

The theater - the sensible universe where the unspeakable is made known

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Abstract: The article explores the religious origins of the theater and its sensitively dependent on them becoming, by seeking to demonstrate how the stage has mirrored humanity's great shifts in consciousness. From the ancient theatre to the Renaissance, up to Chekhovian realism and the existential absurdity of Beckett, the theater has gone through the same transformations through which the human being has defined its existence, thus the theater has become another kind of narrative of the history of the world. A history of the beliefs through which consciousness sought to understand the absolute and the abyss from which it arose. The theater is analyzed from the perspective of a space of revelation, in which the unconscious contents that consciousness has accessed throughout historical time are staged. And the creative act is redefined as the act by which the being frees itself from the divine entities it has created. A demiurgic act by which the being recreates and thus masters time.

Keywords: time, being, universe, divinity, consciousness

Time as an introduction

"What is time? Who could explain this simply and briefly? Who could comprehend even in his mind this thing, to utter a word about it? (...) So, what is time? If no one tries to find this out from me, I know; but if I would want to explain the notion to someone who asks me, I don't know."¹

If we were to substitute the word soul for the word time, we would remain just as ignorant. If space, as well as the physical body, are accessible to our knowledge, be it limited, time and soul remain captives of their immanence. That is if they are not, somehow, immanence itself - the ineffable of being and its measure unit. Following the pattern of space, as it is the only one we know, the one that we have sought and unraveled down to the subatomic unit, and up to the 13.5 billion light-years from Earth, where the most distant known galaxy is today, the human being tries to find out the origin of its soul, of which it knows only the measure: time. And the being hopes that physical time is only a stage of cosmic time, because she cannot accept that she is only a subatomic particle of a cosmos that has no grand intention with it. She aspires to infinity, and to materialize her aspiration, she imagines gods who promise her

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¹ Sfântul Augustin, *Confesiuni*, Editura Humanitas, București, 1998, p. 405-406

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samsara or the afterlife. But “time is nothing but the form of the inner sense, that is, of our intuition and our inner state. For time cannot be a determination of external phenomena: it belongs to no figure, no position, etc.; on the contrary, it determines the ratio of representations in our internal state. (...) Time is undoubtedly something real, namely the real form of inner intuition. It, therefore, has subjective reality concerning internal experience, that is, I have a real representation of time and my determinations in it. It must therefore be considered real not as an object, but as a way of representing myself as an object.”²

Consciousness and the divine within it

The mnemonic vacuum of consciousness will forever remain hidden from us. There are no testimonies of those who created the gods, and we will only be able to make assumptions about how human consciousness evolved from the original perception of its existence to its acceptance and definition. We will never know how consciousness came to create divinity. Was it to give materiality to the sense of absoluteness she was born with? Was agony or ecstasy the state from which and through which the first vision of a Creator materialized? We won’t even know that. And the being will never be able to infeasible admit that, in all the forms divinity has taken, it has been nothing but the self-confession, pursuit, and self-definition of the being. Because that would only increase the anguish of existence. And this is precisely the purpose of divinity, to appease the need for meaning in existence. But the gods of antiquity turned out to be what Sartre defined as *mauvais-foi* – the phenomenon by which the human being allows itself to be inoculated with wrong beliefs, denying its inner freedom, due to the pressure of social forces. And religion, in all its forms, has always been a pressure that society has used against the human being to submit it to its rigors and orders, and it has circularly justified them as the will of the gods, or the word of God.

So, the being denounced all his gods, admitted that she had imagined them, but, because she did not feel liberated from the absolute, she imagined the One. Unique for each cultural space, but wearing the different likenesses of each culture. Immortality as a possibility was eradicated with the demise of the Olympians, but the being gave itself the eternity of the afterlife instead. Which, this time, was not just Hades, but Heaven and Hell. But to get to Heaven, you had to believe in Him and believe that everything you do is His will. All unbelievers, no matter how good they might do for humanity if they don't believe Him, than they will end up on the wrong side of eternity.

There is a reason why the God of the first testament needed to be vindictive, distrustful, and tyrannical: lest men should think that He might end up like his predecessors. Divine power was centralized so that no mortal could ever aspire to

² Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii pure*, Editura IRI, București 1998, p. 39

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commit deicide. The phantasm of a god who could die has been eradicated from the new faith. Later, when the fear of God was not only recognized but transformed into love, the consciousness that created Him, like a true mother, needed to justify her love and tame her child by giving Him a son to sacrifice for him. Perhaps out of the atavistic fear that the son might castrate his father, as Kronos did with Uranus, or perhaps even out of fear that power would again be divided, and polytheism might be restored? Any son, to become† himself, will defy his father. Kronos too was dethroned by Zeus, his son. And Zeus served as the model for the One God: the avenger whom all the gods, not just his sons, called Father. The new myth was created so that history could not repeat itself: Jesus dies. Maria cries and reddens eggs with his blood. It is not difficult to decipher the symbolism of castration in the image that has become the ritual of reddening eggs. If, in mythology, Kronos castrates Uranus - being urged by Gaea, his mother, and Uranus's wife -, this time, God will not multiply. This time, the only son will be mortal and will be sacrificed. According to Hesiod's Theogony, Uranus is the son of Gaea. Alcman considers him the son of Aether, the god of light. The Orphists considered him the son of Nyx, the firstborn of Chaos. There was no unity of representations, only similarities. And perhaps this is precisely what led to the sinking of the gods into the unconscious from which they arose. The association is not arbitrary. Chaos was the first state of the universe. The abyss. The void. The ravine. God's creators took it over, but gave it a different time: it is no longer the beginning, but the consequence of the separation of heaven from earth, therefore created by the One God. For *Domine Deus* to justify his primacy before the gods, He had to precede them and be able to justify why He hid for so long, letting mankind believe that the Olympians were the true face of divinity. He didn't justify Himself, He just called them pagans and punished them for it.

But the new order was not unitary either. The collective consciousness passed through many stages of religious syncretism, belief systems generically called Gnosticism, and cast them away – like the monsters born of Gaea from the union with Uranus – into Tartarus, until the story of God crystallized into the one we know today. And, even today, the story continues to be reinterpreted. Because it is the primary role of a story to carry the truth encoded in symbols, so that each storyteller can narrate himself through it, and each listener to find himself in it, and then carry the story forward imbued with himself. Except that the story also becomes the limit of the one who tells it. It becomes the matrix on which consciousness rises, the form through which it learns to manifest itself in the world. When divine oneness seemed plausible, consciousness was already strained by the understanding of the making of the world by, from, and through multiple gods. Gnostics take the pagan stories and just change the characters, believing they are rewriting the world order. For some of them, the God of the old testament was an evil demiurge born of Chaos named Ialdabaoth, represented as a theriomorphic serpent with the head of a lion. They opposed *gnosis* (knowledge) of divinity to *pistis* (faith) because they considered divinity to be internal

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to the human being. From the Valentinians to Jehovah's Witnesses, consciousness tries to define uniqueness and obey its commands, commands that consciousness has given itself. But because the absolute of existence and that of non-existence cannot be reconciled, the fear of itself makes consciousness need another higher authority to be responsible for these commands, so that she may not dispose of them at will. "The soul translates the physical process into a sequence of images in which we can hardly recognize the objective process anymore (...). Until the soul process can be reproduced in the test tube, the psyche remains a *sui generis* factor."³

But what is the role of theater in this suite of stages of consciousness?

From its beginnings, the religious rituals, to the endless waiting for a Godot who does not show, the theater has been the alchemical crucible in which human consciousness, in its Faustian attempt, has tried to stop the fairness of time. The theater was and still insists on being, the sensitive universe where the unspeakable is made known. A space of revelation, a staging of the unconscious contents that consciousness has accessed and then rationalized, sublimated, and intellectualized in definitions that she believes to be the truth. And she forgets, age after age, millennium after millennium, that everything she understands now will once prove to have been an illusion. Or a dream.

The stage artistic act is the atavistic gesture of the child who, in his play, creates a universe that he can control, according to the understandings he has. A demiurgic act by which the being - who has made another step into understanding, hoping it got her closer to her origins or at least that she is original - recreates the world, with everything in it: space, being, commandments, sins, and salvation. Why? Because, on the stage, the human being can bend time. She can make the past become the present again, she can create the future, and she can unfold it in leaps and bounds. And most of all, she can stop it. It is no coincidence that most theater creators are affected by what psychoanalysis calls the God Complex: the unwavering belief that what they know is the truth. Emphasis and infatuation, the unshakable sense of personal ability, privilege, or infallibility, the refusal in the face of any evidence to admit the possibility of error or failure, to the denial of social conventions and requirements - are all happenings of the one who creates. The explanation is simple: to be a demiurge, there must have been nothing before because he is the one who creates the universe. The extreme description of the complex may seem to border on the pathological and thus may help the conscience to exonerate itself from the guilt of carrying such an abyss. But she carries it, in small doses, because, in its absence, she would no longer create, but would settle for the anonymity of an unknown existence. "Only when the other gazes at one does one belong to oneself as a being."⁴ Theater

³ Carl Gustav Jung, *Opere*, Vol. 1, *Despre arhetipurile inconstientului colectiv*, Editura Trei, 2014, p. 70

⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *Al doilea sex*, Editura Humanitas, 2022, p. 15

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creators are thus the most fragile of mortals. Those who cannot be satisfied with the immanence of the gaze. They need its transcendence.

In the beginning, after creating the gods, consciousness also created the sensible cosmos in which to make them known to humans: the theater. But, leaving the sacred space of the temple, and allowing themselves to be brought into the public square, the gods also took the first step towards perdition. And who, among the gods, could have been the first to dare, if not the only half-god, the twice-born, the one whom Mircea Eliade deciphered as "the stranger in ourselves, the dreaded antisocial forces that unleash divine passion"⁵? Dionysus is the one who will lead the gods to destruction. His rituals and celebrations are brought into the secular space and, one by one, the Olympians will also descend to show their faces in the newly imagined space: *theatron* - the place where it can be seen. And, the theater, through exposure, will slowly make the gods be seen in all their imaginative existence. Dionysus chose to love humans more than the gods, and the gods, in their infatuation, did not understand that the stage is not only space but especially time. They failed to see that, on stage, they will become contaminated with time, they will grow old, and become obsolete.

But Dionysus, like all other gods, was created by the human being. By not accepting this, and being a slave to his faith, the being could not see that the theater is its own unconscious audacity to them all down from Olympus. Being limited by the time she alone created consciousness becomes the cosmos in which even immortality has time to cease. "For in the concept of matter I do not think permanence, but only its presence in space by filling it. Thus, I go beyond the concept of matter to add to it *a priori* by thinking something that I did not think in it."⁶ Imitating the history of being, in its beginning - the infancy of antiquity -, the theater could only be idealistic. It believed, like a divine child, that it was descended from the gods. So, just as the being does when she discovers that the gods are mere beings of her own making, as devoid of virtue as all men, it sinks their original image into the unconscious, where they will continue to exist as archetypes. "The gods die from time to time because we suddenly discover that they are nothing more than useless objects made of wood and stone by the hand of man."⁷

Not only the gods have ceased to be divine but along with them the being itself. If the parents are not divine, neither can the child be. This is when the child discovers his helplessness and blames himself for it. This is the point where the Superego, unable to accept that it is not of divine origin, takes control of the Ego and condemns it to a new morality. The ethics of the One God, whose sole purpose is to punish all that prove unworthy of Him. Thus, in the era of Christianity, no more theaters will be built for a thousand years. The ecumenical canons of the holy fathers officially condemn and threaten with damnation those who make theater or watch it. The theater

⁵ Mircea Eliade, Ioan P. Culianu, *Dicționar al religiilor*, Editura Humanitas, 1996, p. 142.

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii pure*, Editura IRI, București 1998, p. 29

⁷ Carl Gustav Jung, *Opere*, Vol. 1, *Despre arhetipurile inconștientului colectiv*, Editura Trei, 2014, p. 22

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is damned, like the gods for which it was created, and left to wander among its contemporaries, mortals without any god.

The myth of Christ borrows from that of Dionysus but antagonizes it. To Semele, Dionysus' mortal mother, Zeus shows himself in his godly appearance, and Semele does not survive. Zeus will carry the unborn Dionysus in his thigh, until his birth. In the biblical myth, the One God will no longer appear to Mary, godly or not, and will send her a messenger. Being ethical - unlike Zeus who seduced every woman he fancied -, He will impregnate the chosen woman by will, without touching her. Before Christ was needed as the Liberator, Dionysus had also been considered the Liberator by the Thracians, whence he is supposed to have originated. The Romans, later, called Bacchus - their version of Dionysus -, Liber. The son of Zeus performed miracles for mortals, turning water into wine. In Cana, Jesus doubles the number of the 3 vessels that Dionysus had turned into wine at Elis. The festivals of Dionysus (the Archesteries) took place at the beginning of spring, when Demeter left Hades, her husband, to bring spring to mortals. They lasted for three days, during which Dionysus descended into the underworld and returned victorious from the battle with the shadows. He revived on the third day. The similarities with the Easter holidays are obvious. Because Dionysus had his retinue of satyrs and nymphs, Christ had to resume to apostles and myrrhs. Among the Romans, only women participated in the secret rituals of the Bacchanalia. Jesus had to stigmatize the orgiastic of the Bacchantes, which led Dionysus to ruin. The women who follow Him must become nuns, give up the possibility of creating, and adopt Him as the Only Son. Etymologically, the Greek *orgia* means mystery or secret ritual, and is supposed to have its roots in *orge* (nature or fury) or *ergon* (action or war). This will become the cornerstone of the entire biblical myth: the knowledge the being must not become guilty of, so she cannot emulate the divinity. In Paradise, the being is not aware of its sexuality, she is happy and cannot reproduce the creation, because she does not have the consciousness to understand what being created means. In its becoming, consciousness has identified that the source of evil, through which the gods can die - for only in the consciousness of humans can they die, because only there they exist -, is in that part of the body in which the universe encoded its creation. To be able to take control of the being, the dictatorship of consciousness began the process of demonizing sexuality, which the Dionysian ancestors perceived as the *topos* in which the being can experience creation, by procreating. Perhaps not coincidentally, the representation of the inexplicable creation of the world is a Big Bang.

Although it created an antagonist, opposing monotheism to polytheism, and asceticism to orgiasticism, consciousness could not detach itself from the myths with which it was already inoculated. Made intelligible by consciousness, the sensibility of the universe was taken over by it. The new world order has repudiated the place in which it could be seen, the theatre, because the One God rejected the narcissism that, through Dionysus, lost the Olympians. He will never leave the temple and will never

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be seen on stage. It will never be seen by anyone. He will remain hidden behind an empty altar, and no woman will be allowed to enter, lest He would be tempted to show Himself. Although men were the ones to have created the gods and the theater, women became responsible for their downfall, even if they never acted on stage. And, for a long time yet, no woman will be allowed to take the stage. Thus, the stage remains the empty, desacralized space that will always remind us of the fall of the gods. The remaining emptiness, as if recalling the primordial genu, foreshadows the future Godot, but consciousness still refuses to accept his non-existence. Through this refusal, the theater will remain, for a long time, tributary to the initial condition from which it was born: to demonstrate the divine origin of the being, to have been the place and time in which *kosmos noetos* and *kosmos aisthetikos* - the intelligible universe and the sensible universe - were re-becoming the original and amoral monad, which the emergence of consciousness split. The place where the being gives herself meaning. "A new cosmos results when what makes sense separates from what does not make sense. (...) If the lack of meaning does not become the object of laughter, and the meaning the object of speculation, life is banal, everything has insignificant dimensions."⁸

But, "having a soul represents a bravery of life because the soul is a life-dispensing demon that plays its diabolical game above and below human life (...) heaven and hell are destinies of the soul, not of the man who, in his weakness and stupidity, would not know what to do in a heavenly Jerusalem."⁹ So the theater will carry its understandings in exile and will not give up denouncing *le mauvais-foi* while aspiring to the Renaissance. Since it has descended from the gods, according to their model, the day of resurrection will come. And, in the XV-XVI centuries, it came. It wasn't a day it was a century. Overlapping, not coincidentally, but necessarily, with the split of the Catholic church - when the protests against its abuses will make Protestantism a new religion -, the theater will regain its identity, this time as a mirror of the world in which the being is no longer carried by the will of the gods, but is itself the bearer of will.

All representatives of the Renaissance had strong conflicts with the religious spirit of their time. Lope de Vega was included in the Index of Heretical Works by the Spanish Inquisition and became a priest. Cervantes is born in the most prolific period of the rise of Spain, which ensures the legitimacy of this rise by creating the Inquisition, which leaves no room for any other religion than Catholicism. They consider Protestantism and Judaism to be heresies, and condemn, persecute, or kill their followers. The Society of Jesus, also known as the Jesuits, is the papal response to the rise of Protestantism, and the Jesuits are sent into the world to preach, by any means, the truth of the Catholic church. Cervantes, whose ancestors are of Jewish

⁸ Carl Gustav Jung, *Opere*, Vol. 1, *Despre arhetipurile inconștientului colectiv*, Editura Trei, 2014, p. 41

⁹ *Idem*, p. 36

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origin but converted to Catholicism, is sent to study at a Jesuit college. This is the conflict from which and through which, Cervantes can distinguish the truth behind the being's *imaginarium*, the struggle with the windmills in which she can get lost when she does not accept the reality that "everything is vanity and chasing the wind"¹⁰. Religion included.

Through all its creators, Cervantes, de Vega, and culminating in Shakespeare, who could only be a Protestant, the Renaissance would shake the monopoly of the One God, and the reverberations of it would be felt, centuries later, in Zarathustra's words denouncing that God was dead. Shakespeare exposes the tragedy of being human, and not godlike. The curse of having a choice, while being trapped between wanting opposite things, without any god to tell us what to do, that's what makes us humans. To be, or not to be. The biggest mystery in Shakespeare's works, that still haunts us. It's not as much philosophical as it is emotional. It's not reason, it's emotion. Reason can only decipher emotions; this is how the brain is wired: the neocortex is translating what the cortex experiences. And the cortex is the realm of emotions. We all choose to believe Hamlet's phantasm, that Claudius killed his godlike brother. But was it true? Did Claudius kill his brother and was Hamlet (father and son share the same name) godlike? We only have the phantom of him to tell, and Hamlet's faith in it. But we also know that phantoms are nothing but figments of a tormented mind, that can't cope with the reality of losing the one they love. So, is it true, or is our need to believe Hamlet is right that makes us believe his vision, despite our own common sense? Are we being reasonable when we believe that Hamlet's phantom is real and it tells the truth? Or are we perfectly emotional, and giving in our archetypal wish to be divine descendants and that afterlife awaits us?

Another half century will be needed until the liberation of the religious supermorality with which the being has self-flagellated. And the one who would find the courage to say that "for me, the Holy of Holies is the human body (...) love and absolute freedom freed from coercion and lies however they manifest themselves"¹¹, could only be the victim of a scourge dressed in the clothes of religion. The grandson of a Serb and the son of a "god-inspired despot"¹², as he repeatedly described his father, Anton Pavlovich Chekhov denounces the emptiness behind faith and establishes the truth about being on stage: doubt. "It's easy to be pure when you can hate the Devil you don't know and love the God you wouldn't have the brains to doubt."¹³ Beckett would later accept that it is „clear to me at last that the dark I have

¹⁰ Ecclésiastul, sursa <https://www.bibliaortodoxa.ro/vechiul-testament/18/Ecclesiastul>

¹¹ Scrisoare a lui A.P. Cehov către Pleșceev, *Opere, vol. XII, scrisori*, Editura Pentru Literatură Universală, 1962, p. 140.

¹² Henry Troyat, *Cehov* Editura Albatros, 2006, p. 32

¹³ Scrisoare a lui A.P. Cehov către Maria P. Cehov - Philip Callow – „Chekhov - The Hidden Ground”, Ivan R. Dee, Chicago 1998, p. 120

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always struggled to keep under is in reality..."¹⁴. Krapp turns off the tape and doesn't let his former self finish the sentence. Beckett would confess to James Knowsoln, his friend, that what the 39-year-old Krapp would have said next about the darkness within him was that it would be "my most precious ally". With Beckett, the being learns she has no choice but to live with the abyss she carries within. He no longer tries to clothe his fear with any god. This time, it was not the god who repudiated the scene, but the human being on the scene who repudiated God. The theater chose its own purpose, and found its necessity in what made it necessary: the agora. The theatre lost the divine within but gained in humanity. It still aspires to cathartically live out its Dionysian state by becoming passionate, exalted, and irrational. And, now and then an angel passes by. But the theater has only now become truly secular.

Conclusions

"The purpose of art is simply to increase people's self-awareness. Its value is measured according to how its general (or semi-general) acceptance is achieved, sooner or later, in society, this being the proof that art tends to increase people's self-awareness. The more we analyze and break down sensations into their various psychic components, the more self-awareness increases."¹⁵

Each transformation that the *sui generis* consciousness made coincided with the moments when the theater became part of the great culture making. Through those authors and their texts, time after time, each new generation returned, seeking to reinterpret them, to tear out their still hidden meanings, or to leave the mark of its new vision on them, as if in an attempt to live all the times that time had. The scariest thing will always be the present. For it is the present that the theatre creator tries to expose, to understand here and now. On stage, consciousness investigates her authenticity, by invoking Shakespeare and Chekhov, as they have become the archetypes that dictate her present state. Through new texts, consciousness tries to become memory, to make herself known to a prolix future, which she hopes will recognize her. "But even if the future did not leave us any kind of hope - our strange existence would give us the courage right now to live as intensely as possible, according to our own measure and law: that paradoxical fact that we live right now and yet we could be born at any time throughout infinite time, that we only have a span of today and that we must show in its brief respite why and for what we were born just now."¹⁶

¹⁴ Samuel Beckett, *Krapp's last tape*, p. 5, source <https://coldreads.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/krapps-last-tape.pdf>

¹⁵ Fernando Pessoa, *Ultimatum și alte manifeste*, Ed. Humanitas fiction, 2012, p. 43

¹⁶ Nietzsche, Friedrich, „Schopenhauer educator”, *introducere la Arta de a fi fericit*, de Arthur Schopenhauer, Editura Cartex, 2018, p. 13

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