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in the theatre of Fernando Arrabal, 1952 - 1969*

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ABSTRACT

The intention of this thesis is to give an account of the evolution from an inward-looking theatre of obsessions to a more outward-looking theatre of commitment, which characterises the theatre of Fernando Arrabal over a period of seventeen years. The study has a tri-partite structure, corresponding to three distinct periods of artistic creativity: 1952-8, 1962-7 and 1967-9. Each part consists of a chapter exposing background material relating to Arrabal's life, personality and intellectual evolution, followed by a chapter devoted to the analysis of selected plays.

The plays of the first period, described as introverted in nature and hermetic in structure, are seen as intensely personal dramatic projections of the nightmare labyrinth of the author's memory and obsessions. These plays are frenetic efforts to impose order on internal chaos, or to eradicate neuroses through the exploitation of fantasies.

In the second period, when for the first time in his life he discovers a degree of security and self-confidence, Arrabal brings a more lucid introspective approach to bear on the material which provides his inspiration. This is matched by conscious efforts on Arrabal's part to create a more formalised theatrical universe, structured in accordance with the principles of Panique, and an increasing willingness to draw the spectator into the theatrical ceremony, initiating him to the confusion of the author's world. In this period, his heroes are seen to acquire a degree of lucidity and self-determination which was lacking in the earlier heroes, and as the period closes Arrabal is seen to achieve some detachment

ABSTRACT (continued)

from his former obsessions.

Finally, under the influence of Arrabal's revelatory imprisonment and the catalytic effect of the "événements" of May 1968, the Panique theatre is seen to give way to a new type of theatre in which Arrabal seeks to integrate his old obsessions into his new awareness of external reality, and produces plays which are manifestly committed in intention. Arrabal's commitment is described as an unusually non-ideological and broadly based commitment on behalf of tolerance and freedom from political persecution.

**THE MOVEMENT FROM INTROVERSION TOWARDS COMMITMENT
IN THE THEATRE OF FERNANDO ARRABAL, 1952 - 1969.**

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**Ph.D Thesis presented at the University of Durham
by David W. Whitton, B.A. (Dunelm)**

1974.

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Finally, I am grateful to the Department of Education and Science for financial assistance during the period of my research, and to the staff of the Durham University Library for meeting my requests for books and other materials.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Arrabal's plays were first published by René Julliard in Théâtre volumes I - III, 1959-1965.

In 1967 a new series was begun, edited by Christian Bourgois, in which vols. I and II contained the same plays as in the first edition, but with some textual modifications; the four plays in the original Théâtre III were published in two separate volumes, Théâtre III and IV, again with some alterations.

Except where the contrary is specifically stated, references in this thesis are to the most recent (Bourgois) edition.

Similarly, quotations from Baal Babylone, La Pierre de la folie and L'Enterrement de la sardine are from the Bourgois editions of those texts.

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

In this thesis, material originally published in Spanish has been quoted in French wherever such translations exist. Where no French version is known to exist, the Spanish has been quoted, followed where judged necessary by a translation into English, given in a footnote. The translations into English are my own.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The first reaction of a critic confronting a body of work such as that of Fernando Arrabal might understandably be one of bewilderment. Arrabal is reputed to have written some forty plays, five novels and an indeterminate number of sonnets; certainly the publication within the span of eleven years of twenty-eight plays in eight volumes is no mean achievement. The problem, however, is not merely quantitative: Arrabal's output is unusual but not inordinate. What is arresting is the extraordinary diversity within these twenty-eight plays, ranging from the minute composition of the abstract play Orchestration théâtrale to the frenzied and delirious rituals of Le Grand Cérémonial. It is as if the whole corpus of his work were produced under the sign of experimentation, and indeed Arrabal has admitted: "chaque fois que j'écris une pièce j'imagine que tout peut être remis en cause le lendemain." (1)

The issue is further obscured by the controversy, flavoured at times by scandal, which for several years has surrounded Arrabal the man and the artist. This controversy has been kept burning by the negative or hostile criticism of the popular press, sometimes even accompanied by ill-informed judgements on the author's state of mental health. In 1969, for example, J.-G. Maingot wrote: "Arrabal me paraît un échantillon assez représentatif du paranoïaque

(1) Schifres, Entretiens avec Arrabal, Belfond, Paris, 1969, p.154.

atteint du délire sexuel... Nul n'ignore que Fernando Arrabal est fou." (1)

Calumnious insinuations of this sort are not rare, and appear to be indicative of the discomfiture which Arrabal's theatre provokes in some audiences. Readers of France-Soir were treated to doctoral speculations by the paper's "medical" correspondent on the origins and infectiousness of a pernicious disease named "l'arrabalite" (2), whilst the drama critic of this paper, since his first encounter with Le Couronnement in 1965 ("rude soirée") has persistently demonstrated an almost perverse myopia with his reviews prefaced by a disclaimer such as "N'ayant point compris le message qu'a mis M. Arrabal dans sa pièce... je me bornerai à raconter ce que j'ai vu." There follows habitually an out of context account of the various incidental erotic or "obscene" elements of the play in question, this being presented as a "critique impartiale." (3)

Much of this hostility is occasioned by Arrabal's disregard for the proprieties, which is frequently interpreted as an act of provocation, or mere pornographic self-indulgence. In Une Tortue nommée Dostoievsky Liska says to the hero Malik: "Dans tes rêves tu disposes d'une imagination qui ne connaît pas les bienséances, ni le bon goût ni les images distinguées" (4) and the same might well be said of the author, leading at times to excesses which

(1) Maingot, "Paranoïa et délire sexuel", Sud-Ouest, Bordeaux, 3.4.69.

(2) "Medicus", France-Soir, 16.12.69.

(3) J. Dutourd, "Le Labyrinthe, critique impartiale", France-Soir, 16.1.67. See also his "Sado-masochisme-poétique", 6.11.69;

"Le Couronnement", 21.1.65, etc.

(4) Théâtre VI, p.154.

have earned him an unenviable notoriety amongst the general public. It thus behoves the serious critic to devote some attention to the sincerity of Arrabal's motives in these matters.

Other sources of hostility include his alleged repetition, wilful obscurantism or lack of originality, not to say plagiarism. Le Tricycle, for example, is said to be an imitation of Waiting for Godot, though it can be shown that when Arrabal wrote Le Tricycle in Madrid in 1953 he could not have known Beckett's play, which at that time had not been translated into Spanish and which was performed for the first time in Spain at the Faculty of Arts in Madrid in May 1955.

On the other hand certain of Arrabal's favourite authors: Kafka, Carroll, Calderón, Adamov, Shakespeare, Dostoievsky, Cervantes - the list could be extended indefinitely, for Arrabal's work is eclectic - can be seen as having influenced his theatre at one point or another, so much so that one might be tempted to qualify Le Labyrinthe as Kafkaesque, or Concert dans un oeuf as Quixotic. At the risk of becoming involved in an interminable literary treasure-hunt, there might be grounds for examining Arrabal's theatre with the object of determining the extent of his borrowings from these sources. Actually, such a task is not within the purview of the present study for, as the comments on Arrabal's creative process will indicate, the provenance of his material is often less significant than the way in which his borrowings are incorporated into his work.

A more serious ground for criticism is that voiced by the drama critic of Le Monde, to the effect that all Arrabal's plays are the

same: "Il pourrait très bien n'exister qu'une seule pièce d'Arrabal avec intermèdes interchangeable, une sorte de menu à la carte." (1) It is frequently said that Arrabal continues to offer combinatory variations upon certain themes which are particularly close to him, without any real innovation. The question of what one might justifiably call Arrabal's obsessions, and the question of evolution in his art, will be at the forefront of things considered in this study.

In recent years a steadily growing chorus of voices has joined with those who have proclaimed Arrabal the most significant and original young playwright of his generation. Translated into forty languages, performed throughout the world except in his native Spain, Arrabal has gradually gained acceptance in all sectors of the Parisian theatre, from the tiny arts theatres in the rue Mouffetard and the rue de l'Epée de Bois to the huge theatres of the Boulevards, and even, in February 1972, the state-subsidised Théâtre National Populaire. Arrabal is undeniably a major force in the modern French theatre, yet his work has attracted relatively little serious critical attention. (2) There exists too a dense fog of prejudice and misapprehension which the critic must penetrate before he can undertake any rational judgement of Arrabal's theatre. The present study does not seek

(1) Poirot-Delpech, "Le Lai de Barrabas d'Arrabal", Le Monde, 6.1.70.

(2) Alain Schifres' Entretiens avec Arrabal are of course invaluable. Bernard Gille has written a short but excellent monograph in the form of an introduction to Arrabal's life and work, published by Seghers in their collection "Théâtre de tous les temps". In addition, there have been some half-dozen unpublished theses and dissertations devoted to Arrabal in French and American universities.

to whitewash Arrabal, nor is it a suitable forum for polemics; indeed it hopes to serve a more positive function. It hopes nevertheless to help to restore the balance in favour of the reputation which this dramatist certainly deserves by showing grounds for a more favourable response than either rejection through blind prejudice or acclaim for all that smacks of succès de scandale.

Starting with the texts themselves, one consideration presents itself immediately, namely that it is not possible to give a valid account of Arrabal's work without considering it diachronically. During the twenty years of his writing to date his work has been characterised, naturally enough, by a marked and meaningful evolution in terms of thematic material, characterisation and presentation. This is not simply a question of new dramatic techniques or the diversity referred to in the opening paragraph above. What is in question here is a continuous process of evolution, superimposed on the diversity (which is present at all stages of his dramatic career) with the result that his theatre presents the coherent appearance of a continuum, rather than simply a collection of individual works.

It is in effect possible, not to say essential, to view the whole of Arrabal's theatre in terms of a continuous process in which the author moves from virtually total introversion, preoccupation with certain recurrent obsessions, towards a measure of self-knowledge, that is through introspection, and beyond this to a state where concern for external reality and positive action, (commitment in art), become possible.

The distinction between introversion, the self-absorption of the mind, its withdrawal into a very high degree of subjectivity, and introspection, a more lucid kind of self-analysis, is somewhat fine, and one is not able to specify at what point the former becomes the latter, if indeed such a point may be said to exist. It is, however, an important distinction which will be seen to have important repercussions on the type of theatre that Arrabal produces. As regards commitment, let it be said immediately and emphatically that the word is being used here in a strictly limited sense. When one speaks of commitment in the theatre one often thinks first of Brecht or Sartre, or more recently Adamov or Gatti - that is, dramatists whose work both reflects the author's commitment to (usually) a specific ideology and at the same time acts in some way as a vehicle of propaganda. This is not true of Arrabal, and because of this Arrabal himself would not use, nor acknowledge the use of the term "commitment" in relation to his theatre. Nevertheless the word has other meanings, and provided its content is carefully defined can serve a useful purpose here.

Writing on the meaning of Commitment with a capital C, Eric Bentley says:

We mean a political commitment. And we do not only mean that an artist has political views; we mean that his political views enter his art. (1)

This definition is perfectly applicable to Arrabal's most recent full-length plays, but only in this sense, namely that Arrabal's

(1) Eric Bentley, Theatre of commitment, Methuen, London, 1968, p.196.

is a non-specific commitment to the causes broadly defined as freedom and tolerance. He would say, for example, that he is not opposed to General Franco the man or the politician, but to the ideas, the totalitarian spirit of which he is the embodiment in post-war Spain. Arrabal has always been careful to shun association with specific political ideologies or doctrines, and for this reason, in fairness to him, one cannot over-emphasise the particular sense in which it is legitimate to speak of commitment in relation to his work.

Introversion, introspection, commitment: perhaps these neat labels are deceptively simple. To what do they correspond in the reality of Arrabal's life and his artistic creation? It seems that at first, in the early stages of his career, Arrabal is totally immersed in personal preoccupations which dominate both his mind and his theatre. Only when the ghosts of the past have been exorcised, that is to say when he has come to terms with and dominated the memories and the obsessions to which they give rise, only then can he turn his attention to the world beyond his own subjectivity. Clearly the poet cannot become the man of action as long as he remains enchained and paralysed by his personal memories.

Strictly speaking, it cannot be said that in the course of this movement from introversion towards commitment Arrabal shifts his gaze elsewhere; it is rather as if his initially narrow optic is gradually expanded, as if the tiny aperture of a diaphragm is gradually opened out to reveal progressively more and more of the world around. This means that Arrabal does not abandon altogether his former preoccupations, but rather that he integrates them into a new type of theatre. In his own way Arrabal illustrates

the eternal dilemma of the artist who must choose between his ivory tower or a positive stance in the world. The question is particularly apposite for the playwright, whose medium usually presupposes direct and collective communication with a public.

André de Baecque has written of

la véritable vocation de l'auteur dramatique, qui est de s'intégrer à une communauté véritable et d'en exprimer les sentiments, les craintes, les espoirs, les plaisirs, plutôt que de s'enfermer dans un bureau... (1)

This expresses the type of goal towards which Arrabal is moving as his personal experience, instead of being his sole concern, is given historical and universal dimensions, being integrated into contemporary history. (2)

This movement in Arrabal's relationship with himself, his environment and his theatre is paralleled by a change in his attitude towards the theatrical public. It will be seen that the theatre at first functions primarily, perhaps exclusively, in relation to the author himself; that in his early writing Arrabal is able to order and render intelligible the confused turmoil of his life, and at the same time to live more intensely, enacting fantasies and desires which cannot be materialised in reality; that the first plays are not addressed to any audience; and consequently that when these plays are performed the public tend to be present somewhat in the role of voyeurs, (which accounts in part for the uncomfortable feeling they seem to engender). Later

(1) "L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie", Trétaux, April 1967, p.37.

(2) Cf. the works of Arthur Adamov, for whom Arrabal has expressed great admiration. Adamov's theatre in the 1950's betrays a similar evolution from the expression of nightmare fantasies towards social integration and commitment. In Adamov's case this leads to Marxist commitment, and is followed by a third period in which the disillusioned Adamov returned once more to an introverted theatre of obsessions.

Arrabal becomes aware that the theatre can also function in relation to an audience, that it can assume an exemplary rôle, and eventually that it may be positively didactic. The public then become indispensable because it is to them that Arrabal's theatre is addressed; at the same time they become involved to a greater extent as participants in the theatrical experience.

The movement in question here is thus so fundamental as to involve Arrabal's purpose in writing for the theatre. Arrabal has suggested that perhaps, like Robbe-Grillet, "j'écris pour savoir pourquoi j'écris" (1) and one must agree with him that in the final analysis the process of creative writing is an irreducible mystery. Nevertheless there might in Arrabal's case be considerable profit to be derived from attempting to elucidate the more concrete causes which motivate his writing. This is because it is especially difficult with Arrabal, more so than with most authors, to divorce the writing from the artist. The major tendencies of his work appear to be responses to his experience of reality and autobiography is the primary source of both inspiration and material. Hence his theatre is best understood by reference to the artist and his environment. This is especially true of the earlier works, whose highly introverted nature has been referred to above. Arrabal seems to suspect that it is somehow "wrong" to allow autobiography to inform one's work to such an extent, for he comments: "Je crois avoir tort pour un écrivain, celui de posséder une biographie riche en phénomènes, en événements marquants." (2) The fact remains,

(1) M. Bouyer, "Entretien avec Arrabal", Les Langues modernes, March-April 1965, pp.48-53.

(2) Entretiens, p.11.

however, that it is largely to Arrabal's "rich biography" that we owe the creation of his work. Hence the following study, whilst being concerned first and foremost with Arrabal's theatre, will involve simultaneous examination of certain aspects of the author's life and personal circumstances, which are at any given time directly and profoundly linked to the creative process.

The movement from introversion towards commitment is thus considered fundamental to Arrabal's work, affecting as it does every aspect of his artistic creation. It will be traced here by analyses and comparisons of selected plays, considered in chronological order. The study can at best be only a partial exegesis of Arrabal's theatre, since it is manifestly impossible within the limits of such an undertaking to devote serious attention to every one of the author's plays. In addition, and a fortiori, this can only be a partial study because there exist plays which run counter to the general trend. This is partly a consequence of the diversity which characterises Arrabal's work, and does not necessarily invalidate the general trend. His first play, for example, Pique-nique en campagne, is atypical, as also is Guernica, because the didactic elements in these plays presuppose the existence of, first an audience, and second a concern on the part of their author for political reality, both of which are generally absent from the early plays. Similarly, though for different reasons, the abstract Orchestration théâtrale is an experimental work somewhat different in mood and intention, as in style, from Arrabal's other plays.

If these plays are considered atypical, whilst the others by opposition are designated characteristic, it is not because of an arbitrary choice, nor is any value judgement necessarily implied. The point about these exceptional works is that each represents, in one way or another, a faux-départ, an experiment which is not followed up and which does not inaugurate a new type of theatre. On the other hand, what distinguishes most of the plays under consideration in this study is precisely the underlying continuity which, despite differences between the individual plays, is expressive of Arrabal's movement from introversion towards eventual commitment.

For the purposes of this study, Arrabal's theatre has been divided into three periods. The first comprises some fifteen published plays, from Pique-nique en campagne (1952) to Guernica (1958). The second period, between 1962 and 1967, starts with Le Grand Cérémonial and ends with Le Jardin des délices. Many of the plays of this period are known under the epithet "panique". The third period begins with L'Aurore rouge et noire (1968) and continues to the present, though this study terminates with Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs, (1969), the last play to be published at the time of writing.

This study will therefore be divided into three parts, corresponding to the years 1952-1958, 1959-1967 and 1967-1969. Each section has the same bi-partite structure consisting of a first chapter exposing background material relating to Arrabal's biography and his intellectual and artistic development, and a second chapter devoted specifically to the theatre, in which

selected plays are considered as dramatic entities and in relation to Arrabal's life and his work as a whole. Because the plays are consistently viewed in relation to the author's life, it was essential to know as far as possible the exact date of composition of his plays. Research based on examination of certain manuscripts and discussion with Arrabal shows results which are in some cases significantly divergent from what has hitherto been accepted as the chronology of Arrabal's theatre. These results are set out in an appendix.

The division of the twenty-eight plays into three periods is partly a matter of convenience, but there is some justification for this expedient. On the whole, as this study hopes to demonstrate, the plays of each period have some inherent character which tends to make them distinguishable from the plays of the other periods. There are exceptions to this in the form of "premonitory" works, (for example Les Amours impossibles, 1957, which has more in common with the short panique plays of the second period), and "throw-backs", (such as Une Tortue nommée Dostoievsky, 1968, which also belongs more by nature to the second period). But apart from internal evidence provided by the plays, the divisions also have a more formal kind of justification. Between the first and second periods is an interval of almost four years during which Arrabal wrote no plays. Considering Arrabal's passionate love of the theatre - one might almost say his need for the theatre - these years of silence are cause for surprise. In fact, though he wrote no plays, he was fully occupied during this time with other things: studies at the University of Columbia, the evolution of Panique, the writing of his first two novels, the creation of his paintings

and so on. The first play of the second period, Le Grand Cérémonial, marks a new departure thematically and stylistically. The second and third periods are also punctuated by a major landmark in the author's life - his arrest and imprisonment in Spain during the summer of 1967. It is largely to this event that we owe the orientation towards commitment which is apparent in two plays subsequent to 1967.

Speaking of his imprisonment, Arrabal has described the cell in which he was incarcerated as a "womb" from which he was born a second time with a new vision of the world. In 1968 he explained his position thus:

Maintenant je cherche à savoir ce qui s'est passé dans mon enfance, mais il faut aussi regarder ailleurs, retrouver le monde de la prison, c'est-à-dire des gens qui m'entourent. Ce monde n'est pas totalement présent dans mon oeuvre, mais il va l'être. J'ai rêvé récemment que je me trouvais dans une grande piscine circulaire, avec un bâton, je tentais de mélanger un liquide clair et une masse visqueuse. Après, j'ai cru comprendre que je voulais mélanger le monde où j'ai vécu avec celui des impulsions qui est la base de mon oeuvre. (1)

This study seeks to illustrate the long course of the movement towards the integration of "le monde où j'ai vécu" into "celui des impulsions qui est la base de mon oeuvre."

(1) Françoise Espinasse, "Entretien avec Arrabal", Plexus, December 1968, pp.102-109.

CHAPTER ONE

CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

CHAPTER ONE

CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

The facts which furnish the elements of Arrabal's biography are relatively easy of access and largely undisputed. (1) Those relating to his early life and work can be summarised as follows.

Fernando Arrabal Terán was born on 11th. August 1932 in the town of Melilla in Spanish Morocco, the second child of Fernando Arrabal Ruiz and Carmen Terán Gonzalez. His brother Julio was born two years later. On 17th. July 1936, on the eve of the civil war in Spain, (when Fernando Arrabal was therefore less than four years old), Lieutenant Arrabal was arrested in his home in Melilla by Nationalist rebels for suspected Republican activities. An information leak from Alvaro Gonzalez, one of the local leaders of the Phalange, had precipitated the premature uprising in this town. The rebels easily gained control of Melilla and obtained lists of members of trade unions, left-wing parties and Masonic lodges, together with the names of people known to have voted for the Popular Front in the elections of the previous January. (2) Lieutenant Arrabal's name was almost certainly on one of these lists, though his exact allegiance is not known. According to Arrabal he was "un homme de gauche, mais non un militant". (3)

- (1) Major sources are Schifres, Entretiens, and Gille Arrabal, pp.173ff. (though both are subject to error), and Arrabal himself who has helped to establish certain biographical details.
- (2) Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, 1961, pp.131-3.
- (3) Entretiens, p.13.

There is no factual basis for the popular belief that Fernando's father had been denounced to the fascists by his wife, though it is certain that she did not share his liberal ideals and that she attempted to discredit his image in the eyes of her children.

Sentenced to death on a pretext of "military rebellion", the father's penalty was subsequently commuted to thirty years' imprisonment. Arrabal relates that at this time his mother took the three children to visit their father in prison:

Mon père était alors condamné à mort. Il aurait voulu nous embrasser. Ma mère l'en aurait empêché parce qu'il n'était pas digne, parce qu'il était un homme de gauche. (1)

After attempting to commit suicide in the prison at Ceuta he was transferred to gaol in Burgos. In December 1941, suffering from a mental disorder, he was taken to Burgos Psychiatric Hospital, from whence he disappeared without trace on 21st. January 1942. Prison records show that he escaped wearing only his pyjamas; at that time New Castille was lying under three feet of snow. The following day Señora Arrabal told her children that their father was dead, and henceforth she was to attempt to obliterate all traces of her husband's existence.

Fernando Arrabal, his brother Julio and sister Carmen were thus brought up by their mother and aunt (one of the mother's sisters), the family moving successively from Melilla to Ciudad Rodrigo in the Nationalist sector, and from there at the end of the Civil War to Madrid.

Arrabal's formal education began when he was five, in a convent

(1) Entretiens p.15.

school near the Portugese border. He appears to have been happy there, though in retrospect he speaks of it as "bien-pensant et désopilant." (1) In 1941 he entered the fashionable Colegio de San Antón, a catholic school run in Madrid by the Escolapian Fathers. The following year he left this college and with his brother entered another Escolapian establishment at Getafe, a few miles outside the capital. In 1947, at his mother's instigation, he started to attend courses in preparation for entry into the Military Academy, for his mother had destined the two boys for a military career. The discipline and prevailing ethos here were particularly distasteful to Fernando Arrabal, and his first report read "esprit militaire nul."

1949 witnessed an important and formative event in Arrabal's early life, the discovery by him at home of a hidden packet containing letters, souvenirs and documents relating to his father, together with old family photographs from which the father's image had been assiduously removed. The discovery precipitated a crisis in which Arrabal, now aged seventeen, rebelled against his home background and his military training. He says: "Je fus extrêmement bouleversé. J'ai traversé une époque de grande dépression... J'ai décidé de me tuer." (2) He claims that for the next five years he refused to address a single word to his mother. On 1st. September 1949 he left Madrid for Tolosa in the north where, still under the tutelage of the Escolapian Fathers, he trained as a technician in the paper-making industry. Returning to the family home in 1952 he took an office job and studied law in the evenings. This situation lasted for three years, during

(1) *ibid.* p.19.

(2) *ibid.* pp.16 & 27.

which time he also occupied himself with clandestine readings of modern authors in the Ateneo, a liberal stronghold. Here he became familiar with such novelists as Kafka, Proust, Duhamel and Dostoievsky. At the same time he was writing plays: his first published play, Pique-nique en campagne, dates from 1952.

An anecdote which he relates of this period demonstrates a characteristic attitude of revolt and provides the first example of his corrosive and irreverent sense of irony:

Je gagnais 1.181 pesetas par mois, c'est-à-dire à peu près 10.000 francs français. Ce n'est rien... Les soirs de paie il fallait signer sur un grand registre. Au lieu d'écrire "Arrabal" un jour j'ai écrit "Quelle misère!" Ça m'a fait une histoire terrible. Ils ont failli m'expulser. En fin de compte ils m'ont supprimé quatre jours de paie sur mon salaire. (1)

In 1954 he hitch-hiked to Paris to see the Berliner Ensemble perform Brecht's Mère Courage; he says that he was greatly impressed by this production, which incited him to devote even more time to his own theatre. He now started to write Fando et Lis. Back in Madrid one of his friends, the poet José Fernández-Arroyo, persuaded him to submit the script of Le Tricycle (written two years earlier) to the Ciudad de Barcelona theatre competition in 1955. (2) The jury wanted to award the prize to Arrabal until one of the judges objected that the play was an imitation of Waiting for Godot. But Arrabal had never heard of Beckett or his play. He recounts the incident thus:

- (1) Serreau, "Arrabal: un nouveau style comique", Les Lettres nouvelles, November 1958, p.574.
- (2) Arrabal says, erroneously, "c'était en 1954" (Entretiens p.35). In fact the preface to the script of Fando et Lis submitted to the same competition in 1956 refers to Los Hombres des triciclo as "finalista en el último Premio Ciudad de Barcelona", thus clearly indicating the 1955 competition.

On allait lui donner le prix quand un auteur dramatique, très connu en Espagne pour son gauchisme dogmatique, est intervenu, disant que la pièce était plagée de Beckett. Or en Espagne, le poète le plus populaire s'appelle Becquer. Quand j'ai entendu ce nom, très officiel, je fus abasourdi. Plus tard j'ai lu les livres de Beckett. Je ne le connaissais pas alors, mais j'ai découvert que nous avions quelques points communs. (1)

The incident nevertheless helped Arrabal to obtain a scholarship from the French government to study theatre in France. Accordingly, in December 1955 he left home to take up residence in the Collège d'Espagne at the Cité Universitaire in Paris, initially for a period of only three months. Once there, however, he was found almost immediately to be suffering from tuberculosis which had passed unnoticed in Spain, and in January 1956 he entered the Hôpital de la Cité Universitaire. The following month he was moved to the sanatorium at Bouffémont (Seine-et-Oise) and from there, in November 1956, to the Hôpital Foch in Suresnes where an operation was performed to collapse his left lung. In December 1956 he returned to the Bouffémont sanatorium where he convalesced until his return to the Cité Universitaire in April 1957. This time he lodged in the Pavillon du Monaco. On 1st. February 1958 Arrabal married Luce Moreau, whom he had met four years earlier in Spain, and settled permanently in Paris.

Such are the bare facts of what Arrabal calls his "biographie riche en phénomènes." One is on less solid ground when one seeks to interpret these data, to discover what resonances they

(1) Entretiens, p.35.

set up in the author's mind and how they condition his view of life. That, however, is what must be attempted if one wishes to see how the facts of Arrabal's biography relate to his theatre.

First and perhaps foremost at the centre of Arrabal's childhood existence is an absence, that of the father. It is likely that Arrabal, since he was not yet four years old at the time of his father's arrest, would not have been consciously aware of the momentous events which were taking place. On the other hand it is clear that the father's disappearance in 1936 has had a profound effect on the whole course of Arrabal's life. In 1967 he wrote:

On me demande souvent ce qui a eu le plus d'influence sur moi, ce que j'admire le plus, et alors, oubliant Kafka et Lewis Carroll, le terrible paysage et le palais infini, oubliant Gracian et Dostoïevsky, les confins de l'univers et le songe maudit, je réponds que c'est un être dont je parviens seulement à me rappeler les mains contre mes pieds d'enfant: mon père. (1)

In fact the father figure appears very infrequently as specific thematic material in Arrabal's work - how could it be otherwise, since Arrabal's only memory of him is of the paternal hands burying his feet in the warm sands of the beach at Melilla? This scene recurs most notably in the author's novel Baal Babylone, in Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs, and with particular vibrancy in the film Viva la Muerte. Generally, however, the father's presence in his work is less in evidence, though no less important for being concealed. Not knowing his father at first hand Arrabal has had to have

(1) Arrabal, "Fernando Arrabal Ruiz, mon père", in: Entretiens, pp.181ff.

recourse to his imagination to recreate a figure which is perhaps larger than life: a man with noble political ideals, a talented painter, (Arrabal on the other hand considers himself "un peintre raté"⁽¹⁾), whose life was admirable by virtue of its very excess of suffering, ("sa vie fut l'une des plus douloureuses que je connaisse"⁽²⁾), and whose end was exemplary. Of this figure Arrabal says:

Je l'imagine au centre d'un kaléidoscope illuminant mes peines et mes inspirations. (3)

Arrabal has spoken of "la confusion dans laquelle je vis" (4), and the notion of confusion will be seen to be fundamental to his vision of life. Already some of the conflicting forces which have operated to produce in him this impression of confusion can be seen to emerge. The concept of father, for Arrabal, invokes an absence, a sense of void and irretrievable loss. At the same time it invokes a presence, the constant hidden source of his inspiration which time and physical absence cannot efface:

Mais la calomnie, le silence, le feu et les ciseaux n'ont pas éteint la voix du sang qui franchit la montagne et me baigne de lumière et de lymphe. (5)

It implies life, the strong gentle hands associated with the warm sand and sun, and it implies death. The concept of father in itself means doubt, enigma, confusion. In 1960 Arrabal set off to Burgos in an attempt to solve the riddle of what really had

(1) "Plus loin avec Arrabal", L'Express, 16-22 August 1971, p.69.

(2) "Fernando Arrabal Ruiz, mon père", Entretiens, p.182.

(3) ibid. p.183.

(4) Entretiens, p.23.

(5) "Fernando Arrabal Ruiz mon père", Entretiens, p.183.

happened to his father. It proved insoluble, and Arrabal was left facing various hypotheses:

Maintenant je pense qu'il a été tué par les franquistes, ou qu'il est passé en France, qu'il s'est enrôlé dans la Résistance et qu'il a disparu, ou qu'il a refait sa vie, qu'il ne veut plus rien savoir de l'Espagne ni de sa femme. (1)

Of his own life Arrabal has said "Ma vie est comme cela; d'un bout à l'autre ce ne sont qu'interrogations." (2) Perhaps the foremost of these enigmas is that of the lost father.

Arrabal's relationship with his mother is naturally conditioned to a considerable extent by the father's disappearance. Here too there is ambivalence and confusion. Perhaps because of the terrible cruelty and violence with which Arrabal endows the fictitious mother in Les Deux Bourreaux and Baal Babylone, much criticism of his work has in the past centred on the notion of a desperately unhappy childhood at the hands of a tyrannical mother. But this is not a true picture of his childhood. Bernard Gille was the first to protest:

On ne dit pas assez que son enfance a été heureuse. L'Espagne était un vaste pénitencier où s'entassaient vainqueurs et vaincus. Mais il n'y a pas de grilles qui limitent la liberté d'un enfant. (3)

There are two possible sources of error here. The first is simply a failure to distinguish between the real mother and the fictitious mother of the plays and novel. Arrabal is manifestly embarrassed at portraying an image of his mother on the stage and, as he has observed, (4) the result is often

(1) Entretiens, p.14.

(2) ibid. p.130.

(3) Gille, op.cit. p.7.

(4) Entretiens, p.127.

a grotesque melodramatic figure. He also warns us not to interpret Baal Babylone in too literal a sense, for it is "malgré tout une histoire romancée." (1) It may be of course that this cautionary note is also prompted by a sense of embarrassment and a desire to protect his intimate self: certainly Baal Babylone seems to be a very telling (though not necessarily faithful) reflection of the reality experienced by the author.

The second source of error is the failure to appreciate that Arrabal's relationship with his mother was not static, but that it underwent an abrupt transition after 1949. In his childhood his relationship with his mother appears to have been one of love, trust and devotion. The child's filial affection was directed solely towards his mother. He tells us "Je l'ai aimée comme tous les gosses aiment leur mère, et même un peu plus." (2) Speaking to Alain Schifres he elaborated upon this, saying:

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. Je me plaçais toujours entre les hommes et ma mère. (3)

In Baal Babylone, written in 1959, Arrabal expresses a sense, not of hatred, but of bitterness and profound sorrow at the passing of an undoubtedly happy childhood. This is the sentiment which colours his recollection of simple domestic moments such as his mother's birthday:

(1) *ibid.* p.28.

(2) Théâtre III, p.12.

(3) Entretiens, p.21.

Tes mains étaient blanches et sans rides... Quand nous rentrions mes camarades me voyaient avec toi et, alors, je te prenais par la main. (1)

It is true that this state of affairs was not durable, but as far as one is able to judge it seems that until the adolescent crisis the mutual love between mother and son more than compensated for the father's absence. If Françoise in Les Deux Bourreaux is totally immersed in self-pity, hypocrisy and self-sacrifice, Arrabal himself, speaking in retrospect, reminds us of the factual justification for any such attitude which may have been present to a certain extent in his mother:

Mais il faut connaître l'autre visage de ma mère: cette femme épouse d'un républicain condamné à mort, cette femme sans argent, cette femme devenue petite dactylo dans un bureau de Madrid, cette femme qui ne possédait chez elle que trois livres, s'était mise en tête de nous faire faire des études. En Espagne c'était réservé aux riches. Alors elle tapait à la machine chez nous jusqu'à trois ou quatre heures du matin pour gagner plus d'argent. (2)

The discovery of the hidden articles relating to the father brought in its wake a crisis of disillusionment which was all the more traumatic for having been preceded by such idyll. Here is one of the major sources of confusion in Arrabal's life. Photographs from which the father's image was missing provided a graphic illustration of the assiduousness with which his mother had sought to obliterate her husband's memory. Documents from the prison at Burgos revealed that he had escaped and disappeared, not, as Señora Arrabal had solemnly announced to the family on 22nd. January 1942, that he was dead. Her letters

(1) Baal Babylone, pp.31-2.

(2) Entretiens, pp.16-17.

to her husband in which she criticised him for his "fateful" ideals, urging him to renounce them, bore witness to what might have amounted to mental cruelty. By her complicity with the fascists she is seen as having betrayed her husband as effectively as if she had actually denounced him to the authorities, as does Françoise in Les Deux Bourreaux. Her physical beauty (to which frequent allusion is made in Baal Babylone) and maternal devotion now contrast sharply with her ugly hypocrisy and cruelty towards her husband.

So there are in reality two facets of Arrabal's mother which it has been difficult for him to reconcile. This gives rise to an image prevalent in his theatre of woman both as the initiator of life and destroyer of life. The generative cycle is seen as an eternal process of creation and destruction. Love and death, Eros and Thanatos, are seen as the mutually complementary facets of a single process. In this, Arrabal partakes of one of the mainstreams of Spanish traditions. In La Celestina, one of the great archetypal Spanish love stories, is an image which illustrates these ambivalent but indissociable facets of woman. The author, commenting on a passage from Heraclitus, "Omnia secundum litem fiunt", describes the following life-cycle:

La bívora, reptilia ó serpiente enconada, al tiempo de concebir, por la boca de la hembra metida la cabeça del macho é, quequando preñada, el primer hijo rompe las yjares de la madre, por do todos salen y ella muerta queda y él quasi como vengador de la paterna muerta. (1)

(1) "The viper, reptile or other serpent, at the moment of conception, takes her mate's head in her mouth and, squeezing very gently, kills him; the first-born, at the time of his birth, rips open his mother's flanks, thus avenging the father's death."
- La Celestina, Alianza, Madrid, 1969, pp.40-41.

In his plays Arrabal illustrates just such a cruel generative cycle, for in Les Deux Bourreaux Françoise denounces the father of her children to the police, knowing that he will be killed for his supposed crimes. Many years later, in L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, the Emperor commits matricide in order to escape from the suffocating "womb" in which he has been nurtured and kept from the real world. In a sense it is by this act that Arrabal avenges the death nine years earlier of the father in Les Deux Bourreaux.

Actually the plays in which Arrabal portrays a mother figure can be related to his life in another way. In Les Deux Bourreaux the son Maurice is dominated by his mother and forced into submission as she betrays the father and has him executed in the children's presence. This situation would correspond to the period when Arrabal had discovered his mother's perfidy but continued to live at home under her domination, stifling his protests in self-imposed mutism. In Le Grand Cérémonial the son, Cavanosa, is no longer a child yet he remains largely at the mercy of a possessive and jealous mother. He attempts to kill her but is failed in this venture by his will-power. Ultimately Cavanosa leaves home to start a new life in foreign lands, as did Arrabal in December 1955. In L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie the matricidal act is finally accomplished, with all the symbolic liberation which that implies. The Emperor does not in fact escape from the burden of the past, since he is tried for his crime and executed, but the indication is that by this act of expiation the author has appeased the demon which torments him.

And in fact the mother-son relationship has never to date reappeared in Arrabal's theatre as a major theme.

The first of these plays, written in 1956, clearly derives from a profound and bitter antagonism which formed part of a general revolt. It should be made clear therefore that in his mature years Arrabal has come to see his mother in a more moderate light. Her persistent disavowal of her husband, her refusal to allow her children to associate in any way with their father, are explicable partly in terms of the fear to which a woman in such a position in Nationalist Spain would naturally be subject. Arrabal appreciates this and is now able to offer the following rational explanation of her inexplicable behaviour:

Looking back I think my mother was a victim of Spain. It was the Civil War in my house on every level. My mother was always afraid: she chose Fascism out of fear of authority. (1)

Yet, as he remarked to Alain Schifres, "ces conflits demeurent nébuleux." (2) How can a woman envelop her children in maternal devotion whilst at the same time not only remain insensitive to her husband's suffering but actually (to borrow the metaphor which Arrabal dramatises in Les Deux Bourreaux), rub salt in his wounds?

The disillusionment and mistrust which her behaviour inspired in the young Arrabal are seen to have a marked influence on his portrayal of women, not only mothers, in his theatre. Through woman, man learns both love and cruelty. In La Bicyclette du condamné, for example, Vilorio and Tasla are lovers. They plan to

(1) M. Croyden, "Nothing is forbidden", New York Times, 9.8.70.

(2) Entretiens, p.12.

run away together; they delight in giving each other little presents; Viloro aspires to please her and Tasla, in a gentle and almost maternal way, comforts him for the tortures inflicted upon him. Yet at times Tasla is transformed into a lascivious creature playing erotic games with Viloro's torturers before his very eyes. Sometimes the mutually contradictory facets of womanhood are embodied in not one but two characters. Hence Hieronymous in L'Enterrement de la sardine is initiated to love and knowledge by Altagore and Lis, who oscillate between cruelty and tenderness, repression and liberation. Giafar, the hero of Le Lai de Barabbas is similarly confused and deceived by the mutable nature of the composite character Arlys-Sylda.

Arrabal's younger brother Julio, who is now pursuing a successful career in the Spanish Air Force, did not react to domestic circumstances in the same way. "Mon frère a toujours été très sensible à l'influence de ma mère" says Arrabal. (1) Unlike his brother, Julio accepted the military career for which he was being prepared by his mother. Arrabal suspects that his mother intended that as officers in the Spanish forces her sons would of necessity be diametrically opposed to their father on an ideological plane. "C'est révoltant de le voir parader sur des photos dans ce costume grotesque de militaire franquiste" says Arrabal of his brother (2) because this costume is the very negation of the ideals for which their father died. Even this biographical detail finds expression in his theatre, for in

(1) *ibid.* p.16.

(2) *ibid.*, p.17.

Les Deux Bourreaux the second son, Benoît, is portrayed as a submissive lap-dog completely under his mother's spell, and thus sides with her in helping to crush Maurice's revolt. Even when allowance has been made for the melodramatic distortion which undoubtedly characterises this play, the incident is further evidence of the highly autobiographical nature of Arrabal's inspiration in his early theatre.

His years as a pupil of the Escolapian Fathers appear to have been instrumental in inculcating in him an intense dislike of authority. Arrabal tells how the Fathers maintained strict discipline by corporal punishment, and how on one occasion Julio was punished for some misdemeanour by being locked in a tiny room for four days. (Typically, Arrabal organised his brother's escape, an incident which is recreated in Le Jardin des délices when Lais helps Miharca to escape from her cell). Of the general climate prevailing in the College, Arrabal says tersely, "c'était de l'anti-éducation. Nous étions menés à la baguette." (1)

Strict intellectual repression was practised, and many foreign authors together with all controversial works were banned. Arrabal's literary horizons were therefore strictly limited, being conditioned by an almost exclusive diet of classical or pious Spanish works. This is an important consideration, for it means that Arrabal started his dramatic career not as a man of culture but as a young person embarking upon a venture for which he knew no

(1) Entretiens, p.19.

precedents:

Cuando en 1952 (sic) escribí El Triciclo yo no sabía que existía un escritor llamado Beckett (o Adamov, o Ionesco o Jarry). (1)

His knowledge of the theatre was thus restricted to such classics as Calderón, Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina. As for the rest, he nourished no great admiration for what he read: "Au collège," he says, "la grande littérature espagnole m'emmerdait." (2). This does not necessarily imply that his own writing was conceived as a reaction against what had been proposed to him in the name of literature. His own compositions represented something far more personal: "Ce que j'écrivais, d'ailleurs, n'avait aucun rapport avec la 'littérature'." (3)

During the period 1952-1955 he undertook to enlarge his literary knowledge by clandestine readings in the Ateneo in Madrid. Here the discovery of Kafka, Camus and Dostoievsky came as a revelation to him, as did, in 1955, his first contact with the theatre of Beckett and Ionesco:

Ce fut pour moi une énorme surprise, comparable à ce qui s'était passé avec Kafka. Je me suis dit: voici un langage libre et exaltant qui est accepté! Ma liberté sera reconnue un jour! Cette confiance m'a permis de pousser encore plus loin mes expériences et de me laisser envoûter toujours davantage par le théâtre. (4)

The repression in all sexual matters to which Arrabal was subject can also be seen to have had an influence on his thought

(1) "When I wrote Le Tricycle in 1952 I was not aware of the existence of a writer called Beckett (or Adamov, or Ionesco or Jarry". - Teatro, Taurus, Madrid, 1965, p.40.

(2) Entretiens, p.31.

(3) ibid. pp.18-19.

(4) ibid. p.35.

and work, not only in aggravating his hatred of authority but also in conditioning his concepts of love, sexuality and eroticism. In this, as in other ways, Arrabal may be thought to be very much a product of his native Spain. Xavier Domingo argues that the popular myth attributing the downfall of Christian Spain under the Moslem onslaught in the eighth century to licentiousness and promiscuity, symbolised by the sexual crimes of King Rodrigo, has engendered a deeply-ingrained conviction in the Spanish mentality that sex and godliness are mutually exclusive. Hence:

L'Espagne est donc un pays susceptible d'être profondément souillé par le sexe, et tout ce qui au sexe se réfère y revêt une gravité exceptionnelle. (1)

Whatever the merits of this ingenious argument, the situation which it purports to explain is real enough. Arrabal tells of the dreadful ignorance to which as a youth in Spain he was condemned. To talk about sexual matters between friends was deemed sinful. "Toute autosatisfaction", he says, "se transformait en un combat entre le supplice du péché et l'exaltation des sens." (2) The Church naturally played a fundamental rôle in this respect, not least through the condemnation in the confessional of the indulgence of the senses. Arrabal still possesses his cilice, a childhood souvenir of the agonising struggle between his natural adolescent desires and the dictates of the Church.

But in the very mortification of the flesh there is a strange kind of eroticism. Arrabal tells how he learnt from orthodox Catholic teaching, at an early age, the mystical relationship

(1) Xavier Domingo, Erotique de l'Espagne, Pauvert, Paris, 1967, p.35.

(2) Entretiens, p.25.

between suffering and ecstasy:

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 ses entrailles avec une épée de feu... Tout se déroulait dans la douleur. (1)

But when physical suffering is used as a form of expiation for the "sin" of sensual pleasure there is a confusion of purpose. In Viva la Muerte the boy Fando experiences sexual impulses inspired by the sight of his aunt who is flaunting herself in a deliberately provocative and sensual manner. He recalls his confessor's injunction and punishes himself by fastening the cilice on his upper thigh. But this instrument of mortification for the flesh is itself an erotic stimulant. And the excitement it provokes is the source of an intense sense of guilt. In its teaching and practice, therefore, the Church succeeds in elevating precisely those functions which it would seek to obliterate, and at the same time, by a strange paradox, reinforces the cycle of guilt. Xavier Domingo concludes by saying, not without justification, that "élevé dans cette atmosphère de bigoterie inquisitoriale, l'Espagnol est, sexuellement, un névrosé." (2) For Arrabal the association between indulgence of the senses and guilt has become irrevocable:

Pour moi il paraît évident qu'une grande jouissance physique apporte le malheur... J'ai été élevé de telle sorte que j'ai cru longtemps que ma tuberculose était née de mes habitudes d'auto-érotisme. (3)

In this context reference should also be made to Arrabal's

(1) *ibid.* p.30.

(2) Domingo, *op.cit.*, p.243.

(3) Entretiens, p.120.

aunt, who appears to have played a formative rôle in his youth. The aunt emerges clearly as a major figure in Baal Babylone and in the film Viva la Muerte, introducing the boy to certain aspects of eroticism and masochism. But Arrabal speaks rarely of his aunt and the real person remains nebulous. Apparently his mother and aunt had a sister who suffered from a severe mental disorder and who was kept sequestered in the family home, from which Arrabal concludes:

Je crois que cette réclusion a provoqué une situation névrotique dans ma famille, qui explique le caractère de ma mère. Et surtout celui de ma tante: elle arborait un catholicisme extrémiste et abérrant. En même temps, quand j'ouvrais une porte de la maison, je la trouvais souvent nue alors qu'elle savait que j'allais ouvrir cette porte. (1)

Arrabal continues by saying that the real rôle played by his aunt was not one of initiation, as in the novel and film, but rather one of "refoulement", by which one understands that she would be responsible for provoking suppressed desires in the boy through her calculatedly erotic postures. For, as Arrabal says elsewhere, "mon éducation sexuelle fut totalement autodidacte et intériorisée." (2)

The syndrome of pleasure and guilt within a repressive system was not confined only to sexual matters. "Dans mon enfance" he says, "tout était péché." (3) All his attempts to escape from his condition of blind ignorance were liable to punishment. When he

(1) Entretiens, p.28.

(2) ibid. p.26.

(3) Théâtre I, introduction, p.11.

tuned his radio to the B.B.C. it was in defiance of a formal interdiction by his mother. To speak of one's father, to entertain notions of democracy, were crimes. Quite apart from the desire for liberty which is fundamental to Arrabal's personality, one of the consequences of this atmosphere has been an almost paralysing burden of guilt, which is understandably conferred in turn upon the characters he creates. "Je me demande jusqu'à quel point le monde du péché ne me poursuit pas toujours" said Arrabal as late as 1967. (1)

The themes of guilt and innocence assume great importance in his work, especially in the early theatre where it can be seen that intellectually Arrabal has come to reject the concepts of guilt and innocence as absolute values, considering them both arbitrary and repressive. Yet it remains clear that he is unable to divest himself of the personal sense of guilt which haunts him and is perhaps experienced intuitively rather than intellectually. His characters, like Etienne in Le Labyrinthe, are pursued by some monumental guilt as if by furies, which is all the more terrifying for not being attached to any known cause. Of what is Etienne guilty? and by whose standards? One does not know, nor does Etienne, yet he must pay for it with his life. By comparison, the Emperor in L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie is in a relatively enviable situation because his guilt can be attributed to a single specified action. Like Etienne he is pursued by his past, but unlike the earlier arrabalian

(1) *ibid.*

heroes who were condemned to suffer in ignorance of their faults, he is able to purge his crime by means of confession and expiation.

Another source of confusion is Arrabal's relationship with religion. As a child, he says, "j'étais extrêmement croyant." (1) He was subjected to a strict catholic upbringing at home, with his mother and aunt, and at school with the Escolapian Fathers. The rupture in 1949 was accompanied by a revolt against this catholic education - which Arrabal qualifies as a "lavage de cerveau" (2) - but it nevertheless continues to mark him:

Je ne crois plus en cette religion qu'on m'a enseigné par des méthodes inquisitoriales, mais je suis toujours hanté par l'idée de Dieu. J'abhorre pourtant ce Dieu au nom duquel on m'a lavé le cerveau. (3)

This explains the dual tendency in his work towards blasphemy and anti-clericalism, two attitudes which, far from becoming attenuated with time, actually assume progressively more importance. Arrabal is not destined for the easy conscience of one who has adopted the intellectual position of atheism; far more characteristic is the expression of André Breton which Arrabal puts in the mouth of the Emperor: "Tout ce qu'il y a d'atroce, de nauséabond, de fétide, de vulgaire, se trouve résumé en un mot: Dieu." (4)

In fact it is not possible to appreciate Arrabal's attitude

(1) Entretiens, p.21.

(2) F. Espinasse, "Entretien avec Arrabal", Plexus, December 1968, pp.102-119.

(3) Entretiens, p.22.

(4) Théâtre V, p.138.

towards religion except in relation to his parents. Throughout his work one perceives a general tendency towards contamination between his family's domestic circumstances and other broader considerations. This is not surprising if one remembers, as Arrabal himself is quick to point out, that the family drama which he witnessed as a child was an enactment on a personal level of the national conflict of 1936. Fernando Arrabal Ruiz was an atheist and a republican; Señora Arrabal was a devout Catholic and an upholder of conventional social, moral and political values. When, in 1949, Fernando Arrabal revolted against his religious upbringing, this was certainly a reaction against the excessively strict orthodoxy which he had experienced. But one might suspect too that the influence of the lost father was an equally important factor. Just as Arrabal associates the image of his father with the ideals of liberty and tolerance, so too he associates his mother with the orthodox values of Church and State, now conceived as being essentially repressive. Hence in his theatre there is frequently a certain confusion between the mother figure and other "maternal" institutions such as the Church and the State. This is apparent in Les Deux Bourreaux, where the mother betrays the father for his revolt against the State. And in La Pierre de la folie the narrator describes the following incident which demonstrates the conspiracy between the mother and the Church:

Le curé est venu voir ma mère, et il lui a dit que j'étais 'obsédé'; alors ma mère m'a attaché aux barreaux du lit. Le curé avec un bistouri m'a coupé les testicules et à leur place il m'a mis deux pierres. Puis ils m'ont porté, pieds et poings liés, jusqu'à l'église des dévots. (1)

Like the mother of Les Deux Bourreaux who disarms her son in his incipient revolt, the mother here is truly the "madre castradora, portavoz de la hipocresía y de lo convencional" of which Alex Prullansky has written. (2) Again, in the film Viva la Muerte a shot of the mother ascending the altar steps, a guerilla knife grasped in her jaws, followed by a shot of the priest at the altar distributing rifles and blessing those who receive them, demonstrates the complicity between mother and Church and between Church and police state, all of which fuse into a composite image of an emasculating and repressive force.

It is also in Arrabal's youth that one must look for the source of his concept of death and the prominent position which it occupies in his work. As a child in Spain during the Civil War he was surrounded by violence and death, not only that of his father. Hugh Thomas recounts the ferocious brutality which menaced those in the Nationalist sector who were not of right-wing persuasion and explains how the atrocities committed were intended to secure the fascists' grip:

Not only did the rebels feel compelled to act with extraordinary ruthlessness towards their enemies, but also they had to act openly, and expose the bodies of those whom they killed to public gaze. (3)

(1) La Pierre de la folie, p.99.

(2) In: Arrabal, Teatro, Taurus, Madrid, 1965, p.24.

(3) H. Thomas, op.cit., p.166.

One recalls too that in Spain generally death and violence are less subject to the taboos which prevail in the Anglo-American civilisations, and to some extent in northern Europe; the corrida is evidence of this.

The early plays written in Madrid already bear witness to a special concern with death. The violent death of the principal characters is the final term for both of his first two plays. Arrabal's illness in 1956-1957, particularly the period of his stay at Suresnes, coincides with a veritable obsession with the theme of death, the importance of which tends to subside somewhat in later years. In fact unnatural death for one or more of the characters is the condition of twelve out of the thirteen plays with human characters in the first period. (1)

These aspects of Arrabal's early life find expression in his theatre in a variety of ways. Most obviously there are the cases where particular incidents and details are used as specific material for the action of a play. Secondly there are occasions where the thematic inspiration derives from his lived experience: as for example the ambivalence of the female characters which he portrays, which is conveyed through fiction but nevertheless has a basis in reality. And thirdly one can postulate with reasonable confidence an intimate relationship between his life and the hidden motivating causes which prompt him to seek self-expression in the theatre. The following section on the creative

(1) That is, all except Concert dans un oeuf.

process attempts to expose this intimate relationship between the author and his theatre.

Of the various facts and speculations regarding Arrabal's early life, two things above all seem characteristic. The first is how the enigmatic loss of his father, the hypocrisy and ambivalence of his mother, imposed ignorance, the ambiguous nature of sex in relation to the Church, the undermining of so-called universal values, how all these combine to engender an overall impression of confusion. The loss of his father, a traumatic event in itself, and his replacement by the mother, is followed thirteen years later by the discovery of her perfidy. The apparently secure values on which life was founded are discredited. Arrabal's heritage is a profound sense of the fundamental ambiguity of life. This confusion is accompanied by a need for clarity, truth, understanding and order, the need to recreate the security of a stable world.

On the other hand Arrabal has spoken of his youth "qui s'est écoulée au sein d'une société régie par la tyrannie" (1) and one can see how the generally inquisitorial suppression of liberties provokes a questioning and rejection of established values, a hatred of authority, and the concomitant need for freedom.

How can the conflict between these two apparently contradictory forces, (the need for order and security, the need for freedom), be resolved? The first stage in the movement towards equilibrium is a period of introversion during which the theatre serves as focal point of the author's experience, past and present. Arrabal's

(1) Entretiens, p.36.

theatre is an attempt to materialise, to expose, and ultimately to appease the contradictory desires, needs and impulses to which he is prey.

CHAPTER TWO

THEATRE OF INTROVERSION, 1952 - 1958

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(1) The creative process

In his first published interview with Geneviève Serreau in 1958, when questioned about the meaning of his plays (as opposed to their structure) Arrabal said:

Je ne comprends pas ce que j'écris. Je pars dans une histoire comme si on me poussait par derrière, et que je file sur l'eau dans une barque. Et je me sens heureux. Je ne souffre pas du tout quand j'écris. Au contraire, je me sens bien, je voyage dans la barque et tout s'ordonne et s'arrange devant moi. (1)

Thus Arrabal says quite explicitly that writing is not for him a predominantly purposive activity, but that the creative process is largely a function of the subconscious mind. He has continued to reiterate this notion in later statements regarding his writing. In 1965 for example he said "J'écris sous la dictée"⁽²⁾ and in 1969 "cela se met en branle, cela m'échappe." (3)

This would suggest that an examination of his theatre might well commence with some consideration of the psychological basis and mechanisms of the creative process. Such a procedure is clearly not without its difficulties and the conclusions drawn can never be more than speculative. In the first place it is

(1) Serreau, "Arrabal: Quand le jeu devient sérieux", France-Observateur, 20.11.58.

(2) M. Bouyer, "Entretien avec Arrabal", Les Langues modernes, March-April 1965.

(3) Entretiens, p.105.

not clear what relationship there might be between the author as an object of biographical research and the author as he appears in (or behind) his works; as has been said of Proust:

It is useless to look to the writer's life for an explanation of what is in his books, for the conditions in which he writes these books allow him the freedom to express desires, fears, and interests that are not at all or feebly and confusedly expressed elsewhere in his life. (1)

In the second place, the psychological processes which impel any artist to creativity have never been properly explained. Arrabal himself having said that he does not know exactly why he writes, it is hardly given to the critic to enlighten him, and no such end is envisaged here. The purpose of this section is a modest effort to throw some light on the secret relationship between the author and his work in the belief that this will help to give a more complete picture of the "phénomène arrabal".

It has been seen that in his early life Arrabal was haunted by the spectre of the imminence of death which, following the example of his father's fate, is conceived as an absence, a void. Particularly during the period of his illness, the threat of extinction looms large in Arrabal's mind. This obsession with death finds expression in the prominent position which suicide and violent death occupy in his theatre. Various things, however, can be brought to bear in an effort to combat this menace. One such antidote is sexual activity, which by its violent intensity and procreative function is diametrically opposed to the notion

(1) Leo Bersani, Marcel Proust, Oxford University Press, 1965, p.15.

of death. If one accepts that in sexual activity the vital life-force finds its most complete expression, then one might suppose that in the exploitation of sex in his imaginary universe Arrabal can find a powerful antidote to the omnipresent threat of death. This supposition is confirmed by Arrabal when he declares "My plays exalt me like the exaltation of orgasm." (1) The creative act of writing is therefore like the procreative act in its transcendent physical intensity.

Arrabal's likening of writing to sexual fulfillment is doubly informative. Not only does it suggest an analogy for the exhilaration that writing procures for the author, but it also suggests that the creative process might in some way function as a source of experience or enjoyment which everyday reality cannot provide. He continues: "I write plays in order to live more intensely." (2) That is, in his writing, Arrabal is able to enact fantasies and desires which cannot be realised in the normal course of existence:

J'écris pour pleurer, pour rire, pour me masturber, pour vivre des aventures ou des expériences que je ne connais pas dans la réalité. (3)

Writing therefore serves a liberating role for the author, in which suppressed desires and fears may be exorcised. It seems for example that he is able to divest himself of the burdensome guilt which follows him from the past by transferring it onto

(1) Margaret Croyden, "Nothing is forbidden", New York Times, 9.8.70.

(2) ibid.

(3) Michel Thuysinier, "Arrabal: Pour un théâtre de cérémonie", Pas à pas, March 1968, p.23.

the characters he creates in his own image. This is surely one important aspect of the process to which Arrabal was alluding when he said: "Mon stylo me délivre de mes poisons." (1)

The picture drawn in Chapter One of the adolescent Arrabal showed him to be a supremely lonely figure. Alienated in a society which he believed was hostile towards him, out on a limb within his ruptured family, Arrabal was indeed a solitary person. His posture of revolt, the monumental disillusionment felt towards his mother, the silence in which he immured himself, made him a stranger in the family, who responded by tormenting him:

Ils se moquaient de moi, ils me provoquaient. Comme ils savaient que j'écrivais, ils me narguaient: "Ah Fernandito! El poeta!" pour que je réagisse, mais je restais impassible, malgré ma rage intérieure. (2)

His physique was also a source of anguish, for he saw himself as a grotesque dwarf emitting an obnoxious odour. He believed that he was the victim of a conspiracy: "Tout le monde riait de moi, du moins je le croyais." (3) As Bernard Gille has observed, "Arrabal est déjà en exil bien avant de quitter l'Espagne, peregrino en su patria (étranger dans sa patrie), comme disait Lope de Vega." (4) Arrabal's theatre, especially his early plays, is peopled with social outcasts or men who have been rejected on a personal level: sometimes, as in Le Tricycle or Fando et Lis, the hero is simply rejected; sometimes, as in Le Labyrinthe or La Bicyclette du condamné, he is actively persecuted, and there seems little doubt that the isolation of his heroes is a dramatic projection

(1) André Rivollet, "Arrabal", Aux Ecoutes, 20-26 December 1967.

(2) Entretiens, p.16.

(3) ibid. p.26.

(4) Gille, op.cit., p.10.

of the author's own solitude. So here perhaps is another of the "poisons" which Arrabal seeks to eradicate through his theatre.

If the substance of his theatre is the fantasies and obsessions emanating from the author's subconscious mind, it follows that the theatre will be to some extent a mirror reflecting his inner being, revealing to him in all their intensity the hitherto unseen forces and potentialities within him. Hence:

"I identify with all my characters. I see myself as a reflection." (1)

By recreating his obsessions, by reliving certain episodes of his life and by incarnating facets of his own personality, Arrabal's theatre serves to clarify his troubled existence by objectifying it. For this is the peculiar property of a mirror, that the image it reflects is at one and the same time the Self (with which one identifies intimately) and something exterior to the Self, an objectified image of the Self. This would suggest that the theatre might also function for Arrabal as an instrument of self-exploration, and it will be seen how, later, Arrabal himself comes to a conscious appreciation of this potential of the theatre to confer self-knowledge.

These various factors no doubt go some way towards explaining the satisfaction which Arrabal feels in writing. None of them, however, necessarily explains why it should be in the theatre that Arrabal seeks to express himself. The drama is not the only artistic field explored by Arrabal but it is certainly his preferred medium, and for most of the 1950's virtually his sole source of consolation and refuge. What are the special qualities

(1) Croyden, op.cit.

which make the theatre so privileged for Arrabal?

Surprisingly (in view of the solitude in which Arrabal lived and worked) it seems that the theatre's attraction originally had little or nothing to do with its potential as a means of communication. His early plays are eminently private rather than public gestures. If we are to believe Arrabal, these plays were the secretive explorations of the intimate fantasies of a timid emigrant who had no thoughts of ever seeing them staged. One of the salient features of all Arrabal's comments in the 1950's regarding his theatre is that they are concerned exclusively with his own relationship with his theatre and in no case does he seem to envisage the theatrical public. (Later statements still deal with this fundamental question but are complemented by other ideas concerning the role of the theatre in relation to his public). Arrabal even seeks to deny any thematic repercussions of his work, for he said to Geneviève Serreau, "Je ne voudrais être jugé sur aucun autre critère que les critères artistiques. Ni éthique, ni politique, ni social." (1) This fact seems to confirm us in our supposition that for Arrabal, (though not necessarily for us), theatre in the first creative period functions primarily, almost exclusively, in relation to the author himself.

On the other hand, those who know Arrabal will realise that the theatrical medium corresponds to a certain facet of his personality . Arrabal is a man who seeks to conceal his timidity behind a larger-than-life façade of grandiose gestures and rhetorical declamation. In private life, in conversation, he is

(1) "Arrabal: Quand le jeu devient sérieux", France-Observateur, 20.11.58.

given at times to express/himself histrionically. In short, he ^{king} has tendencies towards self-dramatisation, a propensity which is also reflected in his paintings and in photographs of himself. His heroes often possess this trait: Jérôme and Vincent, for example, (Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné), and the Emperor of Assyria, are people who create themselves by acting a rôle.

But apart from its obvious "theatrical" properties, there is another aspect of the theatre which seems to have a very special significance for Arrabal. It was suggested above that in his plays Arrabal saw a reflection of his inner self. One should however qualify this by pointing out that the theatre is not simply a faithful mirror reflecting the author's inner turmoil or confusion exactly as it exists in the subconscious. How could it be, since the substance of his plays, in taking concrete form, necessarily passes from one state to another? The abstract or fluid sensations take on a fixed form as they are moulded into the theatre. For here another aspect of the creative process intervenes:

Au départ il y a cette idée, dictée par mon inconscient. Et progressivement l'histoire s'étoffe, se développe, se construit. Je lui donne une progression dramatique, un "suspense", un rythme, j'y introduis des répétitions à certains endroits, des recommencements. Quand tout est achevé, c'est une pièce. (1)

Thus the theatre does not recreate the confusion of the author's experiences, obsessions or fantasies: they are ordered. And here perhaps is one explanation of why it is that the author chooses

(1) Entretiens, p.94.

to express himself in the dramatic idiom.

It has been suggested that the confused experiences of Arrabal's youth combined to produce two fundamental and at first sight contradictory forces within him, one tending towards order and security, the other tending towards the equally imperative need for liberty. These forces are at the roots of all his work and correspond in a precise manner to the processes of his artistic creation.

Arrabal's insistence upon the primacy of structure is borne out by analysis of his plays. One of the inescapable properties of all plays is of course that they are structured, but in Arrabal's case there is often a peculiar formalism of structure manifesting itself in the two-pronged search for symmetry and balance. What this means, given the source and nature of his inspiration, is that his works establish a dialectic between confusion, or freedom of the imagination, and order.

This dialectic can be seen in various forms. It is at its most obvious in the abstract plays Orchestration théâtrale and Les Quatre Cubes where, as in a game of chess, interest centres on the relative positions of certain elements arranged in complicated formal patterns. In fact Arrabal's procedure here is not really so far removed from that of his other more conventional plays - it is simply that the constituent elements are different. If one replaces the abstract figures with characters, the similarity of the compositional techniques becomes evident. Le Labyrinthe, for example, is the dramatic projection of a wild and nightmarish fantasy, yet it possesses a hermetic

structure. The central image is itself an example of a structure which, although complex and confusing, is nevertheless finite and even comprehensible in its totality... providing one has the key. The action is punctuated by periodic returns to a fixed point and the overall construction is cyclic since at the end of the play the action starts to repeat itself from the beginning again.

The periodic return, imposing a cyclical rhythm within the play, is a common feature of many of Arrabal's plays. In Le Tricycle, Fando et Lis and La Bicyclette du condamné it is effected by means of a vehicle of some sort, and in Le cimetière des voitures the constant coming and going of the athletes Lasca and TioSSido impose a similar rhythm. In all these plays, the periodic return to a fixed point has a marked ordering effect, preventing the action from proliferating into the uncontrollable anarchy which the plays' nightmarish substance might otherwise generate.

Balance is fundamental to Arrabal's dramatic structures. In broad terms it can be felt in the overall shape of a play such as Fando et Lis, which is composed of three units. Two of these are composite: the first consists of Fando and Lis, the second of Namur, Mitaro and Toso, the third of Tar which exerts its irresistible attraction on the five travellers. Much could be said of the significance of these units, presenting as they do the appearance of closed and virtually impenetrable circles, and the relation they might have to Arrabal's alienation complex; for the moment, however, the point to be made is that this triangular schema, which is also found in Le Cimetière des voitures, is an essentially stable structure.

The concern for simplicity and formal pattern is particularly noticeable in the dialogue of Arrabal's early plays. Again taking Fando et Lis as an example, Arrabal has said of this play:

A une certaine époque je pensais que je ne devais écrire qu'avec deux cents mots, que c'était une concession ridicule d'en employer plus... Je n'avais pas de position théorique à l'époque, mais je ressentais une grande exaltation à l'idée que, si je n'employais que trois cents mots, je me plaçais volontairement au niveau de tout le monde. Il y a un exemple typique dans Fando et Lis, quand Fando annonce qu'il va composer une chanson très belle et qu'il ne trouve rien d'autre que ceci: "La plume est dans le lit et le lit est dans la plume". Il répète les mots. Je crois que la règle du jeu de la littérature est très simple. Je ne pensais pas à l'écriture combinatoire à l'époque. J'avais simplement horreur du pédantisme, du jargon. (1)

Arrabal's attitude here is not only an expression of his revolt against an elitist concept of literary theatre. In addition, perhaps unconsciously, the voluntary imposition of these strict limitations is concordant with his tendency towards the patterned structuring of elements. In this case it produces one of his most characteristic types of rhythm within the dialogue: the short-interval repetition. This is a distinctive trade-mark of Arrabal's early writing; in Oraison and La Bicyclette du condamné it is very much in evidence. The technique consists of short speeches in which each speaker retains a key word from the preceding speech and echoes it himself. For example:

FANDO - Mais tu trouves des solutions à tout.
LIS - Non, je ne trouve jamais de solutions; ce qui se passe c'est que je mens en disant que j'ai trouvé.
FANDO - Mais ce n'est plus du jeu.
LIS - Je sais que ce n'est plus du jeu. Mais comme on ne me demande jamais rien, c'est la même chose. Et puis, ça fait très joli.
FANDO - Oui, c'est vrai, ça fait très joli. Mais si quelqu'un te demande quelque chose?
LIS - Il n'y a pas de danger. Personne ne demande rien. (2)

(1) Entretiens, p.163.

(2) Théâtre I, pp.66-67. (My italics)

In later years, as will be seen in Chapter Three, Arrabal formulated his own dramatic theory. Without wishing to anticipate too much the findings of that chapter, it might be said here that his dramatic theory draws upon modern mathematics, in particular "la théorie des ensembles" (set theory), to give a procedure which Arrabal defines thus:

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. (1)

In fact, such a system of interacting units is already present in many of the early plays, such as Fando et Lis. Here the similarity ends, for the "fête démesurée" to which Arrabal hopes his panique theory will give rise is certainly not foreshadowed in this early play. In Fando et Lis there is no elaborate or baroque superstructure but a pure form from which all extraneous material has been rigourously excluded. Nevertheless, the two polarities - "un univers complètement fou" (Arrabal's imagination), and the artistic ordering of disparate elements to create "un monde très précis" - are already essential elements of his creative process, however unconscious this may be. Already, therefore, in his early plays Arrabal is finding in his theatre the balance necessary to his personality between the essential margin of liberty and the discipline which will create order out of confusion.

It should also be observed that the plays of this period are

(1) Entretiens, p.143.

characterised by great spontaneity and vitality, which will be attenuated somewhat when his theatre assumes a didactic role, as it does in some plays of the panique period. But with his first plays, as his comments on the creative process demonstrate, his engagement in the act of writing has the compulsion of a totally unpremeditated adventure. He describes with relish the moment at the start of the day when he sits at his desk and feeds the blank sheet of paper into his typewriter, not knowing what he is about to create:

Quand j'écrivais Le Cimetière par exemple, je m'exaltais beaucoup car je ne savais pas chaque jour ce qui allait arriver le lendemain à mes personnages. J'écrivais comme on lit un feuilleton. (1)

Writing with no preconceptions Arrabal is as it were carried along in the current of what his inspiration dictates, fascinated by the creations of his imagination which, as has been observed, "ne connaît pas les bienséances." Thus, again, in the act of writing Arrabal discovers freedom.

But it is also an immature theatre. However one conceives of the theatre, whether as a bi-partite phenomenon between two sociologically defined groups of participants, or as a tri-partite experience comprising three primary elements, (author - actors - public), the theatrical experience is first and foremost collective and communicative. Some critics would go so far as to say that a script not destined for public performance is still-born. Arrabal on the other hand is concerned predominantly with his theatre as a personal experience, and even as late as

(1) Entretiens, p.105.

1969 he remarked to Alain Schifres:

Mon oeuvre, comme toutes les oeuvres, sera nécessairement un document sur notre époque. Pour ce qu'elle comporte d'autobiographie et, inévitablement, de témoignage. Mais ce document me sera extérieur. (1)

This explains why, in his early theatre, the audience tend to be present somewhat as voyeurs, witnessing what is a projection of the most intimate fantasies of the author's subconscious, whose conscious attention is directed solely to the plays as problematic structural entities. Hence these early works, derived from, composed of, and returning to the author's innermost personal pre-occupations, truly constitute a theatre of introversion.

(1) *ibid.* p.96.

(ii) Le Tricycle

Discounting Pique-nique en campagne for reasons already explained, Le Tricycle represents the first exploration of what was to become Arrabal's dramatic universe. At first sight it appears to be a familiar world:

L'action est située sur les berges d'un fleuve dans une grande ville. Quais avec anneaux. Chaussée d'environ 10m. de large. Jardin au fond, séparé de la chaussée par un petit mur de clôture. Un banc de pierre court tout au long. (1)

However, despite the apparent climate of realism afforded by the location, and which the author was soon to abandon, the spectator is quickly introduced into Arrabal's decidedly anti-realistic imaginative universe. The tricycle, too, decorated with scenes from Alice in Wonderland, seems at first to confirm the realism of the location, but in fact these very illustrations serve to inform us that we are entering an alternative universe of dreams and imagination. This suspicion is very soon confirmed when Climando's complaint that his arms are tired provokes the following typical dialogue of chop-logic and non sequiturs:

LE VIEUX - Ça doit venir des espadrilles. Il m'arrive presque la même chose, à force de jouer de la flûte les genoux me font mal.
CLIMANDO - Ça doit venir de votre chapeau. Il m'arrive presque la même chose, à force de jeûner les ongles me font mal.
LE VIEUX (très fâché) - Ça doit venir de l'eau que tu bois à la fontaine. Il m'arrive presque la même chose, à force de porter des pantalons, les sourcils me font mal... (2)

(1) Théâtre II, p.104.

(2) ibid. pp.107-8.

In fact, throughout this play Arrabal barely maintains an uneasy balance between the conflicting elements of realism and what is at times virtually a surrealist language.

We have had occasion to mention Arrabal's ironic sense of humour as revealed by the incident in 1953 when, instead of signing his name on the company pay-roll he inscribed "Quelle misère!" Le Tricycle, written in the same year, is a dramatic projection of the same ironic spirit of grim humour contained in those two words.

Arrabal's characters are abject beings, but the work's social or political implications are slight. Misery is for the most part situated on a higher, metaphysical plane where social attitudes must be discounted as being largely irrelevant. The play is infused with a deep sense of what Unamuno described as "el sentimiento trágico de la vida" (1), or again, in terms of traditional beckettian criticism, "le malheur d'exister." With reference to this metaphysical aspect, it is not without relevance that an early typescript of the play was bound together with Fando et Lis and Les Deux Bourreaux to form a trilogy which Arrabal called Por qué nos has abandonado? and described as a "tragedia mística." His characters exist in a kind of limbo, they have been "abandoned". It is not ^{that} they have rejected God, (indeed Oraison is concerned precisely with the search for goodness in religion and the futility of this quest), but rather that they have been rejected by Him. Their deist nostalgia is reduced to the barest elements of a christian cosmology: a

(1) Unamuno, El Sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y los pueblos, Madrid, 1913.

heaven where "ce sera du joli" (1) - "s'il existe" - and a hell where Mita will go if she tells lies. (2) Given existence, but devoid of spiritual life, they have been abandoned by their creator to wander in abject misery in a hostile universe, "killing time until time kills them".

Rejected by an uncaring Maker, they are also rejected, indeed positively persecuted, by human society. Deprived of the benefits of integration into a protective society, they are nevertheless trapped in its very basic vicious circle of having to work in order to pay the rental charges for the tricycle which they need to earn their living. Should they fail to keep up with the payments the consequences will be dire. Not only will they be cold and starving (which they already are) but worse: they will be thrown into jail. These déshérités have apparently spent their lives under the threat of persecution, for Climando imagines a "system" which will prevent them from being pursued, and he adds: "Comme ça, nous n'aurons plus à fuir d'un endroit à un autre, comme maintenant." (3)

The reader might infer from the terms of these comments that the play is a work of social criticism, but Arrabal himself had no such intentions in writing Le Tricycle, nor indeed does the play convey such an impression. The social or political implications of Le Tricycle are minimal because society is presented within the play not as a mirror of any real society but as an image of a poetic order whose function is to illustrate and underline the misery

(1) Théâtre II, p.162.

(2) ibid. p.163.

(3) ibid. p.110.

of the protagonists. (In any case one speaks of "society" in this play for want of a better word to indicate "the others", whose nature remains exceptionally nebulous). Climando, Mita, Apal and Le Vieux are alienated, not only in social terms but in cosmic terms too. The way in which this theme relates to Arrabal's own life is clear enough if one recalls that Le Tricycle was written not long after the author's rupture with his mother, when still sequestered in his self-imposed silence. Arrabal is undoubtedly profoundly lonely and unhappy and, as Bernard Gille points out, "ses pièces, jusqu'en 1958, sont le fruit de la solitude." (1) What Arrabal expresses in this play is the profound abjection of being an outcast and it is in these terms that one should view the image of society and the heroes' relationship with it.

It is ⁱⁿ Le Tricycle that Arrabal first evokes the mysterious society which for several years remains a constant feature of his dramatic imagery. Society is just offstage, but it nevertheless does not fail to exert its pernicious influence upon the arrabalian heroes, to their chagrin. Society is remote, inaccessible and alienating, its agents of retribution constantly poised ready to spring into action whenever a misdemeanour is announced, be it the murder of a rich man or, as in Le Cimetière des voitures and La Bicyclette du condamné, the playing of a musical instrument. The entry in order of rank of the policemen demonstrates the hierarchical nature of society. To its victims, this repressive

(1) Gille, op.cit., p.10.

society's wrath is always unpredictable and inexplicable, since it functions according to a system of values which the arrabalian hero does not understand. Hence, when told that the police are hunting him, Climando tries in vain to recall some punishable offence he may have committed: perhaps, he reasons, they are going to arrest him for having "cheated" when arguing with the Old Man. When told why the police are pursuing him, he is still unable to grasp the justice of their motivation: "Et puis on l'a tué sans malice" he protests, "mais il voulait se suicider... Mais c'était la première fois... Apal, nous sommes bons, nous ne voulons pas aller à la guerre... Nous ne marchons pas non plus sur les pelouses." (1) And finally, when it has been explained to him that he and Apal are to be executed in punishment for the murder of a rich man, his inability to appreciate why society should wish to execute them both when they have only killed one person, demonstrates again that the concept of moral wrong-doing and associative guilt (as opposed to the social mechanism of retribution) is fundamentally alien to him.

For here is one of the basic characteristics of the early arrabalian hero: he is essentially amoral. Climando's destruction is caused by his involvement in a conflict between his natural amorality and the mores of society, values which remain external to him. His behavioural norms are primitive and instinctive, never conditioned by "artificial" moral directives. Encountering a man with a fat wallet, and happening to require money for their immediate needs, it seems natural to Arrabal's heroes to take it from the other

(1) Théâtre II, p.145.

man. All that is in question is the means of achieving this end, for when Apal suggests that they kill the rich man, Climando's only reservation is the practical observation that "C'est une façon très longue de voler." (1) But, argues Mita,

C'est la seule façon pour que personne ne le sache. Si on ne le tue pas, il ira tout de suite demander au juge de nous enfermer, et, comme il a sûrement d'autres billets chez lui, il pourra faire ce qu'il voudra. (2)

Thus killing the man presents itself to them quite simply as an expedient having no inherent merit or demerit except insofar as it will enable them to accomplish their immediate objective.

Certainly no moral value is attached to the action.

This has the effect of showing the characters in an exceptionally naive and innocent light. It is this aspect above all that has prompted critics to describe the arrabalian heroes as children. The antagonism between the protagonists and the others, society, evokes the dichotomy between the adult world and the amoral world of children who have not yet assimilated the complicated system of moral values (postulated here as being arbitrary and devoid of any absolute justification) of their elders. In Le Tricycle this is a source of a dark kind of humour which springs from the ridiculous disproportion between the characters' casual naivety and the enormity of their actions considered ethically.

How is it that these characters have reached physical maturity and yet remain amoral and so apparently ignorant of the values which regulate society? One reason is that they are virtually devoid of the faculty of memory. The effect is again decidedly

(1) *ibid.* p.128.

(2) *ibid.*

comic in a gruesome way. When asked how she is going to commit suicide Mita cannot remember. (1) A few moments later she has even forgotten that she is going to kill herself. (2) They forget everything, from trivial details to apparently important matters of life and death. It seems that nothing makes sufficient impact on them for them to be able to retain an impression of it, and as Climando says, "Oui, j'ai oublié, est-ce que vous croyez que je ne peux pas oublier les choses qui me font de la peine?" (3) There is no solution, for even remedies are self-defeating:

LE VIEUX - Je te l'ai déjà dit.
CLIMANDO - Oui, mais je l'ai oublié.
MITA - Je croyais qu'il n'y avait que moi qui oubliais.
CLIMANDO - Ça doit être contagieux.
MITA - Et bien, fais un noeud dans ton mouchoir.
CLIMANDO - Comme ça, ce n'est pas contagieux?
MITA - Je ne me souviens pas si ce n'est pas contagieux ou si ça permet de se souvenir. (4)

But morality, since it is not innate, must be acquired, which is to say it must be committed to memory. Everything has to be learned since nothing is determined by a priori principles, as the following dialogue demonstrates:

APAL - Nous l'avons tué.
CLIMANDO - Mais c'était la première fois.
MITA - Au bout de combien de fois est-ce mal?
LE VIEUX - Une fois suffit.
MITA - Et deux?
LE VIEUX - Aussi.
MITA - Et trois?
LE VIEUX - Je ne suis pas arrivé jusque-là, je sais seulement les deux premières pas coeur. (5)

On rare occasions they do bear witness to having received a rudimentary education - Mita, for example, is afraid to lie to

- (1) *ibid.* p.115.
(2) *ibid.* p.118.
(3) *ibid.* p.143.
(4) *ibid.* pp.145-6.
(5) *ibid.* pp.144-5.

the police for fear of forfeiting her place in heaven. Generally however nothing has been retained from the past, which means that the characters exist in a perpetual present.

Abandoned by God, alienated from society, and divorced from their own past, they are condemned to an indeterminate no-man's-land, which they inhabit with their purposeless existences. Much of what they do, apart from working the tricycle, has value only insofar as it will help them to pass time or to give greater substance to their slender existences. "Comme j'ai de l'importance!" proclaims Climando when told that his arrest necessitates the intervention of the Chief of Police. (1) And in the following dialogue, Mita's eloquent expression of the terrible boredom that drives her to suicide is a clear pointer to their condition:

MITA - Mais moi, je suis très triste.
CLIMANDO - Que t'arrive-t-il?
MITA - Rien.
CLIMANDO - Mais, rien de rien?
MITA - Oui, rien de rien.
CLIMANDO - Mais, rien de rien de rien?
MITA - Oui, rien de rien de rien.
CLIMANDO - Oh! là, là, que tu dois être triste. (2)

In their abject misery these characters seek refuge from despair in various ways. Climando finds solace in small earthly delights: kissing Mita, caressing her knees, the smell of the bakery and the taste of an anchovy sandwich. This perpetual fascination with commonplace things, one of their most endearing qualities, is perhaps a consequence of the memory-less state in which they live. Each day, objects are seen in the fresh light of new and unsullied vision, as if never seen before, and are the

(1) *ibid.* p.149.

(2) *ibid.* p.113.

source of pleasure and wonder. In this fascination with everyday objects and the "merveilleux" which springs from them, Climando approaches the world of childhood.

Climando is also the poet, experiencing the joyful liberation of free and imaginative word associations. Sometimes the result as he indulges in a veritable logorrhœa is quite surrealistic:

Par exemple, l'autre jour Sato est tombé amoureux d'un papillon qui s'était posé sur sa poche, et, comme il ne savait pas comment se déclarer, il est monté sur une chaise et s'est mis à chanter que l'amour a un goût de pêche, jusqu'à ce que le papillon comprenne que, comme il allait geler, la rivière déborderait et qu'il valait mieux s'envoler vers le pavillon des malades où l'on garde des pommes de terre et où l'atmosphère est triste... (1)

The reader might justifiably see in Climando and his esteem for language a reflection of the author's relationship with his theatre. For Arrabal, as for Climando, the imagination is a world which knows no frontiers, where everything is possible.

But language is not only an escapist medium leading to the liberating domain of the imagination. Unlike Apal, who sleeps "pour ne pas avoir à parler, pour ne pas avoir à entendre parler" (2), Climando evidently has an unshakeable faith in the magical power of words, as if they could conjure up the very things they denote. This is to become one of the dominant traits of Arrabal's heroes. They have boundless optimism in the ability of the word to become real, even when the objective facts of their existence deny this. There is, for example, supreme irony in Climando's affirmation to Apal : "Voilà ma devise: 'Savoir ce que l'on a pu faire et ce que l'on n'a pas fait'. Tout, tout,

(1) *ibid.* p.148.

(2) *ibid.* p.151.

parfaitement en ordre. Ce n'est pas pour rien que nous sommes des gens qui pensons." (1) for whatever else they are, it can hardly be said that rational thought is their behavioural guide. But Climando's faith in words is utterly unshakeable. "C'est ça", he exclaims, "s'ils me prennent je leur raconte une histoire." (2)

In fact their optimism is seen to have some justification for language really does confer power upon whoever wields it best. One of the characters' favourite pastimes might be called "savoir discuter". These verbal combats usually constitute clearly circumscribed areas of dialogue, and are thus set apart from the other activities like a formal game. Again like a game, this activity is also structured by its own particular rules, transgressions of which are called "cheating", but as a game it has singularly sinister undertones. Here is a typical example of such verbal aggression:

LE VIEUX - ... ils ont des drapeaux pour cacher les grands soldats.
CLIMANDO - Les grands portent des habits courts pour qu'on ne s'aperçoive de rien.
LE VIEUX - C'est encore faux. Les habits courts on les donne aux soldats qui n'ont pas de poils aux jambes.
CLIMANDO - Ce n'est pas vrai. Les soldats qui n'ont pas de poils aux jambes ne sont pas des soldats. Ce sont des soldates. Et comme il n'y a pas de soldates, ce que vous disiez n'est pas vrai.
LE VIEUX - Tu as encore triché.
CLIMANDO - Si vous voulez, on recommence.
LE VIEUX - Non, parce que tu raisones mieux que moi et que la raison triomphe toujours. (3)

The Old Man says that reason always wins, but it might be more accurate were he to say that the most adroit manipulator of words

(1) *ibid.* p.153.

(2) *ibid.* p.157.

(3) *ibid.* pp.134-5.

always wins. There is a kind of perverse logic in their nonsense, (and it is here that Arrabal's affinities with Lewis Carroll are most apparent), but since the logic is applied to absurd ideas, it is the linguistic formula as much as the concept that comes into play. In these cases of logomachy, therefore, language is seen to serve as an instrument of domination. That this is so is demonstrated again at the end of the play when the policeman imposes the weight of his authority on Climando simply by the power of the incomprehensible noises he utters:

CLIMANDO - Et c'est sûr que l'on nous tuera?

APAL - Oui.

CLIMANDO - Alors je m'en vais.

Climando monte sur le triporteur pour s'enfuir.

L'AGENT, ton de réprimande - Caracatchitcho, caracotchotcho, tcha, tche, chi, caracatchi.

Climando descend du triporteur et s'assied. (1)

Of course the policeman's aggressively onomatopaeic utterances serve to underline what has already been observed, that the workings of Authority are quite alien to the arrabalian hero, but is it not significant that words, not physical means, are the instruments of their power? From Le Tricycle to Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs, Arrabal's characters are filled with awe and respect for the magical or oppressive presence of language.

These comments do not apply to Apal, an enigmatic character who never speaks except when pressed to do so, and then only to give the most tersely economical reply possible. One thing is clear: for some unapparent reason he is far more experienced in the ways of society than any of his friends, even Le Vieux.

(1) *ibid.* p.155.

"Il sait trop de choses" says Mita, (1) which tells us little about his past experience but provides the key to his apathetic retreat from the world. It is Apal who knows why the police are looking for them. His awareness of their condition is far more acute than that of the others; his anguish derives less from ignorance or fear than from a terrible lucidity. Thus his antidote to despair is quite the opposite of Climando's, it is to sleep, to shun futile thought or speech and to oblivate reality. The optimism which animates Climando is not present in Apal, for whom waking consciousness is unrelievedly grim: "Moi, il faut que je dorme. Quand je pense, j'ai faim et froid." (2)

Though diametrically opposed to each other in their responses to an impossible situation, both Climando and Apal are in fact the double reflection of Arrabal himself. Like Climando, Arrabal seeks refuge, solace and liberty from an oppressive world in the poetic imagination; as regards Apal, Arrabal has commented:

Il y a des moments dans ma vie où j'ai la tentation de faire la sieste. Comme j'ai du mal à m'endormir, je pense, les yeux ouverts dans le noir, et ce sont des moments d'atroce lucidité... c'est l'instant où je vois clairement et irrévocablement que la vie est une horrible farce, et que je suis condamné à souffrir et à ignorer. Et en ces minutes, je suis convaincu que dans une heure je me suiciderai. (3)

In his later plays Arrabal does bring his heroes up to and beyond the point of lucidity, a painful but salutary experience, but it seems that for the author of Le Tricycle thought is too terrible to be contemplated without anguish.

There is a third response which is neither the poetry of

(1) *ibid.* p.162.

(2) *ibid.* p.121.

(3) Entretiens, p.129.

Climando nor the ataraxia of Apal. At times certain characters, especially Mita, demonstrate a kind of materialism which in the case of Mita suggests that she pins her hope for future salvation on worldly things. In fact this is not surprising, since much of their misery is caused by their financial poverty. As Mita says, "avec de l'argent on peut acheter ce qu'on veut, y compris mille boîtes d'anchois." (1) There is no place on this earth for the poor, who will be chased from place to place, and Apal even suggests that heaven is similarly disposed: "Comme nous n'avons pas d'argent nous irons en enfer." (2) Material wealth is constantly equated with power, influence and happiness. Mita understands that they must kill the rich man in order to rob him since otherwise he would use his wealth and influence to bring society's retribution upon them. Hence her optimism is generally related to material possibilities, as the following dialogue clearly reveals:

CLIMANDO - Tout le monde dit qu'un métier c'est ce qu'il y a de mieux.

MITA - C'est mieux d'avoir beaucoup d'argent.

CLIMANDO - C'est encore mieux de savoir voler de branche en branche sans jamais tomber.

MITA - C'est encore mieux d'avoir mille avions.

CLIMANDO - C'est mieux de savoir nager sous l'eau sans revenir à la surface pendant quarante-cinq heures.

MITA - C'est beaucoup mieux d'avoir mille sous-marins.

CLIMANDO - C'est mieux de chanter tout le jour monté en haut d'un arbre.

MITA - C'est beaucoup mieux d'avoir mille disques ... (3)

Here two conflicting visions oppose each other point for point, Climando's poetic imagination and Mita's wordly materialism.

(1) Théâtre II, p.126.

(2) ibid. p.111.

(3) ibid. p.146.

The point is of course that none of these responses to the human condition as Arrabal shows it here is anything but a provisional form of escape from an impossible mode of existence. Even Apal's unconscious existence is but a pale prefiguration of the absolute peace which death will bring. At the very moment when they are gleefully enjoying the benefits of their crime, the social machinery which will end in their destruction is already in motion. There is apparently only one solution to such misery, and that is the ultimate release of death. But the curious fact is that, apart from the impassive Apal, their attitude in the face of death is ambiguous. They remain undecided whether death is to be considered a blessing or a menace.

It occurs to Mita that it might be a good idea to commit suicide: "Comme ça, je ne serais plus triste." (1) Climando ingenuously and selflessly exhorts her to do just that: "Si tu crois que tu seras plus heureuse en te suicidant, suicide-toi le plus vite possible." (2) He proposes it too as a cure for the ills of Apal and the Old Man. As for himself, alas he cannot commit suicide because, as he says with laughable illogicality, "demain il faut que je paie l'échéance du triporteur". (3) When Climando says of Apal "un de ces jours il mourra à force de dormir", Mita remarks that it would make no difference to him. Again, when Mita assures Climando that once he is dead he will find himself in heaven, Climando finds the prospect so attractive that he even offers to let Mita be executed in his place, surely a most

(1) *ibid.* p.114.

(2) *ibid.*

(3) *ibid.*

generous offer. But Mita finds a plausible reason to refuse the offer. This is significant, for it confirms what one had already inferred from the earlier discussion on suicide, namely that while each recognises that death would be the ideal solution to the others' suffering, each of them with the exception of Apal is strangely reluctant to quit life himself.

"Ils disent qu'ils vont vous tuer, et je m'en réjouis" says the Old Man. (1) For the victim, however, the situation is less clearly defined. Climando protests, "Mais pour me tuer ils vont me faire mal" (2) and adds "Ne crois pas que ça me plaise beaucoup d'être tué maintenant." A few moments later he adopts a more heroic stance: "Bon, ne crois pas que je le regrette beaucoup personnellement." (3) But his actions contradict this linguistic formula as he plans his escape. Life might be purgatory on earth, and reason might persuade them death is infinitely preferable to life, yet none of them can bring himself to transgress willingly the slender line separating existence from extinction.

This would suggest that Arrabal's characters are animated by an instinctive vital life-force which is sufficiently powerful to overcome despair even in the bleakest of situations. As has been observed, there is a certain animality about these early characters, in the way in which they revel in simple physical pleasures, which makes them very much creatures of the earth. The smooth touch of a girl's knee, the anchovy sandwich, the

(1) *ibid.* p.165.

(2) *ibid.* p.161.

(3) *ibid.* p.146.

smell of the bakery, these represent so many high spots in their daily existence, and this physical attachment to the earth in itself tends to vitiate any inclination they might have for suicide.

In addition, their awareness of the tenuous nature of their own existence means that one of their preoccupations is precisely with imposing themselves with greater force and weight. They are eager to impress their friends, to be at the centre of each activity:

MITA - Et tu vas me laisser le conduire d'une main?
CLIMANDO - D'une seule main? (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.
MITA - Si tu veux, je conduirai même les yeux fermés. (1)

And when Climando proclaims "Comme j'ai de l'importance!" the immediate fact of his importance seems to count for more than the ulterior fact that he is about to be arrested and executed. Similarly, the verbal combats in which they indulge are inspired by the desire to impose their identity and lend greater weight to their slight presence by aggression and domination. For they are flimsy characters, reduced at times to the dimensions of puppets. (2) Little wonder, then, that the characters themselves are concerned to render themselves more substantial, and in these circumstances the total annihilation of death is something to flee.

(1) *ibid.* p.119.

(2) Indeed, the original title of the play as it appears on the first manuscript, Titeres en la techumbre suggests that Arrabal conceived it as an animated guignol show.

Le Tricycle is a deceptive play for its apparent simplicity conceals a variety of themes and questions which are to be at the centre of Arrabal's future work. The theme of solitude and alienation, the theme of death, questions of morality and culpability, the couple, all these are broached, if only in embryo, in Le Tricycle, which contains too the major traits of the arrabalian hero. But the style of composition remains close to that of the puppet theatre in which Arrabal first exercised his dramatic talents. Fando et Lis, written some two or three years later, bears witness to a considerable evolution in terms of thematic development, style of composition and characterisation, whilst the author's newly established relationship with Luce Moreau gives new direction to his study of the dynamics of the couple.

Fando et Lis

J'ai voulu refaire à mon modeste niveau Roméo et Juliette; c'est Fando et Lis: un homme et une femme et l'impossibilité de s'unir, car la femme est paralysée. (1)

In this, his first story of adolescent love, Arrabal draws upon one of the most fertile tragic myths of all time: the difficulty of loving and the love which is created out of this difficulty. In Romeo and Juliet, one of the great archetypal works deriving from this myth, and perhaps Arrabal's inspirational model, the "impossibilité de s'unir" is occasioned by social conditions. In other works, such as for example Le Soulier de satin, there is a conflict with a religious injunction. In the modern permissive or unbelieving society, however, the social or sacramental interdiction is no longer an absolute obstacle. Arrabal recreates the myth in an original modern form: the physical obstacle he creates between the lovers is insuperable. (Though it can be shown that there are other obstacles apart from the physical and of which the physical is perhaps symbolic).

Lis' paralysis frustrates the natural course of love so that physical union becomes impossible and, as Bernard Gille has pointed out, (2) Fando's sexual impulses are perverted and find expression in physical violence. At the same time, Lis' paralysis ensures her dependence upon Fando and ensures Fando's possession of her. He says: "C'est une bonne chose que tu sois

(1) Entretiens, pp.119-120.

(2) Gille, op.cit., p.27.

paralysée, comme ça, c'est moi qui te promène." (1) This apparently cruel expression of Fando's jealousy is at the same time a measure of his love for Lis, since to love and be loved means to possess and be possessed.

Love, in Arrabal's theatre, is violent and rigorous, yet at the same time hesitant and uncertain. The blissful confidence of lovers who can take each other's love for granted never comes to Arrabal's couples. Fando is unsure of Lis, (in this case unjustifiably, it would seem) and is afraid of losing her. In the lines quoted above the syntax of Fando's expression throws special emphasis on the word "moi". That is to say that it is he, Fando, who possesses Lis, implying that if it were not for her paralysis, making her dependent on him, someone else might possess her. Throughout the play Fando is afflicted by a more or less clearly formulated presentiment that he is shortly to lose his only friend, and of course he does, ridiculously, by his own hand.

It is in an effort to keep Lis for himself that Fando encumbers her with superfluous chains and handcuffs. Dramatically, these objects are powerful images of Lis' state of dependence and also visible evidence of the perversion of Fando's sexual impulses. At the same time, however, for Fando himself, they seem to represent a pathetic and utterly inappropriate gesture to forestall the loss of his companion.

Fando is a multi-dimensional character, portrayed with more psychological depth than the guignolesque figures of Le Tricycle.

(1) Théâtre I, p.68.

He is ambivalent, that is, his behaviour betrays the existence within his mind of opposing and contradictory desires which are externalised in the reversal from one state to another. It is in Fando et Lis that Arrabal first explores those curious phenomena, the transformation of character and the subsequent reversal of rôles, which become so characteristic of Arrabal's theatre. Here the transformations tend to demonstrate the flux of a constant struggle for superiority within the context of a love relationship. For example:

FANDO - Un beau jour je t'abandonnerai et je m'en irai très loin de toi.

LIS - Non, Fando, ne m'abandonne pas, je n'ai que toi au monde.

FANDO - Tu ne fais que me gêner. (Il crie.) Et ne pleure pas!

LIS (elle fait un effort pour ne pas pleurer) - Je ne pleure pas...

FANDO (très ennuyé) - Alors, tu pleures et tout et tout, hein? Et bien je m'en vais tout de suite et je ne reviens plus.

(Fando sort furieux. Au bout de quelques instants il entre à nouveau, à quatre pattes, et se dirige vers l'endroit où se tient Lis.)

FANDO (humblement) - Lis, pardonne-moi. (1)

Here, after inflicting physical torture upon Lis, Fando adds further to her mental suffering. At the same time Lis derives masochistic pleasure from the pain which Fando inflicts, for it is in this way that she must belong to him. It is the basis of their relationship. Then their rôles are reversed and Fando is compelled to savour the bitter-sweet taste of repentance and humility. A little later it will be Lis' turn to act as mental torturer, and the entire second scene demonstrates her mental cruelty to Fando.

(1) *ibid.* pp.70-71.

In his symbolic desertion of Lis, Fando demonstrates the complexity of the confused motivation within him. He does it firstly to torture Lis; it is an act of cruelty, parallel to the acts of physical cruelty which ultimately destroy her. At the same time he demonstrates, both to himself and to Lis, his superiority over her, his possession of her and her utter dependence upon him. And thirdly, by this action Fando is able to reassure himself of his own liberty of movement. This is another paradoxical facet of love, for if Fando desires to be loved, that is to be possessed, he also desires to retain his personal freedom. The lover seeks to lose his identity in fusion with the loved one, but also desires to retain his individual autonomy.

Arrabal's remarkable analysis of love shows it to be a synthesis of ambiguous and apparently contradictory sentiments. Tenderness and cruelty, selfless generosity and egocentricity, the desire to dominate and be dominated, to submit and be free, all these forces come to the surface in rapid succession. Though contradictory in appearance, these forces are held by Arrabal to be facets of the same vital force in which all contradictions are fused. Love and violence, far from being mutually exclusive, are in essence inseparable. Arrabal exclaims:

La violence... Mais il faut être martien pour aimer une femme et ne pas la battre, L'acte d'amour est un acte à base de violence masculine. (1)

For the man to impose himself there must always be a fundamental

(1) Françoise Espinasse, "Entretien avec Arrabal", Plexus, December 1968, pp.102-109.

element of violence and if, as in Fando et Lis physical union is precluded, this violence will find expression in other ways.

If one employs the somewhat emotive terms "sadism" and "masochism" in relation to Fando and Lis, it must be with the proviso that they are being used in a purely descriptive sense. Arrabal's characters are not clinically "perverted", nor are they immoral in any decadent sense. On the contrary, their behaviour is shown as being natural and instinctive. But so too is the author in depicting such behaviour. He tells us repeatedly that at the time of writing his early plays he knew nothing of the works of the Marquis de Sade or Sacher-Masoch:

Je ne savais rien de l'érotisme quand j'ai écrit Fando et Lis. Pourtant, on m'a dit alors que c'était du Sade. Après, quand j'ai lu Sade, j'ai écrit une pièce comme L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie où je prends justement mes distances avec les chaînes, les fouets. (1)

In fact he had no need to read these authors. "Par contre" he says, "lorsqu'on est ignorant on peut découvrir de nouvelles fascinations." (2) As has been seen, Arrabal's upbringing was such that cruelty and violence formed an essential part of his vision of life, and Fando's behaviour is an authentic, intuitive (rather than intellectualised) image of this experience of reality. It would of course be absurd to imply that Spaniards have any monopoly on cruelty, but the world vision of Arrabal's generation is necessarily coloured by the brutal reality of the Civil War and the police state of which Arrabal has himself been a victim.

Bernard Lesfargues has shown how Lis is related to a long

(1) Entretiens, p.26.

(2) Françoise Espinasse, "Entretien avec Arrabal", Plexus, December 1968, pp.102-109.

tradition of tortured wives in Spanish literature:

Lis ex osée nue sur la route est une lointaine descendante des filles du Cid, attachées nues à des arbres par leurs maris... Le sadisme de cette scène autour de laquelle pivote tout le poème du Cid est stupéfiant... Or nous nous trouvons aux origines mêmes de la littérature espagnole. (1)

As for masochism, it has been seen how Arrabal learnt from experience and from orthodox Catholic teaching the mystical relationship between suffering and pleasure.

It thus becomes apparent that there is nothing cerebral about the cruelty and suffering which Arrabal's characters inflict and undergo. It is worth insisting upon this point for two reasons. First, in response to those critics who see in Arrabal an opportunist seeking to shock or create scandal by what one critic described as "cet étalage naïf de sado-masochisme." (2) Arrabal's intention is not to be involved in a succès de scandale: this is demonstrated by the intensely personal and private nature of the creative process, for which moreover Arrabal envisaged no public when he wrote Fando et Lis. Secondly because it helps to illuminate the fundamentally coherent nature of the protagonists. Fando embodies contradictory facets, yet this does not render him incoherent. On the contrary, as has been seen reality for Arrabal consists of innumerable apparent dualities, and it is only by accepting in their entirety all such antitheses that one can give a valid account of the confusion of reality.

Given their nature, the behaviour of Fando and Lis, although mutable and sometimes unpredictable, is rigorously coherent. It

(1) Lesfargues, "Cu... Comment s'en débarrasser?", Bulletin du Théâtre de la Croix-Rousse, Lyon, October 1965.

(2) Guy Dumar, "Un Noir Divertissement", Le Nouvel Observateur, 30.3.66.

is coherent even to Lis' death. It is nonsense to talk in this respect of sacrifice, for Lis' death is largely accidental, though theatrically it is the proper conclusion to a mounting tide of violence, each act necessarily being more outrageous than the last. Her death is provoked by the banal intervention of fate. A clumsy movement by Lis tears Fando's drum, provoking him to a fit of rage in which his violence goes too far. Arrabal confirms this anecdotic interpretation when he says:

Entre Fando et Lis il y a un grand amour. Fando ne pense qu'à elle. Je dirais qu'il la tue par mégarde. (1)

In some ways Lis might be considered the innocent victim of this tragedy. Fando's name evokes the Spanish "nefando" meaning "abominable". The beautiful Lis of course evokes the fragile lily flower. This would suggest a poetic interpretation of the play in which beauty is profaned and trampled upon by the beast. But such a view, despite its attractions, fails to render account of the complexity of Fando et Lis, for although Fando is often the aggressor, and although his cruelty is of a more spectacular nature, he too is the victim of a tragedy to which Lis herself is an active party.

Closer examination reveals that Lis is not in reality the innocent, passive and defenceless flower crushed by the beast. She too is ambivalent, subject to conflicting passions, capable like Fando of both sadistic cruelty and masochistic self-indulgence. Like many of Arrabal's women characters she is more intelligent than her male counterpart, and this is the key to her power over

(1) Françoise Espinasse, op.cit.

Fando:

FANDO - Que tu es intelligente, Lis.

LIS - Mais ça ne me sert à rien, tu me fais toujours souffrir. (1)

Her intelligence may not be able to protect her from the ravages of Fando's violence but it certainly enables her to retaliate with devastating effect.

The entire second scene, in which she encloses herself in a barrier of silence and indifference, illustrates the torture which she can inflict on Fando. Just as Lis is defenceless against his physical cruelty, so Fando is utterly disarmed by her silence. He tries to win her favour by being gentle and considerate, (Fando la change de place avec beaucoup de précautions... il la traite avec beaucoup d'attention"), by cajolery, ("Lis, que tu es jolie"), by entertaining her with his song and dance act, and finally by pleading with her in all humility, ("Parle-moi, Lis, parle-moi, dis-moi quelque chose"). (2) When all this fails he too is reduced to silence, in his case the silence of defeat.

The masochistic element of Lis' personality becomes evident in the fourth scene. Each new stage in the progression towards her death is suggested and defined by Lis. She invites Fando to each new atrocity:

FANDO - C'est vrai, comme je suis méchant avec toi.

Pause.

LIS - Et puis te me dis toujours que tu vas me passer les menottes, comme si je n'avais pas assez de la chaîne.(3)

A few moments later Lis, now handcuffed, is being forced to drag

(1) Théâtre I, p.67.

(2) ibid., pp.74-77.

(3) ibid. p.105.

herself round the stage, and she says to Fando:

LIS (doucement) - Ne me bats pas Fando, ne me bats pas. (1)

She knows full well the way in which Fando responds to these words, and her behaviour demonstrates quite clearly that she shares with him the "nouvelles fascinations" of violence and suffering.

Occasionally Fando and Lis are profoundly happy. The simplicity of their mutual tenderness is then the occasion of some of the most beautiful lyrical scenes in Arrabal's theatre:

Fando se dirige vers la petite voiture et détache le tambour avec beaucoup de soin. Ensuite, plein de respect, il le montre a Lis.

FANDO - Regarde le tambour, Lis.

LIS - Qu'il est joli.

FANDO - Regarde comme il est rond.

LIS - Oui, c'est vrai, tout rond.

FANDO - Et bien, je l'ai uniquement pour pouvoir te chanter des chansons.

LIS - Comme tu es bon. (2)

This scene stands in stark contrast to the following scene, which shows the mounting tide of violence culminating in Lis' death. But here all opposition between Fando and Lis is temporarily resolved and they are spiritually united in the contemplation of a beautiful object. Arrabal's theatre is full of round objects: drums, balloons, chamber-pots, wheels, all of which are central to his dramatic imagery. In this case, the roundness of Fando's drum evokes the sphere, symbol of absolute unity. Sexually it represents the perfect androgyne which Arrabal perceives to be the lovers' ideal. It thus represents their

(1) *ibid.* p.112.

(2) *ibid.* p.110.

unattainable goal. But here too there is ambivalence, for at the same time the drum represents the closed system, the vicious circle. Here, then, it evokes both the endless round, the futility of their efforts to reach Tar, and the inevitability of their tragic destiny.

For the lovers there can be no physical union. But neither can there be any real spiritual union, except perhaps momentarily. The object which here unites them for a few moments (the drum) contains within itself an evocation of Lis' impending death; and there is further irony in the fact that it is when Lis accidentally damages the drum that Fando is driven to his final paroxysm of destructive rage. Arrabal's conclusion is that perfect love is not attainable. In Fando et Lis this tragic conclusion is partly the consequence of Fando's ambivalent personality. He genuinely does not wish to hurt Lis - on the contrary he loves her deeply and desires her happiness - yet he invariably makes her suffer:

LIS - Tu me fais toujours souffrir.

FANDO - Non, Lis, je ne te fais pas souffrir, bien au contraire.

LIS - Si, rappelle-toi comme tu me bats dès que tu en as l'occasion.

FANDO (honteux) - C'est vrai. Je ne le ferai plus, tu verras. (2)

Of course this dialogue reveals Fando's inadequate will-power. But further than that, it implies too a basic dichotomy between thought and action. Fando's actions, instead of being motivated by his conscious desires, are actually in opposition to them. Clearly, then, his behaviour must be controlled by one of two forces: either a subconscious desire, or a reflex reaction to

(1) This symbol is also echoed by Lis' carriage, the wheeled object which is also the vehicle permitting the cyclical rhythm within the play.

(2) Théâtre I, p.67.

external stimuli. In fact it is probably a combination of the two. It has been seen how Fando responds predictably to Lis' ostensibly negative demands, whipping her when she pleads with him not to whip her, and so on. More often, however, Fando can be shown to be motivated by subconscious desires.

Every person embodies unconscious and conflicting wishes which are normally resolved by the suppression of one wish in favour of another. Fando's peculiarity is the extent to which his unconscious desires dominate his behaviour: the motivation is not clearly formulated in advance but can only be defined empirically, after the event. That is, his instincts, particularly his frustrated taste for violent self-expression, gain the upper hand over the conscious mind which would seek to dominate such brute forces. That this is so can be seen from the obvious divorce between his stated intentions and his actual behaviour. Fando does not - indeed cannot - tell lies, as the following dialogue demonstrates:

FANDO - Ça me rendra tout triste le jour où tu mourras.

LIS - Ça te rendra tout triste? Pourquoi?

FANDO (désolé) - Je ne sais pas.

LIS - Tu ne sais pas? Tu penses que c'est une réponse...

FANDO - Non, Lis, je te dis vrai, ça me rendra tout triste.

LIS - Tu pleureras?

FANDO - Je ferai un effort mais je ne sais pas si je pourrai.

LIS - Je ne sais pas si je pourrai! Je ne sais pas si je pourrai! Crois-tu que c'est une réponse?

FANDO - Crois-moi, Lis.

LIS - Mais croire quoi?

FANDO (réfléchissant) - Je ne sais pas au juste. (1)

Fando's ridiculous admission that he may not be able to provide material evidence of his chagrin by crying serves to demonstrate

(1) *ibid.* p.64.

that he is utterly incapable of dissimulating, and hence the truth of his assertion that he loves Lis and does not wish to hurt her.

Fando then is as much as Lis the tragic victim of those blind and uncontrollable impulses. Arrabal has here replaced the Fate or Destiny of classical tragedy with an equally imperious Higher Necessity, but one singularly appropriate to the twentieth century, deriving from post-freudian psychology.

Thus far Fando et Lis has been viewed as a modern tragedy of love. Another fruitful approach, and one which shows more clearly how this play is a prolongation of Le Tricycle, is to view it as a tragedy of solitude. Fando's sexual solitude and the virtual impossibility for the couple of transcending their duality has already been noted. But the theme of solitude in Fando et Lis has wider resonances. From the opening lines, the evocation of Lis' death casts a cloud of gloom over Fando. Without knowing precisely why, he is aware that her death will be a great loss to him:

LIS - Tu m'aimes beaucoup.

FANDO - Mais je préfère que tu ne meures pas. Ça me rendra tout triste le jour où tu mourras. (1)

Later, during the fourth scene, with the shadow of Lis' imminent death now dominating the stage, Fando's simple statement of the obscure fear afflicting his mind is transformed into an urgent and pathetic plea. "Ne meurs pas, hain?" he exhorts her. (2)

(1) *ibid.* p.64.

(2) *ibid.* p.104.

The final scene, simple and poignant, shows Fando with dog and flowers going to pay his silent and lonesome tribute to Lis at her grave. Here, as in the second scene, Arrabal effectively portrays in the figure of Fando the impression of a profoundly lonely person. Despite the physical presence of the three men who follow a few paces behind him, his moral isolation is total, for the three men belong to a different society and there can be no real understanding between them.

The second scene, which has been considered above in the context of Lis' masochism, might well be entitled "Fando's solitude". But it is not only at the hands of Lis that he is alienated. Just at the moment when Fando is reduced to complete despair, a new diversion with a new possibility of companionship presents itself, for in come the three men. Fando tries to establish a relationship with them but is again rejected by silent disdain. Utterly discouraged, he returns to Lis and the scene closes with his renewed attempts to persuade Lis to talk to him.

At this point it would be useful to quote what Arrabal himself has said of Fando et Lis. His comments here are exceptionally pertinent:

Ces trois personnages montrent bien eux aussi comme le monde extérieur est clos, organisé. Fando ne comprend pas un mot de leur langage. Ça lui apparaît comme une musique. Et il pense séduire ces gens avec le "chant de la plume" qui ne comprend que trois mots! Et il joue si mal du tambour! C'est là qu'il est beau, Fando: il a tout ce qu'il faut pour séduire Lis, mais séduire le monde extérieur avec ses pauvres moyens, c'est autre chose. Pourtant il essaie d'unir les deux mondes, le sien et l'autre. C'est le moment où il dit aux "trois messieurs": "Voyez comme Lis est belle, Embrassez-la, caressez-la." (1)

(1) Entretiens, p.122.

Not only is this an apposite exposition of the tensions arising from the dramatic situation, but it is also a remarkable indication of the autobiographical implications of Fando et Lis.

Arrabal describes the outside world as "clos, organisé". Already, in Le Tricycle, he has evoked this hostile world, a kafkaesque society, unapproachable, repellent, organised according to a system of values which remains obscure to those outside. The rejection of Fando by the three men seems to translate into dramatic terms a sense of alienation bordering upon persecution, and this dark vision seems to derive from Arrabal's experience of reality combined with his recent literary discoveries.

Arrabal's upbringing in a suffocating climate of political, social and religious repression, his education founded on the principle of punishment, his adolescent crisis, the mutism into which he withdrew, all contributed to make him feel an outsider in his own home. A little later, moving to France he found himself lonely and ill, a stranger in a foreign country.

A persecution complex, no doubt aggravated by a sense of physical inferiority, coupled with the domestic circumstances, produced the sensation of being the victim of a hostile and incomprehensible universe. It is in his favourite authors at the time, Kafka and Carroll, that he finds images expressive of this obsession. In Fando et Lis the three men grouped together under their umbrella form an impenetrable block; in this, and in their indifference to Fando's attempted approaches, they resemble the inhabitants of The Castle. In their aggressive logomachy and chop-logic they are related to the March Hare and the Hatter,

whilst the taciturn Toso, like Apal, is hardly more cooperative than the sleepy dormouse.

Arrabal proceeds: "Fando ne comprend pas un mot de leur langage." Linguistic solitude: here is another important aspect of the solitude which Arrabal expresses in this play. Recently arrived in a foreign country, Arrabal spoke little French and, like Fando, what he heard were sounds which were construed musically rather than semantically:

FANDO - Oh! comme vous discutiez bien, comme ça faisait joli!
NAMUR (ironiquement) - Oui, oui, joli...
MITARO - Est-ce que vous n'entendiez pas ce que nous disions?
FANDO - Si, mais je ne faisais pas attention, j'entendais seulement la musique. Une jolie musique... Patati, patata, si mimi, si momo, que si lo, que si la. (1)

Of course this is not a faithful mirror of real circumstances, for in reality the author's linguistic isolation was the source of anguish. Here it is transformed poetically and the oppressive unknown language becomes musical sounds. But Fando himself is cruelly deceived, for it emerges that what he took for sweet music was in fact bitter argument. In reality, he understands nothing of their language, so how can there be any communication between them?

It is not only on the purely linguistic level that Fando is alienated from the three men. This organised society possesses another typical advantage, namely the superiority of its members in argument and discussion. In Le Tricycle Climando was always the victor in their verbal battles; in Fando et Lis Climando's brother, Fando, finds his match and is subjected to some crushing defeats. For example:

(1) Théâtre I, p.87.

FANDO - ... et le kangarou.
NAMUR - Le kangarou?
FANDO - Oui, le kangarou.
NAMUR - Vous avez dit que le kangarou est pire?
FANDO (un peu honteux) - Oui, oui.
NAMUR - Mais vous en êtes sûr?
FANDO (hésitant) - Oui...
NAMUR - Mais, sûr, sûr?
FANDO (abattu) - Vous prenez les choses d'une façon qui
glisse le doute dans mon esprit.
NAMUR (cruel) - Mais, sûr, sûr, sûr?
FANDO (en larmes) - Vous êtes trop fort. (1)

Later, when Fando again attempts to impress the three men, this time with his "system" for determining who is right in an argument, Namur again reduces him to confusion and tears.

Speaking of Fando, Arrabal continues: "Et il pense séduire ces gens avec le 'chant de la plume' qui ne comprend que trois mots!" Fando's song, the only one he knows, is the sum total of his artistic achievement. In another play, La Bicyclette du condamné, Arrabal will show the hero's impoverished and maladroit artistic activity in a different light. Here there seems to be some unconscious connection between, on the one hand Fando and his song, which is admired by Lis but not by the world at large, and on the other hand the artist Arrabal writing Fando et Lis, for which his only audience is Luce Moreau, and which, he says, would ideally be composed of only three hundred words in combination.

Finally Arrabal speaks of Fando's efforts to integrate the two worlds, "le sien et l'autre". Here too one might postulate some connection between Fando's premature tentatives to take his place in the outside world, using Lis as his means of establishing contact with the three men, and a possible belief on the part of

(1) *ibid.* p.88.

the author that Luce, his French companion, will be the means whereby he might integrate himself into the hostile foreign society.

Fando never achieves the integration he seeks. Virtually every direction taken by his conversation with the three men leads to his humiliation. His possession of Lis certainly confers status upon him in the eyes of Namur and Mitaro, but their attitude is closer to jealousy than admiration. Mitaro asks "Vous, vous êtes vraiment heureux avec elle?", and ^{the} repetition shortly after of "Et vous ne vous en lassez jamais?" suggests a cruelly insidious insistence. (1) If Fando is accepted into their company at the end of the play it is despite Namur's barely concealed hostility and Toso's absolute indifference. The final scene, in which the three men are unable to recount the story of Fando and Lis demonstrates their detachment, perhaps too their indifference, and reinforces the visual image of Fando's ultimate solitude.

From Fando's point of view his relationship with the three men is one of antagonism or at the very least alienation. From a more objective point of view, all the characters are united in a common aim: their journey to Tar. Here the play assumes vaguely metaphysical connotations which have prompted critics to relate it to the so-called theatre of the absurd. Mitaro suggests that Fando and Lis, with their carriage, have a material advantage, though the logic of this is questionable. In any case, such fine distinctions are manifestly irrelevant in the face of the enormity

(1) *ibid.* pp.90 & 92.

of the problem. All five characters are reduced to the same hopeless state by Tar, the leveller, distant, enigmatic and indifferent.

Namur insists that their objective is not unattainable:

Nam, ce n'est pas que ce soit impossible. Tout simplement, personne n'est arrivé et jamais personne ne pense y arriver. (1)

This is a characteristically absurd piece of hair-splitting, for to all intents and purposes it is clear they will never get to Tar.

The characters themselves are not very clear about what Tar represents for them. The three men in particular are very concerned about the methods they adopt, but rarely discuss the object itself. It is as if the former blinds them to the latter. As for Fando and Lis, all one knows is that at Tar they would be "happy" : "Et quand nous arriverons à Tar, alors tu verras comme nous serons heureux" he assures her. (2) They cannot be more precise because, lacking the faculty of imagination, they can only construct their vision of Utopia from the banal elements of their everyday existence. At present they are largely unhappy, except for those rare moments when the tensions between them are momentarily resolved. So, when they reach Tar, life will be the opposite of what it is at present, that is, they will be happy.

Because its properties are so vague Tar is liable to a multitude of interpretations. Alain Schifres thought that Tar represented Knowledge. Geneviève Serreau, in her programme notes for the first performance, wrote of Arrabal as "témoin de l'écrasement des libertés en Espagne" and suggested that Tar

(1) *ibid.* p.85.

(2) *ibid.* p.109.

might be a political symbol. One might even elaborate a plausible religious interpretation. Or is Tar precisely a non-existent mythical ideal and the search for it the symbol of the futile quest for the meaning of life in an incomprehensible universe? These points of view are all more or less valid, but one is bound to remember that the young author of Fando et Lis was not primarily, if at all, a philosopher, and the great danger which these interpretations do not wholly avoid is the tendency to intellectualise his work. Arrabal himself has issued a clear warning of this danger:

En ce temps-là je n'avais aucune volonté de démontrer quoi que ce soit. Faisons de la démagogie: à l'époque, j'étais le petit émigrant malade et sans ressources. Tar, c'était peut-être simplement le bonheur quotidien: le bien-être, le confort bourgeois. (1)

Even allowing for a degree of voluntary exaggeration, (Pique-nique en campagne, for example, was undeniably didactic), one can appreciate the sense of Arrabal's warning against imposing too cerebral an interpretation upon his early works.

The intellectualisation of his early work was possibly induced by a tendency to compare it with the works of Samuel Beckett or of Ionesco, whose works dictated the climate prevailing in the experimental theatre of that time. In retrospect one can see that such comparisons were both erroneous and yet natural, that it was normal for critics and men of the theatre to judge the unfamiliar work of an unknown dramatist with reference to the important avant-garde playwrights of the time. Arrabal's

(1) Entretiens, p.121.

earliest producers themselves often presented his plays in the context of the theatre of the absurd. Madame Gisèle Tavet, for example, who produced Fando et Lis in 1965 referred to the three men as "théâtre dit de l'absurde". (1) Thus it was that early critics saw Fando et Lis as a pale imitation of Waiting for Godot. There is certainly an obvious connection between Godot, who never arrives, and the equally enigmatic Tar which can never be reached; between the "trois hommes au parapluie" and the pedantic or absurd logomachy of Beckett's Pozzo. But to affirm that "Arrabal, c'est l'élève doué copiant son maître" (2) or that "Arrabal 'fait' du Beckett comme certains 'font' de l'abstrait" (3) seems more than a little excessive.

Both Tar and Godot have a precedent, (not necessarily a model), in the inaccessible castle in Kafka's novel. Again, the tortuous and deceptive road up to the castle, like the road to Tar, is equally reminiscent of the endless path to the Garden of Live Flowers, (Through the Looking-glass, chapter II); whichever way Alice goes she invariably arrives back at the house she started from. The language of the three men with the umbrella certainly evokes Carroll more than it evokes Beckett. But all this is of minor importance. Arrabal's affinities with Beckett, or more significantly with Carroll and Kafka, are no dark secret. "En général" says Arrabal, "quand une image me frappe, n'importe laquelle, elle s'introduit dans mon théâtre." (4)

(1) Tavet, "Notes de mise en scène", Bulletin du Théâtre de la Croix-Rousse, Lyon, October 1965.

(2) Carlos Lara, "Le Bon Elève Arrabal", Les Lettres françaises, 8.1.59.

(3) *ibid.*

(4) Entretiens, p.107.

To speak of plagiarism, as does Carlos Lara, ("car son théâtre est entièrement fabriqué" (1)), is to misunderstand the nature of the creative process, which is more than simply a process of compilation. Arrabal takes images from a multitude of sources, be it literature, painting, the sciences or his own fertile imagination, (and as his cultural knowledge widens his theatre becomes visibly more eclectic), and assimilates them into his own imaginative universe, where the image assumes a totally new dimension and impact. Moreover, Tar is in any case a secondary theme and the play's interest and originality lie rather in Arrabal's presentation of the theme of the couple.

The final scene of Fando et Lis is particularly significant in terms of the future development of Arrabal's theatre. It stands apart from the other four scenes in this respect: for four scenes the audience has accepted as "real" (within the terms of theatrical convention) the events enacted before them. But suddenly confronted by the three men who are unable to recount the story of Fando and Lis, the audience are obliged to reconsider their attitude towards the events they have just witnessed. Was it Fando and Lis who robbed the rich man in order to buy anchovy sandwiches? Or were they the ones who were going to Tar? Did they perhaps live in the car cemetery? The audience no doubt has a better memory and remembers what happened on the stage, but their confidence in the "reality" of what happened is irreparably undermined.

(1) Lara, op. cit.

By this means the author throws into relief the theatrically false nature of the play and suddenly we realise that what we took to be a definitive and self-contained episode of events was in fact nothing of the kind. It was, in the words of Bernard Gille, "un peu d'ordre artificiellement imposé à la fondamentale folie du monde." (1) In the minds of Mitaro, Namur and Toso, Fando and Lis merge with Mita and Climando, Emanou and Dila and the multitude of other figures which populate Arrabal's imaginary universe. That this play focusses attention on Fando and Lis, and shows this aspect of their activities rather than another, is seen now to be an arbitrary choice and necessarily evokes the confusion which it ostensibly conceals.

One final point to be made in connection with Fando et Lis concerns a peculiarity of the author's language. As was seen in the section above dealing with Arrabal's creative process, the repetition of certain words or phrases plays a large part in establishing formal patterns or rhythms within the early plays. In addition to these short-interval repetitions, there are two phrases which are repeated at long intervals in Fando et Lis and which seem to be of special significance for Arrabal's characters. The first is "essayer" (and its equivalent form "faire un effort") with the remarkably high incidence of twenty-seven. The second, which also implies the notion of effort and is also suggestive of optimism, is "se mettre en route" (sometimes "faire route") recurring fifteen times. It is striking to find these

(1) Gille, op.cit., p.30.

expressions recurring so frequently in a tragedy where love means the destruction of the loved one and where attempts to find happiness are doomed to failure. Yet the characters' actions corroborate their words and, like the characters of Le Tricycle, they seem to be endowed with an enormous appetite for hope. These eternal optimists, always "making an effort" in the face of manifest impossibility, always "setting off" on the futile round, suggest that even in his darkest visions Arrabal never embraced despair.

Les Deux Bourreaux

In November 1956 Arrabal was taken to the Hôpital Foch in Suresnes where he underwent a major operation. This was one of the darkest moments of his life and here, he tells us, he wrote Les Deux Bourreaux and Le Labyrinthe, the latter being a powerful dramatic projection of the persecution complex, apparently, like Adamov's Le Professeur Taranne, transcribed directly from a nightmare. It is no matter for surprise, therefore, that in these two plays Arrabal plunges deeper into the nightmare world of his imagination and produces, in the case of Les Deux Bourreaux, what is surely the most gruesome of his theatre of cruelty. A play

Les Deux Bourreaux is the third play in what Arrabal originally conceived as a trilogy, entitled Por qué nos has abandonado? The trilogy presents a broad spectrum of the author's experience of life until that time: the first play (Le Tricycle) exploring in general terms the theme of "le malheur d'exister"; the second (Fando et Lis) dealing primarily with the theme of love and the couple; and now a third play showing the mother-child relationship and inspired, albeit unconsciously, by Arrabal's own family life.

Les Deux Bourreaux is thus, significantly, the first play to draw specifically upon autobiography for the dramatic situation. For the first time Arrabal returns to the source. All his early works are bound inextricably in one way or another to Arrabal's experience of reality, but here he focusses attention upon that moment in time when his father was arrested, a critical

moment in reality and one which is at the centre of Arrabal's imagination. It is impossible not to see Arrabal's mother as the prototype of Françoise, the pious and hypocritical woman who denounces her husband to the secret police. And yet Arrabal warns us that this was not his conscious intention:

C'est une oeuvre très proche de moi, de ma famille. Je viens de la revoir et elle m'a semblé très symbolique, alors qu'en commençant à l'écrire je ne songeais nullement à ma vie passée, mais à mettre en présence une femme et deux enfants. (1)

Again one is reminded of the preponderant rôle of the subconscious as the inspirational source of his theatre, for it is clear that the starting-point for the dramatic situation is drawn from the author's past life.

Like the other play written at the Hôpital Foch, this work bears the distinctive mark of Kafka. (2) As Bernard Gille has explained, the location has a dual function as ante-room to the torture chamber and as the family drawing-room:

Comme dans Le Procès, le fantastique onirique envahissant la réalité quotidienne marque la promiscuité entre la vie privée et l'appareil administratif d'une justice dont on ne voit que les membres subalternes. (3)

The location, then, is a dramatic image of the way in which Arrabal, on a personal domestic level, experienced the atrocity of the national conflict. But whereas Kafka's lumber room in Chapter Five of The Trial is a commonplace location tending towards the banal, Arrabal's "salle très obscure" with its bare walls, sparse

(1) Entretiens, p.11.

(2) Kafka's influence is of course more self-evident in Le Labyrinthe, though here too it is implied in the title. The original title of Arrabal's play is Los Dos Verdugos, whilst Chapter Five of the Spanish version of The Trial is entitled El Verdugo.

(3) Gille, op. cit., p.33.

furniture and its creaking door tends more immediately towards the nightmarish. And whilst the whipping scene in The Trial is observed through the eyes of K., in Les Deux Bourreaux there is no such refractive agent between the audience and the events as they are portrayed in all their horror on the stage.

Arrabal has frequently expressed his great admiration for Kafka and it is not difficult to imagine the emotional links which drew him towards the Czechoslovak novelist. Kafka evokes a hierarchical society governed by some stern enigmatic authority, a monumental overwhelming presence which is unseen, inexplicable yet omniscient and omnipresent. The hero K is both alienated from and persecuted by this authority. As Chapter One of this study seeks to expose, the sensations of persecution and alienation are both basic to the young playwright's experience of life, so it seems likely that in Kafka he found a haunting image corresponding to his own intuitive grasp of reality.

In Les Deux Bourreaux and Le Labyrinthe, as in The Trial, a character is indicted by authority, whose agents pursue and punish the miscreant. But of what are the victims guilty? Their crime is not specified. By all normal standards they would appear innocent, but in the nightmare world created by Arrabal the simple mention of the word "guilty" is sufficient to set in motion the implacable machinery which will end in the destruction of its designated victim.

At the sound of the crucial word "coupable", the two executioners, hitherto indifferent to the mother's whining, leap eagerly into

action. The mother ushers her children into the darkened room and her shrill voice pierces the obscurity. From the start she assumes a declamatory style: "Quels tristes et dramatiques moments vivons-nous!" she exclaims. (1) Her language is a grotesque and melodramatic parody in its emotive excesses. It is heavily charged with vocabulary evoking great suffering: adversité, esclave, plaies, blessures, douleurs, souffrances, renoncement, sacrifices, martyre etc. Above all it is a voluntarily religious lexis as she recounts her "passion". "Quel Calvaire!" she proclaims, invoking God. "Mais je porte cette croix avec dignité, par amour de vous" she tells her children. (2) Benoît is not slow to respond to the implications of his mother's language:

BENOIT - Tu es une sainte.

FRANÇOISE - Tais-toi! Que pourrais-je rêver de plus beau que la sainteté! Je ne peux pas être une sainte. Pour être une sainte il faut être quelqu'un de très grand, et moi, je ne vau^x rien. J'essaie seulement d'être bonne, sans plus de prétentions. (3)

Her insistent self-pity, self-sacrifice and sham humility work to create a monstrous, overbearing, larger-than-life figure which dwarfs and suffocates the children.

Françoise is the prototype for all the mother figures in Arrabal's later works. This image of a fanatically pious woman who "sacrifices" herself for her son is clearly fundamental to his imaginative universe. She reappears in 1959 in Baal Babylone, in 1962 in Le Grand Cérémonial and is again evoked in 1965 in L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie. They all speak freely of

(1) Théâtre I, p.39.

(2) ibid. p.43.

(3) ibid.

self-sacrifice. The mother in the novel says: "Je n'ai fait que me sacrifier pour vous, toujours" (1), whilst the mother in Le Grand Cérémonial declares: Je t'ai sacrifié toute ma vie et toute ma jeunesse." (2) Self-denigration is another of their favourite themes:

Je ne suis qu'une pauvre femme ignorante et sans instruction qui ne désire que le bien de ses enfants, coûte que coûte (3)

complains Françoise, and the mother in Baal Babylone echoes:

Je ne suis qu'une pauvre femme sans instruction qui a fait tout ce qu'elle a pu pour vous. J'ai toujours été l'esclave de vos moindres désirs. (4)

This sentiment is again echoed by Cavanosa's mother, who whines:

Tu ne m'as jamais vu sortir ni chercher des distractions de côté et d'autre. J'ai été toute ma vie ton esclave. (5)

That is to say that this image of the "madre castradora" looms large in the author's imagination over a period of many years. That the portrait of Françoise is inspired by certain facets of his own mother seems undeniable. On the other hand Françoise transcends her autobiographical implications in that her significance in the play is not restricted simply to an equivalence between the image and the real-life model. Françoise is also a symbolic figure, and a relatively complex symbol functioning at various levels. In the first place Arrabal appears to be pouring out his hatred, not of his mother but of a whole Spanish climate of suffering, torture, chains, suffocating evangelism, the Church and the Inquisition, and the ethos of sacrifice and expiation. From the distance of

(1) Baal Babylone, p.30.

(2) Théâtre III, p.66.

(3) Théâtre I, p.57.

(4) Baal Babylone, p.30.

(5) Théâtre III, pp.67-8.

his hospital bed in France Arrabal is here evoking with disgust and fascination, perhaps unconsciously, the Spain of which he speaks with such emotion in his notes on the exhibition of paintings by his compatriot Saura:

Je hais les tableaux de Saura comme j'abhorre l'Espagne. Tant de hargne; quelle explosion de l'imagination! Cette Espagne que Saura condamne est si vivante dans son oeuvre qu'à travers l'hostilité apparaît l'horreur.

Au milieu d'une fête dionysiaque, la cour et ses inquisiteurs imposaient l'intolérance, la torture, la haine, le sang... comme aujourd'hui: il n'y a qu'en Espagne que la prison de Carabanchel et l'assassinat de Grimau ne sont pas anachroniques. (1) li

For Arrabal this face of Spain is crystallised and epitomised in the fate of his own father and the deception of his mother.

The rôle of the mother in this is somewhat ambiguous, for if, from one point of view, she is the symbol of this aspect of Spain, from another she is herself its victim. She is a symbol to the extent that she incarnates the fanaticism of Church and State and that by her behaviour she acts as an instrument of the persecuting authorities. It is she who pronounces her husband's guilt, as Maurice's reproaches recall: "Tu es la seule à dire qu'il était coupable." (2) Thus, as much as the two executioners, she is the instrument of his execution.

On the other hand, on a more personal level, Françoise is herself the victim of those things she symbolises in the play. If one regards the action from the point of view of a family drama, Françoise as an individual might be thought to have been tragically corrupted by a church which seeks to impose itself

(1) "Saura", exhibition notes, Galerie Stadler, Paris, 2.11.69.

(2) Théâtre I, p.57.

through fanaticism and dogma, and by a state which seeks to rule absolutely through persecution and fear. Is not the mother motivated in part by fear of persecution rather than ideological conviction? Her husband's crime was not that he had endangered the state but that

Il a compromis l'avenir de ses enfants par sa faiblesse. Il savait bien que s'il continuait dans cette voie il finirait tôt ou tard comme il a fini. (1)

In her language and actions she shows herself to be a product of that brainwashing of which Arrabal has spoken and which is directed towards the inculcation of piety and devotion to established values. Her perversion stems from the fanatical enthusiasm with which she applies herself to the preservation of these abstract ideals. "La famille est une chose sacrée" she proclaims as Jean is being put to death. (2) That is, the concept of family is more sacred than the life of her husband. To Jean himself she proffers these words of encouragement:

Tu es coupable, et ton devoir c'est d'accepter avec patience ton châtement bien mérité. Tu dois même remercier les bourreaux qui te traitent avec tant de remords. (3)

Here the words which Arrabal puts in her mouth are positively prophetic, for when in 1967 Arrabal was released after his imprisonment in Spain his mother came to meet him:

Or, quand je suis sorti de prison elle m'attendait, un livre à la main: c'était un des miens. Elle voulait que je le dédicace au directeur de la prison, pour le remercier de "m'avoir bien traité", alors que j'étais aussi mal traité que tout le monde. Ma mère a eu beaucoup de ces gestes dans mon enfance. (4)

(1) *ibid.* p.56.

(2) *ibid.* p.51.

(3) *ibid.* p.48.

(4) Entretiens, p.12.

The point is of course that Arrabal's mother was as much a victim of the climate of fanaticism in which she lived as she was representative of it, and this is also the case with Françoise.

Françoise's attitude towards her husband's suffering reflects the confusion in Arrabal's mind as a result of ambiguities in his education. On the one hand she constantly incites Jean to fortitude, urging him to accept his punishment willingly. This appears to be a distorted reflection of the doctrine of necessary repentance and expiation for the good of the soul, in which Françoise apparently has implicit belief. "Accepte le châtement sans rébellion. C'est ta purification." (1) The relationship of this attitude to the author's youth is self-evident, for it has been shown how his spiritual education was founded on the cultivation of guilt and the mortification of the flesh. Arrabal casts doubt on this doctrine by showing a man being exhorted in the most cynical manner to embrace death for some unspecified misdemeanour.

Superficially, then, Françoise would wish to be considered the pious guardian of purity and good values. On the other hand, her motives are soon seen to be less disinterested, for she derives vicarious pleasure from her husband's suffering. Whereas the "suffering" she so willingly assumes on her own behalf is the source of cerebral satisfaction to her, her participation in Jean's torture procures her real physical pleasure. As he is being whipped she listens, "les yeux écarquillés, le visage grimaçant, (presque souriant?), hystérique." (2) Her excitement

(1) Théâtre I, p.48.

(2) ibid. p.45.

intensifies as she goes to rub salt and vinegar in his wounds:

Un peu de sel et de vinaigre sur ses blessures feront merveille! (Avec un enthousiasme hystérique). Un peu de sel et de vinaigre! (1)

The excitement makes her quite breathless. Back in the ante-chamber with her sons, as the sound of the whips and Jean's cries continue with increasing intensity towards their fatal climax, Françoise too becomes more and more hysterical, finally lapsing into a frenetic monologue:

Ils le fouettent encore... Et ils doivent lui faire beaucoup de mal... (Françoise parle en haletant). Il pleure!... Il gémit, n'est-ce pas?... (Personne ne répond). Oui, oui, il gémit. Je l'entends parfaitement. (2)

Here again one is reminded of the climate of Arrabal's youth. Cruelty, sadism, the mortification of the flesh within a sado-religious context, and in particular the subsequent identification between pain and ecstasy are all projected in the most dramatic form in the figure of Françoise.

Thirteen years after writing Les Deux Bourreaux Arrabal spoke of it as an allegorical play relating to a specific moment in history. When Victor Garcia's intended production of the play in Madrid was censored by the Spanish authorities, Arrabal made the following declaration in the French press:

La signification en est claire. Sur un fond de cauchemar et de torture, deux fils s'opposent comme les deux moitiés d'une terre déchirée. Quand le fanatisme, qu'incarne la mère, paraît triompher, surgit l'image d'un peuple humilié, vaincu - mais seulement provisoirement - par l'intolérance. Comme l'a très bien compris la censure franquiste,

(1) *ibid.* p.49.

(2) *ibid.* pp.54-55.

cette terre déchirée est l'Espagne, le fanatisme et l'intolérance sont la dictature. (1)

Les Deux Bourreaux can be seen quite justifiably as a political allegory. Benoît, whose name is itself symbolic, the "good" son submitting to the fanatical authoritarian mother, represents fascist Spain. Maurice recalls both Lieutenant Arrabal and, in broader terms, Republican Spain after the Nationalist victory. Arrabal points out: "L'autre doit demander pardon à sa mère pour sa 'révolte', alors qu'elle a livré son père et qu'elle collabore avec les bourreaux." (2) But one recalls that the rebels, on gaining control of Melilla in 1936, had sentenced Lieutenant Arrabal ^{to} death on a pretext of "military rebellion." The political analogy is thus quite precise.

The play, then, can be seen as a portrayal of the Civil War in Spain and its aftermath, but the national conflict is seen with a particular optic. As in Guernica three years later Arrabal approaches history on a personal level. (3) Speaking of Guernica he said, characteristically: "Pour moi, il ne s'agit pas de l'Histoire, il s'agit du quotidien, du merveilleux et de l'humour dans le quotidien." (4) This is precisely because his own experience of the war was essentially a limited personal experience:

C'est ainsi que, à notre échelle, au niveau des "petites gens", nous avons vécu la tragédie de la guerre civile. (5)

(1) "Déclaration de Fernando Arrabal", L'Humanité, 20.2.69.

(2) Entretiens, p.15.

(3) The crucial difference between the two plays from the point of view of this study is that whereas Guernica was conceived as a "political" play with didactic intentions, no such ambition apparently inspired Les Deux Bourreaux.

(4) Entretiens, p.56.

(5) ibid. p.15.

So if one observes that Les Deux Bourreaux assumes a historical dimension and transcends its personal subjective sources, one hastens to add that this does not imply that Arrabal wished it to be so at the time of writing. With the probable exceptions of Pique-nique en campagne and Guernica, all the plays prior to 1962 remain bound by their author's highly subjective vision and are characterised by introversion. Hence, though the political allegory is inherent in Les Deux Bourreaux, its interpretation as such remains strictly posterior to its composition. "Mais je n'en eus pas conscience en écrivant la pièce, je vous le répète", insists Arrabal. (1) The fact that such an interpretation is, on his own admission, an afterthought, and that Les Deux Bourreaux was conceived on a strictly personal level is further evidence that Arrabal in 1956 was as yet unable to extrapolate from his personal experience to consider the reality beyond himself in an objective manner.

(1) *ibid.*p.15.

La Bicyclette du condamné

The published editions of this play bear the date 1959, a fact which should be approached with some circumspection. The chronology and genesis of La Bicyclette du condamné is more complicated than that of most of Arrabal's plays. The findings of examination of available data are given in the Appendix to this study; for present purposes they can be resumed as follows.

The earliest evidence of the genesis of La Bicyclette du condamné is an undated, untitled manuscript which represents some 40% of the published text. This manuscript, which will be referred to as "A", is not an abandoned work but a complete play in its own right; (1) it is an embryonic version of the published play, containing neither the jeux de scène with the balloon and the chamber-pot, nor the conclusion in which childish laughter and perfectly executed piano scales are heard off-stage, whilst on-stage the balloon rises slowly to heaven. (2) "A" can be shown to be contemporaneous with Arrabal's first thoughts and jottings relating to Orchestration théâtrale, which can be accurately dated to December 1956.

The second version is seen in a typescript entitled La Bicyclette des condamnés (sic). This script, which will be called "B", is a revised and expanded version of "A" differing from the published play only in certain minor respects. Evidence indicates that it dates from 1957 or at the latest January 1958, and this at first

- (1) See: D. Whitton, "A critical edition of the MS of the first version of Arrabal's 'La Bicyclette du condamné'", Forum for Modern Language Studies, IX, no.3, July 1973, pp.253-268.
- (2) Théâtre II, (Bourgeois) p.238.

sight appears to give the date of composition of the play as it is known to the public. However, closer examination of "B" casts a large shadow of doubt over this supposition, since the last page, containing the "happy ending" (important for any thematic interpretation of the play) is seen to be typed on a different kind of paper from the rest of the script. Moreover, whilst the first twenty-five pages of "B" are carbon copies, p.26 is an original top copy.

How are these irregularities to be interpreted? They could indicate that Arrabal revised the text again, after the composition of "B", and that, rather than rewrite the entire script, he simply replaced the last page. Internal evidence, provided by thematic analysis of the play, seems to confirm this suggestion, since there is a very marked discrepancy in tone between the optimism of the revised ending and the bleak, unrelieved anguish of the action which precedes it.

(For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that there are in addition two published versions of the play. The second differs from the original edition in the interpolation of several pseudo-surrealist passages of dialogue. For example: "J'ai l'impression d'avoir des bouteilles de bonheur et un chapeau de pluie blanche." (1) Unlike the more substantial earlier re-workings of the text these variations are of a purely stylistic nature).

There are thus four stages to be distinguished in the genesis of La Bicyclette du condamné, the earliest going back as far as 1956. Unlike most of the author's works, which were written quickly

(1) Théâtre II, p.203.

in concentrated bursts of creativity, this play has evolved over a period of years and it is therefore advisable to specify which version one is referring to when discussing the play. This is of paramount importance when, as in this study, one proposes to analyse the relationship between the author's work and his life at the time of writing.

Arrabal has said of La Bicyclette du condamné: "C'est ma vie d'alors représentée telle quelle. Avec une fidélité absolue." (1) But to which version, and to what period in his life, was he alluding? Speaking of his reactions to a performance of this play, he revealed:

Quelle souffrance! Je ne sais pas si elle était bien ou mal montée, tellement j'ai eu mal. Cela me rappelait trop les circonstances pénibles où elle avait été écrite. A la réflexion, elle devait être bien montée pour m'ébranler à ce point. Toutes ces pièces de la première époque sont très proches de moi et elles me troublent beaucoup quand elles sont bien représentées. (2)

In the light of this, and of the anguish and unconcealed pessimism emanating from the play, it was more than a little disconcerting to see that in his published texts Arrabal had attributed the play to 1959, since there had been a considerable evolution in his personal circumstances in the years between 1956 and 1959. In the spring of 1957 he returned from the sanatorium where he had been living for the past fifteen months, cured of his illness. In the following February he married Luce Moreau and, turning his back on the memories of Spain, settled definitively in Paris. In the same year Arrabal signed a contract with the publisher René Julliard assuring him of a fixed income for the rest of his life. He thus

(1) Entretiens, p.123.

(2) ibid. p.122.

achieved, at the age of twenty-six, the rare distinction of seeing his plays published before a single one of them had been mounted on the stage. The first productions of Pique-nique en campagne and Orchestration théâtrale, directed by Jean-Marie Serreau and Jacques Poliéri respectively, materialised in 1959. That is to say that Arrabal in 1959 was no longer the "petit émigrant malade et sans ressources" of 1956 (1) but an acknowledged artist with prospects of a dramatic career ahead. Why then, if La Bicyclette du condamné dates from 1959, does it not bear witness to these more favourable circumstances?

The answer is clearly that when Arrabal speaks of the intense suffering which this play evokes for him he is thinking of the period around 1956 and 1957 when the bulk of the play was written. It could be argued that the text as published (with the "happy ending") was established in 1959, which would explain why Arrabal specifically mentions that date, though all that can be stated with certainty is that the text was revised and completed at some time between 1957 (date of composition of "B") and 1961 (date of publication). The new "happy ending", if, as seems highly probable, it is indeed subsequent to "B", is indicative of the happier circumstances in which the third version was prepared.

In conformity with the principles adopted regarding the use of texts in this study, the analysis here is based on the most recent (Bourgois) version, but the play generally will be considered as dating from 1956, whilst remembering that certain elements are of later origin.

(1) *ibid.* p.121.

The subject of La Bicyclette du condamné is again essentially autobiographical. Viloro the hero is an artist, for whom the supreme achievement is to be able to play faultless scales on the piano. To this end he has devoted two years or more to his daily practice. However, in the world in which he lives, for some incomprehensible reason, playing the piano is forbidden, and Viloro consequently suffers progressively more cruel persecution at the hands of his three censors. These men, agents of retribution from the outside world, mock Viloro's artistic efforts, bind his feet together and ultimately kill him. Paradoxically, the greater his suffering at the hands of these persecutors, the greater his musical talent.

Viloro's lover, Tasla, is employed (or condemned?) by the same society to drive its other victims, condemned men, from prison to the torture-chamber. When together, they form a typically arrabalian couple who suffer under a tyrannical authority, living in fear and ignorance of society's justice. At times, however, Tasla is transformed into a lascivious prostitute playing erotic games with the three men, Viloro's torturers, whilst Viloro is the anguished and helpless witness to these erotic scenes.

From this résumé it will be seen that La Bicyclette du condamné is the point of convergence of various themes observed in earlier plays. Like the protagonists of Le Tricycle, like Etienne in Le Labyrinthe, Viloro is oppressed, and ultimately destroyed, in accordance with the incomprehensible interdictions of some intolerant authority. Like Lis, Tasla is both the hero's lover and a contributor to his suffering. Like Michaela in Le Labyrinthe she is

inconstant and bafflingly unpredictable. Like all other arrabalian heroes, Viloro and Tasla nourish an unjustifiable faith in their dearest fantasy, that one day they will escape from the oppression which blights their lives:

TASLA - Un jour nous serons libres. Et, cachés, nous chanterons à tue-tête les affirmations comme des dessins de rire. Libres! (1)

The work's deepest significance is to be found in this opposition between liberty and persecution. As in Fando et Lis the conflict of tensions is situated precisely at the point of contact between the hero and the "monde extérieur", but whereas Fando was alienated from society in a negative sense, Viloro is actively persecuted by the outside world.

This theme clearly derives from the author's personal obsessions. In an interview with Alain Schifres, he described a dream he used to have in his youth:

... je me trouve sur une montagne, dans le brouillard, et il y a toute une foule qui rit de moi. Je continue d'avancer, le brouillard se dissipe et je suis au bord d'un précipice. Je comprends alors que les gens rient parce que je vais tomber et me tuer. (2)

Many years later, as a mature artist, Arrabal still believed that the censorship directed against his work was the result of a tacit conspiracy. In a letter dated 31 March 1962 to José Menleon, his editor in Spain, he wrote: "Yo estoy convencido de que hay una especie de tácita conspiración contra mí." (3) And in 1969 he said:

(1) Théâtre II, p.212.

(2) Entretiens, p.106.

(3) Teatro, Taurus, Madrid, 1965, p.40.

Longtemps j'ai cru que tous étaient ligués contre moi, maintenant je constate que le monde n'est pas joli à voir, que nous sommes tous contre tous, mais que personne ne m'est "spécialement hostile". Il m'arrive encore de le penser, mais je suis devenu beaucoup plus lucide. Cette croyance s'est exacerbée pendant mon enfance, qui s'est écoulée au sein d'une société régie par la tyrannie. Pour cette raison, l'impression que l'on me persécute n'a pas encore complètement disparu. (1)

Arrabal's heritage from his youth is thus a sensation of being a victim, both of unreasonable constraints and of inexplicable hostility. The resultant persecution complex appears in La Bicyclette du condamné as a veritable obsession. Against this sense of unmotivated victimization, Arrabal opposes his own modest concept of liberty - "modest" because it is usually defined negatively as the absence of persecution. Hence the frequency with which the words "libre" and "liberté" recur in the mouths of his heroes: it is their highest ideal.

La Bicyclette du condamné involves two major themes based on this opposition between persecution and liberty. First, the theme of intolerance and the associated questions of guilt and innocence and the concept of justice; secondly the theme of Viloro the artist and the relationship between suffering and creativity. In fact, if these themes at times are inseparable, (since Viloro is persecuted for his artistic activity), it is because in Arrabal's experience there is a fundamental relationship between the two.

One aspect of freedom for Arrabal is the artist's freedom to create according to the unfettered dictates of his inspiration. Clearly, his restricted education, conditioned by censorship, and even the mockery with which his family greeted his own early artistic endeavour, are at the roots of this attitude. The act of

(1) Entretiens, pp.35-36.

artistic creation for Arrabal not only postulates liberty as its sine qua non, it is itself freedom. When Arrabal spoke of his first contact with the theatre of Beckett and Ionesco, the quality he evoked was their exhilarating freedom. ("Voici un langage libre et exaltant qui est accepté! Ma liberté sera reconnue un jour!" (1)). For Arrabal's imagination knows no boundaries other than artistic ones, admits of no taboos or arbitrary limitations imposed from without. In depicting Viloro being persecuted for his artistic activity, Arrabal seems to have sensed, several years before his work was offered to the public, the hostility which it was going to arouse.

That Viloro in his capacity as an artist represents the author is beyond doubt. Arrabal confirms this when he says:

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. (2)

The original manuscript is even more explicit. During the first conversation with Tasla, Viloro relates his projects for the future; they will run away to foreign lands and Viloro will give concert performances, free of charge. (3) But in addition:

VILORO - Además podemos hacer teatro...
TASLA - Donde?
VILORO - Pues en los países en que vamos.
TASLA - Teatro nosotros?
VILORO - Sí. Por qué no? Así será mas completo.

Viloro is thus a dramatist too. These references disappear in the second version, suggesting that Arrabal preferred to dramatise himself in a less obvious manner.

(1) *ibid.* p.35.

(2) *ibid.* p.123.

(3) Which is what Emanou and his friends do in Le Cimetière des voitures. The many thematic and circumstantial links between this play and La Bicyclette du condamné are more than fortuitous: vide infra, pp.151-2.

In La Bicyclette du condamné Arrabal pursues further his analysis of the dynamics of the couple, particularly in the light of the ambiguous nature of woman. Like Lis, Tasla is capable of the most contradictory behaviour towards her lover, to such an extent that one might say there are in fact two distinct and unrelated Taslas. The transitions between Tasla-lover and Tasla-prostitute are abrupt, and whereas the various facets of personality presented by Fando and Lis could be justified or reconciled psychologically, the metamorphoses which Tasla undergoes are of an altogether more unpredictable and mechanical nature. There is no apparent psychological explanation for these changes, and in this respect Tasla is more akin to Michaela than to Lis. Whilst Fando and Lis were ambivalent, Tasla is frankly polymorphous, that is, she is liable to assume two totally different rôles. It is not only Tasla who is subject to such metamorphosis. There is for example little apparent connection between Paso the condemned man and the other Paso who censors and persecutes Vilorio. (1) Vilorio alone remains psychologically stable or coherent.

La Bicyclette du condamné is thus characterised by the total abandonment of the traditional aristotelian concept of character as a fixed and stable entity. Arrabal is here working even further away from the semi-naturalist tendencies of his first plays, towards a more imagistic dramatic style which tends to enhance the dream-like or nightmarish quality of the action. For Fando, Lis and Françoise, despite the contradictory facets they presented,

(1) In the original version these two "characters" were entirely separate: Paso (the third persecutor) and Atado (the red-haired prisoner in Tasla's cage).

still remained psychologically coherent. But starting with Michaela in Le Labyrinthe Arrabal begins to present what appear to be utterly unrelated rôles within the same person, and the metamorphoses are now motivated primarily by the mechanics of the action rather than by psychological considerations.

As regards the origin of this technique, it could be shown that Arrabal is not the initiator of a particularly novel attitude towards personality. Pirandello, for example, probably the first among modern authors, showed the basic relativity of all our notions of human personality by demonstrating how utterly different people can appear in different situations. Ionesco, too, especially in his portrayal of the couple, sometimes creates a dream-like situation, not unlike Arrabal's, in which human beings lose their consistency. The sister in Le Tableau, for example, can be a tyrant dominating the Gros Monsieur, or can suddenly become the cowering victim of his tyranny.

Needless to say Arrabal's portrayal of these polymorphous characters is not of literary origin; nor in all probability does it have the intellectual basis of Pirandello's or Ionesco's treatment of the subject. His own experience of life has proved to him that appearances are deceptive. Certainly his mother is partly responsible for this attitude, that is, those facets of his mother that relate her to Galdós' Doña Perfecta, the epitome in Spanish literature of "las personas que parecen buenas y no lo son". (1) But that is just one aspect of a broadly based

(1) B. Pérez Galdós, Doña Perfecta, in: Obras completas IV, Aguilar, Madrid, 1960, p.501.

perception of the "confusion" of life. Regarding the polymorphism of his characters, Arrabal told Alain Schifres: "Je trouve cela très réaliste. Pour moi la vie est comme cela." (1) Or again:

C'est une chose que je n'arrive pas à expliquer, mais que je saisis dans toute son ampleur... Ça ne me choque pas car cela me semble profondément vrai, cette ambiguïté. (2)

On another occasion Arrabal was able to explain more precisely how this aspect of his work is related to his perception of reality:

Nous sommes une interrogation pour nous-mêmes. Cette ambivalence de mes mensonges dont vous parliez tout à l'heure, ces êtres qui brusquement deviennent autres, c'est un aspect de cette interrogation. Notre nature est imprécise. Elle change avec le milieu, l'interlocuteur, l'environnement, l'habit. (3)

But if reality is deceptive, any understanding of the constantly shifting relationships presented in Arrabal's theatre can only be elicited by asking the crucial question: from whose point of view does the spectator view the action? The key to an understanding of a specific play like La Bicyclette du condamné lies in the following statement:

Aux yeux de ces personnages, c'est le monde, et non eux, qui est double ou triple ou quadruple. Eux essaient de s'adapter. C'est le monde extérieur, et non eux-mêmes, qui est insaisissable. Mes personnages sont en situation de rupture permanente devant un monde plein de nuances inexplicables. (4)

For there is in fact one fixed point amid the myriad illusionary forms which reality may adopt in his theatre, and that is the hero himself. Viloro at least is constant, and like Etienne in Le Labyrinthe, he alone retains his coherent identity in the face

(1) Entretiens, p.130.

(2) ibid. pp.104-105.

(3) ibid. p.118.

(4) ibid. p.130.

of a metamorphous world.

The analogy between this situation and what happens in a dream is immediately apparent. Like Etienne, Vilorio seems to be experiencing a particularly nasty nightmare. Perhaps the three men who appear each time, almost mechanically, in response to Vilorio's piano playing have no autonomous existence but are conjured up out of his own mind, projections on the outside world of his own obsessions. Whether or not this is so, the play's meaning is obviously related to Vilorio's (and therefore to Arrabal's) obsessions.

If this is so, one might distinguish between three stages in Vilorio's relationship with the three men. In the first, the three men act as the artist's censors; this is when they mock his efforts to play the piano by pointing their accusing fingers at him and by laughing. Whilst the policeman in Le Tricycle asserted his authority by means of vocal utterances, here one is able to impose one's authority by a laugh and a stare.

In their rôle as Vilorio's torturers the three men incarnate the hero's fear of the outside world and this seems to translate not simply an inferiority complex (as in the first stage defined) but a persecution complex. Fando was alienated from the three men with the umbrella and humiliated by them; Maurice witnessed the inexplicable persecution and killing of his father; in La Bicyclette du condamné Arrabal combines the two experiences, for Vilorio experiences for himself the ultimate effects of persecution.

Finally, as Tasla's partners in erotic games, the three men illustrate Vilorio's sexual insecurity. Fando, it was seen earlier, suffered from an obsessive fear of losing his lover and that fear led him to reinforce her paralysis by means of handcuffs and chains.

Tasla however is not bound by such constraints, and true to the nature of her sex, is quite capable of deserting Viloro to indulge in sexual adventures with the first man who happens to come along. For it is Tasla who seduces the men, not vice versa, and this reflects as much on the deceptive hypocritical nature of women as upon the rôle of Viloro's persecutors.

In his rôle as censor Paso stands apart from the other two men. He is the most aggressive and most authoritarian of the three. His relationship with Tasla is equivocal, for at times he rejects her advances in the most brutal manner, whilst at other times he seduces her in an equally aggressive way. This leads to the very interesting suggestion formulated by Françoise Raymond-Mundschau, (1) that in a very precise way Paso is the double image of the hero. As Tasla's prisoner in the cage he is both the predecessor and the image of Viloro as a victim of authority, (for it is Viloro as much as Paso who is the eponymous condemned man). On the other hand, as censor and persecutor, Paso is all that Viloro could wish to be: the psychological superior who can seduce women successfully or dismiss their advances at will. Paso is thus both the mirror image and the inverted image of Viloro: what he is, and what he aspires to be, all of which lends added conviction to the belief that these characters have all materialised from within Viloro's obsessed mind.

In Arrabal's original manuscript, the play ended with Viloro's execution and the removal by Tasla of his body. Thus the curtain came down on one of the most profoundly pessimistic and unrelievedly anguished plays of Arrabal's early theatre. The ending as it

(1) F. Raymond-Mundschau, Arrabal, Editions Universitaires, Paris, 1972, p.60.

appears in the published text presents a totally new departure:

Tasla sort à droite avec sa bicyclette et le cercueil. Long silence. On entend des rires d'enfants. Le ballon commence à s'élever peu à peu jusqu'à ce qu'il disparaisse vers les cintres. Pendant ce temps on entend de plus en plus fort des rires enfantins très purs et au fond des gammes jouées au piano et parfaitement exécutées. (1)

For the first time in Arrabal's theatre there is an escape from the world of oppression and intolerance. The purity of the children's laughter and the perfect piano playing triumph over the torture and violence and end by imposing themselves. The blue balloon rising slowly towards heaven indicates for the first time the possibility of a vertical projection leading out of the "monde concentrationnaire", the world of the prison which had engulfed all previous arrabalian heroes. Vilorio has not come to terms with the cruel world in which he lived; he has not even challenged it. Quite simply, a miracle of apotheosis happens, and "le merveilleux" triumphs over the prison. Dramatically, this miraculous resolution seems almost unjustified, but as a poetic act of faith, an assertion of blind hope, its value is of undeniable significance.

Nothing in Arrabal's theatre would lead one to anticipate this sudden note of optimism. Nothing in Arrabal's work prior to La Bicyclette du condamné would suggest that the sphere, hitherto a symbol of the vicious circle, of the prison, would suddenly assume a new dimension as symbol of the vertical ascent, as it does here and in many subsequent plays. (2) So unexpected is this

(1) Théâtre II, p.238.

(2) Concert dans un oeuf, La Communion solennelle, Guernica, Bestialité érotique, Le Jardin des délices.

conclusion that it barely seems compatible with the rest of the play if, as indeed one is bound, one accepts Arrabal's comments regarding the "circonstances pénibles où elle avait été écrite." In the absence of conclusive evidence, one is left to reiterate the postulate that Arrabal's final stage directions for La Bicyclette du condamné belong to a different period of composition. Certainly, the plays which follow La Bicyclette du condamné, until Guernica, do not bear the mark of such optimism.

Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné

If one makes exception for the conclusion, La Bicyclette du condamné remained firmly entrenched in the "monde concentrationnaire" of Arrabal's first creative period. Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné, written at Bouffémont a few months later, represents an advance on the preceding play in that its theme, an examination of the nature of theatre in relation to life, marks a new stage in the evolution of Arrabal's disposition towards his own life and creativity. The title too foreshadows the ceremonial theatre of the second creative period. (1)

Like Viloro before them, Jérôme and Vincent are artists. But in Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné Arrabal temporarily abandons the theme of the artist persecuted by society to fix his attention on the nature of the artist's activities. This time he makes the protagonists dramatic actors, thereby marking even more pointedly the common identity which links him to his heroes.

One can easily imagine that if Viloro had ever fulfilled his ambition to be a dramatist, he would have resembled Vincent and Jérôme in their ineptitude. The summit of Viloro's artistic achievement was to play the scales correctly, whilst for Fando it was the repetitive "chanson de la plume". For Vincent and Jérôme the most sublime achievement is to play Othello, which they consider consummated when they have donned the appropriate

(1) Though it should be noted that the original manuscript is entitled Salmo para un negro asesinado (Psalm for...). The first use of the word "ceremonia" in the title appears to date from 1958.

costumes; for as Vincent declares: "Avec ces costumes-là nous deviendrons les meilleurs acteurs du monde entier." (1)

What is the reason for their sudden craze for the theatre? In the answer to this question will be found the core of their nature. Jérôme and Vincent, like their predecessors Climando and Apal, Fando and Lis, Vilorio and Tasla, are like "enfants perdus", they have been given existence, but devoid of spiritual life or meaning. Their lives lack direction. They are insubstantial and above all they are terribly bored.

Like the protagonists of Arrabal's earlier plays, they stand apart from society because they cannot identify emotionally with "normal" humanity and because they have not properly understood or assimilated the mores of society. They cannot conceive that crying for a dead person might be a natural response to a loss; for them it is only a social convention, which they do not always remember to observe:

JEROME - Et dis, quand doit-on se mettre à pleurer?

VINCENT - Ça dépend des goûts, il y en a qui commencent avant qu'on meure, d'autres quand on meurt et d'autres encore pendant l'enterrement. Ce qui est mal vu, c'est de ne pas pleurer en public, surtout une femme. Alors, il faut faire des efforts, tu comprends... (2)

Vincent tells with distress how they killed the legless cripple after tormenting him, and how "il ne voulait pas voir qu'on l'aimait bien et qu'on voulait seulement jouer." (3) Like their counterparts in other plays, Jérôme and Vincent are essentially

(1) Théâtre III, p.150.

(2) ibid. p.170.

(3) ibid. p.174.

amoral and lack the sophisticated intellectual processes (especially memory) which would allow them to assimilate the social norms. In consequence their lives are spent in a kind of limbo, some indeterminate no-man's-land where their major occupation is the difficulty of finding amusements to keep themselves occupied. Significantly, their dialogue is structured with pauses and empty moments:

JEROME - Je m'ennuie.

Silence.

VINCENT - Il faut attendre.

Silence.

JEROME - Il ne se passe rien.

Silence.

VINCENT - Si on la fait saigner maintenant... (un temps)
ensuite... (un temps)... on ne pourra plus. (1)

Much of their time is spent in childish amusements:

VINCENT - Tout ce qui nous reste, pour ne pas nous ennuyer,
c'est d'aller aux étangs donner des coups de
bâton aux poissons.

Silence.

JEROME - Ça ne m'amuse plus.

VINCENT - On peut jeter les miettes de pain aux moineaux.

JEROME - On l'a fait trop souvent.

Long silence.

VINCENT - Et le théâtre.

Il rit. Ils rient.

JEROME - C'est vrai, notre théâtre. (2)

Jérôme and Vincent have thus hit upon the theatre as the panacea for their miserable condition. But theatre is not just like the other pastimes, it is far more than simply a distraction. Jérôme and Vincent believe they have been called to the theatre as to a sublime vocation: "Nous sommes des acteurs, c'est un don du ciel." (3) They believe they have been elected to grace, and the theatre is

(1) *ibid.* pp.202-3

(2) *ibid.* p.208

(3) *ibid.* p.160.

to be their salvation, rather in the way that Tar was to be salvation for Fando and Lis, and "bonté" for Fidlo and Lilbé in Oraison.

If Jérôme and Vincent are like lost children, they also possess the naïvety of childhood. They are fragile, immature beings, not prepared to take their place in the world, yet like Arrabal's other characters, they are not allowed to live beyond the reaches of society. Arrabal knows that because society is bound to impinge upon their vulnerable existences, they are doomed to destruction, a fate which he found so distressing to contemplate that he does not portray it in his play; he says:

Ces êtres sont des enthousiastes. Et la vie va leur donner tellement de coups. Ces coups, je ne veux pas les voir. Je veux que cette pièce finisse bien. (1)

The sound of Luce crying in the first scene irritates the heroes precisely because it represents an intrusion of the "real" world into their world of make-believe:

JEROME - Tu as entendu?

VINCENT (ennuyé) - Non.

JEROME - Tu n'as pas entendu?

VINCENT - Non, je n'ai rien entendu. Et si j'ai entendu, je m'en moque. Pour l'instant, on fait quelque chose d'extraordinaire, on ne doit pas s'occuper d'autre chose. (Un temps). Tu ne t'habilles plus?

JEROME - Moi? Si, quelle idée! (2)

Such distractions must not be allowed to impinge upon their devotion to the theatre for, as Vincent says, "maintenant il n'y a que notre vocation qui compte." (3)

Their primary need is to remain encapsulated in the imaginary world which they create for themselves. They are incapable of

(1) Entretiens, p.124.

(2) Théâtre III, p.152.

(3) ibid. p.149.

facing the reality of their situation (that is, their situation as viewed objectively by the spectator) or of the outside world. One of the things they most dread is the "truth", as if in the innermost recesses of their minds they have gnawing doubts about the substance of their fantasies. For example:

VINCENT - Et moi, comment me trouves-tu en Roméo?

JEROME - Franchement?

VINCENT - Oui, franchement, sans t'occuper de rien...

JEROME (ennuyé) - Mais franchement, pour de vrai?

VINCENT - Oui, franchement, pour de vrai. Même si ça me fait de la peine. Fais comme les chirurgiens, charcuté à ton aise, peu importe la douleur du client. Dis-moi la vérité, sois sincère: tu me trouves bien ou au contraire est-ce que tu crois que je ressemble plus au cul d'un singe qu'à Roméo? Franchement.

Attente. Silence.

JEROME (ennuyé) - Franchement?

VINCENT (assailli par le doute) - Oui, franchement.

JEROME (agaçant) - Enfin, il faut que je te dise la vérité?

VINCENT (avec un filet de voix) - Oui, il faut que tu me dises la vérité.

Silence. Attente.

JEROME - Bon, eh bien... tu es parfait. (1)

Jérôme's verdict is pronounced without conviction, but that does not matter: the words have been pronounced and Vincent is infinitely relieved, for so great is his dread of reality that the slightest thread of pretence will be grasped as a life-line.

The make-believe world of the theatre is thus the perfect prolongation and materialisation of the life of fantasy with which they protect themselves from the harsh reality of the outside world. For by becoming actors, from the very moment they assume their disguises, they merge their real selves into imaginary existences, the theatrical illusion becomes their reality, and fantasy and

(1) *ibid.* pp.154-155.

reality thus fuse indistinguishably.

For Jérôme and Vincent, theatre becomes life itself. The contamination between the theatrical game and their private lives is so great that it becomes difficult to distinguish one from the other. Even their everyday activities (which they apparently see as something separate from their theatrical activity) and their dialogue are structured according to the ceremonial forms of a theatrical rite, that is, the external forms and trappings which they consider to be the very essence of drama.

Some of their theatricalised gestures are utterly inappropriate to real life, such as when they contrive the mise en scène for the burial of Luce's father. Their procedure here is epitomised from the start by the use of the trunk in which their stage costumes were stored, now painted black to serve as a coffin, its dual function offering a concrete stage metaphor for the fusing of life and theatre. For them, what counts is not the content of the gesture (which they are unable to evaluate) but rather the observance of the ritual per se: "C'est la mode, le linceul est une affaire de mode et il faut la suivre." (1) When Luce voices her indifference, Vincent protests with unknowing irony, "Vous vivez dans un autre ^{monde} ~~monde~~." That is to say, she has failed to enter into the spirit of the world of theatrical fantasy which for Vincent and Jérôme is the only reality. Thus it is that they hit upon the grotesque notion of disguising the corpse as Cyrano de Bergerac, complete with false nose: "Naturellement, le rôle l'exige." (2)

Their declaration of love to Luce is also staged dramatically:

(1) *ibid.* p.178.

(2) *ibid.* p.181.

the dark suit, the obligatory present, the sham bunch of flowers and other props, the carefully rehearsed lines. But as always, their inept efforts are such that the result is only a poor approximation to the theatrical illusion. On entering their room, Luce immediately senses the contrived situation and asks: "Tu fais toujours du théâtre?" (1) The question must be wounding to Vincent and Jérôme because although in a sense they are still acting out their fantasies, for themselves what they are now doing is not theatre but "real" and sincere:

VINCENT (tout rouge) - Non, il ne s'agit pas de théâtre pour l'instant... On a quelque chose de très important à te dire. (2)

The overt histrionism of their comportment in "real" situations is thus hardly more convincing than their stiff attempts to be actors. (3)

Their attempts to create illusion through language are no less feeble. Their ineptitude invariably betrays their falsehoods, as the following example shows:

JEROME (précipitamment) - On n'a rien entendu, pas vrai Vincent?

VINCENT (faussement dégagé) - Non, on n'a rien entendu. On a eu beau se donner du mal pour entendre, on ne t'a pas entendu dire: "Mon père est mort." (4)

Similarly, when they wish to conceal the evidence of their murder,

(1) *ibid.* p.195.

(2) *ibid.*

(3) This is what makes Arrabal's characters so very different from those of Genet, who also create themselves in theatrical rôles. The latter do so in lucidity, the former are unable to distinguish between their reality and the "games" they play. Irma, in Le Balcon, says "Je ne joue plus. Ou plus le même rôle si tu veux", a statement which Vincent and Jérôme would be incapable of formulating.

(4) Théâtre III, p.169.

Vincent attempts a plausible explanation of the odour emanating from beneath his bed, but betrays himself by contradicting himself:

VINCENT - C'est-à-dire que, tu vois?... bref... il y a un chat crevé sous le lit.

LUCE - Bien sûr.

VINCENT - Ne vas pas croire que c'est François d'Assise.

LUCE - Bien sûr que non.

VINCENT - Enfin, j'avais peur que tu croies que le jour où tu nous as abandonnés on l'avait tué à coups de couteau. (Un temps). Et ce n'est pas vrai. C'est un chien qu'il y a sous le lit. (1)

For Jérôme and Vincent real life and theatre are indistinguishable because of the way in which they devote themselves to the theatre as a total occupation and because of the contamination which causes them to theatricalise their "real" lives. For the audience there is a third way in which this is true, because in their real lives, quite unwittingly, the heroes have fashioned their own version of Othello, the play which as actors they are trying to interpret. In their dramatic activities they have cast François d'Assise as Othello - "c'est un rôle qui lui va comme un gant" says Vincent, because, being black, he has the right superficial attributes. (2) However the game turns sour when François-Othello arouses the jealousy of Vincent-Iago and Jérôme-Roderigo by sleeping with the woman they love, Luce-Desdemona. In an access of jealousy and perverted sexuality they wreak vengeance upon him, and as the curtain falls on their rehearsal of the play Othello, Jérôme-Roderigo is paralysed and mute, whilst Vincent-Iago is about to be delivered into the hands of authority to receive his just

(1) *ibid.* p.214.

(2) *ibid.* p.160. Arrabal says this play was inspired by his roommate at Bouffémont, a negro who like François d'Assise was an avid fan of Louis Armstrong.

punishment. In their reality, therefore, and unknowingly, Jérôme and Vincent have succeeded in recreating a version of the drama of which as actors they were quite incapable.

The effect of the heroes' ineptitude as actors is to emphasise the essential falseness of the dramatic illusion. Their attempts at creating illusion are consistently betrayed by their false histrionics. The difference between Jérôme and Vincent as actors and the actors who play Jérôme and Vincent during the performance of Arrabal's play, is (one hopes) that the latter are more proficient at creating a convincing theatrical illusion of reality. But the substance of this play, and the falseness of the play within the play, are such as vitiate this illusion in the audience's mind, and a strange ambiguity is thus generated.

The attempts by Jérôme and Vincent to create a theatre of realism are seen to be phoney, and this in turn reflects upon the theatrical event, the performance of Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné which the audience are watching, and which by a process of contamination is also perceived to be a game of illusion. But in the first degree of reality, the theatrical event, that is the actors' presence and the audience's, is real enough. And in terms of the play's stage reality, though Vincent and Jérôme fail as actors to give an adequate recreation of Othello, in their "real" life they do achieve this after a fashion. Moreover, for themselves, they make no distinction between real life and the game of theatre, since henceforth theatre is to be their life and since their comportment in private affairs is compulsively theatricalised.

What conclusions can be drawn from this confusion? The first

is that theatre and "reality", that is, theatre and life, are here presented as indistinguishable. There is perpetual and reciprocal interplay between the two. For Arrabal, it might be said that life becomes theatre because his plays, which are created from the material of his "biographie riche en phénomènes", are but a reflection, even a prolongation, of the author's personality, his biography, his fantasies and his obsessions. The latter, which for Arrabal are a very real part of his existence, become translated materially onto the stage. At the same time, theatre becomes life, assuming a reality of its own equal to or perhaps even surpassing the reality of everyday life: "I write plays in order to live more intensely." (1)

But Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné shows theatre to be a game of illusion. The second conclusion to be drawn from the play is thus an interrogation on the nature of reality and illusion, for if theatre is an illusion, and if theatre merges with life into a unique order of reality, it follows that life too must be an illusion. The interplay of different planes of reality, stage reality and stage fiction, (play within play) in Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné is in fact a reflection of the myriad shifting forms which reality has presented to Arrabal in his confused experience of life.

As is often the case, one could indicate many notable precursors who have considered such themes before Arrabal. The notion of the world as a theatre and its inhabitants as actors is found most

(1) Margaret Croyden, "Nothing is forbidden", New York Times, 9.8.70.

prominently in Calderón who speaks of "la anchurosa plaza del gran teatro del mundo" (1) and in Shakespeare: "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players." (2) Again, in La Vida es sueño, Segismundo, considering that "all men dream the lives they lead", concludes thus:

Que es la vida? una ilusión,
Una sombra, una ficción,
Y el mejor bien es pequeño;
Que toda la vida es sueño,
Y los sueños, sueños son. (3)

and in these words of course is the echo of Prospero's "We are such stuff as dreams are made on." (4)

Arrabal is known to have been familiar with these works and the possibility of his having been influenced by them is not remote. On the other hand, as is always the case, the play's thematic substance can be demonstrated as having a precise correlation with Arrabal's personal preoccupations. As has already been indicated, the author finds it as difficult to distinguish between "truth" and "illusion" as between the reality of life and the equally real reality of theatre which is but a fictitious recreation of his real life. What is particularly interesting about Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné is that it seems to represent a new stage of awareness in the author's progression towards self-understanding.

It is perhaps the first step in the transition from pure introversion towards the introspection which must precede self-

(1) P. Calderón de la Barca, Tragedias I, Alianza, Madrid, 1967, p.115.

(2) As You Like It, II.vii.139.

(3) "What is life? An illusion, a dream, a fiction, and the greatest good is but small. For all life is a dream, and our dreams are simply dreams." - Calderón de la Barca, op.cit. p.119.

(4) The Tempest, IV.1.157.

knowledge. In his plays prior to Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné, it has been seen, Arrabal's obsessions and fantasies found expression through a creative process which was nothing if not instinctive. Although the plays necessarily mirror the author's deepest preoccupations, there has so far been no evidence of any tentative at self-analysis. Climando, Fando, Maurice, Etienne and Viloro certainly can be equated with their creator, but this is the consequence of the intense subjectivity of Arrabal's expression in his theatre, not of any conscious desire on Arrabal's part to create heroes in his own image.

Arrabal's procedure in depicting heroes who are dramatic artists, (which he refused to do in the case of Viloro), not only renders more overt the affinities between himself and his heroes but also permits the author to investigate the nature of theatre, that is, of the very instrument which will lead him to self-knowledge. In itself, this does not necessarily prove that Arrabal has here become conscious of the theatre's potential to confer self-knowledge, but it does mark an interesting advance on his former position. Previously his thematic material had emerged spontaneously from the obsessions of the subconscious to forge the very stuff of his theatre. What is now projected in Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné is less the obsessions themselves than the author in his capacity as dramatic author. This important distinction is rather like the difference between the thinking mind of an animal and the reflexive human mind observing its own mental processes.

It will be shown in Chapter Three that in his panique philos-

ophy Arrabal conceptualises notions which have pre-existed in his early theatre but have hitherto been only subjectively experienced. In Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné Arrabal depicts characters who live more intensely through the theatre, who even create themselves through the theatre (by theatricalising their lives), and this is a reflection of what Arrabal himself has been doing, quite spontaneously, in his own theatre since 1952.

If Arrabal has indeed taken cognisance at this point of this situation, then such a new departure would appear to indicate a new kind of introspective, rather than introverted, creative process. Examination of the novel Baal Babylone, written the following year, for the light it sheds on the creative process, tends to confirm such a supposition. Before writing his novel, however, Arrabal returns once more to the nightmare world of his obsessions, creating another oneiromantic play in the style of his first creative period: Le Cimetière des voitures.

Le Cimetière des Voitures

1957 was one of the most prolific years of Arrabal's career to date, for in that year he produced six plays of astonishing diversity. In January he wrote Oraison, an economical, dense dialogue between two young people showing the futility of the individual's efforts to find a workable system of values, or directives for a mode of conduct, in Christianity. In the early months of the year he also composed Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné, the last play to be written at Bouffémont, for in April he returned to live at the Cité Universitaire in Paris. Throughout the summer he convalesced at Lanzahita in Spain where he wrote Orchestration théâtrale, the fruit of his early jottings the previous autumn and winter. For the first time in many years Arrabal apparently felt secure, a situation which appears to be reflected in the light-hearted humour of his abstract play, of which he says "Je m'étais prodigieusement amusé à l'écrire pendant tout un été." (1) A shorter non-figurative play in the same vein, Les Quatre Cubes, was written shortly afterwards and derives from similar preoccupations. Returning in the autumn to the Pavillon du Monaco, Arrabal wrote Les Amours impossibles, a humorous parody contrasting a pure "platonic" mode of love with bestial physical love. This was followed by what is considered by some to be his finest play, Le Cimetière des voitures.

Reflections upon the dramaturgy of the two abstract plays and

(1) Entretiens, pp.152-153.

on the self-assured satire of Les Amours impossibles might lead one to conclude that Arrabal had by now abandoned his former spontaneous style of writing for a more conscious creative process. But though this may be true of the non-figurative works, it cannot be said of the other plays written at about the same time. Of Le Cimetière des voitures Arrabal has said: "J'écrivais comme on lit un feuilleton." (1) This means once again that the play is characterised by a relatively high degree of introversion.

The stage is transformed into an enormous scrap-yard for old cars; five of the rotting hulks serve as accommodation for a number of unseen inhabitants, who behave as if residents in some superior hotel; a sixth car is occupied by the valet-manager Milos and his wife Dila, and a back-drop extends the perspective of heaped-up wrecks as far as the eye can see. Against this stark metallic background will be played out the Passion of Emanou, a modern Christ-figure. Emanou and his two friends Topé and Fodère play jazz at free concerts for the poor people of the district. For some unspecified reason, playing the trumpet is an illegal activity and Emanou is outlawed by the authorities, to be persecuted, tortured and finally crucified.

The theme of persecution, the conflict between the individual and authority, is thus present once more as the central motif, as in Le Labyrinthe and La Bicyclette du condamné. The analogy with this last play is made even more striking by the fact that the hero is a musician who is persecuted for his musical activities. Here the similarity between the two plays ends, for whilst the earlier play derived from a specifically subjective and interior

(1) *ibid.* p.105.

vision of persecution, with a central image created accordingly, Le Cimetière des voitures is enriched by other resonances relating to the outside world, and the theme of persecution is here grafted onto the Christian tradition.

Arrabal establishes with no possible ambiguity the identity of Emanou as a symbol of Christ. His name is itself evocative of the saviour. Dila instinctively recognises his superhuman qualities:

DILA - Tu dois avoir quelque chose en toi, ou bien tu dois être le fils... (elle montre le ciel et dit gauchement)... de quelqu'un... de quelqu'un, disons, de très haut placé. (1)

Whereupon Emanou recounts the circumstances of his birth, (very poor parents, born in a stable), his early life, (helping his father at carpentry), how he resolved to devote his life to helping the poor and how his two "disciples" joined up with him. Now he performs miracles, to the fury of those responsible for civil order:

TOPE - L'ennui, c'est que les autres t'en veulent, tu le sais bien. Depuis que l'autre jour tu as fait manger tout le bal avec un seul pain et une boîte de sardines, ils enragent. (2)

This irreverent parody is representative of the type of humour which characterises Le Cimetière des voitures, deriving from the discrepancy between the sublime action and the banality of the details, a humour which is shocking (or, to some, irritating) not because of the element of blasphemy so much as the degree of naïvety which almost has the appearance of faux-naïf, so great is it.

The author proceeds so exactly in the analogy between Emanou

(1) Théâtre I, p.154.

(2) ibid. p.142.

and the life of Christ that the sequence of events soon becomes predictable and it is no surprise when, after a parodied last-supper, Emanou is betrayed with a kiss by Topé-Judas, denied by Fodère-Peter, crucified (on a bicycle), kissed and tended by Dila-Veronica-Mary. That is to say, the transposition is more than a little overt. (1)

Arrabal's method does however have certain compensating features, for what it demonstrates is the relentless pursuit by an unseen authority of a condemned man. The machinery of the law is implacable, and individuals like Emanou, from the time of Christ to the motorised twentieth century, even if they are really innocent, are defenceless in the face of inquisitorial authority. The only possibility open to them is to forestall the moment of arrest:

TOPE - Tu sais que cette nuit ils viendront sûrement nous arrêter.

EMANOU - Ne te fais aucun souci. Les amis nous feront signe et nous pourrons nous sauver. (2)

Clearly this expedient will work for a certain length of time, but ultimately the victim must succumb. This necessity has the effect of showing Emanou to be a fragile individual at the mercy of a hostile and alienating society - a characteristically arrabalian figure very far removed from the traditional representations of Christ.

The character of Emanou thus functions figuratively at two

- (1) In defence of Arrabal's dramaturgy it might be said that the predictable nature of the action does not necessarily mean that the play is totally without menace or tension. If this is not provoked by the action, Arrabal compensates by way of atmosphere. The rusting metallic landscape, the ever more frenetic sequence of entries and exits, the stage directions calling for police whistles and sirens, all play their part in generating unease, perhaps anguish, in the audience.
- (2) Théâtre I, p.141.

levels which it is important to distinguish between. First, as an image of the individual inexplicably persecuted. In this rôle, as is not hard to see, the hero is once more an autobiographical figure, a projection of one of Arrabal's most persistent obsessions. Secondly, Emanou functions as a figure representing Christ; the parallels between Emanou and his model, we have seen, are perfectly obvious, and the difference between the two lies less in their intentions, (for they both wish to improve humanity's lot) than in the scale of their actions.

Emanou's good deeds are fundamentally petty, and if some of them, such as knitting warm winter pull-overs for the poor, have a certain efficacy, there is nonetheless a marked disproportion between his good deeds and those of Christ. Moreover, the disproportion is not simply in terms of magnitude but also in terms of the register on which the acts are conceived. The effectiveness of Emanou's good deeds is restricted to a temporal and material plane, whilst Christ worked for the spiritual welfare of mankind.

If one sets aside momentarily the analogy with Christ to look objectively at Emanou's life, another analogy presents itself, for it is possible to see in him not a modern redeemer but a twentieth-century Don Quixote. Though the parallel is not explicit, it can be inferred reasonably enough, especially in view of Arrabal's predilection for this story as evidenced by his recreation of Don Quixote in the person of Filtos in Concert dans un oeuf in 1958.

Rather than a persecuted martyr who is sacrificed for the sake of virtue by an evil society, Emanou seen in this perspective appears as a naïve individual who misguidedly sets himself up as

an absurd self-appointed saviour. And as with Quixote, the individual revolt aimed at effecting a radical improvement in the human condition is shown to be futile. Emanou's death alters nothing, serves no apparent purpose, helps no-one. Like Quixote, his intentions are misunderstood and instead of gratitude, he is rewarded with hostility and disdain from those he seeks to help. Dila has to protect him from the fury of his impatient audience, just as she had to save him from the pursuing police in the first act.

The analogy cannot be taken too far, for instead of Don Quixote's Sancho Panza, Emanou has two companions, one of whom is mute, and at this point one becomes aware of how much the trio of musicians owe to the Marx Brothers. Again it would be difficult to demonstrate conclusively the direct influence on Arrabal's work of the Marx Brothers, but the ascription is reasonable. It is known that Arrabal saw and enjoyed their films in Madrid in the early 1950's. (1) Whether or not the Emanou-Topé-Fodère trio, (like Apal-Climando-Le Vieux and Namur-Mitaro-Toso), are indeed consciously modelled upon the Marx Brothers, they might well evoke such connotations in the audience's mind. It seems likely that they do, for Arrabal's text suggests scope for developing this aspect in stage-play, particularly with the gestures and mimics of the mute Fodère during the dumb-show chase:

Fodère, Topé et Emanou traversent rapidement la scène de droite à gauche tout recroquevillés sur eux-mêmes (le menton touchant presque le genou). Topé s'arrête et saute pour essayer de voir ce qui se passe au fond derrière les voitures. Horrifié il fait un geste à ses amis pour leur signaler que le danger est derrière les voitures... (2)

(1) "On pouvait voir les Marx Brothers, que j'aimais beaucoup...", Entretiens, p.34.

(2) Théâtre I, pp.163-4.

The style of acting which such scenes suggest is confirmed by Emanou when he says to Dila: "Tu es notre héroïne de cinéma muet." (1)

The similarity between Emanou and Don Quixote provokes suspicion regarding his real motivation. Are his motives altruistic and divine, those of a latterday Christ, or are they, like Quixote's, basically egocentric and misguided? In other words, what is the source and the reason for Emanou's devotion to the cause of "bonté"?

In common with other arrabalian heroes Emanou is an amoral person. If there is an apparent contradiction in speaking of an amoral person who wishes to be a model of virtue, it is because Arrabal's reflections on the theme of goodness pivot on the dichotomy between man's natural amorality and the artificial system of moral values traditionally perpetuated by society. Although Emanou and his friends employ the term "bonté", they seem to lack any real understanding of the principles underlying its meaning. They know examples of good behaviour: for instance, playing for the poor is "good", knitting sweaters for them is "good", and in general, preventing them from suffering is "good". But that they have learnt these examples without understanding the guiding principle is made clear by the following remark:

TOPE - Moi je crois que pour empêcher les pauvres de souffrir, il faudrait les tuer. (2)

They are unaware of the contradictions implicit in this statement because they have not learnt (or have forgotten?) that killing is "wrong". Indeed, their observation of society has tended to suggest quite the opposite:

(1) *ibid.* p.173. (Not in original edition).

(2) *ibid.* p.142.

TOPE - Et personne ne peut tuer sans être pris?
EMANOU - Bien sûr que si. Tout est très bien organisé. Il y a un moyen, mais il faut faire beaucoup d'études.
TOPE - Comment ça?
EMANOU - On peut être juge.
TOPE - Ils gagnent de l'argent comme les assassins?
EMANOU - Oui, beaucoup.
TOPE - Et qui est-ce qu'ils tuent, les juges?
EMANOU - Ils tuent ceux qui font de mauvaises actions. (1)

So there is a right way and a wrong way of killing - that is to say, a way of killing with impunity and a dangerous way of killing. The naïve, childlike minds of these heroes are confused by the sophistication of such dual standards.

Goodness is a word belonging to an alien system of values, one which the protagonists do not and cannot understand, but which they have appropriated to their own use. Goodness thus is like any other "truc" or game they play. Emanou has learnt some of the rules: "N'oublie pas qu'il faut être bon" he announces dogmatically, and when challenged to give a reason for this assertion, his response is not argued but rattled off like a catechism:

Et bien, quand on est bon, (il récite comme s'il avait appris une leçon par coeur), on ressent une grande joie intérieure, née de la paix de l'esprit dont on jouit lorsqu'on se voit semblable à l'image idéale de l'homme. (2)

This is nothing more than jargon which Emanou has learnt verbatim: an impressive party-piece, especially if one can recite it all in one breath. One rightly suspects that he has not assimilated any of its content, and this is confirmed in the second act: when Emanou loses the sequence of the words, the magic combination, none of their substance remains. (3)

But he has not learnt all the rules of the game. For although he knows that playing for the poor and knitting sweaters for them

(1) *ibid.* p.139.

(2) *ibid.* pp.141-2.

(3) *ibid.* p.200.

are good actions, he does not seem to be aware that certain of his actions, by the same conventional standards of morality, are immoral. And what is significant is that these actions appear to be instinctive and natural, as opposed to his artificial pursuit of goodness. He is sexually licentious with Dila and habitually lies to her in order to obtain her favours. (1) He steals from tradesmen, (though he justifies this in terms of redistribution of wealth), and kills people - but not often, he modestly protests:

DILA - Et tu tues toujours des mouches?

EMANOU - Non, quelquefois je tue autre chose.

DILA - Des gens aussi?

EMANOU - Oui, mais pas beaucoup de ça. Sauf quand je vois quelqu'un dans l'ennui, alors je le tue.

DILA (enthousiaste) - Et dire que tu me cachais ça! Comme tu es adroit! Tu tues aussi bien une mouche qu'une personne. (2)

Does Emanou only kill altruistically in order to help those who are in great difficulty, or does he really enjoy killing but restricts his activities to those whose plight appears to justify their murder? It is not clear, but the distinction is not very important, since everything points to Emanou's absolute confusion over what is good and what is bad.

Emanou is thus an amoral person and his desire to be good is not (could not be) inspired by any instinctive prompting or any innate scale of values. His notions of goodness are all appropriated, artificially and confusedly, from without.

What is the cause of his obsession with goodness? One reason is that Emanou and his friends consider that this course of action will confer substance and importance on them:

(1) *ibid.* p.152.

(2) *ibid.* pp.174-5.

TOPE - Et on pourrait être aussi assassins?

EMANOU - Pourquoi pas?

TOPE (l'air satisfait) - On parlerait de nous dans les journaux. (1)

Their attitude here is very like that of Fidio and Lilbé in Oraison. Fidio, having deluded himself into thinking that in the scriptures he has found the magical key to goodness, and that this is to be their salvation from a life of boredom and misery, proposes that they set themselves up as judges. Lilbé replies with satisfaction: "On va être des gens importants".(2)

It is clear that by being outlawed Emanou assumes considerable importance. Topé is even jealous of this, despite the fact that Emanou is going to be crucified, for he says:

DILA - C'est Emanou qu'ils veulent prendre, c'est ce qu'ils ont dit.

TOPE - Bien sûr, tu te mets toujours en vedette. (3)

and one is forcibly reminded of Climando's exclamation "Comme j'ai de l'importance!", and of the Old Man's jealousy when Climando is to be executed.

Like their predecessors in Arrabal's theatre, Emanou and his friends are fragile, vulnerable creatures and they are conscious of their tendency towards insignificance; in the pursuit of goodness they evidently see a means of acquiring stature, which makes this activity more than a simple pastime. It is thus their key to salvation. Goodness to them is what Tar was to Fando and Lis, what theatre was to Jérôme and Vincent, what escape to liberty was to Viloro and Tasla. And like their predecessors, Emanou and his followers are going to be disillusioned in their enthusiasm,

(1) *ibid.* p.138.

(2) *ibid.* p.32.

(3) *ibid.* p.173.

because in their pursuit of significance they fall foul of society with its agents of persecution.

It is clear, then, that their motives are essentially egocentric. The great irony is that whereas the mission of their divine model was to effect humanity's salvation, the salvation they seek is their own - and even this more modest ambition is well beyond their reach! The figure of Christ does not emerge unblemished from this rapprochement. Arrabal's procedure is basically a simple satirical technique. On the one hand he postulates Emanou = Christ. On the other hand, in practice, Emanou is seen to resemble Don Quixote, his band the Marx Brothers. Effectively, therefore, Arrabal reduces Christ to the stature of these buffoons.

The disparity between Emanou's intentions and the negative result of his actions casts a similar doubt upon the utility of Christ and of Christianity. For the would-be latterday saviour is indeed crucified, but for him there is no resurrection and life continues unaffected in the unheeding world. A new dawn breaks and the daily routine starts up again in the sordid car cemetery.

This total inability to meet the real needs of the world is emphasised by Arrabal's treatment of the Nativity, which is recounted with great simplicity. (1) By emphasising the charmingly picturesque but simple and unsophisticated nature of the story he reduces the event to the substance of a fairy-tale and denies it any credibility.

Like Fidio and Lilbé, Emanou is destined to spend and lose his life in the hope of finding the elusive formula for what Alain

(1) *ibid.* p.154. This passage is transcribed word for word from Oraison, and here it serves the same purpose as in the earlier play.

Schifres has called "l'impossible bonté, l'impossible pureté qu'on imagine à l'enfance." (1) Does this mean that virtue is a myth? If Christianity is a hollow myth, and Christian ethics an artificial code with little or no relevance to life, where can such absolute values as goodness reside? Schifres quotes Arrabal as saying:

Parfois je me dis que la Bonté et la Pureté pourraient bien être des inventions de la Police, et lui profiter, mais je ne peux m'empêcher de "jouer à la bonté" et à sa rivale, la méchanceté. (2)

But if goodness is a myth, and Arrabal like Emanou plays at being good, their engagement in the game is so complete and so compulsive as to give the force of reality to the myth. It is also an idea which haunts Arrabal, or so one infers from the frequent recurrence of the theme in his work. If goodness, like infinity, exists only in theory, its simple theoretical existence is nonetheless an indispensable function of life. It thus becomes futile to speculate upon the "real" existence or otherwise of goodness.

The car cemetery is one of the richest images in Arrabal's theatre. Its earliest origins are not hard to see, for this boundless cemetery is a baroque-like outgrowth of the solitary bicycles, tricycles or carriages of his earliest plays. Here, as before, the motif of circularity, of the "éternel retour" with all its implicit symbolism, is fundamental. But the car cemetery is more than that. The motor car, and in particular the rotting hulks of obsolete models, is a symbol par excellence of the contemporary consumer society with its principles of planned obsolescence and the

(1) In: Théâtre I, introduction, p.14.

(2) ibid.

notorious cycles of production and consumption. What more effective denunciation of this materialism than a stage literally invaded by the refuse of a motorised society, to such an extent that men are now obliged to live in their own decaying cars? In addition, the value of cars as status symbols is universal, and it is with a pleasing touch of irony that Arrabal shows them now rusting and useless, yet with their inhabitants acting with the manners of "de grands seigneurs désinvoltes." (1)

Some critics have seen the car cemetery as a sordid "bidonville" (as of course it literally is) representing the lowest stratum of deprived human existence. This was not the interpretation of Victor Garcia, who first produced the play in France. The cemetery, he said, was "l'église, le foyer, le lieu où l'on s'aime, où l'on se déchire, la chambre de torture, le lieu où l'on vit, quoi." (2) These are apposite comments, for the car cemetery is not simply an image of the déshérités. It may be this, but it is also the very microcosm of the world as seen by Arrabal, and its inhabitants enact all the great moments in life from birth to death. Most basic human activities are represented: sleeping, waking, eating, drinking, urinating, making love, torture, sacrifice, being born and dying.

The car cemetery is a basically ambivalent creation, and from its ambiguity springs much of the play's humour. Whilst evoking status and affluence, its objective reality is one of sordidness and abject poverty. For here are people living quite literally in the heaped-up refuse of their own society, yet adopting the manners

(1) Geneviève Serreau, Arrabal: Un Nouveau Style comique", Les Lettres nouvelles, Nov. 1958, p.578.

(2) Nicole Zand, "Garcia: 'Qu'on me donne un garage, un hangar'", Le Monde, 19.12.67.

of an entirely different social milieu. They ring for the valet to order breakfast and are waited upon in bed in the most obsequious fashion. The parody depends primarily upon a grotesque form of exaggeration affecting both action (Dila the maid is also available as concubine at the residents' disposal), and language:

MILOS - Mais ce n'est pas possible! Que Monsieur et Madame veulent bien excuser ce déplorable oubli. Monsieur et Madame ne peuvent savoir à quel point je regrette... (1)

However, these are only the superficial trappings of a privileged society, since the accommodation in rusting cars is cramped and uncomfortable, and breakfast in bed consists of a glass of warm water.

At times the situation in the cemetery is reversed and Dila suddenly adopts the rôle of tyrant. This relationship is in force when the play opens (second edition) and in the final scene. When such a relationship comes into play the inhabitants, who a few moments earlier had been treating Dila as a contemptible slave, are allegedly "timides et susceptibles." (2) Dila on the other hand is a cruel tyrant:

VOIX DE FEMME - Elle est vraiment cruelle avec nous.

VOIX D'HOMME - Un de ces jours elle nous défendra même de respirer.

VOIX DE FEMME - Qu'est-ce qu'on lui a fait pour qu'elle soit comme ça?

VOIX D'HOMME - Alors qu'avec elle on a toujours été gentils. (3)

The residents often behave like children, (though contrary to good boys they are heard but not seen), and at these times Dila behaves to them like a severe school-mistress, scolding them when

(1) Théâtre I, p.182.

(2) ibid. p.192.

(3) ibid. p.193.

they are silly. And they are silly: like giggling voyeurs they spy on Dila and Emanou as they make love behind the cars. When Dila returns to scold them they are terrified and adopt the unconvincing, and typically childish, defense of pretending to be asleep. Yet they are not children, judging from their own sexual activity; the car cemetery is a veritable hive of promiscuity.

So like everything else in Le Cimetière des voitures, the residents are ambivalent. Children and adults, prisoners and masters, dominant and subservient, they are impossible to define in consistent terms. Their essence lies rather in the relationships they entertain with the other characters, relationships which are liable to infinite transformation.

Of course Dila's rôle is equally mutable. The fluidity of her relationship with her slaves/masters, the residents, is mirrored by the ambiguity of her relationship with Milos whom she fearfully obeys and punishes like a naughty child. Dila is married to Milos. (1) It is unusual for Arrabal to specify such a relationship and it is perhaps with irony that he does so here, for how do two such totally incompatible people, one twice the other's age, come to be living as man and wife in an old motor car? They seem to be an inverse reflection of Lasca and Tiossido, (Lasca being old and grey-haired, Tiossido being youthful), who are equally incompatible. Dila has far more affinity with Emanou, for whom she apparently experiences genuine love. Their relationship is more stable than any other in the play and provides the key link between the world of the car

(1) *ibid.* p.151.

cemetery and the main sphere of action.

Like Fando et Lis, this play is formed with a tri-partite structure, of which Lasca and TioSSIDo are the third component. At first these two are present in a passive manner, crossing the stage absorbed in their athletic training and having no contact with the other elements of the action, until, retiring to bed in one of the "voitures-HLM", they become actively involved in the persecution of Emanou. Their sudden irruption into the world of the car cemetery in the first act is almost surreal and resembles the way figures make unexpected appearances in dreams.

In the second act, after their metamorphosis into police officers, (1), their rôle is quite different. By their uniform and behaviour they are seen to be the visible agents of the hitherto unseen persecuting authority evoked off-stage. In Oraison Arrabal portrayed the conflict between the protagonists' amoral childhood world and the alien logistic world outside, the world of adulthood. The confrontation took place within the characters' minds and was presented in terms of a conflict between two opposing systems of thought. In Le Cimetière des voitures the same issues are presented in a more dramatic way; thought and dialogue are here translated into action. The confrontation between the two worlds is here fully externalised, and in Act II it is the rôle of Lasca and TioSSIDo to incarnate the forces of society. As with their athletic training, they do this with a characteristic mixture of deadly efficiency and buffoonery, resulting in imbecilic application.

But although the hunt for Emanou degenerates into a burlesque parody reminiscent of an old film, Keystone Cops or Marx Brothers,

(1) Which is also a comment on the bestiality of man's sexual comportment. Lasca foresaw the inevitable result of their sexual encounter: "Et puis, je le sais bien, après tu vasts conduire comme une brute." (Théâtre I, p.166).

the game is real enough and Emanou is truly executed. Whether the authority behind the forces of order represents Pontius Pilate, the Inquisition or the Falange, the result is invariably the same: the death of an innocent individual.

The car cemetery in which this twentieth century passion is enacted has appealed strongly to directors, critics and theatre-goers. It has been the pretext for some extremely interesting experiments in mise en scène in France and America. Since the play is known in France predominantly through Victor Garcia's remarkable production at the Festival de Bourgogne in Dijon in 1966 (1) it would not be inappropriate to recall briefly the major features of this production.

The play was one of the outstanding contributions to stagecraft of recent years and at the time provoked the utmost extremes of praise and criticism. Gabriel Marcel, the Catholic critic, speaking of "vacarme... hurlements... paroxysme sonore qui nous a été infligé" defined the occasion as "une technique d'abaissement." (2) But one anonymous critic wrote in eulogistic terms

Ayant vu Le Cimetière des voitures d'Arrabal, j'en demeure habité, fasciné, choqué, changé... Un prodige! Avant Arrabal, après Arrabal, la deuxième partie de ma vie a commencé le soir où j'ai vu la pièce. (3)

A certain amount of confusion was caused by the fact that the programme for the Dijon production failed to make it clear that the "play" was actually a composite montage. What Garcia had done was to create a multiple spectacle consisting of four of Arrabal's plays,

(1) And subsequently at the Théâtre des Arts, Paris, January 1968.

(2) Marcel, "Une technique d'abaissement", Les Lettres Nouvelles, 28.12.67.

(3) Anon. "Le Cimetière des voitures", Gazette de Lausanne, 27.1.68.

arranged in the following order: Oraison served as a prologue and was followed by the first act of Le Cimetière des voitures; after this came Les Deux Bourreaux, and finally Act II of Le Cimetière des voitures, into which was interpolated La Communion solennelle, after the sequence with the new-born baby and before the re-entry of Lasca and Tioçsido with Emanou. Finally Garcia invented a funeral procession in the wake of the crucified Emanou, a resurrection and general delirious celebrations to conclude the performance. It will be clear that by the ending he invented, Garcia not only emphasised but inverted the play's religious significance.

Fidio, Emanou and Maurice were played by the same actor, as also were Benoît and Milos, and the entire composition was played out in the same remarkable scenic space, a metallic universe of burnt-out wrecks engulfing the spectators. These factors helped to complement such unity as already existed between the four plays. And there are unifying factors: Fidio and Emanou engaged in a quest for the elusive formula for the "ideal image of man"; the denunciation of Established Values, especially Christianity; the heavy atmosphere of cruelty and violence, charged with a sense of guilt, in all these plays, culminating in each case in the death of an innocent person, (an infant, a father, a lover and a would-be saviour).

It remains true, however, that the juxtaposition of four different plays was somewhat arbitrary, since the texts used by Garcia exist as independent entities. In an amusing "auto-interview" Arrabal raised just such a question:

ARRABAL - Is there a connection - and if so, what kind - between The Automobile Graveyard and your other plays?

ARRABAL - The Automobile Graveyard, written in 1957, is one of my favourite plays. I wrote it without any pre-conceived notions, just as I have every other play of mine, spontaneously. It was therefore supposed to be an isolated and independent creation. And yet, I understand from what people have said that it is a link in a chain of plays which gives my theatre a certain unity... I'm sorry about this. (1)

Garcia's montage tended to destroy the unity of Le Cimetière des voitures' precise composition. If in so doing he created a new entity possessing its own unity and own frames of reference, this must be regarded as a theatrical event in its own right; the essence of Garcia's stagecraft has been aptly summarised as: "Plutôt qu'un texte à servir, un univers dramatique à projeter librement." (2)

When Garcia brought his production to the Théâtre des Arts in 1968, it is said that he asked Arrabal to collaborate in revising the text. Certain modifications were introduced, and have been incorporated in the second edition of Arrabal's works, but the author declined to write the "happy ending" - the resurrection scene - which Garcia hoped for.

Arrabal did write a new opening scene, so that the play now starts with Dila making the inhabitants go to bed; this establishes a parallel with the final scene where she rouses them at the start of the new day. This has the effect of increasing still further the play's structural cohesion by setting the action within the confines of a single night. It also suggests the circularity of which Arrabal is so fond. Arrabal's motives in making these alterations were probably related to structural considerations, (though the cohesion of Le Cimetière des voitures tended in any case

(1) "Auto-interview", The Drama Review (T.D.R.) no.41, Autumn 1968.

(2) Robert Abirached, "Théâtre pour l'avenir", Le Nouvel Observateur, 29.6.66.

to be lost in Garcia's production). But in addition, thematically, the revised opening, coinciding with the conclusion, emphasises the futility of Emanou's wasted martyrdom. And finally, perhaps, Dila's actions in making the residents go to sleep at the start of the play and in waking them at the end, might be taken as suggesting that the whole action of the play is but a dream. Such an interpretation would certainly be in accordance with the oneiromantic quality of certain moments in the action.

Thematically Le Cimetière des voitures is one of the richest of Arrabal's early works. One might consider the play as an amalgam of themes explored in earlier works, and in two plays in particular. The ethical and theological aspects had been expounded a few months earlier in Oraison, an opuscle which serves as a useful introduction to Le Cimetière des voitures. The quest for goodness, the conflict between natural amorality and society's established values, are brilliantly exposed in this short dialogue; but as Arrabal himself wrote in a letter to his publisher in Spain: "Oración sola, sin otra obra mía 'que la explique' puede dar la impresión de preocupado por problemas teológicos." (1)

Secondly, the theme of the persecuted individual had prefigured in several earlier plays, but most notably in La Bicyclette du condamné. The correlation here is more than coincidental, since examination of the manuscripts, together with discussion with the

(1) "Oraison on its own, without any of my other works to 'explain' it, could give the impression that I am preoccupied with theological problems." - Letter dated 16.12.62, in: Teatro, Taurus, Madrid, 1965, p.43.

author, revealed that an unpublished play entitled Cementerio de autobuses (originally El Rincón de los hombres solos) was the common source of both La Bicyclette du condamné and Le Cimetière des voitures. The unpublished play was set in a scrap-yard for old buses, where two musicians were persecuted by not being permitted to play their instruments, the harmonium and the typewriter. A third character, "un hombre inteligente" joined them but was unable to effect their salvation. Cementerio de autobuses therefore seems to have contained in embryo both the thematic material and the characters which later appear in the two plays mentioned above. (1)

Arrabal's procedure in Le Cimetière des voitures in grafting his familiar theme of the persecuted individual onto the figure of Christ enriches the theme by injecting into it a completely new dimension, that of historicity. The subject of La Bicyclette du condamné was the author's private obsessions rendered quite outside history in the most subjective way. Here he fuses his sense of persecution with the fate of a historical figure. The new dimension which this imparts to the play suggests Arrabal's gradual emergence from the strict confines of the subjective mind towards greater awareness of the outside world. The play's theological content also indicates a relatively new concern on the author's part for problems of more universal scope arising from sources other than his own subjectivity.

(1) References to this unpublished play can still be seen in the Spanish edition (representing the first, unrevised, version) of Fando y Lis (Teatro I, Bourgois, Paris, 1971). They can also be seen in Scene V of the French version of Fando et Lis, but in this version, which obviously post-dates Le Cimetière des voitures, the allusions to "el cementerio de autobuses" are rendered by "le cimetière des voitures". (Théâtre I, p.119).

In later years, (ten years after the composition of Le Cimetière des voitures), Arrabal explained the play's relevance to modern

Spain:

Cette pièce n'est pas seulement le lieu géométrique de toute population vivant en milieu concentrationnaire, bidonville ou favela. C'est aussi l'Espagne, vingt-cinq ans après Guernica. Guernica est reconstruit, certes, mais c'est un cimetière. On croit que c'est riche, que c'est neuf, que c'est beau, mais c'est fait pour des animaux, pas pour des hommes. Le cimetière c'est la trace du souvenir, le H.L.M. bombardé, neuf mais en ruine, dans un lieu où il est impossible de reconstruire. (1)

As with his description of Les Deux Bourreaux as a political allegory, this interesting interpretation must be considered as strictly a posteriori. But by a strange coincidence, Arrabal's next play after Le Cimetière des voitures was located in the real Spanish cemetery of Guernica.

(1) Guy Dumur, "Les Rouilles de l'enfer", Gazette de Lausanne, 30.12.67.

Guernica

For the first time in his theatre Arrabal deliberately chooses a historical subject, a subject which in the words of Bernard Gille is "Ni hors du temps, ni dans une ville imaginaire, mais dans notre temps, dans une guerre qui nous fait mal." (1) In addition to the title, Arrabal multiplies references which are constant reminders that the play is about the Civil War in Spain. (2) The attractions which such a subject would exert upon Arrabal are self-evident, not only because of his own experience of the war but also because of the fact that Guernica is by ancient tradition the home of the liberties of the Basque people, sworn and perpetuated by generations of Spanish monarchs beneath the oak, Guernica's Tree of Liberty.

On April 26th 1937 Guernica was razed by the Luftwaffe. Hugh Thomas describes the incident thus:

At twenty minutes to five, Heinkels 111 began to appear, first bombing the town then machine-gunning its streets. The Heinkels were followed by the old spectre of the Spanish War, Junkers 52. People began to run from the town. These also were machine-gunned. Incendiary bombs, weighing up to 1,000 lbs. and also high explosives, were dropped by waves of aircraft arriving every twenty minutes until a quarter to eight. The centre of the town was then destroyed and burning, 1,654 people were killed and 889 wounded. The basque parliament houses and the famous oak, lying away from the centre, nevertheless remained untouched. (3)

(1) Gille, op.cit., p.59.

(2) The old couple's son has been executed at Burgos, the prison from which Arrabal's father had disappeared. The Writer is collecting material for "un roman et peut-être un film sur la guerre civile espagnole", etc.

(3) Hugh Thomas, op.cit. p.419.

Guernica, it seems, had been a testing ground in which the Germans could observe the effects of their experimental bombing raid. Such factual information, however, is not the subject of Arrabal's play, for the facts themselves are incapable of rendering account of the real truth of what happened at Guernica:

ARRABAL - En ce moment je travaille à une pièce qui s'appellera Guernica sur la Guerre Civile Espagnole...

SERREAU - Historique?

ARRABAL - Non, plutôt cauchemar. La vraie vérité de Guernica, qui est un cauchemar. L'arbre de la liberté, vous savez, il est resté debout tout seul après le massacre. Je dois témoigner de ça. Ce sera un peu dans le ton des Deux Bourreaux. (1)

It was thus to be an historical subject, but transposed poetically to render the subjective truth of the event. As Arrabal foresaw, Guernica resembles Les Deux Bourreaux in that the optic is again that of the individual: "C'est encore l'histoire de pauvres gens dépassés par la guerre civile", he says. (2) In fact Guernica does mark a singular advance upon Les Deux Bourreaux, but the difference lies less in the style of presentation than in the author's intentions, which in the later play are frankly didactic: "Je dois témoigner de ça."

Despite their location at a precise historical moment, Fanchou and Lira remain characters in the now firmly established tradition of the arrabalian couple. Lira's paralysis under the heap of rubble recalls Lis' paralysis in Fando et Lis. But the couple here are not adolescents; they are in their second childhood. Arrabal's stage directions emphasise their already apparent childishness.

(1) Geneviève Serreau, "Arrabal, ou Quand le Jeu devient sérieux", France-Observateur, 20.11.58.

(2) Entretiens, p.55.

Lira cries "comme un enfant". (1) Like Fando offering to distract Lis by telling her the story of the man who was taking a paralysed woman to Tar, Fanchou attempts to entertain Lira in the same unimaginative, narcissistic way:

FANCHOU - Tu veux que je te raconte une bonne histoire pour que tu n'aies plus mal?

LIRA - Tu ne sais plus les raconter.

FANCHOU - Tu veux que je te raconte celle de la femme qui était dans les waters et qui est restée ensevelie sous les décombres? (Un temps). Elle ne te plaît pas? (2)

Not only unimaginative and inappropriate, but pathetically inept too; Fanchou's next idea is to dance for Lira, which he does enthusiastically and grotesquely, heedless of the fact that Lira cannot see the spectacle.

Like the other arrabalian heroes, Fanchou and Lira are virtually devoid of the faculty of memory, which accounts in part for the paucity of their imagination. (When elaborating his panique theories, Arrabal insists that imagination is nothing more than a function of memory), Lira's reproach to Fanchou, "Tu n'auras jamais de la mémoire" (3) is but one of many. The void of their hitherto uneventful lives is filled with endless chatter and recriminations and even now, in this hour of crisis, the same empty talk continues, the endless quarrels and reconciliations, the pathetic illusions and vain aspirations, the compulsion to talk in order to fill the void. Fanchou pronounces platitudes and formulas of social convention. He observes that Lira is dying and conscientiously offers to "notify the family", until Lira reminds him that they have no family.(4)

(1) Théâtre II, p.12 and passim.

(2) ibid. p.14.

(3) ibid. p.15.

(4) ibid.

And later:

VOIX DE LIRA - Je vais mourir,
FANCHOU - Tu veux que j'appelle le notaire pour le testament?
VOIX DE LIRA - Quel testament?
FANCHOU - On ne dit pas comme ça? ... Toutes les grandes
dames en font. Tu devrais préparer ton testament
et tes dernières paroles. (1)

The old couple even retain the chimerical desire, already seen in Fando and Lis and Viloro and Tasla, that one day they will escape from the world of oppression which afflicts their lives. "Dès que la guerre sera finie", promises Fanchou, "nous partirons en voyage. Je t'emmènerai à Paris." (2)

But now their uneventful domestic life is shattered by some infernal conflict in which they are implicated solely as innocent victims:

FANCHOU - Mais tu ne te rends pas compte que nous sommes en
guerre.
VOIX DE LIRA - Nous n'avons jamais fait de tort à personne.
FANCHOU - Ça ne compte pas.
VOIX DE LIRA - On pourrait bien faire une exception pour
nous qui sommes vieux. (3)

For Arrabal, the true meaning of what happened at Guernica is not the historian's figure of 1,654 dead victims, but the misery and suffering inflicted, on a human level, upon such innocent victims as this old couple who "never did anyone any harm."

The frame of reference of this play is thus "le quotidien", the domestic tragedy of an aged couple overcome by events which totally surpass and dwarf them. Lacking the grandeur, the "souffle épique" which would make of them historical heroes equal to the demands of the moment, they are curiously displaced in the momentous events

(1) *ibid.* pp.37-8.

(2) *ibid.* p.24.

(3) *ibid.*

of the Guernica bombardment. The derisive - and pre-eminently human - figures which they cut are the source of a unique form of tragi-comedy in which the author's mockery is coloured predominantly by compassion. "Pour moi" says Arrabal, "il ne s'agit pas de l'Histoire, il s'agit du quotidien, du merveilleux et de l'humour dans le quotidien." (1)

Fanchou and Lira struggle to comprehend the conflict of which they are the unwilling victims and despite their comic naïvety, between the two of them they are able to evaluate it with rare lucidity. The old man, allegedly the more "instruct" of the two, wiser to the ways of the world, understands the mechanics of the events:

FANCHOU - Il faut toujours te répéter la même chose. (En détachant toutes les syllabes). Ils essaient des bombes explosives et incendiaires.

VOIX DE LIRA - Pourquoi?

FANCHOU - Pourquoi veux-tu que ce soit si ce n'est pour voir si ça marche.

VOIX DE LIRA - Et après?

FANCHOU - 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.

VOIX DE LIRA - Ah!

FANCHOU - Il faut t'expliquer tout. (2)

But despite the old man's depreciation of his wife's education, (motivated no doubt by his need to bolster his own flagging ego), in the long run the wife shows herself to be more perceptive than her husband. She keeps asking him to check whether the tree is still standing: that is, although he understands the mechanism of the conflict, the tactical exercise, she alone is capable of grasping its meaning. For the conflict is not only about bombs, it is first

(1) Entretiens, p.56.

(2) Théâtre II, p.34.

and foremost about freedom - for the individual, for the Basque people, or for the Spanish nation in the face of the onset of the fascist dictatorship.

Though Guernica is in this way a work about the Civil War in Spain, many of Arrabal's earlier thematic concerns are still present in the play. Fanchou's tendency towards aggressiveness, doubled by his pathetic pleas to Lira when the latter withdraws into silence, suggest the sexual inadequacy (or at any rate inferiority) of many earlier arrabalian heroes. The scenes where the fascist officer torments Fanchou, staring at him, laughing in his face, terrorising him with the threat of handcuffs and so on, are strongly reminiscent of La Bicyclette du condamné. The speechless censor or torturer whose very presence inspires terror, the protagonists's psychological superior, is the reincarnation of Paso, and reminds us that Arrabal's obsessions are not yet dissipated. But as in Le Cimetière des voitures they are here integrated into a theme of less subjective origin. Here, even more distinctly than in Le Cimetière des voitures, Arrabal is seen to be more aware of the reality of the outside world, and to be seeking to effect some fusion between the outside world and his interior world of obsessions.

The optimism of the conclusion recalls that of the revised version of La Bicyclette du condamné. Arrabal comments:

S'il est vrai que toute oeuvre est prémonitoire, eh bien cette pièce annonce des lendemains qui chantent. (1)

At the end of the bombardment the remaining walls crumble to expose the Tree of Liberty standing triumphant as an untouchable monument

(1) Entretiens, p.56.

to the principle of freedom. Two balloons rise from the spot where Fanchou and Lira are buried and ascend slowly to heaven. The fascist officer rushes demented from the sight, and the retreating sound of marching boots is drowned in the growing chorus of voices singing the revolutionary Basque chant.

The soldier is horrified because he has seen the face of love: according to Arrabal, "devant l'amour il devient fou." (1) As in La Bicyclette du condamné it is the power of love that ultimately triumphs over the world of violence, sordidness and cruelty. Arrabal has already shown the power of love and its unique capacity for reversing the balance of power in a given situation, for this surely is what had precipitated the catharsis of vertical escape which concludes La Bicyclette du condamné and La Communion solennelle. But nowhere is there such optimism as in the closing moments of Guernica. The evolution since the early plays is remarkable. In Le Tricycle Climando and Apal were led off to their death, to be annihilated and forgotten; Les Deux Bourreaux ended with innocence conquered and forced into submission by the powers of tyranny; in Le Labyrinthe the ending was another beginning in an infernal cycle of torture and persecution. But the theatre of the 1950's concludes with an unambiguous act of faith, an irruption of "le merveilleux" into the world of the inquisition: "le merveilleux, c'est une machine infernale pour les tyrans et les complices." (2) Arrabal, it would seem, has found an issue to the seemingly inescapable labyrinth of his obsessions, his own interior "monde concentrationnaire".

(1) *ibid.* p.56.

(2) *ibid.*

There is little doubt that in writing Guernica Arrabal was moved by a conscious and deliberate desire to write a "political" play of some sort:

SCHIFRES - Quels étaient vos sentiments en 1959 quand vous avez écrit Guernica?

ARRABAL - Je pensais écrire le contraire d'une pièce politique. À la relecture il m'a semblé avoir écrit une pièce contre l'art engagé... (1)

Clearly, what he meant by "le contraire d'une pièce politique" is not an apolitical play in the absolute sense, but the opposite of a political play as it is generally conceived. He also said of Guernica, "c'est de l'anti-Brecht" (2), a somewhat obscure statement which fortunately another of Arrabal's interviews allows us to clarify: for Arrabal, Brecht is "un auteur de science-fiction, car ses personnages représentent des idées." (3) Of their respective theatres, he says: "Son théâtre est symbolique, pas le mien." (4) Of course this sweeping generalisation makes little sense if taken too literally, since many of Arrabal's characters do have symbolic functions, but it is meaningful if taken as an effort to characterise two broad tendencies. What Arrabal portrays in his anti-brechtian" theatre is not ideas but emotions, not first and foremost symbolic figures but real human characters, not the epic but the "quotidien". Above all, what distinguishes a play such as Guernica is the poetic transposition of the historical sources into an essentially oneiric climate. In the words of the author:

Voilà deux personnages confrontés à des idées, à des abstractions qui se résolvent en bombardements. Je traite cela par la poésie. (5)

(1) Entretiens, p.57.

(2) ibid. p.55.

(3) Lillet, "Arrabal: Je suis un clown de cette société", Les Nouvelles littéraires, 6.3.72.

(4) ibid.

(5) Entretiens, p.56.

Despite the successful fusion of two disparate elements, the political and the fantastic, Guernica turned out to be a faux-départ. Arrabal became disillusioned with the notion of a political theatre, for he says:

A ce moment-là j'envisageais de faire des pièces politiques. Alors j'ai écrit Guernica. Ça m'a tout de suite dégoûté! (1)

Though it would probably be excessive to impute Arrabal's temporary abandonment of the theatre after 1958 to his disenchantment with Guernica, it is worth noting that the results of his attempt to write a political play were not to his liking. According to Arrabal, ⁽²⁾ the original impetus to write Guernica had come from Jean-Marie Serreau, whose interest in this brand of theatre is now well known. Serreau had apparently urged Arrabal to try his hand at political theatre when he was preparing the first production of Pique-nique en campagne in 1958. This suggests that Guernica was not the fruit of a completely spontaneous experiment, and may help to explain the author's patent disillusionment with it. He does indeed appear to be ill at ease with the political material: in the play itself the ridiculous figure of the Author collecting material for his new work demonstrates clearly enough Arrabal's cautious attitude towards the dangers inherent in committed art. His own theatre after 1958, and until 1968, is marked by the total absence of political themes as Arrabal explores new avenues of artistic expression. What this implies, (as his subsequent return to a more personal and subjective theatre confirms) is that Arrabal is not

(1) Arrabal in conversation with the present author, May 1971.

(2) *ibid.*

yet prepared to indulge in a frankly didactic theatre, and Guernica thus stands apart from the main body of his work as a premature experiment, the fruits of which were not to be borne until a further ten years had elapsed.

(iii) Conclusion : from introversion to introspection.

Although Arrabal shows himself in Guernica to be as yet unready to integrate his theatre wholeheartedly into the world of objective reality around him, one should not underestimate the evolution which separates this play from his earlier work. The conclusion of Guernica in particular, together with the revised "happy ending" of La Bicyclette du condamné, apparently dating from the same time, with their liberating apotheoses, suggest that Arrabal is moving towards a resolution of the antithesis between the world of the prison and the quest for liberty. Significantly, it is the flight into fantasy, into the world of imagination represented by his theatre, that in this period provides the key to this liberation.

In 1958 Arrabal wrote his first novel, Baal Babylone, which may be regarded as another landmark in the evolution of the artist's perspective. In Baal Babylone a young man in a sanatorium recounts the events of his early life. He tells of his father's arrest on the eve of the Civil War; of his mother's attempts to obliterate all traces of her husband's existence, and when all this fails, to blacken the father's images by calumny; of the child's strangely ambivalent attitude towards his beloved mother as he comes to appreciate her treachery; of his guilt-ridden relationship with his own adolescent body; and of the inevitable revolt in which the narrator breaks away from this suffocating environment, only to remain chained to it by his obsessional memories of the past. Set

against the violent background of the Spanish Civil War, the picture that emerges is highly autobiographical.

This first-person singular account is ostensibly addressed to the narrator's mother, but in reality it serves a far more important function in relation to the author himself. As he sifts through his early memories, retracing step by step his troubled childhood, Arrabal is in fact seeking to grasp their significance and to impose order and meaning on this confusion.

The novel is structured with a high degree of symmetry, having a number of key themes which recur at regular intervals. Key points, for example, are the chapters relating the narrator's most recent meeting with his mother (1) recurring (with rare exceptions) at intervals of five and six chapters alternately. The disposition of disparate memories into a coherent, significant whole is mirrored in the formalised structure of the composition. What for instance can be the meaning of the different values which the narrator now remembers having learnt at school? We read:

Eux - et elles - m'ont dit que maintenant tout est changé, que maintenant on guérit les malades, que maintenant les voyages sont rapides, que maintenant l'humanité a fait des progrès et que le bien-être contribue au bonheur. Toi aussi tu me l'as dit. Quand je leur ai posé une question, ils m'ont répondu. Puis je n'ai plus posé de questions.

Ils m'ont dit qu'il fallait aimer la patrie, qu'il fallait se sacrifier pour elle, qu'il fallait être fier de ses héros, qu'il fallait respecter l'ordre du pays, qu'il fallait dénoncer les traîtres, qu'il fallait haïr les ennemis. Toi aussi tu me l'as dit. Quand je leur ai posé une question, ils m'ont répondu. Puis je n'ai plus posé de questions.

Ils m'ont dit qu'il fallait remercier Dieu de nous avoir donné la vie, de ne pas nous l'avoir ôtée, de nous avoir donné une chance de salut. Toi aussi tu me l'as dit. Quand je leur ai posé une question, ils m'ont répondu. Puis je n'ai plus posé de questions. (2)

(1) Arrabal's meeting with his mother in the summer of 1958 was a crucial factor in prompting him to write the novel.

(2) Baal Babylone, pp.169-170.

At the time, for the child, no coherent pattern was evident to relate the various aspects of this catechism. But in retrospect Arrabal perceives very clearly that this was brainwashing intended to produce, as its end products, indoctrinated and docile subjects. For Arrabal adds, simply:

Puis ils m'ont dit que je devais faire cela, alors je n'ai plus posé de questions et je l'ai fait. Puis ils m'ont dit que je devais aller là, alors je n'ai plus posé de questions, et j'y suis allé. (1)

In Baal Babylone Arrabal thus attains a measure of understanding and self-knowledge which comes about partly through the imposition of structure and coherence on the confusion of his memories. But this is precisely what the playwright has been doing in his theatre since 1952, the essential difference being that the effect is now consciously sought after, whereas in the plays much the same result proceeded from a largely unreflecting creative process.

The novel marks an advance on Arrabal's earlier work because of this new quality of self-awareness. Previously, in his early plays, Arrabal had been concerned solely with his fantasies per se, with the obsessions produced out of his memories. Here, in the novel, he returns to the source of these memories, probing them, seeking their meaning. He takes stock of himself. This new quality of introspection, paralleled by that already observed in Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné, (2) marks an important advance on the artist's earlier position and is a major step towards the self-knowledge which is the goal towards which the theatre of his second

(1) *ibid.* p.170.

(2) The difference is that the self-analysis in Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné revolves round the author in his rôle as a dramatist, whilst in the novel the introspection is devoted to an elucidation of his memories as the source of dramatic activities.

creative period tends.

Various currents have been observed in the course of consideration of Arrabal's first creative period: the opposition between the world of the prison and the ideal of liberty, culminating in the liberating apotheoses of La Bicyclette du condamné and Guernica; the gradual turning outwards to embrace a broader view of reality, as obsessions which were previously projected in a pure state are incorporated into themes of more universal concern; and above all, the progression from a state of pure introversion towards the more lucid self-conscious introspection which must precede self-knowledge.

Arrabal's theatre between 1962 and 1967 carries this evolution towards a lucid, liberated man even further, but the procedure is no longer instinctive as in the first plays. In his panique philosophy Arrabal will be seen to conceptualise what in the past was spontaneous, instinctive behaviour. The contradictions, ambivalences, uncertainties of Arrabal's early life do not disappear, but are embodied in the principle of Confusion (with a capital C). The early theatre simply expressed, more or less intuitively, the oppositions of confusion; panique theatre will attempt to reconcile them by incorporating them into an all-embracing system which will at the same time preserve the artistically fruitful tension between them.

CHAPTER THREE

"PANIQUE" - PHILOSOPHY AND THEORY

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(i) Historique

Arrabal has consistently sought to deny the existence of any panique school or movement, preferring to describe it instead as an "anti-mouvement". (1) Panique, he says, "n'est qu'un mot qui s'applique à ceux qui se disent paniques". (2) The word's currency originated in the observation by certain artists living in Paris that they shared similar ideas about the nature of life and art:

Nous avons pensé que si notre manière de concevoir l'art offrait certains points communs, elle n'avait rien à voir avec les écoles du jour; il fallait lui donner un autre nom. C'est le seul mouvement littéraire qui n'a pour définition que celle-ci: l'ensemble de toutes les œuvres de ceux qui se disent paniques, additionnés les uns aux autres. (3)

This careful avoidance, observed by all panique artists, of appearing to be parties to any kind of organised school is not simple affectation, nor is it, as cynics might suggest, simple inability to give any coherent account of what it is that brought them together. It derives in part from the panique artists' dislike in general for the abstract in favour of the concrete, and in part from one of the fundamental tenets of panique philosophy, which strives at all times to reject dogma, to shun organisation and to defy the atrophy of categorisation. The latter is of course a self-defeating objective, for the mutual adherence of a number of

(1) Thuysinnier, "Pour un théâtre de cérémonie", Pas à Pas, March 1968, p.23.

(2) ibid.

(3) Entretiens, p.39.

artists under the epithet *Panique* ultimately tended to create the type of organisational entity (albeit non-dogmatic) which they sought to avoid. This in fact, as the following résumé of the history of *Panique* illustrates, is precisely what happened from the moment when the word "panique" passed from private usage into public currency.(1) Nevertheless, it is worth insisting that its practitioners would have us think of *Panique* not as a school with a collective dogma but as a loose association of friends sharing a similar artistic and temperamental orientation.

The origins of *Panique* can be traced back to the *early years* of the 1960's, to the gatherings which took place at the Café de la Paix in the Place de l'Opéra. Here, amidst the extravagant baroque décor of one of Paris' most expensive cafés, with its clientele of predominantly foreign tourists, (an improbable location for a literary gathering), the founder members of the future *panique* group met regularly for their "colloque mi-sérieux, mi-farceur." (2) Founder members were Alexandro Jodorowsky, a Chilean living in Mexico and Paris, novelist, dramatist and director, inventor of the "éphémère *panique*", who subsequently came to be known primarily for his films; Roland Topor, the French novelist and painter whose drawings won him the Prix de l'Humour Noir in 1969 (3); and Arrabal himself. Less regular participants were the novelist and humorist Jacques Sternberg and the Mexican painter Alberto Gironella, and in subsequent years various other artists associated

(1) This account draws upon the notes by Luce Moreau Arrabal in Indice no.205 (Madrid) 1966, p.4.

(2) Gille, *op.cit.*, p.71.

(3) In 1966 this prize had been awarded to Arrabal for Le Grand Cérémonial.

themselves ^{with} / the group, most notably Jérôme Savary.

In 1961 these artists came to realise that their attitudes to life and the tendencies of their own work held something in common, and in attempting to define the common factor they hit upon the term "burlesque". The word is itself an immediate indication of the mock seriousness with which they were pursuing their activities, and also incidentally a tribute to the predominantly Spanish element of their formation, for the word was taken in the sense in which it is attributed to Góngora.

Panique was born the following year, in 1962. In the February of that year Arrabal, Topor, Sternberg and Jodorowsky decided to adopt the word, but for semi-private usage only, since they were all agreed that they had no intention of founding a new school or movement. The word first appeared in print ^{in this sense} / in September 1962 with the publication in La Brèche (Breton's surrealist review) of Arrabal's Cinq Récits Paniques. (1)

From this moment on the activities of the panique group proliferated. A major landmark was the lecture which Arrabal gave at the University of Sydney in Australia in August 1963. This lecture, entitled El Hombre pánico was an amusing pseudo-dissertation in the characteristic mock-serious vein, yet it nevertheless exposes much of the theoretical basis of Arrabal's philosophy and his approach to the theatre.

Exhibitions of paintings by Topor and Gironella brought Panique to the attention of the public in Paris and Mexico respectively. At the latter, biographical notes in the programme describing the artist as a prominent member of the "Académie Pánico" caused

(1) La Brèche, no.3 September 1962.

many critics to be perplexed. Also in Mexico, Jodorowsky produced several panique spectacles, prototypes of his "efimero pánico". Amongst these was the Opera del Orden, a wild spectacle of provocation which caused such a scandal that more than one newspaper called for the deportation of Jodorowsky and the so-called "pánicos" on the grounds that they represented an attack on the national institutions and public order. The furor caused by these activities was so great that when Arrabal arrived by 'plane from Australia expecting to be met by Jodorowsky, he in fact encountered a delegation from the police authorities who refused him permission to leave the airport and obliged him to continue his journey immediately.

1963 also saw the publication of Arrabal's La Pierre de la folie (sub-titled Livre panique) and in Mexico of Jodorowsky's Cuentos pánicos. The latter included drawings by Topor and a preface by Arrabal.

The relative inactivity of 1964 was followed by a period of most intense panique activity in 1965. In Paris, Arrabal's play Le Couronnement, (a work with didactic tendencies written the previous year illustrating the practical applications of the theories expounded in El hombre pánico), ran for three months at the Théâtre Mouffetard, despite intense hostility from the press. Amongst the many publications of that year were Topor's Dessins paniques (Paris), characterised by grotesque incongruity and a particular style of black humour, Arrabal's Théâtre III, sub-titled Théâtre panique, (1) and Jodorowsky's Teatro pánico. The

(1) In the Bourgois editions, this epithet was reserved for vol. V.

latter included by way of preface the essay Sacar al teatro del teatro, in which the author argued for a new form of concrete dramatic activity: the "efimero pánico".

In this essay Jodorowsky drew a schematic analogy between the visual arts, particularly painting, and the theatre. The object of the "éphémère panique" was to abandon figurative or abstract modes of expression and to replace them with "una manifestación concreta". Primitive theatre, he said, together with classical, romantic and symbolist theatre, corresponded to figurative pictorial representation of various kinds. The contemporary theatre of Beckett, Ionesco and Adamov corresponded to abstraction in painting. The "éphémère panique" on the other hand does not seek to illustrate or represent any a priori reality other than itself and in this respect, following Jodorowsky's schematic analogy, it would be a new dramatic form corresponding to the so-called "concrete" painting. Philosophical or moral preoccupations are not envisaged in the "éphémère", which is an essentially spontaneous improvised activity, or as Jodorowsky puts it, "operational rather than conceptual" :

Avant de se manifester, il ne possède en soi aucun "message" (négatif ou affirmatif), il n'a pas le désir d'exprimer, à travers la fête-spectacle, ce qu'il croit être ou ne pas être. L'expression panique est a posteriori et surgit des actions improvisées et non préméditées. Expression non conceptuelle mais opérationnelle que chaque personne peut interpréter d'une manière différente. (1)

Two things above all thus characterise the "éphémère panique". First, it is a performance in which the improvised gestures are

(1) Le Panique, Union Générale d'Editions, ed. 10/18, Paris, 1973, p.88.

the first and only reality, the action being self-generated by a spontaneous process. What this means is firstly, that the performance is dominated, indeed defined, by the kinetic element, and secondly, as Jodorowsky indicates, that it has no preconceived "themes" and does not seek to illustrate anything. This notion is echoed by Arrabal when he says of panique theatre in general: "no se pone al servicio de una idea, sino es la idea misma." (1) This does not in fact mean that the "éphémère" is purely gratuitous, for although in each individual spectacle anything may happen according to the intervention of chance and the images generated, the "éphémère" as a genre does have an ultimate purpose, namely:

libérer l'homme de ses moules quotidiens afin qu'il puisse, par l'improvisation, développer la totalité de son être. (2)

The second major characteristic of the "éphémère" is obviously that each spectacle will be a unique and unrepeatable occurrence. Jodorowsky seizes upon the ephemeral nature of the theatrical representation and pursues it to its logical conclusion. He argues that the implied permanence of plays embodied in printed texts, and performances devoted to the realisation of such texts, are a denial of the very nature of the theatre:

LE THEATRE EST EPHEMERE; jamais une représentation ne peut être semblable à la précédente. C'est un art qui se dissout en un passé lointain au moment même de sa création. (3)

From Jodorowsky's point of view, the theatrical tradition with its classified styles, genres, fixed décors, even the existence

(1) "It does not serve to express an idea, but is itself the idea."
- Letter dated 13.4.62 in: Teatro, Taurus, Madrid, 1965, p.41.

(2) Le Panique, p.89.

(3) ibid. p.85.

of the text itself, represent so many bonds from which the theatre should break free. In place of these traditional forms the "éphémère" proposes an experience which bears no relation to literature, which appeals to the senses rather than to the intellect, and which in practice bears a strong resemblance to both the fiesta and the equally latin phenomenon, the auto-sacramental.

Although both the Happening and the "éphémère" are types of inter-media non-programmed activities, Jodorowsky would refute suggestions that there is more than a superficial connection between the two. He points out that the Happening has evolved from painting, (presumably action painting), whereas the "éphémère" derives from the theatre and, he adds, might properly be regarded as "una continuación del teatro en la vida." (1) In addition one could add that the Happening usually seeks some specific end outside itself and attempts to convey a message of social import, which again marks a radical distinction from the intentions of the "éphémère panique".

Jodorowsky's concept of theatre in this form found its most complete expression in the festival of "éphémères paniques" given on 24th May 1965 at the American Centre on the Boulevard Raspail in Paris. Included in the programme were Topor's Cérémonie pour la femme nouvelle, Jodorowsky's Melodrama sacramental and Arrabal's Les Amours impossibles. It is virtually impossible to reconstruct what happened in these spectacles. (To attempt to do so would surely be anti-panique). The third play of

(1) "El Teatro Pánico en Paris", Vorick (Madrid) October 1965, p.8.

the three named above survives in the text, but of the other ephemeral manifestations only a few photographs and eye-witness accounts subsist. (1) One observer wrote:

Jodorowski (sic.) avait su retrouver toute la violence des fanatismes de chacun, une manière d'exorcisme collectif, par telle image scénique fulgurante, géniale, même si le spectacle pâtissait de longueurs et de redites. (2)

In the summer of 1966 two short films were produced by Panique Films of Paris, both directed by the Spanish poet and novelist José Fernandez Arroyo and based on scenarios by Arrabal. In the first, Ladrón de sueños, Arrabal, wearing a top hat (one of his favourite accessories) is seen to pierce a hole in the base of the skull of a sleeping person. With a straw he sucks out a yoghurt-like substance, and lying down to sleep, enjoys a "stolen" dream. This is repeated three times with three different victims, who are robbed of dreams inspired by Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights, Dali's Cristo and The Rape of the Sabine Women. The three victims awake and on discovering their loss they remove the sleeping Arrabal's hat: his head is empty save for three palpitating masses of yoghurt-like substance. The victims run away horrified and the final shot shows an inscription on the rim of the robber's hat: "Soy Tablinik, genio de la fascinación". The second film, Los Mecanismos de la memoria, was also based on the theoretical and pseudo-scientific preoccupations expounded in El Hombre pánico.

In 1967, despite the publication of Arrabal's Théâtre panique by Bourgois, the name Panique as a meaningful term describing a

(1) For example in Le Théâtre, 1968-1, Bourgois, Paris, 1968, passim

(2) Lucien Attoun, "L'Ecole Argentine de Paris", Europe, April 1969, pp.378-384.

collective tendency appears to have entered into a decline as its exponents pursued their own progressively more divergent courses. Jodorowsky finally abandoned the "efimero" and devoted himself to artistic activities of a more enduring kind, especially films. (In 1970 he directed Tar Babies, a screen adaptation of Fando et Lis). When Topor's drawings were republished by Albin Michel in 1968 the epithet "panique" was omitted from the title. Arrabal's association with Jérôme Savary in 1966 and 1967 gave rise to the Grand Théâtre Panique of which Savary was President. The company was graced with an impressive membership, including names such as Klein, Mandiargues, Copi and Buñuel, as well as the regular members of the panique group. In its short-lived hey-day this company was responsible for some of the most important panique activities, namely Ivan Henrique's production of Le Couronnement in the little Théâtre Mouffetard and, in January 1967, Savary's remarkable production of Le Labyrinthe, in which live animals and fireworks were introduced to help to generate a fiesta-like climate. But the Grand Théâtre Panique was a short-lived venture and its key figure, Savary, soon departed to pursue his own brand of "theatre" which led eventually to the creation of the Grand Magic Circus. By 1969 Arrabal himself, founder member and major exponent of Panique, was able to speak of it all as a thing of the past. Speaking of Le Couronnement, the play most patently related to Panique, and now the play he regards least favourably, he said:

Je l'ai écrite à une époque où je croyais beaucoup à ma théorie panique. J'avais donné à ce sujet une conférence en Australie et j'étais fasciné par l'idée de la

confusion, par les lois du hasard et de la mémoire. (1)

In 1971 he went even further and (for reasons which will soon be made clear) disclaimed Panique altogether. He declared:

"Maintenant nous faisons tout pour le boycotter, malgré les thèses universitaires qu'il suscite." (2)

(11) Character and philosophy of Panique

The presiding genius of Panique is of course the god Pan, and this is itself informative of the nature of Panique. W. Smith recounts how Pan was born, already fully-formed:

He had his horns, beard, puck nose, tail, goats' feet and was covered with hair so that his mother ran away with fear when she saw him; but Hermes carried him into Olympus where all the gods were delighted, especially Dionysus. (3)

Thus, from the moment of his birth, Pan imposed his extraordinary presence with his dual capacity to inspire both terror and hilarity. In accordance with his ridiculously ignoble body, the young Pan was a buffoon, a prankster delighting in practical jokes, pastoral farces and wild revelry - hence his association with Dionysus. (4) One of his favourite tricks was to terrorise

(1) Entretiens, pp.98-99.

(2) "Plus loin avec Arrabal", L'Express, 16-22 August 1971, p.71.

(3) Dictionary of Greek and Roman biography and mythology, ed. W. Smith, London, 1856, p.106.

(4) Dionysus: the Greek god of wine and drunkenness. P-A. Touchard (in Dionysos, Seuil, Paris, 1968) examines this divinity in terms of the god of dramatic art. According to mythology, Dionysus married Ariadne who demanded that a cult be rendered to her, based on dramatic representation. The essence of these activities, from which the Attic tragedy evolved, resided in the violent intensity of their excesses, in keeping with the nature of the intemperant Dionysus, of whom Touchard writes: "Les anciens lui donnaient souvent la forme d'un taureau pour exprimer non seulement l'abondance de la vie et

solitary travellers by making a sudden appearance in their path. Normally Pan was amorous - tales abound of his exploits with the nymphs - and in Arcadia where he lived his business was to increase the fertility of the flocks. This accounts for his frequent representation as a phallic divinity and again links him with Dionysus.

On the other hand, Pan's temper could be formidable, especially if roused from his afternoon siesta. "He can induce 'panic' terror, (like that of frightened and stampeding flocks) in man." (1)

There is thus at the heart of Panique a duality of mood, an ambiguity which corresponds to certain aspects of Arrabal's vision of life and his personality, and which clearly holds a very strong appeal for him:

L'autre jour j'ai lu dans un dictionnaire que Pan, au début, était un bouffon qui faisait rire, et qu'ensuite il faisait peur. Je voudrais bien être comme Pan. (2)

In this way Arrabal seems to regard Pan as a model to emulate. Perhaps he believed he already resembled Pan, for recalling his youth he has spoken of his body as being grotesque, like Pan's: Je me voyais horrible, j'avais une tête tellement énorme, tellement... Tout le monde riait de moi, du moins je le croyais." (3) The anguish which this vision inspired at first has subsequently

la fécondité, mais aussi la folie furieuse. (...) Le dieu de l'art dramatique est donc avant tout un dieu de dépassement, le dieu de la poésie frénétique, de la libération vertigineuse des sentiments." (pp.12-13). Dionysus is thus the natural companion to Pan, and some of the manifestations of Panique will be seen to approach this concept of drama based on frenetic agitation pushed to excesses bordering on madness.

(1) Oxford Classical Dictionary.

(2) J. Chalon, "Arrabal: 'Je suis un auteur panique'", Le Figaro Littéraire, 7.5.64, p.18.

(3) Entretiens, p.26.

given way to a more lucid self-ridicule:

J'ai trouvé mon équilibre: il me faut à tout prix éviter la folie, et, pourtant, pratiquer quelques pseudo-manières de folie. Je cultive l'ironie de moi-même. Je ris de moi, je me veux grotesque en face d'un monde organisé. (1)

The "pseudo-manières de folie" in which Arrabal indulges are an essential facet of the man's personality and work, and are in general not uncharacteristic of the panique group's more mischievous activities. Arrabal is a man of many contradictions, as those who have studied his many interviews will appreciate, and has told Alain Schifres: "Je me permets de dire strictement n'importe quoi sur mes oeuvres, ou de dire des choses contradictoires." (2) Tales of his lunatic behaviour, both true and apocryphal, proliferate to his delight. Arrabal, the author of some delightfully illogical syllogisms in El Hombre pánico, takes great pleasure in perpetuating contradictions and on several occasions has asserted: "Je n'ai aucune théorie sur le théâtre" (3), conveniently forgetting the whole corpus of dramatic theory elaborated by him between 1960 and 1965. Or is all this to be dismissed as a practical joke? Is the author of El Hombre pánico in reality

(1) Théâtre I, intro. p.11.

(2) Entretiens, p.92. Arrabal's fondness for practical jokes has caused him to be compared to that master of mystification and pranks, Salvador Dalí. It is true that they have in common a marked tendency towards exhibitionism (but in Arrabal's case allied to timidity) and self-indulgence. But Dalí's work in attempting to render obsessions, paranoia, subconscious violence and scatology is both more extreme and more lucid than is the case with Arrabal. Whereas Dalí spoke of his desire to "systématiser la confusion et contribuer au discrédit total de la réalité", Arrabal's aim is not to discredit reality but to reconcile the disparate facets of reality, thus restoring it to its entirety. Arrabal says of Dalí: "Nous sommes complètement différents. Lui, c'est la magnificence, apparente en tout cas. Moi je suis tout le contraire: ma vie est secrète et je doute de moi." (Entretiens, p.136)

(3) Entretiens, p.95.

like the lecturer of Fêtes et rites de la Confusion, who admits:

Savez-vous, je raconte n'importe quoi, sans réfléchir, ne me préoccupant que d'une chose: tenir une heure, celle pour laquelle j'ai été engagé, et passer ensuite à la caisse sans scrupules. (1)

In fact it would be excessive to suggest that Panique is nothing more than a practical joke perpetrated upon a public only too willing to be duped. But the critic would do well to remember that Panique and its practitioners are never one hundred per cent serious. Although Panique might in part be seen as a reaction against the prevailing philosophical currents of the time (especially absurdism and existentialism) which, they claimed, led to anguish and solitude, it can hardly be said to be founded on a new or optimistic vision of the human condition: on the contrary, Jodorowsky says that "el pánico nace de un disgusto por todo lo existente" (2) It is instead a new reaction to an impossible position. There is an undeniable element of escapism in this philosophy which seeks to restrict the domain of the "serious", rejecting gravity, and exploding in unashamedly self-indulgent festival. Jodorowsky explains:

Avant le panique, la pensée produisait l'ANGOISSE et conduisait à la SOLITUDE. En échange, le panique produit l'EUPHORIE et conduit à la FETE COLLECTIVE. (3)

And Arrabal, enumerating the qualities of the "panique man", insists: "REFUS DE LA GRAVITE". (4) The characteristics of the

(1) Fêtes et rites de la Confusion, p.147.

(2) "Panique derives from a feeling of disgust for everything that exists." - "Teatro pánico en Paris", Yorick, Madrid, October 1965, p.8.

(3) Le Panique, p.79.

(4) ibid. p.50.

panique fiesta as defined by Jodorowsky and practised by him in the festival of "éphémères paniques" demonstrate clearly enough the group's parentage in relation to the god Pan: "Trois ingrédients paniques: euphorie, humour, terreur." (1) Panique is above all a way of life translated into action; its activities are characterised by revelry, panic fear and a particular brand of humour from which mockery, self-mockery and the grotesque are seldom absent.

It is probably by accident that the name of the god πάν came to be confused with the word πάν meaning the universe, or all, and that Pan himself came to be considered the universal god, the Great All. (The intervention of a phonetic accident in creating the antecedent of a philosophy in which chance plays such a crucial rôle is eminently appropriate). Homer explains this aspect of the divinity by claiming that the sight of Pan on Olympus delighted all the Immortals. However this may be, etymologically Pan has come to denote All, and here is another important feature of Panique. Panique's ambition is to be a total vision of life; its tenets are not only non-dogmatic but also all-embracing, to the point of being mutually contradictory: "L'intelligence panique est capable d'affirmer deux idées contradictoires en même temps, d'affirmer un nombre infini d'idées, de n'en affirmer aucune." (2)

Similarly, in art, the panique artist's work will embrace all themes, all moods and will employ all modes of expression. In his work will be found the sublime and the sordid, ("Le ciel et la

(1) Panique, p.81.

(2) ibid. p.79.

merde" says Arrabal, using the expression coined by Peter Brook), sacrilege and the sacred, sadism and love, cruelty and tenderness, lyricism and burlesque, all fused to give artistic expression to an integrated vision of life. There is no panique style in art, for to employ any single style to the exclusion of others is in essence anti-panique.

In the face of these somewhat extravagant claims, the critic solicitous for coherence might be tempted to dismiss them as facile apologies for definition from those who lack the rigour to define their position properly. It is a fact that panique philosophy ultimately defies systematic logical explanation, but its broad tendencies are clear enough. One aspect which remains particularly obscure is the relationship between panique thought and panique art. Oddly enough, Jodorowsky crystallises the problem, without providing the solution, when he says: "Pour comprendre les fins de l'éphémère panique, il faut connaître la philosophie panique. Tâche difficile, puisque le panique est avant tout action. Le penseur panique est un guerrier et l'athlète panique un créateur spirituel." (1) For Jodorowsky action means in particular artistic expression, for example the "efimero" in which Panique is given concrete form. To understand the "efimero" one must first have an understanding of panique philosophy; yet panique philosophy does not "pre-exist", it is created by the "efimero", and this is surely a paradoxical proposition.

Despite Jodorowsky's assertion that there is no exclusively panique style, Panique is not completely without an aesthetic.

(1) *ibid.* p.78.

His recipe for a "fiesta pánica" consisting of euphoria, terror and humour points distinctly towards the two typical activities of the panique artist: Jodorowsky's "éphémère panique" and Arrabal's "théâtre panique". The obvious and very important corollary to this call for a "fiesta pánica" is that panique art must have concrete physical existence. The written idiom alone is not panique, says Jodorowsky, (though in practice this has not prevented them from writing and publishing "livres paniques"). Just as Panique is not a discursive or contemplative philosophy but an attitude to life translated into action, so panique art is essentially an attitude to art translated materially in time and space: "La langue écrite ne peut être panique; pour l'être, elle doit s'intégrer dans un ensemble corporel, vocal, spectaculaire; être un élément de la fête panique." (1)

Panique might also be seen as a reaction against the attenuation of liberty which is seen to result from systematic dogma, whether in art or in politics. Arrabal is quite explicit on this point, for he says:

Disons d'abord que "panique" vient pour nous du mot "pan" qui signifie "tout": nous voulions ainsi nous opposer à toute forme de condamnation, d'excommunication, par trop fréquents dans les théories politiques ou littéraires. (2)

Similarly, in El Hombre pánico Arrabal spoke of the need for a new approach to morality:

Morales au pluriel: Rejet d'une morale unique, de la pureté et autres formules policières qui, à la longue, ont abouti à la condamnation (par exemple à l'extermination lorsqu'il s'agit d'une morale politique) de celui qui ne les pratiquait pas. (3)

(1) *ibid.* p.79.

(2) Entretiens, p.40.

(3) Le Panique, p.51.

As an example of how this philosophy is translated into practice in everyday life one might refer to Arrabal's interview with Colette Godard, to whom he said:

Je combats la morale pour trouver des morales adaptées aux circonstances. Ainsi, lorsque je prends l'avion je retrouve mes prières catholiques, mais lorsque je n'ai pas peur de mourir, je pratique plutôt la morale surréaliste! (1)

One essential facet of Panique is the emphasis placed by Arrabal on the rôle of the subconscious, or more particularly his insistence upon the need to reconcile the traditional opposition between fantasy and reason, between dream and everyday reality, into a total apprehension of a Superior Reality. This is of particular importance to Arrabal, who says:

Je suis absolument convaincu qu'il n'existe pas deux mondes séparés, l'un réel et l'autre imaginaire. C'est une vision de schizophrène, digne du siècle. Au contraire les deux univers se complètent en s'interpénétrant et même finissent par se rencontrer complètement. "Nous sommes fait de la même matière que nos rêves", dit Shakespeare. (2)

This aspect of Panique bears an obvious relationship to surrealism, and some commentators, perhaps recalling Arrabal's association with Breton, have sought to portray him as the contemporary inheritor of surrealism. Arrabal himself refuses such a rapprochement, for when asked whether he saw Panique as an offshoot of surrealism he replied:

No lo creo; nosotros buscamos primero una palabra; luego, le dimos la interpretación. Paniques procede del dios Pan también de pánico... Para los dadaístas ni moral ni arte existían; el surrealismo negó la moral, pero hizo un dogma excluyente. En paniques los sistemas morales pueden aportar

(1) Godard, "Arrabal saute le pas", Les Nouvelles littéraires, 11.9.69, p.11.

(2) Entretiens, p.64.

elementos aprovechables. (1)

Despite Arrabal's reservations, which may be largely inspired by his fear of being assimilated into any exclusive movement, (he said of Breton, "su integridad podía llevarlo al sectarismo (2)), there are of course several points of contact between Panique and the surrealists, not least of which is Arrabal's determination, mentioned above, to give a total account of human experience, both subjective and objective, subconscious and conscious. Surrealism is often represented as an escape from reality into the unreal, but this is not the case. Breton was quite explicit in stating that the object was to elucidate a state which has more reality than the objective, logical universe; in 1924 he wrote:

Je crois à la résolution future de ces deux états, en apparence si contradictoires, que sont le rêve et la réalité, en une sorte de réalité absolue, de surréalité, si l'on peut ainsi dire. (3)

Like Breton, Arrabal attaches great importance to the world of dreams and the subconscious, which, however important they may be, are considered only partial attributes of a total reality. Dreams alone do not have a monopoly on the marvellous, which very often has its source in "le quotidien":

- (1) "I do not think so; we start by finding a word, and then we give it its interpretation. Panique derives from the name of the god Pan as much as from "panic"... Neither morality nor art existed for the dadaists; the surrealists denied morality but created an exclusive dogma. In Panique, moral systems can be the source of new beneficial elements."
- "Surrealismo con Arrabal al fondo", La Estafeta literaria, Madrid, 8.10.66, p.33.
- (2) "His integrity could lead him to sectarianism."
- *ibid.*
- (3) Breton, Premier Manifeste du surréalisme, Sagittaire, Paris, 1945, p.15.

ARRABAL - Il y a même dans la vie éveillée tellement de choses fantastiques.

ATTOUN - Vous cherchez dans le fantastique un moyen d'évasion, une fuite?

ARRABAL - Mais non, ça fait partie de la vie... Un monde entre le fantastique et le quotidien, c'est ça qu'il faut mettre dans mon théâtre. (1)

This is undeniably close to the position of surrealism as defined by Breton in the first manifesto in 1924, and as illustrated by Aragon in Le Paysan de Paris. And yet Arrabal somehow sees this as the essential factor differentiating his work from that of the surrealists, as the following statement (which seems to reveal a misunderstanding on Arrabal's part concerning the nature of surrealism) illustrates:

Mon théâtre n'est pas surréaliste, et n'est pas seulement réaliste: il est réaliste y compris le cauchemar. Le cauchemar tient une grande part dans ma vie. Pourquoi ne pas le mettre dans mes livres? (2)

On the other hand, it must be conceded that Arrabal's theatre could only be regarded as surrealist in the largest popular sense of the term. For one thing, it should be remembered that surrealism was from start to finish a revolutionary movement and quickly sought to complement the artistic revolution by a proletarian revolution:

The surrealists had two passwords: "To change life" (Rimbaud) and "To transform the world" (Marx). To change life meant to modify feeling, to guide the spirit in new directions, to wean the individual away from a rational view of the world. To this poetic requirement was added that of transforming the world on the moral and social level. (3)

This alliance of politics and art is utterly alien to the intentions

(1) Radio interview with Lucien Attoun, O.R.T.F., 23.10.69.

(2) Théâtre I, intro. pp.14-15.

(3) Patrick Waldberg, Surrealism, Thames & Hudson, London, 1965, p.18.

of the panique artists, whose efforts are directed largely towards the euphoria of collective festival activities and who were all strangely reluctant to pursue the political implications of their thought to any radical conclusions. (Later of course Arrabal's theatre does become politically orientated, but by this time Panique has become redundant). When panique thought impinges upon politics and ethics, it is to assert the principle of tolerance which proceeds naturally from the blanket rejection of dogma of all kinds. But this call for tolerance is a natural offshoot of the panique Weltanschauung rather than the original aim envisaged by its adherents.

The end product of panique thought, clearly, is freedom: by logical extension political freedom, but primarily freedom for the artist and liberation through art for the public. As the object of Jodorowsky's "efimero pánico" was to liberate man from the bondage of his everyday moulds and conventions, so too in the other principal manifestation of panique art, the "cérémonie panique", Arrabal calls for a theatre where everything is possible, a liberated theatre freed from the shackles of convention and taboo. "Le théâtre établit toute une série de limitations artificielles" he protests. (1) It has already been observed how Arrabal was attracted to the theatre of Beckett and Ionesco because of the refreshing quality of freedom they exhaled, and the word "liberté" recurs constantly in his formulations upon his own panique theatre: "Le théâtre que nous élaborons maintenant, ni moderne, ni avant-garde, ni nouveau ni absurde, aspire seul-

(1) Théâtre III, intro. p.19.

ement à être infiniment libre et meilleur." (1)

And finally, Arrabal summarises his thoughts on the panique artist with the claim that "Dans la mesure où les écrivains font des pièces infiniment libres, ils sont des écrivains paniques" (2), though as the following section demonstrates, the anarchic freedom which this would appear to proclaim is tempered by the almost mathematical precision of Arrabal's dramatic theory.

(iii) Arrabal's dramatic theory.

Whilst Jodorowsky was developing the "éphémère" as the supreme embodiment of the panique way of life, Arrabal's attention was occupied by considerations of a rather different kind. Jodorowsky's essay Sacar al teatro del teatro dealt with a specific form of dramatic activity, but Arrabal's El Hombre pánico paved the way for an admittedly highly personal theoretical and technical explanation of Panique.

In his lecture Arrabal defined Panique most concisely in the following terms:

A partir de tout ce qui précède, nous pourrions même succomber à la tentation de jouer à définir le panique.
ANTI-DEFINITION: Le panique (nom masculin) est une "manière d'être" régie par la confusion, l'humour, la terreur, le hasard et l'euphorie. Du point de vue éthique le panique a pour base la pratique de la morale au pluriel, et du point de vue philosophique, l'axiome "la vie est la mémoire et l'homme, le hasard." (3)

"Life is memory and man is chance". These two functions, memory,

(1) "Le Théâtre comme cérémonie panique", Théâtre V, p.9.

(2) Audouin, "Avec Arrabal pour un théâtre libre", Pourquoi?, March 1968, p.97.

(3) Le Panique, p.52.

and chance, are seen by Arrabal as the two most fundamental elements governing the human condition. In his lecture he postulates memory as the supreme human faculty, expressing surprise that the great thinkers of the past had either failed to give a satisfactory explanation of the mystery of memory or had relegated it to a position of secondary importance. Arrabal ventures to define the other human faculties in terms of memory: he describes intelligence as "facultad de servirse de la memoria", reflexes (somewhat obscurely) as "automatismo para utilizar la memoria" and, most significantly, imagination as "facultad de combinar los recuerdos". (1)

In according such primacy to the faculty of memory Arrabal finds he is confirmed by classical mythology, according to which Mnemosyne (Memory) is the sister of Cronos (Time) and is the only human faculty represented among the Titans, children of Uranus and Ge (the Sky and the Earth) and parents of the gods. Moreover, mythology tells how Zeus, the son of Cronos, seduced Mnemosyne and how the fruit of this union were the nine muses.

He is further confirmed in his postulates by modern biochemistry. Arrabal, no doubt referring to the discovery by Crick and Watson of the structure of D.N.A., records that scientists have established a common identity between the acidic substance in the brain in which memories are stored, and the substance which is responsible for materialising the genetic programme of reprod-

(1) A common idea, widely accepted since the time of Locke, (c.p. for example Diderot: "L'imagination c'est la mémoire des formes et des couleurs" - Rêve de D'Alembert, p.162), but very interesting in view of Arrabal's own creative process.

uction. (1) This leads him to the conclusion that "le support de la mémoire est le support de la vie. La vie est donc mémoire." (2)

Memory is of course related to the past. As for chance, Arrabal starts by saying that it is essentially a function of the future. He thus sees life as being subject to the interaction of two great forces: the past (memory) v. the future (chance). Chance embraces the unexpected, the unforeseeable. Arrabal describes a game he used to play; it consisted in finding "profound" definitions or aphorisms. He would select a word or phrase from a page chosen at random in a book. Some time later he would open the same book at a different page and repeat the operation. It was, he says, not really an automatic game since he would select the second element so that, combined with the first, it would form a coherent sentence from the grammatical (but only grammatical) point of view. But in all other respects the game is closely related in method and intention to the games such as "le cadavre exquis" favoured by the surrealists. One day he obtained in this way the sentence "El porvenir actúa con golpes de teatro" - the future acts with coups de théâtre. Arrabal appears to have been fascinated by the way in which the intervention of chance had produced such a statement. He says:

Cette phrase m'enchanta. J'en vins à penser que l'avenir était déterminé par le hasard et je supposai même que la

- (1) Arrabal's discovery of these developments, providing him with a triumphant vindication of his theory, owes itself to a strange and appropriate intervention of chance. An avid follower of the Tour de France, Arrabal was perusing the sporting journal L'Equipe in connection with this event when he came across a popular scientific article entitled "Les mécanismes de notre mémoire" (L'Equipe, 17.9.64, p.5).
- (2) Le Panique p.47.

confusion (que je ne distinguais pas du hasard) régissait notre avenir et par conséquent notre présent et notre... passé (ex-avenir). (1)

In this somewhat tautological statement, that the rôle of chance is not restricted to the future alone because the future ultimately becomes the past, Arrabal is observing in his panique idiom that one's entire life is influenced by chance. The corollary to this is that memory, although pertaining essentially to the past, is also present at all points on the time scale since it can be projected upon the future in terms of statistical calculation and the laws of probability. But this cannot provide more than a partial elucidation of the mysteries of chance; Arrabal reflects:

Il est curieux de constater que, grâce aux statistiques, à l'histoire, nous pouvons introduire un ordre dans cette série de coups de théâtre qui constituent le présent (sic) mais qui en fait appartiennent déjà au passé; comment comprendre que nous puissions prévoir ce qui va se passer en général (sous certains aspects) sans que nous ayons le moindre indice sur un cas précis? (2)

The human condition is thus governed by two major factors: chance and memory, though the two do not stand in equal relationship to each other, for Arrabal observes "que la mémoire est totalement soumise au hasard: le passé fut le futur: la mémoire fut hasard"

(3). Hence:

Je parvins donc à cette conclusion: dans la vie deux grandes forces agissent qui se résument en la confusion: c'est-à-dire d'une part, le présent et l'avenir, tout ce qui va nous arriver, et d'autre part, la mémoire, tout le passé. (4)

It will be seen that Arrabal has here resolved his former inab-

(1) *ibid.* p.41

(2) Entretiens, pp.40-41.

(3) Le Panique, pp.44-45.

(4) Entretiens, p.41.

ility to distinguish between chance and confusion. Chance is apparently the unforeseeable force, the guiding principle which is responsible for creating what we perceive as confusion. But it will also be seen that Arrabal has obscured the issue by changing the terms of the equation. Starting by establishing the opposition between, on the one hand chance and the future, on the other memory and the past, and proceeding to show that in fact memory is also important in relation to the future and chance to the past, he now opposes present and future to memory and the past. Arrabal is at times frustratingly inconsistent, and incongruities such as this stand as a warning to the critic who would take Arrabal's theory too seriously. Whilst there is no doubt that the overall import of *Panique* is of profound significance to Arrabal, it is equally certain that some elements are less serious than others. In one interview he professed with apparent solemnity that *Panique* was "un moyen de faciliter et de compliquer la tâche des commentateurs, des journalistes" (1), and if the writing of El Hombre pánico gave him pleasure, as it surely did, the pleasure is intensified if it provides the spectacle of perplexed critics seeking to make rigorously logical sense of the words he so promiscuously uses.

Having penetrated, if not dissipated, this smoke screen, the critic is left grasping the basic point that Arrabal is making: namely that chance and memory are the key factors dominating life. But in Fêtes et rites de la confusion he writes:

(1) J. Audouin, "Avec Arrabal pour un théâtre libre", Pourquoi?, March 1968, p.96.

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. (1)

So here the identity of life and art is made evident. On a theoretical basis they are one and the same. This important statement on the creative process, (recalling Arrabal's reference in El Hombre pánico to the genesis of the muses), is in fact a conceptualisation of what has been seen to be his spontaneous approach to the theatre in the first creative period, as reflected especially in Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné. So in Arrabal's theoretical explanation of his theatre, life and art are equated, and the association of theatre and chance in the expression "el futuro actúa con golpes de teatro" is revealed to be a most fortuitous accident.

In the second part of El Hombre pánico Arrabal takes as his starting point the aphorism "life is memory and man is chance" and proceeds to consider the relevance of this to the artist and to his rôle in society. Because the artist creates with and from the mechanisms of memory (or does he mean the objects of memory?) and the laws of chance, he is, claims Arrabal, "le seul homme sur la terre qui éclaire, malgré lui, l'imprévisible, le futur, tout ce qui sera demain." (2) Arrabal is thus claiming for the artist a unique privilege: "El artista es pues, una vez más, el mago, el profeta". (3)

Although there is implicit in this theory the notion that the

(1) Fêtes et rites de la confusion, pp.146-147.

(2) Le Panique, p.48.

(3) "The artist is thus once more the mage, the visionary" - Teatro, p.34. (Omitted from French version)

artist, by discovering the mechanisms of memory and the laws which govern chance (a humorous contradiction in terms), might thus penetrate the future, Arrabal's panique manifesto is really more the proclamation of a personal aesthetic and an effort to provide a theoretical justification for this aesthetic. In his moments of semi-comic exaggeration Arrabal will claim that the panique artist can control the unknown forces still hidden in the "womb of time", but in more modest moments he shows that the theory of El Hombre pánico points towards a particular aesthetic based on the intervention of chance and the recreation of confusion:

L'artiste peut orienter ses recherches vers le hasard, l'inattendu. Les gens le sentent très bien lorsqu'ils disent que l'artiste est original. Nous pourrions l'être. Plus neuve, originale et surprenante apparaîtra l'oeuvre d'un créateur, plus elle sera riche et fascinante. Lorsque je dis riche, enrichissante, je pense comme les romantiques que le poète peut être mage, c'est-à-dire prévoir, sentir cet avenir qui nous remplit d'angoisse par son mystère. (1)

Although El Hombre pánico indicates a panique theatre based on chance and confusion, this amounted to little more than a suggestion of the general "ligne de recherche" and contained few precisions as to how such an end was to be achieved. Arrabal elaborates on his concept of panique theatre in a short text entitled Le Théâtre comme cérémonie panique, first published in 1967 as the preface to Arrabal's Théâtre panique. The theatre must employ all modes of expression, must be prepared to embrace all themes and moods in an attempt to create "une forme de théâtre poussé à ses plus extrêmes conséquences". (2). This is how he

(1) Entretiens, p.42.

(2) Théâtre V, p.8.

conceives of such a theatre:

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 la sublime, s'insèrent tout naturellement dans cette fête, cette cérémonie "panique". (1)

Pan and Dionysus are the natural masters of this vision of the theatre "taken to its most extreme consequences" in the direction of fascination, exaltation and disgust. (2)

The theatre must therefore be a "fête démesurée", that is, it must recreate the confusion of life in all its diversity and profusion. But this does not mean that panique theatre is simply a chaotic miscellany of discordant elements thrown haphazardly together and governed only by anarchy. Excess alone is not enough. On the contrary, Confusion is celebrated, as in Fêtes et rites de la confusion, by the application of strict discipline. Says Maldéric in Le Lai de Barabbas, "Nous nous frappons mutuellement selon un ordre qu'elle nomme 'panique' - l'un frappe l'autre suivant un programme très précis". (3) Arrabal explains:

Le spectacle doit être régi par une idée théâtrale rigoureuse, ou, s'il s'agit d'une pièce, la composition en sera parfaite, tout en reflétant le chaos et la confusion de la vie... Sous un apparent désordre, il est indispensable que la mise en scène soit un modèle de précision...

(1) ibid. p.8.

(2) Arrabal's terminology here recalls Artaud who spoke of "un théâtre où les images physiques broient et hypnotisent le spectateur pris dans le théâtre dans un tourbillon de forces supérieures", (Le Théâtre et son double, Gallimard 1968, p.126). And speaking of the convulsive dionysiac theatre, Touchard wrote: "Tel apparaît ce que l'on peut appeler le but du théâtre montrer à l'homme jusqu'à quel point extrême peuvent aller son amour, sa haine, sa colère, sa joie, sa crainte, lui faire prendre conscience de ses virtualités." (Dionysos, Paris, 1949)

(3) Théâtre IV, p.48.

Plus le spectacle se révèle exaltant (jusqu'à la connivance et la provocation) et fascinant (jusqu'à l'outrage ou au sublime) plus la pièce et la mise en scène exigent de minutie. (1)

Panique theatre is thus built upon the interplay between two apparently contradictory tendencies: on the one hand the re-creation of confusion, the eternal possibility of the intervention of chance, and on the other hand the disposition of material according to a strict, almost mathematical precision. The apparent contradiction between these two tendencies is immediately evident in the humorous paradox contained in the expression "théâtre panique", with its antithesis between "théâtre" (implying an ordered superstructure, a specially circumscribed and delimited area of play) and "panique" (implying something all-embracing, chaotic, confused).

How then are these general precepts related to the practice of panique theatre? Returning to Arrabal's early theatre, one recalls that the creative process seemed to involve several exigencies which derived from the author's personal experience of reality. Two of these exigencies are of supreme importance. The first is the need for freedom, the essential uncurtailed liberty of which the poet must dispose in the realm of the imagination and creativity. In fact, if the artist's work is to be an authentic vision of life, that is, if it is to mirror the confusion of life, it will necessarily contain an evocation of that essential element of anarchy. The second requirement goes in quite the opposite direction and calls for the re-establishment

(1) Théâtre V, p.8.

of order. Both these exigencies were seen to correspond to fundamental impulses in the personality of the author himself. Panique philosophy provides a basis for the ultimate compatibility of these two tendencies. The key to the solution of the dichotomy lies in the eternal interplay of chance and memory, both of which are present at all stages of the creative process. (It could not be otherwise, given the common identity of life and art).

The artist's material, from which and with which he creates, consists of both autobiography (furnished by memory) and fiction (furnished by the imagination). But this is actually a false division, since in El Hombre pánico Arrabal had defined imagination as a function of memory, just as in 1969 he said:

Je ne crois pas que l'homme puisse avoir de l'imagination. Il ne peut avoir que des souvenirs et ses (sic) combinaisons. C'est cela mon imagination: un choc d'images qui m'ont marqué. (1)

In Arrabal's view it can thus be stated without exaggeration that memory furnishes all the artist's thematic material. And how is this material treated by the artist? It is of course disposed by a complex process involving selection, arrangement and juxtaposition according to certain pre-determined patterns, including in Arrabal's case ceremony and ritual. Hence he writes in his poetic idiom:

Lorsque je me mets à écrire, l'encrier se remplit d'imagination, ma plume de souvenirs, et la feuille blanche d'"art de combiner". (2)

In explaining his belief in the need for rigorous discipline

(1) Entretiens, p.117.

(2) La Pierre de la folie, p.59.

in the structuring of artistic material, Arrabal frequently draws his analogies from two of his favourite pastimes: chess and mathematics, especially modern mathematics in which Arrabal was reputed to have been preparing for a degree at the Sorbonne in the 1960's. Set theory ("la théorie des ensembles"), in which objects, numbers, concepts, may be grouped together in "sets" according to a given common property, (thereby permitting a basis to be established for both classification and definition), is clearly a precise discipline which fulfills the function of imposing order on apparent chaos. The attractions of such an operation for Arrabal are self-evident - at least to the critic if not to the dramatist himself:

Je sens que la pratique des mathématiques joue un grand rôle dans l'élaboration de mes pièces. Mais, en même temps, je ne saurais pas l'expliquer. Je développe mon inclination naturelle pour les sciences exactes. (1)

How does Arrabal's concern with set theory find expression in his dramatic theory? Arrabal explains:

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. (2)

The last sentence in particular is a clear indication of the codifying function of such a discipline. But there is another side to the coin, for in the same breath Arrabal declares:

"La mathématique moderne c'est l'apprentissage de l'infinie liberté". (3) This is possible because in the practice of set

(1) Entretiens, p.142.

(2) ibid. p.143.

(3) ibid.

theory it is the operator who is free to determine the common factor which will govern the relationships within and between the sets:

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... La théorie des ensembles permet de prendre n'importe quoi et, à partir de cette infinie liberté, d'établir des rapports. (1)

And in conclusion Arrabal explains his penchant towards modern mathematics in the following revealing terms:

C'est ce que j'aime dans les mathématiques: elles renvoient toujours au hasard mais en donnant la possibilité d'intervenir dans le hasard. On reste totalement libre. (2)

The game of chess, Arrabal's favourite pastime, also contains in its essence this dichotomy between on the one hand the exhilarating freedom presented by the perspective of infinite choice, permutation and combinational possibilities, and on the other hand the clearly defined structure of the game and its rules bringing order out of chaos. In chess, as in set theory, the number of constituent elements is finite, but the laws of chance are such that this finite sequence can give rise to an infinity of possible permutations. In this respect the game of chess might be thought of as a microcosm mirroring the confusion of life in a stylised manner; as Arrabal says:

Pour moi, les échecs, c'est aussi et d'abord un jeu de hasard. Victoire et défaite sont extérieures à nous. Les échecs, c'est la vie même. Un combat de boxe où le plus accrocheur va gagner mais aussi le plus chanceux. On n'y échappe pas. Ce qu'on a appris est aussi très important. Hasard, ténacité, mémoire; tout comme dans la vie. (3)

(1) *ibid.* p.143.

(2) *ibid.* p.145.

(3) *ibid.* p.144.

In this most interesting statement Arrabal reveals not only an attitude towards chess but also an attitude towards life itself. The game of chess is like life... or perhaps life is like a game of chess. Life is controlled by the interaction of two forces: chance and memory. Chance is responsible for creating confusion, the unpredictable forces which have made Arrabal the recipient of a "biographie riche en phénomènes, en événements marquants". But by the application of discipline (to which memory provides the key) coupled with tenacity, one can intervene in the forces of confusion and "win the game", that is to say, no longer remain the passive subject undergoing whatever chance imposes, but rather take one's destiny into one's own hands:

D'où l'importance pour moi de gagner une partie. Avec le billard électrique c'est la même chose. Je joue énormément de choses au "tilt". (1)

It will be seen in Chapter Four that something approximating to what Arrabal here calls "ténacité" becomes an important new factor in the plays of his second creative period, a quality which enables his characters to intervene decisively in the dialectic between chance and memory. The characters of Arrabal's plays in the 1960's become progressively more involved in the elucidation of the forces and events of which his earlier heroes were the passive recipients, and the knowledge which this confers upon them enables them to move forward positively, as integrated beings.

(1) *ibid.* p.144.

In his perspicacious analysis of the nature of game and play activities, John Huizinga explains what happens when a circumscribed area of play is established:

Inside the play-ground an absolute and peculiar order reigns... (Play) creates order, it is order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection. Play demands order absolute and supreme. (1)

In describing the particular time / space properties of the game of chess, Huizinga shows how chess creates a parallel world, at one remove from the everyday world, having its roots in the mind and into which the mind can withdraw. Here order reigns. But once more it must be emphasised that this is not the "sterile" order of absolute perfection and precision: it derives its special value from the fact that it is linked inseparably to the player's freedom, which is never in fact abdicated. Chess is a sphere of conflict, but it is a stylised conflict. Michael Holquist has written of "the kind of satisfaction chess procures" and concludes that "the player's end is to achieve a particular kind of freedom." (2) And Arrabal echoes this in his own style when he declares: "There are so many possibilities in this single structure that one is lost. It is the craziest thing in the world." (3)

Of course Huizinga's remarks on the characteristics of the order-confusion dialectic are applicable to most game activities. But they are particularly exemplified in the game of chess, that perfect microcosm of chance, precision and memory. Arrabal often

- (1) J. Huizinga, Homo ludens, Beacon Press, Boston, 1962, p.10.
- (2) M. Holquist, "How to play Utopia", Yale French Studies, no.41, p.122.
- (3) C. Mauriac, "Night Creature", programme notes for The Architect and the Emperor, National Theatre, London, Feb. 1971.

speaks about his theatre in terms which reflect his passionate interest in chess, and this interest is in turn reflected in some of his more peripheral theatrical activities. For example, he sometimes speaks of his ambition (as yet unrealised) to create a new type of dramatic activity which would be structured like an enormous game of chess in which the spectators would themselves participate physically:

Je pense que je l'écrirais pour quarante spectateurs, tout au plus. Quand on est quarante, on entre beaucoup mieux dans le jeu, on ne peut être "drôle", "parisien". Alors, avec quarante spectateurs, je pourrais "jouer". Et comme une partie d'un jeu de Babylone, cela durerait une demi-heure... ou cela ne finirait jamais. (1)

And in his view, such a development would not be irrelevant to the theatre proper, since he says: "Ce serait une direction pour le théâtre de retrouver cette tension de jeu essentiel." (2)

In point of fact Arrabal's incursions into the field of non-figurative or abstract theatre in 1957 and 1958 were an early realisation of similar preoccupations with a form of "pièce-jeu". The conceptual origins of Orchestration théâtrale were made more apparent when the play was finally published in 1969, for it bore the title Dieu tenté par les mathématiques. And Arrabal had now imagined a theme for this abstract play: after creating the world, an enormously complex structure, God went mad and started to look for his own creator, "les mathématiques étant la seule possibilité de systématiser la folie d'un être si grandiose." (3)

(1) Entretiens, p.157.

(2) ibid. p.148.

(3) P. de Nussac, "Quand Arrabal défend la pudeur", France-Soir, 2.9.69.

In Orchestration théâtrale and Eps Quatre Cubes, using a given number of stylised elements as the constituents of the game, Arrabal devised certain "orchestral" or mathematical permutations from a finite series of movements. To his dismay, he found that in performance his abstract plays, the writing of which had procured him such pleasure, instead of opening onto a perspective of infinite freedom, as intended, in fact opened only onto tedium. He has never really been able to understand why this should be so, though he said to Alain Schifres:

Peut-être cela exigeait-il du spectateur une attention trop soutenue, une sorte d'ubiquité. Il fallait qu'aucun mouvement des objets ne vous échappe car le comique naissait de certaines répétitions. (1)

Actually Arrabal's mistake was in thinking that the pleasure he had experienced in devising these abstract plays could be communicated to an audience who would be present simply as passive observers of an intellectual game. For the great difference between Orchestration théâtrale and the "pièce-jeu" referred to above is like the difference between a chess problem and a game of chess. The two exercises are of course totally different:

As poetic compositions differ from prose uses of language in being impractical, contemplative and in a sense self-enclosed, so chess problems differ from the strife of games in their compositional economy and absoluteness... In chess games we wait for our opponent's mistake and we try to exploit it. There would be no chess-playing without mistakes. In chess problems, on the other hand, both composer and solver take delight in the pure and flawless fulfilment of idea in construction. (2)

In Orchestration théâtrale and Les Quatre Cubes Arrabal himself,

(1) Entretiens, p.153.

(2) W.K. Wimsatt, "How to compose chess problems", Yale French Studies, no.41, p.80.

and not the spectator, was both composer and solver of the abstract compositions, and the end product was not an intuition of confusion and strife but rather the "pure and flawless fulfillment of idea in construction". And as Arrabal discovered in 1960, this was far from dramatic for the spectator.

The disappointment of seeing these experiments fail in their realisation nevertheless did not discourage Arrabal, and in 1969 he affirmed "Je suis sûr qu'il y a un rapport profond entre création dramatique et l'algèbre. Sans parler des échecs." (1) What is particularly interesting is that the "pièce-jeu" of which Arrabal now dreams is based on spectator-participation, this being the main factor differentiating them from his earlier abstract plays. Even at this level, therefore, there is added confirmation of Arrabal's evolution from a hermetic, introverted theatre towards a more outward-looking dramatic activity.

Finally, in the following statement, Arrabal indicates the common factor linking the various activities of chess, mathematics, theatre and life itself:

Les mathématiques me passionnent. Pour moi elles s'identifient aux échecs et au théâtre... elles accomplissent la même démarche que moi dans la vie, une démarche très simple qui part du très normal pour aboutir aux choses les plus absurdes, et vice-versa... C'est un monde en équilibre entre folie et précision qui nous permet de vivre. (2)

By means of set theory (in mathematics), the rules and knowledge of previous moves (in chess), or ritual, ceremony and other

(1) Entretiens, p.143.

(2) Travelet, "Pan", Le Fait public, April 1969.

structural forms (in theatre), Arrabal can achieve the ordering of confusion. But the artist is not thereby called upon to relinquish his essential part of liberty. Freedom can be preserved or attained in this way because of the perpetual intervention of chance, and thus confusion is recreated in art.

One thus arrives at a concept of theatre as a kind of structured game opening onto infinity, onto the unknown; and hence:

Plus l'oeuvre de l'artiste sera régie par le hasard, la confusion, l'inattendu, plus elle sera riche, stimulante et fascinante. (1)

(iv) The artist and the public

In the examination of the first creative period it was seen that Arrabal's theatre was a particular kind of response to the author's experience of reality. The plays derived from highly subjective sources, (giving them a special quality of spontaneity), and served their primary function in relation to the author. For it was also observed that Arrabal very rarely envisaged any public for his work, and only in the last play of the period was there any real evidence of an author consciously seeking to enter into dialogue with his theatrical public.

During this period, however, Arrabal's personal circumstances were changing. His return to good health, his marriage with Luce Moreau, the contract with the publisher René Julliard, the interest shown in his work by the influential director Jean-Marie Serreau,

(1) Le Panique, p.48.

and finally the first performances of his plays in 1959 and 1960, all contributed to the growing optimism which marked the last of his early plays.

The years following 1959 witnessed Arrabal's further integration into the artistic world of Paris and his acknowledgement as a notable dramatist. In November 1959 he left for New York in the company of other young artists such as Robert Pinget, Claude Ollier, Ugo Klauss and Italo Calvino. With the support of a travel award from the Ford Foundation, Arrabal spent several months studying English at the University of Columbia. The years between 1960 and 1962 saw the elaboration of *Panique* in Paris, and in 1962 Arrabal met André Breton, embarking upon a friendship which was to last until Breton's death. From the start he was welcomed into Breton's circle, and was a contributor to the new surrealist review La Brèche, but Arrabal was typically careful to avoid any close formal association with the surrealist movement, preferring to safeguard his artistic autonomy by maintaining a safe distance from the group. The enlargement of Arrabal's artistic perspectives during these years, coinciding with the growing recognition of his talent, conferred new confidence and self-assurance upon him, and all these factors contributed to the new orientation of his theatre after 1962.

In particular, these changing horizons were accompanied by a growing awareness on Arrabal's part of the rôle of the artist and his position in relation to his new-found public. This is most clearly reflected in his shifting concept of the theatre itself. In 1958 Arrabal had bluntly declared:

Je ne voudrais être jugé sur aucun autre critère que les critères artistiques. Ni éthique, ni politiques, ni social. Je reste passionné par les problèmes techniques qui se posent au théâtre... (1)

and it seems clear that no public was envisaged by the author of the early plays. But compare this with Arrabal's thoughts on the rôle of the artist as expressed in El Hombre pánico:

Quel est donc le rôle de l'artiste? L'artiste crée l'inattendu... Parce qu'il utilise le hasard dans son oeuvre, l'artiste est le seul homme sur la terre qui éclaire, malgré lui, l'imprévisible, le futur. (2)

And in 1968 he wrote:

Si une pièce est conçue comme une fête démesurée, le spectateur peut recevoir des lumières sur la part la plus mystérieuse ou la moins accessible de lui-même. (3)

That is to say that the theatre is here being conceived as a ceremony of initiation and revelation for the spectator as well as for the author. In speaking thus Arrabal is certainly introducing a new dimension into his concept of the theatre, compared with his earlier position. The theatre is still an instrument of self-examination for the author but now, in addition, it serves an exemplary purpose for the audience by heightening their self-awareness, plunging them into the depths of the their collective subconscious and revealing hidden potential. "Man is like an iceberg", Arrabal says, "we see only his exterior, logical self; the real self he keeps hidden in the water. I want to expose his interior self." (4)

(1) Serreau, "Quand le jeu devient sérieux", L'Observateur littéraire, 20.11.58.

(2) Le Panique, pp.47-48.

(3) Théâtre III, back cover.

(4) Margaret Croyden, "Nothing is forbidden", New York Times, 9.8.70.

Another interesting fact concerning the dramatic theory elaborated by Arrabal is the extent to which these theoretical formulations were already embodied subconsciously in his theatre prior to 1962. It would appear that with Arrabal theory does not precede practice but is an a posteriori conceptualisation and codification based upon observation of earlier practice, that practice having itself been instinctive. (This fact is also consistent with the belief that Arrabal's theatre has been functioning as an instrument of self-exploration).

In his dramatic theory, for example, Arrabal employs classical mythology and modern biochemistry to demonstrate that the substance of life and art are one and the same and that the essential ingredient of both is the dichotomy between memory and chance. But it had already been observed (especially in Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné) how intimately related life and theatre are. Similarly, when he speaks of the visionary poet who intervenes in the anarchy of confusion by the application of discipline, it is clear that he has merely taken cognisance of the two basic polarities of his work: the quest for order and security, and the quest for boundless freedom. Even the theory of Confusion is itself a conceptualisation of the many inexplicable and contradictory experiences of his early life and the ambivalence of his own personality.

The nature of Arrabal's philosophical and dramatic theory as a kind of codification of his earlier practice is a reflection of the efficacy of the introspection towards which the plays of his first creative period had evolved. No longer content with

being the involuntary forum of his dreams, fantasies and conflicting passions, Arrabal has consistently returned to their source, probing the depths of his consciousness and his memory, determined to take control of his own destiny, and has evidently attained a degree of self-understanding. It is no coincidence that this evolution towards lucidity, the emergence from the state of total introversion, should be accompanied by a growing awareness on his part of the place of his theatre in the outside world, for the two are mutually complementary. The resultant theatre, which Arrabal calls "théâtre panique", continues in the direction of greater lucidity and self-knowledge, but accompanied now by the exploration of themes which go well beyond the author's subconscious mind towards certain absolutes.

CHAPTER FOUR

"THEATRE PANIQUE", 1962 - 1967

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"THEATRE PANIQUE" 1962 - 1967

(i) Introduction: "baroque"; "cérémonie".

Whilst Arrabal himself chose to describe his theatre as "panique", another term frequently evoked by observers and critics has been "baroque". The word immediately suggests certain lines of investigation, but one must beware of the danger that this epithet, like so many generic terms, might prove more of a pitfall than a help, and that rather than assist in elucidating the true nature of Arrabal's theatre, the label might obscure the issue. In 1969 Arrabal confessed: "L'étiquette baroque commence à me peser aussi lourd que les autres: 'avant-garde', 'absurde' etc.". (1)

Arrabal himself first seems to have used the word as early as 1958 when he described the communicant's dress in Communion solennelle as "incroyablement baroque", (2) but it is not a term he has favoured. More commonly, it has been seized upon by critics to describe his theatre seconde manière, and in particular, to relate his writing to a general current in French theatre of the 1960's. This vogue of a so-called "baroque" theatre has been associated primarily with certain Latin-american directors whose work was held by many to constitute the major line of

(1) Entretiens, p.158.

(2) La Breche, no.4. February 1963, pp.54-59.

development in French experimental theatre in the 1960's, and who are sometimes referred to collectively as the "école latine". (The term is an invention of the press, for in reality there was no such school).

Their precursor was the Peruvian Rafael Rodriguez, with his production in 1963 of Rotrou's Saint Genest, a largely forgotten baroque play of the early seventeenth century. So alarming was this production, with its mixture of fantasy, provocation, violence and anarchy, that the theatre's director felt obliged to put a premature end to the performances.

Meanwhile, throughout the early 1960's a steady influx of young artists from South America was taking place: Jodorowsky from Mexico, Victor Garcia, Jorge Lavelli and Alberto Rody from Argentine, Ramón Lameda from Venezuela. The magnet which drew these young men to Paris was the Université du Théâtre des Nations, where they also met French nationals such as Jérôme Savary and Jean-Marie Patte. The latter's production of Artaud's Jet de sang proved to be a particularly violent catalyst. There is no doubt that these future producers were influenced by Artaud's sacred writ in their experiments in the direction of "une poésie dans l'espace" and "un langage physique et concret de la scène" eclipsing the spoken word, and generally, in according primacy to the kinetic element in dramatic performance, though it was more often a case of borrowing from Le Théâtre et son double Artaud's methodology without regard for the strict metaphysical foundations on which it rested.

Lucien Attoun has pointed out (1) that these South Americans brought with them a dynamically heterogeneous cultural heritage, partaking of the Indian (stylised and hierarchical) and the Spanish (the fiesta, the corrida, expressing extremes of passion and violence; linking a profound Christian faith with an equally profound sense of blasphemy; expressing what Unamuno described as "el sentimiento trágico de la vida").

As regards the climate which favoured the development of such a theatre in Paris, one should bear in mind that the French experimental theatre had reached something of a turning-point by 1960. The initial élan of the theatre of the absurd, which for nearly a decade had dominated the drama, was somewhat abated. It was now felt by many to be excessively austere or intellectual, no longer corresponding to the dominant mood of the moment. The theatre was seeking a new direction, pursuing a number of lignes de recherche as dissimilar from each other as from the metaphysical theatre of the 1950's, and what these Latin-Americans proposed was, in contrast to the theatre of the absurd, a strictly unintellectual and non-literary collective festival or celebration.

Abandoning traditional psychology and themes, and shunning the metaphysical preoccupations of the 1950's, each of these producers attempted to create a totally imaginary world in the theatre, a world with its own frames of reference and, above all, its own particular climate (which was most often violent). For many of them the dramatic script was less a text to be served than a

(1) "L'Ecole argentine de Paris", Europe, April 1969, pp.378-384.

spring-board for the realisation of their own theatrical style. Amongst their favourite contemporary authors were Arrabal, Copi, Genet and Gombrowicz, that is, dramatists whose works favoured the explosion of a rich and provocative spectacle where ritual, cruelty and delirium could all play their part. Obscure works by forgotten authors, such as Oscar Panniza's Concile d'Amour (Lavelli, Théâtre de Paris, 1968) were also resuscitated with success.

Arrabal has long enjoyed a close and mutually beneficial relationship with some of these directors, but of three in particular he says:

Le jeune théâtre français compte plusieurs prestigieux maîtres de cérémonies: Victor Garcia, Lavelli et Savary. Tous trois s'imposent à nous par la démesure de leur univers baroque qui illumine un monde délirant, plein d'eau claire et de médiums, un monde où les costumes, les décors et la musique et ses instruments jaillissent d'un même ventre, comme les combinaisons d'un unique kaléidoscope sauvage... (1)

Amongst the successful productions of these three might be mentioned Garcia's Le Cimetière des voitures (Festival de Bourgogne, Dijon, 1966 and Théâtre des Arts, Paris, 1968) and his The Architect and the Emperor (National Theatre, London, 1971); Lavelli's L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie (Théâtre Montparnasse, Paris, 1967) and Savary's Le Labyrinthe (Théâtre Daniel-Sorano, Vincennes, 1967).

But how accurate is the term baroque in describing this new type of theatre? The word is associated first and foremost with certain specific moments in the history of art: the Spanish Golden Age, the Elizabethan theatre in England, the French baroque

(1) Théâtre V, p.9.

of circa 1580-1660 - and as Arrabal hastens to point out, "notre baroque a peu de choses à voir avec celui des 16^e et 17^e siècles." (1) Hence, if only for this reason, the term "neo-baroque" seems more appropriate if baroque there must be.

Some critics would argue that as well as being an historical phenomenon, baroque is also a specific aesthetic of which one should be able to define certain constants, and even a state of mind, philosophy or world vision which the baroque aesthetic seeks to express. According to Jean Rousset the baroque "mentality" is not a unique function of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but rather, yet another eternal facet of the human psyche, like, for example, romanticism. The various manifestations of baroque in different countries and different centuries are thus simply so many contingent realisations of a perpetual undercurrent which is liable to come to the surface whenever suitable conditions prevail. If this is so, the neo-baroque theatre of Paris in the 1960's would be more intimately related than Arrabal allows to the other historical moments of the baroque.

Rousset suggests the following definition of baroque style:

Interpénétration des formes au sein d'ensembles dynamiquement unifiés et animés par un mouvement de dilation, l'effet produit sur le spectateur alliant l'instabilité à l'illusion théâtrale. (2)

This unites two key ideas which together shed light on the baroque psychology: on the one hand "mouvement de dilation", the mobility and mutability of different forms in a state of constant

(1) Entretiens, p.61.

(2) Littérature de l'âge baroque en France, Corti, Paris, 1954, pp.181-182.

flux; and on the other hand, "ensembles dynamiquement unifiés", that is, a constant unifying principle beneath the apparent incoherence and surface confusion. For Rousset the baroque consists precisely in the continuous oscillation between two poles of attraction: the multiple and the one, diversity and unity, this movement being expressive of a reality which is perceived as "le monde en instabilité." Elsewhere Rousset elaborates what he considers the four main characteristics of baroque style: instability, mobility, metamorphosis and the subordination of functional purpose to decorative purpose. (1)

In theory one could apply these criteria to the theatre of Arrabal, Lavelli etc. and thus determine whether it might justifiably be called baroque. But this would be to assume that Rousset's principles are universally valid, which is questionable. How can any empirical observations (even Aristotle's rules of tragedy) which are based on an analysis of phenomena localised temporally and geographically be universally acceptable? The obvious danger is that the effort to apply such criteria might obscure what is specifically original and characteristic in the works under consideration. In any case, Rousset's definition is but one of several pertaining to the baroque. Alternatively, it would be possible to consider correspondences (or differences) between neo-baroque theatre and, for example, French pre-classical baroque, though again the ultimate usefulness of this is questionable.

(1) Rousset, "Peut-on définir le baroque?", Journées internationales d'études sur le baroque, 1963, p.20.

Turning to Arrabal for clarification on this point, the critic is quickly disappointed:

SCHIFRES - Que pensez-vous de ce mot?

ARRABAL - C'est un terme que j'emploie, de même que j'emploie le mot "cérémonie", le mot "rite". Mais je serais incapable de vous en donner une définition précise. Je prends le mot "baroque" dans une acception populaire. Sa profonde signification est difficile à établir.

SCHIFRES - Essayons quand même.

ARRABAL - Baroque signifie à l'origine "perle de forme irrégulière". Et pour moi baroque veut dire très exactement une profusion qui cache une ordonnance très rigoureuse, une solide charpente architecturale. D'une manière plus vague on peut interpréter le baroque comme la démesure... (1)

In speaking of a conjunction of superficial profusion with a solid unifying structure, Arrabal is nevertheless expressing an ideal which is quite close to Rousset's definition of baroque as an oscillation between unity and diversity. Furthermore, he is even closer to Rousset when, referring to Genet, he speaks of "l'univers des apparences, du 'paraître', en perpétuelle métamorphose". (2)

The whole of Arrabal's art, it has been seen, consists in manipulating his material in such a way as to convey an impression of confusion, which nevertheless conceals an underlying coherence of structure. Moreover the profusion of the surface in Arrabal's art is never static: there is perpetual metamorphosis. Characters are suddenly transformed into other people, or simply appear different. In Le Cimetière des voitures, for example, the athletes Lasca and Tiofficio suddenly become police agents. In Le Lai de Barabbas Kardo and Maldéric suddenly become blind and equally

(1) Entretiens, p.60.

(2) ibid. p.61.

suddenly recover their sight. Similarly, an attic bedroom, at the turn of a key, becomes a fairy-tale castle perched in the clouds many miles above the earth's surface.

Brought up in a world where a mother can be both a loving and devoted mother and a treacherous wife, where a father can suddenly disappear for ever in circumstances which defy explanation, Arrabal's perception of the ambiguity of life closely approaches what Rousset calls "une psychologie de l'instabilité et de la mobilité". (1) This is confirmed by Arrabal who, when questioned about the mutability of his characters, replied: "Ça ne me choque pas car cela me semble profondément vrai, cette ambiguïté." (2)

That is to say that the instability of form in Arrabal's theatre is not a purely artistic device but is expressive of his view of reality. The effect on the spectator is to undermine his grasp of reality, producing that mixture of instability and theatrical illusion of which Rousset spoke. No doubt this is generally characteristic of our age, a time of accelerated change, uncertainty, doubt and fear. Lucien Attoun refers in particular to the Latin-American cultural heritage of Garcia, Lavelli etc. as "une civilisation toujours en devenir et toujours en déséquilibre troublante." (3) Arrabal on the other hand seeks to relate this aspect, broadly speaking, to the Elizabethan theatre. He says:

(1) Littérature de l'âge baroque en France, p.79.

(2) Entretiens, p.105.

(3) Op. cit.

On peut rapprocher le théâtre de Shakespeare et celui d'aujourd'hui. La richesse décorative, le foisonnement qui recouvre une construction solide et surtout le doute, l'interrogation, le déchirement sont présents dans nos oeuvres comme à l'époque élisabéthaine. (1)

In fact, in Arrabal's case the neo-baroque aesthetic is an eminently suitable mode of expression because of the correspondence between the baroque style and his own philosophy, in which are to be found doubt, hesitation, uncertainty allied to the positive assertion of the principle of liberty. In his works a fertile imagination is given full rein, and although the material is necessarily structured by the artist, the result approaches more nearly the profusion of nature than those works which are the product of the conscious reasoning mind. In this resides one of the basic characteristics of the baroque. Eugenio d'Ors, who sees the baroque as a flourish of the profusion of nature, and who incidentally cites Pan as the muse of this "pastoral" aesthetic, writes:

A peine l'intelligence rompt-elle ses lois que la vie recouvre son privilège... Dès que la discipline perd son caractère canonique, la spontanéité revêt une certaine divinisation. (2)

The opposition between on the one hand reason and authority, (which are conceived as essentially repressive), and on the other hand a spontaneous vital life-force, suggests that the baroque possesses a subversive rôle which transcends its strictly aesthetic interest. Arrabal's hatred of oppressive authority, his championship of the pastoral god Pan, have been

(1) Entretiens, p.62.

(2) E. d'Ors, Du Baroque, Gallimard, Paris, 1968, p.112.

noted. It would seem therefore that the adoption of a neo-baroque style would point to an appropriate fusion of forme and fond.

Another word used to describe Arrabal's theatre, and one greatly favoured by the author himself, is "cérémonie" :

Malgré mon admiration pour le théâtre dit d'avant-garde, je crois que mes pièces viennent d'horizons plus sauvages, moins spéculatifs, et visent d'autres fins plus exemplaires, au sens cervantin du mot, plus spectaculaires, moins satiriques. J'ai donné deux noms à mon théâtre: je l'ai appelé "théâtre de cérémonie", puis "théâtre panique". (1)

This leads quite naturally to Arrabal's definition of the theatre as a "cérémonie panique".

Ceremony of course implies a return to the origins of the primitive theatre, to the celebration of shared myth in a sacred ritual. One of the most ardent partisans of such a concept of a sacred ceremonial theatre was Antonin Artaud, who wrote in 1932: "Je conçois le théâtre comme une cérémonie magique, et je tendrai tous mes efforts à lui rendre son caractère rituel primitif". (2) Artaud distinguished two aspects of such theatrical ritual: the physical exterior forms and the interior meaning, either religious or metaphysical. To these he added a third dimension which is born of the successful fusion of the first two: the magical, the "côté féérique et poétique du rite". (3)

The peculiar quality of ceremony, (and what makes it instantly recognisable), arises from this opposition between the exterior

(1) Entretiens, p.38.

(2) "Lettre à Comœdia", Oeuvres V, Gallimard, Paris, 1964, p.38.

(3) ibid. p.39.

forms and their inner meaning. Ceremony is at one remove from everyday behaviour because it is "unnatural" or un-naturalistic; it is the deliberate amplification of speech and gesture. Ceremony is ostentatious and tends to assume a cyclical form.

The use of ceremony can create either of two effects which are totally opposed to each other. On the one hand, ceremonial gesture can be used to amplify emotion and to exteriorise meaning to create a powerful and meaningful ritual having a greater transcendent reality than the everyday gesture. This is the nature of ceremony in the primitive theatre and as Artaud envisaged it. On the other hand, ceremonial gesture can be used to replace real feeling, to create an impression of substance in order to conceal the vacuity behind the façade. This use of ceremony tends to undermine reality, to substitute illusion for reality, and to point to insincerity; it is sometimes found in the theatre of Genet, that "architecture de vide et de mots" (1), that "théâtre fastueux, une fête dont les splendeurs vous enveloppent, vous dissimulant au monde". (2)

The two types of ceremony are really quite different because, whereas the latter consists in only the appropriation of the external attributes of ritual, thus creating a hiatus between appearance and reality, the former is imbued with a very real sacred reality such that what is created is not the imitation of a ritual but the enactment of a collective ritual in the first degree of reality. The danger of confusing these two

(1) Les Nègres, Barbizet, Paris, 1963, p.179.

(2) Le Balcon, Barbizet, Paris, 1962, p.80.

sorts of ceremony is evoked by Peter Brook when he says:

Actuellement je constate une confusion entre la "Cérémonie" qui constitue notre vrai but, qui pourrait être le vrai théâtre sacré, et l'imitation de cette cérémonie, imitation basée sur des éléments superficiels extérieurs, devenant une parodie grotesque, bordélique et qui, au lieu d'atteindre le ciel, tombe dans la merde. (1)

though whereas Brook contrasts authentic ceremony ("notre vrai but") with its fraudulent parody, one could justifiably argue in favour of both uses of ceremonial forms in the theatre. Both, in fact, are to be found in Arrabal's "cérémonies paniques".

In Arrabal's designation of the theatre as "cérémonie panique", as with his panique philosophy in general, practice precedes theory. The notion of theatre organised as a ritualistic ceremony is a natural outgrowth of dramatic forms which he had already employed more spontaneously in his early theatre. The stage direction "cérémonieusement" is found in Arrabal's first play, Pique-nique en campagne, and appears with increasing frequency in successive plays. (2) In Le Cimetière des voitures the enactment of certain moments of the Passion of Christ-Emanou is conducted ritualistically. Tioosido-Pontius-Pilate "se lave les mains cérémonieusement". Here ceremony is being used in the first, sacred, sense of confrontation with a myth. But in Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné the ceremonial amplification of the heroes' everyday gestures is an appeal to histrionics and suggests the hollowness of their behaviour. But both uses testify to Arrabal's early fascination with ceremony

(1) "La Merde et le Ciel", Le Théâtre, 1968-1, Bourgois, Paris, 1968, p.19.

(2) Pique-nique en campagne, p.174; Le Labyrinthe, pp.66 & 68; Le Cimetière des voitures, pp.169 & 209, etc.

as a theatrical form.

In the plays of the second creative period the occasional use of ceremony of the earlier plays - the ostentatious gesture, sometimes a little circumscribed area of ritual set apart from the rest of the action - gives way to a far more systematic use of theatrical ceremony. These plays are characterised by an intense concentration of ritual, often erotic, whose intention is to reveal to the spectator hidden depths of his own being. Arrabal argues that everyday life is full of ritualistic gestures, perhaps performed unconsciously. (This is consistent with earlier observations regarding the theatricalisation of life in Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné). He says:

Il peut y avoir pour toute chose une cérémonie: quand vous mettez votre première cravate, par exemple, quand vous achetez un bijou à une femme. C'est dans ce sens que j'aime le théâtre. Quand je pense à l'amour, par exemple, j'y vois plusieurs dimensions: il a d'abord l'amour que l'on vit et il peut être vécu dans la réalité (au premier degré) ou dans la cérémonie (avec une certaine théâtralité) ... et c'est pour cela qu'on crée les rites de l'amour, la Cérémonie. J'écris donc mes pièces comme on ordonne une cérémonie, avec la précision d'un joueur d'échecs. (1)

Ceremony then is yet another means of ordering confusion, of transposing reality in the theatre in a coherent and ordered form. But it is not now simply the question of structure that interests Arrabal, for in addition, he says, ceremonial theatre is:

Une sorte de rite sauvage qui fait appel aux choses les plus grotesques et les plus sublimes et qui, à travers ses artifices, peut éclairer la part la plus secrète de nous-mêmes. (2)

(1) Théâtre I, intro. pp.15-16.

(2) Entretiens, p.114.

This exemplary function is made possible by the divorce, which the playwright can render more or less apparent at will by certain theatrical devices, between the appearance of a gesture and its content. Hence: "Mon théâtre révèle que nous sommes au fond très différents de notre apparence sociale, très loin de nos gestes." (1)

The following plays, particularly those after 1964, are the outcome of Arrabal's efforts to create in practice a theatre "comme cérémonie panique". It will be seen how not only the stylised forms, structures and gestures of ceremony are essential to the dramaturgy, but also how Arrabal seeks to revitalise the theatre by means of ceremony in its original, sacred sense of confrontation with the great myths of the collective human psyche:

Le rite théâtral se changerait alors en un opera mundi comme les phantasmes de Don Quichotte, les cauchemars d'Alice, le délire de K., voire les songes humanoïdes qui hanteraient les nuits d'une machine I.B.M. (2)

(1) "Pour un théâtre de cérémonie", Pas à pas, March 1968, p.23.
(2) "Le théâtre comme cérémonie panique", Théâtre V, p.8.

Le Grand Cérémonial

Unlike some of the subsequent plays, Le Grand Cérémonial is not a consciously didactic illustration of the theories of Panique. It appears to have been written before El Hombre pánico and despite the rather more evolved dramaturgy (particularly in the use of ceremonial forms) is not strictly speaking a panique play. In addition, it is clear that Arrabal has once more returned to his childhood for the subject matter of this play. A cursory examination of the work reveals the presence of various familiar themes already observed in his early plays: love, or more particularly the horrors of the violence implied in love; guilt; the mother fixation and the suffocating, emasculating mother figure; the quest for freedom. For these reasons the play might appear more a tardy avatar of the first creative period than the inaugurator of a new phase of creativity. In fact Le Grand Cérémonial is both of these things. Analysis of the play's thematic content, and in particular the treatment of the themes and the resolution of the problems posed, shows to what extent it marks an advance on the earlier plays. Le Grand Cérémonial is a transitional work for in it Arrabal turns to survey once more the world of the prison which had been that of the first creative period; but the outcome represents further advancement in the author's movement towards liberty than the conclusion of either La Bicyclette du condamné or Guernica, and thus paves the way for the more liberated

"théâtre panique".

The play concerns a hunchback, Cavanosa, who seduces women by the fascinations of his most savage demands. He takes them home and in the course of a semi-religious erotic ritual, adorns them for sacrifice, transforms them into resemblances of the life-sized puppets with which he lives, and eventually strangles them in a convulsive sexual rite. He is assisted in this by his tyrannical mother, who serves as his accomplice only in order to maintain her hold over his life. Finally, however, Cavanosa finds real love and the couple run away together to begin a new and liberated existence.

This strange play has divided critical opinion perhaps more sharply than any other work by Arrabal. Always a popular work in Germany, when first produced in Paris it was a disastrous failure. George Vitaly's production opened at the Théâtre des Mathurins on March 16th. 1966, and on April 1st. the theatre was obliged to open its doors for a final free performance before the play was withdrawn. (This stands incidentally as a clear reminder of the power exercised by the press over theatrical life in Paris, for there is no doubt that the play's failure was due in no small measure to the overwhelmingly hostile press criticism). On the other hand John Fletcher describes this play as "Arrabal's most complex and subtle work". (1)

In fact there are several ways of approaching such a play, of which probably the least satisfactory is to view it as a psychological piece. Unfortunately this is how most critics in

(1) Fletcher (ed.) Forces in modern French drama, University of London Press, 1972, p.206.

1966 saw the play, and as they were quick to point out, a catalogue of pathological deviations makes for somewhat simplistic drama, except to devotees of the grand guignol. One notable critic, Gille Sandier, considered Arrabal as a second-rate Tennessee Williams, a serious misunderstanding. (1) And M. Poirot-Delpech, writing about "ce cas psycho-pathologique élémentaire" concluded:

La vérité est que des manies ainsi cataloguées ne sont dramatiques - ou comiques - qu'aux yeux de celui qui les a vécues et qui les raconte. Résumées pour elles-mêmes, et sans transposition, comme c'est le cas, elles provoquent tout au plus l'indifférence amusée. (2)

Arrabal's intentions had clearly been misunderstood. When Alain Schifres suggested that Le Grand Cérémonial was a predominantly psychological play Arrabal laughingly replied: "Alors je suis très fier. Quel malheur si je n'avais jamais écrit une 'pièce psychologique'." (3) But elsewhere he is quite formal in asserting that it was never his intention to write a clinical psycho-drama, and he is obviously startled by the furor of criticism accusing him of parading before the public such aberrations as paranoiac sadism, impotence and incest. Recently he complained, "J'ai été condamné de la manière la plus violente pour des pièces comme Le Grand Cérémonial qui sont des monuments de poésie." (4) And to Schifres he said:

Maintenant je voudrais faire une petite défense du Grand Cérémonial. C'est une pièce qui m'attendrit beaucoup. Pour moi c'est encore un peu Roméo et Juliette. Aussi,

- (1) "Arrabal: du pire Tennessee Williams", Arts-Loisirs, 30.3.66 - 5.4.66, p.19.
- (2) "Le Grand Cérémonial de Fernando Arrabal", Le Monde, 26.3.66.
- (3) Entretiens, p.128.
- (4) "Je suis un Clown de cette société", Les Nouvelles littéraires, 6.12.72, p.24.

quand les gens ont vu là un spectacle épouvantablement pornographique, cela m'a désespéré. Pour moi, Cavanosa est un être qui souffre comme nous souffrons tous. (1)

How is it then that such a divorce should come about between the author's intentions and the critics' reception of the play? One reason for the misapprehension appears to have been the unfortunate colouring of naturalism which predominated in Vitaly's production, causing the play to tend distinctly towards the "fait divers" and emphasising the hero's psychological abnormality. This was certainly not in the play's best interests, for examination of Arrabal's dramaturgy in this play reveals a consistent tendency away from the anecdotic towards the more familiar arrabalian oneiric climate.

Admittedly there are elements of naturalism in conflict with this climate, but the dominant mood is one of dream tending towards nightmare. Cavanosa is himself immured in a world of fantasy and says to Sil: "Laissez-moi rêver, croire que tout ce qui m'arrive est vrai." (2) Cavanosa's withdrawal into this world of fantasy is so great that one might argue that one of the play's central issues is his gradual emergence from this state to an acceptance of external reality. At the start of the play he tells Sil. "Je mens et je ne mens pas. A vrai dire j'ai une 'vie intérieure' très agitée." (3) The contradictions of Cavanosa's "vie intérieure" are moreover projected upon the action, which at times is virtually supernatural. The inexplicable disappearance of the previous victim's body and clothing,

(1) Entretiens, p.127.

(2) Theatre III, p.55.

(3) ibid. p.32.

the mother's impossible omniscience and omnipresence, suggest a dream-like rather than naturalistic action.

In addition the work is generally characterised by melodrama: savagely erotic rituals; bodies under the eiderdown; flashing signals from the balcony; wailing police sirens; hunchbacked sexual aberrant; martyred mother exhorting son to plunge dagger into her back... : the play has all the ingredients of a grand guignol. It is clear that Arrabal is here seeking extreme emotions, and the mechanism of the play is excess to the point of outrage. In such a climate it is clearly unwise to seek to relate the characters to ordinary experience in terms of clinical psychology. The play's thematic content can only be properly understood if one takes into account the mechanism of excess which distinguishes the poetic transposition in this work.

On the other hand Cavanosa does possess an explicable psychological "history". In the words of Alain Schifres: "Il reste que votre personnage a des raisons très précises, très cliniques de souffrir: il a telle difformité, tels rapports avec sa mère, il a eu telle enfance, etc., en un mot, il est expliqué." (1) Hence, despite the melodrama and the large dose of black humour, despite Arrabal's attempts to point up the nightmare world inhabited by Cavanosa by introducing contrasting elements of a more "normal" reality, (the Lover exclaims in despair: "Comment ai-je pu me fourrer dans ce repaire de fous?" (2)), one is left with an uneasy compromise between the irreality of the

(1) Entretiens, p.128.

(2) Theatre III, p.127.

nightmare and, at certain moments, a tendency towards realism.

In Le Grand Cérémonial Arrabal pursues his exploration of the nature of love first examined in Fando et Lis. Once again he lays bare the intimate relationship between love and violence, even love and death, so that Sil, having escaped by accident from the rite in which she should have been strangled at the moment of orgasm, declares to Cavanosa: "Vous m'avez tant appris sur l'amour et la mort. Je ne pourrai plus les envisager séparément." (1) For Arrabal, the lover's quest for unity with the loved one is linked inseparably to violence since it is through an act of physical violence that, in George Bataille's terminology, he is able to violate or transcend the autonomy or separateness of the loved one. Without doubt, violence here is not only a form in which the intensity of love finds expression, it is also a mode of possession. Says Cavanosa:

Si quelqu'un vous avait aimée avec l'intensité de l'eau, du sable et de l'heure profonde, il vous aurait attachée aux barreaux d'un lit et il vous aurait fouettée jusqu'à ce que votre corps ne fût qu'une plaie. (2)

Taken to its ultimate consequences, this apparently implies the death of the loved one, which is precisely what happens in the course of Cavanosa's ceremonials - until he meets Lys, that is. "Je l'aimais beaucoup; il a fallu que je la tue" says Cavanosa, actually referring to one of his puppets. The ceremonial in these moments assumes a quality of sacrificial

(1) *ibid.* p.122.

(2) *ibid.* p.40.

ritual, of which the invariable cyclic form, as with all rites, is not the least important factor. Cavanosa adorns the victim with all the elaborate preparation suitable for one who is about to be sacrificed. In a convulsive moment of frenzy and passion the desired object, transformed from an individual into an archetype, is fixed for ever at the moment of death in a state of possession.

At first sight then, this would appear to suggest that the only outcome of love can be the death of the loved one. But this is certainly not what Le Grand Cérémonial is intended to convey. Cavanosa's ceremonials, of which we see an incomplete enactment with Sil, transport one back to the bleak world of Fando et Lis where ideal love was indeed seen to be unattainable because of the "impossibilité de s'unir". In Le Grand Cérémonial the woman is not paralysed but there are other obstacles which preclude the possibility of real union between Cavanosa and Sil. Fando's violence towards Lis was seen as subverted sexuality, an expression of his frustration and his effort to attain a state of possession. Cavanosa similarly illustrates George Bataille's observation that:

La possession de l'être aimé ne signifie pas la mort, au contraire, mais la mort est engagée dans sa recherche. Si l'amant ne peut posséder l'être aimé, il pense parfois à le tuer: souvent il aimerait mieux le tuer que le perdre. (1)

Sil was to have been sacrificed because there was no other possible form of possession. Real possession in love, as Bataille indicates, would obviate the need for such sacrifice.

(1) L'Erotisme, 10/18, Paris, 1965, p.25.

Accordingly, the tables are turned in Arrabal's play when Cavanosa encounters Lys for here, for the first time, he knows "l'amour fou". Then the ceremonial becomes superfluous: real love, as opposed to the frustrated search for love which had led to the ceremonials, opens the door to liberty, and Cavanosa and Lys turn their backs on the oppressive world of mothers, police and puppets. And concomitantly, Arrabal himself turns his back on the pessimism of Fando et Lis by showing the possibility of a new kind of existence for the couple.

Not only does Lys share a similar background to that of the hero, at the hands of a tyrannical mother, but she shares too the same interests and particularly the same aspiration for liberty. In the dream she recounts, escape is represented by the typical arrabalian image of the vertical ascent:

Il était une fois une petite fille qui était toujours enfermée chez elle et sa mère, pour qu'elle ne s'échappe pas la nuit, l'attachait au mur avec une chaîne. Une nuit la fille s'évade, elle va dans un parc et elle rencontre un homme. Ils prennent place tous les deux dans un ballon vert, et ils montent vers le soleil, comme s'ils étaient une forêt sur la forêt. Il vous plaît? (1)

Lys is cast in the same mould as the arrabalian hero, not as his opposite.

But above all, Lys' sequestered upbringing causes her to view Cavanosa with the fresh, innocent eyes of childhood, and his deformities become of no consequence. She accepts him uncritically, she does not pass judgement on him. Cavanosa believes himself to be a monster, for his mother has told him so many times, and in

(1) Théâtre III, p.134.

the eyes of conventional society, that is what he is:

CAVANOSA - Suis-je un monstre ou un homme normal?
SIL - Vous n'êtes pas normal.
CAVANOSA - Dites-moi, suis-je un monstre, ou, si vous préférez, un infirme, un être difforme, ou non?
SIL - Oui, vous l'êtes.
CAVANOSA - Je ne parle pas de monstruosité ni de difformités spirituelles, mais physiques, "visibles".
Silence.
CAVANOSA - Répondez.
SIL - Oui, vous l'êtes. (1)

Cavanosa thus forces Sil to admit that she considers him a monstrous deviant, thus emphasising his abnormality and setting him beyond the pale of "normal" humanity. Cast in the rôle of a monster, his reaction and defence is to play the part allotted to him to the very end. But in the eyes of Lys, Cavanosa actually appears attractive. Lacking the social experience which would enable her to "classify" him, she accepts him entirely on his own terms, and he quickly discovers that he is unable to inspire fear or horror in her:

CAVANOSA - Je vous tuerai, vous.
LYS - Pourquoi?
CAVANOSA - "Par amour".
LYS - Alors ce serait très beau. (2)

Her reaction is thus very different from that of Sil and the other women who had been attracted to Cavanosa more through fascination for his monstruosity than through love, and whom he dominated by fear:

CAVANOSA - J'aurais pu vous blesser mortellement.
SIL - Oui.
CAVANOSA - Vous avez craint pour votre vie et vous avez voulu partir. Les violences verbales ne vous font pas peur, mais vous redoutez les voies de fait. Je vous ai fait peur?
SIL - Oui. (3)

(1) *ibid.* pp.56-57.
(2) *ibid.* p.140.
(3) *ibid.* p.55.

But as Arrabal explains, a completely new possibility arises with Lys:

Quand il la prévient, comme il l'a fait pour les autres, qu'il va la torturer, elle répond: "pourquoi pas?" et il comprend que sa panoplie, ses défenses, ne lui servent plus à rien devant cette fille qui, au lieu de le trouver monstrueux, le croit très beau. C'est le plus beau "happy end" (sic.) de tout mon théâtre! (1)

Thus once again Arrabal asserts his optimism in the power of love to unlock the door to freedom, providing the means of escape from the hero's oppressive past.

The past is present at several levels in Le Grand Cérémonial. One might seek an explanation of Cavanosa's attitudes and behaviour in terms of his past. In such an analysis, the dominant factor would be the hero's mother, once more the "madre castradora, portavoz de la hipocresía" which loomed so large in Les Deux Bourreaux. Like Françoise, Cavanosa's mother is self-pitying, hypocritical and tyrannical. Like her prototype she is also sadistic: "Mais je te torturais pour ton bien!" she assures him, "Et parce que je t'aimais!" (2) It is apparently through his mother that Cavanosa has been introduced to love suffused with pain, passion expressed through violence. A new factor has been injected into their relationship since the earlier play, for now the mother's professed devotion for her son assumes strong sexual undertones. In insisting upon her son's abnormality, she is surely seeking to find in him the monstrous seducer, the "être répugnant", nevertheless "étrangement attirant" whom she married, (3)

(1) Entretiens, p.128.

(2) Theatre III, p.67.

(3) ibid. p.71.

and at the same time, paradoxically, to preclude the possibility of his finding a partner of the opposite sex and escaping from her bondage. Her sexual jealousy causes her to exclaim: "Comme j'aurais aimé que tu sois homosexuel. J'aurais eu à lutter contre un homme. Ils sont plus purs que les femmes, ils ne pensent pas à ton argent." (1)

But once again it would be simplistic to reduce the mother-son relationship to its psychological dimensions. The melodrama with which Arrabal portrays the mother figure, coupled with her supernatural omniscience, tend to vitiate the psychological realism and suggest that the relationship involves a conflict of forces which transcend issues of personality. For Cavanosa, the mother represents cruelty, paralysis and authority in a global sense, but also, most significantly, she embodies the past. Because her son has reached maturity, and unlike Maurice in Les Deux Bourreaux is no longer completely submissive to her waning authority, she constantly calls upon Cavanosa to reinstate the lost idyll of his childhood. Throughout their dialogue in the first act she is trying to disarm his incipient revolt by recalling the past happiness they have shared:

LA MERE - Tu te souviens comme nous étions heureux, jadis?
Tu étais un enfant docile et je t'emmenais au
parc, le soir, lorsque les autres enfants
étaient partis, pour qu'ils ne te lancent pas des
injures. Et tu trottais. T'en souviens-tu? (2)

For Cavanosa on the other hand, these evocations are but embodiments of the suffocating past from which he seeks to escape:

(1) *ibid.* p.85.

(2) *ibid.* pp.60-61.

CAVANOSA - Ne me rappelle pas le passé.

LA MERE - Maintenant, tout en toi n'est que folie, illusions, projets d'avenir. Que cherches-tu? Que veux-tu trouver. Tu ne pourras être heureux qu'avec moi. Reviens vers moi, nous recommencerons comme si rien ne s'était passé.

CAVANOSA - Ce n'est plus possible. (1)

As their dialogue proceeds the mother is seen to tighten her grip on Cavanosa, but their confrontation brings them to the brink of a new lucidity from which no retreat is possible:

LA MERE - Comme tu m'as aimée, mon chéri!

CAVANOSA - Oui, maman, et je sais que je ne retrouverai jamais plus cet amour. Tu vois que je suis sincère. Mais je tiens aussi à te dire que je veux plus et que je ne peux plus vivre avec toi. Je rêve de voyager, de partir... (2)

The mother thus stands as the incarnation of the onerous, suffocating burden of the past which she constantly invokes. Not the least paralysing aspect of this burdensome heritage is the stereotyped identity, his representation as a monster, for which she is primarily responsible. Against this Cavanosa responds with his dreams for the future liberation which he longs for. But while the dream was doomed to remain pure chimera for Arrabal's earliest heroes, the "amour fou" which Cavanosa experiences with Lys provides the catalyst which will permit the realisation of his aspirations.

Though it would be excessively schematic to reduce the action of Le Grand Cérémonial to this confrontation between the oppressive heritage of the past and the quest for future liberation, the issue is certainly central to the play. Seen in this light, the play represents a résumé of the totality of the /e

(1) *ibid.* p.62.

(2) *ibid.* p.82.

evolution observed in the works of Arrabal's first creative period. Cavanosa has hitherto existed in an inward-looking prison-like world. He is a prisoner of his own fantasies as much as of his mother. He is therefore called to a dual resolution: first, to emerge from the confines of his fantasy world, to awaken from his dreams and take control of his own destiny; and second, to cast off the burden of the past which, through his mother, haunts and paralyzes him. Although Cavanosa fails to accomplish the symbolic act of killing his mother, the two-fold exigence is fulfilled when he agrees to let Lys take the place of the puppet in his little car and resolves to set off for the new life of which he has dreamed. Thus the play ends with a positive rejection of the world of the prison, and an act of liberation which, as in Guernica, is made possible by the power of love.

But whereas La Bicyclette du condamné and Guernica ended with apotheoses which were primarily poetic acts of faith on the part of the author, in Le Grand Cérémonial there is no such deus ex machina. Instead, it is the hero himself, acting on his own behalf, who works his own salvation. It is thus marked by a rather different type of optimism. Cavanosa, the hero who rejects his past life, renouncing the stereotyped identity which had been imposed upon him, seeking to re-define his identity by his own positive action, is Arrabal's first existentialist hero.

Once again this is consistent with the evolution observed in the author himself. For in Le Grand Cérémonial it is Arrabal, as much as Cavanosa, who is liberated from the past. Arrabal returns

to the claustrophobic world of his early theatre and, taking up the same themes again, is able to work towards a positive resolution of the problems posed. The bleak conclusion of Fando et Lis where love was doomed to end in tragedy is negated when Cavanosa encounters real love. The hero who, as a child, had been emasculated and disarmed by his mother in Les Deux Bourreaux now accomplishes the act of revolt, and in defeating the mother figure thus, Arrabal is confirming the emergence from the world of the prison suggested at the end of his first creative period.

Le Lai de Barabbas (1)

"Le Lai de Barabbas", says Dominique Loubet in her preface to the fourth volume of Arrabal's theatre, "par sa richesse, sa densité, peut paraître d'un abord difficile, mais il ne s'agit nullement d'une oeuvre hermétique: nous n'en voulons pour preuve que la rigueur de la construction." (2) Not all readers would agree with Dominique Loubet's affirmation of the accessibility of this play. The work is certainly one of Arrabal's most ambitious efforts. Written in 1964, it remains his longest play to date and is characterised by a multiplicity of themes and dramatic devices. The density which this confers upon the play makes it stand in sharp contrast to the shorter plays written before 1958, most of which were constructed around a single idea or a single dramatic image or situation.

In addition, it seems likely that the author's rational mind has intervened in the writing of Le Lai de Barabbas to a much greater extent than in any previous play, except perhaps Guernica. This is confirmed by Arrabal when he says:

Le Couronnement est presque une pièce didactique. Je l'ai écrite a une époque où je croyais beaucoup à ma théorie sur le théâtre panique. J'avais donné sur ce sujet une conférence en Australie et j'étais fasciné par l'idée de la confusion, par les lois du hasard et de la mémoire. (3)

Arrabal's enthusiasm for the theoretical critique of knowledge expounded in El Hombre pánico is abundantly clear in Le Lai de

(1) First published as Le Couronnement in Théâtre III, Julliard, Paris, 1964.

(2) Théâtre IV, intro., p.19.

(3) Entretiens, pp.98-99.

Barabbas, and expressed in language which is regrettably explicit. Under the guidance of his mentor Sylda, Giafar is put to the task of understanding a philosophy based on knowledge of the laws of chance. Sylda tells him:

SYLDA - Vous devez imaginer, par exemple, dans une première hypothèse, que l'avenir crée le monde, que l'avenir est le fruit du hasard, ainsi vous découvrez les lois qui régissent le hasard. Grâce à ces lois, en vous appuyant sur la confusion, vous jetez les bases d'un système. (1)

Later in the play Arlys explains to the still mystified Giafar the potential value of such a study:

ARLYS - Il faut trouver le secret.

GAIFAR - Quel secret?

ARLYS - Celui des rapports entre le hasard, c'est-à-dire le futur ou si vous préférez la confusion, et la mémoire, c'est-à-dire le passé. Une fois découvertes les lois qui régissent la mémoire et le hasard, vous pourriez vous livrer à toutes les spéculations et prévoir tous les phénomènes. Vous parviendriez à la connaissance. (2)

The terminology of these passages is a distinct echo of the lecture El Hombre pánico and indicates the extent to which the play's composition is linked to Arrabal's enthusiasm for his newly elaborated philosophy. Not only enthusiasm, but optimism and faith too, for Sylda assures Giafar: "La philosophie est une invention humaine; vous êtes un homme, vous parviendrez à la comprendre." (3) The author of Le Lai de Barabbas is proclaiming an almost renaissance-like faith in man's ultimate capacity to elucidate the mysteries governing his condition.

Unfortunately this optimistic declaration of faith is not borne out by the rest of the play, at least insofar as the

(1) Théâtre IV, p.43.

(2) *ibid.* pp.127-128.

(3) *ibid.* p.43.

theoretical aspects of Panique are concerned. Certainly Sylde's promise to Giafar is fulfilled at the end of the play when he is initiated to Knowledge, but the spectator remains as mystified as ever. The sporadic references to the laws of chance, the relationship between chance and memory, and so on, really have little meaning outside the context of Arrabal's personal philosophy. In the context of the play, and to a spectator unfamiliar with panique philosophy, they are likely to create an impression of deliberate mystification or esotericism.

Giafar is scarcely able to conceal his disappointment after witnessing Sylde's initiation to Knowledge, for the essential information which would allegedly make it all meaningful has been denied him:

ARLYS - Vous devez être enchanté.
GIAFAR - Oui?
ARLYS - Vous avez vu, non?
GIAFAR - Mais, c'est que...
ARLYS - N'êtes-vous pas satisfait?
GIAFAR - Si... j'avais pu lire le parchemin. (1)

And at the end of the play Giafar's frustration becomes the lot of the spectator who for the second time is "cheated", deprived of participation in the ritual in which the hero accedes to Knowledge.

The spectator does not have much to learn from Arrabal's rather naïve and playful references to panique theory. If the play were reduced to a didactic exposition of Panique on this level it would hardly deserve serious critical attention as drama. But there are other ways in which Le Lai de Barabbas is worthy of the epithet "panique", and Giafar is ultimately

(1) *ibid.* p.136.

initiated to Knowledge by other, more human, means than through panique theory.

Sylda tells Giafar that Knowledge consists in understanding the relationship between chance (the future) and memory (the past). But it was seen that in El Hombre pánico Arrabal defined life itself in exactly these terms. So stated in other terms, Giafar's initiation to Knowledge consists in essence not of his assimilation of the laws of chance or the alchemical explanation of memory, but rather in his initiation to the Confusion of life.

The final ceremony of initiation is actually only the culmination of a long process of initiation which has prepared for it. The dramatic action in its entirety represents the hero's passage through a series of adventures parodying the great moments of human existence. In particular, in the course of this ceremonial representation of life, Giafar is brought face to face with birth and death, sickness and healing, sacrifice and resuscitation, love and cruelty. It is this broad sweeping representation of human existence which gives the play its panique quality in the deepest sense of the word, as well as providing the real substance of Giafar's initiation. Arrabal himself sees this panoramic introduction to life as crucial to the play, and describes it as an initiation to happiness as well as to Knowledge. He speaks of

Escenas que evocan el nacimiento, el hambre, la enfermedad, la curación, el amor (bajo todas sus formas), el odio, la crueldad, la religión, la muerte... Es decir que la obra relata la larga y paciente búsqueda de la felicidad por el hombre; pero se trata de una felicidad puramente humana, pues se desecha todo conocimiento místico. (1)

(1) "Scenes which evoke birth, hunger, illness, healing, love (in all its forms), hatred, cruelty, religion, death... that is

Like Dante under the tutelage of his guide Virgil, Giafar is guided through these experiences by the dual hand of Arlys-Sylda. The passage through life is seen as a process of learning and demystification, and finally Giafar is brought to a new state of understanding which embraces both himself and the world in which he must take his place.

It hardly needs to be said that the protagonist can be identified with the author in his own quest for knowledge and self-knowledge; but in this play Arrabal broadens the scope of his vision to embrace wider issues than was previously the case. No longer does the play simply represent the author's fantasies, and knowledge is conceived not purely as a personal goal but as an absolute: Knowledge with a capital K. This is confirmed by the allegorical nature of both the dramatic action and the characters. Early in the play Giafar is startled by Sylda's supernatural powers and he asks:

GIAFAR (effrayé) - ... mais, qui êtes vous?

SYLDA - Moi?

VOIX DE MALDERIC (comme s'il appelait quelqu'un) - Con-nais-sance! Con-nais-sance! (1)

And at the end of the play it is revealed that Arlys and Sylda are actually dissociated facets of a single identity, their function being to represent allegorically different facets of womanhood.

In addition, the play's circular construction, leaving the stage set at the end of the action for the business to start

to say that the play recounts man's long and patient search for happiness; but it is a purely human happiness, since all mystical knowledge is rejected." - G. Pacios, "La Coronación de Arrabal", España Semanal, Madrid, 7.2.65.

(1) Théâtre IV, p.36.

again, suggests that Arrabal intends us to see in Giafar not simply the individual but also a kind of Everyman, the first and indeed only such character in his theatre. The action in which he is involved, unlike that of earlier plays, is not only the the dramatisation of the obsessions of one man's subjective consciousness; it is also the celebration of an apprently time-less divine comedy, far transcending the hero's subjectivity. This extrapolation, Arrabal's attempt to situate his experiences in terms of universal human experience, must be considered an important new factor in his writing.

The starting point is still the author's obsessions, much like those of the earlier theatre. Giafar has a lot in common with the early arrabalian heroes. Like them, he is rendered confused and helpless by the incomprehensible world in which he lives, a world which has all the qualities of a baroque "monde en métamorphose". Giafar is distinguished from the other characters in the play in that he, and only he, retains his coherent identity when everything and everyone around him is subject to endless transformation. His position is in this way analogous to that of Etienne in Le Labyrinthe and Vilorio in La Bicyclette du condamné: that of a central consciousness experiencing a dream-like situation over which he has no control. His inability to grasp the sense of what is happening to him, his inability to situate himself in relation to perceived reality, present him with much the same dilemma as that which confronted Etienne and Vilorio.

But there is one important difference between Le Lai de Barabbas

and the earlier plays dealing with the theme of persecution. In Le Labyrinthe and La Bicyclette du condamné the author's field of vision had been confined to the hero's vision of the nightmares to which he submitted. But in Le Lai de Barabbas, although there is still a high degree of identification between Giafar and his creator, a new dimension has been added, for at the same time Arrabal is now able to stand back from these fantasies to perceive their design and purpose. We can see that the behaviour of Arlys, Sylida and the others is in fact motivated, though Giafar himself is unable to appreciate their motivation until the end of the play. This means that although the author shares his hero's nightmares, at the same time he dissociates himself from Giafar to offer an alternative, more objective, viewpoint. Hence what in the early plays was inexplicable nightmare or confusion becomes, in Le Lai de Barabbas, a controlled celebration of Confusion (with capital C) which ultimately acquires meaning for the hero.

This leads to the second major difference between this play and earlier works: whereas Vilorio and Etienne submitted as passive victims to their nightmares, Arrabal here depicts the hero's gradual progression towards mastery of his condition. Like Cavanosa, Giafar emerges from the dark tunnel in which Etienne and Vilorio remained captive. Disorientated by his strange experiences, he is forced to reconsider the degree of reality he attributes to them. In addition to the intercalated flash-back showing Giafar's first meeting with Sylida, which is presented explicitly as a dream sequence, there are several

indications that the whole action may itself be no more than a dream. Is the comedy of life which we witness merely the projection of Giafar's subconscious, and the attic room in which it takes place an image of the innermost recesses of his mind? Certainly it is a domain which he has never explored:

VOIX DE GIAFAR - 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. (1)

As Syllda leaves Giafar alone in the attic she assures him that "Heureusement avec la roulette et le livre, les heures s'écouleront comme en un 'rêve'." (2) And indeed a few moments later he does fall asleep, and awakens later to find the room transformed by Arlys. When Giafar insists that he has recently seen Kardo and Maldéric (who now appear as playful youths) engaged in bitter combat, Arlys tells him "Vous avez rêvé", though Giafar protests with unknowing irony, "Je sais très bien distinguer le rêve et la réalité." (3)

Towards the end of the play Giafar falls asleep a second time, this time under the influence of the sleeping draught administered by Syllda-Arlys. The ceremony of initiation takes place immediately upon his waking, which fact, as in the first instance, casts doubt upon the degree of reality to be accorded to these events. What is dreamt and what is experienced in waking reality? Arlys pursues her task of sowing seeds of doubt in the hero's mind:

(1) *ibid.* p.86.

(2) *ibid.* p.45.

(3) *ibid.* p.70.

ARLYS - A moins que tout ce que vous m'avez raconté ne soit qu'un songe.

GIAFAR - Un songe? Me le dites-vous sérieusement?

ARLYS - Ce n'est qu'une hypothèse de plus.

GIAFAR - Mais si ce que je raconte est un rêve, pourquoi ce qui se passe maintenant ne le serait-il pas aussi?

ARLYS - Mais oui, pourquoi pas?

GIAFAR - Alors, il faudrait supposer que nous rêvons tous et toujours! (1)

Such a conclusion was found to be implicit in Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné, and the explicit statement of the theme in the latest play brings the question into prominence in a less subtle manner. At the same time, the parallels between the exploitation of the theme in this play and Calderón's La Vida es sueño are even more salient than they were in Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné.

In La Vida es sueño occult predictions have foretold that terrible events will befall the state when Prince Segismundo accedes to the throne. In an effort to thwart these predictions, his father King Basilio has ordered that Segismundo be brought up as a prisoner in a cell accessible only to his tutor-guardian. When the Prince reaches maturity Basilio decides to put him to the test and orders that he be drugged and brought to the palace. Awakening to find himself attired as a royal person, Segismundo is told the truth of his situation, but it quickly becomes apparent that the predictions were only too accurate. Segismundo is put to sleep again and returned to his cell. When he wakes up, his tutor assures him that the whole incident was simply a dream, and having no means of measuring the reality of what he thinks happened to him, he concludes "Que toda la vida es sueño,

(1) *ibid.* p.80.

y los sueños, sueños son." (1)

The device of putting Segismundo to sleep before each removal has an obvious counterpart in Le Lai de Barabbas when Giafar falls asleep before the two principal transformations in his condition: before Sylda becomes Arlys and before his admission to the ceremony of initiation. It thus becomes impossible for him to distinguish with certainty between dream and reality, and it is not surprising that there is such a distinct correlation between Segismundo's conclusion, "que toda la vida es sueño", and Giafar's: "Il faudrait supposer que nous rêvons tous et toujours".

Whether Arrabal's play is actually modelled on Calderón's is perhaps not without interest, but the significant point in terms of the development of Arrabal's theatre is simply the fact that Giafar has arrived at such a conclusion. Compared with Etienne and Vilorio, who were unable to emerge from their nightmare phantasms, and with Jérôme and Vincent, who willingly subscribed to the most thinly disguised illusions without even seeking to distinguish between fiction and reality, Giafar has plainly attained a high degree of lucidity. Forced by his experiences to abandon his former position ("Je sais très bien distinguer le rêve et la réalité"), the lesson he is learning is that life is confusion, that it does not conform to the perfect coherence a naïve person might wishfully imagine.

As in Le Grand Cérémonial Arrabal portrays a hero who is

(1) "That all of life is a dream, and dreams are but dreams."
- P. Calderón de la Barca, Tragedias I, Alianza, Madrid, 1967, p.119.

called upon to abandon his illusions and to become master of his own destiny. It was seen how, towards the end of the previous play, Cavanosa, hitherto the passive recipient of experiences thrust upon him from without, took the first positive step towards redefining his identity in an existentialist sense. A similar evolution marks the hero of Le Lai de Barabbas. Arrabal depicts in Giafar a person whom one suspects to be closely related to the young author: a vacillating character, naïve and credulous, but imbued with a large measure of natural generosity and optimism. (In the first edition Giafar is described as having a "barbe en collier", which marks a distinct physical resemblance to the author). Giafar is essentially a timid person who lacks the conviction to assert himself. Treated with disrespect by Kardo and Maldéric, who wipe their mouths on his jacket, he meekly dismisses the outrage:

ARLYS (sans conviction) - Comme vous êtes mal élevés!

KARDO - Nous n'avons rien fait de mal.

ARLYS (à Giafar) - Ils vous dérangent?

GIAFAR - Bah! ce n'est rien! (1)

Giafar is incapable of asserting himself because he lacks the courage of his convictions. This is not surprising, given the baffling incertitude of the experiences he undergoes. A credulous person, he is easily swayed in his opinions, even regarding the supposed desirability of the chain which Sylva has fastened to his leg:

MALDERIC - Comme vous exagérez, une chaîne!

KARDO - Vous appelez ça une chaîne, vous avez une manière de nommer les choses...

GIAFAR - Regardez!

Il lève le pied.

(1) Théâtre IV, p.79.

MALDERIC - C'est une parure!

KARDO - Elle fait bon effet autour de votre cheville!

GAIFAR (presque convaincu) - Croyez-vous?

MALDERIC - C'est tres chic.

KARDO - Vous pouvez lui en être reconnaissant. (1)

Giafar's lack of self-confidence gives rise to a sensation of inferiority and at times of persecution. This was one of the most powerful of the obsessions projected in the early theatre and it has evidently remained with the author even to this advanced stage of his writing. The victim of a persecution complex perceives the outside world as being an organised conspiracy tacitly directed against him. The dream-like structure of Le Lai de Barabbas, in which Giafar alone retains his coherence in the face of an incomprehensible, amorphous environment, is particularly conducive to the projection of such an obsession because of the hero's alienation in relation to the other characters. It certainly does seem as if there is some tacit conspiracy between the other characters. To his discomfiture, Giafar discovers that the new arrival, the Father, is on the same intimate terms. They form a closed circle from which Giafar is excluded in a sometimes quite obvious manner, as in the extravagantly cordial recognition scene which interrupts Giafar's efforts to converse with the Father:

Au dessus du paravent, Kardo et Maldéric font de grands gestes en brandissant des fleurs.

LE PERE - Excusez-moi!

Il pousse violemment Giafar, qui tombe presque.

Il va voir Kardo et Maldéric.

LE PERE - Mais ce sont mes amis!

Accolades affectueuses.

KARDO - Depuis si longtemps!

MALDERIC - Et quelle joie de vous retrouver! (2)

(1) *ibid.* p.50.

(2) *ibid.* p.100.

Giafar's position of alienation, of inability to situate himself in relation to the outside world, is thus not far removed from the source of anguish which beset Arrabal's earlier heroes. The problem of how to come to terms with the outside world has been seen to be central to the author's creative output. Several solutions are proposed in Le Lai de Barabbas, though here too there is a measure of uncertainty.

One of the functions of the parody of life enacted by Sylde, Arlys and the others for Giafar's benefit is to urge him to act positively. This involves several factors, from making him aware of his own inadequacy to inciting him to revolt. One suspects in Giafar the twin brother of Cavanosa, nurtured and immured in maternal protectiveness, newly escaped into a world where he is hopelessly inadequate. Giafar's credulity, his susceptibility to the influence of other people, makes him largely dependent on those who surround him. He asks Arlys: "Que me conseillez-vous? quelle attitude dois-je adopter envers elle?" and she replies: "Vous êtes un homme, vous devez prendre vous-même une décision." (1)

Kardo and Maldéric are equally explicit, for on two occasions they expose to Giafar the atrocities inflicted upon them by Arlys-Sylde; Giafar, scandalised, resolves to set right these injustices:

GIAFAR - Je ferai tout pour vous délivrer. Tout ce qui sera en mon pouvoir.

MALDERIC - Il y a une méthode infaillible.

GIAFAR - Laquelle?

MALDERIC - La tuer et brûler aussitôt son cadavre afin qu'elle ne puisse plus revenir. (2)

(1) *ibid.* p.77.

(2) *ibid.* p.49.

These characters therefore incite Giafar to take matters into his own hands, to act positively. But on what is he to base his decisions when his perception of reality deprives him of any certain knowledge? "Je voudrais avoir confiance en quelque chose et tout s'écroule peu à peu autour de moi", he laments. (1) He is thus driven back to the prime necessity, learning the lesson in déniement, understanding that life is above all Confusion.

But it is the woman, Arlys-Sylda, who represents the true medium of initiation for Giafar. Arrabal says: "C'est finalement à travers l'amour d'une femme qu'il arrive au couronnement, à l'initiation." (2) In Le Lai de Barabbas Arrabal expresses more overtly than in any previous play his belief in the superiority of woman and in the capacity of love to effect man's salvation. Though the state of grace is here defined as Knowledge, it is clear that the theme is actually another variation, in the panique idiom, upon other works where love was shown to unlock the door to happiness or salvation or liberty.

Giafar, says Arrabal, is initiated to Knowledge "comme dans la vie: à travers l'amour et la violence". (3) Once more Arrabal portrays the necessary relationship between cruelty and love, and again, as in Le Grand Cérémonial, the hero is initiated by a woman to love infused with pain. Only here, the theme is explicitly stated, unlike Fando et Lis and Le Grand Cérémonial where it was more implicit in the dramatic action. It is concep-

(1) *ibid.* p.123.

(2) Entretiens, p.100.

(3) *ibid.*

tualised by Giafar when he says of Syllda "Elle vient de me mettre une chaîne de plus et cependant je l'aime de plus en plus." (1) He displays similar lucidity when he says: "Son visage crée la musique, le doute, et le fouet." (2)

There is no certainty in love, which is seen to be a tyrannical bondage, a hesitant combination of ambiguous sentiments. For the first time in his theatre Arrabal represents the polar facets of womanhood by two allegorical figures who ultimately fuse to form the total woman. (3) Syllda is exciting in an aloof way; she is provocative yet at the same time repressive: she tells Giafar, "Mais quand viendra l'heure du repos, je placerais entre nous une épée." (4) The chain with which she attaches Giafar symbolises the tyranny and superiority of woman over man. It is Syllda who initiates the hero to Knowledge, and in the words of Gille:

Le livre de Syllda n'est pas seulement prétexte à feuilleter le parchemin mystérieux de l'alchimie de la mémoire, ni à introduire le théâtre dans le théâtre. Giafar y apprend que la femme a compris avant lui les mystères, et qu'elle seule peut lui transmettre cette science occulte de la confusion de la vie. (5)

Syllda's rôle in this respect is not simply a figurative expression of the power of love: for Arrabal, it has its basis in lived reality. "Ma femme m'explique mes tableaux", he says, "elle m'apprend beaucoup de choses." (6) And in more general terms he explained his belief in the superiority of women thus:

(1) Théâtre IV, p.50.

(2) ibid. p.76.

(3) As in L'Enterrement de la sardine, where the dwarf Hieronymus is initiated to Love and Knowledge by Lis and Altagore, twin sisters of Arlys and Syllda.

(4) Théâtre IV, p.41.

(5) Gille, op.cit., p.84.

(6) Radio interview with L. Attoun, O.R.T.F., 23.10.69.

Les femmes sont plus sensibles, plus intuitives que nous parce qu'elles ont les cheveux longs. Leurs poils sont des antennes. D'ailleurs la femme nous est supérieure en tout: lorsqu'elle s'épanouit, elle arrive au niveau de l'amour. Nous, en général, à celui de la paillardise. (1)

While Sylva initiates the hero to Knowledge, Arlys initiates him to Love. As an adolescent Giafar dreamed of an idyllic love which would be shared with the ideal woman:

GIAFAR - Lorsque j'avais quatorze ans je rêvais d'une femme comme vous.

ARLYS - Comme moi?

GIAFAR - Oui, aussi pure, en qui je pourrais avoir confiance. Arlys rit (satisfaite? ironique?).

GIAFAR - Je me figurais que je vivrais avec elle toute ma vie.

ARLYS - "Comme c'est joli!"

GIAFAR - Oui, toute la vie, sans la toucher, en la respectant.

ARLYS - Quelle idée!

GIAFAR - Nous aurions vécu comme deux...

ARLYS - "Purs esprits".

GIAFAR - Oui. (2)

The same rather immature and naïve idealism was seen in Jérôme and Vincent, who engaged François d'Assise to perform "ces choses-là" with Luce, because their intentions were pure and free from carnal intentions. "On t'aime avec le coeur" they declared. (3)

Arrabal frequently evokes with bemused irony the opposition between a "pure" spiritual love and a "bestial" physical love. The dichotomy is central to several of his plays, especially Les Amours impossibles and Bestialité érotique, but the motif also recurs quite frequently in Le Cimetière des voitures, Concert dans un oeuf, etc. The condemnation of physical love can

(1) Elizabeth Antebi, "'69 - L'Année Arrabal", Magazine littéraire, no.23, 1969.

(2) Théâtre IV, pp.137-8.

(3) Théâtre III, p.197.

easily be traced back to the repressive conditioning of the author's youth. The problem is that, in Arrabal's experience, possession in love presupposes physical accord as its sine qua non. Platonic love is the whimsy of a naïve adolescent. To borrow Gille's words again, "L'amour est un élan physique, une réalité physiologique. L'amour pur et chaste ne peut mener à l'initiation. Il est emprisonné dans une morale répressive." (1) The reality of this is amply demonstrated in plays ranging from Fando et Lis and Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné right up to Le Lai de Barabbas. But physical love is considered base and is accompanied by conditioned guilt. (The acts of voyeurism in this play and in Le Cimetière des voitures are projections of such a guilt complex). Even Giafar, after his initiation to physical love with Arlys is stricken with irrepressible shame and remorse:

GIAFAR (soudain) - Je vous respecte. Ce que nous avons fait... (Il a honte). Il s'agit d'un accident et je m'en excuse. Je vous aime d'une autre manière. (2)

It is nevertheless at the hands of a sensuous woman that man is introduced to the reality of complete love. Despite Giafar's access of remorse, it seems that he has learnt the lesson from the dual initiation to which Arlys and Sylda lead him. The sacrificial killing of Arlys-Sylda with a large phallic knife implies that Giafar has understood and assumed the essential violence which must accompany their sexual relationship. As in Fando et Lis, love and pain are seen as inseparable, but whilst in Fando et Lis love led to darkness, death and solitude, in

(1) Gille, op.cit., pp.84-85.

(2) Théâtre IV, p.151.

Le Lai de Barabbas, as in the immediately preceding play, it is the means whereby man accedes to a state of grace.

Despite differences in terminology and methodology, Le Lai de Barabbas is not really as far removed from Le Grand Cérémonial as its superficial attributes might lead one to imagine, in the portrayal of a hero who, urged on by the impetus of love, seeks to take control of his destiny and master his environment. But as an existentialist hero, Giafar is less convincing than Cavanosa. The latter ultimately arrived at a position of revolt, and his departure at the end of the play was a positive and decisive gesture on his part. Giafar, on the other hand, hardly rises above his passivity; his lessons are taught to him by others in the course of a somewhat fragmentary series of "tests", and the initiation of the final ceremony is not seized but conferred.

The progression from bondage to liberty in the one play, from ignorance to Knowledge in the other, are complementary facets of the author's transition from the early state of introversion towards the integration of self in the outside world. That the goal in both plays should be achieved under the impetus of love confirms the interpretation given to the conclusions of Guernica and La Bicyclette du condamné.

But Arrabal's attempts in this play to give universal significance to the goal he is pursuing through his theatre, by the portrayal of an Everyman in search of Knowledge, remain unsatisfactory, especially where his panique philosophy is concerned. The real substance of Giafar's initiation to the

mysteries of life is, and can only be, Confusion. Much of the work's efficacy therefore depends on the effectiveness of Arrabal's evocation of this Confusion. Sadly, the author's didacticism, his more deliberate and self-conscious creative process, have the effect of depriving the play of much of the freshness which was one of the major virtues of the earlier plays.

(1). Arrabal's attempts here to simulate Confusion by the opposition of one-dimensional allegorical figures indulging in obscure rituals and mystifying the hero with supernatural tricks, look ponderous and contrived. The confusion of life has been rendered tame, disparate, and artificial. But when, in his next play, Arrabal abandons this didacticism to return once again to his more characteristic spontaneous creative process, Panique is seen in quite a different perspective, and Confusion becomes the savage, primordial confusion of nature.

- (1) The self-consciousness of the creative process is underlined by occasional moments of ironic auto-criticism on the part of the author. The Father, for example, a character with great histrionic tendencies, declaims: "Inutile de faire tant de cérémonies avec moi. Je déteste les cérémonies et leurs rites baroques, grotesques et sublimes jusqu'à la fascination et l'écoeurement." (Théâtre IV, p.102).

L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie.

In the summer of 1965 Arrabal visited his mother in Madrid. Each morning he went to sit in the sun outside a small café in the countryside beyond the capital and there, in the space of three weeks, he wrote L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, his richest and most subtle play. It is infused with a sense of euphoria which apparently reflects the infectious aestival mood in which it was written. (1) For the first time since the composition of Orchestration théâtrale Arrabal had discovered that elusive formula for the exhilarating freedom and fascinating agitation which El Hombre pánico had announced but which in Le Lai de Barabbas had seemed so laboriously contrived.

The relative spontaneity of this play, (especially when compared with the preceding play), is self-evident. It is confirmed by examination of the manuscript, for apart from a false start (soon abandoned) to Act II, and a number of words changed here and there, the original draft presents the text as it was published. It is further confirmed by Arrabal when he categorically refutes the various symbolic interpretations to

- (1) Arrabal's creativity often appears to be influenced not only by his environment but by the season too. For several years now his work has followed a cycle which reaches its peak of intensity in the summer months. His most recent plays, (i.e.) Le Jardin des délices, L'Aurore rouge et noire and Et ils passerent des menottes aux fleurs, were all written in the summer, (1967, 1968 & 1969 respectively). One also recalls that in the summer of 1957 Arrabal had experienced similar euphoria in the composition of Orchestration théâtrale during his convalescence at Lanzahita.

which the play has given rise; he says:

Je n'ai pourtant pas eu l'intention d'y mettre de symboles. Je vous le jure sur la Constitution française. J'ai écrit cette pièce avec un grand bonheur mêlé de souffrance et beaucoup de gaieté. Je l'ai écrite le matin, contrairement à mon habitude. Et à la campagne. Donc pas de symboles! (1)

"Happiness mixed with suffering": the author's description of his mood at the time of writing certainly announces the ambiguous tragi-comic mood which informs the play. Arrabal's pleasure at being back in his homeland is tempered with the sad realisation that he can never again return to live in Spain. In this play he speaks with anguish of the poet's self-imposed exile from his native land, and the emotional bond which unites him to Du Bellay is evident when the Emperor recites from Les Regrets:

"Quand reverrai-je, hélas, de mon petit village
Fumer la cheminée, et en quelle saison
Reverrai-je le clos de ma pauvre maison
Qui m'est une province et beaucoup davantage?" (2)

The theme of exile is constantly present as a sub-current beneath the surface of this play, and in a short commentary written for a Spanish journal on the occasion of the first production of L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie Arrabal described himself as:

un pequeñito emigrante español que en un medio tan difícil como el de Paris y en una lengua que no es la suya, palia, como puede, la postergación a la que su propio país le condena. (3)

But sorrow is present here in another sense too, for the apparent euphoria of this panique fiesta conceals a theme of

(1) Entretiens, p.99.

(2) Théâtre V, p.126.

(3) "A little Spanish emigrant who, in a difficult environment like Paris and writing in a foreign language, conceals as best he can the alienation to which his own country has condemned him." - Mi Emperador y mi Arquitecto de Asiria
- unpublished document.

exceptional gravity. It is through games and play that the Emperor is brought to a lucid confrontation with his guilty past. For the author too the play marks a return to the painful memories of his earlier life, dominated as before by the mother-son relationship, but interwoven here into a rich fabric of reality and fantasy, embracing themes which are both personal and universal.

At the core of the play is a beautifully simple anecdote. For his location Arrabal borrows the setting where Prospero, Caliban and the other shipwrecked travellers played out their human comedy, a remote island on which the Architect lives alone, supreme master of nature and of his domain. (1) Fate casts the Emperor upon this island, the sole survivor not of a shipwreck but of a 'plane crash, and in this way the two are brought together to play out their destinies as reincarnations of the eternal Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday. The Emperor, a compulsive mythomaniac, invents a glorious new past for himself as absolute monarch of the world's greatest civilisation. In the course of their dialogue, which is structured according to an exceptionally fluid reciprocal interchange of rôles, it gradually emerges that the self-styled Emperor was in reality only a minor employee in a large government department, a petty official, in the words of the author, "un petit minable qui veut aimer, un petit minable

(1) In addition to this clearly delimited "cercle magique", there are other echoes of The Tempest (deliberate or coincidental?), especially in the sub-theme of the confrontation between primitive and civilised man. But unlike Shakespeare's learned Prospero, Arrabal's Emperor is the flotsam of modern civilisation, and it is the primitive man who here possesses magical powers over nature.

trompé, qui a tout raté, qui rêve d'écrire, de se libérer de sa mère." (1) He tells the Architect that he has murdered his mother and demands the supreme penalty. In the final scene, the Architect, following his friend's last wishes to the letter, devours the latter's corpse and in so doing is transformed into the Emperor himself, whereupon a new 'plane crash with a new survivor, the Architect, permits the cycle to recommence.

The play is thus constructed around a simple anecdote. Yet Arrabal expands this nucleus to embrace all the major themes previously encountered in his theatre: the mother-child relationship; guilt; identity; fantasy and reality; theatre; love; memory and the past; freedom; God and Christianity. L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie therefore occupies a central place in Arrabal's theatre, being a return to past preoccupations and a synthesis of the ground covered by his theatre over the previous thirteen years. In addition this play is Arrabal's most authentic and successful panique play. Like Le Lai de Barabbas it might be described as a celebration of the Confusion of life. Arrabal has here discovered a strikingly fertile theatrical relationship, for the protagonists' games, in accordance with Arrabal's avowed ambition, hold up a mirror to the audience in which all humanity is reflected. The two characters enact the archetypal human relationships: mother-child, master-slave, teacher-pupil, doctor-patient, executioner-victim and so on, and lay bare before the audience a dazzling range of human aspirations,

(1) Entretiens, p.103.

virtues and weaknesses; in Arrabal's words:

La parodia y la farsa, la sublimación y la mistificación de todos nuestros apetitos y deseos hasta los más sagrados. (1)

Once again, then, although the subject is basically autobiographical, Arrabal confirms the growing tendency to go beyond the limits of his introverted subject-matter, in an effort to situate these themes in terms of universal human experience. In fact this enlarged optic is particularly salient in L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, more so than in any other work prior to 1967, and is seen not only in the universality of some of the themes broached, but also in several significant details of expression which help to make this play so distinctive. On occasions, in certain declamatory phrases, the Emperor announces what might be called a perspective of infinity. For example, parodying Napoleon's speech after the Battle of the Pyramids, he proclaims: "Du haut de ces gratte-ciel, dix mille siècles vous contemplent!" (2) Other instances include:

- Tu mourras accablé par le poids de tes fautes et tu grilleras pendant toute l'éternité à cause de moi.(3)
- Et face à toi, te soutenant, le grand empereur, modeste-ment, moi-même, régissant le destin d'Assyrie et conduisant l'humanité vers des lendemains qui chantent... Ecoute la brise des siècles qui proclame impérissable notre oeuvre. (4)
- Que tous les siècles m'entendent: c'est vrai que j'ai tué ma mère. (5)

(1) "Parody and farce, the sublimation and mystification of all our appetites and desires, even the most sacred." - Mi Arquitecto y mi Emperador de Asiria.

(2) Théâtre V, p.109.

(3) *ibid.* p.96.

(4) *ibid.* p.156.

(5) *ibid.* p.180.

Admittedly this fine rhetoric is later exposed as the delusions of grandeur of a fantast; nevertheless the impression they have created is not effaced. Taken individually, such details are not perhaps of great importance, but their cumulative effect is quite striking, opening up as they do perspectives of infinite liberty which were never suggested in earlier plays. To these should also be added the way in which Arrabal here indulges in an explicit eclecticism, apparently revelling in his cultural heritage from which he draws with great promiscuity, allowing the Emperor to invoke Aristotle, Homer, Cicero, Dante, Shakespeare, whilst references to God and other biblical allusions compete with shades conjured up from the mythological underworld. In other words, like a rapidly-changing kaleidoscope or multi-faceted mirror, the play seeks to reflect diverse aspects of humanity together with, as an added bonus, a whistle-stop tour of civilisation from the stone-age to the space-age. The atmosphere thus produced, when compared with the claustrophobia of many of the earlier plays, offers a striking demonstration of the extent to which the author has now progressed in his emergence from introversion and the integration of his self into the outside world.

It is clear that one of the central issues in this play is the old opposition between truth and fiction, between reality and fantasy. It is through a process of stripping away the various levels of pretence that Arrabal ultimately appears to arrive at some kind of definitive truth concerning the identity of the Emperor. It is proposed therefore to start by analysing

the different levels of reality which are present in the play.

The way in which the Emperor proceeds in his quest for identity presents the audience with a confusing effect of presumed reality giving way to illusion, rather like the ambiguous effect already noted in Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné. In the opening stages of the play the audience accepts the reality (as always, of course, within the context of theatre and the convention of suspended disbelief) of the situation presented. That is, one is prepared to accept as the basis of a stage reality, the substance of the Emperor's stories about his past life, however unnaturalistic his description of the world may be. One is encouraged in one's acceptance of this stage reality by the Architect's tacit connivance in subscribing to the "permitted lie". (1)

At this point both characters present a relatively high degree of consistency, and within this framework the theatrical games in which they indulge are openly avowed as such, by the use of different costumes, by invitations to "play" :

L'ARCHITECTE - Je fais le cheval?
L'EMPEREUR - Non, ce sera moi! (2)

and sometimes by the use of quotation marks to denote the assumption of a false identity:

L'EMPEREUR (sans enfiler la jupe il se transforme en femme, voix de femme) - "Oh! mon amour, m'aimes-tu? Ensemble nous irons... "
L'ARCHITECTE - "Tu es si belle que lorsque je pense à toi je sens pousser une fleur entre mes jambes..." (3)

- (1) In fact the Emperor knows more than he pretends, as he reveals when he asks the Emperor: "Dis-moi, comment l'as-tu tuée", before the subject has been openly broached. (Théâtre V, p.113)
(2) Théâtre V, p.83.
(3) ibid. p.88.

Such deliberate theatricalism also helps to set the seal on one's acceptance of the stage reality, because it is an observed fact that the occasional adoption of theatrical poses or costumes within a play, or the use of play within a play, normally tends to lend even greater conviction to those actions which are not consciously theatrical.

However, from the opening sequence there is a progressive break-down of the certainty of the illusion created. After the Architect has demonstrated his supernatural powers by making night fall, an effect which has disturbed the Emperor and perhaps made him conscious of his inferiority, he asks:

L'ARCHITECTE - Vas-tu enfin m'apprendre la philosophie?
L'EMPEREUR - La philosophie? Moi?

Sublime:

La philosophie? Quelle merveille! Un jour je t'enseignerai cette merveille humaine. Ce divin fruit de la civilisation.

Inquiet:

Mais, dis-moi, comment t'y prends-tu pour faire le jour et la nuit? (1)

It is the momentary hesitation which here gives the Emperor away. He has been caught off his guard and there is a slight lapsus before he is able to resume his adopted rôle as Emperor.

Similarly, on several occasions one is led to doubt the sincerity of the characters' words and actions. The Architect weeps, apparently sincerely, at the pretended death of the Emperor, even though the scene is a regular item in their repertoire.(2) At times the author apparently deemed it necessary to distinguish between "real" and false emotion, as in the

(1) *ibid.* p.101.

(2) *ibid.* p.104.

following scene:

L'ARCHITECTE - Moi...

Sincèrement:

Je t'aime...

L'EMPEREUR (très ému, au bord des larmes) - Tu te moques
de moi.

L'ARCHITECTE - Non. (1)

And at one point the confusion caused by the proliferation of theatrical rôles is so great that even the Architect has to call for clarification:

L'EMPEREUR - Ecoute-moi, ce sont mes dernières paroles:
je suis las de vivre, je désire m'éloigner
de tout ce qui m'attache encore au monde...

L'ARCHITECTE - C'est un nouveau jeu.

L'EMPEREUR - Non, c'est la vérité. (2)

There is thus a gradual disintegration of the illusion created at the start of the play, leading up to the point where what had been accepted as stage reality is contradicted and replaced by a new stage reality. This moment comes during the Emperor's long monologue-dialogue when, believing himself to have been abandoned by the Architect, he constructs a dummy on to which he transfers the identity of Emperor of Assyria, lends it his own voice and himself assumes a variety of rôles; amongst others, a carmelite nun giving birth to a baby, her confessor, a doctor, a martian visitor to earth. The building of the effigy frees him of the constraints of the rôle of Emperor, and it is during this monologue, a confused and fragmentary self-confession intermingled with the spontaneous enactment of various fantasies, that elements of his "real" self are revealed. We now discover that in fact he was a junior office clerk who spent so much

(1) *ibid.* pp.111-112.

(2) *ibid.* pp.113-114.

time working in the office that he became indispensable to his superiors, or so he claims. In the process he lost his friends and his wife. Of his mother he confesses: "Elle ne m'aimait plus comme lorsque j'étais enfant, elle me haïssait mortellement".(1) And he slowly reveals himself as the vulnerable and pathetic mythomaniac that he is:

... et je savais que je serais empereur... comme vous... Empereur d'Assyrie, voilà ce que je pensais devenir: empereur comme vous.

Qui m'aurait dit que j'allais vous rencontrer? Je rêvais que j'allais être le premier en tout. Que j'écrirais et que je serais un grand poète: mais soyez persuadé que si j'en avais eu le temps, si je n'avais pas dû travailler toute la journée... quel poète j'aurais fait. Et j'aurais écrit un livre comme Les Caractères de La Bruyère et j'aurais réglé leur compte à tous mes ennemis qui me jalouaient tant. Personne n'en serait sorti indemne! (2)

In the second act this stage reality, (the Emperor's real identity) which had been partially revealed in the Emperor's monologue, is now accepted by the audience as fundamental. It becomes clear that the grandiose gestures and speeches, indeed the whole persona of the Emperor, were in fact the fantasies of a little man seeking to recapture through imagination what reality had never been able to afford him. Interest now centres on the Emperor's trial on a charge of matricide. Like everything else, this is presented as a game, initiated by the Architect but with the Emperor as a more or less willing victim. On occasions he protests furiously that the game is going too far, as when, in the rôle of his brother as witness for the prosecution, he is called upon by the court to recount his brother's,

(1) *ibid.* p.122.

(2) *ibid.* p.123.

or rather his own, sexual perversions:

L'EMPEREUR frère - Mon frère le po-ète s'amusait, alors que je n'avais que dix ans et lui quinze, a me pervertir, a me violer et à m'obliger à le violer.

L'EMPEREUR (arrachant son masque) - C'étaient des jeux d'enfants sans grande importance.

L'ARCHITECTE - Silence. Que le témoin poursuive son récit.

L'EMPEREUR frère - Comme je vous le dit. Faut-il faire un dessin? Je vais vous raconter comment ça se passait.

L'EMPEREUR (furieux, sans masque) - Assez, assez, ça suffit. (1)

At moments such as this it is clear that the game is impinging upon a deeper, more sensitive and more serious level of consciousness. Indeed as the trial proceeds and more of the truth emerges it becomes apparent that what had started as a game has developed into something deadly serious, at least for the Emperor. Now he is eager to see it reach its conclusion:

L'EMPEREUR -Tais-toi! Ne vois-tu pas que je suivais mon inspiration. Crois-tu que ce soit si facile de chanter l'opéra?

Un temps.

A propos ce jugement, où en étions-nous?

L'ARCHITECTE - A présent, c'est toi qui t'y intéresses?

L'EMPEREUR - Rejoins immédiatement ta place. Ne rendras-tu donc jamais la justice dans cette fichue île? (2)

And finally he forces the reality of his trial upon a reluctant Architect:

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 procès, ton jugement... mais il me semble que tu le prennes au sérieux. Empereur, tu sais que je t'aime.

(1) *ibid.* p.157.

(2) *ibid.* pp.176-177.

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... (1)

For the Architect and the Emperor, then, at least, the identity which has now been revealed is accepted as true, and this truth is accepted as definitive, at least at the level of their stage reality. Accordingly, it is to be consecrated by the most definitive of actions; as the Architect points out in consternation, (2) "Mais mourir n'est pas un jeu comme les autres: c'est irréparable."

In the minds of the audience, however, serious doubts must persist. The Emperor now claims that he is being serious - but how can we judge whether this is true or false? The confusion caused by the constant injecting of "real" emotions into false situations and vice versa, has left us virtually incapable of distinguishing between reality and pretence. Throughout the play the Emperor has revealed himself as a mythomaniac; when he now says that he is in deadly earnest, might it not be more accurate if he said, like Irma in Le Balcon, "Je ne joue plus. Ou plus le même rôle si tu veux."? Perhaps the Emperor never did really kill his mother - we only have his word for it. Perhaps the whole of the second act, his trial, confession and expiation, is yet another farce organised by the Emperor to give substance to another fantasy which has no more basis in truth than the kingdom of Assyria.

(1) *ibid.* p.184.

(2) *ibid.* p.185.

The final scene, in which the Architect eats the Emperor's body, in the process becoming transformed into the Emperor, only to be confronted by another Architect, not only fails to allay these doubts in the audience's mind, but provokes further uncertainty too. So much so that one is obliged to reconsider even one's most basic assumptions about the action one has just witnessed. By this final conjuring trick, Arrabal ensures that the whole episode disappears behind receding layers of illusion. What is now called into doubt is the very existence of the Architect and the Emperor, or both, as autonomous entities, for in fact there seems little compelling reason why we should attribute a greater degree of reality to these two personages than to, say, the various couples enacted by the Emperor during his monologue in Act I.

"On peut dire aussi", says Arrabal, "que tout cela c'est un jeu de solitaire que s'est inventé l'Empereur, et que l'Architecte n'a jamais existé. A moins que ce soit l'inverse." (1)

At one point the Architect relates one of his dreams:

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... (2)

Little wonder that the Emperor cuts him off in mid-sentence, since he has just glimpsed the terrifying prospect that he himself may be simply a creation of the Architect's imagination.

More frequently, however, there are suggestions that the whole play is a projection from within the Emperor's mind. After all,

(1) Entretiens, p.152.

(2) Théâtre V, p.97.

it is his past that is being examined, and it is he who allocates the rôles at the start of the play. The Emperor himself refers to this possibility when he says:

L'EMPEREUR - Imagine-toi que tu tapes maintenant dans tes mains et... que je m'éveille de ce rêve que je prends pour la vie... pour... Tu t'imagines avec moi dans un autre monde... (1)

So when he says to the Architect, "Dis-moi tout... Je suis ton père, je suis ta mère, je suis tout pour toi" (2) there might in fact be more truth in this claim than he appears to be consciously revealing. Like several other arrabalian characters the Emperor demonstrates a compulsive need for dédoublement, an essentially theatrical desire to create and believe in fictitious entities. As he observed to himself during his monologue, "tu deviens schizophrène." (3) Indeed the whole persona of the Emperor has been seen to be one such creation. It might be that the Architect is another such creation, mutually complementary to that of the Emperor and one which responds perfectly to his need for love and understanding, as well as for authoritative judgement - in other words that the Architect is a projection of the Emperor's fantasy, destined to facilitate the farce of confession and expiation.

Ultimately all attempts to explain the action as the projection of either the Architect's fantasies, or the Emperor's, remain unsatisfactory because the inconclusive evidence for both the one and the other ends up by being mutually contradictory. A third thus imposes itself: that both Architect and Emperor represent aspects of a single unifying consciousness which never reveals

(1) *ibid.* p.162.

(2) *ibid.* p.108.

(3) *ibid.* p.119.

itself in the play except through these dissociated facets. In fact, if the play is viewed in the total reality of its creation, the unifying consciousness of which these two characters are the Ego and Alter Ego is clearly discernible, for it is of course that of the author.

It has already been noted how Arrabal sometimes represents opposite facets of woman by incarnating them in separate characters. Here Arrabal turns the technique upon himself and pursues the process of self-examination by incarnating different aspects of his own personality in separate characters.

Everywhere in this play the author's hand is plainly discernible, from the thematic level to the linguistic. The Architect and the Emperor both share their creator's distinctive imagination, as they demonstrate when describing their respective dreams:

L'ARCHITECTE - Je pense que lorsqu'on est heureux on est avec quelqu'un qui a la peau très fine et puis on l'embrasse sur les lèvres et tout se voile de fumée rose et le corps de la personne se change en une foule de petits miroirs et lorsqu'on la regarde on est réfléchi des millions de fois, et l'on se promène avec elle sur des zèbres et sur des panthères autour d'un lac... et quand on la regarde il commence à pleuvoir des plumes de colombes qui en tombant sur le sol hennissent comme de jeunes poulains... (1)

L'EMPEREUR - Architecte, viens! Nous serons amis. Nous construirons ensemble une maison. Nous ferons s'élever des palais avec des labyrinthes, nous creuserons des piscines dans lesquelles viendront se baigner les tortues de mer, je te donnerai une automobile pour que tu puisses parcourir mes pensées... Et des pipes d'où jaillira de la fumée liquide dont les volutes se changeront en réveille-matin... (2)

(1) *ibid.* p.92.

(2) *ibid.* p.142.

The same sort of primitive lyricism, a curious hybrid of modern surrealism and a Bosch-like baroque (1), had been interpolated by Arrabal a year or two earlier in the revised editions of several of the earlier plays, and has become one of the author's trade marks.

Scattered throughout the play are innumerable other distinctive features of this sort: characters talking with their feet whilst reciting from Dante's Inferno; unacknowledged quotations from Du Bellay (supra p.258), from Shakespeare ("Tous les parfums d'Arabie..."), Tzara ("Petit salaud, grand salaud..."), and Breton ("Tout ce qu'il y a d'atroce, de nauséabond, de fétide, de vulgaire, se trouve résumé en un mot: Dieu.").

Details such as these serve to remind one constantly of the extent to which Arrabal's characters are projections of himself. Their fantasies are clearly his fantasies, the author who said of himself, "J'ai joué mille fois l'existence de Dieu au billard électrique." (2) Three years before the writing of L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie Arrabal had written: "Après l'avoir tuée je l'ai mise en morceaux..." (3). Similarly, the Emperor who complains "Tout le monde me déteste" (4) is echoing the author of La Pierre de la folie who had written: "Oui, tout le monde me déteste: on dit que j'ai la manie de la persécution." (5)

These then are the familiar themes and expressions with which

(1) The Architect's image of the carnival of exotic animals around a lake is actually borrowed from the central panel of Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights.

(2) Entretiens, p.144.

(3) La Pierre de la folie, p.102.

(4) Théâtre V, p.179.

(5) La Pierre de la folie, p.104.

Arrabal constructs a play, its substance and its external trappings. But just as the Emperor began by acting in a mock trial, a theatrical game, and in the process revealed an essential hidden truth about himself, so too for Arrabal these theatrical games function as an instrument of self-revelation. Through them, the author's most hidden thoughts and desires take concrete form and meaning. As Arrabal remarked to Schifres, "L'acteur se place devant la glace et devient lui-même." (1) It has been seen how this quest for self-knowledge and the theatre's revelatory function have given a profound unity to Arrabal's drama. What is interesting about L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie in this respect is that here Arrabal has apparently taken cognisance of this potential of the theatre, because the play contains an implicit comment on the nature of his own theatrical activity.

In L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie there are two sorts of theatricality. The first is the virtually unconscious enactment of a fantasy: the Emperor pretending he is Emperor of Assyria is an example of this spontaneous "freudian" acting. Such acting had already been seen in some of the earlier plays, notably Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné. In these cases, acting a part seems to represent an attempt by the character to impose himself, to give himself greater substance, in short perhaps as a compensation for feelings of inadequacy or inferiority. Whatever the precise psychological motivation, the

(1) Entretiens, p.104.

fundamental characteristic of this type of acting is the unconscious desire to believe in the rôle adopted. In the first act the Emperor is apparently not conscious of the discrepancy between what he thinks he is and what he really is, until some chance remark by the Architect brings him back to reality with a jolt. Like all acting, such theatricality is an attempt to substitute one reality for another, but in this case it clearly represents a form of escapism, an uncompromising refusal to accept things as they really are. It seeks to suppress the hiatus between the actor and the rôle, to effect a perfect fusion of reality and illusion. Jérôme and Vincent remained utterly immured in their fantasy world, oblivious to reality even as the police were hammering on their door, and convinced to the end that they were superb actors. This offers a most revealing contrast with the present play, for what is seen here is the Emperor's gradual emergence from the protective cocoon of his fantasy world, fabricated in Act I, and his coming face to face with a suppressed reality.

Now, in L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie there is a second kind of acting, qualitatively different from the first, for in this play we also see characters deliberately and consciously assuming false rôles. This is the kind of play-acting which is often introduced by a formula such as "let's play at..." In other words, within the creation of a fictitious universe, Arrabal introduces circumscribed areas of deliberate "jeu", which have their own prescribed formulas and rules arrived at by common consent. For example:

L'ARCHITECTE - Tu me crucifies maintenant?

L'EMPEREUR - Mais comment? C'est toi qu'il faut crucifier?
Ce n'est pas moi?

L'ARCHITECTE - Nous avons tiré au sort. L'as-tu oublié? (1)

Significantly, it is at this level of theatricality, during the enactment of the trial, that the truth about the Emperor is revealed. By thus using a theatrical game within his play to reveal the true identity of a character who is, after all, simply a dramatic projection of himself, Arrabal appears to be making a revealing comment on his own creative process. The process of introspection through the theatrical medium has brought him to a new state of self-knowledge, and one kind of theatricality, the escape from reality into a world of fantasy, has been destroyed to give way to a new form of self-conscious theatricality which is at once constructive and instructive.

As was observed in Chapter One, L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie is the third of Arrabal's plays to deal specifically with the mother-son relationship. The play marks a new stage in the arrabalian hero's relationship with his mother, for here the terrible crime which Cavanosa longed to commit has been effected. All the evidence suggests that the Emperor's mother was much like Cavanosa's; the Architect says "Et tu as dit que parfois elle te battait avec un fouet." (2) No explicit motive is given for the murder, but the reader infers that the action was conceived as an act of liberation as much as of revenge, for

(1) Théâtre V, p.82.

(2) ibid.

it emerges that the Emperor was unusually dependent upon his mother:

L'EMPEREUR épouse - 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. (1)

Indeed the following revelation should surely be construed as a profound nostalgia for the womb:

L'EMPEREUR - Maman, je veux que tu m'achètes un puits très profond, que tu me plonges dedans et que tous les jours tu viennes un instant m'apporter juste ce qu'il faut de nourriture pour ne pas mourir. (2)

The mother-child scenes enacted by the Emperor and his friend all follow the same childhood pattern of an insecure child seeking maternal protection and reassurance. For example:

L'EMPEREUR - Maman, où es-tu? C'est moi, je suis seul ici, tous m'ont oublié, mais toi...
L'ARCHITECTE - Mon enfant, qu'as-tu? Tu n'es pas seul, c'est moi, maman!
L'EMPEREUR - Maman, tout le monde me déteste, on m'a abandonné sur cette île.
L'ARCHITECTE - Non, mon enfant, je suis là pour te protéger. Il ne faut pas que tu te sentes seul. Allons, raconte tout à ta mère. (3)

In other words, the Emperor, like Cavanosa, has never been able to achieve a mature adult relationship with his mother, he has never been able to pass beyond the childhood state of helpless dependence, compounded by his mother's fierce possessive jealousy. Matricide thus presents itself as an abrupt movement towards maturity and independence, as a gesture of liberation.

(1) *ibid.* p.151.

(2) *ibid.* p.158.

(3) *ibid.* p.89.

Indeed Arrabal has described this play as "este canto a la libertad"(1). However, other factors intervene and the fruit of the Emperor's decisive action is not the longed-for freedom but a paralysing sense of guilt.

As usual with Arrabal, guilt is accompanied by a need for confession and expiation, and it is to satisfy these exigencies that the trial is staged. In fact one might say that the whole of the second act is more a dramatically staged confession than a trial proper, because although the Emperor is superficially a reluctant participant, on a deeper level of consciousness it is his urge to confess that gives the proceedings their impetus. It is he who, at the start of the trial, in a clumsy effort to proclaim his innocence, first mentions the question of his mother's disappearance, thereby revealing the object of his guilty conscience:

L'ARCHITECTE - L'accusé est-il marié?

L'EMPEREUR - Oui, monsieur le juge.

L'ARCHITECTE - Depuis combien de temps?

L'EMPEREUR - Je ne sais plus... dix ans...

L'ARCHITECTE - Souvenez-vous que toutes les déclarations peuvent se retourner contre vous.

L'EMPEREUR - Mais... vous m'accusez... enfin... vous faites allusion... à ma mère...

L'ARCHITECTE - C'est le tribunal qui pose les questions.

L'EMPEREUR - Mais ma mère a disparu.

L'ARCHITECTE - Nous n'en sommes pas encore là.

L'EMPEREUR - Est-ce ma faute si elle est partie Dieu sait où?

L'ARCHITECTE - Nous tiendrons compte de toutes les circonstances atténuantes que vous pourrez présenter pour votre défense. (2)

The irony then is that even in death the mother's grip on her child is not relinquished, but continues to haunt him through

(1) Mi Arquitecto y mi Emperador de Asiria.

(2) Théâtre V, pp.146-147.

his own conscience. Not only that, but in a concrete image Arrabal demonstrates the eternal cycle of destruction and creation. By a supreme twist of irony, it is in the guise of the Emperor's mother that the Architect executes and eats the condemned man. The mother thus takes her revenge, the Emperor returns to the obscurity of the womb by being thus consumed, only to be re-born as the cycle begins again.

In fact the issue is clouded by a number of complications, for the final scene is one of the most richly ambiguous in all Arrabal's theatre. It is so complex, in fact, that although the ambiguity can be sensed and enjoyed in its entirety, it is impossible to disentangle the various threads completely. In the first place, one must remember that the Emperor's relationship with his mother, despite his wife's unconvincing testimony to the contrary, involved a strong suggestion of an Oedipus complex; according to his wife's evidence, he had asked his mother to masturbate him "avec sa bouche maternelle." (1)

To this Oedipus complex must also be related the Emperor's fascination for the Phoenix, a mythical creature which figures prominently in classical Spanish literature. For Arrabal the Phoenix symbol is particularly rich in connotations (2), but what is especially interesting here is the notion, referred to by Françoise Raymond-Mundschau, (3), that the Phoenix achieves the unique and ambiguous position of being both parent and child to itself: "Hijo y padre de sí mismo" as Calderón says. (4)

(1) Théâtre V, p.165.

(2) See, for example, "Labyrinthe 34" in Fêtes et rites de la confusion, where the Phoenix is given as a symbol of memory.

(3) Raymond-Mundschau, Arrabal, Editions Universitaires, Paris, 1972, p.109.

(4) Calderón, El Médico de su honra, v.182.

Perhaps it is an obscure desire for such immortality that prompts the Emperor to say "Ecoute, je suis ton Phénix, monte sur mon dos." (1) And perhaps it is the same impulsion towards immortality that underlies the Emperor's sexual inclination towards his mother, for it could be argued that a person who commits maternal incest enters into this cycle by becoming, in a sense, both father and son to himself.

It is often the case in Arrabal's theatre that sexuality and violence are inextricably involved with each other, both in the essentially violent possession by the male in physical love, and in the cruelty of the generative cycle. L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie is no exception to this, and even brings the two cases together. The Emperor kills his mother with a hammer, (a phallic symbol), whereupon a strange thing happens:

L'EMPEREUR - ... Quelle curieuse impression, de sa tête fendue se sont échappées comme des vapeurs et j'ai cru voir un lézard sortir de sa blessure. Il s'est placé sur la table en face de moi, sa gorge goitreuse se soulevait en cadence et il me regardait fixement. En l'examinant de plus près, j'ai pu voir que son visage était mon visage. (2)

Arrabal seems here to envisage a formula for eternal existence, not unlike that of the Phoenix, the perpetual recreation of oneself through violent incest.

But here too there is ambiguity, for the Architect in this final scene is playing a dual rôle: whilst, in eating the Emperor's body, he is playing the part of the victim's mother, at the same time of course he is also himself. And it is in this

(1) Théâtre V, p.183.

(2) ibid. pp.180-181.

capacity that Arrabal is thinking of him when he says:

Je vois son attitude comme un acte d'amour extraordinaire... Il y a ce moment où l'Architecte, sur le point de manger le pied de l'Empereur, s'interrompt pour se demander si sa chaire est "maigre". Beaucoup de gens rient, mais ils ne sentent pas que cet homme, qui s'est toujours moqué des religions et des carêmes, se rappelle soudain l'autre avec tendresse. 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. Pour moi, c'est très émouvant et je ne comprends pas qu'on m'ait reproché de me complaire sans l'anthropophagie. (1)

From this point of view, eating the Emperor's body appears not as an act of revenge but as an act of love: the supreme consummation, the realisation of the dream to which all arrabalian couples aspire - the fusion of two separate entities in one perfect whole. Mention has already been made of the proliferation in Arrabal's theatre of cycles, spheres and other androgyne images, which were seen as symbolising the reconciliation of opposites in complete oneness. This image is evoked with particular emphasis at the end of L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, for this is surely the meaning of the Emperor's last wish: "Je veux que tu sois à la fois toi et moi. Tu me mangeras entièrement, Architecte, tu m'entends?" (2)

Seen from this angle the conclusion would appear to confirm the optimistic act of liberation which concluded Le Grand Cérémonial. In both plays the hero encounters real love, (the fact that the couple here are both men does not alter the case), which provides a means of liberation from the clutches of a possessive mother who, in both plays, symbolises the whole oppressive

(1) Entretiens, pp.103-104.

(2) Théâtre V, p.185.

heritage of the past. His feast completed, the Emperor-Architect declares:

Une nouvelle vie commence pour moi. J'oublie tout le passé. Mieux encore j'oublie tout le passé mais c'est pour l'avoir plus présent à l'esprit, pour ne retomber dans aucune de mes erreurs d'autrefois. (1)

Perhaps Arrabal has finally, by this theatrical exorcism, laid the ghost which has pursued him through thirteen years of artistic creation. Certainly the mother fixation has never to date reappeared as a major theme in his theatre.

Ultimately, however, one is obliged to admit that no such conclusion can be asserted with any degree of finality, for just as the pattern of interpretation appears to be taking shape, Arrabal shakes the kaleidoscope once more and casts doubt over every issue. The last few moments of the play bring a newcomer to the island, the Architect-Emperor, to complement the Emperor-Architect. Have the two characters simply exchanged rôles? have two new characters been created? or has the androgynous Emperor-Architect inherited the Emperor's compulsive need for dédoublement, causing him to create another fictitious entity? Has Arrabal finally acceded to his dream of eternity, or has he fallen once more into an inescapable vicious circle?

At this stage we can no longer pursue our interpretation of the play, but are obliged to concede with Arrabal that its true coherence is really one of construction rather than of symbolism: "la tentation d'une oeuvre bien ronde, bien faite, page après page". (2) What we are left with is a brilliant exercise in

(1) *ibid.* p.195.

(2) Entretiens, p.99.

theatrical illusion. Bernard Gille's description of Fando et Lis could be applied equally appropriately to L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie : "un peu d'ordre artificiellement imposé à la fondamentale folie du monde." (1)

This play, more than any other, represents the perfect realisation of Arrabal's formula for a theatre as a "cérémonie panique". The panique play, he had explained three years earlier, should mirror the confusion of life, but concealed beneath this apparent chaos the play should be constructed with mathematical precision. Arrabal believes that this play fulfills both these conditions, for he said:

Esta pieza la construí meticulosamente; creo haber conseguido que, respetando las tres unidades del teatro clásico, dos hombres, en un sol decorado, recreen todas las escenas de la vida con sus miserias, sus fascinaciones, sus pomos y sus vanidades... gracias a ritos bambolleros y ferósticos. (2)

The place is limited to a small island inhabited only by the Architect and the Emperor. But by virtue of their prodigious freedom of imagination and complicity in play-acting, their island becomes peopled with a host of spirits. The formula is thus very simple: a single place and two actors, with a few elementary rules of play; but from these basic elements results a potential infinity of permutations. The procedure here is strikingly close to Arrabal's pastimes of modern mathematics and the practice of set theory. The other analogy suggested by this

(1) Gille, op.cit., p.30.

(2) "I constructed this play meticulously; I believe that I have been successful in that, whilst still respecting the three (sic) unities of classical theatre, two men, in a single décor, recreate all the scenes of life with its misery, its fascination, its pomp and its vanity... by means of stupendous, revolting rituals."

- Mi Arquitecto y mi Emperador de Asiria.

play's structure is the game of chess, this analogy being strengthened by specific references to chess within the text, such as when the Emperor asks to be buried disguised as a "Bishop of Chess." (1) It is possible to see the play as a structured game of chess for two pieces in which a series of devious moves and peripeteia leads ineluctably to check and mate for the Emperor. In this way the dramatic structure mirrors the dialectic between the player's inalienable freedom and the "absolute and peculiar order" which were seen to characterise chess and other game activities. And of course it should not be forgotten that L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie is one of the rare plays where Arrabal has achieved the satisfaction of a perfectly cyclical structure, a satisfaction which was apparently consciously sought after:

Cela ne devient même pas allégorique à la fin quand l'Architecte mange l'Empereur. Il y a là un problème de construction: la tentation d'une oeuvre bien ronde, bien faite, page après page. (2)

For this reason one might think that Arrabal had achieved his most perfectly satisfying dramatic structure, the one in which confusion and order are equally present, and yet he continues by saying:

Mais ça devient un peu inhumain. Je crois qu'une pièce, pour ressembler à la vie même, doit être un peu plus confuse... Il faut construire l'oeuvre et puis la détruire. (3)

Arrabal thus feels, at least in retrospect, that the aesthetic perfection of L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie detracts from

(1) Théâtre V, p.104.

(2) Entretiens, p.99.

(3) ibid.

its exemplary value as a mirror held up to the confusion of life, although two years earlier he had expressed no such reservations when he proclaimed:

El director de la pieza es Jorge Lavelli que, en auténtico maestro, ha medido el caos, la histeria, el infinito amor, la soledad, la anarquía del espectáculo. Un orden desmesurado y delirante preside infinitos combates... (1)

Whatever the case, the most interesting point to emerge from Arrabal's comments here on this play is that they refer principally not to the theatre's function in relation to himself but to its function in relation to the public. As was seen in Chapter Three, this is one of the salient factors to emerge from the panique years, and it appears to have been very much in Arrabal's mind towards the end of this period. In several interviews given on the occasion of the first production of L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie he describes the theatre as a mirror reflecting man and society. For example:

Ce ne sont pas mes personnages qu'il faut changer, mais la société. Il ne faut pas cracher sur mon théâtre. On ne doit pas cracher sur des miroirs. (2)

Mon théâtre c'est comme un miroir. On ne peut pas condamner mon théâtre, on ne peut que condamner l'homme. Peut-être ne sommes-nous pas beaux à voir. (3)

Il ne peut y avoir dans mon théâtre que cruauté, tendresse, amour, haine, esthétique et les choses les plus sordides comme dans la vie. D'ailleurs, on ne peut pas condamner mes pièces; on ne peut que condamner l'homme. (4)

- (1) "The director is Jorge Lavelli who, like a virtuoso, a true maestro, has captured the dimensions of chaos, the hysteria, the boundless love, the anarchy of the play. An excessive and delirious order presides over the infinite conflicts..." (my italics) - Mi Arquitecto y mi Emperador de Asiria.
- (2) Espinasse, "Entretien avec Arrabal", Plexus, Dec. 1968.
- (3) Audouin, "Avec Fernando Arrabal pour un théâtre libre", Pourquoi?, no.43, March 1968.
- (4) Thuysinier, "Arrabal: Pour un théâtre de cérémonie", Pas à Pas, March 1968.

He also describes the liberating effect which he wishes the play to have on the theatrical public:

Quisiera que el espectador lllore como en el melodrama decimonono del portentoso Echegaray y ria ria como ante la sorpresa más chocante de un happening. Espero que dejando en el vestuario todos los hábitos de un teatro aburridisimamente grave (que nada tiene que ver con el arte y la juventad de hoy) el espectador entre en esta obra, nade, rumie, eructe, chille o se calle viendo, en este "retablo de las maravillas", desde la condenación de la guerra hasta la exaltación del amor, asistiendo a las ceremonias más inesperadas... (1)

In calling for a jeyous new theatre liberated from the shackles of the excessively "serious" theatre of the day, Arrabal clearly demonstrates how much his perspectives have broadened since the writing of, say, Fando et Lis. No longer the "petit émigrant malade et sans ressources", he is now an established dramatist seeking to impose his ideas on a new-found public, and to effect a veritable theatrical revolution. In his next creative phase this tendency is consolidated as Arrabal makes incursions into the world of theatrical production, whilst at the same time his ambitions take on a new dimension: not content to revolutionise theatre, he ultimately seeks to develop the theatre as an instrument of revolution.

- (1) "I want the spectator to weep as at Echegaray's nineteenth melodrama, and to laugh as at the most shocking and unexpected happening. I hope that the spectator, leaving in the cloak-room all the habits of a tediously solemn theatre, (which has nothing to do with art, nor with the youth of today), will join in with this play, that he will become dizzy, will ruminate, belch, scream or just hold his peace, as he sees, in this picture-book of marvels, everything from the condemnation of war to the exaltation of love, as he witnesses the most unexpected ceremonies... "
- Mi Arquitecto y mi Emperador de Asiria.

CHAPTER FIVE

TWO CATALYSTS - THE "AFFAIRE ARRABAL"
AND THE "EVENEMENTS DE MAI".

CHAPTER FIVE

TWO CATALYSTS - THE "AFFAIRE ARRABAL" AND THE "EVENEMENTS DE MAI.

In July 1967 Arrabal was spending a holiday in Spain when the composition of Le Jardin des délices was interrupted by a strangely "panique" incident. A department store in Murcia where he was staying held a reception to promote sales of Arrabal celebrando la ceremonia de la confusión (1), and here Arrabal was approached by a young man claiming to be an admirer of his work and asking him to sign a copy of the book with an appropriately "panique" dedication. Arrabal wrote, somewhat indiscreetly, "Para Antonio, me cago en Dios, en la Patria, y en todo lo demás." (2) He claims to have discovered subsequently that Antonio was an agent provocateur sent by the authorities to discover a pretext on which to dispose of a writer whose publications in Spain were proving an embarrassment to the Spanish régime. Not surprisingly, it has not been possible to substantiate this claim. Whatever Antonio's real rôle, the text soon found its way to the Director of Public Prosecution, though through what channels remains unclear.⁽³⁾ At 1.00a.m. on the 24th. July Arrabal

- (1) Fêtes et rites de la confusion: Arrabal's oft-repeated claim that the Spanish authorities have never allowed his works to be published or performed in Spain is somewhat excessive.
- (2) Literally: "I shit on God, the motherland and everything else."
- (3) It is not known whether the judiciary received the notorious text from "Antonio" (as Arrabal asserts), or from the youth's outraged parents (as the prosecution alleged), or whether they gained knowledge of it indirectly through the press. (It is known that a copy of the text was in the hands of Sr. Jimenez Quilez, Director-General of the official press, at least 24 hours before Arrabal's arrest) (Le Monde, 25.7.67, p.3).

was arrested in his hotel:

Cinq hommes font irruption dans ma chambre à une heure du matin; ils me prient de les suivre pour un interrogatoire. Je leur demande si je peux refuser. Ils m'informent qu'ils emploieraient la force.

Le commissariat de police se trouvait à quatre-vingts kilomètres. A mon arrivée, le commissaire m'a dit: "Madrid nous a donné l'ordre de vous arrêter. Il faut nous dire pourquoi."

Je ne savais pas. Subitement je me suis souvenu de l'Inquisition, où les accusés devaient trouver eux-mêmes ce qu'on leur reprochait. Alors le commissaire m'a donné un coup de poing léger.

J'ai répondu: "Si vous me torturez, je dirai que j'ai tué ma voisine, je dirai tout ce que vous voudrez." (1)

(This last reply illustrates once again the corrosive sense of humour which has been for Arrabal one of his primary weapons of defence against the miseries which threaten his existence).

Later that morning he was taken to Madrid and put before an examining magistrate, where he was told that he was to be accused of blasphemous and anti-patriotic statements. This is how he describes the conditions in which he was detained:

J'ai d'abord passé à Madrid, après la nuit à Murcie, cinq jours dans une cellule souterraine, sans lunettes, sans possibilité de lire, d'écrire, ni de communiquer avec mon avocat. Une planche métallique sans couverture faisait office de lit, des rats couraient... c'était sale, noir... une oubliette. (2)

From here he was transferred to another prison at Carabanchel, where after a few days the summer temperatures and arduous conditions provoked a relapse of his earlier illness. He was removed to a prison hospital and eventually, on 16th. August, released pending his trial with orders not to leave Spanish territory.

By now the official press had launched its campaign of

(1) Entretiens, p.46.

(2) ibid. p.48.

denigration against Arrabal, most notably in Arriba and Ya, two *Falangist* establishment papers. The latter prejudged the issue by calling for Arrabal to be put on trial, "for his actions must not be allowed to go unpunished." (1) In the former, Juan Aparicio (one of the founders of the Phalange and former Director-General of the Press) wrote that French women married to Spanish intellectuals forced their husbands to insult Spain "because such is their pleasure." He further accused Arrabal of "parading his tuberculosis under the noses of decent Spaniards" and called for Arrabal to be castrated in order to prevent him from having any children who would add their own insults to Spain. (2)

On the other hand, the independent Informaciones and the trade-union paper Pueblo published protests and testimonials from famous artists and intellectuals who included Malraux, Beckett, Ionesco, Rostand, Weiss, Grass and others. Many of these also wrote to the Director of Public Prosecutions pleading clemency.(3)

(1) Ya, Madrid, 23.7.67.

(2) Arriba, Madrid, 11.8.67.

(3) Beckett's testimonial, read to the court by Arrabal's defense, is worth citing in full:

"Dans l'impossibilité où je me trouve de témoigner au procès de Fernando Arrabal j'écris cette lettre en espérant qu'elle pourra être portée à la connaissance de la Cour et la rendre peut-être plus sensible à l'exceptionnelle valeur humaine et artistique de celui qu'elle va juger. Elle va juger un écrivain espagnol qui, dans le bref espace de dix ans, s'est hissé jusqu'au premier rang des dramaturges d'aujourd'hui, et cela par la force d'un talent profondément espagnol. Partout où l'on joue ses pièces, et on les joue partout, l'Espagne est là. C'est à ce passé déjà admirable que j'invite la Cour à réfléchir. Et puis à ceci. Arrabal est jeune, il est fragile physiquement et nerveusement. Il aura beaucoup à souffrir à nous donner ce qu'il a encore à nous donner. Lui infliger la peine demandé par l'accusation, ce n'est pas seulement punir un homme, c'est mettre en cause toute une oeuvre à naître. Si faute il y a, qu'elle soit vue à la lumière du grand mérite d'hier et de la grande promesse de demain, et par là pardonnée. Que Fernando Arrabal soit rendu à sa propre peine."

The trial opened in September and by now the case had aroused considerable public interest, to the intense embarrassment of the prosecuting authorities. Arrabal was charged with blasphemy and insults to the Nation, for which he was threatened with six months' and twelve years' imprisonment respectively. On the second, more serious charge, his defense was based on an ingenious claim that there had been an orthographical misunderstanding: that what had been construed as "Patria" was in fact "Patra", (it can indeed be read as such), and referred to Arrabal's pet cat, Cléopatra, nicknamed Patra. As for the blasphemy charge, the word "Dios", he claimed, referred to the god Pan. Clearly, were the penalties not so serious, Arrabal would have been delighted by the absurdity of the affair.

Arrabal was finally acquitted on the pretext that he had been suffering from temporary mental derangement. In reality, it seems clear that he owed his release in a large part to the pressure brought to bear by writers outside Spain:

Je me trouvais dans une situation qui - grâce à l'appui que je recevais - risquait d'entraver la campagne du gouvernement à propos de la pseudo-libération du régime: campagne entreprise pour favoriser le tourisme, l'entrée de l'Espagne dans le "Marché Commun".

Si j'avais été un ouvrier asturien, j'aurais passé douze ans en prison.

Le Pen Club, la Société des Auteurs Français, les écrivains allemands avec Peter Weiss, les Français avec Mauriac, Ionesco, Anouilh... sont intervenus: les autorités espagnoles ont été surprises. Ils imaginaient avoir affaire à un jeune révolté à qui ils allaient infliger un rude châtement... pour faire un exemple et impressionner la jeunesse révolutionnaire. Soudain ils se sont trouvés face à un auteur envers qui les écrivains et les artistes faisaient preuve de solidarité. (1)

(1) Entretiens, pp.48-49.

The "Affaire Arrabal" was to have far-reaching consequences for his artistic creativity. Its influence is seen most markedly after 1969, but as Arrabal points out, "mon expérience de la prison transparait déjà dans Le Jardin des délices." (1) Immediately upon his return to Paris after his acquittal he proceeded to transcribe certain details of his recent experiences into the play.

It is tempting to see an exceptionally fortuitous coincidence in the fact that Arrabal's imprisonment occurred at precisely that point in his life when he would seem to be most receptive to its influence. In L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie the author's years of questioning are crystallised as the Emperor submits his past to a rigorous process of examination and evaluation; at the same time it is in this play that Arrabal attains his greatest state of liberation to date from his former introversion. It will be seen too in the following chapter how Le Jardin des délices brings the author's quest for liberation and self-knowledge to an even higher pitch. Given this situation, then, Arrabal's arrest and trial could hardly fail to produce profound resonances in his work.

For Arrabal, this experience was nothing less than the key to the meaning of his existence, a violent catalyst which shocked him out of his introspective tendencies, and into an awareness of the outside world; he said:

J'ai trouvé une explication à ma vie. Ça m'a donné une bouffée de chaleur spirituelle: il fallait que je passe

(1) Entretiens, p.57.

du monde des impulsions au monde des réalités, que je naisse une deuxième fois... Je suis sorti de l'oubliette - le ventre de ma mère - pour me retrouver avec des gens injustement punis. (1)

And in another interview given at the same period, he again describes his stay in the prison cell as a second period of gestation in the womb, this time rather more explicitly:

Comme à la plupart des détenus espagnols, les cinq premiers jours on m'a mis au secret dans "l'oubliette". Et là, dans ce trou, je suis rentré dans le ventre de ma mère. J'étais dans le noir, isolé, en dehors de tout, et je naissais une deuxième fois. Je ressentais toutes les douleurs de la naissance. J'ai été de nouveau malade et on m'a sorti de l'oubliette pour m'emmener à l'infirmerie. C'est à ce moment que je suis né. Il m'a semblé que je naissais au monde réel de l'injustice, de la torture, de l'intolérance. Un monde qui avait été en partie absent jusque-là de ma vie, de mon oeuvre. (2)

This incident was therefore of crucial importance in provoking a new orientation in his work, setting him on the path towards commitment which will lead eventually to Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs. Another seminal influence, which led directly to the writing of L'Aurore rouge et noire and which set the seal on his new intentions, followed hard on the heels of this first catalyst. This was the popular movement of revolt in France in 1968: the famous "événements de mai".

Arrabal's actual involvement in the events was slight, and he recalls it with amused self-irony. "Nous avons fait une connerie" he says.(3) Collecting a group of friends, like himself exiled Spaniards fired with revolutionary fervour, he led them to the

(1) E. Antebi, "'69, l'année Arrabal", Magazine littéraire, no.23, 1969.

(2) Théâtre III, intro. p.11.

(3) In conversation with the author, May 1971.

Cité Universitaire and into the Spanish House where he had been a resident some twelve years earlier. Standing in the entrance-hall, they incited the residents to occupy the building, which was there and then re-named Maison des Ouvriers et Etudiants Espagnols. This burlesque episode was obviously peripheral to the events of May in Paris, as was generally the case at the Cité Universitaire:

Unlike the French protest movement, the Cité insurrections sought neither university reform nor the overthrow of President De Gaulle. They were, almost without exception, gestures of defiance against some distant and allegedly repressive government. (1)

The occupation lasted a few weeks, after which the insurgents were expelled and the Pavillon closed by order from Madrid, since when it has remained empty and boarded up, a slightly absurd monument to Arrabal's first incursion into guerrilla politics.

It is not necessary or desirable to analyse here the various currents of thought and sensibility which underlie the events of May '68, the history of the Mouvement du 22 mars, the mundane business of inter-union horse-trading nor the frantic scurrying amongst the different political factions. This aspect of the "événements" is of little relevance to Arrabal, whose knowledge or understanding of political matters is, on his own admission, very sketchy. On the other hand, he could hardly fail to be impressed by the dramatic events he witnessed in the streets of Paris. For a few weeks in May 1968 it seemed as if the whole of France was throwing off the shackles of discipline and authority to protest against the inhuman efficiency of life in a modern

(1) Seale & McConville, French Revolution 1968, Heinemann & Penguin, London, 1968, p.117.

industrial society, against the notoriously rigid and impersonal archaic bureaucracy which controls life in France.

What Arrabal saw during this period was a joyous explosion of liberty set against the background of brutal police repression. Superficially, the events of May were a spontaneous happening with all the ingredients of an éphémère panique: humour, euphoria and terror. Some of the happenings were superbly idealistic gestures, such as the invasion and sacking of the Bourse, temple of capitalism, by a group of student militants; others were more comic or grotesque, such as when demonstrators occupied the Odéon-Théâtre de France and returned to man the barricades dressed in costumes pillaged from the wardrobes of the state-run seat of culture. What the demonstrators were claiming above all was freedom in its various manifestations: sexual freedom, freedom from materialism, freedom to run one's own affairs, as the innumerable graffiti on the walls of the Latin Quarter proclaimed: "Ici l'imagination est reine" - "Plus je fais la révolution, plus j'ai envie de faire l'amour" - or simply: "Il est interdit d'interdire." It was these external trappings, the drama of the street battles, the poetry of the graffiti, the explosion of freedom and individuality, that captured Arrabal's imagination and made the events of May an exhilarating but profoundly meaningful experience for him.

For if the intricate political issues underlying these events passed over Arrabal's head, this does not mean that he was in any way blind to their significance in a broader context. As L'Aurore rouge et noire reveals, Arrabal saw in the exalting confusion of the "événements" a vivid symbol of tyranny and

repression throughout the ages. As in Spain during the previous summer, Arrabal again found himself in the position of witness; once again he saw the ordinary man's cry of freedom stifled by the brutal police forces of a repressive régime. This time he was prompted to take up his pen immediately to testify to what he had seen and felt, in an effort to ensure that the dawn which saw the unfurling of the black and red flags of anarchy and communism would not be a fête sans lendemain.

CHAPTER SIX

TOWARDS A THEATRE OF COMMITMENT, 1967 - 1969

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(i) The nature of commitment.

It was emphasised in the Introduction to this study that the term commitment was to be understood in a particular sense in relation to Arrabal. It is now time to explain how far and in what sense the expression is applicable in this case. At first sight there appears to be an irreconcilable contradiction here: how can one describe as committed an author who categorically refutes the epithet himself? who declares:

Je n'ai de leçons à donner à personne. Je ne suis pas un auteur politique, je ne veux pas l'être; j'ai besoin, comme tous, de vivre libre parmi des hommes libres, et pas seulement libres de rêver. (1)

or again:

Lorsque j'écris je me dis: "Je n'ai aucun rôle à jouer. Aucun rôle positif en tout cas. Peut-être suis-je en train de jouer un rôle négatif, de collaborer avec les forces obscures, les démons..." Mais consciemment je ne me propose rien de tel. Surtout pas de libérer l'homme. Je crois simplement faire un théâtre libre. (2)

In the light of these unequivocal statements, how can the critic possibly be justified in speaking of Arrabal's commitment? The case rests in part on the proposition that the contradiction arises from a dichotomy inherent in Arrabal's own attitude, and in

(1) C. Godard, "Arrabal saute le pas", Les Nouvelles littéraires, 11.9.69, p.11.

(2) Entretiens, p.76.

part on the specific meaning attributed to the word commitment.

To take the second point first, it would be futile to hope to arrive at a single definition of commitment which would hold good for every case. This is because there are very few established criteria, other than arbitrary ones, which will permit any definition of the concept on purely theoretical grounds. One of the most serious and thorough efforts to come to grips with this question has been that of Sartre, but even his early description of the subject has been forced to undergo considerable modification since the writing of Qu'est-ce que la littérature? An attitude which for one writer would be commitment might for another be simply the unavoidable introduction of external reality into his art. What for one writer is pure aestheticism might be interpreted by the marxist critic as a negative commitment to non-commitment. Whilst yet another would reject the division into categories such as aestheticism and commitment (or literature and reality) as an utterly false premise.

Indeed, the closer one tries to approach the subject, the more elusive it becomes, throwing up questions which can hardly be resolved in the abstract. By commitment do we mean only a consciously didactic intention on the artist's part, or will the term include a general direction of intention which the artist may unconsciously betray in his work? (1) Does commitment necessarily

(1) Sartre's concept of commitment, for example, lays great stress on the element of lucidity in the writer's approach to his work. According to Sartre, commitment is inherent in all artistic creation, for the act of writing implies that the author subscribes to a particular attitude to the world - an attitude which may be conscious or unconscious. What distinguishes the committed writer is not the fact that he is involved in the world, since according to Sartre it is impossible to avoid such involvement, but that his involvement is lucid and deliberate: "Je dirai qu'un écrivain est

mean a political commitment? (In other words: commitment to what?). Robbe-Grillet, for example, in proclaiming the autonomy of art as the sine qua non of artistic creativity, appears to be championing the claims of "l'art pour l'art", which most people would consider diametrically opposed to commitment. He says: "L'art ne peut être réduit à l'état de moyen au service d'une cause qui le dépasserait, celle-ci fût-elle la plus juste, la plus exaltante." (1) But as he continues, "l'artiste ne met rien au-dessus de son travail", it soon becomes apparent that his attitude could equally well be described as a commitment to art. Indeed, this is the conclusion Robbe-Grillet arrives at:

Au lieu d'être de nature politique, l'engagement c'est, pour l'écrivain, la pleine conscience des problèmes actuels de son propre langage, la conviction de leur extrême importance, la volonté de les résoudre de l'intérieur. (2)

In other words, there are as many concepts of commitment as there are writers on the subject. In the face of such diversity of opinion, might it not be wiser to avoid the expression altogether, thus avoiding the pitfalls inherent in its use? Certainly Arrabal would prefer not to be labelled in this way. Here, however, the argument impinges on considerations of a broader kind, because despite the notorious inconveniences entailed by such labels, it is questionable whether in the last resort the critic can obviate them altogether. The fact is that Arrabal's work in recent years

engagé quand il cherche à prendre la conscience la plus lucide et la plus entière d'être embarqué, c'est-à-dire quand il fait passer l'engagement de la spontanéité immédiate au réfléchi." - Situations II, Gallimard, Paris, 1948, p.124.

(1) Pour un Nouveau Roman, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1963, p.35.

(2) ibid, p.39.

has been characterised by a particular orientation and a particular Weltanschauung. It is part of the critic's job to describe and define this orientation, and there is undoubtedly a sense in which it is both convenient and legitimate to speak of commitment, in spite of the author's protestations.

Arrabal's accounts of his imprisonment shed valuable light on the matter by illuminating his reactions to the incident. What emerges is not so much the sentiment of having been himself the victim of a totalitarian régime, but rather of having been witness to the injustices endured by other men. In this respect the experience seems to have come to him as a veritable revelation. It is true that in his interviews with Schifres he refers to certain illegalities in his treatment at the hands of the Spanish police, but nowhere is there any indication of personal resentment. On the contrary, he says "Je n'ai pas de rancune." (1) One is justifiably doubtful whether this would have been the case if the same thing had happened ten years earlier, when Arrabal was concerned almost exclusively with the vicissitudes of his own life, nursing his own sense of persecution. Now, apparently, the old persecution complex has given way to an awareness of persecution of which others are the victims.

In a letter written to the editor of Le Monde soon after his return to Paris, he protested against the injustices suffered by his fellow-prisoners, "que je ne saurais passer sous silence sans avoir honte de moi-même." He describes some of their cases:

(1) Entretiens, p.52.

Un ouvrier polisseur de trente ans a été condamné en 1966 à treize ans de prison pour association et propagande "illégalles"; l'un de ses camarades accusé de mêmes délits a été condamné à quinze ans de prison. Un apprenti torréro s'est vu condamné à six ans de prison pour "injures à la nation" parce qu'il s'était écrié, dans un moment de colère à la suite d'un accident de voiture, "Les Espagnols sont cocus!" Après vingt ans de détention un ouvrier vient d'être libéré: en 1947 il avait tenté de construire un syndicat...

... Je n'appartiens à personne ni à rien. Je souhaite modestement que règne la liberté et que l'injustice n'accable pas les autres. J'aimerais pouvoir croire que tout ce que je viens d'exposer est faux, que je me suis trompé, que ce que j'ai vu et lu cet été en Espagne n'est qu'un cauchemar. (1)

The same note of indignation is again apparent in Arrabal's letter to General Franco in which he wrote, with somewhat disarming naïvety:

Je voudrais que vous preniez conscience de cette situation et, grâce à cela, que vous ôtiez les baillons et les menottes qui emprisonnent la plupart des Espagnols...(2)

Vous serez peut-être surpris quand je vous dirai que ce qui m'a le plus indigné fut d'apprendre que les petits délinquants sont torturés presque systématiquement dans les commissariats.

Pourquoi?

Par efficacité bureaucratique. (3)

and in his interviews with Schifres, to whom he said:

Je me souviens des paroles d'un prisonnier condamné à quatre ans de détention: "Je préfère qu'on m'arrache un oeil que de rester quatre ans ici." C'est contre cela que je veux lutter. Je ne veux pas m'enrôler dans un parti. Je ne sais vraiment pas ce qu'on peut faire pour mériter quelque chose de pire que de s'arracher un oeil... Pour mériter d'être enterré vivant. (4)

But what is in evidence here is not simply a sense of outrage.

(1) "Lettre à propos de mon procès", Le Monde, 31.10.67.

(2) Lettre au Général Franco, pp.13-14.

(3) ibid. p.83.

(4) Entretiens, p.53.

The indignation is there, but accompanied by a clearly formulated determination to effect some positive improvement. His position is thus very different from that of the author of Fando et Lis, of whom he said, "En ce temps-là je n'avais aucune volonté de démontrer quoi que ce soit." (1) Now he says "C'est contre cela que je veux lutter", and this is an expression of commitment which it is impossible to ignore.

He makes it clear, moreover, that he intends to allow this new attitude to become an important directive governing his future creativity, because he said in 1968:

J'aimerais pourtant écrire quelque chose sur les prisons en Espagne. Comment peut-on encore enterrer vivants des hommes? Des hommes qui préfèrent qu'on leur arrache un oeil plutôt que de passer quatre ans en prison? Mais il faut que je trouve le ton juste. Mon expérience de la prison transparait déjà dans Le Jardin des délices. Mais j'ai quand même envie d'écrire cette pièce sur les Inquisitions des origines à nos jours. (2)

And this is, in fact, the case with two full-length plays written between 1967 and 1969.

It is now possible to explain what we mean by commitment in Arrabal's theatre. In broad terms, following Maxwell Adereth's definition of a committed man as "a man who feels a sense of responsibility to his fellow men and who takes practical steps to help them" (3), we mean a lucid awareness of external reality, coupled with a determination to effect some radical (albeit ill-defined) improvement. More specifically, we mean a recognition of the plight of victims of oppression and intolerance, and a sympathy

(1) *ibid.* p.121.

(2) *ibid.* p.57.

(3) Adereth, Commitment in modern French literature, Gollancz, London, 1967, p.47.

for them which is allowed to influence the course of his work. When, for example, Arrabal prefaces L'Aurore rouge et noire with the words "Je dédie cette pièce aux étudiants ibériques en lutte contre la violence de la dictature", he is revealing an attitude which it is hard not to define as committed.

What we do not mean is that Arrabal's theatre is reduced to a propagandist function, for in no sense does commitment mean that the artist must relinquish a part of his freedom. One of the great committed writers of the English stage, Bernard Shaw, proclaimed in his preface to Pygmalion that great art cannot be anything but didactic, a proposition which Arrabal would find distinctly uncomfortable. Implicit in the term didactic is the notion of art at the service of an ideology. Arrabal would regard such subordination as a prostitution of his art. For him the artist's freedom is of paramount importance. "Je ne peux pas être acheté", he once said (1), and in Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs we are told "l'un des crimes de la tyrannie c'est de forcer le talent à se dégrader." (2). There is a kind of commitment, however, which because it is inherent in the artist's attitude to life, expresses itself quite spontaneously in his art, and in this case commitment is not the appropriation of art for some ulterior purpose, but simply a matter of being faithful to one's convictions.

Arrabal undoubtedly has such convictions, which guide his artistic creativity; why then does he so persistently refuse to be counted amongst the committed writers? The answer has already

(1) "Plus loin avec Arrabal", L'Express, 16-22 August 1971, p.68.

(2) Théâtre VII, p.73.

been hinted at, namely Arrabal's scrupulous preservation of his personal autonomy. At every turning he is careful to ensure that the precious freedom he has won for himself in the years since he left Spain is not put at risk. Arrabal is manifestly not afraid to declare his commitment to what he considers an urgent cause - providing he always remains free to call his present commitment into question at any time. Anything which is liable to induce restriction is shunned: hence his rejection of labels such as baroque, engagé or even (now) Panique; hence too his non-committal hovering on the fringes of the surrealist movement, and his aversion to political parties or ideologies; and hence the constant experimentation with different forms which marks his work in the theatre.

In this way, then, Arrabal has been able to reconcile the demands of freedom and of commitment. His ideal is of an independent commitment, which some might call commitment without risk or inconvenience, but which is perfectly meaningful in the context of Arrabal's thought and personality as a whole. He says:

Je crois qu'ayant politiquement des positions très proches des révolutionnaires de gauche, je suis content que mon amour de Dieu m'empêche d'être soutenu par eux de la même manière que mon gauchisme m'empêche d'être apprécié par les gens qui aiment Dieu. (1)

Indeed, he apparently believes that his autonomy lends greater efficacy to his commitment. Referring to his Lettre au Général Franco, he said:

Je pensais qu'il fallait que l'Espagne sorte de la nuit et - là je suis peut-être prétentieux - que le meilleur document c'était moi qui pouvait l'écrire. Parce que je suis en dehors de tout parti politique, de toute religion. (2)

(1) "Plus loin avec Arrabal", L'Express, 16-22 Aug. 1971, p.71.
(2) *ibid*, p.75.

It is this broadly based commitment "en dehors de tout parti politique" to liberating the victims of intolerance that underlies Arrabal's major works after 1967.

Le Jardin des délices

Because of the accidents of its genesis Le Jardin des délices occupies a unique position in Arrabal's work. At the start of July 1967 Arrabal settled in Murcia in Spain for the summer months and here began writing a new play destined to create a rôle for Delphine Seyrig, at that time entering into the zenith of her career; three weeks later came his arrest, and the incomplete manuscript lay untouched until his return to Paris the following autumn. The question which this prompts is, of course, how far has the play's genesis been affected by the Spanish incident? Unfortunately the answer seems likely to remain a matter for speculation. Arrabal simply proffers the information that the play was already "assez avancée" before his arrest (1), implying that his task after September was essentially one of completion rather than of fundamental revision.

Such an assumption is confirmed by internal evidence, which also tends to suggest that the published play is cast largely in the form in which it was originally conceived. Unlike the later full-length plays Le Jardin des délices could in no way be described as a work of commitment. Thematically and structurally its overall conception relates more to the panique plays of the second period than to the subsequent works. In terms of subject-matter, theme and treatment it would seem to indicate further evolution, without any fundamental rupture with previous practice,

(1) In conversation with the author, May 1971.

along the path indicated by L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie.

On the other hand certain scenes, those in which Arrabal transcribes real incidents which he had just experienced in Spain, do mark a somewhat radical departure. The play is therefore a transitional work in every sense, because not only are there these two planes of writing, separated in time by one of the most deeply decisive events in Arrabal's life, but in addition, thematically, the play is simultaneously a return to the past and a projection into the future.

L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie ended on a profoundly equivocal note: the Emperor who sought to liberate himself from his past by the act of matricide was pursued by guilty memories, whilst his attempts to find liberation in love through total assimilation with his partner also led into a vicious circle as the temporary realisation of his dream of unity was shattered by the appearance of another Emperor. All such ambiguity is finally dispelled by the conclusion of Le Jardin des délices, and as the second phase of creativity closes a new one opens with the most convincing moment of liberation and reconciliation of all Arrabal's theatre.

For this to happen Arrabal must return once again to the source in order to destroy it. Only by sacrificing a part of herself can Laïs liberate herself and accede to the garden of delights. Naturally, then, memory provides the thematic material; the guiding artistic principle is one of Confusion, but resolving itself this time into clarity and Knowledge. Like the other major plays of the panique period, Le Jardin des délices takes the form

of a ritual of initiation to the state of adulthood, lucidity and self-knowledge, and the freedom of self-determination.

When this play was performed in Paris, many critics were concerned at the apparent absence of dramatic structure. Guy Dumur, for example, wrote:

Arrabal n'est ni Artaud ni Ghelderode. Il n'est pas non plus Jérôme Bosch. Il pourrait être du niveau d'un élisabéthain mineur s'il possédait tant soit peu le sens de la composition dramatique, ce qu'il ne possède à aucun degré. (1)

Dumur's criticism was a not untypical echo of the indignation which prevailed amongst the first-night audience and the press critics. Certainly the play is one of the most complex of Arrabal's theatre. Whereas L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie developed along a linear intrigue with more or less clearly defined incursions into fantasy or into the past, it is more difficult to discern any such thread in Le Jardin des délices. Here Arrabal's procedure is to project a series of tableaux in which past, present and future are sometimes inextricably mingled, and it is never quite clear whether the scenes we are witnessing are "reality" or hallucination.

The audience is forewarned that this is to be so, for early in the play we hear:

VOIX DE LA TELESPECTATRICE - Avec qui vivez-vous?

Long silence.

LAIS - ... Eh bien...

Pause.

Avec mes souvenirs, mes chimères aussi. Je parle avec eux, et ils vivent avec moi, comme s'ils existaient en chair et en os. (2)

(1) Dumur, "Les Délices d'Arrabal", Gazette de Lausanne, 15.11.69.

(2) Théâtre VI, p.22.

Actually, certain scenes - those between Laïs, Zénon and the sheep - do seem to possess a more substantial degree of reality in the present tense, and in the first act at least it seems as if these scenes will provide the key to a sequential action. But this confidence is destroyed in the second act when Arrabal throws the time-scale into confusion. Act I had ended after Zénon had killed the nine sheep. Act II opens at some point in the future, for their bodies have become skeletons. A telephone call from the police serves as pretext to introduce a long scene which allegedly took place the previous evening, between Laïs, Téluc and Miharca; yet, inexplicably, the sheep are alive throughout this scene. And when the flashback ends we return to a "present" in which the sheep have miraculously resuscitated.

Basic contradictions such as these make the play defy rational explanation. Robbe-Grillet said of one of his novels, "Vouloir reconstituer la chronologie de La Jalousie est impossible, impossible parce que je l'ai voulu ainsi" (1), and Arrabal might proudly claim the same for this play, though for different reasons. It was observed that Arrabal found the structural precision of his previous play "un peu inhumain" (2); in the case of Le Jardin des délices it could be said that "Confusion now hath made his masterpiece", for no such criticism could be levelled at this play, as the critics' consternation in 1969 testifies. Here the hold on

(1) Les Nouvelles littéraires, 22.1.59.

(2) Not necessarily because he no longer believed in the necessity of rigorous structural principles (which are still present in Le Jardin des délices), but because in retrospect he felt that the overall structure of L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie was excessively symmetrical and hence too remote from the confusion of life. - c.f. supra p.283.

reality is relinquished even further. The action takes place in the heroine's subconscious and Arrabal recreates this oneiric world with all its confusion and contradictions.

As in some previous works, Arrabal here pursues the process of introspection by incarnating different aspects of his self in separate characters. It is never clear whether the people and animals around Laïs actually exist or if they are projections from within her mind; but one thing does remain quite clear: the ever-present personality and biography of the creative mind which stamps the play with its distinctive traits.

At the start of the play we find the heroine wandering in the baroque labyrinth of her secluded mansion. Like the artist Arrabal, she lives detached from the outside world, absorbed in her memories and fantasies. Her house, like Giafar's mansard room, or the Emperor's desert island, clearly stands for a rejection of external reality - a reality which Arrabal evokes with bemused irony in occasional references to the consumer society. Actually, Laïs has an ambiguous relationship with the outside world. She does all in her power to shun contact with it, but coexisting with this compulsive introversion is a contrary inclination to lead a more normal existence; she tells Zénon:

LAIS - Nous nous marierons, je mènerai une vie normale. Nous donnerons des réceptions, nous assisterons aux courses... Enfin, j'ouvrirai ma porte, tout le monde connaîtra ma vie. Finie ma vie secrète: je n'ai rien à cacher. (1)

(1) Théâtre VI, p.40.

Laïs' words here remind one forcibly of Arrabal's own determination to be "normal": "Et surtout, je vis retiré. Je tiens beaucoup à mener une vie normale... Je veux vivre comme tout le monde." - Théâtre III, intro. pp.9-10.

The television viewers' questions, (the means whereby her protective shell is penetrated), are made to sound odious and progressively more insidious; but the fact remains that it is these same questions that provoke the series of reminiscences and process of self-examination which will lead to her liberation. Introversion alone is seen to be inadequate: the prise de conscience must be effected from without. Like Giafar, Cavanosa and the Emperor, she must emerge from the protective "womb" of fantasy and be born into the real world, and as was the case with the Emperor submitting to the Architect's interrogation, it is the unwelcome intrusion of the outside world which provides the necessary catalyst.

The animals with whom Laïs lives reproduce the dichotomy which is fundamental to Arrabal's view of love, between "pure" platonic love and "bestial" physical love. The sheep seem to symbolise the innocent ideal of a naïve or immature person who aspires to platonic love. But in various plays, from Cérémonie pour un noir assassiné to Les Amours impossibles, Arrabal has shown such love to be an impossible pipe-dream. The tensions arising from this sort of idealism led to the downfall of Jérôme and Vincent. And just as Giafar was cruelly mocked by Arlys for his dream of an idyllic spiritual love, so Laïs is ridiculed for the extravagant attention she lavishes upon her sheep:

LAIS - Et je leur mettrai des cornes. Oui, je leur planterai des cornes sur le dos pour qu'elles chargent de côté et puis je leur achèterai des châteaux, un à chacune, pour qu'elles puissent contempler le monde de leur terrasse. Et celles qui tomberont malades je ne les enverrai pas à l'hôpital des incurables mais dans une ville avec des canaux pour qu'elles guérissent en se baignant... (1)

(1) Théâtre VI, p.72.

Like Giafar, Laïs will have to learn to sacrifice this ideal before she can be initiated to the reality of love with Zénon.

It is worth noting in passing that some of the scenes between Laïs, Zénon and the sheep are open to quite a different interpretation, which underlines Arrabal's tendency towards the use of ambiguous images in his theatre. The speech quoted above has autobiographical implications, for Laïs' solicitude for her sheep's welfare has overtones of maternal devotion and seems to betray Arrabal's nostalgia for his idyllic childhood relationship with his mother. (The "hôpital des incurables", alluded to in Le Tricycle (1), is associated in Arrabal's memory with his lonely and anguished stay at Bouffémont). And on occasions, Laïs strikes a note of histrionic self-pity, and suddenly one finds oneself for a moment in the presence of the old arrabalian mother figure, the self-styled martyr. For example:

LAIS - Tu te rends compte de ce que tu as fait? Qu'est-ce que les gens vont penser de moi? Oh! mon Dieu, quelle honte! Quel supplice! Mais pourquoi moi, malheureuse...

... Mais oui, c'est ça, pleure, pleure, ce serait plutôt à moi de pleurer et pourtant je n'en fais rien. Ce serait beaucoup plus justifié. Ma vie est un calvaire à cause de toi. Maintenant, je resterai toujours avec mes brebis.

Les brebis bêlent.

Laïs va les rejoindre...

VOIX DE LAIS - Mes pauvres petites, je n'aime que vous, mes mignonnes. Vous, vous êtes vraiment adorables. Vous ne parlez pas... (2)

Indeed, there seems to be an even more specific allusion here, for consciously or unconsciously Arrabal has recreated the situation

(1) Théâtre II, p.148.

(2) Théâtre VI, pp.58-59.

of Les Deux Bourreaux, the "bad" son Maurice-Zénon being rejected by the martyrised mother Françoise-Laïs in favour of the effete "good" son Benoît-sheep. Should we therefore see in the sheep an image of the docile ineffectual son utterly submissive to his mother's domination: the lap-dog Cavanosa or Emperor prior to their self-liberation from maternal control, an old figure from the past who has to be destroyed again? Alternatively, do the sheep symbolise the innocence of a happy childhood, an innocence which must be sacrificed, as part of the process of maturation, before Laïs can accede to the garden of delights? In the strangely distorted world of Laïs' subconscious, scenes and images are open to a multiplicity of interpretations and are fitting vehicles for the expression of the ambivalences inherent in Arrabal's own mind.

The first act of Le Jardin des délices is a voyage back into childhood, either remembered or imagined. Laïs' childhood bears an unmistakable resemblance to Arrabal's, but as usual the autobiographical material undergoes considerable distortion as it passes into the theatre. The play abounds in images and incidents whose origins can often be pinpointed very precisely in the author's youth; but the associative influences which come to bear on the creative process are such that these elements are incorporated into the theatre in a quite irrational manner - a further illustration of the panique dictum that art is the product of mémoire and hasard. One example is the scene referred to above, where the heroine suddenly strikes an alien note which normally belongs to the arrabalian mother figure. Further examples are not hard to find. Arrabal's sister, Carmén, makes her first appearance

in his dramatic world in the scene where the young Laïs distributes images to her friends, convinced that she is going to die because she is bleeding, whereas in fact she is experiencing her first menstrual flow. (1) Yet the scene turns back on Arrabal himself because it expresses the state of ignorance to which he himself, like his sister, was condemned in sexual matters.

It is hardly necessary to insist upon the parallels between Laïs' upbringing and the author's education at the hands of the Escolapian Fathers. Clearly present are the Catholic indoctrination and sexual refoulement which Arrabal described to Schifres, an unholy alliance of influences which engenders some curious scenes. The semi-grotesque, semi-sublime rite enacted with Miharca, for example, is an illustration of how the sexual aspects of the young girls' love finds expression in a religious idiom:

MIHARCA - On joue?

LAIS - Oui, à quoi?

MIHARCA - Eh bien! j'aimerais le rôle du chaste saint Joseph et toi tu feras Jésus.
Couche-toi comme ça par terre...

LAIS - Que fais-tu?

MIHARCA - Tais-toi, c'est un rite... Maintenant pousse un grand cri... Plus fort... Ça y est. Regarde-le.

LAIS - Qu'as-tu fait?

MIHARCA - Je t'ai circoncis! (2)

Repression is present at every level of Laïs' education, but not the least manifestation of this is her teachers' efforts to suppress sexual awareness and self-expression: "Les soeurs m'ont dit que Dieu voit toutes nos vilaines actions et qu'il ne faut

(1) Related by Arrabal in Entretiens, p.25. Another incident in this play is also inspired by Carmen Arrabal: when Miharca tells how she was visited by Moses - with his long white beard of course. (c.f. Entretiens, p.98).

(2) Théâtre VI, pp.61-63.

pas se déshabiller même pour aller au lit, parce qu'Il nous verrait." (1) As with Arrabal's own education, the ultimate objective is the total abnegation of the body, and Arrabal shows the consequences of such brainwashing when Laïs tells one of the questioners:

LAIS - Je ne me suis jamais trouvée belle, au contraire, lorsque j'étais petite je m'imaginai que j'étais laide. La... où j'ai passé mon enfance les personnes qui m'ont élevée disaient que je n'étais pas jolie. Et pendant des années j'ai cru que j'étais un des êtres les plus repoussants de la terre. Je me figurais que je ne pourrais jamais avoir un amant. (2)

Here Arrabal introduces a childhood complex which he confessed to Alain Schifres and which he had already exploited in Le Grand Cérémonial, the conviction that he was a monstrously ugly child, so horrible that no-one would ever want to love him. Hence the following scene:

LAIS, jeune fille à Frankenstein - Et moi je sais que tu me comprends, que toi tu m'aimeras vraiment, si horrible que je sois... Je sais qu'à toi je ne peux pas t'inspirer le dégoût que je suis sûre de causer aux autres hommes. (3)

What is the reason for the inclusion of this scene, if it is not simply a fascination with the grotesque? Is it an attempt to appease or erase the nightmare obsessions through the humorous exploitation of them in art? Or is it an indication of the growing distance which now separates the mature Arrabal from his childhood complexes? In an interview given only a few months before the writing of Le Jardin des délices Arrabal explained:

(1) *ibid.* p.48.

(2) *ibid.* p.57.

(3) *ibid.* p.60.

Je n'ai plus peur de moi. J'ai trouvé mon équilibre: il me faut à tout prix éviter la folie et, pourtant, pratiquer quelques pseudo-manières de folie. Je cultive l'ironie de moi, je me veux grotesque en face d'un monde organisé. (1)

Certainly the comic exaggeration, (self-ironical), of the scene with Frankenstein's monster establishes an emotional distance between Arrabal and his subject and appears to confirm the process of detachment from childhood obsessions which is central to this play.

In response to her repressive upbringing, Laïs develops a natural inclination for liberty, which becomes the play's central leitmotif, for Le Jardin des délices is just as much a "canto a la libertad" as the previous play. Or perhaps more so. The theme is stated with great urgency early in the play:

LAIS - Je jure qu'un jour je serai libre, je jure que Dieu n'existe pas, je jure que je ne m'appelle pas Célestine mais Laïs... (2)

The theme of liberty is of course anything but new to Arrabal's theatre; in this play, however, it takes on new connotations, being linked with an irrepressible life-force. Laïs exclaims: "Je ne veux pas mourir, même si je dois rester comme un bifteck pourri toute ma vie, je ne veux pas mourir" (3), which contrasts rather markedly with the preoccupation with death and suicide of earlier plays. The Emperor's efforts to liberate himself, associated as they were with a subliminal death-wish, had led to a somewhat ambiguous conclusion; but how could Laïs' tenacity and insistence be similarly rewarded? From the start Arrabal makes

(1) Théâtre I, intro. p.11.

(2) Théâtre VI, p.25.

(3) ibid. p.45.

apparent the unusually optimistic determination that the quest this time will lead not to death but to accession to the garden of delights.

This is not easily achieved: the path to freedom is tortuous and demands sacrifice and lucidity. However, the task is facilitated by hasard, because on the road Laïs, like Arrabal before her, meets Panique, and this chance encounter provides her with the key which unlocks the door of her childhood prison.

Escaping from the convent school one day into the surrounding countryside, Laïs meets Télóc, a mysterious, exciting figure who has the combined properties of Pan, the Architect with his command over nature, and the musician Emanou. If Zénon is the brute animal lurking beneath man's social mask, Télóc is all that is sublime in man. Télóc is the Initiator who introduces Laïs to unexpected beauty - the sublime-grotesque of his pétomanie, for example - to magic and to Knowledge. Télóc is le merveilleux, where the most extravagant acts of imagination become possible:

Il sort de sa poche un pot de confiture de taille normale.

TELOC - Regarde ce pot... Je t'en fais cadeau et, dès que tu pourras, mets-y ton âme.

LAIS - Qu'il est joli! Comme il est grand et gros! Quels beaux dessins, comme ils sont bizarres!

TELOC - Tu y mettras ton âme.

LAIS - Mais je ne sais pas si la mienne est de la confiture de poires ou autre chose.

TELOC - Tu dois le savoir. Moi, mon âme fait tout ce que je lui demande.

LAIS - C'est vrai?

TELOC - Assurément.

LAIS - Voyons.

Précipitamment.

Qu'à l'instant même tombe un parachute rouge à frange violette avec une boule de cristal et à l'intérieur un poisson avec des ailes.

TELOC - A l'instant même.

En effet, le parachute tombe.(1)

(1) *ibid.* p.34.

In short, Téloc is the complete Panic Man who, having assimilated the laws of chance is master of Confusion and can project himself at will into the past or the future.

It is Téloc who sets Laïs on the road to freedom:

TELOC - Tu vois ces champs?

LAIS - Oui.

TELOC - Tu vois les montagnes?

LAIS - Oui.

TELOC - Tu vois les oiseaux qui volent?

LAIS - Oui.

TELOC - Et bien, tu es aussi libre qu'eux. Et, comme eux, tu chantes ta liberté par tes yeux. (1)

He also announces a brilliant theatrical career for her. On her knees - from first to last a privileged part of the body in Arrabal's theatre, one of the centres of attraction of the female anatomy! - he writes the word Espoir, symbolising both her future dramatic career and her liberation from the taboos asserted by her teachers. Under the impulsion of Panique, Laïs therefore determines to devote herself to the stage and in this way leaves the childhood world of prison behind her.

Téloc, however, has only partially liberated Laïs. Wordly success and acclaim have come to her, yet she is still bound to her past by obsessive memories of childhood. A measure of the extent of her preoccupation with the past is given when she tells Téloc, "Je t'ai cherché toutes ces années" (2), and later to Miharca: "Si tu savais combien je vous recherchais!" (3) She remains torn between conflicting impulses which symbolise the conflict within her between past and future - the urge to lead

(1) *ibid.* p.32.

(2) *ibid.* p.86.

(3) *ibid.* p.102.

a normal existence; the desire to remain encapsulated in her personal world of fantasy and memory; even a nostalgia for the repressive but reassuring secure Catholic discipline of her childhood:

LAIS - Seigneur, mon Dieu... je suis seule ici, seule sur la terre... J'abandonnerai tout, je cesserai d'être actrice. Je me retirerai. Mais tourne tes regards vers moi... Maintenant je me rends compte très lucidement que tout ce que je fais n'a pas de sens, que ma vie est un échec total... Je mettrai un cilice autour de ma jambe, une robe en toile de sac et j'irai faire pénitence. (1)

In the second act all the conflicts which have been evoked in the first act are brought into focus; Arrabal then works towards a resolution of these conflicts and for the first time in his theatre effects a totally convincing reconciliation and liberation for the heroine. Act II depicts Laïs at a crucial point in her life, on the eve of her greatest triumph, a triumph not of the stage but over herself. On the threshold of a new existence, she is visited by Téluc and Miharca, now two figures from the past, and the action proceeds in a climate of mounting violence towards the climax of their struggle for ascendancy over Laïs.

Accusations, denials and contradictions pour from their mouths, making it impossible to know whether they are playing out a pre-conceived scenario designed to incite Laïs to revolt and cause her to make the necessary sacrifice of her old friends, or whether they really are engaged in a bitter life-or-death combat. (The whole act is an echo of the scene in Le Lai de Barabbas where Giafar witnesses the mock (?) fight between Kardo and

(1) *ibid.* pp.39-40.

Maldéric and is exhorted by them to revolt against the allegedly tyrannical Arlys).

On the one hand Miharca urges Laïs to free herself from Télóc's pernicious influence: "Romps l'enchantement qui te lie à Télóc... il te ligote, tu as perdu ta liberté." (1). But in her other ear Laïs hears:

TELOC à Laïs - Tu devrais te révolter contre elle. Elle cherche à te perdre. Elle est venue aujourd'hui à quelques heures de ta consécration où de ta chute pour que tu échoues avec plus d'éclat. Et tout ce qu'elle a fait précédemment, c'était pour te perdre. D'ailleurs, j'ai joué la comédie comme elle me l'avait demandé. (2)

One explanation which would resolve the contradictions of their behaviour is that Miharca and Télóc had come prepared to sacrifice themselves in Laïs' interests, as Miharca at one point claims:

MIHARCA - Laïs, je veux que tu réussisses de plus en plus, que tu triomphes d'une manière exceptionnelle et qu'après que tu entres au Jardin des Délices. Que puis-je faire pour toi? Je suis disposée à tout. Et Télóc aussi.

LAIS - Mais...

MIHARCA - Je pense que ton triomphe et ton bonheur doivent être obtenus pas un sacrifice et, si tu le désires, je suis prête à l'assumer. (3)

Perhaps this is the answer, though Miharca's sincerity must be open to doubt. This much, however, remains beyond doubt: Télóc and Miharca (whatever their motives) have posed the issue of Laïs' future in such a way that she can no longer avoid making her choice. The years of questing, of vacillating between opposite poles, have brought Laïs to a point where she is obliged to choose between her past or the present and the future which the present

(1) *ibid.* p.112.

(2) *ibid.* p.113.

(3) *ibid.* p.103.

bears in it. Télóc tells Laïs:

TELOC - Miharca voulait t'exaspérer, te prouver que tu n'es rien ni personne, que seul est vrai le monde de ton enfance et qu'aujourd'hui tes succès et ta gloire ne sont que mensonges et illusions. (1)

In this way it becomes clear that Miharca represents a hindrance impeding Laïs' future development, and Laïs must now choose between remaining enslaved to her childhood or detaching herself from her roots and going forward into the future as a liberated person.

Arrabal's reflections on this central issue, the theme of liberation, lead here to some interesting conclusions. The play recounts the progressive stages of Laïs' liberation. From the claustrophobic world of the convent school we first see her seeking release from this oppressive reality in acts of imagination: corresponding to the early years of Arrabal's writing, this phase represents a form of imaginative escapism, the satisfaction of a compulsive, un-self-conscious theatrical instinct.

Next Laïs seeks freedom through physical escape, beyond the walls of the "prison" where she has been brought, just as Arrabal ^{had} sought freedom by turning his back on Spain and the family home and coming to Paris. Here she encounters Télóc (Panique), who tries to liberate her from the childhood prison, first by initiating her to le merveilleux, to the secrets of mémoire and hasard which will enable her to excel in the theatre, and later by inciting her to destroy Miharca. But not only has Télóc failed to liberate Laïs completely, as we have seen, for in addition he has himself

(1) *ibid.* p.119.

become a constraint, as Laïs realises when she hears Miharca urging her to rid herself of him.

What was once the embodiment of freedom has thus become yet another yoke to be cast off, and in this crucial observation seems to lie the answer to the interrogations which mark Arrabal's thought. In showing the progressive stages of Laïs' liberation, Arrabal shows that freedom is not a state but a process: a never-ending process of becoming. Freedom is the ability to pass from one state to another, to evolve and develop. Hence, although Panique at first offered liberation from the state of childhood, it too ultimately becomes a constraining factor impeding growth. This is consistent with Arrabal's unrelenting determination to avoid the strictures of belonging to any school, movement, party or organisation of any other sort. Even at the height of his enthusiasm for Panique Arrabal would never concede that it was more than an "anti-mouvement". In 1971 he renounced it entirely by declaring: "Maintenant nous faisons tout pour le boycotter, malgré les thèses universitaires qu'il suscite." (1)

Indeed, one can go further and say that for Arrabal change is the fundamental principle underlying all reality. It was pointed out at the beginning of Chapter Four that the notion of constant change was an essential constituent of the baroque mentality, that "psychologie de l'instabilité et de la mobilité." Arrabal's world is one of perpetual metamorphosis, of constant transformation and cyclical regeneration. In Le Jardin des délices this is expressed both stylistically, at the level of imagistic detail and of

(1) "Plus loin avec Arrabal", L'Express, 16-22 Aug.1971, p.71.

overall structure, and thematically.

As regards the former, that is, structure and imagery, the play invites comparison at several points, as its title suggests, with Hieronymous Bosch's painting The Garden of Earthly Delights. For many years Bosch's pictures have served Arrabal as both conceptual referent, (the Paradise of his imaginative universe, just as Babylone is its capital), and source of inspiration for a number of visual details. An early play, Concert dans un oeuf, was named after a painting by Bosch, but it is only with L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie and Le Jardin des délices that the extent of Arrabal's affinities with Bosch become clear. In these plays, certain visual images undoubtedly refer to the Bosch triptych. The Architect's dream of happiness, riding round a lake on zebras and panthers, can be seen towards the middle of the painting's central panel; the winged fish which Laïs asked Téléc to conjure up appears flying in the sky towards the top left-hand corner of the central panel.

However, the parallels between Bosch and Arrabal are not limited to these details of imagery. Bosch's pictorial universe has been cogently analysed by Wilhelm Fränger (1), and his interpretation of the thematic principles underlying the structure of The Garden of Earthly Delights reveals some striking affinities with the play in question.

In his painting Bosch presents the observer with a universe which literally teems with a proliferation of life-forms. One principle of his creation appears to be movement, which in its

(1) Fränger, The Millenium of Hieronymous Bosch, Faber and Faber, London, 1952.

simplest form is expressed in the physical activity going on in the central panel. Here the whole of creation appears to be indulging in frenetic activity: running, flying, riding, falling, swimming, copulating, balancing and dancing. Movement is also present in the processes of metamorphosis with the result that even inanimate objects present an appearance of instability of form. One of the bizarre structures which tower up from the luxuriant undergrowth in the background has a spherical base of some coarse organic rock from which metallic spikes protrude; from the top of the base grow a cluster of polished marble pillars on which is impaled some huge organic growth of fruit or red foliage. The other structures are subject to similar mutation, as are some of the creatures which inhabit the garden of delights. For example, one creature perched upon a group of cavorting human figures consists of a spherical body like a shiny black chestnut, with inflexible twig-like arms, a bird's head bearing an inordinately long beak (along which a rat is running), and on the top of the head a growth resembling a strawberry from which sprout a pair of human legs and arms. Finally, one of the most disturbing images in the painting, the inscrutable figure in the right-hand panel. With a hollow body like a huge fractured egg or testicle, its rotting tree-trunk legs perched precariously in two boats, their rudders abandoned, and its ghastly pallid face, this is the figure of death evoked by Télec for Laïs. (1)

Underlying all this profusion and confusion, however, is a

(1) Théâtre VI, p.66.

rigorously coherent structural principle. The Garden of Earthly Delights is a classic example of Rousset's definition of the baroque style as "interpénétration des formes au sein d'ensembles unifiés et animés par un mouvement de dilation." Bosch's unifying structural principle is essentially cyclic: life is a constant process of mutation, but within a perpetually recurrent cycle. At one level this idea is expressed in the overall structure of the triptych. The left-hand panel, depicting Adam and Eve with their Creator, represents the Creation; in the centre panel we see the Garden of Delights depicting mankind in its adulthood, surrounded by life in all its forms; the right-hand panel shows Hell in scenes of terrible destruction and chaos; finally, with the outer panels closed once more, the exterior represents the globe enveloped in mists at dawn before the Creation. The cosmos is thus shown in an infinite cycle of creation, procreation, destruction and rejuvenation.

But above all, the garden to which Laïs gains entry is the playground of love, a scene of perpetual accouplement. The theme of the central panel is fertility and procreation, expressed in a mass of images suggesting the uniting of opposites and the unity of the cycle: the fusing of male and female principles in androgynous images, and the unity of the generative cycle in various spherical or ovular forms. The most striking of these, the beautifully depicted scene at the lower left-hand corner of the panel, shows a naked couple in a posture of serene grace, inside a sphere of diaphanous membrane. This image, rich in associative meaning, is certainly Arrabal's source of inspiration for the final scene in his play, where Laïs and Zénon climb into

the egg and, as it swirls into the air, leaving Télóc and the dismembered Miharca far below, exchange their souls in an apotheosis of androgynous love. (1)

The garden thus depicts a golden age of love, but death is constantly present as a counterpart to love. Love is procreation but it also engenders death. Death is felt as an ominous presence in the figure of Death waiting in the right-hand panel, looking dolefully over its shoulder at the antics in the Garden of Delights, and it is implicit in the act of love itself. For example, protruding from the jaws of a large mussel-shell can be seen the legs of a mating couple, apparently being crushed to death. In Bosch's triptych the opposite poles of creation and death are reconciled in a harmonious whole. In the great cosmic regenerative cycle, all contraries are resolved, and Eros and Thanatos take their place as complementary facets of a single movement.

Structurally and visually, The Garden of Earthly Delights is in several important respects the plastic counterpart of Arrabal's theatre. The eternal cycle of creation and destruction dramatised in L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, together with the view of life as a never-ending process of becoming, as seen in Le Jardin des délices, are graphically illustrated in Bosch's painting.

Laïs' accession to this earthly paradise is the most convincing apotheosis of love and self-liberation of all Arrabal's theatre. Giafar's initiation to Knowledge came about through passive acquiescence, but for Laïs it is attained by active self-determin-

(1) Arrabal reproduces the Bosch couple in his painting (front cover of Fêtes et rites de la confusion), but grafts on portraits of himself and his wife. The female body bears his head, whilst Luce's portrait adorns the male body, thus enriching the androgyne image.

ation. Cavanosa's liberation, though self-conferred, was a somewhat negative escape; for Laïs it is a positive accession. The Emperor failed to rid himself of the burden of his past; Laïs' entry into the garden of delights is preceded by the perhaps definitive destruction of that part of herself which was preventing growth.

Does this mean that the author too is on the threshold of a new phase in his life? By this theatrical exorcism is he ridding himself once and for all of the "monde concentrationnaire" which had defined the limits of his vision for the past fifteen years? The usual high degree of identification between author and heroine, - "Mais qui est cette femme? Moi, peut-être" (1) - suggests that Le Jardin des délices marks a crucial point in Arrabal's personal evolution, a moment when Arrabal passes in review memories from his past and traces his artistic development from the beginning to the present, only to reject the past in order to move forward into the future a liberated person. The fact is that Le Jardin des délices is the last of a long line of plays: it is the last play in which autobiography is both the source of inspiration and the subject of an introspective theatre.

But it is also the first avatar of a new type of theatre, a theatre where autobiography still plays a vital rôle as source of inspiration but where narcissistic introspection gives way to a concern for external reality. The play contains three scenes inspired directly by Arrabal's recent imprisonment. These scenes are easily distinguishable, and it is surely to them that Arrabal

(1) Théâtre III, p.22.

is alluding when he says "Mon expérience de la prison transparaît déjà dans Le Jardin des délices." (1) The first is where Laïs is seen in a prison cell, deprived of natural light and with only a cockroach for company. This scene has a direct counterpart in reality:

Dans une prison espagnole les prisonniers peuvent être condamnés à passer deux ou trois mois ou plus au secret, dans de petites cages souterraines dans lesquelles ils sont enfermés jour et nuit sans parler à personne, sans pouvoir lire ni écrire, ni se promener dans la cour. On leur retire même leur pailleasse très tôt le matin... Ils considèrent comme une chance de pouvoir trouver un cafard et lui parler tout bas à l'oreille. Pensez qu'à ce moment, alors que vous et moi sommes tranquillement assis à parler près d'une table confortable, dans les souterrains des prisons espagnoles, des hommes croupissent ainsi... (2)

The other two scenes - Laïs' appearance before an examining magistrate and her interview with a lawyer hired to defend her against a charge of blasphemy - integrate less naturally into the action. Their artificiality in this respect brings into prominence the two levels of writing which lie at the roots of this play. Like the previous scene, they too have pendants in reality: for example, Téluc as the juge d'instruction tries to induce Laïs to condemn herself by saying, "Alors, si nous vous avons arrêtée et emprisonnée, il doit y avoir un motif, c'est à vous de nous en informer!" (3) This is an unmistakable allusion to Arrabal's own encounter with the Chief of Police in Madrid after his arrest. (4)

Whilst not wishing to exaggerate the import of these scenes, their presence in Le Jardin des délices does seem to be of

(1) Entretiens, p.57.

(2) ibid. p.53.

(3) Théâtre VI, p.87.

(4) supra, p.287.

particular significance in the context of the evolution of Arrabal's theatre. Three scenes do not of course add up to a committed play; on the other hand, the fact that they appear in this play where, for the first time in Arrabal's theatre, the protagonist achieves total - perhaps permanent - liberation from the chains of the past, provides added confirmation for the supposition that his work is here assuming an important new orientation. Not, indeed, a radical rupture, for it has been shown how his theatre up to this point has been marked by a progressive broadening of the author's horizons, but a significant new step nevertheless.

Of course, for the critic writing with the benefit of hindsight, it is not difficult to observe that after 1967 Arrabal's creativity did in fact enter a new phase. The remarkable thing about Le Jardin des délices is that it appears to contain within itself a premonition of the new departure which is to succeed it. By depicting the heroine's liberation from her past, both personal and theatrical, it appears to declare itself a transitional work containing the seeds of a new and rejuvenated theatre. The last major play of the panique period, it transcends itself by declaring Panique now to be redundant. In this sense Le Jardin des délices is one of Arrabal's most resolutely optimistic plays, and on a personal level proclaims the theme which Arrabal sings on a universal level in his later plays, namely the destruction of an era of repression and the instauration of a new age of liberty for man.

L'Aurore rouge et noire

When Arrabal returned to Paris after his trial he had already consciously formulated the resolution to write a play bearing witness to the shocking things he had seen in Spanish prisons. Yet for some unapparent reason the full impact of these experiences does not make itself felt immediately in his work. It is in evidence in Le Jardin des délices in at least three scenes, but their scope remains peripheral to the play as a whole. After completing Le Jardin des délices he spent the winter of 1967-8 working on two projects which had been on hand for some time and which do not therefore reveal any significant innovations. First he completed Ars amandi, another panique allegory, not unlike Le Lai de Barabbas, which by this time might almost be regarded as a legacy of the past. (Arrabal had started writing this early in 1967 but had laid it aside in the summer when fired with enthusiasm for Le Jardin des délices. He seems to have had difficulty completing the script, and speaks of it now almost with distaste. (1) Then, with the musician Jean-Yves Bosseur, he began to prepare a revised version of Orchestration théâtrale, (which had never been published), resulting in the appearance of Dieu tenté par les mathématiques in 1969.

As to why so much time elapsed between Arrabal's return from Spain and his writing of the intended play about Spanish prisons,

(1) "Elle n'est pas bonne. J'ai eu beaucoup de difficulté à l'écrire... D'ailleurs, ce sont les pièces qui m'ont le plus coûté qui sont les moins bonnes." - In conversation with the author, 1971.

perhaps the question will never be adequately answered. "Il faut que je trouve le ton juste" said Arrabal speaking of his plans (1), though without specifying what he considered to be this "ton juste." One factor which may have influenced his writing during the latter part of the 1960's is the increasingly insistent attention paid to his work by theatres, critics and general public. The steady trickle of productions of his plays grew to become a stream in 1967 and a torrent during the 1968-9 season, not only in France, but in Germany, Scandinavia and America too. No doubt this phenomenon derived added impetus from the publicity surrounding the "affaire Arrabal" and from the two major productions, remarkably directed by Garcia and Lavelli, of Le Cimetière des voitures (1966 and 1968) and L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie (1967). It seems that during this time Arrabal was under increasing pressure from directors and his publishers, naturally anxious to secure more of the works of a playwright suddenly projected into fashionable notoriety. This situation may help to explain why Arrabal turned his hand again to Ars amandi, a play for which he has so little enthusiasm.

This period of somewhat desultory creativity came to an abrupt end in May when Arrabal was galvanised by the movement of revolt into writing L'Aurore rouge et noire. Composed "in the heat of the moment", the play combines Arrabal's immediate impressions of the Parisian "théâtre dans la rue" - demonstrations and barricades - with his reflections on the theme of repression and intolerance generally. Indeed it is this theme that provides the play with

(1) Entretiens, p.57.

such unity as it possesses, since Arrabal brings together four sketches with different subjects, but having as their common theme the eternal struggle between repression and man's thirst for freedom.

Groupuscule de mon coeur comprises two series of tableaux alternating in counterpoint. One series depicts a meeting of demonstrators fired with revolutionary fervour. Bringing together a speaker, a poet-enragé and other spectators, Arrabal captures the actuality of the events by creating a dialogue generously endowed with the slogans of the moment: "les libertés ne se donnent pas, elles se prennent" - "le dépavage des rues est l'amorce de la destruction de l'urbanisme" - "nous accepterons la pluralité des tendances", etc., and at one point the demonstrators cover the walls with the graffiti which were the linguistic currency of the time.(1) But even these take on an arrabalian flavour when reinforced by invented slogans modelled on the existing paradigms but bearing the unmistakable stamp of panique poetry; for example: "La Révolution sera notre fête panique, notre orgie démesurée et pure". (2) In contrast, the second series of tableaux enacts a lugubrious dream-like ritual in one corner of the stage or acting space. These scenes represent a sort of dumb-show in which love, tenderness, beauty and creativity are brutalised by the uniformed agents of repression, and create a nightmare effect similar to the persecution scenes in Guernica and La Bicyclette du condamné. The conclusion is presented as an

(1) These graffiti and their sources are recorded in Les Murs ont la parole, Tchou, Paris, 1968.

(2) Theatre VII, p.125.

apotheosis, the triumph of the forces of liberty: whilst the meeting culminates in a joyous bonfire of sacks of money - the destruction of the Bourse - the couple in the corner cast off their chains and discover the rotting corpse of their uniformed persecutor.

It is clear that Arrabal envisages the événements as yet one more chapter in the age-old chronicle of the battle against intolerance. In a variety of ways he attempts to inject a historical dimension into his record. As Gille observes, "la roue romaine ensanglantée, le tambourine gothique, les cages médiévales symbolisent l'éternité d'une lutte que les étudiants et les ouvriers de 1968 ne font que perpétuer." (1) The members of the "mouvement" are today's brothers of the members of the Commune, the October Revolution and the Freedom Fighters in Spain. The Movement is clearly meant to transcend its contingent reality, becoming equated with the irrepressible forces which constantly drive men to seek freedom. It is a link in an eternal chain:

L'ENRAGE - Grâce au mouvement j'ai participé aux soviets d'octobre, à l'autogestion de l'Espagne anti-franquiste en 1936, aux jeunes sans dogmes de la Révolution Culturelle, à la Commune de Paris, aux barricades, avec Gavroche, ce pygmée qui avait en lui de l'Antée. Le mouvement a été à l'origine de tout, de la cigogne, du soleil, du mécano, du chemin et de l'alcôve de la femme que j'aime. (2)

Arrabal's attempts to effect a fusion of the particular and the universal are similarly reflected in the structure of this part of the play. The juxtaposition of the real and the oneiric, or rather the enactment of the former against the recurrent backdrop of the latter, represent an effort to situate the events

(1) Gille, op.cit., p.109.

(2) Théâtre VII, p.125.

of May '68 in a broad historical perspective.

The word groupuscule, a neologism coined in May 1968, is rich in connotations for those who experienced the événements. Used originally by cynical observers amongst the orthodox parties as a term of abuse to describe what they considered to be a small handful of meneurs, the word was recuperated by the growing army of activists, and on May 6th. a demonstration several thousands strong marched through the streets of Paris derisively chanting "Nous sommes un groupuscule". The word thus evokes the spirit of fraternity uniting the revolutionaries in their fight against reaction, and the strength and breadth of their movement.

Tous les Parfums d'Arabie is set in Spain: "L'Espagne actuelle ou tout autre endroit où règne la tyrannie", and again draws its inspiration from real events. The revolutionary leader who spurns the safety of exile to return to fight with his fellow-countrymen, whose wife pleads desperately and in vain for his pardon, is modelled on Julian Grimau.

Grimau, one of the key communist underground leaders of the 1930's, had returned from Russia in 1959 to organise clandestine resistance to the Franco régime. In 1963 he was arrested and tried by military court for crimes committed during the Civil War. At his trial, no witnesses were called, since it was alleged that all prosecution witnesses had either died or been killed by Grimau, and under the rules of a Spanish military court, witnesses for the defense were never allowed. Grimau was sentenced to death on 18th. April, and the following day brought a flood of appeals

for clemency, most notably from Krushev, the effect of which was to cause Franco to expedite the execution.(1)

Elevated in this way to martyrdom, Julian Grimau thus entered history as a popular hero, and his execution was seen by many as a sickening return to the ferocious violence of the Civil War and its aftermath. When Arrabal remodels this scene and incorporates it into Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs, Grimau does attain some heroic stature. In L'Aurore rouge et noire, however, the emphasis is rather different because, using a technique like that of Guernica, Arrabal de-mystifies the myth and humanises history. Typically, the incident of Ybar's death presents itself to Arrabal as an eminently human drama, the tragedy of an ordinary woman whose husband is under sentence of death, and in portraying Maïda's humiliation at the hands of authority he is denouncing any régime which separates a woman from her husband in such a brutal fashion.

Arrabal's treatment of the subject is a typical illustration of the fusion of his new committed attitude with the old obsessions. It is clear that memories of his own permeate the thematic material culled from recent Spanish history. In the flashback scenes showing Ybar and his wife before his return to Spain, the gentle, noble freedom fighter he portrays evokes the idealised image he has of his own father, whilst in the figure of Maïda, equally idealised, he expresses his nostalgia for a faithful, supportive spouse, the exact opposite of his mother. Tous les

(1) B. Crozier, Franco: a biographical history, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1967, pp.470-472.

Parfums d'Arabie thus stands as an interesting counterpart to Les Deux Bourreaux, the one depicting the mother Arrabal would like to have had, the other showing his mother as, in the melodramatic distortion of his imagination, she appeared to be.

As in Les Deux Bourreaux Arrabal is here pouring out his disgust at the Spain of the Inquisition perpetuated into the twentieth century. But now his attitude has become more lucid and more purposeful; the revolted fascination of Les Deux Bourreaux which might be called self-indulgent, here becomes a cry of protest. In 1969 Arrabal wrote for the catalogue of an exhibition of paintings by his compatriot Saura:

Je hais les tableaux de Saura comme j'abhorre l'Espagne
et mon oeuvre, imprégnée de ses chaînes et de sa mort...
Il n'y a qu'en Espagne que la prison de Carabanchel et
l'assassinat de Grimaud ne sont pas anachroniques. L'Espagne
empeste et je ne conçois que l'exil. (1)

This is the face of Spain evoked in Tous les Parfums d'Arabie, a Spain where to hold the "wrong" political opinions is a crime, and where Church, Army and State conspire to keep alive the spirit of the Inquisition. Called upon to use their influence with the Head of State and to plead for clemency, the priest, the General and then the banker wash their hands of the affair. But the bowl in which they accomplish their Pontius Pilate gesture is filled with the blood of innocent men, and "all the perfumes of Arabia" will not suffice to cleanse Spain of the smell of death.

On the linguistic level, this section offers a telling contrast with the first section, for in both parts the protagonists express

(1) Saura, Paris, November 1969.

themselves in clichés. But whereas Arrabal had portrayed the revolutionaries' enthusiasm in Groupuscule de mon coeur with perhaps a hint of gentle satire, in the second part his attitude is clearly one of uncompromising denunciation towards the hypocrites who conceal their murderous intolerance behind the cynical clichés of raison d'état. Some of these, like the graffiti in the first part, are actually drawn from reality. The General's declamation, for example, "qu'important mille ou un million de morts si la patrie est sauve", is an unmistakable allusion to General Franco's menacing call to arms in 1936.

After the revolutionary meeting of the first part, Sous les Pavés, la plage plunges the spectator into the battle-lines behind a barricade. Again, the action oscillates between dream and reality. One sequence of scenes, introduced by the mediaeval crier, simulates the climate of the battle by means of flashing beams of light and revolutionary cries from behind, around and amid the audience. In the alternate scenes, a young man is dragged unconscious from the barricade by two women in fin de siècle costumes. They subject him to an obscure ritual of repression; binding him to a chair, covering his head with an upturned funnel, preventing him from seeing, they execute an Indian dance in such a way as to give the impression of a single body having four arms. Perhaps, as Mme. Raymond-Mundschauf suggests (1), their dance is meant to symbolise the fusion of those two extremes which earlier plays have familiarised us with, sexual obsession and idealised love, though it is not clear how this relates to the

(1) op. cit. p.85.

play as a whole, and indeed the dream sequences here are sufficiently obscure to permit a variety of interpretations - if not simply mystification. What is more unequivocally expressed in these scenes is the combination of repressive gestures and erotic suggestiveness which are consistent with Arrabal's portrayal of women in, for example, Le Lai de Barabbas (Arlys-Sylda) or L'Enterrement de la sardine (Lis-Altadore) - though in this case the erotic stimulation is rendered absurd by the fact that the person to whom it is addressed cannot see.

The two women thus evoke the ambivalent behaviour of certain other arrabalian women, and here fuse into a complex image by taking on the qualities of maternal institutions such as the State, which seeks to dominate by a mixture of cajolement and physical coercion. Their behaviour is directly related to the progress of the revolution as narrated by the crier. When the latter announces the university authorities' invitation to the student leaders to engage in dialogue, this is followed - one might say illustrated - by a scene in which the two women throw themselves at the man's feet and whisper sweet promises: "Nous prendrons soin de toi... Nous obéirons à ta volonté... Nous sommes tes esclaves." (1) Behind the barricades, however, the revolutionaries determine not to be so beguiled into laying down their arms. Its subterfuge failed, authority must now drop its mask of sweetness: "L'idéologie éventrée, l'autocensure démasquée, il ne reste au pouvoir que sa force physique pour se défendre." (2)

(1) Théâtre VII, p.164.

(2) ibid. p.165.

Then it becomes clear that the preceding scene was but a farce, a parody of submission, a tiresome old subterfuge. (These scenes are a distant echo of the scene in Le Jardin des délices where Laïs is alternately cajoled and brutalized by the magistrate in an effort to persuade her to confess). In his struggle to free himself, the man knocks the funnel off his head and can now see the women for what they are. Whereupon:

Les deux femmes semblent très effrayées.
Immédiatement elles se mettent chacune une cagoule sur
la tête. La cagoule porte un signe d'intolérance. (1)

They threaten him with a huge egg and a giant knife: the egg has now become a symbol of incarceration, not liberation. Violence is unleashed as one of the women mutilates the other with the knife, and after this symbolic sacrifice the man is given her ears and breasts to eat. Covering him with the egg, they carry him off the stage bound to his sedia gestatoria. In this confused gesture, strongly reminiscent of various scenes from his earlier plays, Arrabal appears to be passing an ironic comment on the facility of the ceremonies of initiation of his own panique theatre. The man enters the egg, like Laïs, and is borne off on the triumphal chair, like Giafar, but their meaning is inverted since here the ceremony is one of initiation to repression. At the same time, this conclusion is an ironic corrective to the facile apotheosis of Groupuscule de mon cœur: contrary to what the enragés thought, the revolution will not be achieved by fine sentiments and superb gestures. The red glow caused by the burning of the Bourse soon fades away, and Sous les Pavés, la plage concludes with the

(1) *ibid.* p.166.

derisory image of an abortive revolution suppressed by an outmoded establishment.

Les Fillettes prolongs this cautionary note of pessimism by depicting the mopping-up operation which follows in the wake of any such unsuccessful revolution. "On mit en prison des étrangers" announces the crier.(1) Like a mediaeval torture chamber, the stage reveals a collection of cages suspended at different heights containing prisoners of various nationalities. As in Tous les Parfums d'Arabie, where Arrabal interpolates flashback scenes showing Ybar and Maída together, the reality of the prison is temporarily effaced by a dream sequence depicting Karin, a Greek prisoner, with his fiancée, in a typically arrabalian ceremony of erotic symbolism and infinite tenderness. Again, its purpose is to render more shocking the brutal reality with which it contrasts.

Victims of an incomprehensible, arbitrary repression, ("... ils n'avaient pas d'armes, ne se trouvaient pas sur les barricades") (2), unable to communicate in their various languages, the prisoners eventually discover their common language by singing the Internationale together until they are beaten unconscious by police. But it is on the level of the human individual confronting suffering that the play ends. As Karin's beaten, unconscious body is despatched to a Greek prison, Lia makes a gesture to comfort him, and the cloth with which she wipes his face remains imprinted with his blood-stained features. This biblical gesture revives an

(1) *ibid.* p.172.

(2) *ibid.* p.174.

echo of the ending of Le Cimetière des voitures, and Arrabal leaves us with an image, "en dehors de toute politique", of the arrabalian couple - Emanou and Dila, Vilorio and Tasla, Fanchou and Lira, Ybar and Maïda, or here Karin and Lia - whose happiness is destroyed by the intrusion into their lives of the blind forces of authority.

Parallel with the new orientation of his theatre towards commitment can be seen the author's efforts to evolve a new dramatic form. In his plays after 1967 Arrabal is seen working in the direction of a more open-ended structure, coupled with attempts to involve the audience more actively in the performance. Such experiments were in any case "in the wind". As Gille observes, "Depuis mai, le théâtre français a tenté de retrouver la spontanéité des scènes de rue." (1) The reasons for this trend are complex and only partly related to the wave of critical evaluation which swept through France in 1968, calling into question amongst other things the existence of the conventional ("bourgeois") theatre and other art forms. Under the impact of a heterogeneous collection of influences, (amongst others: the happening in the mid-1960's, the Living Theatre, a little later the Bread and Puppet Theatre, and experimental theatre groups from Japan, not to mention the ubiquitous Artaud, whose ideas were constantly appearing in different guises), one of the principle lines pursued by the French experimental theatre has been the two-pronged effort to break away from the strictures of the written text, and to integrate the audience into the performance by all available

(1) op.cit., p.110.

means.

The extent to which Arrabal has been influenced by these experiments is impossible to assess. Certainly he was not unmoved by his visit to Off-Off-Broadway in 1969, (when writing Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs), and the direct influence of the street activities of May 1968 is clearly fundamental to L'Aurore rouge et noire. On the other hand, the evolution of his dramaturgy in this way is perfectly coherent even if one denies any such influences, given the evolution in his thought and in his concept of the function of theatre. To some extent the new dramatic forms which he develops are dictated by the different nature of the material involved. Naturally enough, there is in his theatre a distinct correlation between subject matter and form. Expressed briefly, it might be said that the early introverted theatre produced hermetic structures from which the audience were denied access other than as witnesses. Later, for his panique plays, an audience is certainly envisaged and this is itself a new element in his theatre; but the public to whom these plays are addressed is essentially a passive public, who must submit to his theatre like "heureux coupables." Even L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie, despite its tangential projections into a proliferation of play, remained encapsulated in its hermetic structure. In contrast, Arrabal's emergence from this narcissistic universe and his efforts to integrate his own experiences into the real world, are complemented by a dramaturgy calculated to draw the spectator into his dramatic universe.

Actually, as L'Aurore rouge et noire illustrates, there is a big difference between audience integration and audience participation. The latter is not automatically achieved by the simple expedient of situating the public physically in the midst of the action. In this position, unless other crucial factors come into play to generate empathy, the spectator can find himself just as alienated from the action as in any théâtre à l'italienne.

Arrabal's play can be staged in a theatre, though he states his preference for a street performance. Yet even here he betrays a nostalgia for a clearly delimited acting space, a "lieu privilégié" set apart from normal reality. His directions for Groupuscule de mon coeur prescribe:

Des photographies gigantesques... Dans la rue, avec ces photographies, on creera rapidement une sorte de "corral" ... Le public sera à l'intérieur. (1)

The other sections also have fixed elements of scenery which pin the action down and prevent its proliferation into a spontaneous street performance. Despite Arrabal's abandonment of the linear intrigue and his adoption of an unconventional structure based on a succession of apparently unrelated scenes, the play allows little scope for the imprévu to flourish.

On the other hand, Arrabal's efforts to involve the spectator in this way in his theatrical world, however imperfectly, must be deemed a significant new feature of his writing. Indeed, the very fact that in his writing he pays such close attention to the physical conditions of the play's eventual staging is illustrative

(1) Théâtre VII, p.117.

of his increasing interest in the life of his work on the stage, which is rather different from his earlier attitude to the theatre, when a play, once written, was a perfect and complete created entity. These early works of a theatre of solitude have been succeeded by a more mature theatre where a play is but a blueprint for a performance, and is conceived as being addressed to an audience in a predetermined purpose.

The new dramatic techniques involved are thus part and parcel of a general tendency away from an introverted theatre towards involvement in contemporary history. In the Introduction to this study it was stated that Arrabal can be seen moving towards an ideal expressed by André de Baecque, who wrote: "la véritable vocation de l'auteur dramatique... est de s'intégrer à une communauté véritable et d'en exprimer les sentiments, les craintes, les espoirs." L'Aurore rouge et noire is the first real evidence of such an ideal in action, as Arrabal reaches out from the confines of his mental prison to express the joys and fears of a real community whose experiences he has shared and understood.

Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs

Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs illustrates again the strange and unpredictable concourse of events which lie behind Arrabal's artistic creation. In 1967 he had left Spain fired with the determination to write a play revealing the ignominious circumstances in which his fellow prisoners were incarcerated. For two years the germ of the idea remained in his mind, filtering through to the surface in certain scenes of Le Jardin des délices and L'Aurore rouge et noire, until July 1969, when an event of a totally different order took his mind back to Carabanchel and provided the spark which fired another burst of creativity:

J'ai écrit la pièce à New York. Lors d'un voyage en Amérique, j'étais invité chez des amis, et là j'ai vu à la télévision, en couleurs, des hommes qui marchaient pour la première fois sur la lune. J'étais bouleversé. J'ai pensé de nouveau à mon séjour en prison... (1)

The play is a cry of protest, the product of a shocked sensibility spurred to action by the enormity of the contrast between humanity's leap into the space age whilst on the other side of the globe men are suffering in mediaeval conditions of degradation and deprivation. In the author's words:

I wanted to dramatize the discrepancy which I witnessed between the mediaeval conditions of the jails, veritable dungeons equipped with ancient but most forceful instruments of torture, and the steps taken into the twenty-first century by the American astronauts landing on the moon. In my play the prisoners wonder how it is possible

(1) Entretien avec Lucien Attoun, O.R.T.F. radio broadcast, 20.10.69.

that men who have not seen the horizon for years co-exist in time with those who are setting out for the galaxies. (1)

Arrabal renders this discrepancy apparent in scenes where news filters through to the prisoners of Apollo XI's moon landing, and the contrast produces an uneasy sense of irony. It is not clear whether Arrabal really is proclaiming a (rather naïve) faith in technology's promise of a happier future for mankind, or if he is protesting at the facile inanities uttered over the media, which ring so false within the walls of the prison. But what is quite unambiguous is the pitiful cry which the news provokes from the prisoners:

KATAR - Ils n'ont pas parlé de nous?

AMIEL - Comment ça, de nous?

KATAR - De nous qui sommes ici?

AMIEL - Personne ne parle de nous, jamais.

KATAR - Même les premiers hommes sur la lune ne se souviennent pas de nous. (2)

The action takes place, quite simply, within a prison, "entre quatre murs" as Katar bitterly observes, and depicts three political prisoners still languishing in jail a quarter of a century after the war, forgotten by the world. In the scenes transcribed from Tous les Parfums d'Arabie Arrabal has eliminated specific references to his motherland, anxious to avoid too restrictive an interpretation being placed upon his work, but it would be difficult not to identify the régime which treats Amiel, Katar and Pronos in this way with Franco's Spain. Before the play was written, Arrabal had told Schifres, "Je suis sûr que cela

(1) R.L.Farmer, "Fernando Arrabal's guerrilla theatre", Yale French Studies, no.46, 1971, pp.154-166.

(2) Théâtre VII, pp.17-18.

tournera autour de mon cas. A partir de là seulement, je pourrai trouver d'autres images plus objectives." (1) This, as it happens, is the case with Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs. Although the play, unlike earlier works, is not a narcissistic self-dramatisation, autobiography still plays a vital rôle as the source of inspiration, of some of the material, and of the prisoners' fantasies, to whom he lends many recognisable arrabalian obsessions. From this starting point, as in the previous play, he extrapolates to create images of more universal relevance.

An analysis of the material involved and its different sources will illustrate the extent to which Arrabal has now achieved the integration of "le monde où j'ai vécu" and "celui des impulsions qui est la base de mon oeuvre" of which he spoke to Françoise Espinasse. The title-page bears these words:

Ce spectacle a été réalisé à l'aide de livres, de récits et de documents authentiques. Il s'inspire également de confidences recueillies à la prison de Carabanchel.

and it is sobering to discover that a considerable proportion of the detail is based on authenticated fact.

Some of the factual source material is provided by Melquiesidez Rodríguez Chaos, whose account of his experiences in various Spanish jails had been published in 1968. (2) Passages from his text are read aloud to punctuate the action, their stark factual simplicity standing in gruesome counterpoint to the extravagance of the prisoners' fantasies. Several of these passages describe Burgos prison, one which has a singularly notorious history and

(1) Entretiens, p.107.

(2) Melquiesidez Rodríguez Chaos, Veinte años en las cárceles españolas, Librairie du Globe, Paris, 1968.

a particularly tragic connotation for Arrabal, since it was from here that his father disappeared in 1942. Perhaps Arrabal imagines the action taking place at Burgos. At one point in a recent production, directed by Arrabal, (1) the action was interrupted by the sound of an express train rushing past the prison walls. This image recurs several times in his film, Viva la Muerte, and it seems to have a private significance for the author. When he went to Spain in his attempt to solve the enigma of his father's disappearance, he visited Burgos prison hospital and saw his father's cell. The main railway line to Madrid passed beneath the window, which led him to surmise that perhaps his father had escaped by jumping on to the roof of a passing train.

Other material is inspired by historical figures. The title of ^{the} play is borrowed from Garcia Lorca, the poet arrested and executed by Nationalist soldiers during the Civil War. Arrabal apparently feels a certain affinity with this gentle martyr; he says:

I am a little like Lorca. He wasn't political. He was a poet. He wanted the world to be free... Franco was against Lorca because he was a homosexual. To be homosexual at that time was like a cry of freedom, because he was a free man and part of his freedom was manifested in his homosexuality... Lorca was the only poet who was killed in the civil war and he was the least political of poets. I'm not political either. (2)

In the scene depicting Lorca's death, Arrabal perpetuates the popular myth of the "coup de grâce dans le cul" with which the poet was reputedly despatched.

The allusions to Lorca's homosexuality echo an earlier reference to the theme of sexual liberty. In one of his dreams

(1) Open Space Theatre, London, September 1973.

(2) "Family Executioner", The Guardian, 12.9.73, p.8.

Amiel describes the astronauts' conquest of the virgin moon as the consummation of a fantastic marriage sacrament heralding the dawn of a new era of tolerance:

- AMIEL ("DURERO") - C'étaient les nocés du futur. A l'avenir on pourra se marier à plusieurs: une femme, la lune, et deux hommes. Ou bien entre homosexuels.
- LELIA ("PUTAIN") - On célébrera des nocés entre homosexuels?
- AMIEL ("DURERO") - Les premières ont été fêtées par ces deux hommes sur la lune. C'était le symbole de ce qui va venir. Et justement ces deux hommes se sont mariés, ces deux homosexuels précurseurs, dans la mer de la Tranquillité. Nous quittons l'ère des Poissons pour entrer dans celle du Verseau.
- LELIA ("PUTAIN") - Qu'est-ce que ça signifie?
- AMIEL ("DURERO") - Nous sortons de l'ère du fanatisme, du dogmatisme, de l'inquisition, pour accéder à une ère de tolérance. Une ère dans laquelle les pénitenciers et les prisons ne seront plus que des reliques ahachroniques. (1)

Here, as in Arrabal's version of the Lorca incident, homosexuality is seen as a symbol of liberation from sexual taboo and intolerance, from the climate of interdictions, punishment and guilt in which the author spent his formative years.

Another historical figure alluded to in the play is Grimau, who appears in the guise of the revolutionary Tosan, who joins the other three long-term prisoners. Although in borrowing these scenes from L'Aurore rouge et noire he has eliminated specific references to Spain, Arrabal strengthens the allusion to Grimau's case by introducing a new detail. During his interrogation, Tosan has been assaulted and thrown handcuffed from a window. At his trial Grimau alleged that he had been tortured and pushed out of a window, whilst the prosecution claimed that he had injured

(1) Théâtre VII, pp. 24-25.

himself when attempting to escape by jumping out.

Even some of the prisoners' most outrageous fantasies are, scandalously, founded on fact. The scene where the prison chaplain is blinded, castrated and forced to swallow his own sexual organs is inspired by the case of Don Alicia León Descalzo, who met just such a fate at the hands of fascist fanatics in the province of Ciudad Real. (1) In characteristic fashion, Arrabal has grafted the incident on to the theme of anti-clericalism, and distorted it into a scene of black humour. It has been seen on occasions how Arrabal creates composite images in which Church and State are fused to form a single emasculating and repressive force; in view of this, the priest's fate here is literally a juste retour, an appropriate act of vengeance, but perhaps not entirely fitting to Arrabal's purpose. In such cases Arrabal's efforts to bludgeon his audience into a horrified prise de conscience tend to be self-defeating because the incident, true though it may be, hardly passes as credible, especially as it is presented in the context of a fantasy. In consequence it acquires a suspect flavour of morbid self-indulgence.

Underpinning all this material culled from different documentary sources, (and perhaps more transmitted orally to the author by his fellow prisoners at Carabanchel), is an even more substantial body of material which the critic immediately recognises as being specifically arrabalian. Amiel twice describes their cell as a womb: "Ne crois-tu pas plutôt que nous nous trouvons dans la matrice d'une femme, en marche vers l'infini,

(1) H. Thomas, op.cit. p.174.

par la membrane intérieure?" (1) - which of course as a way of viewing incarceration is peculiar to the author. Like several other arrabalian characters, from Climando in Le Tricycle to the enragé in L'Aurore rouge et noire, Amiel is a poet who seeks refuge from reality in fantasy, and like Arrabal in his early theatre he projects himself in his fantasies: he dreams of himself as the envied Durero, the prisoner who was released, of himself with prostitutes, of himself with his fiancée, reunited after a twenty year separation. In his dreams he reveals his fragility and vulnerability, thereby betraying his common identity with the earlier heroes of Arrabal's theatre, but now the violence of his frustrated fantasies serves to point an accusing finger at the brutally real context in which he is placed.

For the first time in his theatre Arrabal dramatises his father. This key figure, the silent faceless figure inspiring his work, assumes flesh and blood in the person of Katar, the tragic victim renounced and betrayed by his wife. In a scene which recalls Les Deux Bourreaux she invites the torturers to begin their work, and as Katar is being whipped, makes her own contribution to his torture, submitting him to the most humiliating of degradations. The bond of love uniting Arrabal with his father's memory is more evident than ever before, and it is apparent that his protest against the forces of intolerance is also a vindication of his father. We read:

AMIEL - Tes enfants... tu verras quand ce seront des hommes... ils te chercheront: tu seras leur idole. Et plus grande aura été la haine qu'elle aura

(1) Théâtre VII, p.16 & p.59.

montrée envers toi, son entourage et sa famille,
plus grande sera la dévotion qu'ils te voueront.
Pronos fait des gestes d'assentiment.

AMIEL - Ecoute, tu es peintre... Tes enfants seront des
artistes... Ils rendront ton nom immortel.

KATAR - Mais l'éducation qu'ils vont recevoir pendant des
années...

AMIEL - C'est un lavage de cerveau... Ils se ressaisiront.
La rupture sera plus sauvage encore.

KATAR - Pauvres petits, si seuls, si abandonnés, condamnés
des leur naissance dans un monde hostile... (1)

And at many other points we recognise the author's hand as he lends his characters his own biography, his fantasies and his own characteristic style of expression: an intense, insistent eroticism, flights of fancy expressed in bizarre lyricism, a tendency towards epic self-dramatisation, (Amiel passing himself off as Rubens or Einstein), and, rising from the depths of their consciousness, the distant echo of the beach at Melilla. (2)

In other words, Arrabal has not abandoned his former preoccupations. Their vestiges are still to be found everywhere, but his obsessions are no longer being exploited per se. In Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs they are synthesised with material inspired by reality of a more objective kind, and in the process acquire both purpose and a new universality of meaning. It is hard to believe that Arrabal will ever divest himself entirely of the obsessions to which he has been prey, but what his most recent plays reveal is a fruitful ability to dominate them, to put them at the service of a new type of theatre aimed at denouncing political repression, and thus to transcend the strictly personal.

(1) *ibid.* pp.77-78.

(2) *ibid.* p.93.

Arrabal's purpose is to bear witness to the iniquities he had encountered in Spanish prisons. The basis of his commitment as revealed in this play is a profound sympathy for political prisoners like Amiel, Pronos and Katar, and an urge to remind the world that such things are still going on. Some may regard this as a negative kind of commitment, since it takes the form of a protest without offering any radical alternative. In fact, it is doubtful whether Arrabal has any concrete notion of how this situation may be improved on a political plane. Even in his commitment Arrabal reveals a degree of naïvety. What makes his commitment so unique is that it stands outside any form of ideological doctrine, and is wholly consistent with his admission: "Vous savez, en matière de politique je ne dispose que de lieux communs." (1) In his own eyes, as we have seen, this autonomy lends greater validity to his protest, and one might argue that his work derives greater universality from it; moreover, his naïvety certainly does make it difficult to ignore his statement of protest in Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs.

There is thus a very precise correlation between Arrabal's commitment and the nature of the dramatic idiom he adopts to express it. Unable to write about politics, he is able to show with horror the pernicious effects that politics can have upon men's lives: how ordinary well-intentioned men are separated from their families, humiliated and driven mad, how the torturer and the executioner are reduced to bestiality, and so on. Writing "en dehors de tout parti politique", he creates a dramatic situation

(1) In conversation with the author, 1971.

which, despite references to Spain and to historical figures, and despite its relevance to the real world, centres on the individual subjectivity, his fears and aspirations, rather than on the individual viewed in the context of society or politics. Without arguing the political rights or wrongs of the case, he wants his audience to know what it is like to be a prisoner in such conditions, to share his condemnation of the society which inflicts such inhumanity. To achieve this, Arrabal sought in his productions of the play to create a "climat de rêve", which he considered the play's true subject. (1) Dramatically, this method is not unlike that of the earlier play, Guernica, ("je traite cela par la poésie"), but in the latest play the intensity of the expérience vécue lends far greater urgency and conviction to the expression of this eminently human commitment.

With this play Arrabal has for the first time assumed responsibility for the stage direction himself, and has brought the play to the public in Paris, New York, Stockholm and London. Like the writing of L'Aurore rouge et noire, his mise en scène reveals a search for new scenic techniques aimed at strengthening the rapport between audience and action. Arrabal had seen for himself the work of various experimental theatre groups in New York in 1969, troupes working outside the established commercial circuits, whose productions combine permissiveness and contestation with the principle of collective creation. It seems likely that he has been influenced by these experiments, for although in Et ils pass-

(1) C. Godard, "Arrabal saute le pas", Les Nouvelles littéraires, 11.9.69, p.11.

èrent des menottes aux fleurs he adheres largely to the printed text as the basis of production, he is seen to make certain concessions to the ideal of collaborative creativity. At three points in the text he abandons the scripted dialogue and indicates a pattern for improvised rituals in which the public would be invited to participate.

In the "prologue" Arrabal introduces the audience, in a spirit of tenderness and fraternity, to the "climat de rêve" which he hopes to generate. From the ticket-office the spectators are propelled into the total darkness of an antechamber, where they are met by an actor or actress taking them by the arm, and led one by one into the darkened theatre:

Les actrices conduiront les spectateurs masculins avec douceur en murmurant pour leur exprimer leur joie, leur crainte de commencer la pièce... Les spectateurs sentiront qu'ils ont été plongés dans l'obscurité. (1)

In this way, Arrabal hopes that the public, denuded of their social masks, will enter in a spirit of fraternity the darkened sanctuary which is both the prison cell inhabited by Amiel, Katar and Pronos, and the night of the womb. His intention is that the audience should experience the prisoners' vulnerability and anxiety, but at the same time that they should feel the reassurance of a tender hand extended to guide and help them? "Si le spectateur s'agrippe peureusement et avec force à l'acteur durant le trajet, celui-ci devra le caresser, le rassurer." (2)

Then the play begins, and Arrabal throws the spectator-participant into a world of great tenderness and almost unbearable

(1) Théâtre VII, p.13.

(2) ibid.

violence. "Les spectateurs, pris dans ce tourbillon, devront intervenir dans une atmosphère de tension extrême. Je les pousserai dans un état proche de la folie" declares Arrabal optimistically, in terminology reminiscent of Artaud. (1) Though on other occasions he is less emphatic:

Leur participation est souhaitée et non extorquée. Le public réagira-t-il? Telle est la question essentielle. S'il ne réagit pas le spectacle ne sera pas estropié, il sera autre chose. Ma pièce est axée sur la liberté, donc sur la liberté du spectateur. (2)

His production, based on an integrated disposition of actors and audience, left the latter free to discover themselves within the action, but thereafter their reaction belongs to the domain of the imprévu, and the actors are free to exploit the prevailing conditions in the way they feel most suitable.

Projected thus into the darkened tunnel, the public are guided by Arrabal and his actors through the labyrinthine night towards the pin-point of light which marks the exit. The ending, in which the martyr Tosan is executed and resurrected, takes the form of a festival celebrating the overthrowing of tyranny and the brilliant dawn of a new era of tolerance - hopefully a veritable catharsis for the audience after the harrowing experiences they have shared with the prisoners.

Finally, the play is prolonged by a concluding ritual for those members of the public who wish to remain. Arrabal says it is impossible to foresee what direction the ritual will take: perhaps a volunteer torturer will whip a volunteer victim, or perhaps

(1) P. Nussac, "Quand Arrabal défend la pudeur", France-Soir, 2.9.69.

(2) J.-J. Olivier, "Arrabal met en scène 'Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs'", Combat, 10.9.69.

another will feel moved to confess himself or to relate some deeply moving experience. Arrabal obviously hopes to generate in this way a high degree of emotional and spiritual empathy, in accordance with his ideal of "une libération par le rêve." But perhaps he was unduly optimistic to expect of his public the unconditional sincerity which such a collective rite demands. His own sincerity, bordering as on many previous occasions on naïvety, is unquestionable; but will it be matched by an equal sincerity on the part of the audience, or - as seems more probable - by embarrassment? To borrow again the words of Bernard Gille, "en inventant ce jeu Arrabal ne s'oublie pas assez pour que tous puissent y entrer sans crispation, sans arrière-pensée goguenarde." (1) It is reported in the published text that, at the time of going to press, "le spectacle se joue avec succès et ferveur: tous les soirs, plus de la moitié des spectateurs prennent part à l'épilogue, suivent une à une les différentes étapes du rituel, et suscitent des expériences fascinantes." (2) But the play's press reviews tell a different story, speaking of a "répugnante exhibition" (3) and "tentatives de conditionnement du public qui sont indignes de la pièce" (4), and in fact in subsequent productions Arrabal, no doubt wisely, abandoned these unscripted rituals.

(1) op. cit., p.119.

(2) Théâtre VII, p.106.

(3) C. Baignères, "'Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs' d'Arrabal", Le Figaro, 29.9.69.

(4) B. Poirot-Delpech, "'Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs' d'Arrabal", Le Monde, 8.10.69.

CONCLUSION

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As committed theatre, Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs plainly has its limitations. Seeking to provoke a prise de conscience through the imagination, Arrabal's method is to create a fictitious universe, one which has its roots in reality but which is itself of a strictly poetic order. Arrabal is not a raisonneur but a purveyor of images in which démésure is the guiding principle. Now it might be said that the efficacy of his theatre as committed theatre is limited to a degree by the permissiveness which is an integral feature of Arrabal's vision. Anticlericalism, blasphemy and scatology are among the constants of his work. Their inclusion is seldom gratuitous; their presence is genuine to the extent that they are expressions of things which the author himself feels very deeply. Nevertheless, when it comes to such matters, he is often insistent, sometimes to the point of tedium, and Arrabal has had to pay a certain price for this. One consequence is the aura of scandal with which his name is often associated and the consequent undermining of his reputation as a serious artist. A related consequence, in the case of Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs is the negative effect such permissiveness has upon his audience. Arrabal frequently skates on the thin ice of bad taste, near the limits of what many would consider beyond the pale, occasionally going well beyond it.

The dangers of outstripping the public in this respect are manifest. Of course, to some extent Arrabal's theatre will always

remain of minority appeal, but one can well imagine an audience who might otherwise be favourably disposed to his cause, but whose critical faculties draw down the shutters when confronted with scenes they consider excessively repellent. Ideally, his plays invite the condemnation, not of himself, but of the reality they seek to reflect, but in practice this is not always the case. In all ingenuousness Arrabal appears to miss this point completely. "Mais pourquoi repousser le miroir et non combattre celui dont il reflète l'image?" he protests, invoking the violent reactions he had encountered in various countries with Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs. (1)

Such alienation must be a factor limiting the value of his plays as acts of persuasion. Indeed, there is good reason to suppose that neither they nor any other committed work can ever hope to do more than preach to the converted, leaving untouched those people who are not already favourably predisposed. One commentator of the theatrical scene actually made this observation about the second Paris production of Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs:

Les spectateurs, jeunes pour la plupart, écoutent la pièce comme s'ils étaient à la messe. Une messe où l'Eglise est quelque peu malménée, on s'en doute, car elle a eu trop souvent partie liée avec le pouvoir, jadis, en Espagne. Toutefois, qu'entendent ces jeunes gens, que voient-ils dans cette pièce? Un acte politique, un réquisitoire; le reste ne les intéresse pas. Ils vont au Palace comme ils iraient à la Mutualité: pour manifester leur opposition à un régime honni. (2)

As for the remainder of the public, it may very well be a case

(1) Arrabal, "Témoigner dignement", Les Nouvelles littéraires, 6-12 Nov. 1972, p.16.

(2) M. Galey, "Ce que masquent des cris", Les Nouvelles littéraires, 12-19 Nov. 1972.

of taste rejecting what reason might approve.

On the other hand, it is worth stressing again that it is never through the faculty of reason that Arrabal hopes to touch his audience: "Je crois qu'il y a une meilleure prise de conscience, plus profonde, plus enracinée, à travers la fascination qu'à travers la raison" he says (1), and this is just as true of his latest works as of their predecessors.

Even in his committed plays Arrabal does not attempt to persuade by the voice of reason. Oscillating between the abjectly sordid and le merveilleux, his plays seek to fascinate and disgust in the hope that the audience will arrive at a new state of awareness by sharing with him something which is experienced emotionally and intuitively. Judged as an effort at committed theatre its efficacy may be questionable, but it undoubtedly creates a singular theatrical presence by which no-one can fail to be moved to react in one way or another.

Fernando Arrabal occupies a unique position in the French theatre, a fact of which he is proudly aware, even if the reasons for it defy explanation. "Ce n'est pas logique que mes trucs marchent" he says. (2) In art, as in politics, his subversive tendencies are the product of naïvety rather than of intention. He once declared with a characteristic combination of modesty and vanity: "C'est à la portée de tout le monde d'écrire Fando et Lis" (3), and at the avant-première of Viva la Muerte he said: "C'est à la portée de tout le monde de faire un film",

(1) Entretiens, p.57.

(2) ibid. p.166.

(3) ibid. p.163.

continuing, "Il faut en finir avec l'aristocratie qui contrôlait l'art, la culture." (1)

Though the time is premature for any assessment of the place Arrabal's theatre will occupy in the future, or how durable his influence will be, it is fair to say that his impact on the French theatre since his first production in 1959 has been considerable - not least in providing inspiration for some remarkable productions by Savary, Lavelli and Garcia. He has had the good fortune to be extraordinarily well served by these directors. As a major figure in the Spanish-American neo-baroque movement he has introduced a new dimension to the French stage. And the unusual blend of material and purpose observed in Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs has led to the creation of a dramatic style which has no equivalent. Totally unlike Gatti's epic marxist drama, and utterly different from the social realism of recent British committed theatre, Arrabal's latest plays are a unique theatre of obsessions-become-committed.

What of Arrabal's theatre after 1969? While this study was being written Arrabal published three new plays and made his first incursion into the world of the cinema. It is not within the scope of the present study to analyse these latest plays. Briefly, it is fair to say that on the whole they offer further confirmation of Arrabal's continuing integration into external reality, and at the same time illustrate once more his prodig-

(1) Cinéma Publicis Saint Germain, Paris, 11.5.71.

iously fertile imagination, (that faculty which Arrabal claims not to possess), and his versatility in experimenting with different theatrical experiences.

Bella Ciao (La Guerre de mille ans), described as a "spectacle musical", is the fruit of a long period of collaboration with a number of artists, ^{among} whom Jorge Lavelli must be accorded the principle rôle. The text consists of a series of scenarios based on the themes of class culture or institutionalised culture, capitalism, colonialism, the mass media, and repression. Directed with consummate skill by Lavelli, the production at the Palais de Chaillot was redolent with good intentions but appeared simplistic and a little naïve. The exact extent of Arrabal's part in this venture is not clearly discernible, but it is apparent that he derived great satisfaction from this new kind of corporate activity:

Quelle expérience passionnante que Bella Ciao! J'ai écrit entouré d'amis qui ont des idées précises sur la politique et sur la solution à nos misères. Je n'ai eu comme mission que de traduire en images dramatiques les débats de tous... et cela depuis près de trois ans de remises en question incessantes et fructueuses. (1)

In the spring of 1970 Arrabal was preparing the first version of this play, La Guerre de Mille ans, for a performance due to take place at the Festival d'Avignon later in the year. When this project was cancelled in April, Arrabal turned to Le Ciel la merde. The title, borrowed from an expression of Peter Brook, reflects the typically arrabalian preoccupation with contrasting elements of sordid and sublime. The play itself, described as

(1) Bella Ciao, preface.

"souvenirs de cinq condamnés pour meurtre dans le couloir de la mort", is a thoroughly unpleasant text inspired by the Manson trial in America, which at that time was commanding considerable notoriety.

Finally, the last of his plays published to date, La Grande Revue du XX^e siècle, was also written in 1970. Like Bella Ciao, this is a collection of sketches evolved from scenarios by a process of collaborative effort, but this time one senses the rabelaisian and irreverent humour of Arrabal's old partner in the Grand Théâtre Panique, Jérôme Savary.

Viva la Muerte, Arrabal's first film, helps to illuminate the evolution which has occurred in his work during the last twelve years. It is adapted from his novel Baal Babylone and is inspired initially by the largely autobiographical material which pervades the novel. However, the film is distinguished from its source by several important differences in terms of treatment and emphasis which do not derive simply from the transposition from one medium to another, and these differences offer a useful measure of the evolution in the artist's perspectives over the intervening twelve years.

Viva la Muerte reconstitutes, by means of juxtaposed scenes of reality and fantasy, the childhood of a boy, Fando, whose country and family are torn apart by civil war. The film has its roots in the boy's mind and radiates outwards to deal with his relationship with his family and ultimately embraces a more general perspective of the Spanish Civil War. It is in this last respect that that author shows the advance upon his former

position. The autobiographical elements which were the source material of Baal Babylone are still present. But in the novel, the narrator's torturous drama was played out in two arenas, within his mind and within the ruptured family, with only a minimal evocation of the real world beyond, and this only insofar as it involved the narrator directly. In the film it is placed very decisively in the real context of the Civil War. That is to say that the autobiographical elements are not de-personalised but assume a new dimension, so much so that the didactic elements may now be considered to transcend in importance the personal.

When asked by a member of the public at the film's avant-première what impact he intended to produce with Viva la Muerte, Arrabal replied:

Je voudrais que les choses qui sont décrites dans le film, c'est-à-dire l'intolérance, ne reviennent plus jamais. Je voudrais que le cri "Viva la Muerte!" ne se prononce plus jamais dans le monde. (1)

This was clearly not the intention in 1959 of the author of Baal Babylone. One is thus left in no possible doubt where the artist's present commitment lies, and it becomes clear what transformations in his intentions have come about since 1959. Without abandoning the "monde des impulsions qui est la base de mon oeuvre", Arrabal again demonstrates that he can transcend the strictly personal, using it as the substance of a universal theme.

What does this development promise for the future? At this point in time Arrabal is forty one years old. He is a prolific artist, with some thirty or more published plays behind him,

(1) Cinema Publics Saint Germain, 11 5 71.

and a not inconsiderable body of prose writings, poetry and paintings. One possible future direction which Arrabal now appears to be pursuing is that of greater involvement in the practical aspects of his creativity. The writer who was formerly content to relinquish his scripts to directors, urging them to do with them as they would, now seems fascinated by the collective work that transforms a text into a theatrical event. At the present time he is preparing his own production of L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie. A second film has been made, loosely based on this play, entitled J'irai comme un Cheval fou, and the scenario for a third is in preparation. Arrabal assumes complete responsibility for every stage in the process of making his films: script, directing and studio editing, and the present evidence suggests that the cinema is currently his preferred medium. But in many respects Arrabal is an unpredictable person, and it has been seen that of all his work one of the most salient features has been its diversity. Enchanted by novelty, shunning atrophy, Arrabal could just as well produce a new opera as a panique happening in the solemn temple of the Académie Française. With this in mind, it would clearly be impertinent to offer any predictions concerning Arrabal's future artistic development; to Arrabal, nothing seems impossible, for as he said: "Chaque fois que j'écris une pièce, j'imagine que tout peut être remis en cause le lendemain. Aujourd'hui, par exemple, je parle beaucoup de cérémonie, de rituel, de théâtre de la tempête. Mais pourquoi demain ne pas fabriquer un soleil?" (1)

(1) Entretiens, p.154.

APPENDIX

NOTES ON THE CHRONOLOGY OF CERTAIN PLAYS

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NOTES ON THE CHRONOLOGY OF CERTAIN PLAYS.

These notes are not intended to give a comprehensive picture of the manuscripts in Arrabal's possession. They present only such information, culled from an examination of the manuscripts, as is useful in helping to determine the exact dates of composition of certain of Arrabal's works.

It should be noted that: (i) Most or all of the manuscripts and typescripts are still in their author's possession, but it has not been possible to consult all of them; (ii) Except in rare cases the manuscripts bear no date, and except in certain special circumstances Arrabal's recollection of the date of composition of his plays is to be considered suspect. Hence in some cases it is at present impossible to ascertain the exact date of composition; (iii) Where no title is mentioned, it means there is no further evidence available either to confirm or to contradict the date given in the published editions.

Fando et Lis

There are several scripts in Spanish and French:

- (A) Untitled MS. filed under "primeros manuscritos", with two unpublished plays dating from 1953. A primitive version.
- (B) MS. entitled Ha muerto la mujer del carrito, filed under "manuscritos sanatorio" with other MSS. from Bouffémont. This is the complete first version, as in (C).

- (G) Typescript entitled Ha Muerto la Mujer del carrito. Signed: "A. Teran, Bouffémont, primavera 1956". Text as in (B) and as published in Teatro, Taurus, Madrid, 1965.
- (D) Typescript in French entitled Fando et Lis. Not dated. This is the definitive version as published in Théâtre I.

The script (C) also bears these words:

Con Ha Muerto la Mujer del carrito termino una trilogia de teatro experimental. Las otras dos obras son Cementerio de autobuses y Los Hombres del triciclo - finalista en el ultimo Premio Ciudad de Barcelona.

which helps to explain the existence of the revised version (D) :

(B) and (C) contain references (in scene 5) to an unpublished play which were subsequently replaced by references to Le Cimetière des voitures, after the composition of the latter. (In fact some specific references to the unpublished play do subsist in the French version. For example: "... les deux hommes dont l'un jouait de l'harmonium et l'autre de la machine à écrire", p.119).

From this we can deduce three stages in the composition of

Fando et Lis:

- (i) The primitive version written in Madrid before 1955.
- (ii) The intergal version written in the first few months of 1956 at Bouffémont.
- (iii) The definitive version, established some time between autumn 1957 (date of composition of Le Cimetière des voitures) and 1959 (date of publication).

Les Deux Bourreaux

Arrabal confirms that this play was written at the Hôpital Foch where he was undergoing a serious operation. Because of the intense suffering experienced here, it was a period of which he retains an unusually vivid memory. He told me: "C'est le moment

de ma vie où j'ai souffert le plus, et c'est là que j'ai écrit Les Deux Bourreaux." This was November 1956.

La Bicyclette du condamné

The published play is dated 1959.

Only three scripts have been seen, though it is clear that others exist.

(A) Part-typescript, part-MS. No title, no date. It is a complete play in itself, but not the integral, of which it represents some 40%.

(A') A variant typescript of (A)

(B) A typescript in French, entitled La Bicyclette des condamnés (sic.), subtitled comédie musicale. Not dated but signed as follows: "Fernando Arrabal, Pavillon du Monaco, Cité Universitaire de Paris". This signature must date from either spring 1957 or September 1957 - January 1958. This is the integral published version, but it is highly questionable whether the whole of this script dates from the period indicated by the signature. (cf. supra p.105).

The margins and reverse sides of certain pages of (A) are marked with abstract sketches and a series of tentative titles. (Teatro total; Teatro de harmonie (sic) ; Teatro sin palabras; Teatro sin diálogos). These are written in pencil, as are some parts of the play script, and are presumed to be contemporaneous.

Teatro sin diálogos is the title in Spanish of Orchestration théâtrale, which was written December 1956 - September 1957.

At first, this seemed to imply either of two solutions:

- (i) That (A) pre-dates Orchestration théâtrale.
- (ii) That (A) dates from 1959, as the date given by Arrabal would suggest, and the sketches etc. would bear witness to the fact that in 1959 Arrabal was working on the first production of Orchestration théâtrale.

But the discovery of the integral French version in (C) suggests that the first hypothesis was correct. The dating of (C) to 1957 means that we can bring the date of (A) forward to at least 1957 (since (A) must pre-date (C)). In fact, (A) probably dates from November or December 1956.

There is no firm evidence to show when the definitive version was established, but it now seems certain that the play was largely written in 1956.

Orchestration théâtrale

The first traces are found on the first MS. of the last play.

The integral text is found in a MS. entitled Teatro sin diálogos, sub-titled Orquestracion teatral (sic) , which bears the following preface:

Commencé esta obra en el diciembre de 1956 en el sanatorium universitaire de Bouffémont, Francia. La termino hoy de setiembre de 1957 en un pueblo de la sierra de Grados - España - Lanzahita.

Orchestration théâtrale can thus be dated with certainty to the period December 1956 - September 1957, the major part having been written at Lanzahita in the summer of 1957.

Les Amours impossibles

This is generally understood to have been written in 1962, but available evidence belies this date.

Mme. Arrabal, whose memory is more exact than her husband's, claimed with certainty that the play pre-dates their marriage,

in February 1958. In addition, it is known that at some time in the 1950's, Arrabal was collaborating with Nicholas Bataille on a proposed production of Le Tricycle at the Théâtre Huchette. It was during this period that Arrabal must have written Les Amours impossibles, since he offered it to Bataille in the hope of having it staged along with Le Tricycle. It was Bataille's reprise of La Cantatrice Chauve and La Leçon that prevented the Arrabal project from materialising. This reprise was in 1957, since when they have been playing without interruption.

There is thus some interesting circumstantial evidence to suggest that Les Amours impossibles was written as early as 1957.

Le Cimetière des voitures

None of the scripts is dated.

Arrabal was sure that he wrote this play whilst living at the Pavillon du Monaco in the Cité Universitaire, (ie. in 1957).

But two facts seem to cast doubt on this:

(i) He alludes to Le Cimetière des voitures in Fando et Lis, a play dating from 1955-6.

(ii) Script (C) of Ha Muerto la Mujer del carrito has this preface:

Con Ha Muerto la Mujer del carrito termino una trilogia de teatro experimental. Las otras dos obras son Cementerio de autobuses y Los Hombres del triciclo.

Taking Cementerio de autobuses to be Le Cimetière des voitures, this seemed again to indicate that the latter pre-dated Fando et Lis.

Arrabal finally provided the solution by remembering that there were in fact two distinct plays:

- Cementerio de automoviles (= Le Cimetière des voitures), written in 1957.
- Cementerio de autobuses (unpublished). The MS. was written at Bouffemont and necessarily pre-dates Fando et Lis. The play involves two musicians living in a scrap-yard for old buses, who suffer through not being allowed to play their instruments, (the harmonium and the typewriter). "Un hombre inteligente" came and joined them, but was unable to redeem them. This is the play from which both La Bicyclette du condamné and Le Cimetiere des voitures evolved.

Guernica

The date usually given for this play is 1959, but it is clear that it was at least started the previous year.

Arrabal says it was Jean-Marie Serreau who gave him the idea of trying his hand at a "political" play, while they were working together on the first production of Pique-nique en campagne - summer 1958. And in his interview with Geneviève Serreau in the autumn of 1958 he said: "En ce moment je travaille à une pièce qui s'appellera Guernica...". (1)

(1) Serreau, "Arrabal, ou Quand le Jeu devient sérieux", France-Observateur, 20.11.58.

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