

# Body Lines - A War Story | Introduction to the Script

Damian Coleridge 2013

*Body Lines is one part of the 4 Mysteries Project which is a theatre project presently developing a fourfold take on the gospel. Four stylised, symbolic, very different performances are in development, which will be presented separately, then together over one day.*

## MAKING A STORY

'I don't think of the gospels as stories.' Many of us think this way and it's understandable because of their episodic structure and various long sections of talking etc. This sort of mix is unique to the gospels, but it's not what we're used to in stories. However, understanding them as stories, and the development of story frameworks, is a useful way of entering them.

## SYNOPSIS

**An unlikely 'hero' emerges out of nowhere. With a band of followers he carries out guerrilla operations to liberate occupied territory. They come to a fateful crossroad where a decision is taken to meet the enemy head-on. A showdown takes place in the capital. There is a wholesale desertion by the following and a public humiliation and execution of the 'hero'. The story ends with the question: what happened?**

## FRAME

The framework for the script is that of a war story, a guerrilla struggle to liberate people from the grip of evil. The guerrilla war story is not a political version, it's mythic. The crucial confrontation is with Satan, not with the Romans, or the Jewish leadership.

## CHARACTERS

- 20 + performers are required – or, as many as it takes. In one sense it's a crowd piece - many scenes begin with a figure in a crowd, or on the edge of a crowd - but it moves to the 'making of body' whereby people come to see that they belong to one another.
- Characteristically there are many characters who appear briefly and intensely and either become one of the J company, or disappear back into the crowd, as it were.
- There are a few characters who reappear at least once, sometimes more often: Jesus, John the Plunger, three male followers - Peter James and John - and three female followers.

## JESUS

- Jesus is played by one person, but the look of the character changes constantly.
- He's a figure like Jet Li. He needs to move like Jet Li because he's a warrior who is effortlessly graceful in the numerous fights he's involved in. It's also a reminder that he doesn't look like Jesus; which means we don't necessarily recognize him.
- At moments he's a terrifying figure, at other moments quite strange, but he's no weirdo.
- He's a 'hero', but with a difference. He's not your isolated hero, instead he's always intent on 'making a body' - on enabling people to see how they belong to one another. The body that's being formed throughout this gospel doesn't make much sense if Jesus is separated out from his following.

## WOMEN

Women are a key to the story. They appear in unusual places right the way through.

## DEMONS

There are different kinds of demons. They accompany those they possess and do them damage. They're outer demons, not inner demons. There are many fights with them, but different demons have to be fought in different ways. They're faceless.

## SATAN

Satan is the power which seeks to bring people undone. In the end Jesus' fight is with Satan, not the Roman or Jewish authorities. Satan is a great puppet figure raised up at two moments, at the beginning and at the end.

## ANGELS

They're seen at the beginning, joining with Jesus in a fight, and at the end. They're often riddling figures, dressed in light. They're not clichés.

## 3 ACT STRUCTURE

There are 3 Acts and 26 scenes. Some scenes are 20 mins long, others 5 mins. Each Act and scene has a title.

**Act 1: AT LAST** - guerrilla warfare clearing no man's land. Pure action.

6 scenes: In Training, Ritual in No-Man's-Land, Guerrilla Warfare, Rout, Execution, Save the Life of My Child.

**Act 2: AT THE CROSSROADS** - there's a rubbish dump. It's an abandoned place. A different sort of training takes place here. There's a change of direction. There are fewer actions by the hero. It's an in-between time.

9 scenes: An Abandoned Place, On Weird Mountain, Chaos on the Ground, Comes to a Head, Learning a Lesson, Seeing, What More is There?, The Great Shock, The Hag at Simon's.

**Act 3: THE SHOWDOWN** - from the Temple to the final battle – the showdown - and the response to it. Active. Insistent.

11 scenes: Blind Seer and Triumph, Attack on the Temple, Collaborating, Passover Meal, Crossing Over, Desertion, The Accused, Scapegoating, Anti-Triumph, Blackout, In the Womb.

## **NARRATION**

- There's narration in each of three acts. In Act 1 it's provided by John the Plunger and various other characters, then in Acts 2 & 3 by some of the followers.
- Narration is designed to comment on, expand and make connections to assist the audience's entry into the performance.

## **SET**

- There's a different setting for each of the 3 Acts: **1)** No Man's Land – a strange threatening place **2)** At the crossroads where there's a rubbish dump. It's an abandoned place that draws outcast people, demons etc. **3)** In the city - upstairs downstairs; bit like an Elizabethan stage, only moreso.
- There are 3 'hologram' settings - 3 moments when we pass into another dimension: the ritual bath in act 1. On weird mountain in act 2. And the blackout / in the womb at the end of act 3.

## **COSTUME**

Various. Colourful. Unexpected. Splendid as Kabuki costumes.

## **MASKS**

They're used throughout. A range of them. Make up too.

## **PUPPETS**

They appear at moments, most noticeably when Satan appears, but elsewhere as well.

## **MUSIC**

Music is heard at every point - it's live . As well there's a wonderful array of sound to punctuate the performance. The script details this and suggests a range of music pieces as analogues.

## MOVEMENT

- Group movement is a key. It needs to be choreographed. There needs to be variety in movement. Otherwise crowd scenes, like fight scenes, can be boring.
- The stylised movement in Kabuki is suggestive; so too the movement in the Kurosawa movie 'Seven Samurai' and Chinese martial arts movies.
- The fight scenes with the demons have to be impressive, stunning even, otherwise they're farcical. Consequently there needs to be a choreographer and a fights director.

## LANGUAGE

- Language is critical to the performance, but in unexpected ways. We tend to think that everyone in the gospel speaks one language, or at least our language, but in the scene titled 'Save the Life of My Child' for instance, the play of language is the dramatic driver. It's dramatically critical, not an add-on. The same for many other scenes.
- This is why there's a need for performers from different cultures. Language is central, but not one, instead a range of languages is involved and many language resources e.g. songs, exorcisms.
- In some scenes language is used for maximum impact, in other scenes there are no words.
- The script is shaped by the framing of a story and the understanding that there is a mythic dimension to it. In so doing it moves away from the order of the written text and its language.

## STYLE

The story isn't set in a naturalistic world, but in a mythic world that introduces us to the unfamiliar and uncanny. Naturalism might work with the 'story-of-Jesus' approach or the 'yesterday's news story' approach to the gospels, but a mythic take on Mark's gospel - mythic in unexpected ways - demands a more stylised, symbolic performance; a more physical theatre approach.

## MYTH

'Body Lines' is a mythic creation story, but unexpectedly so. It's not a biography of Jesus, it's a story about one becoming many, and many becoming one - about the fusion of a group and the risen Jesus in one body: the body of Christ then isn't a he, it's a he/we. This re-creation story is the central myth that the mythic world of Mark's gospel feeds into.

**If you're interested in the 'Body Lines' script contact Damian Coleridge**