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CHARACTER CHANGE IN THE MAJOR PLAYS OF JEAN GENET

by

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ABSTRACT

In Jean Genet's three major plays, The Balcony, The Blacks and The Screens, there is a predominating emphasis on the manipulation of dramatic identities. This study traces Genet's changing and developing use of the dramatic convention of character change as a means of character development. Two characters are drawn from each play for examination from the point of view of character change.

Character in the drama is identity in action and true change in a character's dramatic identity must be accompanied by the dissolution, or death of the first identifying action and the appearance, or rebirth of a new. The form of death can vary and the new identity can manifest itself in different ways, but all character changes must be accomplished through some form of dramatic death and rebirth.

In The Balcony character change is purely a mechanical intervention by the playwright, signalled to the audience by different costumes and new names. In The Blacks the staging of the character changes is more literal and concrete, and carries some of the serious intent of ritual. Finally, in The Screens character changes grow more organically from the situations and from the evolving needs of the characters.

Dramatic life in Genet includes death, and the deaths of characters in these plays is most often a transition into the state of living death. As the plays progress, death is made more and more prominent until in The Screens it is of equal importance with life.

Revolution is a social version of death and rebirth and is structurally parallel to the process of character change. The repetitious aspect of revolution as it is used in these plays also echoes the death/rebirth metaphor of character change. It is with the main character in The Screens that Genet is finally able to successfully interlock the themes of death and revolution.

Said is the most well-developed character found in Genet's work. Genet's development as a dramatist led from purely schematic character changes to the organic, subtle evolution of characterization in Said. This study shows that Said's struggle for hieratic status through character change is integrated with the plot of The Screens, making Said the perfect embodiment of Genet's world view expressed through drama. Genet was gradually able to integrate plot with character development--one of the most important accomplishments in his playwriting. But character change is the essential mode of character development in The Balcony, The Blacks and The Screens, creating wider dramatic possibilities, carrying events forward, giving shape to the action and determining the shape of the plays.

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INTRODUCTION

Jean Genet was born an illegitimate child in France in 1910 and abandoned to the care of public institutions. The singularity of his background provided him with a slant on human experience which is seldom staged with such directness: the universe of the moral deviant. At an early age he committed theft, beginning a chain of crimes and convictions that finally led to life imprisonment. However, his writing had by that time come to the attention of intellectual circles and, after Jean Cocteau and Jean-Paul Sartre appealed to the French President on his behalf in 1948, Genet was pardoned and released. Although apparently removed from overt criminal activity after this time, he sustained a vital interest in the subversive morality so familiar to him from his past, and this deeply affected his plays. He remains tenaciously loyal to an inverted morality which runs through his plays like a strong current. One of the logical extensions of this inversion of conventional morality is his interest in the concept of anti-Christ, the criminal as saint. "I thus resolutely rejected a world which had rejected me,"¹ he says in the autobiographical The Thief's Journal, published in 1949; twelve years later with the publication of The Screens, we find the dramatic embodiment of this same philosophy in the protagonist, Said. These two interests--the repudiation of a social order that repudiated him and an enduring fascination with the anti-Christ figure--combine to produce a predominant thematic motif in his plays: the protagonist's search for hieratic status through the

practice of evil. Because the dramatic focus is on this search, the emphasis in The Balcony, The Blacks and The Screens is on characterization. Genet's exploration of a moral-aesthetic ideal through the pursuits of the main characters provides a connective thread through these plays. Examination from the point of view of character change shows Genet's manipulation of dramatic identities as he tries to express this ideal in dramatic terms.

In the drama a character is wholly the creation of the playwright, with no independent or continuing existence outside the context of the play itself. Harold Rosenberg has said in his essay "Character Change and the Drama," the playwright determines "in advance that the character's emotions, his thoughts and his gestures should correspond with and earn in every respect the fate prepared for him. . . In short, because the dramatist [has] created his characters he [can] maintain the relation between their emotions, their thoughts and their destinies."² One way to define character in the drama is to say it is identity in action. Rosenberg says: "In contrast with the person recognized by the continuity of his being, we may designate the character defined by the coherence of his acts as an 'identity.'"³ The dramatic character, then, has an identifying action within the context of the script and it is from this action that we derive his dramatic identity. This dramatic identity remains constant until the character's identifying action is altered, at which point he is said to have undergone character change. But in order for character change to occur, the old identifying action must give way to make room for the new. This process may be seen as a process of death and rebirth, as "the dissolution of identity and the reappearance of the individual in a 'reborn' state."⁴

Of course dramatic death need not represent the organic death we are familiar with in real life: "Death in the drama means only the cessation of the character's action and the impossibility of his taking it up again."⁵ When the new identifying action is taken up the character is reborn, a changed dramatic identity. Rosenberg's conception is useful in looking at character change as a dramatic convention in The Balcony, The Blacks, and The Screens.

Character change is the essential mode of character development, creating wider dramatic possibilities as the character's actions are fitted to his destiny. It can also be used to carry dramatic events forward, giving shape to the action and significantly determining the structure of the play. For example, character change can occur when it is required for the continued progression of dramatic events: once the first identifying action has served its dramatic function and is no longer useful to the plot, it must be replaced. In order that one identity be replaced by another, however, the playwright must subject the character to some form of dramatic death. In speaking of this death or brush with death, Rosenberg draws an interesting parallel between the phenomena of religious conversion and character change, a parallel which points up the flexibility of character change when used in the drama:

. . . the fact that the phenomenon of religious conversion is the only one which actually effects a change of identity in the living person, in which through the touch of death a course of living is annulled and another substituted without rupturing the organic continuity of the individual, relates religion and drama in a peculiar way. To present identity-replacement in a credible manner the dramatist must imitate the experience of religion and subject his character to the ordeal of death. But he may do so in terms of action alone and without adopting any metaphysical supposition as to the cause of the change. In a word, dramatic death and regeneration need not be involved in faith: there is the death-laden incident; then occurs a transfer of identities within the single figure, a change of faces behind the mask.⁶

Therefore, the form of dramatic death can vary and the new identity can manifest itself in different ways. For example, the death-laden incident can be represented by mere absence or it can be the act of putting on a mask, literally superimposing a new identity over an old one. The audience does not have to witness the change, which can be almost invisibly accomplished or can be made a theatrical event in itself; the change can be revealed through dialogue after it has occurred or it can be discerned through changed goals or behaviour of the character. But for true character change to take place the character must be subjected to some form of dramatic death and rebirth.

All dramatic characters are bound by the laws of the script; any semblance to natural behaviour is contrived. Despite this, it is possible, by a careful choice of detail in relation to costume, manner, blocking and speech, to give the audience the impression they are watching organic human beings who are complex characters drawn from life, who think, feel and act in recognizably human ways. But it is never Genet's intention to create the fourth-wall illusion:

I tried to establish a distantiation which, in allowing a declamatory tone, would carry the theatre into the theatre. I thus hoped also to obtain the abolition of characters. . . and to replace them by symbols as far removed as possible, at first, from what they are to signify. . . in short, to make the characters on the stage merely the metaphors of what they were to represent. . . .

Because he avoids creating the illusion of organic personalities which have grown and evolved through experience, his characters are abstract and schematic, making them particularly apt subjects for change. By this means

Genet has free range for the expression of his theatrical designs without being overly concerned with realistically plausible motivation or even plausible objectives. He is a playwright of ideas whose characters embody his personal, exclusive view of the world. Through The Balcony, The Blacks and The Screens he relentlessly negotiates his main characters toward becoming eternal images in death, but it is only with The Screens that he is able to perfectly articulate his ideal through the action and characterization of Said. Ironically, this play has more organic shading and a more natural development than either The Balcony or The Blacks. There is a certain degree of evolution allowed as Said progresses toward his destiny, a gradual unfolding of events and character actions, leaving room for discovery, both for the character and the audience.

Death in Genet's plays is completely abstracted from death in the real world. To the characters in The Balcony, The Blacks and The Screens death is another form of life, bringing neither suffering nor finality. In fact, the immobility of death holds great attraction for these characters because it represents freedom from the chaos and struggle of living, but without the loss of life normally associated with dying. This is possible for the characters in these three plays since in Genet dramatic life includes death. Death grows in importance as part of his schema until, in The Screens, the realm of the dead is presented as prominent and visible, with a peaceful and transcendent group of cohabitants. Biological death has become no more than an event marking the commencement of another existence.

But apart from this specific use of the concept of death, Genet has filled the plays with references to death. Besides the deaths of

characters by shooting, strangulation or poison, there are deaths of roles as one character plays a new role; wishes and preparations for death; communication between the living and the dead; and, above all, the general message that life before death is a burden, and that the stasis of life after death can be man's greatest reward. This constant reference to death is like an obsession, and certainly provides a common denominator for the three plays. Genet once said, "Everything should work together to break down whatever separates us from the dead."⁸

Just as death is the mode of theme and character unity in The Balcony, The Blacks and The Screens, revolution is the common plot context. Revolution is the structural backbone in these three plays, in that the most important dramatic events hinge on the existence of revolutionary circumstances. At the root of the purpose of revolt lies another of Genet's favoured themes: the destruction of one power structure in order that a new one take its place; in turn, it will also be overthrown and replaced, always feeding the eternal cycle of repetition. Revolution is a social version of death and rebirth and is structurally parallel to the process of character change in the drama. Rosenberg brings the concepts of revolution and the identity change into mesh in the conclusion of his essay:

Individuals are conceived as identities in systems whose subject matter is action and the judgement of actions. In this realm the multiple incidents in the life of an individual may be synthesized, by the choice of the individual himself or by the decision of others, into a scheme that pivots on a single fact central to the individual's existence and which, controlling his behaviour and deciding his fate, becomes his visible definition. Here unity of the "plot" becomes one with the unity of being and through₉ the fixity of identity change becomes synonymous with revolution.

Successful revolution and character change consist of the same underlying process. It was not until he wrote The Screens that Genet was able to completely interlock the two processes in the character Said's fate. Although revolt is an essential part of the action in all the plays, it is progressively brought into greater prominence until, in The Screens, it is truly integrated with the dramatic life on stage.

Genet tends to use the offstage in several particular ways. First, it often represents reality as opposed to the illusion of what is actually seen on stage. In The Balcony there are as many references to the real world outside the brothel as there are to the illusions within, and in The Blacks it is the offstage trial that is real, the onstage one that is ceremonial. Second, the offstage is frequently a magical area from which characters return slightly or substantially changed; at such times the character's absence can be read as a form of dramatic death--in fact, the Envoy in The Balcony equates absence with death. Finally, it is with The Screens that the offstage takes on new dimensions as the place that goes beyond death to a dwelling place of the gods, a realm beyond temporality yet always accessible to the imagination.

It is just such a place that David Cole names the illud tempus in his book The Theatrical Event: "Most religions possess the concept of an illud tempus, a time of origins. . . when gods walked the earth, men visited the sky, and the great archetypal events of myth. . . took place."¹⁰ For his discussion of theatre, Cole draws on religion and mythology for a

vocabulary which places man's traditional understanding of these areas of human experience at the heart of the theatrical event. He refers to the script as the home of the illud tempus with "the potential to be, at any moment, among us"¹¹ through performance. To him, theatre is a way to make present alternate, imaginative realities that could otherwise only be conceptualized. A separate study would be required to deal with Cole's ideas in any depth in relation to Genet's work, but even the extremely limited use of a few concepts from The Theatrical Event is helpful in discussing The Balcony, The Blacks and The Screens. In each of these plays there are characters who die to transcend life, to become emblems in an eternity resembling the illud tempus Cole describes. The ritual, the spectacle, the effrontery of Genet's plays combine to present one dramatist's imaginative universe, certainly an alternate reality to the one familiar to most audiences.

Despite the abstract and stylized view of human experience presented by Genet, his characters do have recognizable human ambitions: they want to give meaning to their lives when there is none; to enhance their fate by transcending personal and social limitations. But always, there must be some form of death before a character can be reborn a changed dramatic identity. Not all characters achieve identity change. In the following chapters, two characters from each of the plays will be studied from the point of view of character change. Genet's use of this dramatic convention changes and develops through The Balcony, The Blacks and The Screens.

NOTESINTRODUCTION

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3. Ibid., p. 325 4. Ibid., p. 335 5. Ibid., p. 336 6. Ibid., p. 330
7. Esslin, Martin, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Doubleday, 1969), p. 178
8. Genet, Jean, Reflections on the Theatre and Other Writings, trans. Richard Seaver (New York: Grove, 1975), p. 11
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11. Ibid., p. 8

CHAPTER I

THE BALCONY

Eight of the nine scenes in The Balcony take place in a French brothel in a city torn by revolution. Here illusion and reality are fused in exotic rituals of power, sex and death. The mastermind behind the organization is the tough proprietress, Madame Irma. Because the fate of her most important customer, the Chief of Police, hinges on the revolutionary events outside the brothel, Irma and her customers are drawn into a masquerade in real life. The masquerade is devised to advance the cause of the city's hierarchical establishment by maintaining an intact image of its strength despite the revolutionaries' wholesale slaughter of all powerful establishment figures, including the Queen. Irma herself takes the role of Queen, the Chief of Police is made Hero, in which role he quells the rebellion, escalating his reputation as a killer to institutional proportions and thus qualifying for impersonation in one of Irma's studios. All that remains is for someone to request to impersonate the Chief of Police. He is finally rewarded when his role is taken by Roger, one of the leaders of the rebellion. In an act meant to truly merge his identity with that of the Chief of Police, Roger castrates himself. This mutilation reduces the status of the Chief of Police's image to impotence. The Chief of Police, though diminished in stature, proceeds undaunted to his waiting mausoleum for two thousand years of living death. His ordinary life ends but his image will live eternally in brothels throughout the world.

The Chief of Police's struggle toward an immutable state of being through death is the main action of the play. His intention is made clear to the audience during his first appearance in Scene Five, and what is seen after that is a gradual unfolding of events as he fulfils his ambition. He must merit an impersonation of his social role in one of Irma's studios which will give him a place in the Nomenclature of the brothels, assuring him of perpetual impersonation in brothels throughout the world. All composite elements of the drama support this end. The Chief of Police's progress from function to final immobility requires two character changes. In the Chief of Police's journey toward secular canonization Genet sets out a dramatic paradigm for the idea of character change as a metaphor for the process of death and rebirth.

The opening scenes of The Balcony show four established rituals taken from the repertoire of the bordello: in a chamber appointed to resemble a sacristy, a larger-than-life Bishop and a provocatively-dressed prostitute share a fantasy built on themes of religion, eroticism and death; in a plainer room but with the same folding screens, chandelier and gilded mirror reflecting an unmade bed seen in the previous scene, a Judge is engaged in a scene of sadism and self-abasement with an Executioner and a beautiful girl, from whom he demands confessions of theft; with the same scenic surroundings and appropriate additional props, an over-sized General rides his girl-horse to his heroic death on an imaginary battlefield; finally, in a room with mirrored wall panels, a little old man in a tramp costume is whipped by an indifferent lady with beautiful thighs when he

offers her a bouquet of artificial flowers. These are strictly make-believe scenarios devised to satisfy the yearnings of men whose real lives fail to meet their needs for experience of power and submission. Although they are blatant masquerades, these scenes are like stage models of the larger structure to come. It is also true that, although the gas man's transformation into Bishop is temporary, it serves to prepare the audience for the character changes to come. And when the Bishop speaks of being on a "skilful, vigorous course towards Absence. Towards Death,"¹ the dramatic climate of The Balcony has already begun to be established.

In The Balcony, a warehouse of material and human props, death is a valued commodity appreciated by all Irma's patrons. The Judge of the second scene explains: "That's why I'm dead. I inhabit that region of exact freedom." What more praiseworthy goal than freedom from the fetters of life when the renunciation of life is the path to the saintliness and freedom of Genet's universe? For the Chief of Police death means welcome possibilities for fulfillment, a frontier to be faced with relish. He regards death as the access point to infinite existence where he can "keep vigil over his entire death" for all eternity. To him, dying seems to be the point of living, and his real purpose while alive is to merit eternal life as a saint of the brothels. His immediate objective is to secure an impersonation by halting the rebellion; his super-objective is to gain admittance to the pink handbook of the brothels, which will guarantee his eternal status as image:

THE CHIEF OF POLICE (calmly): I shall not be the hundred-thousandth-reflection-within-a-reflection in a mirror, but the One and Only, into whom a hundred thousand want to merge.

As Irma explains to him, his reputation will continue to grow if he builds on a solid foundation of killings:

IRMA: You must keep killing, my dear George.

THE CHIEF OF POLICE: I do what I can, I assure you. People fear me more and more.

IRMA: Not enough. You must plunge into darkness, into shit and blood.

Through his response to Irma when she expresses a desire to return to the tenderness they once shared, the audience learns that, for the Chief of Police, this is the climax of his long, private campaign: "You don't know what I was secretly moving towards when I was in your arms." This is a way of telling her that love cannot lure him from death. His one consuming goal is hieratic status and Irma is of value to him because she holds power over the medium through which he can achieve it. All characters, with the exception of Irma, regard the Chief of Police as weak and ineffective in the face of revolutionary violence. It will be only when he can act in his social role of Chief of Police that he will be able to put down the rebellion, and to do this it will be necessary for him to change his dramatic function. He confides to Irma his aversion to action:

THE CHIEF OF POLICE: . . . But I'll make my image detach itself from me. I'll make it penetrate into your studios, force its way in, reflect and multiply itself. Irma, my function weighs me down, it will appear to me in the blazing light of pleasure and death. (Musingly.) Of death.²

Function may be a burden to him, but he must find it in himself to defeat the rebels. Through the process of character change he is freed from inactivity in order to accomplish his immediate goal.

His first character change is a spin-off of Irma's adoption of

the role of Queen. After the rebels demolish the ranks of the establishment, the impersonators from the Balcony immediately affirm the continued potency of the establishment with a show of political strength in the form of a royal appearance on the balcony of the surrogate palace, the brothel. With the entourage is a figure set apart by his simple dress--all but the Hero are dressed as if for Irma's scenarios: in full regalia and of amplified size. The Chief of Police has been made Hero by the new establishment. There has been no preparation or forewarning preceding his change; he simply appears in the costume of Hero without explanation. The change is at first merely visual and, although he is visually presented as a low-status figure in comparison with the others, this marks a significant advance for the Chief of Police. It is his first admittance into the power structure of the establishment. As Hero, ally of the state, his prestige is enhanced, making success a stronger likelihood and perhaps foreshadowing victory. The change in dramatic identity results in action: as Hero, he goes out into the city and defeats the rebels at the time when they are most threatening to the establishment. His character change is thus confirmed. This was not a mere change in physical appearance. To confront and overthrow the rebels required true character change, a change in dramatic function. He has become effectual. In order to have undergone character change, the character must have been subjected to a form of death and rebirth. The change took place in absence; absence in Genet is a recognized form of death. In his absence, then, the Chief of Police's identifying action ends, and his 'rebirth' is his appearance on the balcony as a new dramatic identity. This seemingly symbolic change enables him to become practically effectual. This

character change is borne out in fact by the Hero's subsequent defeat of the rebels--a definite change from the inaction of the Chief of Police. Now that he has become a Hero in reality as well as in name and costume, he must await the all-important impersonation.

The next phase of the transformation of the Chief of Police meets Rosenberg's criteria for character change but with some modification in the arrangement of the events. In this last character change, the structure of the death/rebirth process includes a delay between the death-laden incident (the Hero's absence and his military victory over the rebels) and the final stage of the character change (the impersonation of the Chief of Police, followed by his exit). This delay poses an additional challenge to the Hero, as the other establishment members threaten to exercise their new authority to prevent his accretion of power. He reduces the challenger, the General, to a dog's status by commanding that he lie on the floor, then wondering aloud whether to send him back to his kennel. In the midst of this is a reminder to the group from Irma that they were hired to do this for the glory of the Chief of Police. Although he is subdued and exhausted after his exertion, he passes this test by overcoming the opposition. Immediately after this he senses the coming impersonation as he predicted he would: ". . . I'll know by a sudden weakness of my muscles that my image is escaping from me to go and haunt men's minds. When that happens my visible end will be near." His visible end will result in the birth of the Chief of Police image. But that time has not yet arrived. He must still wait for that "final consecration"³ in the form of an impersonation.

"Let's be silent, and let's wait. . . . (A long and heavy silence.)

Perhaps it is now. . . (In a low and humble voice) that my apotheosis is being prepared. . . . (Everybody is visibly expectant.)" It is Roger, leader of one of the factions of the revolution, who asks to impersonate the Chief of Police. Roger is briefed on the subject matter of the scenario by the guide provided for his excursion into illusion:

CARMEN: You're the first. You're inaugurating this studio, but, you know, the scenarios are all reducible to a major theme. . .

ROGER: Which is . . . ?

CARMEN: Death.

ROGER (touching the walls): And so this is my tomb?

The Slave who is one of the characters of the illud tempus of the Mausoleum Studio explains the difficulty of trying to infuse life with death: "We try hard just to stand and rot. And, believe me, it's not always easy. Life tries to prevail. . . ." ⁴ The difference between this scenario and the earlier ones is that Roger does not want make-believe as Irma's other clients do. He wants to make his masquerade real by surrendering his own identity in order to become the Chief of Police, to become the persona of his conqueror. To take possession of the Chief of Police's image, he must submit to a kind of death. In The Theatrical Event Cole explains that "to be possessed is to relinquish, in greater or lesser degree, one's selfhood. Men flee it as they flee death because it is a kind of death. To be possessed is to die as an autonomous being, yet to keep on living without full consciousness or control: to become the 'living dead'." ⁵ Of course one of the remarkable things about Genet's characters is that they do not flee death in any of its forms and Roger is determined to exchange his personal existence in order to share in the glory of the Chief of Police. He achieves such a high degree of unity with the image he portrays in the scenario that he is able to

repeat words spoken by the Chief of Police but which he has not actually heard. The merging of the two identities, the watcher and the impersonator, becomes complete as the scene is propelled forward with reports of the glory and infinite nature of the Chief of Police's image:

THE SLAVE: . . . all of you is a thundering mouth and at the same time a dazzling and watchful eye. . . .

ROGER: You see it, but do those others know it? Does the night know it? Does death? Do the stones? What do the stones say?

THE SLAVE (still dragging on his belly and beginning to crawl up the stairs): The stones say. . . .

ROGER: Well, I'm listening.

THE SLAVE (He stops crawling, and faces the audience): The cement that holds us together to form your tomb. . . .

THE CHIEF OF POLICE (facing the audience and joyfully beating his breast): The stones venerate me!

.
ROGER (with rising exaltation): Everything proclaims me! Everything breathes me and everything worships me!

At this point Roger believes the destiny of the Chief of Police to be his own. When the Slave exits and Roger anxiously enquires after him, Carmen reassures him with a description of his repute:

ROGER (anxiously): What else will he tell?

CARMEN: The truth; that you are dead, or rather that you don't stop dying and that your image, like your name, reverberates into infinity.

After reassuring him that his image is "everywhere, inscribed and engraved and imposed by fear," she tells him he must leave. "The session's over."⁶

Roger is in no frame of mind to accept this abrupt ending and does not respond to her reminder according to the conventions of the brothel. But when he realizes he cannot continue the scenario he expresses disillusionment with life: "And outside, what you call life, everything has crashed. No truth was possible." He was forced to accept defeat in battle, but refuses to accept it now. Against Carmen's protestations "that

brothels are very strictly regulated and that we're protected by the police," he insists he will carry the merged identities "to the very limit" of their shared destiny. The climax of the scenario is the moment when he castrates himself while still in the role of the Chief of Police. He has forever joined their destinies by mutilating the image during the inaugural event. To condemn the Chief of Police to an eternity of impotence is Roger's revenge; the gigantic phallus the Chief of Police once envisioned as his symbol could now hold no meaning. The castrated image, however, is the more accurate representation of the Chief of Police. As with the other clients of the brothel, there is a strong suggestion of impotence in the earlier Chief of Police and, in a sense, Roger has corrected the image. Besides, death permits no regenerative equipment--the phallus and death are mutually exclusive. After his loss the Chief of Police consoles himself with the thought that at least a "low Mass will be said" to his glory despite the fact that his image will be "castrated in every brothel in the world."⁷ Although his image has been mutilated, he has entered the realm of the numinous and proceeds to his tomb satisfied with this form of eternal life. Perhaps even in this illud tempus where he will dwell as an eternal image he cannot totally escape the reality of his own limitations. All requirements have been met for his final character change and he abandons life for stasis in death.

From the time the Chief of Police surrenders his real life by entering his tomb to begin the wait of two thousand years, he will exist as an image, what Cole calls "an eternal imaginative form,"⁸ waiting to be brought into existence by brothel patrons around the world. This last

character change has been made richer by the accompanying character change of Roger into the Chief of Police. By having the two characters merge, Genet has given the character change greater impact--the image is more powerful for having absorbed two characters. Roger's self-mutilation, a touch of death which, in fact, kills part of him, leaves him permanently altered. Although he was defeated in the revolution, by uniting his fate with that of the Chief of Police he is able to taste the victory of punishment by castrating the image. Genet's complex treatment of this transformation of the Chief of Police into a kind of sainthood is the culmination of the plot and the denouement is abrupt. Irma tries to convince the Chief of Police to stay by telling him she loves him. Interested only in the execution of his plan to the end, he proceeds to his tomb. Irma sends everyone home and turns out the lights.

For two reasons the success of the Chief of Police's plan is wholly dependent upon the co-operation of Irma. First, she is the master builder of illusion, providing theatre, actors and props; second, it is her adoption of the role of Queen which allows his first character change to take place.

Madame Irma is the flinty lady who runs this efficient business providing "the very finest of deaths" for everyone. She is skilled and impersonal in the management of human affairs. Her patrons' fantasies are strictly money-making propositions; she knows "it's make-believe that these gentlemen want," and the end of a session is met without apology:

IRMA (entering): That'll do now. You've got to leave.

THE BISHOP: You're crazy! I haven't finished.

IRMA: I'm not trying to pick an argument, and you know it, but you've no time to waste. . . .

BISHOP (ironically): What you mean is that you need the room for someone else and you've got to arrange the mirror and jugs.

IRMA (very irritated): That's no business of yours. I've given you every attention while you've been here. . . .

Once relieved of his holy vestments, the Bishop returns to being a gas man.

Irma's house is a thriving institution drawing its clientele from ordinary citizens who wish to appease their longing for importance by impersonating members of the "nomenclature of the brothels" who are, for the most part, power figures of the establishment. Although she traffics in identity change, Irma never expresses the desire to change her own identity: On the whole her business provides her with satisfactions, as she confesses to her assistant Carmen: "Darling, the house really does take off, leaves the earth, sails in the sky when, in the secrecy of my heart, I call myself, but with great precision, a keeper of a bawdy-house. Darling, when secretly, in silence, I repeat to myself silently, 'You're a bawd, boss of a whore-house,' darling, everything (suddenly lyrical) flies off--chandeliers, mirrors, carpets, pianos, carytids and my studios, my famous studios . . . everything takes it on the lam, rises up and carries me off!" But there is another side to Irma which we glimpse when she confides discontent to Carmen: "It's this chilling game which makes me sad and melancholy." But her criticism of the outside world reflects her ambivalence towards reality: "But bear in mind that General, Bishop and Judge are, in real life. . . props of a display that they have to drag in the mud of the real and the commonplace. Here, Comedy and Appearance remain pure, and the revels intact." She

prefers, then, the illusion of her establishment to the hard reality of the functional outside world. Still, she is not sure, and asks the Chief of Police, "Do you still insist on keeping up the game? . . . Aren't you tired of it?" Later, she asks that they return to the time when they loved each other. His response is a slap that knocks her down and threatens further violence. This seems to titillate her. To the Chief of Police's gentle, "Do you think I'm capable of it?" she answers, in a panting whisper, "Yes, darling."⁹ There is an abrupt change in tone immediately following this moment and they get down to business. For the moment Irma has lost the appeal for any change in their relationship. She wants warmth and companionship and the Chief of Police wants death. She is committed to helping him achieve his destiny even if she does consider everything in her life but her jewels to be sham. Having recognized the limitations of her world, she carries on with her work. It is she who arranges everything to suit the needs of her clients, and the Chief of Police is one of her clients. They have a partnership: he provides police protection for the brothel, and she keeps the Mausoleum Studio ready for the anticipated impersonation of the Chief of Police.

Suddenly, the revolution affects life inside the brothel. Irma's pimp, Arthur, returns with news of the devastation outside. A bullet shatters a window and kills Arthur with a single shot in the forehead. There is a brief pause while Irma and the Chief of Police complain about this inconvenience, Irma leaves instructions for clearing the body, then goes to see the Queen's Envoy.

The rebels have murdered all the power figures of the establishment

and now have the upper hand in the rebellion. Something must be done to waylay their success, to allow the Chief of Police to get out there and put down the revolution. As the one remaining palace authority, the Queen's Envoy takes up residence in the brothel. This is the first step in his plan to preserve the image of an intact establishment in the eyes of the populace. In order to do this he will need a new Queen because the old Queen is either dead or dying. Once he has a new Queen he will create a whole new establishment to replace the one destroyed by the rebels. But he shrouds his intent in mystery, refusing to tell Irma or the Chief of Police whether the Queen is alive or dead. They are dressed in tatters, the Funeral Studio they are in is in ruins, the corpse of Arthur lies in state amidst an array of fake detail, and Irma and George are nervous. Looking at Arthur's corpse, she says, ". . . his entire being is speeding toward immobility." The Envoy responds by saying, "She, too, is moving rapidly toward immobility," arousing their fear and suspicion that the Queen may, in fact, be dead. The possibility of the Queen's decease is most alarming to George because she is essential to his hieratic quest:

THE CHIEF OF POLICE (more and more threateningly): Enough of that. You said the palace was in danger. . . . What's to be done? I still have almost the entire police force behind me. Those who are still with me are ready to die for me. . . . They know who I am and what I'll do for them. . . . But if the Queen is dead, everything is jeopardized. She's my support, it's in her name that I'm working to make a name for myself. How far has the rebellion gone? I want a clear answer.

It is in both Irma's and the Chief of Police's best interest to assure the survival of the Queen. Irma is anxious to see the Chief of Police attain an impersonation, so in this sense she, too, is concerned about

the safety of the Queen. But if the rebels win this revolution, they will close down her brothel; if the Queen is dead, the rebels will most certainly win. In utter exasperation, the Chief of Police finally forces the Envoy's hand: "But, after all, in coming to see me, you did have something definite in mind, didn't you? You had a plan? Let's hear it."¹⁰

The answer to his demand is a terrific blast that sends all but Irma to the ground. She remains symbolically upright, the only one of the three to maintain her balance. It is this moment the Envoy shrewdly chooses to begin to build his case. Slowly, with tact and by flattery, he convinces Irma to take the role of the dead Queen. He tells her he is impressed with her courage; he reassures Irma and the Chief of Police that the Queen's death can be overcome; and he praises the significance of living in "providential fixity" as an image, rather than simply dying an ordinary death. Being primarily life-bound, Irma does not think in these terms and at first wonders if she is dying: "Do you mean I'm at my last gasp?" Again, the Envoy has chosen a convoluted approach to his task, and again arouses impatience, at which point Irma suggests he clear out and "poke around for the Queen in the rubble."¹¹ In his response he appeals to her vanity, marking the turning point in his strategy.

"And even when alive she was less beautiful than you." Irma begins to compare herself with the Queen and, with some encouragement from the Envoy, considers the proposition seriously: "I'm hurrying, sir, I'm approaching my destiny as fast as I can." After a quick blast of machine-gun fire she announces, "My mind's made up. I presume I've been summoned from all eternity and that God will bless me."¹² Irma is prepared to

renounce her past life and, as she says good-bye to George, he threatens the plan by telling her he loves her. This is the only moment of tenderness from the Chief of Police in the whole play, and is contrived to prevent her rise to power over him. The Envoy successfully distracts him from this interference by conjuring up a magnificent image of the tomb the Chief of Police will inhabit once he wins his place in the nomenclature.

George once said to Irma, "I penetrate right into the reality that the game offers us. . . ." Irma herself is now about to be carried away in the game, making it a reality for her as well:

IRMA (hugging the Chief of Police to her): So I'll be real? My robe will be real? My lace, my jewels will be real? . . .

She is about to become Queen. The Envoy sends her off to her quarters to "embroider an interminable handkerchief" just as the first Queen once did. To truly become Queen, Irma must undergo some form of death and relinquish her function as "keeper of a bawdy-house"¹³ to become an image.

Irma's first appearance as Queen is made on the balcony of the brothel with the other members of the new establishment. Patrons of the brothel have been persuaded to replace the power figures who were killed. They appear in full regalia and the Queen is given a weak cheer by a single beggar. This appearance, coupled with the parade through the streets we will hear about but will not see, will bolster the confidence of the public and allow the establishment to continue its war against the rebels, unhampered by the deaths of its key power figures. At the same time, the appearances help lubricate the Chief of Police's way to success.

This event marks the admission of the Chief of Police into the

ranks of the establishment. He has been named Hero by the new power block. He appears slight of stature compared with the others because he is without cothurni and fancy regalia. But this preliminary acceptance places the Queen's support behind him as he ventures to fulfil his mission. His success is made more likely by both the increased status of his role and the restoration of public faith in the establishment. In this way the Queen's appearance advances the main action of the play.

There is another contingent occurrence during this scene which strikes a serious blow to the morale of the revolutionaries. The counter-symbol of the revolution, Chantal, is shot dead as she steps forward on the balcony. By this twist the new establishment, to be represented in battle by the Hero, will have even greater chance of success. And, although there has been negligible public response to their appearance on the balcony, the deception gives the imposters the edge they need. The Chief of Police does follow up by defeating the rebels.

It is Irma's adoption of the Queen's identity that has made all this possible. But has she achieved true character change? She can be said to have undergone symbolic death during her absence, since absence in Genet signifies a form of dramatic death; the actual change takes place offstage. Irma returns 'reborn' to the role of Queen. There is no dialogue, so the transformation remains visual. But if we examine the function of the Queen in this scene we discover that the requirements for true character change have not been met. The Queen's identifying function is to provide the illusion that the establishment is still intact. She has also named the Chief of Police 'Hero.' These are both the key identifying actions of Irma:

providing illusions and assigning roles. There has been no change in her own dramatic function and, therefore, no true character change. This is very evident in the following scene.

With the intention of propagating "true image born of false spectacle," the new establishment is in session for photographs which will later be distributed to the public. The Queen enters, in a preoccupied state. Before long she is asking after the Hero, speaking of her plans for his tomb and his desire for impersonation. She gets no sympathy from the others and is moved to defend his cause:

THE QUEEN (suddenly vibrant): Yet it was he who saved everything. He wants glory. He insists on breaking open the gates of legend, but he has allowed you to carry on with your ceremonies.

Her goal as Queen is identical with her goal as Irma: to see the Chief of Police become image, to see him entered into the pink handbook of the brothels. The other members of the group are not particularly supportive of the Queen's ambition for the Hero. The Bishop's implication that the new establishment's destiny may lie beyond this "make-believe" sparks a response from the Queen that clearly reflects her true identity:

THE QUEEN (very angrily): Veritable! And what about those? You mean that those you're wrapped and swathed in--my whole paraphernalia!--which come from my closets, aren't veritable?

The closets she refers to, of course, are those of the Balcony. At this point Irma has dropped all pretension to an identity other than that of a madame of a good whore house with a worthy collection of props and costumes. The argument with the Bishop is conveniently defused by the sudden entrance of the Hero. He comes in "quietly, humbly,"¹⁴ announces his victory over the rebels and sits down to wait. Thereafter the focus

is on him.

Although she wears the Queen's apparel for the remainder of the play, Irma's dialogue and action anchor her firmly to the identity of brothel-keeper. At one point, the Hero, in addressing her, refers to "your joint,"¹⁵ and she calls him George. After his entrance there is no further reference to her royal status. When a client requests to take the role of the Chief of Police, Irma returns with her jubilant "George!" falling into his arms with the good news. She watches the scenario through her apparatus, just as she did earlier in the play. When the customer grows unruly during the session, Irma shows the controlled displeasure that kept order in the first scenes. When Roger castrates himself in the Mausoleum Studio, she rushes away to clean up the carpets. Carmen calls her Irma and the Chief of Police follows suit when the moment comes for his evacuation from life.

As Irma implores the Chief of Police to stay with her rather than shut himself into his death chamber, she indirectly reveals that her motivation has been to get George. But she has exhausted her resources without achieving her objective. She will receive no share of the rewards of success. By helping George reach his goal she has lost him: he will go to his destiny alone, leaving her to return to life in the brothel. She seems unprepared for his abrupt withdrawal and cries out, "What about me? George. I'm alive! . . . But I still love you!" When this fails to deflect him from his course toward death she reminds him of her efforts: "But it was I who did everything, who organized everything. . . . Stay. . . ." ¹⁶

The Chief of Police exits.

Irma assimilates this development, recovers herself and pragmatically disperses the actors remaining on stage. She plunges into busywork in preparation for the next day's activities in the brothel. She will be more isolated than ever in the sham of her bawdy house now that George is gone, taking with him any further hope of change or fulfillment in a love relationship. She failed to transcend her function as an organizer of continuous rituals of death and rebirth enacted in her studios. Her attempted character change resulted in an extension of her role as provider of illusions. By making an appearance as Queen and appointing the Chief of Police Hero, her dramatic function was merely enlarged, not changed. Tomorrow the scenes will begin again, and Irma will again provide the props, the space, the actors:

IRMA: In a little while I'll have to start all over again. . .
 put all the lights on again. . . dress up. . . . (a cock crows)
 Dress up. . . ah, the disguises! Distribute roles again. . .
 assume my own.

Perhaps Irma takes the role of Queen only because it falls within her duty as a brothel-keeper to create the larger circumstances needed for the fulfillment of the Chief of Police's destiny. But she wanted to use the identity of Queen as a means to an end, rather than as an end in itself. She attempted character change as a means to a more satisfying life, not as a means to eternal life through death. Irma was never interested in dying and, in this sense, is the antithesis of character change. She is completely life-oriented, and wants a real relationship with George, while George is interested only in death and the "reality the game offers."¹⁷

In the last moments of The Balcony Irma turns to address the

audience: "You must now go home, where everything--you can be quite sure--will be falser than here. . . ." ¹⁸ As a necessary corollary of the image of eternity created by the Chief of Police's advancement to the illud tempus of the brothels, Irma's role is brought symbolically to an end. Her attempted character change had failed, and she had earlier dropped the Queen role when it was no longer needed to serve the destiny of the Chief of Police. Irma was, however, willing to sacrifice her identity to help him attain his goal, something we will see again with Leila in The Screens. Irma's is a male-dependent role and she undertakes the Queen's role as another form of attachment to George, and as a possible route to fulfillment in the other reality--the reality of the game.

Unlike Irma, the Chief of Police is entirely self-motivated, self-obsessed and emotionally detached from all humans, seeking the ultimate solitude of death. His desire for alienation and his callousness allow him to take the immoral route he does in order to merit impersonation. This characteristic of the Chief of Police's quest for glory, built on fear and killing, foreshadows a theme to be much more fully developed in The Screens: evil as good, criminal as saint. The Chief of Police is actually an anti-hero who wants to stop the revolution, not to save people from chaos or suffering or even to preserve a good system of government, but to enlarge his personal reputation. To kill for one's own glory is immoral, although in The Balcony this evil is given the protective shield of legitimate public function, since George is the head of the police department. This aspect of the Chief of Police's climb to the nomenclature is not emphasized and the theme of evil as good is only tentatively

put forward in this play. Fuller exploration is left to The Screens, where Said's character changes mark his progress into ever greater criminal acts. But the Chief of Police's changes do not escalate his criminal acts as Said's do; his changing dramatic identities move this character toward his eternal life in death, creating the plot with his destiny. Schema dominates The Balcony, and the Chief of Police's attempt to achieve stasis through character change is the plot.

NOTES

CHAPTER I

1. Genet, Jean, The Balcony, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove, 1958, 1960), p. 7.
2. Ibid., p. 17; p. 69; p. 80; p. 48; p. 52; p. 48.
3. Ibid., p. 82; p. 86. 4. Ibid., p. 84; pp. 87-88; pp. 90-91.
5. Cole, Theatrical Event, p. 61. 6. Genet, Balcony, p. 91; p. 92; Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 93; Ibid.; Ibid.; Ibid., p. 94. 8. Cole, p. 64.
9. Genet, Balcony, p. 40; Ibid., p. 61; p. 12; p. 84; p. 37; p. 31; p. 36; p. 50; p. 53.
10. Ibid., p. 61; p. 62; pp. 62-63; p. 64.
11. Ibid., p. 65; Ibid.; Ibid., pp. 65-66.
12. Ibid., p. 66; p. 67; p. 68.
13. Ibid., p. 50; p. 69; Ibid.; p. 37.
14. Ibid., p. 75; p. 76; p. 77; Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 78. 16. Ibid., p. 94. 17. Ibid., pp. 95-96,
18. Ibid., p. 96.

CHAPTER II

THE BLACKS: A CLOWN SHOW

The Blacks: A Clown Show is not as linear in construction as The Balcony and its themes are cast in a larger, more complex mold. Rather than focussing on the fate of a single individual, The Blacks deals with a clash between two races. Structurally, it is a play-within-a-play which is not broken up into separate scenes. With several addresses to the audience and frequent interruptions by the actors, Genet avoids any attempt to create the illusion of reality in this play. There is greater emphasis on abstraction in The Blacks than there was in the earlier play, and an alienating distance is imposed on the audience beginning with the commentator's opening speech, which in a way is a kind of ironic, inverted continuation of Irma's final words:

This evening we shall perform for you. But, in order that you may remain comfortable in your seats in the presence of the drama that is already unfolding here, in order that you be assured that there is no danger of such a drama's worming its way into your precious lives, we shall even have the decency--a decency learned from you--to make communication impossible. 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.

Genet is aggressive in his stance against realism in The Blacks. This is clearly expressed, again by Archibald, when he states the intention of this performance: "We're being observed by spectators. Sir, if you have any intention of presenting even the most trivial of their ideas without

caricaturing it, then get out! Beat it!"¹ The Blacks is "a clown show" with that medium's composites of humor, irony, cruelty and pathos. Always a useful cover when the subject matter is volatile, caricature allows Genet to present the depths of hatred and contempt that exist between blacks and whites in this imaginary confrontation between the races.

The subject matter of the script these actors are about to perform is this confrontation between the white race and the black. By the rape and murder of a white woman the blacks will earn the condemnation and revenge of the white Court, in whose presence they will re-enact the killing. But the strength of the white race is in a period of remission, and when they seek revenge they are overcome in battle and summarily shot. The blacks will now reign supreme as they take their turn at the top of fortune's wheel, not to be diminished by the fact that their reign promises to be a mere aping of white rule. The white Queen, resurrected after the execution, goes off with the Court in tow, promising the future regeneration of the white race. Eventually the cycle will complete its course and return the whites to power after ten thousand years.

Death and ritual leap out at the audience in the first moments of The Blacks. At centre stage is a catafalque covered with a white cloth around which a troupe of blacks dance a stately minuet to a Mozart air. They are dressed in attire of "fake elegance, the very height of bad taste,"² and place flowers on the catafalque as they dance and whistle. One barefoot dancer in a plain sweater contrasts with the rest. This is Newport News, the character in direct contact with the "real" world

offstage, and who represents reality. The stage is divided horizontally into three tiers. The Court, each member wearing a white mask, ceremoniously enters and takes its place on the highest of these levels. Genet specifies in a short introduction that this play is targeted at whites, who must either make up the audience or be represented by a white puppet. The white Court he places in judgement over the blacks below faces this white audience and serves as its surrogate--as a kind of reflection of the audience before it, which it purports to imitate and represent. The black actors are on the lowest level and the black woman, Felicity, the matriarch of her race, is on the middle platform. This stratified stage space is a visual indicator of the pecking order. At the end of the play the top level will also be used to represent a combined heaven and earth. The offstage is included in the dramatic space in The Blacks as it was in The Balcony, and represents reality, the real as opposed to the illusionary, as it did in the earlier play. In fact, the alleged purpose of this show is to divert the audience's attention from the real action proceeding offstage: a black organization is trying a black informer who is eventually shot for treason. News from the offstage is periodically relayed by Newport News, and at one point he reports that all the blacks of the world have united in revolt against the white race. But these events are of negligible dramatic interest because they are not represented on stage and are given no dramatic development. In this well-documented stage space is assembled a group of black actors to perform a ceremony of hatred and death.

The two characters to be examined in this play are Diouf and the Queen. Both are pivotal to the plot: the Queen is the leader of the judging

Court and it is she who leads the other members on their quest for revenge against the blacks; Diouf takes the role of Marie, the white woman who is ceremoniously raped and murdered. Since it is Diouf's first character change that precipitates the main action of the play, he will be the first character examined.

In "real life" Diouf is a cleric, and he brings to the gathering the mask and conciliatory aspirations of that vocation. The audience sees almost immediately that he is an outcast amongst his peers because he is overlooked in the introductions. Even when he calls attention to himself he is left unnamed. He is held in low regard because his perspective clashes with the objective of the group. Diouf is a black who is a pacifist, a compromiser who wants to ingratiate himself to the whites as he always has, and so maintain the status quo. He plays the devil's advocate, but the others remain dedicated to hatred and revolt. His first dramatic function, then, is to oppose the violence and hatred which the blacks are directing at the white race.

Diouf and his cohort, Village, have supplied the most important prop for tonight's ceremony, as Village explains: ". . . Besides, I'm tired. You forget that I'm already knocked out from the crime I had to finish off before you arrived since you need a fresh corpse for every performance." Diouf seizes this opportunity to question the need for a fresh corpse each time: "We could use the same corpse a number of times. Its presence is the thing that counts." The blacks are unimpressed with his logic and his enquiry is deflected by Archibald's evasive, feigned concern about the odor of

decomposing flesh which would be the result of following Diouf's plan. The mention of rotting flesh provokes Bobo to praise stench, particularly that which "rises from . . . African soil," and to belittle whites as "a pale and odorless race, race without animal odors, without the pestilence of . . . swamps." The blacks continue with a description of the night's violence, the result being copious reaction from the Court and tears from the Queen. Finally, the Judge calls for action: ". . . You promised us a re-enactment of the crime so as to deserve your condemnation. The Queen's waiting. Hurry up." There is yet another delay as Newport News brings word from the real trial proceeding offstage. As he is about to leave, Diouf asks whether he is sure he really wants to carry a gun. Archibald, the moderator, makes clear the blacks' non-negotiable position:

ARCHIBALD (to Diouf, violently): I repeat once again--you're wasting your time. We know your argument. You're going to urge us to be reasonable, to be conciliatory. But we're bent on being unreasonable, on being hostile. You'll speak of love. Go right ahead, since our speeches are set down in the script.

Despite this expression of the immutability of the blacks' stand, Diouf takes the floor to try to amend their view. Archibald pledges to ignore whatever Diouf says; but the cleric speaks, undaunted, of harmony, balance and love. He repeats that they do not need a fresh corpse for every performance--this involves them in hatred and he thinks they need a rite of love:

DIOUF (with an appeasing gesture of his hand): May I explain? I should indeed like the performance to re-establish in our souls a balance that our plight perpetuates, but I should like it to unfold so harmoniously that they (pointing to the audience) see only the beauty of it, and I would like them to recognize in us that beauty which disposes them to love.

His focus is on pleasing whites rather than on equality of the races. What Diouf does not seem to grasp is that blacks have catered to whites for generations, and that their status has not improved. Revolution is required to change this pattern, but Diouf is asking them to submit once more to trying to be white in spirit, since they can never be white in body. However, he admits he has been assimilated to such a degree that he cannot change:

DIOUF (to Archibald): Sir, I apologize. I'd like to glorify my colour, just as you do. The kindness of the whites settles 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 on my left. And, at times, when I opened my hands, I would find their charity nestling there. In my negro solitude, I feel the need, just as you do, to glorify my exquisite savageness, but I am too old and I think . . .

BOBO: Who's asking you to? What we need is hatred. Our ideas will spring from hatred.

DIOUF (ironically): You're a technician Bobo, but it's not easy to cast off a quality of meekness that the heart desires. I've suffered too much shame not to want to befoul their beauteous souls, but. . .

Diouf is a beaten man. He is not committed to the black cause, does not want to participate in this ritual of hatred, and asks to leave: "It was wrong of me to have come this evening. Please let me go."³ He has opposed the ideology of the group, but without success. The rite will be performed as planned. The price he must pay for his opposition is being cast in the role of Marie, the white female victim. The way in which Archibald earlier refused this part made it clear that the role is not a favored one. Diouf's first dramatic function was ineffective and will now be changed.

The required props for his new identity are brought forward and he gives the opening declaration after Felicity's directive:

DIOUF (facing the audience): I, Samba Graham Diouf, born in the

swamps of Ubangi Chari, sadly bid you farewell. I am not afraid.
Open the door and I shall enter. I shall descend to the death
you are preparing for me.

Diouf's transition from his first role to the dramatic persona of Marie adheres to Rosenberg's schema for character change: the identifying action of Diouf ends and the function of the white woman victim is taken up; the process is treated as a ritualistic death and rebirth. The company sings him a lullaby as he dies. Death, as in The Balcony, is not organic death, but a modified state of existence that is included in dramatic life. From it, Diouf will go on to a new phase of life:

DIOUF: Your song was very beautiful, and your sadness does me honor.
I'm going to start life in a new world. If I ever return, I'll
tell you what it's like there. Great black country, I bid thee
farewell.

After this speech, "the actors ceremoniously bring the wig, mask and gloves, with which they bedeck Diouf. Thus adorned, he takes the knitting,"⁴ and the character change is complete. The white smiling mask gives Marie a strong visual presence, and Diouf's old identifying action dissolves in favor of the new: to take the role of sacrificial victim.

This metaphorical death and rebirth is different from what we have seen in The Balcony because it occurs in full view of the audience, with overt reference in the dialogue to the death of one identity and the rebirth of another. The character change is better integrated and more concrete. Once the identity of Diouf is replaced by the new identity, Marie, there is no further dissension and the ceremony can progress unimpeded. Just as Irma's adoption of the Queen's role was necessary before the Chief of Police could defeat the rebellion, so Diouf's character change is the catalyst for

the crime to be re-enacted in The Blacks. Marie is the critical living prop, the white woman to be destroyed; the blacks will be condemned for her murder.

Suddenly Marie gives birth to five large dolls representing members of the Court:

BOBO: You'd better lie down so that it doesn't hurt too much. (She listens to the Mask, who makes no answer.) Your pride? . . . All right. Remain standing. (She kneels and puts her hand under the Mask's skirt, from where she takes out a doll about two feet long representing the Governor.)
THE GOVERNOR (to the Court): I'm entering the world! With boots on, decorated. . .

Bobo pulls out dolls representing the Valet, the Judge, the Missionary, and finally, the Queen:

THE QUEEN (re-entering just as the doll emerges): I'd like to see myself come out of there. . . There I come! My mother spawned me standing up! (Exit.)
(The Negroes have hung up the dolls. . . under the Court's balcony. They gaze at them and then resume their recital.)⁵

Marie, by producing a new iconic generation of the white hierarchy, becomes the symbolic mother of the white race. It is ironic and appropriate--the governed create the governors--that a black male in the role of a white woman gives birth to emblems of the white hierarchy which represent the regenerative power of the white race. The murder of Marie kills the "power" of the blacks to create their conquerors. This inversion of the death/rebirth cycle also serves to reinforce Marie's womanly role, making her murder that much more a heinous crime.

After the birth interlude, Marie is abruptly ordered to continue her progress toward death. This episode evolves into a kind of verbal foreplay with sadistic overtones which Village uses to excite himself for the kill:

VILLAGE (to the mask): And now, let's continue. Go on, Madame. . .
 (The Mask starts walking very slowly toward the right screen.)
 Walk! This evening you have the noblest gait in the realm. (to the audience): As you see, the husband arrived too late. He'll find only his wife's corpse, disembowelled but still warm. (to the Mask, who had stopped but who starts walking again): It's no longer a Negro trailing at your skirt; it's just a marketful of slaves, all sticking out their tongues. Just because you've kindly given me a drop of rum you think . . . eh, you bitch! Pull me toward your lace . . . (They both move toward the screen, very slowly, the Mask in front of Village.) . . . Underneath you're surely wearing some sort of black petticoat that's silkier than my gaze Walk faster, I'm in a hurry. . . . You know the door of your room. Open it. How gracefully you walk, oh noble and familiar rump!⁶

The references to slavery incite anger and bring into play the historical reasons for this murder. Ironically, Village approaches Marie as a tantalizing sexual object whose erotic appeal is enhanced by the taboo of racial mixing, the inverse of a predominating attitude of whites toward blacks. While the events on stage build to a climax of encouragement for Village, the white Queen is offstage weeping over the fate of her favorite saint, Joan of Arc. The approaching martyrdom of Marie disturbs her and she cannot bear to witness the act. On stage there is soft hand-clapping and stamping of feet to create tension and a quality of urgency which builds until Felicity suddenly rises from her throne and begins to speak.

The action stops. The white-gloved hand of Marie, who is otherwise concealed behind a screen, rests on Village's shoulder. Felicity calls the spirits of blacks, the living and the dead, from all points of the globe. In this evocation of black consciousness she alludes to the origin of all blacks, summoning them from the illud tempus where the black African presence dwells:

FELICITY: . . . Are you there, Africa with the bulging chest and oblong thigh? Sulking Africa, wrought of iron, in the fire, Africa of the millions of royal slaves, deported Africa, drifting continent, are you there? Slowly you vanish, withdraw into the past, into the tales of castaways, colonial museums, the works of scholars, but I call you back this evening to attend a secret revel. . . It's a black 'of darkness, compact and evil. . .⁷

By calling forth the spiritual force of blacks to witness this murder, she makes the rape and murder a single, symbolic act for all blacks against all whites. The crime is being committed on behalf of the black race, and the presence of the black spiritual force will bring additional power and meaning to the ritual.

To the accompaniment of a chant sung to the melody of the Dies Irae, the Latin hymn sung in the Mass for the Dead, the white-gloved hand draws Village behind the screen. His disappearance marks the end of Marie's dramatic function as sacrificial lamb. The white Court now has what it needs to judge and condemn the blacks for murder. But before the Court launches its vendetta against the murderers, Diouf undergoes a second character change.

The Court enters in procession, accompanied by the tune of a solemn march, to reassemble on their balcony. The Queen is leading Diouf, who is still in the mask and costume of Marie. The first spoken lines following the entrance precisely reflect the character change that has occurred:

THE QUEEN: This is the woman whom we must go down and avenge.
SNOW: Diouf has arrived!⁸

The two identities of Diouf and Marie have merged into one. Each identity remains recognizable: the whites see her as Marie, the blacks see him as

Diouf. The merger is a true union of opposites in that he is both male and female, white and black, dead and alive. The death of Marie behind the screen has been followed by the rebirth of a new identity with a new, double, dramatic action: to be the white martyr who will be avenged by the Court, and to report to the blacks, as Diouf promised he would before his first character change, on the experience of being "up there" with the whites.

After the Court has gone down to seek justice, Diouf looks over the railing at the Negroes below:

BOBO: You! You, Mr. Diouf?

(The Negroes all raise their heads and look at Diouf, who, still masked, nods "yes.")

Mr. Diouf, you're living a curious death. What's it like there?

.
DIOUF (hesitating): I see you--sorry--I see us as follows: I'm on high and not on the ground. And I am perhaps experiencing the vision of God.

What greater reward could the black cleric hope for than to be made a white saint? He has achieved the black/white duality he envisioned at the beginning of the play when he suggested a compromise host: black on one side, white on the other, or grey throughout. Compromiser and pacifist that he is, he has reached the pinnacle of his aspirations as a black accepted by the white community as being white, and, at the same time, being a Negro in white heaven. He is completely taken with the harmony of living death and tells the blacks that their hatred of whites does not penetrate the upper level. He says the whites "are able to perform true dramas and believe in them," while the illusion has become real to Diouf as well, or at least preferable to reality. Diouf's life after

death meets all his ideals of assimilation and he has no desire to end it. He resists leaving this white heaven until Archibald promises him the role of "the Worthy Mother of the heroes"⁹ in future ceremonies. He is lured from the balcony to perform his final function, the burying of the corpses of the dead Court. Diouf does not make another appearance.

Diouf's character changes are essential to the development of the plot, for without Marie there would be no murder, no judgement, no condemnation and no retaliation to merit revolt. Diouf is a caricature of the docile black who submits without protest to white domination. One of the black actors says to him near the end of the performance: "If they've [the whites] turned you into the image they want to have of us, then stay with them. You'd be a burden to us."¹⁰ Blacks who side with whites as Diouf has done by allowing himself to be assimilated will be killed along with the whites. There will be no more compromises. The white race will be systematically slaughtered. Murder is the way to victory and crime will be the salvation of the blacks. But all in The Blacks is symbolic, and the characters are all playing roles. The identities Diouf has at the beginning of the play and then for the ceremony are formalized roles in a non-realistic drama. In a ritual of death and rebirth Diouf does undergo true character change.

Through the Queen's dramatic role is expressed the idea that all living things, including races and civilizations, are part of an eternal cycle of death and regeneration. This Queen not only rules, but embodies in her person the whole cultural heritage of the white race, from Greek

times until the present. She draws inspiration and strength from this rich cultural background as she tries to withstand consecutive attacks by the primitive blacks. She is a lethargic figurehead symbolizing the declining white race; although the power she wields is weak, she is still obeyed and treated with deference.

With her Court, she forms part of the white audience watching the ceremony on the stage below. The Negroes who play the members of the Court, with the exception of the Valet, wear elaborate vestments in their roles of Queen, Governor, Judge and Missionary. It is revealed early in the play that they have come to die, as the Governor explains: ". . . And we know that we've come to attend our own funeral rites. They think they're compelling us, but it is owing to our good breeding that we shall descend to death. Our suicide."¹¹ To accomplish this, it is necessary for the blacks to stage the rape and murder of the white woman so that the Court can, in turn, condemn the crime and seek revenge. When they challenge the blacks, they will be shot. It is the Queen who leads them to this fate.

At first impression she seems vacuous, with her insipid curiosity about the proposed murder. Her capricious attitude and languid demeanor make her a caricature of royalty. She has few personal resources to help her rule, and she relies on her Court to prop her up. The Missionary tries to bolster her spirit by the reminder that God is on their side: "Have confidence, Majesty, God is white. . . .--would he have allowed the Miracle of Greece? For two thousand years God has been white. He eats on a white tablecloth. He wipes his white mouth with a white napkin. He picks at white meat with a white fork." This encouragement does not give

the Queen the spark she needs. She is incapable of rallying, and lapses into a deep sleep from which she cannot be roused. The Court refers to this dozing as "hatching. Hatching what? Celtic remains and stained-glass windows of Chartres,"¹² thereby placing her in direct connection with monumental achievements of the white race. While she is in this state of trance, her voice is taken over by Virtue, the black actress who is Village's lover. The Queen wakes, but remains in a dazed state. She is like one of the living dead, listening, then speaking in unison with Virtue as one possessed.

Virtue takes her on a poetic journey through images associated with the white experience, but in mid-stream Virtue suddenly switches to imagery of flesh, darkness, sexuality. The Queen then begins to speak in unison with Virtue, travelling with her through references to black suffering and the chains of slavery. But when Virtue says, "I love you" to Village, the Queen is jolted to herself, and is suddenly wide awake: "That'll do! Silence them, they've stolen my voice! Help! . . ." The Queen does not want to be subjected to the black experience in any form, even imaginative. It is preferable to die. Her call for help is answered by a powerful speech from Felicity, matriarch of the black race. Felicity makes a dramatic appeal to "Negroes from all corners of the earth" to bring her strength, sending the Queen into a swoon from which she does not recover until after the birth of the dolls. The Court believes her to be near death. She calls on the "angel of the flaming sword, virgins of the Parthenon, stained-glass windows of Chartres, Lord Byron, French cooking . . ." to rescue her, and she says in a dying voice that her blood is ebbing away. The Missionary

asks her to "put a good face on it,"¹³ since their death is planned in every detail. They must go through each step as it has been set down in the script.

Although she is with the Court as the blacks prepare for the ceremony and transform Diouf into Marie, the Queen¹ is virtually silent. In the midst of the seduction scene that is part of the ritual, Marie is instructed to play an imaginary Strauss melody on an invisible piano, which she does. This rouses the Queen to a simpering compliment, the only dialogue she has before her exit. A cutting remark is made in reference to the martyrdom of Joan of Arc, the Queen's favorite saint, and she leaves "hiding her face and crying her heart out."¹⁴ She has regained her self-control when she makes a brief appearance for the birth of the dolls. After that event, she is absent until the Court reconvenes on the balcony with the murdered Marie.

Her first absence from the set can be seen as a form of dramatic death, and the birth of the Queen doll is blatantly symbolic of the rebirth of the Queen. Technically, she has undergone the death/rebirth process which may result in character change. However, when she reappears after Marie's death, she is visually identical with her earlier self. What is changed about the Queen is her approach to leadership: she is assertive and energetic, articulate and clear-thinking. She undertakes to avenge the murder, participating with an immediacy and responsiveness that was totally lacking in the earlier Queen. She is prepared to act, and she leads the Court off into the heart of Africa with "cloak and boots, a pound of cherries"¹⁵ and her horse. She is still the leader, the governing

authority. Therefore her dramatic function is the same; it is her approach to her function that has changed. In spite of having undergone a clear form of dramatic death and rebirth, the Queen cannot properly be said to have achieved true character change. Although her rule was weak at the outset, it was functioning and it was obeyed. She is now revitalized, but she is not a new dramatic identity. It is as though the birth of the Queen doll freed her from lethargy.

When the Court arrives in the jungle of the stage floor, they are all reeling drunk. This is important because, in their inebriated state, they reveal their arrogance and racism as white colonists visiting their African possessions, making them contemptible and foolish. The hunt is a facetious game until the blacks organize the court of justice at dawn. The Negroes are exaggeratedly debased as the trial gets under way, but in the midst of this militant nonsense, the Judge clearly articulates the seriousness of the crime the blacks have committed: "No, one can't hold all of Africa responsible for the death of a white woman. Nevertheless, there's no denying the fact that one of you is guilty, and we've made the journey for the purposes of bringing him to trial. According to our statutes--naturally. He killed out of hatred. Hatred of the color white. That was tantamount to killing our entire race and killing us till doomsday."¹⁶ In a characteristic act of Christian forgiveness, the Queen is willing to grant the murderer pardon and absolution. This would defeat the purpose of their symbolic act, and the Queen's suggestion brings Felicity out in full force, calling upon all blacks to back her in claiming credit for the crime. This is a crime of all Africans against all whites. The blacks do

not want forgiveness. They want the political intention behind the white woman's murder to stand as the ultimatum it was designed to be.

This cry brings about the confrontation between Felicity and the Queen that is the apex of the Queen's role. The two matriarchs arrange themselves opposite each other on either side of the stage, the Court behind the Queen and the Negroes behind Felicity. The women fight it out face to face, each representing her race. This is a battle of wits, and the friendly ambience that develops during the ritual does not alter the serious nature of this encounter: it is the pivotal confrontation between the races that will tip the balance of power into the hands of the blacks.

At the beginning the Queen is confident there can be no true defeat of the white race because eternity is on its side. They engage in polite, slightly hostile banter on esoteric subjects. Then Felicity speaks lovingly of her crime and the Queen counters the implication that the black rituals will be the death of the whites. The Queen stands up well in the initial sparring, but falters when Felicity abruptly changes the timbre of the exchange with, "We'd let a fart and blow you out." The Queen is angered and disarmed by this vulgarity and her response reveals her racism and profound disrespect for human life: "I'm going to have you exterminated." However, once the Queen has been thrown off guard she is unable to recover her ground. She rapidly sinks into subjective and personal comparisons between the two women based on feminine conquests of the past and on physical attraction. It emerges that Felicity is the stronger, more resourceful of the two and cannot be shamed by traditional racist attitudes cast at her by the Queen. In fact, she embraces the insults and transforms

them to glory as is the custom in Genet's world. The Queen is reliant on the Court for assistance and advice. As the dispute progresses, they yield less and less until Felicity says the white race is "bogged down in weariness and time," to which the Queen asks of the Court, "What should I answer?"¹⁷ The battle is lost.

After this defeat the Queen does make one more attempt to discourage the blacks from assuming power by citing the trouble it is to rule. The triumphant Felicity speaks metaphorically of the black race's potential for growth: "And you, think of the mosquitoes in our swamps. If they stung me, a grown Negro, fully armed, would spring from each abcess. . ."¹⁸ No longer involved in conflict, she quietly describes the new beginning, the beginning of a black mythology based on black experience, origins and beliefs--one closely bound to the natural world and their African heritage.

Felicity's promise of a flourishing black race brings the Queen to tears. The Court grows indignant and the Judge tries to bring back the trial by demanding a guilty party for the purpose of satisfying justice. But there is an interruption in the ritual as Newport News brings a report on the progress of the real trial happening offstage, and when the play-within-a-play is resumed the players want to hurry it to its conclusion. In one of her last gestures of leadership, the Queen explains to the blacks that their victory is not as complete as they might think: "You haven't realized that we're heading for death. We're going to it voluntarily with a sneaking happiness." As is always the case in Genet, the victim has the ability to modify or rob the victor by choosing his defeat:

THE QUEEN: We choose to die so as to deprive you of pride of triumph.

Unless you're going to boast about having conquered a people of shadows.

FELICITY: We'll always be able. . .

THE QUEEN (with great authority): Be quiet. It's for me to speak and give my orders.

.
THE QUEEN (to the Valet): At least say to them that without us their revolt would be meaningless--and wouldn't even exist. . .

She is firm in her role as imperial leader of the white race despite her recent humiliation. After her attempt to disclaim any true victory on the part of the Negroes, she commands the Governor to "lead off!"¹⁹ Before he is shot, he prophesies that he will transcend death. One after the other the members of the Court are shot, their bodies forming a heap on the stage.

The Queen can be said to undergo the formula for character change again here, because she is executed and begins a new existence. Although she continues to speak throughout her lyrical slaying, she immediately refers to her life as Queen in the past tense: ". . . It was easy for you to transform us into allegory, but I had to live and suffer to become that image. . . and I have even loved. . .loved. . . How I have loved! And now, I die--I must confess--choked by my desire for a Big Black Buck. Black nakedness, thou hast conquered me." It is obvious that she would like her new existence to be more flamboyant and vital than her reign as Queen. Although she refused to admit defeat in connection with the battle with Felicity, she accepts being conquered sexually and seems to anticipate some contact with the "terrific fuckers" referred to at the beginning of The Blacks. Again, through a form of dramatic death, she becomes recharged, energetic as a leader. She herds her flock off to eternity with a parting

promise of the regeneration of the white race:

THE QUEEN (turning to the Negroes): Farewell, and good luck to you. Decent girl that I am, I hope all goes well for you. As for us, we've lived a long time. We're going to rest at last. (Felicity makes a gesture of impatience.) We're going, we're going, but keep in mind that we shall lie torpid in the earth like larvae or moles, and if some day. . . ten thousand years hence. . .²⁰

As was the case with her earlier exposure to the requisite death/rebirth process for character change, the Queen's dramatic function here is still the same: she is the leader of her race in death as she was in life. The Queen does not achieve character change.

As in The Balcony, we have one male who experiences two character changes and a female who is subjected to a symbolic form of death and rebirth but does not achieve character change. Perhaps it is impossible for females to achieve true character change in Genet's plays. Through Marie, females get as close as they ever will to character change in these plays. But Marie is a dramatic hybrid, a woman's role taken by a man, so it remains that no female experiences character change.

Character change in The Blacks is as decisive a structural element as it was in the first play. But in The Balcony the main action is character change, the Chief of Police's changes are the spine of the plot. With Diouf it is more accurate to say his changes allow the events of the play to unfold, contributing elements in a larger whole. Roles and identities proliferate in this play-within-a-play, but the characterization in The Blacks is abstract and one-dimensional. Such characters can be easily manipulated through schematic identity changes with the barest, if

any, reference to motivation, organic development or natural behaviour.

The abstract quality of the drama is heightened and reinforced by the poetic language, through which Genet pontificates on his favored themes of evil, judgement, condemnation and death. He does truly succeed, in The Blacks, in making the characters "metaphors of what they were to represent."²¹

NOTESCHAPTER II

1. Genet, Jean, The Blacks: A Clown Show, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove, 1960), p. 12; p. 33.
2. Ibid., p. 8.
3. Ibid., p. 19; pp. 19-20; p. 20; Ibid.; p. 25; p. 29; p. 31; pp. 32-33; p. 51.
4. Ibid., p. 54; p. 55; Ibid. 5. Ibid., p. 72; p. 73. 6. Ibid., pp. 73-74.
7. Ibid., p. 77. 8. Ibid., p. 86. 9. Ibid., pp. 88-89; p. 90; p. 124.
10. Ibid., pp. 113-114. 11. Ibid., p. 13. 12. Ibid., pp. 23-24; p. 43.
13. Ibid., p. 46; Ibid.; p. 47; Ibid. 14. Ibid., p. 72. 15. Ibid., p. 87.
16. Ibid., p. 98. 17. Ibid., p. 104; Ibid.; p. 105. 18. Ibid., p. 108.
19. Ibid., p. 116; Ibid.; p. 122; p. 117.
20. Ibid., p. 124; p. 80; p. 126.
21. This quotation taken from Genet was cited in the Introduction of the thesis on page 5.

CHAPTER III

THE SCREENS

The Screens, Genet's longest and most ambitious play, has seventeen scenes and over fifty characters. It takes place in Algeria during the French-Algerian war (1954-1962) and is the story of Said, a poor Algerian peasant who becomes a folk hero through acts of theft and betrayal. The play is unique in Genet's work because this anti-hero comes to know his destiny gradually. The Chief of Police and Diouf move toward a destiny that is predetermined and are involved in rituals whose outcome is known in advance. At the beginning of The Screens Said merely wants to improve his situation by getting a better wife--neither the main character nor the audience knows what path his destiny will take. This grants an element of suspense to the play which is absent from the more obviously schematic and predictable plots of the two earlier games. His final destiny is to be one we have not yet seen: Said, like Genet himself, makes total alienation his goal and regards the attainment of nothingness as a supreme human achievement.

In the opening scene we see Said and his mother on their way to the village of Said's future bride, Leila. Because of severe poverty he must marry the most ugly woman in the vicinity, and because of this unfortunate union he becomes the object of ridicule and rejection in his community. He decides to work for the money he needs to purchase a

better woman, but eventually steals it instead. He is caught and jailed, and thus begins his awakening--he discovers the pleasure of distinction that results from being a thief. Stealing becomes his vocation and it becomes his ambition to excel as a thief. He is dependent on the system he defies for recognition of his crime through condemnation and punishment. He grows more and more interested in "becoming someone"¹ through infamous acts.

In the course of the play, the Algerians begin an insurrection against French colonial rule, and it is this development that gives Said the golden opportunity to prove himself a despicable character. He betrays his own countrymen after poisoning their water supply. In the end he is sought by the Algerians as well as the French, despised by all but his immediate family and the village elder, Ommu. His reputation flourishes, and when he is finally caught, he rejects all sides with the epithet, "To all of you, I say shit!"² He walks away in an act of defiance and is shot. He transcends the realm of the living dead to become legend.

The characters from The Screens to be analysed are Said and Warda, Said because he is the principal character, and Warda because her development forms an opposite parallel to Said's.

Said achieves his destiny in three phases, each linked to a character change, though these changes are not as transparently schematic in The Screens as those in The Balcony and The Blacks. Said's character changes result from his dramatic experience and a developing desire to alter his destiny. He is an evolving dramatic character who chooses to change his

identity as he works his way toward his chosen fate.

As Said and his mother make their way to the village of his betrothed, Said is dejected at the prospect of marrying "the ugliest woman in the next town and all the towns around."³ His mother thinks it is comical, implying that the way to deal with it is to treat his wife as an ugly woman by vomiting on her. The Screens is steeped in references to the effluence of various body orifices as part of Genet's relentless portrayal of the poverty, ignorance and repression of this environment. The brightly colored clothing of Said and his mother, which seems to have been gathered from eclectic sources, stands out against their barren surroundings as they engage in an animated fantasy that sustains them on their journey. They refer to the wonderful gifts they are taking the bride in the valise, but later laugh when the suitcase falls open and is revealed to be empty. To relieve his depression, Said asks his mother to dance for him. Her energetic and sensuous dance is a celebration of life shared by mother and son. He shows a rapturous appreciation of her with his praise of her tits, belly and her beauty. There is a fierce bond between them and it will be a formidable task for Said's new wife to make a place for herself in this nexus.

In the first domestic scene we see after the marriage, Leila, whose ugly face is perpetually covered with a black hood, makes sexual advances to a pair of pants in an attempt to overcome her loneliness. The mother is merciless in her cruelty toward Leila, but in a poignant moment of honesty between the two women, Leila puts Said in his place: "At night, you think I marry Said who hasn't a penny? And who's not good-looking? And whom no woman ever looks at? What woman has ever turned around to look at Said?"

Yet it is this same unattractive man who is less and less able to withstand the humiliation of being married to Leila. He tortures her with accounts of the daily suffering brought upon him by her ugly face:

SAID: I had to receive the ugliest one, and that would be nothing compared to my misfortune, but the cheapest one, and now I have to get into a fight every afternoon with the other farm hands who kid the shirt off me. And when I get home after a day's work, instead of comforting me, you purposely make yourself uglier by crying.⁴

He does not want to be an outcast because of Leila and devises a plan for escape: he will cross the sea to France to make money to buy a better wife. This is the first indication of Said's potential to overcome the circumstances of his poverty. The interesting thing is that he is doing this to gain social acceptance. It is only later that he comes to relish being an outsider.

Said's arrival at this plan is the result of a growing awareness. He admits his dissatisfaction with the situation and then realizes that he can change it. This is by far the most natural character development we have seen in Genet, with Said presented as a character who changes and develops with time and experience. But his true destiny is still unknown to him.

Later, in a scene in which Said is not present, it is revealed that his first sum of money towards his goal was stolen from a fellow worker's vest. He was apprehended, returned some of the money, but was jailed for the offense. Before Said is even released from prison, his mother is enjoying the distinction of her son's theft and is protecting his guilt from forgiveness. She has already absorbed some of his guilt and speaks

of dazzling the local women with her shame. And so Genet's induction of the idea that immoral acts are desirable is accomplished.

When Said is released, something is different about the dynamics of the family. In contrast with the earlier scenes, the mother is decent toward Leila and the group is relaxed and humorous. It is as though Said's crime has mysteriously drawn them together. It is a new thing for Said to be short with his mother and to address his wife as a human being:

THE MOTHER (stopping in order to examine Said): It's really true that you've changed.

SAID: It's the lack of air.

They start walking again in silence.

SAID (to Leila): Leila.

LEILA (she stops): Yes, Said.

SAID: Take off your veil so I can look at you.⁵

In this brief scene we are informed that he has changed in some discernible way without being given more than that. He says he will now go to work in the phosphate mines, but the next time he appears he is on trial for theft.

The trial scene gives clear evidence of Said's character change. Said faces a dilemma because the Cadi refuses to judge him. Said begs for his sentence, knowing his identity as thief is dependent on the recognition of his crime through judgement and punishment. He will not be "taken seriously" as a thief if he is allowed to go free. His reputation would suffer and he would be prevented from attaining his destiny. He needs the Cadi's sentence to validate his thefts:

THE CADI: Said, I could play a dirty trick on you: I could acquit you of each of your crimes. I'd deliver sentence in the name of God and the people. . . . You're asking me to do a grave thing. . . . You steal often. I spend my time sending you to jail. . . . Nothing's sacred to you. . . .

SAID: You'd be killing me.⁶

Said's dramatic action has changed from trying to get money to buy a better wife to stealing for the sake of it, without remorse. Since he has also undergone a form of death and rebirth, it is clear he has experienced true character change. As was the case with the Chief of Police in The Balcony, ineffectuality is changed to effectiveness. Said's character change occurred during his absence in prison. The enforced absence of prison can be seen as a symbolic form of death, and when he reappears he has been 'reborn' a new dramatic identity. Although his physical appearance is the same, his old identifying action is dropped and he never again takes up his early attempt to socially integrate himself by purchasing a more handsome wife. Said's dramatic death and rebirth is purely symbolic and is more subtly handled than in the earlier plays. The change in his identifying action arises from the changing needs of the character. The schematic quality of Diouf's and the Chief of Police's character changes has been replaced by the more organic development of character awareness leading to change. The formula of character change as a kind of death/rebirth is still there, but the emphasis is on the change in identifying function that results rather than on the formula itself. It is perfectly clear with this scene with the Cadi that Said is fully engaged in building a reputation as a criminal. Said now wants to increase his alienation through anti-social acts rather than to find acceptance in the community.

The Cadi evidently does not refuse Said his punishment, because the next time we see him he is again in jail. His wife has now also begun to steal in order to contribute to their shame, and has even been given jail sentences. She has sided with her husband and to her the project is a

"great adventure."⁷

The dramatic climax of their relationship occurs when they are imprisoned in the same jail, but in different cells. They are able to speak through the partitions, and their dialogue reveals that they are now conspirators in crime. Leila has become so adept at crime that Said asks her for guidance. He is moving toward a climax in second dramatic identity and must find his destination through more acts of crime; he is not yet fulfilled in evil, and he needs her help to discover the way. In this scene their relationship peaks in a bizarre inversion of a love song filled with ecstatic references to filth, decay and stench:

LEILA (in a guttural tone, and talking like a pitchman trying to gather a crowd at a fair): . . . And who still hasn't seen Said flipping and flopping when the cops get to work on him! And drooling blood and bleeding snot and oozing from every hole. . . .

SAID (same tone): And my wife, who hasn't seen her running away? . . . --running from under the stones, and when they fling bags of guess what. . . .

Each tries to scream more loudly than the other.

LEILA: . . . my man around the jackets. . .

SAID: . . . She runs head down, her hands and legs writhing. . .

LEILA: . . . prowling, crawling on all fours in the grass, his belly scraping up everything. . .

SAID: The woman the birds in the sky shitting on her. . . . One sure thing, it's nice and sheltered here for squabbling with Leila.⁸

They share this vision of depravity and are jointly committed to the achievement of even greater debasement. When Leila tells Said she can now panhandle he is delighted with her, and finally the guard tells the "lovebirds" to sleep. This imprisonment and this sleep represent a symbolic death from which Said will emerge with a new identifying action.

The insurrection which has begun while Said and Leila are in prison is a perfect vehicle for the further refinement of his talent for

evil. The rise of the Arab peasants against the French is keyed into action by an eloquent elder of the village, Kadidja. She urges the Arabs to "merit the world's contempt" through crime, taking the crimes of the very gods as their own if they are unable to invent enough. In doing this she shifts the frame of reference from that of a racial uprising to the act of creating a mythology--a mythology of evil.

KADIDJA: Said, Leila, my loved ones! You, too, in the evening related the days' evil to each other. You realized that in evil lay the only hope. Evil, wonderful evil, you who remain when all goes to pot, miraculous evil, you're going to help us. I beg of you, evil. . . impregnate my people. . .

Kadidja is a powerful woman and it is she who "organized the rebellion, drew the men into it, and died for freedom."⁹ Her praise of Said's and Leila's evil, therefore, is significant. They are considered to be worthy models to imitate in the formation of a new mythology. It is to be the revolution instigated by Kadidja that gives Said the scope he needs for further exploration of his evil. When he is released from prison he knows he will betray the Arabs, but is not yet sure what form his action will take.

It is ironic that Said must rely on Leila for the discovery of the new action that will enlarge his reputation as a "complete louse." Leila must ask her guiding spirit, her dragon, what act of betrayal Said should perform:

SAID: Has he come?

LEILA: He's drawing near.

SAID: Already! (A pause.) Ask him. . . (He hesitates.) . . . ask him what I can say, what I can sell out on, so as to be a complete louse.

Despite his reliance upon his wife for the attainment of his goal, it

becomes clear that the final glory is to be his alone. He sees Leila as a part of himself rather than as an autonomous person:

LEILA: I'm tired from walking, the sun, the dust. . . . Where are we going, Said, where are we going?

SAID (turning around and looking at her straight in the eye): Where am I going?

LEILA: Where are we going Said?

SAID: Where I'm going, me, and me alone, since you're my misfortune and nothing but. . . . Well, I'm going, and it must be far away, to the land of the monster. Even it's where there'll never be sun, since I'm carrying you and dragging you along you're my shadow. . . . If I succeed, later on they'll be able to say. . . . --"Compared to Said, it's a cinch!" I'm telling you, I'm on my way to becoming someone. Are you coming?¹⁰

She accepts his terms, continues to help him achieve his destiny, and is finally absorbed into the identity of Said.

The audience does not witness the traitorous acts through which Said's identifying function changes from theft to betrayal. Dialogue between other characters indirectly reveals his treachery:

THE LIEUTENANT: To say nothing of the fact that that maddening Said, who still can't be found, keeps getting worse and worse. A traitor. . .

THE GENERAL: It's thanks to his treason that our men. . . managed to capture the rock where we are.

THE LIEUTENANT: And the more disgusting and repulsive he is. . .

His infamy grows, he is more and more loathed as he excels in crime. He has also betrayed his own people in a particularly insidious way:

OMMU (an Arab woman about sixty): Green, pale green, a kind of green glass powder, a green bottle broken and ground; that was it. A packet of it in each well. . . .

HAMED: What about the donkeys? . . . And the sheep?

OMMU: If they don't like arsenic, they can croak. . .

HAMED: There're three disemboweled goats in the Kaddur. . . They're black with flies. . . . we may have been betrayed, and in all probability by Said. . .¹¹

These acts firmly establish that Said is no longer engaged in theft. Once he is released from prison after his last detention, his actions reveal he has again undergone character change: the temporary absence that represents a form of death has again caused his old identifying action to be dissolved and for another, new action to take its place. He is symbolically reborn as a traitor, and he totally abandons theft as the means to his end. That identifying action ended successfully and was no longer useful to him. As before, the change does not affect his physical appearance, and results from his developing need to reach his destiny as image.

Said's reputation has been swelling since his success as a thief, but his new activity arouses both admiration and outrage. Ommu praises him: "And as for Said, may he be blessed!" and when one of the Arab fighters protests that "putting arsenic in wells is a sin," she says Arabs have "nothing else to live but sins." The soldiers are not convinced and, as they leave, warn her: "And when we catch that Said of yours, he'll get what's coming to him."¹² She declares her loyalty with her belief that Said is on the side of the Arabs.

But it is revealed through dialogue between French soldiers that they have "been ordered to bring him back to the commanding officer dead or alive." Said is meeting with success as a traitor, since he is now sought by both sides. He is no longer helped by Leila, since the merging into her husband's identity has begun. Said is a figure who has become totally alienated and must be close to his fulfillment. He appears twice as a type of apparition, detached from the dramatic action around him.

The first, ironically, occurs immediately after Ommu has said, "Said's for us."

. . . the rear screen moves aside. Said appears, motionless, smiling and self-possessed. He has his thumbs in his belt and his hands flat against his thighs. He moves his shoulders casually.

SAID (without moving): . . . The big job's been done. I've let you know where to direct your boats in order to cut off your enemy's retreat.

The screen moves back, concealing Said. Nobody appears to have heard him.

This appearance functions as a separate showing of his last big act of betrayal against the Arabs, leaving no doubt that he has consummated his rattiness. He is alone on the stage for his next appearance and is addressing Leila, who cannot be seen:

SAID: Done, Leila! With the eye you've got left, if you can see me, I'm relaxed, Leila. . . . And don't worry about a thing, I've shot the works. It's going to be hard making a getaway with all those snouts on my tracks. And I stink as much as you. I hope I've shown the right way. Though at bottom all ways are alike. Leila. . . (He yells) Leila! . . .¹³

Leila has truly become his shadow and Said is at peace with himself, waiting for his final transformation. He is assured of victory and has no further interest in the land of the living. There is nothing more for him to do. He has fulfilled his mandate by being the lowest of the low, a thief and a traitor. He has sold out on humanity and now awaits recognition for his achievement. Said's identity changes have formed a steady progression from his desire to be socially integrated, to his successful attempts to attain social alienation, to his final identity as "legend"--an identity which is outside society, independent in a sense. Said does finally transcend social limitations. When he next appears on stage, he

has achieved legendary status.

Immediately after his last speech to Leila, The Screens is shifted from the earth-bound to the numinous. In the "nowhere" where "time never passes" we find a gathering of the dead. Some are familiar to each other from life before death, some are not. Their faces are smeared with white grease paint and they wander about in a sort of celestial retirement. They are relaxed and quiet and entirely free from the stresses of their former lives. They have a detached attitude but are still interested, and have not severed all relations with what goes on "down there." In fact, Said's mother wants to recreate the corruption she loved on earth: " . . . But the smell of our garbage cans is still in my nostrils. . . . the smell I smelled all my life, and that's what I'll be composed of when I'm completely dead, and I have every hope of polluting death too. . ." ¹⁴ She also wants to keep her guilt alive and asks Kadidja to send a swarm of flies, symbols of her chosen guilt (as they were to Sartre's Orestes), to her dump. Decay and evil must be continued on earth.

To enter the realm of the living dead, the characters break through a white screen covered with transparent paper which represents the portal into the next world. The screens are arranged at intervals of about three feet, one behind the other, and as the characters emerge into the land of the dead they speak the same quiet phrase and then laugh softly, amazed at how easy it all is. It is this world that all ordinary people pass into after death, whether they be Arabs or French. However, because she sacrificed her identity in order to merge with Said and enhance his evil, Leila does not reach this afterlife. She simply disappears, having given

everything of herself to Said, but without having attained his status.

In her last scene Leila holds death at bay while she touchingly recollects the limitations and satisfactions of her marriage. She is actually speaking her love for Said, but love is not admissible in a life founded on the pursuit of evil. She concedes his destiny was greater than hers, that he was "way ahead of [her] in rattiness,"¹⁵ but lays claim to her share of the honor for being his wife, for having merged her life with his to help him achieve his glory. She is willing to die, once her thoughts have been spoken, and looks without struggle for the way to take. She travels in light and music to her death, speaking of floating and a wave of time, then disappears. This marks her dramatic death. She is transformed into whiffs of stink and is never again seen onstage. Since she has surrendered her identity to Said's she cannot emerge with the others in the realm of the dead; nor does she achieve the transcendent status of Said. Perhaps a portion of her spirit survives in him.

Said goes to his final destiny alone. But before we witness his last moments, Si Slimane reveals in his death speech that Said's version of his final act of betrayal was incorrect--that, in fact, he botched the episode, was caught by the Arab soldiers, and shot for treason. This only shows him capable of deception until the very end; other than that, it does not affect his end.

In careful preparation for Said's last appearance, the stage is divided into four horizontal areas, the highest level reserved for the dead, the three below representing various locations and buildings in the village. The screens at the top are white and the one long screen across the stage

floor is black, and it is here that most of the French aristocracy is seated. Above them is the brothel, the village square and the interior of a house, and above that is the prison and a grocery shop. The company is assembled to wait for the arrival of Said.

Genet has divided the last scene into smaller scenarios involving the characters seen earlier in the play; each appears within his or her familiar context, yet is also seen as part of this monumental totality which is the world of The Screens. In opposition to the mother's dance in celebration of life at the beginning of the play, this is a kind of grand finale in celebration of death.

Just before Said's entrance takes place, Genet has strategically dramatised a maxim he put forth in The Thief's Journal in 1949: "Saintliness will be when the tribunal ceases, that is, when the judge and the judged merge."¹⁶ The Cadi, who formerly judged and sentenced Said, is arrested, stripped naked with the assurance that he will be subjected to a body search, and sent to prison for theft. Said and the Cadi have been made equal: "There are no more judges, there are only thieves, murderers, fire-brands. . ."¹⁷ one of the Arabs tells Said at the end of the play. The judge has become the one who is judged, and Said will be hailed as a saint.

The community is at attention for the entrance of its most prominent citizen. When he does enter he is in an intermediate state of being and is guided by Ommu, who is now a "kind of corpse held up by two red canes." She functions as his spiritual advisor and as a liason officer between Said and the community during his final judgement. She tells him his success as a traitor was not impressive, but that he passes the test. He is then tried for love of his wife, but is found innocent of that: ". . . I'm not saying

I was never on a point of weakening, a tenderness, like the shadow of a leaf trembling above us, ready to alight, but I'd take hold of myself." After this initial phase of his trial scene, there is a final test before his deliverance. But he is already being acclaimed as a god: "Said, Said! . . . Larger than life! . . . Your brow in the nebulae and your feet in the ocean. . . ." Out of the filth and degradation of their lives, the Arabs have fashioned a saint: ". . . [we need a Said] . . . an emblem that rises up from the dead, that denies life. . . . preserve, precious, our Said and his saintly wife. . . . We're keeping Said. In order to protect his squalidness. . . and we're also going to water his squalidness so that it grows."¹⁸ But they will have to cherish his squalidness without his loyalty because Said chooses absolute alienation.

As part of his final test, one of the French representatives offers Said forgiveness for his transgressions; Ommu does not want his evil neutralized and asks that Said refuse forgiveness. At first he rejects both pleas: "To the old gal, to the soldiers, to all of you, I say shit."¹⁹ However, being a weak man, he waffles, considers accepting a price. But suddenly his mother explodes in a rage, then speaks to him in a whisper. She is depending on him to carry through his evil to the bitter and to sustain their outcastness by refusing any alliance with people or with life itself--she wants him to shit on everything. When Ommu, too, encourages him to bolt for freedom, he tries to leave. He defies an order to halt and is executed. His body collapses behind a screen and the play is brought to an unceremonious end. Through the renunciation of all alliances, Said achieves the saintliness described by Genet: "Starting from the elementary

principles of morality and religion, the saint arrives at his goal if he sheds them. Like beauty--and poetry with which I merge it--saintliness is individual. Its expression is original. However, it seems to me that its sole basis is renunciation. I associate it with freedom."²⁰ In freedom, achieved through evil acts and condemnation to death, Said achieves eternal life as an emblem of nothingness. The final change has occurred. Said will live on in song.

In The Balcony the purpose of the brothel is to satisfy the client's need to become an image, but in The Screens the focus is off the customer. It is the whore's destiny that is important. Warda is a highly successful prostitute who has dedicated her professional life to perfecting her art. Before the insurrection she sought living death as ". . . a perfect whore, a simple skeleton draped in gilded gowns."²¹ Through dying she becomes this emblem of perfect whoredom. Warda's progress toward a living death forms an opposing parallel to Said's. She knows from the outset what her goal is, and has already achieved considerable success at being dead alive. When the war distorts her experience by forcing her into activity, she realizes what she had before and begins the struggle to regain it. Said does not know his goal in advance, and must discover it as his life progresses. But both attain eternal stasis as images by choosing to die, although Said surpasses Warda in his total alienation. But Warda does achieve in death what she was unable to achieve in life.

Warda is the grande dame of the local brothel, and makes an impressive sight. She wears a "dress of very heavy gold lame, high-heeled

red shoes, her hair coiled up in a huge blood-red chignon. Her face is very pale. She is about forty. . . . and has a very long and very thin nose." Artificiality and illusion are the substance of her art, concealing the emptiness within, just as her greasepaint conceals the corrosion of her body:

WARDA (to the MAID, in a drawling voice): Thick. . . thicker, the white on my ankles. . . (She is picking her teeth with a kind of long gilt-headed hatpin.) It's the white that keeps the skin taut. . . . (She spits out, far off, what she had between her teeth.) Completely decayed. . . The whole back of my mouth is in ruins.

To Warda, decay is cherished as something that brings her closer to death. Like the Chief of Police in The Balcony, she wants to be detached from function. Function is a burden to her and she wants the freedom of a living death. She says death is "quietly at work" inside her, explaining that a quarter of a century has been devoluted to refining her image: "Twenty-four years! A whore's not something you can improvise. She has to ripen. It took me twenty-four years. And I'm gifted!"²² Presumably, after reaching the pinnacle of her art, she would withdraw from all practical aspects of prostitution and exist in the stasis of living death as an image. Unfortunately her progress is interrupted before she can attain this perfection. The revolution disturbs the established rhythm of life in the brothel by replacing its mystique with function.

At the end of the first brothel scene, Warda is going off to look after Said. Although this indicates she is not yet entirely free from function, the scene firmly establishes that Warda strikes awe in the hearts of many, and that the number of her appearances before admirers

far exceeds her engagements in the bedroom. When the next brothel scene takes place, the revolution has begun and all traces of mystery have gone from the house. There have been tremendous changes in pace and emphasis. A steady traffic of uniformed soldiers enters and leaves regularly, and Warda is full of venomous despair for her lost style: "Poor golden petticoats! I'd always hoped that one day, instead of being an adornment, you'd be, by yourselves, the whore in all her glory. A pipe dream. And picking my teeth with hatpins, my style!" In the new circumstances function is given priority, and she is forced into active service just as the others are. However, she is still a whore whose identifying function is to make love for money--her function is modified, but not changed. Her difficulty is that the pace is frenetic and the days of cultivating untouchability are over:

WARDA: (curtly, she goes to the mirror): I do the job fast. It's a regular factory. They're killing us, at least let's take advantage. Got to rake it in. Bye-bye to my hatpins for picking my teeth. My style! Bye-bye my style! Men used to come from far away to see me, me, Warda, pick my teeth with my big hatpins. Now they come to fuck me.

Perhaps most distressing to her is the loss of alienation. The whorehouse has been accepted as part of the community: ". . . At the butcher's, at the grocer's, they say hello to me. . . I'm less and less someone. . . and my anger is greater and greater, and so is my sadness. It's my sadness that's going to make me invent the misfortune that's been taken away from me. . . ." To be ostracized by women was recognition of her corruption and a measurement of her success. She has lost her status as an outcast. Once stasis has been taken from her, she better appreciates what she had and longs to

restore her life to its former inactivity: "Mirror, mirror, where is the time when I could stare at myself, and yawn, for hours on end? (She spits on the mirror.) Where are the men who used to stare at me staring at myself without daring to breathe?"²³ To regain her former alienation and stasis, she tries a reversal of tactics: instead of resenting the action being imposed on her, she embraces it and actually accelerates. In this way she becomes such a proficient whore that she drives the men of the village into a state of distraction. As is the case with so many of Genet's characters, she turns misfortune to her advantage by making it work for her rather than against her. The wives hate her for her power over their men and, in their anger, they murder her. The murder is proof of the alienation Warda has earned despite her earlier setback. She dies and is reborn a perfect emblem of whoredom.

However, Warda does not undergo character change--she attains her goal without it. But her struggle is a dramatic variation on the pattern of character change. During her absence between scenes, a change occurs in her quality of life due to the effects of the uprising. This change in external circumstances has an effect similar to character change in that she must change her approach to the same dramatic action. This change in approach, forced by political events, is so intense that it has the impact of a changed dramatic function without actually being one. The change is in the dramatic context in which the character must operate. In Warda's case, this forces a disruptive intensification of her first dramatic identity with the result that, without having actually experienced character change, the quality and degree of her function in the community is substantially altered. It is

this difference she must overcome to recreate her former status. Her reward for success is death, a death she says she chose herself: "I treated myself to the death of my choice. Just as everything in my life would have been chosen if there hadn't been that stupid mess I found myself in. . . . But my death was of my own making."²⁴

We have been given a visceral description of Warda's death by Said's mother, who watches it from the realm of the dead:

THE MOTHER (smiling): I see very well how they're going to finish off Warda. They'll leave blood with their knitting needles. They're not very clever. . . . Yet the spectacle's worth a look: six knitters pounced on the lady who'd managed to become the most artful whore in the world. Together they were a giant hornet swooped down on the flower and pierced the skin of its belly and neck. . . . the blood spouting and spotting them, and the poor thing straining every muscle to breathe her last.

After death Warda emerges in the realm of the dead, where she offers a fanciful version of her death: ". . . that one evening. . . . I went out into the darkness and the fresh air--I was so delicate and so unmeant for living out-of-doors that. . . . when the fresh air struck my forehead it killed me. That's how it happened."²⁵ Like a hot-house plant, Warda is so accustomed to the artificial climate of the brothel that she cannot survive natural conditions. By revising history this way, she rebuilds a personal mythology by claiming absolute self-determination; by disregarding the role of the murderers in her death, she reduces them to mere agents, accepting nothing but her own will as the cause of death.

The corpse is arranged for burial by two other prostitutes: "The corpse is adorned in extraordinary fashion: a large gold lace dress covered with blue roses; the shoes are made of huge pink roses. The dead

woman's face is painted white. Roses and jewels on her head. Between her teeth, seven very long hatpins."²⁶ Her body now restored to its former dignity and ornateness, Warda is prepared for her journey to the hieratic realm of the dead. She has become the quintessential whore, an eternal image, untouchable in death.

Warda's dramatic development is unusual in these plays for several reasons. First, she does not achieve her notorious status through committing heinous crimes--she does not kill or betray to gain salvation. Second, of those characters seeking the freedom of a living death, only Warda meets with circumstances beyond her control which take away her hard-earned status. Yet she has the resourcefulness and resilience to overcome this obstacle by reconstructing the lost alienation. To do this she improvises on the new circumstances to produce the same end. Third, she is the only female character to become a permanent, separate emblem in life after death.

The characterization in The Screens is less obviously schematic than in The Balcony or The Blacks. Because of this, the development of Said and Warda seems to evolve from changing dramatic needs, without that mechanical, predetermined quality attached to the action of the characters in the two earlier plays. Like Irma and the Queen before her, Warda does not achieve character change, lending weight to the probability that women cannot experience character change in Genet. But character change is an essential element in Said's development, making it also a strong structural force in the play. Although this is true, Genet has not stressed the process of character change as a form of death and rebirth in The Screens--the emphasis is on

the changed dramatic action, which is gradually revealed rather than visually announced by costume changes or made known by changed names. His use of the convention is more subdued and the changes are better integrated with the overall shape of the character's movement.

Characterization in The Screens is more solid and well-developed than what we have seen in The Balcony and The Blacks. The Screens is a complex, difficult play, but in relation to character change, it is more technically mature than either of the earlier plays. Through the character of Said, Genet is at last successful in translating his point of view into the dramatic medium.

NOTES

CHAPTER III

1. Genet, Jean, The Screens, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove, 1962), p. 109.
2. Ibid., p. 197. 3. Ibid., p. 12. 4. Ibid., p. 26; p. 28.
5. Ibid., p. 38. 6. Ibid., p. 51; p. 52. 7. Ibid., p. 62.
8. Ibid., pp. 86-87. 9. Ibid., p. 101; p. 97; p. 144.
10. Ibid., p. 114; pp. 107-108; 109. 11. Ibid., pp. 125-126; pp. 131-132.
12. Ibid., p. 132; p. 133; Ibid.; p. 134.
13. Ibid., p. 138; Ibid.; pp. 138-139; p. 142.
14. Ibid., p. 144; Ibid.; p. 149. 15. Ibid., p. 156.
16. Genet, Thief's Journal, p. 222.
17. Genet, Screens, p. 189. 18. Ibid., p. 186; p. 190; p. 192; pp. 195-197.
19. Ibid., p. 197.
20. Genet, Thief's Journal, pp. 188-189.
21. Genet, Screens, p. 131. 22. Ibid., p. 17; p. 18; p. 22; p. 19.
23. Ibid., p. 129; p. 130; pp. 139-140; p. 139. 24. Ibid., p. 163.
25. Ibid., pp. 161-162; p. 163. 26. Ibid., p. 168.

CONCLUSION

What we have seen in the preceding analysis is a changing and developing use of character change through The Balcony, The Blacks and The Screens. This growth is accompanied by changes and developments in staging, plot and theme.

The characterization grows more complex as we move from The Balcony to The Screens, with Said bearing a closer resemblance to a real person than the paper cut-out figure of the Chief of Police. Said is cruel and self-obsessed, but he grows as a character; he is more fleshed out than any of the characters in the earlier plays and his changing relationship with his wife, based on long association and partnership in crime, adds depth to his character and makes him seem more human. On the other hand, the Chief of Police is sexually impotent, is without ties to human beings, and seems abstract and hollow. Diouf, before his character change into Marie, is slightly more textural than the Chief of Police, but there is no well-developed character before Said.

The changing quality of the human relationships portrayed in the plays also contributes to the complexity of the characterization. Between the Chief of Police and Irma there is no warmth, all is "dead," and he sees her as a utility. Village and Virtue, the young lovers in The Blacks, have a brief love scene after the laughter and final exit of the Court at the end of the play. Genet has allowed this note of optimism, through a warm personal relationship between two characters, that one day blacks may evolve their

own way of being in the world. In The Screens Said and Leila form a powerful union founded on loathing and hate. They merge in this inverted love relationship, a strangely moving union.

Several characters merge with the key characters in these plays. This strengthens the character change because more than one character can take part in it, causing the key character to accrete others, to create a larger, collective image. Most often, it is the women who merge with the men, making the man's transformation into image more potent when it occurs.

Of the three women chosen from the plays, only one achieves the status of image, and she does it without experiencing character change. It may be that no female achieves character change because of the way Genet sees women rather than by design. Women in Genet primarily service men and they are prepared to sacrifice their identities for men. There is a partial parallel here between Irma and Leila, who both surrender their identities to help their men meet their fates. This is not applicable to the Queen in The Blacks, who is more an authority figure. But perhaps the women, because of their biological function and grasp of organic reality, are too rooted in the world to experience character change. In Genet, metaphorical death and rebirth is a movement away from the world, towards abstraction, something more possible to the men because they are much less rooted in organic life. The women also tend to function as supports, pushing the men toward evil acts without committing themselves. Warda, however, not being involved in evil to the same degree or with the same intention, is a touchingly innocent character.

A changing concept of fate is involved between the Chief of Police's

enforcement of his self-invented, predetermined destiny, the communal destiny of the white race played out in The Blacks, and Said's gradual discovery of the destiny that lies within himself. They all lead to eternal life through death, but Said's fate more naturally follows from his struggle for fulfillment. The fate of the white race, to exist in a state of suspended animation for thousands of years until their turn comes to rule again, is the result of an artificial ceremony expressing an ideological stance and, like the Chief of Police's two thousand year wait, is contrived to advance the plot to its end. Perpetual death and regeneration, however, is promised them all: the Chief of Police will have his image impersonated, the whites will be returned to power again and again as Fortune's wheel turns, and Said will live forever in song.

Revolution is perhaps the most important common denominator in these plays, providing a structural format for each, and also functioning as a dominant thematic element. But its role in each play is somewhat different. In The Balcony the revolution is largely relegated to the 'real' world offstage, having some impact on the internal activities of the brothel, but primarily functioning as a backdrop for the play and as a key to the door of eternal life for the Chief of Police. Revolution is brought on stage as a ritualized conflict in The Blacks. Its presence is intensified by a concurrent 'real' revolution offstage which never becomes part of the action. The revolt has wider significance in this play since it symbolically represents the dilemma of a race and is not geared to the needs of a single character as it was in The Balcony. In The Screens revolution is wholly integrated with the dramatic action. Reality is as welcome on stage in

The Screens as illusion and is considered equally valid. Therefore, revolution is not confined to the offstage and is developed as a dramatic complement to Said's evolving fate. Said's participation in the revolution is not partisan but personal, as it was for the Chief of Police. But for Said the goal is not to impress people by military conquest, but to use the revolution as a medium through which to express his evil.

The repetitious aspect of revolution in The Balcony and The Blacks echoes the death/rebirth metaphor of character change in the plays. As Irma prepares her studios for another day, rifle fire is heard in the background--another revolution has begun. All war and peace, death and rebirth are parts of an eternally recurring cycle.

Genet's way of staging the process of death and rebirth changes through the plays. In The Balcony, although there are myriad references to death and dying, the symbolic deaths that are part of the convention of character changes take place in absence. The character emerges at a later part in the drama in a 'reborn' state and his new identifying action is established after that. In The Blacks we witness Diouf's first death/rebirth as he takes on the identity of Marie, but his second death takes place behind a screen "in the Greek tradition." However, this second death is well prepared and the audience knows exactly how the murder proceeds, making this death a lucidly described event. But with Said, death again is a kind of absence, his incarceration in prison serving as a symbolic form of death, and his changed dramatic function verifying his rebirth as a changed dramatic identity. In The Screens there are no new names, no new costumes, but an emphasis on internal motivation and evolving dramatic

need.

The way of achieving final stasis through character change is also different in each play. In The Balcony it is a "game"; in The Blacks it is a ceremony; in The Screens it is life transcendence. In the first play the character changes seem like technical incursions that are signalled to the audience by different costumes and new names. It is as though the artificiality of the brothel revels overshadows any sense of true development in these characters. In The Blacks the principal character change occurs on stage and carries some of the serious intent of ritual, despite the fact that the play is called a clown show. Although the play itself is more abstract than The Balcony, the staging of character change in The Blacks is more literal and concrete. In The Screens the character changes are more organically conceived and represent the most serious achievements in the character's life, allowing him to transcend life through dying.

The dramatic representation of the living death achieved in all these plays grows more complex and visual between the first play and the last. In The Balcony the Chief of Police's final death is simply absence-- he exits to his tomb, leaving everyone else on stage. His tomb, we know, is one of Irma's studios. There is no staging of life after death, and we see no other inhabitants of this region. This changes somewhat in The Blacks in that Diouf is actually seen after his symbolic death, and the Court rises up from the dead to leave the stage en masse after it has been executed. The use of the upper balcony for Diouf's appearance after death foreshadows Genet's expansive representation of the kingdom of the dead in The Screens. In this last play most of the characters who were intro-

duced during the play as the living appear later in the realm of the dead. The audience sees several characters emerge there after their other life, to find contentment in eternal stasis. Said transcends this form of living death to dwell as an image in an illud tempus beyond it.

The language of the three plays does not greatly change between The Balcony and The Screens, and it has no substantial effect on Genet's use of the convention of character change. Dialogue is, of course, important in the plays, since so much of the action is translated into words. But the most noticeable development is that the language of The Screens is more strongly poetic than the language in the other plays. For this reason, some of the speeches--Leila's death speech, for example--sear the imagination with cruel and beautiful images. Despite the striking originality of many of his images, it is a weakness in his playwriting that Genet relies so heavily on dialogue to transmit ideas that sometimes would be better expressed in a dramatic context through action. But his language, replete as it is with images and references revolving around violence, corrosion, death and evil, is entirely supportive of his themes.

The plots of The Balcony, The Blacks and The Screens are made known in advance, removing the usual element of dramatic suspense from the unfolding action. After the introductory rituals in The Balcony, the Chief of Police enters, declares his intention to divest himself of life, and proceeds to do so. The static quality of The Balcony is not helped by the fact that most of the action--including the Chief of Police's main action of putting down the rebellion--occurs offstage. At the beginning of The Blacks, the actors who are about to perform the ceremony announce their

plot as well, leaving the audience to watch what is basically a long verbal confrontation with very little action. After the earlier plays, The Screens is an oasis of vulgarity, color and activity. There is a significant change in the events and neither Said nor the audience, as we have seen, knows the plot in advance. Said's development through character change evolves with the changing circumstances of the plot in such a way that they appear naturally interdependent, whereas the predominant impression left by The Balcony and The Blacks is that the events were mechanically arranged to accommodate the fates of the main characters. This integration of plot with character development is one of the most important accomplishments of Genet's playwriting.

Genet's ability to express his dramatic ideals through characterization matured between The Balcony and the last play. The characters in The Balcony and The Blacks are mechanically negotiated through the character changes required to move them toward eternal stasis. The underlying process of death and rebirth is always present, but the identity changes are prominently schematic, and it is only with The Screens that Genet's use of the convention of character change is more subtle. Said's discovery of his fate, gradually realized through the development and refinement of his criminality, is also achieved through character change. But the changes in Said seem to evolve more naturally, because Genet has integrated Said's struggle for hieratic status with the dramatic developments of the plot. In the character of Said, Genet has accomplished the perfect dramatic embodiment of his world view.

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