed and eager to turn to the next page. Toole has a gift for not caving in to the kind of narrative theology that strands the reader in the solipsistic world of a circular mimesis. He acknowledges the metaphysical premises, even of writers such as MacIntyre. He is willing to point to the origins of philosophical and theological narratives in metaphysical decisions about the nature of identity and difference, without reducing these narratives to those origins. He is also able to celebrate alternative or "odd" forms of consciousness without blowing the triumphal horn of the "resident alien."

Near the end of the book, one detects a tiredness, an exhaustion with the subject - and rightly so. It is difficult terrain to cross, filled with the lure of harpies and paradoxical demons. But Toole navigates this minefield for and with the reader, showing compassion and genuine commitment to the human condition that he seeks to illumine. Every thinking preacher who wants to speak a word of resistance and hope to the world's suffering and pain should read this book.

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- 25 Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*. Random House, 1997. \$25.00.

Adolescent girls' bodies have always been a problem for them. Developmental theorists who study girls have found that before