

## **Religious Satire in Robert Askins' *Hand to God* in the light of Lyotard's concept of Metanarratives**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Religious satire serves to shed light on the hypocrisy and corruption within organized religion, critiquing the deviation from religious teachings. In contemporary literature, a shift is seen where satire targets not just deviations, but rejects the interpretations of religious teachings. Thus, the study investigates the characteristics of religious satire in the play of Robert Askins "Hand to God." In light of Lyotard's theory of meta-narrative, it aims to explore the evolution of religious satire in literature, specifically focusing on its altered focus from critiquing deviations to rejecting interpretations of religious teachings. The study examines Robert Askins's play "Hand to God" to elucidate how this transformation is portrayed and understood in the context of metanarratives. The present study uses Lyotard's theory of metanarratives as methodological tool , encompassing overarching explanations of reality. A close examination would show sophisticated emphasis that goes beyond just criticizing deviations from religious teachings. Instead of emphasising these deviations, the play questions conventional understandings of religious teachings, echoing Lyotard's assessment of the diminishing influence of metanarratives in contemporary society. The play emphasises the emergence of multiple narratives in a culture where once-universal certainties no longer rule the roost through its irreverent treatment of religious notions.

Keywords: (Religious satire, Metanarrative, Robert Askins, Lyotard, postmodern).

### **Introduction**

Satire has been used for many years in many different mediums including books, comics, and even politics. All art can be classified into one of several categories that share a common theme of extreme contempt. Satire is funny because it satirizes ideas with which its audience disagrees. Since this is the case, satire is commonly used by authors, politicians, and artists to refute the position they are lampooning. They arrive at a humorous critique of the work that changes the audience's perspective dramatically and makes them

more empathetic toward the creators no matter what they think of the work. (Kaplan, 5).

Satire, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is “a way of utilizing comedy to suggest that someone or something is silly, which on English and Irish civilizations was gradually becoming more widespread”. Satire is a type of writing that aims to ridicule, humiliate, or disgrace its subjects via the use of humor (Gottlieb,15).

Religion is sometimes described as the most powerful, authoritative, and potentially violent social intensity experienced across the country. There is no other institution that has been as successful in uniting and motivating its followers as religion has done. Both “religare,” which means “chain” or “knot again,” and “re-legere,” which means “collect” or “read again,” can be traced back to the Latin word “Religio,” from which the English term “religion” derives. Whatever their precise meanings may be, the Romans employed them to stress the importance of carefully considering rituals before engaging in business with the divine. (Jensen, 14)

Most people classify satire as a literary device, though “literary” in this context usually encompasses more than simply books. This strategy is most commonly associated with novels and pamphlets, but it may also be present in many popular movies, TV shows, and nonfiction works today. One example is the widespread satire of religion in popular media, such as movies and TV shows. Religion is an extremely touchy subject, and even well-meaning criticisms of it can upset some people. Therefore, satirists should be prepared for at least some resistance and possibly hostile reactions, despite the fact that this is often exactly what they are looking for. ( Johnson, 19)

A work of religious satire that seeks to persuade its readers to change their beliefs must, first and foremost, be an attack on, exposure of, or derision of that which the satirist finds ludicrous or unpleasant. Attempting a knowing smile or laugh is usually not enough. Making a religious leader into a comical character without also making a statement about the faith as a whole would not

qualify as religious satire. Satire occurs in media when there are humorous moments involving an issue that is similar to the one being satirized. (Spivak, 5)

In a nutshell, religious satire calls attention to the failings and foibles of religion, such as hypocrisy and the misuse of power. Giving religious topics the trappings of comedy increases the possibility that the target audience would laugh along with the author rather than retaliate to the criticisms and jokes being made about them. Christian satire, when done correctly, allows readers to brush aside an author's statements and ideas as harmless hilarity. These same nonthreatening decorations can help spread the criticisms far and wide, keeping them out of the hands of those who would rather take the jokes at face value.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Religion influences social life via influencing an individual's character. In people's minds, it awakens a sense of societal importance. Religion has a significant role in adhering to social regulations, showing respect for elders and others' sentiments, and faithfully carrying out social commitments. (Nath, Karimganj, 84) But in the contemporary society, Religion exerts a significant and disputed influence on modern communities. In many postmodern plays, the religious aspect has steadily evolved from being depicted with decency and respect into an element of mocking. (Jassim, 29) Although being based on a collection of dogmas that appear to relate to apparent "staticity," religion as a phenomenon in society changes significantly on a regular basis. (Cacanoska, 7)

Religion in the postmodern society change from fixed facts that has belief and role. There are no more grand narrative (multiplicity) to the mininarrative which means religion is seen according to view of an individual. Everybody interpreters religious views according to his understanding. In place of grand narratives that explain large-scale universal or global notions, postmodernism prefers "mini-narratives," or stories that explain tiny behaviors or local happenings. Postmodern "mini-narratives" never pretend to be

universal, true, rational, or stable; instead, they are always situational, provisional, contingent, and transient. (Klages, 4)

Postmodernity has, in fact, also been seen as the denial of the ideologies modernism supported. Outspoken postmodernists and those who elevated postmodern critique of modernism both exist. Francois Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, and Michael Foucault are a few of them. I'll examine Lyotard's ideas on postmodernism and how it affects religion. Postmodernism is both an abstract and concrete experience. The postmodern condition refers to the postmodernization of the human experience today. The postmodern condition by Lyotard includes a thorough study of philosophy, politics, and aesthetics as well as an array of stylistic experiments. The most significant figure in postmodern philosophy is Lyotard, the founder of postmodernism. The postmodern situation by Jean François Lyotard marked the introduction of postmodern as a new language. He was a poststructuralist theorist from France. In his research on language use, he discovered a postmodern experimental language game that combines science and technology with language play. His opinions on philosophy, politics, aesthetics, science, and technology, as well as the postmodern condition, have been particularly well-presented in his writing. (Chalise, 124)

According to Lyotard's *The Post-Modern Condition* (1979), post-Modernism rejects the tenets of industrialized civilization and is suspicious of reason. It also views technology as a weapon of mass destruction despite its role in its development. Additionally, he says that "metanarratives" are untrustworthy in the context of postmodernism since they seem inappropriate. According to Lyotard, postmodernism therefore implores people to live and think in a rhetorical concept, in which people attempt to persuade others of their point of view by presenting their ideas in a very persuasive manner. All moral and philosophical questions are up for discussion and debate in postmodernism, and according to Lyotard, this debate should go on indefinitely. The mistake that has been made in the past is to offer opinions that

lead to the closure of any topics that required further discussion. (ED. Rivkin, Ryan, 355)

In his famous book, *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), Lyotard states; I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements—narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. (TR. Bennington, Massumi, 25)

There are no grand narratives in the postmodern context (no ethics, no aesthetics, and no metaphysics). There are no unified projects. They do not believe in one truth. They reject all the traditional concepts whether Eastern or Western unsympathetically. Lyotard claims that society is fragmented so there are no big stories. Little narratives become the appropriate way of interpreting social transformations and political problems. These mininarratives replace grand narratives. (Samadara, <https://medium.com/@sewsam0/religion-in-postmodern-society-regarding-lyotards-concept-of-meta-narratives-6555b90bf1c0>)

For Lyotard, a “metanarrative” is more than just a “great story” in the sense of a narrative with grand or universal aspirations or even one that makes universal claims. The type of the claims these narratives make, rather than their extent, is what is at question. According to Lyotard, metanarratives are a uniquely modern phenomena since they claim to be able to justify the story and its claims by making an appeal to universal Reason, even though premodern and tribal stories do the same. (Smith, 354)

The phrase “metanarrative” has developed into a word that, like “deconstruction,” has never been without a job but, regrettably, has been assigned tasks it never requested. In other words, Lyotard’s use of the term “metanarrative” has been removed from its very specific context and open to equivocation. For instance, Lyotard’s concept of a metanarrative is misrepresented in three different ways in Middleton and Walsh’s discussion. First, a definition of “metanarratives” in their purest form After referencing Lyotard’s characterization of postmodernism as skepticism of metanarratives, they go on to outline what they believe to be the two main issues with metanarratives from a postmodern perspective: “They are totalizing or marginalizing; they are (a) “universal” stories. To put it another way, they contend that the scale of metanarratives is their main flaw “claims to be a great narrative that spans all of human history, not just the local, but the entire planet, from the beginning to the end. They continue by speculating, despite the fact that they acknowledge Lyotard never says it “-that skepticism of metanarratives implies “widespread scepticism of any comprehensive metanarrative of world history that makes ‘total’ claims” due to the fact that such claims invariably result in violence. This explanation of metanarratives has an issue in that it is not based on Lyotard’s discussion of metanarratives, which leads to a significant misunderstanding of what “post-modernism” entails. The issue with meta-narratives is unrelated to the extent to which they assert to be “large-scale” stories with “universal scope.” “but the manner in which they are justified. (Smith, 355)

The epistemological issue of justification or legitimation is thus central to the Postmodern Condition, A Report on Knowledge. However, Middleton and Walsh frame the issue as follows in light of their understanding of Lyotard, postmodernism, and metanarratives:

The problem, from a postmodern point of view, is that the Scriptures, in which Christians claim to ground their faith and in which we will seek answers to the worldview questions we have raised, constitute

ametanarrative that makes universal claims. [...] SO the question we are confronted with ... is whether the Christian faith, rooted as it is in ametanarrative of cosmic proportions, is subject to the postmodern charge of totalizing violence. (Smith, 355)

So according to Lyotard's conceptions on religion, it can be said that religion reinforces the viewpoint of the individual and weakens the strength of institutions and religions which deal with objective realities in postmodern society. In postmodern society, there are no universal religious truths, rather, the reality is shaped by social, historical, and cultural contexts according to the individual. Most of the time studies of religion are approached from a historical perspective. In postmodern society, religion shows that history can be exemplified in an intrinsically biased way through highlighting the conventional ideologies of those in power. In the modern period, religious claims were seen as either true or false. But in postmodern society, truth is denied and these religious claims are judged on private preference. It is no more objective. (Samadara, <https://medium.com/@sewsam0/religion-in-postmodern-society-regarding-lyotards-concept-of-meta-narratives-6555b90bf1c0>)

### **Robert Askins' *Hand to God***

Robert Askins in his play *Hand to God*, uses satire and humor to talk about religious ideas. The play talks about religion, morals, and the fight between good and evil. Askins examines the complexities and inconsistencies of religious belief through humour, irreverence, and the juxtaposition of religious images.

Also, *Hand to God* examines how faith helps people deal with personal and social problems. The play shows how people tend to look outside of themselves, like faith, for answers and solutions to hard problems. Askins wonders if religion is a real source of comfort and direction or if it can be used to manipulate and control people.

Through his play, Askins challenges religious norms and asks the audience to question their views and assumptions. He uses dark humor, shocking images, and subversive stories to push the limits and make people think about faith, morals, and what it means to be human.

Robert Askins's *Hand to God* shows religion in a nuanced and complicated way through all of these different ideas and ways of looking at it. He questions traditional religious structures, makes fun of religious hypocrisy, and encourages people to think critically about faith, morals, and what it means to be human. Askins starts conversations and asks important questions about the role of religion in society and how it affects people's lives by being funny and disrespectful.

Robert Askins's play *Hand to God* satirizes the hypocrisy and corruption of the systemized religion. The play ridicules the blind faith in religion that it provides a cure for every problem. The characters are flawed and struggling with their own demons in spite of their professed faith.

Robert Askins' play *Hand to God* made its Off-Broadway debut in 2011. Jason, a meek and unhappy youngster, and his friendship with Tyrone, an impolite and irreverent puppet, are at the centre of the story. Also, there are another characters in the play who are Margery, Jason's mother as well as two other teens, Jessica and Timothy and later pastor Gregg. The play examines issues of loss, sexuality, religion, and the inevitable conflict between our inner desires and society standards. It is set in a small Texas town and centers around a puppet ministry class at a local church.

Askins delves into the depths of human nature with the skilful use of black humour and absurdity. Ingeniously fusing puppetry, humour, and darkness, the show offers an original and captivating theatrical experience. Jason's suppressed feelings, passions, and internal anguish are expressed through the puppet Tyrone. The interaction between Jason and Tyrone questions the idea of good against evil and the fine line between sanity and the crazy, serving as a metaphor for the duality of human existence.



## Discussion of the play

The concept of meta-narratives is contested and undermined, especially in the context of Christianity, in Robert Askins' play *Hand to God*, a work of religious satire. The play emphasizes the impossibilities and absurdities of trying to reduce complicated human experiences and struggles to a single, all-encompassing story.

Jason, the main character, is a member of a Christian puppet ministry where he is required to follow a specific religious story and moral code. Tyrone, the puppet, however, comes to represent a chaotic and disruptive force that transcends the limitations of the Christian meta-narrative as the play progresses. Askins makes fun of organized religion's strict doctrines and too simplified moral standards through the figure of Tyrone.

*Hand to God* uses religious satire to challenge viewers to critically assess the reliability and authority of meta-narratives, particularly religious ones. It casts doubt on the idea that a single story can explain everything there is to know about morality, human nature, and the complexities of life. The play advocates a more nuanced and open-ended approach to tackling core issues of faith, identity, and the human condition through humor and irreverence.

Robert Askins' play *Hand to God* might be seen as a type of metanarrative via the prism of Jean-François Lyotard's postmodernism theory. The idea of metanarratives, which are grand narratives or overarching stories that declare to give a complete explanation of reality, is contested by Lyotard's thesis. Postmodernism, according to Lyotard, rejects the notion that there can be a single, all-inclusive story that captures all facets of the human experience.

The play starts in a church basement where Margery prepares her students to perform a puppet show. Her students are two boys (her son Jason and Timothy) and a girl, Jessica. Everyone starts to show that he /she is about to fix his puppet:

**MARGERY:** Well where's everybody at? Jessie you gonna finish your ...

**JESSICA :** Jolene.

**MARGERY:** Are You gonna finish Jolene today?

**JESSICA:** I guess. (Act 1/Scene 1).

Margery asks Timothy if has his puppet and Timothy replies that he does not have it because he thinks that puppets are for the homosexual:

**MARGERY:** Why don't you have a puppet, Timothy.

**TIMOTHY:** 'Cause puppet are for faggots. (Act 1 / Scene 1).

Jason brings up his puppet, Tyrone and he starts a rendition of — Jesus Loves Me. The puppets serve as a symbol of the inner psyche and desires of the characters.

Jason uses his puppet, Tyrone to express his own repressed feelings and emotions. Through the puppet (Tyrone), Jason is able to say and do things that he dares never to do in real life. Puppets also could be seen as a metaphor for the character's struggle with their own identities and desires. The puppet workshop could be interpreted as one of the teaching ways (Metenarratives) used by the Christian church to mold children into a certain mold. The puppets themselves can not be controlled and they have their own wills which gives them symbolic meaning that the characters are trying to break from religious norms and expectations and practice what they desire or believe (mini-narratives). (Talktheatretome)

Margery and her son Jason are seen in the car. Margery is driving. She asks her son:

**MARGERY:** What do you want for dinner?

**JASON:** doesn't answer.

**MARGERY:** Chick-fil-A? You want some nuggets. Some chicken nuggets?

**JASON:** doesn't answer.

**MARGERY:** You hungry? You really ... we could go to Grandy's. They got that Chicken Fried Steak you like.

**Jason looks at his mother and says, — Momma. I don't wanna do the puppets no more — .( Act 1/ Scene 3)**

His mother tries to ignore him but Jason repeats his words that he is unwilling to do a puppet show:

**MARGERY:** That's what we'll do. We'll get you a parfait. Parfait means perfect in French.

**JASON:** Momma ...

**MARGERY:** You can keep on repeating yourself, young man. I'm gonna keep On ignoring you.

**JASON:** Why, Momma.

**MARGERY:** You know what them puppets mean to your Momma.  
(Act 1/Scene 3)

The dialogue shows Margery's insistence and her devotion to her work in the church.

This way of teaching is satirized in the play. Church representations like Pastor Greg and Margery fail to convince these boys to cope with their rules and instructions because they neglect the emotions and desires of these boys. Pastor Greg and Margery believe that there is only one correct way to interpret the scripture (a Metanarrative that should not be violated) neglecting boys' opinions, desires, and hopes that represent what is called mini-narratives. Lyotard states that:

Modernity is defined by its reliance upon grand narratives that depict human progress. Their difference from traditional metanarratives is that they point towards a future in which the problems facing a society (which is most often thought of as all of humanity) will be resolved. He identifies two key types of modern metanarrative in *The Postmodern Condition*: the speculative grand narrative and the grand narrative of emancipation (or freedom). (Simon Malpes, 25)

<https://www.scribd.com/document/647005464/PAGE-69-74>

Lyotard asserts that the use of grand narratives to depict human progress and provide a glimpse of how society will be when its issues are handled is a hallmark of modernity. These metanarratives differ from conventional narratives in that they often offer an idealistic or utopian view of the future that frequently includes all of humankind. (Datta, 3917)

The great narrative of emancipation or freedom, on the other hand, places a strong emphasis on the release of people or social groups from repressive institutions and structures. Social justice, equality, and the fulfilment of human rights are its goals. This story emphasizes the emancipation struggle and imagines a time when no one will be subject to political, economic, or cultural dominance. (Peters, 3-4)

The extract shows how Margery tries every way to make her son Jason agree to go on his work with the puppets. Jason starts to rip the head of the puppet in half and makes his mother furious:

**JASON:** rips the PUPPET's head in half.

**MARGERY:** gasps, her eyes go wide.

She slams on the brakes.

**MARGERY:** Get out.

**JASON:** What.

**MARGERY:** Get out of the car.

**JASON:** Momma.

**MARGERY:** Get out of the car you spoiled little shit. Get out of the car. Get out of the car get out of the car.

**JASON:** No Momma.

**MARGERY:** Now.

**JASON:** Momma. Please.

**MARGERY:** Do it.

**JASON:** Momma I love you.

**MARGERY:** No you don't.

**JASON:** I do. I do.

**MARGERY:** No you. None of you do.

**JASON:** Momma.

She screams.

**JASON:** Momma.

She screams again. ( Act 1/Scene 3)

This incident shows the arrogance of Margery and her false devotion to a systemized way of teaching religion. At the same time, it shows how Margery fails to accept any violation or rejection in that way, and her inability to listen to any justification regarding why her son Jason likes to stop doing his work with puppets.

In act one scene 4, Margery and Pastor Greg are seen sitting on desks facing each other in the church's basement. Margery seems to be frustrated because the boys are not there and are not expected to come. Pastor Greg tries to comfort her :

**MARGERY:** They're not here.

**PASTOR GREG:** I can see that.

**MARGERY:** They're not here, and they're not coming.

**PASTOR GREG:** Margery ...

**MARGERY:** I don't know what kind of performance we can have without any of the performers.

**PASTOR GREG:** The Lord works in mysterious ways.

**MARGERY:** I don't know what to do.

**PASTOR GREG:** Stop trying to do.

**MARGERY:** What does that mean.

**PASTOR GREG:** Just be still.

**MARGERY:** I can't.

**PASTOR GREG:** Give me your hands.

**MARGERY:** Pastor.

**PASTOR GREG:** Just give 'em to me.

She does. ( Act 1/ Scene 4)

This incident shows the hypocrisy of religious figures represented by Pastor Greg who tries to comfort Margery by giving a false justification for the absence of the boys that God works in mysterious ways. The reality is that he never tries to find a solution for the situation but he shows a kind of blind faith. This is one of the meta-narratives criticized and rejected in postmodern society. Pastor Greg supposedly should search for a solution to the absence of the boys for how the performance could be held without the performers.

For Lyotard, then, the human is the product of a conflict between two inhumans: the inhuman systems of capitalist development and technology threaten to extinguish anything in the human that is not of value to them, and yet within this same human lies the uncanny strangeness of another inhuman that is a potential site of resistance. (Simon Malpes, 91)

Pastor Greg feels that Margery feels lost after the death of her husband and needs someone to compensate him:

**PASTOR GREG:** I know. I know you're a wounded thing that needs to be cared for. I know you need for someone to share your burden. You need someone to pull in harness with you. I know what empty days are like Margery. I know what lonely nights are like. I know what it's like when you eat your lunch in silence and you think you're choking down dry white bread and then you realize it's half a cry. I know what it's like to look at your arms and ask what use are these empty. I know what it's like to wanna scream at happy couples on the street just 'cause they're happy. Just cause they're together and you're not. I'm not the biggest man in the world Margery. I'm not so rich or so handsome or so ... good. I am not so good. But I got empty arms. Empty arms and ears made just to hear you cry. That's my best shot Margery. I think we could be good together, real and whole, and if you think there's even a sliver of a section of a portion of a chance I wish you'd give it to me. 'Cause I sure could use a break. (Act 1 / Scene 4)

This scene highlights the hypocrisy and contradictions inherent in organized religion and criticized religious characters like Pastor Greg. This incident satirizes the idea of religious certainties and the belief that there is only one correct way (meta-narrative) to interpret Scripture. It portrays Pastor Greg, the leader of the group as a narrow-minded and hypocritical person who uses his position of authority to impose his views on others. It also reveals the failure of the organized religion (the use of meta-narrative) to find solutions for every problem in life. Lyotard states that:

The central idea of the speculative grand narrative is that human life, or 'Spirit' as Hegel calls it, progresses by increasing its knowledge. All the different language games are brought together by philosophy in order to present a 'universal "history" of spirit'. All knowledge is thus related in a system of philosophy and, according to Lyotard, 'True knowledge . . . is composed of reported state- ments [that] are incorporated into the metanarrative of a subject that guarantees their legitimacy (Simon Malpes, 26)

We may see Pastor Greg's personal narrative expressed in the quotation. He addresses Margery directly, letting her know that he recognises her suffering and the void she feels. He recognises her need for support, someone to shoulder her problems with, and a partner. Instead of depending on a big storyline or a universal truth, this story emphasises personal experiences and emotions in an effort to forge a connection between two people.

Pastor Greg's story also illustrates how splintered personal experiences may be. He talks about having to choke down dry white bread and having lonely nights. These disjointed encounters support the concept that there is no single, all-encompassing explanation for human experience and lead to the rejection of a universal narrative. The quotation's phrasing also illustrates a distaste for large narratives. Pastor Greg doesn't portray himself as a model of virtue or perfection. In declaring that he is not the biggest, richest, or most attractive man, he admits his own faults. He draws attention to his hollowness

and flaws while emphasising his capacity for sympathy and listening to Margery's screams.

Overall, this statement serves as an example of a personal narrative that rejects the idea of a grand narrative from a Lyotardian standpoint. Instead of attempting to create absolute truths or comprehensive explanations, it places an emphasis on unique experiences, feelings, and the fragmented structure of personal narratives.

Timothy in moments of anger confirms his sexual affairs with Margery (Jason's mother) :

**TIMOTHY:** I fucked your mother and she liked it.

TYRONE's laugh gets scary.

**JESSICA:** Jason.

**TIMOTHY:** She liked it a lot. ( Act 1/Scene 6)

The above extract shows the corruption of those who are devoted to organized religion. Margery who is supposed to be pure and righteous is shown as a lusty woman who exploits a boy supposed to be like her child to have a sexual relationship with him.

Regarding the difficulties posed by gender and sexuality, there are a variety of topics covered, including complementarity and egalitarian gender roles, marriage, divorce, homosexuality, and gender identity. These problems have led to division within Christian faiths, organizations, and churches. They may also be the cause of the Church's cultural alienation in the twenty-first century. According to Lehr (2017), these concerns present a wide range of challenges since they have significant pastoral and theological ramifications. For instance, the conservative theological churches frequently work to uphold a biblical ethics that is consistent with such difficulties.( Amankwa, Akoto, 293-294)

In Act two scene one, Margery is shown tending to Timothy's ear. Timothy was yowling because of the pain :

**PASTOR GREG:** Margery that's a lot of blood.



**MARGERY:** Problem one solved. Ear stays on. ( Act 2/ Scene 1)

Jessica expresses her astonishment at the idea of buying a puppet with teeth :

**JESSICA:** Well who bought him the puppet with teeth?

**MARGERY:** This isn't funny Jessie.

**JESSICA:** I'm not trying to be funny. My puppet doesn't have teeth. **MARGERY:** Your puppet isn't possessed by the devil.

**JESSICA:** Is it the puppet that's possessed or Jason?

**MARGERY:** Jessica.

**PASTOR GREG:** That is an interesting question.

**MARGERY:** I have had enough interesting questions for one day. The devil is in that puppet and we are goin to exorcise him right out and have everyone back home by midnight. That's what I want and that's what Jesus wants and that's what's gonna happen. Right? ( Act 2/Scene 1)

This above extract shows the blind faith of Margery to find solutions for any problem in religion. Margery believes that she could set the puppet right again. She believes that the puppet is possessed by the devil. Both Margery and Pastor Greg believe that they can dismiss the devil through exorcism.

According to Lyotard:

Science has always been in conflict with narratives. Judged by the yardstick of science, the majority of them prove to be fables. But to the extent that science does not restrict itself to stating useful regularities and seeks the truth, it is obliged to legitimate the rules of its own game. (Bennington, Massumi, 24)

Margery's persona exemplifies irrational religious faith as shown by her conviction that the puppet is in the devil's hands. She is steadfast in her conviction that they will drive the demon from the puppet and things will be

back to how they were. This illustrates her steadfast adherence to her religious principles and her determination to identify straightforward solutions to difficult issues. Margery dismisses Jessica's question and maintains that they would exorcise the devil from the puppet when she queries if Jason (probably the puppeteer) or the puppet itself is possessed. This rejection of competing interpretations and concentration on her own narrative is consistent with Lyotard's observation that meta-narratives frequently exclude opposing points of view.

Margery states that pastor Greg needs a quiet atmosphere in order to concentrate on his pre-exorcism prep:

**MARGERY:** Pastor Greg could use some quiet to concentrate on his pre- exorcism prep.

**PASTOR GREG:** Actually I have remarkable powers of concentration. (Act 2/ Scene 1)

Interpreting the incident as a kind of possession by the devil shows the failure of the church to find solutions for everyday problems. The religious figures refuge to exorcism in order to convince people that it is the only way to dismiss the devil. At the same time they try to impose that this kind of problem is propagated by the devil and that they have the power to solve it.

After Jessica drags Timothy out, Margery and Pastor Greg are left to discuss whether they inform the police or not :

**MARGERY:** Greg we can't. No police ... we can't. We just can't.

**PASTOR GREG:** Margery calm down.

**MARGERY :**They'll take him away.

**PASTOR GREG:** Maybe he needs to be taken away.

**MARGERY:** No. No. I can't. I can't lose him too.

**PASTOR GREG:** I know.

He goes to his book shelf and grabs a Bible.

**PASTOR GREG:** Ok. Then I guess that leaves just me.

**MARGERY:** Well what are you gonna do?

**PASTOR GREG:** I have no idea. I guess I'm just gonna try to talk to him. (Act 2/ Scene 1)

Pastor Greg and Margery show their blind faith in their interpretation of the problem claiming they have a solution through exorcism. The extract above shows their bewilderment at how to end this problem. Actually, this shows the hypocrisy of these religious figures and their attempt to impose these meta-narratives ( interpretations and solutions ) in the minds of the boy. The irony is that they themselves are not sure of their validity.

Religion can engage in the pluralistic exchange of ideas when metanarratives are rejected, but this also makes religious ideology itself problematic. Religions advocate philosophies that unify all social and natural systems under a single, suffocating rule. For instance, Christianity asserts that God's will caused the cosmos to exist. It teaches that although people are sinners, they can be saved and have their souls transported to heaven after death if they live according to a set of moral principles. The Ten Commandments are laid forth as the foundational principles, and various facets of a code of conduct are explained throughout the Bible, particularly in the New Testament. The religion explains why we are here, what we are here for, what is right and what is wrong, and why we must do what is right. It educates about the universe's supreme power and what it requires of people. In summary, Christianity, like other religious systems, offers solutions to a broad range of existential concerns.

But other than giving supernatural revelation as proof, which is obviously problematic in an increasingly sceptical society, it fails to meet any legitimacy standards. The postmodern knowledge that various sets of ideas belong to various modes of thinking is not made up for by the endeavor to sum up all facets of human experience into a clear, black-and-white set of doctrine and code. According to Lyotard, the postmodern society is experiencing a knowledge crisis that necessitates the adaptation of narratives to certain

situations. It demands subjectivity as well as the legitimacy of various viewpoints. His writing in “The Pragmatics of Narrative Knowledge” reveals a keen understanding of how knowledge provided by a narrative lacks inherent accuracy and is instead the outcome of the cultural narrative that came before it. (Alexandra, 51-52)

Margery describes love as a kind of shit and Timothy comments on her description:

**MARGERY:** Love is a day to day pile of shit.

**TIMOTHY :**That’s very poeti ...

She grabs his balls.

**TIMOTHY:** OOOOOOOOOH.

**MARGERY:** Is this nice?

**TIMOTHY:** Kinda...

**MARGERY:** Is this? ( Act 2/ Scene 3)

These extracts show that Margery is a lusty woman who seeks sexual relationship with the kid that she is supposed to teach him good and moral behavior.

Margery’s character could be interpreted as a symbol of the blurring of traditional gender norms and the intricacies of human aspirations. Postmodernism questions established standards and investigates the multidimensional nature of human identity and behavior.

Margery’s portrayal as a “lusty woman” may represent the dissolution of traditional boundaries and power dynamics in postmodern culture. It could be a statement on the complexities and paradoxes that develop when societal conventions collide with individual wants and personal challenges.

Margery confesses that she is frustrated and disappointed. At the same time she attacks Pastor Greg describing him as a piece of shit :

**MARGERY:** You’re a real piece of shit Pastor Greg. I have endured some pussy pasty limp dick come-ons in my time but really? My arms were made to hold you.

**PASTOR GREG:** I have feelings too, Marge. I have human feelings.

**MARGERY:** La-di-fucking da.

**PASTOR GREG:** You wanted to talk. I listened. You needed a place to go I was here. You needed work for idle hand. I gave you puppets ...

**MARGERY:** Oh and you think that entitles you to a piece of this.

**PASTOR GREG:** You brought an abomination into the house of God.

**MARGERY:** You used the church to try and fuck me. ( Act 2/ Scene 3)

These exchangeable accusations show the corruption of the religious institution and the invalidity of its metanarratives to find solutions for the problems of the postmodern society. Pastor Greg accuses Margery of spoiling the image of the church and Margery accuses him of using the church and his authority to have sexual relation with her.

The Church faces a number of challenges, including as a decline in faith in the Church as an institution, the growing influence of mainstream denominations and liberal theology, the cultural shift to postmodern philosophical and religious beliefs, and the denial of absolute propositional truth.

Internal problems that religious institutions may have can distract them from effectively addressing societal issues. These problems may include institutional disagreements, financial difficulties, or issues with their leadership.

Despite these difficulties, some religious institutions are adjusting and figuring out how to interact with the issues of postmodern culture, but because of the shifting landscape of belief and values, their total impact might not be as significant as it previously was. (Lawless, 6)

In a moment of great frustration, Margery insults Jesus and starts to tear up the Bible:

**MARGERY:** Fucking Jesus.

She pulls the Bible off the shelf.

**PASTOR GREG:** Give that to me.

He tries to take it from her.

**MARGERY:** Fucking wisdom of the ages. Fucking stories. And fucking rules and fucking Geneology.

**MARGERY:** Abraham begat Issac.

She tears a page out of the Bible.

**PASTOR GREG:** Stop it Marg.

He steps towards her.

**MARGERY:** Issac begat Dorkus.

She dodges him. Shredding the old book as she moves.

**PASTOR GREG:** Margery give it to me.

**MARGERY:** Dorkus begat Gibberish. Gibberish begat balderdash.

**PASTOR GREG:** You know what go ahead.

**MARGERY:** Stupid fucking God.

**PASTOR GREG:** Go on. Keep going, if this is what helps.

In frustration she throws the tattered Bible on the floor. ( Act 2/  
Scene 3)

Insulting Jesus Christ and tearing the Bible by Margery represent the climax of rejection of the ways of teaching people blind faith closing every possible way of a counter interpretation for the problems of life. It also shows the defeat of the church's meta-narratives at the hands of the mini-narratives (the ways people possibly should act and react towards a lot of things). Arguing about this issue, Lyotard stresses that:

This practice focuses on the individual 'little narratives' and their differences from each other, the fact that they are not all reducible to the criterion of efficiency. Once the grand narratives have fallen away, we are left only with the diverse range of language games, and

the aim of postmodern criticism should be to do justice to them by allowing them to be heard in their own terms. (Simon Malpas, 30)

This quotation appears to criticize the inability of meta-narratives to address societal problems as a result of unthinking confidence in the notions of postmodern society. It implies that postmodernism emphasizes individual 'little narratives' and their uniqueness, recognizing that they cannot be simplified only for the sake of efficiency. With the decline of great narratives, the emphasis has shifted to a wide range of linguistic games or perspectives. According to the quotation, the purpose of postmodern criticism should be to give these varied perspectives due treatment by enabling them to be heard on their own terms. This technique appears to create a more nuanced knowledge of other points of view, supporting variety and openness in dealing with complex challenges.

The failure of the meta-narrative to discover solutions to problems is linked to postmodern society's naïve faith. Postmodernism questions large narratives or overarching belief systems that formerly claimed to hold all the answers to societal problems. Individuals who reject these all-encompassing narratives frequently become sceptical of the likelihood of finding universally applicable answers. As a result, the emphasis switches to varied perspectives and localised realities, making it difficult to develop a coherent framework to solve complicated challenges. The absence of a comprehensive story may fragment efforts and impede the creation of effective solutions.

### **Conclusion**

The play *Hand to God* by Robert Askins explores the idea of Lyotard's theory that meta-narratives are falling out of favor in postmodern society by showing how the characters battle with having different beliefs and the breakdown of traditional authority structures. Postmodernism is skeptical of big stories that claim to tell the truth about everything, and *Hand to God* shows this by showing different views on religion, identity, and morality.

The story of the play is about a young guy named Jason, whose conservative Christian mother has a big impact on him. But he also has trouble and confusion inside, which are shown by a sock puppet named Tyrone. Tyrone gets a life of its own and questions the religious rules that Jason has been forced to follow.

This clash between Jason's religious training and Tyrone's chaotic, rebellious voice shows how meta-narratives in postmodern society are broken up and fallen apart. The play shows that people are no longer limited to a single set of beliefs or a single authority. Instead, they have to deal with many different points of view, which makes it hard to have a single story that ties everything together.

Also, the characters in the play have trouble figuring out who they are, and they have to deal with the breakup of traditional family structures. This is like the postmodern condition, in which people are urged to question and challenge established norms, leading to a wide range of identities and experiences.

In short, *Hand to God* shows how Lyotard's theory about the fall of meta-narrative in postmodern society is true. It does this by showing the complexity of belief, identity, and authority, as well as the lack of a single, all-encompassing story that explains what it means to be human. The play looks at how truth has many sides and how different points of view can live in the modern world.

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