Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers Who Died between 1900 and 1960, from the First Published Critical Appraisals to Current Evaluations

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Preface

Since its inception more than ten years ago, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* has been purchased and used by nearly 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. With this edition—volume 36 in the series—*TCLC* has covered over 500 authors, representing 58 nationalities, and more than 25,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *TCLC*. In the words of one reviewer, "there is nothing comparable available." *TCLC* "is a goldmine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many libraries would have difficulty assembling on their own."

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction for students and advanced readers to authors who died between 1900 and 1960, and to the most significant interpretations of these authors' works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and excerpting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, *TCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *TCLC* presents a comprehensive survey of an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism,* which reprints commentary on current writing. Because of the different periods under consideration (*CLC* considers authors who were still living after 1959), there is no duplication of material between *CLC* and *TCLC*. For additional information about *CLC* and Gale's other criticism titles, users should consult the Guide to Gale Literary Criticism Series preceding the title page in this volume.

Coverage

Each volume of *TCLC* is carefully compiled to present:

- criticism of authors who represent a variety of genres and nationalities
- both major and lesser-known writers of the period (such as non-Western authors increasingly read by today's students)
- 14-16 authors per volume
- individual entries that survey the critical response to each author's works, including early criticism to reflect initial reactions; later criticism to represent any rise or decline in the author's reputation; and current retrospective analyses. The entries also indicate an author's importance to the period (for example, the length of each author entry reflects the amount of critical attention he or she has received from critics writing in English, and from foreign criticism in translation)

An author may appear more than once in the series because of continuing critical and academic interest, or because of a resurgence of criticism generated by such events as a centennial or anniversary, the republication or posthumous publication of a work, or the publication of a new translation. Several entries in each volume of *TCLC* are devoted to criticism of individual works that are considered among the most important in twentieth-century literature and are thus frequently read and studied in high school and college literature classes. For example, this volume includes entries devoted to André Gide's *The Counterfeiters* and Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court.*

Organization of the Book

An author entry consists of the following elements: author heading, biographical and critical

introduction, list of principal works, excerpts of criticism (each preceded by explanatory notes and followed by a bibliographic citation), and a bibliography of further reading.

- The *author heading* consists of the author's full name, followed by birth and death dates. The unbracketed portion of the name denotes the form under which the author most commonly wrote. If an author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located at the beginning of the introduction to the author entry are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets.

- The *biographical and critical introduction* outlines the author's life and career, as well as the critical debate surrounding his or her work. References are provided to past volumes of *TCLC* and to other biographical and critical reference series published by Gale, including *Short Story Criticism, Children's Literature Review, Contemporary Authors, Dictionary of Literary Biography,* and *Something about the Author.*

- Most *TCLC* entries include *portraits* of the author. Many entries also contain reproductions of materials pertinent to an author's career, including manuscript pages, title pages, dust jackets, letters, and drawings, as well as photographs of important people, places, and events in an author's life.

- The *list of principal works* is chronological by date of first book publication and identifies the genre of each work. In the case of foreign authors with both foreign-language publications and English translations, the title and date of the first English-language edition are given in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.

- *Criticism* is arranged chronologically in each author entry to provide a perspective on changes in critical evaluation over the years. All titles of works by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type to enable the user to easily locate discussion of particular works. Also for purposes of easier identification, the critic's name and the publication date of the essay are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the journal in which it appeared. Many of the excerpts in *TCLC* also contain translated material. Unless otherwise noted, translations in brackets are by the editors; translations in parentheses or continuous with the text are by the critic. Publication information (such as publisher names and book prices) and parenthetical numerical references (such as footnotes or page and line references to specific editions of works) have been deleted at the editors' discretion to provide smoother reading of the text.

- Critical excerpts are prefaced by *annotations* providing the reader with information about both the critic and the criticism that follows. Included are the critic's reputation, individual approach to literary criticism, and particular expertise in an author's works. Also noted are the relative importance of a work of criticism, the scope of the excerpt, and the growth of critical controversy or changes in critical trends regarding an author. In some cases, these annotations cross-reference excerpts by critics who discuss each other's commentary.

- A complete *bibliographic citation* designed to facilitate location of the original essay or book follows each piece of criticism.

- An annotated *list of further reading* appearing at the end of each author entry suggests further reading on the author. In some cases it includes essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights.

Cumulative Indexes

Each volume of *TCLC* includes a cumulative index listing all the authors who have appeared in *Contemporary Literary Criticism, Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Nineteenth-Century Litera-*

ture Criticism, Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800, Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism, and *Short Story Criticism,* along with cross-references to the Gale series *Children's Literature Review, Authors in the News, Contemporary Authors, Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series, Dictionary of Literary Biography, Concise Dictionary of American Literary Biography, Something about the Author, Something about the Author Autobiography Series,* and *Yesterday's Authors of Books for Children.* Useful for locating an author within the various series, this index is particularly valuable for those authors who are identified with a certain period but who, because of their death dates, are placed in another, or for those authors whose careers span two periods. For example, F. Scott Fitzgerald is found in *TCLC,* yet a writer often associated with him, Ernest Hemingway, is found in *CLC.*

Each volume of *TCLC* also includes a cumulative nationality index, in which authors' names are arranged alphabetically under their respective nationalities.

Title Index

This volume of *TCLC* also includes an index listing the titles of all literary works discussed in the volume. The first volume of *TCLC* published each year contains an index listing all titles discussed in the series since its inception.

Suggestions Are Welcome

In response to suggestions, several features have been added to *TCLC* since the series began, including annotations to excerpted criticism, a cumulative index to authors in all Gale literary criticism series, entries devoted to a single work by a major author, more extensive illustrations, and a title index listing all literary works discussed in the series since its inception.

Readers who wish to suggest authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to write the editors or call our toll-free number: 1-800-347-GALE.

Acknowledgments

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Karel Čapek (Czechoslovakian novelist and dramatist)—Čapek is celebrated for his science fiction novels and dramas in which he warned against the dehumanizing aspects of modern civilization and satirized a wide range of social, economic, and political systems.

Charles Waddel Chesnutt (American short story writer and novelist)—Chesnutt was one of the first black American writers to receive widespread critical and popular attention. He is best known for short stories about the antebellum South that incorporate subtle and ironic condemnations of slavery.

Benedetto Croce (Italian philosopher and critic)—Considered the most influential literary critic of the twentieth century, Croce developed aesthetic theories that became central tenets of modern arts criticism while establishing important critical approaches to the works of such authors as William Shakespeare, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Pierre Corneille.

Countee Cullen (American poet)—One of the foremost poets of the Harlem Renaissance, Cullen is best remembered for his numerous poems treating contemporary racial issues.

Ford Madox Ford (English novelist)—Ford was a major English novelist and a strong influence on modern trends in both poetry and prose. *TCLC* will devote an entry to *The Good Soldier,* a novel that is often considered Ford's most important.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (American fiction writer and essayist)—Gilman was a prominent social activist and leading theorist of the women's movement at the turn of the century. She examined the role of women in society and propounded her social theories in *Women and Economics* and other nonfiction works, while she depicted the realization of her feminist ideals in her novels and short stories.

Henrik Ibsen (Norwegian dramatist)—Ibsen is regarded as the father of modern drama for his introduction of realism and social concerns to the European theater of the nineteenth century. *TCLC* will devote an entry to one of his most important and best-known dramas, *A Doll's House.*

Sinclair Lewis (American novelist)—One of the foremost American novelists of the 1920s and 1930s, Lewis wrote some of the most effective satires in American literature. *TCLC* will devote an entry to his novel *Babbitt,* a scathing portrait of vulgar materialism and spiritual bankruptcy in American business.

Jack London (American fiction writer and essayist)—London was a popular writer of Naturalist fiction in which he combined high adventure with elements of socialism, mysticism, Darwinian determinism, and Nietzschean theories of race. *TCLC* will devote an entry to his most widely read work, *The Call of the Wild.*

Katherine Mansfield (New Zealand short story writer)—Mansfield was an innovator of the short story form who contributed to the development of the stream-of-consciousness narrative.

Claude McKay (American poet)—A prominent figure of the Harlem Renaissance, McKay was the author of powerful poems of social protest that are considered among the most significant of the early American civil rights movement.

Edmond Rostand (French novelist)—Significant for his revival of romantic verse drama at a time when Naturalism and Symbolism dominated the French stage, Rostand combined an excellent sense of theatrical effect with a keen wit. His optimistic idealism found its best expression in the comedy *Cyrano de Bergerac*, which achieved a lasting international reputation.

John Millington Synge (Irish dramatist)—Synge is considered the greatest dramatist of the Irish Literary Renaissance of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *TCLC* will devote an entry to his drama *The Playboy of the Western World,* which is regarded as his masterpiece.

Yevgeny Zamyatin (Russian novelist)—Censored in the Soviet Union for his best-known work, the dystopian novel *We*, Zamyatin wrote satiric fiction characterized by experimentation with language and imagery that made him one of the most influential Russian writers in the decade following the Russian Revolution.

Emile Zola (French novelist)—Zola was the founder and principal theorist of Naturalism, one of the most influential literary movements in modern literature. His twenty-volume series *Les Rougon-Macquart* is a monument of Naturalist fiction and served as a model for late nineteenth-century novelists seeking a more candid and accurate representation of human life.

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Antonin Artaud

1896-1948

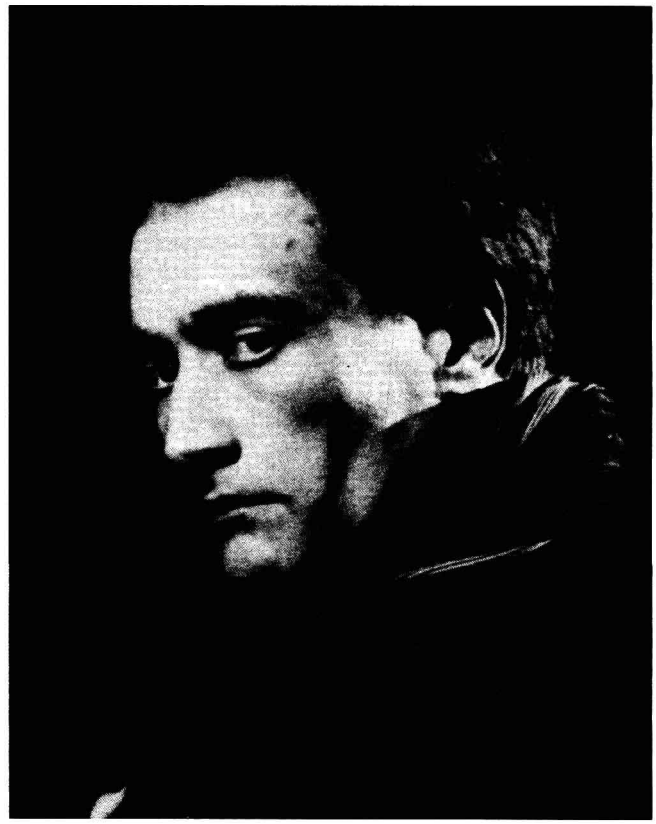
(Also wrote under the pseudonym Le Révélé) French essayist, dramatist, poet, novelist, screenwriter, translator, and actor.

For further discussion of Artaud's career, see *TCLC,* Volume 3.

Artaud is considered one of the most influential drama theorists in the development of modern theater. His concept of Theater of Cruelty—which he outlined in *Le théâtre et son double (The Theater and Its Double)* and other works—extended the possibilities of theatrical presentation by repudiating Western theatrical traditions of realistic social drama in favor of an antirationalist spectacle intended to provoke in his audience an awareness of a higher order of truth and reality.

Artaud was born in Marseilles, the son of a prosperous shipfitter and his wife. Throughout his childhood and adolescence Artaud suffered ill health, chiefly headaches that were believed the result of an acute case of meningitis in 1901. He attended the Marist school in Marseilles, where he founded a student journal in which he published his own poetry. In 1915, suffering from depression, headaches, and other ailments, he sought treatment at a local sanatarium. The following year he was drafted into the army but given a medical discharge a few months later. He spent two years in a Swiss hospital, where his artistic tendencies were encouraged as part of his therapy. After Artaud's condition had improved, he moved to Paris under the care of Dr. Edouard Toulouse, a psychoanalyst and editor of the literary magazine *Demain.* Toulouse published Artaud's poetry in *Demain* and employed him to help with editorial duties. In 1923 Artaud submitted several poems to Jacques Rivière, the editor of the *Nouvelle revue française.* Although Rivière rejected these works as incomprehensible, he did publish Artaud's correspondence which comprised a defense of his works and a statement of his poetic theory, as well as a disclosure of the mental problems that afflicted him.

In Paris, Artaud became fascinated by the theater, and he joined a series of experimental theater groups, including that of Charles Dullin at the Théâtre de l'Atelier. His associates in Paris included many of the artists and writers of the Surrealist group, and for a time Artaud was identified with that movement. However, Artaud, with Roger Vitrac and Robert Aron, was repudiated by the Surrealists when he refused to embrace Marxism. Together, the three founded the Théâtre Alfred Jarry in 1926, stating that their intention was "to contribute by strictly theatrical means to the ruin of the theater as it exists today in France." Throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, Artaud worked in theater and film and grew increasingly dependent on narcotics, which he found relieved the symptoms of his mental disorders. In 1931 he attended a performance by a Balinese theater troupe and was fascinated by the predominance of movement over speech in their art, something he later sought to emulate in his own theatrical works. In 1936 he traveled to Mexico to study the Tarahumaras, a tribe of native Americans living in the Sierra Madre



whose religious rituals include the use of peyote. Artaud's experiences among the Tarahumaras had a profound influence on his perception of the value of mystical religious experience, and he later incorporated this understanding into his work in the theater. He subsequently became interested in Irish mythology as well, and traveled to Ireland in 1937 in possession of a walking stick he believed to have once belonged to St. Patrick. Although details of the event are unclear, Artaud was deported after causing a disturbance in a Dublin monastery. Upon his arrival in France he was judged mentally ill and institutionalized in Rouen. Artaud spent nine of his last eleven years confined in mental asylums and died of cancer in 1948.

Artaud is considered most important as a drama theorist, and his concept of Theater of Cruelty has greatly influenced the development of theater in the second half of the twentieth century. By cruelty, Artaud meant subjection to a theatrical experience in which both audience and actors would confront the fundamental realities of human existence. In his collection of theoretical writings, *The Theater and Its Double,* Artaud asserted that Western theater was in need of radical transformation because its well-ordered plots, realistic presentation of characters, and preoccupation with language no longer had any connection to life. To counteract these con-

ventions of traditional drama, Artaud proposed devaluation of the written text and increased use of movement and sound. He maintained that emphasizing symbolic gestures, nonverbal chanting, and sound effects in a stage production would have the power of a primitive rite in releasing the repressed emotions of the audience. Artaud described what he envisioned in his "First Manifesto of the Theater of Cruelty": "Every spectacle will contain a physical and objective element, perceptible to all; cries, laments, arguments, surprises, all kinds of theatrical shocks, magic beauty, and costumes taken from certain ritual models. Resplendent lighting, incantatory beauty of voices, charm of harmony, rare notes of music, colors of objects, physical rhythms of movements whose crescendo will blend with the pulsation of movements familiar to everyone, the concrete appearance of new and surprising objects, masks, puppets several yards high, sudden changes of light, the physical play of light which causes feelings of warmth and cold."

In addition to his theoretical works, Artaud produced a wide variety of writings, including screenplays, dramas, poetry, and extensive correspondence. His best-known cinematic work is the controversial surrealist screenplay *La coquille et le clergyman,* which in 1927 was made into a film directed by Germaine Dulac. Upon its release Artaud angrily claimed that he had been shut out of Dulac's production and that her realization of his script had radically transformed his work. For some time thereafter, critics largely disregarded *La coquille et le clergyman,* but Artaud's criticisms of the production are now used as a basis for discussion of his film aesthetics. Of his dramas, *Le jet de sang* (*The Jet of Blood*), has received the most critical attention. A violent work considered difficult to produce, *The Jet of Blood* concludes with a prostitute biting the giant wrist of God and causing a stream of blood to splash onto the stage. Artaud's nontheatrical writings include nonfiction works detailing his experiences in Mexico as well as letters and essays on suicide, alienation, madness, and drug use.

Artaud's illness, drug addiction, and alienation have caused him to be linked with such figures as Arthur Rimbaud and Gérard de Nerval as a cult hero of the avant-garde whose work presents an often moving portrait of a tortured mind. Because of his mental illness some critics have dismissed his work as illogical and valueless, but others submit that he purposefully rejected formal logic, intent instead on developing the emotive powers of his work. Artaud's various theories have never been realized in a single production, but aspects of his work have been incorporated into the works of prominent dramatists of the late 1950s and early 1960s, including Jean Genet, Eugene Ionesco, and Peter Weiss.

(See also *Contemporary Authors,* Vol. 104.)

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Tric-trac du ciel (poetry) 1923
**L'ombilic des limbes* (poetry, essays, and dramatic dialogues) 1925
Le pèse-nerfs (poetry) 1925
La coquille et le clergyman (screenplay) 1927
Correspondance avec Jacques Rivière (letters) 1927
[*Artaud-Rivière Correspondence* published in journal *Exodus,* 1960]
L'art et la mort (essays) 1929
Le manifeste du théâtre de la cruauté (manifesto) 1932
Héliogabale; ou, L'anarchiste couronné (novel) 1934
Les Cenci (drama) 1935
[*The Cenci,* 1969]
Les nouvelles révélations de l'etre [as Le Révélé] (essays) 1937
Le théâtre et son double (essays) 1938
[*The Theater and Its Double,* 1958]
D'un voyage au pays des Tarahumaras (essays) 1945
[*Concerning a Journey to the Land of the Tarahumaras* published in *City Lights Journal,* 1964]
Artaud le Momo (poetry) 1947
[*Artaud the Momo,* 1976]
Ci-git, précédé de la culture indienne (poetry) 1947
Van Gogh: Le suicidé de la société (essay) 1947
[*Van Gogh: The Man Suicided by Society* published in *The Tiger's Eye,* 1949]
Lettres de Rodez (letters) 1948
Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu (radioscript) 1948
[*To Have Done with the Judgment of God* published in journal *Northwest Review,* 1963; also published as *To End God's Judgment* in *Tulane Drama Review,* 1965]
Supplément aux lettres de Rodez, suivi de Coleridge, le traitre (letters and essay) 1949
Œuvres complêtes. 20 vols. (essays, poetry, drama, novel, letters, sketches, dramatic dialogues, dramatic sketches, interviews, screenplays, and diaries) 1956-84
Antonin Artaud Anthology (essays, poetry, and drama) 1965
Collected Works. 4 vols. (essays, poetry, drama, dramatic sketches, dramatic dialogues, letters, and interviews) 1968-75
Love Is a Tree That Always Is High: An Artaud Anthology (poetry, drama, and essays) 1972
Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings (essays, poetry, drama, letters, dramatic dialogues, screenplay, interview, and diaries) 1976
The Peyote Dance (essays) 1976

*Includes the first publication of *Le jet de sang;* English translation *The Jet of Blood* published in *Modern French Theatre,* edited by Michael Benedikt and George E. Wellwarth, 1964.

PAUL GOODMAN (essay date 1958)

[*Goodman was an American poet, novelist, short story writer, dramatist, critic, and social commentator. Considered a prophet of the radicalism that flourished on college campuses during the 1960s, he challenged the bureaucratic organization of society and advocated a philosophy uniting principles of anarchism, nonviolence, and political decentralization. In the following excerpt, Goodman praises Artaud's insight into theater while challenging several arguments presented in* The Theater and Its Double.]

Artaud's [***The Theater and Its Double***] is by a man in love and banking everything on his love. He wills this love to give a meaning to life and he wills by this love to counterattack in the society where he is desperate. What he says is often wrong-headed and he often contradicts himself, but he also sees and says important truths with bright simplicity. "I will do what I have dreamed or I will do nothing"—naturally this comes to doing very little; yet since his death the passion of his dream has moved and conquered theatre people. "He was

the only one of our time who understood the nature and greatness of theatre," they say of this confused little book (I am quoting Julian Beck). Now if here for a few paragraphs I try to distinguish the true and false voices of this explosion, it is not to diminish the idol of the theatre people; his passion is more important than sound sense; but it is to help simplify their discussions, in order that that passion can be more effectual.

Everywhere Artaud betrays the attitudes and prejudices of a puritan, self-depriving and with a nausea for ordinary food. I should guess that he clung precariously to his sanity by warding off fantasies of cannibalism and other things he thought depraved. When the theatre broke through this shell and provided him a real excitement, he inevitably thought of it as totally destructive and hellish; it had raped him. The theatre, he says, is "the exteriorization of a depth of latent cruelty by means of which all the perverse possibilities of the mind are localized."

He is wearing blinders. He does not seem to conceive of the more ordinary neurotic or simply unhappy man to whom the magic of the work of art is its impossible perfection, its promise of paradise. And for the happy there is no art: "Where simplicity and order reign, there can be no theatre."

So he famously derives the theatre from the last stages of the Plague, when "the dregs of the population, immunized by their frenzied greed, pillage the riches they know will serve no purpose or profit. At that moment the theatre is born, i.e., an immediate gratuitousness provoking acts without use of profit." He goes on to quote St. Augustine's horror of the theatre's poison. And he ends with a rhapsody on [John] Ford's *Whore,* whose content seems to him to be the plague itself. All this is brilliantly told, with good oral savagery; it may be only a partial view of theatre, but it is a hot one that could give birth to fine works.

Alas! as he thinks it, he becomes frightened of his love, and he begins to reiterate a tediously moralistic theory of illusion and catharsis, false in itself and in direct contradiction to the best things he has to say elsewhere. The action, he reiterates, is only on the stage, it is "virtual" not actual, it develops an illusory world like alchemy; its aim is to "drain abscesses collectively." He seems to think that this symbolic action is the primitive theatre magic, but the very point of the primitive magic is that it is not virtual, it makes the grass grow and the sun come back; the primitive is not afraid of the forces he unleashes.

Artaud's theory of draining the abscesses seems to look like the Greek view of catharsis, but there is a crucial difference: for when it had purged the passions, the Greek play restored its audience to a pretty good community, further strengthened by the religious rite that the play also was, that sowed the corn with the dismembered limbs. But Artaud's play would purge the audience of such vital vices as they have and let them down into the very world from which there is no escape but the asylum. Just so, Artaud is beguiled by the wonderful combination in the Balinese theatre of objective and accurate complexity with trance and indeed witchcraft; but he astonishingly does not see that this is possible because it rises in and still rests in the village, its everyday way of life, and its gamelan. Artaud makes the fantastic remark that the Balinese dances "victoriously demonstrate the absolute preponderance of the *metteur en scène*"—there is a delusion of grandeur indeed!

Artaud betrays little humor, but his view of comedy brings him to the same dilemma, the fear of total destruction. Comedy, he says, is "the essential liberation, the destruction of all reality in the mind." No, *not* all. Comedy deflates the sense precisely so that the underlying lubricity and malice may bubble to the surface. Artaud always thinks the bottom will drop out and that through the theatre one is "confronted with the absolute." But it is not the absolute but always a risky next moment that is very real.

But let us start again on a positive tack, and see where Artaud is strong. Artaud is great when he insists that theatre, like any art, is an action in the sense of a physical cause; it is not a mirroring or portrayal that can be absorbed by the spectator and interpreted according to his own predilections. It is not a fantasy. He rightly compares it to psychoanalysis: "I propose to bring back into theatre the elementary magical idea, taken up by psychoanalysis, which consists in effecting the patient's cure by *making* him assume the apparent and exterior attitudes." Let me say this my own way: the moment of communication we are after is not that in which a structure of symbols passes from the system in one head to the system in another, when people "understand one another" and "learn something." The semanticists, the language-reformers, the mathematicians of feedback do not give us what we are after; the interesting moment is when one is physiologically touched and one's system is deranged and must reform to cope with the surprise. This Artaud wants to say and does say.

It is in the context of theatre as effectual action that Artaud comes to his celebrated assault on literary plays, his refusal to use text to direct from. It is not that he means to attack speech as such, for he understands perfectly that speech is a physical action, it has intonation, it is continuous with outcries and natural signals. He wants, he says beautifully, "to manipulate speech like a solid object, one which overturns and disturbs things, in the air first of all." And his remarks on breathing in the essay on Affective Athleticism are solid gold; for the breathing of anger or some other affect has far more theatrical value than the verbalizing or confabulation about it, which can certainly profitably be diminished.

But there is an aspect of the action of speech that he quite neglects and that makes his attack far too sweeping. Words have inter-personal effect, they get under the skin, and not only by their tone but especially by their syntax and style: the mood, voice and person of sentences, the coordination and subordination of clauses. The personalities of men are largely their speech habits, and in the drama of personalities the thing-language that Artaud is after is not sufficient; we need text, but a text not of ideas and thoughts, but of syntactical relations. Artaud polemically condemns Racine as literary, but he surely knew that Racine's theatre did not depend on the content of those speeches, but on the clash of personalities in them, and especially on the *coup de théâtre* of the sudden entrances and the carefully prepared big scenes. *Coup de théâtre* is theatre as action. If the old slow preparation makes us impatient, the fault may be ours.

Artaud neglects these obvious things because he has, I am afraid, one basically wrong idea: he says that the art of theatre aims at utilizing a space and the things in the space; and therefore he makes quite absolute claims for the *mise en scène.* But this is too general; for the theatre-relation is that some one looks at and is effected by, not a space with things and sounds, but persons behaving in their places. Theatre is

actors acting on us. So the chief thing is neither interpreting the text nor the *mise en scène,* but the blocking-and-timing (conceived as one space-time solid): it is the directedness of the points of view, the confrontation of personalities, the ongoing process of the plot. Artaud was misled, perhaps, by his experience of cinema, where the one who makes the montage, the so-called "editor," is paramount, for what we experience is the flow of pictures. But for the blocking-and-timing of theatre we need, as is traditional, the collaboration of three: the actor, the director and the dramatic poet. (pp. 412-14)

Paul Goodman, "Obsessed by Theatre," in The Nation, *New York, Vol. 187, No. 18, November 29, 1958, pp. 412-14.*

CLAUDE MAURIAC (essay date 1958)

[*The son of Nobel–prize-winning author François Mauriac, Mauriac is a French novelist, dramatist, and critic who is best known for his association with the New Novel movement in France during the late 1950s. In the following excerpt from his study* The New Literature, *Mauriac examines the motivations for Artaud's experimental literature.*]

As in the case of Kafka, it is difficult if not impossible to evaluate the works of Artaud without reference to the man who created them. His poetry is almost intransmissible. It is not inexpressive, but rather it is expressive in the way that human cries can be. **"Cry,"** moreover, is the title of one of his very first poems. It was printed in the *Nouvelle revue française* of September 1, 1924, not for its poetic value, but because it happened to be quoted by Artaud himself in the course of one of his letters about his work of that time. Jacques Rivière had inserted these letters in his review in place of the works themselves, which he considered unpublishable.

When Artaud evokes the *men tortured by language* and names them (François Villon, Charles Baudelaire, Edgar Poe, Gérard de Nerval), he knows that he belongs to the same breed: the poets who *suffer their works.* Reproved, accursed, they *transude* rather than write. As far back as 1923, in the letters to Jacques Rivière, Antonin Artaud makes a diagnosis of the metaphysical illness with which he was afflicted. "I am suffering from a frightful malady of the mind. My thoughts evade me in every way possible. (It is a question of) a total absence, an actual loss." The few fragments which he submitted to the editor of the *N.R.F.* constitute "those remnants which he was able to win away from complete oblivion." Rivière's condemnation was for Artaud equivalent to denying him any sense of reality. If these passages do not succeed in *existing as literature,* their author will be deprived of his only claim to existence: "The whole problem of my thinking is at stake. For me it is a question of nothing less than knowing whether or not I have the right to continue to think, in verse or in prose."

Jacques Rivière replied that "the awkwardness and disconcerting strangeness" of his poetry did not preclude the possibility "that with a little patience he will reach the point of writing perfectly coherent and harmonious poems." Artaud describes his real problem, which will be the real problem throughout his life: *as a central crumbling of the soul, a kind of erosion of thought, essential and at the same time fugitive.* He is "a man who has had great mental suffering and who, by this token, has the right to speak." His weaknesses "have living roots, roots of anxiety."

> There is something that is destroying my thinking, something that does not prevent me from being whatever I shall be able to be, but that leaves me, so to speak, in suspense. Something furtive which takes away the words *that I have found,* which diminishes the intensity of my mind, which, step by step, destroys in its substance the bulk of my thinking, which goes so far as to take away from me the memory of the figures of speech and devices by which one expresses oneself. . . .

His whole generation is suffering, Artaud indicates, from a "weakness that touches the very substance of what has been conventionally called the soul, and which is the emanation of our nerve forces coagulated around objects." In 1924 he wrote that Tristan Tzara, André Breton, and Pierre Reverdy showed symptoms of this sickness: "But in their case, their soul is not affected in a physiological way, nor is it deeply affected. It is only affected at all points where it touches upon something else, so that it is not affected anywhere *except in their thinking.*" They do not suffer, while the pain that afflicts him tortures him "not only in the mind, but in the everyday flesh": "This non-application to the object which is characteristic of all literature is in my case a non-application to life. I can truly say that I am not of this world and this is not simply an attitude of mind."

Jacques Rivière understood. Therefore, in the *N.R.F.,* in place of Artaud's poems he published the letters in which the poet comments on them, as well as his own replies. These are fine, intelligent and such as one could hope for from this man who was himself in a state of continual uneasiness and self-doubt. Two lines from Jacques Rivière show how far he entered into the drama of Artaud, a drama which is not so much of a period as of Man (but which, in this accursed poet, as in Kafka, is carried to a point of exemplary incandescence): "Proust described the *intermittences of the heart;* now one must describe the intermittences of human beings."

Antonin Artaud loses contact with his ego; it is continually in retreat and as though cut off from him. As he points out again to Rivière: "He is not completely himself, not as tall, thick or wide as he really is." His entire life will be spent chasing after his real self, trying to catch his double, in order to fuse with it and at last become only one being. Yes, Jacques Rivière understood Antonin Artaud as much as one could understand him at that time. But we, who know the sequel and the end of his life, give these letters of 1923–24 a significance which escaped not only Rivière but even Artaud. Fortunately for him, Artaud never believed himself to be incurable and regardless of how much his disorder became aggravated he never gave up all hope. If he submitted manuscripts to Rivière, it was in order to prove to himself "that he could still be something," and, above all, a writer: "This is my particular weakness and my *absurdity,* to want to write at any price and express myself."

Some of Artaud's work finally appeared in the December 1, 1925, issue of the *N.R.F.* (Jacques Rivière died at the beginning of the year and probably it was not he but Jean Paulhan who decided to publish it). These are no longer letters in which he explains that he wants to write and that it is his only hope of salvation, but actual literary works. These three fragments: **"Positions de la chair," "Manifeste en langage clair"** and **"Héloïse et Abélard,"** bring us new proof of Artaud's permanent place in letters which was, once and for all, established from this time on. When he writes that "the Sense and Science of every thought is hidden in the nervous vitality of