THEMATIC POLARITIES IN THE MAJOR PLAYS OF JEAN GENET

by

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The characters of Genet's drama live in a world which is inadequate to certain basic emotional needs. The shortcomings of this world can be compensated for only in imagination, and so Genet's characters fantasize modes of living and social roles and gestures denied to them in real life. The identities and attitudes they create in fantasy are therefore the opposites of the same factors in life. Thus all the polarities in Genet's drama stem from the basic dichotomy between reality and illusion.

The average man tries to keep reality and illusion distinct, but Genet deliberately confounds the two so that the identities he creates are continuously in a state of flux. When these identities become indefinable, contraries coincide. Genet's significant contribution to modern drama is accomplished in his deft exploitation of the interchangeability of reality and illusion by which he gives theatrical expression to his view of the unity of opposites.

This thesis is a study of four of the most closely related sets of polarities in Genet's drama: the central duality of reality and illusion and the three related dualities of life and death, love and hate and anarchy and order. It is demonstrated that while Genet recognizes these conflicting absolutes as unalterable facts of existence, he also shows them as providing the equilibrium necessary in turbulent human relations. The three major plays of Genet - The Balcony, The Blacks, and The Screens - are analysed from both a dramatic and a theatrical perspective. Although
the examination of these plays in chronological order does not reveal any remarkable change in Genet's outlook as a dramatist, we do see a marked progress in his craftsmanship from *The Balcony* to *The Screens*. In the course of these three plays he develops and refines the dramatic and theatrical expression of his fundamental concern with the dialectic of dualities, moving closer to this ultimate resolution of these dualities into a philosophy of nothingness.
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INTRODUCTION

Drama has frequently been described as character in action. It is an art that is concerned with the relationship of human action to human character. Since every human is distinctive as an individual, he has to be distinguished from others. Hence, in a play, each character is a totality of characteristics which distinguishes him from each of the other characters. Thus in its very use of the dramatic agents of character, a play emphasizes differences rather than similarities.

The interrelation of these characters who epitomize oppositional traits is naturally a conflictual one. If drama can be described as character in action, the essence of drama is conflict. Conflict is created by the tension of opposites and it is the element that makes the interaction of characters dynamic. In brief, the action of a play becomes potentially dramatic with the introduction of conflict. It is obvious, therefore, that the polarization of some of its elements is basic to the creation of drama.

In the Poetics, Aristotle distinguishes the dramatic art from the epic and the lyric by saying that although all three imitate men, the dramatic mode of imitation has all the persons who are performing the imitation, acting. Three factors emerge as significant in drama from this definition: imitation, action, and, indirectly, performance. Drama
presupposes performance. The presence of an audience is a prerequisite. Secondly, the action performed is an imitation and not a real happening. Thirdly, Aristotle's reference to the acting reminds one of the physicality of the actor, his posture, voice, and movements. In other words, a play does not become a drama until it has been realized in performance on a stage. The duality of the dramatic and the theatrical elements is inherent in drama and operates at all levels.

The principle of duality is important in the experience of the theatre. There are two angles to this experience - the actor's and the spectator's - and each enjoys a double perspective. The actor experiences the action on stage as both real and make-believe. As Harold Clurman puts it,

\begin{quote}
The actor 'forgets' himself in his role, yet always knows that he is playing, and that the object of his performance is to entertain.
\end{quote}

A good performer functions at once as both actor and character. His double vision is matched by that of the spectator whose bifocality enables him to immerse himself in the experience on the stage and yet detach himself sufficiently to assess it as a work of art. He derives gratification both from the empathy he can establish with the actor as a momentarily real person in a life-like action and from a critical observation of the feat of acting.

Within the play's structure, we have already seen how conflict emerges from a tension of polarities. It is important to examine how the ideas of duality, polarity, and conflict are interrelated. The
relationship hinges on the distinction we can make between the twin factors of a dual principle. (It goes without saying that a distinction is possible, as otherwise there is no justification for the existence of the duality.) Now, any distinction is liable to sharpen into a contrast; and, as the contrast intensifies, the dual factors emerge as the absolutes of a polarity, and conflict arises.

This, in short, is what is achieved by dialectical speculation. But in drama the dialectics is given a circular form by the operation of irony, which reveals the self-contradictory nature of the conflict. In his book *Irony and Drama*, Bert O. States discusses the role of irony in causing the convergence of opposed courses:

In the world of drama, acts do not simply produce further acts (or history); they tend to produce counteracts; as Hamlet, in slaying Polonius, inadvertently sets up the conditions for his own death by provoking an avenger who is precisely lacking in his own scruples. Thus, the extreme potentiality of the dramatic situation is the promise of a paradox in the making, and the secret of drama's appeal lies precisely in the unfolding of this paradox.

The creation of a dramatist like Genet is itself a paradoxical process. The artist wishes to secure his identity in life and creates his work for this purpose. But in choosing an art form that reflects his views, he is moving from the dynamism of real life to its opposite, the fixity of art, which is a kind of death. Again, in integrating the theatrical element with the dramatic, the playwright exploits the self-contradictory aspects of the opposition of reality and illusion. Genet, for instance, remarks on the indistinguishability of reality and illusion in *The Balcony*, where real life is declared to be as false as stage illusion.
At the highest level of differentiation, the opposites of a polarity lose their identities and merge. Genet's masterly use of dramatic illusion relies on this quality of dual-polar elements.

The action of duality and polarity in a play is pervasive. Their significance in plot is seen as peripety or a reversal in situation which, according to Aristotle, is a necessary feature of a good, complex plot. The shift in the action is usually in a direction opposite to the original and the dramatic potential of this has already figured in the discussion of irony.

The idea of polarity is also in evidence in the characterization as in the action since it is central to conflict, external or internal. This could be a conflict of opposing wills or the conflict between the protagonist's will and the environment. Again, in the characterization, duality and polarity enable the dramatist to achieve complementation and contrast. Characters could be distinguished as opposites or allies on the basis of biological traits which establish their identities as male or female; by physical traits which refer to facial features, mannerisms, etc; by dispositional traits which indicate their emotional propensities; and by their motivations.

Since the theme of a play is organically related to its action, the idea of polarity which engenders the conflict of the action enters the theme also. The theme of the play takes into consideration the forces in conflict, views them as value polarities, and examines which force wins and why. In Genet's plays the themes often establish a dialectical relationship between opposites, revealing them as mutually dependent or inclusive.
As a play gains the stature of drama only after it is realized in performance, the staging deserves special mention. Duality and polarity are incorporated in the staging by several means - by means of contrasting actors and their performance; by the physical levels of the stage on which the action takes place; through contrasting and complementary costumes; by the contrast between masked and unmasked characters; by contrasted lighting of different characters or areas of the stage and a variety of sound effects, either the human voice contrasted with animal or instrumental sounds or variations within each category.

Duality and polarity function in the language of drama through differences in the vocabulary of the characters, contrasting images, tonal distinctions, and different speeds and pitches of enunciation.

Polarities evolve in Genet's plays often in the Hegelian pattern of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Duality and polarity are underlying features of Genet's thought. As drama of revolt, his plays condemn middle ways and deal in extremes. They accept no compromise with the bourgeois world they attack. Consequently, they picture the conflict of polarities - the bourgeois world and Genet's.

Genet's revolt consists not merely in rejecting the aesthetics and ethics of the world around him but also in setting up his own system of values. But the world order he projects is not entirely new, being a mirror image of the order he condemns. Neither is it possible for him to conceal the established set of values from which his own originates. And so we have the duality of his creative vision which pictures the two conflicting aspects of every issue in life. Genet would like to reject
the society whose restrictions he hates, but he is also fascinated by it and, as an artist, he has to confront it and describe it to others. Ironically, the society he defied in his vocations of thieving and writing has heaped its honours upon him. The love-hate relationship he has towards society is reflected in the similar polarity of his rebel heroes' attitudes.

Genet's theatre of doubles depicts the conflict between dominative and defensive characters, between male and female, illusion and reality and other opposed principles. But all these conflicting elements are contained in the duality of the human psyche and in the theatre which is its metaphor. This is the schism between the conscious and the unconscious levels of human existence. The first, also known as the Self, is that aspect of ourselves which we show to the world and of which we are ourselves aware. It is in harmony with the social order. The Unconscious level of our existence is fascinated by those regions of experience which are taboo, by the elements which are considered ugly and evil by the world. Genet explores the innermost depths of the Self and comes up with the entirely opposite features of the Other, which is deliberately repressed because it epitomizes the traits that violate accepted social values. His contention is that the Other is part of the Self, in fact it is the real Self, while the familiar Self is only an illusion. The concept of duality and polarity in this context is central to Genet's imagination.

This thesis purports, first of all, to study the use of duality and polarity as dramatic and theatrical strategy in Genet's major plays. It is interesting to consider the function of duality and polarity in
contributing to the artistic composition of the plays and in eliciting audience response to situations and characters. Secondly, the thesis investigates the establishment of the synaesthesia between the opposites and thereby tries to resolve the meaning of the plays. Lastly, it considers the social and ethical implications of the conflict of opposites that have a bearing on the life of the individual, the family and society at large.

With these objectives in mind, I have listed four polarities which it is my intention to study. The reason for choosing only four is that, although dual and polar principles proliferate endlessly in Genet's plays, these four dominate his thought as the basic polarities that govern human existence. They are (1) living and dying, (2) illusion and reality, (3) love and hate, and (4) anarchy and order.

Only the three major plays of Genet - The Balcony, The Blacks, and The Screams - have been selected for analysis. The reason is that there is a fuller dramatic development in these which is absent in the early plays. They show evidence of the mature Genet who has formulated his ideas with more conviction. The frame of reference for the action, too, is more comparable in the last plays, being a political revolution in each case.

An analysis of the elements of action, characterization, theme, language and staging has been done in each play in order to examine the treatment of each set of polarities as completely as possible. The aim is to establish the correlation between the concept and execution of Genet's ideas by studying how these ideas have been translated in every aspect of the play's structure. It is also to investigate the dramatic and theatrical potentials of the conflict of opposites and to study
actor-spectator relations. Each set of opposites has been dealt with in a separate chapter.

The organization of the theses posed a number of problems. Firstly, there was the problem of overlapping. It has not been possible always to separate the different elements of the plays' structures tidily. At certain points, for instance, the action is character. Again, the polarities themselves are so closely linked that the grounds they cover overlap frequently. At some point, the discussion of each set of polarities returns to the basic conflict between illusion and reality. To take the example of a specific play, the central action of *The Blacks* is very closely tied up with two sets of polarities, living and dying as well as illusion and reality, which themselves bear close affinities. In order to avoid the tedium of repetition, the first chapter mentions the fact that in *The Blacks* both living and dying are illusions, but their illusory quality has been accorded detailed treatment only in Chapter II.

A second problem has been the geometry of opposition, for the polarities are not diametrically opposed always. The opposites in each set envelop each other. Consequently, they have been defined as principles with oppositional functions, but their complementary nature, and, where possible, their oneness, have been pointed out.

Lastly, the text of the plays and Genet's letters written in connection with their production gave rise to the question whether the original French texts or their translations in English should be used for quotes. The arrangement of ideas in this work requires frequent quotes from Genet's plays and I was rather reluctant to use so many French passages in a thesis written in English. For this reason, and also because I
cannot claim a very deep scholarship in the French language, I have used the translations of the plays by Bernard Frechtman, which are very close to the original. However, the French has been retained in Genet's letters and in the excerpts from the critical reviews of his plays. The choice of Frechtman's translations was made easier by the fact that they retain the essential poetic beauty of Genet's language.

The theatre of Genet, which restores drama to its original roots of ritual, achieves the reconciliation of discordant elements by means of the dual factors of language and spectacle. This thesis endeavours to study the contribution of both these elements in the performance of ceremony and ritual. The plays of Genet definitely reveal his awareness of the duality of the dramatic experience and his skill in integrating its twin facets.
NOTES

INTRODUCTION


CHAPTER I

LIVING AND DYING

All the plays of Genet reveal a preoccupation with life and death, so it is logical to begin a work of this kind with a discussion of these facts pertaining to the human condition. In his treatment of the phenomena of life and death, Genet depicts them both as integrated factors and even goes so far as to say that the seeming opposites are really one and the same. While making this paradoxical revelation, he also equates this set of opposites with another set whose components are similarly indistinguishable: reality and illusion.

The development from separation to synthesis of the opposites occurs in clear stages in the structure of The Balcony and The Blacks. The action of these plays depicts the life and death struggle of rival camps. Living and dying seem to be very distinct and opposed processes. At the same time the spurious nature of the distinction is suggested by placing the action on the tenuous ground between reality and illusion. Hence, in the final analysis, living and dying seem to be as indistinguishable as reality and illusion.

The next step is from the ambiguity of the two opposites to their integration, which is specifically achieved in the characterization. In both The Balcony and The Blacks, there are characters who are personifications of the life-death synthesis. In The Screens, however, the technique is slightly different, the characterization as well as the staging being
aimed at showing the location of the opposites in each other's territory. Thus the living bear the paraphernalia and accoutrements of the dead and vice versa.

The themes of the plays elucidate the interrelation of the living and dying by viewing death as a continuity rather than as a cessation. Related themes like procreation and regeneration are also incorporated into the actions of the plays.

The language of the plays links diverse phenomena such as life, death, power and glory. In The Balcony, dying is glorified as an act superior to living. It is a phase of civilization alternating with living in The Blacks. Dying is an inescapable condition of matter, as is living, in The Screens. As befits this variety of delineations of life and death, the imagery of the twin subjects ranges from the splendid to the squalid.

The Balcony, which is the first of the three major plays of Genet, has the life-death polarity functioning at all levels of its structure. Its action is set in the political framework of a revolution. The rebels are out to destroy the established order which is represented by The Grand Balcony, Madame Irma's brothel. The Balcony is a "storehouse of mummeries", turning out the images of the Establishment in great numbers, as men from different walks of life here act out their fantasies of being high ranking officers of the state. Such ardent imitation denotes acceptance. Hence, by creating these images of power, the Balcony serves the Establishment.

The revolutionaries, on the other hand, have vowed to destroy the society built on sham elements and symbols and this means the breaking
of the images created by the Balcony. The kernel of the play's action is thus a life and death struggle between the Balcony and the rebels.

The situation, when we look at it closely, is fraught with irony. Images, being fixed and static things, are the very opposite of the dynamic forces of life. The actions of the Balcony's clients, who change themselves into images temporarily, could therefore be interpreted as a constant striving for death. In the secret recesses of the bordello, men act out their fantasies of dying. In every studio of the Grand Balcony, there is an impersonation of death. We see the victorious General who 'dies' on his 'war horse'; the brave legionnaire who 'dies' on a sand dune; and the rest, like the Bishop and the Judge, who consider themselves dead when they play their roles. As the whore, Carmen, informs the rebel leader, Roger, later in the play, the scenarios of the Balcony are all reducible to one major theme, which is death. Ironically, it is the revolutionaries who desire change and progress, although they appear to be death-bringers by their having precipitated a civil war. The essence of living is the dynamism of change and, by this token, the rebels become symbols of life.

The main conflict of the play, that between the Balcony and the rebels, is highlighted by two subsidiary courses of action. Chantal, one of the prostitutes at Irma's House of Illusions, rebels against her status as an erotic symbol. Seeking to escape the passivity of an image, she plunges into the active life of the revolution, only to be trapped in inaction again. The rebels make her a singer at the barricades and transform her into yet another kind of image, a fetish to boost their morale. Chantal's
life is thus a progression from one death-like state to another until she is killed, and then her image is perpetuated as a saint's.

As a contrast to Chantal, the Chief of Police, who is the real man of action in the play, wishes to exchange his position with that of an image. His one ambition in life is to have his function imitated in the bordello, but for a long time he is disappointed. When, finally, Roger asks to imitate him in Irma's studio, the Chief of Police is elated. But Roger, bitter at the failure of the Revolution, castrates himself in a gesture of self-punishment and thereby symbolically punishes the Chief of Police. Yet the latter exults that he is now "larger than large, stronger than strong, deader than dead (the emphasis is mine)". Unlike Chantal, he more than realizes his dream by claiming the castration as his apotheosis. As Robert Brustein puts it, "Mutilation is the destiny of the Man-God, whether he be Christ, Osiris or Dionysius." By remaining whole while his image is mutilated, the Chief of Police appears as the figure who unites within him the forces of life and death.

In passing, we have to consider the real deaths in the play, Arthur's and Chantal's. Both are theatrically very effective moments in the play. Arthur, who has been sent to contact the Chief of Police, returns dishevelled after an unsuccessful attempt to reach the Police headquarters. He finds the Chief already with Irma and starts describing the general destruction and confusion in the city, when a shot is heard. A window pane and a mirror in the room are shattered and Arthur falls, hit in the forehead by a bullet which has come through the window.

It is a tense moment for the audience, which remembers Arthur's
earlier fear of going out in the streets where the fighting was thick. A person being killed suddenly is a sensational incident on the stage and the audience tensely awaits the rest of the action. But in The Balcony it is a moment of anticlimax, as those around Arthur react to his death in the most unemotional way possible. The Chief of Police does not even seem to notice that Arthur is dead and goes on planning what he should do from within the brothel to crush the rebels. Carmen is worried about her Saint Theresa's costume, in the event of the house being blown up next. Irma is the only one who is a little shaken, but even she is concerned only with the safety of her studios and jewels. She orders Carmen to remove the body, as she is about to receive the Envoy.

The incident shows that the pimp is a dispensable cog in the machinery of the brothel. It also shows that a real death does not move these characters who are accustomed to the illusions of death in the bordello on a daily basis. The same characters are profoundly disturbed when they talk of their symbolic deaths - when, for instance, the Chief of Police talks of his becoming an image in the Balcony, when Carmen talks of her transformation for the bank clerk, and Irma, of her becoming the Queen. But the audience, which has sat back listening to these intellectual accounts of their false deaths, is startled by the real death on the stage, possibly because of the sheer physicality of the scene - the sound of the shot, of broken glass and the posture of the dead man.

Chantal's death produces a similar effect on the audience. The scene itself is very brief and Genet sets it up carefully, arguing the
expectations of the spectators. We see the Balcony first and the closed shutters of the brothel. The shutters open suddenly and, through the windows, we see the Judge, Bishop and the General getting ready for their public appearance. The french windows are then flung open and the three men, followed by the Hero or the Chief of Police step out on to the balcony. Madame Irma, now dressed as the Queen, enters, and she and the others show themselves to an imaginary crowd. Then a beggar enters below them, greets the Queen and goes away. Chantal next makes a striking entry and things happen rapidly after that:

(Finally, a strong wind stirs the curtains. Chantal appears. The Queen bows to her. A shot. Chantal falls. The General and the Queen carry her away dead.)

The whole action takes place as a dumb show. Suspense is built up in the sudden opening of windows before the Queen and the others enter the balcony, and then again by the wind ruffling the curtains before Chantal appears. The ringing sound of the shot cuts through the silence electrically and the tension of the spectators reaches a peak. Then, as in the case of Arthur's death, they see no visible signs of distress on the part of the other characters. Those on the balcony are gigantic and look unreal. They are silent and only make the gestures of living persons - mechanical gestures at that. The only spoken words are those of the beggar who is seen immediately before Chantal, and, ironically, his words are a blessing of long life for the Queen.

Later on, we learn the political implications of Chantal's death when we are told that it was planned in advance by the Bishop, but at the moment, our reaction is almost wholly physical. What strikes us in
the visual details of the scene is the proximity of death to life.

Genet's characterization in *The Balcony* makes ample use of psychological obsessions about death. The death-wish of the clients who visit the brothel is mainly rooted in the desire for glory and the aspiration to immortality. Nearly all the customers of the brothel are insignificant officials drudging away at petty offices. These men, who have no status in real life, covet glory in a faked death. Thus the fake General envisages a grand death on the battlefield:

> In a little while, to the blare of trumpets, we shall descend - I on your back - to death and glory, for I am about to die. (p.26)

The stasis of death is equated with immortality. The Queen's Envoy who has come to ask Irma's help in projecting the images of power to the populace comments on this when she shows him the corpse of her pimp, Arthur, who has been killed by gunfire:

| IRMA: | ..... His entire being is speeding towards immobility. |
| THE ENVOY: | He was therefore meant for grandeur. |
| THE CHIEF OF POLICE: | Him? He was a spineless dummy. |
| THE ENVOY: | He was, like us, haunted by a quest of immobility. By what we call the hieratic* |

(p.61)

The Chief of Police himself dreams of attaining "providential fixity" (p.65) within the nomenclature and he desires a tomb to be erected in his honour, where he would "keep vigil over his entire death." (p.69) So great is the number of men who play at being dead that Irma has a special Mausoleum Studio built in the brothel. Dying is an ever renewed drama in the house of illusions and yet, the Balcony is a place where love-making, which is a vital affirmation of living, is a full time occupation.
The irony is directed against whores and customers alike. The men come to assert their virility but fantasize themselves into images of power and become "dead" beings. The whores who minister to them are referred to as Irma's "long, sterile girls." (p. 31). They, too, are dead in the figurative sense, since they do not fulfil the essential life-giving function of the female, that of procreation. One remembers in this context that Roger, who rescued Chantal from the whorehouse, talks of having snatched her from a grave. The life style of the characters of The Balcony follows two motifs. Irma's girls and her "visitors" are engaged in a pursuit of death in life, while the Chief of Police, wishing divinity, pursues his goal of everlasting life in death.

The central theme we arrive at after grasping the interchangeability of the two opposite processes of living and dying is that living is dying. This is the message implied by all the masquerades in the house of illusions. Living is a process of constant role-playing, and as such, is a mode of dying to our true identity and continuing in terms of the image one creates. Benjamin Nelson, commenting on the nature of role-playing, suggests that a life-death union is implied by it. To assume a role is to undergo a mortification since we have to suppress our true feelings. And yet, according to Genet, the only way we know to be real is to assume one role after another. Nelson sums up the anomaly inherent in the process:

Every role is a release of vitality; yet every role, like every image, is a mortification.

Our most genuine attempts at living, then, are nothing more than an elimination of our true identities or, in other words, a pursuit of
death.

The second theme we discover by applying the life-death polarity to the action of the play concerns the mortality of the individual as opposed to the permanence of the institution he serves. This is an elaboration of one aspect of the preceding theme, namely, the image. The individual attains permanence only when he becomes an image, the transformation into which may be effected by his physical death. The individual is dispensable, but the institution he represents, which is a symbol, is not. The Queen may die, but the Crown lives on. The Envoy, who understands the absolute reality of the Crown, is not shattered by her majesty's death. "That phoenix, when dead, can rise up from the ashes of the royal palace." (p.165) is his prediction, and he declares that the Queen attains her reality when she absents herself or dies.

The Balcony's theme also defines Art and Life as polarities. Genet's preference of death over life in The Balcony is really a matter of aesthetic judgement. Art, according to him, is death, since it is concerned with the creation of images which are static.

The whore is, for Genet, the artist par excellence since she lives solely by appearances, constantly projecting images of herself and of her customers. Her function is non-utilitarian, as she is neither a housewife nor a mother. As Roger points out to Carmen, the whore is purely ornamental. She thus embodies the principles of Art (or beauty), of illusion and of death at once. Irma's House of Illusions perpetuates images, and, therefore, is a museum of Art. Significantly, it is also a house of death.
If Art is death, its opposite, naturally, is life. Life is dynamic while Art is static and it is practical while Art is aesthetic. But if the superiority of a principle rests in the hardship encountered in practising it, then Art wins over life. The slave in Irma's Mausoleum Studio sums it up when he tells Roger, "we try hard just to stand and rot. And, believe me, it's not always easy. Life tries to prevail..." (pp. 90-91).

In the final round of the contest between Life and Art, Art is the victor. Irma reverts to her role as brothel madame after a brief experience of the politician's active life and the Balcony's studios are once again prepared for the production of new images. It is Genet's plea for the acceptance of Art as superior to Life.

In the staging of the play, the image of death is carefully reinforced. Both in the costumes and decor, there is a touch of the austerity that one associates with a funereal atmosphere. Irma, at the beginning of the play, is a severe figure dressed in black. In his notes 'Comment jouer Le Balcon', Genet even indicates that she could be in mourning:

Il va de soi que le costume d'Irma doit être au bout de la pièce, très austère. On peut même la supposer en deuil. C'est dans la scène avec Carmen qu'elle s'attifera, portera cette robe longue qui, dans la scène du Balcon deviendra, grâce à quelques décorations, la robe de la Reine.

The colours used in the set are dark, again giving a serious if not gloomy touch to the decor. In the scenes with the fake Bishop, Judge and General at the beginning of the play, the walls of the room are blood
red, brown, and dark green, respectively. One is reminded of the works of the Dutch school of painting in the seventeenth century, where these colours predominate. The visual impact of the set is like that of a Rembrandt painting in which the same colours are used to give a contrasted effect of light and shadow.

At least in one scene, a real corpse, that of Arthur, is laid out on a fake tomb of black marble. The aura of death is complete in the Mausoleum Studio into which the Chief of Police descends to live in death for two thousand years. The circular wall of the studio resembles a well in the centre of which there is another well. The impression of a vault or tomb is emphasized by the laurel wreaths and crêpe hung on the wall. Thus austerity characterizes the scenery throughout, as we are taken through the solemnity of the Bishop's sacristy to the magnificent desolation of the Mausoleum.

Contrasted with the sober details associated with death are those that evoke thoughts of sumptuous living and carnal pleasures. Juxtaposed with the corpse and the tomb are Irma's laces, silks and crystal chandeliers. While the walls and the furniture of the studio in the first four scenes lend a note of decorum, the unmade bed reflected in the mirror in the same room proclaims the prostitute's trade. A similar effect is achieved in the contrast between words and actions. While Irma talks to Carmen and Arthur about the war and people dying on the streets, she gets ready to greet her lover, the Chief of Police. We get a vivid impression of sensuous living as she pirouettes slowly in front of the mirror, the pimp, on his knees, spraying her with perfume.
But overriding the visual impact of such scenes is the sound effect produced by machine gun fire. It is the rat-tat-tat of the guns at frequent intervals that sets the mood of the play. The sound functions organically in producing the total effect of the play, establishing death as the dominant principle in the life-death polarity scheme. In the stillness of the mausoleum, the sound of a cock crowing and a hammer striking an anvil startles Roger who exclaims that life is so near the tomb. But it is only he who feels the proximity of life. For the audience, the sounds only serve to underline the silence of the tomb. It is the burst of gunfire that has the greater impact, reminding them constantly of the imminence and physical reality of death.

The language of *The Balcony* is another element that sets in relief the two principles of life and death. The subject of death is treated in a lyrical vein. Dying is described as a sensuous experience, superior to living. While a prosaic and practical language characterizes the everyday activities that constitute living, one is struck by the poetic beauty of the descriptions of death. There is a tremendous variety of adjectives and nouns employed in the language. "We'll have a lovely death, Carmen," says Irma, and continues:

> It will be terrible and sumptuous.... We have our cohorts, our armies, our hosts, legions, battalions, vessels, heralds, clarions, trumpets, our colours, streamers, standards, banners.... to lead us to catastrophe! Death? It's certain death, but with what speed and with what dash!... (p.39)

In the second half of the play, the language dealing with the issues of life and death becomes increasingly obscure and metaphorical. The
life-death union in one's image is spoken of repeatedly. The Envoy describes it in the form of riddles about the Queen and her embroidery. Carmen sums it up more simply to Roger:

He'll (the slave) tell... the truth; that you're dead, or rather that you don't stop dying and that your image, like your name, reverberates to infinity. (p. 92)

In short, a review of all the aspects of *The Balcony* shows that observations on living and dying permeate the play; the dramatic technique shows the conflict of the opposites and then their coincidence.

Coming to the second play, *The Blacks*, the treatment of the aforementioned opposites is symbolic. Like the brothel's customers in *The Balcony*, the blacks fantasize a death, but their fantasy has the sinister import of murder. The main action of the play is the supposed rape-murder of a white woman reenacted by Village, a black, with the help of fellow blacks. While he recounts his actions, another group of blacks executes a traitor to their cause off stage and the news is brought to those on stage. It is said that the enacting of the rape-murder is a coverup for the 'real' action off stage. However, as spectators in a theatre, we know that the term 'real' is suspect and that the dying on and off stage are both play acting by a group of actors.

The on stage action of dying also has its corollaries of procreation and resurrection. Diouf, the black minister who is transvested into Village's white victim, gives 'birth' to five dolls which are seen to be the representatives of the white community. The action is contradictory in itself, since procreation is the functional aspect of living
and yet the objects procreated are lifeless. Soon after this extraordinary conception and delivery, Diouf is killed by Village and, subsequently, he is resurrected and ascends to the white 'heaven' - an event which comments on the futility of Village's action. If Village hopes to eradicate the white race by his symbolic murder, the resurrection of Diouf signifies the unattainability of such a goal.

The central action of Village's murder has far reaching consequences. It escalates the opposition between the blacks and the whites and the stronger group wins the right to live. The white Court comes down to the blacks' land to 'try' them for the murder of the white woman. They come with the intent to kill but the tables are turned on them as the blacks assume control and summarily execute all the whites. Like the other deaths in the play, the death of the white Court is also make-believe. It gives a cyclical form to the drama, as immediately afterwards the characters arrange themselves as they were at the beginning of the play and the whole episode starts afresh.

The characters in The Blacks evince, by and large, archetypal qualities of the race they belong to. As a broad classification, we could consider the blacks as embodiments of energy and by extension, of life, while the whites evincing lethargy are embodiments of death. But in the case of a few characters, the opposing principles of life and death combine, as they do in the Chief of Police in The Balcony. Diouf, by his act of producing progeny before his death, is one such. He also unites in himself the male and female principles.

It is the dominant female figure who holds in equilibrium the
conflicting forces of life and death. Lewis Cetta talks of the assertion of the matriarchal principle in *The Blacks* by Genet. Attributes of the Mother figure whom Cetta identifies with Earth are detected in three women in the play, Felicity, Virtue and the Queen. Of the three, it is Felicity who typifies the unity of life and death insistently. She describes herself as "Darkness in person. Not the darkness which is absence of light, but the generous and terrible mother who embodies light and deeds" (p.105). It is Felicity who, by her sorcery, calls up the hordes of Blacks and sustains the failing courage of Village and the others, inciting them to kill. She has already offered grains of corn for the white victims' sustenance. Significantly, it is she who nominates Diouf as Village's victim and presides over his ritual dying. Felicity thus personifies the life-death integration seen as the propensity at once for preservation and destruction in the Mother figure.

While the blacks are represented as a dynamic group, the whites are identified with the stasis of death. They are the living dead, "the race without animal odours" (p.20) whose whiteness is seen as the pallour of death.

'It's not time that corrodes me,' says the Queen to Felicity, 'it's not fatigue that makes me forsake myself, it's death that's shaping me...'

FELICITY: If you're death itself, then why, why do you reproach me for killing you?

THE QUEEN: And if I'm dead, why do you go on and on killing me, murdering me over and over in my colour? Isn't my sublime corpse - which still moves enough for you? Do you need the corpse of a corpse? (Emphasis mine) (p.103)

The theme unfolded by the conflict of such complex characters is fittingly intricate. *The Blacks* deals extensively with the life-death
dialectic of Time. Time is relentless and destroys everything, consuming itself in its passage, and its tyranny can be arrested only by Death. But as Time is cyclical, it also renews itself and phases of destruction are followed by regeneration in this never ending cycle. It is the certainty of regeneration after destruction that gives the Queen the last word. As she is being led to her death she prophesies that the whites would "lie torpid in the earth like larvae or moles" (p.126) and rise again in ten thousand years, when the fight for their freedom would begin.

Yet another theme dealt with in the play is the indestructibility of racial attributes. Diouf, by his social position and behaviour, has shown himself to be the white man's protégé - a fact that earns for him the role of the whites' Mother. But he is resurrected after death, which shows that the effort to kill white attributes or to exterminate the entire race is of no avail. Again, even after the corporeal death of the whites effected by execution, the blacks cannot erase their influence, as reflected by Village's inability to invent a 'black' language of love instead of copying the words and gestures of the whites.

Genet re-emphasizes in The Blacks a point he has already made in The Balcony, namely, that the social institutions continue to live while men may come and go. A theatrical dimension has been added to the idea in the mock birth Diouf gives to five wooden dolls which are the replica in miniature of the white Court above him. Soon after this, Diouf is raped and killed by Village. The dolls remain on the stage during the rest of the play, thereby intimating to the audience that
while Village may have massacred the whites symbolically, the domination
of the institutions organized by the whites will be a living force in
black society. It should be remembered that in the wooden dolls, as well
as in the Court, the figures of the Queen, Governor, Bishop and Judge
whom we have already seen in The Balcony reappear.

The staging techniques used in The Blacks produce contrapuntal
reflections on living and dying. Both at the beginning and at the end
of the play the sombre visual impact of the catafalque with its association
of death is lightened by Mozart minuets. In the second instance, the
music is the opening measures of the minuet from Don Giovanni. The
choice is very apt as one remembers the hero's love of sensual living-
the minuet itself is from the seduction scene which illustrates this-
and that death comes to the great sensualist in the form of a terrible
vengeance. In his choice of the Don Giovanni minuet, Genet shows an
ingenious application of the law of opposites, as the form and content
of the music illustrate opposite processes involving the principles of
life and death.9

As a contrast to this, immediately before the ritual murder, which
is the Blacks' vengeance on the Whites, all the characters around the
victim intone their words to the stately measures of the Dies Irae - the
Day of Wrath - which creates fearsome images of death.

Again, when Diouf is about to 'deliver' the five dolls, Village calls
upon a member of the audience to come and hold the victim's knitting.
The spectator is dismissed after the 'birth', soon after which Diouf is
murdered. Since Genet intends the play to be performed specifically for
a white audience, there is already a subtle identification of the audience with the white Court whom the dolls in turn resemble. The presence of the spectator on the stage ensures that a surrogate of the living audience is present to witness the birth of the community's representatives and then the death of the race itself. The perpetration of psychological cruelty, believed by Artaud to be the essence of theatre, is complete.

The execution of the Court by the Blacks is a piece of transparent play-acting. The 'killing' is accompanied by the crowing of cocks, which presages the dawn of a new era for the living. However, both killing and dying are shown as mere 'stage business' by Village's explanation to the dying Court about the exigencies of the script and the 'dead' whites promptly rising to bow and acknowledge Diouf as their Mother.

In keeping with the mood of the characters engaged in the ritual, the language used by them is also extremely powerful, suggesting an explosive energy which is barely repressed. The whites, on the other hand, are repeatedly referred to as pale and transparent and their language correspondingly is almost anaemic. The imagery recalls things of a light colour or ethereal quality. In response to Felicity's call to her cruel hordes, the white Queen summons the guardians of her race:

To the rescue, angel of the flaming sword, Virgins of the Parthenon, stained-glass of Chartres, Lord Byron, Chopin, French cooking, The Unknown Soldier, Tyrolean Songs, Aristotelian principles, heroic couplets....

The call seems to indicate that the achievements of the whites are all in the dead past.
The language employed by the blacks for the ritual is that of incantation rather than spoken words. Dark images of death are invoked by Virtue and Snow in their chant and Felicity's call to the African tribes is strongly reminiscent of the language of exorcism:

Tribes covered with gold and mud, rise up from my body, emerge! ... Conquering soldiers, enter. Conquering soldiers, enter....
You, too, who dig up corpses to suck the brains from skulls, enter unashamedly. You tangled brother-sister, walking melancholy incest, come in. Barbarians, barbarians, barbarians, come along. I can't describe you all, nor even name you all, nor name your dead, your arms, your ploughs, but enter. (pp. 76-77)

The words conjure up very vivid pictures of death. It is language removed from day to day living, powerful enough to reach the dead in their realm.

A noteworthy feature of the language of The Blacks is its tremendous emotive potential. The blacks rely heavily on the hypnotic effect of words to bring about the dissolution of their enemies. By insistently repeating words related to physical exhaustion they brainwash the whites into believing that they are a dying clan. The whites, for their part, talk of the sense of physical oppression they get from a contact with the blacks. Thus the Queen talks of the blacks' odour 'choking' her, and when Felicity describes the blacks' crime as a tree in bloom, she replies that the odour of the flowers spreads into her country and destroys her. The language which describes the reaction of the whites to the blacks is thus very physical.

While the whites show that they are mentally prepared for death,
the blacks identify themselves strongly with energy, growth and with things pertaining to life. Even their potential for evil is described as a living, growing force:

...it's sprouting, sprouting, my beauty, it's growing, bright and green, it's bursting into bloom, into perfume, and that lovely tree, that crime of mine, is all Africa! Birds have nested in it, and night dwells in its branches. (p. 102)

Both in the sheer beauty of the language and its emotive appeal, the blacks emerge superior to the whites. As the rift between them widens with the murder, the language reflects the tension increasingly and sharpens the contrast as between the living and the dying. Aurally and pictorially, the language of The Blacks is a match for the turbulent emotions of its characters.

Turning from The Blacks to The Screene we come to a play where the conflict is largely internal and concerns the mental states of the characters. The conflict assumes a spiritual or metaphysical dimension as both the living and the dead struggle to claim as their own. Said, the ascetic hero, who rejects them both in his journey from Being to Non-being.

This being the main line of action in the play, there is much interaction between the living and the dead. Said and his wife Leila between them commit a variety of crimes ranging from theft to treason which cuts them off from their fellow men. They then undertake a journey to 'the land of the monster'. In short, the two reject life and court death. But death is a goal only insofar as it removes them from the bonds of the living. When it appears that the dead would impose their
norms of behaviour on Said, he defies them, preferring to enter a state of Non-being. The dead and the living display the same possessive attitude towards the anti-hero.

Genet exploits, for dramatic effect, the spectators' awareness of life and death as opposites. We carry this conventional notion regarding the two processes into the theatre. But, as we watch the dead in The Screens revealing passions and weaknesses that are identical to those of the living, the realization dawns on us that, far from being different, life and death are similar. The main plot of The Screens thus utilizes the unity of opposites which is Genet's tour de force.

In the sub-plot of the brothel, Warda the whore submits to death when she realizes that she is no longer a unique being in society. Her professional pride is destroyed when, after the war, prostitution is recognized as a legal trade, thus stripping her vocation of its mystery. For her, dying is the answer when living becomes a problem.

Genet uses the old technique of framing the entire action in a war, this time, the French-Algerian war. The business of any war is, of course, destruction and survival. Genet's emphasis, however, is on the aesthetics of death which inspires the French. Urged by their military commanders to shed blood, the men derive a physical pleasure from the act of killing. As they get carried away in considering the means of dying on the field, the outcome of the war itself becomes irrelevant to them. The irony of the mechanics of death distracting the instinct of survival is inherent in any war.

Although the characters in The Screens are separated into the regions
of the living and of the dead, there is not too much of a difference between the two worlds. Here, again, the opposites perform a complementary function.

To the Arabs, death is nothing unusual but part of the general decay in which they live their lives. In the scene where the village women mourn the death of the rebel, Si Slimane, we see that the act of mourning is a matter of course with them. Said's mother comes to join them but they chase her away as she is the mother of a thief. The selection of mourners is thus a simple matter of social status. The Mother decides to ask for the dead man's approval. Speaking through Madani, the Arab, who acts as his Mouth, Si Slimane too rejects her. Such unusual occurrences as a dead man 'possessing' a living person and speaking through him are also accepted as part of the workaday world's routine.

Kadidja, the leader of the village women, exhibits on the point of her death the same matter-of-fact attitude. She calmly gives instructions as to how her body should be prepared for burial. Living in the midst of political and economic erosion as they do, death seems nothing more to the Arabs than an extension of that erosion to their bodies.

Said alone appears as the character who transcends life and death. Poised between the living and the dead, he is neither attracted by life nor does he fear death. His strength is his isolation and his freedom from emotional ties. Compared with him, the living and the dead are both weak, unable to assess him objectively due to their affection for him.
The dead come to adore him as do the living. He is "larger than life... Your brow in the nebulae and your feet on the ocean..."  

The Screens outlines a rather unusual theme. The hero, Said, is bent on self-destruction. By a deliberate choice of criminality he isolates himself from the living, and by pursuing negativity to its utmost and not for approval, even from the dead, he estranges himself from them too. Such absolute freedom in life ensures his liberation into Nothingness in death, for, while the other characters are in a kind of limbo after death, Said just disappears. 'L'impossible nullité', which is Genet's Utopia, is a reality, he seems to say, only to those who in their isolation are absolutely free from conventions.

The play also makes the statement that for others, the social inhibitions in which they were bound in life continue after death. In the famous scene where characters emerge through the white screens into the world of the dead, the Arabs and the French killed in the fighting below meet face to face. The Arabs tremble violently on seeing the Frenchmen and it takes them quite a while to realize that Death is the great equalizer.

Spectacular devices in staging transmit Genet's ideas on life and death. The dead enter their world by breaking through white paper screens which signifies that the transition from life to death is really simple. Genet wants the unity of the two opposites, life and death, suggested in the costume and make-up. In his letter to Roger Blin, he stipulates,

Je crois que les morts seront très maquillés—mais le vert dominera. Les vêtements blancs, évoquant le suaire. Leur diction aura changé. Elle sera plus proche du langage quotidien.
In juxtaposition to the white clothes of the dead, which are suggestive of the winding-sheet, their heavily made-up faces are to show predominantly green, the colour of life and growing things. Their speech, too, is closer to everyday language. At the same time, in theatrical tradition, the green colour evokes associations of death. The green on the actors’ faces absorbs the colour of blood and dehumanizes them. The use of make-up thus has opposite effects in the traditional contexts of drama and theatre.

The difference between the realms of the living and the dead is made evident in the dead deliberately ignoring the logical relations of time and space which are so important to the living. The stage directions specify that the dead look up at things happening below them and look down when they see things happening above them.

Since living and dying are seen as phenomena of the flesh, they are described in terms associated with the body. There is a deliberate dwelling on images of filth, decay and of the excremental aspects of the body. The pictures of death are often repulsive or violent. We hear of flies swarming about a corpse, of the fluids from the corpse seeping away into the earth or of the blood and guts of those killed in battle drying in the sun. The same flies and filth are part of the Arabs’ everyday existence.

What is unusual about the language of The Screens is that descriptions of anatomical decay and filth are spoken with great relish, as though the speakers roll the words round their tongues. Acts of defecation and the neglect of the body are described in minute detail. Here is a
typical example of the latter:

And what's meant by going into mourning, gentlemen, if not to make oneself ugly? To cover oneself with crape, with ashes, with mud, with flies, with cow dung, to let one's beard grow, to let filth accumulate in the folds of the skin, to pluck out one's eyes, to scrape one's fingers, what's meant by going into mourning, gentlemen? (p.133)

Apart from the shock value of such descriptions, the language of The Screens aims at showing the ugly and repugnant aspects of life as inescapable. Man's physical nature includes the excretory function which is a necessary part of living and anatomical decay is inevitable in his death. While the traditional attitude is to ignore the unpleasant aspects of life and death, Genet not only aims at an acceptance of them, but even exalts them by his use of language.

In the last three plays of Genet, the theme of life and death intertwines with that of illusion and reality, which will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter. All three plays stress the oneness of life and death. Both The Balcony and The Screens present the idea that death is the continuity of life while The Blacks pictures death as the origin of life. The life-death duality controls human existence, yet the ordinary man chooses to align himself with the first of these principles alone, because he looks upon the second, death, as something unpleasant. Genet tries to grant recognition to this important but neglected principle by stressing its unity with life. This much for the ordinary man. But Genet's super man like Said divests himself of all human associations, including consciousness of life and death. His vision is infinite, since it sees beyond life and death and, in Genet's scheme
of opposites, it is also nothing. That is why Genet refers to *The Screens* as "la célébration de rien"\(^{14}\), a celebration of nothing.

2. This and other passages from the play quoted in the Thesis are taken from The Balcony, translated from the French by Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960). Pagination of the quoted passages will be given hereafter parenthetically, in the body of the text.


4. A function can become a symbol only when it is detached from the living identity which defines it. In other words, the symbol is dead, which makes it sacred. The Bishop admits that his dignity is not the result of his personal endeavour but the sanction of a long line of bishops who preceded him and who are now dead.


8. This and subsequent passages quoted from The Blacks are from the translation into English by Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960).
9. It is the statue of his foe - an image - that comes alive to kill Don Juan. The process of its transformation from death to life is the opposite of the one described by Genet as the function of Art - the change from life to death. All the whores and power symbols in his plays who shape themselves into images are caught up in this process.

10. Roger Blin differentiates between Artaud's cruelty and Genet's by comparing the former with the religious cruelty of the Aztec Indians and the latter with the classical cruelty of the Greek theatre. This distinction seems to be too fine. Artaud's outlook is influenced by all ancient cults and his concept of cruelty as 'a kind of rigid control and submission to necessity' is closer to the Greek than to anything else. Genet shares Artaud's contempt towards traditional western drama and his admiration of Oriental theatre. Both men relate their myths to a world of dark, sexual freedom. Both believe that the sensibility of the spectator should be attacked on all sides, but there is one essential difference between them. Artaud claims a therapeutic value for his ritual exorcism of the spectator's fantasies. He does not advocate Sadism or violence in daily life. Genet, on the other hand, not merely shows but exalts crime in his theatre and justifies his own perversions. His cruelty, therefore, does not turn - as Artaud puts it - 'on the preoccupation of the great mass of men' and seems to be a vicarious indulgence of his personal dislike of the bourgeois world in which he is an outcast.
11. This and subsequent passages quoted from The Screens are from the translation into English by Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1962).


CHAPTER II
REALITY AND ILLUSION

The three last plays of Genet orchestrate a theme which has persistently fascinated him: the ambivalence of reality and illusion. At different levels in these plays, the opposites confront each other as essence and appearance, figure and image or identity and function. The Balcony, for instance, treats the relation between reality and illusion in terms of image, function and identity. Both in the action and characterization of this play, every step of the dialectic between reality and illusion is argued out. The events, characters, and the language of the play illustrate the separable nature of a person's identity and function and then show the interpenetration of the two aspects. But the dialectic is developed on the lines of an intellectual debate and appears very complex.

In The Blacks, on the other hand, the complex inter-relation of reality and illusion is so blended into the play's structure that it is automatically implied by the action and the characters, and this works better. Here, the action, characterization and staging techniques strike a balance between the subjective dichotomy of essence and appearance and the external interplay of illusion and reality.

The Screens treats the opposites in the metaphysical context and focuses on yet another facet of their conflict - the relation between the conscious and the unconscious regions of existence referred to as the Self and the Other. The tension of these opposites is present in
the other plays as well but it is explicitly formulated in action and
categorization only in The Screens.

All the plays deal with characters who are caught in a reality-
oriented world and who escape its insufficiency in fantasy. Thus the
petty officials of The Balcony play at being the "grands bourgeois", the
blacks play at being powerful whites and the abject poor of The
Screens pretend to be farm owners. But the dividing line between
illusion and reality is so fine that it is quite difficult to say where
exactly one ends and the other begins in the plays. The staging and
language of these plays are also designed to reinforce the spectator's
sense of ambiguity concerning the illusory world of the theatre and
his world of reality outside.

At the outset of the action of The Balcony we are made aware of the
interpenetration of reality and illusion. The Grand Balcony is the
"most artful, yet the most decent house of illusions." (p.39) By means
of the impersonations within its walls, it preserves the social
institutions. The revolutionaries, on the other hand, are enemies of all
that is illusory and wish to found a society based on absolute truth.
Hence, at a first glance, the war between the Balcony and the rebels seems
to be the war between illusion and reality. But the Balcony's business
is the creation of images and Genet's argument is that a function gains
authenticity only when it is elevated to the status of a symbol. It is
for this reason that the Chief of Police who has the power of action seeks
to transform himself into an image. The rebels, too, who had believed
that they could do without the illusion of grand symbols and gestures,
find that they need a supreme symbol to win the war. Their dependence on Chantal, the whore turned saint, proves the indispensability of illusions. As the paradox proliferates through the play's action, it becomes increasingly difficult to discern which of the camps represents reality and which illusion.

The barriers between the two worlds dissolve when, according to the instructions of the Queen's Envoy, Irma assumes the office of the Queen and the fake Bishop, Judge and General of the brothel accept the places of their namesakes in the real world. Once these people become the power figures whose mere appearances they had taken previously, the insurrection is quickly put down. The populace needs to see a Queen, a Bishop and a Judge. The fact that the real Queen and her officers are dead and that these are impostors does not penetrate its cognizance. The whole episode, elucidating the interpenetration of reality and illusion, makes the point that in the social context, power is based on illusion.

Once Irma's clients become power symbols, they are faced with a dilemma. They are symbolic figures and automatically go through the gestures and poses that are associated with such symbols. This is what they do in the ceremonial procession. But they are also symbols of power and power must act. The illusion of action (i.e., movement which suggests life) which emanates from the image has to give place to the reality of the political responsibility. The Bishop, Judge and General now start wielding power in earnest, each introducing reforms in his specific field of activity. The Bishop voices the concern of the three power figures when he moans to the Chief of Police:
... We're now tied up with human beings, tied to you, and forced to go on with this adventure according to the laws of visibility. (p. 79)

The only way to stem the terrible power of a symbol which stops being a static illusion and starts acting in reality is to withdraw it from the eyes of the populace and make it a pure image reflected ad infinitum in a mirror in solitude. As Richard Coe puts it,

> The ultimate perfection of a power symbol is one which has only the appearance of a purpose, and has finally abandoned its vocation to function in reality. It is a power symbol which is sterile ... which brings us back to the Grand Balcony, the Brothel, with its sterile whores and its sterile mirrors, to which, amid the devastation of the play's end, the various characters return. 12

The performances at the bordello take the form of rituals. The ceremonies range from a confession to the coronation of the King of France. In this connection, mention must be made of Genet's belief in the efficacy of ritual and ceremony as a means of communion. For him, the highest form of ceremony is the Mass:

> Beneath the familiar appearances - a crust of bread - a god is devoured. I know of nothing more theatrically effective than the elevation of the host. 3

Neither the experience of the believer who sees only the body of Christ in the Eucharist nor that of the sceptic who sees only a piece of wafer is complete. The former grasps only the symbol and the latter only the substance. The truly profound experience is to be aware of both at once and believe in the reality of each separately. Genet's mysticism derives basically from this religious experience. It is also, according to him,
the principle of all true theatre.

Actor and spectator share a moment of communion when both are aware of the transformation of actor into character. Just as the willed susceptibility of the believer transforms the piece of bread into the symbol of a more hallowed thing, the willing suspension of disbelief on the part of the spectator accords to the character its contextual reality. According to Richard Coe, such a transformation by faith (both in a religious sense and in dramatic terminology) can take place only in an atmosphere of intense emotion – of hatred in particular. The three elements that trigger off vast reserves of hatred are, according to Coe, sex, politics and racial antagonism. The Blacks uses all the three elements in an interrelated fashion and is therefore electric in its appeal. The Balcony confines itself to the first two.

The principle of mystic experience operates within the structure of the action as well, in the rituals of the Balcony. Each of the impersonators believes in the transcendental reality of the Figure he imitates or defiles. Yet each is also aware that his own connection with that Figure is an illusion. For the illusion to be perfect, Irma never permits her girls to smile, for "a smile means doubt" (p. 30). The dual impact of the ritual explains the clients' insistence on the one authentic and the one spurious detail in the scenario.

The action of the play pushes the characters from illusion into reality and back again into illusion. It is interesting to note that as the Bishop, Judge and General step out of their fantasy world into the real one, their images are etched on film indelibly. The mirrors
of the House of Illusions which dominate the scene at the beginning of
the play are replaced by photographs which are supposed to record
reality. But the young men who take the photographs are specialists
in illusion. They suggest to the Three Figures the classical poses
and facial expressions which they should adopt in order to appear as
models of devotion, righteousness or authority as the case may be. The
first photographer settles the Bishop in an attitude of prayer; the
second one asks the Judge to be "horselike and sullen" (p. 73) and
the third man improvises a paper baton for the General to strike the
pose of Wellington. Photographic reality thus requires a lot of illusions.
As the second photographer tells the Judge, "A good photographer is one
who gives a definitive image." (p. 73)

All the characters in The Balcony are faced with a choice between
illusion and reality. Right at the beginning, the customers at the
brothel find in its illusions the thrills they miss in real life. The
characterization reveals psychological insight, for it is the small men
of the world like the gas man, the bank clerk and the plumber who
impersonate the big figures of the social institutions. While toiling
at their insignificant offices, they, like Walter Mitty, have dreams of
power, which are briefly realized in the House of Illusions.

While the masquerades of the customers are a periodic escape from
reality, those of the whores is a total rejection of the same. Carmen,
who is Irma's confidante, is torn between her affection for her
daughter and her life as a prostitute. Playing the Immaculate Virgin
for the bank clerk, she has experienced, in the illusion, a state of
purity unattainable to her. If she decided to go back to her daughter, she would have to give up such beautiful illusions and resume contact with reality. Carmen's life is so rooted in appearances that the serious implications of real life simply elude her grasp. Irma tells her that the rebels might bring about a reform in the lives of the harlots.

IRMA: .... They'll marry you off. Would you like to get married?
CARMEN: Orange blossoms, tulle....
IRMA: Wonderful! To you getting married means masquerading. Darling, you certainly are one of us. (p. 39)

We are not surprised when Carmen chooses the life of illusions and remains with Irma.

Two of the characters figure as opposites in the choice between reality and illusion. For the Chief of Police it is a choice between his identity as a man exercising power and his function detached from that identity, which would be a symbol. He wishes to dissolve his identity in the symbol, but ironically his wish comes true only when Roger, the avowed enemy of all symbols, is defeated in his quest of reality and plays the role of the Chief of Police. But Roger punishes himself for elevating the function of his adversary by castrating himself. The act is a symbolic destruction of his own identity as well as his enemy's.

Thematically, the dialectic between illusion and reality could be amplified into several statements. Firstly, illusion and reality in their oppositional characteristics are identified with the polarity of life and death. It is significant that Irma's House of Illusions is also a mausoleum. The characters' preference for illusion over reality is
tantamount to a preference of death over life. In choosing to be images
of the Balcony, they opt for a death-like stasis in the place of
movement and life. This explains why Irma herself, when she is about to
play the role of the Queen, takes leave of the Chief of Police, her
lover, as though she is going to her death.

The dialectic brings into sharp relief the frightening aspect of
reality as opposed to the pleasing effects of illusion. When the Bishop
and his peers of the Balcony have to accept the responsibility of their
offices in earnest, they mourn the loss of "the delicious untroubled"
state of illusion (pp. 79-80). Fantasy affords pleasure only because,
for all its appearance of reality, it remains make-believe. While the
customers at the bordello act out their fantasies with the props
necessary to furnish the scenes with an air of authenticity, they insist
on the one false detail in the scene which would reassure them that the
roles they play are assumed and not real. Thus, while the gas man would
have the studio furnished like a Bishop's sacristy, he also has his
working clothes in the room to remind him of the illusory nature of his
role. "If your sins were real", he tells the harlot who poses as the
penitent, "they would be crimes, and I'd be in a fine mess." (p. 10)

The disparity between illusion and reality is also that between
identity and function, as mentioned earlier. Function, isolated from
identity, is only an appearance. Irma voices all the characters' preference
for undiluted illusion over reality when she tells Carmen what a judge,
general and bishop are in real life:
In real life they're props of a display that they have to drag in the mud of the real and commonplace. Here, Comedy and Appearance remain pure, and the Revels intact. (p. 36)

That, in the social context, power is based on illusions is elucidated in the scene with the photographers. The three dignitaries are made to assume poses and gestures intended for mass-consumption and the photographers have no qualms in deluding the public. Thus, the 'host' which the Bishop is seen receiving in the picture is, in reality, the General's monocle, borrowed for the occasion, and the General's baton is only a piece of paper rolled up.

Both the decor and the costumes used in the play direct our attention to the contiguity of reality and illusion. The costume incorporates ideas from Greek tragedy. An illusion of grandeur is created by the impersonators at the brothel who wear cothurni to give them extra height and padded shoulders to exaggerate their girth. Stripped of these aids at the end of the scenes, they appear as very ordinary, run-of-the-mill actors.

As for the decor, mirrors and movable screens are used to convey a sense of unreality. In the first three scenes, a large mirror in the room reflects an unmade bed "which, if the room were arranged logically, would be in the first rows of the orchestra" (p. 7). The walls of the room are movable cloth screens which, with different colours, represent different studios in the brothel. A further level of unreality is reached in the fourth scene and our attention is more insistently drawn to the ambiguity of the two states of reality and illusion. The stage directions
indicate that the three walls of the room are three mirrors. The occupant of the room is a little old man, dressed as a tramp, whose actions reveal his nervousness. The stage directions at this point are:

All the gestures of the little old man are reflected in the three mirrors.
(Three actors are needed to play the roles of the reflections.)

The mirrors, which are symbols of illusion, are doubly illusory here, as they are not mirrors at all. By rejecting the more convenient method of employing real mirrors and by substituting actors for the mirror-reflections, Genet strengthens our sense of ambivalence between reality and illusion.

The use of the mirrors makes voyeurs of us all, in addition, as we watch the play-acting in each room along with Irma, who watches it through her special viewing apparatus. Just in case we feel smug about watching a false spectacle from the security of our real world, we are told by Irma, as she turns off the lights, that our world is more unreal than the theatre:

....You must now go home, where everything -you can be quite sure- will be falser than here.... (p. 96)

Even the actors, according to Genet's instructions, are not to keep the two states of illusion and reality distinct. The audience is to be left in a state of uncertainty concerning the genuineness or fakery of the feelings of the characters and the precise locale of the action:

Les sentiments des protagonistes, inspirés par la situation, sont-ils feints, sont-ils réels? La colère, vers la fin de la pièce, du Chef de la Police à l'égard des Trois Figures, est-elle feinte, est-elle réelle? L'existence des révoltés
In keeping with this general sense of ambivalence, the language, too, is deliberately equivocal frequently, conveying two opposite ideas in the same proposition. The Envoy's comments on the whereabouts of the Queen are examples of practised equivocation.

THE ENVOY: Her majesty is occupying herself in becoming entirely what she must be: the Queen. (He looks at the (Arthur's) corpse.) She, too, is moving rapidly towards immobility.

IRMA: And she's embroidering.

THE ENVOY: No, Madame. I say the Queen is embroidering a handkerchief, for though it is my duty to describe her, it is also my duty to conceal her.

IRMA: Do you mean she's not embroidering?

THE ENVOY: I mean that the Queen is embroidering and that she is not embroidering. She picks her nose, examines the pickings and lies down again. Then, she dries the dishes. (p. 62)

There is sufficient mention of movement in the Envoy's words to indicate that the Queen is alive and yet at the same time there is also a veiled suggestion in the reference to immobility and her meaningless activity, that she is dead. As Irma and the Chief of Police ponder over the Envoy's words to find out if the Queen is alive or dead, we have a strong suspicion that while the Queen's office may be real, her majesty herself in the play could be an illusion.

Two distinct styles of language can be traced in the speeches of the characters. The play-acting in the bordello is accompanied by a highly rhetorical, grandiloquent style of speech which reveals the
narcissism of the men. The Bishop, for instance, declaims when he beholds himself in the mirror:

Ornaments! Mitres! Laces! You, above all, oh gilded cope, you protect me from the world...
Under your scalloped, lustrous flaps, what have my hands been doing? Fit only for fluttering gestures, they're become mere stumps of wings—not of angels, but of partridges! (p. 13)

Irma, too, uses an ornate manner of speech when she is playing a role, as, for instance, when she tempts Carmen to stay with her by hinting at a lesbian attachment between them. When she is haggling with her clients or talking business with Arthur, however, she adopts a curt and more realistic tone. Essence and appearance thus express themselves in different modes of speech.

As befits the dreamlike atmosphere of the second half of the play, the language becomes less simple. There are obscure metaphors as in the speeches of the Envoy, and contrapuntal phrases abound as in "...a true image born of a false spectacle" (p. 75), "the taste of the bitter delight of responsibility..." (p. 80). As the characters move away from realistic, everyday language, the lines become more ponderous and slow moving. The Balcony's approach to political problems is cerebral, unlike The Blacks' which is emotional. In the numerous platitudes of the later scenes, Genet seems to caricature the Politician whose words build up an appearance instead of revealing the real person.

In summing up, it could be said that the dialectic of illusion and reality is established in The Balcony at every turn - in the impersonations at the bordello, the beliefs of the revolutionaries, in the aspiration of the Chief of Police and in the ascendancy of the Three Great Figures.
Taking the second play, The Blacks, we find that illusion is again at the heart of the action. Here, Genet resorts to the device of a play within a play in which he elicits the complicity of the audience cunningly so that the stage world of illusion and the real world of the spectator meet. In the inner play, a group of blacks enacts before a jury of white-masked blacks, its murder of a white woman. Right at the beginning, we see a catafalque in the middle of the stage which is said to contain the 'corpse'. Near the end, when the 'white' court prepares to try the blacks for their crime, the sheet over the catafalque is removed and it is seen that it had been represented by a pair of chairs over which a sheet had been draped. The corpse and the coffin are both discovered to be illusions and the performance aspect of the whole thing is stressed by Archibald, the blacks' master of ceremonies, who tells the court, "We are actors and organized an evening's entertainment for you" (p. 99).

Archibald's words are really meant for the audience, which is made to believe that the ritual murder on stage had been a cover-up for the real killing off-stage, the execution of a black traitor. But the off-stage action is again part of the illusion of performance, since the explosion the audience hears, supposed to be the shot which killed the traitor, is, in 'reality', the noise of a fire cracker and the sparks of fireworks are distinctly seen against the black velvet of the set. Thus the sudden revelation of a play-outside-the-play intimates to us the existence of a new and unsuspected dimension of illusion. The masked whites of the court fulfil the functions of a chorus and also of the antagonists in the action. Seated in the gallery above the blacks who
perform the ritual murder, they are also an audience, listening, applauding, and reacting to those on the main stage. But we, the real audience, know that they are only actors playing at being an audience. With the arrival of Newport News, who brings the news of the traitor's death, their play acting comes to a halt and they reveal themselves to be the members of a militant Black Movement. The man who played the valet seems to be their leader, and, after questioning Newport News closely, he orders the court to resume their play-roles and continue the performance. The real audience, which has seen actors playing audience, now sees actors playing actors. The element of surprise, which causes dramatic tension, is implicit in the convoluted structure of the play's action.

The idea of duality inherent in a ritual is exploited in the ceremonious incarnation of Diouf. The transformation of the vicar into Village's victim occurs in the presence of witnesses. Diouf dons the blonde wig and mask representing a white woman and 'becomes' Marie. In this guise, he later produces five wooden dolls as his offspring. The man is thus transformed thrice - first as an actor, then as a white and, lastly, as a procreating female. The symbolic identity of Diouf owes its acceptance not to the blatantly theatrical transvestism itself but to an emotional preparedness on the part of the audience which, as mentioned earlier, is brought to a head by the simultaneous presence in the play of the elements of sex, politics, and racial antagonism. The 'feminising' of Diouf takes into account the awareness of the spectators that it is an illusion, as well as a readiness to transcend the dimension of illusion.
and seek the truth of the symbol.

After the rape-murder of the representative white victim, the court descends to the main stage, which is "Africa," to try the blacks for their crime and to punish them. But the accusers become the accused and the blacks symbolically execute each member of the court. Here, again, the make-believe nature of the execution is underlined by the characters, who hold bulletless pistols and kill by merely clapping their hands. "We're actors, our massacre will be lyrical" announces the Queen (p.115). The mock execution of the court then proceeds to the crowing of cocks.

Characterization in *The Blacks* is more simple but more effective than in *The Balcony*. Genet views his characters in *The Blacks* as personifications of racial attributes and blackness and whiteness are, in his view, warring absolutes. Since both whites and blacks are played by black actors, their motivation is the same - hatred of the whites. The cast of characters consists of a cook, a medical student, a vicar and others who indulge in play-acting as a means of wish fulfillment. They inform us that they play their roles as the whites imagine them. The ritualistic murder and mock execution are dramatic expressions of their repressed longing for revenge on the whites.

The conflict of these opposites precludes any meaningful relationship between them. Each group deludes itself in the belief that the other does not exist in any significant sense of the term. Quoting stock market figures to each other, the whites try to ignore the blacks who perform before them, as the blacks in their turn ignore the whites who interrupt their remarks by continuing their speeches as though no interruption
has occurred. The only meeting point they will have is the illusion of theatre where they can destroy one another with immunity. "At last they'll know the only dramatic relationships we can have with them," says the Queen (p. 114), as the whites in the play are about to be killed. Neither group keeps its hold on reality when dealing with the other. While the blacks see everything that is despicable as white, the whites suffer from the illusion that anything that is good has to be white. Genet points out the absurdity of their illusion in a humorous little scene. The blacks show their disrespect for the dead woman by lighting their cigarettes around the catafalque in order to "smoke her out" (p. 23). The Queen then begins to weep and the Missionary comforts her with his views on God's colour and daily habits which would convince her that He is on the whites' side.

Have confidence, Majesty. God is white.
...For two thousand years God has been white. He eats on a white table cloth. He wipes his white mouth with a white napkin. He picks at white meat with a white fork. (A pause.) He watches the snow fall. (p. 23-24)

As the two groups gird themselves to be uncompromisingly black or white, the theme of the play unfolds slowly, showing both goals to be illusions and establishing the interdependence of the absolutes, which is the reality. In their all-out effort to 'negrify' themselves, the blacks try to appear more primitive and savage but, living in a white world, they cannot but ape white manners. Wearing evening dresses and dancing the minuet, they cannot rid themselves of the contaminating influence of the whites just as the whites, who shun the blacks, secretly
desire the black world of erotic freedom. Thus the Queen confesses before she dies that she is "choked" by her "desire for a Big Black Buck" (p. 124). In an earlier scene, Virtue, the black whore, describing herself as "the lily-white Queen of the west" (p. 44), anticipates the words of the Queen herself. The two women, in a state of trance, then recite together a poem in praise of whiteness. Similarly, at the end of the play, Felicity and the Queen taunt each other with insults, but they are described as moving together "almost amicably" (p. 103) and talking to each other "like two women exchanging recipes" (p. 107).

If we interpret these scenes in the light of the black-white dialectic established in the rest of the play, we arrive at the conclusion that the enmity between the two groups, like everything else in The Blacks, is playful illusion, the reality being that the two seeming opposites envelop each other and are inseparable.

The theme of The Blacks also stresses the disparity between essence and appearance. This applies in particular to the whites who are the masked characters in the play. The mask symbolizes the suppression of the real self and the assumption of a facade to present to the world. Whiteness represents, for Genet, besides good, light, etc., hypocrisy and repression. The whites mask their feelings of hostility towards the blacks in an attitude of conciliation and kindness. They also suppress their own desire for the blacks' world of sensuality. Thus essence and appearance are a sharp contrast to each other like the ill-concealed black forces of the actors and their white masks.
The techniques of staging *The Blacks* try to do justice to its description as "une clownerie." It is quite easy to forget that the play's nature is that of a charade and mistake the animosity of the blacks against the whites to be real. Genet guards against this contingency by means of stage directions which explicitly denote that the whole setup is the illusion of performance. Thus, when a character is required to go somewhere, the stage direction says that he should mime the movement of walking while remaining stationary. Bobo, playing the role of the victim Marie's neighbour, takes elaborate leave of her and then "remains fixed in an attitude of departure" (pp. 63-64). Similarly, Archibald who is supposed to enter Marie's garden makes his entry by just miming the walk.

At times, the characters listen to someone who remains mute and pretend they have heard some communication. One of them plays a silent melody on an invisible piano. The responsive laughter or applause of the characters around the supposed speaker or musician creates the illusion of conversation or music. Finally, when the white court descends to the main stage, all the blacks vocally produce the noises of the jungle and transform the area into Africa. There is no attempt to create an illusion of reality that would induce the spectators to forget the milieu of the theatre and identify themselves with the action on stage. Any such identification is due only to an emotional predilection and racial antagonism that the spectators already experience in real life. In an interview by Jean Duvignaud one week before the opening of *The Blacks* at the Théâtre de Lutèce, Roger Blin maintained that
it was important to discourage an empathy between the spectators and the characters on the stage:

Si le public adhère physiquement à la pièce, il faut ménager des ruptures dans cette adhésion et que la crédibilité soit interrompue afin qu'on lui rappelle sans cesse qu'il s'agit de treize comédiens qui s'amusent entre eux! 6

In this connection, mention must be made once again of the use of masks as an explicit theatrical device. The mask by its very fixity of expression dehumanizes and abstracts the human face, which is mobile and expressive. It is very difficult for the spectators to identify themselves with such a dehumanized figure. The mask reminds them of the actor performing for them. The wearing of masks by the court gives just such a reminder:

Each actor playing a member of the Court is a masked negro whose mask represents the face of a white person. The mask is worn in such a way that the audience sees a wide black band all around it, and even the actor's kinky hair. (p. 8)

Both in this case and in that of the masked Diouf who conceals his identity to assume the face and function of a white female, the arrested expression on the mask is a most effective device of audience alienation.

Language is an acknowledged means of communication but in The Blacks its function is just the opposite - distancing. Right at the beginning, Archibald tells the audience,

We shall increase the distance that separates us - a distance that is basic - by our pomp, our manners, our insolence - for we are also actors. (p. 12)

In order to break down communication, the blacks have to avoid the spoken
word of the reality-oriented world and resort to spectacle - the ritual of murder. The language that accompanies ritual is incantation or recitation, which is part of the formal language of the stage as contrasted with the informal language of life.

Yet the lyric flights of the blacks' language affords glimpses of a rich, poetic imagination not revealed by the words of the whites. The drab reality of the blacks' subjection to the whites is compensated by dreams of an untainted, primitive state of freedom:

Haunt me, lance bearer. With my long dark strides
I roamed the earth. Against that moving mass of darkness the angry but respectful sun flashed its beams. They did not traverse my dusky bulk. I was naked...

(p. 45)

Interrelating the conflict of blacks and whites with the polarity of illusion and reality, Genet finds that the two are interchangeable and mistaken for one another. As the blacks gain the upper hand in the power struggle with the whites, the colour black usurps the connotations of goodness so long implied by white. However, the blacks' ascendancy is not real, since the resurgence of the whites will occur in course of time. The irony of the blacks mistaking the illusion of grandeur for reality is reflected in the factual misrepresentation of objects sanctioned by the speaker's colour:

...whatever is gentle and kind and good and tender will be black. Milk will be black, sugar, rice, the sky, doves, hope, will be black.

(p. 106)

The language varies in tone and tempo constantly, shuffling the different levels of illusion and reality. The ceremonies of Diouf's
incantation and his murder are carried out to the chanting of a melody
and a blasphemous litany, respectively. The chant is characteristic
of the language of ritual, which, on the stage, is unreality in the
traditional sense. Consequently, it is symbolic and slow, and sets off
the brisk factual speeches between Newport News and the blacks about
the Black Revolution, which, we are conned into believing, is real. It
takes us a while to realize that the conversational tone and tempo of
the language in the off-stage action is a trick that presents illusion
as reality.

Much of the power of The Blacks derives from its dynamic theatricality.
At every turn, the play probes the depths of reality and illusion and
comes up with the interchangeability of the two opposites. The play is
kaleidoscopic in its presentation of the black-white confrontation. We
get to see the blacks' view of the whites, the blacks' view of what the
whites think of the blacks, the blacks' view of other blacks, and so on.
As we get involved in the several layers of the play's meaning, it is
well to remember that the whole situation is the figment of a white
writer's imagination and the idea of a Black Revolution itself is, in
this context, an illusion.

Coming to the third play, The Screens, we find that Genet adopts
a cynical tone in the place of the playful juggling with reality and
illusion. He creates a world of utter nihilism where truth ceases to
have any validity. Right at the outset of the action, the characters are
bent on a course of self-destruction. Saïd, the hero, has as his objective
the attainment of Non-being, which he (and Genet by tacit approval)
considers the ultimate reality. All his actions are calculated to bring him nearer to this goal. He marries the ugliest girl in town and subjects her to heartless treatment. He deliberately steals from his fellow workers and suffers imprisonment as a punishment. Once released, he goes in quest of further hardships, accompanied by Leila, his wife. Before she dies of utter fatigue, he puts out her eye. Alone now, he betrays the Arab cause in the French-Algerian war. By now his notoriety has made him a legend and, instead of detesting his treachery, the Arab village comes to emulate him. The living and the dead both try to win him over with flattery and the former even try to make him the subject of a song. Saïd's Mother, who has died earlier, warns him not to join either group. He is prepared for one more act of treachery but before he can do anything, he is shot and dies. The dead wait for his arrival, but Saïd does not arrive in their region, for he has attained non-being.

Each step of the main action in the play outlines a phase of Saïd's progress to Nothingness. It is true that in the beginning Saïd talks of going to Paris to earn money with which to buy himself another woman. But by deliberately stealing the money instead of earning it and thereby suffering imprisonment, he shows that money itself is not his concern any more. Besides, he does not steal from his employer or any other European but only from fellow Arabs who are quite poor. By this act he abandons his wife and his mother to the reprobation of the village. Thus, by a conscious choice of criminality, Saïd cuts himself off from material possessions and family ties, which are illusions. Similarly, by committing treason, he isolates himself from the other Arabs. By
the end of the play, poised between life and death, he is utterly alone, and with complete disregard for human values, is able to say to his admirers, "To the old gal, to the soldiers, to all of you, I say shit" (p. 197).

Said's search for absolute reality is paralleled by Leila's. She begins her life with Said by creating a make-believe world of matrimonial bliss. She makes her declaration of love to her husband's pants which she pretends are a live person. For a brief while, she comforts herself with the illusion, but soon finds a real way to get his attention. She steals and goes to jail with Said in a like attempt at self annihilation. Her conversion to evil is at first undertaken with a view to win his approval, but very soon she comes to feel a perverse happiness in her suffering. Her pursuit of negativity makes her take to begging and to maintain an unkempt appearance. She thus rejects the illusions of respectability and outward beauty.

In the subplot, we have the self-deception of Warda, the whore. She prides herself on her whoredom and on being the mysterious creature whom housewives fear and hate. She tells Malika, the young harlot, that whore should be able to attract men by what she is reduced to become. After the war, new girls like Djemilla arrive from the continent and they set up the trend of titillating men's senses. The soldiers treat the prostitutes as chattels, and, since prostitution has become legal, the village women recognize and accept them as social equals. Warda now realizes that both her artistry and her uniqueness as a whore have been illusions and tears her clothes in despair. Soon afterwards, she dies
at the hands of the village women, who attack her with knitting needles.

The characters of *The Screens* have widely different concepts of reality and illusion. Said and his family are seekers of the real. Truth or reality is almost always harsh and unpleasant and the bodily pain and disfiguration inflicted by Said and Leila on themselves and others signify a confrontation with reality. They are the nettles which others avoid. Says the Mother:

I've known since childhood that I belong—perhaps through the females, and Said through me—to the nettle family. Near ruins, tangled with shards, their bushes were my cruelty, my hypocritical meanness that I kept, with one hand behind my back, in order to hurt the world! (p. 112)

Said is superior to her, since his meanness is open whereas hers is hypocritical. In fact, while the actions of the rest of the characters in the play—even the dead—are self-centred and hypocritical, Said's and Leila's show that they are true to themselves. Genet's view is that one can find one's real essence only in utter solitude. Said by his anti-social activities isolates himself from the world around him. Only then, when he has stripped away the illusions surrounding him, does he find transcendental reality.

It is not without reason that Genet repeatedly refers to the foul bodily odour of Said and Leila. As Lionel Abel puts it, Said is human crap, socially and morally. And Genet wants us to have a good whiff of him whenever he is on stage.

The masochism of Said and Leila achieves the destruction of the ego which thrives on illusions. Achieving their self-negation through criminality and physical stench, each becomes a saint-criminal.
As a contrast to these two characters who confront reality in all its starkness, we have the whores of the brothel who live by illusions. They project an image of mystery and exoticism by means of their elaborate toilette. Warda does not survive the revolution because it destroys the illusions which were the mainstay of her life. The other whores compromise with reality and, instead of looking on their profession as an art, regard it as a business enterprise.

The French soldiers, being aesthetes, have an unreal and rather absurd notion of war. Like the whores, the lieutenant relies on external ornaments of the soldiers' uniforms, for he does not know the actuality of war but only its theory. The General finds that the war is a theatre, a cruel game. The Sergeant thinks that his cruelty makes him beautiful. In short, then, the French soldiers equate war with the unreal characteristics of art as opposed to life. It is the Arabs who grasp the reality of war—the scarcity of water, the filth and the deaths that are inevitable.

The French colonists, too, are like the whores, living by means of illusions. They symbolize the rich bourgeois whom Genet despises and hence are exaggerated, ridiculous figures. Mr. Blankensee creates an illusion of his powerful physique by padding his stomach and his behind. The other characters of this world like the Missionary and the Banker are even more unreal. They are "des marionettes mi-vivantes, mi-figées," parading in their costumes of the past.

*The Screens* delineates in its theme the real and the illusory aspects of human life. Genet implies the presence of two levels of
existence, the conscious and the unconscious. Sartre, whose philosophy also incorporates this idea, refers to them in his *St. Genet: Comedien et Martyr* as the Self and the Other. The Self accepts the ethical code imposed on us by society. It also denies conscious expression to the Other which explores areas that society considers obnoxious. Through his portrayal of the anti-couple, Said and Leila, Genet triumphantly asserts the Other as the authentic part of the human entity. The couple's iniquity is open and essence and appearance are one in their case, while most of the other characters conceal their real selves and live by appearances.

The *Screens* gives an ascetic's view of life, implying that the values that human beings cherish are really empty. In the opening scene, we see Said and his mother on their way to his wedding. Said carries a valise which is supposed to contain a lot of gifts—pieces of lace, china and goodies to eat. When the valise falls open at the end of the scene, we see that it is actually empty. In another scene, Leila and the Mother imitate the clucking of hens and cooing of pigeons. The two scenes, while depicting the illusions of grandeur that poor folk have in order to satisfy their hankering for wealth and property, carry a more important message. Translated into metaphysical language, they state that the notion of property and possessions is itself a grand illusion like the empty valise and the barnyard sounds.

It is significant that once Said's quest for an authentic life begins, he stops going to the brothel. Leila, too, no longer desires sexual fulfilment in her married life. To those whose goal is the final
reality of self knowledge, sexual love is an illusion and irrelevant.

The play's theme touches on the question of power also. The relation between the Algerians and the French colonists is similar to that between the blacks and whites of the previous play; the dominated versus the dominators. At first the Algerians are submissive since their French masters appear to be vastly superior and powerful. Sir Harold, whose plantation is cultivated by Arab workers, watches them strictly. When he is away from the plantation, he leaves his pigskin glove to watch them. The glove, symbolizing the iron hand of the colonist, is later discovered to be packed with straw. Similarly, Mr. Blankensee, who owns estates of cork oak, pads himself in front and behind to present an imposing figure. When the truth about Sir Harold's glove and Mr. Blankensee's build is known, the former's trees are destroyed and the latter is killed. Here we have the theme already expanded in The Balcony, that power is based on illusions.

The Screens is equally sceptical about the bourgeois display of merit and distinction. One of the scenes portrays an old couple pinning medals and ribbons of fictitious orders onto a dummy and admiring it. The scene attacks social and military distinctions, which conceal the basic worthlessness of a person and create the illusion of his great merit. Genet goes further and says that beneath the ornate splendour of his social position, man is a creature of filth. The sergeant is the playwright's spokesman when he declares that excretion levels social ranks:
When you squeeze, you get glassy eyed, something clouds over.... and.... what is it that clouds over and blots out? The world? .... The sky?.... No. Your rank of sergeant, and that of captain! And all that goes with it: the uniform, the stripes, the decorations and the Officers' school diploma when you've got one!...

(p. 170)

Man's moment of truth comes when he is doing this basic biological function which is symbolic of the Other in one's self. Absolute honesty to oneself requires the recognition and acceptance of the Other. Said shows this honesty by embracing criminality and excrementalism, which go together. His system of values also outlines the most controversial message in the play, namely, that Good is the greatest illusion of all, Evil being the only reality. Genet questions the validity of conventional ethics by his anti-ethics. To label crime as immoral or evil is to pass a value judgement based on social values. To be good is to display, sheep-like, a desire for conformity whereas the pursuit of evil asserts one's individuality. And in Genet's view, truth or reality is unattainable so long as one conforms to an arbitrary system of morality.

The techniques used in the staging of the play integrate dramatic and theatrical illusion. First of all, the setting of the action, although it is said to be Algeria, is deliberately left imprecise. What struck the audience in the 1961 Berlin production of The Screens was that the milieu was a no man's land. The region of the dead, of course, has to be such a territory, but even the 'real' setting of the Arab village seemed unreal despite its multiple landmarks such as the brothel, orangery, prison, road, and so on. The movable screens which shift the scenes from one of these locations to another remind the audience of the make-believe
setting of the play.

Play and illusion characterize the decor. The actors create, as part of the performance, the locales of the action by means of the drawings on the screens. In one scene, a spectacular fire is suggested by means of flames drawn with orange coloured chalk. Odette Aslan draws our attention to this imaginary aspect of the decor:

Les comédiens n'entrent pas au lever du rideau dans un univers immuable qu'on a construit pour eux, mais ils créent eux-mêmes leur décor avec des parois mobiles qu'ils doivent manipuler, et sur ces parois, ils dessinent devant le spectateur les objets ou les signes nécessaires pour que l'action puisse progresser.

The actors are at play either among themselves or with objects. It is made clear that the sound effects are produced by them as part of this play. Thus sounds of wind, forest fire and thunder are all produced by the actors on stage.

Genet stipulates that in contrast with the objects drawn in trompe-l'oeil on each screen, there must be one or more real objects on the stage. The confusion between reality and illusion is maintained throughout by juxtaposing concrete things with impersonations. Thus Leila, who shows her mother-in-law her deftness in stealing, displays a real cheese grater and lamp which she has stolen, but she draws the picture of a Luis XV clock. The reason for this item alone being represented in picture form is based on the dialectic between illusion and reality. Clocks, which measure time strictly in the real world, have no place in this stage world of illusion which ignores the concept of time. The only kind of clock which is seen here has to be an illusion itself.
Similarly, the continuum of space is irrelevant on the stage. Hence, when the gendarme comes to arrest Leila for burglary, she turns to the direction opposite to that of his entry and bows. Everything is illusion and make-believe.

The characters are to be made up in such a way that they emphasize impersonation and illusion, which are the business of the theatre. Genet writes that he would like the characters to be masked. Where this is not possible, they are to be highly made up - "excessive make-up, contrasting with the realism of the costumes" (p. 10). He advises the use of a large variety of false noses and chins which would detract from the conventional beauty of face which is highlighted on the stage.

The language of The Screens, at once brutal and poetic, reinforces the ambiguity between reality and illusion. Genet indicates that the language of the dead is closer to daily life. By contrast, that of the colonists is deliberately inflated. Again, in the language of the living, in their reality-oriented world, we have certain images where poetry and fantasy unite:

....I hope I've shown the right way. Though at bottom all ways are alike. Leila.... Leila!...
If you see steamboats crossing the rye fields,
if you see sailors in the alfalfa.... (p. 142)

Poetic images and metaphors abound in the words of Said and Leila who reject the world of materialism. "A used match is pretty," soliloquizes Leila, "It's only then, when it's white and black and a little twisted by the flame, that it looks gentle and kind." (p. 109) She and Said live in filth but the language they speak has a unique beauty noticeably absent in the language of the other Arabs. The latter's idea of reality
amounts just to an obsession with repulsive, visual details. "The flies! The flies! The flies!..." screech the women mourning Sir Slimane's death, and one of them describes the infestation in detail: "Flies in the cellar, flies on the ceiling, and their droppings on my skin..." (p. 40). What is unusual is that the words connected with excrementalism are uttered with great relish as if the characters savour each syllable.

Genet's use of scatological imagery stems from a wish to force upon others an awareness of the ugly aspects of reality as well as from his own fascination with the excremental aspects of evil. He tries to glorify squalour and transform it into something noble, but the transformation will not be effective in the mind of the public so long as it remains real squalour. As Sartre points out, Genet has to present excrement in the guise of rose jam if the public is to consume it.

In The Screens, at least, he does not attempt this culinary deception.

From an examination of Genet's last plays, it is clear that the dialectic of illusion and reality is basic to all the three plays. The function of this polarity is curiously related to the good-evil polarity, as it is related to the life-death principle. Richard Coe points out "the ingenious twist of the theory of appearances" in the last plays. The grands bourgeois of The Balcony, the whites of The Blacks and the colonists of The Screens are masked and caricatured so as to make their evil readily discernible. But the evil of the whores, the blacks and the Arabs is hidden. Their unmasked faces actually conceal evil and present the illusion of good. The traditional role of masks and faces is reversed here, since the masks present reality
and faces, illusion. It is, perhaps, Genet's final word on the indistinguishability of reality and illusion.
NOTES

CHAPTER II


5. This is the subtitle of the play in French. The English edition similarly bears the title, The Blacks: a Clown Show.


12. It is interesting to compare Sartre's use of the same image in *Les Mouches*. In Genet's play, flies are part of scatology which the characters savour. They are greeted as friends by the women. Kadidja, for instance, knows each fly by its name. In *Les Mouches*, on the other hand, the flies are symbols of a divine scourge or punishment which mortals have to experience for having sinned. They inspire either fear or resignation. The lonely figure of Orestes pursued by swarms of flies at the end of the play is more tragic than the characters of *The Screams* who converse with the insects.


CHAPTER III
LOVE AND HATE

Genet's faith in the efficacy of hatred as a potent stimulus of dramatic experience has been discussed in connection with his love of ritual. A discussion of the treatment of love and hate in his last plays shows that the ambivalent love-hate relationships portrayed in these plays is only a magnification of his own relationship with society.

It is not only hatred but also extreme love or fear which can contribute to the total experience of the spectator in the theatre, when he becomes a duality, part of him believing what he sees and the rest of him knowing that the belief is based on illusion. However, in Genet's view, hatred produces this willed belief more easily than love or fear. The last plays of Genet take for granted the spectator's immense potential for hatred, which needs only to be catalysed by the events he sees on the stage.

In the three plays, there is no middle course between love and hatred, which are contending absolutes that coincide. Their unity is not really new, as hatred which is seen to be really love and (to use a hackneyed phrase) love-hate relationships have been treated by other dramatists. What is unusual is the wholly negative display of love and hate and the dramatist's and the actors' attitude to the spectators. This attitude transforms the spectators into symbols and subjects them to the acrimony exhibited on the stage.
The already controversial subjects of politics and sex are made additionally provocative in *The Balcony* with the introduction of sacrilege in the action. Both here and in *The Blacks*, the characterization features love being displayed as hate. The theme that naturally derives from this is the oneness of the supposed opposites. In *The Blacks*, hatred is not merely a motivation but the hallmark of black identity. Consequently, the actors' hate relationship with the audience has meaning only if the audience is white. In other words, the identities of the actors and the spectators, based on colour, provides the emotional atmosphere of the play. In *The Balcony*, on the other hand, Genet is less sure of the spectators supplying the hatred. He therefore tries to bring it into the open, first by means of the provocation of sacrilege and then by showing that it is the so-called normal world of the spectator which displays such distorted behaviour.

*The Screens* develops the love-hate polarity in the peripheral detail of the Franco-Algerian war. The love or fascination which the dominated Arabs have for their French rulers is similar to the attitude of the blacks towards the whites in *The Blacks* and to that of the plebians towards the Establishment in *The Balcony*. But in the Said story, we have a number of hate-acts committed by the anti-hero against society and against himself. His actions are means to achieve supreme negativity. They are symbols of his individualism. But precisely because of these hate-acts, he is loved by the Arabs. The hate-love polarity thus functions in the form of cause and effect in the main action of *The Screens*. In its characterization, hatred figures largely as the motivational force while
love is almost wholly absent. Love and hate as distinct elements in the duality of the matriarchal figure are revealed by the three female leaders: the Mother, Kadidja and Ommu. The play espouses the cause of evil, not because of any intrinsic value it has, but because it is a gesture of hatred against the society which has imposed its system of values on people. If one accepts those values, he becomes hateful, too, which is what the masochistic actions of the characters say. Thus to a large extent, the conflict of love and hate in *The Screene* concerns the question of ethics while in *The Balcony* it is connected with politics and in *The Blacks* with racial identity.

The element of hatred is implicit in any war, so an examination of *The Balcony*'s action, which treats the war between the Establishment and the rebels, gives prominence to this feeling. The Balcony represents the Established Order since it projects images of that order. The revolutionaries hate the Balcony and all that it represents. The tension between the two groups is very great as the rebels' hatred of Authority is matched by love of the same Authority within the bordello. The love is expressed in the form of admiration in the play-acting of the whores and customers who rehearse the functions of the Establishment. The others, like Irma and the Chief of Police, display loyalty to the government. Their loyalty seems to follow a pattern of hierarchy. Thus the Chief of Police has his bodyguards who, in order to show their loyalty to him, will protect his protegées at the brothel. He in turn serves the Queen, who, we are told, has guards so loyal they will die for her. When the war becomes really bitter and the Queen and her officers of the state
are killed, the Envoy depends on the loyalty of Irma and the others in
the Balcony to resolve the crisis.

But once Irma becomes the Queen and her 'visitors' become Judge,
Bishop and General in reality, they show an attitude of hate to the
common people. "Your grandeur requires your having slaughtered the
rebels wholesale," says the Bishop to the Queen (p.75). He excommunicates
people on the frailest of excuses while the Judge levies death penalties
at will and the General extracts the maximum labour from the workers who
build the public monuments. The rulers repay the love or loyalty of
subjects with hate and when this becomes too unbearable, the subjects
rebel. And so we have a new revolution (or perhaps it is just the
resurrection of the old one) at the end of the play when the rebels
show their hatred of the Establishment once again.

The love-hate polarity of the main plot is cross lighted by two
incidents: the defection of Chantal and the castration of the rebel
leader, Roger. Chantal, the erstwhile resident of the Grand Balcony,
turns against it when she elopes with Roger and joins the revolutionaries.
The men make her a symbol to sustain their morale and she lends her face
and voice "for hatred's sake" (p. 56). As the instrument of war, her
business is to whip up the hatred of the rebels against the Establishment.
It is a complete change of roles. Formerly, as a prostitute, she had
shown men a semblance of love. Now she uses her skills to produce hate.
Her transformation into a symbol of hate denies her the joy of personal
love and she has to reject Roger's advances. A symbol lacks individuality.
It objectifies the response it excites. Chantal, the symbol of the
insurrection, arouses hatred that is directed not against any particular individual but against the mass of governmental authority. The love elicited by such a symbol can only be equally de-personalized. The revolutionaries love Chantal, not for what she is but for what she represents. When she is assassinated and then canonized, she becomes trapped into an emblem and commands the same kind of love from both parties.

Unlike Chantal's hatred, Roger's, as seen in the castration scene, is extremely personal. The severest punishment he can think of for his failure in the revolution is to merge his identity with that of his ideological opposite, the Chief of Police. The castration is a gesture of hatred against himself and against his enemy at once. Ironically, it is a gratuitous blessing for the Chief of Police whose self-love is fully satisfied since he can now claim divinity. With his metamorphosis into an image and then into a deity, he, too, like Chantal, rejects personal love. Irma calls to him as he descends into his tomb, but his response to her is "I've nothing more to do with you" (p. 94).

If, in the action, love and hate operate separately, they are coexistent in the characterization. The customers of the bordello imitate the functions of the power figures. The imitations are in the form of rituals and have the solemnity of a Mass. Each of the impersonators takes his role very seriously. He demands that the scenario be as authentic as possible, handles his robes with reverence and in general feels the dignity of the role he adopts. Such an imitation betokens a fascination with the offices-rehearsed that amounts to love. And yet, by imitating these offices in a brothel, as a prelude to sexual relations with whores,
the men also defile the sanctity of these offices, which reveals a hatred of them.

The relationship of Irma's girls with these men has similar ambivalent implications. Most of the customers of the brothel show a psychological need for affection and sympathy. The General who pretends that he is dead and that multitudes weep for him is a case in point. But love is a commodity for sale in the brothel and those offering it in the market cannot afford to become emotionally involved with the buyers. Even feelings approaching love are out of place. Irma admits to Carmen:

It would be a catastrophe if my clients and girls smiled at each other affectionately. It would be an even greater catastrophe than if it were a question of love. (p. 41)

The activity of the girls suggests love, but they give only the semblance of the emotion, without its spirit. It is a travesty of a love-relationship and, if the argument were carried to its logical extreme, one detects the presence of a latent hatred.

The sado-masochistic practices of the customers reflect the conflict of extreme love and hate within them. The flagellation scene is a brilliant example of this psychological conflict. The pseudo judge gratifies his ego by judging the fake thief for a supposed crime. He has the pimp, dressed as an executioner, whip the girl soundly and finds a sadistic pleasure in her tears. At the same time, he is aware that it is only because the whore consents to play the thief that he is able to pretend that he is a judge, and it is only due to the strong arm of the executioner that his sentence is carried into effect. Criminal, judge
and executioner are all caught in a sado-masochistic round.

We are bound together, you, he and I. For example, if he didn't hit, how could I stop him from hitting? Therefore, he must strike so that I can intervene and demonstrate my authority. And you must deny your guilt so that he can beat you. (p. 15)

The thief is thus the object of his love and hatred and the judge, who reveals his self-love in exalting his role, also shows signs of self-hate when he abases himself by licking the girl's shoes. The executioner and the thief have their moment of sadistic triumph now as the former holds the whip above the judge and makes him crawl and the girl haughtily demands that he lick her shoes.

Quite a few of the characters in the bordello are torn between strong feelings of love and hate. In another scene, a lice-ridden tramp is transported with joy as a beautiful girl whips him. Genet leaves us in doubt as to whether this extreme cruelty and abjection are perversions or common aspects of human nature. Irma herself, who is in control of the situation, is not exempt from a tendency to cruelty, as her words to Carmen about her daughter indicate:

You're the fairy godmother who comes to see her with toys and perfumes. She pictures you in Heaven. (Bursting out laughing) Ah, that's the limit - to think there's someone for whom my brothel - which is Hell - is Heaven! It's Heaven for your brat! (She laughs.) Are you going to make a whore of her later on? (p. 31)

Viewed in the perspective of her lesbian attachment to Carmen, the words give the impression of a jealous hate-attitude. Genet himself indicates, in "Comment Jouer le Balcon", the presence of an antagonism between the two women:
Essayer de rendre sensible la rivalité qui paraît exister entre Irma et Carmen. Je veux dire: qui dirige-la maison et la pièce? Carmen ou Irma? ¹

The Balcony's theme finds power and sexuality related factors. Romantic sexual love, which offers little scope for power politics is consequently shown as weak and sentimental. Roger's love for Chantal falls into this category. At the first opportunity, Chantal escapes from this irksome romance to seek glory as a singer leading the troops.

Since power and sexuality are interrelated in Genet's drama, implications of love and hate that go with sexuality enter any discussion of power. Kenneth Tynan's observation on the castration scene is of relevance in this matter. According to him, while the sources of power are erotic, power itself is sexless, which is what the castration is all about. ² The ordinary men who visit the Grand Balcony are transformed into power figures by the erotic ministrations of the whores. Once they put on the robes of the figures they imitate, they describe themselves as 'dead'. Death, which frees one from sexual identity, is a mark of power. But power must be exercised and, invariably, it emanates in hate acts. Hence the bloodshed, slave labour and excommunications we hear about in the last half of the play.

The theme also states that love and hate are opposite extremes in mob sentimentality. Emotions felt en masse are highly unstable and the mob's feelings veer from love to hate and back again. The rabble, sympathising with the rebels at first, shows its bitter hatred of the Establishment by massacring the Queen and her followers. The people even exhibit the decapitated head of the Bishop on the handlebars of a
bicycle. Soon after this gruesome exhibition of cruelty, the new Queen, Bishop, Judge and General ride in procession and the same crowd cheers and throws flowers and kisses at them. The mob's attitude betokens the love-hate syndrome of subjects to their rulers.

Any performance of *The Balcony* would make the most of the elements of erotic love and sado-masochism in the first few scenes. The brilliant effect of the second scene derives from a judicious combination of the two. The eroticism of the scene is conveyed through the costumes and poses of the thief and the executioner:

> A woman, young and beautiful, seems to be chained, with her wrists bound. Her muslin dress is torn. Her breasts are visible. Standing in front of her is the executioner. He is a giant, stripped to the waist. Very muscular. His whip has been slipped through the loop of his belt, in back, so that he seems to have a tail...³ (pp. 13-14)

Sadism and masochism combine in the dynamic picture of the executioner holding the whip above the prostrate judge who crawls towards the thief, shrinking back at his approach. The sound effects, too, give a tone of hostility. There is the ominous crack of the executioner's whip and the thief's cry of fear. The last thing we hear as the screen moves into the wing is the shriek of the girl holding out her foot to the judge, "Not yet! Lick! Lick! Lick first!" (p. 20).

In the next scene, the sound effect creates a contrast with the visual element in the sense that the former is suggestive of fear while the scene being acted out is of an amorous nature. The appearance and movements of the 'war horse' are extremely sensual, but before the audience can sit back and enjoy this element the long-drawn scream
of a woman is heard from elsewhere in the building, presumably suggesting
the sadistic practice of some client. In the 1960 production of The
Balcony in New York by the Circle in the Square, the erotic appeal of
the scene won particular mention in the reviews. The Time reports:

...Earlier, the evening has a moment so vibrantly
mad that it all but leaves the audience unhitched
from the third scene on. The General stands dressed
for battle. Into his presence, pacing voluptuously
with long-legged precision, pawing the earth with
impatient sensuality, comes history's first whore... 4

The last of these masquerades at the brothel again synchronizes
attitudes of love and hate. The red haired girl who strikes the pseudo
tramp has "an exaggeratedly lofty and cruel air," (p. 28) as she puts
the lice-ridden wig on his head roughly. There is no spoken word; only
the 'swish' of the whip as it comes down on the tramp, and the actions
of the two make an effective contrast between love and hate:

The man takes a bouquet of artificial flowers
from his pocket. He holds it as if he were
-going to offer it to the girl, who whips him
and lashes it from his hand.
The man's face is lit up with tenderness. (p. 28)

Amidst the props of the Balcony, like the mirrors and the unmade bed
that indicate its concern with love, is Irma's viewing apparatus, with
which she spies on her girls and customers. Its presence in her room
denotes the distrust and doubt she has of her employees, which are
feelings allied to hate.

The language of The Balcony employs a variety of styles and imagery
to convey the oppositional functions of love and hate. The romantic love
of Roger for Chantal is expressed in poetic language:
Your breasts, your skin, your hair are more real than the certainty of noon. You envelop me and I contain you. (p. 59)

But juxtaposed with the more realistic speeches of Irma and the others, Roger's words as well as Chantal's drip with sentiment and sound contrived. Similarly, self-love is expressed in an unrealistic, inflated style of speech. In the Mausoleum Studio, as the slave sings the praise of Roger, the Chief of Police, whose image Roger has adopted, says, "The stones venerate me!" Roger, his alter ego, echoes his sentiment, saying,

    Everything proclaims me! Everything breathes me and everything worships me! My history was lived so that a glorious page might be written and then read. (p. 91)

Irma, too, uses an ornate style of speech when she avows her affection for Carmen. The language of love is thus exaggerated or stylistic but hostility and hatred are expressed in a very natural, easy style of speech. The exchanges between Arthur and Carmen and between the whores and the customers outside the make-believe incidents are brisk, everyday speeches.

There is a definite sense of pleasure exhibited by some of the characters over the suffering of others. "I want to see hot tears gush from your lovely eyes" says the Judge, "Oh! I want you to be drenched in them."

    THE THIEF: I've already cried...
    THE JUDGE: Under the blows. I want tears of repentance. When I see you wet as a meadow, I'll be utterly satisfied. (p. 15)

Since the concept of love - either romantic or patriotic - is idealized, the language describing it is full of conventional images associated with the sentiment. We frequently hear about blood, sweat and tears which symbolize the sacrificial element in love. On the other
hand, hatred is communicated far more effectively by means of sound effects, for instance the crack of a whip or the sound of gunfire, the tone used by the actors, their gestures, and facial expressions, rather than by means of the imagery. When the Chief of Police pushes the Three Figures down and threatens them, he does not need a description of his feelings to convey to us his mood.

Thus the love-hate polarity in *The Balcony* presents us with the different aspects of each, ranging from loyalty to lust in the first category and from enmity to open cruelty in the second. Love is the more articulate force in *The Balcony* although its expression is rather artificial, but in the next play, *The Blacks*, it is hatred which is most articulate and splendidly poetic.

The central action of *The Blacks* is motivated by hatred which is not merely a make-believe action in the theatre but is an authentic fact of the blacks' and whites' existence outside. The vituperation of the blacks is directed into three channels of action: the rape-murder of the white woman, the execution of the white court and the denunciation of the white audience.

The moving force behind the murder is not Village's personal hatred of a white woman, but the hatred of all the blacks for all the things represented by white. The transvested Diouf is not really Marie but the collective white race which is symbolically annihilated. The judge apprehends this sinister import of Village's action:

He killed out of hatred. Hatred of the colour white. That was tantamount to killing our entire race and killing us till doomsday. (p. 98)
This hatred is so intense that when one of the blacks, Diouf, dares to propose that the ceremony should involve both races, "not in hatred, but in love", he is singled out for the role of the murder victim. The transformation takes place before our eyes, as Diouf is bedecked with the mask and curls that represent a white female, wears a woman's skirt and takes up a piece of knitting. Later on, he 'gives birth' to the five wooden dolls which are the images of the white court. Diouf's action is hostile to both sexes. By reason of his profession as a clergyman, he is, or should be, a patriarchal figure among the blacks. But by masquerading as a female and arrogating the procreative function of the female, he evinces a jealousy towards the female, which is a betrayal and demeaning of his own sex. Further, as his identity as a male beneath the mask is only too well known and as he produces lifeless dolls for his offspring, his role is a travesty of the female function. Diouf's incarnation as an androgynous figure is thus an act of hatred towards both men and women.

The blacks' acrimony is not spent even after the symbolic murder of Diouf. It is directed against the court which comes to try them for the crime. The whites are 'executed' to the sound of cocks crowing victoriously in the background. Even then, the blacks' desire for revenge is not satisfied and they vent their hatred in condemning the souls of the dead to 'Hell'.

Genet's stipulation that The Blacks should be played before a white audience and performed only by black actors clearly denotes that he means the audience to be the target of the action and receive the vilification
and contempt directed against the whites. At a crucial moment in the play, when Diouf delivers the representatives of the white race, a member of the audience is invited on stage to hold his knitting. The complicity of the audience is thus elicited in the symbolic birth of its community and it is made to witness the death of the race in Diouf's murder. Genet betrays the spectators many times over in *The Blacks*. They are alerted to an off-stage action— a 'real' murder which has used the events on stage as a smoke screen. As the blacks strip off their masks and discuss the political exigencies of this off-stage action, the audience is led to half believe that a black insurrection against whites is imminent. They have already been denounced as a diseased, hypocritical bunch due to their identification with the white court and now they have become participants in the action which depicts their own death. It is Genet's coup de grace in a ritual celebration of hatred.

In the characterization, the love-hate dialectic works through black and white interrelation. The hatred which the blacks have for the whites is tinged with a fascination for their ways and a susceptibility to their personal charms. Snow accuses the men of having been attracted by the white woman:

> There was a touch of desire in your hatred of her which means a touch of love.  

(p. 17)

Virtue, the black whore, has had intimate relations with the whites in her professional capacity and she reveals herself as one half of the duality of the matriarchal figure, the other half being the Queen, when she anticipates the Queen's words and describes herself as white. The whites, for their part, find the blacks' world of erotic freedom most
alluring, as confessed by the Queen. Thus, despite the two groups' resolve to hate each other, they cannot avoid feelings akin to love.

Felicity, the other counterpart of the Queen, also symbolizes the love-hate dialectic. She is the mother figure among the blacks, to whom they look up for guidance. To the whites, she is the terrible sorceress who typifies black hatred. In the scene where she places corn on the catafalque she signifies the maternal propensity for nurture. But what she is feeding is the corpse - a symbol of the blacks' hatred of whites - and she does not want it to "dwindle away" (p. 50). One is reminded of a similar instance in Ionesco's *Amédée* where a corpse, symbolizing Amédée's dead love for his wife, keeps growing despite all his efforts to prevent its growth. The corpse in *The Blacks* symbolizes virulent hatred and Felicity's concern is that it should not diminish in size.

Even Diouf, who advocates harmony and love with the whites, is not free from pangs of resentment against them. He shows all the indecision and malleability of a black on whom the education and culture of the white man has been imposed. But Diouf has found the white man's kindness oppressive:

> The kindness of the whites settled upon my head, as it did upon yours. Though it rested there lightly, it was unbearable. Their intelligence descended upon my right shoulder, and a whole flock of virtues upon my left. And at times, when I opened my hands, I would find their charity nestling there. (pp. 32-33)

Neither faction accepts him, each finding in him traits of the opposite. He is variously referred to as Mr. Clergyman and Vicar General in derisive tones and finally, for talking love, he is made to undergo the ultimate humiliation of womanising himself.
The blacks excel in different forms of hatred. As they think of hatred as their prerogative and love as the white man's, they invent new ways of showing hatred. They gather around the coffin smoking cigarettes and singing "Mary had a little lamb" and the gesture of profanity causes great anguish to the whites. The little hate gestures culminate in the sadistic murder and the execution of the court. An equal measure of masochism is exhibited by the blacks who play out their roles as imagined by the whites. They deliberately abase themselves, creating a picture of vulgarity and meanness:

...Thieves that we are, we have tried to filch your fine language. Liars that we are, the names I have mentioned to you are false.  
(p. 14)

This self-torture has the merit of insulating the whites at the same time by exaggerating their virtues by implication and thus hinting at their questionability.

Village and Virtue are the only characters the dramatist allows to indulge in mutual expressions of love. Curiously enough, Village's love for Virtue is really a love-hate relationship that has Oedipal overtones. He associates her symbolically with Africa, the Mother of the Blacks, and professes a hatred of her while at the same time he makes a declaration of love:

...And I began to hate you when everything around you would have kindled my love and when love would have made men's contempt unbearable and their contempt would have made my love unbearable. The fact is, I hate you.

......................
Oh darkness, stately mother of my race, shadow, sheath that swathes me from top to toe, long sleep
in which the frailest of your children would
love to be shrouded, I know not whether you
are beautiful, but you are Africa, 0 monumental
night, and I hate you. (pp. 36-37)

Archibald hints at the Mother in Virtue when he tells Village, "She
can...bring you what most resembles love: tenderness. In her arms, you
will be her child, not her lover." (p. 39) Virtue, in turn, identifies
herself with the white Queen who, in her turn, has her counterpart in
the black Felicity. The three women personify the synthesis of two
pairs of opposites: black and white and love and hate.

The theme naturally follows from this feature of the characterization.
Love and hate are mutually inclusive principles as black and white are.
The Times's review of the Royal Court Theatre's production of The Blacks
sums up the theme in a homorous vein:

There is a wide choice of morals to be drawn,
some milder than others, but the one that
leaps to the eye is that whites and blacks
are brother devils under the skin.

Each of the two worlds - the blacks' and the whites' - shares the
attributes of the other. Sexually and socially they desire each other.
Black traits of hatred and cruelty have to be suppressed by the whites
as the white traits of tenderness and love have to be suppressed by the
blacks. Neither group is wholly successful in its attempt.

Genet propagates the creed of self purification, which is the freeing
of oneself from all alien influences. Since he believes his own true
nature to be evil, self purification for him means the rejection of
conventional morality. In the case of the black, Genet sees the colour
of his skin as the true reality of his nature, and self purification
for a black would be to aim for a complete blackness, free from all white
influences. If whiteness represents love, blackness can only represent its opposite, hatred. This is why Village and Virtue are not free to love each other so long as they hold the traditional 'white' concept of romantic love. Virtue attempts to solve the problem by urging Village to invent a new black formula of love, and the Governor and the Missionary react with alarm, for the new power of a black love would be a direct threat to the white's supremacy. "Damn it, they're going to gum up the works!" exclaims the Governor (p. 42). But Village finds that his language is tainted with white vocabulary and that he is not black enough to love Virtue. The remedy to this dilemma lies only in killing the whites with hatred and then being free to love his lady. Paradoxically, the evil act of murder is a means of self-purification for the blacks in the play. Storywise, Village and Virtue are united in love after the whites have been killed. Thematically, however, the black-white dialectic reveals the attraction between the two opposites and it is only a question of time when black love will be superseded by white love.

In staging The Blacks, Genet wants the hostility borne by the blacks to be extended to the audience. He insists that his play be performed only by black actors and specifically for white audiences. In fact, when Jerzy Lisowski, who had translated The Blacks into Polish, requested permission to produce the play, Genet refused it on the ground that no Polish negroes were available to act in it. It is quite clear from Genet's instructions that the audience is to be the target of the insults heaped on the whites:

This play.... is intended for a white audience but if, which is unlikely, it is ever performed before a black audience, then a white person, male or female, should be invited every evening.
The organizers of the show should welcome him formally, dress him in ceremonial costume and lead him to his seat, preferably in the front row of the orchestra. The actors will play for him. A spotlight should be focused upon this symbolic white throughout the performance.

But what if no white person accepted? Then let white masks be distributed to the black spectators as they enter the theatre. And if the blacks refuse the masks, then let a dummy be used.

The next step is the symbolic identification of the audience with the masked whites of the court. The court is already separated from the blacks by the different physical levels of the stage and their similarity with the audience is established by their being the stage audience of the blacks like the larger one in the auditorium. Further, Archibald, the Master of Ceremonies, addresses himself sometimes to the court and sometimes to the audience. Then, the blacks proceed to indulge their hatred of the whites by showing them as a diseased, hypocritical race.

The most spectacular device by which the blacks project their hatred is the mask. The masking is meant to suggest the essential blackness of the whites; their repression and duplicity. It is also a caricature of the whites. Throughout the play, the blacks exaggerate the social graces of the whites in their perfectly orchestrated laughter and their mincing gestures and words. They exaggerate also their own relative savagery and bad taste which, again, is a caricature of the whites' notion of the blacks. "We are what they want us to be," says Archibald, "We shall therefore be it to the very end, absurdly" (p. 126). Sarcasm and contempt couldn't go further.
Diouf's investiture in a blonde wig and mask is yet another contemptuous gesture against the whites. He is made to put on the mask representing the laughing face of a white woman, right before the audience. The intimation is unmistakable. Diouf, the male masquerading as a female, becomes a figure of betrayal and promiscuity which the blacks associate with the whites.

Ceremony is used by the blacks, not to create a rapport of friendliness between the actors and the spectators but in order to create a formal atmosphere that would discourage communication. There is a deliberate attempt to bruise the sensibility of the spectators by profaning orthodox religious practices as part of the ceremony. Thus Diouf's incarnation as Marie is accompanied by blasphemous chants. Virtue recites "the Litany of the Livid" as a parody of the litanies of the Blessed Virgin. Similarly, the blacks sing their words to the melody of the Dies Irae at the time of the murder. The Satanic or diabolic element in the ceremony shocks the audience, which is precisely what Genet wants.

There are direct and covert references to the element of cannibalism which is part of the hatred borne the whites. "Let Negroes nigrify themselves," says Archibald.

Let them persist to the point of madness in what they are condemned to be, in their ebony, in their odour, in their yellow eyes, in their cannibal tastes. Let them not be content with eating whites, but let them cook each other as well...

(p. 52)

At the beginning, as the blacks gather around the catafalque, Snow bites into a flower which she associates with the dead woman and eats it. This
show of cruelty is again meant for the spectators, who are expected to change towards the blacks, if they change at all, "not out of indulgence but terror" (p. 52).

The actors are also supposed to intimidate the audience by an aggressive deportment. However, in performance, this is an extremely difficult thing to do, as noted by Whitney Balliet in his review of the St. Marks Playhouse's production of *The Blacks*:

The only time the cast displays the slightest weakness is in the brief sections where they confront and are meant to stare down the audience. These potentially frightening moments simply don't come off. Perhaps it was because the audience was an integrated, maskless one, in which blacks and whites laughed equally hard or were equally solemn. Genet hadn't thought of that.  

Or, perhaps, in extending the black-white conflict into an actor-spectator confrontation, Genet has inverted the traditional attitude of the two. The actors' psychological need for the spectators' approbation, and the spectators' impersonal love of the artists' feat do not permit a personalized hate-relationship. Nevertheless, *The Blacks* comes nearest to such a relationship in performance. It is said that Eugene Ionesco left midway through the premiere of *The Blacks* due to a feeling that he was being attacked personally by the actors.  

The stage sets for *The Blacks* seemed designed with the love-hate polarity in mind. The first production had symbolic sets and lighting:

They were made up of iron bars covered over by asbestos. The asbestos made the iron bars look more pliable. It was a stark and yet soft set. From the orchestra, the decor looked like a giant sculpture. With proper manipulation of lights it assumed different shapes, different colours and moods. It reflected and participated in the action of the play.
The love-hate dialectic is also symbolically represented in the stage positions of the actors. The blacks who are the dominated class are on the lower level of the stage and the whites are on the higher level. Roger Blin, in his production, placed Virtue directly below the Queen and he was right. The curiously ambivalent relations between the blacks and the whites is explored in the scene where the symbolic identity of the two women is established. Virtue, in a state of somnambulance, describes herself as white and the Queen, who significantly is also half asleep at the time, recites along with Virtue a eulogy of whiteness. Together, they address Village and declare that they love him. Then, suddenly, the Queen wakes up and cries that the other two have stolen her voice. It is a dramatic method of conveying, through the actors' positions and voices, the union of the opposites, love and hate.

As for the language of *The Blacks*, it shows a preoccupation with love and hate. The terms occur frequently and are used interchangeably at times, as in Village's outburst to Virtue. The language polarises the two opposites by means of colour-identification. Blue is the colour of beauty associated with the Caucasian race. It is synonymous with love. When Village states his love for Virtue, she describes herself as "the lily-white Queen of the West, ... immaculate, pleasing to the eye and the soul" and apostrophises:

Oh eye of mine, delicately shaded iris, bluish iris, iris of the glaciers.... (p. 44)

Again, Village, reenacting the seduction of the white woman, speaks of "the limpidity of your blue eyes" while looking at Virtue, to whom he says, "I love you and I can't bear it any longer" (p. 67). If blue is
the colour of love, black is the colour of hatred. Archibald and his troupe 'beautify' themselves with shoe blacking. Coal and tar are to the blacks what the lily and iris are to the whites.

Hatred is the inspiration for poetry in *The Blacks* while love untinged with hate is not even relevant. "Invent, not love, but hatred," says Archibald, "and thereby make poetry, since that's the only domain in which we are allowed to operate." (p. 26) It is the blacks whose hatred is open who dominate the show. Some of the most poetic passages in the play are in Village's seduction speech and the variety of images is truly amazing. By contrast, the language of the whites who mask their hatred in a cultivated graciousness is vapid and dull.

Though the sentiments of blacks and whites to each other are similar, the tactics of showing them differ. The court reveals its hatred insidiously so that it almost seems to be the opposite sentiment of love. "Be friendly.... Mention Dr. Livingstone," advises the Missionary. (p. 105). Even while threatening the blacks with execution, the court assures them of pardon and absolution first. The blacks rely on the sheer force of their hatred and induce the whites, by psychological coercion, to believe in their death:

> You are pale but you are becoming transparent.  
> Fog that drifts over my land, you will vanish utterly.  

(p. 103)

The language also reflects the cruel pleasure in physical torture. The blacks dwell on the gruesome details of slaughter: "You'll have your head sliced off, but sliced into slices," Archibald tells the Judge (p.119). Their cruelty has the bizarre aspect of cannibalism as they
talk of the culinary possibilities of murder. Archibald calls for recipes and sauces for knee caps, shinbones, and calves (p. 52). There is frequent talk of cooking and eating the whites.

The whites are fully capable of showing cruelty and hatred like the blacks. The members of the white court reveal their sadism in gleefully contemplating the severe punishments they can impose on the black culprits. The Judge's words reveal both his vindictiveness and his ghoulish delight in torture:

....a Negro's a Negro and all we need is two arms, two legs to break, and neck to put into the noose, and our justice is satisfied. (p. 109)

The Governor, for his part, reels off a list of possible methods of execution:

A bullet in his head and calves, spurts of saliva, bowie knives, bayonets, pop guns, poisons of our Medicis.... (p. 99)

If the normal purpose of language is to communicate, its use in The Blacks is to create the opposite effect on the audience. The spectators are often addressed in words of contempt:

.... In order that you be assured that there is no danger of such drama's worming its way into your precious lives, we shall even have the decency - a decency learned from you - to make communication impossible. (p. 12)

In The Balcony, Irma's words to the "rebels who allow the revolt to congeal" (p. 96) are in a tone of contemptuous pity. In The Blacks, there is no room for pity in their all-consuming hatred, which contains every other emotion, even love.

In the last play, The Screens, the action is characterized by hatred once again. Events of sadism and masochism are the order of the day. The
hero, Said, commits a number of hostile acts on himself and on others in order to achieve total isolation. His masochism begins with his marriage to Leila, a girl so ugly she never removes the veil from her face. At work, Said is ridiculed by his fellow workers, and at home, he and his mother exercise unmitigated cruelty towards Leila. When his potential for hatred erupts into anti-social activities of thieving, Leila follows suit. Both look for means of inflicting pain on themselves and are overjoyed on being jeiled for theft. They also cultivate a filthy appearance and offensive body odour. As they journey to their deaths, Said puts out Leila's eye. Then, as the grand finale to his career in evil negation, he betrays the Arabs to the French. Having destroyed everything around him, he finds absolute solitude. It is precisely then that he is hailed as the supreme hero and wooed by both the living and the dead. He defies both, and then boasts about his chance of selling himself to the highest bidder. Before he can do anything more, he is shot dead by the soldiers, but he achieves total disintegration in death and does not go to the realm of the dead.

In the story of Said, love and hate are irreconcilable. His progress towards absolute negativity requires his severing the bonds of love. He destroys friendship by stealing from his co-workers, but destroying family bonds that engender love is more difficult. Said abandons his mother and wife to the castigation of the village. It should be easier to hate an ugly wife than a beautiful one and he begins his hate programme by taunting Leila with her ugliness. Ironically, her pride in her ugliness and her masochism elicit his grudging admiration and they grow closer
together in prison. Said is so afraid of being lost in the positive feeling of love that in one scene, when Leila tries to comb her hair, he snatches away the comb and tells her angrily not to beautify herself, for it might make him forget his project of hate.

The last stage in his pursuit of negativity is to reject society. By poisoning the water trough of the Arabs, he displays a hatred of his own countrymen. Said's acts of hatred, however, are not the result of anything done to him by others but rather the means to an end - his goal of Non-being.

In the subplot, Warda, the whore, takes great pride in being the village pariah hated by housewives. But her status as a unique being is lost once the war ends and she is accepted by the bourgeois society. She decides to die in order to regain the status she has lost and submits passively to her crucifixion. The subplot, too, thus develops the subject of masochism.

The action of the play gives prominence to hatred yet again in the relationship between the colonists and the Arabs. The Arab workers at Sir Harold's plantation refer to him as their Father, and ostensibly a friendly relationship exists between them. But he shows his suspicion of his workers when he leaves his glove to watch them. They, in their turn, set fire to his orange grove and reveal their hatred.

Since The Screens develops the most unusual actions, it is not surprising that the characterization is more complex than in the other plays. The protagonists reject the traditional values of the bourgeois society and create an inverted system of values. The new system gives
priority to those aspects of life which are considered despicable by the bourgeois. Hence, where normal men and women desire love, the characters of *The Screens* desire its opposite, hatred.

Both Saïd and Leila strive to suppress feelings of love. They view love as a detriment to the attainment of their goal. Saïd confesses later that it was not easy to shut out feelings of love for his wife:

> I am not saying I was never on the point of weakening, a tenderness, like the shadow of a leaf trembling above us, ready to alight, but I'd take hold of myself.  

(p. 190)

Like Saïd, Warda too finds that it takes effort to cultivate hatred. She is furious when the villagers are friendly, because she has worked hard to earn their hatred, not friendship.

Unlike Saïd, who has to work at it, the Mother has a natural flair for hatred and ample reasons for venting it. She hates her daughter-in-law's ugliness, and she hates the village women who ostracize her. She is proud of her vocabulary of insults and abuses and, when words fail her, conveys her hostility by means of animal sounds.

Most of the characters attach a spiritual value to their acts of hatred. In Genet's view, masochism is a form of self purification, even if it should be achieved by means of criminality. Saïd's hate acts towards society and towards himself make him an ascetic in Genet's view. Leila invokes her ugliness when demanding of Saïd that he know only hatred and never love, because she knows Saïd will value her masochism.

Again, Kadidja, who urges the Arabs to commit crimes, tells them to call upon God for inspiration:

> If you can't find any more crimes, steal crimes from heaven, it's bursting with them! Wrangle
the murders of the gods, their rapes, their fires, their incest, their lies, their butcheries! (p. 102)

To Genet, whose thoughts are steeped in religion and whose crimes were dedicated to God, it is not at all contradictory that God, whom we identify with love, should inspire hatred and sanction crime.

However, there is a significant difference between Leila and Kadidja, who both pursue evil. Leila's cult of hatred and evil is practised for its own sake, as part of her negativity, while Kadidja's hatred is a political weapon. She invokes evil to produce hatred, which in its turn engenders more evil. Kadidja talks of the Arabs as her 'sons' and her attitude towards them is maternal. She encourages them in acts of terrorism which are perpetrated on the colonists. Love and hate are channeled in two directions while Leila's (as well as Said's) hatred lacks direction.

While some characters attach a spiritual value to hatred, others find it of aesthetic value. The French soldiers find that cruelty is integrated with beauty. Putting the uniform on, with his different medals, the lieutenant is a participant in a ceremony. (In The Balcony, the Bishop, who is a narcissist, performs a similar ceremony when he puts on his mitre and robes.) The soldiers are said to be more cruel when in complete uniform. Here again, love and hate work in opposite directions, a hatred of the enemy vying with narcissistic love of the soldiers. The sergeant's words on the subject are, "My beauty grew with my cruelty, one heightening the other." (p. 201)

The theme of The Screens presents love and hate as opposites but also suggests that they are similar and could be mistaken for one another. In
Said's epic of self destruction, we find that absolute isolation is achieved only through hatred. Love binds men; hatred separates them. Said, who gets his true identity by communing with himself in solitude, shows hatred of all others, even his own family, in order to be alone.

The person who earns the contempt and hatred of the world is, according to Genet, truly unique. The more Said betrays his people, the more he is held in esteem. Warda, likewise, feels she has become a nobody when the housewives exchange friendly greetings with her. In order to regain her uniqueness, she has to die in extreme physical pain as the village women indulge their hatred by sticking knitting needles in her.

In Genet's view, masochism and sadism are simply the result of the recognition of the Other in ourselves. If the Self proclaims love, the Other dreams hate, towards others and towards the Self. It is usual to maintain a clean appearance and strive for a beautiful appearance. Said and Leila, who are personifications of the Other, deliberately cultivate a physical stench.

On the subject of sexual love, there is little else besides its interchangeability with hatred. Said and Leila find it a detriment to their goal. For the European couple, Mr. and Mrs. Blankensee, love is only hate in masquerade. Mrs. Blankensee even states that sexual love in the past was an act of betrayal between man and woman. When her husband comes to her without the illusion of his imposing bulk, after the maid had discovered the padding, she shoots and kills him.
Staging procedures aim at conveying the sense of hatred which is so important in *The Screens*. In one scene, a theatrical representation of evil and hate is given in the form of pictures drawn by the Arabs on movable screens. Kadidja calls the Arabs one by one and asks what they have done to further the cause of evil, and in reply, each man draws a picture. Drawings of mutilated limbs, fires lit to destroy property and bloodstains denoting acts of violence fill the screens. The shock effect of the scene does not lie in the pictures themselves but in the mode of drawing which shows that the characters savour their cruelty. One of the Arabs, M'Hamed, boasts that he plucked out a heart. He draws a heart on the screen and leaves, but Kadidja calls him back. "That heart looks old," she complains. The man goes back to the screen and draws a few spirals above the heart. "It's still steaming, Kadidja," he says, and the old woman is satisfied (p. 99). In his letter to Roger Blin, Genet specifies that the Arabs should look happy when they draw the pictures.

The movements and gestures of the characters frequently convey their hatred. Many of them give a glimpse into the bestial side of their nature by 'becoming' animals. The Mother, who is prevented from mourning the dead rebel, screams insults at the village women. Her feelings are so venomous that she refers to them as the pack of dogs gathering in her belly. As the women leave her, she turns to them, and, "with her hands on her thighs, unlooses in the direction of the right wing, into which the women disappeared, a torrent of barks that seem to come from a pack of dogs." (p. 45)

When Leila enters, she barks with the Mother and at the women at first. Then, suddenly, the rapport breaks and the two face each other
as enemies. The stage directions clearly indicate a scene rife with hate. "The Mother turns around, and seeing Leila, starts barking at her, and the two women are suddenly dogs about to devour each other." (p. 45)

Farmyard sounds previously established a mood of amity - almost of love - between them and the same kind of sound now expresses antagonism. The Screens utilizes sound effects very cleverly to produce moods of love and hatred.

Most of the characters are masked and nearly all are heavily made up. The dehumanized and abstracted features of the mask suggest more easily the propensity for cruelty and violence. In the pictures we have of Roger Blin's production, Warda's mask clearly suggests her hostility towards society. By contrast, Said, whose capacity for self-torture exceeds his desire for aggression, is unmasked. The unmasked face looks more vulnerable beside the masked one.

The lighting on the stage also accompanies the mood of the play. It should be harsh and very light. Genet refers to it as "cruel".¹²

The language of The Screens makes no concessions to decorum. It is frequently coarse or violently abusive. The intent to hurt another is reflected very clearly in some of the speeches, as in the Mother's advice to Leila: "Since you're ugly, be idiotic. And don't slobber." (p. 26)

Said makes an equally cruel rejoinder when Leila asks him where they are to go: "Where I'm going, me, and me alone, since you're my misfortunate and nothing but." (p. 108)

The imagery is also very repulsive, dwelling on pictures of physical decay and filth. There is such an insistence on scatological images with repeated references to foul smell that the spectators seem to be really
offended by such smells. In fact, Genet's obsession with images of excrementalism has led to some students retitling the play, "Six Characters in Search of a Bathroom." 13

When we examine the language of The Screens carefully, it becomes clear to us that it is Genet's verbal aggression on our world - the bourgeois world that is his anathema. It is this world that is being taken to pieces in the action, theme and language of the play. All the obscenities and violence conveyed through the language are Genet's gesture of hatred towards the spectators of the bourgeois world. It must be noted that the most indecent language is spoken by females in the play, which is an added attack on bourgeois sensitivity. The audience, too, rises to the bait rather easily. The performance of The Screens at the Odeon Théâtre de France in 1966 broke up due to angry and violent reactions from the audience. 14 In a letter to Blin, Genet says that he wished the spectators to leave the theatre with the taste of ashes in their mouth and the smell of decay in their nostrils. 14 They would, if they and the actors could see the play through to its end.

The three last plays of Genet are said to have a cathartic effect on the spectators. 15 The acts of hate and the vitriolic language of The Blacks and The Screens in particular could provide an escape valve for the spectators' emotive energy. On the other hand, they could well frustrate us by showing, in all three plays, hatred as the dominant component in the polarity between it and love.
NOTES

CHAPTER III


3. There is a faint suggestion of animalism in the executioner's costume and bearing. The bestial element is very prominent in Genet's major plays. Both here and in *The Blacks*, display of lust has general associations of bestiality. In the latter play, Village, when he seduces Marie, compares himself to a panther. Note that in *The Balcony*, the Judge calls the Executioner 'Cerberus'.


6. The playwright's note appears just before the dramatis personae in Bernard Frechtman's translation of *The Blacks*.


10. Genet's view that it takes a lot of effort to practise evil is shared by Brecht. In his short poem The Mask of Evil (Die Maske des Bösen) Brecht observes that it is a great strain to be evil.


12. Jean Genet, Ibid., p. 15: "Et en plus, sur la scène, une lumière si cruelle! Mais c'est ce qu'il faut."


Genet is the ideal anarchist. He revolts, not against any one institution in particular, but against institutionalism per se. He detests any form of commitment. Yet his plays are often considered to be works of political commitment. In at least one play, *The Screene*, some of the important experiences of the European Left have been included. Nevertheless, Genet cannot be called the spokesman of this political wing. His anarchism transcends the narrow confines of politics. The undeniably political content of the three last plays is only a format for exploring various forms of individualism. This individualism, identified with the forces of anarchy, has meaning only in the context of collective organization, since it is a revolt against such order. Hence, Genet's plays present both sides of the issue - anarchy and order - as seen in art, politics and social relations.

Though Genet loves total anarchy, i.e., a revolt against the very concept of law and order, he has to admit, through characters like Roger, that it is impracticable. The revolution is always a failure in Genet's plays, since it nullifies its raison d'être as soon as it is organized. The political revolutions of *The Balcony*, *The Blacks* and *The Screens* all establish a new order, which has retained the worst characteristics of the old, and so are failures. In the action of the plays, then, anarchy and order are alternating phases, each originating
from the other. In the characterization of these plays, the opposites are seen as the contrasting traits of individualism and collectivity. Again, much as Genet upholds individualism, the individual rebel, like Roger of The Balcony, is defeated. In The Blacks, Village and Virtue, who rebel against the recognized mode of courtship, still have to love according to a black law. It is only in The Screens that individualism comes closest to triumph, in the character of Said, but here the individual himself is destroyed in the process. Thematically, the dialectic takes the shape of other absolutes, art vs. political reality or anarchic ugliness vs. disciplined beauty. While the difference in ideology between the anarchists and the Establishment is indicated in different stage levels in the first two plays, The Blacks and The Screens emphasize the distinction further in the different costumes and in the language used as well. In the final analysis, though Genet's convictions favour the negativism implied by anarchy, his practical mind makes order the winning element in the plays.

The dramatic action of The Balcony pivots around the conflict between the established order of the state and the revolutionaries. The rebels are opposed to the symbol-ridden institutions of the Establishment. But the institutions mean social organization which ensures order. The rationale of the revolution, which seeks to destroy the images of the Establishment, would really destroy the order created by those images. The real conflict is, therefore, between anarchy and organization.

The rebellion is doomed when the rebels begin to demand their own symbols and banners. Chantal, whom Roger rescued from the brothel, is
bartered for a hundred women and becomes the men's inspiration. A revolt cannot be faceless and the men need a grand image to fight the images of the Balcony. It is a case of the means defeating the end, as the revolt has to be organized in order to destroy social organization.

Politically, the revolution is successful, at least temporarily, and the rebels kill the Queen, Judge, Bishop and the General. The crisis occurs after this, as the men have not visualized anything beyond the destruction. Order has to prevail and at the suggestion of the Envoy, the places of the Queen, Judge, Bishop and General are taken by the brothel imposters. Thus, in the first round of the battle, order triumphs over anarchy.

In the ranks of the Establishment, a fresh complication sets in now, in the form of a power struggle. The Bishop, Judge and General decide to reorganize the clergy, magistracy and the army. The Bishop wants to appoint new priests and introduce reforms in the clergy while the Judge wishes to draft bills and revise the regal code. Governmental organization works on a hierarchical principle and the distribution of power raises the question of the relative superiority of the Queen and her officers. So far, the roles of the Great Figures had been traditional, presenting the images of the Establishment to society. Their decision to make their ornaments 'useful' poses a threat to the Chief of Police, the man of action who exercises the power behind the institutions. Ironically, while the men who live in images want to become active, he, the active agent, longs to become an image in the bordello. Until such time when he is consecrated as an institution himself, he has to do the work of
the established institutions, maintaining order in the state. The ambition of the Bishop and the Judge now presages the disintegration of images, which would lead to anarchy.

The problem is resolved when the disillusioned Roger asks to imitate the Chief of Police in Irma's studio. With his apotheosis achieved by Roger's self-mutilation, the Chief of Police retires from the lists to be an eternal image in the brothel, leaving the field of action to the three Great Figures. Unconsciously, Roger helps to perpetuate the order against which he revolted, by restoring the equilibrium of power. The action thus shows order to be the stronger element in the polarity between it and anarchy. However, Genet also shows that the very existence of order invites anarchy. At the end of the play, when the power dispute is settled, a fresh revolution begins outside and the dialectic is set in motion again.

The characters of The Balcony illustrate the tension between anarchy and order by their varying allegiances. Two figures emerge as diametric opposites: Roger and the Chief of Police. The Chief of Police, who represents order, knows only too well the sanctity of images and the hold they have over popular imagination. Roger, on the other hand, rebels against the very idea of images and the whole artifice of the government. It is inevitable by the law of opposites that, when Roger arrives at the balcony to play a role, he should choose that of his arch enemy, the Chief of Police. In castrating himself and playing the role to its absolute end, he gets the vicarious satisfaction of destroying the order that the other man represents but, it is, at the same time, an admission of his own defeat.
Chantal is another character whose ideal is total liberation but she, too, fails to achieve it. She has escaped the sham life of the balcony and wishes to be an individual but, conscripted in the service of the revolution, she has no scope for individuality. As the men haggle over her, she realizes that even in the ranks of the anarchists, there are categories and groupings and no one can be detached from these:

THE MAN: I'm asking you to let us have her for two hours.
ROGER: Chantal belongs....
CHANTAL: (Standing up) To nobody!
ROGER: ....To my section.
THE MAN: To the insurrection!

Irma and her clients are, of course, champions of the established order. Among the figures of the Balcony, there is a further distinction. The Chief of Police personifies the active element in the organization, while the Bishop, Judge and General typify the passive element. Genet seems to feel that the distinction is vital to the survival of the organization. When the Three Figures indicate that they would actively exercise power, Irma holds them in check by insinuating that she would call a halt to the masquerade by relegating them to the status of brothel clients once again. Once the active agent of power, the Chief of Police, disappears from the scene, she carries out her threat and resumes her role as keeper of a bawdy house.

The whores of the Grand Balcony typify the union of two contraries, order and anarchy. In their rituals with the customers of the brothel, they rehearse the organized relationships of the political world. At the same time, they are, by the very nature of their profession, rebels
against social ethics. Richard Coe remarks on the prostitute's similarity with the artist in this respect:

Like him, she is sacred - she is the very symbol of transgression, just as art itself is, at bottom, a transgression that stinks in the nostrils of all right thinking people. And at the same time, she is herself a work of art. She is all appearance, all illusion.

The idea of the whore being a rebel is further developed by Genet in his characterization of Warda in The Screens.

The Balcony orchestrates the theme that total anarchy is a myth. The behaviour of the revolutionaries illustrates this point. Roger's mistake is to make the revolt a movement of pure reason. He makes no allowance for the emotional element in the uprising, which is a decisive factor. The dissent within the rebel camp is the conflict of reason with imagination. The entire sixth scene is a debate on this conflict, and, needless to say, reason cannot win in "a combat of allegories" (p. 57).

Genet's sympathies are with the individual rebel, but not with the mass revolt. The mass movement corrodes the very spirit of anarchism, because it is organized into categories, slogans, and emblems. Every revolt is a failure in the long run, since, instead of changing the world, it becomes a reflection of the order it sought to destroy. Roger sums up the disenchantment of the dramatist with popular insurrection, when he tells Carmen, "And what's the saddest of all is people saying: 'The rebellion was wonderful!' " (p. 89)

The stage props and costumes of the play highlight the contrast between the anarchic and the organized styles of living. In the sixth
scene, which takes place in the rebel camp, we see the machine guns of the revolutionaries pointing at the Grand Balcony, which is visible in the distance. The sight of the guns bristling about the place suggests at once the isolation of the Balcony, i.e. the Establishment, from the rest of the world and also the threat to its security from forces of anarchism.

The men, dressed in inconspicuous black sweaters and suits, are a telling contrast to the Establishment figures, whose ceremonial costumes and insignia bear witness to their reliance on external appearances. While the revolutionaries appear normal sized, the Bishop, Judge, and General wear cothurni and shoulder pads to appear larger than life. It is a theatrical indication of the immensity and strength of established order. There are constant visual reminders that the homage paid to this order is not for the men themselves, but for their robes of office, which are symbols. We see the Balcony figures repeatedly preening before a mirror. The court Envoy, who is already immaculately dressed in embassy uniform, takes a whole collection of decorations from his pocket and pins it on to his tunic after he has persuaded Irma to become the Queen. In Genet's works, the uniform, as a symbol of organized power, is sacred.

Irma's brothel is itself a highly structured institution, with its organized relationships of employer, employees, and business partners. The view finder, earphone, and bells we see are important paraphernalia of the organization and help Irma to keep a strict check on her employees and to hear reports on what goes on in her studios.
The impression that the place is a business institution is strengthened in the fifth scene, where we see Irma seated at a desk, going over the accounts while Carmen counts the day's takings. As the latter counts methodically, "the General, twenty... the sailor, twenty... the brat, thirty...", Irma interrupts her book-keeping with the admonition that she should show respect for the 'visitors' and then, "flashily snaps the sheaf of bank notes she has in her hand" (p. 29). The whole scene underlines the binding structures and, at the same time, the economic strength of the institution.

Lastly, there is the visual symbol of the Balcony itself. Le Grand Balcon, by its very title, is reminiscent of an elevation from which those in power look down upon the proletariat. And it is the proletariat that breeds the anarchists. The difference between the Balcony and the populace is one of social class, as we realize when we see the beggar appearing on the stage directly below the Queen.

The lighting, too, plays up the difference between anarchy and order. Bright lights are characteristic of the Balcony. There are mirrors and chandeliers everywhere, and the last time we see Irma, she is extinguishing the lights: "It took so much light... two pounds' worth of electricity a day!" (p. 95) The rebels, on the other hand, are seen in semi-darkness, which is consistent with the subversive nature of their activities. The public square, where Roger and Chantal swear love to each other in the presence of the other rebels, has patches of shadow.

The language of the play takes the serious tone of an intellectual debate in distinguishing the bourgeois characteristics from the revolu-
tionary ideals. Inhumanity and hardness are inferred as the qualities of the Establishment. The language reflects these traits right at the beginning in the opening lines of the Bishop: "In truth, the mark of a prelate is not mildness or unction, but the most rigorous intelligence." A little while later, he amends his statement:

It is something quite other than intelligence that is involved... It may be cruelty. And beyond that cruelty - and through it - a skilful, vigorous course towards Absence. Towards Death. (p. 7)

It is the rebels who practise the ideals of humanitarianism and justice, though that justice might require the destruction of the aristocracy. Nevertheless, the humanitarianism is a sign of weakness and intolerable sentimentality, and any reference to it is quite cynical. "In every revolution there's the glorified whore who sings an anthem and is virginified," comments Irma. "...The others'll piously bring water for the dying to drink. Afterwards... they'll marry you off." (p. 39)

The structured artifice of the established order is alluded to directly or indirectly by those in the Balcony. Their exchanges with one another and with the Queen indicate a feudal system of loyalty. As the Chief of Police tells the Three Figures,

...above you, more sublime than you, is the Queen. It's from her, for the time being, that you derive your power and your rights. Above her - that to which she refers - is our standard, on which I've blazoned the image of Chantal Victorious, our Saint. (pp. 82-83)

The Bishop continues, "Above Her Majesty whom we venerate, and above her flag, is God, Who speaks through my voice."
There is no allusion to any such tightly organized relationships among the revolutionaries. The lack of direction, ascribed generally to anarchism is sensed in Roger's poignant words, "None of us knows any longer why we revolted." (p. 57)

The offices of the established order owe their eminence to the hieratic sanction of centuries. There are several amplifications of the theme by the Bishop, the Envoy and others. The speeches about tradition are made in a rhetorical vein and the language is bombastic:

For more centuries than I can tell, the centuries have worn themselves thin refining me... subtilizing me... (p. 60)

Activities concerned with the Revolt, which is anti-traditional, are described in realistic language, often, even a flippant style of speech. The first photographer explains the tricks played on the public by the media:

When some rebels were captured, we paid a militiaman to bump off a chap I'd just sent to buy me a packet of cigarettes. The photo shows a rebel shot down while trying to escape. (p. 75)

The language of The Balcony, I feel, is the weak point in establishing the dialectic between Anarchy and Order. While the action, characterization and staging of the play incorporate the tension between the two principles very effectively, the language tries to bring out the polarity by means of specious arguments. The case for and against anarchy is developed step by step by men like the Chief of Police. The language is too rational, and there is no scope for the emotive power of poetry. This heavy handed treatment mars the dialectic, but Genet rectifies
the defect in *The Blacks* by working into the language, very naturally, the polarity between anarchy and order, in the form of a contrast in imagery, voice patterns, and speeds of delivery.

In *The Blacks*, the revolt is against the system of social laws imposed on the blacks by the whites. It is the confrontation with political as well as social undercurrents, between the rulers and the ruled. The central action is a crime that disrupts the social organization, the rape-murder of a white woman by a black. The white law-givers (played by masked blacks) come to try the criminals and sentence them, but the rebels triumph as the representatives of the established order are executed one by one. Thus, at the first level of action, the blacks, who embody the principles of lawlessness and anarchy, bring about a dissolution of the law and order represented by the whites.

On a second plane of action, we are told of a black insurrection. A traitor to this cause, we learn, has been executed off-stage while we were engrossed in the murder on stage. As the actors discuss this execution with the messenger, we realize that it took place after a proper trial, defense of the accused and other rites of justice familiarized by the white man. Paradoxically, the blacks who oppose the whites' organization of their society have to implement the discipline of that organization for the success of their revolt.

The messenger also tells the blacks that a new leader has been elected to lead the insurgents. He will *organize* and continue the fight against the whites. Everything has been "planned and prepared" for the success of the movement. Thus, to eradicate the old order, a new order comes into being. In the three phases of the dramatic action, the seeming
triumph of anarchy is seen to be a contradiction of its principles and the beginning of a new order.

The characters in the play represent two distinct ideologies. The whites' way of life is organization and system. The members of the court represent various institutions which shape the social and ethical laws according to which they and the blacks are governed. We have the images of The Balcony here in the persons of the Queen, the Bishop and the Judge besides the Governor and the Queen's valet. As their lives have been governed by law and order, their deaths follow the same pattern, and each goes to his death, even before the blacks shoot him, in order of rank, as specified by the Queen. The Governor is the first and the valet, the last. Each is conscious of his specialization in one particular department of Her Majesty's service and also of the repressive power he has held over the blacks as a member of the Establishment.

"Colonially speaking, I've served the court well," says the Governor. "I've been given a thousand nicknames, which proved the Queen's esteem and the savage's fear." (p. 117) The Missionary reminds the blacks,

It was I who brought you knowledge of Hell... I have blessed brides and grooms, christened pickaninnies, ordained battalions of black priests, and I brought you the message of One who was crucified.

(p. 120)

If the whites are the law-givers, the blacks are the lawbreakers. They resolve "to deserve their (the whites') reprobation and get them to deliver the judgment that will condemn us." (p. 30) Each of them is a transgressor of the social or ethical code of the whites. Village is a murderer and the others abet his crime. Virtue is a prostitute, one
who violates the principles of domestic life. Felicity is a personification of evil and invokes every sin abhorred by the whites. All of them typify lawlessness and lack of inhibition, just as the whites (and this includes the audience) typify a law-oriented society.

The blacks possess two traits which are the hallmarks of anarchy: the total and absolute attitude of revolt, and subversion. The colour the blacks glorify determines the polarity of the play. It is a total and uncompromising blackness which would absolutely and irrevocably reject all whiteness. "I order you to be black to your very veins," says Archibald to the others. "Pump black blood through them. Let Africa circulate in them." (p. 52) To assert their aggressive blackness and to show their hatred of whiteness they would 'eat' the whites.

Even in this open revolt, the females work for subversive destruction. In general, the males, like Diouf, are inclined towards order and reason while the females, like Snow and Bobo, are averse to reason and represent anarchy. Virtue in her profession solicits white customers and holds the destructive power of seduction over them. Felicity demonstrates the victory of the anarchic female principle over the male. She nominates Diouf to play the role of the white victim and presides over the ritual slaying. She lends her skirt to Diouf to complete his impersonation and plays the role of the white woman's mother. It must be remembered that Diouf incarnates black fatherhood. For compromising with the whites, Diouf, the black father, is made the sacrificial victim by Felicity, the black mother, who helps her 'son', Village, to kill him.
Theymatically, The Blacks reiterates the statement made by The Balcony, that anarchy, though good in principle, is self-defeating in practice. The pull of order is so strong in the polarity that it is always the winning principle. As the blacks do away with the whites and promulgate the beginning of their rule, they assume, more and more, the sophistication they had condemned in the whites. The absolute freedom they had wished for is inconceivable and they have to structure their society like the whites, class distinctions and all. Thus the ruling blacks think of their own slaves and underlings, now to be filled from the ranks of the whites.

However, Genet's "geometry of revolt," to quote Brustein, is circular. Each order is to have its supremacy for a set number of years after which its opposite would replace it. The Queen, as she is taken to her death, predicts the resurgence of the whites in ten thousand years. In Genet's vision of history, things come full circle, the underdog becoming the privileged and vice versa, but order has to be replaced by order and anarchy can never be realized. This is so because finite human intelligence cannot understand anarchy in its purest form, which is an infinite concept.

The performance of The Blacks stresses the indestructibility of established order. About the most spectacular way this is done is in the 'birth' of the five dolls on stage. The white race is to be symbolically killed in the person of Diouf, but before the slaughter he ensures the permanence of the structured white civilization by delivering five dolls which are images of the court. The dolls are hung up on the stage directly below the court where they remain till
the end of the performance. This indicates to us that even if the individuals in the Establishment die, the ideas or images imposed by them are indelible.

The dialectic between order and anarchy is incorporated variously in the staging. The intensive use of ceremony and ritual is one method. Both are formal celebrations which require discipline and order in performance. This inherent paradox in the Blacks' revolt was underlined very subtly in Roger Blin's production. As Village and Virtue concluded their final dialogue, strains of a wild African rhythm were heard. All the actors re-entered the stage and started a tribal dance while Newport News (Ville de St. Nazaire in the French version) disappeared into the wings. Quite suddenly, the first measures of the Mozart minuet were heard instead of the African music and Newport News re-entered with the catafalque covered with flowers which he placed at the centre of the stage, where it should be found at the beginning of the play. The music continued and the actors began to dance the minuet.³

The transition from the tribal music to the structured notes of the minuet signifies, firstly, the tempering of complete freedom or anarchy by order and, secondly, the influence of the white civilization in the black Establishment. Genet stated later that he preferred Blin's ending of the play to his own.

The use of masks by the actors establishes yet another curious link with the dialectic. In general, actors have a temptation, while doing a role, to 'play themselves out'. This weakness is termed ego-gratification and an effective curb on it is the mask. The Brechtian theatre exploits the mask's capacity to impose a restriction on the actor and
remind him of theatrical discipline. In *The Blacks*, the supposed whites who wear masks are really blacks. While admittedly their behaviour shows more constraint and punctiliousness than that of the other unmasked blacks, it is interesting to speculate how far the masks prevent feelings of personal prejudice. The atmosphere is so charged with the turbulent emotions that characterize the relations between the blacks and whites outside the theatre that even the mask is not proof against them. Roger Blin notes that his cast could not submerge their identity as blacks even off-stage. Nevertheless, the oppositional characteristics of anarchy and order are visualised in the juxtaposition of faces with masks.

The language, too, reflects the dichotomy between anarchy and order. While the blacks on the lower level of the stage speak a free and easy language, which is also lyrical, the Establishment figures use an artificial diction. They mouth a lot of platitudes which, however, reflect their consciousness of law and order. "Show these barbarians that we are great because of our respect for discipline" says the Queen (p. 116), and this is exactly what they try to do. Each reveals his concern with technicalities. The Judge describes the legal proceedings by which the blacks will be tried and punished, "according to our statutes - naturally" (p. 98). The Governor proposes the method of execution and the Missionary advocates that he christen the man before the execution and then give absolution for his crimes. Later, after the execution, they would all pray. The nicety of these proceedings is matched by the nicety of the terms they use. The attention to propriety is striking. The language
used by the blacks deliberately ignores propriety but, being the poetry of hatred, it is more imaginative.

While the whites are identified with the cult of beauty and art, it seems to be more a concession to tradition which ascribes works of art to them than a faith in their creativity. In the matter of language, it is the blacks who show the inspiration of poets. The only lines of formal verse spoken in the play, incidentally, are those of Snow and Virtue, before the ritual slaying:

**Expire, expire gently**
**Our lady of the Pelicans**
**Pretty sea gull, politely**
**Gallantly, let yourself be tortured...** *(p. 80)*

The imagery of the language used by the blacks has a splendid range and is extremely colourful. By contrast, the white court, which speaks a very colourless prose, shows also its earth-bound aspirations:

"...Tell us how rubber stands on the Stock Exchange." *(p. 19)*

As in the styles, the mode of delivery of the speeches is also distinct in the two groups. The whites speak to each other, but often harangue the blacks. The blacks, on the other hand, employ incantation, which communicates a mood to the play. Its value consists, not in the meaning of the words, but the sheer physical impact. Virtue's Litany evokes of the Livid, for instance, myriad free associations of an untamed, primitive culture. The words used by the blacks "sway and pulsate like African dancers, and their very sound is hypnotic, hallucinatory and cruel." Genet thus differentiates between the highly organized world of the whites and the relatively free world of the blacks by varied styles and manner of language.
As an anarchist in principle, at any rate, if not in practice, Genet is against any organization that calls for commitment. He dislikes categories and groupings which give any revolution the aura of organization. And yet the anomaly of his situation in *The Blacks* is that he gives his support to the blacks when the very validity of his dialectic is based on the blatant categorizing of people as black and white.

It is in the last play, *The Screene*, that the full implications of social order are examined on the one hand and the meaning and problems of anarchy given full consideration on the other. The plot is set against the French-Algerian conflict which, by its link with colonialism, automatically suggests the existence of a structured, class-conscious society. But the spine of the action is not the political insurrection of the Arabs against the French Order but the private revolt of Said against any order - which amounts to pure anarchism.

The position Saïd adopts is that of the anarchist par excellence. He belongs to neither the Arab nor the French faction and his rebellion strikes at any law, social or moral, imposed by an external agent. To that end, he deliberately exiles himself from society by thieving, living in filth and finally betraying his countrymen. In the meanwhile, Kadidja, who had condemned Saïd's mother for being related to a thief, is shot by one of the French colonists, Sir Harold's son. Before dying she organizes acts of terrorism among the Arabs. But now that crime is organized and taken over by the entire Arab community, Saïd and Leila withdraw from it.

In the political sphere, the Arabs successfully fight the French,
both in direct confrontation and by means of subversion. Feigning loyalty, the Arab workers set fire to the orange groves of the French. Others weaken the colonists by acts of arson and the old regime falls. With it goes the class distinction between the colonists and the colonials and a new order is established. However, it is an order and inherits many characteristics of the old order. The leaders enforce law and discipline and castigate the lawless elements in their midst, who are devotees of Said.

The action now alternates between the votaries of order and anarchy in the ranks of the Arabs and the new society in the Kingdom of the Dead. Here, Arabs and French, who were enemies in the old social structure, meet in harmony. Both the living and the dead Arabs claim Said, but the very idea of belonging to any one order upsets him. He rejects both and enters Nothingness after death, which symbolizes pure anarchy.

In the main action of the play, anarchy manifests itself as Said's individualism while order appears in the form of the mass movement, Arab and French. Likewise, in the subplot, the individualism of Warda, the whore, is set against the principle of social uniformity. Her uniqueness as a whore is lost when she is made a nurse of the Red Cross and, in order to gain her old glory, she dies.

Corresponding to the conflict between anarchy and order in the action, the characters fall broadly into two groups, the anarchists who reverse society's conventional values and the orthodox figures. Said, Leila, the Mother and other rebellious characters like Kadidja and Ommu belong to the former category while the colonists, the French soldiers
and those of the Arabs who emulate them fall in the latter. Within this broad division, there are very many distinctions which ensure the individuality of the characters themselves and the highlight the dialectic between anarchy and order in the characterization.

Saïd is so indomitably individualistic that he categorically rejects all ideals, previously known. His poverty implies a rejection of the bourgeois ideal of economic prosperity; his marriage to Leila and his cruelty to her are a rejection of the conventional notion of beauty and the ideal of marital bliss. Relentlessly, he destroys the ideal of social cohesion and solidarity which attracts the French and the Arabs alike. Conventional morality is similarly disposed of, and Saïd rejects also the ideal of patriotism by betraying the Arabs. He finds his true essence when he has detached himself from every social bond.

Leila, who begins by wanting Saïd's appreciation, ends her career of abjection with a true liking for what she does. By the time she has become a confirmed thief, she is proud of her anti-social activities. She boasts that she has taught even the family chickens to steal. Saïd, at least, is conscious of the political exigencies around him and that he can be used by one of two factions, but Leila's revolt against social conventions is carried out in total absorption, with a complete unconcern for political realities. She is so much an essence of herself that she becomes the envy of even Saïd.

The Mother, of course, is their preceptor in anarchy. Rejected by the living and the dead, she develops a disregard for the social institutions which organize them. When Kadidja, who has ostracised her before,
invites her to join the incendiaries later, she asserts her independence by refusing to join them: "I give advice. I don't take it. I sow my seed as I like." (p. 104) Saïd acknowledges that the Mother was Leila's inspiration: "You brought to perfection." (p. 199)

Thus the three outlaws, called the family of nettles, are different from the other Arab rebels in that they do not commit their anti-social activities for any cause. The Mother unwittingly becomes a fighter for the Arab Cause when she kills a French soldier. She is so revolted by even the unconscious compromise with virtue that she warns Saïd, at a crucial moment, of doing anything similar and being claimed by any social clique. Nevertheless, the Mother's anarchism springs, to a large extent, from society's hostility towards her family, and therefore is a reactionary force. Leila and Saïd are the true rebels, for their anti-social acts have no personal cause. They cultivate anarchy for anarchy's sake.

Kadidja and the other rebels are committed to their cause, and their revolt is not wholly negative. They are, strictly speaking, political terrorists and not anarchists. Their aim is to disrupt the colonial order, and to achieve this, they organize a movement of crime.

Opposed to the anarchists, we have the supporters of order. The colonists are emblems of perfect organization. The planters, like Sir Harold, even know the exact number of trees and plants on their lands and the number and names of the labourers. Genet ridicules their fanatical preoccupation with precision and organization in Mr. Blanken-see's identification of his roses:
...I've attached to each rose bush a bell with a different note. At night, I can recognize them by their odour and voice. (p. 69)

The Legionnaires similarly incarnate organization and discipline. The Lieutenant commands his men to look their best in spotless uniforms. They practise the cult of Beauty, which Genet equates with order. They guard the neat organization of society into its several departments, which are headed by the Missionary, the Judge, the General, and the Academician. Together, the colonists (soldiers and planters) typify economic prosperity, law and order, and beauty of form.

By the law of opposites, since the French incarnate the principle of beauty and organization, the Arabs should make ugliness their emblem. But, while some avow a dedication to ugliness and outlawry, a small group has doubts about the efficacy of these principles and takes to organization. The soldiers in this group sing an anthem, march in step, and adopt the rational approach to problems. Ommu accuses the Combatant of adopting the French ways: "We have nothing to do with you. You reason." The Combatant counters it with, "If you want to organize, you've got to reason. What are we combatants entitled to?" (pp. 194-195)

The characterization not only outlines ideological differences between the anarchists and the organizers, but also draws our attention to the polarity between them by means of a simple strategy. The rebels are all referred to by their names - even the women and the little known labourers. But the characters in the other camp, barring a few like Sir Harold or Mr. Blankensee, are all anonymous. They have only archetypal names like the Academician, the Vamp, and the Combatant,
signifying their loss of individuality.

The *Screne* condemns the idea of conformity which is part of organization. It finds extreme individualism synonymous with pure anarchy. Genet also shows that it is very difficult not to conform to any form of organization. According to Lucien Goldman, the play's three social orders correspond to "three basic concepts of European socialist thought: the class society based on oppression; the society born of the successful revolt which does away with oppression but is still rooted in constraint; and the vision of the classless society with no constraints." Even the dead are not free from constraints in the play and they make and accept concessions. They elect their own elite, and they adore Said and honour his mother. The classless society thus remains only a vision. It is only the supreme anarchist, who refuses to conform to any order and who is totally free from social consciousness, that is free from constraints in life and in death. Said and Leila are the only two who achieve this by their revolt against social law.

The theme also relates to Genet's concept of beauty, which has profoundly disturbing implications. He attributes the beauty of efficiency, of justice and of law, to the colonists. It is they who have improved the land and ensured its prosperity. The rose in Mr. Blankensee's garden is a symbol of beauty that is inherent in the colonists' culture. Whether it is this tangible beauty or the abstract beauty of justice and order, it is the colonists who develop it. The traditional colonists' claim to ownership of land rests on the argument that it is they who have brought real value to the native's land by improving it.
In *The Screens*, the Cadi undermines their claim precisely because they made the land beautiful: "Things cease to belong to those who have been able to make them more beautiful." (p. 141) This is a direct contradiction of the view expressed by Brecht in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, that things belong to those who work to improve them. Genet makes a snide reference to Brecht in his mention of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* as a "German operetta" (p. 74)

The Cadi's remark is a cunning argument against the denizens of order and reflects Genet's anarchist leanings in the matter of politics. At the same time, its validity in the context of Art brings Genet to an impasse. The artist who creates beauty places his work of art beyond individual claims of ownership and beyond restrictions of time, so that he himself cannot possess it. The Cadi's argument is therefore essentially correct, but Genet, the artist, has identified the concept of beauty already with the enemy camp representing order. By sympathising with the anarchists politically, while at the same time associating beauty with order, Genet seems to be arguing against himself; against his artist's concern with beauty. The attempt to reconcile his aestheticism with political principles is a failure.

In performance, the polarity between anarchy and order is emphasized repeatedly. There is a marked distinction in the costumes of the Arabs and the French. The Legionnaires are meticulously dressed in uniform, complete with brass buttons, buckles, crossbelts, holsters and shining shoes. The planters, too, give an appearance of solid dignity. Sir Harold is a splendid figure - "boots, cork helmet, gloves, switch, riding breeches." (p. 29) In direct contrast we have the Arabs, who are dressed in rags
and in bright, clashing colours. The Mother's costume in the opening scene, for example, is a revolt against conventional notions of taste and beauty:

...violet satin dress, patched all over in different shades of violet. Big yellow veil. She is barefooted. Each of her toes is painted a different - and violent - colour. (p. 11)

The colonists are made bombastic figures. The padding used by Blankensee to create his bulk, Sir Harold's glove and his meddling with his whip and glove whenever he is on stage emphasize the ludicrous aspects of the ruling class. The make-up incorporates the cartoonist's technique for the same effect. Sir Harold has "bushy red hair and eyebrows, big, bristling moustache, red chin, huge freckles, etc." (p. 30)

Genet insists on very bright lights on the stage. In the Stockholm production, The Screens, Sigvard Olsson's decor was a conglomeration of colours which seemed to be a visual aggression on the spectators:

Depaysement, violence. Décorateur et metteur en scène ont agressé visuellement le public par des taches de couleur, des éclairages durs.

It was the ideal setting for anarchy.

The scene at the orangery affords great scope for directors to show their originality in producing an atmosphere of revolt and intrigue. The fire itself is stylized, the flames being drawn by the Arabs with bright orange chalk. The actions of the colonists and the Arabs create a lot of suspense. Sir Harold and Blankensee are busy, talking about the possibility of a native revolution, when the Arabs creep in one by one and draw the flames. The irony is conveyed by another little gesture in the same scene. Blankensee casually remarks, "You're armed, of
course," (p. 71) to which Sir Harold responds by slapping his holster confidently.

The stage directions indicate that as they are talking, darkness comes on gradually. This, of course, is represented by the dark panel of the movable screen. The audience would remember how, minutes before, the Arabs working on the plantation worked and moved in a line with their hoes, showing a stereotypical behaviour when supervised by Authority. The same workers now come in singly. Each crawls surreptitiously to a screen and in turn makes bigger and bigger flames, blowing on them. Comparing various productions of *The Screens*, Odette Aslan notes that in Roger Blin's production, despite the stylization, there was a very real impression of arson - one saw the orange colour of the flames and heard their crackling.

Lietzau's production in Germany capitalized on the distinction between the colons and the Arabs. Prior to the fire, the aggressive attitude of the established order was suggested. Whenever Sir Harold spoke to an Arab, he would make him raise his chin and attend to him, and, when he was finished, would push the man's head down brutally. During the fire, the stupidity of the colonists was contrasted with the cunning and diligence of the anarchic elements. The two colonists walked in step with an artificial gait and together would execute an uneven and clumsy little jump every now and then, while the Arabs entered noiselessly with smooth movements.

In the brothel scenes, Warda is a striking figure, her costume and make up reflecting her aggressive individualism. She claims her style
as her true identity and, certainly, it is a far cry from the tradition­
al appearance of the prostitute. The popular picture of a prostitute
is that of a woman who wears clothes that set her figure off to advantage
and who tries to make herself beautiful. Warda rebels against this idea
of the whore. She has big, gold-plated buck teeth which she picks
conspicuously with a long, gilt hatpin; she wears a heavy gold-lamé
dress weighted with lead at the helm; she wears her hair in a ridiculous­
ly high chignon and, to crown everything, she wears a very long, very
thin false nose. The pictures of Madeleine Renaud in the role of Warda in
the Paris production of The Screens show her as cadaverous. In short,
Warda, with her 'style', rebels against the law of the brothel, that a
whore should beautify herself. She makes a ceremony of her dressing up -
watched by three curious Arabs - to look ugly.

The language of The Screens serves to polarize the forces of anarchy
and order. The colonists, being aesthetes, are conscious of the beauty
of words and proper syntax in language. Genet refers to their love of
order and symmetry of form by making the rose their symbol:

MR. BLANKENSEE: We're the lords of language. To tamper
with roses is to tamper with language.
SIR HAROLD : And to tamper with language is sacrilegious.

(p. 74)

The language of the Arabs is meant to shock the proprieties of the
colonists. It abounds in coarse and vulgar terms and images of excretion.
In a review of Roger Blin's production of The Screens at Essen in
January, 1968, Botho Strauss refers to the language of the play, which
makes the Algerian revolt omnipresent in the third world. The scatologic­
al language, according to him, is not the product of a sick mind but the
weapon of the "sale troisième monde" with which it transmits its message of violence to the "monde propre", preoccupied with its ideals of beauty and its narcissism.

Genet points to the absurdity of the Colonialist fashion of bringing even the language to order. Mr. Blankensee's description of the rose is an exaggeration of his concern for the beauty of form:

Mr. BLANKENSEE (as if he is reciting Mallarme): The stem, straight and stiff. The green foliage, sound and glazed, and on the stem and in the foliage, the thorns. (p. 74)

The language of the Arabs is structurally chaotic, unlike the precise speeches of the colons. Ommu gibbers away in a delirium about forests, ponds without water, and the sun's "golden rain." (p. 191)

It is interesting to note that, as Saïd and Leila intensify their revolt against social and moral law, their language incorporates more obscure images and sounds more incoherent. Saïd, boasting of his wife's skill in stealing, uses the tone she had used in boasting of his escapades, i.e., he speaks in a gutteral tone and talks "like a pitchman trying to gather a crowd at a fair":

And my wife, who hasn't seen her running away? Go see her, go see her! - running from under the stones, and when they fling bags of guess what, and from under the pommeling... (pp. 86-87)

Finally, the dialectic between order and anarchy is argued out by spokesmen for both sides. The colons use the Brechtian argument on ownership of things to strengthen the case for the Colonial Order:

MR. BLANKENSEE: In a German operetta, I forget which, a character says, 'Things belong to those who've known how to improve them... ' Who is it who's improved your orange groves and my forests and roses? My rose bushes and my blood... (p. 74)
The issue is taken up much later, when the Cadi refutes the Colon's argument with the controversial statement that sums up the anarchist's position, namely, that things do not belong to those who beautified them, precisely because they made them beautiful:

Better and more beautiful, light-footed, winged, they gracefully abandon the one who made them better. (p. 141)

The conflict between anarchy and order occupies Genet's mind in all the three plays. While *The Balcony* deplores the impracticality of the ultimate rebellion, *The Screens* concentrates on the differences between organization and anarchy. It is possible that Genet's views on individualism were influenced by his conversations with Sartre, but that is beside the point. That he outlines a case for negative anarchy is again evident. The remarkable thing is that he has utilized the polarity between anarchy and order in a dramatic-theatrical milieu to reinforce the opposition of the Stage to Life:

*Ma pièce n'est pas l'apologie de la trahison. Elle se passe dans un domaine où la morale est remplacée par l'esthétique de la scène.*
NOTES

CHAPTER IV


7. Odette Aâlan, Ibid., p. 76

8. Odette Aslan, Ibid., p. 81


CONCLUSION

The dialectics outlined in the preceding chapters pertain to the basis of human existence. While all of us are aware of the oppositional characteristics of life and death, illusion and reality, love and hate and anarchy and order in separate contexts, it is the artist's vision which seeks an inner unity within the oppositions. It has been pointed out in the Introduction that these polarities are closely interrelated. In each case, the discussion, at some point, returns to the basic conflict between reality and illusion. For the sake of logical clarity, both the identities and relations of the opposites have to be defined on the basis of what is apparent and what is real. The distinction is further refined in terms of relative and absolute reality. In giving dramatic and theatrical expression to the relationship of these opposites, Genet exploits fully the shifting levels of reality and illusion. All the other polarities considered in this thesis are thus fragmentations of this central opposition between the real and the illusory.

Despite this unifying factor in the scheme of opposites, establishing the dialectics is not easy. The artist has a dual perception of things, as a social being and as an individual, and it is not always possible to reconcile the two. In the case of Genet, the tension between his individual aestheticism and his social experience finds outlet in arguments of involved logic. Much as he would like to reject society altogether, he is a unit of society due to a fact over which he has no control - namely, his status as a human being. So, while his particular
brand of aestheticism opts for death, illusion, and anarchy as superior principles, he is forced to reckon with life, reality, and order as facts of existence.

The attempt to resolve this conflict results in the most extraordinary statements in Genet's plays: living is dying; reality is illusion; hate is love. Using all the resources of the theatre - the appeal of ceremony and ritual, varied sound effects, lighting, suggestive decor, costumes and the potent device of the mask - he delineates these themes in the plays ranging from The Balcony to The Screens. When he comes to the last set of opposites - anarchy and order - he is faced with a dilemma. While the dialectic is easily established in The Balcony and The Blacks, it is not quite so easy in The Screens. This is because the question of anarchy and order is a political -communal issue in the first two plays but becomes a political-ethical issue in The Screens. In other words, while communal or group interests shape the conflict in the first two plays, individual decisions matter most in the third. Any such decision requires a committed attitude one way or the other and commitment is what Genet abhors. The result is a certain unevenness in the structure of the play: on the one hand, a spurious logic justifying political anarchy despite the fact that beauty, which is the artist's objective, goes with order; on the other, a concentrated analysis of individual revolt in the character of Said.

The treatment of revolt in Genet's last plays reminds one of a system of concentric circles. Revolt is at the heart of the action of all three plays, but while it has the broader scope of social and racial
confrontation in The Balcony and The Blacks, a significant part of it narrows down into a personal introspection in The Screens.

The conflict is between groups rather than individuals in the first two plays. It is the Establishment vs. the rebels or the Blacks vs. the Whites. Even where individuals emerge prominently as the combatants — as Roger and the Chief of Police do in The Balcony — the opposition is really between two antithetical viewpoints. It is only in The Screens that we get the isolated, single rebel, in Said. Although there is, nominally, a political revolution going on in the background, the real action of the play concerns Said's revolt against the world around him, or, rather, against the ethical code of that world.

The Screen's structure is very disparate and unwieldy when compared to the relatively neat form of The Balcony or the very tight frame of The Blacks. Its theme, too, is denser, being a philosophical or metaphysical thing while the themes of the earlier plays have a social or emotional flavour.

The conflict in each of the three plays is a war of absolutes, for Genet, like Nietzsche, detests the middle way in anything. The battle between the dominators and the dominated, depicted in the earlier plays, becomes, in The Screens, the conflict between the Self and the Other or, to be more precise, a fusion of the two elements and in fact the usurpation of the Self by the Other. Each of these opposites represents an extreme.

The portrayal of absolutes requires an emotional intensity on the part of the actors, and yet Genet maintains that life and stage are
opposites and therefore the actor must be alert to the nature of his presence on stage and keep the real world distinct from the world of illusion. This is not really surprising in Genet whose dramatic vision constantly synthesizes opposed principles. His injunction to the actors of Blin's troupe throws light on the subject of an actor's volatility.

This may not be an original thought with me, but let me restate it anyway, that the patron saint of actors is Tiresias, because of his dual nature. Legend has it that he retained the male sex for seven years, and for seven more the other. For seven years a man's clothing, for seven a woman's. In a certain way, at certain moments - or perhaps always - his femininity followed in close pursuit of his virility, the one or the other being constantly asserted, with the result that he never had any rest, I mean any specific place where he could rest. Like him, the actors are neither this nor that, and they must be aware that they are a presence constantly beset by femininity or its opposite, but ready to play to the point of abasement that which, be it virility or its opposite, is in any case predetermined.

Saint Tiresias, the patron saint of actors.
As for the divinatory powers of the saint, let every actor make an effort to see clearly within himself.

We may be certain that Genet clearly has in mind the reputation of Tiresias as a seer. Like the prophet, the actor, too, has to have a special insight. He has to divine not only all the possibilities of the character he impersonates but also gauge the pulse of the audience. The task of the actor is, to a large extent, anticipatory. Genet's remark

about the divinatory powers of Tiresias is, therefore, no idle
statement.

Nor is it only the actors who have to 'see clearly within' them-
selves, but the audience as well, Genet's sly manipulation of the
spectators elicits their conscious or unconscious participation in
the rituals performed; arouses powerful and negative emotions in them
and finally confuses them as to which one of the two worlds - theirs
or the actors' - is more authentic. It would be naive to read Genet's
belligerence towards the spectators as constructive didacticism. Never-
theless, our unique experience in his theatre does lead to some
soul searching. The most fitting retaliation we can make for Genet's
hostility is to construe his negativism as an ultimately positive
force on this ground.
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