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Wilting Flowers: An Exploration of the Metatheatricality in Fernando Arabal's Prison Play And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers

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Wilting Flowers:

An Exploration of the Metatheatricality in Fernando Arrabal's Prison Play

And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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For my Friends

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KATAR All I dream about is this fucking jail.

- Arrabal, 8

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i.**Introduction**

Prisons are inherently theatrical spaces. They are structures designed with the intent that their occupants be carefully observed, much in the way a theater is designed. Space is efficiently utilized so that the maximum number of inmates can be watched by a minimal number of guards. If an outsider enters a prison to visit an inmate, he enters the space as a spectator who is entirely separate from the rest of the population. The spatial relationship between prisoners and the public has shifted drastically since the foundations of early modern imprisonment. This change in spatial awareness foretells a shift in the role of the public in relation to imprisonment and punishment. Ancient prisoners were actors in a way; they were brought to an audience in a centrally-located public gathering area and used for entertainment. In Ancient Greece and Rome, prisoners were made to battle each other or ferocious animals in gladiator tournaments. These events were a huge draw for the masses -- a precursor to the spectacle of other massive outdoor events like the Olympics, circuses or outdoor theater. As time passed, capital punishment shifted from entertainment to public morality lessons that were accessible to all of society. In his book *Discipline and Punish*, philosopher Michel Foucault wrote about the evolution of imprisonment in France beginning in the late 1700s. At this time, the judiciary system was still actively linked to public forms of entertainment, and for this reason discipline became a theatrical event. Crowds would gather to watch the condemned man take the stage for the last time. He would often make a speech for one

last emotional tug at his audience's heartstrings. And with that, he would be hung, or if the executioner had a flair for the dramatic -- perhaps drawn and quartered or tarred and feathered. The audience watched, in horror and glee, as justice was enacted.¹

Capital punishment today occurs in much more contained and defined spaces; justice is no longer enacted in the town square, or on more gory occasions, all over the streets of the town. Instead, it is a space that is often in the midst of a city, yet entirely separate. Punishment is no longer a public spectacle; it is a secretive process that has become fantastical and terrifying in the general population's eye. An average member of society will probably never witness an execution, and if he desires to do such, he will have to seek it out, not happen upon it in town. What exactly goes on in prisons is mystifying to most, and it is this mystery that makes prisons theatrical and captivating settings for drama. Theater about imprisonment attempts to modify the notion that prison is a mysterious, foreign place "by putting the prison experience into a palpable and confined space (on stage) with real people (actors). It creates an intimacy between audience and actor that forces a personal investment in the topic and can become the starting point for social change."²

Although the element of spectacle has been removed from modern prisons, the elements of theater still exist. When a person enters a prison, he is assigned a role -- either as an inmate, guard, or visitor. These roles have specific characteristics attributed to them, and going against that assigned role can lead to an array of crime-specific punishments. For an inmate, going against his role of prisoner can mean further seclusion and less access to real freedoms. The playwright Jean Genet, who spent much

¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 2nd ed., trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

² Thomas Fahy and Kimball King, eds., *Captive Audience: Prison and Captivity in Contemporary Theater* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.

of his life in and out of French prisons, discussed the predetermined roles in prisons -- specifically at Mettray Penal Colony, where he was imprisoned as a youth -- when he said, "It was as if the guards were the first audience and the inmates were the actors."³

The similarities between the charged space inside a prison cell and the theater make the institutions of prisons captivating and interesting spaces in which to set plays. A prison cell's fourth wall is not as figurative as most trained actors are probably used to. In prisons, they are literal dividers -- further separations from the prison community and the rest of the building. On a grander scale, they separate prisoners from society and the freedom beyond the outer walls of the prison. That dividing wall -- whether it be a door with a small window in it or a wall of iron bars -- is the inmate's only connection to the larger community of other prisoners and guards. Inmates must turn to that dividing wall to get what they want in much the same way an actor turns to the audience to show it what he wants. These containers are microcosms of the outside world; there are rules and laws and hierarchies that must be followed in order to maintain order -- within both the inmate population and the judiciary system.

These realms are beyond the realm that the rest of the world exists in. When a play is set in a prison, the audience is watching a drama about a space that is already inherently dramatic. It is with this in mind that prison plays can be described as being metatheatrical. Metatheater is an illusive term for theater that is dream-like in structure and often self-referential in a manner that exposes the technical fundamentals of theater within which the play exists. The Greek etymology literally means a realm beyond theater. Richard Hornby, a modern critic who writes about metatheater, defines it as

³ *Jean Genet: Saint Genet* (Films For The Humanities & Sciences, 1985), <http://ezprox.bard.edu:2111/view/657646>.

“drama about drama; it occurs whenever the subject of a play turns out to be, in some sense, drama itself.”⁴ Metatheatrical elements challenge attempts at realism that exist in a play, and in a theatrical setting like prison, it is impossible to exist in an entirely realistic world.

In this paper, I argue that prison plays, herein defined as plays that are set entirely in prisons, exhibit certain specific elements which take them out of the realm of realism and into the realm of metatheater.⁵ My argument is that metatheater is the ideal genre with which to create an accurate and honest representation of prison life, because it has the potential to make a great impact on the audience. My argument will stem primarily from the writings of Lionel Abel and Richard Hornby, modern theater critics who forged their way into the mysterious domain of metatheater. The five elements of metatheater that will be discussed in the paper are play within the play, self-reference, ceremony, role playing within the role, and literary or real-life reference.⁶ Applying these techniques to prison metaplays may seem like a fantastical and difficult endeavor, but in actuality, most prison plays that I examined in my preliminary research modeled at least one metatheatrical aspect. In this paper, I will make a close analysis of the metatheatrical techniques present in Fernando Arrabal’s prison play, *And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers*, and the effect they have on the audience.

⁴ Richard Hornby, *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1986), 31.

⁵ Prison plays should for the entirety of this paper be defined as plays that take place primarily, if not entirely, in prison. Although plays that are directed in prisons are of equal interest, they add too much to the scope of the project. Of similar interest is the inmates’ fascination with and connection to metatheater, made most famous by San Quentin Correctional Facility’s Drama Workshop production of *Waiting for Godot*.

⁶ Hornby, 32. Although Richard Hornby did not invent these terms, he was the first person to assemble all of the techniques together, thus creating a systematic approach to metatheater.

The term “metatheater” was first coined in the early 1960s by playwright and critic Lionel Abel. His creation of the term sprung from his investigation into the distinction between tragedy and comedy, and his feeling that there should be a name for that mysterious middle ground. He felt that modern playwrights were not writing classical tragedies anymore, and the genre had transformed into an entirely different literary genre. His need to create a solidly structured title for the grey area that is realistic plays with non-realistic elements -- that can neither be labeled tragedy nor comedy -- captures quite well the spirit of metatheater. Although it is difficult to state a general definition of metatheater, Abel believed it was a literary technique that enabled the audience to laugh at the protagonist while feeling empathetic simultaneously.⁷

In Abel’s book, *Tragedy and Metatheatre*, he discusses metatheater in the context of Shakespeare, as well as popular playwrights through history such as Genet, Calderon, Racine and Brecht. Throughout the text he discusses metatheatrical elements that exist in the plays of the aforementioned playwrights. He argues that these elements create a high degree of consciousness for the audience, in which one may question the reality of the world presented during the metaplay. The audience often feels like it is sharing in a collective dream that is slightly too realistic to be considered surreal or nonrealistic theater. Abel takes his argument from the quote from Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players,” when he discusses the dreamlike quality of metatheater:

In the metaplay there will always be a fantastic element. For in this kind of play fantasy is essential, it is what one finds at the heart of reality. In fact, one could say that the metaplay is to ordinary fantasy as tragedy is to melodrama. As in tragedy the misfortunes of the hero must be necessary

⁷ Lionel Abel, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* (Clinton, Ma: Hill and Wang, 1963).

and not accidental, so in the metaplay life *must* be a dream and the *world* must be a stage.

Abel, ultimately, cannot be used as a valid resource, because his theories are dated, and have evolved to encompass a larger scope of theater history than he ever imagined. His research began in examining the tragedies of early Western playwrights such as William Shakespeare and Pedro Calderon de la Barca. While Abel was studying these so-called failed tragedies, which incidentally also employ metatheatrical devices, especially the play within a play, he realized they were a genre of theater that was entirely different from tragedy. Rather than study these plays as an example of a failure, Abel realized that it was an increased self-consciousness on the part of the playwright that led them to write metaplays instead of tragedies.

Unfortunately, his analysis of metatheatricality seems incomplete. In a review of Abel's book by Julian Markels, he writes that "Mr. Abel does not really demonstrate that, for all its structural differentia, metatheater is a distinct genre like tragedy and comedy rather than a baroque style like that of Jacobean tragedy, which he does not mention, but which strikingly satisfies his conception."⁸ What limits his research is the definitive belief that these playwrights invented metatheater as we know it. Contemporary literary critic Martin Puchner, who wrote the introduction for a new edition of Abel's groundbreaking work, illuminates the error Abel made by placing the birth of metatheater in the early 1600s, because, as he writes, all plays (including plays written before the 1600s) are metatheatrical to an extent. "It is almost impossible for theatre not to become metatheater. For how could any theatre not know, somehow, and show that it knows,

⁸ Julian Markels, "Review: [Untitled]," review of *Metatheatre*, by Lionel Abel, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (Fall 1964): 441, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2868117>.

somehow, what it means to be theatre.”⁹ Abel makes insightful remarks about metatheater throughout the course of his book; sadly, they are buried amidst vast explications of the plays he chooses to discuss. Ultimately, Abel must be regarded in literary theory history as the misguided father of metatheater who paved the way for future theorists to clarify his creation.

In 1986, Richard Hornby took Abel’s theories about metatheater and attempted to clarify the definition of the term, as well as create a structure that could be employed to examine metaplays. His five principles of metatheater were presented in his book, *Drama, Metadrama and Perception*.¹⁰ Metatheater, in Hornby’s mind, is a device that is geared towards provoking a reaction from an otherwise calm audience. The principles allow the audience to reflect on the content of the play as they simultaneously reflect on the devices and form of the play. Hornby calls this audience experience “seeing double.”¹¹

The metadramatic experience for the audience is one of unease, a dislocation of perception. It is thus possible to talk about the degree of intensity of metadrama, which varies from very mild to an extreme disruption. At times, metadrama can yield the most exquisite of aesthetic insights, which theorists have spoken of as ‘estrangement’ or ‘alienation.’¹²

His beliefs about metatheater might be construed as similar to the Brechtian distancing effect, but in his mind, playwrights who write metaplays have different intentions than Bertolt Brecht had when writing his plays. That higher degree of consciousness might exist in both types of plays, but that is the main similarity between them. Brecht’s

⁹ Hornby, 13.

¹⁰ Although Hornby refers to the genre as metadrama, for the purpose of continuity, I will refer to it as metatheater, except in direct quotations. Generally, I define metatheater as the term for the genre of dramatic literature, and metaplays are plays with metatheatrical elements.

¹¹ Hornby, 32.

¹² Ibid, 32.

distancing effect was proposed to be a form of dramaturgy and play creation which would function with the intent to make the familiar seem strange to audiences. The purpose of this effect was to cause the audience members to maintain a critical perspective throughout the performance, while still possibly having emotional responses. Brecht's intended effect was that the audience would have a heightened awareness of the social and political dynamics of the play, rather than simply feeling moved by emotions with no social context. Unlike Brecht's alienation effect, it is my contention that metatheater is a genre of theater as well as a device playwrights employ in order to force an audience to question the construction of the play as they witness the content of it. Brecht was using metatheatrical devices towards a different end; his alienation effect was a means of intellectualizing the social context of theater while metatheater elicits a visceral and emotional response from the audience by subverting traditional forms of theater.

The five principles of metatheater that Hornby details are: play within a play, ceremony within the play, role playing within a role, literary or real-life references, and self-reference. The first four principles are self-explanatory and will be addressed in detail throughout the paper. The last principle, self-reference, is the most elusive of the group. It refers to the technique the playwright uses to critique the act of experiencing theater. As Hornby puts it, "Self-reference is always strongly metadramatic. With self-reference, the play directly calls attention to itself as a play, an imaginative fiction."¹³ That can happen by a character directly addressing the audience or making a remark about theater and drama. Similarly, the playwright can construct the entire play so that it confronts the audience in a manner that makes the tone of the play feel self-conscious.

¹³ Ibid, 103.

Self-reference, which Hornby has the most trouble defining as an element of metatheater, seems to me to be the most important device of them all.

My research has led me to my own definition of the metaplay: a play in which certain devices exist that make the audience examine the form of the play as they experience the content. A further defining aspect of metatheater is eloquently stated by Cornell Professor Stuart Davis: “‘Metatheatricality’ should be defined by its fundamental effect of destabilizing any sense or realism.”¹⁴ There are oftentimes fantastical and invasive elements of metaplays which aid in creating a dream-like state for the audience to experience. The audience is both immersed in the dramatic content of the play, and at the same time experiencing it as theater constructed with certain theatrical devices specifically placed inside. Metatheater is, in effect, art imitating life, but the act of imitation is as important as the content being presented. Although I do not agree with everything that Hornby’s book outlines, I have chosen to use his five principles as a springboard to examine *And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers*, as they provide a helpful structure from which to explore this compelling play. In Chapter I, I will give a biography of Fernando Arrabal and contextualize the history of the play. In Chapter II, I will explore the impact the *mise-en-scène* has on the metatheatricality of the play. Chapter III discusses the chaos in the world of the play which is structured by role play, play within a play and reference. And finally, Chapter IV explores all of Arrabal’s favorite topics; sex, violence and ceremony.

¹⁴ Stuart Davis, "Metatheater," Cornell University English 3270, accessed April 22, 2011, <http://courses.cit.cornell.edu/engl3270/327.meta.html>.

Chapter I.

Fernando Arrabal and his play

And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers is an exemplary metaplay because it honestly portrays the violence and sadism of the Spanish Civil War as well as the trials and faithlessness of the political prisoners who were targeted during the war. The play excels at presenting an accurate representation because the content was a lived experience of the playwright, Fernando Arrabal. His confrontational play draws from the horrors Arrabal experienced growing up and the stories of those who could not voice the atrocities they witnessed themselves.

Fernando Arrabal was born in Spanish Morocco in 1932, just four years before the Spanish Civil War began. Prior to the Civil War, Spain was controlled by the Second Spanish Republic, which had been the legally established government since 1931. The Republic's constitution mandated a complete separation of church and state, as many Republicans blamed the Catholic Church for the ills of the nation. The separation of church and state was a much contested issue and one of the main causes heralded by General Francisco Franco's Nationalists. The Republic was declared during a period of worldwide economic hardship, resulting in civil unrest and antagonism towards state institutions. At the same time, Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy were gaining power, which inspired General Francisco Franco to lead a successful military uprising against the Second Spanish Republic. During the three-year Civil War, over 130,000

Republicans were brutally murdered. The Rebellion created a reactionary dictatorship that fused together all Spanish right-wing parties, and was ruled by General Franco. Because Franco and the Nationalists fought against anti-clericalism, the Catholic Church supported Franco's regime.¹⁵

Arrabal's father, Fernando Arrabal Senior, was a military officer for the Second Spanish Republic. When Franco's coup occurred, Arrabal Senior refused to join the Nationalists and was sentenced to life in prison. After a failed suicide attempt, he was transferred from a maximum security prison to a less secure mental facility and escaped, never to be heard from again. His father's courage and conviction was always an inspiration to Arrabal; the false pretenses under which he was imprisoned angered Arrabal and were the catalyst for his hatred of Franco. Because Arrabal felt inadequate and guilty for never standing up for his beliefs against a totalitarian regime, he committed to bearing witness to the atrocities of war and reporting them to the public. Arrabal believed that this job of witnessing should not be his alone, but that it should be every artist's intention. "Our mission is to be witnesses to our time and to shock the bourgeois, without meaning to, something which is frowned upon nowadays. The artist's mission is to be original, to explore the future, to explore confusion. It is a most exalting human activity."¹⁶ In interviews and articles, he adamantly denies that he is a political writer, or a social activist. Instead, he writes what he sees and knows, and shares those often appalling insights with his audiences.

¹⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "Spanish Civil War," <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/558032/Spanish-Civil-War>.

¹⁶ Eva Kronik and Fernando Arrabal, "Interview: Arrabal," *Diacritics* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1975): 59, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/464643>.

Arrabal once described theater in Franco's Spain as propaganda in support of the regime and the Catholic Church, two institutions he abhorred. In an act of self-exile, in 1955, he settled in France with his wife, and from then on wrote in Spanish but published primarily in French.¹⁷ His work is a violent and erotic mix of autobiography and fantasy. He is the author of over seventeen volumes of plays, and wrote in and was closely linked to many of the important avant-garde traditions of his time, including the absurdist and surrealist movements. As he matured as a playwright and artist, he backed away from preconceived notions of what "theater" means, as well as most established theater movements, choosing instead, to develop his own theories about theater. Still in Paris in 1963, he developed the Panic Movement with the French artist Roland Topor and the Chilean artist Alejandro Jodorowsky. The Panic Movement is a denial of affiliation with any specific movement; it is intended to mock categorization. Named after the god Pan, the Theatre of Panic exists in order to literally manifest "Great God Pan's Gifts. Panic is a living and actual theatre."¹⁸ Theatre of Panic is difficult to describe because it was designed to avoid categorization. It embraces ceremony as a means for accurately expressing the cruelty and confusion of life. In the preface to his book, *Théâtre Panique*, Arrabal describes Panic Theory as a "ceremony both sacred and sacrilegious, erotic and mystic, sordid and sublime."¹⁹ As quickly as Panic theater was developed, however, it was abandoned by its creators. Years after the demise of the Panic Theater, Arrabal once

¹⁷ In his interview with Eva Kronik, published in *Diacritics Journal* in 1975, he responded defensively when asked if he wrote his plays in Spanish or French, "Forgive me for saying so, but that is the classic question put by fascists who then end up by reproaching me for not writing in Spanish. If I do not publish in Spanish, it is because the Franco censorship prevents me from doing so. I write in Spanish, and with my wife I translate my work into French." Arrabal, Interview, 55.

¹⁸ Fernando Arrabal, "Arrabal: Auto-Interview," interview by Kelly Morris and Bettina L. Knapp, *The Drama Review: TDR*, Fall 1968, 73, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1144435>.

¹⁹ Dorothy Knowles, "Ritual Theatre: Fernando Arrabal and the Latin-Americans," *The Modern Language Review* 70, no. 3 (July 1975): 527, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3725520>.

said, “It is a child that has grown up too fast, and as such we reject it.”²⁰ Arrabal was interested in creating a theatrical tradition that would be private and inconspicuous, and when it gained too much momentum, it became a beast that he felt he did not want to tame. Today, Arrabal still believes in the ideals of Panic Theater, but cannot confine himself to any one movement.

Arrabal’s aversion to convention led him to trouble when, on a visit to Spain in 1977, he was arrested and imprisoned after signing a personalized “dedication considered ‘blasphemous’ to the government in a copy of his book *Arrabal Celebrating the Ceremony of Confusion*.”²¹ Arrabal was held in Carabanchel Prison, the largest prison to hold political prisoners in Europe until it closed in 1998. The government’s justification for imprisoning him was the questionable claim of punishing Arrabal for the so-called “criminal” anti-institutionary nature of his writing. As he once stated, “It is subversive in Spain. It is forbidden because my plays are not pieces of political propaganda. The Franco government readily accepts propaganda, whatever its nature, but I do not write propaganda, and that is why I am feared. In my work there is something that escapes the authorities, something dangerous.”²²

Arrabal’s arrest caused a stir in the press and among the writers and intellectuals of Eastern Europe. Samuel Beckett, a contemporary of Arrabal’s as well as a playwright of similar interests and style, was one of many artists who supported Arrabal at the time of his arrest.²³ Beckett wrote a letter to the judge in charge of Arrabal’s case and offered

²⁰ Arrabal, Interview, 57.

²¹ Ante Glibota, "Curriculum Vitae of Fernando Arrabal," Arrabal, accessed April 20, 2011, <http://www.arrabal.org/cure.html>.

²² Arrabal, Interview, 59.

²³ When, during an interview, Arrabal was compared to Samuel Beckett, he replied, “I read his work, and indeed there were points of contact between us -- a very understandable phenomenon, since we are both witnesses to our time and were traveling at that moment along the same path.” Arrabal, Interview, 54.

to appear at the trial to provide testimony -- an uncharacteristically public act for a man who normally avoided the media at all costs.²⁴ His empathy for Arrabal's situation is apparent in what he wrote to the judge: "The writer should not be kept in prison because we must not add to his suffering."²⁵ The media attention and support from important artists eventually led to Arrabal's acquittal, but the experience became a defining moment in Arrabal's life. He was finally able to believe that he had personally fought against the regime for what he believed was right in a way that was similar to the hardships his father experienced. He embraced his status as enemy of the Spanish state and was able to clarify why he felt the need to write and create: "My theater has encompassed ceremony as well as blasphemy and eroticism... I hope to liberate my body and soul, to purge myself, to free my spirit, to break the chains of fascism and Catholicism."²⁶ Three years after being imprisoned, he wrote *And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers*.

Arrabal's plays are well-known for being abstract and violent and he makes no apology for it. In response to negative criticism of his work, he simply says, "My theater is direct: what is said is said."²⁷ He believed that two big shifts in Western societal norms led to the outrage over his plays. The first shift was in the declining prevalence of violence, especially domestic violence, in daily life. As he stated, "Brutality in the intimacy of love relationships does not distress me at all. On the contrary, I approve of it heartily. What disturbs me is institutionalized brutality."²⁸ The second shift was in audience reaction to the content of plays. Arrabal was astounded by the impassivity of

²⁴ James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 490.

²⁵ Arrabal, Interview, 57.

²⁶ Ibid, 57.

²⁷ Ibid, 56.

²⁸ Ibid, 56.

contemporary audiences and how graphic content would not shock or appall the average audience. When Arrabal was once asked if he expected applause from his audiences, he replied, “These days everybody applauds and spoils the occasion. What was done in Spain in my youth was better: some people would applaud and some would hiss and boo.”²⁹ It seems that Arrabal intentionally put confrontational and upsetting material in his plays in order to elicit a reaction from his audience. On the subject of audience reaction to his plays, he once said, “There are plays in which I did everything possible to have the spectators in passionate opposition and disinclined to applaud.”³⁰

Arrabal believed these two major shifts led modern audiences to the position of passive witnesses instead of impassioned rioters, an evolution which frustrated him. His writing is confrontational, violent and erotic and yet, after sitting through ninety minutes of graphic sadism and violence, his audience members still applaud for what they have just seen, because they have been trained to. His reasoning for this increase in audience politeness, as well as his distaste for it, serves his metatheatrical style quite nicely. Because Arrabal refuses to conform to theatrical standards, he is not afraid to push the limits of the audience. As he despondently says, “Convention rules the theater, and the audience always applauds at the end.”³¹ His plays seem to be, if nothing else, attempts at destroying convention. Although he no longer identifies as a proponent of the Theater of Panic, he is still highly experimental with style and form.

And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers is a collage of the memories, dreams and fantasies of four Spanish political prisoners. It weaves their stories together with the stories of famous tragic heroes throughout history and literature, such as Hamlet,

²⁹ Ibid, 60.

³⁰ Ibid, 60.

³¹ Ibid, 60.

Fernando Garcia Lorca, and King Solomon. In the play, Katar, Amiel and Pronos, who is mute, have all been living in the same prison cell for a vast amount of time. They are awaiting the arrival of an infamous new prisoner named Tosan who is sentenced to be executed for an unspecified crime against the Franco regime that becomes more defined as the play continues. There is minimal linear action in the play; rather than create an arc for each character's journey in the real time of the play, Arrabal chooses instead to present studies of character and what happens to the soul when it is imprisoned and tortured.

Dreams permeate this play in ways both metaphorical and literal. Metaphorically, the men often speak about their dreams of leaving prison and Amiel, the dreamer in the group, often finds himself thinking about the recent moon landing, which is, incidentally, one of the only references that grounds this play in a specific time period other than the references to Franco's regime. The content of the play revolves around the dreams the men have, whether they are wet dreams about a beautiful woman, or dreams of meeting Jesus Christ and being saved. As the men slip in and out of the collective experience of sharing one man's dream, they play the different roles present in each. In this way, the metatheatrical technique, role play within a role, threads its way throughout the entire play.

"Arrabal's play is a series of *tests* of the vision and faith of the past against the misery of the prisoner's condition. Each of the myths, dreams, and rituals emerging from these tests becomes a parody of all myth, dream, and ritual."³² This parody of belief in trusted institutions like the Catholic Church, the national government and judiciary

³² Phillip Blumberg, review of *And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers*, by Fernando Arrabal, UCSC Barn Theatre, Santa Cruz, *Educational Theatre Journal* 24, no. 4 (December 1972): 453, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3205944>.

system aligns perfectly with the definition of metatheater. Metatheater destabilizes any semblance of realism an audience assumes exists in order to allow for the structure of the play to be exposed to the audience as it experiences the content. The metaplay, as manifested by Arrabal, exposes the structure of societal institutions while exploring the content of the drama that exists within them. This exposure exists in the parameters of a dream that the audience and actors share, as Arrabal has stipulated that there are no boundaries between the two. This theory of shared dreams is explored by UC Berkley Classics professor, Thomas Rosenmeyer, who defines the experience of seeing a metaplay as “an audience’s reality being improbably overlaid by collective dreams.”³³

And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers not only utilizes role play within a role, it manages to employ every metatheatrical technique that Richard Hornby outlined. The pairing of *Handcuffs* and metatheatrical elements is interesting because, although it seems as if Arrabal was intentionally employing these techniques to distance the audience from the content of the play in order to critique it more closely, he hates filing his theater under labels, and would likely be instantly repelled by the term metatheater. His distrust in institution is clearly symbolized in both his playwrighting style and the content of the plays he writes. What Arrabal seems to trust most is the gut instinct of the audience. He assumes that when it is confronted by horrifying imagery, its response will be to criticize the construction of what it is witnessing as it emotionally responds to the content.

“Arrabal rejected the accusation of ‘provocation’ leveled against the work, and declared

³³ Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, "'Metatheater': An Essay on Overload," *Arion* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 112, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20163888>.

that his only desire was to carry the theatre right to the limit of what was bearable.”³⁴ He creates this barely tolerable world for the play to exist in with the aid of metatheatricality.

³⁴ Dorothy Knowles, "Ritual Theatre: Fernando Arrabal and the Latin-Americans," *The Modern Language Review* 70, no. 3 (July 1975): 528, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3725520>.

Chapter II.

Establishing the mise-en-scène in the Prologue

In general, metatheatrical techniques are employed to take the audience away from reality. The playwright uses conventions of metatheater to create a world beyond the world of the theater, and the theater that exists inside of this charged space is beyond a realistic portrayal. The world that the play exists in, in terminology specific to theater (and, more recently, film) is called the mise-en-scène. The literal translation from the French is “putting into the scene” and it is defined by everything that is in the performance space during a play.³⁵ A successful mise-en-scène evokes a reaction from the audience just by existing; it makes the play more than just something the audience is witnessing from afar. Instead, it is a world that the audience becomes immersed in.

Fernando Arrabal has created a rich mise-en-scène in *And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers*, which is a logical move for him to make as a playwright, as he is adamant that his intention for the play is to mimic the atrocities of Spanish political prisons for the benefit of the audience. I say benefit, because Arrabal truly believed he was doing the audience a service by illuminating the horrors of prison to his audiences. “I wanted the audience to be party to the condition of a Spanish political prisoner. You [the interviewer] say that the play is disgusting, horrible. Well, I wanted it to be exactly that-- every bit as atrocious as reality is.”³⁶ The specific conditions of the world of his play, aided by metatheatrical techniques, allow the audience to feel nothing but the horrors of prisons.

³⁵ "Mise-en-scène," *Mise-en-scène*, last modified 2007, <http://direct.vtheatre.net/doc/mise.html>.

³⁶ Arrabal, Interview, 54.

Metatheater begins by sharpening awareness of the unlikeness of life to dramatic art, it may end by making us aware of life's uncanny likeness to art or illusion. By calling attention to the strangeness, artificiality, illusoriness, or arbitrariness -- in short the theatricality -- of the life we live, it marks those frames and boundaries that conventional dramatic realism would hide. It may present action so alien, improbably, stylized, or absurd that we are forced to acknowledge the estranging frame that encloses a whole play. It may, on the other hand, break the frame of the 'fourth wall' of conventional theatre, reaching out to assault the audience or to draw it into the realm of the play. It may ... dwell on the boundaries between 'illusion' or artifice and 'reality' *within* a play, making us speculate on the complex mixture of illusion and reality in our ordinary experience.³⁷

The rules Arrabal created for *Handcuffs* allow for a world in which reality and fantasy blend together seamlessly, leaving the audience in a state of confusion. He is adamant that confusion is integral to the process of making and experiencing art, stating, "the work of art bursts forth from the author's own confused innards with all of its fascination and terror. This does not mean that I either defend or provoke such confusion. I simply declare that such a state exists. I even say that where there is not confusion, there is no life."³⁸ Arrabal did not want his audience to have a passive, intellectualized response to what it was witnessing on stage. He demanded, rather, that the audience take an emotional beating from the play.

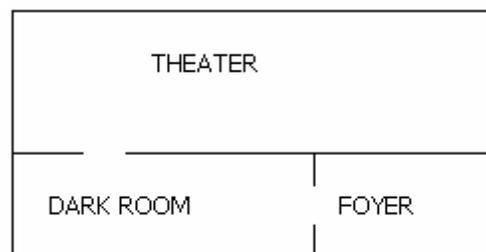
The metatheatrical techniques Arrabal employs in *Handcuffs* bring the audience to a place that is beyond the style of theater that can be labeled as realism. Realism implies that an audience is seeing a play that imitates real life, while still observing theatrical conventions like the proscenium arch and the fourth wall. By utilizing a space that is inherently self-referential and lacking standard conventions that are comfortable and familiar to the audience members, Arrabal invites his audience to experience with all

³⁷ Davis, 1-2.

³⁸ Fernando Arrabal, "Arrabal: Auto-Interview," interview by Kelly Morris and Bettina L. Knapp, *The Drama Review: TDR*, Fall 1968, 75, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1144435>.

faculties and senses, instead of just watching the play. It is this full sensory experience that allows the audience to make the connections between life and art. In the *mise-en-scène* Arrabal has created, he demands that the audience be highly critical of the information it is receiving, and he uses metatheatrical devices to bring his audience to the state of consciousness that he expects it to sustain.

Arrabal exposes the conventions of theater to the audience in order for it to fully experience the juxtaposition of maintaining a critical mindset and submissively witnessing drama. The audience experiences the background of the play -- the structure he has so specifically designed -- as it experiences the foreground of the drama. The play manages to break theatrical conventions long before the first lines of text are spoken. In the Prologue, Arrabal outlines specific instructions for the audience's entrance into the playing space and the dark atmosphere into which it will be injected. "*The theater foyer will lead into a "dark room" which will in turn be connected by a door to the actual theater where the action takes place.*"³⁹ He includes a diagram of the space; an interesting addition considering that after the specifics of the Prologue, there are no directions about the actual staging of the play or the use of space.



Arrabal's metatheatrical use of space can be viewed through the lens of Richard Hornby's metatheatrical paradigm of self-reference. Self-reference operates by

³⁹ Fernando Arrabal, *And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers*, trans. Charles Marowitz (New York: Grove Press, Inc, 1973), 1.

interrupting the dramatic illusion so as to alter our relationship with it and, in the case of *Handcuffs*, Arrabal creates that interruption from the moment the theater-goers enter the space.⁴⁰ Arrabal removes the customs of going to the theater that the average audience might expect -- proscenium arch, stadium seating, and a curtain -- and strips all meaning from the predictable theater paradigm. At first glance, there seems little difference between the diagram Arrabal includes for the space and a more traditional theater. In a traditional theater, the audience members enter a foyer and check coats or buy drinks. Then, they enter the theater by way of some sort of light lock -- perhaps a room sandwiched between two doors or curtains. And when they finally enter the theater, they are prepared to see a play because they have gone through all of the motions necessary to going to the theater. Arrabal, however, subverts this procedure, by making the physical structure of the theater the same as a standard theater, while changing the design and contents of the space. The skeleton of the theater is exposed to the audience in a way that makes any semblance of a dramatic illusion impossible, and yet the audience is forced to remember that it is witnessing a stylized version of the same conventions it is used to.

Arrabal goes further with the disruption of dramatic illusion by giving the Stage Manager a role in the Prologue, which exposes the frame of the play from the very beginning. Hornby categorizes the phenomenon of theater practitioners -- whether they are actors or stage hands -- breaking their assigned roles as “real-life reference.”⁴¹ When the Stage Manager steps out from backstage to interact with the audience, he is intentionally breaking his assigned role. “What is odd and estranging about the intentional dropping of role in avant-garde performance is that background and

⁴⁰ Hornby, 105.

⁴¹ Ibid, 32.

foreground suddenly are reversed.”⁴² It is the Stage Manager’s job to bring audience members “one by one” from the foyer into the dark room, and finally into the theater, being careful, according to Arrabal’s directions, to split up couples and large groups.⁴³ Arrabal creates an atmosphere of terror and suffering by specifying, “Strange cries can be heard coming from the theater, a melancholy flute, pygmy music, a woman crying.”⁴⁴ Although the experience is meant to be slightly frightening to the audience members, the Stage Manager prepares each of them by whispering phrases such as, “*Relive as in a dream the experience of being born*” and “*You are entering the penitentiary alone.*”⁴⁵

This exchange is interesting in terms of the creation of the play, because Arrabal provides a list of six phrases that could be used, all of which give the audience varying amounts of responsibility and facility. The two aforementioned phrases are pleas for the audience member to give himself fully to the play, as it is not a play that can be merely watched, and it begs for an audience that understands that need. Other phrases, like “*A man is going to be murdered tonight,*” focus on making the atmosphere foreboding and also give the audience a certain amount of responsibility. As it has already been acknowledged that the play will not be a conventional one, an audience member might wonder, upon hearing that someone will be murdered, how involved she will have to be with the action of the play. The fact that audience members are told different things by actors, and that Arrabal leaves it up to the director if he wants to use those phrases at all, makes the experience personal, and the antithesis of a play in which actors follow a strict script on stage.

⁴² Ibid, 100.

⁴³ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 1.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 2.

After the Dark Room, the care of the audience member is handed over to that of an actor, who guides her through a room that is immersed in darkness to a place suitable for that specific person to watch the play. Actors will guide audience members of the opposite sex, and Arrabal encourages them to be invasive and pushy. *“The actresses will guide the male spectators, gently murmuring to them and expressing their joy and fear at starting the play. The actors will guide the female spectators, gripping them as forcefully as possible. They will murmur to them, perhaps something incomprehensible.”*⁴⁶ At this point in the detailed stage directions, Arrabal briefly addresses the playing space or more specifically, the lack thereof. Audience members will sit on the ground or on scaffolding levels that are built in the space. There are no chairs or other comforting theater staples, and once the audience realizes this, it becomes aware of the fundamental principles of this performance: *“There is no actor/audience opposition. The actors invent a game, and invite the audience to join them.”*⁴⁷ The only spatial distinction that Arrabal does specify is: *“In the center (at ground level) the prison scenes will take place in an irregularly-shaped- space.”*⁴⁸ Because the audience members are positioned on different levels surrounding this playing space, Arrabal states in the stage directions that he believes all audience members will be able to view the play easily. What is missing from this stage direction is specific staging instructions for the dream scenes that exist outside of the world of the prison cell. These make up more than half of the content of the play. He does not dictate whether the actors should utilize the entire space, or contain their playing to inside of that irregularly shaped space.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 2.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 3.

Arrabal readies the audience for the immersive, experiential structure of the play - which could be shocking for audiences who regularly go to the theater and sit in comfortable seats and are separate from the action of the play. The play's first lines of written text are not spoken by an actor, but by a VOICE from above. This VOICE establishes that the audience and players alike are together in a space that is not a theater but a prison: "VOICE: Open the grill. The prisoner Tosan is entering the penitentiary."⁴⁹ Arrabal subtly introduces the audience to the character Tosan, a new inmate whose arrival is anxiously awaited by his future cellmates. (He is introduced into the space forty pages later, and only attentive audience members will connect that beginning announcement to his entrance.) This convention of defining the entire theatrical space (including the audience) as actively part of the *mise-en-scène* is common to prison plays, perhaps because it breaks down barriers between the audience and actors. Rick Cluchey's prison play, *The Cage*, begins with a voice over the loudspeaker making seemingly benign prison announcements, such as "Inmates Cob 09749, Everhart 0950, Allen 09814, Murphy 09115, and Johnson 09446 report to the hospital gate for work detail."⁵⁰ This unification allows for the audience to feel like they are inside the content of the play, not just watching it.

Although the world of this play might seem chaotic, unstructured and terrifying, it is actually extremely ordered. All of Arrabal's intentions for breaking the fourth wall and

⁴⁹ Ibid, 4.

⁵⁰ Rich Cluchey, *The Cage* (San Francisco, CA: Barbwire Press, 1970), 2. Originally, I was intending to examine Cluchey's play in this project as well, but the focus of the project became too wide. Occasionally, I will refer to his play for examples of metatheatrical techniques to compare to *Handcuffs*. For this reason, I will provide a short biography of Cluchey and a synopsis of his play. Cluchey was an inmate in San Quentin Prison when *Waiting for Godot* was performed there. After seeing the play, he created the San Quentin Drama Workshop. Nine years after the performance, he wrote and published *The Cage*, which was the first play to be written in a prison and published outside. His play illuminates, with the help of metatheatrical devices, the effects imprisonment has upon the body and soul. The play, in its most bare state, is about the introduction of a new prisoner to a cell that already contains three men.

creating an experience for audience members to truly witness the horrors of political prisons are specifically outlined in the Prologue. Directors are given specific instructions for how to stage and costume the role playing within a role that is woven into the play. The actors and actresses are all dressed in the same base costume: tight jeans, black shirts and skull caps. Beyond the base costume that unifies the cast as an ensemble of blank slates that can be adapted, Arrabal also prescribes the costuming for the circumstances when the actors are playing specific “other” roles:

When the actors play the part of oppressors they are to wear hoods. When it is neither a prisoner nor an oppressor they are to wear a hat -- for example, a top hat. When they adopt a role different from their own but of the same kind they will put on a plastic mask to disguise themselves.⁵¹

These costumes are consistent with the form Arrabal follows in structuring the play and the mise-en-scène. They are not statements, but rather suggestions that evoke personal reactions in the minds’ eye of each audience member.

Lionel Abel examines the metatheatrical effect of costumes on stage in his essay about Jean Genet’s *The Balcony*. That play is set in a brothel in which men can role play their most grotesque and fantastic dreams, and Abel examines the effect on the audience of watching characters dress up as people other than themselves on stage. This point is, in my opinion, universally applicable to metaplay, which is rare for Abel’s work, considering how much it is grounded in a specific time period. “It is to be noted that in watching them change before our eyes from their uncostumed reality to the bravura figures they become when arrayed to act, we get an altogether new feeling of the reality - not of character but of costume. Seldom does it happen in any play, modern or classical,

⁵¹ Ibid, 4.

that costume means much to the audience.”⁵² Abel goes on to say that prior to this play, costume had lost its poetic value on stage, “For the fact is that when we see costumes being put on, we can accept them as the necessary garb for the characters, whereas if the characters come on the stage fully costumed, we think at once of the work of the director and the costume designer.”⁵³ Abel’s point here is that rather than the costumes being clothing which evokes contemplation about the efforts of the costume designer or director, they are a tangible need for the characters. It is rare to see a character change clothing on stage, and the act breaks the convention of an actor leaving the stage and returning looking entirely different.

These strict rules add structure to the chaotic world of prison that the audience assumes exists. They also immediately introduce the audience to the style of the play -- the audience will not see elaborate costumes and sets; it will see, instead, a stark symbolic representation of that grandeur. This idea of metonymy, the evocation of the whole by a symbolic and connecting signifier, is reminiscent of Beckett’s style of an absence representing a whole. When characters do break from this uniform minimalism, it will be shocking to the audience, bringing it out of the stasis that exists when watching a play. Arrabal ends his Prologue with one more fact that establishes the lack of fourth wall: when actors aren’t “acting” (the quotes are in his text, a sign that he was already rather fed up with the conventions of acting when he wrote this play), they “are to sit in the audience: the actresses could perhaps lay their heads on the spectator’s knees.”⁵⁴ Arrabal goes to great lengths to break any barrier between audience and actor, and yet he does not invite the audience to respond, just react.

⁵² Abel, 80.

⁵³ Ibid, 80.

⁵⁴ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 4.

As discussed in the previous chapter, one element of metatheatricality is the playwright's intended effect on the audience. Some playwrights choose to be vague about their intentions; hoping to allow the audience members to have their own intellectual response to what they are witnessing. Arrabal clearly presents his intentions to the audience; the discomfort and confusion it experiences is not accidental. It is the invasive nature of the play that makes it a metaplay. Hornby writes, "We are never the principal characters in a play even if it is dream like. We are passive participants."⁵⁵ Arrabal uses *Handcuffs* to get as close as possible to presenting a play in which the audience might be the principal characters, by making it almost as much about its journey watching and feeling the play as it is about the journey of the characters.

The world of the play that Arrabal has created is dream-like in that it quickly adapts from a lyrical musing to an atrocious nightmare. Constantly shifting, nothing can be taken for granted, much in the same way that a dream feels for the dreamer. Hornby writes about the common paradigm of relating the experience of seeing a play to the experience of dreaming, and comments on the differences: "The dreamer is always present in his dream, as the principal character, experiencing all the events... In the theatre, this is not the case. There, we are never the principal character."⁵⁶ He goes on to say that what the theater lacks in the all-encompassing feeling of being an active participant in a dream, it can make up for in the creation of a vivid imaginary world. In creating a rich *mise-en-scène*, the audience has the ability to identify with the characters of the play. "This identification, however, is *not* a displacement. It is instead an *expansion* of the ego boundary that defines our concept of ourself. We both remain who

⁵⁵ Hornby, 112.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 112.

we are *and* become the hero on stage.”⁵⁷ In this regard, Fernando Arrabal has created a very successful metaplay. He has attempted to motivate the audience to feel for the prisoners not by merely presenting the audience members with a tragic story; instead, he makes them feel in a way that one can only feel in dreams, so that they might know quite personally the horrors of a Spanish political prison.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 112.

Chapter III.

Chaos, as defined by role play, play within a play and reference

Fernando Arrabal is interested in capturing life's contrasts and putting them on stage. He takes subject matter that is horrifying and with a lyrical flick of the pen, he makes it poetry. When asked if he regards theater as scenic or linguistic, he mocked the question and replied,

Personally, I dream of a theatre where humor and poetry, *panic* and love would be fused. Poetry is born from the nightmare and its mechanism, excess. The theatrical rite -- the *panic* ceremony -- must be looked upon by the spectator as a kind of sacrifice. This infinitely free type of theatre which I envisage has nothing to do with anti-theatre or with the Theatre of the Absurd. It's a vast domain, shrouded in ambiguities, and patrolled very carefully by the mad hound which stalks the night.⁵⁸

The misty area between two extremes that is often shrouded in confusion is where Arrabal's attention lies. It is his perception of the most horrifying as the most beautiful and important that meshes with the philosophy of metatheater. Arrabal is able to use the syntax of metatheater to present horrifying situations in a mysterious and poetic light that enlightens the audience instead of terrifying it. At the same time, he exploits the premise that anything goes in the theater, and even if the images are disgusting, they are still "art." Hornby writes about Aristotle's perception of artistic representation as a means of glorification: "[T]here are some things that distress us when we see them in reality, but the most accurate representations of these same things we view with pleasure- as, for example, the forms of the most despised animals and of corpses."⁵⁹ Prison as a theme for a piece of artwork can sound distressing in theory, and yet Arrabal undermines that

⁵⁸ Arrabal, Auto-Interview, 75.

⁵⁹ Hornby, 106.

mindset, and mocks it at the same time. By juxtaposing lyrical language and graphic imagery, he puts the audience in a position that exists in between real life and art mimicking real life. By doing this, the audience members can indulge themselves and enjoy the violence just as much as they enjoy the poetry in the play.

Arrabal uses his carefully constructed, lyrical syntax to evoke a certain tone. His sorrowful, poetic language is an important feature because it counteracts the brutality and violence that is so vividly present throughout. Although the characters are imprisoned for alleged crimes against the state, they appear to be intelligent and creative men who long for much greater things. Within the *mise-en-scène*, the four walls of the prison are an abstraction; Arrabal has specified, by omission, that there are no literal walls in the playing space. In this abstract world, the men have a powerful capacity to delve into their sorrows, and deeply share with each other. The play begins with the characters establishing their presence in the space, and voicing some of the confusion that the audience might be feeling as well. The first lines of the play are:

| | |
|-------|---|
| AMIEL | Where are we? On a mountain? |
| KATAR | No, inside four walls. |
| AMIEL | More like a womb -- with infinity out there waiting for us. ⁶⁰ |

In these three lines, Arrabal establishes the fact that the space of the play is an adaptable, metaphorical container for any dream or fantasy to happen, rather than a literal space with definition. The abstraction of the playing area and language forces the audience to grasp at any sense of logical reality it can find. There is no logical dramatic illusion in this play in the way that there is in a realistic drawing room play.

Arrabal's purpose for creating this play was to allow the audience to feel the horror of being a political prisoner in Spain in 1970.⁶¹ He achieves this by not only

⁶⁰ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 5.

making the world that the audience exists in physically invasive, but by leaving audience members in a state of confusion, searching for answers in a way that is very similar to the way prisoners feel. Kant once wrote, “There is no such thing as observing reality *directly*” and yet Arrabal is able to portray reality by making it experienced, rather than merely visualized.⁶² Arrabal takes the unsettling experience of being imprisoned and quite masterfully evokes those same feelings of impending doom and sadness for the audience. He does not moralize or tell the audience how to feel. Instead, he uses the metatheatrical world of the play, which has been established by strict rules, to force on the audience its own sensory experience. The metatheatrical contrivances that exist in the play -- role play within a role, ceremony, reference, and play within the play -- bring the audience as close to the lived reality of prisoners as it will ever be while watching a play. The metatheatricality in *Handcuffs* evokes stronger reactionary feelings in audience members than would be evoked by watching a more conventionally written production of a play about prisoners.

Handcuffs is a didactic play by nature, and this is supported by the metatheatrical world of the play. Arrabal wants to school his audiences, and therefore *Handcuffs* is not only a collection of dreams, it is also a collection of literary and historic references. Without prior knowledge of any of Arrabal’s references the play flows and the content can be followed. It is that added dimension of hearing something one has heard in a different venue, however, that makes the play metatheatrical. Hornby refers to this paradigm as the foreground and background of the play. The foreground is the content of the drama that the audience witnesses at face value. The background, on the other hand,

⁶¹ As referenced in the previous chapter, Arrabal once said, “I wanted the audience to be party to the condition of a Spanish political prisoner.” (Arrabal, Interview, 54)

⁶² Hornby, 113.

is the context we create in our minds as we watch. “We perceive a play as an intuitive foreground set against numerous logical backgrounds. The foreground is pleasurable, easy, fun; the background is onerous, hard, serious.”⁶³ He goes on further to compare the background to the rules of a game. Although a player might not think of them as they are actively playing, their experience of playing is based upon their knowledge of the rules.

Richard Hornby writes that the degree to which the audience recognizes the literary allusion is proportional to the degree of its metatheatrical estrangement.⁶⁴ When an audience recognizes the allusion, “the result is like an inset type of play within the play in miniature; the imaginary world of the main play is disrupted by a reminder of its relation.”⁶⁵ This happens in *Handcuffs* when characters like Jesus Christ or Hamlet enter the world of the play. For example, in a memory scene between Amiel and his wife, Lelia, Amiel tells her, “Get thee to a nunnery.”⁶⁶ Well-read audiences would recognize this quote as a citation from Hamlet. Hornby goes on to write that the allusion is often didactic in nature. “The play stops being a play for a moment” and the audience fills in the context that connects the allusion with its referent.⁶⁷

In the case of *Handcuffs*, it seems as if Arrabal was adamant that the play should be both a visceral and intellectual learning experience for the audience. His characters lecture the audience on the lived experience of prisoners, as well as the academic world of great literature. In a very real way, the didacticism of the play manifests itself in the role of the Apparition, which Arrabal specifies should be played by a boy.⁶⁸ This

⁶³ Ibid, 114.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 88.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 88.

⁶⁶ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 23.

⁶⁷ Hornby, 88.

⁶⁸ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, Cast of Characters.

character breaks the fourth wall by reciting, directly to the audience, quotes from an authoritative text about a specific prison in Spain by an author named Melquesidez Rodriguez Chaos. The first time the Apparition enters the space, he begins his speech with “Melquesidez wrote:.”⁶⁹ Melquesidez was, according to the only source in English about him that I could find, “a worker, who had been the commissar of a brigade fighting the fascists in Spain. After the defeat he was held in Franco prisons for 24 years.”⁷⁰ He wrote a book entitled *24 Years in Prison*, which was published in Paris in 1968. “The language of the book is terse, even dry, but it moves the reader by its authenticity and accuracy.”⁷¹ Although I could not find any information about a connection between Melquesidez and Arrabal, they were contemporaries in Paris and it is possible and probable that they knew each other’s work.

The content of the Apparition’s speeches at the beginning of the play consists of general facts about the prison Melquesidez wrote about. In these instances, he is announced by a drum roll or lighting change. The Apparition breaks the action of the play, says his piece, and then does not speak again for a long while. I imagine the characters hold a freeze when the Apparition speaks in these situations, although there are no stage directions. His entrances, exits and general demeanor are left to interpretation by the director. In his more broad speeches, the Apparition discusses the atrocious nature of the prison: “The penitentiary was built to house four hundred prisoners, but as many as six thousand have been incarcerated there”⁷² and

⁶⁹ Ibid, 8.

⁷⁰ "3. The Communist Party- The Genuine Party of Action," Leninist.biz, last modified January 18, 2010, <http://leninist.biz/en/1977/RV318/07.3-Communist.Party-The.Genuine.Party.of.Action>.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 18.

In the middle of each cell there was a clay receptacle shaped like a cocked hat upside down- into which the prisoners relieved themselves at night. There were so many prisoners in a cell that it was only too easy to upset this receptacle if you so much as stretched your legs, and so the prisoners slept in a constant state of watchfulness.⁷³

Although the content of his speeches varies, it is generally related to the content of the scene being enacted. Directly before the Apparition discusses the clay receptacle in the prison cell, the imprisoned men are suddenly awakened in the middle of the night by Amiel's cries and screams. Katar chastises him for making too much of a commotion and says, "Don't thrash around like that, you'll knock the crapper over."⁷⁴ The Apparition then contextualizes Katar's use of slang, and informs the audience of the implications of Katar's outburst.

As the play evolves, the Apparition's words become more specifically connected to the content of the play. In some scenes, he influences the dramatic action that occurs on the stage. On page 18, the Apparition is making a speech about prison conditions when Arrabal injects stage directions that dictate that the actors should enact the content of the Apparition's speech.

(The scene conjured by THE APPARITION is mimed by PRONOS and TOSAN.)

THE APPARITION A prison guard nicknamed Coyote noticed one of the prisoners looking through the spy hole. Sticking close to the wall, he approached the cell door on tiptoe and jabbed the point of his knife into the prisoner's eye. *(When the actors have finished miming this scene, the one who took the part of the prison guard eats the eye [simulated by a big black olive].)*⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid, 41.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 41.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 18.

By influencing the dramatic action, but still being separate from it, The Apparition is fulfilling a qualification of a metatheatrical self reference as defined by Hornby. He is not breaking the action, just referencing it, and vice versa.

Hornby categorizes a direct quotation from another literary source as a citation reference: “the direct quotation of a real-life person’s words, or the depiction of such a person as himself, or the depiction of real-life objects, places, or things as themselves.”⁷⁶ He writes that the more contemporary the reference is, the more metatheatrical it becomes. “Since the greatest metadramatic impact occurs when references are to recent and controversial works (or, as we shall see, to recent and controversial people), with the passage of time, the works either become too obscure, or, conversely, too well known, passing into the common coin of the drama/culture complex, to have their original disruptive power any longer.”⁷⁷ In extremely contemporary plays, mentioning the tsunami in Japan or the conflict in Libya, for example, would have the power to take the audience out of its stasis in a way that mentioning George Bush or even the tsunami in Sri Lanka in 2007 wouldn’t. The play sometimes manages to date itself by making references to the time period it was written in. There is a mention of the approaching “Age of Aquarius” that firmly plants the play in the early 1970s.⁷⁸ By comparison, these dated citations strengthen the power of the citations that actually function in taking the audience out of the dramatic illusion.

Arrabal seems to be aware of the paradox of time eating away at the metatheatricality of a certain reference, and for that reason, he does not make one of the four imprisoned characters quote Melquesidez, but has created the specific role of the

⁷⁶ Hornby, 90.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 91.

⁷⁸ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 23.

Apparition, whose only purpose is to interject Melquesidez quotations. This aligns with Hornby's aforementioned definition of citation. The Apparition has staying power because he is his own entity rather than a more generalized character who is quoting an authority. His metatheatricality is also defined by the fact that only the most elite of the intellectuals in Arrabal's audience will probably have any knowledge of who Melquesidez is, or whether he is even a real person.

In other scenes in the play, the Apparition seems to be commenting on the action of the play in order to inform an audience that might otherwise be confused. Arrabal changes the structure of the play to expose a deeper meaning by doing this. About halfway through the play, there are "*flashes of light*" which the audience will discern as an indication that there has been a change into a dream or memory. Suddenly, the mute character Pronos is wearing a newly procured muzzle.⁷⁹ At first, the audience is led to believe this is an elaborate, metaphorical portrayal of his self-imposed silence. Imis, the woman who stars in Pronos's dream, comments on the muzzle lovingly, "That muzzle really suits you. It's marvelous. That way you can't say anything. You used to be so talkative before the war."⁸⁰ Imis's speech leads the audience to believe that this muzzle is a symbolic representation of the oppression that has silenced Pronos. It is not until one of the last of the Apparition's speeches that the audience finds out the truth behind Pronos's muzzle;

The light concentrates on PRONOS.

THE APPARITON Every morning, for years after the war, the reactionary government executed large numbers of prisoners against the cemetery wall. The authorities discovered that these men uttered subversive remarks like 'Long Live Freedom' as they fell under the hail of bullets. To put a stop to this it was decided that those under sentence of

⁷⁹ Ibid, 51.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 51.

death should be fitted with muzzles as they left the prison. These muzzles had a wooden peg attached which held the mouth open during the execution, but which prevented the man from shouting.⁸¹

At this moment, the audience references back to when the muzzle was first introduced in the play, and every truth that was invented in the mind of the audience about Pronos's circumstances is destroyed. As it turns out, Pronos wears the muzzle because he was mistakenly taken to be executed and fitted for a muzzle before the executioner realized his error. This self-reference to a moment earlier in the play is the most heightened version of Hornby's definition of literary reference that can exist. If the highest level of metatheater is achieved when the reference is contemporary to the time at which the audience is watching the play, "there can be nothing more recent than the play one is currently watching!"⁸²

The Apparition is not only integral to the play because of its didacticism, it is also a device employed to define the structure of the play. Although there are few rules for the structure or arc of the story of *Handcuffs*, the Apparition works to define scenes and identify their content as reality and or fantasy. As the action of the play becomes increasingly fantastical and horrifying to the audience, it might begin to reject what it is seeing as truth. The Apparition defies that rejection by asserting that everything the audience is witnessing is fact, and has been happening in prisons right under their noses. For example, the play ends with a death, which will be discussed further on in the paper. The character, Tosan, who is executed, is killed by garroting, which the Apparition quite passively explains, "is death by strangulation."⁸³ The Apparition then goes on to explain, in an informative and unemotional manner, the procedure of garroting, as Tosan is being

⁸¹ Ibid, 51.

⁸² Hornby, 104.

⁸³ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 86.

killed. His emotionless distance to this otherwise horrifying scene brings the audience members out of any sort of reactive state so that they can question what they are seeing, rather than accept that it is just another a tragic ending to a play they saw.

The play is not only framed by the sudden appearance and disappearance of The Apparition, the audience's perception of reality is also broken by dreams and fantasies that are integral to the structure of the play. At times, characters will speak of a certain dream they have had recently, and then suddenly, they will be inside of the dream, reenacting it. At other times, the jump is much more abrupt and confusing. Early in the play, Katar and Amiel are talking about the erotic dreams Amiel has, as well as a man named Durero who had recently left prison.⁸⁴ Amiel says, "I feel as if I *am* Durero. I close my eyes and I see myself in the city, running all over the place, the happiest I've ever been for twenty years, admiring all those free people, living my first adventure."⁸⁵ As sleepers often dream of warped versions of what they have experienced that day, suddenly, the play moves to inside of Amiel's dream, and he is role playing Durero. "AMIEL's dream: *Flash of light. Eventually the theater is suffused with a strange light which prevents one from knowing whether one is there in reality or part of AMIEL's delirious imaginings. AMIEL puts on a plastic mask to 'transform himself' into DURERO.*"⁸⁶

⁸⁴ It is possible that the Durero mentioned in this scene is a reference to the German Renaissance painter Albrecht Dürer, but because the play was written in Spanish, published in French and then translated into English and reprinted, this citation has been lost. This could just as easily be a name that Arrabal chose to use without any prior connotations in mind, as after the scene ends and the men return to the reality of the prison, they speak of Durero as if he has lived in prison with them, "AMIEL How many years did we spend here with him?/ KATAR Right from the beginning." (Arrabal, 17) This is an example of Arrabal's misleading citations and references.

⁸⁵ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 8-9.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 9.

These structural elements allow for two of Hornby's facets of metatheater to exist throughout the entire play: play within a play and role play within a role. Richard Hornby states that there are three types of role play in metatheater; voluntary (willingly putting on a costume or disguise -- oftentimes dressing in drag -- in order to achieve some sort of goal), involuntary (often caused by external factors out of the character's control, as well as a hidden inner weakness), and allegorical (references to well known characters from literature or religion).⁸⁷ When an audience enters a theater, its members agree to believe that they are watching a portrayal of reality that is being enacted by actors -- however realistic the play may seem, they are still watching a play which has been rehearsed and staged. Role play within a role adds a third layer which sets the audience off; the character is playing a role, but the actor is playing a character. This third layer plays with the audience's perception of the identity of the person it is watching, and as is intended by metatheatrical devices, brings them out of the content to examine the form.

In the *Cast of Characters*, Arrabal specifies that there should be a core ensemble of four men and four women who will play specific characters, and then role play within those specified roles. The actor who plays Tosan, for example, will play the character of Tosan throughout the entire play, and then also play Tosan playing the roles of a Picker and Christ. Arrabal specifies this constructed role play in the text by not writing just the role-played character's name, but by writing, "TOSAN (*a picker*)."⁸⁸ This reiterates the point that these are not a multitude of different characters present in the play, but specific figures present in the dreams and fantasies of the four men which will be enacted by the core group. In this way, each dream scene is not a new circumstance interjected into the

⁸⁷ Hornby, 73.

⁸⁸ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 25.

content of the play, but a play within the play that is put on by Tosan, Pronos, Amiel and Katar. The rules of the world are abstracted even further by the structure Arrabal has created for his characters' role playing.

The character Pronos is mute (according to Arrabal's stage directions on page 6) when the audience first meets him. He seems to be cognitively aware, but cannot communicate other than to nod. Arrabal writes these non verbal communications into the text to ensure that the way in which the character is played is specific, "PRONOS, *who is dumb, is following the conversation with the greatest of interest.*"⁸⁹ or later on, "PRONOS *shakes his head.*"⁹⁰ When he is role playing other characters in the plays within the play, however, he can speak. In a memory scene between Amiel and his wife, Lelia, she tells him of a charismatic general whom she heard speak: "I felt so happy listening to him I forgot all about you and I went up and touched his khaki shirt."⁹¹ In the next moment, there is a lighting shift and suddenly, Pronos is "*addressing the crowd from a balcony*" as that leader.⁹² This switch of vital character facility occurs throughout the play, and although it is confusing to the audience at first, it also aids them in creating stability. When Pronos is mute, the audience is witnessing real time. When Pronos has faculties, the characters are in a dream.

This layering of characters destabilizes the audiences' perception of reality even further. "We unconsciously fear that letting down the boundaries of identity will lead to letting down all constraints for our animal impulses, leading to loss of control, to

⁸⁹ Ibid, 6.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 18.

⁹¹ Ibid, 23.

⁹² Ibid, 24.

unlimited promiscuity and perversity.”⁹³ Arrabal preys upon that fear of chaos in order to present the realities of living in prison in a way that is far away from the audience; literally, the audience is watching these four men enact all of their fantasies, perhaps because the prisoners are bored or need to do something to maintain hope. At the same time, the content is confrontational to the audience -- as the characters play more and more roles, the audience plummets further into confusion in a manner similar to the confusion felt by inmates.

The roles played by the four men and the women who help them enact their dreams range from friends and family members from the past to contemporaries of the imprisoned men -- a revolutionary leader or a jailer -- to biblical references like Christ or Elijah. In this way, Arrabal is not only making literary or allegorical references by writing a citation into a character’s dialogue, he is putting the reference directly in the play. Not all of the role-played characters who seem like they are referencing a contemporary actually are; some of them are figments of Arrabal’s imagination, which destabilizes the audience’s sense of reality even more. As mentioned previously, in the scene in which Amiel plays Durero, the audience does not know if the name is a reference to the famous painter, or just a name Arrabal chose to employ. In this scene, Katar plays Aristodome, who also seems like he could be a reference. These characters are written with such conviction, it is impossible to know if the reference is to a character in Katar’s, Amiel’s and Pronos’s shared history, or a reference to someone from the real world outside of the play. In other instances, Arrabal’s stage directions call for reference without blatantly telling the audience: “PRONOS *is now dancing like Frank Sinatra*”⁹⁴

⁹³ Hornby, 70.

⁹⁴ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 47.

The audience will automatically grapple with making connections to the allusion presented because they should, at this point in the play, be actively engaged in recognizing the references Arrabal makes. This cyclical nature of the audience's response to what they are witnessing is exactly what Arrabal tried to subvert and manipulate. This reference dates the play significantly, but it doesn't seem to matter. If the audience cannot connect Pronos's dance to Frank Sinatra, they will still be taken out of the scene by seeing him dance in a scene that is otherwise quite serious.

Arrabal is able to manipulate the audience further by changing the rules of reference as he writes his play. In some instances, the references are direct citations, but in others, they are adaptations of literary references. In a scene that the stage directions describe as Amiel's dream, Amiel role plays as the famously imprisoned Baroque painter Peter Paul Rubens, and a page into the scene, Katar begins to role play as the Prophet Elijah. The two men speak to two beautiful women, and as the scene progresses, Ruben and Elijah become more and more sexually explicit and suggestive with the women. The women go unnamed until Elijah asks one of them, who is role-played by Leila, who she is. Suddenly, she begins role playing as Desdemona from Othello. From then on, when she speaks, the text says "LEILA (*Desdemona*)."⁹⁵ Once she has been introduced, Rubens decides that the four characters present should get married and begins to tell his life story. He goes on to tell his story which is a slight adaptation of the life of Othello, from a speech Othello makes in Act I, Scene 3 of Shakespeare's play.

The syntax changes from prose to a semi-sonnet that is unrhymed and fourteen lines long during Rubens's speech. After Rubens's story, Desdemona replies with a speech that has been adapted from the lines that follow in Othello's original speech. In

⁹⁵ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 40.

Shakespeare's text, Othello continues with: "She swore, in faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange..."⁹⁶ In *Handcuffs*, the context of the speech changes from Othello's third person description of Desdemona's response to his life story to Desdemona's first person adaptation of Othello's speech: "I swear I' faith 'tis strange, 'tis passing strange..."⁹⁷ Hornby argues that adaptation is a very specific type of metadramatic literary reference, and that all plays reference each other, just as all plays reference the world of drama in general. Hornby argues, "Adaptations of other plays are not metadramatic for the audience members unless they are to some extent "seeing double"; they must perceive the current play and the parodied play as separate entities rather than as a blending into a single experience."⁹⁸ Although Hornby is specifically discussing full-length adaptations like *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, his theory applies to and is even strengthened by the presence of a miniature adapted play within the container of another play.

The metatheatrical elements mentioned in this chapter -- role play, play within a play and reference -- as well as the didacticism of the play, create and contain the chaos in the play. To the audience, all of the added elements of the play may appear to bring it away from any semblance of a narrative with character and plot progression. To the playwright, on the other hand, they are extremely specific and ordered. These metatheatrical tropes bombard the audience, but in a very structured way. In this way, Arrabal has created safety in a world of chaos for the audience to exist in.

⁹⁶ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, I,iii, <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/othello/full.html>.

⁹⁷ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 40.

⁹⁸ Hornby, 94.

Chapter IV.

Arrabal's favorites: sex, violence and ceremony

Fernando Arrabal does everything in his power to push his audience to its limits. He uses literary devices that he excels at in order to create a world of the play that weighs heavily on the audience. The three motifs that are most prevalent in *And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers* -- and perhaps hold the most power -- are sex, violence and ceremony. The gritty imagery that comes with these three hot topics is laced throughout the play so seamlessly that it makes the audience feel that the world of the play would be lacking if these events did not occur. Arrabal is most interested in juxtaposing the beauty of language and the horrors of life, and the shock that witnessing both at the same time can induce. He is adamant that the way to produce such an effect on the audience is by creating theater that is ceremonial in content. In his mind, "the theatre is first and foremost a 'festival, a rigorously ordained ceremony.'"⁹⁹ Arrabal believes that his employment of ceremony in theater is not merely a matter of artistry, but an absolute necessity. When an interviewer once asked him to comment on the development of ceremonial theater, he replied, "What is a ceremony? It is a spiritual vehicle through which a group may communicate with someone whose language is unknown."¹⁰⁰ Arrabal is clearly most interested in communicating efficiently and effectively, and his conviction is that ceremony, which often has no language, is the most accessible means of performance. His interest in making his theater as accessible as possible, while still

⁹⁹ Knowles, 526.

¹⁰⁰ Arrabal, Interview, 57.

making an impact, stems from his belief in tolerance and liberty for all. His theater is a reaction to the rigid control of Franco's regime that he experienced firsthand.

Classically, Richard Hornby defines a ceremony in a play as a "formal performance of some kind that is set off from the surrounding action."¹⁰¹ They are laden with meaning and importance, and precision in enacting the ceremony is as important as the ceremony itself. In metaplays, the "ceremony is never haphazard, in fact, it must always be performed the same way."¹⁰² Hornby writes that society as a collective "we" employs ceremony "to understand our world and ourselves."¹⁰³ We are able to maintain a critical perspective when we ritualize events in a symbolic manner. Theater and ceremony are closely linked by standards and rules that all participants are aware of and follow. What is different, though, is the degree to which the participants give up their own identity to take on a role. In theater, actors give themselves completely to the characterization, and a great actor's true identity will be forgotten. In ceremony, the participants may give themselves fully, but they will always remain their own selves playing a role.

Ceremony in theater expresses metatheatricality because a play is a microcosm of the real world and ceremony examines the facts the "real world" holds to be true and just. "If ceremony is a way in which society examines the eternal, unchanging aspects of life (which, in a static society, includes almost all of them), theatre is a means for examining ceremony, and thus for questioning supposedly eternal verities."¹⁰⁴ Watching a play asks for a certain level of criticism from the audience, no matter how superior or entertaining

¹⁰¹ Hornby, 49.

¹⁰² Ibid, 50

¹⁰³ Ibid, 52.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 55.

the play might be. An audience member might be pondering the socio/political context of the play he is watching just as the man next to him is critiquing the costume or set choices. Ceremony within a play demands that the audience be critical. When the audience watches a ceremony that takes place inside of a play, it moves to a higher state of consciousness and is able to examine the moment being ceremonialized in the larger scheme of society.

In Rick Cluchey's *The Cage*, the ceremonial content revolves around the only set piece in the play: the toilet. Throughout the course of the play, the cell's new prisoner, Jive, is baptized, tried, convicted, and drowned, and all of these events happen in and around the toilet. Jive is baptized by the mentally unstable Hatchet, who has delusions of grandeur throughout the play, and role plays as famous men of power. Similar to Arrabal's structuring of ceremony, Jive's baptism is written into the stage directions, "(HATCHET scoops water from toilet with his hand and baptizes JIVE repeatedly) ... Thy pain alone, that you shall keep ... and bear ... here in this cage!"¹⁰⁵ This cycle of ceremonies examines societal values like justice and order in the microcosm of the prison. Performing these acts inside of a prison demands that the audience critique the ceremonies on a larger scale, as well as their connection to imprisonment. The audience can reflect on the symbolic meaning of a baptism, trial and murder inside of a prison; so-called "justice" is what leads men to prison, and religion often comes to the imprisoned as a way out.

Arrabal's ceremonial content is not celebratory and delightful to witness; some of it is gratuitous and disgusting. Violence and sexual gratuity are as integral to the arc of *Handcuffs* as plot and character development. Arrabal is quick to admit that he lives for

¹⁰⁵ Cluchey, 41.

the ills of the world just as much as the good. “I am certainly obsessed by the temptations inherent in purity and goodness; they fascinate me, even to the point of nausea. But climaxes are hot- with precipices and sharp curves.”¹⁰⁶ It is in these sharp curves that the drama lies, and Arrabal understands that a smart writer will not skim over the dirt and grime, but instead, relish it. In fact, Arrabal thinks of *And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers* with fondness. In his opinion, “it is a play filled with tenderness.”¹⁰⁷

The ceremonial moments in *Handcuffs* are reminiscent of Beckettian metonymy. They are snapshots of a much larger image that must be created in the audience’s mind’s eye. In society, ceremonies are used as visual representations of more abstract concepts. A wedding is a highly stylized, symbolic representation of a contract made between two people. A commencement ceremony after four years of college marks not only that the graduate is on her way to a new life as an adult, it is also a tangible symbol of sixteen years of education. Hornby writes that ceremonies always mark change “from maiden to wife, from student to graduate, from pollution to purification.”¹⁰⁸ Perhaps then, the ceremony in *Handcuffs* is so compelling because of the static environment in which the men exist. They can dream of change all they want, but have little power over changing their position. That struggle for change is captivating to an audience; we connect to someone wanting something more than we connect to someone who has it all. This immutable desire for change is metatheatrical because the very existence of the ceremony subverts the course of the plot. “Ceremonies have a ‘plot,’ but exist in order to transcend it; theater exists to celebrate plot. Instead of an emphasis on what is eternal, the emphasis

¹⁰⁶ Arrabal, Auto-Interview, 74.

¹⁰⁷ Arrabal, Interview, 54.

¹⁰⁸ Hornby, 53.

is on what is transitory -- the shifting events in the lives of the particular individuals.”¹⁰⁹ In *Handcuffs*, the ceremony usually marks a departure -- the most significant departure being death.

Ceremony is especially important inside prison, because prisoners are separated from society, and yet are used to critique the values society holds closest. Ceremonies are meaningful diversions from the reality of everyday life for the prisoners. “Ceremonies always convey meaning. They contain encoded signs by which their society understands both the external world around them, and the emotional world within.”¹¹⁰ Inside prisons, they become self-contained rituals that are observed and easily repeated by the people enacting them. They are also a way to maintain some semblance of control in an already extremely rigid environment. Rules for each ceremony are to be followed, and if they are not followed, the players will be punished.

Inside prisons, the ceremonies that are most frequently performed -- trials, executions, funerals -- are dark, formal occasions. The ceremonies that celebrate love and friendship inside of prisons are rarely enacted or if they are, they are rarely witnessed by outside audiences, and so it is a surprising treat for a theater audience to see one in the context of a prison play. In prison, where men are “cooped up” like animals and stripped of all rights, their bodies and minds are all they have to celebrate, honor, or punish. It is ownership over the primal, human, nature of ceremony that makes them so important to the men acting them out. Ceremony is a metatheatrical paradox because it is inherently theatrical, and yet conversely, modern theater evolved from ceremonies and rituals that

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 54.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 51.

occurred hundreds of years ago.¹¹¹ Seeing the intersection of both of these deeply connected events allows us to verify, critique or even attack the act of putting on a ceremony as we watch the play.

In *Handcuffs*, much of the content of the imprisoned men's dreams is ceremonial, and ceremony is especially prevalent in Arrabal's stage directions. His stage directions are rarely suggestions for how to technically stage the play; instead, they are small bits of plot that are to be completed without text. For example, when the infamous Tosan is finally introduced into the space of the prison the stage direction reads, "TOSAN *makes a spectacular entrance.*"¹¹² In another scene, an erotic and gratuitous ritualized sex act is enacted between Pronos and Imis (who is role playing as his wife at the time) that is entirely separate from any spoken dialogue. The directions instruct:

*She takes her clothes off, gets down on all fours and starts to bray. PRONOS, very happy now, skips around her. Occasionally, he adjusts her position so that she is on all fours with her face to the ground and her bottom in the air.... Finally, he utters a Tarzan-like cry, strips off his clothes and throws himself on her. They both bray.*¹¹³

This theme of ceremony abruptly interrupting the action of the play aligns with Hornby's definition of a ceremony within a play: "ceremony within the play involves a formal performance of some kind that is set off from the surrounding action."¹¹⁴ Hornby references classical plays like Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in which there is a funeral, a

¹¹¹ According to an article by Monica Prendergast in *Theatre Topics Journal*, "early theatre audiences were inscribed as *witnesses* to theatre rituals and storytelling that everyone understood to be a part of sociocultural (even political and/or religious) practice, not simply an evening's diverting entertainment to be consumed then soon forgotten." Monica Prendergast, "From Guest to Witness: Teaching Audience Studies in Postsecondary Theatre Education," *Theatre Topics* 18, no. 2 (September 2008): 95, <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/tt/summary.v018/18.2.prendergast.html>.

¹¹² Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 41.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

¹¹⁴ Hornby, 49.

banquet and a fencing match, to make his point about ceremony being a derivative of the plot of the play.¹¹⁵

In *Handcuffs*, after Rubens and Desdemona (played by Pronos and Lelia) profess their intent to marry each other, Arrabal includes the stage direction, “*Grotesque marriage.*”¹¹⁶ This simple stage direction can open up a world of dramatic possibility for the theater producing this play that aligns with the ideals of Panic Theater. In her article about Latin-American usage of ceremony and ritual, Dorothy Knowles writes that Arrabal’s ceremonial theater illustrates the freedom expected from the Panic Theater, “Art that is ‘panic’ is all embracing and free from constraint of any kind at all. In the domain of the theatre it was not a new avant-garde that they sought to create, but a completely unshackled theatre.”¹¹⁷ Just as abruptly as this ceremony in *Handcuffs* (the duration of which could last as long as the director feels necessary) is introduced, Pronos suddenly becomes a priest and pronounces Rubens and Desdemona husband and wife. Amiel is taken out of his dream and back into the space of his cell by a blackout and the loudspeaker announcing, “What’s going on in the cellblock, swine? No dreaming out loud!”¹¹⁸ The omnipotent voice of the loudspeaker, presumably the voice of a prison guard, brings the characters and the audience out of their revelry and back into the “reality” of the world of the play.

Amiel’s dream and the ceremony that occurs inside of it is capped off with a tiny metatheatrical quote that could easily be ignored by an audience which has not been prepared to be actively listening (and critiquing). The Loudspeaker, which is a symbolic

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 49.

¹¹⁶ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 40.

¹¹⁷ Knowles, 527.

¹¹⁸ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 40.

reference to a much larger authority than the one man who is actually speaking the words, chastises Amiel for dreaming out loud. That poetic phrase encapsulates the entire definition of metatheater. It is a dream, out loud, that is experienced by everyone in the audience. Hornby writes that this statement is as self-referential as saying “nobody dies halfway through the last act.”¹¹⁹ He goes on to say that this kind of statement has the effect of drastically realigning the audience’s perception of the drama, forcing it to examine consciously the assumptions that lie behind and control their response to the world of the play.”¹²⁰ This self-reference challenges the audience not to be complacent, not to accept everything it witnesses.

This type of self-referential remark occurs throughout this play, yet they are subtle enough that they do not act as an oppressive reminder of the metatheatrical nature of the play, but represent more Arrabal’s witty sense of humor. He clearly holds the conventions of theater as silly and over-utilized and is interested in informing his audiences of his opinions by both the construction of his play and its content. In a scene between Tosan and his lawyer, played by Pronos, Tosan is informed that he will have a trial, although his crime against Franco has already been judged and his punishment predetermined. He asks his lawyer if spectators or journalists will attend the trial for formality’s sake, to which his lawyer replies, “What do you think this is, a theater?”¹²¹ Arrabal is both mocking the so-called justice system during the Franco regime, as well as referencing the play as a piece of theater in which a theatrical event is happening. The

¹¹⁹ Hornby, 117.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 117.

¹²¹ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 66.

Lawyer continues by reassuring Tosan: “We’re not going to make a spectacle of you” perhaps referencing the spectacle-like early modern torture that Foucault wrote about.¹²²

Not all the ceremony in *Handcuffs* is recognizable as institutionalized ceremony; some of the ceremonies, instead, “have an overall ceremonial quality, as a result of their solemn tone, their structured organization, their independence from the surrounding action, and, above all, the meaningfulness that the characters -- but not the audience -- place in them.”¹²³ At the end of the play, the story narrows to a focus on Tosan and the end of his life, and the presence of symbolic ceremony weighs upon the audience. As Tosan is sentenced to be executed, his wife, Falidia, makes a dramatic entrance into the space:

*Lighting change. FALIDIA is standing center stage in a long cape. A large, blood-stained flag stretches the width of the stage above the audience’s heads. A patch is spreading in the center. Beneath this patch is a sort of basin. Blood drips steadily from the patch to the basin during the rest of the play. A clock shows four in the morning.”*¹²⁴

At this point, the play moves far away from the world inside of the prison, and, instead of depicting the outside realistically, Arrabal chooses to portray it abstractly. Outside the confines of the prison, the country is in the process of being bled dry by the Franco regime. This image conjures thoughts of the bloodbath that was the Spanish Civil War, as well as the deterioration in the state of the nation under Franco.

The last ten pages of the play focus on Falidia’s attempt to save her husband from his execution. She speaks to three different men of power who are role played by Amiel, Katar, and Pronos. First, she begs a Confessor for the Catholic Church, then speaks to a General, and finally, a wealthy banker who is close to President Franco. Each

¹²² Ibid, 66.

¹²³ Hornby, 61.

¹²⁴ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 77.

conversation gives Falidia a little taste of hope before her dreams are dashed. At the end of each conversation, the stage descriptions state that the powerful man “*ostentatiously washes his hands in the basin. The light concentrates on him. He wipes his hands.*”¹²⁵

This direction symbolizes authority turning its back on those in need and, as the expression goes, “washing one’s hands of the whole problem.” The fact that this event is repeated three times references one of the oldest theatrical and literary traditions of honoring the number of three.

The final image of the play is that of Tosan being executed by garroting. As he dies, the stage directions state that he urinates. “*A woman, FALIDIA, catches the liquid in a bowl. The women take the bowl from FALIDIA and hold it before her. She dips her hands into the bowl. When she removes them they are covered with blood. The urine is really blood. She washes her face in the blood. There is a very slow fade to black.*”¹²⁶

The image of a mourning woman cleansing herself of her sorrows evokes thoughts and feelings of the Bible and baptism, and above all, purity. The ceremonial cleansings that happened prior to this one have built the audience up to expect something magical from this last washing. When the water she is attempting to cleanse herself with turns out to be blood, the audience is shocked and distanced from the play one last time. Rather than reel the audience in for the last moment of the play, Arrabal confronts it with one last grotesque image that brings the audience out of any sort of inert condition it might have been in.

The two visually disturbing motifs that wind their way through *Handcuffs* -- graphic violence and sexual perversity -- also aid in distancing the audience from the

¹²⁵ Ibid, 81.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 86-87.

content of the play. Clearly, Arrabal felt that this imagery was not only important to create an atmosphere, but absolutely necessary, as both motifs are heavily present throughout the entire play. The technical act of employing violence and sex in the play combines ceremony and self-reference with the intention of taking the audience completely out of its play-watching stupor as well as its comfort zone. Russian critic, Viktor Schklovsky, wrote,

Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.¹²⁷

As Schklovsky comments, art should be felt, not just seen. And it is apparent that Arrabal felt very similarly about the experience he wanted to create for his audience. His writing asks questions of his audience rather than answers them, and in this way audience members are forced to feel their way through the process of the play instead of just witness it as an entirely separate entity from themselves. His play is different from one in which an audience is just waiting to get to the finish line, so that the whole story can be neatly wrapped up in a bow. Arrabal wants his audience to delve quite deeply into the process of perceiving every element of the play, including the more gory imagery.

In the journey from neoclassicism to present modern drama, the prevalence of perversity in theater has increased. In early dramas, like *Medea*, violent plot points occurred offstage, a choice which was necessitated by the lack of technology and special effects needed to create realistic-looking bloodshed on stage. As stagecraft evolved and societies became less puritanical and more accepting of brutality on stage, grotesque

¹²⁷ Hornby, 62.

imagery moved to center stage. By bringing violence to the foreground, audiences have been trained to numb themselves to watching horrific imagery and reminding themselves that they are watching something that is an imitation, not reality. Violence has become, in a way, ceremonialized in the theater, because as realistic as it may seem, it is the result of specific blocking and hours of rehearsal to perfect every move. If pushed to their limits, the audience members can revert to their knowledge of play production in order to make themselves feel safe.

Arrabal pushes the boundaries of humans' capacity to watch violence and do nothing to stop it. That being said, he is absolutely uninterested in audience participation, just reaction. "He does not hold with active audience participation as a dramatic principle. He maintains that a spectator joining in the action causes a 'break in transmission' unless he is in a sort of trance, and the 'transmission', in Arrabal's opinion, should take place in one direction only, from actors to audience."¹²⁸ This transmission that Arrabal speaks of is supported by the metatheatricality of the play, and the manner in which the audience is processing the content as it witnesses it. The specific rules of the prologue, which include a soundscape of women's cries and chains clanking, might prepare the audience for grisly imagery, but it is impossible to be entirely prepared for the shock of seeing a man tear out and eat another man's eyeballs.

Handcuffs is an interesting and exciting case study for an examination of metatheatrical techniques, because rather than use metatheater to push the audience away and intellectualize what it is witnessing, Arrabal seems to employ the techniques to draw the audience in as deep as possible, so he can make as much of a horrific impact upon it as possible. He gives the audience a slice of life of the imprisoned, and does it by

¹²⁸ Knowles, 529.

constantly putting the audience in a feeling of discomfort. Arrabal manipulates the audience by taking every truth the audience feels they can accept as fact, and flips them.

Arrabal asks a lot of his audiences, but he perhaps asks even more of the people who chose to produce his play. He asks the impossible of his directors and yet, his most violent and grotesque ideas are quite often abruptly dropped into the play and then moved away from. Although they seem like stage directions that could be just as easily ignored as acknowledged, they are integral to evoking the atmosphere of Spain under Franco's ruling -- a sadistic world of nonsensical violence. The violence often occurs in the context of the church or government, a sign that Arrabal is trying to allow his characters some control -- if only in their dreams -- over their own destiny. Arrabal wants his audience to embrace the disgusted feeling that sits in the pit of the stomach as we witness brutality, and use it to reflect on social institutions we rely on and take for granted. The stage directions are more implications than instructions because Arrabal doesn't want his director to get lost in a wordy description of what Arrabal imagined would happen. Instead, he gives the director a brief visceral image that he asks the director to depict in the way most close and horrifying to him.

In a scene between Katar and a priest, the priest is presented as an oppressive, hateful dictator who uses Catholicism to terrorize the men he is with. After describing a story of punishing a man who disobeyed God, the prisoners revolt against the priest. Katar takes his own vengeance on the priest by gouging his eyes out, an image that is supported by both the text, "First, I'm going to gouge his eyes out," and the stage directions, "*He puts his eyes out.*"¹²⁹ The violence continues as the men "*trample on his eyes*" and eventually, Katar slowly "*tears off the priest's testicles, which can be seen*

¹²⁹ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 29.

bleeding in his hand.”¹³⁰ The violence in prisons that is emulated in *Handcuffs* manifests itself in many ways. Arrabal never allows the audience to remain in its comfort zone, so as soon as he feels that it might have become accustomed to seeing men tear out eyeballs, he makes his violence more abstract and perverse. In the scene following Katar’s life sentencing, an executioner attempts to perform a quasi-execution on Katar. The scene is clearly a dream or nightmare and is evoked by a severe lighting change. Pronos, dressed as a ballerina on roller skates, dances “*an effeminate dance to The Swan by Saint-Saëns.*”¹³¹ As Pronos dances, Katar’s wife denounces him, proclaiming that he must pay for the sins he has committed. In a final act of defiance towards her husband, his wife stabs him in the back while the executioner “*holds him in a vice-like grip.*”¹³² Directly after that stage direction, Arrabal abstracts the scene even further by adding, “*Pronos is now dancing like Frank Sinatra.*”¹³³ The dream concludes with a literal interpretation of every idiom that can be used to represent betrayal. After Katar’s wife has literally stabbed her husband in the back, the executioner says, “*Shit on him, madam. Shit on him.*”¹³⁴ At this venture, the audience might have become immune to the scatological humor and blunt language that the play is laden with. What it hasn’t become immune to though, is the actual human act of defecating on stage, which is exactly what Katar’s wife does next. “*The wife brings out a pot, puts it on her husband, and starts defecating. Farting noises. PRONOS dancing frantically.*”¹³⁵ This moment is a key metatheatrical moment, as it completely takes the audience out of the content of the play that it might

¹³⁰ Ibid, 30.

¹³¹ Ibid, 46.

¹³² Ibid, 47.

¹³³ Ibid, 47.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 47.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 47.

feel justified in personally relating to. It is impossible to witness such perverse cruelty, followed by a basic fart joke, and not feel removed from the play.

This scene also lends itself to a discussion of the sexual perversity and sadism that is prevalent in *Handcuffs*. Graphic imagery becomes, very quickly, a motif that flows throughout the play without apology or excuse. In a manner similar to the way Arrabal includes violence in his play, as the action continues, the sexual acts become more erotic and horrifying. An element of this perversity is nudity, a performance technique which evolved with society becoming more and more tolerant. As Hornby writes, “Direct stimulation tends to destroy the dramatic illusion; nudity on stage, for example, may make us forget the world of the play by stimulating us with the sexual potentialities of the actor or actress. (For this reason, nudity, which became popular in the theater in the 1960s, is actually a metadramatic device, a form of real-life reference).”¹³⁶ An actor’s nude body on stage brings the audience out of the drama by deconstructing the theater decorum an audience expects. Stripped of a costume, the actor is making the most honest self-reference he can possibly make. Any semblance of the fourth wall is completely broken down as the audience can now relate to the actor not as a character he is playing, but as an object audience members can watch and commodify. This act moves the play beyond realism -- where the actor and the character he is playing both become very much present in the mind of the audience.

The frequent nudity in the play might become commonplace as the audience adapts to seeing naked actors, and yet it is difficult to imagine an audience which would not be shocked by some of the obscenities presented. In the scene previously mentioned between a priest and the prisoners he tortured, Christ appears to perform a miracle and

¹³⁶ Hornby, 112.

restore the priest to his whole self. Christ's appearance is established by "*Divine Light. Harmonium*" and the stage directions dictate that he is seated with a sheet covering his privates.¹³⁷ After Christ (played by Tosan) performs the miracle of restoring the Priest's vision and testicles, he says, "As soon as Cleopatra's done, she'll get on to you. *Then* you'll see. *Christ pulls away the sheet, revealing a woman- DRIMA- in the act of sucking his enormous cock. DRIMA -- winks saucily.*"¹³⁸ Just as abruptly as this pornographic imagery is introduced into the scene, the lights change and it is revealed to the audience that this was an erotic dream of Pronos's, and now the men are back in their prison cell. Arrabal is constantly pushing the limits of the audience's tolerability by building on graphic imagery towards the hot climax he spoke of so fondly.

When graphic sexual or violent acts are performed on a stage, no matter how convincing they are, the world of the play will break for the audience as it tries to piece together what it is seeing. Hornby writes that self-reference acts "as a splash of cold water in the face of the dreaming, imaginative audience" and as nudity is the most primal self-reference to be made, this scene changes the audience's perception of the play.¹³⁹ Hornby also writes that self-reference "drastically realign[s] the audience's perception of the drama, forcing them to examine consciously the assumptions that lie behind and control their response to the world of the play."¹⁴⁰ It evokes feelings of betrayal by the church and other forms of authority, as well as illustrates, quite clearly, how primal and violent the imprisoned men's desires are.

¹³⁷ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 32.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹³⁹ Hornby, 140.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

Conclusion

Society is quick to compartmentalize its ills. We gather up all of the gritty, dark horrors that are openly present in our lives, and confine them in secure and entirely separate spaces. Graffiti is painted over, trash is taken to dumps, stray animals are taken to shelters. Society's biggest eyesore, perhaps, is the criminal: a person found guilty of performing an act that goes against the law. Criminals are imprisoned and left to suffer their guilt and shame behind bars. What happens to the soul when the body is imprisoned is what Fernando Arrabal so eloquently explores in *And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers*.

Arrabal's opinion about modern imprisonment is clear: prisons are inhumane. The imprisoned characters in the play are psychologically damaged and hardened from the time they have spent behind bars. The men are nearing the limits of their capacity to suffer, and what comes out of that suffering is the prose that Arrabal excels at: the juxtaposition between the beauty of intense longing and the appalling nature of violent reaction:

| | |
|-------|--|
| KATAR | Who invented prison? |
| AMIEL | Animals don't have them. |
| KATAR | Do people know that a lot of guys in here would rather give up one of their eyes instead of staying shut up in here for another ten years? |
| AMIEL | People today find prison an acceptable punishment . . . but they'd be horrified if someone started putting criminals' eyes out . . . even though there'd be less suffering. |
| KATAR | I've read of countries that people call savage where a man who commits a crime gets one of his hands cut off. (<i>He laughs.</i>) How many of us wouldn't give a hand to get the fuck out of here? |

AMIEL Is it more barbaric to cut off a hand and let the man go
free? Is putting people in prison more civilized?
KATAR Not much to choose between them. They're both the
same.¹⁴¹

This scene very clearly exemplifies Arrabal's impetus for creating this play, which was to expose the horrors of imprisonment to a civilian audience.

Arrabal successfully creates the world of a prison for his audience by first creating a unity in it that cannot be broken, much in the way prisoners in a cell must form bonds to survive. Although Katar, Amiel, Pronos and Tosan started their lives as four distinct men, they have shared so much time together in one cell that their realities have overlapped, and their own distinct personalities have been lost by the wayside. Even the prisoners' dreams -- the one thing they should be able to take ownership over -- are shared between the four. They share in a collective consciousness that mimics the state the audience experiences when it watches a play that exhibits metatheatricality.

All of the metatheatrical elements Arrabal chooses to employ aid in the creation of this harsh world in which the audience must exist in contradiction to its environment. Every aspect of the play, from the *mise-en-scène* to the action on stage, is confrontational in a manner that forces the audience to pay attention. The devices present are important to the play because they force the audience members to question the knowledge they hold to be true, and to think beyond their own lived experiences. As Hornby writes, "Theatre teaches the skill of *identifying* with others rather than objectifying them -- to recognize the humanity they have in common with us, rather than treating them as mere things to be shoved aside or stamped out."¹⁴² It is a simple task to create a play that objectifies the imprisoned and forces the audience to subjectively feel pity for them. What Arrabal has

¹⁴¹ Arrabal, *Handcuffs*, 58-59.

¹⁴² Hornby, 71.

achieved with the aid of metatheatrical devices allows the audience to empathize on a basic human level, but still maintain a critical perspective. This duality allows the audience to feel empathy and still be willed to act upon those feelings.

By exposing the conventions of the theater and the play to the audience, Arrabal also opens a gateway for the audience members to explore the conventions of societal institutions. This exposure forces the audience to critique certain truths it holds true -- specifically the institutions of the church, government and the judiciary system. After watching Arrabal's play, an audience member cannot be complacent; he has witnessed cruelty and has been given the faculty to create change, if he so wills. This call to arms is the heart of Arrabal's point. He knows that theater is a powerful social tool, because it "enables [the] viewer to adopt the role of visitor/witness/agent of social change."¹⁴³

Arrabal succeeds in his goal for the intended effect of the play on his audience, because he writes what he knows. His experiences as a child during the Franco Regime, as well as his brief stint in prison as an adult, were formative. They made an impact on him, and more importantly, they made him want to make change. Arrabal seems to be drawn to metatheater for the same reasons he feels the necessity to bear witness, because, as Hornby observed, "it produces a special, heightened, acute perception. Taken out of ourselves, we see our world, our culture, for a moment as a whole. The fact that the incident occurred only once (if at all) made it no less significant in the lives of those who experienced it."¹⁴⁴ Although Hornby is specifically discussing the impact of seeing a metaplay on an audience, the same could be said for any defining experience in a person's life.

¹⁴³ Fahy, 27.

¹⁴⁴ Hornby, 100.

One small incident can be the catalyst for redefining how a person views the world, and what level of critical distance that person chooses to maintain. When the audience is confronted by that extension of Arrabal's will to bear witness, it is given a level of responsibility. Fernando Arrabal bombards his audience with as much confrontational content as he can, with the intended effect of motivating his audience members to feel the impetus to feel horrified, and therefore attempt to change the conditions it has become accustomed to. Ultimately though, as much as Arrabal tries, the onus is on the audience. I consider *And They Put Handcuffs on the Flowers* a success because Arrabal is able to give voice to the poetic sadness of imprisonment while also capturing the horrors of it, all inside of a metatheatrical structure. In my opinion, Arrabal would only believe himself to be a success, though, if his audience was motivated to create change by their reaction to the world he has so specifically created.

DRIMA Prison is a university for the spirit.

- Arrabal, 70.

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