



DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

V O L U M E

35

DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

Criticism of the Most Significant and Widely Studied
Dramatic Works from All the World's Literatures

VOLUME 35

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Preface

D*rama Criticism (DC)* is principally intended for beginning students of literature and theater as well as the average playgoer. The series is therefore designed to introduce readers to the most frequently studied playwrights of all time periods and nationalities and to present discerning commentary on dramatic works of enduring interest. Furthermore, *DC* seeks to acquaint the reader with the uses and functions of criticism itself. Selected from a diverse body of commentary, the essays in *DC* offer insights into the authors and their works but do not require that the reader possess a wide background in literary studies. Where appropriate, reviews of important productions of the plays discussed are also included to give students a heightened awareness of drama as a dynamic art form, one that many claim is fully realized only in performance.

DC was created in response to suggestions by the staffs of high school, college, and public libraries. These librarians observed a need for a series that assembles critical commentary on the world's most renowned dramatists in the same manner as Gale's *Short Story Criticism (SSC)* and *Poetry Criticism (PC)*, which present material on writers of short fiction and poetry. Although playwrights are covered in such Gale literary criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*, *DC* directs more concentrated attention on individual dramatists than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries in these Gale series. Commentary on the works of William Shakespeare may be found in *Shakespearean Criticism (SC)*.

Scope of the Series

By collecting and organizing commentary on dramatists, *DC* assists students in their efforts to gain insight into literature, achieve better understanding of the texts, and formulate ideas for papers and assignments. A variety of interpretations and assessments is offered, allowing students to pursue their own interests and promoting awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Approximately five to ten authors are included in each volume, and each entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that playwright's work. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's literary criticism series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a *DC* volume.

Organization of the Book

A *DC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** consists of the playwright's most commonly used name, followed by birth and death dates. If an author consistently wrote under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the introduction. Also located at the beginning of the introduction are any name variations under which the dramatist wrote, including transliterated forms of the names of authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.

- The list of **Principal Works** is divided into two sections. The first section contains the author's dramatic pieces and is organized chronologically by date of first performance. If this has not been conclusively determined, the composition or publication date is used. The second section provides information on the author's major works in other genres.
- Essays offering **overviews of the dramatist's entire literary career** give the student broad perspectives on the writer's artistic development, themes, and concerns that recur in several of his or her works, the author's place in literary history, and other wide-ranging topics.
- **Criticism** of individual plays offers the reader in-depth discussions of a select number of the author's most important works. In some cases, the criticism is divided into two sections, each arranged chronologically. When a significant performance of a play can be identified (typically, the premier of a twentieth-century work), the first section of criticism will feature **production reviews** of this staging. Most entries include sections devoted to **critical commentary** that assesses the literary merit of the selected plays. When necessary, essays are carefully excerpted to focus on the work under consideration; often, however, essays and reviews are reprinted in their entirety. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- A complete **Bibliographic Citation**, designed to help the interested reader locate the original essay or book, precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

Cumulative Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *DC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in *DC* as well as other Literature Criticism series.

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A **Cumulative Title Index** lists in alphabetical order the individual plays discussed in the criticism contained in *DC*. Each title is followed by the author's last name and corresponding volume and page numbers where commentary on the work is located. English-language translations of original foreign-language titles are cross-referenced to the foreign titles so that all references to discussion of a work are combined in one listing.

Citing Drama Criticism

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language As-

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Rocha, Mark William. "Black Madness in August Wilson's 'Down the Line' Cycle." In *Madness in Drama*, edited by James Redmond, 191-201. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Reprinted in *Drama Criticism*. Vol. 31, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 229-35. Detroit: Gale, 2008.

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Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xv

Fernando Arrabal 1932- 1
Spanish-born French playwright, novelist, screenwriter, poet, and nonfiction writer

Georg Büchner 1813-1837 121
German playwright and novella writer

Carson McCullers 1917-1967 317
American playwright, novelist, short story writer, and poet

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 377

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 489

DC Cumulative Nationality Index 505

DC Cumulative Title Index 507

Fernando Arrabal

1932-

Spanish-born French playwright, novelist, screenwriter, poet, and nonfiction writer.

INTRODUCTION

Arrabal is hailed by some critics as an avant-garde playwright who exposed the demoralization of humanity in the modern age, and he is excoriated by others who regard his works as blasphemous and obscene. He is associated with the Theater of the Absurd, a dramatic movement of the 1940s through 1960s that combined black comedy, abject tragedy, and horror to examine the hopelessness of the human condition. Arrabal came to the movement in its later years, following the pioneering stagecraft of Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco, and some commentators regard his ties to the movement as tenuous. His early works in particular are highly regarded for their exploration of the effects of memory, chance, and confusion on the individual and collective psyche. Arrabal developed a style of performance art he called "Panic theater," reminiscent of absurdist theater and Theater of Cruelty, which, he stated, incorporated "the sordid and the sublime." In Panic theater, Arrabal wrote, "humor and poetry, panic and love are united."

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Arrabal was born in Spanish Morocco on August 11, 1932, and his family moved to mainland Spain early in his childhood. His mother was a conservative Catholic and his father a political liberal who opposed the regime of Generalissimo Francisco Franco. In 1936 Arrabal's father, an army officer, refused to fight for Franco in the Spanish Civil War. He was arrested and sentenced to a thirty-year prison term. It is believed that Arrabal's mother turned her husband in to authorities because she disagreed with his political beliefs. The elder Arrabal spent eight years in prison and then disappeared from all official records, having allegedly gone insane and escaped. Arrabal's mother, in the meantime, had told her children that their father was dead and destroyed all physical evidence of his existence in letters, photographs, and personal items. When he was seventeen Arrabal discovered a box of his father's letters and became enraged by what he saw as his mother's betrayal. For the rest of his life he would associate his mother with

the rigid authoritarianism of Franco-era Catholicism and political oppression, an association that figures strongly in his plays.

In 1955 Arrabal moved to Paris, in part to search for his father but also to write freely without the fear of arrest in fascist Spain. In 1958 he married Luce Moreau, who has over the years helped translate many of his plays from Spanish into French. Arrabal's early works were always performed initially in French, and they were banned altogether in Spain. With Roland Topor, an artist, and Alejandro Jodorowsky, a filmmaker, Arrabal founded the Panic Movement in 1962. Incorporating elements of surrealism, absurdism, and Antonin Artaud's Theater of Cruelty, the Panic Movement, or Panic theater, was named after the Greek god Pan and sought to produce theatrical events so sensually all-encompassing that they would shock the audience out of middle-class complacency. At the same time, however, Arrabal based his notion of Panic on strict mathematical models to prove what he contended was the perfection and order of chaos.

In 1967, while on a visit to Spain, Arrabal was arrested for blasphemy and imprisoned for several weeks. There he took note of the abysmal living conditions of prisoners, an experience that he wrote about in his play *Et ils passerent des menottes aux fleurs* (1969; *And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers*). Upon his release Arrabal returned to Paris, where he took part in the student uprisings of 1968. These experiences made his subsequent plays more overtly political in tone and subject matter than his earlier, strongly biographical works had been. Arrabal employed Panic techniques when he wrote and directed his surrealist films *Viva la muerte* (1971) and *J'irai comme un cheval fou* (1973). The Panic Movement was dissolved after Arrabal published his "Panic manifesto," *Le Panique*, in 1973.

Despite his reputation for obscenity and rebellion, Arrabal has been awarded numerous international prizes and accolades, including a Ford Foundation Award in 1959, an Obie Award in 1976, a Chevalier of Arts and Letters in 1983, Spain's National Theater Award in 2001 and National Literary Award in 2003, and the University of Murcia's Wittgenstein Prize in 2004. He was decorated with the French Legion of Honor in 2005. He continues to live in Paris with Moreau.

MAJOR DRAMATIC WORKS

Most of Arrabal's early works are biographical in nature, reflecting his nightmarish childhood during the fascist Franco regime and particularly his mother's complicity in his father's imprisonment and disappearance. His characters in these plays are childlike and naïve but also cruel, having no moral center or sense of empathy. In three of his earliest plays, *Le Tricycle* (1958; *The Tricycle*), *Pique-nique en campagne* (1959; *Picnic on the Battlefield*), and *Fando et Lis* (1959; *Fando and Lis*), characters' innocence is perverted, leading to tragedy. In *The Tricycle*, two homeless men rent a tricycle that they in turn rent out to children in a park. When their rent on the tricycle is due, they reason that the best way to handle the situation is to kill a man for his money. The murder, however, is done without malice, and the men do not comprehend society's need for justice when they are taken to prison and their tricycle falls into the hands of others. *Picnic on the Battlefield* features a young soldier and his parents who decide to have a picnic on the battlefield where a war has taken place. After inviting an enemy combatant to join them, they are all killed by machine-gun fire. The title characters of *Fando and Lis* are young lovers on their way to the mythical city of Tar. Fando pushes Lis, who is paralyzed, in a baby carriage, indicating a dependent relationship. But while Fando appears to take parental care of Lis, he does not hesitate to abuse and exploit her. When Lis accidentally breaks Fando's drum, he beats her to death and continues on his way to the city.

In other works, such as *Les Deux Bourreaux* (1960; *The Two Executioners*), Arrabal often conflates a sadistic mother figure with fascism and Catholicism. *Guernica* (1960) was Arrabal's first attempt to present subjective experience in the context of twentieth-century sociopolitical events, with its backdrop of the Spanish Civil War. *Le Cimetière des voitures* (1961; *The Car Cemetery*) is an apocalyptic retelling of the Passion of Christ that takes place in an automobile junkyard where vagrants and prostitutes live as if in a hotel. A jazz musician, Emanou, is the junkyard Christ figure who tries earnestly to be devout and virtuous, but ultimately his attempts are shallow and he is betrayed by a friend and crucified.

One of Arrabal's plays most representative of his Panic period is *La Communion solennelle* (1966; *First Communion*), in which a grandmother dresses a little girl for her first Communion and lectures her on the duties of a good wife, while a necrophiliac undresses himself, preparing to violate the body of a dead woman in a coffin. In the end, the little girl plunges a knife into the necrophiliac, laughing as she stains her pure white dress and red balloons float up from the coffin. *L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie* (1967; *The*

Architect and the Emperor of Assyria) is a two-act play in which a mundane businessman is the sole survivor of a plane crash on an isolated island. There he encounters a savage, whom he teaches to speak and then regales with stories of the glorious human civilization off of the island—all the while convincing the savage, who is the architect of the play's title, that he is a revered emperor. Afterward, the two role-play with a series of masks, and the "emperor" gradually reveals his conflicted relationship with his mother, whom he killed with a hammer, and with his religion. The play's second act presents a mock trial at which the emperor is charged with his crimes and in the end insists on being sentenced to death, directing the architect to eat his body while dressed as the emperor's mother. The play ends back at the beginning, with the actor who had played the emperor dressed in the architect's costume, symbolizing the architect's willing consumption of the materialism and hypocrisy of the civilized world.

Following his arrest and imprisonment in Spain in 1967, Arrabal's focus shifted from the wounds of the individual human psyche to the larger crimes of political oppression and state-sponsored terror. In *And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers*, he deals specifically with the treatment of political prisoners incarcerated under Generalissimo Franco. The play's aim is twofold: Arrabal simultaneously presents a more or less realistic depiction of prison conditions while enacting the turmoil and obsessions of the individual prisoners, each of whom is horrifically debased by his experiences. But the play goes further than its synopsis would suggest, as Arrabal wrote specific directions to involve the audience in the performance. Spectators of the play are confronted with many of the same feelings experienced by the characters in the play: On entering the theater, they may be dragged away from their companions, shoved around, verbally abused, and generally made to feel disoriented and dehumanized. Dehumanization and debasement are also themes in *Le Ciel et la merde* (1972), another Panic piece that involves audience complicity in the perverse actions onstage. Relying heavily on religious imagery and ceremony, *Le Ciel et la merde* portrays Charles Manson as a sexually deviant Christ-like savior and his followers as innocents victimized by an insane society. At the end of the play the characters are put on trial and executed.

Arrabal has frequently used music, dance, and images in his dramatic works. *La Grande Revue du XX^e siècle* (1972) is a multimedia series of skits in the form of a music hall revue but with Arrabal's characteristic use of surrealism, satire, and grotesquerie to criticize modern culture. *Bella Ciao, la guerre de mille ans* (1972) uses similar techniques for the same purpose. In 1974's *Sur le Fil, ou La Ballade du train fantôme* (*On the Wire, or The Ballad of the Phantom Train*), Arrabal explores his ambivalence toward living in exile, which was ampli-

fied on a trip to New Mexico when he discovered a ghost town called Madrid. In the play, the abandoned Madrid, New Mexico, parallels the sterile oppression of Madrid, Spain, as a train comes into the town to remove the dead bodies of men and their horses from an abandoned coal mine to turn into dog food. Yet ultimately Arrabal expresses hope that humanity will triumph over stasis, corruption, and terror through artistic endeavor.

While Arrabal has continued to write plays, which have been produced worldwide, in the 1970s he turned to filmmaking to break out of the visual restrictions of theater. This in turn served to make his later plays even more visually oriented. Among all of his plays, Arrabal has characterized his 1988 revised script of his 1986 play *The Red Madonna* the most difficult to stage because of its frequent set changes and preponderance of visual elements that take the place of dialogue in many scenes. *The Red Madonna* is a fictional interpretation of the factual story of an early twentieth-century Spanish woman named Aurora Rodríguez, who tried to create the perfect child using the theory of eugenics. Her daughter, Hildegart, became a well-known and admired socialist activist, but when she attempted to establish independence from her mother, Aurora killed her. As in Arrabal's earlier plays, sexuality, cruelty, and egomania lead only to corruption and death.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

In his early years as a playwright Arrabal was something of a sensation in Europe, despite his exile from Spain and the fact that his plays were neither written nor performed in his native language until the Franco regime came to an end in 1975. As an artistic descendent of Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco—both of whom petitioned the Spanish government for his release from prison in 1967—he was well known for his shocking and outrageous theatrical “happenings,” particularly those of the Panic period. Neither audiences nor critics were entirely sure what to make of his fascination with obscenity, perversion, and scatology, much less his blasphemous treatment of religion.

Moreover, his outsized personality and vocal criticism of institutions that would limit personal and political liberty have led some to assert that he is more interested in the shock value of his work than its substance. Marie-Lise Gazarian Gautier has noted his reputation as an “anarchist” and the “enfant terrible” of French theater. Reviewing a 1976 production of *The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria* in New York, Stanley Kauffmann wrote of Arrabal: “What is *really* central is the author’s smugness, a conviction that the true test of your spirit will be your appreciation of his poetic play, that to ask

any questions of its theme or its symbols is to betray your dullness. This is one of the con games of the avant-garde hack—not of the genuine avant-garde artist—and Arrabal lolls in the middle of it.” Likewise, critics of a 2007 staging of *The Car Cemetery* in London were unimpressed. Nicholas de Jongh labeled the play “sensational silliness,” while Dominic Cavendish called it “teeth-grindingly ghastly” and Lyn Gardner described it as an “old crock of a play.”

Whether or not Arrabal’s works have lost their power to shock—one common complaint of critics is that Arrabal makes his points too obviously—his imprint on modern theater is unmistakable. Many observers have noted that his most artistically satisfying plays are from the period that followed the Panic Movement, when he successfully merged his early psychological examinations of the inner life with a newfound interest in the macrocosmic effects of institutional oppression. In discussing this phase of the playwright’s work, Peter L. Podol praised Arrabal’s ability “to provide a total theater experience which in its more inspired moments is telling and poetic.”

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Plays

- Le Tricycle* [*The Tricycle*] 1958
- Fando et Lis* [*Fando and Lis*] 1959
- Pique-nique en campagne* [*Picnic on the Battlefield*] 1959
- Les Deux Bourreaux* [*The Two Executioners*] 1960
- Guernica* 1960
- Orchestration théâtrale* [*Theatrical Orchestration*] 1960
- Le Cimetière des voitures* [*The Car Cemetery*] 1961
- Strip-tease de la jalousie* [*Strip-tease of Jealousy*] 1964
- Les Amours impossibles* [*Impossible Lovers*] 1965
- Le Couronnement* 1965; revised as *Le Lai de Barabbas*, 1969
- Oraison* [*Orison*] 1965
- La Bicyclette du condamné* [*The Condemned Man’s Bicycle*] 1966
- Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné* [*Ceremony for a Murdered Black*] 1966
- Une chèvre sur un nuage* [*A Goat on a Cloud*] 1966
- La Communion solennelle* [*First Communion*] 1966
- Concert dans un oeuf* 1966
- Le Grand Cérémonial* [*The Great Ceremonial*] 1966
- L’Architecte et l’Empereur d’Assyrie* [*The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria*] 1967
- *Dieu est-il devenu fou?* [*Has God Gone Mad?*] 1967
- La Jeunesse illustrée* 1967

Le Labyrinthe [Labyrinth] 1967
 **Les quatre cubes* [The Four Cubes] 1967
 †*L'Aurore rouge et noire* 1968
Bestialité érotique [Erotic Bestiality] 1969
Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs [And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers] 1969
Le Jardin des délices [The Garden of Delights] 1969
Une Tortue nommée Dostoïevski [A Tortoise Named Dostoevsky] 1969
 **Ars Amandi* (libretto) 1970
Bella ciao, la guerre de mille ans 1972
 **Le Ciel et la merde* 1972
 **La Grande Revue du XX^e siècle* 1972
La Marche royale 1973
Sur le Fil, ou La Ballade du train fantôme [On the Wire, or The Ballad of the Phantom Train] 1974
Jeunes Barbares d'aujourd'hui [Today's Young Barbarians] 1975
Le Ciel et la merde II 1976
La Gloire en images [Glory in Images] (ballet) 1976
 **Une Orange sur le mont de Vénus* [An Orange on the Mount of Venus] 1976
La Tour de Babel 1976
Vole-moi un petit milliard 1977
 **Le Pastaga des loufs, ou Ouverture orang-outan* 1978
 **Punk et punk et colégram* 1978
Le Roi de Sodome 1979
Inquisición 1980
The Extravagant Triumph of Jesus Christ, Karl Marx, and William Shakespeare 1982
Bréviaire d'amour d'un haltérophile [The Body Builder's Book of Love] 1984
The Red Madonna: A Damsel for a Gorilla 1986; revised, 1988
La Charge des centaurs 1990
Le Fou Rire des Lilliputiens 1996
Teatro completo. 2 vols. 1997
Carta de amor (Como un suplicio chino) 2002

Other Major Works

Baal Babylone [Baal Babylon] (novel) 1959
L'Enterrement de la sardine [The Burial of the Sardine] (novel) 1961
La Pierre de la folie (poetry) 1963
Fêtes et Rites de la Confusion (novel) 1967
Viva la muerte (screenplay) 1971
Lettre au Général Franco/Carta al General Franco (nonfiction) 1972
J'irai comme un cheval fou (screenplay) 1973
Le Panique (nonfiction) 1973
L'Arbre de Guernica (screenplay) 1975
Lettre aux militants communistes espagnols: Songe et mensonge de l'eurocommunisme/Carta a los militantes comunistas españoles: Sueño y mentira del eurocomunismo (nonfiction) 1978
Carta a Fidel Castro (nonfiction) 1983
La Tour prends garde [The Tower Struck by Lightning] (novel) 1983

Humbles Paradis: Première anthologie poétique (poetry) 1985
La Reverdie (novel) 1985
La Vierge rouge [The Red Virgin] (novel) 1986
La fille de King Kong (novel) 1988
L'Extravagante Croisade d'un castrat amoureux, ou Comme un lys entre les épines (novel) 1989
La dudosa luz del día (nonfiction) 1994
La Tueuse du jardin d'hiver (novel) 1994
Diccionario pánico: jaculatorias y arrabalescos (nonfiction) 1998
Le funambule de Dieu (novel) 1998
Porté disparu (novel) 2000
Champagne pour tous! (novel) 2002
Como un paraíso de locos (novel) 2008

*Date indicates first publication rather than first performance.

†This work includes *Groupuscule de mon coeur* (The Groupuscule of My Heart); *Tous les Parfums d'Arabie*; *Sous les pavés, la plage*; and *Les Fillettes*.

AUTHOR COMMENTARY

Fernando Arrabal (interview date April 1974)

SOURCE: Arrabal, Fernando. "Interview: Arrabal," translated by Eva Kronik. *Diacritics* 5, no. 2 (summer 1975): 54-60.

[In the following interview, conducted at Cornell University in April of 1974 with a group of students and faculty members, Arrabal discusses his role as a renegade playwright, forbidden from publishing in his native Spain under Francoist censorship. He also shares his thoughts on fellow modern dramatists such as Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, and Michel de Ghelderode.]

[Interviewers]: A common opinion among those inclined to be critical of culture and wines produced south of the Pyrenees is that Spanish literature is always derivative of something. Specifically, I have heard it said that your theater is half Goya, half Beckett. What is your reaction?

[Arrabal]: Of Goya there is a great deal in my work. But at the time I was writing my first plays, I was living in a small, primitive village in Spain, oblivious to the very existence of Beckett. I wrote those plays in perfect innocence, and when I showed them to some bright friends of mine, they said: "But that's very much like Beckett!" "Who is Beckett?" I asked. And they told me: "He's a writer." I read his work, and indeed there were points of contact between us—a very understandable phenomenon, since we are both witnesses to our

time and were traveling at that moment along the same path. Starting with my second volume of plays, my theater has very little connection with Beckett's. In the period when Ionesco and Beckett were beginning to write, the playwright was faced with a very important problem: the search for reality. Reality was to be seized by figures such as Ionesco, Beckett, Adamov—the so-called dramatists of the absurd. Their literature, which they considered realistic, was called absurd and avant-garde, even though it was the very opposite, a literature that reflected reality to perfection. That was the problem facing men who are now between sixty and seventy years old, and we only happened on the scene *after* that. Their whole theater is a theater of communication through the Word, ruled by His Majesty the Word. Then we came with our theater, which said that no longer was the Word exclusive ruler; rather, His Majesty was image, gesture, body, movement. We created a theater of movement, gesture. Immediately, critics delved into its origins and found, for example, Artaud. It is not surprising that Artaud—a forerunner and a man who had suffered enormously—should have been able to see thirty years into the future, into today's theater. The theater we are creating at this moment (in the United States you have exciting representatives like the Living Theater, the Open Theater, the Playhouse Theater) has nothing to do with the so-called avant-garde, absurd, surrealist theater of Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov. We lend this theater its due respect, of course, but our theater constitutes a total break with theirs.

You talk about the "Word," but you do exactly the opposite of what earlier dramatists did. You seem to destroy words, debase language. We might ask ourselves if the theater can survive if it destroys its own medium.

I believe (and I speak for us all) that we are not attempting to annihilate the word, but to enrich the theater with something it was in danger of losing, that is, movement and imagery. That should make it obvious that we are not out to crush the theater. My theater is very modest; I do not mean to place myself on a level with my colleagues, but I do believe that, thanks to our work and that of the groups I mentioned earlier, we are at the moment witnessing a rebirth of the theater.

*What sort of reaction do you look for in your spectators or readers? Is it a negative one, since there is so much that is shocking and repulsive in your plays? In **And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers**, for example, one leaves the theater completely horrified, disgusted, and with the feeling of having lost contact with everything. If the spectator loses contact with the play, the dramatist fails. Is that the response you expect, or is there something positive to be gleaned from your work?*

You are playing the Devil's Advocate, and you don't want to see what it's all about. One shouldn't spit into a mirror. I am the mirror and witness of society. In

some productions of the play I would ask the actors to exhibit a certain degree of violence toward the audience. I don't know if you felt this. It was necessary because I wanted the audience to be party to the condition of a Spanish political prisoner. You say that the play is disgusting, horrible. Well, I wanted it to be exactly that—every bit as atrocious as reality is. Only a few weeks ago, in Barcelona, some young boys—one a Spaniard, the other a Czech—were executed by the same method described in my play, the garrote. The torture of the garrote is very slow and excruciatingly painful. Death can be agonizing. And these are the horrifying facts in this case: one of the boys was a basketball player, robust and with a powerful neck, and according to the Madrid correspondent of *L'Express*, it took him twenty-five minutes to die. We cannot hide our heads in the sand; we must look reality in the face, as witnesses to it. That may shock you. I would like it to shock you more deeply yet, to the point of getting you to cry out against this horror and keep it from happening again.

One does indeed emerge from the play with a feeling of horror, and of course one feels compassion for the prisoners. But all those frightful scenes destroy everything, even the positive emotions that might be aroused.

No, I think that most of the critics who wrote about **And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers** understood that it is a play filled with tenderness. I was constantly saying to the actors performing it in New York (I express myself badly in English): "Big emotion!" That was the main thing, to display much emotion, to be very nostalgic, very sentimental. But even if you were left shocked and shattered, I know people just like you, who are shocked and shattered but nevertheless spend their summers in Madrid peacefully under the protection of the fascist police. While you and I are talking, there are people who have spent over twenty years in a Madrid prison cell. That, to me, is much more shocking. I believe that a totalitarian regime, like the Franco regime in Spain, the Nazi regime, or the Pinochet regime in Chile, prostitutes the theater. In comparison with the novel, which is a voyage and follows an itinerary, the theater is always a moral lesson. When the playwright sits down to write, he knows what he is going to say and to show, whether his name is Beckett, Brecht or Arrabal. That is why the theater has always been persecuted. That is why I, who am not a political person, and my theater, have lost all right to exist in Spain. Those who write theater in Spain do not have their work forbidden because, simply stated, their plays are novels. Fascist governments everywhere capitalize on the theater's nature as spectacle and prostitute it by converting it into dramatic ceremonies designed to traumatize the people. In Chile, for example, the poet Jara was condemned to death by a court of justice, but

before his execution, his hands were cut off and he was forced to sing. We cannot leave the theater exclusively in the hands of our enemies; we, too, must take advantage of it. What proves the usefulness of the play you mention is that, everywhere and every time it was produced, the Spanish authorities exerted all possible pressure to have it prohibited. Even in a country as liberal as Sweden, Spanish fascists, including a bishop, formed an association to prevent its showing. It is a play that disturbs, and not for the reasons that it disturbs you.

I gather you believe in a kind of theater that conditions the audience as the mass media do, a theater with a subversive thrust necessary in a so-called liberal bourgeois democracy. Since you are no longer in Spain, how do you define your role in a French society that is apparently becoming more and more Spanish in its methods?

The difference between countries like France and Spain is like the difference between night and day. Of course France has its share of trends that are alarming, but nothing comparable to what goes on in Spain. Keep in mind that a few days ago a group of people accused of having assembled in a church in order to talk were sentenced to twenty years in prison. [The case of Marcelino Camacho.] In spite of everything, in France we can express ourselves. We have our difficulties, but, nonetheless, my books are published, my plays are produced, my films are shown.

Although you claim that there are differences among the United States, France, and Spain, the country in which your works are published—France—is, after all, a bourgeois country. Can one deny that France, like the United States, bears a part of the responsibility for what goes on in Spain, in the sense that if a certain kind of society did not exist in France, neither would Spain have the kind of society that has grown there since the Civil War?

France, within its limited means, does what it can for the cause of Spanish democracy. But what can I say? Would you have me not publish my works in France? I suffer because I am not published in Spain. I feel that a tree has a right to its own soil and a writer to his own words and language. Obviously, it is a source of great sadness to me not to be able to express myself in Spanish. I am not a voluntary exile; exile was imposed upon me. I didn't choose not to publish in Spain; my plays were rejected. My plays are published and my films shown everywhere in the world except in Spain. I'm not responsible for that. In a way, censorship is the only distinction that a poet can accept from the Franco regime.

Do you write your plays in Spanish or French?

Forgive me for saying so, but that is the classic question put by fascists who then end up by reproaching me for not writing in Spanish. If I do not publish in Spanish, it is because the Franco censorship prevents me from doing so. I write in Spanish, and with my wife I translate my work into French.

How has the handling of a language that is not your own affected your work?

Some critics who have studied my theater, my novels, and my poems mention my style. I think that an important aspect of my style is the fact that I speak French badly, and in so doing I enrich the language. But I am not unique in this. The contemporary French theater (the most important in the world) is made up in large part of foreigners: Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov. Even the latest theater is created by foreigners. Topor is Polish; without exception, all the important stage managers in France at the moment are foreigners: Victor García, Lavelli, Savary . . . and I think it is a good thing.

Then that gives you an advantage?

Yes, of course, since it is so difficult for us, who are foreigners and half-breeds, to master a foreign language. We enjoy the battle, and in the end, it serves our purpose.

On this subject, what do you think of Genet, since he is a half-breed, morally speaking, but a native Frenchman? Do you like the language and general style of his theater?

Unfortunately, it is a very long time since Genet has written anything.

Yes, but there are works like The Balcony that seem to stake out somewhat the same territory as yours.

I believe Genet is one of the geniuses of the French theater, a great poet. When he was asked: "Aren't you a little sad not to have known your father or mother?" he answered: "How lucky I am! I always imagined that my father was Hercules and my mother a crocodile." I do think he was lucky in that way. If you analyze Genet's theater, whether *The Maids* or *The Balcony*, you discover a pure theater of words. Today's stage managers have embellished it. I recommend to you the issue of *The Drama Review* [June 1973] in which there are photographs of the production of *The Balcony* presented in Rio de Janeiro. It was fantastic! Genet went to Rio and saw the production but found it dreadful because he could not find His Majesty the Word anywhere. All he found was His Majesty the Body. But, nevertheless, he was a precursor without knowing it. The case of Artaud is different. Artaud was a precursor in every way. As I read Artaud I was frightened because I had the sensa-