

An Artaudian Study of Jean Genet's *The Balcony*

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Abstract:

Antonin Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty' is an anti-establishment theatre of the mid twentieth century. It is the result of Artaud's mistrust in western theatre to function as real theatre and show the origin of human being, and his present status quo. Artaud built this new type of theatre to demonstrate images on the stage that are cruel to the norms of civilization and the established order.

The present study examines a play by the French playwright, Jean Genet; *The Balcony*, according to Antonin Artaud's theory of the 'Theatre of Cruelty'. In this paper, different methods and notions are used to apply Artaud's theory on the play. Firstly, an introduction to Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty' is provided. Then, desire for power in Genet's play is analyzed as a method in which Artaud's theory is reflected. After that, collapse of hope, as resemblance of Artaud's hopelessness is studied. Eventually, the notion of 'house of illusions', which is the name of the Grand Balcony in the play, is examined as a way through which Artaud's suggestion of illusion and dreams in his theatre is demonstrated.

Finally, the study ends up with the conclusion, which goes over the main points of the main important findings of the study, and followed by the list of the works cited in the paper.

Keywords: cruelty, anarchy, desire for power, hopelessness, illusion, reality.

المستخلص:

"مسرح القسوة" لأنتونين أرتود هو مسرحًا لمكافحة المؤسسة في منتصف القرن العشرين. إنها نتيجة عدم ثقة لآرتود في المسرح الغربي للعمل كمسرح الحقيقي وإظهار طبيعة البشر، والوضع الراهن و الحالي. بنى أرتود هذا النوع الجديد من المسرح لإظهار الصور على المسرح التي هي قاسية لمعايير الحضارة والنظام المؤسسة. تتناول الدراسة الحالية مسرحية للكاتب المسرحي الفرنسي جان جينيت "البلكون"، وفقًا لنظرية أنتونين أرتود عن "مسرح القسوة". في هذه البحث، يتم استخدام أساليب ومفاهيم مختلفة لتطبيق نظرية أرتود على المسرحية. أولاً، يتم تقديم "مسرح القسوة" لآرتود. ثم، يتم تحليل "رغبة السلطة" في مسرحية لجينيت كوسيلة تنعكس فيها نظرية أرتود. بعد ذلك، البحث يدرس "انهيار الأمل"، مثل تشابه يأس أرتود. في النهاية، يتم فحص مفهوم "دار الأوهام"، وهو اسم "الشرفة الكبرى" في المسرحية، كوسيلة يتم من خلالها عرض فكرة أرتود عن الوهم والأحلام في مسرحه. أخيرًا، تنتهي الدراسة بالنتيجة التي تتطرق إلى النقاط الرئيسية للنتائج المهمة الرئيسية للدراسة، وتليها قائمة الأعمال المذكورة في الورقة.

پوخته:

شانۆی توندوتیژی، ی نانتونین ئارتود یهکیکه له شانۆ دژه رموتهکانی ناوهر استی سهدهی بیستم. ئەم جۆره شانۆیه دهر نهجامی بئ متمانی ئارتوده به شانۆی رۆژ ناوا که بتوانیت رۆلی راستهقینهی شانۆ بگيریت له پيشاندانی راستی و رهسەنی مروف و نهو بارودوخه که تيايدا دهژی. ئارتود ئەم جۆره نوێیهی شانۆی دامهزراند به مهیستی پيشاندانی ئەو وینانهی که دهینه هوی توندوتیژی بهرانبهر وینه باومهکانی کۆمهلگا و شارستانییهت. ئەم توێژینهوهیهی بهر دهست خویندنهوهیهکه بۆ شانۆیهکی شانۆ نووسی فهرهسی ژان ژینیت، *بآلهکونهکه*، له روانگهی تیوری 'شانۆی توندوتیژی' ی نانتونین ئارتود. لهم توێژینهوهدا بیرۆکه و شیوازی جیا جیا بهکار هینراون بۆ پهیره کردنی تیورییهکی ئارتود لهسه دهقه شانۆیهکه. له سههتادا، ناساندنیککی 'شانۆی توندوتیژی' ی نانتونین ئارتود خراومه بهر دهست. پاشان، بیرۆکهی دهسهلاتخوازی له شانۆکهدا، وەک چهممیک که تیورییهکی ئارتود تيايدا رهنگی داومهوه، ئاماژهی پیکراوه. دواتریش، ههر سههینانی هیواکان له شانۆکهدا، وەک رهنگدهر مهیهکی بئ هیوایهکی ئارتود خویندراومهوه. له پاشان، چهممی 'مالی خهپالهکان'، که ناویکی بآلهکونهی گهره ناو شانۆکهیه، وەک ریگایهک خویندراومهوه که له رینهوه پيشنار مهکانی ئارتود له بارهی خهون و خهپالهوه پيشاندادهت. له کوتايدا، توێژینهوهکه به نهجام کوتایی دیت که بهسهر دهر نهجامه گرنهگ و سهرمکییهکانی توێژینهوهکهدا دمچیتهوه و لیستی سهه چاوه بهکار هینراومهکانی به دوا دا دیت.

Antonin Artaud and the Theatre of Cruelty

'Theatre of Cruelty' is a kind of theatre that was invented in the 1930s by the French theorist, poet, novelist and playwright, Antonin Artaud. He wrote a collection of many essays about his preferred theatre, published in a book under the title of *The Theatre and its Double* (1958). Artaud, through this kind of theatre, wants to show the reality and original nature of man, and the status of human beings in this world. He suggests this kind of theatre as he thinks that it is cruel to civilization and society. He believes that true theatre should be born out of anarchy and danger. Thus, it should reflect this anarchy in itself and demonstrate it to the audience.

Artaud thought that human nature has been restrained from its pure form, and been created again based on some social and religious principles. This is a long continuous process applied throughout history. According to Artaud, the original nature of man is different from the one that is prevailing presently. This nature contains some wild impulses, instincts and desires of man that have been suppressed from revealing. Therefore, the 'Theatre of Cruelty', the type of theatre that Artaud suggests, attempts to reveal these characteristics of humans that have roots in the mind of human being. Artaud states that essential theatre evokes the lost world of anarchy, chaos, danger and cruelty, without which neither poetry nor humor can have a function in society, and freedom is meaningless chimera and delusion (Brustein, 1964, pp.368-369).

Desire for power is a natural instinct of man, which is repressed due to the rules and principles of civilization and religion. Hence, Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty' has a function of revealing the natural characteristics of man that have been repressed, and which might be considered cruel in the civilized society. Therefore, this could be presented to the audience as one of their original tendencies. Besides, cruelty and taste of crime are what Artaud believes to belong to the nature of man. Thus, when power is obtained, characters, in this type of theatre, commit numerous cruelties towards others who are their minor people (Brustein, 1964, pp.367-368; Artaud, 1958, p.85).

Besides, Antonin Artaud, due to his hopelessness in the western tradition and the world, did not believe in any reformation. Thus, because of his disappointment in the world and its establishment, he proposed 'Theatre of Cruelty'. Therefore, this type of theatre should depict the miseries and provide reasons for human despair. According to Jannarone, Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty has a strong

relationship to the pessimistic, dark, totalizing and conflictive worldview. Artaud believed that his 'Theatre of Cruelty' pierces into the heart of the day's anxieties (Jannarone, 2012, pp.44-45).

In addition, Artaud believed that the rubbles of two-thousand-year history of Christianity and social principles have covered the nature and natural tendencies of man. Besides, he thought that Christian ideals have drained man's psychic energy. Therefore, for the purpose of the restoration of the kind of life, he claims to belong to human nature, Artaud believes in creating a different kind of reality in theatre which could represent the reality which has been lost for a long time. Based on Artaud's thoughts of 'The Theatre of Cruelty', theatre should provide the spectator with dreams and illusions, so that through this illusion a kind of lost reality is relived. He argues that through illusion the true nature of humans will be exposed. Human's taste for crime, savagery, sexual intercourses, and cannibalism, which are inhibited due to civilizations, social and religious rules, could be revealed through illusion (Artaud, 1958, p.90).

According to Poppy Bullard, Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty' is not dedicated to public sadism or masochism. Instead, it concentrates on breaking the sameness and relationship between theatre and fiction through its cruel aspects. Besides, Artaud attempts to break down the illusory and false existence of theatricality, and emphasizes on a kind of reality, through illusion, within theatre. The reality that Artaud seeks to create is different from the common and usual reality. Artaud's reality comes from within the human mind and heart; the unavoidable reality that is hidden inside humans and suppressed by outer appearance. The confrontational style of this type of theatre aims to shock, unsettle, and disturb the audience mind by juxtaposing images of fiction and reality (Bullard, 2013, p.1).

Based on Brustein's words, Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty' is a double of reality. In other terms, it duplicates the reality, not everyday reality, but another typical and dangerous reality. Brustein states that it is a kind of mirror that is positioned to reflect the unconscious. Furthermore, this type of theatre is considered to be an externally illusory world evoking or demonstrating the inner world or reality of human mind; the kind of reality that is usually revealed or uncovered in dreams. In addition, Artaud's theatre finds its true materials and resources in the cruel and unkind content of dreams (Brustein, 1964, pp.370-371).

I. Desire for power:

According to Savona, one of the structures that Genet's *The Balcony* is based on is power struggle and the structure of the fascist state (Savona, 1983, p.95). In Genet's *The Balcony*, each character attends the brothel for satisfying his/her sexual desire, and his/her fantasies of social and political powers. They are all fascinated to see the image of themselves in the costumes of different social and political leaders, reflected in the mirror-gilded room of the brothel, as it provides them the satisfactory feeling as if they were in the real world and they have these social and political powers, reputations and positions in reality. They want to see themselves powerful and authoritative, and they try to retain other powerless characters under their command. Thus, they order, command and direct other unauthoritative characters forcefully as if they, themselves, were people of power and command and others are lower people who must obey their orders. Therefore, besides showing their natural features as power ambitious characters, they commit cruel and unkind acts and utter forceful and disgusting

speeches, which can apply, and contribute to Artaud's ideas of 'Theatre of Cruelty' (Savona, 1983, p.74).

In the play, on a level, the representation of desire for power is explicit through characters' long for costumes and uniforms of people belonging to different social and political ranks. According to Niladri Mahapatra, the costumes and clothes are consumed to realize the roles of the characters as figures of authority when they appear in them. Therefore, it reflects their desire for power as they willingly wear clothes belonging to different people distinct from themselves as it provides them the feeling of having these roles in the real world (Mahapatra, 2016, p.244).

Similarly, Savona claims that wearing these costumes of people belonging to high social and political status by the characters provides the evidence for existence of Artaud's theory of 'Theatre of Cruelty'. It might satisfy the characters' desires for the ranks and positions to which the costumes belong (Savona, 1983, p.86).

In the play, Jean Genet himself illustrates this desire on the language of characters and emphasizes on the use of their clothes in signifying their roles. Furthermore, characters declares that these clothes give them power and dignity. Therefore, they wear these clothes to have a rank with dignity and influence. Consequently, it can satisfy the desire that they have for the status and reputation, which they lack in real world. Their desire is not for the sake of the indicated functions, or for being dutiful, or performing what the runner of the position is expected to do. It is for the influence and power that people of these status and roles have in reality. For instance, the Bishop, after wearing his costume, through talking to his clothes, explains that he does not care about the Bishop's function and being dutiful and loyal in the position, as he says "To hell with the function". He cares more about this rank due to its influence and power, socially and politically, upon people in the real world (Genet, 1966, pp.12-13).

Furthermore, through the Bishop talking to his clothes on the floor, one can understand that it is the desire for the position that makes him wear these costumes willingly:

THE BISHOP (looking at his clothes, which are heaped on the floor): Ornaments, laces, through you I re-enter myself. I reconquer a domain. I beleaguer a very ancient place from which I was driven. I install myself in a clearing where suicide at last becomes possible. The judgment depends on me, and here I stand, face to face with my death" (Ibid, p.13).

This example demonstrates that the Bishop has a very keen desire for the position of a bishop. His desire for this status is to an extent that he believes that without a bishop's costume he has no existence, as he cannot "conquer a domain". He proclaims that through that status he can judge about very intense matters such as suicide, and the decision whether it is possible or not relies on him. This speech reveals a very strong desire and longing for having the power of a bishop for judging about different issues and imposing his opinions. Hence, this image contributes to Antonin Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty', as, according to Artaud, it shows a repressed natural desire of human being.

Moreover, the author has chosen a hall full of mirrors for the performance of his characters. It might be considered as a tool for pleasing the characters' wishes through which they can see themselves in

the clothes. Therefore, it puts more emphasis on their desire for power as they feel pleased when they see themselves in the mirrors on the wall while wearing the fictitious figures' costumes and uniforms. For instance, the General feels very happy and proud when he watches his reflection in the mirror wearing his general clothes (Dobrez, 2013, pp.236-237; Norrish, 1988, p.116).

Furthermore, when the Bishop talks to his clothes, he watches his reflection in the mirror and feels more confident in them (Genet, 1966, pp.11-13). As Savona states, when the Bishop participates in his ritual act of forgiving the sins of a female repentant, he becomes hypnotized by seeing the reflection of his own gestures and costume in a mirror (1983, p.74). Thus, one can say that a purpose of the mirrors might be for providing a satisfactory feeling to the characters in the clothes performing their fake roles. Hence, Artaud's theory can be applied on this evident image of power ambition.

On another level, the presence of the desire for power can be noticed very obviously through characters' determinations to direct, order, and, persecute other characters to show their power and authority over other characters through make-believe performances. This belongs to Artaud's notion of the 'Theatre of Cruelty', in which man's instincts are revealed, and as a result, they commit cruel acts, which belong to their taste of crime, savagery and cannibalism. In this process, their acts and speeches demonstrate their very intense desire for power and authority. Genet proves that on the language of Irma: "They all want everything to be as true as possible" (Genet, 1966, p.36).

Hence, the characters seek for the authenticity of their roles, due to which, for them, it is crucial that all the actors play their roles in a good manner. In addition, because of his power and status-ambitious personality, the Judge makes sure that the role-playing goes well without any problem or interruption, so that his role as a powerful character is not spoiled, and its authenticity is preserved. He addresses the prostitute playing the role of the thief: "Look here: you've got to be a model thief if I'm to be a model judge. If you're a fake thief, I become a fake judge. Is that clear?" (Dobrez, 2013, p.208; Genet, 1966, p.15).

Moreover, sometimes, the strength of the characters' desire for power is to an extent that, when they wear their playacting costume, they do not want to go back to their real life, even though their role-playing is not their reality. For example, the Bishop determines to stay on stage, even when his costume was taken off from him. In addition, the General could be mentioned as another power-ambitious character who does not want to enter his reality again. When he enters the brothel and wears his general costume, he asks the women to remove his clothes from sight, and even to burn them so that he will never see them again, and he forgets his reality and lives his role-playing forever. When he sees his reflection in the mirror, he bows to it and feels very thrilled by his image as a general. This demonstrates his strong desire for the power of a general, which makes him determinant of asking for burning his real life clothes, so that, he could remain in his power position forever, or to forget the life that he has in his reality and continue living his fake role as a powerful person (Genet, 1966, pp.21-24).

Furthermore, he is a so power and status-loving character that asks for someone to escort him like real generals. He wants to appear powerful and authoritative and orders the prostitute to bow for him and bend on her knees. Besides, he animalizes the girl and turns her into his own horse, as he wants to be a general who participates in battles and commands other people. Furthermore, he wants to

magnify his role by mentioning that he participates in a battle and leads a group of soldiers who live under his mercy and kindness. Besides, he wants to be memorable even after his death, and people would respect his name and image, as he imagines of an honorable death in a battlefield, martyred in heroic action (Liu and Wang, 2018, p.7; Genet, 1966, pp.21-24).

In addition, the character playing the Chief of Police wants to show himself as a powerful person through ordering and directing others below himself. He speaks to the other characters authoritatively and with power. He calls himself “the strong-man of this country”. Besides, when the characters realize that the real queen of the country is killed, the Envoy tries to convince Irma to appear as the queen so that they refute the death of the queen, and the monarchy and the system of authority continues on its role and maintains its power. In this circumstance, the Chief of Police becomes reluctant and says that Irma’s position surpasses his and thus Irma becomes above him: “THE CHIEF OF POLICE (furiously): Above me! So Irma would be above me! All the trouble I’ve gone to in order to be master would be wasted effort” (Genet, 1966, p.66). Thus, he is so power-ambitious that he wants no one else to have a more powerful position than himself. Therefore, he might want to become the king of the country and rule the people, including Irma, who is proposed to act as the queen.

Through the presented images of desire for power, Genet contributes to Artaud’s theory of ‘Theatre of Cruelty’. The power ambitious characters show that humans have a natural tendency and desire for power, which they repress either for religious purposes, or due to social and political principles. In Genet’s play, characters find pleasure in playing the role of powerful people, as in Artaud’s theory, there should be images in which humans find pleasure in discovering themselves. In addition, when the characters achieve a state of power, they show another side of their nature, in which they become cruel to the ones that are minor and powerless. Again, this also contributes to Artaud’s notion of man’s taste of crime, savagery, and cannibalism.

II. Collapse of Hope

According to Robert Brustein, Jean Genet embodies real successor of Artaud in his hopelessness. He states that Genet, like Artaud, stands against all the political and social norms. He tries to destroy everything like Artaud. Brustein argues that Genet wants to change everything, which is why every word he writes is a clear criticism of the established order and institutions. Besides, he is aware of that the destiny of his longing for total change is conditioned by the established order. Therefore, for Genet, to rebel, the power of the church, the army, and the magistracy must remain inviolate. Brustein proclaims that Genet plays a game in which, he knows well, he loses. Genet knows that the established order is ineradicable, and absolute rebellion is impossible. Thus, his hopelessness for revolution is reflected in *The Balcony*. He claims that rebellions are destined to take on the features of the old established order. Due to that, in the play the established regime takes credit for the revolution. Thus, the revolution results in a desperate termination (Brustein, 1964, p. 385; 387; 393).

Furthermore, Martin Esslin considers Genet’s play as a world of illusion, in which people are tragically hopeless and desperate. Esslin asserts that Genet’s characters have only a false image of themselves, and they try to alleviate the pain of their loneliness and difficulty with this false image or impression. He says that Genet’s play is more concerned with expressing the author’s own feelings of hopelessness and loneliness. The author feels more desperate and hopeless when confronted with

the despair and loneliness of man in a room full of mirrors reflecting the human circumstances. Besides, inevitably, man is trapped by limitless progression and development of images that only demonstrate his own distorted reflections; lies covering lies, and fantasies batten upon fantasies (Esslin, 2001, pp.200-201).

According to Lucien Goldmann, Genet's *The Balcony* concerns about great political and social upheavals of the twentieth century. Besides, a collapse of tremendous hopes for revolution is presented in the play (Goldmann, 1960, p.128). Besides, Clare Finburgh emphasizes on that idea and proclaims that Genet's *The Balcony* excludes hopes in revolutions, as the ending of the play demonstrates the fall of the revolution in favor of the brothel characters (Finburgh, 2004, p.120).

One may say that Genet criticizes the world of his day due to his hopelessness in the circumstances surrounding him. Finburgh argues that *The Balcony* stimulates and presents the historical loss of the democratic revolutions of the twentieth century, and the victory of dictators and totalitarian governments, either the fascism of Franco or Stalin, or the liberal capitalism of today. Therefore, it evokes a kind of disappointment of people in revolutions as their endings have brought worse situations upon them, such as that of *The Balcony*. For more clarifications, in the play, the members of the whorehouse become their real political leaders and authoritative people, and Irma, the whorehouse owner becomes their new queen, despite their incompetence and lack of honesty and accountability (Finburgh, 2004, p.120).

Furthermore, Savona states that Genet's *The Balcony* is a desperate political document. His statement is due to the reality of the play that none of the characters, who gain power later in the play, have any positive qualifications and capability to stimulate the audience, or the reader's emotional or intellectual approval. Thus, this creates the impression in the audience that the possibility of future political changes is not available in the course of the play (Savona, 1983, pp.82-83).

In the play, failure of revolution even disappoints its leader, Roger, to an extent that he wants to impersonate his oppressor, Police Chief, and participate in the house of illusions, as his reality made him hopeless, like the other desperate impersonators. However, the Chief of Police defeats the revolution, which Roger leads (Brustein, 1964, p.401). According to Ben-Cnaan, Roger has hoped for obtaining the position of the chief of police after the success of the revolution. Different from his expectations, when the revolution fails, due to his hopelessness for the revolution and obtaining the status of police chief, he attends the brothel to participate in a scenario where he takes the role of police chief. Then, when he realizes that police chief has been his oppressor as he has put down the revolution, he castrates himself in front of the audience. Ben-Cnaan claims that his self-castration symbolizes the collapse of hope and annulment of the revolution at this precise moment (Ben-Cnaan, 2008, p.118).

Based on Ben-Cnaan's words, Genet wrote *The Balcony* about a particular historical situation, which is the Spanish Civil War and its consequences. He proclaims that Genet himself admitted that the addition of Roger's self-castration was equivalent to the Republican concession of defeat. Further, *The Balcony* cannot be detached from the social reality in which it was written. Indeed, the content of the play and its structure of theatre within theatre presents a complex political message. In the play, the obscurity of interconnection between performance and real life reorganizes the staged incidents,

and they become significantly more authoritative methods where messages of political and social circumstances could be conveyed. In addition, this type of artificiality aims straightly for the attitudes of the audience and their captivation of the circumstances. Therefore, Ben-Cnaan claims that Genet's personal anarchism, his reference to the political situations and the play's unrealistic artificiality is a kind of resentment and anger toward the essential unreality of ideologies and politics, or other dangerous aspects of the theatricality and unreality of everyday life. Thus, the play's theatre within theatre structure is a representation of pessimism in a particular type of social reality (Ben-Cnaan, 2008, pp.119-120). Hence, one can connect it to Artaud's organized anarchy, representing hopelessness in revolution and pessimism in the social reality.

Lucien Goldmann asserts that the main powerful people in the play are Irma, representing enterprise technocracy and economic power, and the Chief of Police, representing State technocracy and political power. Thus, the play, despite its very different themes, reflects the contemporary social reality in a didactic way. Goldmann believes that Genet's *The Balcony* represents a kind of literary demonstration of the European, especially the French, radical Left between 1917 and 1923, which had designed its outlook and attitude as a critical but frustrated consciousness. It was oriented toward the idea of overcoming capitalism by revolution and protests. As Goldmann states, it was a fantasy resulting in frustration and exhaustion by the fascination of the ruled or oppressed with their rulers or oppressors (Goldmann, 1979, pp.33, 35, 39-40).

Therefore, this contemporary European Left can be mentioned as another aspect of the play as the changed nature of experience is reflected under the capitalism system where the loss of reconciliation of relationships, by the group consciousness, between society and its cultural products is represented. Thus, the pessimistic view of Genet about the role of revolution against capitalism is demonstrated through the success of capitalism and the loss of the revolution against the system (Ben-Cnaan, 2008, p.120).

According to Ben-Cnaan, one of the elements of pessimism in Genet's play is betrayal of characters within the play. Genet sometimes demonstrates betrayal reactions to oppression, or revenge of the excluded and downtrodden on their society. This reaction could be compared to the revolt of people on their political and power system. Thus, betrayal, like the revolution, results from hopeless minds about their power system and society (Benn-Cnann, 2008, p.122).

Therefore, one might be able to say that this type of reaction resembles Artaud's hopelessness, as he was deeply desperate and depressed about the established order, and the religious, social and political powers. Artaud, due to his desperation and hopelessness, did not believe in any kind of reformation in society under the present social and political powers. Accordingly, he wished to destroy everything in society and burn everything down so, as he considered that, from the ashes, a pure form of society would be reestablished. In addition, he was hopeless about his strategies of purifying the world, that is why, he proposed a Theatre of Cruelty so that the nature of his society would be depicted, and the hopelessness of people would be demonstrated, as he thought that theatre is the double of life (Jannarone, 2012, pp.44-45; Schumacher, 1990, p.110).

Therefore, one can say that, like Artaud's vision, the revolutionaries in Genet's play stand against a system in which they are hopeless and frustrated. They try to destroy the system and society in which

they live, and create a new one for themselves. However, the revolution ends in a hopeless situation in which some masochistic and exploiter characters achieve power and create a worse system or political power for them.

According to Martin Esslin, human's struggle for achieving power over oneself and others result from the individual's feeling of hopelessness and helplessness (Esslin, 2001, p.156). Thus, one can say that the desire and struggle for power by the characters in Genet's *The Balcony* results from their hopelessness and helplessness in a world in which they are greatly ineffective. Besides, McLafferty explains that the feeling of hopelessness is evident in the character of Genet's *The Balcony*. Their hopelessness and helplessness can be observed through their effort to alleviate the psychic pain of their impotence and ineffectiveness. In the play, this is demonstrated as clearly when the men come to the brothel, perform their desires for authority, and rank over women. They exchange money for a time of illusion, to perform a role of domination, and to forget their weaknesses and ineffectiveness in their real life and society. They do not just wish to have power over women, but they demand to be looked at as real powerful people. They try to imitate the role of those who have control or great influences in social and political matters. The roles that the first three characters of the play try to imitate are the role of the General, the Bishop, and the Judge. They wear special costumes for the roles they play so as to create a make-believe situation to feel that they influence masses of people. However, they are originally some hopeless people attending the brothel, and being directed by a woman, Irma, who is the owner of the whorehouse (McLafferty, 2009, p.32).

Furthermore, Norrish states that characters in Genet's *The Balcony* try to magnify themselves and heighten their images, so that they can ease their pain of powerlessness. Their impersonation of powerful people derives from their hopelessness to achieve such kind of power and prestige. Therefore, they create illusions for themselves, through which they can perform their dreams (Norrish, 1988, p.115).

In addition, after the failure of the revolution, Roger, the revolutionary leader, becomes hopeless like the first three male characters of the play who attend the brothel to impersonate the roles, which they dream about. Then, like them, Roger's hopelessness leads him to attend the brothel as well, so that he can impersonate the person or the role which he wishes for, which is the role of The Police Chief (Savona, 1983, p.82).

III. House of Illusion

According to the tenets of the theory of 'Theatre of Cruelty', firstly, (through illusion and dreams in the play,) the application of Artaud's ideas on Genet's *The Balcony* is possible. It is worth mentioning that Genet names the brothel as the 'House of Illusions'. One might be able to state that the author wants to make a remark for the world of the play, as it is based on illusion and dreams. Furthermore, Christopher Innes states that, although Genet's play appears to tackle contemporary political and social issues, such as class hatred and exploitation, revolution and repression, racial conflicts, and third world liberation, through different statements and events, indeed, for Genet, social realities are illusory. Besides, the necessity of the humans for illusion is so strong that they do not see any possibility of establishing the social order on reality. Thus, they live in a reality, which works,

and is run, through participations of illusions and dreams, as the reality is not bearable for humans, and it does not belong to their originality (Innes, 1981, p.144).

Through illusions, the author, demonstrates the emptiness and absurd of the social roles and makes fun of the religious and political principles and tries to refute them. This can be related to Artaud's hatred toward the usual nature and status quo of the world in which the humans live; the world of social, political and religious beliefs and principles. Besides, it can be noticed that, when the characters play the roles as illusory roles, they feel very free and satisfied. On the contrary, when, after the fall of the pillars of the monarchy, they are forced to play as real men of power in their roles, they do not feel as free and satisfied as before (Mc.Mahon, 1961, p.35).

As Thody states, Genet believes that human nature is so in need of illusion and dreams that no social order can be established on reality. Madam Irma is afraid of that the revolution wins and they will bring the world of her 'House of Illusion' to an end. Therefore, the author, due to the importance of illusion in his play, stands against the revolution and the world of reality for the success of illusion and dreams of characters. Besides, Lionel Abel believes that the main point of Genet in the play is that the destruction of illusion and dreams is the destruction of life. In other words, he means that through these illusions in the play, the reality of life is exposed. For Genet, the revels have not ended, as those who play illusions succeed in the play, and the action will continue. The more or less humble characters will again attend to play illusory roles and participate in the organized scenarios by costuming themselves to be again extravagant in sex. Illusion and reality cannot be separated, they will continue interchangeably, and be the same to the other, or the other to the same; they reflect each other (Thody, 1968, p.179; Abel, 1963, p.82).

In addition, Genet believes that men can act politically only if they are led by illusions. That is why, the Chief of Police is less interested in power than his image and prestige symbolized by a place in the Nomenclature; the world of the powerful figures of the brothel. Thus, one might be able to state that Genet's ideas reflect that of Artaud as both of them try to refute the reality of the social and established orders to belong to the nature and reality of humans. They both stand against the established order; Artaud through his ideas and theories, and Genet through his organization and the sequence of events in *The Balcony*. In addition, one can mention that the characters attend the brothel, 'House of Illusions', to escape from the reality and the established order of the world they live in. The brothel provides them with their fantasies and dreams so that they are relieved from their feelings of alienations and absurdity, or hopelessness. Thus, they prefer the illusion of their original nature to the reality of the established order and their present real world. However, the illusory reality they create for themselves in the play is not real, and the world outside the brothel is the real one (Ali, 2011, p.898; Thody, 1968, pp.184-185).

Furthermore, in each of the scenarios, the powerless and the broken male attendants of the brothel who act the illusory roles for satisfying their own desires, glorify themselves either through the costume and mirrors of the hall by praising themselves as powerful men, or through subjugating the women for their own ambition. However, they have less control over the circumstances they go through than the female characters, who are able to either make the men satisfied about themselves, or undermine their world of illusions and let them down. For example, the girl in the first scene who plays the role of the prostitute complies with the demands of the Bishop. In his explanation to Madame

Irma afterwards, the Bishop states that they did not have to confuse or stress themselves in their scenario, they had only six sins, which were not his favorite ones. Then, the Girl replies that whether what he means by that only six sins. She states that she had gone through difficulties finding those sins, as they were deadly ones. Thus, this Girl plays an important role for developing the illusions of the male character, for had she not arranged her role and organization of the scenario of the deadly sins, the Bishop would have suffered a serious loss in his role and illusion (Haney, 2008, p.140).

Therefore, in Genet's play, through the characters' participation in illusions, dreams and fantasies, the author might want to reveal or mention man's true being, based on Artaud's beliefs, which is repressed due to the principles of either religion or civilization.

According to Savona, there is a philosophical battle between illusion and reality in Genet's *The Balcony*. Besides, the problem of reconciling an unjust and confining world of reality with dreams and illusions, as results of freedom of imagination and desire, is raised in the play. Therefore, due to the contradictory existence of the two elements, one of them should be superior, and the other inferior. That is why, as Savona states, due to the characters' call for fantasy and dreams, *The Balcony* demonstrates the superiority of illusions over reality, and it does not convey any truth beyond a certain theatrical show of mirrors reflecting one another (Savona, pp.76, 84-85).

Furthermore, despite the superiority of illusion in the play, Christiane Vymetal Jacquemont states that illusion reaches its highest level in this play in an extent that it surpasses reality. The characters attend the brothel, not for the sake of sexual intercourses. Instead, they come to the brothel due to their attraction toward the world of illusion and dreams. That is why, Irma, the mistress of the whorehouse, calls her place a "House of Illusions". Therefore, the level or grade of reality in the play comes after that of illusion and dreams. Moreover, Madam Irma's 'House of Illusions' provides refuge for those who escape from the outside world of reality and revolution, recreating another world for them through different rituals, participation of illusions, and dreams. They create an independent world with its institutions inside the brothel through the participation of illusions and the decline of reality; as Artaud does through his theory of theatre. It offers its clients the protection from reality with its walls and illusions. Besides, The Grand Balcony is refuge not only for the clients of the brothel, but also for Irma, the mistress of the brothel (Jacquemont, 1980, pp.282-284). Carmen expresses this protection of the house for all of the characters as she says:

"Carmen: ...You're so kind, Madame-I wasn't being ironic. The thing to be said for your house is that it brings consolation. You set up and prepare their secret theatres You've got your feet on the ground" (Genet, 1966, p.35).

This perception of refuge is intensified by the existence of the revolution and chaos outside the brothel. Irma asserts that: "Between this place [the Grand Balcony] and the nursery in the country there's fire and water, rebellion and bullets" (Ibid, p.30), and she intimidates the characters by stating: "The city is full of corpses. All the roads are cut off" (Ibid, p.32), so that they prolong her world of illusion and contribute to the circumstances. Consequently, the characters stay in the brothel and the revolution approaches. Gradually, it invades the cosmos of the bordello. The two deaths that occur in the play, those of Arthur and Chantal, result from their own abandonment of the protection of the 'House of Illusions', and they cannot survive the chaos outside the brothel. Therefore, the lives of

those who escape the illusion offered in the Grand Balcony or the House of Illusion are not safe. On the contrary, those who continue in illusion and participate with their roles are safe and unharmed, like the Bishop, Judge, and the General (Jacquemont, 1980, p.284).

Besides, when the revolution destroys everything of the monarchy, those characters who prolonged the illusions of the house and continued role-playing, now they play the role of the real people of power; those who were killed and eliminated by the revolutionaries. However, they are not as pleased and satisfied with these real social and political positions as they were with the fake or illusory ones (Mc.Mahon, 1961, p.35).

Finally, at the very end of the play, illusion reaches its highest level and exceeds reality incomparably. Irma, who resumes her identity as the mistress of the 'house of illusions', dismisses the false public officials and all the spectators. She wants to close her place or studio for the night, due to that she dismisses everybody and sends them home, including the audience whom she compares with brothel patrons and the unsuccessful revolutionaries (Mc.Mahon, 1961, p.75). According to Norrish, Genet wants to make the claim that if people think that they are doing something practical in their lives, then they are unaware of the hidden falseness in their acts. In addition, Genet claims that illusion is more real than the ordinary life outside the theatre. Hence, Irma speaks directly to the audience and states: "You must now go home, where everything, 'where everything - you can be quite sure - will be even falsier than here' (Norrish, 1988, p.108).

Conclusion:

The present study of Jean Genet's *The Balcony* as a Theatre of Cruelty concludes that Genet can be considered a real inheritance of Antonin Artaud, whose notion of 'Theatre of Cruelty' can be observed in Genet's play. Firstly, the representation of Artaud's idea of the repressed instinct of man toward power and prestige can be seen through the characters' desire for power in *The Balcony*. As Artaud claims, these desires are repressed due to civilization and religion, but they remain intact in the mind of the humans, as they are original and natural. Therefore, the characters in Genet's play are very power-ambitious and prestige loving. When they are given a chance, they demonstrate their strong desire for power.

Besides, due to hopelessness in the reality of the world and the catastrophic events of the last century, Artaud was hopeless about the present status and future of human beings. Also, this hopelessness is resembled in Genet's play. In the play, hopelessness in revolution and reformation of the world is obviously presented. Additionally, characters are very hopeless in their real lives, due to their hopelessness to be powerful people, they attend the brothel and participate in different scenarios playing the fake role of powerful people.

Finally, in his play, Genet applies Artaud's theory of illusion to reveal the reality and nature of man. Artaud believes that through illusion and dreams in plays another reality should be presented on stage. It is the reality that is lost under the rubble of thousands of years of history. Therefore, in Genet's play, the characters in the play participate in different illusions, through which they show their own

reality, which Artaud mentions. Through illusory presentations, Genet contributes to Artaud's ideas and theory of 'Theatre of Cruelty'.

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