



**T. C.  
YEDITEPE UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**THE INFLUENCE OF ANTONIN ARTAUD ON THE BRITISH STAGE AND  
THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF SARAH KANE**

**by**

**Ayşe Gülsüm KARAALIOĞLU**

**Submitted to the Graduate Institute of Social Sciences  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of English Language and Literature**

**ISTANBUL, 2006**



**T. C.  
YEDITEPE UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**THE INFLUENCE OF ANTONIN ARTAUD ON THE BRITISH STAGE AND  
THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF SARAH KANE**

by

**Ayşe Gülsüm KARAALIOĞLU**

**Supervisor  
Prof. Dr. Aysin CANDAN**

**Submitted to the Graduate Institute of Social Sciences  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of English Language and Literature**

**ISTANBUL, 2006**

**THE INFLUENCE OF ANTONIN ARTAUD ON THE BRITISH STAGE AND  
THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF SARAH KANE**

**by**

**Ayşe Gülsüm KARAALIOĞLU**

Approved by:

Prof. Dr. Aysin CANDAN .....  
(Supervisor)

Prof. Dr. Cevat ÇAPAN .....

Prof. Dr. Süheyla ARTEMEL .....

Date of Approval by the Administrative Council of the Institute  
.../.../2006

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	vi
ABSTRACT .....	vii
ÖZET .....	viii
<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ANTONIN ARTAUD: A GREAT SUCCESS OR A TRAGEDY? .....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 THE BIRTH AND THE EARLY YEARS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY .....	4
2.2 SURREALISM AND THE ALFRED JARRY THEATRE .....	9
2.3 1931: DOUBLE INSPIRATION .....	17
2.4 THE THEATRE OF CRUELTY AND “THE CENCI” .....	18
2.5 “A VOYAGE TO THE LAND OF THE TARAHUMARA” AND THE SHILLELAGH OF ST PATRICK.....	24
2.6 THE THEATER AND ITS DOUBLE .....	30
2.7 ON THE WAY TO RODEZ .....	36
2.8 LAST YEARS .....	40
<b>3. AFTER ARTAUD .....</b>	<b>48</b>
3.1 THE WORK OF THE LIVING THEATRE .....	55
3.1.1 The Connection .....	56
3.1.2 The Brig .....	57
3.1.3 Mysteries .....	57

3.1.4	Frankenstein .....	58
3.1.5	Paradise Now .....	59
3.2	<b>THE WORK OF PETER BROOK</b> .....	60
3.2.1	King Lear .....	61
3.2.2	1964: LAMDA Theatre of Cruelty Season and “Cruel” Productions .....	63
3.2.2.1	The Screens .....	63
3.2.2.2	The Marat/Sade .....	64
3.2.3	US .....	67
3.2.4	Oedipus .....	67
3.2.5	The Tempest .....	69
3.2.6	A Midsummer Night’s Dream .....	70
3.2.7	Orghast .....	70
3.2.8	The Ik .....	71
3.2.9	Ubu aux Bouffes .....	71
<b>4.</b>	<b>THE ARTAUDIAN THEATRE OF SARAH KANE</b> .....	73
4.1	1971-1999: THE LIFE OF AN EXTREMIST .....	79
4.2	<b>THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF KANE</b> .....	85
4.2.1	Blasted .....	86
4.2.2	Phaedra’s Love .....	92
4.2.3	Skin .....	96
4.2.4	Cleansed .....	98

4.2.5 Crave .....	103
4.2.6 4.48 Psychosis .....	107
<b>5. CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>CURRICULUM VITAE OF THE AUTHOR .....</b>	<b>121</b>

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The road to a completed master's thesis is a long and arduous process with numerous people involved. It is a pleasure to thank those people who made this thesis possible by giving their time, assistance and patience so generously. I feel the honour of expressing my thanks to all.

My first thanks goes to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Aysin Candan, for giving me an opportunity to work in the field of avant garde theatre and to write my thesis under her direction. I am indebted to her for her valuable advice, continuous guidance, support, seemingly never-ending encouragements, and for her insistence in pushing me forward with my thesis. Her patience, despite my many, many questions, is greatly appreciated. I would have been lost without her.

My special thanks goes to Prof. Dr. Cevat Çapan for providing invaluable insights and suggestions during the development of this thesis. I wish to express sincere gratitude to him for sharing his wealth of knowledge and experience.

My heartfelt thanks goes to Prof. Dr. Nedret Kuran Burçoglu who first sparked my interest in literary criticism. Her courses, which were instrumental in my penetration of the subject, were of tremendous value for me. She was an inspiring example.

I give my thanks to Prof. Dr. Süheyla Artemel for her encouraging words and the enthusiasm she gave me whenever I saw her.

I cannot end without thanking my parents, my source of constant encouragement, strength and motivation. It is to my family that I dedicate this thesis.

## ABSTRACT

One of the guiding spirits of the twentieth century experimental theatre is the visionary French theorist Antonin Artaud who, by leaving prominent traces on the generations after him, altered the course of the modern theatre. The life and theories of him left an undeniable influence on the directors, theatre groups, and playwrights from all over the world. When we come closer to the particular time we are living in, the influence of Artaud shows itself in the recent dramatic works of the British playwright Sarah Kane.

After the introduction which constitutes the first part of this thesis, there comes the second part which involves the life and works of Artaud as a whole since it would be a fatal mistake to separate his works from his life. His connection with the Surrealist movement, the *Alfred Jarry Theatre*, the *Theatre of Cruelty*, his production of *The Cenci*, and his mystic journeys to both Mexico and Ireland are dealt with in all their fundamental details. His most representative work, *The Theater and Its Double*, is especially discussed as it contains most of his outstanding perspectives on theatre.

The third part of the thesis deals with the philosophy and theatre after Artaud. In the context of philosophical studies, writings by Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari are given place because of the fact that they have a shared hero: Artaud. In the theatrical context, innumerable Artaud-inspired works are examined. After these comes the main body of this chapter: The Artaud-influenced work of the British director Peter Brook, with the utmost emphasis placed on his production of *The Marat/Sade*.

In the fourth part, the Artaudian theatre of Sarah Kane is dealt with by dwelling on her complete plays – *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love*, *Cleansed*, *Crave*, *4.48 Psychosis* and *Skin*.

In the fifth and last part, which is the conclusion, a general evaluation is made; the ideas deduced from the study are summed up.

Key Words: Antonin Artaud, Surrealism, Theatre of Cruelty, Sarah Kane



## ÖZET

Yirminci yüzyıl deneysel tiyatronun yol gösterici önderlerinden biri olan, ileriye gören Fransız kuramcı Antonin Artaud, kendinden sonraki nesillerde çarpıcı izler bırakarak modern tiyatronun seyrini değiştirmiştir. Hayatı ve teorileri dünyanın her tarafından yönetmenler, tiyatro toplulukları ve oyun yazarları üzerinde inkar edilemez etkiler bırakmıştır. Yaşadığımız zamana doğru ilerledikimizde, Artaud etkisi İngiliz oyun yazarı Sarah Kane'in yakın tarihte yazılmış olan dramatik eserlerinde kendini belli etmektedir.

Bu tezin birinci kısmını oluşturan giriş bölümünden sonra, Artaud'nun hayatı ve eserlerini ayırmak ölümcül bir hata olacağı için, bu ikisini ayırmadan bir bütün olarak ele alan ikinci bölüm gelmektedir. Artaud'nun Sürrealizm akımıyla ilgisi, *Alfred Jarry Tiyatrosu*, *Vahset Tiyatrosu*, *The Cenci* prodüksiyonu, ve Meksika ve İrlanda'ya olan mistik yolculukları tüm mühim detaylarıyla ele alınmıştır. En belirgin eseri, *Tiyatro ve İkizi*, tiyatro üzerine en önemli perspektiflerinin çoğunu barındırdığı için özellikle tartışılmıştır.

Tezin üçüncü bölümü Artaud'dan sonraki felsefe ve tiyatroyu ele almıştır. Felsefi araştırmalar kapsamında, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze ve Félix Guattari'nin yazılarına yer verilmiştir, çünkü hepsinin ortak bir kahramanı vardır: Artaud. Teatral kapsamda, sayısız Artaud esinli çalışmalar incelenmiştir. Bunların ardından, bu bölümün ana vücutu gelmektedir: İngiliz yönetmen Peter Brook'un, en büyük vurgu *The Marat/Sade* prodüksiyonu üzerinde olmak üzere, Artaud etkili çalışmaları.

Dördüncü bölümde, Sarah Kane'in tüm oyunları – *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love*, *Cleansed*, *Crave*, *4.48 Psychosis* ve *Skin* – üzerinde durularak, Artaudyen tiyatro işlenmiştir.

Besinci ve son bölüm olan sonuç bölümünde genel bir değerlendirme yapıp, çalışmadan çıkarılan fikirler özetlenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Antonin Artaud, Sürrealizm, Vahset Tiyatrosu, Sarah Kane

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“Theatre” is really a wondrous, ravishing and bewitching word which forms a sparkling picture in the mind: the convivial atmosphere, people streaming down the road-like aisles, the wonders present behind the gorgeous front curtain, the hushed, eager and curious spectators waiting for the lights to dim. In the twentieth century, theatre – which is so enchanting and exhilarating – owes a great deal to the consummate avant garde theatre directors making their ways on the theatrical arena.

Bertolt Brecht from Germany and Antonin Artaud from France, who have given their works between World War I and World War II, are two seemingly opposite poles of the theatrical spectrum. To begin with, they are contradictory even in their approaches: Brecht being a Marxist, and Artaud – the reverse side of the medal – a legendary Surrealist. It was Artaud who denounced Marxism as “the last rotten fruit of the Western mentality”.<sup>1</sup>

Brecht’s “epic theatre” “turns the spectator into an observer”<sup>2</sup> while Artaud’s “theatre of cruelty” makes the spectator a participant of the event that is taking place on the stage. Brecht used “alienation effect” – *Verfremdungseffekt*<sup>3</sup> – to engage the audience in critical thought about the action on the stage rather than emotional involvement: Theatre appeals more to the audience’s reason than to his feeling. He wanted to show the familiar in an unfamiliar way; so the audience would see the inequities of the economic system in which they lived. His didactic theatre does not prescribe remedies for social ills explicitly, but it fosters a critical attitude.

It was Artaud who said “for me everything that proceeds from reason is untrustworthy”.<sup>4</sup> In his *Letter to the Schools of Buddha*, he rejected reason and logic as “the chains that bind us in

---

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Szondi, *Theory of the Modern Drama: A Critical Edition*, Ed. and Trans. Michael Hays, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> In Brecht’s theory, both spectators and actors should preserve a state of critical detachment from the play and its presentation in performance. He required the audience to be reminded that they were only watching a play, a representation of life, and therefore they should control their identification with the characters and action. In an ideal Brechtian performance, the spectators receive intellectual signals which keep them alert.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 108.

a petrifying imbecility of the mind”.<sup>1</sup> He proposed irrational spontaneity and delirium which could free the repressed feelings in an emotional purgation similar to the effect of “catharsis”.<sup>2</sup> As opposed to Aristotle, Artaud placed cruelty instead of pity and fear.

“For Artaud, theatre is fire; for Brecht, theatre is clear vision.”<sup>3</sup> Gill Lamden’s analysis was the same when she said “if Artaud is fire and passion, then Brecht is reason.”<sup>4</sup> Artaud wanted to release the tendencies repressed in the unconscious, to reawaken the dormant fear hidden beneath the skin of the audience: He attempted to reach the audience not rationally but subconsciously. He allowed the unconscious to be addressed through the senses. His theatre works viscerally, on the nerves and senses, rather than on the intellect. The spectator is to be terrified to such a degree that he loses control of his reason. During the experience of terror or frenzy, the spectator should perceive new truths, superhuman in quality.

Artaud, who was influenced by myth, ritual, and the world of dreams, wanted to replace the bourgeois classical theatre with his theatre of cruelty, a primitive ceremonial experience aimed at liberating the subconscious and showing man to himself. He saw theatre as a ritual – the outward form of the deepest spiritual experience – able to give rise to a numinous experience within the spectator; and he advocated a metaphysical theatre, linking spectator and spectacle. In her essay entitled *Artaud*, Susan Sontag underlined Artaud’s purpose: The theatre he aimed at is “a commando action against the established culture, an assault on the bourgeois public; it would both show people that they are dead and wake them up from their stupor.”<sup>5</sup> All these reveal that Artaud had an extraordinary train of thought.

Artaud was such an outstanding, eccentric and stimulating figure that it is possible to divide the history of contemporary theatre into two periods: “before Artaud” and “after Artaud”. He has countless heirs. Among the ones who followed in his footsteps are the leading figures of

---

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Purgation. Aristotle used the word in his definition of tragedy in Chapter VI of *Poetics*: “Tragedy through pity and fear effects a purgation of such emotions.” The tragedy, which arouses powerful feelings in the audience, has also a therapeutic effect. After the storm and climax, there comes a sense of release from tension, of calm.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Brook, *The Shifting Point*, p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Weiss, *Marat/Sade*, Introduction, p. vi.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, p. xxxviii.

the theatrical avant garde of the twentieth century, all of whom will be handled in the third part of my thesis. The time we turn back to the English stage, we see a great number of playwrights influenced by Artaud: Samuel Beckett, John Osborne, Harold Pinter, Edward Bond, and Caryl Churchill. But, the most contemporary Artaudian impact is on the British playwright Sarah Kane.

This work aims at building a bridge between the works of two extremists – the French “prophet” Antonin Artaud, and the enigmatic “enfant terrible” of the British stage: Sarah Kane. At the heart of the thesis will be the Artaudian influence on the dramatic works of Kane. In the fourth part of the thesis, by giving quotations by Kane, from time to time I have attempted to let her own words show the Artaudian effect on her own works. If it is successful in reaching its aims, in Turkey, this will be the first study on Kane in connection with Artaud.

## **2. THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ANTONIN ARTAUD: A GREAT SUCCESS OR A TRAGEDY?**

Artaud, who is one of the main inspirations of the “theatre of the absurd”, is to the modern theatre what Einstein is to science, and Freud to psychology. Artaud’s life and his works are so delicately interwoven that they form a complex whole, and it is not possible to separate one from the other. Any attempt to understand this true existential hero must take his tumultuous life as its starting point. His own statement is a mirror of his artistic achievement: “Tragedy on the stage is not enough for me, I’ll transfer it into my own life.”<sup>1</sup>

What was Artaud’s prime objective? It was concealed in his ceaseless vehement onslaught to revolutionize the theatre. It seemed that theatre was his *raison d’être*: “In life I don’t feel myself living. But on the stage I feel that I exist.”<sup>2</sup> It is certain that “the theatre is not, in Artaud’s eyes, an end in itself. It is a weapon, a means to ‘change life’.”<sup>3</sup> He believed in theatre’s power to change society, man and the world.

### **2.1 THE BIRTH AND THE EARLY YEARS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY**

It was 8 a.m. on 4 September 1896 when Antonin Marie Joseph Artaud – later to become the renowned French actor, director, playwright, essayist, theoretician, and poet – was born in Marseilles, at 4, rue du Jardin des Plantes. He was the first-born child<sup>4</sup> of Antoine-Roi Artaud, a wealthy armateur; and Euphrasie Artaud née Nalpas, a mother from a Levantine Greek background. At the age of five, he suffered a near-fatal attack of meningitis, which gave him an irritable temperament throughout adolescence. He suffered from sharp headaches, neuralgia, stammering and severe bouts of depression. At the age of ten, during one of his visits to his maternal grandmother who lived in Smyrna, he is said to have nearly drowned in the sea, an event which left him with a detestation of water in his later life.

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Esslin, *Antonin Artaud: The Man and His Work*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Claude Schumacher, Brian Singleton (eds.), *Artaud on Theatre*, Introduction by Claude Schumacher, p. XXII.

<sup>3</sup> Alain Virmaux, “Artaud and Film”, Trans. Simone Sanzenbach, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 11, No. 1, T33, Fall 1966, p. 164.

<sup>4</sup> Out of nine children, only three lived to adulthood: Antonin, his sister Marie-Ange, and his brother Fernand.

From 1906 to 1914 – until the age of eighteen – he attended *Collège du Sacré-Coeur*. In 1910, at his school, Artaud founded a literary review and published his first poems under the pseudonym “Louis des Attides”. Because he was in depression, he destroyed all his youthful writings, and abandoned school, before taking the leaving certificate. In 1915, he had to stay in a sanatorium – La Rougère, near Marseilles – for nervous disorders.

It was the third year of World War I. After his return from the sanatorium, Artaud received his call-up papers, and was conscripted into the army. He spent nine months of 1916 in a military training camp at Digne, but was discharged on grounds of mental instability.<sup>1</sup> He had to stay at various sanatoriums: Saint-Dizier near Lyons, Lafoux-les-Bains in Le Gard, Divonne-les-Bains in Ain, and Bagnères-de-Bigorre in the Pyrenées. Around that time, he was occupied with reading Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Poe.

After a while, Artaud was placed in the custody of Dr Dardel at a sanatorium at Le Chanet, near Neuchâtel, in Switzerland where he lived almost two years and where he was prescribed opium to relieve headaches, precipitating a lifelong addiction to drugs. As a consequence of Dr Dardel’s treatment, Artaud’s health improved a great deal which made it possible for him to go to Paris in March 1920. But still, Dr Dardel recommended that he should be under medical supervision. That is why Artaud started to lodge with Dr Edouard Toulouse, the head psychiatrist of the asylum of Villejuif.

Dr Toulouse created a literary periodical named *Demain*; and it was in this periodical that Artaud began to publish some of his poems. In Artaud, Dr Toulouse found “an exceptional being, of the race that produces a Baudelaire, a Nerval, a Nietzsche”.<sup>2</sup> Dr Toulouse, whose psychiatric writings were edited by Artaud under the title *Au Fil des Préjugés*, introduced him to Aurélien-Marie Ligné-Poë, the director of the *Théâtre de l’Oeuvre*.

On 17 February 1921, for the first time, Artaud appeared as an actor: In Henri de Régnier’s *Les Scrupules de Sganarelle*, he was a bourgeois woken from his slumbers because of a

---

<sup>1</sup> Later, Artaud himself said that he was released because of sleep-walking.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Esslin, *Antonin Artaud: The Man and His Work*, p. 19.

disturbance during the night. In October 1921, through his maternal uncle Louis Nalpas – the artistic director of the *Société des Cinéromans* – Artaud obtained an audition with Firmin Gémier who recommended him to Charles Dullin. In turn, Dullin offered Artaud work with the workshop of actors he was about to form – the *Atelier*.

Dullin was the theoretician of a theatre in which gesture, color, music, and movement would rival the dialogue. Artaud, who was thinking along similar lines, was deeply impressed by his intentions.<sup>1</sup> Artaud's satisfaction was obvious in the letter he wrote to the poet Max Jacob:

I am very enthusiastic about his work. ... To hear Dullin teach is to feel that one is rediscovering old secrets and a whole forgotten mystique of theatrical production. ... We act from the deepest stratum of our hearts, we act with our hands, with our feet, with all our muscles and all our limbs. We feel the object, we smell it, we touch it, we see it, we listen to it – and there is nothing, there are no props. The Japanese are our masters and our inspiration, together with Edgar Allan Poe. It is *admirable*.<sup>2</sup>

In a letter to the painter Yvonne Gilles, Artaud once more praised Dullin's work:

... he wants his productions to give a constant impression of something that has *never been seen before*. All the action takes place in the soul. ... His ideal is the Japanese actor who performs without props. ... The gods of the school are not Tolstoy, Ibsen, or Shakespeare, but Hoffmann and Poe.<sup>3</sup>

In the autumn of 1921, it was in Dullin's company that Artaud met and fell in love with a young and robustly attractive Rumanian actress named Gélica Athanasiou.

In 1922, Artaud appeared as Anselme in a production of Molière's *L'Avare (The Miser)*; as the Moorish king Galvan in Alexandre Arnoux's *Moriana et Galvan*; as Sottinet in Regnard's *Le Divorce*; as A Blind Man in Francisco Sánchez de Castro's *L'Hôtellerie*; as Don Luis in Calderón's *Visits of Condolence*; and as Basilio, the King of Poland, in Calderón's *La Vie est un songe (Life is a Dream)*. In July 1922, he saw a troupe of

---

<sup>1</sup> Sometime between 1923 and 1925, Artaud wrote a play in four acts, *Samourai ou le Drame du Sentiment*, influenced by Dullin's taste for Japanese drama.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Cambodian dancers, performing in a replica of the temple of Angkor at the Marseilles Colonial Exhibition. This experience <sup>1</sup> was his first contact with the Oriental dance theatre.

On 3 November 1922, Artaud played Apoplexy in *La Mort de Souper*, Roger Semichon's adaptation of a sixteenth-century morality play in verse by Nicole de La Chesnaye. When he played Tirésias in Jean Cocteau's *Antigone* on 20 December 1922, he was greatly approved by Dullin. However, at times, he annoyed Dullin by insisting on strange interpretations of his parts. In Pirandello's *La Volupté de l'honneur (The Pleasure of Honesty)*, in which he was playing Marco Fongi – a member of the board of directors of a commercial enterprise – Artaud appeared made up in the highly stylised manner of the classical Chinese theatre.

On 2 February 1923, the first <sup>2</sup> number of Artaud's own literary periodical, *Le Bilboquet*, was published. Under the pseudonym "Eno Dailor", he wrote:

There aren't enough magazines, or if you will, all existing magazines are useless. We are appearing because we believe we are responding to something. We are *real*. <sup>3</sup>

In the early part of 1923, after he appeared as the evil marionette Pedro Urdemalas in Jacinto Grau's *Monsieur de Pygmalion*, he played the Emperor Charlemagne in Alexandre Arnoux's *Huon de Bordeaux*. During a rehearsal, he crawled towards his throne like an animal, he quarrelled with Dullin, and it was April 1923 when Artaud joined Georges Pitoëff and Ludmilla Pitoëff's troupe at the *Comédie des Champs-Élysées*.

An improvement for Artaud's career was his correspondence with Jacques Rivière, the editor of the *N.R.F.* <sup>4</sup> which was the leading literary periodical of France. Artaud had sent his poems to the *N.R.F.* and, on 1 May 1923, Rivière replied that he was unable to publish them. But, he wanted to see the author of the poems. "Could Artaud pass by any Friday between four and six?" On 5 June 1923, Artaud went to see Rivière. Artaud, who admitted the weakness of his poems, explained his difficulty in a letter he wrote to Rivière the same evening:

---

<sup>1</sup> This foreshadows his discovery of Balinese Dance Theatre at the Paris Colonial Exhibition of 1931.

<sup>2</sup> Only two numbers appeared. The second was in December 1923.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> The acronym for *La Nouvelle Revue Française*.



I suffer from a horrible sickness of the mind. My thought abandons me at every level. From the simple fact of thought to the external fact of its materialization in words. Words, shapes of sentences, internal directions of thought, simple reactions of the mind – I am in constant pursuit of my intellectual being. Thus as soon as *I can grasp a form*, however imperfect, I pin it down, for fear of losing the whole thought. I lower myself, I know, and I suffer from it, but I consent to it for fear of dying altogether.<sup>1</sup>

It seemed that there was a barrier between Artaud's thought and its expression; it was this obstacle which incarcerated him within certain limits. By the way, on 4 May 1923, Artaud's first volume of poems, *Tric Trac du Ciel (Backgammon of the Heavens)*, was published by Daniel-Henri Kahnweiler. The same year, he appeared as Retarius in Shaw's *Androclès et le lion (Androcles and the Lion)*; as one of the two detectives and one of the four policemen in Ferenc Molnár's *Liliom*; as the First Mystic in Alexander Blok's *La Petite Baraque (The Fairground Booth)*, and as the clown Jackson in Leonid Andreyev's *He Who Gets Slapped*.

When we come to the year 1924, we see him as the Prompter in Pirandello's *Six personnages en quête d'auteur (Six Characters in Search of an Author)*. He appeared as the robot Marius in Karel Capek's *R.U.R.*, under the direction of Théodore Komisarjevsky; and in Claude Autant-Lara's *Faits Divers*, he filmed as Monsieur II, a lover who is strangled to death in slow motion. His first important text on theatre – *L'Evolution du décor (The Evolution of Décor)* – was published in the magazine *Comoedia* on 19 April:

What we must do is rediscover *the life of the theater*, in all its freedom... We must rid ourselves not only of all reality, all verisimilitude, but even of all logic, if at the end of illogic we can still catch a glimpse of life.<sup>2</sup>

In the summer of the same year, he filmed in Brittany in Luitz-Morat's *Surcouf, le roi des corsaires* in which he played Jacques Morel, the villainous traitor.

“Were not the products of such an effort real worth?” This was the question Artaud asked himself after the disappointing conversation with Rivière. The correspondence with Rivière, which started on 1 May 1923, continued till 8 June 1924. Rivière suggested that instead of publishing the poems Artaud had sent him, the correspondence about the rejection of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53-55.

poems should be published. On 1 September 1924, the *Correspondence avec Jacques Rivière* (*Correspondence with Jacques Rivière*) was published in the *N.R.F.* These “flawed poems” were examined by Maurice Blanchot in *Le Livre à venir*; and in his essay *La Parole Soufflée*, Derrida said:

*Unpower*, which appears thematically in the letters to Jacques Rivière, is not, as is known, simple impotence, the sterility of having “nothing to say, or the lack of inspiration”. On the contrary, it is inspiration itself: the force of a void, the cyclonic breath of a prompter who draws his breath in, and thereby robs me of that which he first allowed to approach me and which I believed I could say *in my own name*.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.2 SURREALISM AND THE ALFRED JARRY THEATRE

On 7 September 1924, Artaud’s father died which meant the end of the financial help coming from Marseilles. Now, Artaud had to earn his own living. The cinema could be a source of an income. In Yvan Goll’s *Methusalem* – a play which included filmed passages – directed by Jean Painlevé, Artaud played an officer, a bishop, and a country bumpkin. Artaud, who was in pursuit of a light in life, joined the Surrealist movement in October 1924. He was introduced to the group by André Masson, and soon he began his close contact with the Surrealists.<sup>2</sup> In January 1925, a text by Artaud appeared in the magazine *Disque Vert*:

If I kill myself, this will not be to destroy myself, but to reconstruct myself; for me, suicide is only a means to reach myself after a fatiguing struggle, to make a raid on the interior of my existence, to rouse to action before God...<sup>3</sup>

Artaud, who was sunk in such pessimistic thoughts, was given the directorship of the *Surrealists’ Bureau de Recherches*. He contributed to No. 2 – dated 15 January 1925 – of the periodical *La Révolution Surréaliste* (*The Surrealist Revolution*) which included his text rejecting suicide. Nevertheless, he approved of suicide which is planned and determined:

---

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alan Bass, p. 221. Derrida’s other views on Artaud will be handled in details in the third part of this study, pp. 48-49. Also see the second part, pp. 33, 35.

<sup>2</sup> André Breton, Robert Desnos, Louis Aragon, Paul Eluard, Max Ernst, Raymond Queneau, and many others.

<sup>3</sup> Yasar Güneç (Haz. ve Çev.), *Antonin Artaud: Yasayan Mumya: Metinler*, p. 23. This is my own translation. In Güneç, it writes “Ben kendimi öldürürsem bu, kendimi yıkmam için değil, ama kendimi yeniden oluşturmam için olacak; intihar, benim için, kendimi zorlu bir uğraşla yeniden ele geçirmemi, varlığımın içine baskın yapip girmemi, belli belirsiz ilerleyen Tanrıdan önce davranmamı sağlayacak bir araçtır yalnızca.”

Suicide is merely the fabulous and remote victory of men who think well, but the state of suicide proper is to me incomprehensible. The suicide of a neurasthenic is without any representational value whatsoever, but simply the state of soul of a man who has carefully planned his suicide, the material circumstances, and the moment of wondrous release. I know nothing about things, I know nothing of any human state, no part of the world turns for me, turns in me. I suffer hideously from life. There is no state that I can attain. And it is certain that I have been dead for a long time, I have already committed suicide. They have suicided me, so to speak. But what would you say to an *anterior suicide*, a suicide which made us retrace our steps, but to the other side of existence, not to the side of death. This is the only suicide that would have value for me.<sup>1</sup>

On 15 April 1925, we see No. 3, edited and almost entirely written by Artaud. He gave the title *1925: Fin de l'ère chrétienne (1925: End of the Christian Era)* to this issue. It contained five open letters: *Lettre aux Écoles du Bouddha (Letter to the Schools of Buddha)*,<sup>2</sup> *Lettre aux Recteurs des Universités européennes (Letter to the Rectors of European Universities)*, *Adresse au Pape (Address to the Pope)*, *Adresse au Dalai-Lama (Address to the Dalai Lama)*, and *Lettre aux médecins-chefs des asiles de fous (Letter to the Head Doctors of Asylums)*. On 28 and 29 May, he directed Aragon's *Au Pied du Mur (At the Foot of the Wall)*; and in June, he filmed as Cecco, in Marcel Vandal's *Graziella* on location in Italy.

*Correspondence with Jacques Rivière* had given Artaud an awareness: He had found a new theme of his own, which was himself, his own case. In relation to this, we see two volumes of writings, which frankly show this change towards his new subject matter: *L'Ombilic des Limbes (The Umbilicus of Limbo)* published on 23 July 1925; and *Le Pèse-Nerfs (The Nerve Meter)* published on 1 August 1925. In *The Umbilicus of Limbo*, he wrote:

Where others present their works, I claim to do no more than show my mind.  
Life consists of burning up questions.  
I cannot conceive of work that is detached from life.<sup>3</sup>

*The Umbilicus of Limbo* contained a text entitled *Le Jet de Sang (The Spurt of Blood)* which is generally said that Artaud was parodying a one-act play by Armand Salacrou, *La Boule de Verre*. A young man and a girl declare their love for each other. All of a sudden, a sound of a huge wheel is heard, and the hurricane divides them in two. Two stars collide, parts of human

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, pp. 102-103.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 59.

body, colonnades, porticoes, temples and alembics fall. Three scorpions, a frog and a scarab appear. A huge hand seizes the bawd's hair which catches fire. The gigantic voice orders "Bitch, look at your body!"<sup>1</sup> as the bawd's clothing becomes transparent, showing her in nudity. She bites God on the wrist, causing an immense spurt of blood to strike the stage. All die and their corpses lie all over the ground. Only the young man and the bawd remain, devouring each other with their eyes at the point of orgasm. A multitude of scorpions crawl out from beneath the dress of the Wet Nurse who has enormous breasts, and swarm between her legs. Her vagina swells up, splits, and becomes transparent, vitreous, and glistening like a sun. Regarding the Surrealist elements within, this playlet, in a way, is a reminiscent of Guillaume Apollinaire's 1913 "drame surréaliste" *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (*The Breasts of Tiresias*).<sup>2</sup> The playlet may be representing some other things as well:

Artaud's *Le Jet de Sang*... included human limbs and pieces of masonry falling from the flies to represent the collapse of civilization. The rebellion of mankind was conveyed by having a whore bite the wrist of God, which incident was followed by a great spurt of 'blood' shooting across the stage.<sup>3</sup>

*The Nerve Meter* was also full of continuous assertions of Artaud's newly-won awareness:

Under this crust of skin and bone which is my head there is a persistence of anguish... Here is someone in whose mind no place becomes inured, and who does not suddenly feel his soul on the left, where the heart is. Here is someone for whom life is a point, and for whom the soul has no edges and the mind no beginnings. I am an idiot by the suppression of thought, by the malformation of thought; I am vacant by the stupefaction of my tongue. ... What I lack is words that correspond to each minute of my state of mind. ... I am the man who has most felt the stupefying confusion of his speech in its relations with thought. I am the man who has most accurately charted the moment of his most intimate, his most imperceptible lapses. I lose myself in my thought, actually, the way one dreams, the way one suddenly slips back into one's thought. I am the man who knows the inmost recesses of loss.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> In *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, Tirésias starts as a woman named Thérèse, who wants to enter politics, the arts and other masculine occupations, and decides to become a man. An operation is accomplished by the release of her breasts, which float into the air as toy balloons. Her husband fulfills the function of Thérèse, who has now become Tirésias, and he produces more than forty-thousand children.

<sup>3</sup> J. L. Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice: Volume 2: Symbolism, Surrealism and the Absurd*, p. 106.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, pp. 82-85.

As Maurice Saillet says in *In Memoriam: Antonin Artaud*, “Antonin Artaud observes Antonin Artaud. His work is an inventory of himself... and at the same time an interminable message to himself.”<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of 1926, Artaud’s text *Fragments d’un Journal d’Enfer* (*Fragments of a Diary from Hell*) first appeared in the magazine *Commerce*. In August of the same year, he played the street urchin Gringalet in Luitz-Morat’s film *Le Juif Errant* (*The Wandering Jew*).

The year 1926 was a milestone: With Roger Vitrac<sup>2</sup> and Robert Aron, Artaud formulated an idea for the exploration of thoughts related with Surrealism. He called it *Théâtre Alfred Jarry* (*Alfred Jarry Theatre*), naming it after the writer of the riotous play, *Ubu Roi*, which scandalized the audience when it opened in 1896, the year Artaud was born: Whom Bettina L. Knapp calls the “Enfant Terrible of Symbolism”<sup>3</sup> gave his name to Artaud’s theatre.

Artaud, Vitrac and Aron approached Dr René Allendy and his wife Yvonne on 26 September 1926 with a request for financial assistance. Yvonne, who was extremely interested in arts, assisted them and raised 3000 francs. In November 1926, the *N.R.F.*<sup>4</sup> published *Le Théâtre de la Alfred Jarry, Premier Manifeste* (*First Manifesto of the Alfred Jarry Theatre*) in which Artaud compared his ideal theatre to a police raid on a brothel, with – in Esslin’s words – “the procession of the arrested whores being led away like cattle to the slaughter.”<sup>5</sup> In the manifesto, Artaud underlined various points related with his theatrical perspective:

It is not to the minds or the senses of the spectators that we address ourselves but to their whole existence. Their existence and ours. We stake our own lives on the spectacle that unfolds on the stage. ... The spectator who comes to our theater knows that he is to undergo a real operation in which not only his mind but his senses and his flesh are at stake. Henceforth he will go to the theater the way he goes to the surgeon or the dentist. In the same state of mind – knowing, of course, that he will not die, but that it is a serious thing, and that he will not come out of it unscathed. If we were not convinced that we would reach him as deeply as possible, we would consider ourselves inadequate to our most absolute duty. He must be totally convinced that we are capable of making him scream.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans. Richard Howard, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> After his quarrel with Paul Eluard, Roger Vitrac had been expelled by the Surrealists in December 1924.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Docherty (ed.), *Twentieth-Century European Drama*, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> After the death of Jacques Rivière in February 1925, it was edited by Jean Paulhan.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Esslin, *Antonin Artaud: The Man and His Work*, p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, pp. 156-157.

In 1925 or 1926, Artaud wrote a screenplay named *Les Dix-huit Seconds (Eighteen Seconds)*. The scenario shows a progression of disconnected thoughts passing through a young actor's brain in eighteen seconds. This actor, who is on the verge of suicide, hallucinates under a lamp-post. He is about to become famous and to win the heart of a woman he fell in love. But, he has been struck by a strange disease: He cannot express himself. The situation of the actor, which calls to mind Artaud's defence in his letters to Rivière, is rather heartrending:

He has been stricken with a bizarre malady. He has become incapable of reaching his thoughts; he has retained all his lucidity, but no matter what thought occurs to him, he can no longer give it external form, that is, translate it into appropriate gestures and words.

The necessary words desert him, they no longer answer his summons, he is reduced to watching a procession of images, an enormous number of contradictory images without very much connection from one to the next.<sup>1</sup>

The hero is in fact Artaud's double. In one part of the text, he reads *Cabala*, some cops put him in a straitjacket, take him to the madhouse;<sup>2</sup> there is the "view of the man shaking the bars."<sup>3</sup> He takes a revolver and puts a bullet in his head. According to Mark V. Rose, "the images might have appeared in the mind of nineteenth-century poet Gérard de Nerval whom Artaud admired and who hanged himself from a lamp-post."<sup>4</sup> In Stephen Barber's words, this is "an autobiographical scenario about his relationship with Génica Athanasiou."<sup>5</sup>

The Surrealists taunted Artaud for his supposed commercialism in appearing as a film actor and in trying to start his own theatrical enterprise. Later, Breton and his followers decided to convert the literary Surrealist revolution into a political one. At the end of November 1926, at a meeting in the café *Le Prophète*, "The Big Five"<sup>6</sup> signed the pamphlet *Au grand jour (In Broad Daylight)* in which they announced their adherence to the Communist Party and the expulsion of Artaud and Philippe Soupault from the Surrealist group.

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> In 1937, Artaud really experienced all these events.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> Mark V. Rose, *The Actor and His Double: Mime and Movement for the Theatre of Cruelty*, Appendix, p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, p. 33.

<sup>6</sup> André Breton, Louis Aragon, Paul Eluard, Benjamin Péret and Pierre Unik.

The *Alfred Jarry Theatre* never had a building of its own: The productions were presented in rented playhouses. Its first production was an evening of three short plays on 1 and 2 June 1927, at the *Théâtre de Grenelle: Le Ventre Brûlé ou la Mère Folle (The Burnt Womb or the Mad Mother)* by Artaud, *Gigogne* by Max Robur,<sup>1</sup> and *Les Mystères de l'Amour (The Mysteries of Love)* by Vitrac. According to a critic, *The Burnt Womb or the Mad Mother* “showed a young man in almost complete darkness, moving a chair forward then back, uttering mysterious phrases as he did so. He died, then a Queen passed by, who died in turn, and other characters, who also died.”<sup>2</sup> *The Mysteries of Love* showed the misgivings, dual isolation, eroticism and criminal thoughts lurking in the minds of lovers. It was of the tender and sadistic fantasies of two lovers. The author tried to commit suicide by shooting himself, and came bathed in blood but shaking with helpless laughter.

The quarrel between Artaud and the Surrealists did not stop. The Surrealists had uttered rude words about Artaud, and in return Artaud replied in June 1927, in his own pamphlet *A la grande nuit ou Le Bluff surréaliste (In Total Darkness, or The Surrealist Bluff)*:

Indeed, one wonders if there is still a Surrealist adventure, or if Surrealism did not die on the day when Breton and his adepts decided to join the Communist movement and to seek in the realm of facts and of immediate matter the culmination of an action that could normally develop only within the inmost confines of the brain.<sup>3</sup>

“Surrealism has never meant anything to me but a new kind of magic.”<sup>4</sup> “What separates me from the Surrealists is that they love life as much as I despise it.”<sup>5</sup> These were what Artaud said. For him, Surrealism was no better than a rable of pretentious frauds. The year 1927 also brought Artaud one of his most famous roles: That of Marat in Abel Gance’s film *Napoléon*.

On 14 January 1928, at the *Comédie des Champs-Élysées*, there was the second production of the *Alfred Jarry Theatre*. One half of the programme consisted of Vsevolod Pudovkin’s film version of Gorki’s *The Mother*, the showing of which had been banned. The other half was a

---

<sup>1</sup> The pseudonym for Robert Aron.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Braun, *The Director and the Stage: From Naturalism to Grotowski*, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 139.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, p. 30.

presentation of a single act of a play, which was put on without the permission of its author. The play was act III of Paul Claudel's *Partage de Midi (Break of Noon)*. The long dialogues were not understandable, and it caused the audience to get bored. Even Artaud's tempestuous relationship with Génica Athanasiou suffered. He had made her play *Yzé* without letting her know the author of the play and quarrelled with her over the interpretation of the text.<sup>1</sup>

On 9 February 1928, *La Coquille et le Clergyman (The Seashell and the Clergyman)* had its première at the *Studio des Ursulines*. It was another scandal: Artaud and Robert Desnos attempted to stop the screening and were thrown out of the theatre. Artaud created a disturbance, because he was not satisfied with the director's – Germaine Dulac's – approach to his script: She had turned it into dream images. Artaud shouted insults about Dulac. Even, at one showing, he sat in the audience and said that Dulac was "a cow". On 22 March 1928, Artaud lectured at the Sorbonne on *L'Art et la Mort (Art and Death)*.<sup>2</sup>

On 2 and 9 June 1928, there was the third production of the *Alfred Jarry Theatre*: August Strindberg's *Le Songe (A Dream Play)* at the *Théâtre de l'Avenue* in which Artaud played the part of the Dean of Theology. In the productions sponsored by the Swedish Embassy, there were disturbances caused by the Surrealists: In the first performance, the Surrealists who occupied the front rows insulted the actors. In the second, Breton, Sadoul, Unik and other Surrealists were arrested at the entrance. Aron resigned after the scandal.

In the course of the year 1928, Artaud played the part of the young monk Massieu – the friar accompanying St Joan to the stake – in Carl Theodor Dreyer's film *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc (The Passion of Joan of Arc)*. He also appeared as a young soldier – the Intellectual – in Léon Poirier's *Verdun, Visions d'Histoire (Verdun, Memories of History)*; and he filmed as the secretary Mazaud in Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Argent (Money)* after Zola's novel.

---

<sup>1</sup> In spite of the fact that Artaud's liaison with Génica Athanasiou had come to an end after this quarrel, he continued to see her sporadically throughout his life.

<sup>2</sup> Artaud has a book of the same name which was published on 17 April 1929.



On 24 and 29 December 1928, and 5 January 1929, there was the fourth and last production of the *Alfred Jarry Theatre: Vitrac's Victor ou les Enfants au Pouvoir* (*Victor, or Power to the Children*) at the *Comédie des Champs-Élysées*. The action takes place at the home of the Paumelle family between 8 p.m. and midnight on 12 September 1909, and is about the Paumelles and their friends the Magneaus. It is the ninth birthday of Victor Paumelle, a hyper-intelligent child, who increases in height from six feet to six feet, seven inches. Victor and his six-year-old girlfriend Esther are the only rational beings in a family of mad puppet-like adults. Victor's father has an affair with Esther's mother, but the children expose the lovers. Esther's father, Monsieur Magneau, hangs himself from the flagpole on the balcony; Victor dies of a stroke at the exact second of his anniversary; and the adulterous Charles Paumelle and Emilie Magneau commit suicide by shooting themselves. There is also a mysterious visitor, Ida Mortemart, who suffers from a chronic inability to control her farts.

From February to April 1929, Artaud filmed in Raymond Bernard's epic *Tarakanova*, playing the part of a gipsy, at the Nice studios. He wrote a film treatment of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Le Maître de Ballantrae* (*The Master of Ballantrae*), and made a free translation of Lewis's Gothic novel *The Monk*. Unfortunately, none of these film projects came to fruition. The Vicomte de Noailles gave him 20.000 francs in November 1929, but even this amount was insufficient. In 1930, Artaud published *Le Théâtre Alfred Jarry et l'Hostilité publique* (*The Alfred Jarry Theatre and the Public Hostility*), and wrote production plans for Strindberg's *La Sonate des spectres* (*The Ghost Sonata*) and Vitrac's *Le Coup de Trafalgar*.

In the late 1920s and 1930, Artaud wrote original scenarios: *Deux Nations sur les confins de la Mongolie* (*Two Nations on the Outer Edge of Mongolia*), *Les 32* (*The 32*), and *L'Avion solaire* (*Flights*). Another scenario, *La Révolte du Boucher* (*The Revolt of the Butcher*), is about a madman who is obsessed by meat and the treachery of women. Artaud summarized its content as "eroticism, cruelty, the taste for blood, the search for violence, obsession with the horrible, dissolution of moral values, social hypocrisy, lies, false witness, sadism, perversity."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, p. 34.

To work on G. W. Pabst's film version of Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*, in 1930, Artaud went to Berlin.<sup>1</sup> In 1931, in the French version of the *L'Opéra de quat'sous*, Artaud played a beggar. To make some money, he wrote three imaginary travel articles for the magazine *Voilà*, setting his writings in Shanghai, Tibet and the Galapagos Islands. To say honestly, he had been to none of these places. He filmed in Raymond Bernard's *Faubourg Montmartre* and *Les Croix de Bois (The Wooden Crosses)*; in Marcel L'Herbier's *La Femme d'Une Nuit*; and in Léon Poirier's *Verdun, Souvenirs d'Histoire*, the sound version of *Verdun, Visions d'Histoire*. In *The Wooden Crosses*, he was Vieublé, an enthusiastic soldier, who tries to leap out of his trench towards the Germans, crying "I shit on you, swine!"<sup>2</sup>

### 2.3 1931: DOUBLE INSPIRATION

In July 1931, Artaud visited the Colonial Exhibition in the Bois de Vincennes and had one of the most important experiences of his life. On the terrace of the Indonesian temple, which housed the exhibit of the Dutch colonial empire, he witnessed a performance of Balinese dancing. This was the second<sup>3</sup> exposition he had attended, but it made a stronger impression on him. Here, all his ideas of a non-verbal, magical theatre of light, colour and movement were present. In his essay entitled *He Wasn't Entirely Himself*, Jerzy Grotowski said:

The Balinese performance for Artaud was like a crystal ball for a fortune-teller. It brought forth a totally different performance which slumbered in his depths, and this work of Artaud's provoked by the Balinese theatre gives us an image of his great creative possibilities...<sup>4</sup>

"The performances and festivals presented during a colonial exhibition had to create for its visitors the illusion of a voyage overseas."<sup>5</sup> There is a speculation that it was the review of Florent Fels, the editor of *Voilà*, that convinced Artaud to visit the exhibition:

---

<sup>1</sup> Artaud went to Berlin several times between 1930 and 1935. In Germany, he saw productions by Adolphe Appia, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Max Reinhardt and Erwin Piscator. According to what Artaud said, he had met Hitler in the *Romanisches Café*, the meeting place of actors and intellectuals.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> The first exposition he saw was in 1922. See pp. 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Ed. Eugenio Barba, p. 89.

<sup>5</sup> Nicola Savarese, "1931: Antonin Artaud Sees Balinese Theatre at the Paris Colonial Exposition", Trans. Richard Fowler, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 45, No. 3, T171, Fall 2001, p. 54.

Dancing is a ritual, dance poetry, movement created by the soul, possessed and conquered. The fingers move imperceptibly, and then the wrists and the lower arms unfurl like lianas, become flowers; waves pass through the torso and the rest of the body, the feet rest light on the ground, off-center, with a form of constraint which explains their seductive effect, they are in the power of the long wave which the body delineates, like a baroque garland. The head is held like a weightless jewel, the eyes fixed, enlarged, impassive, open to infinity.<sup>1</sup>

The Balinese theatre performance – a barong dance featuring the ‘barong’<sup>2</sup> – appealed to him with its codified, highly ritualized physicality and improvisatory possibilities; it “became for him the stick with which he could beat literary, word-bound Western theatre.” “Just as for Nietzsche Dionysian music took spectators deeper than a mere imitation of nature, so for Artaud Balinese theatre offered something deeper than, and prior to, words.”<sup>3</sup>

A month later, in the *Musée du Louvre*, Artaud was struck by the fifteenth-century painting *Lot and His Daughters* by the Dutch Renaissance painter Lucas van Leyden. This was another inspiration. Its perspectives of calamity and sexuality had an incredible effect upon him. The implicit incest in the relationships between the characters triggered a mental drama.

Apart from these two inspirational events, some time later, Artaud saw two films by the *Marx Brothers*: Namely, *Animal Crackers* and *Monkey Business*. Artaud was convulsed by *Monkey Business*, a film in which a man tries to embrace a woman who suddenly turns into a cow which moos.

#### **2.4 THE THEATRE OF CRUELTY AND “THE CENCI”**

Artaud, who had no home, continually moved from one place to another. In 1931, he moved from 178, quai d’Auteuil to the Hôtel Saint-Charles, 45, rue Pigalle. In spite of being in such poverty, he desperately wanted to start his own theatre, and he tried to make a place for himself in Louis Jouvet’s troupe. At the end of his efforts, in February and March 1932, he assisted Jouvet in a production of Alfred Savoir’s *La Pâtissière du Village (The Village Baker)*, which had its première at the *Théâtre Pigalle* on 8 March 1932. This time,

---

<sup>1</sup> Nicola Savarese, “1931: Antonin Artaud Sees Balinese Theatre at the Paris Colonial Exposition”, Trans. Richard Fowler, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 45, No. 3, T171, Fall 2001, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> A lion-like dragon figure who aids people by opposing the evil Rangda.

<sup>3</sup> Simon Shepherd, Mick Wallis, *Drama/Theatre/Performance*, p. 64.

surprisingly enough, Artaud put forward extravagant ideas. He suggested that some twenty giant puppets, each more than fifteen feet in height, must appear, swaying to the tune of a military march, made absurd by the addition of Oriental harmonies, while Bengal fireworks exploded around them. With no hesitation, Jouvet dropped him. Artaud, who approached Dullin, was planning a production of Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*<sup>1</sup> at the *Atelier*.

Just prior to April 1932, Artaud wrote a "talking pantomime", *La Pierre Philosophale (The Philosopher's Stone)*, in which there is a doctor busy with fiendish experiments: Harlequin loses his arms and legs, in front of Isabelle in whom horror is combined with the first attractions of love. Harlequin makes Isabelle pregnant, but surprised by the doctor during their erotic labors. A child is brought out from under Isabelle's dress. It is a dummy of Dr Pale who cannot doubt his parenthood when he sees himself reproduced in his wife's child. There is a massacre: Dr Pale chops dummies up with an axe, like a woodcutter, or a butcher. Isabelle has a kind of dream in which Harlequin appears to her, but she is separated from him by the wall of unreality through which she seems to see him.

In April 1932, Artaud went to Berlin to film in a crime thriller named *Coups de Feu à l'Aube (Gunshot at Dawn)*, directed by Serge de Poligny at the UFA studios. In the film, which was shot between April and August 1932, he was the leader of a gang of assassins, a murderer named "The Trembler" because he shook his hands to distract the suspicions of the police.

On 1 October 1932, the *N.R.F.* published *Le Théâtre de la Cruauté, Premier Manifeste (First Manifesto of the Theatre of Cruelty)*. Day and night, Artaud was thinking of a name for his theatre. Paulhan suggested "The Alchemical Theatre",<sup>2</sup> "Theatre of the Absolute" or "The Metaphysical Theatre". Artaud considered "The Theatre of the Ordeal" and "The Theatre of Evolution", but subsequently insisted on "The Theatre of Cruelty".

---

<sup>1</sup> A play about a soldier driven mad by inhuman military discipline.

<sup>2</sup> *Le Théâtre Alchimique (The Alchemical Theatre)* was the title of an article Artaud wrote for the journal *Sur* of Buenos Aires.

In November, an invitation came from the composer Edgar Varèse whose music was a sonic parallel to Artaud's theatre with its percussive movements. Varèse was planning a musical event of dance, light and gestural movement, to be staged in the street. It was to be titled "The Astronomer", and would deal with a destructive star which exhilarates and threatens the world's population. Artaud produced four movements of the libretto, entitled it *Il n'y a plus de firmament (There is No More Firmament)*, and then abandoned the project. <sup>1</sup>

Artaud's translation – in collaboration with Bernard Steele – of Ludwig Lewisohn's novel *The Case of Mr. Crump* was published in 1932 under the title *Crime Passionel*. Around that time, Artaud was in the grip of destitution:

A malicious fatality oppresses me. Like Lazarus, I have to nourish myself with the crumbs which fall from the table of the fortunate rich. <sup>2</sup>

One night in February, on the Boulevard du Montparnasse, Artaud found a starving sixteen-year-old girl named Anie Besnard who was sitting on a bench and weeping. In spite of his own poorness, he fed her benignly and benevolently; and, after a while, they became intimate friends. March 1933 was the commencement of a friendship with Anais Nin who was studying psychoanalysis with Dr Allendy. In her diary, Nin gave a description of Artaud:

Artaud. Lean, taut. A gaunt face with visionary eyes. A sardonic manner. Now weary, now fiery and malicious. The theatre, for him, is a place to shout pain, anger, hatred, to enact the violence in us ... He is the drugged, contracted being who walks always alone, who is seeking to produce plays which are like scenes of torture. His eyes are blue with languor, black with pain. He is all nerves. Yet he was beautiful acting the monk in love with Joan of Arc in the Carl Dreyer film. The deep-set eyes of the mystic, as if shining from caverns. Deep-set, shadowy, mysterious ... <sup>3</sup>

In *The Journals of Anais Nin*, Artaud – with his purple, laudanum-stained lips – is quoted:

The revolution will come soon. All this will be destroyed. The world must be destroyed. It is corrupt and full of ugliness. It is full of mummies, I tell you. Roman decadence. Death. I wanted a theatre that would be like a shock treatment, galvanize, shock people into feeling. <sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning of 1934, Artaud sent some work to Varèse who, at that time, was in suicidal depression.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Esslin, *Antonin Artaud: The Man and His Work*, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Artaud, who was writing a book on Heliogabalus, <sup>1</sup> read books on Roman history, astrology and esoteric religions; and he was interested in mysticism, magic and primitive mythologies. In *Héliogabale, ou l'Anarchiste couronné (Heliogabalus, or the Anarchist Crowned)*, Artaud identified himself with the mad emperor. He structured Heliogabalus' life around the breaking of borders and the expulsion of blood and sperm. In *In Memoriam: Antonin Artaud*, Maurice Saillet described the work as "à life of *Heliogabalus*, the false Antonin, who was cradled in sperm and buried in excrement." <sup>2</sup>

The year 1933 saw the publication of *Le Théâtre de la Cruauté, Second Manifeste (Second Manifesto of the Theatre of Cruelty)* in which he announced that the first production of the theatre of cruelty would be *La Conquête du Mexique (The Conquest of Mexico)*: A depiction of the defeat of Montezuma by Cortez and the massacre of the Spanish forces. He wrote an adaptation of Seneca's play *Atreus and Thyestes* <sup>3</sup> which he called *Le Supplice de Tantale (The Torture of Tantalus)*; and he had a role – as the lawyer – in the sound version of Gance's *Mater Dolorosa*.

In 1934, Artaud met the painter Balthus whom he visited every morning. One day, he found Balthus in a coma after attempting suicide with an overdose of laudanum. At that time, for Artaud, only theatre could be a matter for suicide. In the summer of the same year, Artaud went to Algeria to play the part of the Emir Abd-el-Kader in a musical based on an operetta about the conquest of Algeria in the 1840s, *Sidonie Panache*, produced by his uncle Louis Nalpas and directed by Henri Wullschleger. Here, Artaud was the villain. He also starred in films: As a historical figure – the monk Savonarola – in *Lucrece Borgia* directed by Abel Gance; as the librarian Cyrus Beck in the historical epic *Koenigsmark* directed by Maurice Tourneur; and as the stylized knife-seller in Molnár's *Liliom* <sup>4</sup> directed by Fritz Lang.

---

<sup>1</sup> Heliogabalus, the tyrannical third-century Roman emperor, reigned from the age of fourteen to eighteen. His reign was marked by sadism and sexual perversity: murder, incest, debauchery, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans. Richard Howard, p. 154.

<sup>3</sup> There is no Seneca play called *Atreus and Thyestes*, but he wrote an *Agamemnon* and a *Thyestes*. Artaud must have meant these plays, and may also have been thinking of the tragedy by Crébillon père, *Atrée et Thyeste* (1707), based on Seneca, and the tragedy by Voltaire, *Les Pélopidés ou Atrée et Thyeste* (1770).

<sup>4</sup> He had played in the Pitoëff stage production of *Liliom* in 1923.

Since autumn 1934, Artaud had been working on a four-act tragedy, *Les Cenci* (*The Cenci*), based on Percy Bysshe Shelley's five-act play written in 1819, and Stendhal's 1837 translation of a sixteenth-century archival manuscript. It was the true story of the Roman Renaissance aristocrat Count Francesco Cenci who was killed by his daughter in 1599.

Count Cenci, born in Rome in 1527, devoted himself to a life of blasphemy, crime and debauchery, and purchased absolution from the Pope. In the play full of murder, rape, incest, blood and thunder, he celebrated the violent deaths of two of his hated sons who had tried to secure execution for proven sodomy. He raped his sixteen-year-old daughter, Beatrice, because he wanted to condemn her to eternal damnation. Beatrice conspired with her step-mother Lucretia, her brother Giacomo and Orsino, a priest in love with her, to bribe two assassins to kill him. He is impaled through the eye, and a nail is driven into his throat. When the crime is revealed by betrayal, Beatrice and Lucretia are tortured and executed. In the last scene, Beatrice is in jail, attached by her hair to a wheel, awaiting execution.

The production was financed by three people: Artaud's editor Robert Denoël together with his wife Cécile Bressant; and a Russian-born aristocratic lady named Iya Abdy. The scenery – scaffolding for the palace like a giant ladder against the sky, red curtains hanging like clots of congealed blood, etc. – and costumes were by Balthus; the music and sound effects were by Robert Désormière. “The sound of large bells, the creaking noise of machines, footsteps echoing from far away, wind, storm and lightning had exerted an influence upon the audience from all sides...”<sup>1</sup> Artaud included sound effects for rhythmic stamping, a thunderstorm, crashing waves, a ticking clock, random bangs, an organ, chiming bells, and factory noises. Dissonant and strident sound effects, whirling stage sets, an oscillating metronome, deafening fanfares, ringing anvils from loudspeakers, and blinding lights were all included.

Iya Abdy played Beatrice; Cécile Bressant played Lucretia; Roger Blin played one of the murderers; and Artaud played the part of the father, Cenci. Jean-Louis Barrault who was

---

<sup>1</sup> Aysin Candan, *Yirminci Yüzyilda Öncü Tiyatro*, p. 137. This is my own translation. In Candan, it writes “Çan sesleri, makina gicirtilari, uzaktan yankılanan ayak sesleri, rüzgâr, fırtına, simsekler, o günlerde ses sistemlerinin fazla gelismemis olmasına karsin izleyiciyi dört yandan etki altina aliyordu.”

actually cast as Beatrice's younger brother, Bernardo, later decided to quit.<sup>1</sup> In his letter to André Gide on 10 February 1935, Artaud had described his forthcoming production:

The dialogue of this tragedy is, if I may say so, of the most extreme violence. And there is *nothing* among the traditional notions of Society, order, Justice, Religion, family, and Country, that is not attacked... It is not pure anarchy.<sup>2</sup>

On 5 May 1935, Artaud wrote in *Le Figaro*: "The tragedy, *Les Cenci*, is a Myth that brings some truths to light."<sup>3</sup> Despite high hopes, Artaud had made some grave mistakes: The venue chosen for the performance, the *Théâtre des Folies-Wagram*, was originally a music hall. In addition to the problems related with the place chosen, most of the actors could not grasp Artaud's ideas and what he was demanding of them: There was a lack of communication. Some thought that it would have been better if Artaud had given the leading role to an actor less extreme than himself. He shouted his lines in paroxysms of intensity. The Russian accent of Iya Abdy was impenetrable. The play which was fatally textual and intractable caused financial problems with the low attendances. *The Cenci*, which opened on 6 May 1935, had to close on 22 May 1935, after seventeen performances.

Although Shelley's *The Cenci* is commonly regarded as a "closet drama" – a play designed to be read rather than performed – Artaud had the intrepidity to stage it. It was viewed as a catastrophe, but here we may recall what Artaud had said during his involvement with the *Alfred Jarry Theatre* which showed how courageous he was in staging:

In the theater that we want to create, chance will be our god. We fear no failure, no catastrophe.<sup>4</sup>

After the misfortune of *The Cenci*, Artaud helped Barrault stage a mime drama adapted from Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying* called *Autour d'une Mère (Around a Mother)*, which was presented on 4-7 June 1935. In the autumn of the same year, Artaud met a young Belgian girl

---

<sup>1</sup> According to some sources, Barrault, who at that time was working with Dullin, dropped out because Dullin did not release him from his commitments. According to others, Barrault had quarrelled with Iya Abdy.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 340.

<sup>3</sup> *The Drama Review*, "Artaud's *Les Cenci*", Trans. Nancy E. Nes, Vol. 16, No. 2, T-54, June 1972, p. 104.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 158.



named Cécile Schramme and fell in love with her. At the same time, he was planning a publication of his theatrical manifestos in book form. But, most interesting of all, Artaud had plans for a trip to Mexico. In Charles Marowitz's words, Artaud "was looking for some concrete manifestation of the metaphysical universe he carried around in his head."<sup>1</sup>

## 2.5 "A VOYAGE TO THE LAND OF THE TARAHUMARA" AND THE SHILLELAGH OF ST PATRICK

Of course, we need to question why Artaud was so determined to go on such a journey. The time we start to search, we immediately come face to face with a succession of reasons: Throughout 1935, Artaud read the *Cabala* and the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*. Other documents he read on mysticism were *Ollantay*, a three-act Peruvian drama; *Popol Vuh*, the sacred book of the ancient Quiché Maya in Guatemala; the *Zend-Avesta*, a collection of sacred writings of the Persian Zoroastrians; the *Zohar*, the masterpiece of Spanish Cabalism; and the *Sefer Yetsirah*, a book describing, with astronomical, astrological and anatomical details, how the cosmos was built. He also read about "Ka".<sup>2</sup>

Dr Allendy, the author of a book called *Symbolisme des Nombres, essai d'arithmosophie*, was interested in alchemy, astrology, and the *Cabala* followed by Paracelsus<sup>3</sup> in the sixteenth century. From Allendy, Artaud borrowed many books about the Orient. Artaud also had contacts with René Daumal, a translator of Hindu texts. There was also an acupuncturist named George Soulié de Morant who treated Artaud in February 1932. De Morant, who at one time was the French consul in Shanghai, had written a book on the history of Chinese art. It seems that all of these factors added up to Artaud's insistence on the journey to Mexico.

It was clear that Artaud was interested in occultism, and in the purity of extra-European cultures. When he worked on a project to dramatise the Spanish conquest of Mexico, he learned about the mystical cult based on drugs there. In Mexico, he wanted to study the

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles Marowitz, "Artaud at Rodez", *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. II, No. 6, April-June 1972, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> The "Ka" is the vital force of a person. In ancient Egypt, the offerings at the tomb were made to a person's Ka; to die meant "to go to one's Ka."

<sup>3</sup> Paracelsus (1493-1541), the Swiss alchemist and physician, elaborated a mystical neo-Platonic theosophy.

remains of pre-Columbian culture and the cult of peyote.<sup>1</sup> For his trip, Artaud obtained official approval from the French Ministry of Education. He had to borrow some money from Barrault, Paulhan, and Lise Deharme. Moreover, the steamship company – *Compagnie Transatlantique* – gave him a fifty percent discount.

The time of his departure was drawing nearer, but he was still working on the essays which the *N.R.F.* was going to publish. He left for Mexico from Antwerp on the S.S. *Albertville* on 9 January 1936. It was during this voyage that he decided on a title for his book – *Le Théâtre et son double* (*The Theatre and Its Double*) – and wrote to Paulhan about it on 25 January:

I believe I have found a suitable title for my book.  
It will be:  
THE THEATRE AND ITS DOUBLE  
for if theatre doubles life, life doubles true theatre, ...  
And the double of the Theatre is reality *untouched* by the men of today.<sup>2</sup>

On 30 January 1936, he was in Havana where he attended a voodoo ceremony. From a Negro sorcerer, he received a little sword in Toledan steel which he came to regard as a talisman. On arrival in Mexico, he was lionised, was invited to lunch by the French minister, and was given the opportunity to write articles for the newspaper *El Nacional Revolucionario*. He also gave lectures at the university: *Surréalisme et révolution* (*Surrealism and Revolution*) on 26 February; *L'Homme Contre le Destin* (*Man Against Destiny*) on 27 February; and *Le Théâtre et les dieux* (*Theatre and the Gods*) on 29 February. He really believed in the superiority of ancient Indian culture over the corrupt civilisation of Europe. With the help of the Rector of Mexico University, he obtained financial help to go to a place inhabited by unspoilt Indian tribes. He believed the Tarahumaras to be uncontaminated by European civilisation. In 1935, before setting off on a journey into the interior in Mexico, he had written:

---

<sup>1</sup> Peyote is a cactus, part of which can be taken as a drug that changes the appearance of reality. It contains mescaline which causes hallucinations. In Andrew M. Colman's *A Dictionary of Psychology*, p. 442, the definition for mescaline is: "A psychotropic alkaloid, chemically related to adrenaline (epinephrine), derived from the flowering heads of the mescal or peyote cactus *Lophophora williamsii* native to Mexico and the southwestern US, used for religious ceremonies in some Native American cultures, usually eaten or dissolved in a drink, acting as a central nervous system stimulant causing pupil dilation and palpitations, together with psychedelic and hallucinogenic effects and feelings of euphoria."

<sup>2</sup> Claude Schumacher, Brian Singleton (eds. and trans.), *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 97.

I am leaving in search of the impossible. We shall see whether I can nevertheless find it. I believe that in Mexico there are still seething forces which pressurise the blood of the Indians. There the theatre which I imagine, which I perhaps contain within myself, expresses itself directly.<sup>1</sup>

It was the end of August 1936 when he set out for Chihuahua. Riding on horse, he travelled into the Sierra Madre and into the country of the Tarahumara tribe, the Sierra Tarahumara. Artaud could not control himself: Two men had to hoist him onto the horse, they had to put the reins into his hands and close them around the reins. Before confronting the Indians' drug, he wanted to get rid of the drugs which tied him to his European addiction: He deserted the last of his heroin at the base of the mountains. On the way, he saw Indians masturbating.

During the ride, he counted the rocks which recurred in groups of 3, 4, 7 and 8. He was reminded of the music of numbers in the *Cabala*. He came across a sign in the shape of "H". The shape of men's tortured bodies, gods' heads peering from behind rock clusters, drowned men half eaten by stones, a statue of Death holding a child in its hand, a man lying on a stone, his arms open and his hands nailed... He was dazzled by the region's topography:

The land of the Tarahumara is full of signs, forms, and natural effigies which in no way seem the result of chance, as if the gods, whom one feels everywhere here, had chosen to express their powers by means of these strange signatures in which the figure of man is hunted down from all sides... And I saw that the rocks all had the shape of a woman's bosom with two perfectly delineated breasts... This inhabited Sierra, this Sierra which exhales a metaphysical thinking in its rocks, the Tarahumara have covered with signs, signs that are completely conscious, intelligent, and purposeful. At every bend in the road one sees trees that have *deliberately* been burned in the shape of a cross, or in the shape of creatures...<sup>2</sup>

In September 1936, Artaud spent a month with the Tarahumara Indians: He was housed in the local school, where the teacher was preoccupied with fornicating with his female colleague. Artaud saw the "tutuguri" dance, participated in the peyote ritual, and drank the hallucinatory drug in which the god "Ciguri" was hidden. In the beginning of October 1936, he returned from the Sierra Tarahumara. On 31 October 1936, he left Mexico on S.S. *Mexique*. On 12 November 1936, he was back in France at Saint-Nazaire. He went for days

---

<sup>1</sup> James Roose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre from Stanislavsky to Peter Brook*, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, pp. 379-381. An extract from *D'un Voyage au Pays des Tarahumaras (A Voyage to the Land of the Tarahumara)* which was published in 1945.

without eating, and spent his time sitting in the *Dôme Café* where his friends paid for his drinks. He insulted passers-by in the street, seized people by the throat, spat on the face of people, and related with his emotional life, he got engaged to Cécile Schramme.

From 25 February to 4 March 1937, Artaud had a disintoxication treatment at the *Centre Français de Médecine et de Chirurgie* in the Rue Boileau. From 14 to 29 April 1937, he was at a clinic at Sceaux. It was Paulhan who paid the expenses anonymously. Now, Artaud was ready to meet his fiancée's parents, respectable bourgeois of Brussels.

On 18 May 1937, while in Brussels, Artaud was going to give a lecture on *La Décomposition de Paris (The Decomposition of Paris)* at the *Brussels Maison de l'Art*. But instead, he spoke about his Mexico adventure and, while he was talking, he became more and more aggressive. He went completely out of control and began screaming at the audience. He talked about the effects of masturbation on the Jesuits, causing most of the audience to leave the hall. Cécile's parents, with whom Artaud had stayed at Brussels, were petrified. The engagement was broken off by Cécile's father; and Artaud returned to Paris on 20 May.

Being preoccupied with esoteric subjects, magic and miraculous signs, his situation was a shocking spectacle. He was sleeping out at night and begging on the boulevard du Montparnasse. Seemingly leading the life of a tramp, he was lost in mysterious thoughts. He was seen with an ancient knotted Irish cane which was given to him by his friend René Thomas, who got it from the daughter of a Savoyard sorcerer. This cane belonged to Lucifer, and it passed through the hands of Jesus Christ and St Patrick. For Artaud, it was a weapon of violence and a sign of sexual vulnerability. When friends wanted to touch it, he became infuriated, saying that it was as if they had grabbed at his penis. One day, he chased the Dada leader Tristan Tzara around Saint Germain-des-Prés for touching the cane.

On 28 July 1937, *Les Nouvelles Révélations de l'Être (The New Revelations of Being)* was published as an anonymous pamphlet, signed *Le Révélé (The Revealed One)*. It was based on notions adopted from astrology, the *Cabala* and tarot. It predicted that fire would consume the world in November of that year. He prophesied the destruction of civilisation by fire,

water, earth and a star which will cover the surface of the air, in which the spirit of man had been immersed. The author reached a state of separation from normal existence:

It is a real Desperate Person who speaks to you and who has not known the happiness of being in the world until now that he has left this world, now that he is absolutely separated from it. The others who have died are not separated. They still turn around their dead bodies. I am not dead, but I am separated.<sup>1</sup>

Artaud saw himself as the tortured bringer of both destruction and salvation to the world. He knew that everybody viewed him as a madman when he said “the image of the world’s madness was incarnated in a tortured man.”<sup>2</sup> According to Mitter, “madness was Artaud’s *raison d’être*, his religion, the source of his pride.”<sup>3</sup> As this debate about his madness went on, Artaud was preparing for another journey into the unknown, this time to Ireland. He wanted to return the sacred cane of St Patrick to St Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin where it had been attached to a wall for 1500 years until it disappeared in the nineteenth century.

On 12 August 1937, Artaud set off. On 14 August, he was in Ireland at Cobh; on 17 August, he was in Galway; and on 23 August, he was in Kiltonan in the Aran Islands where he consulted a medium. He wrote letters to friends in Paris, covering the paper with fetish symbols, burning the surface with cigarette ends. Being penniless, Artaud wanted help from Breton and Paulhan. On 5 September, he was in Galway, at the Imperial Hotel; and on 8 September, he left for Dublin. On 14 September 1937, he wrote a letter to Breton which was postmarked Paris: He had sent it to Anne Manson, a young journalist, asking her to mail it to Breton, because he did not want anyone to know where he was.

In the second half of September 1937, an incident – which sealed up the last quarter of his life – occurred. Artaud, who was in a spiritually distressed and physically restrained state, could not pay for his room, and he was turned out into the street. Unable to speak a word of English, he sought refuge in a Jesuit college where he hoped to find French-speaking monks. The monks, who accepted him at first, were surprised when they heard ear-splitting cries and

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 414.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Esslin, *Antonin Artaud: The Man and His Work*, p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> Shomit Mitter, Maria Shevtsova (eds.), *Fifty Key Theatre Directors*, p. 47.

groans emanating from his room. The police, who were apprised of the trouble, came to eject him.<sup>1</sup> There was a fight in which the cane of St Patrick was lost.<sup>2</sup> Artaud was free for several more days; he slept at the night-shelter. On 23 September, he was arrested for vagrancy and imprisoned for six days in Mountjoy Prison. Then, he was put on a ship, the S.S. *Washington*, which left Cobh on 29 September 1937.

In his cabin on the ship, Artaud was sitting on his bunk watching the sea. He was frightened when a steward and a mechanic brandishing metal implements – hammers and spanners – came probably in order to repair a washbasin. Thinking that they came to harm him, in a deeply paranoid and delirious state, Artaud attacked them and was eventually detained in a straitjacket, and placed in irons by the captain. On 30 September 1937, on arrival at Le Havre, he was handed over to the French authorities who interned him in an asylum.

Artaud was living in a world of violent hallucinations: He was assaulted sexually by demonic figures. From his cell, he heard armies – led by his friends – fighting in the hospital grounds, trying to break the walls and release him. Breton, who was at the head of one of the assaults, was shot dead. He also heard the sounds of an actress named Colette Proust, being hacked to death with an axe.

After his short stay in Le Havre, he was transferred to the asylum of Quatre-Mares at Sotteville-lès-Rouen. In Artaud's words, "theatre is the *scaffold*, the gibbet, the trenches, the crematorium or the mad house. / Cruelty, *massacred* bodies."<sup>3</sup> This time, fate, in reality, had brought him to the mad house. This was the beginning of the last phase of his life.

Since his disappearance, Artaud's mother had been searching for him. After his whereabouts were discovered, she wanted him to be freed, or moved nearer to Paris, where it would be easier to see him. On 12 April 1938, he was transferred to the mental hospital of Sainte-Anne.

---

<sup>1</sup> According to some accounts, having tried to enter the monastery late at night and not getting anyone to open the door, he shouted and screamed in the street. According to another account, the director did not accept him.

<sup>2</sup> At Rodez, he would say that he left it in a bed at the night-shelter where he then went to stay.

<sup>3</sup> Helga Finter, "Antonin Artaud and the Impossible Theatre: The Legacy of the Theatre of Cruelty", Trans. Matthew Griffin, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 41, No. 4, T156, Winter 1997, p. 16.

At Sainte-Anne, Artaud was in the Henri-Rousselle clinic where Jacques Lacan was in charge of diagnosing patients. When Roger Blin went to see Lacan to discuss Artaud's condition – as Stephen Barber wrote in his introduction – Lacan told him that “Artaud's case did not interest him, that Artaud was ‘fixed’ and that he would live to be eighty, but would never write another line.”<sup>1</sup> He was in solitary confinement there, silenced and poisoned. Here are Artaud's woeful words:

For 48 hours I was between life and death after swallowing a so-called powder against diarrhoea, which immediately gave me a terrible bloody dysentery, during which I fell on the edge of my bed.<sup>2</sup>

When the collection of his essays, manifestos and letters – *Le Théâtre et son Double (The Theater and Its Double)* – appeared in the *Metamorphoses* series in February 1938, Artaud was in a near-catatonic state. However, the publication of the book by Gallimard had drawn attention to the theatrical genius.

## 2.6 THE THEATER AND ITS DOUBLE

The theatre is a simulacrum – at its highest level, ordered and elevated to the status of art – of the real world and real life. That is why Antonin Artaud called his book *The Theatre and Its Double*.<sup>3</sup>

Artaud's most representative work *The Theater and Its Double*, which is a fundamental theatrical treatise, consists mostly of essays which were delivered as lectures at the Sorbonne and elsewhere during the previous seven years. In Michael Benedikt's words, “derived from Surrealism is perhaps the text's central tenet: that it is vital to violate occidental rationalism by ‘de-Western-culturalizing’ art.”<sup>4</sup>

In the preface entitled *Le Théâtre et la culture (The Theater and Culture)*, Artaud mentioned the capacity of gestures, sounds, words, screams, light, and darkness to convey meaning on

---

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Esslin, *The Field of Drama: How the Signs of Drama Create Meaning on Stage and Screen*, p. 176.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Benedikt (ed. and trans.), *The Poetry of Surrealism: An Anthology*, p. 280.

the stage. He drew a striking picture of his ideal actors who are “like victims burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames.”<sup>1</sup>

*Le Théâtre et la peste (The Theater and the Plague)* was an essay which was originally given as a lecture at the Sorbonne on 6 April 1933. During the lecture, Artaud was screaming; people gasped, laughed, hissed and left protesting. In his text entitled *K*, Allen S. Weiss quoted Anais Nin’s description of Artaud’s Sorbonne presentation:

... imperceptibly almost, he let go of the thread we were following and began to act out dying by plague. No one quite knew when it began. To illustrate his conference, he was acting out an agony. ... His face was contorted with anguish. One could see the perspiration dampening his hair. His eyes dilated, his muscles became cramped, his lungs struggled to retain their flexibility. He made one feel the parched and burning throat, the pains, the fever, the fire in the gut. He was in agony. He was screaming. He was delirious. He was enacting his own death, his own crucifixion.<sup>2</sup>

Artaud, who was extremely aggrieved, was quoted in Nin’s diary:

They always want to hear *about*; they want an objective conference on “The Theatre and the Plague”, and I want to give them the experience itself, the plague itself, so they will be terrified, and awaken. I want to awaken them. They do not realize *they are dead*. Their death is total, like deafness, blindness. This is agony I portrayed. Mine, yes, and everyone who is alive.<sup>3</sup>

Artaud’s goal has its roots in Aristotle’s catharsis: theatre as a way of purging feelings of terror and pity. Artaud wanted theatre to swoop down among the spectators with all the horror of the plague, the Black Death of the Middle Ages, with all its shattering effect, creating physical, mental and moral change, among the populations it struck. For Artaud, theatre is like the plague: communicative, violent, honest, relentless. The plague, one of the great scourges of mankind, is a calamity in the history of man, and a triumph of dark powers. The body of the victim, who has died of the plague, shows no organic lesions. This can be compared to the actor whom his feelings overwhelm and shatter without an effect on reality. Theatre and plague are social necessities. Artaud likened theatre to plague which attacks the audience, breaks down its resistance, and cleanses it morally and spiritually:

---

<sup>1</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans. Mary Caroline Richards, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Scheer (ed.), *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader*, pp. 151-152.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, p. 63.



The theater like the plague is a crisis which is resolved by death or cure. And the plague is a superior disease because it is a total crisis after which nothing remains except death or an extreme purification. Similarly the theater is a disease because it is the supreme equilibrium which cannot be achieved without destruction.<sup>1</sup>

In Peter Brook's words, Artaud's theatre is "a theatre working like the plague, by intoxication, by infection, by analogy, by magic; a theatre in which the play, the event itself, stands in place of a text."<sup>2</sup>

*La Mise en scène et la Métaphysique (Metaphysics and the Mise en Scène)* was a lecture Artaud had delivered at the Sorbonne on 10 December 1931. In the text, which handles the philosophically ingrained concept of metaphysics, Artaud mentions the figures in the painting *Lot and His Daughters*. He asserts that the two figures walking across a bridge in silhouette in the background are reminiscent of Plato's shadows in the cave. Artaud sees the painting as a model for theatre, if only a similar language could be applied. It is not easy to put metaphysical concepts into words: They are so profound, so deeply buried in the core of our being that they surpass the limits of expression. Words lead to a purely intellectual comprehension, whereas gestures have an eloquence which communicates on the deeper level of intuitive comprehension. Artaud had actually shown his hostility towards words in *The Nerve Meter* by saying "all writing is garbage."<sup>3</sup> In the introduction of his book, Mark V. Rose quoted Artaud:

A Movement, a gesture in the nick of time sometimes does more to elucidate a complicated thought than all the treasures of the spoken language.<sup>4</sup>

*Sur le théâtre balinais (On the Balinese Theater)* was based on Artaud's 1931 experience at the Paris Colonial Exhibition. Actors are "animated hieroglyphs";<sup>5</sup> and the director – the unique creator – is "a kind of manager of magic, a master of sacred ceremonies".<sup>6</sup> There must be a technique for transcribing the modes of expression of the non-verbal language of

---

<sup>1</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans. Mary Caroline Richards, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> Mark V. Rose, *The Actor and His Double: Mime and Movement for the Theatre of Cruelty*, p. xii.

<sup>5</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans. Mary Caroline Richards, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

the stage. Each gesture, each movement, each intonation must have a precise expressive meaning comparable to that of Egyptian “hieroglyphics”. In 1927, Artaud, who was influenced by Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*,<sup>1</sup> wrote in his *Manifeste pour un théâtre avorté (Manifesto for an Abortive Theatre)*:

What we would like to see sparkle and triumph on stage is whatever is a part of the mystery and magnetic fascination of dreams, the dark layers of consciousness, all that obsesses us within our minds.<sup>2</sup>

In *Théâtre oriental et théâtre occidental (Oriental and Occidental Theater)*, he defended Eastern theatre of metaphysical tendencies against Western theatre of psychological tendencies, because of the fact that Eastern theatre was not so dependent on words. In Artaud’s words, “the theater as we conceive it in the Occident has declared its alliance with the text and finds itself limited by it. For the Occidental theater the Word is everything, and there is no possibility of expression without it.”<sup>3</sup> The Oriental theatre, which Artaud saw as a compact agglomeration of gestures, signs, and sounds, constituted the stage language.

In *En finir avec les chefs-d’œuvre (No More Masterpieces)*, he laid the blame for the psychological drama. He declared that the classical theatre of the past was moribund, and the writers of other eras did not have much to say to the present conditions of peril. Artaud argues “that an expression does not have the same value twice, does not live two lives; that all words, once spoken, are dead and function only at the moment when they are uttered, that a form, once it has served, cannot be used again and asks only to be replaced by another, and that the theater is the only place in the world where a gesture, once made, can never be made the same way twice.”<sup>4</sup> Derrida summarized the aim of Artaud in his particular essay *The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation*, by saying “Artaud wanted to erase repetition in general. For him, repetition was evil...”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Freud had explained how language in dream is transposed into images which can be read like picture-writing, hieroglyphs.

<sup>2</sup> Claude Schumacher, Brian Singleton (eds.), *Artaud on Theatre*, Trans. Victor Corti, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans. Mary Caroline Richards, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alan Bass, p. 310.

Theatre has the potential to affect spectators like a snake-charmer's music which makes the serpent, willy-nilly, rise from the earth. Refusing cerebration, Artaud wanted an interior and subtle music which would hypnotize us as the flute-player charms the cobra:

If music acts upon snakes, it is not through the spiritual idea it supplies to them, but because snakes are long and they wind their length across the earth so that their body touches the earth at almost every point; and the musical vibrations which are communicated to the earth reach the snake in the form of a very subtle, very long massage; I propose acting upon spectators as music upon snakes, causing them to return to the subtlest ideas through their entire being.<sup>1</sup>

In *Le Théâtre alchimique (The Alchemical Theater)*, he compared theatre to alchemy, for both turn base matter into gold. In *Un Athlétisme affectif (An Affective Athleticism)*, he dealt with the actor's respiratory capacities. As the basis for character portrayals, he introduced breathing techniques. Using tempos of breathing patterns, "taught us by the Cabala",<sup>2</sup> the actor makes use of his emotions as a wrestler makes use of his muscles. The breath is capable of stimulating organic centers in the body; it releases emotional memories stored there. An actor's affective organism is like the physical athlete's: The actor is a heart athlete.<sup>3</sup>

The basic concept of the book was *Le Théâtre de la Cruauté (The Theater of Cruelty)*. In the *First Manifesto of the Theater of Cruelty*, Artaud expressed the need "to put an end to the subjugation of the theater to the text, and to recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought."<sup>4</sup> "The theater will never find itself again... except by furnishing the spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism, pour out, on a level not counterfeit and illusory, but interior."<sup>5</sup> "Giving words approximately the importance they have in dreams"<sup>6</sup> was what he wanted. Just like

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul Arnold, "The Artaud Experiment", Trans. Ruby Cohn, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Winter 1963, p. 23. An extract from *En finir avec les chefs-d'œuvre (No More Masterpieces)*.

<sup>2</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans. Mary Caroline Richards, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> Although the text entitled *Le Théâtre de Séraphin (The Theater of the Seraphim)* was destined for inclusion, it was omitted when the book was published in 1938. The *Théâtre de Séraphin* is the name of a Chinese shadow and marionette theatre established in Paris in the year 1781 by an Italian named Serafino. *Le Théâtre de Séraphin* is also the title of a section of Baudelaire's book *Les Paradis artificiels* (1860).

<sup>4</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans. Mary Caroline Richards, p. 89.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

the way in dreams, he wanted to draw the fullest possible effect from the quality of words as objects with a physical existence. In his essay entitled *The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation*, Derrida said:

The theater of cruelty is not a *representation*. It is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable. Life is the nonrepresentable origin of representation.<sup>1</sup>

The word is a frozen means of conveying feeling, magic and mystery. It is essential to find a “new stage language” which, for Artaud, constitutes “pure theatre”. A variety of sources can be used: “incantational beauty of voices, the charms of harmony, rare notes of music, colors of objects, physical rhythm of movements whose crescendo and decrescendo will accord exactly with the pulsation of movements familiar to everyone, ... sudden changes of light, the physical action of light which arouses sensations of heat and cold, etc.”<sup>2</sup> He included oscillating lights: The resplendent light is “in fusillades of fiery arrows”.<sup>3</sup>

In order to facilitate a direct communication between the spectator and the spectacle, the barrier between the stage and the spectator should be obliterated. Some hangar or barn can serve instead of the conventional theatre buildings; or the building can be a bare and undecorated one. As there will be no set, this function will be served by hieroglyphic characters, ritual costumes, and musical instruments as tall as men. Manikins, huge masks and objects of strange proportions are included. He gave great importance to large puppets which would produce magical effects of dreamlike fantasy or surprise. “Puppets greater than life size” became a favourite device for Artaud, after seeing the barong of the Balinese theatre. In the *First Manifesto of the Theatre of Cruelty*, he makes an enigmatic reference to “*manikins ten feet high representing the beard of King Lear in the storm*”.<sup>4</sup>

Artaud envisaged a theatre which would act directly on the audience’s emotions. “This cruelty, which will be bloody when necessary but not systematically so”<sup>5</sup> brings the

---

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alan Bass, p. 294.

<sup>2</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans. Mary Caroline Richards, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

spectator out of his desensitisation, frees unconscious repressions, and forces him to confront his real self, his real identity. To achieve the desired effect, the audience were seated in the centre of the action; cries, shrieks, strange vibrations, and unendurable voices were commonly used. In Bettina L. Knapp's words, "to establish such a theatre, theatrical techniques must be precise and as organized as the circulation of blood in the arteries."<sup>1</sup>

In his second letter – dated 28 September 1932 – in *Lettres sur le langage (Letters on Language)*, Artaud went on underlining the underprivileged position of words. For Artaud, "gesture", which is a language in its own right, was the new theatre language's "material and its wits; and... its alpha and omega."<sup>2</sup> He saw "voice" as "one weapon in the dramatic armoury, one instrument in the theatrical orchestra."<sup>3</sup> In his text entitled *Artaud, Defecation and Birth*, Leo Bersani wrote:

Perhaps the most fundamental aspect of theatrical reform in the twentieth century has been the devaluation of the written theatrical text. And of course the figure most intimately connected with this project is Antonin Artaud.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.7 ON THE WAY TO RODEZ

On 27 February 1939, Artaud was transferred to the mental hospital of Ville-Evrard in Seine-et-Marne. His head was shaved, and he had to wear hospital clothes. In a letter he wrote to Gélica Athanasiou on 24 November 1940, he expressed his yearning, his pleas, for heroin:

You must find *heroin* at all costs and you must risk death to get it to me here. This is where matters stand. The Initiates have real instruments of torture, as I have already told you, and they use them from a distance to mutilate me while I sleep, each night a little more. If it is difficult to procure heroin or opium, it is *solely* because of me and because they know that it is the one thing that would restore my strength and make me fit to struggle against Evil.<sup>5</sup>

The outbreak of World War II and the fall of Paris to the Nazis in May 1940 led to starvation cases. The darkest hours of the war turned everything upside down. In 1942, during the

---

<sup>1</sup> Brian Docherty (ed.), *Twentieth-Century European Drama*, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans. Mary Caroline Richards, p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Leach, *Makers of Modern Theatre: An Introduction*, p. 184.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Scheer (ed.), *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader*, p. 96.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 418.

Occupation, patients in French asylums were threatened with death because of the shortage of food. Lunatics and mental defectives were liquidated in order to save food supplies. Artaud, who was now pasty-faced, began to suffer from malnutrition: He was in an emaciated state. By the spring of 1942, his weight had dropped to fifty-two kilograms.

Arthur Adamov's cousin, Mme Bourdet, knew a psychiatrist named Gaston Ferdière who was the head of a mental hospital in the zone then still unoccupied by the Germans, where conditions were better. However, moving a mental patient across the zonal borders was far from easy. It was Ferdière who found a solution: The Surrealist poet Robert Desnos and Artaud's family would ask for his transfer to another institution within the German zone of occupation, but very near the demarcation line, the rural mental asylum at Chézal-Benoît. From there, it would be easier to move Artaud across the demarcation line.

Artaud said that at Ville-Evrard, he was "transferred without motive or reason from the maniacs' ward... to the epileptics' ward..., from the epileptics' ward to the cripples' ward..., and from the cripples' ward to the undesirables' ward..."<sup>1</sup> It was 22 January 1943 when Artaud left the hell-hole of Ville-Evrard. He spent nineteen days at Chézal-Benoît where he was diagnosed as suffering from paranoid psychosis. During his transfer to the asylum of Rodez, Artaud lost the sword he had received in 1936 at the voodoo ceremony in Cuba. He arrived at Rodez in Aveyron in the early morning of 11 February.

According to Artaud himself, he suffered because his body carried all the world's sins. He was starving because other people were eating his food. He was poisoned by the sperm and excrement the world unloaded upon him. In a letter to Barrault, he wrote that his soul "was that of an angel who had previously dwelt on earth under the name of St Hyppolitus, Bishop of Piraeus in the second century AD."<sup>2</sup>

Artaud spent his time humming, gesturing and spitting to defend himself against the demonic figures he could see. Despite all his delusions, auditory hallucinations, glossolalia and violent

---

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Esslin, *Antonin Artaud: The Man and His Work*, p. 55.

tantrums, he began a correspondence with his friends. In his theatre, Artaud used “shock treatment”, but this time it was Ferdière who was going to use it in a different way: With the most humane intentions, Ferdière took the decision in June 1943 to give Artaud a series of “electroshock treatments”.<sup>1</sup> Later, it was Dr Jacques Latrémolière, one of the psychiatrists at Rodez, who wrote about Artaud’s treatment in his doctoral thesis. Artaud complained of the unbearable intrusion of the electric current into his living consciousness. During a seance, one of his vertebrae had been fractured. The unanaesthetized treatment gave Artaud an indescribable pain and a bloodcurdling anguish:

I died at Rodez under electric shock. I say dead. Legally and medically dead. The coma of electric shock lasts a quarter of an hour. Another half-hour and the patient is breathing. But one hour after shock I hadn’t awakened and had stopped breathing. Surprised by my abnormal rigidity, an attendant went to look for the chief doctor who, after auscultations found no sign of life. I have my own memories of my death at that moment, but it is not upon them that I base my testimony. I restrict myself to the particulars which were given to me by Jean Dequeker, young internee of the Rodez asylum who got them from the mouth of Ferdière himself. And the latter told him on that day he believed me dead, and that he had summoned two asylum guards to instruct them to transport my body to the morgue as an hour and a half after shock, I had not revived. And it seems that, at the very moment the attendants entered to remove my body, it quivered slightly, after which I awakened all at once – I have another recollection of it, and this recollection is that everything which Doctor Jean Dequeker told me, I had seen, but not from this side of the world, but from the other....<sup>2</sup>

Ferdière, who saw the slight improvement in his health, encouraged him to make translations. Artaud – who could not use ink, since the Rodez inmates would knock it over his writings – translated Robert Southwell’s *The Burning Babe* which he titled *Le Bébé de feu*, Edgar Allan Poe’s *Israfel*, and Lewis Carroll’s *Ye Carpette Knyghte*. He also translated Chapter VI of *Through the Looking Glass*; and he completed the manuscript of *D’un Voyage au Pays des Tarahumaras (A Voyage to the Land of the Tarahumara)* which was concerned primarily with the supernatural. Around that time, Artaud started to suffer from severe intestinal haemorrhages. On 22 June 1944, he wrote a letter to his mother which showed that he still had hopes in life:

---

<sup>1</sup> We do not know exactly how many seances of electroshock treatment Artaud underwent. But, by July 1945, Artaud said that he had been through no less than fifty comas.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Marowitz, “Artaud at Rodez”, *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. II, No. 6, April-June 1972, p. 61.

... I have been outside of the world for 7 years, since 1937, and I cannot see when it will be over... We shall all see better days. ... it has been too many years that I have been deprived of too many things, but God will provide and they will come back.<sup>1</sup>

Paris had been liberated from the German Occupation on 23 August 1944. After the war, the painter Jean Dubuffet and the novelist-poet Henri Thomas came to Rodez. On 6 January 1945, in a letter to Latrémolière, Artaud wrote about the effect of the iniquitous treatment:

Electric shock, Mr. Latrémolière, reduces me to despair, it takes away my memory, it dulls my mind and my heart, it turns me into someone who is absent and who knows he is absent and sees himself for weeks in pursuit of his being, like a dead man alongside a living man who is no longer himself, but who insists on the dead man being present even though he can no longer enter into him.<sup>2</sup>

On 30 January 1945, Artaud wrote to his sister Marie-Ange Malausséna:

... the thing I have missed most for several years is pastries or cookies but I am not forgetting that you have two children who both need sweets and I beg you to make sure they have everything they need before you think of me.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of his intestinal problems, he never lost sight of his aims in art; he was still quite conscious of his goals. On 6 October 1945, in a letter he wrote to Henri Parisot, he said:

If I am a poet or an actor it is not in order to write or recite poems but in order to live them. When I recite a poem I don't do it to be applauded but to feel the bodies of men and women, I said *bodies*, tremble and turn in unison with my own...<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, Artaud made tableaux of "hieroglyphics": human figures, symbolic objects, and words, in invented languages. He "drew fields of human dissection and torture, filled with splinters and spikes, cancers and broken, bleeding bodies." "Pieces of metal, insects, tiny girls' faces, penises, internal organs all spilled out in a painful dispersal across the furrowed surface of the paper. Old machinery and propellers intersected with swollen human shapes and lacerated faces."<sup>5</sup> In a drawing, he depicted himself as the King of the Incas.

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, pp. 436-437.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 438.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 441.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 452.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: The Man and His Work*, pp. 113-114.



Artaud's relationship with the doctors of Rodez got worse: Ferdière was accused of having raped a nurse who was taking opium to Artaud, and of torturing Artaud with electroshocks when his patient asked for drug, despite being a drug addict himself. In February 1946, the five letters Artaud wrote to Henri Parisot <sup>1</sup> in the autumn of 1945 were published under the title *Les Lettres de Rodez (Letters from Rodez)*. Those letters were full of views about his confinement, his drug addiction, language, poetry and art. According to Georges Bataille:

The unique thing about these writings is their shock, the violent shaking of ordinary boundaries, the cruel lyricism that cuts short its own effects, not tolerating even the very thing it is so clearly expressing. <sup>2</sup>

Around that time, Artaud tried to make contact with Cécile Schramme whom his friends found at a sanatorium in Belgium, paralysed and prematurely aged by drug abuse. In a letter to Adamov, Artaud wrote that he was looking forward to his release from Rodez as “the explosion of a dead volcano”. <sup>3</sup> On 26-27 February 1946, Marthe Robert – the translator of Kafka – and Adamov came to Rodez to see Ferdière. Provided that Artaud's life was financially secured, Ferdière was ready to release him. So, a committee was formed in Paris in order to raise funds. Adamov collected a huge quantity of donated manuscripts and paintings to be auctioned to provide money for Artaud. His friends were also planning a gala matinée. Ferdière was satisfied.

## 2.8 LAST YEARS

In March 1946, André de Richaud, a precocious novelist and playwright who suffered from incapacitating alcoholism and drug addiction, came to Rodez. Ferdière decided to give Artaud a trial release by sending him to stay with Richaud at a hotel in Espalion, some thirty kilometres from Rodez. Richaud and Artaud could supervise each other. The date on the calendar showed 19 March 1946 when they left Rodez for Espalion. Artaud, who returned to Rodez on 14 April, left for Paris on 25 May, accompanied by Ferdière. At dawn on 26 May,

---

<sup>1</sup> A friend of Breton and Eluard.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Scheer (ed.), *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader*, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: The Man and His Work*, p. 119.

on the platform of the Gare d'Austerlitz, Artaud's friends – Jean Dubuffet, Marthe Robert, Henri and Colette Thomas <sup>1</sup> – were waiting for the night train which set off from Rodez.

Ferdière had recommended him to be under psychiatric care. So, Artaud's friends took him to Dr Achille Delmas' convalescence clinic in the rue de la Mairie in Ivry-sur-Seine. Delmas gave him the keys to the clinic gates which meant Artaud could come and go as he pleased.

On 7 June 1946, at 5 p.m., there was a benefit performance at the *Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt*. Breton began with a homage to Artaud, calling him “that man of prodigies”, and saluting him “for his passionate, heroic negation of everything that causes us to be dead while alive.” <sup>2</sup> Barrault read *Les Cenci*; <sup>3</sup> Roger Blin read *Les Nouvelles Révélations de l'Etre*; and Jean Vilar read *Le Pèse-Nerfs*. There were also readings by Arthur Adamov, Maria Casarès, Alain Cuny, Charles Dullin, Louis Jouvet, and Barrault's wife, Madeleine Renaud. Colette Thomas recited a poem she had rehearsed with Artaud himself. Although Artaud wanted to attend, Breton, Adamov and Marthe Robert did not allow him to do so. On 13 June, at 3 p.m., an auction of manuscripts and works of art was held at the *Galerie Pierre*. Jean Paulhan, Jean Dubuffet, Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, Alberto Giacometti, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir were among the donors. The auction brought in 1 million francs.

On 8 June 1946, Artaud recorded a radio programme, *Les Malades et les médecins* (*The Patients and the Doctors*), which was broadcast the following day. Likewise, *Aliénation et magie noire* (*Insanity and Black Magic*), which was recorded on 16 July 1946, was broadcast a day after. It condemned mental hospitals: He saw them as factories of magical torture. On 31 July 1946, he mentioned his plans to direct *Les Bacchantes* (*The Bacchae*) by Euripides. Artaud was also thinking of a mystical journey to Tibet. <sup>4</sup> He wrote unceasingly: He even wrote while riding in the Métro or in automobiles.

---

<sup>1</sup> Colette Thomas had worn straitjacket during her internment in a mental hospital in her student years.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Scheer (ed.), *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader*, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Later, Barrault denied that he had appeared.

<sup>4</sup> He never could go on a journey to Tibet in his life. In a letter to Henri Parisot, which is dated 7 September 1945, he had mentioned his hope to go to Tibet one day.

In October 1946, while Artaud was walking in the grounds of the clinic, he saw a large, dilapidated, derelict hunting pavilion deep in the woods. It dated from the eighteenth century, and its windows opened out into a garden of flowers where irises bloom in season. Although it had no running water, electricity or central heating, Artaud was determined to live there. Dr Delmas tried in vain to dissuade him from his intention. According to what Artaud said, Nerval had stayed at the same institution and it was also the place where some heroes of the French Revolution – Robespierre and Marat – made speeches.

From time to time, Artaud drew pictures: He even did his friend Paule Thévenin's portrait, and Thévenin quoted Artaud in her essay *The Search for a Lost World*: "I have given you the face of an old empire of barbarian times."<sup>1</sup> Around that time, Artaud burned a great majority of his Poe adaptations in the fireplace of his room in Ivry.

At the end of 1946, Artaud wanted to give a public reading of his poems. Breton was against the idea of such an exhibitionist performance; and Gide was apprehensive and feared a disaster. The event, which was called *Tête-à-tête, par Antonin Artaud (Tête-à-tête with Antonin Artaud)*, was scheduled for 13 January 1947: On that day, literary figures were ready at the *Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier* to watch Artaud on the stage. The theatre was crowded with nine hundred spectators. Several hundred latecomers had to be turned away when the theatre became too packed. Artaud spoke for three hours, from nine until midnight. He spoke about electroshock treatment, psychiatrists, and his trips to Mexico and Ireland. "In resorting to peyote I didn't want to enter a new world, but to leave a false world."<sup>2</sup> This was what he said related with his trip to Mexico. Some fainted due to the heat in the small theatre. In his *Artaud at Rodez* (1975), Charles Marowitz quoted Roger Blin's account of the night:

Artaud suddenly found himself on a stage, all alone, in front of a full house which included Camus, Gide, and a great many people who were waiting for him with an enormous curiosity. Many with sympathy, but many more with open curiosity. Artaud began to read and for a long time his voice was uncertain. He had some deep bass notes, and some very high ones, but because of his lack of teeth, and because of the damage wrought by certain drugs, he no longer had a middle register. It was an extraordinary voice. He began reading rather solemnly,

---

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, Paule Thévenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, Trans. Mary Ann Caws, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, p. 85.

then little by little, we could see that he was seized with panic. He was – as if for the first time – hearing his own voice, and it terrified him. The large hall, the total and somewhat strained silence of the public made him terribly nervous, and then he made a clumsy gesture that scattered all his papers over the floor. He tried to pick them up. They were all in a tangle. He tried to improvise and then, seized with panic and terror, he fled out of the building. We found him afterwards, but it was a devastating affair, absolutely shattering.<sup>1</sup>

Some other views about the event were:

... it was unforgettable. A small group of hecklers soon became quiet. An anguished silence hung over the public when that *inspired* man hurled at the public what Gide calls his ‘filthy, blasphemous curses’ or when he got muddled with the text of his lecture and fell silent for long moments holding his head in his hands, writhing in pain. We all suffered with him.<sup>2</sup>

When he came on stage, his emaciated and haggard features reminiscent both of Baudelaire and of Edgar Allan Poe; when his hands hovered about his face like two birds of prey, ceaselessly clawing at it; when he started to chant his beautiful, but barely audible poems in his hoarse voice choked by sobs and tragic stutterings – we felt ourselves lured into that danger zone, and as if we were reflections of that black sun, caught up in the all-devouring combustion of a body consumed by spiritual fire.<sup>3</sup>

Later, Artaud explained his reason for leaving:

I abandoned the stage because I realized the fact that the only language which I could have with an audience was to bring bombs out of my pockets and throw them in the audience’s face with a blatant gesture of aggression... and blows are the only language in which I feel capable of speaking.<sup>4</sup>

He had stopped because he was fed up trying to express himself before “that shower of cunts” quite incapable of understanding him.

An exhibition of the paintings of Vincent van Gogh opened in late January at the Orangerie museum in Paris. Artaud, who visited the exhibition on 2 February 1947, was affected by the work of the painter who had also been confined in lunatic asylums like him. When Pierre Loeb, the art dealer, sent him a newspaper cutting which described van Gogh as a degenerate, Artaud started to write an essay in defence of van Gogh.

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles Marowitz, “Artaud at Rodez”, *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. II, No. 6, April-June 1972, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> Claude Schumacher, Brian Singleton (eds. and trans.), *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 203. Louis Guillaume’s account.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Maurice SAILLET’s account.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, p. 139. For sure, this is the quotation which gave Barber’s book its name.

*Van Gogh, le suicidé de la société* (*Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society*) was a furious polemic against psychiatrists and psychiatry. It contained the analysis of van Gogh's paintings. Artaud identified himself with van Gogh who was driven to suicide by society. The essay, which was awarded the Prix Sainte-Beuve for the best essay of 1947 on 16 January 1948, ended with the evocation of a huge rock blown from a volcano: An image for Artaud's own body. In this work, Artaud also gave a description of "a madman":

And what is an authentic madman?

It is a man who preferred to become mad, in the socially accepted sense of the word, rather than forfeit a certain superior idea of human honor.

So society has strangled in its asylums all those it wanted to get rid of or protect itself from, because they refused to become its accomplices in certain great nastinesses.

For a madman is also a man whom society did not want to hear and whom it wanted to prevent from uttering certain intolerable truths.<sup>1</sup>

In July 1947, he read his own poetry at *Galerie Pierre* where an exhibition of his drawings was held. The two key texts on the theatre from 1947 were *Aliéner l'acteur* (*Deranging the Actor*) and *Le Théâtre et la science* (*Theatre and Science*). In the latter, he said:

True theatre has always appeared to me as the exercise of a dangerous and frightful act, ... The act I'm talking about aims at the true organic and physical transformation of the human body.<sup>2</sup>

*Artaud le Momo*,<sup>3</sup> which was published on 15 September 1947, contained five texts, two of which were *Le Retour d'Artaud*, *Le Momo* (*The Return of Artaud, le Momo*) and *Aliénation et magie noire* (*Insanity and Black Magic*). For these poems, Artaud created a language which used violent, excremental and sexual terms. *La Culture Indienne* (*Indian culture*) and *Ci-gît* (*Here Lies*) were his poems from 1947. In *Here Lies*, he went so far as to deny ever having owed his own life to a sexual act between his parents:

I, Antonin Artaud, am my son, my father, my mother, and myself...<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 485.

<sup>2</sup> Claude Schumacher, Brian Singleton (eds. and trans.), *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 216.

<sup>3</sup> "Momo" is a Marseilles slang word for a fool or village idiot. Perhaps, Artaud was thinking of the Greek god Momos, who was the god of ridicule, a personification of fault-finding, a grumbler who objects to the things the gods do. In Latin and some modern languages, the name was used to refer to any captious, bad-tempered or obstinate critic, a person impossible to please.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 540.

In November 1947, Fernand Pouey, in charge of literary and dramatic broadcasts at the French Radio, asked Artaud to appear in the programme *La Voix des poètes* (*The Voice of the Poets*). Artaud prepared a programme which he called *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu* (*To Have Done With the Judgment of God*). The transmission, which was scheduled for 10:45 p.m. on 2 February 1948, was rehearsed and recorded from 22 to 29 November 1947. But, at the last minute, on 1 February, Wladimir Porché, the Director General of the Radiodiffusion Française, decided to stop the broadcast because of the fact that Artaud's pronouncements were scatological, vicious, obscene and blasphemous. America was shown as a baby factory, war-mongering machine; bloody and apocalyptic death rituals were described; and shit was praised as proof of life and mortality.

According to some critics, it was “the only true example of his Theatre of Cruelty”.<sup>1</sup> It was said that Artaud regarded this as the first real public presentation of his ideas of a theatre of cruelty. Apart from Artaud, the speakers were Maria Casarès who read *Tutuguri*; Roger Blin who read *La Recherche de la fécalité* (*The Pursuit of Fecality*); and Paule Thévenin who read *La Question se pose de ...* (*The Question Arises ...*). There was also a poem entitled *Le Théâtre de la Cruauté* which was actually intended for the broadcast but never recorded. Although some wanted the recording of the production to be destroyed, surreptitious copies were made. The theatrical and literary critic Martin Esslin, who owns one of the copies, says:

One of these – eventually recopied on to a small cassette and therefore much deteriorated in quality – is in my possession. And so I can listen to Artaud's own voice as he recites his weird and violent words and utters his wild, piercing, inarticulate cries – outbursts of such a deep intensity of anguish beyond speech that they freeze the blood: it is as though all human suffering, mankind's sum-total of dammed-up, frustrated rage, torment and pain had been compressed into these tortured, primal shrieks.<sup>2</sup>

Profoundly disappointed over the rejection of the work, in late 1947 and early 1948, from his bed, Artaud dictated to Paule Thévenin the texts for a book entitled *Suppôts et Supplications*. Around that time, Artaud made a drawing entitled *The Projection of the True Body*. It showed his own body being shot by a firing-squad, and his hands chained, while opposite

---

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, p. 62. According to some other critics, Artaud's public lecture on 13 January 1947 was an example of Theatre of Cruelty.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Esslin, *Antonin Artaud: The Man and His Work*, p. 9.

stood his double, a black skeleton with its life spurting outward around its bones. In a self-portrait, dated December 1948, Artaud's head was like a skull composed of the hardest bone. His twisted hand dominated the image, and an oppressive death's head was at his shoulder.

Artaud had been in agony for months. Thévenin had to take him for an examination at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris. It was 3 February when they heard Dr Henri Mondor's diagnosis: Artaud was in the advanced stages of the cancer of the rectum, inoperable and incurable. This meant that the severe intestinal haemorrhages he suffered in the earlier years were the first indications of the cancer. The rectum – an organ that figured centrally in his work – was what made him suffer. He was allowed to take all the drugs and sedatives he needed to alleviate the pain. On 24 February, in his letter to Thévenin, Artaud wrote:

and from now on will devote myself  
exclusively  
to the theater  
as I conceive it,  
a theater of blood,  
a theater which with each performance will have done  
something  
*bodily*  
to the one who performs as well as to the one who comes to see others perform,<sup>1</sup>

On 3 March 1948, Artaud lunched with Thévenin – to whom he entrusted forthwith the publication of his writings. A little before 8 a.m. on 4 March 1948, the gardener who brought Artaud his breakfast every morning in his room at the clinic found him dead sitting upright at the foot of his bed, holding his shoe. It was Artaud himself who said that he would never die lying down, had vowed never to let death catch him napping. “I have nothing more to say, I have said everything I had to say.”<sup>2</sup> “I know I have cancer. What I want to say before dying is that I hate psychiatrists.”<sup>3</sup> These were what he continually said in his last weeks. When he closed his eyes for the last time at Ivry, 23, Rue de la Mairie, he was fifty-two years old. The “animal which was gnawing at his anus” had killed him. However, according to Adamov and Paulhan, it was the suicide of Antonin Artaud by an overdose of the drug chloral hydrate.

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 585.

<sup>2</sup> Paule Thévenin, “A Letter on Artaud”, Trans. Bettina Knapp, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 9, No. 3, Spring 1965, pp. 110-111.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, p. 160.

Who am I?  
Whence do I come?  
I am Antonin Artaud  
and I proclaim it  
as loud as I know how  
instantaneously  
you'll see my real body  
shatter  
and reassemble  
in ten thousand shining shapes  
a new body  
in which you will never be able  
to forget me. <sup>1</sup>

Of course, his body did not burst into unforgettable fragments when he died. However, there was one thing which did: It was his work which made him remain engraved on our minds.

---

<sup>1</sup> Claude Schumacher, Brian Singleton (eds. and trans.), *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 234.



### 3. AFTER ARTAUD

With the end of the nineteenth century, the relationship between the artist and madness emerged as a widespread area of research. This issue which was brought to light by personalities such as Sade, Nietzsche, Nerval, Hölderlin and van Gogh, finds life in Artaud. Is madness the power to create? Was the artist inspired? Or, did he experience hallucinations? According to the French philosopher Michel Foucault:

Artaud's madness does not slip through the fissures of the work of art; his madness is precisely the *absence of the work of art*, the reiterated presence of that absence, its central void experienced and measured in all its endless dimensions. ... Madness is the absolute break with the work of art; it forms the constitutive moment of abolition, which dissolves in time the truth of the work of art; it draws the exterior edge, the line of dissolution, the contour against the void.<sup>1</sup>

For Foucault, Artaud, whose life was a struggle between creativity and insanity, represents a certain relationship between art and madness; he is a part of the tradition of artists and writers who succumb to madness. To an extent, Artaud's name is a kind of key for Foucault. Although nourished by the same source, there is a dividing line between madness and the work of art. In his essay *La Parole Soufflée*,<sup>2</sup> Derrida pointed to the aim of Artaud:

In pursuit of a manifestation which would not be an expression but a pure creation of life, which would not fall far from the body then to decline into a sign or a work, an object, Artaud attempted to destroy a history, the history of the dualist metaphysics...: the duality of the body and the soul which supports, secretly of course, the duality of speech and existence, of the text and the body, etc... Beating his flesh in order to reawaken it at the eve prior to the deportation, Artaud attempted to forbid that his speech be spirited away from his body.<sup>3</sup>

In order for our word to be whispered to us, first of all, we have to be deprived of the word. Before uttering a word, Artaud finds the word, says it to himself, then without any interruption, he approves and says it: It is as if another person is whispering the word to the speaker before the speaker utters it. After this process has taken place, the word uttered carries no sign of the process. The whisperer, after doing all these, also steals the memories

---

<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Trans. Richard Howard, pp. 272-273.

<sup>2</sup> This can be translated into English as "The Stolen Word".

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alan Bass, pp. 219-220.

of what had happened and returns to the place he has come from. Therefore, the thief has also stolen the theft. It seems that there is a thief stealing before Artaud. But who is this thief? Where does he come from? In *La Parole Soufflée*, Derrida asks about this thief:

And who could the thief be if not the great invisible Other, the furtive persecutor who *doubles* me everywhere, that is, redoubles and surpasses me, always arrives before me where I have chosen to go, like “the body which pursued me” (persecuted me) “and did not follow” (preceded me) – who could he be if not God? <sup>1</sup>

Derrida, just like Artaud, asks existential questions. In his essay *The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation*, the famous deconstructionist quotes Lichtenberger:

I cannot rid myself of this idea that I was *dead* before I was born, and that through death I will return to this very state. ... To die and to be reborn with the memory of one’s former existence is called fainting; to awaken with other organs which must first be reeducated is called birth. <sup>2</sup>

In the same essay, immediately after, Derrida turns to Artaud’s case, even quoting a line from Artaud’s *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society*:

For Artaud, the primary concern is not to die in dying, not to let the thieving god divest him of his life. “And I believe that there is always someone else, at the extreme moment of death, to strip us of our own lives.” <sup>3</sup>

Derrida, in his piece of writing entitled *To Unsense the Subjectile* – in *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud* – reads Artaud’s drawings as pictographs, writings which are also drawings and vice versa. The focus is the cluster of images, texts, portraits and sketches of Artaud. Derrida sees them as a continuation of Artaud’s concerns with signifying practices.

The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and the psychoanalyst Félix Guattari’s 1972 work *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie: L’Anti-Oedipe (Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia)* gives us a lot about Artaud. In it, they develop their concept of the BwO, “body without organs”, <sup>4</sup> their term for changing social body of desire. In their 1980 work, *A Thousand*

---

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alan Bass, p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> A term borrowed from Artaud’s *To Have Done With the Judgment of God*.

*Plateaus*, they differentiate between three kinds of BwO: cancerous, empty, and full. The body without organs is a chastised body. In his radio play *To Have Done With the Judgment of God*, Artaud proposed a kind of Dionysian castration, and God turns up on an autopsy table as a dissected organ taken from the mankind's defective corpse:

– By placing him again, for the last time, on the autopsy table to remake his anatomy.  
I say, to remake his anatomy.  
Man is sick because he is badly constructed.  
We must make up our minds to strip him bare in order to scrape off that animalcule that itches him mortally,

god,  
and with god  
his organs.

For you can tie me up if you wish,  
but there is nothing more useless than an organ.

When you will have made him a body without organs,  
then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom.<sup>1</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari discuss schizophrenia and Artaud's case:

*Artaud makes a shambles of psychiatry, precisely because he is schizophrenic and not because he is not. Artaud is the fulfillment of literature, precisely because he is schizophrenic and not because he is not. It has been a long time since he broke down the wall of the signifier: Artaud the Schizo.”*<sup>2</sup>

In her 1972 essay *The Subject in Process*, Julia Kristeva looks at Artaud's language: Artaud's splintered and fractured writings show multiplicity, and his texts are expressive, elusive and compressed.

Apart from the philosophy after Artaud, the theatre after Artaud deserves equal attention and, therefore, is worthy of discussing under this title. He is the father of the avant garde theatre. He can be thought of as a sun, each ray of which shines on a different theatrical man. His

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, pp. 570-571.

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Part 2: "Psychoanalysis and Familialism: The Holy Family", Trans. Robert Hurley and Mark Seem, p. 135.

theory of the theatre of cruelty influenced Albert Camus, Jacques Audiberti, Jack Gelber, Peter Weiss, Roger Blin, Jean Vilar, Edward Bond, Caryl Churchill, and many others.

Elements of the theatre of cruelty are present in the abusive language of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*; in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *The Zoo Story*; in the Surrealist eroticism of Fernando Arrabal's *Fando et Lis (Fando and Lis)*; in the masked utterances and enigmatic silences of Harold Pinter's "Comedies of Menace"; and in the ritualistic aspects of Jean Genet's plays, which are about vice, Catholicism, gay sex, crime, and moral decay. The dangerous games in Genet's *Les Bonnes (The Maids)* owe Artaud a great deal. Eugene Ionesco's emphasis on the fragility of the commonsense world, and the ever-growing corpse in his *Amédée* are all Artaudian. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is the story of our own abortive efforts, our own fruitless search for meaning. The room with the tiny windows and the dustbins and the wheelchair in Beckett's *Endgame* may be described as Artaudian. Artaud's anarchic humour can be found in Peter Shaffer's epic *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*: The proto-Tarahumarian lord of the sun, Atahualpa, is crushed by the Spanish conquistador, Pizarro. The immense influence Artaud's theories exerted over the theatre in the second half of the twentieth century is self-evident. The manifestos of theatre of cruelty became something like a bible for the avant garde theatre artists. "Happenings" descended from the work of Artaud.

"Everything you do is based on Artaud!"<sup>1</sup> This was what others said to Jerzy Grotowski. Like Artaud, he placed great emphasis on gesture, breath and emotional expression; he used incantation; he extracted maximum expressiveness from the body; he insisted on the abandonment of the conventional theatre architecture; he set the action all around the audience; and he believed in the theatre as a metaphysical force. Grotowski's "poor theatre" was a theatre of ceremony in which the actors' physicality, spirit and behaviour had a direct impact on the spectator's psyche. He wanted an immersion in the theatre as a holy rite and a quasi-religious practice. In his 1966 production *The Constant Prince*, he stripped the text down as Artaud had proposed, and his actor, Ryszard Cieslak, was genuinely humiliated, put

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Brook, *The Shifting Point*, p. 41.

in danger, and made to feel the pain of the flagellation. In his essay entitled *He Wasn't Entirely Himself*,<sup>1</sup> Grotowski wrote about the “great theatre-poet”, visionary and prophet: “We are entering the age of Artaud. The ‘theatre of cruelty’ has been canonised”.<sup>2</sup> “His chaos was an authentic image of the world.”<sup>3</sup>

In Poland, apart from Grotowski, the painter and scenic designer Tadeusz Kantor used Artaudian techniques. He was the founder of the “Theatre of Death”; and his macabre *The Death Class* was striking. His group *Cricot II* worked on pseudo-Surrealist performances.

In France, Jean-Louis Barrault’s works took the technical features of the theatre of cruelty. On Artaud’s approach of “affective athleticism”, he developed the theory of “total theatre”. His performances of Claudel depend on stage movement and cosmic symbolism. It was Artaud who introduced Barrault to Eastern mysticism, Indian mythology, yoga, and to the *Cabala*. Barrault’s 1974 *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* was a product of his Artaudian ideas. According to Barrault, Artaud was “the metaphysician of the theatre”.

In 1970, Ariane Mnouchkine’s *Théâtre du Soleil* turned a powder mill into a theatre in Paris which emphasized Artaud’s idea of abandoning conventional theatre buildings. In *1789* and *1793*, and *L’Age d’Or*, there were multi-focused spectacles in an unstructured space where the audience moved from one place to another. For *1789*, Mnouchkine created a circle of stages surrounding the audience who stood in the middle.

In his piece of writing entitled *Saint Artaud*, Weightman stressed the Artaudian influence in Roger Planchon’s “playing down of language in favour of stage-business”.<sup>4</sup> Jacques Lecoq’s *International Theatre School* explored the body in space. Inspired by the last recordings of Artaud, Henri Chopin and François Dufrêne worked on the body’s noises and circulatory movements. It was the end of the 1940s when Chopin heard a clandestine copy of *To Have*

---

<sup>1</sup> The phrase is taken from Artaud’s diagnosis of his own condition. In a letter to Rivière, Artaud had defined his situation, saying “I am not entirely myself.”

<sup>2</sup> Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Ed. Eugenio Barba, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>4</sup> John Weightman, *The Concept of the Avant-Garde: Explorations in Modernism*, p. 152.

*Done With the Judgment of God*. He wanted to know about the vocal origins of his body, so, he had a microphone passed down through his throat to record his cries from their source. Unfortunately, the microphone became stuck, and he suffered internal damage. His work with the *Sound Poetry* group and his magazine *OU* were fruitful in their research into the body and its most direct movement, the cry. Pierre Guyotat's fictional works included elements of extreme obscenity and prostitutional sexuality. His 1970 novel *Éden, Éden, Éden* was censored, and he was subjected to abuse and political attacks. For him, writing is a violent physical secretion, and "a raw exudation of physical material, a creative expectoration of deadly substances."<sup>1</sup> The film-maker Jean-Luc Godard, and the artists Maurice Bejart and Pierre Boulez have also acknowledged Artaud.

The influence of Artaud is apparent in the works of some Latin-American directors active in France: Jorge Lavelli, Jérôme Savary and Victor Garcia. Lavelli worked with magical effects of sound and light. Savary developed *Le Grand Magic Circus* with its spectacular effects and its ritualistic intensity, and combined elements of circus and ritual, fiction and reality. Garcia used swivelling seats for a production of Arrabal's *Le Cimetière de Voitures (Cemetery for Abandoned Cars)*, and made the action take place around the spectators.

In America, *The Performance Group* of Richard Schechner explored ritual drama, and the kinds of religious performance in primitive cultures. *The Open Theatre* of Joseph Chaikin experimented with abstract, non-verbal communication with explorations of dreams and myth. The company's Artaudian works were *The Serpent* and *America Hurrah*, both by Jean-Claude van Itallie; *Viet Rock* by Megan Terry; and *A Dream Play* by Strindberg. *The Serpent* was based on the biblical book of Genesis. Other Artaud-inspired groups were *La Mama Troupe*; and Peter Schumann's *The Bread and Puppet Theatre* which used giant puppets, supermarionettes. Charles Bukowski, an alcoholic Los Angeles poet and novelist staying in inexpensive rooming houses, was also heavily influenced by Artaud. His favourite subjects were the drunken, the destitute, the degraded, and the debauched. He depicted alcoholics, drug addicts, criminals, and prostitutes. In Robert Wilson's performances, there are "people

---

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, p. 4.

who do not talk so much, historical figures who appear like dream creatures, gigantic or miniature objects in story dimensions, bean trees, talking animals.”<sup>1</sup> At the end of the 1960s, Jim Morrison – the lead singer of the rock group *The Doors* – made use of Artaudian elements. The Canadian Robert Lepage’s use of technology also has Artaudian resonances.

In Britain, the work of Charles Marowitz’s *Open Space Theatre* was striking. Marowitz worked on montaged Shakespeare shows in which the text was cut and reordered to form disturbing juxtapositions. Works by the *People Show*, the *Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre (CAST)*, the *Kartoon Klowns*, Ed Berman, and Spike Milligan were Artaud-inspired. The *Pip Simmons Theatre Group* staged *The George Jackson Black and White Minstrel Show*: Spectators were encouraged to buy blacked-up white actors as slaves, to whom they were then chained. *An die Musik* was about Jewish musicians in concentration camps. At the command of their whip-wielding German masters, they were forced to play music by Mozart and Beethoven. The performances of *Welfare State International Group* were visual and aural epic poems, but virtually without words. Fantasy was used by the *Forced Entertainment Group* of Tim Etchells. In 2003, Peter Sellers staged a version of *To Have Done With the Judgment of God* at Tate Modern in London.

In Germany, Georg Baselitz drew his *Pandemonium* manifestos of 1961-1962 from the furious power of Artaud’s Surrealist manifestos and open letters. Julian Schnabel used a self-portrait of Artaud in his 1981 painting *Starting to Sing: Artaud*. Pina Bausch’s *Bluebeard* seems to have embodied what Artaud wrote about. In music, Blixa Bargeld of the Berlin group *Einstürzende Neubauten* is attracted to the movement towards violent fragmentation in Artaud’s work. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, whose films show darkness, blood and shock, dedicated his film about identity duplication and social alienation – *Despair* – to Artaud.

In Italy, Dario Fo and Luca Ronconi were the ones who showed Artaudian characteristics. Ronconi’s *Orlando Furioso* was presented in a huge hall with two set stages, and the

---

<sup>1</sup> Aysin Candan, *Yirminci Yüzyilda Öncü Tiyatro*, p. 209. This is my own translation. In Candan, it writes “Oyunlarında varlık gösteren figürler, az konuşan insanlar, düs yaratığı gibi beliren tarihsel kisilikler, masal boyutlarında dev ya da minyatür nesnelere, fasulye ağaçları, konuşan hayvanlardır.”

audience milled about between them. Many scenes appeared on specially constructed carts. There were strange fabricated monsters flying through the air, giant dragons being cut in half, and giant puppets of horses. Using physical reality, the film-maker Michelangelo Antonioni produced metaphysical drama.

In Spain, Antonio Buero Vallejo owed a great debt to Artaud in three of his plays: *Today's a Holiday*, *The Sleep of Reason*, and *The Concert at Saint Ovide*. In Austria, three of Peter Handke's works – *The Lesson*, *Deathwatch*, and *Offending the Audience* – have some Artaudian qualities.

The Japanese dance pioneered by Tatsumi Hijikata, *Butoh*, is Artaudian in its painfully contorted imagery of the dancing anatomy. Its violent and erotic manipulations of chance and metamorphosis are based on Artaud's vocal movements and screams. The dancer Sumako Koseki said: "Butoh is Artaud's voice at the end of his life."<sup>1</sup>

Other than these Artaudian influences, we have two prominent points to discuss in terms of the Artaud-inspiration: The work of *The Living Theatre* and the work of the British director Peter Brook.

### 3.1 THE WORK OF THE LIVING THEATRE

When I was six years old, I had eaten the tissue in my hand during a performance of Hensel and Gretel at the Metropolitan Opera. It was an opera mostly based on food, huts from candies, children who are hungry, crumbs of bread, Hensel and Gretel being set to fatten by a witch who eats children. According to my father, I should have eaten the tissue because of my anger; sure he was right, but I was eating a tasteless horrible tissue for the purpose of doing something with Gretel.<sup>2</sup>

These words – implying audience participation – were uttered by Julian Beck who founded *The Living Theatre* in 1947 together with his wife, Judith Malina. The nomad group, which

---

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, Introduction, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Aziz Çalışlar (Haz. ve Çev.), *20. Yüzyılda Tiyatro*, Ed. Manfred Brauneck, p. 353. This is my own translation. In Çalışlar, Julian Beck's words are translated into Turkish as: "Altı yasımdayken Hensel ile Gretel'in Metropolitan Opera'daki bir gösterimi sırasında elimdeki kağıt mendili yiye yiye bitirmistim. Ağirlikli olarak yemek üstüne kurulmuş bir operaydı, sekerden kulübeler, aç çocuklar, ekme kırıntıları, Hensel ile Gretel'in çocukları yiyen bir cadı tarafından besiyeye çekilmeleri. Babama göre mendili sinirimden yemis olmalıydım; haklıydı da, ama ben Hensel ile beraber bir şey yapmak için, tatsiz tutsuz korkunç kağıt mendili yiyordum."



led a collective life, consisted of some thirty men and women who lived together, made love, produced children, and did physical and spiritual exercises. In 1958, Beck and Malina read *The Theater and Its Double* and they found what they had been looking for. Beck's own words explicitly show the Artaudian concern of their work:

With obstinate devotion we believe in the theater as a place of intense experience, half-dream, half-ritual, in which the spectator approaches something of a vision of self-understanding, going past the conscious to the unconscious, to an understanding of the nature of all things.<sup>1</sup>

Their theatre as a rite of purgation, their emphasis on audience participation, their anarchist views, their flamboyant style of performance based around cacophony, and their rejection of verbal texts for physical language are all Artaudian. In their theatre, audiences were even harassed. Beck wrote about Artaud's impact upon him in his book *The Life of the Theatre*. According to the Becks:

Life is not suspended in the theatre. The actor breathes, the spectator lives. In the theatre life is intensified.... We seek a style of acting that will produce revelation.... A performance is an act of love in which the playwright, actor, and theatre artist expose themselves, body and spirit, under ordeal, at great risk, to produce catharsis and enlightenment for an anonymous audience.<sup>2</sup>

A short analysis of the landmark achievements of *The Living Theatre* will reveal the Artaudian elements lying in the background.

### **3.1.1 The Connection**

For their 1959 production of Jack Gelber's *The Connection*, Beck used Artaud's essay *The Theater and Culture* in the programme note. Beck had painted a mural of two pyramids, palm trees, and a winged surrealist eye. There was a group of drug addicts, including four jazz musicians, who were waiting for their connection, Cowboy, to come with heroin. Act I was about the waiting; in act II, Cowboy came and the addicts shot up and got high. The hyper-realistic view of drug pushers and addicts – needles shooting into arms – was too much to watch. Leach, one of the characters, shot up in full view of the audience and overdosed.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jack Poggi, *Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces 1870-1967*, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> Charles L. Mee, Jr., "The Becks' Living Theatre", *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Winter 1962, p. 199.

Over the run of the show, fifty spectators – interestingly, all men – fainted or left the theatre. The technique, that was borrowed from jazz, opened the door for non-speech sounds and music-like speech. Some observers claimed that real heroin was used at times. As Oscar G. Brockett says “all effects from the beginning to the end were a part of real life.”<sup>1</sup> According to Beck:

If there was to be real speech, then there had to be real profanity; the word “shit” would have to be said, not once but again and again and again until the audience ears got used to it.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.1.2 The Brig

Kenneth H. Brown’s *The Brig*, their 1963 play, was set in a brutally run and dehumanizing Marine Corps prison where the prisoners genuinely suffered the sadism of the prison guards. No prisoner could speak except to his guards. On the floor, the prisoners were sitting between the white lines drawn with chalk. No prisoner could cross any white border without permission. The play portrayed a world of constraints: Everything was done within a framework of order and obedience. “In order to get the actors to fully feel the sadistic terms of their confinement, Judith required them to read *The Guidebook for Marines*, ‘the acme of the venerable line of study manuals designed to teach men to kill and function in battle situations.’ ”<sup>3</sup> In Christopher Innes words, “humiliation, physical punishment, isolation and depersonalization are intrinsic parts of this particular play’s logic”.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.1.3 Mysteries

The title of their 1964 play, *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces*, “was invented by Malina as a reference to the Eleusian mysteries of ancient Greece.”<sup>5</sup> There was no set; and the stage was bare. The play, which consisted of nine distinct ritual games, started with a silent and

---

<sup>1</sup> Oscar G. Brockett, *Tiyatro Tarihi*, Yay. Haz. İnönü Bayramoğlu, Çev. Sevinç Sokullu, Sibel Dinçel, Tülin Sağlam, Semih Çelenk, Selda B. Öndül, Beliz Güçbilmez, p. 590. This is my own translation. In the source, it writes “Bastan sona tüm efektler dogal hayatın bir parçasıydı.”

<sup>2</sup> Arnold Aronson, *American Avant-garde Theatre: A History*, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> John Tytell, *The Living Theatre: Art, Exile and Outrage*, p. 182.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre*, p. 183.

<sup>5</sup> Arnold Aronson, *American Avant-garde Theatre: A History*, p. 70.

motionless actor staring at the audience. In rigid military posture, this actor was waiting for audience reaction to begin the play. After about six minutes in which nothing happened, the audience started shouting at the immobile figure, even throwing things. Then the performers began to jog down the aisle onto the stage. Some actors who were scattered throughout the theatre recited the “Dollar Poem”, an abstract poem derived from the words and numbers on a dollar bill. A woman accompanied by guitar began to chant an Indian raga. The next section was “The Odiferie”. The actors had sticks of glowing incense; then they moved through the auditorium. After this came “Street Songs”, an incantatory poem. In the final section, the performers, who sat cross-legged, passed a roll of toilet paper among themselves, they blew their noses to clear the breathing passages, and they began a yoga chant.

Part II began with the “Tableaux vivants”, in which the performers assumed different postures inside four wooden compartments, while their faces expressed different emotions. The last section was inspired by Artaud’s essay *The Theater and the Plague*: In dim light, the actors clutched their bodies, sputtered, blubbered, groaned, gasped, and writhed on the ground as if in the grips of the plague. In tears, the actors salivated, staggered, and shuddered. Like medieval doctors during the plague crisis, six actors removed the shoes of the actors, lined them up at the front of the stage,<sup>1</sup> and piled the corpses into a pyramid. The actors were kicked or abused to try to get the corpses to move, and once Malina’s hair was even set on fire. In Amsterdam, the audience members wanted to get the corpses respond by burning them with cigarettes and even throwing an actor into a canal adjacent to the theatre.

### **3.1.4 Frankenstein**

A “leap into the abyss of our own helplessness,” *Frankenstein* was an attempt to cut what Julian called the “evil madness” of the world that was in all human hearts and to “hang it up in the public square which is our theatre.”<sup>2</sup>

The members of the company had discussions about violence in society, its reflection in horror films, and the capacity of science to turn people to devils. They worked on Artaud’s outline scenario *The Conquest of Mexico*, which emphasized the sensory effect of cries,

---

<sup>1</sup> An image that calls to mind the Nazi death camps.

<sup>2</sup> John Tytell, *The Living Theatre: Art, Exile and Outrage*, p. 211.

groans, apparitions, lighting effects, and the use of masks and surprising objects. Their 1965 adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* opened with a half-hour of silence, during which the actors try to make a woman levitate. When the levitation fails, she is thrust into a coffin, and carried in a funeral procession. An actor shouts "No!", and he is hung. Others are executed in an electric chair and a gas chamber, by guillotine, firing squad, and crucifixion.

The body of the Monster – which symbolizes the ego of modern man – is formed by the bodies of some twenty actors clinging to the scaffolding; and two red eyes are added to this impression. The twenty-foot setting of tubular scaffolding built in three tiers changes from the laboratory in which the Monster is brought to life, to the inside of the Monster's head. This again changes to a prison which represents the world itself. In act III, prisoners are caught in the auditorium and placed in the spaces formed by the scaffolding as if in cells. The actors search the spectators with flashlights for other actors, whom they arrest. When the prisoners revolt, Dr Frankenstein starts a fire. The prisoners form the giant Frankenstein monster who lurches toward the spectators, the symbol of civilisation menacing itself.

### 3.1.5 Paradise Now

To discover the feeling, the first step was Artaud's declaration that the texts had to be burned, that the theatre of intellect had to be abandoned, that the actor would have to find feeling through inner resources. For *Paradise Now*, Julian wanted to devise a form that could allow the release of spontaneous creative forces which could transform audiences and society.<sup>1</sup>

For their 1968 production of *Paradise Now*, the company discussed texts such as the *I Ching*, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and the *Cabala*, and worked on meditation, yoga and daily exercises. The play began with "The Rite of Guerrilla Theatre". A catalogue of prohibitions were heard: "I am not allowed to smoke marijuana", "I am not allowed to take my clothes off", etc. There was a "Rite of Universal Intercourse" in which the spectators joined the actors in naked bodies, all humming and caressing each other. The indecent exposure, the stripping off clothing, and the erotic ritual – love pile of bodies – were all shocking. According to Beck, sexual repression is the basis of violence, and the theatre, as Artaud

---

<sup>1</sup> John Tytell, *The Living Theatre: Art, Exile and Outrage*, p. 226.

envisaged it, was “created as an outlet for our repressions.”<sup>1</sup> In order to act as cheerleaders or provocateurs, the group moved out into the spectators. In Mitter’s words, “in *Paradise Now* the audience danced with an ecstasy little known in the theatre since the bacchanalian rites of ancient Greece.”<sup>2</sup>

### 3.2 THE WORK OF PETER BROOK

Artaud applied is Artaud betrayed: betrayed because it is always just a portion of his thought that is exploited, betrayed because it is easier to apply rules to the work of a handful of dedicated actors than to the lives of the unknown spectators who happened by chance to come through the theatre door.<sup>3</sup>

While looking for an Artaudian inspiration in the British theatre, a clear-cut answer comes from Irving Wardle who discusses the work of Peter Brook: “His 1964 Theatre of Cruelty season for the RSC<sup>4</sup> launched the age of Artaud on the British stage.”<sup>5</sup> For sure, there were others before Brook; but, in any case, more than any other in British theatre, Brook was responsible for bringing the ideas of Artaud into the theatrical arena:

Is there another language, just as exacting for the author, as a language of words? Is there a language of actions, a language of sounds – a language of word-as-part-of-movement, of word-as-lie, of word-as-parody, of word-as-rubbish, of word-as-contradiction, of word-shock or word-cry? If we talk of the more-than-literal, if poetry means that which crams more and penetrates deeper – is this where it lies? Charles Marowitz and I instituted a group with the Royal Shakespeare Theatre called the Theatre of Cruelty to investigate these questions and to try to learn for ourselves what a holy theatre might be.<sup>6</sup>

For Artaud, theatre was the double of life. Esslin shared this view when he said “drama is a mimesis of real life.”<sup>7</sup> In turn, Brook’s view was the same when he said “theatre is life.”<sup>8</sup> Brook, who said “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage”,<sup>9</sup> quite clearly shares one of the most famous Artaudian ideas: abandonment of the conventional stage. In James

---

<sup>1</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans. Mary Caroline Richards, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Shomit Mitter, Maria Shevtsova (eds.), *Fifty Key Theatre Directors*, p. 97.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> The acronym for the *Royal Shakespeare Company*.

<sup>5</sup> David Williams (comp.), *Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook*, Foreword, p. xiii.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Esslin, *The Field of Drama: How the Signs of Drama Create Meaning on Stage and Screen*, p. 176.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Brook, *Açık Kapı: Oyunculuk ve Tiyatro Üzerine Düşünceler*, Çev. Metin Balay, p. 13. In the source, it writes “Tiyatro yasamdır.”

<sup>9</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 9.

Roose-Evans' words, "that Brook's actors should perform on a carpet in the middle of the desert, or in a quarry outside Adelaide, is living proof of Artaud's vision."<sup>1</sup> Artaud had expressed his disinterest in conventional stages so insistently:

We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theater of the action. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle... from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it... Thus, abandoning the architecture of present-day theaters, we shall take some hangar or barn, which we shall have reconstructed according to processes which have culminated in the architecture of certain churches or holy places, and of certain temples in Tibet.<sup>2</sup>

Like Artaud's flute-player charming the cobra, Brook's actor, without words, is capable of making the other actors obey him:

An actor sits at one end of the room, facing the wall. At the other end another actor, looking at the first one's back, not allowed to move. The second actor must make the first one obey him. As the first one has his back turned, the second has no way of communicating his wishes except through sounds, for he is allowed no words. This seems impossible, but it can be done. It is like crossing an abyss on a tightrope...<sup>3</sup>

The "more violent, less rational, more extreme, less verbal, more dangerous"<sup>4</sup> theatre of Artaud was appealing for Brook. Even in Brook's 1985 work *The Mahabharata (Great Poem of the World)* – one of his career highlights – Artaudian moments were felt. "*The Mahabharata* achieved what Artaud craved when he saw Balinese dancers in Paris..., a theatre that 'has its origins in the dance...'"<sup>5</sup> However, in this part my focus will be on Brook's productions from 1962 to 1977 – *King Lear*, *The Screens*, *The Marat/Sade*, *US*, *Oedipus*, *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Orghast*, *The Ik*, and *Ubu aux Bouffes*.

### 3.2.1 King Lear

We need to look to Shakespeare. Everything remarkable in Brecht, Beckett, Artaud is in Shakespeare. For an idea to stick, it is not enough to state it: it must be burnt into our memories.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> James Roose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre: From Stanislavsky to Peter Brook*, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans. Mary Caroline Richards, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Eyre, Nicholas Wright, *Changing Stages: A View of British Theatre in the Twentieth Century*, p. 359.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Brook, *The Shifting Point*, p. 54.

In 1962, with his staging of Shakespeare's *King Lear* at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford, Brook started his concern with the issue of cruelty. In the play, Gloucester loses his eyes; Edgar loses his freedom; and Lear loses his senses and life. Like all tragedies, *King Lear* – which is full of elements of crime, love, war, and madness – produces a catharsis. In *The Theater and Cruelty*, Artaud had said:

Everything that acts is a cruelty. It is upon this idea of extreme action, pushed beyond all limits, that theater must be rebuilt... The theater must give us everything that is in crime, love, war, or madness, if it wants to recover its necessity.<sup>1</sup>

Lear, the elderly king of Britain, decides to divide his kingdom among his beloved daughters, and announces that the daughter who loves him the most will receive the biggest share of his property. The avaricious elder sisters, Goneril and Regan, eloquently, lie with exaggerated, embellished and flowery declarations of affection; but Cordelia modestly says that she loves him as a daughter should. In the grip of senility, Lear disinherits Cordelia, and goes insane; he flees to wander on a heath during a thunderstorm. Gloucester's illegitimate son, Edmund, lies by saying that his legitimate son, Edgar, is trying to kill him. Edgar disguises himself as a crazy "Bedlam" beggar, and calls himself "Poor Tom". Regan and her husband, Cornwall, discover Gloucester helping Lear, accuse him of treason, and pluck out his eyeballs. Edmund is romantically entangled with both Goneril and Regan. Goneril and Edmund conspire to kill Albany. Gloucester tries to commit suicide, but Edgar saves him by pulling the trick of leading him off an imaginary dizzy cliff. In his account *Lear Log*, Marowitz wrote about this:

A blind man, resolved to die, is led up a steep mountainside by one he takes to be a naked lunatic. The steep mountainside is, in reality, a flat field; the naked lunatic, his son. Arriving at what he takes to be the topmost point, the blind man leaps into what he takes to be a fathomless chasm, and falls in a faint two feet away from where he stood.<sup>2</sup>

The Edmund-led English defeat the Cordelia-led French. Edgar kills Edmund. We learn of the demise of Gloucester. Goneril poisons Regan because of jealousy over Edmund, and kills herself when her treachery is revealed to Albany. Edmund's betrayal of Cordelia results in her execution in prison. Eventually, enfeebled by Cordelia's death, Lear dies out of grief.

---

<sup>1</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans. Mary Caroline Richards, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> David Williams (comp.), *Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook*, p. 6.

### 3.2.2 1964: LAMDA <sup>1</sup> Theatre of Cruelty Season and “Cruel” Productions

After the production of *King Lear*, which foreshadowed the Theatre of Cruelty season, Brook and Marowitz formed a group of actors affiliated with the RSC. For twelve weeks, they explored the rhythms and inner feelings of the actors; and finally, they mounted a workshop demonstration which was presented at LAMDA: A version of Artaud’s *The Spurt of Blood*, Marowitz’s collage of *Hamlet*, and scenes from Genet’s *Les Paravents (The Screens)*. A foreshortened *Hamlet* with dislocated speeches and a Prince of Denmark swinging on a rope above its head did not mean much for the spectators. John Arden and Margaretta D’Arcy’s fantasy on education, sexuality, and militarism, *Ars Longa, Vita Brevis*, and Brook’s *The Public Bath* were also produced.

*The Spurt of Blood* was staged by Brook in 1964 in spite of the critic Eric Sellin’s comment: “This is as unstageable as it is unscientific. ... it is strangely static in essence and... reminds us more of a Max Ernst collage than a blueprint for dramatic action.” <sup>2</sup> It was shocking: A violent storm raging on the darkened stage, writhing actors on a platform, a flight of steps, a huge hand of God descending from above, and a gush of blood. <sup>3</sup> There was also a production which was perhaps the most striking of all: The staging of Peter Weiss’ *Marat/Sade*: <sup>4</sup> The peak of Brook’s career. In terms of the Artaudian elements present in the productions, *The Screens* and *The Marat/Sade* deserve special attention.

#### 3.2.2.1 The Screens

In May 1960, Brook – who thought Genet’s theatre was a prophetic theatre – had directed the first French production of Genet’s *Le Balcon (The Balcony)* at the *Théâtre de Gymnase* in Paris. *The Screens*, which was staged in 1964, was an experimental production of the first twelve scenes. Using coloured paints and chalks, the actors improvised emotional expression. The Algerians’ burning of the colonists’ orchards was shown by flames being painted on the

---

<sup>1</sup> The acronym for the *London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art Theatre Club*.

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Matthews, *Theatre in Dada and Surrealism*, p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> For more details about the plot of the Artaud sketch entitled *The Spurt of Blood*, see pp. 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> The full name of the play is *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*.



screens. The Arabs splashed flames on to the screens; and others created the sounds of crackling flames, at the same time crushing pieces of orange paper in their hands. Images of murder, rape, disembowelment, and expressions of fear were drawn, until the screens were covered with the scrawled images of evil. According to Williams, it was “a catalogue of horrors in a frenzied dance of death.”<sup>1</sup> Tom Milne wrote in *Encore* in July-August 1964: “The result is electrifying: naked hatred is present on the stage.”<sup>2</sup>

The play was a history of Algeria, its oppression, degradation and rebellion. Saïd’s salvation through degradation was reflected with relentlessness. The gigantic dummy literally covered with medals and ribbons, or the enormous glove imbued with his spirit which Sir Harold left in the fields to keep law and order in his absence, were absurd. The Algerian rebels burned, killed, and fought for freedom. Three soldiers farting a farewell to their dead Lieutenant was acted ceremoniously. Among the characters, there were also two whores: Warda and Malika.

### 3.2.2.2 The Marat/Sade

MARAT: I read in your books de Sade  
in one of your immortal works  
that the animating force of Nature is destruction  
and that our only instrument for measuring life is death<sup>3</sup>

The first English performance of Weiss’ *Marat/Sade* – a play-within-a-play – was at the Aldwych Theatre, London, on 20 August 1964. As Esslin says, “the company Brook had trained triumphed in the summer of 1964 in *Marat/Sade*.”<sup>4</sup> But, before focusing on the details of the production, it is crucial to have a look at *Marat/Sade*’s subject matter: As a part of the therapeutic treatment of the patients, Monsieur Coulmier – the liberal-minded, pre-Freudian director of the Charenton Asylum – established theatrical entertainments in his clinic. An inmate, the Marquis de Sade, wrote a play to be performed by himself and the other inmates: His play is set in 1793, during the bloodiest part of the French Revolution. The subject is the assassination of the revolutionary leader Jean Paul Marat by Charlotte Corday.

---

<sup>1</sup> David Williams (comp.), *Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook*, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Weiss, *Marat/Sade*, English version. Geoffrey Skelton, Verse Adaptation. Adrian Mitchell, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, pp. 229-230.

Charenton – as Weiss wrote in the *Author's Note on the Historical Background to the Play* – was the “hiding-place for the moral rejects of civilised society”.<sup>1</sup> And, Sade was an inmate of Charenton from 1803 until he died in 1814. In Paris, some people visited the asylum with the sole purpose of observing the “socially unacceptable” lunatics who threatened the ordered nature of the society. Weiss’ 1808 play – set in the communal bathhouse, the hydropathic part of the institution – showed the atmosphere of an asylum as a social microcosm. The play, which centred around the evil nature of man, was a representation of insanity.

Brook had advice from his brother Alexis, a consultant psychiatrist; and he visited asylums in London and Paris. In a television programme – in Jonathan Miller’s words – “in the course of talking about acting, he managed to say things about insanity that a qualified psychiatrist might have taken years to arrive at.”<sup>2</sup> He wanted the cast to see paintings by Breughel and Hogarth and etchings by Goya. They read articles on mental illness, and saw films – *Regard sur la Folie* and *Le Maître-Fous* – about madness. As J. C. Trewin quoted in his account, Brook wanted the players to “dig out the madman”<sup>3</sup> from themselves; and “we were all convinced that we were going loony”<sup>4</sup> said Glenda Jackson, the actress who played Corday.

Clive Revill played the paranoiac Jean Paul Marat; Patrick Magee played Marquis de Sade; and Robert Lloyd played the former priest, the radical Socialist Jacques Roux. Ian Richardson, who played the herald, was gay and detached. Richard Peaslee’s sour music was played by a quintet of musicians; and there was a choric quartet of singers in coloured sacks, comic red hats, and clown-like masks. The stage was almost bare; and the walls were grey and sickly. Tin cans were used for sound effects; and paint – red and blue – was used for blood. On 23 August, Alan Brien described the setting in the *Sunday Telegraph*:

A towering windowless silo walled with tiny bricks and booby-trapped with sunken pits. Among the inmates with their padded clothes and sunken faces, the devil-worshipping priests and burned-out whores, the lecherous ex-aristos and the lethargic ex-rebels, the childish volutaries and the aged virgins, move the black-eyed nuns and the muscle-bound warders.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Weiss, *Marat/Sade*, Trans. Geoffrey Skelton, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> David Williams (comp.), *Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook*, p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Artaud had stressed the importance of the body's concrete physical language over verbal language and abstract thought. In Brook's production, the striking thing was the visual effect and – in Milton Shulman's words – the “debris of souls from some private hell.”<sup>1</sup> The wretched inmates – who were dressed in pale, grey, ragged and shapeless uniforms – wandered on the stage; they turned in circles, hopped, crouched, muttered, wailed and screamed. Some were bandaged; some were cripples; and some had twitches. According to a mental specialist, “it was hard to credit that the actors had not been coached by someone who had worked in chronic mental wards for many years, so resolute was their acting.”<sup>2</sup>

Marat, who was crowned as a premature Bonaparte, stood like an emperor; but he writhed in a bathtub, swathed in bandages to ease the pain of his skin disease. The activist and assassin Corday was played by a somnambulist. Duperret the deputy was an erotomaniac. When his hands reached for Corday's skirt, he had to be held back by warders. When he advanced towards her, he was held back by the chains which clank from his wrists. Sade was fat and asthmatic. Jacques Roux could move only within the limits of his straitjacket. The inmates – who did not want to be locked in as prisoners – shouted their political slogans for freedom, and they attacked the guards. Their words echoed Artaud's desire to be freed from Rodez.

In J. C. Trewin's words, “the chalky clothing, the writhing limbs, the hysteria, the grimacing, the lolling heads, the whirr and thud of the guillotine, the buckets of blood, the schizoids and cretins, eroto-maniacs and manic-depressives, the faces peering from the hidden baths, and Charlotte Corday's use of her hair to whip the naked Sade” were unforgettable.<sup>3</sup> The production was of “‘extreme urgency’ in confronting the darker aspects of human reality”.<sup>4</sup> In the brilliant review Albert Hunt wrote in *Peace News* in September 1964, he said that a herald in a blue uniform acted as “a master of ceremonies”.<sup>5</sup> The production – which included hallucinations, paroxysms, executions, whippings, cries, moans, and a surprising use of make-up – was the portrayal of the violence latent within people.

---

<sup>1</sup> David Williams (comp.), *Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook*, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

In her introduction to *Marat/Sade*, Gill Lamden quoted a critic for the *Time Magazine* who described the performance as “a hypodermic needle plunged directly into the playgoer’s emotional bloodstream. It hypnotises the eye and bruises the ear. It shreds the nerves; it vivisects the psyche – and it may scare the living daylight out of more than a few playgoers.”<sup>1</sup> In Brook’s words, “everything about this play is designed to crack the spectator on the jaw, then douse him with ice-cold water, then force him to assess intelligently what has happened to him, then give him a kick in the balls, then bring him back to his senses again.”<sup>2</sup> In Brook’s 1967 film production, the patients took control of the institution, and the spectators climbed bars to get a better view of the rape as Sade laughed with pleasure.

### 3.2.3 US

“If a play does not make us lose our balance, the evening is unbalanced.”<sup>3</sup> said Brook in 1965; and in October 1966, after fifteen weeks of rehearsal, *US* was presented at the Aldwych. A semi-naked person undergoing torture represented Vietnam. For the division of Vietnam into two parts, there was a ritualized scene: The top half of the actor’s body was painted one colour, the bottom half another. This actor writhed in pain on a sheet of paper which was later torn in two: The graphic dismemberment of a nation. The immolation of Buddhist monks and Quaker pacifists, and the burning of a live butterfly were all violent. Butterflies were released from a box to flutter into the auditorium. With ceremonial slow-motion, an actor reached into the box to pick out another. He proceeded to burn it with a lighter. A number of spectators stood up and protested at this point. Although the sacrificed butterfly was only a crumpled piece of white paper, it had pricked the subconscious.

### 3.2.4 Oedipus

I am reading Seneca... he seems to me to be the greatest tragic writer in history... I weep as I read his inspired theater, and beneath the sound of the syllables I hear sizzling hideously the transparent surge of the forces of chaos. ... There is no better *written* example of what can be meant by cruelty in the theater than *all* the Tragedies of Seneca...<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Weiss, *Marat/Sade*, p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Brook, *The Shifting Point*, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> David Williams (comp.), *Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook*, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 307.

This was what Artaud wrote in a letter to Paulhan on 16 December 1932. In Brook's 1968 production of Seneca's *Oedipus* at the National Theatre Company, John Gielgud played Oedipus; Irene Worth played Jocasta; Colin Blakely played Creon; and Frank Wylie played Tiresias. In an interview with the journalist Margaret Croyden, Blakely described the event:

If you listen to the play – blood, torn eyeballs, torn insides, and torn gizzards are mentioned about every five seconds for two hours. Death, disaster, plague, sickness, horror are the main ingredients of the play... In fact, I wondered whether it was right to perform this in front of people. In one of the speeches – the one in which the slave describes Oedipus' tearing his eyes out – people in the audience became physically ill, and the St John Ambulance Brigade was always on hand ready to carry people out.<sup>1</sup>

Brook's agonizing production, which counts as theatre of cruelty, made thematic use of Artaud's metaphor: a city devastated by plague. In the obscenity rehearsals, they worked on Oedipus killing Laius, and Oedipus copulating with Jocasta. The costumes were dark slacks and dark brown pullovers. To denote blindness, Gielgud was fitted with black eye-patches. Worth and Gielgud both had mask-like faces. At times, sounds and movements were used instead of verbal language; and blinding lights were used to create a miraculous impression.

The production, which emphasized the violent and irrational side of life, was a sacrificial rite, and a religious ceremony. The primitive rhythmic orchestration, which was compared to "The Rite of Spring", was hypnotic. An enormous cube of gold revolved, and the chorus produced the rhythmical drumming. The speeches were patterned on tribal chants including African shamans, Tibetan monks and South-American Indians. The archetypal sounds of the ritual were derived from the recordings of the voices of shamans and priests of primitive tribes. There were rhythms of breathing derived from recordings of a witchdoctor in a trance; there was the trance of a voodoo session; and there was a Bacchic dance which was modelled on the "Maori haka": a ritual of aggression symbolizing the destruction of an enemy. When he told how he met the bloodstained ghost of Laios, Blakely – as Martin Esslin wrote in his review *Oedipus Complex* in *Plays and Players* in May 1968 – whirled round "like a spinning top, like a dancing dervish".<sup>2</sup> Louise Purnell, as Tiresias' daughter, writhed on the floor

---

<sup>1</sup> David Williams (comp.), *Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook*, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

when she talked to her blind father about the slaughtered animal. The appearance of a giant seven-foot golden phallus was shocking. Accompanied by a Dixieland band playing *Yes, We Have No Bananas* – musical phallic symbolism – the cast danced around the “maypole”<sup>1</sup> in glittering gold costumes. Caught up with the jazz, the spectators joined in the festivities.

### 3.2.5 The Tempest

Artaud found confirmation for his theories in Oriental theatre, in the life of Mexico, in the myths of Greek tragedies, and above all in the Elizabethan theatre.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after the opening of *Oedipus* in London, Brook accepted an invitation from the director of the *Théâtre des Nations*, Barrault, to work in Paris. It was May 1968. *The Tempest*, an exploration of the anarchic and primitive side of human nature, was performed in the Round House in London. The lights were on, at full blast and white. Many spectators sat in the highest planks of the scaffolding. The actors displayed archetypal masks which were made with facial muscles. There were animal sounds, grunts, moans, howls, whispers, intonations, and gibberish. Prospero wore a white Karate suit. Ariel evoked the storm; he used the sleeves of his kimono as wings with which he called forth the spirits. His voice – a combination of Japanese and non-verbal sounds – and Noh foot movements evoked the wind, rain and thunder. In the crash of the ship, percussion instruments were used.

Miranda and Ferdinand fell in love, and made love; and this was homosexually mimicked by Caliban and Ariel. Caliban and his mother Sycorax symbolized the violent forces of people. The monster-mother was an enormous woman who expanded her body to larger proportions. She gave a yell and Caliban, with a black sweater over his head, came from between her legs. Caliban raped Miranda and tyrannized the island. There was a wild orgy. Caliban stood on his head, legs spread; and Sycorax’s mouth was on his genitals. In Croyden’s words, fellatio, cunnilingus, all anal and oral intercourse showed “a monster-sexuality, a Dantesque phantasmagoria: the ‘Garden of Delights’ has been transformed into the ‘Garden of Hell’.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A maypole is a tall pole with long ribbons – narrow strips of cloth – fixed to the top of it, the ends of which people hold as they dance around the pole on 1 May.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Brook, *The Shifting Point*, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> David Williams (comp.), *Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook*, p. 140.

Prospero was captured, was wheeled in on a table, and was thrown to the floor; and they were on top of him, they bit him, sucked him, and chewed him. The image was homosexual rape, Caliban and Prospero in each other's arms. Obscene sounds – gulping, swallowing, choking, defecating, farting – were heard. Miranda's and Ferdinand's marriage ceremony was performed in Hebrew-Hippie-Japanese rites. At times, Hokey-Pokey dance was used.

### 3.2.6 A Midsummer Night's Dream

The raging rocks  
And shivering shocks  
Shall break the locks  
Of prison-gates;<sup>1</sup>

In Brook's 1970 production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the RSC, the anarchic exuberance, the acrobatic prowess, and the physical inventiveness and expressiveness were all Artaudian. Brook wanted the text to play the actors, rather than the actors play the text; what was done was more important than what was said. Over the eight-week rehearsal period, they used trapezes, stilts, ropes, plastic rods, spinning plates, tennis-balls, hoops, paper, string, and unfamiliar musical instruments. They held conversations without words, using the gymnastics of the circus tumbler as their vocabularies; and candles were used as the only source of light. Sally Jacobs, the designer, worked on light reflecting from various thicknesses of wire. The lovers were the pony-riders, the jugglers; the fairies were high-trapeze artistes; and the rustics were the clowns. In his review which was published in the *New York Times* on 13 October 1970, Marowitz said that Brook used Shakespeare's text "as a trampoline on which to display some dazzling effects."<sup>2</sup>

### 3.2.7 Orghast

Brook asked Ted Hughes for rhythmic syllables, and Hughes invented the particular language "Orghast" for the "fire of being", in metaphorical terms "the sun": The root "org" meant "life/being", and "ghast" meant "spirit/flame". In August 1971, *Orghast* was presented

---

<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, "A Midsummer Night's Dream", *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Act I, Scene II, p. 282.

<sup>2</sup> David Williams (comp.), *Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook*, p. 160.

at the Shiraz International Festival of Arts, in Persepolis, Iran. The material was a myth of creation compiled from the legends of Prometheus, Chronos devouring his children, and the sun-worshipping cults of Helios and Zoroaster. The play – which was a drama-opera, ritual, and ceremony – stemmed from some myths: the gift of fire, the massacre of the innocents, the imprisonment of the son by the father, the search for liberation through revenge, and the tyrant's destruction of his children. *Avesta* was used; and there were passages from Seneca's *Thyestes* and *Hercules Furens*. The actors relied increasingly on gestures; they did warm-up exercises on the mat in the hall; they had breathing exercises; and they explored the Greek, even when they did not understand the meaning, by using it conversationally, shouting, whispering, solo, and in chorus. There was a general dance in which some children joined.

### **3.2.8 The Ik**

Brook's 1975 production *Les Iks (The Ik)*, which represented the ultimate in human experience, was based on Colin Turnbull's partly anthropological study of an African tribe, *The Mountain People*. Brook showed the despair of a society, the harrowing reality of our time, and the breakdown of our humanity, of family bonds and human love. In the production at the Round House in London, nut-brown earth was spilt from burlap sacks on to the concrete floor. Children, who are thrown out of the family at the age of three, grow up with no allegiance to their family. When the parents are old, they are turned out by their children to die. Brook showed a boy ferreting in the earth and swallowing pebbles for nourishment. This boy was lured close to the fire by his mother who proffered food, then pulled it away, her son burned his hand on the fire, and she laughed. When they find food, they gobble it down secretly in order not to have to share it with members of their family; they see giving food to the old and dying as a waste; they gorge themselves sick on relief grain rather than give it to the poor; they build stockades to protect themselves from each other; they laugh at the misfortunes of the others; and they rarely mourn.

### **3.2.9 Ubu aux Bouffes**

FATHER UBU: ... I'm in favor of simply poisoning the king by slipping a little arsenic in his lunch. At the first nibble he'll drop dead, and then I'll be king.

...



CAPTAIN BORDURE: I'm of the opinion that we should give him one good stroke of the sword and slice him in two, lengthwise. <sup>1</sup>

A production of the virulent protest play *Ubu Roi* had actually been planned for the RSC's Theatre of Cruelty season in 1964, but had not materialized. Jarry's deliberately provocative play was an exaggerated reflection of the true nature of its audience. Ubu represented a grotesquely caricatured archetype of bourgeois vulgarity, stupidity and selfishness. We see the anti-humanism of his merciless greed for power, villainy, and human cowardice. He manifests the cynical sadism of man as beast following the logic of his basest instincts. In Brook's 1977 production, Jean-Claude Carrière worked in collaboration with Brook to create a composite "Ubu" entitled *Ubu aux Bouffes*, comprising elements from Jarry's four plays, *Ubu Roi*, *Ubu sur la Butte*, *Ubu Cocu*, and *Ubu Enchaîné*. In order to collect tax from the miserable and oppressed peasants, Ubu used rapacious methods. Various objects – bricks, sticks, spools, etc. – were used. Some of the peasants were crushed when the spool ran over them. An object was used to create a terrifying picture of a war machine. The Russian offensive and bombardments of Ubu's army were conveyed through the dropping of superballs from the balcony, these bombs bouncing on the floor and into the spectators. Toshi Tsuchitori's percussive accompaniment was magnificent.

---

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Jarry, "King Ubu", Eds. and Trans. Michael Benedikt and George E. Wellwarth, *Modern French Theatre: The Avant-Garde, Dada, and Surrealism: An Anthology of Plays*, pp. 12-13.

#### 4. THE ARTAUDIAN THEATRE OF SARAH KANE

The time we go on searching for Artaudian influences on the British stage, we come face to face with a great deal of Artaudian works although we encounter an assertion such as:

Artaud's influence has been very considerable, especially on the work of Adamov, Genet, Camus and Audiberti. English dramatists have not been affected anything like as much.<sup>1</sup>

While trying to find out an answer to the question whether this argument lost its value, the answer comes directly from the British playwright Sarah Kane. Here is her refutation, here is Kane talking about her work in relation to Artaud's:

It's pretty weird – because a lot of people said to me for a long time 'You must really like Artaud', and I hadn't read any of that. Artaud was recommended to me by a lecturer at university who I hated so much that I thought, 'Well I'm not going to read it if he thinks Artaud is good. He simply can't be'. So I only started reading him very recently. And the more I read it I thought, 'Now this is a definition of sanity; this man is completely and utterly sane and I understand everything he's saying'. And I was amazed on how it connects completely with my work. Also his writings about theatre are stunningly good. And it's amazing to me that I'd never read it.<sup>2</sup>

Being a playwright who committed suicide by hanging herself while staying at a hospital, Kane owes so much to the French sage Artaud. An excerpt from Artaud's awarded essay *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society* can be a good starting point to connect Artaud and Kane:

I myself spent nine years in an insane asylum and I never had the obsession of suicide, but I know that each conversation with a psychiatrist, every morning at the time of his visit, made me want to hang myself, realizing that I would not be able to cut his throat.<sup>3</sup>

In his lifetime, Artaud had connections with people who were in suicidal depression, namely Balthus and Varèse. Adamov, an intimate friend of Artaud, also committed suicide in 1970. Even in Artaud's death, his friends had suspected of Artaud's suicide by chloral hydrate. And, it was Artaud himself who wrote about the issue of suicide in *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society*:

---

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, p. 910, def. of "theatre of cruelty".

<sup>2</sup> Graham Saunders, *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, pp. 496-497.

... one does not commit suicide by oneself.  
No one has ever been born by oneself.  
No one dies by oneself either.

But, in the case of suicide, there must be an army of evil beings to cause the body to make the gesture against nature, that of taking its own life.

And I believe that there is always someone else at the moment of extreme death to strip us of our own life.<sup>1</sup>

“In the amorous realm, the desire for suicide is frequent: a trifle provokes it.”<sup>2</sup> But, what about the suicide of Kane? Although her five plays – *Blasted*, *Phaedra’s Love*, *Cleansed*, *Crave*, *4.48 Psychosis* – and one screenplay – *Skin* – are about love, they all display characters who attempt to commit suicide. Apart from the concept of “danger”, what else do they share? Here, let us recall Artaud’s remarks in *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society*:

There is in every lunatic a misunderstood genius whose idea, shining in his head, frightened people, and for whom delirium was the only solution to the strangulation that life had prepared for him.<sup>3</sup>

Can it be the extraordinary ideas shining in Kane’s head which led to her suicidal depression? Whether it be or not, without doubt, Artaud and Kane have certain things in common. It is evident that the technique they both use is not similar, but identical: shock treatment. To make the audience react emotionally, Kane bombards them with powerful images; and she never gives the audience a chance to calm down. “Frighteningly long silences interrupted his garbled ragings... from which one could only make out a few of the words he was yelling: ‘cunt, arse, masturbation, etc.’ ”<sup>4</sup> This was what Gide said about Artaud’s disastrous public speech on 13 January 1947. As it can be seen, even the words used by Artaud and Kane are the same. These all add up to the idea of cruelty, and by means of cruelty, catharsis. Like Artaud’s, Kane’s head is a raging cauldron of excessive feelings.

Artaud and Kane had volatile religious opinions. Artaud was a deeply devout practising Christian; but, at times, he was a blaspheming atheist. Kane was religious in her early years; but, later, she renounced religion saying “I committed the unforgivable sin, which is knowing

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 511.

<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, Trans. Richard Howard, p. 218.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, pp. 492-493.

<sup>4</sup> Claude Schumacher, Brian Singleton (eds. and trans.), *Artaud on Theatre*, p. 204.

that God is real and consciously deciding to reject Him... According to the Bible, I am now utterly damned.”<sup>1</sup> However, the violent, apocalyptic, and biblical imagery remained as a distinguishing characteristic of her work. Like Artaud, Kane’s concerns were existential and cosmic questions, the existence of God, suicide, damnation, and life after death.

Incest and intra-familial violence are the shared concerns of Artaud and Kane. If they are not related, what does this amount to? Artaud saw salvation in sexual excess; but sometimes, he regarded sexuality as the ultimate source of ills. He could not escape the connection between cruelty and forbidden sexuality, the sadistic and sexual elements of cruelty. His theatre showed fantasies of rape and murder. *The Cenci*, as well as other plays he admired, such as *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*,<sup>2</sup> explore this theme relentlessly. Here is Jane Goodall’s summary of the content of Artaud’s favourite plays: It echoes the content of the plays of Kane:

There is brother/sister incest in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, father/daughter incest in *Les Cenci*; brother/sister-in-law incest is an element in the precipitating action of *Thyestes*, stepmother/son incest features in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and is implied in *The Cenci*. Fathers murder sons in *Les Cenci* and in the Tantalus myth which forms the prelude to *Thyestes*; brother murders sister in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*; uncle murders nephews in *Thyestes*; daughter and sons murder father in *Les Cenci*; and in *The Revenger's Tragedy* there are examples of intentional and unwitting fratricide, threatened matricide, and execution of a son by unwitting order of his father.<sup>3</sup>

After his release from Rodez, Artaud referred to himself as “incestuous”:

I thought a lot about love at the asylum of Rodez, and it was there that I dreamed about some daughters of my soul, who loved me like daughters, and not as lovers – me, their pre-pubescent, lustful, salacious, erotic and incestuous father; and chaste also, so chaste that it makes him dangerous.<sup>4</sup>

According to Artaud and Kane, fate is the sole power controlling our existence. By reminding us that we are all going to die, by making us face this reality, theatre gives us the

---

<sup>1</sup> Annabelle Singer, “Don’t Want to Be This: The Elusive Sarah Kane”, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 48, No. 2, T182, Summer 2004, pp. 140-141.

<sup>2</sup> In *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, Giovanni stabs his sister while making love to her, and later flaunts her heart on the tip of his dagger.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Goodall, *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama*, p. 115.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, p. 116. Artaud had an imaginary creation which he referred to as “daughters of the soul/heart”: His maternal grandmother Neneka Chilé, his paternal grandmother Catherine Chilé, Cécile Schramme, Anie Besnard, and Yvonne Allendy.

strength to assume our mortality. Like Artaud, Kane wanted to show that what was happening on the stage was a reflection of reality; she unveiled the cruelty of human nature; she unmasked hypocrisy; and she was determined to awake the mind and body of the audience. Theatre, which is not about the shock of something new, is about organizing the old in a different way. The eroticism and violence in Kane's plays are parts of real life; we all take part in a vicious circle of violence. Artaud's focus was the same when he talked about the work of the *Alfred Jarry Theatre*. With its anxieties, theatre is the double of real life:

... we reestablish communication with life instead of cutting ourselves off from it. Neither the spectator nor we can take ourselves seriously unless we feel very clearly that part of our inner life is engaged in this action unfolding on the stage. Whether comic or tragic, our performance will be of the kind that sooner or later produces a forced smile... This is the kind of *human* anguish the spectator must feel as he leaves our theater. He will be shaken and antagonized by the internal dynamic of the spectacle that will unfold before his eyes. And this dynamic will be in direct relation to the anxieties and preoccupations of his whole life... The illusion that we seek to create will depend not on the degree of verisimilitude of the action but on the communicative power and the reality of this action. Each spectacle will by its very nature become a kind of event. The spectator must have the sense that what is being performed in front of him is a scene from his own life... <sup>1</sup>

According to Artaud and Kane, man has created a violent world which forces human beings to be more violent. Man cannot control his animality, and his violent instincts. For instance, when Kane let her cat out, she feared: A vivisectionist could put washing powder in its eyes.

Like Artaud, Kane tried to find a new theatrical language capable of provoking a strong emotional and intellectual reaction in the spectators; she wanted to invent new forms, and to find new modes of representations. She rejected fixed forms and genres; she experimented with form, language, rhythm and music. According to her, when a theatrical form is used once, it becomes redundant. Her eschewal of realism in language was similar to Artaud's.

Like Artaud, "speechlessness is Sarah Kane's forte; she shows what it is not to have words... She would rather show than tell." <sup>2</sup> In order to achieve coherence and completeness, she used the smallest amount of words possible. Without hesitation, she spent hours searching out and deleting a single superfluous word. Kane, who minimized and eliminated words just like

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, pp. 157-158.

<sup>2</sup> Kate Kellaway, "Cleansed", *New Statesman*, 15 May 1998, par. 5, <<http://find.galegroup.com>>.

Artaud, said: “I don’t like writing things you really don’t need, and my favourite exercise is cutting – cut, cut, cut!”<sup>1</sup> In her final play *4.48 Psychosis*, Kane wrote: “Just a word on a page and there is the drama”,<sup>2</sup> which really summarizes her view. Like the work of Artaud, her writing emphasized performance over texts, action over speech: Until enlivened by a theatrical gesture, the words on the page are lifeless. Kane, who rediscovered Ernest Hemingway’s “iceberg theory”,<sup>3</sup> wanted to make something felt rather than spoken: Revealing all the details of a character or action is unnecessary.

According to Artaud and Kane, theatre has medical – therapeutic – virtues. For Artaud, theatre is a saving poison; for Kane, it is like a vaccine. Like psychoanalysis, they worked on the dark and hidden layer buried deep within the recesses of the unconscious of the spectators. The cathartic effect – the liberating emotional release – enables the spectator to externalise something he represses. Like Artaud, Kane does not support psychological theatre; she does not reassure us with Freudian psychology; she forces the audience to be active in the process; and she insists upon an intense connection with the spectator:

I decided on theatre because it’s a live art. The direct communication with an audience I really like ... when you go to the theatre, and you just cough, it may alter a performance. As a member of an audience I like the fact that I can change a performance. As a writer I like the fact that no performance will ever be the same.<sup>4</sup>

In their works, Artaud and Kane wrote about ruthless, monstrous, and hopeless prisoners living in a locked hell. Kane wrote about depression because of her state of being, because of the split in her own personality. Kane, whose characters are facets of herself, said:

My main source of thinking about how violence happens is myself, and in some ways all of my characters are me. I write about human beings, and since I am one, the ways in which all human beings operate is feasibly within my understanding.<sup>5</sup>

For Artaud, theatre is not a mere place of entertainment. For Kane, the mission of theatre is the same. On 23 January 1995, in *Independent on Sunday*, David Benedict quoted Kane: “I

---

<sup>1</sup> Graham Saunders, *‘Love Me or Kill Me’: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 213.

<sup>3</sup> The text resembles an iceberg; what shows on the surface hides something more important.

<sup>4</sup> Graham Saunders, *‘Love Me or Kill Me’: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Heidi Stephenson, Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, p. 133.

hate the idea of theatre just being an evening pastime. It should be emotionally and intellectually demanding.”<sup>1</sup> Both Artaud and Kane put people through an intense experience; and they push theatrical form to its limits. For them, performance is visceral.

Apart from the cruelty of men against each other, there is also the cruelty of life: Artaud called this the “cruelty of things”. The awareness of the cruelty of mankind and the cruelty of things can result in despair. In *No More Masterpieces*, Artaud referred to this cruelty by saying “We are not free. And the sky can still fall on our heads. And the theater has been created to teach us that first of all.”<sup>2</sup> According to Kane, the cruelty of things is the cause of existential despair. Like Artaud, she confronted the audience with the cruelty of things, his mortality; and she showed violence on the stage to avoid them in real life. She wrote about the paradox of life: Life means death. Here are her own words which call to mind Artaud’s declaration that theatrical violence will mitigate violence outside the theatre:

There’s only the same danger of overdose in the theatre as there is in life. The choice is either to represent it, or not to represent it. I’ve chosen to represent it because sometimes we have to descend into hell imaginatively in order to avoid going there in reality. If we can experience something through art, then we might be able to change our future, because experience engraves lessons on our hearts through suffering, whereas speculation leaves us untouched. And anyone – politician, journalist, artist – who attempts to give people that imaginative experience, faces defensive screams that it’s too much from all sectors of the artistic and political spectrum. It’s crucial to chronicle and commit to memory events never experienced – in order to avoid them happening. I’d rather risk overdose in the theatre than in life. And I’d rather risk defensive screams than passively become part of a civilisation that has committed suicide.<sup>3</sup>

In the light of all these, we see that Kane left behind a legacy of works permeated by a shared language: “theatre of cruelty”. In his writing entitled *Sarah Kane (1971-1999): The Poetry of Madness in Violent Dreams*, Christopher Innes underlined this crucial point:

... Kane is fulfilling all the requirements of Artaud’s ‘Theatre of Cruelty’: ‘a theatre in which violent physical images crush and hypnotize the sensibility of the spectator’ bringing ‘to birth images of energy in the unconscious, and gratuitous crime on the surface’. Her drama is also intrinsically poetic – again in the sense of Artaud, who called for action to replace written poetry, and particularly formal verse.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Graham Saunders, *‘Love Me or Kill Me’: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans. Mary Caroline Richards, p. 79.

<sup>3</sup> Heidi Stephenson, Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century*, p. 533.

Here, I can hear the heartbeat of my thesis. But, before concentrating on the complete plays of Kane, it is necessary to have a look at her rather short life story since her writing is influenced by her own experience of life.

#### 4.1 1971-1999: THE LIFE OF AN EXTREMIST

There is always one child in the class who will do the things others fear to. That is what marks them out, their courage, and their will. The good friends of that child will help her to harness it for her own benefit. The bad friends will use it as a form of entertainment. ‘Go on, jump over that’, ‘Say that to the bully’, ‘Go on cut yourself’. Sarah was that child, and where some reined her back, others let her go, even encouraged her.<sup>1</sup>

It was 3 February 1971 when Sarah Kane – later to become the exceptional actress of the 1990s – was born in Brentwood, Essex. Her parents were devout evangelists and journalists: Her father was a *Daily Mirror* journalist; and her mother had given up work to raise Sarah and her brother, Simon. She grew up in Kelvedon Hatch, near Brentwood; and she went to Shenfield Comprehensive School. Sarah loved writing short stories and poems; she directed Ibsen, Shakespeare, and Joan Littlewood’s *Oh, What a Lovely War* at school; and she played truant to work in a production of Chekhov’s *The Bear*.

In October 1989, she began BA in drama at Bristol University, where she acted and directed *Macbeth*, *Top Girls*, and *Rockaby*. She played Bradshaw in Howard Barker’s *Victory*. One day, a tutor accused her of writing a pornographic essay, and she threw porn mags at him at the next tutorial and told him that if he wanted to wank he should use those. In Vincent O’Connell’s words, ‘she knew theatre, understood how it worked... It was an instinctive thing. She had the ability to create a crackle in a room, the same ability she had as a writer.’<sup>2</sup>

After a while, because she did not want to be at the mercy of the directors, Kane stopped acting and she started directing. She wrote three monologues – *Comic Monologue*, *Starved* and *What She Said* – which were performed under the title *Sick*. The pieces were about rape, sexual identity, and eating disorders. Kane, who liked darker things, belonged to a group of

---

<sup>1</sup> Dominic Dromgoole, *The Full Room: An A-Z of Contemporary Playwriting*, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Iain Fisher, “Sarah Kane: The Notion of Cruelty”, Introduction, par. 3, <<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/kandac0.html>>.



gothic people, listened to *Joy Division*,<sup>1</sup> dressed in black, and raged against the slaughter in the Balkans. In July 1992, she graduated from Bristol University with a First Class Honours Degree. In the summer, when she saw Jeremy Weller's *Mad* in Edinburgh, she was struck:

It was a project that brought together professional and non-professional actors who all had some experience of mental illness...*Mad* took me to hell. ...the night I saw it I made a decision about the kind of theatre I wanted to make – experiential.<sup>2</sup>

In October 1992, she began David Edgar's MA in playwriting at Birmingham University. She was not interested in it because the courses were all academic, and she did not want to be an academic. The writers she liked – Harold Pinter, Edward Bond, Howard Barker – were not coming to talk to them. Kane, who really hated living in Birmingham, started writing plays set in a large industrial city, and afterwards came the first forty-five minutes of *Blasted*.

On 3 July 1993, there was the workshop performance of *Blasted*. The play came to the attention of Mel Kenyon, a London theatrical agent, who was in Birmingham to see the students' end-of-year show. Kenyon, who saw Kane's potential, asked her if she could read it when it was completed. Kane, who later went to see her in London, chose her as her agent. On 29 January 1994, Kane rehearsed reading *Blasted* at the Royal Court. In March, she became the literary associate at the Bush Theatre, London.

Kane's first play, *Blasted*, which opened at the Royal Court, in the sixty-seat Theatre Upstairs, on 12 January 1995, and which was directed by James Macdonald, engendered a media storm. It was designed by Franziska Wilcken. Pip Donaghy played Ian; Kate Ashfield played Cate; and Dermot Kerrigan played the Soldier. It received a harsh response – maybe the worst reviews of the decade – for its gruesome portrayal of violence. Jack Tinker<sup>3</sup> of the *Daily Mail* denounced the play as “this disgusting feast of filth”.<sup>4</sup> On 20 January 1995, Michael Billington wrote about the content in the *Guardian*: “scenes of masturbation, fellatio, frottage, micturition, defecation – ah those old familiar faeces! – homosexual rape,

---

<sup>1</sup> Purveyors of dark music. The lead singer of *Joy Division*, Ian Curtis, committed suicide by hanging himself.

<sup>2</sup> Iain Fisher, “Sarah Kane: The Notion of Cruelty”, Introduction, par. 6, <<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/kandac0.html>>.

<sup>3</sup> After him, Kane named a dislikeable character in her 1998 play *Cleansed*.

<sup>4</sup> Aleks Sierz, “In-Yer-Face Theatre”, Sarah Kane 1, par. 3, <<http://www.inyerface-theatre.com/archive7.html>>.

eye gouging and cannibalism.”<sup>1</sup> On the same day, Paul Taylor wrote in the *Independent* that it is like “having your face rammed into an overflowing ashtray... and then having your whole head held down in a bucket of offal.”<sup>2</sup> Two days later, John Gross wrote in the *Sunday Telegraph*: “a gratuitous welter of carnage, cannibalism, male rape, eye-gouging and other atrocities.”<sup>3</sup> After the castigation of *Blasted* by many, Kane spoke about the event:

The Court didn't really know what to do about *Blasted*. They were a bit embarrassed about it, so they programmed it just after Christmas when no one was going to the theatre and they hoped no one would notice.<sup>4</sup>

The week the play opened there was an earthquake in Japan in which thousands of people died, and in this country a fifteen-year-old girl had been raped and murdered in a wood, but *Blasted* got more coverage in some newspapers than either of these events. And I'm not only talking about tabloids.<sup>5</sup>

Kane was lauded by some, reviled and vilified by others. Edward Bond, Harold Pinter, and Caryl Churchill were the ones who defended Kane. On 16 December 2000, Bond – referring to *Blasted* – wrote in the *Guardian*: “The only contemporary play I wish I'd written, it is revolutionary.”<sup>6</sup> He also wrote an essay entitled *Sarah Kane and Theatre*. Due to the physical and sexual violence depicted, *Blasted* was seen as a continuation of Bond's 1965 play *Saved* – in which there was a baby-stoning scene – and Howard Brenton's 1980 play *The Romans in Britain*. According to Aleks Sierz, “in *Blasted*, Kane took the temperature of the times, and inadvertently brought down a plague on herself.”<sup>7</sup> Here is what Kane said:

There's a famous photograph of a woman in Bosnia hanging by her neck from a tree... That's shocking. My play is only a shadowy representation of a reality that's far harder to stomach. It's easier to get upset about that representation than about the reality because it's easier to do something about a play – ban it, censor it, take away the theatre's subsidy. But what can you do about that woman in the woods? Take away her funding?<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Graham Saunders, *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Annabelle Singer, “Don't Want to Be This: The Elusive Sarah Kane”, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 48, No. 2, T182, Summer 2004, p. 142.

<sup>5</sup> Heidi Stephenson, Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> Graham Saunders, *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> Iain Fisher, “Sarah Kane: The Notion of Cruelty”, Introduction, par. 9, <<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/kandac0.html>>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter One: Subversive Theatre, Indifference, par. 1, <<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/kandac1.html>>.

Commissioned by the Gate Theatre in Notting Hill, Kane was going to write a play based on a European classic. She chose Büchner's *Woyzeck*, but the theatre was planning a season of Büchner's plays; she chose Brecht's *Baal*, but the theatre anticipated problems with his estate. Subsequently, she wrote an adaptation of a Senecan tragedy because Caryl Churchill had done a version of *Thyestes* which Kane admired. *Phaedra's Love*, which Kane called "a black comedy", premiered at the Gate Theatre on 15 May 1996. The director was Kane herself; and the designer was Vian Curtis. Cas Harkins played Hippolytus; Philippa Williams played Phaedra; Catherine Cusack played Strophe; Andrew Maud played the Doctor / Priest / Theseus; Giles Ward played Man 1; Paolo De Paola played Man 2; Catherine Neal played Woman 1; Diana Penny played Woman 2; and Andrew Scott played the Policeman.

The same year, on 28 August, she was appointed the writer-in-residence at Paines Plough, a theatre company helping new writers. There, she ran the Wild Lunch series of writers' groups. In February 1997, she participated in the Royal Court's annual International Exchange Programme – New English Drama – at the Deutsche Theater Baracke, Berlin.

*Skin*, Kane's ten minute film, was directed by Vincent O'Connell, and broadcast on 17 June 1997, on Channel 4, at 11:35 p.m. Ewen Bremner played Billy; Marcia Rose played Marcia; Agnieszka Liggett played Kath; Yemi Ajibade played Neville; Dave Atkins played Mother; James Bannon played Terry; Dominic Brunt played Martin; and Gregory Donaldson played Nick. In October 1997, Kane directed *Woyzeck* at the Gate Theatre, after which she went through an appalling depression. She was also completely, utterly, and madly in love.

On 30 April 1998, *Cleansed* was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre Downstairs at the Duke of York's, St Martin's Lane, London. It was directed by James Macdonald, and designed by Jeremy Herbert. Martin Marquez played Graham; Stuart McQuarrie played Tinker; James Cunningham played Carl; Danny Cerqueira played Rod; Suzan Sylvester played Grace; Daniel Evans played Robin; and Victoria Harwood played the Woman. Because Suzan Sylvester injured her back, Kane played the role of Grace for the last three performances. She was again attacked by the critics, because of the intense, and almost unbearable, violence present in the play.

In May 1998, supported by the British Council, Kane worked with Dutch writers in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. A month later, she visited the Varna Festival in Bulgaria, and she helped set up a writers' group in Sofia. In July and August of the same year, she led a playwriting workshop at the Royal Court's International Residency in London.

In order to get rid of her bad reputation, Kane wrote *Crave* under the pseudonym of "Marie Kelvedon".<sup>1</sup> She wrote it under a nom de plume, because she wanted to write a play which could be judged for what it was. In David Greig's words, Kane wanted "to escape, briefly, from the shadow of being 'Sarah Kane, the controversial author of *Blasted*.'" <sup>2</sup> Mark Ravenhill, Paines Plough's former literary director, talked about his first meeting with Kane:

I waited nervously in a bar, expecting someone tall and fierce and difficult. She was, of course, nothing of the sort: small, almost vulnerable, she spoke thoughtfully and quietly, occasionally allowing a naughty smile to light up her face.<sup>3</sup>

On 13 August 1998, *Crave* was first performed at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh. The play, which echoed the King James Bible, was directed by Vicky Featherstone, and designed by Georgia Sion. Alan Williams played A; Paul Thomas Hickey played B; Sharon Duncan-Brewster played C; and Ingrid Craigie played M. The play, which deployed language like music, was staged with four actors sitting on swivel chairs as in a talk show.

*Crave*, which was welcomed with critical success, was compared to T.S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*. Kane, whose voice was heard especially in France and Germany,<sup>4</sup> believed that the world was a pretty grim place. She ran writers groups and led workshops with Paines Plough and the Royal Court's European Summer School. On 8 September 1998, *Crave* transferred to the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs at the Ambassadors Theatre, London. The play toured to Dublin, Berlin, Copenhagen, and Maastricht. Kane played the role of C for five performances. In November 1998, she worked with Andalusian writers in Seville, Spain. Moreover, she was awarded the 1998 Arts Foundation Fellowship for Playwriting.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Marie" was her middle name, and "Kelvedon" was a town near where she was born.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, Introduction, p. xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Iain Fisher, "Sarah Kane: The Notion of Cruelty", Introduction, par. 13,

<<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/kandac0.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> German writers such as Marius von Mayenburg and David Giesemann were directly influenced by Kane.

Kane, who found herself awoken every morning at 4:48 a.m., took this time, the darkest hour before dawn, and found a moment of clarity in it. The moment of clarity in the psychotic mind is to those outside it, the moment when delusion is at its strongest. Her last play, *4.48 Psychosis*,<sup>1</sup> is based on Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*.<sup>2</sup> As the name of her play indicates, she suffered from depression: "tragically she was... prefiguring her own death."<sup>3</sup>

For years, Kane had been plagued by recurrent bouts of severe and intense manic depression, and she was hospitalized several times at London's Royal Maudsley Hospital. She was living in a gray world of depression. The consequence was not hard to guess: She swallowed one hundred and fifty anti-depressants, and fifty sleeping pills. Her flatmate discovered her unconscious at their Brixton flat, and rushed her to the hospital. After her stomach was pumped clean, she went home, but was taken back to hospital. Two days later, Kane, who was left alone for ninety minutes, took the laces from her shoes, and hanged herself in the lavatory at London's King's College Hospital. It was a cold winter day – 20 February 1999 – and she was just twenty-eight years old. In Dominic Dromgoole's words, "Sarah's grand larceny of her life left a long black cloud hanging over many."<sup>4</sup>

Why did she commit suicide like the poet Sylvia Plath? Was it in order to achieve a calm she never could find in her sorrowful life? Kane, the self-destructive young talent of the new generation of playwrights, is acknowledged as a key-figure of "in-yer-face" young British dramatists: "writers whose work adopted a tone of nihilistic, drug-fuelled, hard-edged, sexually explicit bravado in an attempt to reflect the new realities."<sup>5</sup> Kane, also regarded as one of the "New Brutalists", wrote plays that portrayed sadistic violence, cruelty, and worlds deranged by chaos. As a quintessential and controversial dramatist, she was the producer of the cutting edge plays of the 1990s.

---

<sup>1</sup> On 23 June 2000, *4.48 Psychosis* was performed posthumously at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, London. It was directed by James Macdonald, and designed by Jeremy Herbert. The ones who were playing were Daniel Evans, Jo McInnes, and Madeleine Potter.

<sup>2</sup> Werther was a fictional hero who killed himself for unrequited love. After the publication of Goethe's story, similar suicides followed.

<sup>3</sup> Sheridan Morley, "Blasted: Death and the Dramatist", *Spectator*, 14 April 2001, par. 3, <<http://find.galegroup.com>>.

<sup>4</sup> Dominic Dromgoole, *The Full Room: An A-Z of Contemporary Playwriting*, p. 163.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Unwin, Carole Woddis, *A Pocket Guide to Twentieth Century Drama*, p. 248.

## 4.2 THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF KANE

It was Kane who – in James Macdonald’s words – was painted by the media as “a wild axe-girl”.<sup>1</sup> Kane described herself as “the child of negation”,<sup>2</sup> and said “there isn’t anything you can’t represent on stage.”<sup>3</sup> She was not in favour of plays in which everything happened off-stage. She wrote about our modern world which is ruled by violence; the function of theatre is to reflect the terrifying undercurrents of life; and the violent incidents in her plays are inspired by real facts. Her plays are pervaded by the impact of Artaud. *Cleansed* is included in the London Theatre Museum’s Education pack, *Antonin Artaud and His Legacy*. Here is a conversation – dated 8 August 2000 – between Graham Saunders and James Macdonald:

**GS:** The Theatre Museum in London has included *Cleansed* in its education pack on Artaud as a modern example of ‘total theatre’. Were you aware in your realisation of the play that you wanted to incorporate elements of The Theatre of Cruelty.

**JM:** ... I only looked at him again when we were working on *4.48 Psychosis*, because she had said she’d gone back to his work when she was writing it. I loved the early letters to Jacques Rivière – they’re extraordinary and very interesting in relation to her philosophy – that there’s nothing you can’t write about. And Artaud encountered the same problem of having to fight against very conservative notions of form in theatre. There’s one particular letter where he says he needed his writing to take a form on the page which reflected directly what was happening inside his head. That’s exactly what Sarah was doing with *4.48 Psychosis*.<sup>4</sup>

According to Nils Tabert, the German translator of *Cleansed* and *Crave*, Artaud’s theatre appeals “to all the senses, and... it requires actors to act without a safety net... Sarah’s plays – among other things – have the same quality. They are risky and exhausting for actors and directors, but at the same time very enriching.”<sup>5</sup> According to Artaud, “it is certain that we need above all a theater that wakes us up: nerves and heart.”<sup>6</sup> Kane’s theatre wakes us up exactly in the same way. Artaud saw suffering as essential to existence; and Kane saw suffering as a way to gain insight. Starting from this point of my thesis, I will focus on the entire dramatic works of Kane, and analyse them one by one from an Artaudian perspective.

---

<sup>1</sup> Aleks Sierz, “In-Yer-Face Theatre”, Sarah Kane 2, par. 5, <<http://www.inyerface-theatre.com/archive7.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase also occurs in *4.48. Psychosis*: “the child of negation / out of one torture chamber into another.”

Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 239.

<sup>3</sup> Graham Saunders, *‘Love Me or Kill Me’: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>6</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans. Mary Caroline Richards, p. 84.

### 4.2.1 Blasted

I think that what happens in war is that suddenly, violently, without any warning whatsoever, people's lives are completely ripped to pieces. So I literally just picked a moment in the play, I thought I'll plant a bomb and blow the whole fucking thing up. I loved the idea of it as well, that you have a nice little box set in the studio theatre somewhere and you blow it up. You know you go to the Bush Theatre and you go in and you see the set... and there's always a longing for it to blow up, so it was such a joy for me to be able to do that!<sup>1</sup>

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, the appearance of ethnic cleansing, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991, CNN reporters talking about US air raids from a Baghdad hotel's roof, Bosnia's horrors being shown on television... This was the historical context of *Blasted*. The "vile" play, with which Kane exploded onto the London theatre scene, draws parallels between Britain and Bosnia. It shows the escalating destructiveness of the humanity; it is an examination of the effects of war on three people; and it has its roots in the modernism of Artaud.

According to Artaud, theatre must deal with the anguish which is common to all human beings, with the great desires and horrors which haunt the dreams of men. The spectator must be shaken by the internal force of the play, and this force must be parallel with the anxieties and preoccupations of his life. The sharp images of Kane destabilize sanity, and free the subconscious. When she was asked whether she would alter anything in *Blasted*, she replied:

If I was going to rewrite it I'd try the purifying images even more, and I'd cut even more words out if such a thing is possible, because for me the language of theatre is image.<sup>2</sup>

The naturalistic first half, set in a luxurious Leeds hotel room "representing the materialistic superficiality of a globalized culture",<sup>3</sup> suddenly turns into a symbolic and nightmarish Bosnian battlefield in the second half: A bomb blows up the realistic and claustrophobic façade; and the socio-realistic becomes surreal. According to Artaud and Kane, a realist play does not make any demands on the audience; triggering a reaction is of great importance.

---

<sup>1</sup> Graham Saunders, *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 41. Because it recalls Artaud's explanation with "blows" and "bombs", this quotation of Kane is interesting. See p. 43, quotation 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century*, p. 530.

In the play, Ian – a sexist, racist, xenophobic, and homophobic middle-aged tabloid journalist dying from a terminal lung cancer – took his ex-girlfriend, Cate, a vegetarian, and a mentally-deficient naive young woman plagued by fits and epileptic seizures, to a Leeds hotel room where he abused her. Ian, in whom we see symptoms of self-destructiveness, is a heavy drinker of gin and champagne, and a chain-smoker. He coughs terribly; he has a gun; and he has been involved as an undercover agent for a right-wing nationalist group. He tortures Cate psychologically, taunts her, mocks her mental slowness, and calls her brother a retard. Stinking and being obsessed by his own dirt, Ian constantly takes showers. Cate, who sometimes uses obscene language, stutters when under pressure, and she sucks her thumb.

There is a link between the domestic violence in Britain and the civil war in the former Yugoslavia: Private violence becomes a generalized one. In an interview with Dan Rebellato, Kane explained how Srebrenica being under siege was related to a rape in a hotel room:

I knew that I wanted to write a play about a man and a woman in a hotel room, and that there was a complete power imbalance which resulted in a rape. I'd been doing it for a few days and I switched on the news one night while I was having a break from writing, and there was a very old woman's face in Srebrenica just weeping and looking into the camera and saying – 'please, please, somebody help us, because we need the UN to come here and help us.' I thought this is absolutely terrible and I'm writing this ridiculous play about two people in a room. What's the point of carrying on? So this is what I wanted to write about, yet somehow this story about the man and the woman is still attracting me. So I thought what could possibly be the connection between a common rape in a Leeds hotel room and what's happening in Bosnia? And suddenly the penny dropped and I thought of course it's obvious, one is the seed and the other is the tree. I do think that the seeds of full-scale war can always be found in peace-time civilisation.<sup>1</sup>

In scene I, the ghostly room service of the hotel brings gin and sandwiches with an almost supernatural speed. When Cate expresses her dislike for Ian's clothes, Ian takes them all off and stands in front of her, naked. When Ian says she is "too thick to understand", Cate trembles, faints, becomes unconscious, and *'bursts out laughing, unnaturally, hysterically, uncontrollably.'*<sup>2</sup> The time she comes round, Ian says "thought you were dead", and shows an existential concern by saying that he could not stand "Death. Not being."<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Graham Saunders, *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.



Ian has one lung – “Last year. When I came round, surgeon brought in this lump of rotting pork, stank. My lung.”<sup>1</sup> – but, he goes on to destroy himself; he does not want to get a transplant because he sees himself as a lifeless individual: “They give them to people with a life.” “Why? What for? Keep me alive to die of cirrhosis in three months’ time.”<sup>2</sup> Then, he shows his indifference to violence by dictating an article about a sadistic event on the phone:

A serial killer slaughtered British tourist Samantha Scrace, S – C – R – A – C – E, in a sick murder ritual comma, police revealed yesterday point new par. The bubbly nineteen year old from Leeds was among seven victims found buried in identical triangular tombs in an isolated New Zealand forest point new par. Each had been stabbed more than twenty times and placed face down comma, hands bound behind their backs point new par. Caps up, ashes at the site showed the maniac had stayed to cook a meal, caps down point new par. Samantha comma, a beautiful redhead with dreams of becoming a model comma, was on the trip of a lifetime after finishing her A levels last year point. Samantha’s heartbroken mum said yesterday colon quoting, we pray the police will come up with something dash, anything comma, soon point still quoting. The sooner this lunatic is brought to justice the better point end quote new par. ...<sup>3</sup>

Ian, who wants to make love to Cate, undoes his trousers, starts masturbating, and begins to undo Cate’s clothes. As a consequence of his coercive tactics and culpable actions, Cate panics, trembles, and makes inarticulate crying sounds. In pain, Ian grasps her hand around his penis, and masturbates. He gives her a bouquet of flowers, representing a little beauty in a cruel world. They hear “the sound of spring rain” which means awakening, love, and life.

In scene II, the flowers are scattered around the room, foreshadowing evil. As soon as Ian takes a sip of gin, he starts writhing in pain, and he makes involuntary crying sounds. It is as if he is dying: He is “*a crumpled heap on the floor.*”<sup>4</sup> After the pain decreases, he goes into the bathroom. Cate takes Ian’s leather jacket, rips the arms off at the seams, and slaps him around the head. Ian pushes her onto the bed; Cate kicks, punches, bites, and points the gun at his groin, after which she trembles and faints. In the throes of the fit, Ian thrusts against her inert body; his gun held above her head, he lies between her legs, and simulates sex, with Cate “*crying her heart out.*”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Outside, when a car backfires, an enormous bang is heard. Thinking that it was a gun, Ian throws himself on the floor, afraid of dying. Cate undoes his shirt, kisses his chest and back, licks and bites his back, sucks his nipples, and performs oral sex on him. She bites his penis as hard as she can, leaving him prostrate in pain. She spits, and cleans her teeth; she wants to get every trace of him out of her mouth. By the way, overnight, Ian has forced himself upon Cate, and she is bleeding from a bite administered during cunnilingus: She is in bloody panties. Cate shakes, retches, puts her fingers down her throat, produces a hair, and spits.

When they hear a knock at the door, Cate puts her head under the pillow, and Ian puts the gun to her head. A Soldier comes. In the introduction he wrote to Kane's complete plays, David Greig says that the Soldier, who bursts in with a sniper's rifle, "brings in with him the terrifying fragments of a world blown apart by violence."<sup>1</sup> Armed and menacing, the Soldier takes Ian's gun, gobbles up both breakfasts, rubs Cate's knickers over his face, and urinates over the pillows. This Soldier is nameless, because he can be anyone: Violence is an integral part of our inner reality. Through the bathroom window, Cate temporarily escapes from the malignity of Ian. There is a blinding light, a huge explosion, and "the sound of summer rain".

In scene III, the hotel is blasted by a mortar bomb. The wall of the hotel is demolished by a massive explosion; the room is dismantled, representing the final disintegration of a corrupt civilisation. In Greig's words, "it is as though the act of rape, which blasts the inner world of both victim and perpetrator, has also destroyed the world outside the room."<sup>2</sup> The unconscious Soldier wakes, and then talks about issues of Artaudian cruelty:

Went to a house just outside town. All gone. Apart from a small boy hiding in the corner. One of the others took him outside. Lay him on the ground and shot him through the legs. Heard crying in the basement. Went down. Three men and four women. Called the others. They held the men while I fucked the women. Youngest was twelve. Didn't cry, just lay there. Turned her over and –  
Then she cried. Made her lick me clean. Closed my eyes and thought of –  
Shot her father in the mouth. Brothers shouted. Hung them from the ceiling by their testicles.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, pp. ix-x.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

In his chapter entitled *Trauma and Testimony in 'Blasted' – Kane with Felman*, Peter Buse underlines this cruelty: “How is it possible to forget the anal rape of a twelve year-old, or hanging men by their testicles?”<sup>1</sup> The Soldier tells Ian about the agonies of fighting a civil war, and about the sexual atrocities he has committed. It is as if he is taking revenge for the mutilation of his girlfriend by other soldiers. He tells Ian about the death of his girlfriend: “Col, they bugged her. Cut her throat. Hacked her ears and nose off, nailed them to the front door.”<sup>2</sup> The Soldier vents his fury on Ian, holds the revolver to Ian’s head, and anally rapes him. Ian is in pain, but he is silent. The Soldier pushes the revolver up Ian’s anus: He sodomizes him with the loaded revolver. Ian tries to speak but cannot. The Soldier tells about exploits of group rapes, grotesque killings, and mass transportation of refugees in trucks:

... Saw thousands of people packing into trucks like pigs trying to leave town. Women threw their babies on board hoping someone would look after them. Crushing each other to death. Insides of people’s heads came out of their eyes. Saw a child most of his face blown off, young girl I fucked hand up inside her trying to claw my liquid out, starving man eating his dead wife’s leg. ...<sup>3</sup>

The violence Ian has used turns against him. This means that we are all torturers, and we can all become victims. The Soldier sucks Ian’s eyes out, bites them off, and eats them, after which “the sound of autumn rain” is heard. Here is Kane talking about her inspiration:

I’d been reading Bill Buford’s *Among the Thugs* which is about football violence. He joined up with a group of Manchester United supporters and went round beating people up, and there was one particular incident in it, where there was an undercover policeman, and he got into a row with someone from another firm, and someone just went up to him at a party, grabbed his head – sucked his eye out, bit it off and spat it on the floor.<sup>4</sup>

In scene IV, the Soldier commits suicide by blowing his own brain out with the revolver. Cate returns with a baby a woman has thrust into her arms. Unlike Ian, Cate believes in God; she argues with Ian about the existence of God, and tells him that it is not right to kill himself, and that God would not like it. In spite of Cate’s attempts at dissuasion, Ian puts the gun in his mouth, pulls the trigger, but, luckily, Cate had removed the bullets in the revolver. Cate believes that God has intervened to prevent Ian from committing suicide. When the

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Buse, *Drama + Theory: Critical Approaches to Modern British Drama*, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>4</sup> Graham Saunders, *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 61.

baby dies, Cate “*bursts out laughing, unnaturally, hysterically, uncontrollably.*”<sup>1</sup> “The sound of heavy winter rain” is heard, which means death and destruction.

In scene V, Cate buries the baby beneath the floorboards, rips the lining out of Ian’s jacket, binds two pieces of wood together in a cross, sticks it into the floor, and puts flowers under the cross. Ian is a nihilist; but Cate shows Christian faith when she prays for the soul of the baby. Ian, who is stripped of power, feels the extremes of physical and mental anguish. In a hallucination-like episode, in which the passing of a week is indicated by alternations of darkness and light, he is reduced to an animal: In a wretched state, he masturbates, attempts to strangle himself, defecates, tries to clean it up with newspaper, laughs hysterically, has a nightmare, weeps, tears the cross out of the ground, rips up the floor, disinters and eats the baby out of hunger, climbs down into the hole with its remains, and lies down, head poking out of the floor. It starts to rain on Ian, representing the heartlessness of the world. The rain washes away the blood and the evil, while Ian remains there like a Christ-like image.

Ian dies and sees that the thing he has ridiculed – life after death – really exists. His dissolution and his resurrection are shown in episodic and wordless scenes. Cate comes to this metaphoric hell with some bread, a large sausage, and a bottle of gin. Blood is seeping from between her legs. This is enough to indicate what has happened to Cate without her telling the spectators that she has sold herself for food, and that she has been raped violently. She nourishes and mothers the eyeless entombed man protruding from a hole. According to Graham Saunders, “Edward Bond makes a perceptive point when he says the end of *Blasted* should not be about two individuals left stranded in a hotel room but the collapse of a whole world.”<sup>2</sup> In the play, the characters all undergo a sequence of traumatic experiences.

In *Blasted*’s premiere in the sixty-seat Theatre Upstairs in January 1995, the spectators were not far from the area of action; they were in the centre of the action. Two people walked out, some hid their eyes, some giggled, the people sat stunned for a while. When people walked out, it was part of the whole experience of it: According to Kane, if people walk out during a

---

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Graham Saunders, ‘*Love Me or Kill Me*’: *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 135.

play, it means something is happening. In the Brussels production, the spectators were crying in the baby-burying scene. The Hamburg production was done like a peep-show; the set was a realistic hotel room; and the spectators were sitting around it. Kane liked the reciprocal relationship between the play and the spectators. Nils Tabert talked about the staging:

Ian's shown eating a baby. I mean it was a prop of course – chicken or something. But he really ate the meat which was absolutely terrifying. A few people walked out at that moment. Some of them walked out earlier... You had this subtle sound of tiny bones being broken which was horrible. <sup>1</sup>

In a conversation with Graham Saunders on 13 November 2000, Mel Kenyon stated her view about the production: “Even talking about it now the hair on my arms stands up which is always a good sign. A physical response to something unique.” <sup>2</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Phaedra's Love

... when we did the final scene with all the blood and the false bowels by the end of it we were severely traumatized. All the actors were standing there covered in blood having just raped and slit their throats; and then one of them said, ‘this is the most disgusting play I’ve ever been in’, and he walked out. <sup>3</sup>

These were Kane's reflections about the production of *Phaedra's Love* with which – as David Greig says in his introduction to Kane's plays – “the source of pain has narrowed down from civil war to war within the family.” <sup>4</sup> The play, which consists of eight scenes, shows a sexually corrupt royal family. It starts with Hippolytus – a spoiled prince, a depressed narcissist, and an overgrown child – sitting in a dark room full of expensive electronic toys, empty crisp and sweet packets, used socks and underwear. Hippolytus, who is fat, vulgar, apathetic, repulsive, chaste, puritan, and a hater of mankind, is watching a violent Hollywood film on television and eating a hamburger. He blows his nose on a sock, then he puts his penis into the sock and masturbates. His indifference symbolizes the cruelty of the dehumanised society in which the individual is oppressed and forgotten. Phaedra – his mother-in-law and stepmother – is in love with him.

---

<sup>1</sup> Graham Saunders, *Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, pp. x-xi.

In scene II, Phaedra talks to the Doctor; she wants a diagnosis and treatment for her stepson's depression. Hippolytus stinks, and all he does is to sleep, watch films, and to fill the void with sex. In scene III, Phaedra tells her daughter, Strophe, that she is in love with Hippolytus: "Wished you could cut open your chest tear it out to stop the pain?"<sup>1</sup> "Can feel him through the walls. Sense him. Feel his heartbeat from a mile."<sup>2</sup> "Can't switch this off. Can't crush it. Can't. Wake up with it, burning me. Think I'll crack open I want him so much."<sup>3</sup>

In scene IV, Hippolytus, who seems detached from the world, plays with a remote control car which whizzes around the room. It is his birthday. When Phaedra asks Hippolytus what he watches on television, Hippolytus replies: "News. Another rape. Child murdered. War somewhere. Few thousand jobs gone. But none of this matters 'cause it's a royal birthday."<sup>4</sup> Hippolytus is a nihilist counting out time, waiting for death to feel in touch with himself. He is waiting for something to give a meaning to his life. In the grip of irrational desire and unconventional love, Phaedra performs fellatio on Hippolytus, who ejaculates into her mouth. When Phaedra asks him about his former girlfriend, Lena, he grabs her by the throat telling her not to mention Lena again. When Hippolytus tells Phaedra that he had an affair with Strophe, Phaedra slaps him around the face. He tells Phaedra that he has got gonorrhoea – a disease which causes pain in the sexual organs and which can be given from one person to another during sex – on which Phaedra opens her mouth to speak, but no sound comes out.

In scene V, Hippolytus stands in front of a mirror with his tongue out, boking for traces of sexual disease. We learn about Phaedra's suicide, and the vengeful note she left in which she denounced Hippolytus as a rapist. Because of her disillusionment with Hippolytus' indifference to sex with her, Phaedra – a masochist – finds the ultimate self-destruction in suicide, and she hangs herself. Phaedra's passion for Hippolytus is a kind of madness which leads her to mental distraction and suicide. Strophe batters Hippolytus, then sobs and wails. We also learn about Strophe's affair with her mother's new husband, her stepfather, Theseus: She was Theseus' mistress on Theseus and Phaedra's wedding night.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

In scene VI, Hippolytus – imprisoned on the charge of raping Phaedra – is visited by a Priest in a prison cell. Hippolytus’ words – “Always suspected the world didn’t smell of fresh paint and flowers.” “Smells of piss and human sweat. Most unpleasant.”<sup>1</sup> – echo the words of Artaud. The Priest urges him to deny the crime. Hippolytus, who follows a creed of atheism, denies the existence of God: “What do you suggest, a last minute conversion just in case? Die as if there is a God, knowing that there isn’t? No. If there is a God, I’d like to look him in the face knowing I’d died as I’d lived. In conscious sin.”<sup>2</sup> “I can’t sin against a God I don’t believe in.” “A non-existent God can’t forgive.”<sup>3</sup> The Priest performs fellatio on Hippolytus.

In scene VII, Theseus “*tears at his clothes, then skin, then hair, more and more frantically until he is exhausted.*”<sup>4</sup> Without crying, he lights the funeral pyre, and the body of Phaedra goes up in flames. In scene VIII, outside the court, Theseus and Strophe are both disguised. Hippolytus – who surrendered to the police and refused the Priest’s offer of forgiveness – is ready for his death. People lynch, and hurl rocks at him. According to Kane, the Bible is full of rape, mutilation, war, and pestilence; and religious references can be seen in Hippolytus’ stoning, and the kiss of Judas which Theseus gives to Hippolytus before giving him to the raging crowd. Man 1 puts a child’s tie around Hippolytus’ throat, and strangles him. Strophe tries to save her semi-conscious half-brother from the angry crowd. However, because of “defending a rapist”, Theseus rapes Strophe, and kills her by cutting her throat.

**Man 1** pulls down **Hippolytus**’ trousers.

**Woman 2** cuts off his genitals.

*They are thrown onto the barbecue.*

*The children cheer.*

*A child takes them off the barbecue and throws them at another child, who screams and runs away.*

*Much laughter.*

*Someone retrieves them and they are thrown to a dog.*

**Theseus** takes the knife.

*He cuts **Hippolytus** from groin to chest.*

**Hippolytus**’ bowels are torn out and thrown onto the barbecue.

*He is kicked and stoned and spat on.*<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

After Hippolytus is disembowelled and his genitals are grilled on a barbecue, step by step, the family moves towards a violent destruction. When Theseus looks at the woman he has raped and murdered, he realizes her with horror. Although suicide is forbidden by religion, choosing suicide is a way to assert oneself: Theseus cuts his own throat out of remorse and bleeds to death. Three bodies lie motionless on the ground. Although his body is dismembered and its fragments lie around him, Hippolytus says: “If there could have been more moments like this.”<sup>1</sup> He dies; a vulture descends from the sky, and eats his body.

Because it gives birth to powerful feelings such as ecstasy or despair, love is painful. Phaedra lies when she says that Hippolytus raped her. Hippolytus, who follows honesty to the point of self-destruction, also lies when he confirms the rape. Being publicly accused of rape gives him the opportunity to realize his deepest desire, death. He finds unity at the moment of death; he is connected with himself for the first time; his death is the “pinnacle” of his existence. The royal family and the kingdom are destroyed by incest, suicide, rape, and apathy; and the stage is bathed with blood. In the production of *Phaedra's Love*, the audience sat all over the theatre; they sat on benches in the middle and on the edges of the room. The actors emerged from the middle of them. Some members of the audience rose up, and attacked Hippolytus. In Kane's own words, “for any given audience member, the play could be at one moment intimate and personal, at the next epic and public. They may see one scene from one end of the theatre and find themselves sitting in the middle of a conversation for the next.”<sup>2</sup> Graham Saunders' description of the production is really one of the most striking:

Kane's direction for the production also concentrated on attempting to break down the barriers between audience and the actors where seating was dispersed around the theatre, and no single playing space selected. Nowhere was this more apparent than the bloody climax of the play when members of the audience suddenly found that their up to then silent neighbour turned out to be from the cast. The barrier between stage and audience was then further broken down (and made extremely uncomfortable for the audience at times) when the slaughter of Hippolytus was carried out 'with bleeding body parts chucked over the audience's heads.'<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> Heidi Stephenson, Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> Graham Saunders, '*Love Me or Kill Me*': *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, pp. 80-81. The quoted section at the end – 'with bleeding body parts chucked over the audience's heads' – has been said by Sarah Hemming in *Financial Times*, on 23 May 1996.



### 4.2.3 Skin

Despite the fact that *Skin* is a ten minute film, it is worthy of evaluating under the title “dramatic works”. This screenplay, which consists of twenty-four short parts, portrays Billy, a young and extremely thin skinhead. Billy has a large skull on his back, a Union Jack on his right arm, a bull-dog on his left arm, blue dots on one of his forearms, and “Mum” over his heart. He stands naked in front of the window, and sees a black woman staring at him from one of the windows of the house opposite. He touches his penis, makes wanking gestures at her; she laughs, and goes away. Billy goes to the sink, looks at his face in the mirror, smiles, grimaces, tries to look hard, and giggles. He draws a black swastika on his right fist.

Part II takes place in a South London cafe; and Mother – the cafe owner, a big man with a fag – serves breakfasts to the skins. Billy smokes; Terry splats some ketchup on his food, and puts the bottle in his pocket; Martin sprinkles pepper on his food, and puts the pepperpot in his pocket. When the phone rings, all the skins, except Billy, shout “Yeah” into a mobile, repeatedly. With his cigarette end, Billy burns a sausage “skin”, and squeezes the meat out. Then, he takes a banana from the counter in order to shoot people with it.

In part III, Billy and the gang are outside the church. A black bride and a white groom come with the sound of the bells, and a shower of confetti. Billy joins in the racist attack on the black wedding party, takes the banana from inside his jacket, eats it, and throws the “skin” at a man. Billy and Martin make the sound of monkey noises. Terry takes the sauce bottle stolen from the cafe, and smashes it into the face of a young black man. There are various violent attacks: boots in faces, knees in groins, a fork being stabbed into a leg, pepper thrown into eyes, etc. Martin smashes the photographer’s camera in the photographer’s face, breaks his nose, takes a picture of him, and drops the camera on his sprawling body. Billy, who is hit hard on the back of the head, smashes a brick down onto a black head. The policemen arrest the motionless bodies, and they kick both blacks and skins. Billy, who dashes down an alleyway, slumps against a wall. In part IV, while Billy is in the shower, Neville – an old black man – knocks on the door. Billy dries himself, sits on the toilet, has a crap, wraps a towel around his waist, and opens the door. Neville looks down the toilet, and pulls the chain.

When the black woman, who appears at the window, beckons him, Billy leaves his flat to go there. Kath, a young white woman with a shaven head, opens the door. When Billy asks about the black woman living on the second floor, Marcia comes. She looks at Billy's wound and swastika, they arm wrestle, kiss each other deeply and passionately, take off their clothes, touch each other's "skin", and have sex. Marcia rips up Billy's boxer shorts, and ties his hands to the bedstead with the shorts. Blindfolded and hands tied behind his back, Billy licks, kisses and smells Marcia's "skin". To stop Marcia making any noise, a hand is stuffed in her mouth. Marcia slaps the semi-conscious Billy around the head and face. Billy, who is naked, crouches on the floor; and Marcia tips some dog food into the bowl which Billy sniffs, disgusted. Billy lies on his back on the bed, tied up. Marcia shaves his chest, legs, eyebrows, and pubic hair with a razor. According to Kane, in societies based on violence, there are class, race, and gender divisions. Marcia wants to erase the visible signs of Billy's racism:

MARCIA is scrubbing BILLY's tattoos with a stiff brush and bleach. The skin is raw and bleeding, and BILLY is screaming in pain. MARCIA removes the swastika... <sup>1</sup>

*Skin*, with its ritualistic effect, is full of pain, torture, and blood:

BILLY is tied to the bed, lying on his front, spread-eagled. MARCIA is cutting her name into his back with a stanley knife. She cries silently, and licks away the blood. <sup>2</sup>

Billy wears Marcia's clothes, and hugs the clothes to him. When Marcia rejects him, he strides across the road, and kicks a car. Neville paints a large smiley face on the side of his shed, then, turns it into a sad face, and paints on tears. Billy comes to his flat, slams the door, tears off his clothes, cries, and punches and breaks the mirror. He goes to the window with his nude body, swigs some beer, swallows a handful of painkillers, leaves a new message on the answerphone saying that he is dead, lights a cigarette, and waits for something to happen. Marcia finds solace with her flatmate, Kath. Along by the ankles, Neville drags Billy who is naked and unconscious. Billy's head bangs on the door frame, and bumps down steps; he vomits down the toilet, sobs, and puts his head on the toilet seat.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 262.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

#### 4.2.4 Cleansed

*Cleansed*, which consists of twenty scenes, is set in “an institution designed to rid society of its undesirables”, a barbarous, concentration camp-like university under the control of a vicious, sadistic, malevolent, and psychotically wicked doctor, a chameleon-like presence, Tinker. The nameless sinister institution for social dissidents recalls both a mental institution and a death camp. The White Room is the university sanatorium; the Red Room is the university sports hall; the Black Room is the showers in the university sports hall which are converted into peep-show booths; and the Round Room is the university library. Tinker inflicts horrific experiments on the inhabitants to test the limits of their love: He subjects them to horrendous atrocities, and submits them to unbearable torments to test the endurance of love. Kane, who has a prophetic awareness of the modern world, portrays the dark side of the human nature. The spectators have a metaphysical experience, and are all purified.

In scene I, Tinker heats smack on a silver spoon, fills the syringe, injects into the corner of Graham’s eye, and Graham slumps. The injection through an eyeball, an eye impaled with a hypodermic full of heroin, is an unspeakable act. In scene II, the season changes from winter to summer; and there is the sound of a cricket match which is an evidence of real life. We are introduced to a homosexual couple formed by Carl and Rod. Carl puts a ring on Rod’s finger; and Rod puts a ring on Carl’s finger: Love is really a kind of madness and ecstasy.

In scene III, Grace looks for her dead brother, Graham, who had actually been murdered by Tinker in the first scene. Tinker tells her that Graham died of an overdose, and that he was an addict. Grace wants Graham’s clothes. Tinker, who had given Graham’s clothes to a nineteen-year-old boy named Robin, says that they normally recycle or incinerate the clothes. When called, Robin comes, and Grace wants him to take off his clothes. Robin puts off his underpants, and stands shivering with his hands over his genitals. Grace undresses, wears Robin’s / Graham’s clothes, shakes, breaks down, wails uncontrollably, and collapses. Tinker handcuffs her arms to the bed rails, and injects her with sedatives after which she relaxes. He takes a bottle of pills from his pocket, and puts a pill on Grace’s tongue which she swallows. Robin, who puts on Grace’s clothes, opens his mouth to speak but cannot.

In scene IV, Carl is beaten by a group of men. To get him to betray the name of his lover, Carl is tortured mercilessly. His torture involving a pole being inserted through the anus until it is released through the shoulder is a kind of crucifixion which Serbian soldiers used against hundreds of Muslims in Bosnia. After impaling them, they hang them up, and it would take them approximately five days to die:

**Tinker** There's a vertical passage through your body, a straight line through which an object can pass without immediately killing you. Starts here.

*(He touches Carl's anus.)*

**Carl** *(Stiffens with fear.)*

**Tinker** Can take a pole, push it up here, avoiding all major organs, until it emerges here.

*(He touches Carl's right shoulder.)*

Die eventually of course. From starvation if nothing else gets you first.

*Carl's trousers are pulled down and a pole is pushed a few inches up his anus.*

**Carl** Christ no<sup>1</sup>

Rod falls from a great height, and he falls next to Carl. Tinker takes a large pair of scissors, and cuts off Carl's tongue to prevent him from expressing his love for Rod. Carl's mouth fills with blood. Tinker takes the ring which Carl had put on Rod's finger as a pledge, he makes Carl swallow the ring, which is a symbolic act of violence signifying the death of love.

In scene V, Grace smacks Graham as hard as she can, then hugs him very tightly. Grace's incestuous relationship with her brother is delusional based on Graham being alive: She does not accept Graham's death, and she resurrects him in her imagination. Graham dances a dance of love for Grace. She copies his movements, takes on the masculinity of his movement and the expression on his face, and her voice is more like his. She dances with his spirit; and they sing the first verse of "You Are My Sunshine" by Jim Davis and Charles Mitchell. Grace says: "Love me or kill me, Graham."<sup>2</sup> He sucks her right breast; and she touches his penis. They stand naked, and make love. Miraculously, a giant sunflower sprouts up through the floor, grows above their heads, representing the final disintegration of a corrupt civilisation. The boundless power of love, and the fire of passion are purifying.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120. For sure, this is the quotation which gave Graham Saunders' book its name: '*Love Me or Kill Me*': *Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*. Also, in scene XII, Graham says: "Love me or kill me", p. 135.

In scene VII, Grace teaches Robin how to read and write. Actually, Robin's story is based on a black activist who was jailed with Nelson Mandela during the apartheid years: He was eighteen years old. He was put in Robben Island, and was told that he would be there for forty-five years. Because he was illiterate, it did not mean anything to him. Other prisoners taught him how to read, write, and count; he realised how long his prison sentence was and what forty-five years meant, and he hung himself.

Grace tells Robin that she once had a boyfriend who bought her a box of chocolates and then wanted to strangle her. Robin is in love with Grace, a person who does not believe in heaven. When Tinker comes, picks up Robin's paper, and sees a flower – the motif signifying the love between Grace and Graham – he sets light to the paper, and burns it.

Scene VIII starts with the sound of a football match, which is again a sign of real life. Carl tries to speak, but no sound comes out. He writes Rod words of love, and Tinker cuts off his hands to prevent him from writing. Rod picks up the severed left hand, takes off the ring he put there, and puts on the ring. A rat scuttling around gnaws Carl's amputated right hand. In scene X, Grace is beaten by a group of men. There is the sound of baseball bats hitting her. Graham tells her the way to endure extreme pain:

**Graham** I used to put my spoon in my tea and heat it up. When you weren't looking press it on your skin at the top of your arm and you'd (*crack*) scream and I'd laugh. I'd say Do it to me.

**Grace** Do it to me.

**Graham** You'd press a hot spoon on me I'd not feel a thing.  
Knew it was coming.  
If you know it's coming you're prepared. <sup>1</sup>

Grace, who is raped by one of the Voices, is wounded. Her clothes turn red where Graham touches, blood seeping through; and Graham's body bleeds in the same places, because of the destructive nature of love. When an automatic gunfire shatters the wall and splatters it with blood, out of the ground grow daffodils which cover the whole stage. Love as a purifying force is shown by a profusion of daffodils; love can make "bigger-than-life" flowers bloom in the torture chamber. In scene XII, Grace's subjection to shock therapy is Artaudian:

---

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 132.

*An electric current is switched on.  
Grace's body is thrown into rigid shock as bits of her brain are burnt out.  
The shaft of light grows bigger until it engulfs them all.  
It becomes blinding.*<sup>1</sup>

In scene XIII, a child sings Lennon and McCartney's "Things We Said Today". Carl, who is recalcitrant, dances a dance of love for Rod. The dance is frenzied, and Carl makes grunting noises. Each time Carl used a part of his body to express love, it was cut off: This time, Tinker cuts off Carl's feet which the rats immediately carry away. Carl is ritually mutilated.

In scene XV, Tinker comes, pulls Robin – who is asleep – by the hair, puts a knife to his throat, and uses force to feed him with a box of chocolates. Robin retches, wets himself, and remains in the puddle; Tinker rubs Robin's face in his own urine. Robin uses the empty chocolate box to clean up the urine, tears up some books, and soaks up the mess. Tinker provides Robin a box of matches, and Robin burns the spoiled books.

In scene XVI, there is a scorching heat and fire in which most of the rats are dead, and the few which are alive run around frantically. Carl makes love to Rod. Rod takes off the ring, puts it in Carl's mouth, and Carl swallows it. When Tinker sees them lying wrapped around each other, he kills Rod by cutting his throat, and says nothing more than "Burn him."<sup>2</sup> In scene XVII, Grace, Graham and Robin are by the ashes of the fire. Robin takes off his – Grace's – tights, makes a noose, and commits suicide by hanging himself.

In scene XVIII, Grace lies unconscious on a bed, and Carl lies unconscious next to her. Apart from a strapping around her groin and chest, Grace is naked. She had a penis transplant, and her breasts are chopped off; she is crudely operated on by Tinker to more fully resemble Graham. A phallus hangs from her crotch. Apart from a bloodied bandage strapped around his groin, Carl is naked. His penis is sewn on to the body of Grace who touches her stitched-on genitals, her transformed body. During World War II, the Nazi scientists carried out similar horrible operations. Carl looks at Grace, and screams silently. In *Antonin Artaud and His Legacy*, Mal Smith wrote:

---

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

Artaud was interested in the power of the scream for the actor. At the end of *Cleansed* Carl screams silently. This used to be vocal, but was changed in rehearsal after discussion with people from Amnesty International. They told us about the way in which a victim watched another being tortured. They felt they were screaming, but in fact they became paralysed with fear, and though they wanted to, they could not scream. So, in the penultimate scene we have Carl physically screaming, but without the sound.<sup>1</sup>

In scene XX, Grace, who looks and sounds exactly like Graham, wears his clothes: She takes up his identity. Carl wears Robin's – Grace's / women's – clothes. Two rats gnaw at festering wounds: One chews at Grace's / Graham's wounds, the other at Carl's. Carl cries, Grace / Graham holds the handless arm of the castrated homosexual. It stops raining, and the sun shines. *"The sun gets brighter and brighter, the squeaking of the rats louder and louder, until the light is blinding and the sound deafening."*<sup>2</sup>

In scenes VI, IX, XIV and XIX, between the scenes of torture, Tinker goes to the peep-show booth. He sits in a booth, puts a token in the slot, the flap opens, and he masturbates while watching an erotic dancer imprisoned in the booth. In scene XIX, Tinker, who treats the Woman like a prostitute, takes her right breast into his mouth. Both naked, they make love. She licks away his tears. When Tinker asks her name, she answers "Grace": He transposes the idea of Grace onto this woman. In scene XI, Robin goes into the booth. He watches eagerly, but then becomes distressed, and *"cries his heart out."*<sup>3</sup>

*"Cleansed"* means catharsis: Theatre cleanses the spectators by making them feel powerful emotions. According to Artaud and Kane, the spectators are transformed by the play; they are freed from psychic tensions. In the 1998 Royal Court production, Stuart McQuarrie, the actor who played the part of Tinker, made a snipping sound with the shears to show the removal of Carl's tongue. The mutilation was shown through a piece of red cloth being extruded from the mouth and cut. When Tinker amputated Carl's hands and feet, red streamers were used.<sup>4</sup> Blood was represented by ribbons and red silk material, the rats by twitching bags with tails, and the fire by an orange-lit cloth. The actors had to do psychological work on themselves.

---

<sup>1</sup> Graham Saunders, *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 151.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> This reminds us of Brook's 1955 Stratford production of *Titus Andronicus*, in which Lavinia comes after her rape and mutilation with red streamers, representing blood flowing from her mouth and hands.

The subconscious was shocked with visual images which recalled the depth of primitive rituals. The ritualised cruelty, the extreme love and cruelty, the diminution of language, the extraordinary set and theatrical imagery, and the Jacobean quality were all Artaudian:

Jeremy Herbert's scenography, described as a 'series of vividly lit, cunningly designed tableaux', where characters 'lie on violently tilted hospital beds' or 'sprawl on steeply raked platforms as if stuck in a fly-trap', seemed to come close at times to an Artaudian conception of theatre...<sup>1</sup>

As James Macdonald says, "Words are literally only a third of the play... The bulk of the meaning is carried through the imagery."<sup>2</sup> In the production, there were moments of magic and bliss; and the rat sounds were used in a metaphoric way. There were no separate rooms; the lighting changed according to the colours given in the script.

#### 4.2.5 Crave

In some ways for me *Crave* has very fixed and specific meanings in my mind which no one else could ever possibly know unless I told them. For example, who knows what 199714424 (188) means? I'm the only person who knows – and the actors – and I have no intention of telling anyone what it means. So I can't ever possibly expect to see the same production of the play twice thank God.<sup>3</sup>

In her theatrical journey, like Artaud, Kane was always in pursuit of a new direction. *Crave* – which is an ironic, allusive and meditative text with no stage directions – shows four characters: A, B, C and M. They can also be four distinct elements of the human mind, four aspects of the human nature, a fragmented self, or the competing factions of a person's consciousness. The play shows mental images; and the characters are embittered, dismayed and bewildered by an existence they are not able to control. We see an abusive older man (A) craving for the love of a younger vulnerable woman (C), and the desire of an older woman (M) to have a child by a younger man (B). It is possible to interpret the play as an account of two couples, as the mental collapse of a mind, or as the overlapping feelings of four people. Kane says that the four nameless and unidentified voices stand for specific archetypes:

---

<sup>1</sup> Graham Saunders, *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 86. The quoted parts are said by Susannah Clapp, in the *Observer*, on 10 May 1998.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.



To me A was always an older man. M was always an older woman. B was always a younger man and C was always a young woman ... A, B, C and M do have specific meanings which I am prepared to tell you. A is many things which is The Author, Abuser (because they're the same thing Author and Abuser); Aleister – as in Aleister Crowley who wrote some interesting books ... and Antichrist. My brother came up with Arse-Hole which I thought was quite good. It was also the actor who I originally wrote it for who's called Andrew. M was simply Mother, B was Boy and C was Child, but I didn't want to write those things down because then I thought they'd get fixed in those things forever and nothing would ever change.<sup>1</sup>

A describes himself as a paedophile, a person sexually interested in children. B, who wants to be seduced by an older woman, shows his self-destructive nature by saying “The fags aren't killing me fast enough.”<sup>2</sup> C, who is haunted by abuse, says:

Someone has died who is not dead.<sup>3</sup>  
You've fallen in love with someone that doesn't exist.<sup>4</sup>  
I see no good in anyone any more.<sup>5</sup>  
I'm evil, I'm damaged, and no one can save me.<sup>6</sup>  
I watched my father beat my mother with a walking stick.<sup>7</sup>  
Why did I not die at birth<sup>8</sup>  
I am an emotional plagiarist, stealing other people's pain, subsuming it into my own...<sup>9</sup>

All these uttered by C are full of Artaudian concerns: darkness, death wish, depression, violence, cruelty, existential questions, etc. The omnipresence of the idea “life means death” conquers the entire play. The title of the play means “to have a strong desire for something”; it also recalls its French homonym “crève”, which means “to die”. The destructive and liberating force of death is shown by light: *Crave* ends in blinding light. The ending can be interpreted as the silent drifting into unconsciousness, the anger towards the fading of the light, or the last gasp of gaiety before death. In the play, death is symbolized by maggots:

---

<sup>1</sup> Graham Saunders, *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 104. “Andrew” is the actor Andrew Maud, who played the roles of Doctor, Priest, and Theseus in the British premiere of *Phaedra's Love*. Aleister Crowley – a diabolist claiming to be the Beast from the Book of Revelation – was from a group named the “Order of the Golden Dawn” which dealt with Cabalistic magic.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158. A repeats the same sentence later in the play, p. 190.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

C Maggots everywhere.  
 ...  
 C Whenever I look really close at something, it swarms with white larvae.  
 ...  
 C I open my mouth and I too am full of them, crawling down my throat.  
 ...  
 C I try to pull it out but it gets longer and longer, there's no end to it. I swallow it and pretend it isn't there.<sup>1</sup>

M says "I have a black black side I know. I have a side so green you will never know",<sup>2</sup> where black means death, and green means life. Later in the play, C says "A cool summer and a mild winter",<sup>3</sup> where summer means the fertility of life, and winter means the sterility of death. The passages with "yes" and "no" also denote the same thing: the positive side of life versus the negation of life, death.

The dark side of the play, which explores the bleakest corners of life, is Artaudian. Kane constantly reminds us that all human beings are mortal. She uses the image of the night as a metaphor of death; she plays with the lexical field of death; and she uses words such as "night", "nightfall", "dark", "darkened", "darkness", "black", "blackness", "shade", "die", "dead", "murder", and "kill". Like Artaud, she leaves the spectators with something they can walk away with. The surreal piece, *Crave*, shows anguish, sexual torment, and spiritual despair; and it confronts the thoughts and feelings of the spectators through physical reactions. Life is cruel, and the individual is forgotten in a dehumanised society:

M I don't want to grow old and cold and be too poor to dye my hair.  
 ...  
 M I don't want to be living in a bedsit at sixty, too scared to turn the heater on because I can't pay the bill.  
 ...  
 M I don't want to die alone and not be found till my bones are clean and the rent overdue.<sup>4</sup>

The twentieth century pain is reflected in the play. Kane shows the horrors of war; and she refers to the Vietnam War and the picture of Nguyen Kong when A says "A Vietnamese girl, her entire existence given meaning and permanence in the thirty seconds she fled from her

---

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

village, skin melting, mouth open.”<sup>1</sup> Loneliness, being excluded from the rest of the world, and loss of self-esteem are symptoms of depression. A talks about a little girl’s depression:

A small girl became increasingly paralysed by her parents’ frequently violent rows. Sometimes she would spend hours standing completely still in the toilet, simply because that was where she happened to be when the fight began. Finally, in moments of calm, she would take bottles of milk from the fridge or doorstep and leave them in places where she may later become trapped. Her parents were unable to understand why they found bottles of sour milk in every room in the house.<sup>2</sup>

What C tells about being hospitalized in “ES3”, with its clinical procedures where “They switch on my light every hour to check I’m still breathing”,<sup>3</sup> is a precaution taken for patients at risk of killing themselves. Kane deals with existence by giving a definition of it:

A Life happens.  
B Like flowers,  
C Like sunshine,  
A Like nightfall.  
C A motion away,  
B Not a motion towards.  
...  
C As if the direction makes any difference.<sup>4</sup>

In the play, Kane shows the cruelty of our nature as human beings; and she uses quite shocking descriptions. For instance, what A says leaves us aghast and petrified with horror:

In a lay-by on the motorway going out of the city, or maybe in, depending on which way you look, a small dark girl sits in the passenger seat of a parked car. Her elderly grandfather undoes his trousers and it pops out of his pants, big and purple.<sup>5</sup>

And the bus driver loses it, stops the bus in the middle of the road, climbs out of his cab, strips off his clothes and walks down the street, his cute little arse shining in the sun.<sup>6</sup>

With her “cruel” descriptions, Kane attacked the mind of the twentieth century. On 7 February 1948, Artaud had written a letter – about the writer’s assault on the mind – to the journalist and critic René Guilly:

---

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 157-158.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

#### THE DUTY

of the writer, of the poet  
is not to shut himself up like a coward in a text, a book,  
a magazine from which he never comes out  
but on the contrary to go  
into the world  
to jolt,  
to attack  
the mind of the public,  
otherwise  
what use is he?  
And why was he born? <sup>1</sup>

Losing one's lover means that life becomes meaningless. Instead of leading an unbearable life, some, without hesitation, choose death. Michael Billington of the *Guardian* describes C's reaction to A's long love speech as she "twists and writhes like a trapped snake." <sup>2</sup> Like Artaud, Kane emphasized the destructive nature of the human beings, and her spectators were all actively engaged with the drama that is being performed on the stage.

#### 4.2.6 4.48 Psychosis

I think to a certain degree you have to deaden your ability to feel and perceive. In order to function you have to cut out at least one part of your mind. Otherwise you'd be chronically sane in a society which is chronically insane. I mean, look at Artaud. That's your choice: Go mad and die, or function but be insane. <sup>3</sup>

Kane believes that madness is better than sanity; because all people live in an insane world, it is impossible for them to be sane. In order not to be crazy, people must refuse to face reality. Artaud's theatre of cruelty influenced Kane's astonishing, mesmerising, hypnotic, poignant, and harrowing *4.48 Psychosis*. Its formal qualities resemble Artaud's *To Have Done With the Judgment of God* in which the pain coming from the split between mind and body is shown.

Kane reaches the spectators subconsciously. Artaud's actors made signs and gestures to the spectators in the same way as those about to be burnt at the stake. Kane's actors are also "like victims burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames." <sup>4</sup> According to Nils Tabert:

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, pp. 582-583.

<sup>2</sup> Graham Saunders, *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 31, quotation 1.

Sarah's plays can't be limited to this but they are desperately making signs to society – not cries for help, but saying 'this is what the world is like from my point of view'. And it makes you very uncomfortable towards the world ... And I think that was one of the things Sarah was working for – that we have to get back in touch with our feelings – even if this is very risky.<sup>1</sup>

*4.48 Psychosis*, which looks like a modernist poem rather than a playtext, consists of doctor-patient conversations, notes about dejection, mental anguish and psychological affliction, and caustic accounts of the use of drugs. Kane highlights their inefficiency by making a list of the doses of the drugs injected to the patient and their negligible consequences. The material of the play is taken from self-help psychology books, apocalyptic visions inspired by the *Book of Revelations*, the language of medical questionnaires, and clinical case histories.

In Stephen Barber's words, "the symptoms of schizophrenia, delirium and paranoia are viewed, assessed and incorporated into Artaud's language."<sup>2</sup> And, Kane's play is full of such mental problems. The play is "something beautiful about despair"; and it is a cry for help. In David Greig's words, "*4.48 Psychosis* sees the ultimate narrowing of Kane's focus in her work. The struggle of the self to remain intact has moved from civil war, into the family, into the couple, into the individual and finally into the theatre of psychosis: the mind itself",<sup>3</sup> and it is "a report from a region of the mind that most of us hope never to visit but from which many people cannot escape."<sup>4</sup> Kane thinks that depression is quite a healthy state of being as it gives a better perception of the world. In the play, the depressive patients are referred to as "anathema / the pariahs of reason".<sup>5</sup> Although our modern society regards hospitalization as the only remedy for depression, Kane rejects such a solution: Doctors think that depression is an illness, and they try to treat it with medication which, in reality, makes it worse.

4:48 a.m. is the darkest hour before dawn; it is the moment most suicides take place in England; it is the time when the awareness of the cruelty of man and the realization of the cruelty of things become unendurable; in psychological crisis, it is the minute when the boundaries between waking life and dream life completely disappear.

---

<sup>1</sup> Graham Saunders, *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. xvi.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

4.48 *Psychosis* is written from the point of view of a person with bipolar disorder, which Kane herself also suffered from. The motif “serial sevens” – counting down from one hundred by sevens, a diagnostic test used by psychiatrists to test for loss of concentration in psychotic delirium – is repeated. The issue of suicide is dealt with; and it was Artaud who had written about suicide in *The Umbilicus of Limbo*:

Anguish which drives men mad.  
Anguish which drives men to suicide.  
Anguish which condemns them to hell.  
Anguish which medicine does not know.  
Anguish which your doctor does not understand.  
Anguish which violates life.  
Anguish which constricts the umbilical cord of life. <sup>1</sup>

Kane deals with death wish, pain, and existential questions: “I have become so depressed by the fact of my mortality that I have decided to commit suicide / I do not want to live”, <sup>2</sup> “there’s no point in anything because I’m going to die”, <sup>3</sup> “Take an overdose, slash my wrists then hang myself”, <sup>4</sup> “I feel like I’m eighty years old. I’m tired of life and my mind wants to die”, <sup>5</sup> “I miss a woman who was never born”, <sup>6</sup> “the only thing that’s permanent is destruction / we’re all going to disappear / trying to leave a mark more permanent than myself”, <sup>7</sup> etc. The play, which shows madness and suicidal depression from the inside out, can be evaluated as a journey through the mind of a person; it is a stream-of-consciousness view of a person’s effort to attain peace; it is an internal monologue showing the progress of clinical depression leading to death. A voice is dragged through therapy and medication; a character looks for a non-existent lover. Life has no meaning if one loses his love:

Cut out my tongue  
tear out my hair  
cut off my limbs  
but leave me my love

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Sontag, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 207.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

I would rather have lost my legs  
pulled out my teeth  
gouged out my eyes  
than lost my love. <sup>1</sup>

4.48 *Psychosis* is a criticism of the medical system. In order to cure the depressive, the doctors disconnect him from the reality; and this is a dilemma for the patient who is torn apart between contradictory desires: He wants to get rid of his pain, but cannot accept the idea to refuse the truth. Artaud had always looked for an evil intent behind the psychiatric institution. Kane's words echo the same. The patient is helpless in front of "an armada of intimidating doctors". The patient thinks that the doctors' only aim is to humiliate him: "A room of expressionless faces staring blankly at my pain, so devoid of meaning there must be evil intent", <sup>2</sup> "Paranoid thoughts – believes hospital staff are attempting to poison her", "Argument with junior doctor whom she accused of treachery after which she shaved her head and cut her arms with a razor blade", <sup>3</sup> "You are my doctor, my saviour, my omnipotent judge, my priest, my god, the surgeon of my soul / And I am your proselyte to sanity." <sup>4</sup>

In the play, there are different kinds of typographical presentations which show the different psychic states of the depressive. The disorganized speech shows his interior monologue; the dialogues – his conversation with the doctors – show his return to reality; their contradiction shows the schizophrenia, the duality of the patient's mind and body.

James Macdonald, the director, divided the voice of the play into three: two women and one man. The three voices actually symbolize the division of a person into victim, perpetrator, and bystander. In the actual production, on the back wall of the stage, there was a forty-five degree wall of mirrors sloping upwards towards the spectators; the stage could be seen from above through the mirrors; the spectators witnessed everything carried out on two different planes. The mirror was used as a medium in which different states of mind were given

---

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Kane, *Complete Plays*, p. 230.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

expression. Also, video projections were used. Daniel Evans – an actor who appeared in the Royal Court production of *4.48 Psychosis* – had carved scars on his arm, which spelled out “Yes / No”: This connected the mind and the body; and it was based on someone Kane knew:

I just met someone who has taken God knows how many overdoses and has attempted suicide in almost every imaginable way. She has a huge scar round here [points to her throat] and scars round here [points to her wrists]. But actually she's more connected with herself than most people I know. I think in that moment when she slashes herself, when she takes an overdose suddenly she's connected and then wants to live. And so she takes herself to hospital. Her life is an ongoing stream of suicide attempts which she then revokes. And yes, there's something really awful about that but I can understand it very well. It makes sense to me.<sup>1</sup>

At rehearsals, they had psychiatrists and other professionals. In an interview dated 19 July 2000, Evans said:

... We had Louis Wolpert who was actually a famous embryologist and also suffers from depression. One of the most helpful people was an actress and poet called Poppy Hands who suffered from depression, but who's well now. She had many failed suicide attempts, and was really helpful. We went to the Maudesley Hospital where Sarah had been. We didn't go to her ward, though I had been there whilst we were doing *Cleansed*. Just to see the Maudesley was a thing in itself, because it's fucking horrible! Oh the wards that we were on, God alive! From the colours of the walls, to the ... I mean the nurses were great. The nurse who spoke to us was brilliant. But they were obviously under so much pressure from bureaucracy, that how anyone can get better in that atmosphere is beyond me. ... Going to the Maudesley for me showed and justified absolutely the anger that flows through *4.48 Psychosis*, against the way the medical profession treat people when they fall ill.<sup>2</sup>

They read the books which Kane was reading at the time of her death: C. S Lewis' *The Silver Chair*;<sup>3</sup> Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*; Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*; and Edwin S. Shneidman's *The Suicidal Mind* which Kane consulted when writing *4.48 Psychosis*. The list of books which informed the play was from the bedside of Kane. Her brother let them know about the reading material. There were also books on suicide, the play by Phil Jameson, Lewis Wolpert's *Anatomy of Despair*, and Elizabeth Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation: Young and Depressed in America*.

---

<sup>1</sup> Graham Saunders, *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>3</sup> *The Silver Chair* is about a Prince who is forced to live underground and has only an hour of true sanity each night. But, during this hour, everybody thinks that it is his only hour of madness.



## 5. CONCLUSION

In our perverse world, the most direct, maybe the only possible way, to tell the truth is dark fantasy in which the transformation of the lives of the actors and spectators is required. Artaud, who believed in the theatre's power to represent life, lived and breathed theatre like no other. Real life is full of evil. Artaud exposed the spectators to the experience of a danger, and then freed them from it. His theatre was not a kind of torture, but a facing of the worst that could happen, followed by a refreshing release from it. At the end, the spectators felt relieved, as if awakening from a nightmare, the evil and terror cleansed away. He wanted his audience to take something home from his theatre: He appealed to their emotions, to their reactions, and to their humanity. According to him, true theatre "is born out of organized anarchy". Kane, whose theatre truly does all these, can acquire the reputation of being the foremost practitioner of Artaud's theories of cruelty.

Like Artaud, Kane worked with the soul, and attacked the senses of the spectators, who are brought out of their desensitisation, confronting themselves. Like Artaud's actors, Kane's actors were not afraid of the true sensation of a knife-wound. They both used savage shock tactics, and insisted upon a direct and immediate contact between the performers and the spectators, thus maximizing the effect through the intensity of the experience. Kane's consciousness-raising performance was a visual and aural attack on the senses. Like Artaud, she wanted to awaken the spectators from their passive slumber; she confronted them with an experience so direct that the consciousness of that audience was shaken; her productions were visceral assaults on the spectators.

Although many of the critics were shocked, Kane's plays were nothing more than the display of the human condition itself: The spectator could see his own reality in the spectacle. The responsibility was towards the truth, even if the truth was disastrous. Like Artaud, Kane made the individual question himself and the society he lived in: If theatre can change lives, it can change the society. Like the work of Artaud, pain is an integral part of Kane's work. Changing the well-known English proverb "No pain, no gain" slightly, on 29 April 1998, Claire Armitstead wrote in the *Guardian*: "No Pain, no Kane", which briefly summarizes her.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Apollinaire, Guillaume, "The Breasts of Tiresias", Trans. Louis Simpson, *Modern French Theatre: The Avant-Garde, Dada, and Surrealism: An Anthology of Plays*, Eds. Michael Benedikt and George E. Wellwarth, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc, New York, 1964, pp. 55-91.
- Arikan, Yilmaz, *Uygulamali Tiyatro Egitimi*, Pozitif Yayınevi, 7. Basım, İstanbul, 2002.
- Arnold, Paul, "The Artaud Experiment", Trans. Ruby Cohn, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Winter 1963, Tulane University, Department of Theatre and Speech, New Orleans, Louisiana, pp. 15-29.
- Aronson, Arnold, *American Avant-garde Theatre: A History*, Routledge, London and New York, 2003.
- Artaud, Antonin, "Scenarios and Arguments", Trans. Victor Corti and Simone Sanzenbach, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 11, No. 1, T33, Fall 1966, Tulane University, Department of Theatre, New Orleans, pp. 166-185.
- . "States of Mind: 1921-1945", Trans. Ruby Cohn, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Winter 1963, Tulane University, Department of Theatre and Speech, New Orleans, Louisiana, pp. 30-73.
- . *Suç Ortakları ve Iskenceler*, Çev. Ahmet Soysal, Nisan Yayınları, İstanbul, 1992.
- . *The Theater and Its Double*, Trans. Mary Caroline Richards, Grove Press Inc., New York, 1958.
- . "To End God's Judgment", Trans. Victor Corti, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 9, No. 3, Spring 1965, Tulane University, Department of Theatre and Speech, New Orleans, Louisiana, pp. 56-98.
- Aston, Elaine, and Janelle Reinelt (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern British Women Playwrights*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.
- Barber, Stephen, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs*, Faber and Faber Limited, London and Boston, 1994.
- Barthes, Roland, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, Trans. Richard Howard, Vintage Classics, London, 2002.

- Benedikt, Michael (ed. and trans.), *The Poetry of Surrealism: An Anthology*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, Toronto, 1974.
- Bentley, Eric (ed.), *The Theory of the Modern Stage: An Introduction to Modern Theatre and Drama*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1992.
- Bermel, Albert, *Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty*, Methuen Publishing Limited, London, 2001.
- Brandt, George W. (ed.), *Modern Theories of Drama: A Selection of Writings on Drama and Theatre 1850-1990*, Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press Inc., New York, 1998.
- Braun, Edward, *The Director and the Stage: From Naturalism to Grotowski*, Methuen Drama, London, 1996.
- Brockett, Oscar G., *Tiyatro Tarihi*, Yay. Haz. İnönü Bayramoğlu, Çev. Sevinç Sokullu, Sibel Dinçel, Tülin Sağlam, Semih Çelenk, Selda B. Öndül, Beliz Güçbilmez, Dost Kitabevi Yayinlari, Ankara, 2000.
- Brook, Peter, *Açık Kapi: Oyunculuk ve Tiyatro Üzerine Düşünceler*, Çev. Metin Balay, Yapi Kredi Yayinlari, Istanbul, 2004.
- . *The Empty Space*, Discus Books (Avon Books), Second Printing, New York, 1972.
- . *The Shifting Point: Theatre, Film, Opera: 1946-1987*, Theatre Communications Group, Inc., Second Printing, New York, 1999.
- Buse, Peter, *Drama + Theory: Critical Approaches to Modern British Drama*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 2001, pp. 172-190.
- Büchner, Georg, *Woyzeck*, Trans. John Mackendrick, Methuen Publishing Limited, London, 1979.
- Candan, Aysin, *Yirminci Yüzyilda Öncü Tiyatro*, Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayinlari, Istanbul, 2003.
- Caws, Mary Ann, *The Inner Theatre of Recent French Poetry: Cendrars, Tzara, Péret, Artaud, Bonnefoy*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1972, pp. 106-140.
- Colman, Andrew M., *A Dictionary of Psychology*, Oxford University Press Inc., New York, 2002.
- Cuddon, J. A., *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, Rev. C. E. Preston, Penguin Books, Fourth Edition, London, 1999.

- Çalışlar, Aziz (Haz. ve Çev.), *20. Yüzyılda Tiyatro*, Ed. Manfred Brauneck, Mitos Boyut Yayınları, Tiyatro / Kültür Dizisi: 5, İstanbul, 1993.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Continuum Books, London and New York, 2003.
- Derrida, Jacques, *Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alan Bass, Routledge Classics, London and New York, 2005.
- Derrida, Jacques, and Paule Thévenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, Trans. Mary Ann Caws, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, 1998.
- Docherty, Brian (ed.), *Twentieth-Century European Drama*, The Macmillan Press Ltd., Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London, 1994.
- Dromgoole, Dominic, *The Full Room: An A-Z of Contemporary Playwriting*, Methuen, London, 2002, pp. 161-165.
- Esslin, Martin, *Antonin Artaud: The Man and His Work*, Calder Publications Ltd., London – Riverrun Press, New York, 1999.
- . *The Field of Drama: How the Signs of Drama Create Meaning on Stage and Screen*, Methuen Publishing Limited, London, 1988.
- . *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Vintage Books, New York, 2004.
- Eyre, Richard, and Nicholas Wright, *Changing Stages: A View of British Theatre in the Twentieth Century*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London, 2001, pp. 347-376.
- Finter, Helga, “Antonin Artaud and the Impossible Theatre: The Legacy of the Theatre of Cruelty”, Trans. Matthew Griffin, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 41, No. 4, T156, Winter 1997, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, pp. 15-40.
- Foucault, Michel, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Trans. Richard Howard, Routledge Classics, London and New York, 2005.
- Genet, Jean, *The Screens*, Trans. Bernard Frechtman, Grove Press, Inc., New York, 1962.
- Goodall, Jane, *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama*, Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press Inc., New York, 1994.

- Grotowski, Jerzy, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Ed. Eugenio Barba, Methuen Publishing Limited, London, 1991.
- Günenç, Yasar (Haz. ve Çev.), *Antonin Artaud: Yasayan Mumya: Metinler*, Yaba Yayinlari, Ankara, 1995.
- Huxley, Michael, and Noel Witts (eds.), *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader*, Routledge, London and New York, 1997.
- Innes, Christopher, *Avant Garde Theatre 1892-1992*, Routledge, London and New York, 2005.
- . *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 528-537.
- Jarry, Alfred, "King Ubu", Eds. and Trans. Michael Benedikt and George E. Wellwarth, *Modern French Theatre: The Avant-Garde, Dada, and Surrealism: An Anthology of Plays*, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc, New York, 1964, pp. 1-54.
- Kane, Sarah, *Complete Plays: Blasted, Phaedra's Love, Cleansed, Crave, 4.48 Psychosis, Skin*, Methuen Publishing Limited, London, 2001.
- Kumiega, Jennifer, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, Methuen, London and New York, 1985.
- Leach, Robert, *Makers of Modern Theatre: An Introduction*, Routledge, London and New York, 2004.
- Marowitz, Charles, "Artaud at Rodez", *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. II, No. 6, April-June 1972, London, pp. 58-62.
- . "Notes on the Theatre of Cruelty", *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2, T34, Winter 1966, Tulane University, Department of Theatre, New Orleans, pp. 152-172.
- . "State of Play", *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2, T34, Winter 1966, Tulane University, Department of Theatre, New Orleans, pp. 203-206.
- . "The Royal Shakespeare's US", *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2, T34, Winter 1966, Tulane University, Department of Theatre, New Orleans, pp. 173-175.
- Martin, Jacqueline, *Voice in Modern Theatre*, Routledge, London and New York, 1991.
- Matthews, J. H., *Theatre in Dada and Surrealism*, Syracuse University Press, New York, 1974.

- Mee, Charles L., Jr., "The Becks' Living Theatre", *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Winter 1962, Tulane University, Department of Theatre and Speech, New Orleans, Louisiana, pp. 194-205.
- Mitter, Shomit, *Systems of Rehearsal: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Grotowski and Brook*, Routledge, London and New York, 1992.
- Mitter, Shomit, and Maria Shevtsova (eds.), *Fifty Key Theatre Directors*, Routledge, London and New York, 2005.
- Neyzi, Ali H., *Tiyatrodan Gösteri Sanatlarına: Tiyatronun Başlangıcı ve Geçirdiği Evreler*, Mitos Boyut Yayınları, Tiyatro / Kültür Dizisi: 57, İstanbul, 2004.
- Poggi, Jack, *Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces 1870-1967*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1968.
- Roose-Evans, James, *Experimental Theatre from Stanislavsky to Peter Brook*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996.
- Rose, Mark V., *The Actor and His Double: Mime and Movement for the Theatre of Cruelty*, Actor Training and Research Inst. Press, Chicago and Amsterdam, 1986.
- Ryan, Paul Ryder, "The Living Theatre's Money Tower", *The Drama Review*, Vol. 18, No. 2, T-62, June 1974, New York University, School of the Arts, New York, pp. 9-25.
- Saunders, Graham, *'Love Me or Kill Me': Sarah Kane and the Theatre of Extremes*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 2002.
- Savarese, Nicola, "1931: Antonin Artaud Sees Balinese Theatre at the Paris Colonial Exposition", Trans. Richard Fowler, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 45, No. 3, T171, Fall 2001, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, pp. 51-77.
- Scheer, Edward (ed.), *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader*, Routledge, London and New York, 2004.
- Schumacher, Claude, and Brian Singleton (eds.), *Artaud on Theatre*, Trans. Claude Schumacher, Brian Singleton, Victor Corti, Simon Watson Taylor, Methuen Publishing Limited, London, 2001.
- Seneca, Lucius Annaeus, "Oedipus", Trans. E. F. Watling, *Four Tragedies and Octavia (Thyestes, Phaedra, The Trojan Women, Oedipus, Octavia)*, Advisory Ed. Betty Radice, Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, 1966, pp. 207-251.

Shakespeare, William, "A Midsummer Night's Dream", *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Wordsworth Editions, Hertfordshire, 1999, pp. 279-301.

--- . "King Lear", *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Wordsworth Editions, Hertfordshire, 1999, pp. 885-923.

--- . "The Tempest", *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Wordsworth Editions, Hertfordshire, 1999, pp. 1135-1159.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe, *The Cenci*, Ed. George Edward Woodberry, D. C. Heath & Co., Publishers, Boston and London, 1909.

Shepherd, Simon, and Mick Wallis, *Drama/Theatre/Performance*, Routledge, London and New York, 2004.

Singer, Annabelle, "Don't Want to Be This: The Elusive Sarah Kane", *The Drama Review*, Vol. 48, No. 2, T182, Summer 2004, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, pp. 139-171.

Sontag, Susan (ed.), *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Trans. Helen Weaver, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988.

--- . "Film and Theatre", *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 11, No. 1, T33, Fall 1966, Tulane University, Department of Theatre, New Orleans, pp. 24-37.

Stephenson, Heidi, and Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting*, Methuen Drama, London, 1997, pp. ix-xx, 129-135.

Strindberg, August, "The Dream Play", Trans. Edwin Björkman, *Plays by August Strindberg*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1928, pp. 23-104.

Styan, J. L., *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice: Volume 2: Symbolism, Surrealism and the Absurd*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

Szondi, Peter, *Theory of the Modern Drama: A Critical Edition*, Theory and History of Literature: Vol. 29, Ed. and Trans. Michael Hays, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987.

Sener, Sevda, *Dünden Bugüne Tiyatro Düşüncesi*, Dost Kitabevi Yayınları, 3. Basım, Ankara, 2003.

*The Drama Review*, "Artaud's *Les Cenci*", Trans. Victoria Nes Kirby, Nancy E. Nes, and Aileen Robbins, Vol. 16, No. 2, T-54, June 1972, New York University, School of the Arts, pp. 90-145. A dossier on Artaud's production of *Les Cenci*.

- Thévenin, Paule, "A Letter on Artaud", Trans. Bettina Knapp, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 9, No. 3, Spring 1965, Tulane University, Department of Theatre and Speech, New Orleans, Louisiana, pp. 99-117.
- Tytell, John, *The Living Theatre: Art, Exile and Outrage*, Methuen Drama, London, 1997.
- Unwin, Stephen, and Carole Woddis, *A Pocket Guide to Twentieth Century Drama*, Faber and Faber Limited, London, 2001, pp. 248-252.
- Virmaux, Alain, "Artaud and Film", Trans. Simone Sanzenbach, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 11, No. 1, T33, Fall 1966, Tulane University, Department of Theatre, New Orleans, pp. 154-165.
- Vitrac, Roger, "The Mysteries of Love", Trans. Ralph J. Gladstone, *Modern French Theatre: The Avant-Garde, Dada, and Surrealism: An Anthology of Plays*, Eds. Michael Benedikt and George E. Wellwarth, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc, New York, 1964, pp. 227-267.
- Wandor, Michelene, *Drama Today: A Critical Guide to British Drama 1970-1990*, Longman (in association with The British Council), London and New York, 1993.
- . *Post-War British Drama: Looking Back in Gender*, Routledge, London and New York, 2001, pp. 232-234.
- Weightman, John, *The Concept of the Avant-Garde: Explorations in Modernism*, Library Press Incorporated, Second Printing, La Salle, Illinois, 1974.
- Weingarten, Romain, "Re-read Artaud", Trans. Ruby Cohn, *Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Winter 1963, Tulane University, Department of Theatre and Speech, New Orleans, Louisiana, pp. 74-84.
- Weiss, Peter, *Marat/Sade (The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade)*, English version. Geoffrey Skelton, Verse Adaptation. Adrian Mitchell, Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd, London and New York, 2001.
- Williams, David (comp.), *Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook*, Methuen, London and New York, 1988.
- Wright, Elizabeth, *Postmodern Brecht*, Yay. Haz. İnönü Bayramoğlu, Çev. Aysegül Bahcivan, Dost Kitabevi Yayinlari, Ankara, 1998.



## **Newspaper Articles**

Kellaway, Kate, "Cleansed", *New Statesman*, 15 May 1998, <<http://find.galegroup.com>>. British Council Journals Database, Thomson Gale, British Council – Turkey (Ankara), 10 November 2005.

Morley, Sheridan, "Blasted: Death and the Dramatist", *Spectator*, 14 April 2001, <<http://find.galegroup.com>>. British Council Journals Database, Thomson Gale, British Council – Turkey (Ankara), 10 November 2005.

## **Websites**

Fisher, Iain, "Sarah Kane: The Notion of Cruelty", 7 November 2005. Available on sites <<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/kandac0.html>>, <<http://www.iainfisher.com/kane/eng/kandac1.html>>.

Sierz, Aleks, "In-Yer-Face-Theatre", 7 November 2005. Available on site <<http://www.inyerface-theatre.com/archive7.html>>.

**ÖZGEÇMİS**  
**Ayşe Gülsüm KARAALIOĞLU**

**Kişisel Bilgiler:**

Dogum Tarihi	08.06.1979
Dogum Yeri	Istanbul
Medeni Durumu	Bekar

**Eğitim:**

Lise	1989-1994	Özel Eyüboğlu Lisesi
	1994-1996	Istek Özel Belde Lisesi
Lisans	1996-2001	Gazi Üniversitesi, Gazi Eğitim Fakültesi, İngilizce Öğretmenliği Bölümü
Yüksek Lisans	2004-	Yeditepe Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Yüksek Lisans Programı

**Çalıştığı Kurumlar:**

2006-	Yeditepe Üniversitesi İngilizce Hazırlık Okulu Okutman
2003-2004	Özel Bogaziçi Lisesi İngilizce Öğretmeni
2002-2003	Özel Batı İlköğretim Okulu İngilizce Öğretmeni