

**Reforming Society through Metatheatre in Jean
Genet's *The Balcony* (1956)**

Submitted by

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إصْلَاحُ الْمُجْتَمَعِ مِنْ خِلالِ المِيتَامَسْرَحِ فِي مَسْرُوحِيَةِ الشُّرْفَةِ لِجِينِ جِينِت

إِعْدَاد

دُعَاءُ هَرُونِ عَبْدِ النَّعِيمِ هَرُونِ

البَاحِثَةُ بِقِسْمِ اللُّغَةِ الإِنجِلِيزِيَّةِ - كَلِيَّةِ الأَلْسُنِ - جَامِعَةِ المِنِيَا لِلْحَصُولِ عَلَى دَرَجَةِ المَاجِسْتِيرِ فِي الأَدَبِ الإِنجِلِيزِيِّ

Abstrac

Drawing on the function of the metatheatre technique in Jean Genet's *The Balcony*, this paper examines how metatheatre has been used as a social tool to reform the society. It also introduces the metatheatre technique and explains its function.

In *The Balcony* (1956), Jean Genet makes Irma's brothel a microcosm of the general's warehouse to make a biting satire of the aristocratic society's power dynamics by enacting the roles of the various classes of society. Through the metatheatrical technique, the tension between the class stratifications and the efforts of resistance of the poor to free themselves from the oppression of the aristocrats are exposed. Therefore, the Marxist critical approach is adopted: its basic tenets such as class stratification, proletariat, aristocracy, and hierarchy are used to analyze the play, highlight the metatheatrical representations of reality, and provide a proof of how the society's reform can be achieved.

This paper attempts to find answers to the following questions: What does metatheatre mean? How is metatheatre used as a tool to reform the society? How does Genet convince the spectators throughout the metatheatre technique that theatre and society are related and cannot be separated? How are the views of Jean Genet expressed through metatheatre? How does *The Balcony* represent Genet's critical views of his society? Which critical approach is applied to analyze Genet's *The Balcony*?

The paper concludes that the metatheatre technique is represented in *The Balcony* throughout the form of role-playing. This means that there is a character disguises to perform the role of another character in reality. The choice of one of the metatheatre forms over the other" relies on a self-conscious writing on the playwright's part and the self-reflexive aspect of the performance itself" (Fischer 32). In addition, the paper highlights the function

of metatheatre in *The Balcony*. It is used to discuss the social aspect as it enables Genet to express his negative ideas about his society that is full of hypocrisy, chaos, and ruthlessness. From Genet's point of view, theatre becomes no longer a tool for entertainment and amusement, but rather a medium through which the spectators are urged to bring about a social reform for their society.

Keywords: *Metatheatre, mise-en-abyme, Dramaturgy, Marxism Criticism.*

الْخُلَاصَةُ

تهدف الدراسة إلى توضيح استخدام تقنية الميتامسرح أو المسرحية داخل المسرحية على الأحداث في مسرحية الشرفة لجين جينيت وتغيير الشخصيات داخل العمل المسرحي ومن ثم إصلاح ولفت أنظار المشاهدين إلى المشكلات المحيطة بهم في المجتمع لتغييرها. و من خلال تقنيات الميتامسرح و التي تعد إليه كاشفة للصناعة المسرحية التي تلتفت الانتباه إلى ذاتها، حيث أن المسرح داخل مسرحية هو تصنيع مكشوف للعب المسرح، ينكشف الصراع الطبقي في المجتمع و يتضح الفساد من الطبقات الارستقراطية الغنية و استغلالها للفقراء و العمال. فعلى سبيل المثال؛ فقد استطاع "جينت" من خلال استخدامه لتقنيته الميتامسرح في مسرحية الشرفة من عرض سخرية لاذعة للصراع الطبقي للمجتمع والتي تتمثل في أداء بعض الزبائن المترددين على منزل "أيرما" لدور شخصيات مجتمعية شامخة كنور القسيس والقاضي والجنرال، وأخرى منحطة اجتماعياً كالشحاذ بينما تراقب "أيرما" الأحداث بداخل كل حجرة من خلال جهاز المراقبة الخاص بها.

تبدأ الدراسة بعرض مقدمة تعريفية لبعض من المصطلحات الرئيسية التي يتضمنها البحث ومن أبرزها: تعريف لتقنية الميتامسرح أو ما يسمى بالمسرحية داخل المسرحية وكيفية تطورها والميتا مسرح تقنية ليست حديثة بل قديمة قدم المسرح ذاته وأبرز استخدام لها كان في مسرحية هاملت لوليم شكسبير و استخدمها من بعده كثيرون أبرزهم لويجي بيراندللو و استخدمت أيضا في المسرح العربي على يد مارون النقاش و صلاح عبد الصبور و الفريد فرج و سعد الله ونوس و كتب عنها الكثير من الكتب مثل كتاب المسرحي الشهير لينونيل أبل منظور جديد للشكل الدرامي و كتاب الدكتور رضا غالب الميتاتياترو: المسرح داخل المسرح.

ثم تتناول الدراسة كيفية استخدام تقنية الميتامسرح مع الإشارة لمسرحية الشرفة للكاتب الفرنسي جين جينيت (1956) ثم تأتي الخاتمة لتناقش بعض النتائج التي توصلت إليها الدراسة وكذلك بعض التوصيات المقترحة لدارسي ونقاد أدب المسرح لاحقا.

ومن الجدير بالذكر أن الدراسة الحالية تهدف للإجابة على الأسئلة اللاتية : ما هو مفهوم مصطلح تقنية الميتامسرح ؟ كيف استخدم جينيت تقنية الميتامسرح كأداة داخل العمل الدرامي المسرحي لإصلاح المجتمع الخارجي؟ ما هي آراء جينيت فيما يخص تقنية الميتامسرح ودورها وتأثيرها على الشخصيات وسير الأحداث داخل العمل الدرامي المسرحي؟ كيف تمكن جينيت من خلال تقنية الميتامسرح من عرض أفكاره المسرحية ومفاهيمه المجتمعية؟ كيف استطاع جينيت تغيير مفهوم المشاهدين للمسرح وكيفية ارتباطه وتمثيله للمجتمع الخارجي ؟

لقد استطاع الكاتب من خلال هذه التقنية إبراز المساوئ المجتمعية بما فيها الفساد الذي يسود المؤسسات الاجتماعية وكذلك انعكاس المشاكل المنتشرة داخل المجتمع في ذلك الوقت. فقد كان لحياته الشخصية البائسة أثرًا سلبيًا على كتاباته المسرحية التي تعكس إحتقاره وشعوره بالكراه تجاه مجتمعه الذي يحتاج إلى التغيير الكامل في أسرع وقت ممكن. لذا فقد يلاحظ بعض المستمعين محاولات الكاتب لتبرير وإثبات أن أفعال كل من الفقراء والمهمشين ما هي إلا نتاج لما يتعرضوا له من تقييل الذات وتجاهل وتهميش المجتمع لهم .

وَمِنَ الثَّابِتِ أَيْضاً أَنَّ الْكَاتِبَ يُحَاوِلُ خِلَالَ هَذِهِ الْمَسْرُحِيَّةِ تَغْيِيرَ مَفْهُومِ الْمَشَاهِدِينَ عَنِ الْمَسْرُحِ فَلَمْ يَظَلْ بِمَتَابَةِ أَدَاةِ التَّرْفِيهِ أَوْ التَّسْلِيَةِ بَلْ وَسِيلَةَ تَذَكْرِهِمْ بِوَأَقْعِهِمِ الْحَالِي وَحَيَاتِهِمِ الْمُجْتَمَعِيَّةِ لِمُسَاعَدَتِهِمْ عَلَى إِيجَادِ حُلُولٍ لِمُشْكَلَاتِهِمْ دَاخِلِ الْمُجْتَمَعِ. لَذَا يُوصِي جِينتَ الْمَشَاهِدِينَ فِي مَسْرُحِيَّتِهِ مِنْ خِلَالَ تَقْنِيَّةِ الْمِيْتَامَسْرُحِ أَوْ الْمَسْرُحِيَّةِ دَاخِلِ الْمَسْرُحِيَّةِ بِأَنْ يَنْدَمِجُوا وَيَضْعُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ مَكَانَ الْمُثْمَلِينَ كَنَوْعٍ مِنْ تَبَادُلِ الْأَدْوَارِ كَيْ يَشْعُرُوا بِنَفْسِ أَحَاسِيْسِهِمْ وَالْأَمَمِ فِي مُحَاوَلَةٍ مِنْهُمْ لِلتَّخْلِصِ مِنْ مَشَاكِلِهِمْ وَأَوْجَاعِهِمْ وَإِحْسَاسِهِمْ بِالنَّقْصِ دَاخِلِ مُجْتَمَعَاتِهِمْ.

أَمَّا فِيمَا يَخْصُ الْخَاتِمَةَ فَهِيَ تَحْتَوِي عَلَى تَلْخِيصٍ عَامٍ لِمَا جَاءَتْ بِهِ الدَّرَاسَةُ مِنْ مَفَاهِيمٍ أَسَاسِيَّةٍ كَتَعْرِيفِ تَقْنِيَّةِ الْمِيْتَامَسْرُحِ مَعَ سَرْدِ بَعْضِ النُّتَاجِ وَالْأَسْتِنَاجَاتِ الَّتِي تَوَصَّلَتْ إِلَيْهَا الدَّرَاسَةُ إِلَى جَانِبٍ بَعْضاً مِنَ التَّوَصِيَّاتِ وَالْإِقْتِرَاحَاتِ الَّتِي يَضَعُهَا الْبَاحِثُ كَنُقْطَةِ لِبْدَايَةِ سَبِيلاً مِنَ الْأَبْحَاطِ وَالدَّرَاسَاتِ الْقَادِمَةِ.

كلمات البحث: تقنية الميتماسرح، فن التأليف المسرحي، النقد الماركسي.

Reforming Society through Metatheatre in Jean Genet's *The Balcony*

Introduction

This paper endeavors to prove how metatheatre is used in Jean Genet's *The Balcony* as a social tool to reform the society. It also introduces the metatheatre technique and explains its function. In *The Balcony* (1956), Jean Genet makes Irma's brothel a microcosm of the general's warehouse to make a biting satire of the aristocratic society's power dynamics by enacting the roles of the various classes of society. Through the metatheatrical technique, the tension between the class stratifications and the efforts of resistance of the poor to free themselves from the oppression of the aristocrats are exposed.

Metatheatre or a play-within-a-play technique is introduced by Lionel Abel in the twentieth century as "a form of *antitheatre*, where the dividing line between play and real life is erased" (Pavis 210). Historically speaking, the metatheatre technique is not new, it is known since the Greek theatre as *mise-en-abyme* which is a French term coined by Andre Gide to refer to the technique of a play-within-a-play. In addition, Phyllis Zatlin confirms that metatheatre was common in dramatic works of art by the playwrights like Cervantes, Calderon, and Shakespeare in her journal article *Metatheatre and The Twentieth Century Spanish Stage* (1992) in which she states:

Although Lionel Abel titled his ground breaking 1963 work, *Meta-theatre: A New View of Dramatic Form*, the dramatic form itself was hardly new. As Abel notes, it was a dominant mode of the baroque

period of Cervantes, Calderon, and Shakespeare with their concepts of characters as would-be dramatists of life as a dream and the world as a stage. (55)

In the current paper, the technique of metatheatre is defined as both a dramaturgical device and a structural device. Simply, it means a theatrical device where there is a play-within-a-play and the actors turn to be spectators watching other actors who take additional roles, with two blackouts and self-reflexivity; and a structural device (*mise en abyme*) if it is used as any kind of mirroring which reflects the entire narrative by simple repeating or duplication. This duplication of reality" is reinforced with the presence onstage of an internal audience which as a double to the actual audience" (Fischer 12). As it is said, there are two kinds of the audience: the internal audience who plays as actor at some other times and the actual audience who attends the performance of a play-within-a-play at the stage. Therefore, the Marxist critical approach is adopted: its basic tenets such as class stratification, proletariat, aristocracy, and hierarchy are used to analyze the play, highlight the metatheatrical representations of reality, and provide a proof of how the society's reform can be achieved.

For more clarification, the terms: *Mise-en-abyme* and dramaturgy are discussed. Early, the term *Mise-en-abyme* is used in the dramatic plays in order to shed light on certain parts in the play, and, thus, providing readers with an insight into the larger text. It acts as a reflexive device through which a smaller image is shown inside another larger one. Nowadays, it has a double-mirroring effect upon the plot of the larger play. It also draws the audience into the realm of the play and provides him with an insight of the characters' own feeling, suffering, and behavior. In addition, the term "dramaturgy" refers to "the art of composition of plays". In its broadest sense, it is the technique of dramatic art that seeks establishing the principles of play construction that is to say; "it describes a technique for constructing play texts that contain within the parameter of their fictional reality, a second or internal theatrical performance in which actors appear as actors who play an additional role" (Fischer 12).

Study Questions

The paper attempts to find answers to the following questions: What does metatheatre mean? How is metatheatre used as a tool to reform the society? How does Genet convince the spectators throughout the metatheatre technique that theatre and society are related and cannot be separated? How are the views of Jean Genet expressed through metatheatre? How does *The Balcony* represent Genet's critical views of his society? Which critical approach is applied in the paper to analyze Genet's *The Balcony*?

Review of Literature

This section introduces the previous studies including the books and dissertations that have dealt with such a topic.

In books, Payal Nagpal's *Shifting Paradigms in Culture: A Study of Three Plays by Jean Genet" The Maids, The Balcony, and The Blacks"* (2015) is an analytical study of Genet's selected plays. The book highlights the relationship between the theatre and the outer society. It investigates the relationship between what is written about society in these selected plays and what actually occurs in the society outside. For more clarification, one can observe Nagpal's speech in which he states: " this analysis of Genet's plays is an effort at trying to decode his plays to see if there is any connection between what he had written, the society to which he belonged and the present day world" (2-3).

As for dissertations, George Clyde Fosgate introduces throughout a theatrical study in a chapter entitled Jean Genet: The Theatricality of the Absurd in *The French Existential Playwrights and The Theatre of The Absurd* (1971), Jean Genet as the founder of the absurd theatre. The study highlights Genet's attempt to break all the traditional forms and structures with a special reference to his plays *Deathwatch* (1947) and *The Maids* at the same time. Accordingly, one can have a look at Fosgate's statement in which he says:

Genet is the natural link between the existentialist playwrights and the theatre of the absurd for a number of reasons. Besides being the first of the major absurdist playwrights to have his work produced, Genet seems to have certain characteristics of form and style that are more in common with Sartre than Ionesco or Beckett... (106).

First performed in the Arts Theatre Club in London in 1957, Jean Genet's *The Balcony* reveals his inner contempt for his society and his own concern with some certain social issues including sex, prostitution, and corruption. In his book *Integral Drama: Culture, Consciousness, and Identity*, William S. Haney refers to Genet's pessimistic view of society:

As a social outcast, Genet undoubtedly felt powerless, alienated, and helpless in a world that to him appeared absurd, a world that considered him in turn a perpetual menace to institutions such as the law, the church, the police and the military (141).

Genet's sense of being alienated from his society is the reason beyond his disgust towards his society. His hard life and childhood makes Genet feel being isolated from the external world and socially marginalized. Therefore, he attempts to criticize society and all the existing authorized institutions and figures in a very mocking satiric style. Being confident of the theatre's ability, he uses it to confront the spectators with their current social problems to be solved afterwards.

The Balcony opens in Irma's brothel where the clients achieve their fantasies by playing out the roles of other characters in real society such as the bishop, the judge, the general, and the tramp. The opening scenes present some common men who play out their fantasies with the help of a chosen whore.

The first scene starts with a full description of the place which is one of the studios in Irma's brothel and a glimpse of the bishop's outer look that is dressed in mitre and glided cope while sitting in the chair next to a woman who acts as his partner in the performance. To satisfy his psychological needs, the bishop asks the whore and Irma, the owner of the brothel, to help him act perfectly as if he is already a bishop who tries to make the sinner, the whore, feel remorse and repent for her guilt.

The second scene starts after Irma's request from the previous client to take off his clothes and leave the room for the coming client. The studio becomes ready for the next client who depicts the character of the judge and always tries to identify himself with him. The judge asks the woman, who presents the character of a thief, to act normally as if the events that happen at that room are real so that he feels pleased. At the meantime, there is a revolution takes place outside Irma's brothel against the queen who is killed at the end of the play. But unfortunately, the revolution fails and is broken up.

The third following scene begins with a portrayal of the setting of the room that would be fit with the incoming character of the general. Indeed, Irma provides the general with all the recommended supplies such as mud, the patent leather, and blood. The general acts as if he is fighting in a war and the woman acts as the general's own horse. At the end of the war, the general dies and the woman announces for the funeral that is made for him.

After that, the fourth scene introduces a client who is given a dirty wig to present the character of the tramp. Presenting this character satisfies Genet's own latent desire to depict the marginalized people whom he supports. The scene depicts an old man dressed as a tramp and stands beside a beautiful naked prostitute. Finally, the play ends when the revolution finishes and the queen is killed. What is really ironic is that the clients, who presented the characters of the bishop, the judge, and the general, are asked to act these social roles in reality in front of the public in order to convince the public that the queen is still alive and to remain loyal to her. Indeed, Irma is asked to play the role of the queen who is already dead. Irma resumes her work in her brothel with the clients whom she enables to play out their own fantasies.

In a fantasy world, Jean Genet's *The Balcony* takes place where the class stratification of the society plays a major role in the action. The poor (the commoners), the rich (the aristocrats) and the prostitutes are the classes of the society in the play. Therefore, conflict between the society's strata is

inevitable and the gap between them is huge. By the end of the play, the aristocratic queen is assassinated by a revolution and the roles have reversed: Irma, the prostitute, plays the role of the queen and wins the hearts of the people.

Based on the conflict between the society's strata and the wide gap between them, Marxist critical approach of analysis is adopted to analyze the play. In "Chapter 5: Marxist Criticism" in *Theory into Practice: an Introduction to Literary Criticism* (2011), Ann Dobie points at the significance and function of the Marxist critic as he states:

The good Marxist critic is careful to avoid the kind of approach that concerns itself with form and craft at the expense of examining social realities. The Marxist critic operates a warning system that alerts readers to social wrongs, he is a mentor to the proletariat, pointing out how they can free themselves from powerless position in which they have been placed. The function of literature is to make the populace aware of social ills and sympathetic to action that will wipe those ills away. It can strengthen a readers' values or reveal their flaws through characters and events and editorial comment. (86-7)

Once the literary work concerns itself with examining social realities, it follows Marxist criticism. Throughout the work of art, the Marxist author is able to reveal for the readers the social public problems and help them to find solutions for these problems. In this case, literature is the medium through which the author refers to the social diseases that spread at this period of time and enable the readers to investigate and look at themselves in an attempt for both social reform and self-reconciliation. The literary work itself becomes no more than a reflection of the social institutions that already exist in society.

It should be noted that the literary movement of Marxist criticism has a long historical background; it returns back to the nineteenth century German philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883). His Marxist philosophical theories, as explained in his book *Das Kapital*, contradict with capitalism that deprives the poor working classes from ownership and let it only for the rich ruling classes. His views are analyzed in the following quotation in which Dobie adds:" in the three-volume work *Das Kapital* (1867), Marx argued that history is determined by economic conditions and urged an end to private ownership of public utilities, transportation, and the means of production"(79). From the Marxists' point of view, the critics should not be only concerned with the literary work's aesthetic qualities and whether it follows the literary conventions or not, but rather the critics should investigate the literary work's ideology and its deliberate function. By doing so, the Marxists encourage the readers to revolt against the social traditional norms and class-order.

In addition, it is obvious that Jean Genet follows what is referred to above as Marxist criticism. Jean Genet's *The Balcony* has been a satirical criticism of his society at that time. Through his fantasy world, Genet exposes the ills of the social milieu of his society and urges the audience indirectly to struggle and speak up against the oppression and injustice. He exposes the ills of the capitalistic system and its dangerous effect on the proletariat. He believes that society will be better if there is a conflict between the existing opponent social classes because it will lead for a class transformation. In *The Balcony*, the conflict between the aristocrats, the poor and the middle class is investigated. Genet foresees a revolution that will eventually happen due the injustice and oppression of capitalism.

According to the above explanation of the plot and the critical approach of *The Balcony*, it is true that Genet reconstructs the play in that way in order to be able to investigate the general social struggles. For more clarification, Robert Sanford Brustein's statement is examined:

The Balcony begins as a piece of theatrical pornography, then enlarges into a theatricalized view of society, and concludes as a conception of history and religion be a subversive and audacious mind (Brustein 394-5).

In *The Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to the Modern Drama* (1991), Brustein points at the dialectical relationship between the play and society. As it is said, *The Balcony* is considered an illustration of social ills and criticism of Genet's own society as well. The inner essential message of the play seems to be social though it has sexual and joyful indications from the outer look. The brothel symbolizes the outer society where the clients play the roles of the socially high members. Their performance is no more than a representation of real human behavior. When Genet writes the play, he intends to introduce the relationship between society and theatre in a dialectical way. The actors' or the clients' behaviors in the performance are not more than representations of the spectators' own outer state. However, the spectators view the actors' way of imitating the characters of the bishop, the general, the judge, and the tramp as not the same realistic ones. This urges the spectators begin to think and investigate the social realities of such personalities. The spectators begin to realize that there is another hidden side in these social positions that is not visible for most people. They intend to analyze not the character of the bishop, for example, but rather his relation with the sinner. The spectators become able to examine the hidden social relations and divide them into either the marginalized or the dominant ones. For more explanation, one can look at the following quotation, which has been written by Jeannette L. Savona in her book *Macmillan Modern Dramatists: Jean Genet* (1983), which indicates the deliberate reference of

The Balcony to the dialectical relationship between social realities and theatrical illusion:

The Balcony is deeply informed by such aesthetic concerns, and its protagonists' quests are also presented as the result of dialectic between social realities and theatrical illusion. The chief of police occupy opposite strategic positions as metafictional figures. George describes politics as play-acting and treats personal relationships as games (87).

The clients' desire to enact the socially high positions emerges from their realization of the dialectical relationship between the figures' social realities and the theatrical illusion. However, the police chief is aware that politics is no more than games or performances like those that are enacted in the brothel. This reflects Genet's own feeling of disgust and contempt towards the socially high figures and social institutions in general.

Throughout role-playing, Genet is enabled to urge the spectators to change their positive image of the current real social existing positions like the bishop, the judge, and the general. The spectators are asked to revolt and bring a change for their recent social problems. Theatre, from his point of view, is a tool through which society can be reformed. He struggles against the conventional nature of the theatre which is only used for entertainment. The spectators would be reminded by their social realities and their everyday life to reconcile their existent problems and reform their outer society. This is obvious in *Jean Genet: Performance and Politics* (2006), a book edited by Finburgh, Lavery and Shevtsova, in which there is a reference to Genet's own vision of theatre and its dialectical relation to the external society as follows:

Genet's theatre works negate both the nature of the theatre and the contemporary social world itself... In *The Blacks* and *The Balcony*, Genet disrupts the spatial logic of Western drama by allowing life to enter the theatre from the outside in (95-8).

Socially speaking, Genet feels being a powerless, alienated, and marginalized person. Being an illegitimate son, who is abandoned by his mother and lives most of his childhood in a reform school, is the cause beyond his feeling of alienation, revolt, and disgust towards his society. This prompts him to portray the social institutions including the law, the church, the police, and the military in a very detestable way.

In *The Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to Modern Drama* (1991), Brustein mentions that "scorning external truth and physical reality, Genet... creates a drama of appearances through which a deeper reality is evoked...an art of being and seeming built around the illusion-making faculty of man"(373). As it is said, the clients' outer appearance and disguise provide the spectators with some social hidden realities. It is true that Genet's play is an imitation of the outer real life. Throughout the clients' performance in the brothel, the

images of authorized figures including the bishop, the judge, and the general are destroyed and the superiority of their social positions is undermined. Genet's main concern is to highlight the emptiness of the societal roles. This is clear in the following quotation in which the client in the first scene insults the character of the bishop that he presents in order to fulfill his social needs as he says:

THE BISHOP. (to the mirror) The majesty, the dignity, that light up my person, do not ... and I wish to bishop in solitude, for appearance alone... and in order to destroy all function, I want to cause a scandal and feel you up, you slut, you bitch, you trollop, you tramp. (I. 12)

However, the client in the next scene is pleased and proud for enacting the role of the judge who presents a social high position. This is not contrary with the fact that once their roles are presented in the brothel, their social positions are underestimated and immortalized. The judge also looks at the mirror and utters in the presence of the executioner and the prostitute:

THE JUDGE. Mirror that glorifies me! Image that I can touch, I love you. Never would I have the strength or skill to leave streaks of fire on her back. Besides, what could I do with such strength and skill? My huge arm, too heavy for me, too big, too fat for my shoulder, walking at my side all by itself! Arm, hundredweight of meat, without you I'd be nothing. (II. 19)

Genet criticizes the dominant ideology of the state which is fully dependent upon those power heads who are politically unqualified including the characters of the bishop, the general, and the judge. He rejects the existence of the brothel as a product of a society that lets it being established and does not take any action against its existence. When Genet provides the audience and the readers with a full description of Irma's brothel, he aims at criticizing the issue of prostitution as a social disease which is as important as unemployment and poverty. Genet mocks at the existence of the organizations of prostitution that are indicated by police control and regular medical checkup in most of the European capitals nowadays. Actually, Irma's brothel operates while being protected and supervised by the police presented in the character of George, the chief of police. This refers to the legal state of the brothel where actions are observed by the police. Irma addresses George and faces him with the fact that "you know who. You have your index cards"(V. 47). The envoy of the royal palace also takes Carmen as a spy who informs him with all what occurs in the brothel which implies that even the high authority, the queen, knows what happens in the brothel and accepts its existence inside society. This is explicit in the following dialogue between Irma and George:

IRMA. {...} Do you really know what is going on? What about your spies?

THE ENVOY. They inform us as accurately as the peep holes that peer into

your studios. (VI. 67)

Carol Rosen, a director, views Irma's brothel in his book *The Structure of Illusion in Genet's The Balcony* (1992) as:

1) A naturalistic representation of a brothel. 2) A structural analogue for society. 3) A symbolic reflection of grand illusions and larger than life desires and. 4) A metaphysical construct in a discussion play about the value of mimetic ritual, the transcendence possible in play, and the magical efficiency of the theatre of itself. (513-19)

Rosen asserts that Irma's brothel is no more than a depiction and reflection of real brothel that exists in society. It is a symbol of the clients' real life needs. Moreover, Genet attempts to justify the actions of the criminal, the insane, and the poor who are socially marginalized. He believes that their doings are the vital result of the domination that the powerful men practice over them. The elite's tough treatment and high social place are what drive them to do bad behaviors. He swears that the society's view and its underestimation of them are what urge them to do such bad actions. This is evident in Toma's argument in *Producing and Performing Identities: Theoretical, Cultural, and Practical Articulations of Jean Genet's Concept of Self* (1997) in which she claims:

I believe, however, that social values are a function of the theatre form and not of the specific content of any particular play. ... Theft reassures the rich that everything that have is worth keeping; madness assures the powerful that what they have is worth holding on to. (42)

Genet is considered a social analyst who reveals the social diseases in his society and tries to find solutions for them. Theatre becomes a part of the society that can never be separated from it. This justifies the claim that: "the theatre is of and for the community, just as the actor is of and for the audience" (Toma 14). There is a close relationship between theatre and society. It is difficult to separate the theatre from society. For more confirmation, it is necessary to look at Gilbert Leslie Muchmore's statement in his book *The Theatre of Genet: The Actor in Society* (1980) in which he asserts:

It is not theatre that is able to imitate life; it is social life that is designed as a continuous performance and because of this, there is a link between theatre and life. Within this perspective, the connection between theatre and life is the esthetic intent: that is, in our case, it is Genet's resolve to place his experience within the context of theatre.

(2)

It is obvious that there is an entangled relationship between the theatre and society. Theatre is a depiction of real life and the world itself is as the theatre.

Throughout the performance of the clients inside Irma's brothel, Genet tends to present the reality of the world where he lives. The brothel seems to be a miniature and a satire of the society as a whole. He mocks at these men of power like the judge, the general, and the bishop who are only concerned with their image in the society as they love themselves. Genet intends to explore their reality and defects to people who are deceived by their outer look and behaviors. He also criticizes the other powerless men who seek their gratification. Martin Esslin, a dramatist, journalist, and critic describes in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1964) Genet's play as follows:

It is a play which strips away the mask of the society itself, by giving a close analysis of it. This analysis reflects the workings of the society as false. He projects: The feeling of impotence of the individual caught up in the meshes of society, he is dramatizing the often suppressed and subconscious rage of the (I) alone and terrified by the anonymous weight of the nebulous (they). (151)

Genet's method of representing such social problems and defects is appreciated by some critics. Being an efficient writer, Genet uses his writing ability in a way that enables him to express his ideas concerning his society in order to bring a change for it. For instance, in the book that is entitled *A Study Guide for Jean Genet's The Balcony* (2001), there is a reference to Brustein's argument who views Genet's social commentary as "relevant, deep, and complicated. He writes" fashioned by a genius of criminality and revolt, the play is absolutely stunning in its twists and turns of thought... in its interpretation of history, it is both provocative and scandalous" (26).

With *The Balcony* Genet wrote an excellent example of a metaplay. In a way Genet shares the weakness of his revolutionaries in *The Balcony*; he too would like to create something other than the kind of play he can make so magnificently; this master of the metaplay would like to create tragedy. (Abel 26)

Concerning the metatheatre technique, it is useful to begin with Abel's argument in his 1960 article in the *Partisan Review* as mentioned in a book entitled *A Study Guide for Jean Genet's "The Balcony"*. As Abel states above, Genet with *The Balcony* provides the spectators and readers with a brilliant example of metatheatre. All elements of the metatheatre technique are found in *The Balcony*. It contains the performance of some mini-plays where the fantasies of the customers of Irma's brothel with the help of the prostitutes as participators while being observed by Irma throughout her viewing apparatus. Richard Hornby, a British politician and writer, investigates the four types of metatheatre in *Drama, Metatheatre, and Perception*"(1986) as:" the play-within-the play, the ceremony within the play, role-playing within the role, and literary, real-life reference, and self-reference" (31).

Role-playing is the form throughout which metatheatre takes place in *The Balcony*, which consists of nine scenes; each scene of the play introduces the spectators with a new character: first the bishop, then the judge, the general, and finally the tramp. Each scene of the play introduces the audience with a new character or social figure and a new partner. Each scene presents a new separate act of role-playing. Each scene can be regarded as a separated play-within-a-play that occurs in a different studio with a new different character. Each client in each scene performs his fantasy in a closed and secret studio with the help of another employee of the brothel.

During the performance of the metatheatre play, the actors are aware that they are not more performers who are acting in a play. On the other hand, the spectators also know that they are watching a performance of the play which depicts their real life. There is a reduplication of the actions and the characters. There are two blackouts: the brothel where all incidents of the play occur and the theatre or stage where the actual spectators attend to watch the performance of the play. The clients, who willingly play their preferable roles inside Irma's secret rooms, are asked after that to act the same roles but in front of the public outside the brothel. In these two cases, there are two kinds of the audience: the spectators who attend and watch all actions that occur from their seats on the stage in the outer play and the other characters of the play, the public, who view their performance on the balcony of Irma's brothel in reality. All of this is in the presence of Irma who observes every action that takes place inside the rooms by her viewing apparatus. Irma serves as the bridge that connects the two worlds: that illusory world of the brothel and the realistic one of the audience.

According to Manoranjan Behura, a lecturer of English literature, as mentioned in a journal article entitled *Stoppard: The Metatheatre: A Study of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (2016) a play can be considered a metatheatre play when it employs the stage as: "a stage to present life as theatricality has as one of its goals, an examination of the distinction between art and life. This is the type of play about playing, about theatricality, about the human impulse to create fiction and revise reality "(229). Unlike the conventional plays, the metatheatre play draws a line between the actors and the spectators. It always reminds the audience that there is a difference between the performance and reality. The incidents of a metatheatre play are not extracted from the playwright's own imagination, but rather his vision of his society. However, the metatheatre play is not an exact depiction of real life. It rather provides the audience with an exaggerated portrayal of human life in order to urge the spectators to take a positive action and bring a change for their society.

Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst, theatrical critic, and philosopher, highlights in *Theories of Subject- Development* (1977) the metatheatre

elements that are used in *The Balcony* as he says: "the elements required for Genet's stage: a mirror which reflects an unmade bed, a costume and a woman, manufacture the drama that results in the temporary actualization of the clients' and the audience's psycho-fantasies"(4). As for Genet's *The Balcony*, the elements of metatheatre are going in a circle. They are completing each other. Genet uses them in a way that enables him to achieve his goal. The technique of metatheatre makes the performance of the play seem more complex and meaningful instead of enacting a simple story.

While some clients pay money to play the roles of other authorized men, others choose to act as the poor and powerless men. They are provided with all necessary props and costumes that must be realistic. With the help of these props, the illusory world of the play would seem to be more realistic. This is why Irma and also the clients are concerned with the reality of these costumes that are used inside the performance. Irma pays money, but within reasonable costs, to insure that everything seems realistic and original. The clients would enjoy their roles and feel pleased as their props and appearance resemble the realistic ones. One can observe the bishop's utterances in which he refers to the significance of the props: (while looking at his clothes which are heaped on the floor): "ornaments, laces, through you I re-enter myself. I re-conquer a domain. I beleaguer a very ancient place from which I was driven. I install myself in a clearing where suicide at last becomes possible. This judgment depends on me, and here I stand, face to face with my death" (I. 13). The bishop asserts that throughout his costumes and outer appearance, he is able to enter and get out of his own self to enact another.

The brothel is partitioned into numbered studios which resemble prison cells, since they all contain people who play their supervised games without any real understanding of the structure by which they are manipulated the political system of *The Balcony* fosters ignorance, illusion, and spying. (Savona 79)

Even the setting, Genet uses in a way that enables him to express his ideas regarding metatheatre and its function as an assault on the social theatricality. One can observe Jeannette L. Savona's claim in her book *Macmillan Modern Dramatists: Jean Genet* (1983) in which she states that Genet draws the rooms of the brothel as if they are the cells of a prison. He criticizes the existence of the brothels and the prisons that are structurally similar and have no benefit for the outer society. In addition, Genet prefers to begin each scene of the play with a detailed description of the setting which enables him to introduce his ideas concerning metatheatre in a very sufficient way. For example, the audience is provided throughout the below mentioned quotation with a glimpse about the studio where the client's fantasies take place:

On the ceiling, a chandelier, which will remain the same in each scene. The set seems to represent a sacristy, formed by three blood-

red, cloth folding-screens. On the right wall, a mirror, with a carved gilt frame, reflects an unmade bed which, if the room were arranged logically, would be in the first rows of the orchestra. (I. 7)

Moreover, there is an important metatheatrical element which is any performance must be viewed by other characters plus the audience who attends and watches the play enacted. In *The Balcony*, Irma is the only person who supervises all the actions that take place inside her brothel. She has a viewing apparatus through which she observes all events that occur inside the secret rooms. This is confirmed through the following conversation in which the police chief asserts that nothing would take place in the brothel without Irma's knowledge and permission:

IRMA. The ceremonies are secret.

THE CHIEF OF POLICE. You liar. You've got secret peep holes in every wall. Every partition, every mirror, is rigged. In one place, you can hear the signs, in another the echo of the moans. You don't need to tell me to tell you that brothel tricks are mainly mirror tricks. (V. 48-9)

In this case, Irma plays two roles as a character that acts with the other players inside the play and as a spectator who observes all the actions that happen. Irma is the tool that connects the two worlds: the fictional and realistic outer ones. one can examine Toma's reference in *Producing and Performing Identities: Theoretical, Cultural, and Practical Articulations of Jean Genet's Concept of Self* (1997), to Irma's function which is: "she is both inside the dramatic situation inter-relating to other characters, and outside, regulating the entire process in which the characters indulge. Irma's intra-action questions the audience's own position as viewers" (36).

Conclusion

To conclude, *The Balcony* is a mirror which reflects the external world that Genet views as full of violence, emptiness, and corruption. For Genet, life represents a huge masquerade or a play in which people act their roles whether consciously or unconsciously. Since the roles of the authorized icons of society are imitated inside the brothel, the significance of their social positions is undermined. From Genet's point of view, society and theatre cannot be separated. Theatre is the medium through which social defects are manifested and have to be solved. It becomes no longer a tool of entertainment and amusement, but rather a medium through which the social and political defects can be manifested. The spectators become aware that they are going to attend the dramatic theatrical performance of a play in order not to escape from their actual realities, but rather remember them and enable them to find solutions for their problems. Genet seeks that the audience revolts to survive from such social problems. He criticizes the emptiness of

grand social positions such as the judge, general, and bishop. He admits that there is a severe need for a social change.

Role-playing is the form throughout which metatheatre takes place in *The Balcony*. There are nine scenes in *The Balcony*. Each scene can be regarded as a separated play-within-a-play that occurs in a different studio with a new different character. Each client in each scene performs his fantasy in a closed and secret studio with the help of another employee of the brothel. All of these mini-dramas are monitored by Irma, the owner of the brothel.

By means of the metatheatre technique, Genet is able to introduce the dialectical relationship between social realities and the theatrical illusion of the play. The spectators who attend the performance of the play become consciously aware of the hidden social relations among people in the outer real world. Genet invites the spectators to be identified with the actors who are playing out their roles on the stage. They extend the process of identification with the role-players by beginning to practice their authority and power over others. The spectators can realize the social message that Genet wants to deliver. They would acknowledge the emptiness and corruption of their society. Therefore, they are asked to take any action and bring a change for society.

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