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Lois M. Frolkis Messerman

1970
THE THEATRE OF FERNANDO ARRABAL

A GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Lois M. Frolkis Messerman, B.A., M.S.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1970

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INTRODUCTION

Fernando Arrabal, Spaniard by birth, Frenchman by choice, has in a few short years contributed significantly to the revitalization of the dramatic idiom. His is a theatre of immense, of significant sound and fury, a theatre atrocious in its cruelty, exalting in its tenderness, a theatre of nightmare and chains, a theatre of infinite freedom and fancy, a theatre of the senses which reaches out to touch something immediate and universal in the beholder. Perhaps no other description so aptly and precisely invokes this latest star on the horizon of contemporary theatre as does this one of Jean Vilar:

Le théâtre est irréalité, songe, magie psychique, mythomanie; et s'il est aussi réalité, du moins il faut qu'elle nous dope, nous enivre, nous jette hors du théâtre le coeur vif, l'esprit plein de merveilles, le coeur vivant.¹

One cannot but be provoked by Arrabal: fascination, horror, exaltation, disgust are the pith of this theatre which simultaneously excludes indifference, apathy, ennui.

Universal provocation, yes; universal acclaim, no. Although Arrabal has in the last five years been the most consistently performed of the new playwrights, although his dramatic works have been translated into more than twenty languages and been adapted as many times into film, Arrabal's critics are as sharply and as vehemently divided now as when his works first began to be published and performed some ten years ago. As recently as July, 1969, Julius Novick in his discussion of the American Conservatory Theater's production of *The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria* (L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie) called the play "a sophomoric attempt to imitate Beckett and Genet," and, dismissing the play's enthusiastic reception in Paris as a "succès de scandale," fixed caustically upon its supposed sensationalism: "A transvestite nun is perhaps nothing to write home about one way or the other, but a transvestite nun in labor is something else again." Novick's response to Arrabal is representative of much of the negative criticism which has appeared to date both in the United States and in Europe. In general it centers around what these critics believe to be Arrabal's sensationalism, his exhibitionism, his obsessive preoccupations, his lack of originality.

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3Ibid., p. 5.
And yet in the face of these condemning judgments there has been a persistent and growing body of Arrabal enthusiasts. Thomas Q. Curtiss, writing in *The New York Times*, has called *Le Jardin des délices* "the most important play on the French stage since Jean Genet's 'The Screens'," while Alain Schifres, a long time dévoté and faithful supporter of Arrabal, expresses his excitement in a more personal and flamboyant fashion: "Ayant vu 'Le Cimetière des voitures' d'Arrabal, j'en demeure habité, choqué, fasciné, changé au point que tout ce qui n'est pas ce spectacle se trouve soudain dévalué, oblitéré, décoloré."

Interestingly enough, in spite of the intensity with which Arrabal is either censured or lauded, there exists a startling paucity of valid critical material devoted to his work. Most of what has appeared on Arrabal is contained in the summary judgments of theatre critics who, having viewed the opening of one of Arrabal's plays (sometimes the demands of their profession dictate appearance at several openings in a single evening), record their fleeting impressions in a short piece which generally

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begins something like, "Last night at the Théâtre de Poche we saw..." No full length study has appeared on Arrabal to date, and only three articles and several short sections contained in larger critical works add any real dimension to the present state of the Arrabal controversy.

It is this author's contention that Arrabal is an artist of sufficient stature to merit complete and undivided critical attention. The present study has been undertaken as a first step toward this important goal. It should be added that Mr. Arrabal himself lent the final impetus to this effort when he generously consented to an interview with the author in early May, 1969, during his New York visit for the opening of *Guernica* and *Pique-nique en campagne*. His comments upon the analyses suggested as well as what he warmly and spontaneously chose to reveal about himself as a man and an artist were invaluable in the preparation of this study.

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There are several ways in which one might go about studying a body of dramatic literature such as this one. One might, for example, study the work in terms of its origin in other sources, or in terms of certain influences which have been brought to bear upon it. In the case of Arrabal this method would seem at first glance to be particularly fruitful since Arrabal has openly acknowledged his debt to Kafka, Carroll, and Dostoevskii. One might point, for example, to the overwhelming sense one has in watching a play of Arrabal of man dwarfed and overcome by a mechanism beyond his control, of a basic dilemma between the demands of some higher necessity and those of human freedom, of a sense of anxiety, guilt, passivity and awe of authority, of bureaucratic absurdity and labyrinthine ferocity—and one might easily label this "Kafkaesque."

Similarly, one might fix upon the magical, fantastic aspect of Arrabal's theatre: mirrors opening into strange new worlds in which memory works both ways, chess pieces talk, and cards have a mind of their own: a world of fluid and changing contours and yet one rooted in mathematics (Dodgson, as it is well known, was also a mathematician), a world in which animals are more human than their human counterparts, in which non-language becomes language, and in which, in a very real sense, "one must
keep running in order to stay in the same spot." One would be justified in seeing here the presence of Carroll. Or one might point to still other characteristics of Arrabal's theatre and label them Dostoevskian: ironic fantasy, metamorphosis of character, courage of the "little man" in the face of overwhelming force, and what William Phillips has called in Dostoevskii a "recurrent pattern of compulsive want, paralysis, action, guilt, orgiastic confession and expiation." One might also call into evidence here a recent short piece of Arrabal's entitled "Une tortue nommée Dostoevsky," which, as he writes in his preface to the work, is an homage to Dostoevskii occasioned by a rereading of "The Crocodile." This cataloguing of sources might be extended almost indefinitely since the plays of Arrabal seem to call forth an uncanny number of literary and philosophical associations: Shakespeare, Calderon, Strindberg, Pirandello, Valle-Inclán, Cocteau, Breton and the surrealists, Bergson, Sade, Gracian, Ghelderode—all are names frequently invoked in connection with Arrabal's as possible sources or influences.

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10 Janet Winecoff-Díaz catalogues many of these influences in her study "The Theater and Theories of Fernando Arrabal."
One might also point to the influence of certain plastic artists, to painters such as Bosch, Breughel, Goya, Picasso, and Magritte, whose works are sometimes actually incorporated into Arrabal's plays through the use of slide projections, or are incorporated through thematic assimilation frequently reflected in the title of the work: "Concert dans un oeuf" and "Le Jardin des délices" are titles of paintings by Bosch as well as of plays by Arrabal. "Guernica" recalls Picasso's masterpiece. There are also the novels L'enterrement de la sardine (Goya) and La Pierre de la folie (Bosch).

But even if one were to track down every last "source," assuming all the while that the material under

11A partial elucidation of Arrabalian "source" material would point to Calderon, Shakespeare, Strindberg, and Pirandello as containing the notion of reality as dream, dream as reality, and of theatre as part and parcel of both. In Calderón's La Vida es Sueño which also foreshadows the Pirandellian theme of theatre within theatre through a sort of "construction en abyme" (Six Characters in Search of an Author), the hero, Sigismundo is heard to say:

What is life? A frenzy. What is life? A shadow, an illusion, and a sham, The greatest good is small, all life, it seems, Is just a dream, and even dreams are dreams.

Shakespeare's "we are the stuff that dreams are made on" and "all the world's a stage" echo the same theme: what we perceive as "dream" and "reality" are but two facets of a single, elusive and theatrical "Reality." Gracian can probably be invoked under the same rubric. His is a baroque reality in which appearance or facade is more "real" than the ever shifting reality it masks.
consideration actually had its origins here rather than in a sort of spontaneous generation in the mind of Arrabal himself, one still must deal with the question of why that source was chosen rather than some other, of what particular

In Cocteau we find a theatre of magic and myth, a fusion of the everyday and the extraordinary, a sense of "scandale," faith in the ordering forces of chance, the externalization of dreams. The use of free-associated dream material reaches its zenith in the dramatic works of the surrealists with its strange and ferocious lyricism. Arrabal frequented Breton's group in the early 1960's, and was, in fact, published in Breton's review, la Brèche. Arrabal denies, however, that he was influenced by the theatre of the surrealists, seeing instead an influence on his work in visual and plastic surrealist art.

In Sade (although Arrabal absolutely disclaims any familiarity with this author at the time of writing his most "sadistic" works), one finds the co-existence of pleasure and pain encompassing the entire complex dialectic of tormentor and tormented, of hangman and victim. The esperpentos of Valle-Inclan, and more particularly "The Horns of Don Friolera" and "The Gala of Death" which combine all the horror and fierce humor of the Spanish grotesque are seen by Professor Diaz as being the most immediate Spanish antecedents of Arrabal's theatre. The works of Ghelderode evoke the whole rich tapestry of the Flemish Middle Ages, a palate of Breughelian tones including the cacophony of a village fair, the incantations of black magic, the derisive cruelty of an emboldened crowd—all tempered, however, by the use of complex technical innovations such as loud speakers, slide projections, and the like. Ghelderode, like Arrabal, was fascinated by Bosch, and even has Folial in L'Ecole des buffons describe the horror of the final panel of "Le Jardin des délices."

Finally, in the work of Bergson and his celebrated theories on the nature of memory, time, and knowledge there exists a possible confirming influence on Arrabal's thought, although, as this author hopes to demonstrate, Arrabal's theory seems too immediate, too strongly bred of his own experience to attribute it entirely to Bergson.
need it meets within the total configuration of Arrabal's optic. Furthermore, can it ever be assumed that any artist is wholly explicable in terms of those influences which have been brought to bear upon him. Is there not something inherent in the nature of the concept of creative art which precludes the defining of the whole on the mere basis of the numbering of its parts?

On the other hand, given the extent to which Arrabal seems willing to risk the integrity of his literary works in the hands of the director ("La mise en scène ne doit avoir rien à voir avec ce que j'écris...Le metteur en scène prend ce canevas, et il fait autre chose."\(^{12}\)), it would seem fruitful to examine Arrabal's theatre in terms of the delicate and changing relationship of author to director, considering the additional intriguing problem of the desirability and extent of spectator participation. One would want to explore in this context the whole notion of the "happening," relating it to its ancient function as religious ceremonial, and one would examine, so as to better delineate the role of Arrabal's theatre with relation to them, the work now being done by Lavelli and Garcia in Paris, Peter Brook in London, Julian Beck's Living Theatre, Richard Schechner's Performance Group, and Jerzy Grotowski's

\(^{12}\) Alain Schifres, *Entretiens avec Arrabal*, p. 77.
Polish Laboratory Theatre. This approach, however, has the obvious disadvantage of putting the cart squarely before the horse. It cannot be determined how a director has modified any particular piece of dramatic writing before determining what that writing is. The effect of spectator participation cannot be weighed except in the larger context of the work's own limits.

Another approach to Arrabal's theatre might relate it to the broader question of general trends in contemporary theatre or in contemporary French theatre. Here is perhaps cause for closer examination, for while Arrabal's universe cannot be fully explained in terms of its relative position in a larger movement (Arrabal both affirms and denied his originality when he says of his work: "Le théâtre que nous élaborons maintenant, ni moderne, ni d'avant-garde, ni nouveau, ni absurde, aspire seulement à être infiniment libre et meilleur."), it is only when viewed against the background of this movement that his own real originality and creative power is manifest.

It is generally conceded, although the names given the phenomenon as well as the reasons posited for its

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13 Arrabal's continuing interest in this area is demonstrated by his having founded in 1968 the review, Le Théâtre, of which three volumes have already appeared.

existence are multiple, that the theatrical production in France during the past seventy years possesses certain characteristics which lend it both coherence and direction. This is not to say that French theatre exists or has ever existed in a void, uninfluenced by broader European cultural movements, or that reverberations which it has itself initiated do not return to reshape it once again. It does seem, however, that whatever one means when one speaks of the "avant-garde" is closely related to the particular sort of experimentation that has taken place in France since that fateful day in December, 1896, when Alfred Jarry's King Ubu first brought chaos to the audience gathered at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre with his shattering "Merdre."

Experimentation: it is not by accident that Jacques Lusseyran in his piece on the contemporary French theatre calls it a "laboratoire dramatique." One of the constants in all the contemporary French playwrights of stature is a spirit of free inquiry, a refusal to be bound by the traditional formal requirements of "good" playwriting. The famous unities have given way to the free play of time, space, and action. Time-worn notions of plot and character continuity have ceded before the

onslaught of fantasy and free association. Psychology has vanished as an essential foundation for "character" and with it the necessity for rationally motivated dialogue whose primary former function was to reveal the calculated inner workings of that "character." Objects have taken on a new vitality, erasing the arbitrary distinction between the animate and the inanimate: they may possess decidedly "human" characteristics as in the early surrealist plays, or, as in plays of Ionesco, proliferate like cancerous excrescences, suffocating the humans who would try to inhabit their world. They may even, as in the most recent efforts at purely "abstract" theatre, drive humanity completely from the scene in eerie ballets of their own making. Science and advanced technology have invaded the new theatre: the contemporary theatregoer may expect to have his senses assailed by a wide range of artificially produced stimuli such as strobes, slides, moving pictures, and electronically produced sounds which have moved into the domain once occupied exclusively by music and dance. And the use of scenic space has been altered: no longer need the action unfold in a closed or arbitrarily defined area, separated from the spectator in attendance, but may, even in less radical theatrical manifestations than the "happening," surround, bombard, invade the spectator whose seat has been carefully positioned so as to best expose
him to the particular power of the theatrical event.

What have these phenomena in common? What can be deduced from their occurrence in the way of defining the nature and scope of contemporary French theatre? We see emerging upon closer observation a curious and altogether remarkable convergence of two cultural strains, one of them artistic or formalistic, the other intellectual or philosophical. Together they amount to a complete rejection of Rationalism in these two spheres. But to fully appreciate this fact in its historical relevancy for the theatre we must return once again to Jarry. When Ubu opened Ubu Roi with his now famous "Merdre," he was rejecting by the inventive addition of a single letter the whole concept of realistic drama, that tenacious by-product of eighteenth century scientific rationalism still lingering even today in the French "théâtre de boulevard" as on Broadway, wherein the art of the theatre is dedicated to the end of photographically reproducing some small and arbitrarily chosen aspect of "réalité." The theatre was at this important historical moment clearly behind the times. In other art forms inroads had already been made into this constricted notion of reality: Dostoevskii, Carroll in prose, Rimbaud, the symbolists in poetry, the impressionists in painting were all affirming the existence of a valid reality beyond realism. It was Jarry's genius
to affirm this right for the theatre, to see the potential inherent in a non-rationalist theatre in which, as Guicharnaud has put it, the familiar could be reconstructed in a shocking and provoking way "in all its fundamental strangeness." Jarry's *Ubu Roi* was militantly anti-realistic both in concept and realization. In terms of its plot it has the gross over-simplification and improbability of a child's fantasy combined with that of the satirical farce or "sottie" of the Middle Ages as re-interpreted by the Grand Guignol. Placards represented scene changes while single individuals symbolically stood for entire groups. As Jarry himself phrased it, "...raconter des choses compréhensibles ne sert qu'à alourdir l'esprit et fausser la mémoire, tandis que l'absurde exerce l'esprit et fait travailler la mémoire." The "absurde," the irrational, is vindicated as an artistic device, as a means of communicating a total reality which had nothing to do with the dictates of realism.

Jarry's crusade was taken up by Guillaume Apollinaire. *Les Mamelles de Tiresias*, begun in 1903,

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17 Jarry is to have said this to Dr. Saltas after an incomprehensible lecture which the former had given on "L'Art et les artists." (Jacques Lusseyran, p. 128.)
the year of Apollinaire's meeting with Jarry, but not completed until 1917, marks another step in the theatre's liberation from the shackles of realism. Unlike Jarry's scathing attack on the vileness, the "ubuesque" characteristics inherent in us all, Apollinaire's Mamelles is a whimsical and poetic injunction to make love, not war. Many of the techniques he uses are obviously motivated by Jarry: the representation of "the people of Zanzibar" by a single character, his use of megaphones for the delivery of lines, the famous "breasts" of Tirésias, finally revealed as two balloons which float skyward at the play's conclusion, and a startling new invention: a dancing, speaking newspaper kiosque with a painted proprietor. It is in the introduction to Les Mamelles de Tirésias that Apollinaire, protesting against the predominantly realistic theatre of his times, coined the word "surrealism" which was later adapted in a much more specific sense by Breton and his followers: "Quand l'homme a voulu imiter la marche il a créé la roue qui ne ressemble pas à une jambe. Il a fait ainsi du surréalisme sans le savoir."\(^{18}\) The "real," once again, exists in the realm beyond appearances, and can be reached only through the free play of fantasy, and, more

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\(^{18}\)Guillaume Apollinaire in his preface to Les Mamelles de Tirésias (Paris: Editions Sic, 1918), ix.
importantly, through theatricality which avows itself as such.

Michael Benedikt points out that Apollinaire's second use of the word "surrealism" occurs in a program note to Cocteau's ballet *Parade*. Cocteau is, in fact, the next significant figure in this profile of the development of non-realistic theatre, for he was the first to explore both in theory and actuality the possibilities of "total" theatre, the fortunate merging of dance, mime, music, dialogue, and the concomitant and necessary cooperative relationships among author, director, composer, actor and dancer. Cocteau presents the notion of the theatre as an extension of the "universal athlete" in his preface to *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*. It is here, moreover, that he first compares the playwright to the poet, and demands for him the same freedom and the same responsibility to create and communicate with all the means at his disposal (and in particular with the non-literary, the sensual, the sublimely theatrical), a personal vision, a refraction, not a reproduction of everyday reality: "J'essaie donc de substituer une 'poésie de théâtre' à la 'poésie au théâtre'."\(^\text{20}\)


Cocteau argued for the essential and romantic subjectivity of the playwright as poet; the surrealists who followed him elevated subjectivity to an artistic first principle, not only the subjectivity of the artist to record at will his conscious longings and convictions, but the ultimate subjectivity of the subconscious. Breton's fascination with Freudian psychology and its revelation of this hidden but potent source of human motivation is well known. Breton saw in the subconscious the domain of man's true beauty and power. It remained only to tap this vital source of psychic energy, to allow its release in complete spontaneity, in automatic writing, in free associative techniques unfettered by artistic or social restraints. The real lay, then, in the surreal. Surrealism's death-dealing blow to rationalism cannot be overestimated. What was implicit in its insistence on the validity and power of an effective zone other than that immediately discernable was that man's conduct, and by extrapolation, the entire workings of the universe, was governed by laws infinitely more subtle than those of classical logic, and therefore that realism, in pretending to represent even a portion of "reality" was, in fact, grossly distorting Reality.
In terms of their actual theatrical production the Surrealists have little behind of lasting value. One of the reasons for this may lie in the fact that many of their works are unstageable, having rejected even the minimum requirements for scenic realization. Another may lie in its frequent triviality. More than particular plays, it would seem that the Surrealists have left a legacy of theatrical inventiveness: the use of dreams and dream imagery, free association as a literary device, the further exploration of the dramatic properties of objects, the objectifying of language, or at the very least its devaluation as an instrument of rational communication--these techniques are much in evidence in the works of many of the playwrights writing today. Perhaps only Roger Vitrac's *Les Mystères de l'Amour* and his *Victor, ou Les Enfants au Pouvoir* both performed under the direction of Antonin Artaud at the Théâtre Alfred Jarry in 1927 and 1929, respectively, deserve special mention. What Vitrac is able to do very effectively in both of these plays is to combine surrealistic techniques with what is essentially a bourgeois drama. As Benedikt rightfully observes\(^\text{21}\) one of Vitrac's major innovations is to involve the audience

in the production first by having the action of *Les Mystères de l'Amour* begin in a box overlooking the stage as if originating in the audience, by repeated appearances of the "author" (which has the effect both of creating a sense of immediacy on the part of the spectator and of drawing his attention to the intentional "theatricality" of the proceedings), and finally, by having one member of the audience shot from the stage and "killed." Additionally, the whole problem of a non-verbal theatre is broached when at the very end of the play the Author implies that he never intended to write anything but plays without words.

It was noted that Vitrac's plays were directed by Artaud. It is in the theoretical writings of Artaud, although his original dramatic writings are quite meager, that we find one of the most important seminal influences on the contemporary theatre. Genius and mad man, actor, producer, director, and passionate theoretician of the theatre, Artaud in *Le Théâtre et son double* is both chronicler and seer: he takes from his predecessors Jarry, Apollinaire, Cocteau, surrealism, certain "matière brute," and binds it all together into a coherent and forceful program for the rehabilitation of the theatre. The theatre, like poetry, cannot be based on a conception of art which has its roots in "realism." The theatre must abandon the structure imposed upon it by a devitalizing "culture,"
must abandon its psychological pretensions and recapture its ancient function as ritual, as ceremonial. The theatre must uncompromisingly expose man to his darkest and most deeply hidden nature (hence the "double" of the title: the theatre is a reflecting mirror of man's truest nature), because only then will he have the freedom and the lucidity with which to face his destiny. The "poetry of the theatre," then, will be emphasized, the sensual rather than the literary aspects of drama, since "dialogue" can do nothing more than serve psychology by trying to reduce the unknown to the known. It is, paradoxically, by reorienting the theatre toward the visceral rather than toward the intellectual through the use of sound, gesture, light, movement, language as incantation, that it becomes a metaphysical instrument. Art, not logic, will provide man with the understanding he seeks. And here, it would seem, is one of Artaud's inestimable contributions: he rescues the theatre from the cloak of frivolity which had surrounded it for so long and vindicates as a means of achieving lucidity. It is in this light that the more contemporary writers of avant-garde theatre may be approached, for each in his own way is using the theatre as a means of revealing a total vision of the universe.
The advent of World War Two exercised an immediate and far-reaching effect on that vision. The last mortal blow had been dealt to faith in the ordered workings of a divinely inspired universe. Nietzsche's "God is dead" acquired new relevance as existentialist philosophers, among them Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, acknowledged the gratuitous nature of the cosmos and of man's place in it, and the concomitant futility of logically motivated investigation of the "real." Man was a solitary being, a "stranger" in a world which he could neither understand nor control, finding his sole and tragic joy in a lucidity he did not seek. Necessity had vanished with God: everything was uncaused, "de trop," from the existence of innocuous household objects to the futile attempts at human communication. But although both Sartre and Camus chose the theatre as a vehicle for the expression of their visions, neither utilized the formal and structural potential already prepared by half a century of experimentation. Paradoxically, while decrying the "absurdity" of the universe, they continued to employ the outworn theatrical forms whose validity that universe belied. As Geneviève Serreau has put it in her *Histoire du 'nouveau théâtre*:
"A aucun moment, ils ne tentent d'en révolutionner la forme et les structures, versant avec insouciance leur vin
It fell to others to operate a new fusion between "forme" and "fond," to discover new solutions to the dramatic problems posed.

It is not within the scope of this short profile to discuss the contributions of Arrabal's more immediate precursors: Audiberti, Ghelderode, Adamov, Schehadé, Vauthier, and the giants Ionesco, Genet, and Beckett, although references will be made during the course of this study to these last three in particular, when doing so seems relevant to the illumination of Arrabal's theatre. Each of these men has created a personal idiom in response to the dictates of his vision and his talents. To reduce each to a categorizing paragraph would be both to falsify his vision and to betray his talents. There are, however, certain generalizations that can be made about these playwrights as a group. Unlike the first revolutionaries of the theatre, they are not arbitrarily and militantly "anti-realistic." One might say, rather, that they are at ease with their role as poets, as purveyors of a total and subjective vision which is concretely realized through

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the imagery of the stage. Implicit in the vision is the recognition that the lines between illusion and reality, dream and waking states, theatre and non-theatre, are not as clearly drawn as they once were. Life itself is seen as theatricalized, illogical, and theatre may now unashamedly declare itself as artifice, may double upon itself as theatre within theatre, may make use of all the technical means at its disposal to communicate this new, expanded notion of reality. The new theatre is, in a word, constructively "self-conscious." It is also richly sensual as opposed to merely literary or intellectual. The new theatre is being written not to be read but to be played. It must be a tangible presence, must involve and provoke the spectator at many levels, so that the totality of the playwright's vision may be met by the totality of the spectator's experience. Language in the theatre, far from being abolished, as Artaud is often misunderstood to have suggested, has found an expanded, a richer function, adding incantation (Genet) and even objectification (Ionesco) to its repertoire. And in Beckett language swells to fill the bleak spaces of inaction and despair: one speaks precisely because there is nothing left to say.

Another constant in the new theatre is the use of humor as a dramatic device. Artaud was quick to see humor's efficacy as a means of striking through layers of cultural habituation to the heart of anarchy.\(^\text{24}\) Humor lies in the realm of the unexpected, in the fusion of disparates, in metaphor. Humor is an instrument of lucidity in that it brings into question the whole gamut of cause and effect relationships, necessitates a re-evaluation and revitalization of "reality." It is precisely the innovation of the new theatre that while appearing not to take itself very seriously it draws the spectator in by an alternating demand for his identification and his lucid objectivity. The spectator is caught off guard, so to speak, buffeted, confronted, and through his confusion and embarrassment forced to recognize a truth. The "theatre of the absurd," then, if it is characterized as Martin Esslin suggests, by its metaphysical anguish,\(^\text{25}\) is not primarily characterized by its dark tone, by its floundering in the hopelessness and despair of an absurd universe. Over and above the despair one senses affirmation, not resignation. Brustein calls it a spirit of revolt,\(^\text{26}\) and, in fact, if one examines


the contemporary theatre with a view to extracting a single unifying strain, one cannot help seeing in all these artists their assertion, in the face of the void, of a humor, an energy, and a courage which lends man new dignity and new life.

What has consistently recurred in the theoretical formulations regarding the contemporary theatre is the fact of its similarity to poetry. One speaks, as we have seen, of the author's "poetic vision," of the "poetry of the theatre," and so forth. This is immediately suggestive of a critical approach to the new theatre, and to that of Fernando Arrabal in particular. Since it is a commonly accepted notion that poetry is most effectively explicated in terms of its own idiom, by reference to thematic and structural material contained within the poem itself, to the extent that theatre is poetry, and that the creating of a new optic is simultaneous with and dependent upon the creating of a new form, it would seem that the most effective expletive analysis of a playwright's work could and should take place within the confines of his own poetic universe. It is immediately apparent, however, that this method, too, is beset by certain limitations. If, for example, one is given a poem to analyze, one may reproduce everything which was intended as the complete experience of
that poem merely by reading it aloud. One has certain words, intoned in a given order, and having a given phonetic or musical shape as well as a physical or spatial shape on the printed page; one has, additionally, the whole range of musical and semantic associations occasioned by those words in that order. Likewise, in analyzing the poem, one has at one's disposal the same array of tools as did the artist who created the poem. One will describe and analyze words with other words, and even if poetry is "denser" than prose in the sense of proceeding at the same time along musical and semantic lines both of which are prone to associative involvement within and across those lines, occasional reference to the original experience, that is, reading the poem, will serve to restore that density while still admitting the possibility and the value of linear analysis.

This is much less true of the theatre, particularly of the contemporary theatre, which is characterized, as we have seen, by its refusal to exist as pure literature. In addition to the "lines" which characters speak to each other, and which might be analyzed, once again, musically or in terms of their semantic significance or lack of it, to the ordering of lines within the scenes, and ultimately within acts, to the revelation of character and the development of dynamic tensions between characters, there is in
the theatre the entire impact of the visual presence of those characters: their physical dimensions and bearing, the manner in which they move and gesticulate, what they are wearing—all of these factors may somehow modify or enrich the nature of the lines they speak. This information must then be placed in the larger context of the set or scenic frame in which the characters move with its complex interplay of color, light, and form, and in the context of any additional visual effects employed: film sequences, slide projections, strobes or other unusual lighting, gauze partitions for dream sequences, and so forth. Add to this the entire range of auditory elements (and to the extent that there is spectator participation tactile and olfactory material becomes relevant as well) from voice quality and intonation to the use of songs, musical interludes and accompaniments, it becomes increasingly obvious why the theatre, perhaps more than any other art form, is characterized by extreme density or concomitance, rejecting even the most adept efforts at verbal analysis, which, by its very nature, must be both linear and separational.

Secondly, we are met in working with the theatre of Arrabal, by a problem quite peculiar to his case. While much of contemporary theatre tends to be subjective in the
sense of incorporating and revealing the playwright's personal optic, the theatre of Arrabal is intensely and peculiarly so being for him, as he has often stated, the instrument of self-knowledge, the incarnation of his personal memories, desires, and dreams. It is impossible, in fact, to adequately grasp the totality of Arrabal's universe without reference to his life, just as it would be impossible to fully explain the significance of the events in his life without reference to his dramatic and fictional works. The problem of analysis is made even more interesting and more complicated here by the fact that Arrabal is also a dramatic theorist who has recently abandoned his early reticence and now speaks out quite freely about what the theatre is and should be, and what in particular he is trying to do within this framework. One would expect that Arrabal's formulations on the theatre should be intimately connected with his dramatic works; what is unexpected is that these formulations should be so intimately connected with his life.

What emerges, in fact, when one views the totality of Arrabal's optic or vision is a dizzying series of resonances, of correspondences, each existing as a self-contained system, but capable of merging into those systems which surround it. Arrabal's universe may be visually
conceived as a kaleidoscope, (the figure was suggested by a comment Arrabal made to this author regarding the structure of his early life), as an infinitely varied play of light against darkness, of color against color, of form against form, creating in the eyes of the beholder a constantly changing visual reality, brilliant in its intensity, perplexing in its fluidity, a baroque reality which all but conceals the simplicity and order of its underlying structure. It is only by slowing the movement of this expanding and contracting universe—knowing that the very act of so doing is the perversion of a universe defined by that mobility—that its order and its structure may be revealed.

We may now perceive the kaleidoscope as composed of a series of independent bands or circles, which, because of the variability of their parameters, are sometimes merged in a single band of color, sometimes disparate and concentric. Arranged within the spectrum of each circle are bits of colored glass. Depending on the degree of light exposure, certain patterns may predominate over others, although even the less prominent may be glimpsed in their opacity as through the still water of a deep pool. When the circles containing them are fused, these patterns occupy the entire visual field, existing without further amplification, but when the circles diverge, the
patterns are somehow drawn out by reflecting and refracting mirrors like the spokes of a wheel, so that they are infinitely repeated in some form at every point along the radii of the circles.

We may think of the various spectra of the kaleidoscope as representing the distinct but interrelated domains of Arrabal's universe: That of his life experiences, that of his artistic creation, and that of his theoretical formulations. The patterned bits of glass constitute the specific thematic material contained in each spectrum. The following study, while concentrating on the broad spectrum of Arrabal's dramatic works (an equally persuasive case could be made for his novels, but that is not within the perview of this study), will nevertheless show how each of these spectra is the reflection of those which surround it, or which are contained within it, how each is characterized by the same thematic and structural polarities which characterize Arrabal's vision as seen in its totality, and how, within each spectrum, it is the interrelationship, the playing off of these thematic polarities against each other, their fusion and their infinite expansion which defines Arrabal's raging universe.
CHAPTER ONE

EXPOSITION

To the extent that Arrabal's fictional universe can be immediately identified with any "school" or contemporary literary movement it is with the "mouvement panique" which Arrabal along with Topor and Jodorowsky founded in Paris in 1965 by the simple act of proclaiming themselves "auteurs paniques." While these authors steadfastly refuse to be doctrinaire in their theoretical formulations they have in common the conviction that theatre should be essentially a "ceremonie panique," i.e., a poetic and ritualistic fusion of the sublime and the grotesque.

The word "cérémonie" immediately suggests certain avenues of investigation, among which the whole concept of theatre as a religious manifestation, as a return to communal exorcism and confrontation with myth, a contemporary auto sacramental, an instrument of revitalization in the

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1Arrabal in his commentary to Théâtre IV, p. 188: "Je n'ai aucune théorie sur le théâtre. Écrire s'offre à moi comme une aventure, non comme le fruit du savoir et de l'expérience."
face of metaphysical anguish. It implies the participation either real or symbolic of the spectator, his involvement in ritualistic re-enactment as opposed to the distanciation implied in a more traditional "psychological" theatre. It is difficult to think in these terms without invoking the name of Antonin Artaud (perhaps Arrabal's only true parent although the latter denies having read any of his work until recently), who, in *Le Théâtre et son double* argued, as we have noted, against a literary or psychological theatre for a theatre of the senses, a theatre of ritual in which the spectator's "hantises noires" could be exposed and expurgated like so many abscesses of the plague, liberating his vital energies for lucid confrontation with destiny.

The word "panique" is also evocative at several levels, and reflects Arrabal's well known proclivity for "jeu" here incarnated in a "jeu de mots." At one level the word "pan" can be taken in its meaning of "all," of "universal," of "that which encompasses all dualities."

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2 Martin Esslin sees the function of all "new" theatre as essentially religious. See *The Theatre of the Absurd*, pp. 291-312.

3 Arrabal disclaims any prior knowledge of Artaud, having read him only lately at the suggestion of Breton. Now he sees that "Artaud a tout prévu." (Alain Schifres, *Entretiens avec Arrabal*, p. 72).

It reflects the search for a theatre of metaphor in which contraries may be fused, in which reaction becomes counter-reaction, an *opera mundi*:

La tragédie et le Guignol, la poésie et la vulgarité, la comédie et le mélodrame, l'amour et l'érotisme, le happening et la théorie des ensembles, le mauvais goût et le raffinement esthétique, le sacrilège et le sacré, la mise à mort et l'exaltation de la vie, le sordide et le sublime s'insèrent tout naturellement dans cette fête, cette cérémonie "panique."

At another level "pan" recalls the god Pan, etymological source of "pan" as "universal," in himself uniting the properties of man and goat, pictured with the pastoral flute he had invented, the poet, the muse, presiding over the dance of nymphs and other fantastic creatures. Arrabal reminds us that as a child Pan was to have been a sort of buffoon, a prankster, manifestation once again of his contradictory nature. A further association is with a contemporary mythical buffoon, a king and learned master of other buffoons, with Ghelderode's Folial, who, in a moment of revelation announces to his assembled followers: "Je vous le dis, en vérité...le secret de notre art, de l'art, du grand art, de tout art qui veut durer...c'est la CRUAUTE!"

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The mechanism of the clown's art is cruelty. We are brought to Arrabal's third and final construction of the word "panique," that first elucidated once again by Artaud in his formulation of a "théâtre de la cruauté," a theatre which strips us of our defenses, which through shock, through terror, reveals us to ourselves "nerfs et coeur" in our fundamental contradictions and in the glory of our full potential:

Si le théâtre essentiel est comme la peste, ce n'est pas parce qu'il est contagieux, mais parce que, comme la peste, il est la révélation, la mise en avant, la poussée vers l'extérieur d'un fond de cruauté latente par lequel se localisent sur un individu ou sur un peuple toutes les possibilités perverses de l'esprit.

For Arrabal as well as for Artaud, cruelty is lucidity, its mechanism excess. The clown becomes seer. The theatrical rite rages through us bringing with it a new level of awareness: "Je fais appel à l'homme, à tout ce qui est caché dans l'homme." Theatre for Arrabal is a ceremony of initiation, a trial by fire and anguish, a sacred rite in which the spectator is forced by all means available to the dramatist and to the director, that "maître de cérémonies

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sacrées" to confront himself and the universe. Arrabal's notion of "panique" thus recalls Breton's "convulsivité de la beauté" and rejoins in its excesses the notion peculiar to all religious rites of an arid moral purity.

If the theatre, then, as it is conceived by Arrabal is a refracting glass in which the spectator may see himself in all his potentiality, it is none the less so for the author himself: "J'écris pour savoir pourquoi j'écris ...pour me débarrasser de tout cela...enfin, pour être normal..." This suggests that the theatre for Arrabal will be both the vehicle of self-awareness, of personal integration through intuitive withdrawal, and, at the same time, of catharsis: a means of acting out obsessions and desires through their projection into the poetry of the stage. For Arrabal theatre is reality and reality is theatre:

Je suis presque toujours le personnage principal de mes pièces...mon théâtre, c'est moi...tout ce que j'aurais aimé faire, tout ce que je ne peux pas être dans la vie, je le fais, je le suis dans mon théâtre...13.

10 Messerman, "Arrabal in Conversation" (Unpublished).
12 Messerman, "Arrabal in Conversation".
13 Ibid.
Unlike Genet to whom he has frequently been compared, and whose life as well as fictional works are seen by Sartre as acts of existential freedom and self-creation, \(^{14}\) Arrabal can create himself only through his theatre. Seen in this light his plays are always a response to the query of the dwarf, Hieronymous of *L'enterrement de la sardine*: "Qui suis-je? Pourquoi suis-je ici?"\(^ {15}\)—a network of psychic tropisms organized into rites, a progressive confrontation and materialization of the reality of his own inner being, and, to the extent that he shares with others all the myths of the Jungian unconscious, that of all men. "Pour être normal..." It is though by giving fictional form to the dark or inconsistent aspects of his own nature, by incarnating them like so many errant spirits in search of a body to inhabit, that Arrabal may at last be free.

The liberation of dreams, the plumbing of the subconscious, the shunning of rationality, free association, violence, excess, the integration of the "moi"—all characterize Arrabal's methodology. It is not surprising, then, that the term "surrealist" should often be mentioned


in connection with his name. In fact Camilo Jose Cela, a fellow Spaniard and distinguished artist in his own right, in defending Arrabal in his latest confrontation with the Franco Regime\(^\text{16}\) invoked not only the absolute freedom of the artist against political and social repression, but the particular irresponsibility of the surrealist who, in "trying to express with his automatic thought the most obscure zones of the subconscious"\(^\text{17}\) exerts no conscious control over his behavior. Arrabal, however, speaking in his own behalf, consistently stresses the need for more than mere arrangement and choice of material originating in the subconscious; he argues for internal structure approaching the mathematical in its precision and its rigor. In the accompanying commentary to Théâtre IV we find:

Mais pour atteindre ce but le spectacle doit être régi par une idée théâtrale rigoureuse...la composition en sera parfaite, tout en réflétant le chaos et la confusion de la vie. De nos jours, et c'est là notre chance, les mathématiques modernes nous permettent de construire avec maestria [sic]\(^\text{18}\) la pièce la plus subtile, la plus complexe.

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\(^{16}\) Having inscribed a book for his nephew with the dedication "Me cago en Dios, en la patria, y en todo lo demás" ("To hell with God, fatherland and everything else"), Arrabal was arrested on charges of blasphemy and calumny, later absolved by Madrid's Tribunal of Public Order.


\(^{18}\) Arrabal, *Théâtre panique*, p. 189.
Thus one of the fundamental polarities of Arrabal's universe is brought to light as it finds expression in the elucidation of his theory of literature: apparent chaos, underlying order. The architecture of a play must be a masterpiece of precision and balance, since only such a solid "charpente" will produce the dramatic tensions and contrasts from which baroque fury may arise. It has been rightly noted that Arrabal sees in Benavente an early master. One need hardly add that the theme of architecture appears regularly in Arrabal's theatre culminating in a play in which the protagonist is an architect.

Mathematics, another keen interest of Arrabal's (he is currently preparing a license in mathematics; "Ce que j'aime dans les mathématiques c'est qu'elles renvoient toujours au hasard mais en donnant la possibilité d'intervenir dans le hasard. On reste totalement libre." unlock the door to many secrets of his universe. It is particularly in the "théorie des ensembles" or set theory that Arrabal finds both the properties of precise delineation and those of infinite possibility and permutation:


20 Arrabal, L'Architecte et L'Empereur d'Assyrie in Théâtre panique.

21 Schifres, Entretiens, p. 145.
"Des objets, des signes, des êtres rassemblés en vertu d'une propriété commune constituent des ensembles." According to set theory, then, thematic material, bits of dialogue, characters, structural patterns may be grouped in accordance with any given property or combination of properties and may be varied ad infinitum:

On peut faire un ensemble des choses les plus simples, les nombres premiers, par exemple. Mais on peut faire aussi un ensemble des choses les plus absurdes ou grotesques. On peut faire un ensemble de tout ce qui est en carton, ou de toutes les personnes qui tiennent une cigarette entre leurs lèvres, ou de toutes celles dont le nom commence par A. La théorie des ensembles permet de prendre n'importe quoi et, à partir de cette infinie liberté, d'établir des rapports.

And again:

Imaginons que l'on construise une pièce comme un ensemble ou des ensembles qui se confondent. On peut alors établir des relations à l'intérieur d'un ensemble et entre les différents ensembles. Et alors construire un monde très précis en partant d'un univers complètement fou.

Closely connected with the notion of mathematical permutation is that of "jeu" or "game." Here certain rules are set down which determine the manner in which constants may relate to each other but which permit within this framework the choice between "moves" or combinations of "moves."

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22 Ibid., p. 164.
23 Ibid., p. 143.
24 Ibid.
This fascination has found expression not only in Arrabal's published theatre ("jeu" as structure shall be discussed at some length) but in at least three sorts of extra-literary theatrical manifestations: "abstract" theatre which involves only the interplay of objects or geometric constellations and which Arrabal has apparently abandoned as being too taxing for the spectator, who, in order to appreciate the humor or pathos or surprise arising from any particular confrontation of objects had to have remembered all those preceding it; the "éphémère panique" the first of which Arrabal with Topor and Jodorowsky created in 1967 and which lies somewhere between the rigidly structured traditional play, rehearsed in its totality down to the most trivial gesture, and the contemporary "happening" which admits of no pre-arranged structure; and, finally, Arrabal's as yet unrealized dream of a theatrical "jeu" written for an exact number of spectator-participants, who, in following certain established rules of the "game" could alter the course of the performance, a sort of "partie de monopoly... survoltée par la poésie."  

It is not surprising to discover that the game of chess with its infinite manoeuvres and counter-manoeuvres is both pastime and structural referent for Arrabal, for it is here within the framework of mathematical probability

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25 Ibid., p. 79.
that "le hasard" is born"

Pour moi, les échecs, c'est aussi et d'abord un jeu de hasard. Victoire et défaite sont extérieures à nous...En même temps ce qu'on a appris est aussi très important. Hasard, tenacité, mémoire: tout comme dans la vie.26

Thus, chaos may be ordered, but even the most precise ordering opens onto a world of infinite possibility. "Hasard" may be structured by "jeu," yet the combinatorial possibilities of "jeu" rejoin "le hasard." "Cérémonie" is a way of giving form to the world of "confusion," but "cérémonie" as "jeu" may be infinitely permutated to the level of "panique." Now a new constant is added to the complex of polarities which characterize Arrabal's theoretical formulations, that of "mémoire." In chess it is memory which both stores information regarding what has gone before in the game and that pertaining to the potential for future moves, the "rules" of the game. This concept has resonance both in Arrabal's metaphysics, his theory of knowledge, and his theory of literary creativity.

When asked in a recent interview if God existed, Arrabal replied that God exists but has gone made. He is

26Ibid., p. 144.
powerless to regulate the machine which he set in motion. Having created the necessary constants and a system of movement or interaction necessary to these constants, God, as supreme chess player, as supreme master of ceremonies has forgotten the rules and the rituals, leaving the machine he had fabricated to its own devices. Thus, the chaos we perceive is as much a reality as the structure we impose on the workings of a defunct machine: "Je me refuse à imaginer la réalité sans les phantasmes, les monstruosités, les distorsions du baroque." 

How can man comprehend and assimilate the fluid and changing contours of a baroque reality? How may he arrive at Knowledge? Does Knowledge, as such, exist? "La connaissance," Arlys tells us in Le Couronnement exists in the interplay of "le hasard, c'est-à-dire le futur, ou, si vous préférez, la confusion, et la mémoire (my italics) c'est à dire le passé." Knowledge lies at the juncture of "mémoire" and "hasard" and may be attained only through an initiatory rite violent in its intensity. Yet art itself is defined in similar terms by the Orator of Fêtes et rites de la confusion:

27 Messerman, "Arrabal in Conversation."

28 Schifres, Entretiens, p. 64.

L'oeuvre de l'artiste...est le fruit de l'union du temps et de la mémoire. La mémoire symbolisée par la biographie de l'artiste et l'histoire de l'humanité, et, le temps, par le futur, c'est-à-dire par le hasard.30

The parallel between art and knowledge is here irrevocably drawn: both consisting of "mémoire" and "hasard"; both, furthermore, contain the same violence, the same poetic, intuitive grasp of reality. Within this framework the importance of memory is further heightened by Arrabal's contention that imagination, as such, does not exist:

Je ne crois pas que l'homme puisse avoir de l'imagination. Il ne peut avoir que des souvenirs et ses combinaisons. C'est cela mon imagination: la mémoire, un choc d'images qui m'ont marqué.31

It is thus the fortuitous combination of memories which defines imagination in Arrabal's esthetic. Once again "mémoire" is played off against "hasard!" The latter at any given moment determines the choice and combination of memories which constitute artistic inspiration. It is again the play of "jeu" and "hasard" or of order and baroque frenzy which characterizes the realized work of art which, in turn, is a microcosm of the universe.


31Schifres, Entretiens, p. 117.
Finally the act of writing is itself a sacred ritual or ceremony through which the artist gives form to the nameless phantoms of the subconscious. Art is intensity is confusion is knowledge. Memory, then, is at the very center of Arrabal's universe. At the level of theory it becomes the basis of both his esthetic and his metaphysics; at the level of artistic creativity it furnishes the thematic material and the structural basis for both his plays and his novels. It would seem well, then, to briefly examine Arrabal's life, the observable facts of his existence, which, as they become part of a complex network of attitudes and emotions, find resonance in his theatrical works.

Perhaps no single event marked the life of Arrabal as did the imprisonment and subsequent disappearance of his father. Arrested on the eve of the Spanish Civil War (July 17, 1936) in the family's home in Mellila, Spanish Morocco, by

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followers of Franco who deemed him a dangerous "leftist," Fernando Arrabal Ruiz, a painter, was condemned to death after a travesty of a trial "aussi féroce que bref."  

Nine months later Fernando Ruiz's sentence was commuted to thirty years imprisonment. Arrabal was not yet four years old: "Je ne me rappelle que ses mains enterrant mes jambes sans le sable de la plage à Mellila...Je me rappelle ses mains contre mes jambes..."  

He was subsequently transferred to prisons at Ceuta, Ciudad Rodrigo, and Burgos. At Ceuta he tried to commit suicide ("moi encore je sens couler son sang humide sur mon dos nu..."). On January 28, 1942, having been for five months in the Asylum of the City of Burgos, Fernando Ruiz somehow escaped from his narrow cell and disappeared into the snow-covered Castilian countryside. He was dressed only in a pair of pyjamas; he had no papers of identification: "Mais j'ai voyagé avec lui - en imagination - la main dans la main, par des sentiers et des galaxies, caressant des fauves inexistants, buvant

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33 Schifres, Entretiens, p. 13.
34 Ibid.
à des sources et des trous d'eau douce dans le sable.  

For Arrabal as for his alter ego the actress Laïs of *Le Jardin des délices*, his father was a "personnage mythique," an absence, a specter whose photograph had been torn out of the family album by a mother who, Arrabal suspects, may have denounced him to the authorities:

Mais la calomnie, le silence, le feu et les ciseaux n'ont pas éteint la voix du sang qui franchit les montagnes et me baigne de lumière et de lymphe... Je l'imagine au centre d'un kaleidoscope illuminant mes peines et mes inspirations...

The injunction "Souviens-toi de ton père" scraped on a doll house and on a toy locomotive which Fernando Ruix made for his children while he was in prison, and finally uncovered under the paint with which Arrabal's mother had tried to hide it, lies at the very center of Arrabal's being. His entire artistic achievement can be seen as an attempt to recreate the presence of this lost father, to overcome the attempts by his mother to repress and abolish his father's image, to reinstate the security and orderliness of a universe whose fixed contours exploded with his father's disappearance: "Ma vie est comme cela; d'un bout à l'autre, ce ne sont qu'interrogations. Cela a

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36 Ibid.
38 Arrabal, "Fernando Arrabal Ruiz, mon père," p. 117.
commence avec l'histoire de mon père et n'a pas cessé depuis. 39

It is difficult not to see in Arrabal's subsequent loss of religious faith ("Je crois que Dieu est un mythe comme tous les autres") 40 in his rejection of a benevolent and protective God who regulates the universe in justice and harmony, a parallel with the loss of his earthly father. And just as the small boy both loves his father and desires his death so Arrabal the man and artist both seeks the order of a divinely inspired universe and rejects the limitations which such an order implies: "Je suis toujours hanté par l'idée de Dieu... On ne doit pas chercher Dieu de cette façon! A ce point! Ce n'est pas bien. Ces nostalgies désistes... ce n'est pas humain... pas progressiste..." 41 But in the same breath he adds: "La confusion dans laquelle je vis est si grande que je suis, malgré mes nostalgies désistes, convaincu intellectuellement que l'idée de Dieu est répressive." 42

Absence-presence, death-life, order-freedom, such are the contradictory valences occasioned by the concept of "father" for Arrabal. Yet it is in relation to his mother

39 Schifres, Entretiens, p. 130.
40 Ibid., pp. 22-23.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., p. 23.
that Arrabal has lived out an even more tortured and ambivalent destiny. Fierce, possessive, cruel, fanatic in her Catholicism of guilt and retribution, totally unaware of a sadism which she cloaked in the martyred and self-effacing tones of Françoise in Les deux bourreaux. It was Arrabal's mother who taught him love as suffering, as the desperate possession of one being by another. As a child, he writes, "Je l'adorais. J'étais d'une jalousie féroce. Parfois au jardin public, nous nous asseyions par terre et les hommes contemplaient ses jambes. Alors, je les cachais avec mon pull-over..." But the reverse side of this passionate attachment of the child for his mother was her own violence which often manifested itself in physical cruelty: "Elle me battait avec les mètres en bois qui provenaient de la boutique de tissus de mes grands-parents...Je me souviens que j'allais regarder mes bleus dans la glace de la salle de bain et que je pleurais..." It was in this climate of maternal rage and affection and in the context of his father's death, and not as it is commonly supposed through any

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43Arrabal told me during my interview with him that a young enthusiast of his theatre had gone to Spain to visit his mother and had found in her the exact prototype of the mother, Françoise of Les deux bourreaux.

44Entretiens, p. 21.

45Ibid., p. 36.
familiarity with the works of Sade, that love and suffering, tenderness and cruelty came to be identified in the mind of the young Arrabal:

J'ai éprouvé l'intensité de l'amour à travers la souffrance, j'ai senti que si l'on voulait - peut-être moi-même - montrer son amour, il fallait y parvenir en se détournant tout à fait de la mort... Il fallait de la vie, donc une certaine violence.

It is also through his mother and more particularly through his mother's sister, the Aunt of Baal Babylone, that religion, sexual excitation, guilt and repression should come to be intimately identified. Arrabal's aunt, perhaps even more exaggerated in her fanaticism than his mother vacillated between acts of blatant sexuality and those of extreme piety, variously exhibiting herself nude to the adolescent Arrabal and exacting from herself cruel retribution. "Elle exprimait," says Arrabal, "par tout son corps le désir et la souffrance." She was for Arrabal Spanish Catholicism "en sourdine," a desperate fusion of suffering and eroticism:

46Ibid., p. 24.
47Ibid., p. 28.
48Arrabal believes that the aberrational behavior of both his mother and his aunt is due to having been raised in the environment created by the presence of a third sister, seriously disturbed and macrocephalic, the apparent favorite of her parents. The neighbors referred to them as the "sorcières."
49Entretiens, p. 29.
Nous étions nourris de sado-masochisme. Nous lisions saint Jean de la Croix qui s'écrie: "fais-moi mal, mon Dieu", et sainte Thérèse "je meurs parce que je ne meurs pas", sainte Thérèse qui sent Dieu pénétrer dans ses entrailles avec une épée de feu... Tout allait de soi pour nous. Tout se déroulait dans la douleur. 50

Arrabal still possesses the cilice which the priest of the parish church gave him to wear tightly bound about his thigh: "Je peux vous assurer qu'à la puberté, il provoquait en moi une excitation terrible. La cuisse s'enflait, et, lorsque j'enlevais le cilice, le sang coulait." 51

In this environment of severe repression and unbearable titillation Arrabal came of age sexually. The anguish was only intensified for him by what he perceived as his own physical repulsiveness and deformity. He saw himself as a dwarf with a huge head, the butt of neighborhood jokes, a monster from whom there arose a fetid odor. His sexual initiation was realized, then, in solitude: "Mon education sexuelle fut totalement autodidacte et interiorisée. Je ne pouvais connaître que mon corps." 52

All pleasure co-existed with acute feelings of guilt and

50 Ibid., p. 30.
51 Ibid., p. 29.
villany: "Toute autosatisfaction était un combat entre le supplice du 'péché' et l'exaltation des sens."^ At one point during a period of deep depression Arrabal even decided to kill himself in this way, certain that the accumulated "sin" would suffice to snuff out his life:
"J'ai tout prévu, j'ai beaucoup péché toute une journée jusqu'au sang. Ensuite j'ai été me confesser de tous ces péchés, et j'ai cru que j'allais mourir le soir même."^4.
It was almost, Arrabal observes in retrospect, as though the absolute repression of the Church were a means of refusing, in spite of the perpetual Inquisition it had lived, the destruction of physical love, a means of institutionalizing a cult of sexuality. We want most what we are forbidden from having, be it the sacred or the sacrreligious.55

The same principle seemed to hold true for Arrabal in the domain of intellectuality. Prevented from reading as a youth anything but those books officially approved by his mother and the Church (the manual Escuelas Pías defined Voltaire as a "satanic monster who tried his best to destroy the Church"^56 but apparently passed over Lewis Carroll whose

^3 Ibid., p. 25.
^4 Ibid., p. 28.
^55 Ibid., p. 30.
^56 Ibid., p. 20.
status as an author of no consequence sufficed to save him...) Arrabal recalls the zeal with which he attacked all manner of reading material when, as a law student in Madrid, he had gained a measure of personal freedom, and the deception with which he discovered, after years of longing to explore its contents, that Rousseau's *Contrat Social* was not pornographic.

In order to fully understand the nature of the external circumstances which have collaborated to form Arrabal, the man, we must see the climate of intellectual and sensual repression in the larger context of political repression and terrorism existing at the time of Generalissimo Franco's take-over. The sound of marching feet, bombs, children's screams, the vision of dark cells, citizens dragged from their beds, poverty, hunger - all the anguish and violence of Picasso's "Guernica" remain part of Arrabal's inner world. Death was always near for him, now showing its face in a morbid and guilt-ridden religiosity, now gliding swiftly through the ruins of a bombed town. And then there was and is the immediate threat of Arrabal's own ill health. First stricken with tuberculosis as an adolescent, Arrabal suffered a relapse shortly after coming to France in 1955 when on a scholarship to study theatre in Paris. He was sent to the sanatorium at Buffémont where
one of his lungs, apparently too diseased to function, was surgically collapsed. A fifteen-inch scar bears witness to his ordeal.

Arrabal's refuge from death has been the violence of life intensely lived and intensely suffered. "Pour me donner l'impression d'exister" is a phrase which appears frequently in his conversation. Writing is apparently one of the things which gives him the feeling of eluding death. It is significant that his stay at Buffémont was characterized by a frenzy of creativity in which three major works and several minor ones were completed.

But with all his frenzy there remains in Arrabal a strange immobility. The victim of repressive forces, he would break through his chains to self-awareness, to freedom, but some strange fatality, some paralysing bond of intense conflict prevents his complete liberation; hating God, he cannot, however, rid himself of the obsession of God; hating his mother for her denigration and obliteration of his father's memory, he none the less remained in her house, although he could at that time have afforded to take a room elsewhere, without uttering a word to her for a period of five years. One wonders the extent to which this fatality lies in the subsequent realization that he resembled this loved and despised woman: "Une fois de plus,
j'ai compris que je ressemblais à ma mère et non à mon père.\textsuperscript{57} Despite his efforts to escape the sphere of his mother's influence, to recreate through his work the image of his lost father, and thus find his own identity as a man, Arrabal seems to progress with desperate slowness to his own coming of age: to destroy his mother in him is to destroy himself:

Je fais tout mon possible pour y parvenir. A ce moment dont je vous parlais, quand je me mets à écrire, je me dis: "C'est formidable, cela va être tellement différent". Puis je donne le texte à lire à ma femme et elle me dit: "Malgré la nouveauté de la pièce, décidément on te retrouve toujours!" Alors je suis furieux. Je croyais qu'on ne me reconnaîtrait plus, que j'avais rompu avec le passé.\textsuperscript{58}

As a result of this brief exposition a distinct pattern of thematic and structural correspondences is already beginning to emerge. Taking as our point of departure Arrabal's literary or dramatic theory the presence of two contradictory yet complementary tendencies was noted: on the one hand the movement toward order or structure as seen in his proclivity for ceremony, mathematics, "jeu," and the pre-eminence of memory; on the other hand we find "panique," infinite freedom, and the

\textsuperscript{57}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{58}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 22.
intervention of "le hasard." One might say, in fact, that the fusion of contraries in a general way characterizes Arrabal's theoretical formulations in which art is identified with knowledge, both being the products of "mémoire" and "hasard."

Taking a cue from Arrabal himself ("la mémoire symbolisée par la biographie de l'artiste") Arrabal's life experience was found to contain the germ of the very polarities which he later incorporated theoretically. At the center of the kaleidoscope of Arrabal's being there exists an absence - that of his father, of God, of order, of structure, of self-knowledge and knowledge of the universe. The search for meaning, for absolutes, for definition is a response to this absence. A climate of severe repression, however, also characterizes Arrabal's early life experiences: affectional, sexual, intellectual, and political repression. It is not unexpected, therefore, that along with the desire for order should have arisen the desire for freedom, for the unstructured, for "le merveilleux." Onto this already complex network of dualities may be superimposed those of love and hate, of tenderness and cruelty, of need and rejection, of pleasure and

59Arrabal, Fêtes et rites de la confusion, p. 147.
and pain, of dependence and independence. Finally, the need to escape the ubiquity of death through the violence of experience was also seen to have theoretical resonance in one of the constructions of the word "panique."

It remains for us now to examine Arrabal's dramatic works so as to further trace the development of these correspondences, which,

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténèbreuse et profonde unité

create a universe of perverse and stunning beauty.
CHAPTER TWO

CHILDHOOD: THE SEARCH FOR SIGNIFICANCE
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With the observation that "Le monde de l'enfance est celui de mon oeuvre. Rien n'est sûr, ni le bien ni le mal,"\(^1\) Arrabal lends support to the assertion that critics have tended to make most consistently about his works: his creatures are child-like in certain apparent and statable ways. (That they are not children in the normal sense is a point which needs making and which will be developed below.) Because of the critical attention already given to this question and because the quality seems to be particularly characteristic of Arrabal's early plays, it would seem a likely point of departure for systematic inquiry into the nature of Arrabal's universe. There is a further reason for beginning here. Memory, as we have seen, lies at the very core of Arrabal's esthetic. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that there is some validity in focusing on that domain where adult memories tend to converge: the domain of childhood. It should none the less be stressed that one might have begun anywhere. Since all of the important thematic material, like the kaleidoscope's

\(^1\)Alain Schifres, *Entretiens avec Arrabal*, p. 132.
bits of patterned glass, is present to a greater or lesser degree in all of Arrabal's dramatic works (a possible exception in his "pure abstraction" for four cubes and two actors which still, interestingly, bears structural similarities to the rest of his work), one might justifiably have argued for any number of chronological orderings.

If one were to fix upon the single quality of Arrabal's characters which makes them appear most childlike it would undoubtedly be their innocence. Fando, Lis, Emanou, Tasla, Vilaro, the entire gallery of Arrabalian creatures have in common their eternal naïveté, their eternal incredulity and surprise in the face of life's vicissitudes. More than the array of toys (dolls, wagons, balloons, jumpropes, drums, bicycles, skates) with which Arrabal's characters surround themselves, which occupy their time and attention, and which are considered by the author as important enough to provide the title for several of the early plays, more than their preoccupation with urination and defecation (preoccupation is perhaps unfair: Arrabal's characters are interested in these body processes and have not acquired the taboos which would hinder the indulgence of that interest), it is the perpetual newness of life surging up always in its essential differentness which particularly identifies the Arrabalian character.
These creatures take nothing for granted because, as it is soon apparent, they have no frame of reference into which new information may be integrated. Everything happens to them as though it had never happened to them or to anyone else before. Thus great wonderment and delight may be expressed at events which are not only uninteresting to those who do not share their optic, but may even be repugnant. The following example taken from *Le Tricycle* is one among many. Climando has just told Mita that she may ride his tricycle:

MITA

Et tu vas me laisser le conduire d'une main?

CLIMANDO

D'une seule main? (Il réfléchit.) Enfin, bon. (Il réfléchit.) Et qu'est-ce que tu vas faire avec l'autre?

MITA

Je me mettrai un doigt dans le nez.

CLIMANDO

Quel numéro! Tu sais tout faire. ²

What is equally evident from the above example is that the abolition of a frame of reference also vitiates any notion

of a hierarchy of values. In Arrabal's world everything is reduced to the same state of absolute equivalence in which a game of hide and seek may end in murder without remorse while the accusation of unfairness in a word game may call forth tears and pleas for forgiveness. It is a world in which Fando seeing Lis, his paralysed and completely dependent lover in a state of distress may ingenuously inquire, "Je ne sais pas si tu as faim, si tu veux des fleurs, ou si tu as envie de pisser."

How is it, one asks, that such characters have reached a state of physical maturity (that they are sexual adults is an observation so evident as to need no elucidation or support) without developing a system of cataloguing, judging, assimilating new experience? The answer is fascinating in terms of what we have already noted regarding the pre-eminence of memory in Arrabal's theory of imagination and creativity: Arrabal's characters are almost completely devoid of the faculty of memory! From Fando (Fando et Lis) whose theory of knowledge eludes him at the very moment he calls upon it, to Giafar (Le Couronnement)

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4 Arrabal, Le Tricycle, p. 132.
5 Arrabal, Fando et Lis in Théâtre I, p. 72.
who not only cannot recite the message he has just "memorized" but cannot even recapture its contents in general terms, to Climando (Le Tricycle) who "forgets" that the police are looking for him because they have found out about the murder he has committed, Arrabal's characters might all join with Jérôme as he exclaims in Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné: "On oublie tout."^6

If it can be said, then, that Arrabal writes in part to purge himself of the obsessions and destructive memories of his own childhood, his characters seem to exemplify a mindless and memory-less state which precedes knowledge. In the "théâtre panique" we read in La Pierre de la folie, the "insolite" is born of the "familier."^7 The familiar is a notion with which we can identify but which is completely foreign to Arrabal's creatures. An experience immediately after having been lived falls once again into the realm of the unknown. Logical consequence, causality, predictability are all concepts which find no breathing space in this world at once hermetically sealed and infinitely open, a world in which Tasla (La Bicyclette du condamné), receiving as a gift from Vilaro the same

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^6Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné, p. 441.

balloon which she had given him as a gift moments before, may respond ecstatically, "Quelle suprise!"  

Having retained from prior experience only that modicum of linguistic and behavioral information which enables them to function at the most elementary level, having been denied the faculties for storing and sorting the events of the past, Arrabal's characters are, in a real sense, without identity. In fact, it is with great difficulty that one thinks of them as "characters" at all in terms of having any psychic reality outside of their function as elements in the interplay of dramatic tensions. They are not, in a word, what Henri Gouhier in his discussion of those great characters of dramatic literature has called "les réssuscitables." The very notion of "character" implies a certain psychic density, a complexity, a state of tension or conflict within the confines of a single consciousness. Arrabal's creatures are, on the other hand, completely lacking in density, flat, unidimensional. They are thus completely without artifice, without hidden motivation. Says Arrabal, "Mes personnages veulent

\footnote{Arrabal, \textit{La Bicyclette du condamné} in \textit{Théâtre II}, p. 221.}

It is perhaps their unidimensionality, their insubstantiality as particularly reflected in their language which makes Arrabal's characters more abstract than "real."
The exoticism of their names alone: "Filtos," "Micara," occasionally only the initials "F" or "L" would suffice to disassociate them from any particular time or culture. But the complete nudity of their verbal expression, having nothing behind it, as Geneviève Serreau has noted, "no shadows, no implications, no ambiguity, no false modesty" is the single most important factor in the communication of utter simplicity and flatness of character. We recall, parenthetically, that until quite recently Arrabal was involved in a conscious effort to limit the scope of his vocabulary to three hundred words, convinced that "la règle du jeu de la littérature, au contraire de la musique, de la peinture, est très simple." One sees very clearly here (the topic will be developed more fully in a later chapter) the extent to which "jeu," the desire on the part

10 Schifres, Entretiens, p. 92.
12 Entretiens, p. 163.
13 Ibid.
of the artist to experiment with "form," precedes and creates "content."

To say that Arrabal's characters lack density is not to say, however, that any one of them behaves in the same way all the time but merely to say that at any given moment in time there is no coherent referent from which the direction and limitation of his behavior may be predicted, nor, one might add, is there any complex of personality traits which a given act may tend to confirm. Arrabal's characters are at any given moment either one way or another, but rarely are they the sort of creatures about whom it might be said, "Now he is behaving in manner A but there is something about him which leads me to believe that he is also capable of behaving in manner B." There is a certain purity in the excess of the Arrabalian hero who, whatever he might be, is that way all the way. It is his absolutism which, paradoxically, accounts for the feeling of sincerity he communicates, and may also explain the fact of a certain limited identification on the part of the spectator. For although it is improbable that one could identify completely with the amorphous and constantly shifting outlines of the phantoms which Arrabal sets before us, one can identify with the power and intensity of their emotional states as disparately viewed: their rage, their
fear, their delight is real to us. It may be in this alternation on the part of the spectator between the identification peculiar to tragedy and the lack of involvement characteristic of comedy that the peculiar "dark" comedy of Arrabal (and of much of the new theatre) comes into being.14

Part of what we sense as comedy in Arrabal is a function of the lack of self-knowledge, of self-awareness on the part of his characters.15 They are nothing if not enigmatic to themselves. Their comportment, being as it is totally beyond the dictates of personality dynamics as that concept is normally understood, totally "unmotivated," taken from "mémoire" and dropped in the lap of "hasard," Arrabal's characters are capable of anything from the most touching care and solicitude to the most brazen acts of cruelty and destruction. It is within Arrabal's world that Kardo's paradoxical observation in Le Couronnement becomes strikingly profound. "Votre innocence," he says of Giafar, "est une qualité diabolique."16 Thus in Le cimetièr...
Milos in the first part of the play completely dominates the sweet and submissive Dila, while in the second part of the play it is she who becomes the stronger, rendering meek and emasculated the once arrogant Milos. Sylda in Le Couronnement is at one moment an omniscient fairy princess, the next, a clinging; weeping young woman who doubts her powers.

Not only are the inhabitants of Arrabal's dramatic universe capable of completely unmotivated changes of mood and behavior (it should be apparent at this point that by "unmotivated" is meant not only without reference to external stimuli but also irrespective of any internal necessity), they are capable of becoming "someone" else. "On peut devenir n'importe qui," Arrabal reminds us, "Nous sommes tous capables de tout."17 In Le cimetière des voitures, to cite a single example, the relationship of Tossido and Laska is in the first act that between a not very energetic young man and an extremely energetic female trainer who periodically drags him across the stage in a "pas de gymnastique." During the second act Tossido and Laska become lovers: Tossido masculine, insistent, Laska retiring, clinging. In the third act Tossido and Laska assume the roles of police inquisitors who capture, torture, and

17 Schifres, Entretiens, p. 104.
eventually crucify the unlucky Emanou. The final scene finds them once again in the roles of reluctant athlete and aggressive trainer except that this time the roles are reversed: Tiska is the athlete, Tossido, the trainer. 18

Within the framework of the Arrabalian character who does not undergo such complete metamorphosis there is perhaps one impetus to action which recurs often enough to assume special significance: Much of what Arrabal's characters do they do to escape boredom. Theirs is less the "nausée" of Sartre's Roquentin who must somehow deal with a world in which everything is "de trop" than it is an attempt to elude the terrible anguish of absence. Language is a common refuge of the Arrabalian character who often talks because there is nothing else to do:

JEROME (ennuyé)

Encore.

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18 Ionesco has used this kind of character metamorphosis very effectively in La Leçon (Théâtre I, 1954), to cite only one example, in which a vivacious female pupil and a retiring schoolmaster exchange personality traits so thoroughly that his excess of energy ends by killing her. Ionesco also employs the complete metamorphosis of character as in Le Rhinocéros (Théâtre III, 1963), wherein the contagious disease of conformity results in the transformation of most of the dramatis personae into grunting pachyderms. In Arrabal, character metamorphosis, rather than indicating progression, usually indicates the multiple facets of personality.
VINCENT
Quoi. (Un temps.)

JEROME
Qu'est-ce que tu disais? (Un temps.)

VINCENT
Quand?

Long silence. Vincent pleure.
Jérôme pleure.

One cannot but think here of Beckett's Estragon as he confides to Vladimir, "On trouve toujours quelque chose, hein Didi, pour nous donner l'impression d'exister."^{20}

Violent action is another antedote to despair. It may take the form of cruelty on a small scale: "Tout ce qui nous reste pour ne pas nous ennuyer c'est d'aller aux étangs donner des coups de bâton aux poissons."^{21} Or it may be carried to the extreme of brutal murder as in the case of François d'assise in *Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné*. Violence is a way of giving substance to one's existence in a world so shadowy that even the reality of that existence is undermined. On the other hand, Arrabal's

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^{19} *Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné*, p. 460.

^{20} Samuel Beckett, *En Attendant Godot* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1952), pp. 116-117. In the plays of Beckett absence and inaction are almost always primary motivating sources of verbal expression: one must talk to maintain existence, particularly since Beckett's characters are prevented by their advanced age or physical decrepitude from physical expression.

^{21} *Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné*, p. 459.
creatures managed to seek and find comfort in simple sensual pleasures. In this paradoxical sense they are both insubstantial and creatures of the earth, delighting in the heat of the sun, the movement of their bodies, the taste of an anchovy sandwich.

It is evident that because they do not build on prior experience future experience is equally inconceivable to them, consisting always in a slight rearrangement of immediate information without any real envisioning or projection into a different future reality. Arrabal's characters, in a word, lack imagination. Fando, in an effort to please Lis, creates for her the "Chanson de la plume":

La plume était dans le lit
Et le lit était dans la plume.22

Most difficult for them to imagine, being as we have seen, sensual creatures, is a state of non-being, of non-feeling: death. In Guernica Lira's voice is heard from the latrine in which she has been imprisoned by the bombardment:

VOIX DE LIRA
Je te connais. Ça t'est bien égal si je meurs.

FANCHOU
C'est toi qui le dis. Quand tu seras morte je... (il réfléchit) coucherai trois fois de suite avec toi.23

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22 Arrabal, Fando et Lis, p. 72.
23 Arrabal, Guernica, p. 35.
Or Climando in *Le Tricycle*, who, hearing that Mita is contemplating suicide, hastens to assure her: "C'est clair. Suicide-toi...Si tu crois que tu seras plus heureuse en te suicidant, suicide-toi le plus vite possible."  

Cut off from their past, Arrabal's creatures are equally cut off from their futures. Time for them is encapsulating, a perpetual present which defies chronology and prevents growth. It is not by chance that so many of Arrabal's plays return at the final curtain to their point of departure. Time is imprisoning, womb-like, refusing the birth of identity. It is perhaps in this sense that we may understand what Arrabal adds to his statement that "nous sommes tous capables de tout...Et pourtant nous sommes toujours le même."  

Unmotivated action, complete metamorphosis of character are poetic manifestations of the fact that reality itself is volatile, fluid, multi-faceted, but containing, none the less, its own inner coherence which is immutable if unattainable: "C'est le monde extérieur et non eux-mêmes qui est insaisissable," writes Arrabal. Removed from any frame of reference in a society

25*Entretiens*, p. 104.  
based upon "logic," "significance," "relevance," (Arrabal's plays, as it shall be discussed below in another context, take place in enclosed space as well as time; they are outside of history, outside of civilization) Arrabal's phantoms are a perfect reflection of the baroque universe in which they find themselves.

This is not to say, to be sure, that Arrabal's characters make no attempt to structure "reality." In fact, the most basic source of dramatic tension in Arrabal's theatre is precisely this effort on the part of his characters to order a reality which constantly eludes them. "Je voudrais avoir confiance en quelque chose et tout s'écroule peu à peu sous moi," cries Giafar in Le Couronnement.

One way in which they attempt to give form to experience is through language. They have incredible confidence in its formalism, apparently unaware that the reality it both reflects and creates at every step refuses the order they are seeking:

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LIS
Il faut nous mettre d'accord.

FANDO
Et tu es sure que ça nous servira?

LIS
Presque sûre.

FANDO
Mais nous servir à quoi?
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27Le Couronnement, p. 122.
Their faith in the ordering power of language removes them even further from the reality of immediate experience. Fanchou in *Guernica*, learning that Lira is dying, invokes once again the formalism of language: "Tu vas mourir pour de bon? Tu veux que je prévienne la famille?" A natural consequence of fixation upon the forms of language is its complete literal construction in which language destroys itself. From the Father in *Le Couronnement* we hear:

> Ce n'est pas une femme comme les autres...
> alors qu'elle était encore enfant je la prenais dans mes bras et lui murmurai:
> "Ma fille, tu seras un fils."

Attempts at logical deduction lead to non sequiturs just as attempts at description or definition lead to tautology: "Quand on est un grand acteur," says Vincent in *Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné*, "on est presque aussi connu que..."

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28 *Fando et Lis*, p. 59.

29 *Guernica*, p. 20.

30 *Le Couronnement*, p. 107. The literality of language as a self-destructive technique is widely used by Ionesco. The most salient example is the discourse by the Professor of *La Leçon* on the "neo-hispanic" languages.
If language sets up its own interior system of conflict and destruction "reality" as it is perceived by the spectator also serves to vitiate the language with which Arrabal's characters try to grasp it. At the very moment Tasla reports to Vilaro (La Bicyclette du condamné) that her prisoner, Paso, never sticks his tongue out at her, he is doing so; when she says that the cage in which he is imprisoned is too solid for him to escape, he blithely opens the cage door, steps out, and takes physical liberties with her.

Finally, language often serves in Arrabal's world to call into question the very existence of those using it as well as those upon whom it is focused. Mitaro in Fando et Lis is speaking to Némur about Fando: "Tu l'as fait pleurer comme si c'était un homme qui aille à Tar avec une femme dans une petite voiture." It is the "comme si" which is jarring here since our perception is precisely that Fando is the man on the way to Tar pushing Lis in a child's carriage, that Mitaro is one of the three men "au

31Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné, p. 418. Beckett's Didi and Gogo (En Attendover Godot) flounder in the same sort of circular logic which inevitably precludes action.

32Fando et Lis, p. 85.
parapluie" whom he meets along the way, etc.

In this battle for survival silence occasionally wins out over sound. Fando recalls how he once managed not to talk for a whole day, attempting to fill the silent space with physical action. Although he refuses to discuss the incident in detail, things apparently ended very badly. More often than not, however, Arrabal's characters pursue their hapless quest for system. The quest may be quite limited in scope as in the case, once again, of Fando who had devised a method of knowing whose side to take in disputes. The winner would always identify himself as "le premier qui dira le mot 'ou'." But for many of Arrabal's characters the dilemma is much broader.

Climando of Le Tricycle states it well when he says:

Enfin ce que je dis c'est qu'il faut un ordre, savoir pourquoi on a dit ce qu'on a dit, ce qu'on va faire, et ce qu'on fera... Il faut avoir un ordre, un chemin droit, rationnel, il faut trouver la meilleure conduite.

The search for significance, for a hierarchy of values, for a code of behavior is a constant preoccupation of Arrabal's characters. It is not surprising, moreover, they should seek answers to these most basic of questions in religion.

33Ibid., p. 95
34Le Tricycle, p. 154.
They recall, interestingly, in the particular direction of their search something of Arrabal's own inspiration:

Deux personnalités espagnoles, également persécutées par l'Inquisition, me montrent deux voies. Ce sont Thérèse d'Avila qui contemple un Dieu de bonté, un Dieu tel un volcan d'amour et Fray Luis de Léon qui cherche en Dieu le soleil de la connaissance, la clé de toutes les énigmes.  

Arrabal's characters, too, may be said to seek meaning both in "bonté" and in "connaissance," and although both tend to remain active choices throughout the body of Arrabal's work to date, "bonté" dominates the earlier plays while "connaissance" becomes more of a concern in the later plays.

Three early plays in particular, Oraison, Le cimetière des voitures, and Le Tricycle, deal with the attempt on the part of Arrabal's characters to establish a moral code, to erect certain guidelines for living. Fidio and Lilbé of Oraison, like Adam and Eve before knowledge, cannot distinguish between good and evil. Curiously, however, and unlike the inhabitants of Eden, they have a nostalgia for what is "good" ("à partir

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35 Entretiens, p. 23.
d'aujourd'hui nous serons bons et purs"^6 as if the concept had somehow remained with them through time and distance, the last vestige of a form whose content had long since vanished. The play which unfolds amidst all the formal trappings of a solemn religious ceremony (crucifix, lighted candles, austerity of costume) and which utilizes the repetitious and innocent lyricism of a Claudelian "verset" traces their effort to rediscover the significance of the word "bon":

FIDIO
Est-ce que tu ne te rends pas compte de ce qu'il faut faire pour être bon?

LILBE
Non. (Un temps.) Et toi?

FIDIO
Pas très bien. (Un temps.) Mais j'ai le livre, Comme ça je saurai.37

Fidio reads to Lilbe the story of creation and that of the birth of Christ, answering her questions as would a tender parent those of a curious child, yet manifesting all the while his own strangely innocent construction of the holy writ:

36Arrabal, Oraison in Théâtre I, p. 9. Didi's query to Gogo, "Si on se repentait?" (EAC, p. 15) is less the sort of driving desire for "goodness" that one finds in Arrabal than it is a direct response to Didi's own preceding story about the one thief crucified with Christ who was saved. Estragon's reply is even more telling: "De quoi...D'être né?" (p. 16). In Beckett's universe man's most serious indiscretion is to exist.

Et les voilà qui suivaient l'étoile et qui la suivaient: enfin, ils sont arrivés un jour à la crèche de Bethléem. Alors ils ont offert à l'enfant tout ce qu'ils portaient sur leurs chameaux: beaucoup de jouets et de bonbons et aussi du chocolat...38

Fidio seeks God in terms of his only real attachment to existence: his physical experience of the world. It is this sensuality rather than a sense of blasphemy (Lais in Le Jardin des délices makes a case for blasphemy, however, in saying that since love of God presumes free will this freedom may as easily give rise to the blasphemous as to the sacred.) which creates the peculiarly touching quality of his quest. Fidio and Lilbé, apparently unaware of the repressive Catholicism of Arrabal's own youth, that which Cavanosa in Le Grand Cérémonial describes as a "mythe horrible," try to relate to the arch-legend in the only way open to them:

LILBE
Et on pourra coucher ensemble comme avant?
FIDIO
Non.

LILBE
Il faudra que je dorme toute seule alors?
FIDIO
Oui.

LILBE
Mais je vais avoir très froid.
FIDIO
Tu t'y habitueras.39

38Ibid., p. 23.
39Ibid., p. 12.
It is evident that such a categorization must be completely arbitrary resulting in the following permitted and proscribed behavior:

LILBE
Je pourrai mentir?
FIDIO
Non.

LILBE
Même pas faire de petits mensonges?
FIDIO
Même pas.

LILBE
Et voler des oranges à l'épicerie?
FIDIO
Non plus.

LILBE
On ne pourra pas aller s'amuser, comme avant au cimetière?
FIDIO
Si, pourquoi pas?

LILBE
En viola une affaire difficile la bonté.
FIDIO
Oui, très.40

There is tremendous irony in the fact that Fidio recalls to Lilbé Christ's injunction to the multitudes that they regain the innocence and the purity of childhood. The innocence of the Arrabalian "child" is not synonymous with moral purity only with absolutism. We discover that these "innocents" have in fact "amused themselves" at the cemetery by putting out the eyes of corpses and are even now conducting their search for goodness before the casket of the child they have killed. "Mes personnages ont une

40Ibid., p. 13.
nostalgie du Bien," observes Arrabal, "mais il leur est impossible de devenir 'bons' comme ils veulent." Arrabal provides no contrasting optic, does not define "good" in Oraison but in the interview which serves as introduction to Théâtre VI he mentions in connection with the concept of goodness the following three terms, inadvertently explaining why his characters cannot achieve goodness: they are "énergie sexuelle," "imagination," and "connaissance." It is immediately apparent that sexual energy taken in its broadest meaning, that of Eros or life force, is the only trait of the three which Arrabal's characters possess, being, as we have seen, precluded from attaining either imagination or knowledge by their lack of memory. The fact that knowledge is equated by Arrabal with art comes once again to mind here when it is noticed that one of the ways in which Arrabal's characters attempt to arrive at an ethic is by way of esthetics. On three different occasions in Oraison Fidio seeks to define "good" in terms of what is pretty. One example will suffice:

41 Messerman, "Arrabal in Conversation."
"Ça" is the fact of being good which is understandably as impossible to codify for the Arrabalian character as that which is pretty, both being equated with "connaissance."
The effort is doomed to failure from its inception: "ça va être comme le reste," says Lilbé as the curtain falls; "On va s'en lasser aussi." To which Fidio replies with all of the tenacity and improbable optimism of one who cannot imagine the future, "on essaiera."

The same ineffability, the same tenacity in the face of repeated failure to create a meaningful system characterizes the heros of Le Tricycle. Their concern, however, is less with the abstract statement of rules of conduct than with the resolution of a practical problem: they must somehow find the money to pay the rental on the tricycle which they use to ride children around in the park for a small fee. Fate provides them with an answer in the form of a rich old man whose wallet they steal but only after they brutally murder him. Neither the act of robbery nor the act of murder occasions remorse in them. It is more a question of practicality. As Climando suggests in considering the murder, "Ça ne me plaît pas

42 Oraison, p. 16.
43 Ibid., pp. 27-8.
beaucoup d'avoir à le tuer. C'est une façon très longue de le voler." On the other hand certain acts are seen by them as outside their system of ethical conduct. Mita, for example, although she would like to save Climando from going to jail by taking his place, realizes the impossibility of doing that since in answering the roll call of her captors she would be morally obliged to answer "présente" rather than "présent" thus giving away her feminine identity.

What becomes evident is that Arrabal's characters, just as they seek structure and significance in the forms of language, seek in these same forms the basis for their moral code. That the forms are completely devoid of content for them is shown, first of all, by their inability to generalize, to apply the principle of any moral injunction to a situation not entirely elucidated in that injunction. The "Vieux," for example, in Le Tricycle knows that it is bad to kill once or twice, but doesn't remember about three times: "Je ne suis pas arrivé jusqu'à là, je sais seulement les deux premières par coeur."  

44Le Tricycle, p. 126.  
46Ibid., p. 145.
A parallel case is that of Emanou in Le cimetière des voitures. Here the irony is even more acute since Emanou bears such a striking resemblance to the Christ figure: his name is singularly evocative of "Emanuel," he was born in a stable under supernatural conditions, he is thirty-three years old, he cares for the multitudes by knitting them sweaters and buying them margueritas, he is eventually betrayed and crucified, and as if this were not enough, Dila alludes to his parentage by saying, "Tu dois être le fils (elle montre le ciel et dit gauchement)... de quelqu'un ... de quelqu'un si tu veux, de très haut placé."  

But if Emanou is the son of God, the savior of mankind, his sense of calling is very different from that which we have been led to expect. Early in the play he expresses his dissatisfaction with being an outcast musician, hero of the downtrodden, and considers becoming instead either a killer or a judge, both "professions" which pay well and which afford a great deal of publicity. Emanou is, moreover, in spite of his sporadic gentleness capable of violent and antisocial conduct. He has killed people whom he buries single-handed and on whose graves he

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then plants geraniums because it is "joli" (again the substitution of esthetics for ethics). He has, however, infinite faith in the power of "good," a concept to which he refers often, "comme s'il avait appris une leçon par coeur": "Quand on est bon...on ressent une grande joie intérieure née de la paix de l'esprit que l'on connaît lorsqu'on se voit semblable à l'image idéal de l'homme." That Emanou's definition of good is a useless tautology (goodness is the experience of being good) is born out by its utter inapplicability to life situations. As noted above, Emanou's "good" may include the killing of all the poor to keep them from suffering as it includes the sexual promiscuity of Dila:

DILA
Moi aussi, je veux être bonne, Emanou.
EMANOU
Toi, tu l'es déjà: tu laisses tout le monde coucher avec toi.49

More interesting is Emanou's unshakable faith in the magic power of the words themselves, quite apart from their significance or lack of it. They give him the courage and energy to go on; they are the source of his optimism. On the other hand, his sudden inability to

48 Ibid., p. 144.
49 Ibid., p. 152.
recreate their magic leads to a parallel lack of confidence, and to subsequent deterioration. And yet it is inevitable that this inability arise, for magical formulae must be remembered:

Mais tu sais bien que lorsqu'on est bon (il récite en hésitant) on ressent une grande joie...(il continue à réciter en hésitant de plus en plus)...qui...découle...non, qui provient...de la paix...de la bonté, non de la bonté, non, de la paix...qui...(Ton normal, au tragique.) J'ai oublié, Dila. 50

Arrabal's creatures are always, then, the victims of their own attempts to structure the world and their conduct in it. They seek solace from utter freedom, from absence, in the forms of order and significance, but these very forms insidiously work toward repression, toward suffocation. The most extreme consequence of the need for certainty is the temptation of slavery: "Quel bonheur!" cries the Emperor of L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie as he chains himself to a tree, "Viva las Cadenas! Mon univers: une circonférence qui a pour rayon la longueur de la chaîne." 51 But it is also this overwhelming need for certainty in the Arrabalian Character, his awe in the face of established order and authority which calls into

50 Ibid., p. 200.
being repressive forces originating from without. From the towering figures of the policemen in *Guernica* and *Le Tricycle*, to the jailors of *Les deux bourreaux*, *La Bicyclette du condamné*, *Le Labyrinthe*, to the stretcher-bearers of *Pique-nique en campagne*, Arrabal's universe abounds with the representatives of a rigorous and abusive super-structure before whom Arrabal's children bend in complete submission. Curiously, these children never try to sound the values underlying the awesome order they perceive. It is not by accident that the oppressors in Arrabal's world rarely speak: they are the products of those who permit them to exist, the natural outgrowth of their passivity. Occasionally the oppressed try to explain away the actions of the oppressors in terms of their own shaky reality as in the case of Fanchou (Guernica) who, watching helplessly as Lira is buried alive, justifies the bombing:

> Ils essaient des bombes explosives et incendiaires. Après, tu diras que c'est moi qui n'ai pas de tête... Si la bombe tue beaucoup de monde, elle est bonne, et ils en fabriquent davantage, et si elle ne tue personne elle ne vaut rien et ils n'en fabriquent plus.52

Sometimes in exceptional moments of courage they brazenly, albeit ineffectively, defy the powers which overwhelm them:

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Fanchou thumbs his nose at the back of the policeman who has just brutalized him; Vilaro (La Bicyclette du condamné) points at Paso and laugh derisively, but immediately reverts to a timid and subservient state. But more often Arrabal's "little men" passively accede to the repressive forces which surround them. Vilaro is delighted when he realizes that although his captors have chained him (he has no right to play the piano) he can still reach the piano stool. Françoise in Les deux bourreaux unconsciously uses the Gestapolike torturers to enact personal revenge upon her husband whom she has denounced to them, thus becoming herself one of the "bourreaux" of society. Climando (Le Tricycle) even though his very survival is at stake, is prevented from escaping by a few nonsense syllables uttered by a policeman who is lying reading in a hammock.

53 This play has a particularly personal resonance for Arrabal who seems to suffer acutely each time he sees it performed: "Cet homme qui n'arrive à faire la gamme que lorsque ses bourreaux lui passent une chaîne de plus, qui n'arrive à créer que parce qu'il souffre, c'est moi." (Entretiens, p. 123) Paradoxically, then, artistic freedom or creation for Arrabal grew out of repression. The derisive laughter of the bourreaux may also be seen as that of his own family who mocked his early attempts to write, or as that of society who would deny the artist any freedom of experimentation. One wonders, however, the extent to which Arrabal identifies with Vilaro whose entire accomplishment was the more or less correct playing of a C major scale.

54 This use of language is infrequent in Arrabal but is a favorite device of Ionesco who often materializes language, employs it as object rather than as poetry or as an instrument of communication.
In fact, the approval of the policeman is so important to Climando that he subsequently offers him some of his treasures: a jar of preserves, a key, a few sheets from a calendar.

The fear and awe of authority does not even depend on the presence of authority figures for its effectiveness. The sounds and symbols of authority are enough to inspire guilt, shame, and terror in the oppressed. Derisive, mocking laughter arising as if from nowhere, a background of police whistles, sirens, and searchlights creates an atmosphere of constant surveillance and vigilance on the part of the powers that would control and destroy. (Le Grand Cérémonial, Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné, Le cimetière des voitures.) Arrabal's oppressed may also experience a sort of free-floating guilt in the absence of any real wrongdoing. If Adam and Eve can be said to have come to guilt as a consequence of knowledge, Arrabal's characters experience guilt before knowledge. Giafar in Le Couronnement tries to explain away the obvious presence of Kardo and Maleric although he has no reason for doing so; Etienne, although he is completely innocent, lies to the court in Le Labyrinthe thus creating a network of falsehood from which he cannot extricate himself. The guilt of Arrabal's world is so terrible and pervasive
precisely because it has no real issue. It cannot be attached to acts that are "wrong" just as it cannot be purged through reparation. That guilt is seen by Arrabal as a powerful force in his work is borne out by his statement that the role of the spectator is very often that of an "heureux coupable": "heureux" to the extent that he is in fact irresponsible, "coupable" in terms of his temporary identification with the dramatic universe before him.\footnote{Messerman, "Arrabal in Conversation." The guilt with which Arrabal imbues his characters is not, one feels, that occasioned by existence in an absurd universe, but rather Arrabal's own personal guilt retained from his childhood.}

Arrabal's use of scenic space as a means of isolating and imprisoning his creatures relates both to the theme of repression and to that of guilt. Arrabal creates, to be sure, a physical environment of extreme poverty, particularly in the early plays. His characters are provided with little in the way of positive external stimuli, and since, as it has been noted, they cannot rely on memory and have only rudimentary imaginations this factor alone results in a narrowing of experience with a subsequent narrowing of optic. More importantly, perhaps, the action of the play almost always unfolds within severely abridged spatial limits. \textit{Oraison} is set in a closed sanctuary entirely cut
off from the rest of the world. The action of *La Bicyclette* unfolds in a cubicle set off by high walls. In *Guernica* a character expires within a closed latrine, itself contained within the bombed out hulk of an enclosing structure. Jérôme and Vincent in *Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné* are closed into a single room with the decomposing corpse of the man they have murdered. Arrabal's universe is frequently a claustrophobic one, a closed casket in which even "normal" existence is seen as caged and compressionistic. The characters of *Le cimetière des voitures* exist within the abandoned carcasses of an automobile junkheap in which half a car is rented out for the night as something of a luxury, and where life, in order to persist, must be so strictly regulated that even urination is accomplished in accordance with a prearranged schedule: "C'est votre heure," says Dila to the inhabitant of "Car 2" as she passes him the chamber pot.

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56 The term "compressionism" is that of Lawrence Kitchin presented in his *Drama in the Sixties. Form and Interpretation* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966).

57 Víctor Garcia's set for the Paris production of *Le cimetière des voitures* surrounds the spectator with a fantastic metal junkyard, the last remnants of a decaying civilization.

58 *Le cimetière des voitures*, p. 184.
The carriage in which Fando pushes Lis is another extreme example of Arrabal's compressionism. Because Lis is paralysed it constitutes in a real sense her entire living space. Thus, while outwardly denoting mobility, as do the cars in Le cimetière, it is but another imprisoning and immobilizing instrument. This is true for Fando as well, who is as chained to it as was Prometheus to his boulder; hence the irony arising from the observation of the three men who assume that the carriage will enable Fando to go much faster than they can on foot. The property inheres in all the innocuous Arrabalian vehicles of childhood - tricycles, bicycles, wagons, etc. - which seem to confine and debilitate their occupants and riders, stressing always their essential immobility. In this sense they are all so many "bicyclettes des condamnés." 59

Le Labyrinthe, whose very title implies its imprisoning and suffocation properties, deserves special mention here. Interestingly, it is the closest of all

59 Beckett's compressionism is even more blatant than that of Arrabal: the trash can containers of Nell and Nagg in Fin de Partie; the urns of the three characters in Play; the "mamelon" of Winnie in Oh les beaux jours. Beckett also immobilizes his characters through physical deterioration: Lucky and Pozzo in Act II of Godot, Hamm and Clov of Fin de Partie, Krapp of Krapp's Last Tape, Willie of Oh les beaux jours. But Arrabal's compressionism is frequently more insidious: it seduces us by its deceptive incarnation in the joyful playthings of children.
Arrabal's plays to direct dream transposition. The dream itself apparently took place while Arrabal was in the sanatorium of Buffémont shortly after undergoing the operation to collapse his left lung. It is particularly interesting to contrast this play with other plays written at about the same time (1956) because although it deals with many of the themes already considered, one sees here a distinct difference in tone which can only be attributed to lack of conscious arrangement and "artistry" on the part of the author.

The action of the play reduced to its simplest terms involves the attempts by Etienne to escape from the latrines in which he finds himself prisoner. With him is another prisoner, Bruno, who is apparently dying. Surrounding the latrines and extending as far as the eye can see is a park in which sheets have been hung in such a way as to create an incredibly dense and complicated network of narrow pathways. Early in the play Etienne manages with great difficulty to free himself from his chains, over­comes his anxiety about leaving Bruno behind, and flees into the labyrinthine channels of the park. He comes upon Micaela who says she is the daughter of the park's owner and who seems to want to help him escape. Justin, the father, soon appears, however, contradicts everything
Micaela has said, confiding in an aside to Etienne that she is quite mad, and tells him that in order to be freed he must appear before the tribunal of the park who is the final arbiter in such matters. In ensuing alternating conversations with Micaela and Justin, reality and truth evaporate in a labyrinth of conflicting reports which mirrors in its ferocity that of the park itself. Etienne finally appears before the court, is condemned to death for killing Bruno (whom we have seen commit suicide), escapes somehow, and finds himself once again in the latrines where Bruno, still dying, utters the refrain which opened the play, "J'ai soif."

There are certain immediate similarities between this play and others which have been discussed to this point. There is the preoccupation with the problem of chaos as opposed to repressive order: Micaela argues ironically for a sort of "divine" order behind the chaos of the park when she says, "Viola pourquoi les choses peuvent ici avoir l'apparence du désordre, ce qui ne fait que mettre en relief l'existence d'un ordre supérieur beaucoup plus complexe et exigeant que celui que nous pouvons imaginer"; the struggle for liberation, for light, for truth: "J'ai soif," which also recalls the words of the dying Christ; abrupt character

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60 Arrabal, Le Labyrinthe in Théâtre II, p. 57.
change: Micaela is alternately fragile, victimized, and masculinely assertive as when she asks Etienne to climb on her shoulders to see if her father is coming; awe of authority: the Judge, like the authority figures in Guernica and Le Tricycle, eats a sandwich during the trial to show his complete indifference to the administration of justice. Additionally, there is the pervasive guilt which has been noted before: Etienne is perpetually being asked in an accusing manner to explain things which he cannot, and often resorts to lying. There is also complete structural circularity: the action returns to its point of departure with Etienne trapped for eternity between slow death with Bruno in the latrines and the certain death of attempted escape. Any notion of a stable and fixable reality is undermined by behavior which discounts the spectator's perception of the existing state of affairs: Micaela shows Etienne (and the spectator) the lash marks on her back where Justin is to have whipped her. But when, during his trial, Etienne would call them into evidence as proof of Justin's brutality, the marks have entirely vanished. Language may also discount observable reality: Justin observes the vulgarly sexual assault of Micaela upon Bruno and calls it "innocent" and "romantic."

But language is also used in Le Labyrinthe in a manner somewhat different from that seen in other plays of
this period. Although it serves to undermine its own integrity, it does so not through primitive tautology and repetition but through its labyrinthine complexity which sets into motion mutually destructive systems of "reality."

We do not have the feeling in Le Labyrinthe that Micaela, Justin, and the Judge are children overwhelmed by language or by the "reality" which it represents. On the contrary: everything is explicable, even the most blatant and outrageous contradictions: "Vos questions, comme toujours, sont justifiées," begins Micaela, "C'est pourquoi il faut que je vous explique minutieusement, enfin, avec toute la précision dont je suis capable, tous les détails de chaque problème pour aboutir à une solution juste et compréhensible." The "solution," however, is rarely just and never comprehensible. Language is as insidious and as enveloping as the sheets of the park, the "details" of explanations constituting only mazes from which there is no exit. The whole question of Micaela's sanity and, therefore, of whether her "reality" is to be believed rather than Justin's seems to turn on the veracity of her story regarding how the park came into being. Without ever addressing herself to seemingly basic questions of motivation (which as we have

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61Ibid., p. 61.
seen cannot exist in Arrabal's world), she permits details to replace coherent major premises. It is in this way that Micaela's whole story may be discounted by Justin's assertion that rather than having left his domain for a month in order to seek a cure for running sores, he was actually seeking a remedy for corns.  

There is a further and still more essential difference between Le Labyrinthe and Arrabal's other plays, not only of this period, but generally. With the exception of Le Grand Cérémonial (the Lover is the character brought to mind) this is perhaps the only play in which one of the characters is set apart from the rest as embodying or reflecting a world view more or less similar to the spectator's own. Etienne is the victim of the madness in which he finds himself. He is weak, dishonest, and unimaginative, but unlike Emanou, or Vilaro, or Climando, he views the developing circumstances as somehow alien and apart from himself. This leads to interesting speculation about the nature of the creative process for Arrabal and the degree to which he projects himself into his work. If we can assume that a work so closely approximating raw dream material is more likely to contain a complete projection of Arrabal's optic at any given time than is a work

\[62\text{Ibid.}, ~p. ~67.\]
in which material is included or excluded in keeping with structural or technical considerations, it is fascinating to note through the character of Etienne the refusal to succumb to the forces of alogic. He stands a lonely and frustrated Eros in a work otherwise given over to the purging of demons.

We can at this point come back to the figure of the circle as having new symbolic relevance in Arrabal's theatre. The outright circular structure of many plays has already been noted. It remains, however, to comment upon the implied circularity of even those plays where something progressive "happens." In Le cimetière des voitures Emanou is crucified on a motorcycle (having been betrayed by Topor, the modern-day Judas) but this climactic moment is followed by a return to life exactly as it was before, with the athletes Lasca and Tossido still jogging across the stage, and the cries of a new born infant arising to suggest that although one being has left a life of violence and suffering, another is just beginning it. In Le Tricycle although Climando is apprehended by the police, his friends divide up his worldly possessions and plan to continue the existence they had known up to that time. Fando (Fando et Lis) buries Lis but continues with the three men on the road to Tar, that mythical city whom every-
one seeks but whom no one has ever reached. In this play, the circularity of time and action converge, the essential antagonism of action and inaction providing the basic dramatic tension. In fact, the whole action of the play is little more than a demonstration of Lis' initial statement, "Mais je mourrai et personne ne se souviendra de moi." It seems fitting that the word "cycle" (bicyclette, tricycle, motocyclette) should occur so innocently and often in the Arrabalian vocabulary. Many of his plays are in fact cycles composed of recurring sets of sequential events, as for example in La Bicyclette du condamné in which scenes of repression alternate with those of love and hope. With few exceptions they are illustrations of that principle of human conduct elucidated by Micaela in Le Labyrinthe: "Grâce à un sens de l'orientation naturel, on parvient à revenir à son point de départ."  

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63 Fando et Lis, p. 55.

64 Le Labyrinthe, p. 61. In Arrabal's early plays his circular world of children is evocative of Beckett's circular world of tramps. In both playwrights we find the same isolation of their protagonists, the same structural "cul de sac" in which no important movement is achieved and in which time takes on new dramatic properties. And yet "nothing" happens very differently in these kindred but clearly distinguishable poetic realms. Perhaps the key word in Beckett is "ashes." It is not by chance that the word recurs so frequently in his theatre, becoming at one point the title of a play. There is in Beckett's aging outcasts the clear implication that life, that fleeting
One has not far to look, moreover, for other symbols of circularity in Arrabal's works. His theatre abounds with them: circular cages, balls, spheres, balloons in great numbers - all tend to suggest that the figure was not arrived at fortuitously. What is interesting here is the double and paradoxical nature of the circle as symbol. On one hand the circle has traditionally been associated with the notion of unity, of oneness, thus of structure.

instant between inexistences, has already passed them by, that there remains now in the final moments before extinction only the word, the verbal evocation of what was or what may have been. "On reparle de tout, de tout ce qu'on peut," says Winnie of Oh les beaux jours (p. 83). Thus while Arrabal's children are deprived of memory, Beckett's tramps are left with very little else. This seems to be a progressive tendency in Beckett: Didi and Gogo are still doggedly and optimistically waiting at the final curtain (ashes are juxtaposed with the unfolding leaves of a single tree), but Hamm, Clov, Nagg, Nell, Winnie, Willie are being entombed before our very eyes. If time in Arrabal refuses the birth of life and personal identity, time in Beckett refuses even the gift of death. One is condemned to eternal sameness and inevitability: "Fini, c'est fini, ça va finir, ça va peut-être finir," says Clov at the beginning of Fin de Partie. But it never finishes. One must sustain the torture of bodily decay and the gradual dimming even of memory. One sustains it with humor, with pathos, with dignity, but one sustains it. Hamm speaks for all of Beckett's creatures when he observes, "Je suis mon cours" (p. 60). Arrabal's children, on the other hand, have not learned with Didi and Gogo that "Nous n'avons plus rien à faire ici...ni ailleurs" (EAG, p. 89). They bring to their quest an innocence, a freshness, a savage grace. They are joyfully sensual, eternally hopeful even in the face of repeated failure and punishment. They still have the energy to love, to invent, to dream of a future. Death, not waiting, ends their search.
and coherence. One would expect this to be particularly attractive to the Arrabalian character, deeply involved, as we have seen, in the effort to lend form to the formless. And, in fact, in the early plays the balloon, both round and levitational, recurs frequently as a symbol of hope and liberation. Fanchou gives a balloon to Lira when all other contact with her has been severed. Vilaro and Tasla also give balloons to each other as a reminder of the day they will be free. Significantly, when Vilaro misses the balloon he is bouncing, derisive laughter can be heard issuing from behind the wall. In a similar manner, the unfettered laughter of children is associated with the free ascendance of balloons toward the sky. This juxtaposition provides the final note of hope in La Bicyclette du condamné, Une chèvre sur un nuage, and Guernica (although Peyrou's production for Le Tréteau de Paris deleted this optimistic finale).

But if the circle provides structure and shelter, it may also imprison, repress, suffocate. It is significant that the cages in which Arrabal's characters are so often held captive are circular as are the handcuffs that bind them. In Une chèvre sur un nuage two blood spattered balloons escape from a spherical structure. Hope may, in fact, be illusory, an incurable disease, as Arrabal suggests in
Fêtes et rites de la confusion where those afflicted mistake Death carrying a gallows for Fortune carrying a horn of plenty. It is true that Arrabal's characters have a tendency to fix upon some element outside the enclosing structure to provide the hope which drives them on. In Guernica it is the "tree of liberty," in Une chèvre sur un nuage it is the fabled goat of the title (Pan?), in Bicyclette it is the image of a perfectly realized musical scale. And can we ignore the fact that in each of the works where symbolic freedom is at last achieved in the liberation of balloons the humans to which they belonged have met violent and futile death.

Arrabal, Fêtes et rites de la confusion, pp. 161-163.
CHAPTER THREE

LOVE
Death as seen in the reflecting mirror of the Arrabalian kaleidoscope immediately conjures love. It is one of the startling paradoxes of Arrabal's universe that death and love are both mutually repellent and mutually attractive: love is sought as a refuge from death, from absence, from futility. Its intensity, like the violence with which it is so often linked, is a means of reinforcing the illusion of life. But like other illusions love is never mastered, never attained in life. It is always just beyond the reach of those who would seize it, announcing its proximity by the degree of suffering it invokes. Its face is that of Goya's "El entierro de la sardina," leering, demonic, bespeaking what Arrabal's characters will discover only through the pain of living: love may be fully possessed only in death. Thanatos and Eros are but mirror images of a selfsame reality:

Les grands mythes de notre époque sont des variantes de la difficulté d'aimer qui elle-même crée l'amour.¹

¹Schifres, Entretiens avec Arrabal, p. 120.
That Arrabal's characters should also experience this "difficulty in loving" would seem a necessary outgrowth of their difficulty in "being." Loving presumes a modicum of self-awareness, a sense of self for the purpose of transcending self. Yet Arrabal's characters, as has been noted, lack coherence. They are tied not only to their own experience, but to their own immediate experience; they are incapable of identifying with or projecting into the desires, fantasies, needs of a loved one. They are prisoners within their own skins, consumed with the satisfaction of immediate needs, childlike, egocentric. (One speaks uneasily of "egocentrism" with regard to Arrabal's characters since it implies the existence of an immutable "ego."). Interestingly, Arrabal has said of love, "Pour moi l'amour est un sentiment d'auto-tendresse envers notre mémoire 'si miserable'."

By "miserable" he apparently means not only that the memory is impoverished but that it is as inept as a predictive instrument as it is inefficient as a unifying force in personality. For him, then, love is essentially inward-turning, a yearning for those parts of the self which have disappeared with one's memory of them, a feeling of compassion for what one may never be again. Curiously, however, Arrabal's characters

\[Ibid., p. 41.\]
have an immense, an insatiable need for tenderness which frequently pushes them outside of themselves, if not beyond themselves. And just as the near impossibility of creating a meaningful system of the chaos which surrounds them spurs them on to greater and greater efforts at systematization, so the difficulty of loving creates for Arrabal's creatures an ever greater need to love and be loved, a need which can never be fulfilled.

Women occupy a central position in Arrabal's universe. Not only are they the givers of life but they are the initiators to life through sexuality and the concomitant transmission of knowledge. This double face of Woman is incarnated in the dual characters of Altagore and Lis (L'enterrement de la sardine) who minister to the dwarf, Hieronymous, alternately awakening his body and his mind. Arrabal apparently sees woman as the initiator in real life as well. In the interview which serves as introduction to the new edition of Théâtre III Arrabal says of her:

C'est la personne qui connaît l'homme. La femme se comporte avec plus d'instinct que l'homme. Elle ne fait pas la guerre, elle n'écrit pas, elle a des enfants; elle ne fait pas le con comme nous. Je la crois supérieure...L'homme le plus doué n'est rien en rapport d'une femme.

But if woman is giver of life, she is also destroyer. If she teaches love, it is a love infused with pain; if she excites, she also represses; if she gives knowledge, she also takes it away. It is woman, who, particularly in her role as mother and therefore as initiator to life, creates the cycle of tenderness and cruelty, pleasure and pain, excitation and guilt which her male children perpetuate. The Oedipus myth is thus fundamental to Arrabal's universe, creating the dimensions within which one sees realized what Georges Vitaly has called "l'horreur fondamentale de l'amour, sa splendeur tragique, son essentielle culpabilité."

In only three plays is the character of woman as mother developed in any depth: Les deux bourreaux, Le Grand Cérémonial, and L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie. Françoise of Les deux bourreaux is closest, as we have noted, to being an untouched projection of Arrabal's own mother. Having denounced her husband, Jean, to the "authorities," Françoise arrives with her two sons, Benoît and Maurice, at the place where the "bourreaux" of the title will torture Jean until he dies. But the real "bourreaux" as it is soon apparent are Françoise and Benoît, who will with the

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insidiousness of their arguments justify the murder of the father while perverting the innocence and destroying the sense of justice of the younger son, Maurice.

The simultaneous killings are played off against each other as in counterpoint. In the room visible to the audience, once again a closed space, a "salle obscure" where the light of truth cannot penetrate, is enacted the symbolic murder of Maurice. Two doors, however, lead from the room: one to the street through which Françoise and her sons and later the two tormentors enter with Jean, the other to the torture chamber where Jean slowly falls before his captors. The spatial implications are clear: for Maurice there is a choice but the choice must be made in darkness. Maurice cannot overcome the forces of darkness, cannot choose the door which leads to freedom. He is progressively engulfed and destroyed by Françoise against the background of his father's anguished cries.

And Françoise is engulfing. Hers is the ineffable force of the martyred, of the self-righteous. She acts only in selflessness and for the "good" of others: "Je ne suis qu'une pauvre femme sans culture, sans instruction; je n'ai fait toute ma vie que m'inquiéter pour les autres, en m'oubliant moi-même." Unlike Fidio and Lilbé who, although

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5Arrabal, Les deux bourreaux, p. 50.
they have a certain nostalgia for what is good, ultimately admit the impossibility of being good, Françoise, when she says, "J'essaie d'être bonne," is inwardly convinced that she has already achieved that state. Her son, Benoît, responds immediately: "Comme tu es bonne! Comme tu es bonne...Maman chérie...tu es une sainte..." It is by using the same sort of thinly veiled insinuation that Françoise succeeds in arousing Benoît against Maurice who has bitterly condemned his mother's actions. Says Françoise to Benoît: "Je ne veux pas que tu le battes même s'il le mérite grandement." Benoît, to be sure, is immediately incited to attack his brother.

Françoise's actions belie at every step her protestations of selflessness and her verbalized desire to see justice done. Not only has she come personally to the "bourreaux" to disclose her husband's "guilt" and to give them his address so that they may find him immediately, but once Jean is prisoner she goes often into the torture chamber to assure herself that the job is being properly carried out. She, too, tortures Jean, first verbally by disclosing that it is she who has denounced him and by tell-

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6Ibid., p. 36.  
7Ibid., p. 34, 36.  
8Ibid., p. 35.
ing him that he now must gracefully accept his punishment:
"Tout ceci te fera grand bien, cela t'appendra à avoir de la volonté, tu en as toujours manqué...Tu dois remercier même les bourreaux qui te traitent avec tant d'égards." She tortures him physically by rubbing salt and vinegar into his wounds, clawing at them with her fingernails: "C'est ça, encore un petit peu, là, là ça te fera du bien." Her pleasure throughout is evident and is just short of the obviously sexual. The stage directions read that Françoise is "excitée" at the sounds of her husband's groans, that she "fait une grimace qui est presque un sourire." She reinforces his suffering with a verbal description of it, a kind of doubling and extension of reality which heightens her pleasure:

Ils le battent encore...Et ils doivent lui faire beaucoup de mal...(Françoise parle en haletant.)...Il pleure! Il pleure...Il gémit, n'est-ce pas?...Oui, oui, il gémit, il gémit. Je l'entends parfaitement.

Françoise, like all Arrabalian mothers, is a figure in caricature, fantastic in her excesses and her unidimensionality. ("La relation qu'on a avec sa mère est

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9 Ibid., pp. 40, 41.
10 Ibid., p. 45.
11 Ibid., p. 40.
12 Ibid., p. 47.
A fine line keeps her from being a comic figure and even this line is occasionally traversed. What maintains the tension between the comic and the tragic is the very real destruction of two beings before our eyes. Jean dies after hideous agony and is carried out by his tormentors hog-tied on a long pole. Maurice at the final curtain has succumbed to his brother's desire that he forgive and embrace his mother. The final picture of the family reunited bespeaks his utter defeat.

The character of Françoise is made even more interesting by her complete conviction that she is acting in good faith. The exaggerated nature of her claims, their theatricality, would tend initially to detract from their sincerity. But Françoise is without knowledge of her essential cruelty. She believes that she has sacrificed her youth and beauty to an ungrateful husband and son, and that she is acting even now in benevolence and in the interest of the greatest good. One is reminded of Arrabal's statement about his own mother that she, too, felt completely justified in her conduct regarding Arrabal's father, and later regarding Arrabal himself. The lines cited earlier, "Tu dois remercier même les bourreaux..." were lines apparently spoken by Arrabal's mother, not, as in the play, to her husband, but to her son,

13 Messerman, "Arrabal in Conversation."
Arrabal, on the occasion of his imprisonment in Spain in 1967. Arrabal tells how, on the eve of his release, his mother came to the prison with a copy of one of his books which she wanted him to autograph for the director of the prison who had "treated him so well." Uncannily, and in keeping with his feeling that art is "prémonitoire" or predictive of the future, the fictional dialogue preceded the real by ten years!

Yet if the character of Françoise is at least in part assimilable to Arrabal's own mother, and, as such, serves as prototype for the mothers in his fictional works, it is also probable that she may be expanded to symbolically include other institutions of maternal sponsorship and concomitant repression. There are several indications that one of these institutions is the Church. Françoise speaks frequently of her martyrdom, of her desire to live in keeping with God's will, of the presence of evil in the world as a punishment for sin. The stage directions also make it apparent that at the point of revealing to Jean that she has denounced him, she speaks "comme si elle était à l'église." At other times she recalls both the Church and the larger structure of a repressive political force, hiding its self-

14 Entretiens, p. 12.
15 Les deux bourreaux, p. 41.
interest and treachery behind perfidious slogans and the perpetuation of guilt: "Je veux que nous vivions en paix, dans l'ordre...que la paix et l'amour règne." The nameless faces of the "bourreaux" indicate that they stand always in readiness to answer whatever master beckons to them. If Oraison poses the problem of the child's quest for good, Les deux bourreaux annihilates good; the pure give way to the overwhelming machinery of injustice.

The "Mother" of Le Grand Cérémonial recalls Françoise in several respects. Like her she is drawn in caricature, the consummate martyr who has sacrificed "everything" for her son. Like Françoise she attempts to control her son through guilt:

Le médecin m'a dit que j'avais un début d'encéphalite due à des contrariétés. Je n'ai rien dit, je n'ai pas voulu lui avouer que c'est toi la cause de mes contrariétés. Tue-moi si tu veux, tue-moi avec tes mains, vite, mais ne me laisse pas mourir petit à petit de chagrin. Quel calvaire! Like her, she hated her husband, long since departed ("C'était un monstre répugnant") and sees in her son, Cavanosa, many of his "qualités:"

\[\text{16}^{16}\text{Ibid., p. 35.}\]
\[\text{17}^{17}\text{Arrabal, Le Grand Cérémonial, p. 239.}\]
\[\text{18}^{18}\text{Ibid., p. 252.}\]
Unlike Françoise, however, for whom sexuality was a confined response to the tortures she inflicted, Cavanosa's mother is also his sexual initiator. It is her hope that by being "everything" to him she may keep him forever: "Laisse-toi aimer et aime-moi. Toi et moi nous pouvons former le couple le plus heureux du monde. Moi, je te soigne, je te nourris, je te fais tout."  

But her maternal love, like that of the Mother in La Pierre de la folie has within it the seed of intense cruelty. Her embrace tears his flesh as it enfolds him; his body is bleeding from her "love:"

Cavanosa

Tu me fais mal. Tu m'enfonces les ongles dans la chair.

La Mère

Je suis ta mère.

She has taught him masturbation so that he will remain faithful to her, forbidding him at the same time contact with other women. Apart from indiscretions with certain of his life-sized dolls, Cavanosa has remained pure. He recalls

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19 Ibid., p. 237.
20 Ibid., p. 234.
21 Ibid., p. 245.
fondly how his own feelings of jealousy and protectiveness led him as a child to cover his mother's legs in the park so that she could not be ogled by passing men. But he has now come of age: he wants to be free to live with Sil, a young girl he has met in the park. His mother will not release him. Her seemingly omniscient eye has followed him everywhere. She knows that he has seen Sil and that together they plan to murder her.

Matricide is one of the perpetual temptations of the Arrabalian hero, alternating always with an equally strong desire to remain a child sheltered in the pervasive warmth of the maternal embrace. Cavanosa’s first lines are "Maman, maman," but as he later remarks his cries are "pour la mère que j'avais lorsque j'étais enfant." The child, like the faceless lamb envisioned asleep in his mother's womb in La Pierre de la folie strives for identity as a man, identity which the mother would refuse him. He must kill her, and yet he cannot. Cavanosa gives his mother as a gift a small casket symbolizing her death, but his real violence is unleashed upon his dolls whom he tears to shreds. He enlists the aid first of Sil, then of Lys, but all attempts to destroy

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22 This, as it will be recalled, is something that Arrabal did with his own mother.
23 Le Grand Cérémonial, p. 228.
24 Arrabal, La Pierre de la folie, p. 127.
his mother are abortive. Even the Mother in a frenzied scene of the macabre and the slapstick tries to be helpful by suggesting ways in which he might accomplish the task. The police sirens wail in readiness for the act which Cavanosa cannot bring himself to commit. His mother declares herself victorious once again:

Comme la nature fait bien les choses! Non seulement je suis plus forte que toi spirituellement, mais aussi matériellelement. Tu es un malheureux infirme sans forces. Et spirituellement, tu es un pauvre être sans expérience.25

It remains for the Emperor of L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie to complete the task which Cavanosa has left unfinished. The mother in this play never appears in "life," only in the retrospective fantasies of the son who has killed her as he projects himself into the roles of the various witnesses who will condemn him to death for the act. As the wife of the accused he tells the court:

Il la haïssait mortellement et il l'aimait comme un ange, il ne vivait que pour elle. Pour un homme de son âge, croyez-vous que ce soit normal d'être jour et nuit pendu à ses jupons? Il n'avait pas besoin d'une femme mais d'une mère.26

And as Olympia, the Emperor's sister, we hear a similar story amplified by a report of how on one occasion, the Emperor had

26 Arrabal, L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, p. 141.
prepared himself for a feast before the sleeping body of his mother. Just as he was raising the axe to kill her, she awoke, preventing the act. It is when the Architect plays the part of the Emperor's mother that the Emperor avows the act which he had denied until that moment:

C'est vrai j'ai tué ma mère, moi-même, sans l'aide de personne...Je lui ai assené un coup de marteau sur la tête pendant son sommeil...Le chien loup que nous avions...le chien...le.chien...enfin, il a mangé le cadavre.27

But the Arrabalian hero cannot escape his mother. Just as the dismembered remains of a murdered mother track down and destroy the son who had rent them in La Pierre de la folie,28 so the guilt which the Emperor's mother has instilled lives on to destroy the body it inhabits. The Emperor is immediately overcome, even in his fantasy re-enactment, by remorse: "Petite mère. C'est moi. Je ne voulais pas te faire du mal. Qu'as-tu? Pourquoi ne bouges-tu plus?"29 Maladroitly he tries to bring her back to life by reciting to her the tea party scene from Alice in Wonderland. But her life cannot be reinstated. He will pay for his crime with his own life: "Je voudrais être tué par

27Ibid., pp. 170, 172.
28La Pierre de la folie, pp. 102, 103.
29L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, p. 171.
vous-même d'un coup de marteau, Architecte, tu me tueras toi-même."  

These three plays, then, constitute a trilogy in which the entirety of the mother-son relationship is played out. It is a constant battle for survival with the mother destroying the son in Les deux bourreaux, initiating him to violence and sexuality in Le Grand Cérémonial, and becoming his victim in Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie. But as victim, the mother is still victor. The circle comes full round once again with love giving birth to death.

A brief study of love as it is seen in Arrabal's couples would now seem in order. The couple is a basic theme in Arrabal's work representing what he sees as an incessant human striving for tenderness and for union.  

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30 Ibid., p. 173.

31 The dynamics of the couple is also fundamental to the dramaturgy of Ionesco (the Smith couple and the Martin couple of La Cantatrice chauve, the Professor and the Pupil of La Leçon, the Old Man and Old Woman of Les Chaises, Jacques and Amédée of Amédée ou comment s'en débarasser, Jacques and Madeleine of Jacques ou la soumission, Bérenger and Daisy of Rhinocéros, King Bérenger and his two wives of Le Roi se Meurt, etc.) and of Beckett (Estragon-Vladimir, Pozzo-Lucky of En Attendant Godot; Hamm-Clov, Nell-Nagg of Fin de Partie; Winnie-Willie of Oh les beaux jours; Henry-Ada of Cendres; the unnamed Women and Man of Play, etc.).
Arrabal recognizes in his preoccupation with the couple, moreover, a projection of his own need for what he calls "ambiguïté," that is, a complete merging with the loved one, androgyne, as visually represented in the cover painting of Fêtes et rites de la confusion. Here Arrabal is pictured nude with his wife, Luce, (It is not by accident that so many of Arrabal's couples are given names beginning with F and L: Fando and Lis, Fanchou and Lira, Filtos and Li, Fidio and Lilbé, "F" and "L.") but the heads have been exchanged so that Arrabal's rests on a feminine body and vice versa. Arrabal's dramatic characters, too, seek union with a loved one. For the purposes of this survey they may be somewhat arbitrarily divided in terms of the way they are able to pursue this quest.

There is considerable continuity to the kinds of relationships in which the physically impoverished characters of the early plays find themselves engaged. Theirs is a reaching out through the shifting contours of shadowy existences toward beings who are no less phantoms than themselves. It is necessarily a world of gestures in which humorous, cruel, touching but essentially irrelevant actions are used to create the illusion of love but end by completely replacing it. Arrabal's men-children shower their women with gifts: balloons, light bulbs, chamber pots, paper flowers, all the
treasures of their universe. They try to please them by Chaplinesque clowning, vaudeville acts, dancing, drumming, the composition of poetry and music. They take innocent pleasure in the physical charms of their women, particularly their knees; they share this pleasure with other men by exhibiting their women to them. The women, for their part, are frequently soft, supportive, appreciative of the men's meager accomplishments, providing succor in times of trial. Lira, for example, even though she is in dire trouble, inspires confidence in Fanchou by telling him that in listening to him speak "on dirait que tu es capitaine et même antiquaire."^32

But the members of couples who "love" each other are also capable of inattention, violent cruelty, and even murder. There are several factors that might account for this. The first is the possibility, existing within all of Arrabal's characters for unmotivated and unpredictable behavior. Immediate self-interest transcends any prior commitments to another. Dila, for example, in *Le cimetière des voitures* uses her body to divert the attention of the police from Emanou so that he can escape. But an alternative course of action, one equally in keeping with her feeling of affection

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for him, would have been to turn him in so as to have enough money to buy some sanitary napkins.

Another possible source of cruelty and its acceptance in the early plays is boredom. Says Micaela of her relationship with Bruno (Le Labyrinthe) who regularly stuck pins in her: "Quand j'étais avec lui, je souffrais beaucoup, mais au moins je ne m'ennuyais pas."33 Jérôme and Vincent of Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné, having avowed their "deep feeling" for Luce, convince her to come live with them in a platonic "ménage à trois." But even as they watch her sleep the seeds of restlessness appear:

JEROME
Quel spectacle!

VINCENT
Oui, c'est très joli, tout est joli.

JEROME
Tu entends comme elle respire?

VINCENT
Oui.

Silence

JEROME (dramatique)
Tu veux qu'on la fasse saigner avec le couteau?

VINCENT (ennuye)
Pas encore.

JEROME (très sérieux)
Je veux voir son sang.

VINCENT
Tu vas recommencer? (Un temps.) Plus tard.

JEROME (l'air triste)
Un tout petit peu seulement, à la gorge ou au coeur.

33Arrabal, Le Labyrinthe, p. 81.
VINCENT
Non, Jérôme. Tout à l'heure.  

It is evident that Jérôme's primary desire is to relieve the boredom of his existence. That the need to inflict pain upon, or at the very least to intimately expose another may be connected with his own unrealized sexuality is suggested by Vincent's observation several moments later and Jérôme's reaction to it:

VINCENT
Mais elle aimerait sûrement avoir des amants grands et beaux qui lui feraient des choses laides.

JEROME (inquiet)
C'est certain. Pourquoi n'ai-je pas pensé à ça plus tôt?

A similar question is raised with regard to Fando et Lis, a play which Arrabal himself alludes to in Le Jardin des délices as having been written with Romeo and Juliette in mind, and which André de Baeque has called "l'histoire d'amour la plus insolite, la plus cruelle, la plus émouvante à laquelle nous ayons assisté au théâtre depuis longtemps." Fando's attentions to the paralysed Lis are caring, tender. He ministers to her physical needs, feeding her, carrying her about. He tries his best to amuse her, composing for her, clowning for her, going out of his way to show her a

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34 Arrabal, Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné, p. 454.
clump of spring flowers. He tells her of the wonder of life in Tar and how happy they will be once they reach their destination. Fando even verbalizes his version of the Arrabalian dream of "ambiguïté:" he wants to suffer Lis' pain by having children for her.

But Fando is incapable of appreciating the pain he inflicts. If his relationship to Lis is characterized by tenderness and lyricism, it is no less so by exploitation and cruelty. Suddenly and for no reason other than that he has tired of carrying Lis, he drops her, badly injuring her, and goes off to play his drum. He forces her to remain nude on the road throughout a chilly fall evening so that his friends can appreciate and caress her. He handcuffs her and beats her until she agrees to see how far she can drag herself with her hands bound along the rough stones of the road. When she dies as a consequence, however, Fando is incredulous, shaken. In the stage directions we read, "Il est très probable qu'il pleure." 37

Why does Fando not respond to Lis' pleas that he not drop her, not force her to remain unclothed, not beat her. Is he trying to rid himself of the burden of her complete dependency? Is he punishing her for her periods of

37Arrabal, Fando et Lis, p. 119.
retributive silence and lack of confidence in him? Apparently not. On more than one occasion when asked if this were the case Arrabal has answered that Fando's pain at Lis' death is real, that he loved her "à la folie." He prefers to think that Fando kills Lis through inattention, insisting that he is not a "personnage sadique."

On the other hand, and in complete contradiction to what we have just seen, Arrabal admits the pleasure that Fando experiences in his subjugation of Lis through violence. As he says in his introduction to the Christian Bourgois edition of Théâtre III, "L'acte d'amour est un acte à base de violence masculine." Based on what we have already seen as the essential identification of love with humiliation and cruelty in the male child's relationship with his mother it would be reasonable to assume that it is also the source of the love-cruelty equivalence in his other relationships.

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38"Arrabal in Conversation."

39Introduction to Théâtre III (Christian Bourgois) p. 14. Arrabal elaborated upon this notion in our interview saying that the role of woman in sexuality is to give pleasure, not to experience it. He sees the ideal woman as similar to the hen who welcomes the male's tearing claws as she supports him above her during coitus.
A further speculation is that violence is the only way of making contact in a world in which inner life has dried up and where language does little more than reveal the void. Murder, the supreme act of violence, is, then, according to Geneviève Serreau:

...a desperate way of taking possession of another person, of fixing him forever in a relation to oneself that is perfect and irreversible...

Peace follows the crime, an ease like that which follows love. 40

This contention is supported in a certain sense by Arrabal's saying that Fando feels a need with Lis to perform the "ultimate act." It is she, however, who defines the "ultimacy" of the act each time she says, "Fais tout, mais ne me fais pas ça." 41 On each occasion Fando must surpass himself, must bind Lis in a progressively more demanding dialectic of violence of which the supreme violence is death. Fando et Lis is a perceptive and delicate study of the intricate and self-sustaining relationship of tormentor and victim.

Fando would seem himself, furthermore, to reflect that higher determinism of cruelty also illustrated in Une chèvre sur un nuage wherein "F" although he is himself


41 "Arrabal in Conversation."
chained asserts his cruel mastery over "L." As Artaud has pointed out in his discussion of the Marquis de Sade,

Il y a dans la cruauté...une sorte de déterminisme supérieur auquel le bourreau suppliciateur est soumis lui-même, et qu'il doit être le cas échéant déterminé à supporter. 42

The "victims" are not, however, always as clearly demarcated as in Fando et Lis or in Guernica where essentially helpless women can do little more than punish verbally, or, on the other hand, by the complete withdrawal of speech. Women may undergo, as we have noted, complete changes of personality, suddenly subjugating their masters as in the case of Milos and Dila (Le cimetière des voitures) and in the case of Filtos and Li (Concert dans un œuf). This brings us to another of the great paradoxes of Arrabal's female creatures: they are both "children" in their utter simplicity, their incredible naïveté, and sexual sirens, fully aware of their power over men. They sometimes use their sexuality as a means to an end as does Mita in Le Tricycle when she exhibits herself to the rich old man so that her friends may rob him. It is this tendency which has undoubtedly motivated the epithet "putain" with regard to Arrabal's women. More often, however, their behavior would seem to be not purposeful, merely promiscuous. Dila is alternately abashed at

42 Antonin Artaud, Le Théâtre et son double, p. 121.
Milos' demands that she kiss the guests in the cars and lasciviously aggressive in her attempts to do so. Tasla in *La Bicyclette du condamné*, while she apparently "cares" for Vilaro, enacts with his captors a scene of blatant seduction in which the balloon serving as a symbol of the "innocent" love of Tasla and Vilaro, of freedom and levity, becomes the symbol of her sexuality which Vilaro's captors toss about out of his reach while Tasla's provocative laughter fills the air. Death, love, and freedom merge here in the symbol of the balloon: as a result of Tasla's betrayal, Vilaro falls to his captors, but in death finds absolute finality and absolute freedom.

Freedom in sexuality is rarely achieved by Arrabal's couples in life. All physical contact conjures immediate guilt and the experience of being observed, spied upon. Frequently the guilt is scenically realized by having the characters actually observed by others as they attempt to achieve even the most innocent of contact. Tasla and Vilaro are aware that they are being watched since each time they kiss mocking laughter is heard. Frequently the act of watching is even more blatant: Voyeurism is the reverse side of guilt. In *Le Couronnement* Kardo and Malderic spy

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43 The autobiographical origins of this theme are too evident to require further elucidation here.
on Giafar and Arlys through a pair of opera glasses; the two young girls in *Concert dans un oeuf* stand by the barque in which Filtos and Li are lying, pointing and tittering at what they see; Jérôme and Vincent in *Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné* invite François d'Assise to make love to Luce so that they can watch; Milos in *Le cimetière des voitures* hands out binoculars to the guests in all the cars so that they may watch Emanou and Dila. In this scene a brilliant comedy of objects is achieved in the appearance and disappearance of binoculars from behind the drawn curtains of the car windows, each new appearance suggesting that renewed contact is taking place between Emanou and Dila. Yet it is also a comedy of extreme cruelty. In Arrabal's world privacy knows no place. If guilt is inherent in every attempt at physical contact, voyeurism is the revenge of Arrabal's creatures upon the guilt imposed from without: it provides the opportunity to identify with pleasure in the absence of guilt, but at the same time it perpetuates for the others a cycle of culpability from which there is no escape.

Guilt is also a prominent theme in *Le Grand Cérémonial*, but, as we have seen, it is related here both to sexuality itself and to the desire to destroy the source of that guilt: the loved and hated mother. Arrabal apparently
sees this play as an "oeuvre clef," showing what is for him the ideal relationship between a man and a woman. It is also, as he phrases it, a "hymne à la libération de toute répression," meaning that in it he gives rein to that part of himself which he tries to conceal in real life, his "sadisme naturel." We cannot but think again of Artaud here: "Toute vraie liberté est noire et se confond immanquablement avec la liberté du sexe."

Cavanosa is a figure very close to Arrabal himself. Although his name is prevented by a single exchange of consonants from being that of history's greatest lover, Cavanosa is not the beautiful man of the legend, but a "bossu," keenly experiencing the humiliation of his deformed body and seeking revenge for years of suffering at his mother's hands. His huge dolls, a gift from his mother, are a means both of satisfying his mother's demands for fidelity and of living his violence. As the play opens, however, he is discovered on a park bench by the beautiful Sil, who is immediately attracted to him (hence the double irony of his name), and in spite of his repeated rejections of her, convinces him to allow her to be his victim: she will accompany him home.

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44 Entretiens, p. 167.
46 Artaud, Le Théâtre et son double, p. 37.
to help him dispose of his mother's body (he tells her initially that he has already killed his mother) and welcome whatever infamies will please him, happy to die at the height of his pleasure: "Le matin, les premières lueurs du jour illumineront votre cadavre." Sil is the reverse side of Cavanosa's mother. If the latter desires complete domination of her son, the former wants only to serve; if the latter needs to humiliate, to punish, to castrate, the former needs to be humiliated, to be punished, to be tortured. Both, however, are equally excessive, melodramatic, absolute.

Sil accompanies Cavanosa home. In a ceremony which recalls in its solemnity the investiture of a monarch (the ceremonial nature of love in Arrabal's work will be more fully developed in the following chapter), Cavanosa, by changing Sil's attire and hair "transforms" her into a man, recalling his mother's declaration that she would prefer his homosexuality to his infidelity with other women. He then "makes" her into one of his dolls, requesting that she not move and that she speak only when asked. He minutely inspects the workings of her mouth as he has her repeat the word "volubilis," enchanted as before some fantastic machine. But Cavanosa cannot love Sil as a live woman. The

47 Le Grand Cérémonial, p. 195.
apotheosis of the ceremony in which Sil is to be strangled to death at the moment of orgasm is interrupted by Sil's lover who has followed her there and who begs her to leave surroundings which he regards as maniacal. She refuses, choosing to remain as Cavanosa's mother's slave, knowing fully that she will never be permitted to see Cavanosa again, that she will be brutally and humiliatingly used.

The final act opens as did the first with Cavanosa crying for his mother on a park bench amidst the wailing of police sirens. This time he is found by Lys, who also wants to be with him. Unlike Sil, she comes to him not to find pain and dégradation, but in utter innocence. She is very young. She has never seen any man before, having been kept at home by her mother with whom she ironically earns a living by painting the faces on dolls. Cavanosa is freed with her from the burden of his differentness: "Je peux, donc, vous dire une chose," he says to her, "j'aime votre compagnie." Although he is afraid to remain with her for fear that he will kill her "like the others," she persuades him to chain her and to let her take the place of his doll in the carriage. They depart together leaving Cavanosa's mother alone on stage with the abandoned doll.

\[48\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 321.}\]
Arrabal wants us to believe that Cavanosa and Lys will be happy together; that the symbolic act of leaving both his dolls and his mother mark the beginning of a new life for him. And yet Cavanosa's final words would seem to belie this design. They suggest that although Lys has temporarily taken the place of his doll, she has not eliminated his need to torture and destroy: "Partons! (Rêveur) Tes yeux sont ardents pour le plaisir de mes yeux, tes mains sont de flammes pour mes mains, ton dos est de nacre pour mes verges, et ta voix est endeuillée pour ta mort."

*Le Grand Cérémonial* is liberating for the spectator by virtue of its very excesses. Characters drawn unidimensionally and pushed to the limits of caricature become comic no matter how serious the real nature of their plight. Tragedy pushed beyond credulity becomes Grand Guignolesque just as repression excessively conceived opens into new freedom. Cavanosa's suggestion to Sil, "J'ai une idée. Pourquoi ne m'appellez-vous pas Quasimodo?" or his avowal

49 "Arrabal in Conversation."

50 Arrabal was apparently shocked to learn that the Belgian actress playing the part of Lys in the film version of *Le Grand Cérémonial* assumed that she was to meet the same fate as Cavanosa's other women.

51 *Le Grand Cérémonial*, p. 325.

that "mon sexe est tout petit...Je crois que je le dois à l'alcoolisme de mon père à moins que ce ne soit à la syphilis de mère,"\textsuperscript{53} goes beyond indelicacy, beyond the scope of family tragedy to join with the music hall. If excess alone creates the grotesque, the fantastic, the liberated, the juxtaposition of normally exclusive excesses, their playing off against each other, their fusion, serve to create a universe where repression as we know it cannot continue to exist.\textsuperscript{54} This juxtaposition of excesses is primary to Arrabal's world. We have already seen it as it affects the nature of his dramatic characters who contain within themselves with no attempt at integration or resolution the most blatant contradictions. In \textit{Le Grand Cérémonial} these movements toward cruelty or tenderness, toward repression or freedom exceed to a greater extent than in earlier plays the confines of individual characters. The eye piece of the kaleidoscope has been turned several degrees, enlarging the scope and amplitude of the pattern. Cruelty and tenderness as tropisms within Cavanosa become the exteriorized states of Cruelty and Tenderness. Ugliness is played off against Beauty, and so forth. This juxtaposition

\textsuperscript{53}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 182.

\textsuperscript{54}Susan Sontag sees what she calls "radical juxtaposition" as fundamental to the surrealist esthetic and as playing an important part in the creation of the contemporary "happening." "Happening: an art of radical juxtaposition" in \textit{Against Interpretation} (New York: The Noonday Press, 1966), pp. 263-274.
of larger states or movements is also used effectively by Arrabal in three short plays all dealing with the subject of love and sexuality.

In the first, *La communion solennelle*, contained within the collection *Théâtre panique*, a collection in which Arrabal's preoccupation with both the ceremonial aspects of theatre and the all-inclusiveness of Pan is clearly manifest, a grandmother's solemn words of wisdom to her granddaughter are set against a backdrop in which a woman's corpse is possessed by a necrophile. As the young girl is being dressed in the white robes which indicate her purity, as she listens to her grandmother tell her how to create a lasting and happy home (she must never leave dirty dishes, must dust the floors, must not let her husband smoke cigars in the house) every word uttered by the grandmother, every apology for order as opposed to the "filth" of disorder, is belied by the "reality" of the necrophile who is becoming visibly more and more excited. As he enters the casket the grandmother's voice can be heard saying: "Aujourd'hui alors que tu vas recevoir la première communion tu vas devenir une vraie petite femme. Le Seigneur va descendre dans ton cœur et va te purifier de toute faute."55

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55Arrabal, *La communion solennelle*, p. 16.
annointed, the young girl takes a knife, and with all the ceremony of a priest during high mass plunges it into the necrophile's body. Two red balloons escape from the casket and rise toward the sky: death, sexuality, and religion are symbolically reunited.

In *La communion solennelle* Arrabal creates a liberating counterpoint of the sacred and the sacrilegious; in *Les amours impossibles* he creates another between the chaste romantic ideal of the nineteenth century novel and the bestial. A lovely princess sings sweetly of the prince of her dreams. A prince materializes but instead of being the handsome galant of her song he is midway between man and beast with the head of a dog. She is smitten with love, speaks to him in the lilting language of the flowers to which he replies with monosyllabic grunts. The princess is dismayed. She wants only to love him: "Aujourd'hui j'ai rencontré le prince de mes rêves, l'homme que j'ai cherché toute ma vie...Lorsque j'étais enfant et que mon père m'emmenait au zoo, je pensais déjà à lui."\(^5^6\)

Another bestial prince, this time with the head of a bull, arrives on the scene. As she tells him that her love is for another, that he may only love her platonically, she

is in fact engaging with him in the most blatant and vulgar sexuality. In a frenzy of jealousy the two princes duel to the death, each burping convulsively as he expires. The princess throws herself obscenely upon the body of her true love: "Si Dieu a voulu qu'il meure c'est qu'il désire aussi ma mort." And before she can be stopped by her father, a well dressed man with the head and trunk of an elephant, she has stabbed herself to death. He comments sadly as he caresses her with his trunk: "Je sais bien que ce sont les amours impossibles." This last line which serves as the title, in addition to indicating the future of the love envisioned by the princess also reflects what Arrabal has attempted to do within the play: it is itself a wedding of forbidden loves, a union of contraries.

Bestiality is also treated in a short piece called Bestialité érotique, a play which Arrabal considers "très pure, très chaste." Here, in fact, it is the love between two "horses" (actors wearing horses' heads) which, as it is set against the bestial love of two humans, appears lyrical, romantic. The words of love proffered to one another by the "humans" as they frantically lick the soles of each

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57 Ibid., p. 28.
58 Ibid., p. 29.
59 "Arrabal in Conversation."
other's feet are basely naturalistic. At best they constitute the fantasy of Arrabal, the child, who thinks himself ugly and evil-smelling, but loved for all of his unseemly qualities:

ALIMA
Aujourd'hui, comme j'ai perdu tout à fait ma timidité, je peux te dire le fond de ma pensée, même si l'excès de ma passion m'éloignait de toi, j'irais plus loin ô mon aimé, amour de ma vie, homme de mon sang... Tu sens mauvais.

ASAN (qui découvre quelque chose de nouveau)
Je sens mauvais?... Et comment est cette odeur?

ALIMA
Répugnante.

ASAN (tout heureux)
Non?

ALIMA
Si.

ASAN
Mon amour, donne-moi des précisions...

ALIMA
C'est une odeur forte, insupportable, extrêmement désagréable, une sorte de mélange de saleté, d'urine séchée, de cadavre...

C'est intolérable!

ASAN
Merci, mon amour.

It is only after their horses have created an operatic interlude and ascended to the heavens in a magical barque throwing rose petals as they go, that their masters, awakening from a deep sleep, find themselves suddenly gifted with tenderness and poetry.

60 Arrabal, Bestialité érotique, pp. 134, 135.
Arrabal has another way of dealing with contrary states and that is their incarnation in more than one character. These characters are, however, as in the disassociation common to dreams, part and parcel of the same Character, just as on a higher plane, the often contradictory faces of reality as we perceive it mask underlying coherence. In three plays which we shall now briefly consider, this tendency bears upon the nature of love.

In *Le Couronnement*, a play owing much to Lewis Carroll, and rather diffuse in spite of its apparent composition along mathematical lines, Giafar, one of Arrabal's innocents, has found the beautiful Sylda, object of a long and torturous search. She is apparently dead. At the suggestion of Kardo and Malderic who appear from nowhere engaged like Tweedledum and Tweedledee as if by some outside force in a perpetual and ferocious combat, Giafar kisses her and she awakens to life. She tells him that she died as a consequence of losing all her blood during her first sexual encounter. 61 There follows a "flashback"

61 This story is related to an experience had by Arrabal's sister and later incorporated exactly as it was lived into the character of Lais in *Le Jardin des délices*. It illustrates both the autobiographical nature of Arrabal's work and the total repression practiced with regard to sexual matters during Arrabal's youth. His sister, resident at a convent school, one day apparently began to give away to her friends certain of her worldly possessions, convinced that the end was near for her. When asked why she thought
Cone is rarely sure of chronology in Arrabal) of a card game between them in which her extraordinary powers are manifest: she always wins; she reads Giafar's mind; she makes her nails grow and retract at will. Having avowed his love for her, Giafar agrees to let Sylda chain him to the bed while she goes out, promising to study in her absence the book of philosophy that she has given him. It is called "Les jeux de hasard et les lois de la certitude" and will enable him to predict the numbers on a roulette wheel.

While she is gone, Arlys appears. Physically different from Sylda, she is also different in temperament. Whereas Sylda was aloof, exciting, provocative in a mysterious and frequently cruel way, Arlys is tender, maternal, lyrical. Giafar finds himself confiding to her his love for Sylda. She shows Giafar Sylda's magic diary and crystal ball. Together they relive by having them played out before them the scenes of Sylda's birth and ascension to Knowledge. Now the lines between journal entry and present reality completely fade as characters from the diary appear. A scene reminiscent of Carroll's mad tea party ensues with poetry recited by Sylda's father amidst the chaos of flying

she was going to die she replied, "Parce que je suis en train de perdre mon sang entre mes jambes." (Entretiens, p. 25.)
food and drink. Suddenly Arlys changes. She becomes lascivious, inviting. She takes Giafar into the curtained bed and initiates him to manhood. When Giafar disavows Sylda, pledging all his love to Arlys, the latter reveals herself as Sylda intentionally costumed to deceive him. It is now time for Giafar's initiation to Knowledge, but the sacrifice of Arlys-Sylda (the names lack one letter from being mirror images of each other) is required. A ceremony much like that in which Sylda attained Knowledge follows in which Arlys-Sylda dies at the hands of Kardo and Malderic. Giafar reads the "parchemin de la Suprême Violence" which contains the secret of Knowledge. His final words are "J'ai compris."

Arlys-Sylda are, then, the multiple faces of Woman: cruelty, poetry, fascination, mystery, whose primary role is seen by Arrabal as that of initiator to knowledge through love and violence. Arrabal likes to think that Le Couronnement ends well with Giafar crowned, initiated. But to what is he initiated? If he has known momentary pleasure with Arlys-Sylda Giafar must loose her again before the final ceremony in which he is accepted into the world of those who "know." And even his "knowledge" is illusory.

To begin with, the contents of "le parchemin de la Suprême Violence" are never revealed: form seems once again to have replaced content. Secondly, it will be recalled that before the ceremony Giafar is given a magic potion to drink which puts him to sleep. Is everything that follows "dream" or "reality?" And what of the ending? At the final curtain, the body of Arlys-Sylida has been laid on the bed attired just as at the beginning of the play; all others have left the stage; knocking is heard at the door. The circle has once again completed itself. Death, love, illusion, reality are fused in a perpetual present like the incandescent glass of Sylda's sphere. That the action has run its course before and will continue to do so indefinitely is suggested by women's voices arising from the dark as Giafar enters the room for the "first" time:

VOIX DE FEMME (1)
Voilà plus d'un an qu'il la cherche.
(Ricanements)

VOIX DE FEMME (2)
Tout le monde sait ou il est sauf lui.
(Ricanements)

The fact that others have knowledge of Giafar's life of which he is himself unaware leads to the following speculation regarding Arrabal's view of reality and of

63Arrabal, Le Couronnement, p. 9.
love. At one level it could indicate nothing more than the fact that Giafar's memory is defective, that the circularity of the action is, as it often is in Arrabal, a poetic realization of the resulting absence of chronology. But at another level, the introduction of the theme of dreaming and that of the very real assimilation of dream to reality suggests another possibility. When he dreams, the dreamer projects some part of himself into each of the characters who appear in his dream. Having done so, he then "disassociates," he ceases to recognize that part of himself which now inhabits the bodies and personalities of others. The action of Le Couronnement may be seen in this light as Giafar's waking dream of initiation to Knowledge through the integration of those parts of himself represented by Arlys-Sylida, the Mother, the Father, and so forth. Love, as Arrabal has said, is a feeling of "auto-tendresse." Knowledge, then would be

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Arrabal rejects the theory held by existential psychology that the dreamer is author of the personnages in his dream when he has Cavanosa say:

Je rêve que les gens rient et savent que je vais me tuer. Mais moi, j'ignore pourquoi. Je ne l'apprends qu'à la fin du rêve. Et par conséquent ceux qui riaient n'étaient pas une création de mon esprit puisqu'ils connaissaient quelque chose que je n'ai deviné que plus tard! *Le Grand Cérémonial*, p. 288.
the result of a violent initiatory rite in which the various parts of the self are reconciled. But the circularity of the structure while symbolizing potential unity also suggests constant motion. Knowledge is never attained: one is never "complete" but is engaged in a process of perpetual becoming.

That this construction of *Le Couronnement* is not entirely far-fetched is borne out by *L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie*, possibly Arrabal's most perfectly realized dramatic effort to date. The title may have been suggested by one of Artaud's essays ("En finir avec les chefs-d'oeuvre") in which he states that cruelty for him does not necessarily mean the sort of cruelty "que nous pouvons exercer les uns contre les autres en nous dépeçant mutuellement les corps, en sciant nos anatomies personnelles, ou tels des empereurs assyriens (my italics), en nous adressant par la poste des sacs d'oreilles humaines, de nez ou de narines bien découpés..."65 Arrabal will in his play utilize precisely this most terrible and perverse of cruelties, the sawing and devouring of one human by another, but will make of it an act of extraordinary tenderness, the consummate act of love. This scene, excruciating in its intensity, grotesque, melancholy, lyrical and comic in the

deepest meaning of the term ("Eh, Empereur, qu'est-ce que tu te foutais dans les os des pieds qu'il n'y a pas moyen de les scier."⁶⁶) actualizes Artaud's dream for a theatre which by stripping away the chaff of civilization may empty the abscesses of the plague.

L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie is also a chef-d'oeuvre of the "théâtre panique," the opera mundi which Arrabal envisioned in his theoretical writings. Taken most superficially the Architect and the Emperor are the natural forces and energies in man and the civilization which his inventiveness has permitted him to erect. The Architect is endowed with wondrous powers: he moves mountains and seas, brings light and darkness to the universe, speaks to the animals in their languages. He is at least several thousand years old if the sacks containing the locks of hair he cuts annually are any indication. The implication is clear: the Architect may be the Supreme Architect, the creator of the universe. But if he is so, he is the creator as peculiarly refracted in the Arrabalian prism, for this architect knows no architecture. He is like the God who, as he is envisioned by

⁶⁶L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, p. 176.
Arrabal, created the world and then went mad:

L'EMPEREUR
Tu es devenu fou comme lui.
L'ARCHITECTE
Qui est devenu fou comme moi?
L'EMPEREUR
Dieu. 67

The task falls to the Emperor who crash lands on the Architect's desert island to teach him not only architecture but all else which is the product of civilized man. And the Emperor is civilized in all that the term conveys both of the grandiose and of the tarnished. He is a preposterous mixture of East and West, ancient and future: "Ignorais-tu que l'Assyrie a déjà lancé plusieurs satellites habités sur Neptune!" 68 At one level the play traces the attempt of the Empereur to "educate" to "civilize" the inarticulate being whom he finds upon his arrival.

But the Emperor's lessons are constantly being interrupted by desires, surging from some deeper level, to re-enact scenes from the life he had known. The Architect lends himself fully to the "game" and together they run the gamut of possible relationships and postures. They are the blind poet Homer and his dog; they are soldiers at war, a child and his mother, a man and his love. They are history,

67 Ibid., p. 141.
68 Ibid., p. 93.
they are the world. The god Pan is assuaged. It is at this point that something else becomes apparent: the Architect and the Emperor are a couple like Arrabal's other couples: they reach out to each other, attempt to touch each other, hurt each other and are reconciled. They share with Arrabal's other characters an immense and overpowering need for tenderness:

It is in this light that Arrabal wants us to see the final act of the play. When it is revealed through the "trial" which the Emperor forces to its logical conclusion, that he is not at all what he has seemed, not the great and glorious monarch whose "lever" is attended by thousands of naked slave girls to the blaring of hundreds of royal trumpets, but instead, as Arrabal puts it, "un minable qui

69Ibid., p. 101.
veut aimer qui rêve d'écrire, de se libérer de sa mère,\textsuperscript{70} and who has, he insists, murdered his mother, he asks that his punishment be meted out in such a way as to ensure union and perpetuity with the one he loves: "Je désire que...je désire...enfin...que tu me manges...que tu me manges Je veux que tu sois à la fois toi et moi Tu me mangeras entièrement, Architecte, tu m'entends?\textsuperscript{71}

The consuming of the body of his beloved friend is thus a supreme act of communion. When the Architect suddenly stops chewing a morsel of the Emperor's foot and asks if this is not "maigre," that is, if it is not a day on which the Church forbids the eating of meat ("gras"), it is not, suggests Arrabal, the sarcasm of one who had ridiculed the Church, but rather the sincere query of a man who loves: "Il se souvient qu'ils se sont aimés et voilà, il cherche à se rappeler les mythes de l'autre et si vendredi n'était pas maigre."\textsuperscript{72}

As the Architect consumes the Emperor's body, he begins to take on the voice and personality of the Emperor. It would seem for a time that Arrabal's dream of "ambiguïté," of the literal and complete fusion of two beings, has been

\textsuperscript{70}Entretiens, p. 103.

\textsuperscript{71}L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, p. 175.

\textsuperscript{72}Entretiens, p. 104:
realized, that the Emperor is surviving in the Architect's body, having divested himself of his own body, which is to say, according to Arrabal, of his defects. But soon the Architect begins to lose his mysterious power over nature. The process once set in motion cannot be stopped: the Architect rapidly loses even the physical properties which had distinguished him from the other: he has become the Emperor. As the curtain falls a plane crash just like the one which first brought the Emperor to the island now delivers up the Architect, wearing the same decadently elegant robes in which the Emperor originally appeared. And the action, fulfilling the prophecy made moments before by the Emperor - "J'arriverai tout seul à découvrir le mouvement perpétuel" - begins anew.

There is reason to believe, however, that the Architect and the Emperor were never other than composite parts of a single consciousness, that like a single circle which binocular eye pieces can make appear to separate, move first to one side of each other, return, fuse momentarily, and then move to opposite sides, the whole action

73 Ibid., p. 103.
74 L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, p. 186.
75 When I suggested this to Arrabal as a possible interpretation of the play, he replied, "Oui, je le crois parfois moi-même."
of the play and doubling of character was a fantasy
generated either by the Architect or by the Emperor or by
some intermediate higher consciousness. This is suggested
by a "dream" which the Architect relates to the Emperor:

J'ai rêvé que je me trouvais seul dans une
île déserte et que tout à coup un avion tombait
et j'avais une peur panique et je courais partout,
j'ai même voulu enfouir ma tête dans le sable
lorsque quelqu'un m'a appelé par-derrière et... 76

Here is a dream within a play which is that dream,
its author a single consciousness. Arrabal further tends
to support the notion by a remark following that cited
earlier relating to the Emperor's effort to survive within
the Architect. He says of him: "Il ne se rend pas compte
que l'homme est toujours le même, quels que soient les pays
et les corps..." 77 The ego, then, is all encompassing:

L'EMPEREUR
Quelles orgies je me prépare. Moi tout
seul je vais être le premier, le seul.
Le meilleur. 78

The ego is the giver of life through the mother, the de­
stroyer of life through the ritual murder and absorption
once again of the son into the mother's body. It is the
creator of love as well as its Nemesis. It is Pan, the
world in microcosm.

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76 L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, p. 87.
77 Entretiens, p. 103.
78 L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, p. 186.
Le Jardin des délices, Arrabal's most recent full-length play which was written during his incarceration in Spain in 1967, deals once again with the themes of love and self-integration. Lais, the beautiful and recently successful actress, lives in a crumbling castle of which labyrinthine ruins fill the main hall. With her, although it is never clear how much of the ensuing action and personnages "exist" outside of her own fantasies and the evocation of her memories, are her nine pet sheep and the man/beast, Zénon. Lais has accorded a telephone interview to one of the television stations. In this way the questions of the home interviewers are used as a structuring device to motivate the action which takes place in the interludes between calls.

The play is reminiscent of Le Couronnement, in that it, too, is a ceremony of initiation to adulthood and to the freedom of self-determination. Miharca, Lais' childhood friend, and Teloc, the mage/musician, are summoned to the scene, each having played an important part in Lais' past (although in the alternation sequences of past, present, and future, time is caught up once again in a continuous on-going present). In order for Lais to enter the "jardin des délices" the sacrifice of Miharca will be required, for as Teloc puts it: "Elle voulait...te prouver
que seul est vrai le monde de ton enfance et qu'aujourd'hui tes succès et ta gloire ne sont que mensonges et illusions."

The extent to which Lais is a projection of Arrabal himself is as evident as it is considerable. Like Arrabal, who felt orphaned, Lais had actually lost her parents at an early age; like him, she sees herself, in spite of her great beauty, as ugly and foul smelling. Like Arrabal, once again, Lais has a great need for calm which she seeks in God and in the religion of her childhood. But her need for God's love is complicated by a tendency toward self-punishment, pain and sacrifice, which are in turn related to her sexuality and to the physical overtones of her relationship with Miharca. (If Miharca is representative of the narcissistic homosexuality of childhood, the reverberation in Arrabal's own auto-eroticism is evident.)

Lais finds in Téloc an initiator to beauty, to the marvelous. He constructs for her the wondrous helmet which enables her to look into past and future. He is creativity, "hasard." He teaches her freedom. He composes for her a new accompaniment to "Ave Maria" which he executes by using his anus as a musical instrument. His soul is contained in

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a jelly jar which he gives as a present to Lais. 80

But Zénon is no less a part of Lais than is Téléloc. If Téléloc is man in his effort toward the sublime, Zénon is man as beast. The bestial nature of man is, as we have seen, a theme very close to Arrabal. He recalls in this Calderón's Segismundo who avows:

\[\text{But now I know just who I am,} \]
\[\text{And find that I am both a man and beast combined.}^81\]

Arrabal has said of himself in the interview which precedes Théâtre III that he sees himself as he was between the ages of eighteen and twenty as "un animal doué de la parole." 82 Zénon seems to be this "talking animal," a being both awe-inspiring in his rage and violence and touching in his tenderness. It is he who through his insane jealousy kills innocence in the form of the "brebis" (they are resuscitated in the final love apotheosis) but who also saves Lais from death at the hands of Miharca.

Miharca is childhood, she is memory. Memory has been incarnated in this play only to be destroyed. And

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80 This theme also appears in La Pierre de la folie and seems based in Arrabal's profound religiosity, particularly in the notion of communion through the consuming of the flesh of another, which is, of course, related to the whole Eucharistic mystery.

81 Calderón, La Vida es Sueño, p. 46.

82 Introduction to Théâtre III (Christian Bourgois), p. 13.
Miharca knows from the beginning that she will be sacrificed as though her role is already prefigured in her. Once again this "future" is announced in terms of a dream:

MIHARCA
J'ai rêvé que tu me tuais, mais une fois morte je revenais te voir et tu me donnais un morceau de pain blanc.\textsuperscript{83}

What can we glean from Miharca's use of the imperfect tense? Is the action caught here in one moment of its perpetual return? Does childhood never die but return always to be vanquished anew? Are Zénon and Téloc also projections of a central consciousness called Lais? The complete interchangeability in terms of dominance-passivity, cruelty-tenderness of the four major characters reinforces the notion that they are part and parcel of the same Character. Miharca is that part of Lais or of the higher Ego whose constant presence impedes integration and growth. In a scene of bloody violence Miharca and Lais battle for their very survival. At one point Miharca seems close to being the victor. She tears off Lais' ear threatening to kill her unless it is eaten by the now impotent Téloc. This will be Lais' scar, the permanent concession she makes to her childhood even as Zénon frees her for adulthood by murdering Miharca.

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Le Jardin des délices}, p. 61.
The apotheosis in love is reminiscent of that in L'Architecte et L'Empereur d'Assyrie. Lais offers her soul (also contained in a jelly jar) to her love, Zénon, who eats it thus becoming human. Once again, the dream of "ambiguïté" is temporarily realized. Lais rejects the narcissism of her childhood, integrating at the same time Zénon's animal energies. But Lais in so doing also loses her humanity. Even as Zénon sings to her a beautiful operatic aria, Lais' own voice is becoming hoarser, more like that of an animal. As the curtain falls, they are seen ascending toward the sky in a huge Boschian egg, a new version of the womb, the balloon, the cage-sphere. Love is freedom, love is imprisonment; love is unity and disparity, love is life as it is death.
CHAPTER FOUR

CEREMONY
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It is perfectly in keeping with Arrabal's proclivity for the union of contraries that love, the most basic of human strivings, be used in his own example as an illustration of the intense theatricality of life:

Quand je pense à l'amour j'y vois plusieurs dimensions: il y a d'abord l'amour que l'on vit et peut-être vecu dans la réalité (au premier degré) ou dans la cérémonie (avec une certaine théatralité). On peut imaginer une autre dimension, si l'on pense, comme il m'arrive de le faire, que l'amour est inexistant, et qu'il est remplacé par un simple rituel, par les "gestes" de l'amour.1

Once again form is set off against content; the "gestures" of love are set off against the tenuous "reality" of love which ends by vanishing behind its own exteriorization.

But by "cérémonie" Arrabal also means those "formes extérieures de solennité"2 which characterize the dual evocation and celebration of the great myths of mankind.

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2 This is the dictionary definition of "cérémonie" given in the Petit Larousse, p. 189.
Ceremony is theatre both in the primitive religious sense and in the contemporary, bringing to life within the confines of its very formalism a reality which transcends ritual while at the same time it self-consciously asserts its role as purveyor of illusion. For Arrabal it is precisely through the illusion of theatre that he may expose those truths hidden by the "gestures" of life. Theatre for him is a purposeful ritualization of daily events so as to make manifest their inherent but disguised disproportion, their irregularity, their excess: "Mon théâtre révèle que nous sommes au fond très différents de notre apparence sociale, très loin de nos gestes." The theatre of reality is called into question by the reality of theatre. Illusion which declares itself as such illuminates the hypocrisy of illusion which would shrink from that awareness. Milos in *Le cimetière des voitures*, when he turns his binoculars away from Dila and Emanou and fixes them on the

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4A similar view of theatricality characterizes Jean Genet in whose dramatic works reality and theatre are set off against each other as in a hall of reflecting mirrors which both blurs the distinction between the two and permits the elucidation of a higher "truth." In his introduction to *Les Bonnes* Genet writes: "Je vais au théâtre afin de me voir, sur la scène (restitué en un seul personnage ou à l'aide d'un personnage multiple et sous forme de conte) tel que je me sais être." (p. 10) Genet, like Arrabal, creates in his theatre a reflecting mirror of his own essence.
spectators in the hall, acknowledges at once a hierarchy and an identification. The gesture says, in effect: We are alike; my theatricality is formalized; yours is not; but both of us are actors as well as observers; we contribute equally to the illusion of life.

The idea of ritual, of ceremony, of subject as object, relates then both to what Arrabal sees as the function of theatre and to the reality which through theatre he will try to realize. In two cases, in *Oraison* and in *La communion solon nelle* this preoccupation has led him to write plays which are in themselves short ceremonies, rites, in which language, setting aside its function as dialogue, as the instrument of psychological revelation, recaptures its ancient and, according to Artaud, its proper function as incantation, that "acceptation religieuse et mystique dont notre théâtre a complétement perdu le sens..." More frequently, however, although the ceremonial preoccupation is stated in the title (*Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné; Le Couronnement, cérémonie de l'initiation; Le Grand Cérémonial; Concert dans un œuf, cérémonie quichott esque*), and although the play may contain

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5 Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, p. 56. Genet's use of theatre as a Black Mass in which language is incantation and acts are conjured by their symbolic equivalents is discussed by Robert Brustein in *The Theatre of Revolt*, pp. 377-411.
within it short ceremonies which are recognizable as such, the sense in which the play itself may be considered ceremonial is less obvious and deserves development. There are also, however, the early plays, those written before Arrabal's theoretical formulations on theatre as a "cérémonie panique." How do his notions of theatricality manifest themselves here? Has Arrabal's optic undergone modification or remained constant, merely resorting to different forms of expression?

Interestingly, apart from Oraison there is among those plays contained in Volumes I and II of the Julliard collection and, therefore, written prior to 1961 (a few were written as early as 1948 when Arrabal was in his late teens) only one formal ceremony, that of the "crucifixion" of Emanou in Le cimetière des voitures. It is significant that Emanou's life and death should be so closely modeled upon that of Christ for it illustrates the intensely religious preoccupation which underlies all of Arrabal's work. But, as we have noted, it is religious dogma as peculiarly viewed through Arrabalian binoculars: Emanou is like Christ only in certain formal and superficial ways (a kind of double theatricality), having lied, stolen, murdered. There is further irony in the fact that he is killed finally not for these transgressions but because he persists
in giving trumpet concerts for the poor. Even his crucifixion is a bizarre fusion of the biblical and the Arrabalian: in a sort of pre-crucifixion ceremony Tiossido and Lasca wash their hands with great pomp, drying them on a towel which appears in one of the car windows. They then measure Emanou with a measuring tape, as if for a suit of clothes, and, after cruelly beating him, stretch him Christ-like on the handle bars of a bicycle. There he expires amidst the sporadic ministrations of Dila, the child-prostitute, a contemporary Mary Magdelene. And the bicycle, ubiquitous emblem of childhood, completes its destiny as an instrument of death.

More often theatricality in the early plays is incorporated less formally into the fabric of the daily reality lived by Arrabal's characters. Gesture, role-playing, games, are the very stuff of existence for the child-creatures of Arrabal's universe who are constantly attempting to create a reality which does not exist for them, to modify an experienced reality in an effort to render it palatable. Their theatricality is never completely cut off from the larger theme of childhood, partly, perhaps, because it is never slick, never polished. Fando and Fanchou are inept if enthusiastic vaudevillians; the imitation of a locomotive by the three captors of Vilaro
in *La Bicyclette du condamné* is laughably clumsy, and so forth. "Play" for them may also consist of a self-conscious and ineffective role-playing as in *Oraison* where Fidio, in order to pronounce on what is "good," assumes the voice of a judge, ceremonially reinforcing the substance of his claims.⁶

But one is always impressed by the extent to which play not only reinforces or expands but replaces reality for Arrabal's creatures. Fanchou in his absolute frustration at not being able to aid Lira, "takes offense" at her silence and creates around it a motivation which he can accept more easily than her impending death: "Madame ne peut pas parler. Madame est fatiguee."⁷ Another more global example is *Pique-nique en campagne*. Zapo and Zépo are two young men of identical temperament and history. Although they are enemies, they look alike, wear the same uniforms in different colors, carry the same toy-like guns. Neither can understand the reasons for his presence on the battlefield. Equally timid and passive they knit sweaters and make paper flowers to pass the time in the trenches.

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⁶This kind of theatricality is present to some degree in Samuel Beckett. In order to help pass the time, for example, Estragon and Vladimir "play" that they are Pozzo and Lucky.

But, at the same time, they are aware of the seriousness and potential danger of their predicament. Zapo's parents, on the other hand, view the war as utter nonsense. They arrive laden with wine and meats to picnic with their son on a Sunday afternoon. (Hence, the irony of the title which translates both as "Picnic on the Battlefield" and "Picnic in the Country.") If for Zapo and Zépo the game of war is an enigmatic, though deadly, reality whose rules must be mastered, ("Et les grenades, qu'est-ce que j'en fais? Je dois les envoyer en avant ou en arrière?"\(^8\)), the reality of war for Mr. and Mme. Tépan is that of a frivolous and irrelevant game. Says Mr. Tépan: "Pour moi tout ceci n'est qu'un jeu. Combien de fois, sans aller plus loin, ai-je descendu du métro en marche?"\(^9\)

Not even the enemy bombs inspire terror in the Tépons. As their soldier son and his newly befriended enemy take shelter under a pile of sand bags, the Tépons nonchalantly wait out the bombing under an umbrella, talking and eating all the while. For them the "reality" of social convention, itself a body of rules for playing the game of propriety, is much more immediate and compelling: "Laisse

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\(^8\) Arrabal, *Pique-nique en campagne*, p. 176

\(^9\) Ibid., p. 177.
ton fusil tranquille. C'est mal élevé de tenir son fusil à table."10 But the Tépans' disregard of the reality of the war game is fatal. Having declared a private end to the war at Mr. Tépan's instigation, the four are cut down by enemy bombs as they joyfully dance a fandango. The game of war once set in motion, like the stretcher bearers who relentlessly seek out the dead, is a reality which cannot be denied.

Céramonie pour un noir assassiné, dated Bouffémont, 1956, is an intriguing study in the counterpoint of reality and theatricality. Significantly Jérôme and Vincent, typically inept Arrabalian heroes, are named for saints, immediately establishing the connection between the ceremony of religion and that of theatre. Unlike the saints whom their names evoke, however, and particularly unlike Vincent's namesake, founder of the "Enfants trouvés," Arrabal's Vincent replies to the cries of Luce whose father has just died with a desultory, "Et puis, qu'est-ce que ça peut foutre? On a des tas de choses urgentes à faire."11 Vincent and Jérôme have fixed upon only that aspect of saintliness which serves them: the idea of grace, or

10 Ibid., p. 180.
11 Arrabal, Céramonie pour un noir assassiné, p. 404.
election. The two feel that they have been singled out to be great and glorious actors, "Types universels," equally adept at costuming, set design, and directing.

At one level then, the play, already a theatrical event to the members of the audience who have come to witness it, involves the attempt by Jérôme and Vincent to become actors, to create theatre, and particularly, to create the play of Othello.\textsuperscript{12} They do so, as one might expect, not by involving themselves with the "characters" in Othello, but by costuming themselves in the same way as at the beginning of the play they had decided to "be" Casanova and Don Juan because they preferred the splendor of those costumes to others they found in their trunk. Jérôme and Vincent try, then, to create the reality of theatre through the gestures, the costumes, hence the "forms" of theatre, and fail in the sense that their efforts are never more than the mediocre and infantile approximations of a theatrical event. But in another sense Jérôme and Vincent are, at the

\textsuperscript{12}A parallel may be seen in Genet's Les Nègres in which a group of Negro actors perform the ritual murder of a white woman before another group of Negros disguised as Whites. Off stage, however, a "real" act is being committed, the murder of a Negro traitor. Yet both "theatre" and "reality" are merely components of a higher theatricality which members of the audience have come to view. Genet's play calls into question both the nature of the concept "Negro" and that of the concept "actor."
final curtain, the successful actors they have dreamed of becoming. In order to understand how this is true both the reality and the ceremony of their lives must be brought into question.

At the level of their "reality" Jérôme and Vincent are like Arrabal's other characters of this period. They are linear, lacking coherent value systems, subject to instant changes of mood and behavior. They are outside of the human community both because of the acts they perform and because of their inability to identify fully or consistently even with the feelings of those they think they care about. They think, for example, that they will cheer up Luce by telling her the story of how they taunted and finally murdered the "cul de jatte." Interestingly, one of the errors of their perception relates to the distinction between "play" and "reality." They are devastated that the cripple couldn't see that they were "just playing;" and that he accuses them before they kill him of having tortured him. The reality of "play" in this instance is paralleled by the derivation of substance from gesture in the larger framework of their lives. Luce is berated for not being able to cry at her father's death. What matters is the gesture of grief: "Ce qui est mal vu, c'est de ne
And Vincent, seeing the occasion to add something profound to the conversation, injects another platitude: "Un malheur n'arrive jamais seul," inappropriately implying an identification in tragedy between losing a father and not being able to cry about it.

The language of their daily reality is theatrically structured like the lines of a play which they impose upon themselves and try to live. The same may be said of the gestures of their reality. Jérôme and Vincent "stage" a declaration of love to Luce in which they borrow not only the verbal expression of their feelings, "Ce qu'il y a c'est qu'on t'aime beaucoup et qu'on est amoureux de toi; on est capable de mourir pour toi," but awkwardly and ritualistically perform the presentation of flowers and gifts (a light bulb wrapped in newspaper). Inept at the reality of theatre, they manage the theatre of reality. Luce is apparently aware of the theatricality involved in what is about to take place. Upon entering the room and seeing the two superbly outfitted and bearing gifts she

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13 Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné, p. 426.
14 Ibid., p. 423.
15 Ibid., p. 450.
asks Vincent, "Tu t'occupes de théâtre?"  

Even the reality of death is theatricalized. Since "le linceul est une affaire de mode et il faut la suivre" the two would-be actors decide to bury Luce's father in costume, choosing that of Cyrano de Bergerac because "Ça fait noble." For a time, although they are eventually dissuaded from the project by Luce, they even insist on the use of the nose which comes with the costume: "le rôle l'exige." Reality to them is inconceivable, one might say non-existent, without the dialogue, the gestures, the costuming of theatre. There is moreover, yet another level at which theatricality comes to bear upon the comportment of Jérôme and Vincent. Occasionally they intentionally

\[16\text{Ibid., p. 449. Genet's characters differ from Arrabal's in that they have a clearer notion of the distinction between levels of theatricality (or reality, depending on one's optic). It is clear to Claire and Solange (Les Bonnes), for example, when they are "playing" and when they are not, some verbal cue always signalling the return to ritual. Claire's death at the end of the play brings an end to this clarity since she both dies as Claire and in the role of "Madame" which she has played "jusqu'au bout." In Les Nègres, Archibald's observation that "Nos répliques sont prêvues par le texte" (p. 45) also indicates a consciousness of theatricality which makes the ritual qualitatively different from either the off-stage action or the apparently more "real" affection of Village for Vertu.}\n
\[17\text{Ibid., p. 433.}\n\[18\text{Ibid., p. 435.}\n\[19\text{Ibid.}\]
dramatize what are apparently real feelings, as in the scene quoted previously wherein Jérôme says first "dramatiquement": "Tu veux qu'on la fasse saigner avec le couteau?" but adds a moment later in a manner labeled by Arrabal's directions as "très sérieux," "Je veux voir son sang." \(^{20}\)

But the theatricality of Jérôme and Vincent also serves to underline their essential transparency, their ineptitude, and, in a strange sense, their humanity. Like very young children they are unpracticed at the mechanics of deception. In the scene just described in which Vincent by prearrangement declares the love of both of them for Luce, Jérôme was to have hidden behind a large screen, silent spectator to the proceedings. But not only does he go to the door with Vincent to greet Luce, thus making his presence known, but once the "scene" of declaration has begun, and he has taken his place behind the screen, he repeatedly sticks his head out so as to better hear what is going on. Language, too, frequently betrays them, as when Vincent tries to assure Luce that he did not hear her crying for help on the night her father died:

\(^{20}\)Ibid., p. 454.
Similarly, Vincent awkwardly attempts to dissimulate the presence of the decomposing corpse of François d'Assise, insisting that it is a cat; then, forgetting what he has said, he calls it a dog:

VINCENT

\Ne va pas croire que c'est François d'Assise, le noir.\n
LUCE

Bien sûr que non.

VINCENT

Enfin, j'avais peur que tu croies que le jour où tu nous a abandonnés on avait tué le noir à coups de couteau. (Un temps.) Et ce n'est pas vrai. C'est un chien qu'il y a sous le lit.\footnote{Ibid., p. 424.}\footnote{Ibid., p. 465.}

Finally, there are numerous instances in which raw emotions, totally unrelated to theatricality, and in spite of persistent efforts to control them, rise to the surface: the curiosity of Jérôme who wants to know what it is like to die, the enthusiasm, the delight of both at the sight of each other in costume, the very real timidity of Vincent as he prepares for the arrival of Luce:
VINCENT
Je suis énervé.

JEROME
Moi aussi.

VINCENT
Mais au fond, je sais assez bien me dominer, tu ne crois pas?

JEROME
Effectivement. Tu te domines très bien.
(Il est de plus en plus nerveux.
Leurs paroles sont entrecoupées de rires.)

VINCENT
Toi aussi, tu te domines bien. On ne croirait pas que tu es nerveux.

JEROME
On se domine bien tous les deux.

VINCENT
C'est l'essentiel, pour des acteurs. Imagine un peu un acteur timide ou ému quand il entre en scène. (Il rit.) Il ne pourrait rien faire. (Il rit.) On n'est pas comme ça. On est...
enfin (il rit) supérieurs.23

It is this level of reality which motivates the murder of François d'Assise, the sensitive and soft spoken dévotée of Bach and Armstrong whom Jérôme and Vincent have chosen as a lover for Luce. The morning following the first union of the lovers, Luce leaves for work without speaking to Jérôme and Vincent. In a moment of sudden frenzy, part jealousy, part subverted sexuality, Jérôme plunges a knife into François, killing him. Arrabal has worked his own variation on Shakespeare's Othello: François rather than Luce (Desdemona) is sacrificed to the jealous

23Ibid., pp. 447-8.
fury of Jérôme and Vincent. In Shakespeare's play, Othello, overcome with grief when he learns of his error, takes his own life. Arrabal's Jérôme suddenly finds himself mute and paralyzed, a particular and pointed sort of death for one whose chosen profession demands the full range of physical potentialities.

The final scene constitutes a merging of the myriad levels of reality and theatricality already present. With the stench of the rotting corpse filling the air and the cries of angry and frightened neighbors rising outside the door, Vincent, Jérôme, and Luce begin to rehearse Othello. But because Jérôme is no longer capable either of moving or of speaking, an additional element of theatricality comes into play: Jérôme is supported on a pair of crutches from behind the curtain while his voice is supplied by Luce. Thus, within the illusion of the play Othello will be the additional illusion of Jérôme's capacities as an actor. But the real play of Othello created in life by Jérôme and Vincent is also moving toward its denouement. The rehearsal is interrupted by knocking at the door; the police have arrived to investigate the neighbors' complaints of foul play. Jérôme and Vincent are in ecstasy, oblivious to any reality but that of the fact that they are now the actors they have wanted to become:
VINCENT
Tu as vu, Luce? C'est formidable. On est des sacrés acteurs! Les meilleurs! 24

And Jérôme grunts his assent, unaware that it is his reality not in his theatricality that he has created the tragedy of Othello.

While in Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné, as we have noted, Jérôme and Vincent are occasionally given to speaking "dramatically" as opposed to "naturally" it is not until Le Grand Cérémonial that this level of theatricality is officially recognized by the use of quotation marks. Cavanosa often speaks "as if," that is to say, he intentionally utilizes the style and vocabulary of another. Although there are examples of this in all his conversations, they occur most frequently when he is talking with Sil's lover, the representative of the "outside world" who tries to take Sil away from the perversity and horror of Cavanosa's influence. It is extremely difficult to establish a consistent pattern or tone to the things that Cavanosa says which are indicated between quotation marks. Sometimes they appear to denote mimicry of something that someone else has said:

24 Ibid., p. 470.
LA MERE
Et tu lui as menti pour la séduire.
CAVANOSA
Et je lui ai menti.25

But more often they reflect a generalized lack of involvement, an insincerity, an effort to disappear behind words obviously not of his own making. The following lines show how, in at least one instance, Cavanosa's theatricality is interpreted by his mother:

LA MERE
Est-ce que je ne suis pas à toi? Est-ce que je ne souris pas?
CAVANOSA
"Oui," "aussi."
LA MERE
Sur quel ton me dis-tu cela!
CAVANOSA
Sur quel ton faut-il le dire?
LA MERE
Sur un ton sincère.26

It is precisely when Cavanosa speaks in his theatrical mode or in what Arrabal refers to as his "manière anormale" that he seems least different from the others. Arrabal evidently intended that this be the case:

Mais cette manière "anormale" évoque la manière "normale" de parler des gens, des autres, c'est à dire justement les êtres normaux qui ne sont ni "différents," ni obsédés. Cavanosa est un personnage dos-

26Ibid., p. 227.
toievskien. C'est-à-dire qu'il joue le jeu des gens normaux, mais sans jamais se mettre dans leur peau, en "gardant ses distances" ironiquement et douloureusement.27

But if Cavanosa "keeps his distances" from those not sharing his fantasy life, he also permits, indeed demands, that they participate upon occasion in the "realization" of his fantasies:

SIL
Je vous achèterais des fleurs.
CAVANOSA
Des fleurs?
SIL
Non...des livres.
CAVANOSA (ironique)
Comme...
SIL (elle comprend tout à coup; d'un ton faux).
Je vous achèterais, je vous achèterais un fouet et un cercueil miniatures et une poupée.28

In fact, it is Sil's tacit recognition of his "differentness" born of the need to play-act in order to enter his world which makes possible the various formal "ceremonies" that they create together; for example, that of the transformation of Sil into a man. Here the recognition by both of the fact that they are acting is suggested by the placing between quotation marks of the stage directions governing even their gestures. Cavanosa, suddenly "pris d'une

27Schifres, Entretiens, p. 125.
28Le Grand Cérémonial, p. 265.
crise de folie furieuse" stamps on Sil "sauvagement," at which point she cries "désespérée." Or later, during the ceremony in which she is to die, Sil is "folle de passion."

Ironically, Sil's desire to cooperate, to "play," leads to her ultimate rejection by Cavanosa. She has made herself an accomplice in deformity, and thus an instrument of Cavanosa's further alienation from the love he seeks. It is as though he must always be the way others see him - to the very limits of madness and despair. He is destined then to vascillate between two forms of theatricality. On the one hand, he ironically asserts his differentness from others at the same time that he rejects them by speaking theatrically when he says things that they are more likely to have said than he. On the other hand, he "super-theatricalizes" his differentness in ceremonies, certain of which require the cooperation of others, but which only confirm his profound alienation from them. His entire existence is a "grand cérémonial" which cannot permit him the real freedom of love.

It is with Lys, not with Sil, and only when the former has convinced him by her complete innocence and in-

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30 Ibid., p. 275.
experience that she finds him "très joli"\textsuperscript{31} and "formidable"\textsuperscript{32} that Cavanosa may timidly express his feeling of affection: "Vous êtes différente. J'ai envie de vous caresser, de vous embrasser."\textsuperscript{33} But the ending remains ambiguous. Even with Lys in this final scene Cavanosa resorts both to ironic withdrawal and to the fantasizing of Lys' death at his hands. His freedom is never complete. In some mysterious and imprecise way one senses behind his deceptively autonomous gestures the taut strings of a marionette.

In terms of its theatricality \textit{Le Couronnement}, \textit{cérémonie de l'initiation} develops along the lines of pomp and ritual already laid down in \textit{Le Grand Cérémonial}. Over and above the three major ceremonies, that of the birth of Sylda, her initiation, and the final initiation of Giafar, are interspersed numerous smaller ceremonial sequences: the dressing of the body of Sylda described in the stage directions as a "cérémonie de l'habillement de sa bien-aimée,"\textsuperscript{34} the ritual kiss with which Giafar awakens Sylda, Arlys' transformation of the attic, the ceremonial declarations of Sylda's father, the moments of Giafar's seduction,

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., p. 311.
\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., p. 320.
\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., p. 322.
\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Le Couronnement}, p. 10.
and so forth. The very characters of Kardo and Malderic, and to a lesser extent all characters other than Giafar, are ceremonial in that there is always a certain ostentation, a certain weightiness to their comportment which gives it a highly theatrical air and detracts simultaneously from its authenticity. The illusory nature of their being is particularly compelling since Giafar is trying with such urgency to situate himself in the bizarre world in which he finds himself. At one moment, Kardo and Malderic are engaged in mutual flagellation dictated by some great "Elle;" the next they are seen calmly playing chess, and, reminiscent both of Carroll's Tweedledee and Tweedledum and of K's two servants in Kafka's The Castle, they turn on Giafar when he tries to free them, saying that their prior struggles were "only an illusion." At other times they cry "avec ostentation, on peut presque affirmer qu'ils font semblant." The suggestion that they are being intentionally theatrical is supported by Kardo's instruction to Giafar relative to Malderic: "Ne le prenez pas au sérieux, il est très comédien." The play, then, may be seen in terms of its layered theatricality with the encompassing "ceremony of

36Ibid.
initiation" containing within it more and more circumscribed areas of theatricality.

But *Le Couronnement* also adds a new dimension to the ceremonial of *Le Grand Cérémonial*—that of magic and the supernatural. Like Altagore in *L'Enterrement de la sardine* whose teachings to Hieronymous include such subjects as alchemic formulae, the predictive and controlling power of signs and numbers, the meaning and use of the signs of the Zodiac, Arlys-Sylde, who is often referred to as "Connaissance" by Kardo and Malderic, is also a sorceress, queen of her world of the marvelous: she always draws "seven" on the oversized cards on which she and Giafar play; she waves a wand transforming a dreary attic into a fairyland, she possesses a miraculous diary, which, like a medieval book of alchemy, contains the secret of realizing the return of moments already lived. Ritual in her hands becomes a magic ritual in which the structuring or controlling properties of ceremony merge with its potential for complete liberation. Knowledge, as she explains to Giafar, is a question of controlling "le hasard," and this is precisely what she is able to accomplish. Hers is a domain in which everything is possible. Her "ordre panique," for example, as it applies

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37 Malderic ironically refers to Sylde early in the play as "la sorcière au lit dormant." (*Le Couronnement*, p. 14.)
to the mutual flagellation of Kardo and Malderic is one in which "toute erreur est condamnée d'une manière progressive bien que quelquefois ce soit l'inverse."\(^{38}\) It is a domain in which an ostrich (not a rabbit) crosses the room, looks perturbedly at his watch, and announces, "Je ne serai pas à l'heure au rendez-vous d'Alice."\(^{39}\)

It is only when Giafar attempts to follow the ostrich that the real origin and significance of the marvelous become apparent to us. Arlys offers him a golden key, which, depending on the direction and the number of times it is turned, causes the door to open variously onto the stairs (the world of everyday "reality"), or into regions of infinite space and possibility from which the earth can be glimpsed slowly rotating thousands of miles below. A castle appears, mysteriously suspended, changes to a cloud, and finally to a billboard reading ESPOIR. Three turns of the key produce a mirror through which Arlys miraculously steps, disappearing from Giafar's view, but continuing to demonstrate her power over objects in the room.

What is the key which operates magical transformations, which opens the door both to the reality of daily existence and to that of fantasy, of the unknown, of the

\(^{38}\)Le Couronnement, p. 38.

\(^{39}\)Ibid., p. 48.
never before conceived? What is the nature of the "mansarde" from which, as Arlys exclaims, "Quels paysages vous pouvez admirer!" A possible clue is the surprised recognition with which Giafar views the attic where Sylda's birth is being magically re-created:

VOIX DE GIAFAR (en un murmure)
Mais c'est ma propre mansarde.

VOIX D'ARLYS
Ne saviez-vous pas qu'elle était habitée?

VOIX DE GIAFAR
Non. Je l'ignorais. Depuis plusieurs générations nous n'y montions plus.

The attic is that of Giafar's own fantasy world, the world of dreams, of the subconscious. The key that unlocks this miraculous realm is that of the "cérémonie panique" itself. Suddenly the worlds of reality, dream, and theatricality are merged: "Heureusement," Sylda tells Giafar, "avec la roulette et le livre les heures s'écouleront comme en un 'rêve'." The door which leads to the world of castles and clouds is the same door which leads "through the looking glass" into the labyrinthine complexity and unspoken freedoms of the subconscious. Dreams are knowledge: the "pierre de la folie" and the "pierre philosophale" are one.

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40 Ibid., p. 51.
41 Ibid., p. 87.
42 Ibid., p. 35.
43 Arlys speaks of "la pierre philosophale" and "la pierre de la folie" as essential to the understanding of "la confusion" (pp. 56-9).
There is thus tremendous irony in Giafar's contention that "Je sais très bien distinguer le rêve de la réalité."\textsuperscript{44} No truth emerges from \textit{Le Couronnement} if not that dream and non-dream, illusion and reality are but multiple facets of a theatrical and elusive higher Reality which contains, but is never totally defined by, its constituent elements. So imprecise is the silhouette of "reality," in fact, that a curious paradox arises: it is only in moments of extreme theatricality or ceremony that the illusion of substantial, graspable reality is achieved for the spectator. And, overall, the hand of Arrabal may be seen realizing through the magic and ritualistic structure of the play itself, his own poetic universe. The magic number "seven" which is drawn at cards by Sylda, and which is also the number of turns of the sphere necessary to evoke her past, is additionally the number of "levels" of reality which go to form the total structure of the play.\textsuperscript{45} The play is, in itself, a game of "sevens" with Arrabal presiding, and like the seven days of

\textsuperscript{44}\textit{Le Couronnement}, p. 65.

\textsuperscript{45} These levels may be somewhat arbitrarily seen in terms of concentric circles. From the outermost to the innermost they are:

1. The reality of the spectator: the play taken in its entirety as a panic ceremony.

2. Giafar's reality after initiation. "Knowledge" is immediately reduced to innocence.
creation, constitutes a universe. Arrabal, like Sylda, would insist that "que gagne celui qui contrôle le mieux le hasard." 46

L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie is also built upon layers of theatricality which are both collectively supportive and mutually destructive. As they are first perceived by the spectator the Architect and the Emperor present a considerable measure of character integrity. One accepts as valid the Emperor's "history." The details of his past life, inconsistent though they may be with our construction of the actual nature of things ("Alors commençait l'audience militaire que j'accordais du haut de ma chaise percée." 47), would seem to establish him as having actually come from an

4. Giafar's experience of what is happening outside the room, but which is not visible to the spectator.
5. Giafar's rememberance of the events surrounding his planned rendez-vous with Sylda.
6. Giafar's dream: either the memory of a real experience or magically induced.
7. Sylda's past: her birth and initiation.

Seven, then, is the perfect number resulting in the totality of creation. It should be remembered, however, that because characters other than Giafar regularly appear at all levels, the distinction between levels is not as obvious as this schematization would make it appear.

46 Le Couronnement, p. 21.
47 Arrabal, L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, p. 86.
exotic civilization in which he was a pampered and demanding prince. One accepts, with the same ease, the integrity of the Architect as an altogether remarkable personnage, a repository of natural energies and magical powers, a blank screen on which the Emperor will create the image of a civilized man. The task of accepting the "reality" of the Architect and the Emperor as they are initially presented to us is simplified by the fact that, as the Architect and the Emperor, they don the costumes in which they will engage in a wide range of more evidently "theatrical" behavior. As Lionel Abel points out, there is in the act of seeing a stage character put on a costume something which makes the spectator identify even more intensely with his "non-theatrical" reality.\(^{48}\)

The first of the two acts of the play thus consists of a sub-series of playlets in which, as it was previously noted, the Emperor and the Architect re-create an extraordinary variety of personal and social relationships. If any internal necessity governs the format of the roles which are chosen, its nature has eluded this observer. What does seem worth mentioning, however, is an apparent structuring

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along the lines of a chess game. The Emperor and the Architect seem to respond to each other’s cues in a way which implies "If you be A, I’ll be B" much like a player engaged in a game of chess who responds to his opponent with a tacit, "If you move to X, I’ll move to Y." Arrabal’s continuing preoccupation with chess, moreover, is evidenced by the fact that he has the Emperor say that he wants to be buried disguised as a chess bishop. (The word is "fou" in French which ironically also recalls the identification of Arrabal’s world of poetic freedom and "radical juxtaposition" with madness: *La Pierre de la folie*.) What is not clear in the analogy, however, is the precise identification of specific chess pieces and their

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49 In Genet’s theatre, roles are determined by some outside referent: for the convicts of *Haute Surveillance* it is the absent hero-criminal Boule de Neige; for Solange and Claire of *Les Bonnes* it is Madame whom they simultaneously seek to become and destroy; for the Negroes of *Les Nègres* it is their essence as imposed on them by white community which they attempt to ceremonially recreate and vindicate; for the visitors to Madame Irma’s Grand Balcony (*Le Balcon*) it is socially determined "types" which provide the context for the roles chosen: judge, priest, general. Here the brothel and society end by becoming reflecting mirrors of theatricality as Madame Irma and her girls first "become" society's figureheads, later determine society's heroes by providing a framework in which these roles may be requested. Unlike Arrabal, there is both for Genet and his fictional characters a certain heroism in the notion of playing an imposed role "jusqu’au bout." This may be seen as an extension of Genet's own existential assumption of the labels "bastard," "homosexual," "criminal," and his creating around them of an inverse ethical system in which saintliness is a derivative of the greatest evil.
moves with the roles that the Emperor and the Architect play. Certain roles such as that of horse and rider suggest the knight in chess. Others are more difficult to assess in this light. It would seem an interesting area for further inquiry even though Arrabal insists that it is futile to look for "keys" in his work.  

Within the scope of the interplay of roles created by the Architect and the Emperor in Act One, certain further levels of theatricality may be distinguished. The first is the presence, as we have seen in other works, of circumscribed areas of ceremonial within the roles being developed. The fixed structure of the confessional in which the Emperor is priest to the Architect's penitent serves as an example of this phenomenon. There is also the further theatricalizing created by the enclosing within quotation marks of the lines spoken by each, and of the stage directions which determine both the manner in which lines are delivered and in which other stage actions are carried out. Arrabal would leave it to the individual director to decide how

50 Beckett's Fin de Partie (Endgame) is, of course, a "check" and "mate" with Clov finally leaving Hamm to die alone. That there is some consciousness of this on the part of both Hamm and Clov is indicated by Clov's saying at one point: "Cessons de jouer," and by Hamm's rejoinder: "Jamais" (p. 102).

51 Messerman, "Arrabal in Conversation."
much of this "accessory theatricality" to utilize or dis- 

card.

Equally often, however, the directions indicate 

that "real" emotions are to be experienced and expressed 

relative to what begins as an "enacted" sequence. The 

Architect, for example, "sobs" at the feigned death of 

the Emperor even though it is clear that they have 

"played" that scene before. In fact the confusion between 

"game" and "reality" is often sufficient to motivate a 

demand for clarification, which is, in spite of its formal 

attractiveness, never conclusive:

L'EMPEREUR
Je veux m'écarter de toi. Et surtout ne me 
parle plus. Je resterai seul plongé dans mes 
méditations.

L'ARCHITECTE
C'est un nouveau jeu.

L'EMPEREUR
Non, c'est la vérité.

There are, moreover, moments in the first act where 

first the Architect and then the Emperor engages in a mono- 

logue in which he creates dialogue. The Architect, thinking 

that the Emperor has withdrawn from him for an indefinite 

period of meditation tries to tempt him out of the shelter

52 Entretiens, p. 126.

53 L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, p. 95.

54 Ibid., p. 104.
by reproducing the sounds of a passionate encounter between himself and a beautiful woman. But by far the most sustained and astounding sequence is enacted by the Emperor. Having been left alone, or so he thinks, on the island, he tries to fill the time and silence by materializing the fantasies which rise to the surface of his consciousness: he is a nun who gives birth, and her confessor; a doctor; a sacred camel; a Martian and his Earthling interpreter. At the same time he is himself, interjecting into the theatre of his creation frantic cries for the one he loves: "Architecte! Architecte! Viens, ne me laisse pas seul. Je suis trop seul. Architecte! Archi..."55 And finally, he is the Architect. The whole monologue of the Emperor is accompanied by his building of an effigy of himself so that he can play Architect to the dummy Emperor, whose voice he also supplies.56 In the Architect's easily identifiable lisp he humbles himself before his own image:

55Ibid., p. 108.
56 Genet creates a parallel construction when he has Solange play Claire so that Claire can play Madame. Arrabal's originality is to have a single character, the Emperor, play not only himself and the Architect, but to further erase the distinction between reality and theatricalized fantasy by enabling yet another facet of the Emperor, possibly the most central one, to emerge in this way.
Ne me gronde pas, je sais bien que ça fait un an que tu m'apprends à parler et je ne sais pas encore prononcer le s convenablement. (Il lui fait une profonde révérence.) Raconte-moi, Empereur, comment tu te réveillais en Assirie, au son de la musique que jouait une légion de flûtistes.57

It is, ironically, as the dummy Emperor, as this "super-theatricalized" version of himself, that the Emperor, occasionally forgetting and delivering the material in the Architect's voice and accent, interjects threads of a consciousness which had not manifested itself before this time: the fantasies of a modest employe who hopes touchingly for a raise in salary, whose wife has been unfaithful, who dreams of becoming a poet.

In the second act, the "reality" of this consciousness asserts itself as fundamental. During the trial which the Architect initiates but which the Emperor forces in spite of his occasional faltering ("D'ailleurs je ne joue plus. C'en est fini de ce jugement."") to the point of his condemnation for the murder of his mother, the "reality" of the Emperor in Act One, pompous, self-assured, steeped in the superiority of his civilization is now seen in its theatricality as the effort by the latter to create a world

57 L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, p. 110.
58 Ibid., p. 145.
which never actually existed for him. His declamatory style, and particularly the details of his "lever," a ceremony to which he often returns and which is more or less fixed even though it varies slightly with each successive recounting, can be retrospectively viewed as an effort to solidify his tenuous fantasy existence, to concentrate once again on form in the hope that actual content or existence will somehow materialize. It is apparent during the trial that the effect connected with the roles that he has played as his own condemning witnesses touches deeper levels of his awareness and involvement. When, as his "brother," he begins to describe the sexual "infamies" perpetrated as a boy by the Emperor upon the former, he suddenly tears off his mask, furious: "Assez, assez. Ça suffit."\(^59\) Or later when as Olympia de Kant he tells of the attempt by the accused to kill and devour his mother, he interrupts his recounting with hysterical laughter and, as the Emperor, blurts out "Belle viande de mère! Boucherie modèle. L'article vedette de la semaine."\(^60\) The Emperor would appear, then, to be moving closer to his reality. Through the game, some deeper truth is coming to light:

\(^{59}\)Ibid., p. 147.

\(^{60}\)Ibid., p. 164.
L'EMPEREUR

Après ma mort...

L'ARCHITECTE (en enlevant sa toque)

Empereur, parles-tu sérieusement?

L'EMPEREUR (grave)

Très sérieusement.

L'ARCHITECTE

Ce n'était qu'une farce de plus: ton jugement, ton procès...mais il semble que tu le prends au sérieux. Empereur, tu sais que je t'aime.

L'EMPEREUR (ému)

Tu le dis sérieusement?

L'ARCHITECTE

Oui, très sérieusement.

L'EMPEREUR (changeant de ton)

Mais aujourd'hui nous ne jouions pas.

L'ARCHITECTE

Aujourd'hui c'était un jour comme les autres.

L'EMPEREUR

C'était différent, tu as appris beaucoup de choses que je ne voulais pas t'avouer.61

At the level of their stage reality this truth becomes definitive for the Architect and the Emperor. The Emperor declares himself guilty of the crime of matricide and demands the punishment we have already seen: that he be beaten to death with a hammer and then completely assimilated by the Architect. But it is the brilliance of Arrabal's creation that no reality is ever definitive for the spectator. When the Architect upon eating the Emperor becomes the Emperor only to greet a new Architect we are forced once again to reconsider our most basic assumptions regarding the dichotomous nature of the Architect and the

61 Ibid., p. 174.
Emperor. Must we acknowledge that this reality of two is any more compelling than the multiple realities which the Architect and the Emperor create? Can a cogent argument be made for the presence of a single consciousness which, as in a hall of reflecting mirrors, infinitely proliferates its essence, becoming now two now twenty?

We have already examined the Architect's dream as possible evidence of the whole play being a materialization of the fantasy of either the Architect or the Emperor, or, alternatively, of some intermediate dissociating consciousness. There is additional evidence in support of this position. It seems, on occasion, as though the Architect "knows too much," that is to say that he possesses information, sophistication, which surprises both the spectator and the Emperor:

L'EMPEREUR
Comment veux-tu que nous arrivons à...

L'ARCHITECTE
A Babylone

L'EMPEREUR (effraye)
D'où sors-tu ce mot? Qui tè l'a appris?
Qui vient te voir pendant mon sommeil?62

Or again, the Architect seems more at home than the Emperor with the formulae of civilized man:

62Ibid., p. 74.
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L'EMPEREUR (inquiet)
Mes dernières paroles? Je les ai oubliées. Dis-moi, dis-moi vite, quelles sont-elles?
L'ARCHITECTE
"Je meurs et je suis content: j'abandonne un monde périsstable pour entrer dans l'immortalité." Mais ne te soucie pas de ça.63

The thrust of these examples is reinforced by the strange and premonitory gesture of the Architect at the beginning of Act Two. Rolling onto the stage a huge table, he prepares it as though for a meal about to be served, and then mimes the act of cutting up so as to devour it some huge corpse which would be lying on the table. Minutes later the table becomes the judge's bench and the Architect initiates what begins as the "game" of the trial.

Additionally, there are moments when the Architect's language suddenly recalls that of the Emperor; not the Emperor who presents himself as such to the Architect, but the dummy which the Emperor creates in his loneliness and then gives the gift of language. Particularly similar in tone are his fantasies about the blond girl he loved and the Architect's earlier musings on the nature of happiness. Both are conceived in the same savage lyricism:

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63 Ibid., p. 93.
L'ARCHITECTE
...et l'on se promène avec elle sur les zèbres et sur des panthères autour d'un lac et elle vous tient attaché par une corde et quand on la regarde il commence à pleuvoir des plumes de colombes qui en tombant sur le sol hennissent comme de jeunes poulains...64

L'EMPEREUR
...Elle m'aimait sans aucun doute, quand elle me disait "il fait moins froid que l'année dernière" je compréhens qu'elle voulait me dire "nous partirons ensemble et nous mangerons ensemble des oursins tandis que je couvrirais tes mains et ton pubis d'appareils photographiques" et quand je lui répondais "oui l'année dernière à cette époque on n'aurait pu se promener dans le parc à cette heure-ci", c'était comme si je disais "tu es semblable à toutes les mouettes du monde à l'heure de la sieste, tu dors sur moi comme un oiseau entre dans une bouteille, je sens ton cœur battre et le rythme de ta respiration sur tous les pores de ma peau et de mon cœur jaillit un jet d'eau cristalline pour baigner tes pieds blancs"...65

Finally, a number of otherwise "innocent" remarks may be interpreted in the light of this supposition. One example will suffice. The Emperor is speaking out against the notion of justice set forth by the Architect-Judge:

Si je pleure ou si je prends l'air contrit vous ne serez dupes ni de mes larmes ni de mon repentir, mais vous aurez compris que j'assume mon rôle dans ce guignol et vous en tiendrez compte à l'heure de rendre la sentence. Vous êtes là pour me faire la leçon: mais vous savez bien que la leçon on peut la faire à n'importe qui, à vous-même pour commencer.66

64 Ibid., p. 82.
65 Ibid., p. 115.
66 Ibid., p. 149.
The lesson might be relevant to the Architect "to begin with" because the Architect is no less guilty than the Emperor, both being facets of a single consciousness. There is indeed the possibility that the Architect is the Emperor's creation in whom he incarnates the love and understanding he seeks, no less than the judgment and punishment. Viewed in this light, the whole character of the Architect would never be more than a fantasy projection of the Emperor himself and qualitatively no different from the creation of the Architect by the Emperor during the latter's "absence" in Act One. The words of the Emperor at the beginning of this sequence now take on new meaning: "Te voilà déjà en train de parler à toi-même: tu deviens schizophrène." Is the whole play, then, an artistically conceived schizophrenia, a convincing series of hallucinations by the Emperor? Did he never actually kill his mother but devise a means of punishing himself for the act he wanted to commit?

Like the pinball machine which remained stuck at 999 when 1000 would have irrefutably proven the existence of God, the certainty of an answer is never forthcoming. The play remains enigmatic, shifting between elusive and

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67 Ibid., p. 109.
receding layers of illusion. There is perhaps only one existence which is never in question: that of the Supreme Artist and Architect, of Arrabal himself. While it is never clear if the Architect and the Emperor are, or are not, separate beings, if their story is real or imagined, lived or theatrical, there can be no doubt that they are Arrabal's creatures. His hand is everywhere present from the autobiographical details which he repeatedly injects into their history, to the whole panorama of his easily recognizable fantasy world (the symbols, themes, poetic structures which inhabit his entire fictional universe), to the contrived insertion into the fabric of their lives of material simply because it pleases him. The "petit salaud, grand salaud" of Tzara; the "tout ce qu'il y a d'atroce...se trouve résumé en un mot: Dieu" of Breton, a

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68 There is thus a significant difference between the relationship of Claire and Solange and that of the Architect and the Emperor. The former have agreed on the performing of a ritual in which the essential identity of each is never brought into question. When Claire says to Solange, "Mais j'en ai assez de ce miroir effrayant qui me renvoie mon image comme une mauvaise odeur" (Les Bonnes, p. 48), she means simply that Solange is the mirror image of her own servitude to Madame; they are both "maids" in the context of a relationship which could not exist without a "mistress." The Architect and the Emperor, on the other hand, are virtually two facets of a single character who never appears except in his disparate and theatricalized versions.
passage from DuBellay's "Ulysse," the realization in the
Architect of a painting of Dante's Divine Comedy in which
a character is speaking with his feet. These are the
elements, the structures upon which Arrabal constructs his
"play" and we must see the word now not only in its mean-
ing of a theatrical event or ceremony, but as "jeu," a
game, an amusement, and a combat, which unfolds according
to given rules. This is the outermost layer of Arrabal's.
theatricality, these conventions, which like the fixed
part of the ceremony, determine the shape and general
structure of the work. But just as the Emperor began by
constructing a dummy, a bit of illusion, and in so doing
revealed his deep truth, so the act of theatre is, for
Arrabal, one of self-creation, of revelation. "L'acteur,"
as he is fond of saying, "se place devant la glace et
devient soi-même."69

Brief mention should be made at this point of yet
another of Arrabal's plays in which the presence of "jeu,"
of intentional and heavy-handed theatricality, as opposed
to the illusion of independent "reality" for fictional
characters, is both evident and determining. The play is
Concert dans un œuf, cérémonie quichottesque written in

69"Arrabal in Conversation."
1958 but unpublished until 1965. The title is taken from a painting of Jerome (Hieronymous) Bosch in which a group of Flemish townsmen, all with an air of evil unwholesomeness about them (the head of one is becoming a castle) are performing a piece of music as they protrude from the disintegrating shell of a huge egg. Arrabal's play is also a "concert," rigorously composed in the harmonics of alternating tableaux, themselves internally divided by the projections of paintings, predominantly of Bosch and Breughel. The two acts are precisely symmetrical, each containing a series of seven tableaux. In the odd-numbered sequences of each act is played out a continuous spectacle; the same characters reappear in roughly equivalent relationships to those indicated in their last appearance. In the even-numbered sequences of each act the personnages as well as the subject matter differ overtly both from the odd-numbered sequences which surround them and from the last even-numbered sequence. But certain thematic similarities relate the two acts to each other in such a way as to make the whole work a "theme and variations" on the familiar Arrabalian polarities of dominance-submission, love-cruelty,
innocence-knowledge, good-evil, structure-freedom, magic-naturalism, play-reality. For each theme stated in a tableau of Act One, resonance is found in the corresponding tableau of Act Two. For example, the "action" of scene i, Act I can be paraphrased as follows: Li is subjugated and then abandoned by a nameless man. She is found by Filtos who treats her with care and tenderness. The action of scene i, Act II can be stated as: Li dominates and mistreats the man to whom she was submissive in Act One. She abandons him. He is found by Filtos who treats him with care and tenderness. The same sort of thematic restatement is found throughout, although it is not always, as in scene i, inversive.

Additional symmetry or thematic correspondence is provided by the use of the same pictorial projections between scenes. Scenes i and ii of Act I are separated by twenty seconds of Bosch's "Jardin des délices" followed by ten seconds of Breughel's "Jeux d'enfants," followed by ten seconds of a contemporary photograph, etc. The same visual elements in the same order separate scenes i and ii of Act II, and likewise throughout the rest of the play. The use of music, lighting, and blocking, although complete treatment of these factors does not seem necessary here, also serves the end of thematic statement and variation.
Over the whole work drafts the leitmotif of "play."
The characters are more like marionettes than like dramatis
personae, seemingly obeying the dictates of an ubiquitous
but invisible hand. Or rather, they are like dancers;
moving with practiced but prefigured steps in a ballet of
someone else's creation. Filtos and Li, like Arrabal's
other creatures, live in gesture, but in Concert dans un
œuf even the fact of their theatricality seems immediately
and purposefully dictated by their creator.

The subtitle, "cérémonie quichottesque" suggests
both the utter fancy and the sense of commitment which
Arrabal hopes to communicate. Filtos is a contemporary
Don Quixote who goes off on a motorcycle to do battle with
windmills. He is eternally hopeful, sincere and unswerving
in his pursuit of "justice," although he is generally
regarded as mad by those around him. And yet Filtos in his
idealism joins the rank of other Arrabalian idealists when
he admits that his quixotic exploits were undertaken as
theatre, as diversion, to the end of dispelling the monotony
and the frustration of life. Being good, he argues was al­
ready tried and proved futile in Oraison. (Once again the
tacit recognition of himself as just another fictional
creation.) He considers other valid alternatives to the
course of action he has chosen: "On pourrait aller pisser
sur la flamme du Soldat inconnu, nous masturber sur l'autel de la cathédrale, et aller rire aux enterrements."  

"Jeu" is also materialized in the overtly childish behavior of the two "women," who, dressed in the pigtails and pinafores of little girls, jump rope, skate, dance, and spy on the "adult" behavior of Filtos, Li, and the Man under the worried surveillance of La Vieille. Their presence adds to the piece the whole dimension of a child's game: both whimsical and cruel, illusory and real. It is the same universe conjured by Arrabal's short piece *Dieu est-il devenu fou?* in which silent doll-like creatures laugh, jump, and dance to the arbitrary, directing cadence of a drum, crying with frustration when a whistle blows to remind them that they are the pawns of a power who moves them in keeping with his own erratic designs.  

The house which serves as a backdrop for *Dieu est-il devenu fou?* recalls once again the doll house received by Arrabal's sister with its inscription "Souviens-toi de

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71 Arrabal, *Concert dans un œuf*, p. 354.

72 The actors are given as A and B, the actresses as M and N. The action of the play can then be symbolically stated as:

\[ BN \vee AM \wedge B^{+N} \wedge AM \wedge ABMN \wedge AM \wedge BN \ldots \]

with the action now ready to begin again, BN replacing AM in the initial sequence.
ton père." Arrabal's tribute to his father is the act of creation itself. Like the doll house with its complement of miniscule inhabitants, Arrabal's fictional world reproduces the real, but it is the real as conceived and executed both in the arbitrariness and the fantasy of a child at play:

La tache, à l'horizon, s'écartait définitivement de la terre: c'était une colossale tête d'enfant qui souriait, les deux énormes orifices étaient ses yeux.

Il posa ses gigantesques "menottes" sur la ville et des milliers et des milliers de pantins tombèrent en se balançant, et la vie et la cité reprit son cours normal.

Une voix de stentor - toujours la même, qui paraissait venir de toute l'éternité - s'exclama:

---Drôle de fils que le mien! Toute la journée à faire des farces! Etre dieu est difficile: qu'adviendra-t-il de lui le jour où je ne serai plus là? 73

Strangely, Arrabal's dramatic characters, like the narrator of Fêtes et rites de la confusion seem to have been gifted with an intuitive knowledge of the flimsiness of their existence. On several occasions, even in the early plays, they work into the fabric of their conversation the outline of a "story" which is, in fact, the one they are living. Fanchou wants to tell Lira about the woman who was imprisoned by the bombardment in the W.C; Fando will tell Lis the story of a man who was taking a paralytic woman to Tar in a little

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73 Arrabal, Fêtes et rites de la confusion, p. 56.
carriage. The stories are never actually told, however, for the obvious reason that the characters cannot forecast, as they are living them, the ends to their own stories. In *Fando et Lis* the illusory nature of what we have seen enacted is heightened in the final scene by a conversation among the three men "au parapluiie" in which they attempt to verbally recreate what has transpired. Was it that Fando promised to mourn Lis at her death? Or was he the one who told the girl to commit suicide if she wanted to? The integrity of Fando and Lis' story is lost amidst a jumble of characters and plot lines, all of them taken, moreover, from Arrabal's other plays (*Le Tricycle*, in particular), or constituting slight reworkings of favorite Arrabalian themes. The overall effect is to destroy any feeling of inner necessity: "all the world's a stage," and at one level, at least, it matters little what illusion is being perpetrated.

This "fictionality" is complicated, as has been noted, by a more global tendency in the later plays toward confusion and identification by the characters of the reality of their experience with that of dreams. Giafar voices this growing fear of inexistence when he says, "Alors il faudrait supposer que personne ne vit, que nous rêvons tous." And withal there is the growing sense of an

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74 *Le Couronnement*, p. 79.
external determining presence, that of a higher necessity; of a god who manifests himself through the commonality of his creatures' fantasy world. Each has received from his creator the breath of life; each remains his eternal plaything.

Viewed in this way, the theatricality of Arrabal's creatures, while it represents their striving toward structure, toward an ordered reality, toward the mastery of Knowledge, is also, paradoxically, a fleeing of Knowledge. Like Apal in Le Tricycle who sleeps constantly because "on a froid quand on pense," they must avoid the lucidity of that moment when, as their creator, Arrabal, avows: "Je vois clairement et irrevocablement que la vie est une horrible farce, et que je suis condamné à souffrir et à ignorer." Lucidity implies finality, death, and fearing the fate of the man in Fando et Lis who, once he learned to

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75 We come here to the distinguishing difference between Genet's theatricality and that of Arrabal. Genet tends progressively towards metaphor, towards the deper- sonalization of his own obsessions. Arrabal, on the other hand, is always immediately present in his work: theatre is never other than an instrument of self-revelation for him. Thus while Genet exteriorizes his fantasies in a progressively less "personal" way allowing the poetic arrangement of symbols to recreate his inner landscapes, Arrabal inevitably transposes his fantasies directly, filling his plays with the undisguised phantoms of his own night and projecting into his fictional characters his own tenuous attachment to existence.

76 Le Tricycle, p. 117.

77 Entretiens, p. 129.
think thought of nothing but death, Arrabal's characters try to avoid this confrontation with their own evanescence.

There is perfect consistency in Arrabal's choice of the word "farce" to describe life. It implies not only that life is some sort of cosmic joke perpetrated by a higher power, but that it is also profoundly theatrical. Arrabal has created in his own image. For his creatures, as for himself, lucidity, chased out the door, returns through the window. They are forced by a gnawing terror of evaporation into ever more complicated and more excessive theatricality, always searching, as does their creator, that elusive "impression d'exister."
CHAPTER FIVE

KNOWLEDGE:

BOSCH, THE BAROQUE, AND BEYOND
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Up to this point ceremony or theatricality in Arrabal has been viewed substantially as a process: either that through which his fictional characters attempt to flee an amorphous and threatening reality or that through which Arrabal himself structures his poetic universe, the rules and regulations, personal or mathematical which constitute the "données" of the artistic problem to be resolved. And yet there has been the growing perhaps intuitive awareness that theatricality was more than a technique, more than a device of form but something inherent in Arrabal's optic itself and completely inseparable from it. Arrabal, writing in Entretiens, casts further light on the issue when he says, "Nous sommes saturés de logique...nous cherchons autre chose...cette démesure qui s'appelle aussi théâtralité..."¹ There exists an equivalence, then, between the process of theatricality and the state of extreme intensity, of "déraison"

¹Schifres, Entretiens, p. 119.
(both in the sense of alogic and in that of excess) which has been seen to characterize Arrabal's experience of the world. He views life itself as already theatricalized, as already containing the violence of "démesure." In art as in life, theatricality is not only process, but vision, not only form, but content.

Le Jardin des délices, already discussed in Chapter Three perhaps best exemplifies this new complete merging of form with content. It was expressly deleted from consideration in Chapter Four because although it is rife with ceremony at all the important levels considered, the play suggests that certain changes have taken place in Arrabal's creative inspiration, and that other changes, announced but not materialized, will be forthcoming.

A word about the circumstances under which the play was written is relevant here. Le Jardin des délices was already in preparation when Arrabal was seized by the Franco regime in the summer of 1967. That the major inspiration, Bosch's painting, "The Garden of Earthly Delights," had been a part of his awareness for some time is a certainty. Arrabal, as it has been noted, has widely used Bosch as an inspiration, visual and thematic, both in his novels and in his plays. The "Garden," moreover, seemed to be a particular preoccupation even as he was writing L'Architecte
et L'Empereur d'Assyrie: the Emperor, it will be remembered, always has the same dream, a visual conjuring of Bosch's "Garden," once again manifesting the irrefutable identification of his fantasies with those of his creator, Arrabal.

But during the time that Arrabal spent in prison, during the sunless days and sleepless nights of his incarceration in a fetid underground cell barely large enough for him to fully stretch out in, something quite extraordinary occurred. He came to experience the cell not as a hostile, limiting enclosure, but as a protective womb, unconsciously sought in his writings, in which a new life was preparing itself. Suddenly he was reborn into the fraternity of men. He was acutely aware of his fellow prisoners in a way that he had not been before. A new fusion seemed to have been realized for him between his inner world and the world of external concerns. He was overcome by a desire to write a play about inquisitions past and present, about tyranny, political and social injustice. A new fantasy came to his mind, that of a circular swimming pool in which he was stirring together with a huge stick a bubbling broth composed of a gelatinous substance and a clear liquid. The gelatinous substance was the world of the unconscious, his primary artistic inspiration to date; the liquid with which he would mix it was that of social
awareness and concern. Henceforth, as he interpreted his
dream, his work would be a more perfect union of the two
spheres.

It is with this in mind that one turns again to
*Le Jardin des délices*. In what way, if at all, does
Arrabal's experience in jail seem to have affected the
nature of his original inspiration? What does all this
have to do with vision and theatricality?

Taken on its surface the play does make certain
concessions to Arrabal's days in the jail of Carabanchel.
Several scenes directly recall those events described by
Arrabal in our conversations and those with Alain Schifres
in *Entretiens*: the scene in which Lais is put to the ques-
tion by Téloc/Inquisitor; the scene in which Téloc/Lawyer
refuses Lais his assistance; the scene in which Lais finds
herself in an airless cell with only a cockroach for com-
panion - these events were actually lived by Arrabal and
incorporated directly into the material of the play. But
as autobiography they are no different from the events of
Arrabal's childhood which are also utilized: the familiar
panorama of sexual repression and spiritual denial at the
hands of religious figures, the desire for freedom and self-
expression - all of this goes to make up a sort of global
consciousness which permeates Arrabal's entire work. Even
the specific references to his widely denigrated enemy, the "société de consommation" (conjured in Miharca's prayers to the refrigerator and the thermostat) which he sees as enveloping like some insidious paramecium any who would raise their voices against it, is essentially no different from the Emperor's diatribe against "justice" (L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie) or from Arrabal's portrayal of the political and social annihilation of a people in Guernica or Les deux bourreaux. It is thus difficult to fully understand what Arrabal means when he says that it was only his rebirth which permitted him to "ouvrir les yeux sur le monde du conscient et ses injustices."^2

It is perhaps, then, at the level of poetic statement rather than in specific thematic material that the changes forecast by Arrabal will be revealed. Significantly, Le Jardin des délices is not only, as it was noted in Chapter Three, a pean to self-integration, it is equally and at the same time a "défense et illustration" of Arrabal's creative processes. Laís is an actress. Like Arrabal she is a master of illusion, a creator of worlds that could not exist without her, a god on earth who may assume and recreate

^2Ibid., p. 168.
"toutes [sic] les douleurs et les plaisirs du monde entier." Interestingly, it is her talent for mathematics which makes her peculiarly fit for the task, for as actress she must transform herself into "un kaléidoscope sauvage et ordonné." Freedom, fancy, the marvelous on the one hand, order, structure, control on the other: Lais, in order to attain the summit of her art must enact a fusion of these facets of her being.

Both are contained in childhood. As Miharca phrases it, "Nous sommes ton enfance." Téloc, the visionary, the magician-musician, master of ceremonies of confusion, whose heart consists of a series of cinematographic projections, is king of the marvelous, source of the "infinite freedom" which Lais seeks. He teaches her hope, contained in the intuitive sense of inexhaustible possibility, ("L'avenir te surprend comme c'est son rôle." and the technique for fusing moments of the past, present, and future. "Tout ce que j'ai appris, même au théâtre, ce fut grâce à lui," affirms Lais in answer to the question of a telephone

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3 Arrabal, Le Jardin des délices, p. 50.
4 Ibid., p. 66.
5 Ibid., p. 120.
6 Ibid., p. 86.
7 Ibid., p. 116.
8 Ibid., p. 43.
Miharca is no less a part of her, however. It is she who contains and personifies the specific material of the unconscious: the fantasies and actual events of childhood which may provide artistic inspiration, but which may also imprison, paralyze, suffocate. Thus the freedom which Lais seeks is not only that from the repressive surveillance of the "good" sisters of the convent, but from the obsessional and driving forces of her own inner limitations. Childhood cannot be murdered but it can be integrated in a new way. Freedom from self is impossible, but freedom in self can be attained through the very act of artistic creation: the tyrannical, controlling surges of the unconscious cede to the ordering forces of art. Miharca's "suicide" note proclaims: "Avec la complicité de Téloc je vais offrir ma vie en sacrifice. La main qui me torturera et me tuera sera guidée par moi, ainsi je célebrerai ma mort avec des bouteilles noires et des extases et des volubilis." Art is a ceremony of sacrifice and purification, of ecstasy and pagan indulgence. The play which unfolds before us is Lais' initiation to awareness. It is her act of self-creation. Like Arrabal, she will effect the act through dream and theatre, through violence and ritual, through "hasard" and "mémoire." And

9 Ibid., p. 125.
she does so with a measure of lucidity never before achieved by an Arrabalian character. In answer to a viewer's question about living alone she replies: "Je ne suis pas seule, à vrai dire...(Je vis) avec mes souvenirs, mes chimères aussi. Je parle avec eux et ils vivent avec moi, comme s'ils existaient en chair et en os." Like Arrabal she peoples her universe with a host of creatures which are real to her because they are part of her. For the first time "mémoire" becomes accessible ("mes souvenirs") and joins with the realm of fantasy ("mes chimères") in a ceremony of initiation which liberates as it consumes. The ceremony of theatre for Lai's, the actress, exactly parallels the act of writing for Arrabal. It is, as Miharca puts it, a marvelous pencil "pour dessiner en bleu tes angoisses, et avec sa petite gomme, il effacera tes cauchemars." 

Nightmare is erased because it is exploited in the creative process. Lai's, no less than Arrabal, is a "réveur éveillé," who finds in the unfettered realm of dreams what Liska of Une tortue nommée Dostoïevsky calls "une matière brute...l'oiseau des arbres et le réverbère de la nuit." 

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10 Ibid., p. 22.
12 Entretiens, p. 97.
13 Arrabal, Une tortue nommée Dostoïevsky, p. 154.
In this play, a poetic tribute to Dostoevski's "The Crocodile," the poet Malik discovers inside the body of the radioactive tortoise who has swallowed him the world of infinite possibility which is also that of Lais' Téloc. Lais' dream world, with Malik's and Arrabal's, is never what Arrabal denigratingly refers to in Cocteau as a "pure situation de rêve." It is always a dream based on everyday reality: realism pushed to the limit of nightmare: nightmare gathered in the fields of the day.

If the "matière" of dreams serves as artistic inspiration, excess, the mechanism of dreams, provides the "démesure" which characterizes Arrabal's theatricality. For him as for Artaud theatre is that "anarchie qui s'organise." The defining limits of his universe are those of the grotesque seen by Thomas Mann as that which is excessively true, excessively real. Arrabal joins with him in saying that:

14Dostoievski is for Arrabal what the tortoise is for Malik: an introduction to the world of the marvelous. Hence, a tortoise named D.

15Entretiens, p. 97.

16The grotesque is described by Kayser as inhabiting the "estranged and inexplicable world of dreams." Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 186.

17Artaud, Le Théâtre et son double, p. 62.

18Quoted by Kayser in The Grotesque in Art and Literature, p. 158.
...l'homme panique, par son attitude grotesque,
met à nu le mécanisme réel de la conduite humaine,
ce qu'aujourd'hui nous appelons l'absurde.¹⁹

The grotesque, interestingly enough, is fully rele-
vant only in the context of the non-grotesque, just as dream
becomes truly significant only in its juxtaposition with the
quotidien. Arrabal, through the ceremony of theatre,
operates a constant fusion of these contrary states, which,
like the Grande Oeuvre of the alchemists, succeeds in trans-
forming the base metals of realism and fantasy into the gold
of poetry.²⁰ The "wedding" ceremony, for example, between
Lais and Zénon, Zénon, the ape-man dressed as the bride,
Lais, the beautiful actress, attired in a smoking jacket
and top hat, unfolds amidst the cacophony of bells and horns
and under showers of confetti. It is, as Arrabal sees it,"grandiose...très poétique et grotesque."²¹ Similar examples
stud the entire Arrabalian landscape. His grotesque goes
equally toward the déformed, the vulgar, the horrible, and
toward the transcendental, the délicate, the enchanted. It
incorporates the sublime poetry of Lais,

¹⁹Entretiens, p. 89.

²⁰Baudelaire was aware of the sweet "discordance"
produced by the fusion of the grotesque and the tragic.
André Breton quotes him as saying (Fusées) "Le mélange du
grotesque et du tragique est agréable à l'esprit comme les
discordances aux oreilles blasées." Anthologie de l'humour
noir, p. 176.

²¹Le Jardin des délices, p. 41.
Quand je partirai d'ici, je serai infiniment libre. J'aurai tout: des œufs transparents remplis de harpes et de tricycles, des cafards et des zèbres et je me promènerai en leur compagnie dans des jardins en forme d'échiquiers, avec des cloches de pensées pour ombrelles et j'aurai... et j'aurai...

as it incorporates the "baise mon cul" of Miharca in immediate juxtaposition with Lais' delicate avowal of tenderness. It is equally at home with the mystical religiosity of Lais and with the outrageous sense of physical suffering in Miharca's death scene.

Frequently, the suddenness of an unexpected juxtaposition evokes laughter. The "imprévu," one of the basic tenets of the "monde panique" is thus a fundamental source of its humor. Many examples have already been mentioned in the course of this study, not the least striking of which is the poetic gesture of Téloc who accompanies Lais' "Ave Maria" "en pétant" in what Arrabal describes as an attitude of exaltation. Another example is the Emperor's envisioning of his "child's" future: "Ses mains masseront les dores, les cuisses, les ventres des hommes de la terre. Ce sera la réincarnation de Marie-Madeleine." Or again, the reaction

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23 Ibid., p. 28.
24 Ibid., p. 35.
of Vincent to the corpse of his murdered friend, François d'Assise: "C'est une odeur insupportable. Il devait avoir de la merde dans les os." 26

The anarchy of Arrabal's universe calls forth in the spectator more than a laughter of shock, of scandal: it evokes a laughter of liberation. It is once again Artaud writing in Le Théâtre et son double who illuminates the issue. Speaking of the essential anarchy of all poetry which brings into question the relationship of object to object and of form to significance, he continues by saying that poetry is also "anarchique dans la mesure où son apparition est la cause d'un désordre qui nous rapproche du chaos." 27 Arrabal's theatre realizes Artaud's dream for a theatre of intensity too excruciating to bear. It is as if for the duration of the panic ceremony he is able to concentrate all of the spectator's awareness in a single vibrating center: the "bulle" of La Pierre de la folie, that part of each of us capable of both anguish and ecstasy. We are like Lais squirming in acute discomfort as Téloc touches the contents of the jam jar which contains her soul. Arrabal touches the soul of the spectator, changes him by

26 Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné, p. 463.
27 Artaud, Le Théâtre et son double, p. 52.
illuminating and exposing the lies to which he so tenaciously clings. Thus, from a non-intellectual point of departure Arrabal accedes to extreme metaphysical efficacy. We are brought face to face with those secret inner regions which the systematic and closed philosophy of the three men in Fando et Lis tried vainly to reach. Art, not philosophy, brings lucidity in its "prestidigitation sublime et symbolique," in its function as a "source d'émerveillement." 28

But why laughter? The answer lies in the paradoxical nature of lucidity itself. Lucidity contains both the awareness of life's transience and of its infinite capacity, one brought brilliantly into relief by the presence of the other. Lucidity is contained in Téloc's warning to Lais that it is Death in the solitary barque who can tell her anything she wants to know about her future. Death is an ever-present reality in Arrabal's universe, lurking behind Apal's refusal to think as it does behind the ubiquitous symbol of the casket. Death in Arrabal resides not only, as Téloc suggests, in the future. It is as much that state which precedes existence, the darkness which precedes light, the ignorance which precedes knowledge, the chaos which precedes order.

28Messerman, "Arrabal in Conversation."
"Our little life," as Shakespeare has said, "is rounded with a sleep." Yet sleep is the stuff that dreams are made on. Once again dreams, the paradoxical enemies of waking life, are seen to be bringers of life. The barque of the River Styx becomes that of the ascension of the two horses in Bestialité érotique, ascension not to death but to the profusion of life. Dreams contain the collective myths of mankind; they are the repositories of Arrabal's opera mundi where the marvelous, the larger than life is born.

"Le merveilleux," Arrabal has said recently, "est le vrai sujet de mes pièces." And, in fact, if one were to chart any direction in Arrabal's work from the early plays to the present, it would be a growing sense of the extraordinary, the bounty, the profusion in life. The characters in the early plays also had a sense of the marvelous, but deprived, as has been noted, of both memory and imagination, they sought the marvelous in the experience of immediate physical reality. The "Vieux" of Le Tricycle acknowledges the only "merveilleux" possible to him when he exclaims: "Conducteur de triporteur! Comme c'est joli. C'est plus joli que de jouer de la flûte!" There is a growing

30 "Arrabal in Conversation."
31 Arrabal, Le Tricycle, p. 147.
sophistication in the characters of the middle plays. The introduction of dream material and of complicated theatricality leads both to the intuitive knowledge of the transience of life and to that of its fluidity, its profusion. Says Arrabal of L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, "Ce n'est plus un enfant qui parle."^32

It is at this point that we must return to the visual inspiration for Arrabal's Jardin des délices, Bosch's painting of the same name, which, incidentally, is used throughout the play in the form of cinematographic projections, thus constituting a "merveilleux" for the spectator over and above that of the play itself. It is difficult not to see in this startling and paradoxical creation of the fifteenth century a plethora of visual details which are possible sources of Arrabal's inspiration not only in the particular play under consideration, but in those already discussed: Great seed pods which give birth to hordes of naked men and women; the sexual union of blacks and whites; conspicuous anality; zebras and panthers as human mounts; oversized cards and dice; musical instruments as gallows and guillotines; severed limbs pierced by knives and arrows (a huge pair of ears run through by a bloody

^32 Entretiens, p. 75.
knife particularly applies to the final scene of *Jardin*); the Fountain of Youth or Life; dream materialized as a "bosquet des songes" in which naked couples pull the fruit of knowledge from leafy boughs; terrible visions of war, raging fire, mutilation; drums as prisons; a woman passing gold ducats from the anus (this is described in *L'enterrement de la sardine*); a dog devouring a human corpse; flagellation as a sexual excitant; a penguin wearing ice skates and carrying a bow and arrow; couples enclosed in spherical structures - each of the aforementioned images has found translation somewhere in Arrabal's fictional universe.

More significant even than the details of the painting are certain general inferences that can be drawn from its structure. Metamorphosis is one of the indisputable characteristics of this fluid world where the real gives rise to the fantastic, where everything is in the process of becoming something else: a man grows out of a huge strawberry which is itself hairy, bestial; human limbs end as branches; vegetable and mineral forms commingle in eerie union; a lover whose head is a pomegranate captures the attention of a young girl at his side; a bagpipe is a human heart, its valves spouting steam like a human kettle; a grotesque egg gives form to a trunk which is also the
hanging head of a huge carcass; castle-like structures rise out of rock only to terminate in the softness of tendrils - and tendrils everywhere, groping, creeping, contorting: movement, timelessness is the very cornerstone of this creation, a creation which is never complete but in a state of perpetual "devenir."

Yet within, or perhaps superimposed on the apparent chaos is a curious order. Relational schemes between groups of images are not difficult to discern. The egg-carcass-tree sends its double trunks into row boats which are themselves floating in a sort of molten sea. Nearby a swimmer clings to a rabbit ear as if to a primitive canoe, while to his left a penguin skates across the same sea become ice. Dream association rather than logic dictates a concordance of discordance. Geometric forms occur: spheres in particular predominate, encompassing, discharging, secreting, revealing, containing within themselves still other spheres or opening onto larger circular arrangements of forms.

But it is in consideration of the outermost or containing structure of Bosch's work that the profound resemblances between painter and dramatist are revealed. One finds in Bosch a perfectly symmetrical triptych composed of two side panels and a doubly wide central panel. In the first panel, generally referred to as "Paradise," a rosy
and serene Christ presents the newly formed Eve, still bearing evidence of the sleep from which she was created, to an expectant and smiling Adam. In the background is the Fountain of Life, a combined circular and phallic structure, around which a variety of animals cavort. The central panel by whose name the whole of the work is known depicts fecundity: men and women in great numbers have filled the garden; animals and plants prosper, sometimes attaining gigantic proportions; eggs and seed pods continue to spew forth new creatures. Tropical warmth and verdancy predominate. The third panel pictures the Hell of creation. In contrast to the first two panels it is a maelstrom of violence, torment, cacophony. Nature has become grotesquely perverted: the elements are in rebellion as fire and floods ravish a glacial terrain; monsters and severed limbs scream in agony; Satan in the form of a hideous bird devours his unlucky prey and excretes them into a pit housing some as yet unknown torture. In the center of the panel, careening on its withered legs, the Tree of Life, still recognizable by its double trunks and its egg-shell body has become the Tree of Death.

It is when the eye, wearied and tormented beyond endurance, would bid the hand to close the side panels over the center so as to hide the hideous spectacle of Hell from view, that the significance of structure in Bosch is further
illuminated: what is now pictured is the dawn before creation. It is a gray dawn, inchoate. The globe is seen as a luminescent yet transparent sphere whose clouds and sheets of rain seem to be at once contained within the sphere and hovering above its surface. A horizontal plane dissects the sphere as if it were a child's toy, or better, Sylda's crystal ball in which a fugitive and insubstantial creation makes a brief appearance only to recede once again into the mists. In the upper left hand corner, minute, seated upon an invisible throne, and with the merest hint of perplexity moulding his features, is God, the Creator. The circle as symbol for Bosch becomes fully relevant here. Like Arrabal he envisions the perpetual "becoming" of a Creation which is never complete. The frenzy of Hell gives way unceasingly to the dawn of creation. Containing the infinite process of rejuvenation and decay is the Globe, itself unity, oneness. circularity as concept and symbol is repeated in the life cycle of each creature as it is in the egg which generates new life - a life carrying already within it the seeds of destruction.

It is to the extraordinary study of Wilhelm Fränger that we owe the discovery of still more startling similarities

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between Bosch and Arrabal. Paradoxically, Fränger's contribution to the present study lies not in his major thesis, namely that Bosch's "Garden" represents pre-Reformation Sectarian Christianity, that it symbolically incorporates the beliefs of an Adamite cult for whom eroticism and mysticism were joined in the fecundity and wonder of creation, and, finally, that each panel contains the portrait of the Free Spirit cult's Grand Master for whose wedding the triptych was intended as gift and celebration, and who, according to Fränger, even dictated to Bosch the specific symbology of the work - but rather in his unveiling of the triptych's structural integrity, an integrity which had been ignored by prior art critics and historians.

A common practice even among such enlightened critics as Charles de Tolnay, Ludwig von Baldass, Marcel Brion (and Wolfgang Kayser, although Fränger does not specifically mention him) has been, as Fränger notes,34 to regard Bosch as he presents himself superficially: as a "faizeur de diables," a painter of the "grotesque" taken only in its meaning of the distorted or fantastic. None before Fränger had attempted to establish an underlying structural or theoretical relationship among the three panels of the

34Ibid., p. 7.
triptych simply assuming that they represented a chronological ordering of events: Paradise, followed by the Fall and subsequent expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden, followed by the peopling of the earth by the descendants of Adam and Eve, followed by the end of earthly life and the eternal anguish of souls. According to this theory the eroticism and fecundity of the central panel was to have been insidious and unsavory. The strange pairings of man and beast, the gigantic berries and birds were taken as precursors of the monsters pictured in the Hell panel, dire harbingers of things to come. It is Fränge's great contribution to have viewed the panels not as separate entities, each participating in a prefigured chronological ordering, but as facets of a kaleidoscopic, encompassing reality which nonetheless reaches its apotheosis in the central panel. Without reiterating the entirety of Fränge's detailed analysis, it would be well here to review some of his major observations, particularly as they bear upon what we have noted to be the emerging optic of Arrabal.

Although he does not state it in this fashion, what Fränge sees as the unifying principle of the triptych is the concept which Arrabal refers to as "panique." Bosch, like Arrabal, has literally created an opera mundi which is characterized, furthermore, by its recurrent cycles of polar elements. One of these elements, as we have already
noted, is the creating of life and its destruction. Fränge
even goes so far as to see the globe as an egg, a "fertilized
germ-cell [which] floats in the fluid of the ocean and the
rainy sky,"\textsuperscript{35} but which contains within it its own destiny
of annihilation. Not only does Fränge see the playing off
of the first and third panels as indicative of this constant
polar juxtaposition, the Pool of Life being played off
against the cess pool of Death, the infinite potential of
unfolding buds presided over by the Christ against the pur­
poseless consumption and devaluation of life by Satan, the
orderly workings of natural forces against their abortive
holocaust, but within each panel this thematic contrast is
equally in evidence. Already in the Paradise panel Fränge
notes the presence at Christ's feet of the crouching ibis,
both "procreator and devourer, maker and taker of life that
revolves in the eternal cycle of birth and rebirth,"\textsuperscript{36} while
in the Hell panel the potential renewal of life is indicated
by the egg dolefully borne on the back of a man who toils
atop the metronome in what is commonly called the "Hell of
the Musicians." (Could Bosch be suggesting that although
these musical instruments are being used as instruments of

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., p. 32.
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 53.
torture it is through art that man will be "saved?"
) In the central panel amidst the proliferation of life, death also resides in the symbol of the owl, in that of the snake biting its tail, and in two "death scenes," both, importantly, placed immediately below the great Pool of Life in the panel's vertical axis. The first shows the painful convulsions of a youth lying on his back, his arms outstretched, supplicating. Around him curve the tentacles of a giant circular shell. Immediately below him, another youth, the agony of death on his face, is seated in a hollow tomblike enclosure. Once again the double nature of the circle as symbol is manifest: the egg is both seed of life and its ultimate entombment.

Another constant polarity in Bosch according to Fränger, is that between the male and female principles. This is not in the least surprising, furthermore, in a work given over to the depiction of creation. From Adam and Eve in the Paradise panel to the infinite couplings of the central panel to the base lechery of the Hell panel, Bosch's work is profoundly erotic. Eroticism is contained, moreover, not only in the animate forms, but in the inanimate, in the Fountain of Life and rocky prominences of the first panel, in the pearly egg-like shells and the five background structures of the second, in the knife rising
obscenely from between two ears in the third. (One is immediately reminded of the frequent equivalence in Arrabal of sexuality and sadism or sexuality and aggression.) Frängé also sees sexuality in the interpenetration of the lute and the harp of the Hell panel, the music for which, as evidenced in the open music book below them, calls for a harmonic blending of instrument voices so as to form one musical "body."37

According to Frängé's theory in which the humanistic celebration of Creation provides the background against which Bosch's eroticism is played, procreation is the only way in which man may raise his voice against death. It is in this way that the thematic tension between love and death comes into being, best exemplified, perhaps, by the strange configuration in the lower right corner of the second panel. An owl, symbol of sagacity, sits atop a flowering bud from which are protruding, flailing about as though in great agitation, the arms and legs of a man and a woman. The owl in addition to symbolizing knowledge also symbolizes death, death being the ultimate revelation of wisdom. The couple enclosed in the bud are refusing love

37Ibid., p. 88. Frängé cites in this connection the decoding work of Johannes Wolf, expert in medieval musical notation.
in the face of death, Fränger argues, unwilling to bring forth life condemned to destruction. The bud in which they are contained symbolizes both the immaturity of their love and its ultimate likely fulfillment as a procreative agent.

Whether or not one agrees with Fränger's thesis that the Adamite cult of eroticism and procreation provided Bosch's inspiration, one cannot but notice in his painting the recurrent theme of androgyny. If the male and female principles are shown as disparate, contrasting, they are also shown as seeking reunion, return to the primal state of being. It is as though from the moment of Eve's separation from Adam's body in the first panel, the sexes have never stopped striving for fusion, oneness. This union is realized in the second panel in which literally hundreds of men and women, like so many pale blossoms against the lush tropical foliage, gambol, woo, and consummate their love. The theme of androgyny is not missing, as we have noted, from the Hell panel, but here eroticism has been debased: flesh is in a state of decay, the elements which compose it having been subverted from their natural functions. But how does the Hell panel relate to the preceding two panels if not chronologically or as their logical consequence? Does the theme of androgyny have even more profound ramifications than those visible in Bosch's eroticism?
The answer, it would seem, lies in the triple presence of a man's face. Upon close scrutiny the face of the hooded crow in the Paradise panel, that of the dark-haired man at the lower right of the central panel, and that peering from the right side of the monster in the Hell panel are seen to be identical. Fränger would have us believe that this is the face of the Free Spirit's Grand Master, the man who not only commissioned the work but dictated both its composition and symbology. And yet Fränger dismisses rather perfunctorily the possibility that the face, although its appearance in the central panel is precisely where painters traditionally sign their work, is that of Bosch himself: "It cannot be a portrait-signature, since the black-haired man has not the slightest resemblance to any portrait or self-portrait of Bosch that has come down to us." 38 Fränger apparently feels that even in a work so full of fantasy and symbolism Bosch would have been incapable of representing himself in a way other than that in keeping with photographic realism. But whether the face is that of Bosch or of some other central motivating source, the fact remains that the work has a visible Ego, an integrating presence which transcends the apparent chronology of the contexts in which it appears.

38Ibid., p. 140.
It is significant that only in the central panel does the face appear in normal proportions, firmly attached to the remainder of a human body. In the first panel, as we have noted, the face appears attached to the body of a lower form of life, while in the Hell panel an outsized, severed head turns morosely and nostalgically back to the central panel. The central panel, then, would seem to suggest an integration, a fusion of the animality and child-like innocence of Paradise with the fantasy and frenzy of Hell, purged of its demons by the creative act. We are brought to the surprising conclusion that the panel generally referred to as the "Garden of Earthly Delights" depicts androgyny not only in its visibly erotic forms but in its symbolic significance as the re-integration of disparate and longing facets of the self, the very force we have seen at work in Arrabal's dramatic universe.

We may now re-examine the details of the three panels in terms of their further relevance to Arrabal's theatre. The Paradise panel with its sleepy Adam and its Eve newly awakened to life, both "innocent," "uninitiated," is reminiscent of the "innocence" of Arrabal's child-characters. There is about Bosch's naked figures something of the freshness, the youth, the grace of Arrabal's children. They share with Arrabal's creatures the same air of bedazzlement
and estrangement in an unfamiliar world. They, too, are without memory as they are without experience having been so recently brought from the sleep of inexistence. And yet for them as for Arrabal's creatures the injunction "Souviens-toi de ton père" is relevant. Between Adam and Eve, still holding the wrists of his creations, is the Lord, the Creator, in his earthly form as the Son of God. The Garden is full of promise: the Fountain of Life occupies the entire central axis radiating energy into the animals surrounding it and emerging from it as it does vertically into the Christ figure and his creations. But creation is not complete as is evidenced by the parallel pointers of Adam's and Eve's legs, starkly outlined against the darker hillock. Full creativity will not be realized until Paradise has become the "Garden of Earthly Delights."

Moving for a moment to the Hell panel one cannot but be impressed by the number of images with immediate resonance in Arrabal's personal experience: memory returns bearing with it its terrible demons but unlocking at the same time the floodgates of imagination. The ravages of war with its fire, famine, and torture have already been noted. What has not been noted are the images of hypocritical and repressive religiosity. Fränger points to the satire of sexual neutrality in the pig-abbess pictured at the lower
right whose complete lack of sexuality condemns her unnatu-
39 ral asceticism, as he does to the "caricature-like figure of
the beggar-monk" whose spoon-shaped bill degrades his
sermon to the status of idle cackling, and finally to the
deeptively righteous confessor whose devil's tail indicates
that he is far more wicked than his penitent.

There is even in the center foreground a huge rab-
bbit blowing upon a hunter's horn from which dangles a
minute human form. Immediately to the left resting on the
head of a blond girl is a giant die. Since Bosch predated
Lewis Carroll by almost five centuries we cannot project
into Bosch's painting the characters and episodes known
to Arrabal from Carroll's work. But what better example
could be found of the workings of "hasard" than this drama-
tic reversal of size and predominance: the hare wears the
waistcoat and exhibits his human catch presided over by the
symbol of "jeu" itself, the ivory die.

It is assuredly, however, the contained anguish of
the face immediately adjacent to the rotting egg-carcass
which rivets our attention. It appears in Gargantuan pro-
portion to the surrounding figures indicating not only its

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39 Ibid., p. 93.
40 Ibid., p. 80.
centrality but its possible authorship. Significantly, the face is imprisoned, prevented from even seeing the Garden of Earthly Delights towards which it nonetheless reaches with its eyes by the vise-like right angle of its bagpipe hat and the great decaying hulk of infertility. Although this is the realm of the subconscious, of the greatest potential creativity and fantasy elaboration, in the closed regions of Hell fantasy produces only the demons of destruction. Hell is self-imprisonment, the decay which results from immobility. Here even the instruments of possible illumination and artistic expression are turned to torture: the harp becomes a rack, the lute a pillory, the metronome scene not only of the anal pinioning of the figure atop it but of a new mountain of Prometheus on which a figure staggers under the burden of an infertile egg. The key which can unlock the magic of creativity hangs out of reach of he who must see it as he looks imploringly into the Garden. The key, too, has become a torture rack through which a lifeless body hangs. And just as the legs of Adam and Eve in the first panel point diagonally toward the central panel, so does the shield in the lower left corner of the Hell panel against which a man has been crucified with a sword and dagger.
The central panel depicts creativity in its myriad forms. It is here that androgyny becomes productive, not only, as we have seen, in the procreative sense (interestingly, the "ego" figure is pictured emerging from a trysting chamber in whose entrance the face of a dark-haired girl is framed), but in the more loosely construed sense of artistic creation. It is in this "Garden of Earthly Delights" that the polarities of life and death, light and darkness, animal energies and ethereal fantasy, innocence and the tormented regions of the soul become one. It is here that initiation takes place. Fränger has discussed in some detail the ritualism, the ceremonial solemnity with which this instruction is carried out. It is in the deepest sense a "cérémonie panique" in which knowledge is revealed through the creative act. Before the chamber of the dark-haired couple a pensive Eve holds the fruit of knowledge. She is Altagore/Lis, Sylda/Arlys, the double initiator to love and wisdom. Elsewhere instruction is carried out under the watchful eye of male mentors as eager youths wait out the reticence of shy maidens. (Interestingly, initiation in Arrabal is, until the Jardin des délices carried out exclusively by women. Téloc is the first male to play this

41Ibid., 103-137.
rôle. To the extent that he, too, is a part of Arrabal, this represents striking changes in the dramatist's self perception: he is no longer the passive initiate but is in full possession of Knowledge.

For Bosch as for Arrabal, however, the ritual of initiation to love and knowledge is not all containment and solemnity: new access is acquired to the "démesure" of the subconscious now purged of its demons. As the eye moves up the horizontal planes of the panel from the many rites of introduction to the *ars amandi* past the exuberant cavalcade of men and beasts around the Pool of Life, a cavalcade which incorporates the innocence and animal joy of the Paradise panel, the structure becomes visibly looser, the forms more fanciful. A man and woman with reptile tails frolic in the shallows of the primal pool; an antelope is seen silhouetted against the sky as it climbs the branch-like projection of a rock and shell structure. Above them the air swarms with creatures of uncertain origins: a griffen carries a tortoise; a fish has sprouted wings and flies carrying a man on its back; a winged man is borne toward the sky by the upward momentum of the sphere to which he clings. The real and the transcendent, the erotic and the mystic are one.

42The terminology is that of Fränger, p. 122.
Three important spherical forms of the central panel cast further light upon the deep affinities between Bosch and Arrabal. The first is the egg resting in the shallows of the same primal pool. Instead of expelling its contents it is taking in a group of men and women as if for rejuvenation in the seedbed of creation. One is reminded of Arrabal's recounting of his experience in prison: how he came to regard his cell as a womb, as a life-giving enclosure in which he was spiritually and artistically reborn. The second of these forms is the large globe immediately to the right of the egg. A crystalline tower emerges from the top of the globe. Frängger has noted the bottle-like character of this structure and has likened it to Rabelais' wonder working "bouteille:" "Just as that magic bottle held the quintessinal meaning of Creation, and formed the crown of that world-embracing epic work, so Bosch's bottle also contains the quintessence of his panorama."43 Again, we think of Arrabal's Jardin in which Téloc and Lais each distill their liquor vitae into a containing jar which is then imbued with magic properties. Frängger finds in the two figures joined in a hand stand on the girdle of the globe the clear implication of immortality in creativity:

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43 Ibid., p. 113.
The couple performing the hand-stand have arrived at this position by doing a cart-wheel by means of which they have connected the beginning with the end. Now they pause in their own cyclical movement, in the vertical axis connecting heaven and earth in reversed positions. The heavens under the soles of their feet become the earth for them, while the earth over their heads becomes their heavens. So the circle of immortality is closed.44

The third spherical figure with important resonance in Arrabal is that found on the panel's left side centered between the middle axis and the bottom. This sphere is transparent though finely veined like the yolk sac of an egg, a miniature of the globe found on the outside of the closed triptych. It grows like the seed pod of a great dandelion which will soon free it to float upward on the breezes of the garden. Its contents are clearly visible through the crystal shell. In it, a double embryo, sit a blond girl and her black lover: his hand is on her belly; her hand is on his thigh. They are in an attitude not unlike that of Arrabal and his wife, Luce, on the cover painting of Fêtes et rites de la confusion. In a single image Bosch conveys androgyny, unity, creation, and the ceaseless renewal of life.

Bosch's central panel, then, bears much more than surface resemblance to Arrabal's play of the same name.

44Ibid., p. 114.
Taken in the context of the two side panels it constitutes a visual transcription of a "cérémonie panique," a ritualistic fusion, consummation, and deliverance. It is a garden of delights not only for the senses but for the soul, as the soaring figures above the horizon would suggest. The grotesque of the final panel, the baleful, malign grotesque confectioned of disease, decay, and outrage is distilled and redirected. "ESPOIR" which Arrabal's Téloc writes on Lais' thigh is implicit in the notion of new life. Lais, during her symbolic gestation (represented by the nine lambs) descends into her own fantasy world, confronts the hell of her own nature. Paradoxically her descent is also an ascension, that to self awareness, to adulthood. It is an ascension achieved through ceremony in which Lais sacrifices that part of her which would keep her from self knowledge. The sacrifice is no less of a curious, paradoxical nature: Lais must unite with Miharca in order to subordinate her; she must become one with her and kill her at the same time. Thus childhood is not abandoned forever as Camille Amary suggests in her introduction to the work, but becomes accessible in a new way. Its terror has somehow been purged permitting a rebirth of innocence. This, to be sure, is the significance of the rebirth of the sacrificial lambs.

45 Introduction to Théâtre VI, p. 12.
which Zénon had murdered. Lais joins with Zénon (ironically reminiscent both of Zeus, the creator, origin of vital energies, and of Zénon, the Greek philosopher who argued against the reality of movement) in the huge egg. But the egg has now become the symbol of new life, of renewed hope: it rises toward the sky like the liberated balloons of the early plays, like the flowering crystal globe of Bosch's "Garden." Lais, not unlike Malik of Une tortue nommée Dostoievsky, is the artist who sees everything with the innocence of new eyes. Art fuses with self awareness in new creation. Theatre is genesis. It is Arrabal's answer to death and the absence of God whose work he assumes. The concentric bands of the kaleidoscope have become one: life, art, theory, knowledge, intensity, vision, ceremony are fused in the creative act itself, an act both passionate and convulsive, in which past, present, and future, childhood and adulthood are joined, in which memory is restored and given new vitality. Arrabal has sought "le temps perdu" and has found it within him. He has come of age:

et je suis heureux, car je vois et je connais l'éternité, et ma mémoire s'enrichit, et j'aperçois l'oiseau qui, tous les cent ans, dérobe une goutte d'eau à la mer, et je vois les océans se dessécher grâce à lui, et je vois les pierres des montagnes, et tous les sables des plages, et je comprends la vie, et je suis chat et Phénix, et cygne, et éléphant, et vieillard, et je suis seul et accompagné, et j'aime
et je suis aimé, et je découvre des rivages et des paradis, et je suis ici et là, et je possède le sceau des sceaux et, au fur et à mesure que je tombe dans l'avenir, je sens que l'extase me saisit pour ne plus jamais me quitter.46

46 Arrabal, Fêtes et rites de la confusion, p. 184.
CONCLUSION
CONCLUSION

Le Jardin des délices would appear to mark both the end of one creative cycle for Arrabal and the beginning of another. In its bringing together of memory and "confusion," of order and "le merveilleux," in its integration of childhood both as a source of thematic inspiration and of effective energy, it brings to a close Arrabal's long and painful quest for identity. It serves as a final rite of initiation, a "cérémonie panique" in which Arrabal, by assimilation rather than rejection of his polarities, achieves freedom and adulthood.

In terms of the spatial representation with which this study began, the figure of a kaleidoscope whose concentric bands were to designate the separate but interrelated domains of Arrabal's experience (Arrabal's biography, his dramatic theory, and his creative production), Le Jardin des délices may be seen as a moment of complete resolution—an instant in time in which the concentric bands are as one, their interlocking harmonics creating a superbly rich field of resonances in which memory, knowledge, love, and theatricality are fused in a new and important way, in which
self realization for the artist through the act of creation is mirrored in the liberation of the spectator. That the treatment of these major themes is qualitatively different here may be seen by a brief recapitulation of their treatment in the earlier plays. ¹

Memory, as was previously noted, is present as a dramatic force in the early plays. It is present, however, only as autobiography, as specific thematic inspiration: the brutality of war (Guernica), the martyred but sadistic mother (Les deux bourreaux), the dialectic of hangman and victim (La Bicyclette du condamné), the attempted elucidation of a code of ethics (Le Cimetière des voitures, Le Tricycle, Oraison, Pique-nique en campagne), the acute sense of guilt and lack of privacy (in most of the aforementioned). This thematic material has its origins in Arrabal's early experience and is projected directly into the child-creatures who represent him. But memory is absent in the early plays as a viable force in the dynamics of character. Arrabal's children exist in complete innocence. Fresh, sensual,

¹ One might add, parenthetically, that this is not to imply a value hierarchy with the early plays giving way to the "better," more recent ones any more than a chamber work may be deemed inferior to a symphony by the same composer simply because it lacks its full orchestration. Le Jardin des délices is not, in the opinion of this author, Arrabal's best play. It lacks, for example, the tightness, the constant and exquisitely maintained tension of L'Architecte et L'Empereur d'Assyrie.
possessing an inexplicable grace, they are nonetheless unidimensional, cut off from their pasts, their intelligence, and their creativity in such a way as to severely limit the scope of their ability to deal with life. They are the victims rather than the exploiters of "hasard," imprisoned by their poverty and ineptitude in a perpetual seesawing between chaos and repressive order. They struggle courageously, though ineffectually, with problems of morality, freedom, knowledge, evolving by their very fascination with form and structure new shackles to bind them.

If memory exists as autobiography but not as an accessible motivating force in character the reverse may be said of love, for while Arrabal, the artist, cannot effect integration of his disparate selves except through his writing, love for his creatures is constantly sought as a refuge from chaos, repression, and death. Particularly in its physical intensity it offers itself as an antidote to the obsessive fear of inexistence. But despite their intense and overpowering need for tenderness, for spiritual union with a loved one, Arrabal's creatures can never escape the closed and restrictive boundaries of their own egos. Pain, cruelty, and physical violence are frequent accompaniments to love's approach having been equally a part of the original bond between mother and child. Guilt is another
of love's burdens: it is the natural complement to each act of physical love as it is to the recognition that freedom in love may be attained only by eliminating the repressive and eternally vigilant Mother. But the Mother cannot be destroyed without destruction of the Ego which has assimilated her as _L'Architecte et L'Empereur d'Assyrie_ clearly suggests. Love, already specified as such in Arrabal's theoretical writings, is revealed through the use of fantasy and dream disassociation (_Le Couronnement, L'Architecte et L'Empereur d'Assyrie_) as a "sentiment d'auto-tendresse," but it remains for _Le Jardin des délices_ to poetically realize what was equally clear in Arrabal's theoretical formulations: namely, that the object of this self love was the impoverished, incapsulated memory, always a repository of potential creativity, but until then wholly inaccessible as a source of productive energy. Love, then, finds its symbolic representation in Arrabal's theatre in the attraction between the sexes but its origin lies in the unity of androgyny: the self, once divided, ceaselessly pursues the return of its estranged elements.

It is, interestingly, in the domain of theatricality that the greatest continuity is established between Arrabal's quest for self awareness and that of his stage characters. The act of creating theatre for Arrabal, in fact, finds its
mirror image in the theatricality of his creatures. In writing Arrabal seeks the intensity which his daily life refuses him. It has only been, in other words, by theatricalizing his reality that he has been able both to experience it fully and rid himself of its destructive potential. Arrabal's creatures, too, typically attempt to intensify their reality by bolstering it with the gestures and the contrivances of theatre. In the early plays, ceremony is a corollary of the need to formalize existence and results in an even further estrangement from lucidity. Beginning with *Le Couronnement*, however, theatricality combines with fantasy and the magic of dreams to become, paradoxically, an instrument for the elucidation of a higher Reality. The structure of "jeu" unites with the combinatory possibilities of "hasard:" Giafar of *Le Couronnement*, the Architect and the Emperor in the play of the same name are moving toward the elaboration of an initiatory rite in which the fusion of contrary states, symbolically represented by multiple characters, is enacted. It is precisely, however, when we become interested in the evolving reality of these creatures that their essential transience is manifest: their identity struggle has no issue. Arrabal has tricked us once again. His characters are condemned to eternal repetition without
resolution by a superior presence: it is this Presence which, using the characters as vehicles, as chess pieces in its own transcendent "jeu," is striving for knowledge, intensity, integration.

Integration is accomplished in *Le Jardin des délices* not only for the actress, Laís, but for the artist, Arrabal, who projects himself both into Laís and into the collective character, Laís-Miharca-Téloc-Zénon. There is in the androgynous coupling of Laís and Zénon at the end of the play the suggestion that permanent fusion has been achieved for Arrabal as for Laís which may dictate new directions in his personal life and in his artistic production. One of the constants that we have learned to expect in Arrabal is metamorphosis. Will the fact of having purged his childhood demons mean a turning outward, an abandoning of the polar elements which have characterized his dramatic works to date? Or will autobiographical material simply take its place in the larger, evolving constellation of themes and effective energies which constitute Arrabal's present artistic inspiration? What Arrabal has verbalized is a desire to focus his attention on the pressing problems of social and political injustice. His writing of four short plays for the May, 1968 student revolution may be indicative of this direction. On the
other hand, Arrabal has promised us two operas soon to be published by Christian Bourgois, assuring us that one of them calls for the sawing in half on stage of a live elephant. The familiar Arrabalian landscapes are not, then, to be completely eradicated. One can only assume that the infinite fertility of the Arrabalian imagination will continue to nourish his powerful talent as dramatic author.

\[2^2\text{Messerman, "Arrabal in Conversation."}\]
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