

The Revolt of Theatre in Mid 20th Century From Jean Genet with The Maid and The Balcony

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◁ 목 차 ▷

- I. Introduction
- II. Illusion: The Mirror Image of Role-Playing
 - 1. The Maid
 - 2. The Balcony
- III. Non-Existence as Luigi Priandello
- IV. Violence of the Cruelty as Antonin Artaud
- V. Conclusion

Abstract

장 주네의 혁명적 연극의 반란 연구 - 작품 하녀들과 발코니를 중심으로

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2차 세계대전에 따른 정치적, 사회적, 문화적 여파는 20세기에 파괴적, 비인간적, 야만적 경향

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으로 심각하게 퍼져갔다. 연극 또한 이러한 속성 안에서 급진적인 변화의 흐름을 반영하기 시작했다. 작가들과 예술가들의 광란의 노력들로 연극은 더 급진적이고 충격적이며 환각, 환영(illusion)을 일으킬 모순된 주제를 다룰 수 있는 새로운 형태로 발전한다. 이와 같은 연극적 움직임에서 장 주네(Jean Genet, 1910-1986)는 20세기 중반 연극적 반란(The revolt of theatre)의 작가로 부각된다. 특히 그의 연극의 반란은 가족과 사회로의 거절에서 비롯된 도덕적 결여와 반사회적 행동에서 나오는데, 그는 예술계의 무법자처럼 그의 작품 속에서 철저히 정의의 사회와 결별한다. 주네의 삶은 도덕적 삶에 정반대인 거울 이미지가 되어 의식의 변질, 반항, 환상과 바꾸어 놓을 수 있는 연극을 탄생시킨다.

장 주네의 연극적 세계는 19세기 잔혹극(the theater of cruelty)을 이끌어낸 앙토냉 알토드(Antoinin Artaud 1896~1948)와 루이 피란델로(Luigi Priandello 1867~1936)처럼 환상, 부조리, 동성연애, 공공의 적, 버림받은 자, 잔인성 같은 극적 주제를 다루는 아방가르드(avant-garde)의 혁신적 전위연극 안에서 잉태된다. 사실과 허구 사이에 그의 갈등은 질서와 혼란의 갈등처럼 드라마와 연극에 혁신적 연극의 주제를 이룬다. <하녀들(The Maid)>과 <발코니(The Balcony)> 같은 그의 희곡들이 주네의 개인적 갈등의 삶과 혁신적 이미지를 반영하는 거울이 되어, 신성한 악이 주네의 제의(ritual)로 전념되어 비추어진다. 그러므로 장 주네는 부도덕적, 악의적, 파괴적 요소 같은 그 자신의 법으로 사회질서를 무너뜨린다.

억압된 상황들에 맞서는 또 다른 혁명적 방법으로서 주네는 변태, 성욕을 자극하는 환상, 그리고 역할놀이와 같은 허구를 사용한다. 그는 작품 속에 인물들을 또 다른 인물들로 그들을 드러내는 역할을 하고, 그의 이미지를 반영한다. 그 역할놀이의 행동은 하류층이 권력자들과 동일시 할 수 있는 허구적 제의의 가능성을 제시한다. 권력층과 대립하는 하류층에 의해 보여지는 허구와 현실사이의 갈등으로, 그 환상은 반란, 증오 그리고 거짓으로 구성되고 그 내적 갈등들 안에서 주네는 거짓과 허위, 가식의 요소로 연극을 만든다. 진실과 현실을 경멸하는 주네는 현실적 사실을 환기시키고, 관련된 허구와 환상의 양식을 재창조한다. 그러나 살인자들, 무정부주의자들, 동성연애자들, 그리고 창녀들과 같은 그의 반란적인 인물들의 거울 이미지는 불안전함과 공포와 억압이 존재하는 허구의 현실 안에서 반영되어, 패배자나 희생자로서 부정적이고 비극적인 결말을 맺게 된다.

궁극적으로 주네의 작품들은 반란과 구축된 질서를 헐박하는 악으로 선을 변형하는 구원자로 충격적이고, 현대극에 소생과 부흥을 일으키는 강력한 힘을 가지며, 인간의 폭력적이고 비이성적, 비양심적 의지와 생각을 자유와 해방운동으로 이끈다.

주요어 : 연극적 반란, 일루전, 폭력적 잔혹성, 거울 이미지, 비실존, 제의식

Key words : Theatrical revolt, Illusion, Cruelty of Violence, Mirror Image, Non-Existence, Ritual

I . Introduction

Two World Wars and their political, social, and cultural aftermaths were deeply spread over the twentieth century. Within a destructive, inhumane and barbarous state, the theatre attempted to reflect the rapidly changing streams like problems. In frantic efforts, the theater found new forms to enable to deal with the more radical, shocking, hallucinating, and contradicting subject matter. In this theatrical movement, Jean Genet(1910~1986) is one of the main playwrights who led the context and form with avant-garde theatre stylistically in mid twentieth century.

Genet's moral solitude and anti-social behavior is caused by his rejection from his family and a society. French novelist, playwright, and poet, Jean Genet was the illegitimate son of a prostituted and orphaned. At the age of ten, the innocent boy was accused of stealing and resolved to be a thief. Abandoned by his parents, he spent his youth in an institution for juvenile delinquents. During adolescence, he stent five years in the Mettraty Reformatory where his sexual awakening occurred by the inmates; he became a male prostitute. After joining the French Foreign Legion, he began a period of wandering throughout Europe. He survived by begging, homosexual prostitution, theft, and smuggling. By the age of 23, Genet was living in Spain in European prisons where he started to write in passion. Genet explores the revolt of all servants and prisoners against their rulers. At the age 32, after being imprisoned for theft, Genet began writing while ignoring conventional plot and psychology.¹⁾

He divorced from a society of laws as a literal outlaw artist. His life becomes a reversed mirror image. His plays are so many imaginary autobiographies. Genet's plays rely on ritual transformation, rebellion, illusion and interchangeable identities. His theatrical world is conceived in the revolt using dramatic themes such as illusion, absurdity, homosexuality, outcast, and cruelty like Antonin Artaud(1896~1948) and Luigi Priandello(1867~1936). His conflict between anarchy and order. His plays such as <The Maids>(1948) and <The Balcony>(1955) are like a mirror reflecting the image of his life and his revolt. Genet puts his personal conflicts at his drama with revolt as the theme and as the principle of his work.

1) Most famous Genet's autobiographical work, 『The Thief Journal』

Genet, Jean, 『The Thief Journal』, Trans. Bernard Frechtman(New York: Grove Press, 1964), pp.44~46: reference.

II. Illusion: The Mirror Image of Role Playing

The characters in Genet's plays play the roles revealed on them by others. They are reflected in the mirror image of illusion. The characters are filled with illusions created by the other characters as a way to confront their oppressive circumstances with role-plays to fulfill their dreams of wealth and authority. The illusion they create are so powerful so that they confuse their reality. It seems clear that the characters play out their illusory roles to give them more power - as they sadistically condescend the others. The illusion, however, can only last so long before reality takes its original place. The conflict between illusion and reality is explored in two plays: 《The Maids》 and 《The Balcony》.

1. The Maids

In 《The Maids》, just as Genet, the maids are also poor, filthy, and thieves, but their use of Madame's properties is less significant than their major role-playing thief of her identity. It is presented with Genet's complex of oppression seen through the daily rituals of two maids, role-playing, and exchange of identities.

Claire hates her sister, Solange, because she is the reflected image of her own slave. She is sick of seeing her sister's image thrown back at her by a mirror. Their love, hatred, jealousy, and desire for possession come to an end against each other.

Madame's force is more powerful in the maids' imaginations. She is a vivid presence in absence by the maids who are playing roles. They write an anonymous letter and cause Madame's lover imprisoned, but he is released. They attempt to kill Madame with a cup of poisoned tea, but she departs home without drinking the tea. Thus their fantasy ritual is followed into reality. In the absence of their mistress, the sisters return to their original masquerade. Claire pretends to be Madame, and Solange to be Claire and brings the tea in the game of make-believe. Claire desires to give herself to Solange. She says:

It would be too simple to conspire with the wind, to make the night our accomplice. Solange, you will contain me within you. [...] We're alone in the world. Nothing exists but the altar where one of the two maids is about to immolate herself. [...] It will be your task.

yours alone, to keep us both alive. You must be very strong. In prison one will know that I'm with you, secretly.²⁾

Claire, the weaker of the two, reveals herself as the stronger. Claire treats her reflection in the mirror as Madame, orders her tea, and drinks the tea. Madame cannot be defeated and the maids are forced to destroy themselves in order to preserve the seriousness and authenticity of their existence. Solange thinks that she has killed her mistress in the mirror, and now her dream comes true. The satisfaction of a wish and the realization of a dream is just fantasy. Solange says the illusory and the real in her final monologue:

The orchestra is plying brilliantly. The attendant is raising the red velvet curtain. He bows. Madame is descending the stairs. Her furs bursh against the green plants. Madame steps into the car. Monsieur is whispering sweet nothings in her ear. She would like to smile, but she is dea. She rings the bell. The Porter yawns. He opens the door, Madame goes up the stairs. She enters her apartment-but, Madame is dead. Her two maids are alive: they've just risen up, free from Madame's icy form. All the maids were presents at her side-not they themselves, but rather the hellish agony of their names. And all that remains of them to float about Madame's airy corpse is t he delicate perfume of the holy maidens, which they were in secret. We are beautiful, joyous, drunk, and free!³⁾

The Maids' characters are females, but Genet's intention is that boys should play them. His personal experience is often reflected in the homosexual characters in his work. As the men play the female role, the male position is more lowered than that of the female maids. Matt Wolf wrote in <New York>,

Men play all three roles. There's a subversive logic and power to swapping gender in a play about shifting identities, sexual stealth and various kinds of political, religious and social revolt. It gives the play its ritualistic atmosphere.⁴⁾

2) Genet, Jean.<The Maids and Deathwatch> Trans. Bernard Frechtman. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961. pp96~97.

3) same above pp.99-100

4) Wolf, Matt, 「The Maids: Donmar Warehouse, London」, 『Variety』, July 14, 1997, pp.51.

The image transforms into a smell on the way back. John Simon says,

It is a searing, hothouse experience, pitting the rage of an underclass—here represented by incestuous, sadomasochistic homosexuals—against a bourgeois society that, as embodied by Madame, treats them kindly but with a certain indifference. The rage, however, is ultimately powerless against an over-class that the underdogs both fear and envy, and desperately wish to emulate. So they turn it against themselves, and find release in inflicting and suffering death.⁵⁾

2. The Balcony

《The Balcony》 is the set in the Grand Balcony, a brothel where the customers enact their fantasies of power a self-abasement. Madame Irma's brothel, a house of illusion, exists in a fictional European kingdom undergoing a revolution. Inside The Grand Balcony, prostitutes assist customers in play-acting sexual fantasy in a variety of roles. The house of illusions belongs to the chief of police and his girl friend, Irma.

The play shows how the image of the chief of police penetrates the ritual of the house of illusions. Irma produces illusions needed to satisfy the sexual desire of men. She pretended a queen and her false bishop, judge, and general as well as the real ones that they succeed. Irma in a mistress of lies and may be called an evil. Carmen is forced to choose between her love and her daughter. Irma tells Carmen that she will have to give up her daughter and she is given the role of Saint Theresa. Carmen gives up life in favor of illusion.

Irma: whether dead or alive, your daughter is dead. Think of the charming grave, adorned with daisies and artificial wreaths, at the far end of the garden. [...] and that garden in your heart, where you'll be able to look after it.

Carmen: I'd have love to see her again

Irma: You'll keep her image in the image of the garden and the garend in your heart under the flaming robe if Saint Theresa. And you hesitate? I offer you the very finest of deaths, and you hesitate? Are you a coward?⁶⁾

5) Simon, John, 「The Maids: Classic Stage Company, New York」, 『New York』, October 18, 1993, pp.141.

6) Genet, Jean, 《The Balcony》, Trans. Bernard Frechtman(New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1966), pp.40.

In the rebuilt house there is the fiction between the bishop, general, and judge and the Chief of police, who has the power. Roger presents himself and asks to play the chief of police. Roger, however, recognizes that he is nothing but play-acting, a ritual. He castrates himself in despair; thus fantasy is coupled with the reality of revolt. Machine guns are heard from outside. The Queen, Irma asks and answers:

Who is it? [...] Our side? [...] Or rebels? [...] Or? [...] Someone dreamaing, Madame.⁷⁾

The Bishop says,

Now answer, mirror, answer me. do I come here to discover evil and innocence? And in your gilt-edged glass, what was I?⁸⁾

When illusion is broken, the prostitutes break their role as criminal. The bishop notes,

So long as we were in a room in a brothel, we were in a room in a brothel, we belonged to our fantasies, but once having exposed them, we're now tied up with human beings, tied to you and forced to go on with this adventure according to the laws of visibility.⁹⁾

When machine gun fire starts up again in the streets, Irma sends every one except the Chief of police home. She turns out the lights and covers the furniture at the end or a working day. Dismissing the audience at the end of the play, Irma says:

You must go home now, where everything-you can be quite sure-will be even falser than here.¹⁰⁾

Fantasy and reality become blurred when the rebels in the street overthrow the royal Palace. A society and the law are sham in illusion. Genet's criminals are role-players as his characters

7) same above, pp.95.

8) same above pp.11.

9) same above pp.79.

10) same above pp.96.

are all masks.¹¹⁾

《The Balcony》 is a variously layered play about illusion, the social and the individual. John Simon remarks in <New York>:

Genet's idea in *The Balcony* is that people live by illusions, act out what they cannot achieve. When these illusions (power-cum-sex fantasies of being bishops, generals, judges, etc., indulged in by customers at Madame Irma's brothel, the Grand Balcony_ become reality (the revolution raging outside destroys the Queen and other high functionaries: Irma and her clients are pressed into service as queen, bishop, general, judge), their nurturers fail both themselves and others. Moreover, not even the realistic revolutionaries, led by the plumber Roger, can make reason prevail; they, too, succumb to curious illusions. Only the brothel continues, eternal and unchangeable.¹²⁾

In his play, all characters play the role of a character who plays a role. He uses his imprisonment in illusion. Bruckner utters in <New York Times>

That is exactly the right feeling: the world has been emptied, for her and for us. [...] It can be a political tract, a social satire, a farce, whatever.¹³⁾

III. Non-Existence as Luigi Pirandello's Works

Genet's questioning of reality and existence reflects the works of Pirandello, who Genet's admired. Genet's plays are philosophical, as Pirandello's plays are comprised of theatrical revolt to transform reality into poetic image. Since the reality is unbreakable, Pirandello avoids reality by stopping time, namely, being illusions. To stop time, he creates the disguised characters. Brustein wrote:

11) Brustein, Robert, 『The Theatre of Revolt: Studies in Modern Drama from Ibsen to Genet』(Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991), pp.389.

12) Simon, John, 『The Balcony: Hudson Guild Theatre, New York』, 『New York』, April 23, 1990, pp.104.

13) Bruckner, D.J.R, <Untangled Genet's Puzzle of Power> The New York Times, November 19 1999, late ed.: E3+.

As an external rebel, Pirandello explores the roles men play in order to escape from life-revolt turns inward against the elusiveness of human existence...-revolt turns outwards against the intruding social world.¹⁴⁾

Genet's cynical attitudes towards social and political institutions are like Pirandello, who is in revolt against the external society.

At the same time Pirandello knows the false identity is destroyed as Genet does. This philosophical perspective is compared with 《Six Characters in Search of the Author》. The play is built into a structure of actors playing actors who are then impersonating characters who are actually presents about the nature of reality. The Father, who is one of the characters, articulates the isolation and illusion in the Act II. The Father comments to the director on the changing nature of reality for everyone:

All I wanted to know, sir, is if you, as you are now, can truly see yourself [...] as you see, for example, in the distance of time, what you were at one time, with all the illusions that you had back then, with all those things in and around you as they seemed to you then - and which were actually really to you! Well then, sir, if you think back to those illusions, which now you no longer have, to all those things which now no longer 'seem' to be for you what they 'were' at one time. don't you feel - not necessarily the boards of this stage - but the ground, the very ground your feet give away - when you deduce that in the same way 'this', the way you feel right now, all the reality of today, the way it is, is destined to seem an illusion to you tomorrow?¹⁵⁾

Existential analysis deals with Genet's and Pirandello's characters who cannot accept their existence as real. The chief of Police in 《The Balcony》 seeks his existence in a world where the individual is denied. He chooses a life of sham because of his fear of futility, and accepts a role. In a world where the power of the rulers cannot be shaken, he identifies with the rulers and succeeds in fantasy to overcome them. The objective of his essential existence is to reveal deceptions and swindle of the

14) Brustein, Robert, 『The Theatre of Revolt: Studies in Modern Drama from Ibsen to Genet』(Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991), pp.292.

15) Pirandello Luigina L. <Six Characters in Search of an Author and Other Plays>. Trans. Mark Musa. London: Penguin Books, 1995. pp.55.

contradictory society.

In his inner conflicts, Genet explores the theatre with the elements of fake, sham, and masquerade. Despising truth and reality, Genet creates a form of the illusion related with a reality evoked like Pirandello. Brustein wrote,

Genet wants to be a man without a mask - in Pirandello's term, a nobody - and plunge through appearances into reality, which is the negation of roles. But reality is also nobody invariably finds himself becoming somebody, and acting out a role.¹⁶⁾

IV. Violence of the Cruelty as Antone Artaud

Genet's ritual in this background is dedicated to sacred evil. Coped with his own outcast, solitude, and a sense of rejection, he increased hatred and his violence. He wrote in 『The Thief's Journal』:

Abandoned by my family, I already felt in was natural to aggravate this condition by a preference for boys, and this preference by theft, and theft by crime or a complacent attitude in regard to crime. I thus resolutely repudiated a world which had repudiated me.¹⁷⁾

Genet also experienced a sensual and brutal portrait of World War II. The shocking show of naked and arbitrary power in Hitler's Germany should be coupled with Genet's particular sort of homosexual vision since both contained great deal of sadomasochism, glorified the act of killing. His homosexuality and murder is a tool of his revolt in stimulation by evil.

Thus, he breaks the social order with his own order such as immorality, vice, and destructive element. Genet says,

I choose to go back to primitive life... I shall impose a candid vision of evil, even though I lose my life, my honor, and my glory in this quest.¹⁸⁾

16) Brustein, Robert, 『The Theatre of Revolt: Studies in Modern Drama from Ibsen to Genet』(Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991). pp.388.

17) Brustein, Robert, 『The Theatre of Revolt: Studies in Modern Drama from Ibsen to Genet』(Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991), pp.382: recite.

In 1952 Sartre wrote,

He decided that he will do the worst in every circumstances and as he has come to realize that the greatest crime was not the doing of evil but the manifesting of evil.¹⁹⁾

Genet's plays are, therefore, always shocking and have a powerful force in the renewal of modern drama. Bettina Knapp mentions that Genet is the inventor of a highly personal metaphoric imagery with a unique structure of serious relationships and analogies and an extraordinary violence and cruelty that produces energetically rhythmic dramatic sequences.²⁰⁾

Genet's plays represent the application of Antone Artaud's theory on the theatre of cruelty, and thus are led into liberation of man's violent, irrational, subconscious devices. Like Artaud he creates themes of extreme violence in his theatre. His plays are portrayed with evil and homosexuality that are showed in an ironic and critical way. He keeps breaking a more conventional type of theatrical experience and offers avant-garde challenge. The actor's stylized movements and the visual images are as significant as the spoken language - or even more important like the idea of Artaud. His plays are presented as a sequence of episodes enacted by characters. Brustein wrote:

Genet's love of appearance leads him into dazzling stage effects with verbal and theatrical skill (spectacles). In the plays, Genet's use in all his full-length plays, of dummies, masks, tragic boots, and padded costumes realizes Artaud's vision of a theatre equipped with manikins, enormous masks, objects of strange proportions as dance, mime, and gesticulation.²¹⁾

The modern theatre is a diversion. It is sometimes, rarely, an estimable diversion. Genet, like Artaud, cultivated variety of events and precise ideas of spectacles.

18) same above, pp.383

19) Dobry, Gary. "Murder and the Intellectuals." December 28, 2000

<http://www.uturn.org/Prisissue/dobry2.htm>

Sartre, Jean-Paul, 『Saint Genet: Actors and Martyr』, Trans. Bernard Frechtman(New York: George Braziller, Inc. 1963).

20) Brantley, Ben, <The Maids>, The New York Times, September 30, 1993, late ed.: C17+: recite.

Knapp, Bettina L. 『Jean Genet』(Boston: A Division of G.K. Hall and CO., 1989).

21) Brustein, Robert, 『The Theatre of Revolt: Studies in Modern Drama from Ibsen to Genet』(Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991), pp.391.

In 《The Maids》, both Claire and Solange recognize that they are slaves and it is impossible to defeat Madame. Claire and Solange explore sadistic impulses and masochism stems from deep self-loathing in the face of Madame's superiority. Both sisters repeatedly criticize themselves. The sadomasochistic reaction to authority is evident when Solange impersonates a horse and then a rider in her final scene. She says she is going to whinny as Claire prepares to insult her, and strikes Claire with a riding whip. In this illusion, Claire always plays the dominant role first but is an insulted royalty later. Solange soon overturns insults as the maid. Claire ends up as a submissive Madame, while Solange ends up as a dominant maid.

In 《the Balcony》, Chantal, the girl from the brothel who has become the rebel's victim is killed and her name and image glorified, inscribed on the banners of the repressive forces. Chantal, an ex-prostitute turned revolutionary, is the key of revolution. She is a symbol of purity and passion of the revolutionaries, but her death reflects Genet's victorious violence.

The rejection of industrial society is coupled with the revolution of the lower middle class that feels oppressed and frustrated in conflicts and complex. Drained into vileness, Genet exists nowhere, in futility. Genet seems to acknowledge that the violence of thieves, traitors, murderers and cheats has a profound beauty.

V. Conclusion

Genet has described in his works the underworld, maids, male prostitute, homosexuals, and social outcasts in self destructive circles. Genet identifies himself with the outcast: the black, the Arab, or the terrorist. He is the product of the French underclass of thieves and homosexuals like his underclass experiences. Genet encounters a radical rejection of society in his work because the underclass has been expelled from society. Genet conceived the life of a masquerade in creation such as an ideal thief, absolute evil, etc.²²⁾

There are the subject matter and the forms of Genet's works as it is described above. One of his main elements is the fashion of his image. Another is his Messianic expectation to transform good into evil, which threatens the established order in cruelty and revolt like Artaud. The other is the

22) Most famous Genet's autobiographical work, 『The Thief Journal』

Genet, Jean, 『The Thief Journal』, Trans. Bernard Frechtman(New York: Grove Press, 1964)

conflict between illusion and reality seen by the underclass to conflict with the rulers like Pirandello.

Genet's plays are composed of a role-play within the play. The characters in the plays can only find their truth in falseness or fantasy in which they are contented with sex and power. The fantasy is composed of revolt, hatred, and falseness. The action of the plays offers the possibility of a fantasy ritual, which produces merits that are not found in the real world. In 《The Maids》 Claire plays Madame and Solange plays Claire. In 《The Balcony》 minor employees play a bishop, a judge, a general, etc. While perceptions of reality are changed and illusion is focused on, Genet's characters understand reality, and the world of illusion is articulated. Beneath the reality and illusion, there are its own imperfections, ugliness and oppression.

With scenes of sadomasochism, erotic fantasies, and role-playing, Genet's theatre invites the contemporary audience to participate visually in many of the situations and fantasies. It is his nature, and part of his literary gift, to attack or else to scorn his audience. The commingling of politics with sex and power resonates strongly with all the societies today. It is a timeless play. Also, Genet's theatrical world reflects the human life in mirror of his image. Director, Katie Bales remarks,

I find the truth of these characters captivating, disturbing, intriguing. In a world where every day we hear of unimaginable acts and wonder how someone could do that or what could have been going through their minds, Genet offers us this peek inside²³⁾

While portraying his rebel characters such as maids, murderers, anarchists, and homosexual prostitutes, Genet knows that their playacting is in vain; thus, the ultimate break with the real world is possible only in illusion. His works express the despair of a man caught by images that are merely his own distorted in reality.

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