

The Symbolist Aesthetic: One Century in European Drama

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1. THE SYMBOLIST AESTHETIC

Before Freud illuminated the intricate paths to the caverns of personality, an entire sector of western thought had attempted to approximate the interior of man through the aesthetic sectors based on intuition, feeling, and suggestion.

At the end of the nineteenth century, in Art this process undergoes a period of great splendour with the appearance of an aesthetic language which uses the *symbol* as the basic element of expression. That which is inscrutable, undefinable in the authentic reality of the human being, the absolutely inapprehensible range of the nature of the soul, the immaterial and certainly profoundly authentic essence of man and things, implies the impossibility of apprehending those realities by means of scientific objectivity. Access to these realities, which was wielded until then exclusively by positivism, demonstrated in itself the falacy of a supposedly *realist* procedure; realism was made impossible by the recognition of the more noble and meaningful sectors of reality. It became necessary then, to invert the direction of the search, the means of grasping this profound reality. The indirect processes of analogy, symbol and evocation became the only instruments capable of realizing as much as possible the supreme aspiration of man's knowledge: to *suggest* reality before describing it, evoke it before defining it, and to insinuate it before offering it as an object of certainty. Artistic Symbolism, the set of manifestations which shaped the Symbolist movement in different realms of Fine Art, gathered the sediments of the intimist tradition of the century, filling with its ethereal presence the transcendental years that formed the turn of the century and the beginnings of the Avant-Garde fervor.

Historically, Symbolism proposed the most important condensation and artistic manifestation of the idealistic trends that arose from the complex phenomenon of Pre-Romanticism. The theoretical Symbolist reflection had initially concentrated on the treatment of the word's musical qualities in poetry. The first Symbolist manifesto was

published by Moréas in 1886. Symbolism expresses artistic language as a system of signals that form *suggestions* through diverse sensorial perceptions. These suggestions might reveal the true, profound essence of man's soul in the background. In order to avoid directly naming the realities alluded to, the artistic language must suggest and evoke in such a way as to express the state of the soul which is the ungraspable manifestation of the Idea. In this sense, Yeats brings out the poetic value of symbols by dividing them into emotional and intellectual parts. He also expresses the ability of human senses to evoke emotions. To create, according to Baudelaire, was to recall the original secret unity of the soul within which perfumes, colors and sounds communicated like distant echos in a familiar darkness. To achieve this, the artistic language must be based on symbolic values and relations that -as interwoven symbols directed only toward the ineffable- are able to capture a state of the soul.

In theater, Symbolism offers a notably well determined theory that comes from a praxis of renowned playwrights such as Maeterlinck, Hauptmann, Strindberg, and Ibsen. The Symbolist theatricality has been well codified and this is the basic principle of the Symbolist theatrical creation: to produce a vital show on stage. This show, unlike life but a life in itself, is built from the subject's inner self and by his rules. Beyond this principle, the Symbolist theatricality mainly pursues the expression of the playwright's inner self, thus achieving a fusion between him and the expression of his external depiction. The dramatic action must emerge from an inner conflict. The dramatic language admits expressive elements from other Arts and from earlier traditional theater. Finally, the actor's function is revised because his physical personality threatens the essence of the character. The model of the marionette proposes the interpretive ideal as far as an objective neutral link between the creator and the receptor's inner selves.

The symbolist concepts of staging and dramatic communication are notably similar to the theories developed by the British director, Edward Gordon Craig. He proposes the concept of the super-marionette as a central element through which the play can be "de-realized" (undone) and essentialized thus allowing us to approach the soul's hidden secrets. Craig describes the Symbolist aesthetic with the following words:

Symbolism is found not only in the roots of Art but also in those of life itself; only through symbols does life become possible. We always use them (...). It's the true essence of theater if we include the art of theater among the greater Arts.¹

Especially fertile in literature and theater, Symbolism became a great movement that maintained a dialectic relationship with Positivist thought, and moreso, with one of its more precise creations, Emile Zola's Naturalism. Engendered by the poetry of the great masters (Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Mallarmé) and French Parnasianists, Symbolism

¹ Edward Gordon Craig, *The Art of Theater [El Arte del Teatro]*, Department of Culture, Literature Division, Grupo Editorial Gaceta, S.A. de C.V., UNAM Mexico, 1987, pp. 285.

maintained relations with other forms of Idealism toward the end of the century. It did so to such an extent as to maintain a clearly genetic relationship with Decadentism whose atmosphere or spiritual climate -well suited to turn of the century change- had begun to bloom.

In 1885, Jean Moreás published an article which shifted the differentiating criteria from the *decadent* to the *symbolic*, thus provoking a symbolist schism in the heart of French Decadentism. Before then, he had created a kind of cultural climate with new sensibilities. In Art these included a self-redeeming aestheticism free of the impurities of contact with life, new tones expressed by nuances, moving and vagrant formulas, the search for melodies that reveal the essence of man's soul, and the fondness for heroes that gladly paid their lives or personal ruin as the luxurious price for having experienced great ideals and passions. Before the budding secession of Symbolism, Decadentism arose as a state of mind that coincided with the appearance, in the spiritual realm, of the turn of the century crisis.

We believe Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (drama debuted in Paris at the end of 1897) should be contemplated in this context because the drama's formal aspects and sensibilities correspond in many ways to those of the Decadent spirit. Cyrano's figure becomes a popular representation of the *turn of the century* during which the most relevant motifs of the idealist cultural tendencies combined. He is reinvested in the Decadentism that is revealed by a love for manners, the permanent contradiction of life, the continuous zeal for acting and the final purification of ruin.

2. POST-MODERNITY AND ARTISTIC CREATION

Contemporary criticism has been establishing the concept of Modernity as a global structure in western art that is "a complete, revolutionary cultural process, argumentable and describable, that is borne fundamentally in the second half of the eighteenth century and ends with the Spanish Civil War and World War II in the purely European sense".² This "artistic-cultural European system" borne in the context of Pre-Romanticism experiences an initial moment of crisis with the arrival of positivist thought in the nineteenth century. This crisis determined a kind of dualism later: the configuration of the general Idealist tendencies and Positivism, as longterm parallel processes. The persistence of Romantic elements in Idealism's cultural process appeared in Art through the Impressionist and Symbolist aesthetic movements. These developed around the general complex phenomenon known as the *turn of the century crisis*.

² Pedro Aullón de Haro, *Poetry in the Twentieth Century (Until 1939)* [*La poesía en el siglo XX (Hasta 1939)*], Madrid, Taurus (Critical History of Hispanic Literature [Historia crítica de la Literatura Hispánica]), n. 20. The following citations refer to the excellent introduction in this essay.

In the dualization produced in the artistic system of Modernity with the appearance of positivisms, the creator is presented with a fork in the road (Idealism/Positivism) by which he might exercise his artistic expression. The explosive arrival of the Avant-Garde must be considered with respect to the idealist creation. This innovation supposes the second great flaw in the system of Modernity which accelerates and becomes violent as an artistic-cultural revolution. As a result, the Avant-Garde adds a necessary component to the search for innovation as an end in itself to the second stage in the process. This pretension was the underlying cause of the exhaustion of the cycle. After the 1970's, signs of the phenomenon that has been recognized now as *Post-Modernity* began to show.

In the last quarter milenium, this term (*Post-Modernity*) designates a spiritual category more than an artistic movement or tendency. The phenomenon still lacks an in-depth study capable of endowing it with a concrete definition. However, a growing number of specialized studies is progressively nearing a definition of its nature and origins. *Post-Modernity* has experienced an initial level of formulas inspired by concepts from History. These link the phenomenon to the socio-economic events of advanced capitalism and post-capitalism. More than a stylistic option, *Post-Modernity* is an epistemological-cultural category that apperas in all areas of life and thought in societies and communities that have been through the cycle of productive capitalism and now experience, in this century, the final stages of this cycle's decline. The arrival of the artistic Avant-Garde, the cultural dehumanization and exhaustion of the same cultural Avant-Garde, the invention and development of computer and audiovisual technology, the appearance of such impacting social phenomenon as the post-nuclear era, the genetic revolution or the fall of Marxism as a direct form of exercising power, the difficult maintenance of the supply of goods in the face of the demand of potential buyers who, in western societies, have fully entered in the stages of post-consumism, are factors that explain and characterize largely the diffuse profile of the *Post-modern* phenomenon.

On the second level of analysis, the advent of Post-modernity is related to the confirmation of the end of historical modernity. Historical modernity made continuous progressive change which was Art's principal *raison d'être*. And, in Art, the individual was imposed as an indispensable figure. Without the individual, no other creative activity could aspire to distinguish itself from traditional Art. Originality and novelty became necessary maxims of the *modern* condition. Any artistic activity had to lead the historical Avant-Garde toward the point of exhaustion. Thus, *Post-Modernity* comes forth as an attempt to synthesize the styles and themes of the previous tradition and to integrate them with the advances of Modernity. These advances are based on one central development- that which allows the artist to extract freely the artistic universe and formulas that most agree with his personal sensibilities. The new concept of originality now affects the act of selecting traditional and/or Avant-Garde elements. It frees the artist of his obligation to be either completely Avant-Garde or completely Modernist, and allows him to elect creative paths that are capable of extenuating the adverse, dehumanizing conditions derived from post-consumism and degraded capitalism.

By including elements of the artistic tradition prior to the Avant-Garde, the artist attempts to rehumanize the post-modern creation from his own creative vantage point. As the creator, he finds himself already in a disorganized multiple reality. He exchanges his previous inclination to surpress for an approach that attempts to master the confusion through a method of artistic organization. He achieves an artistic organization of reality through an aesthetic method that integrates different traditions and experiences.

The most important trait of this artistic method is the epistemological nucleus which represents the external attributes of the *Post-modern* creation. These works' untranscendancy and ahistoricity and their ties with the artist's pleasures and personal tastes are, like their *textual* nature, definitely processes that summarize one common aesthetic factor: the intra-artistic nature of the act of creating. This is the substitution of external references for universes that pertain to the autocomplacency created upon making the same creative activity a theatrical theme. The processes of revision, adaptation, and recreation of motifs and ancient languages multiply, thus converting Post-Modern Art into a reflection on Art, that is, a meta-language.

As if the chronological reality of eternity imposed itself elusively over the contemporary mind and creation -ending a voyage that reverts over itself- the final years of the twentieth century look like a reflection of the last years of the nineteenth century. Some artistic processes began then which seem to be ending now. When Modernity exhausted itself, *Post-Modernity* gathered its styles and themes along with classical elements that had been somewhat abandoned due to the implacable progressive attitude of the century. Freed of the chains of an undeniable advance, the eternal spirit comes back adorned with a slightly decadent tone recalling the Decadentism one hundred years ago.

3. CYRANO AND POST-CYRANO

In his *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the French playwright Edmond Rostand reaches beyond the apparent drama of the cape and sword with a romantic flavor and versified form that seem to constitute the generic form of the play. Taking advantage of theatrical experiences of Scribe and Sardous, masters of the *pièce bien faite*, Rostand demonstrates his knowledge of the intense development that theatrical theory and practice had achieved in France toward the end of the century. The innovations of this period include the appearance of the stage director and with him, the revision of the great actors' roles in the new theatricality. Perhaps for this reason, Rostand writes the greater part of the script and personalities in his plays to suit his friends who include such well-known actors as Sarah Bernhardt and Constant Coquelin. Perhaps as well, the protagonist of his greatest work, inspired by a French poet who had actually lived in the first half of the seventeenth century, appears in the drama endowed with the essential qualities of the *turn of the century*. Rostand presents the world of literature and Art in general: the character Cyrano, a romantic by his generous idealism, demonstrates by his prodigious capacity to versify

and his marvelous eloquence the forms and attitudes of a Parnisian poet, while his decidedly tragic-comical circumstances amidst misery approach the taste and aesthetic of French Decadentism.

The five acts of *Cyrano de Bergerac* each have settings as attractive as they are detailed. The scenes are described by the author with such precision and theatrical knowledge that, no doubt, they were learned during the intense development of the Naturalist theater which materialized in France particularly with André Antoine's *Théâtre-Libre*, the playwrights who practiced Émile Zola's theories, and coincidentally, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the beginning of the new theatricality in western drama.

In his plays, Rostand puts into practice a dramatic line that is formally infused by the tradition of theater in verse but equally nourished by the ever-present Decadentist sensibilities and the aesthetic of dramatic and literary Symbolism.

The elements borne of this *turn of the century* spirit and the Symbolist aesthetic can be found in the *Cyrano* of our days though in distinct forms and with different meanings. This *Cyrano*, the *Cyrano* of our days, is Joseph-Angel's post-theatrical version entitled *Cyrano Parfumé* (*Cyrano's perfume*).

This post-theatrical recreation of Rostand's *Cyrano* is selectively projected over some intense moments of French drama. Thus, over a total of five acts, Joseph-Angel concentrates on the third one which is composed of thirteen scenes. Within the third act, the post-theatrical author chooses preferably the seventh scene. This way, the post-theatrical *Cyrano* can be found in the very heart of Rostand's work, the composite heart, the predominant aesthetic element in the verses that refer to the heart. The increasingly intense reiteration of this term (the heart) in the forementioned scene corroborates the symbolic categorization of this receptacle of passion. The heart is the most important element of the sensitivity or interior world that the play attempts to recreate. It constitutes the play's global universe. Similarly, as we shall see, Joseph-Angel will make the heart one of the richest aesthetic elements in his play.³

In this scene, Rostand's dramatical conflict arises only as subtly as his theatrical aesthetic requires it to: the hero can only enjoy passion when he substitutes for the true lover for which he must adopt a character of deferred love for the rest of his life.

Hence, the night becomes a requirement whose alliance permits the game of love to be fulfilled (at least on the spiritual level which is as real in the symbolist reality as the physical level,) "...because with night's shield/I dare to be 'myself'" (Rostand: Act III, scene VII).

Joseph-Angel calls his version, *Cyrano's Perfume*, according to the preferred mode of communication that it indicates. Perfume becomes the textual element of primary

³ This continues until, in a future edition, the heart is reduced to *Cyrano's perfume* which is presented and commercialized in heart-shaped post-theatrical flasks. Thus doing away with paper, the author projects the creation of a *solidrama* through a single didascalia -perfumed- which becomes the autonomous dramatic text.

concern, a didascalia that holds a central position in the play (in the heart of the play, a heart of perfumed paper.) It incites the reader to make use of his sense of smell, the essential sense for carrying out Joseph-Angel's rendition.

We find the subtitle of the play imprinted on the book's coversheet (page 1): *Duel amoureux entre Cyrano et Roxane*. According to the central episode of Rostand's *Cyrano* (Act III, scene VII) a notable advance toward the essential occurs in the Joseph-Angel's play: Christian, direct recipient of Roxane's love, has disappeared, the love game becomes an intimate battle of verbal fencing between Roxane and Cyrano, and a dialectic exchange whose words convey impassioned exhaltations of live and as fencing sabres embodied, attempt to overcome the opponent's heart.

From this moment forward, the post-theatrical drama developes symmetrically in three acts or shifts whose respective titles, intensely loaded and exhausted with beautiful meanings, suppose a condensation in other such moments of amorous conflict.

The first act, entitled *Au coeur de la nuit... (In the heart of the night...)*, demonstrates the recurring symbol of the heart. As the French author's central value, the heart joins aesthetic references and the metaphor of fencing. Joseph-Angel gives the word *coeur* a disemic value, propitiating a metaphorical rupture with that of the literal meaning suggested by its syntax.

Nevertheless, the night possesses an equally important value. As we have seen in Rostand's version, it became the fortunate pretext for romantic encounters, an unexcusable context filled with symbolism. In Joseph-Angel's recreation, the night's evocative power is intensely reinforced by the nature of the script or post-theatrical creation. The play must be read with veiled eyes thus appealing to the non-verbal senses. Prepared in a series of nine letters in each of the three odd-numbered pages in the first act, the Braille alphabet imposes a tactile interpretation upon the reader. Through this exercise, the reader submerges himself in the drama of the differed lover.

The even-numbered pages (4, 6, and 8) are olfactory counterparts to their corresponding odd-numbered pages (which constitute the principal text, the expression of the conflict.) They also constitute an extension between the olfactory atmosphere (culminating in the central fold/recipient) and the reader's familiar points of reference. In the first version, the post-theatrical *Cyrano* relied primarily on the variation of real perfumes inserted materially between the pages to express the game of communication. Each perfume corresponded to one of the characters in the drama. The new version presents our cultural ethic which advertises a showcase of accredited brands of perfume including those which interest us- international cosmetics- to the turn of the century post-industrial reader who dresses with a familiar post-consumist refinement. Thus, Dior, Chanel, Guerlain (Act I), Lancôme, Hermés, and Cacharel (Act III) are inserted into the post-modern reader's subconscious and constitute effective contextualizations for the fusion of the two essential aromas in the play: "*Roxane eau de toilette*" and "*Cyrano eau de toilette*" (pages 10 and 11.) These are physically infused with real perfume emanating from the recipient in the central pages. Thus, by endowing words with a functionality (in

the post-theatrical creation,) the compositive procedure emphasizes the alternating game of amorous conflict; when the three-dimensional triangles composed of brands of perfume in the first act (pages 4, 6, and 8) are stood on their bases, they symbolize the receptive surrender of Roxane's heart while in the third act, when they are inverted over the spine, they adopt the initiative of Cyrano's love. There is a new chain of signs to reinforce the "fencing" conflict between the two lovers which is fused between the central pages (10 and 11, amorous flanks or ventriloquisms from both hearts) amidst the emanation of the only aroma of love- the perfumed rose that distills the aromatic essence of Cyrano's love.

The second act forms a diptych similar in form to those in the visual arts. It represents a crossing of codes on the first semiological level, a constant in the post-theatrical creation which reaches its apex in this particular play. Pages 10 and 11, with their triangle-shaped hearts hinting at the art of perfumery, surround -as we have seen- the aromatic stage direction that the title alludes to, *...Parfumée de jasmin...* Meanwhile, the external pages (9 and 12) present the only printed replies, in the conventional sense, in the whole.⁴ These verbal replies make a very representative example of the structural cohesion that animates the dramatic universe of the post-theater. Symmetry presides over the selection and disposition of the replies. There are a total of twelve replies distributed in each of these indicated pages- one each in a series of six. Alternately, half of these belong to Cyrano and the other half to Roxane. The geometry is reinforced as each pair of replies (Cyrano/Roxane) corresponds to a position in the fencing game. The iconographic representations of the game are identical to those shown in the areas of the fencing area represented by the page tabs: greeting-attack-rest. This continues in the inverse in the second series: rest-attack-greeting. The formal logic of the *Post-Cyrano* text (both verbally and visually complex) appears in alliance with an intense condensation of the levels of meaning in the play.

The translation of the verbal replies in the first series (replies 1 and 6, page 9) is as follows:

A) Greeting position:

CYRANO: Ce soir, je vais vous parler pour la première fois. Laissez un peu que l'on profite... de cette occasion qui s'offre... de pouvoir se parler doucement, sans se voir.

ROXANE: (*Le crépuscule commence à venir.*) Sans se voir?

B) Attack position:

CYRANO: Mais oui, c'est adorable. On se devine à peine. Vous voyez la noirceur d'un long manteau qui traîne.

ROXANE: (*Elle lui donne un petit sachet.*) Tenez!

⁴ Joseph-Angel has maintained the original French verbs in *Cyrano's perfume*; hence, the replies on pages 9 and 12 are also in French. References to the replies in the post-theatrical text are indicated by the Arabic numeral that corresponds to the place that each occupies in the set of nine.

C) *Rest position:*

CYRANO: Je crains tant que parmi notre alchimie exquise, le vrai du sentiment ne se volatilise.

ROXANE: Ouvrez... (*fermant les yeux*) et lisez.

The second series offers the following replies (7 and 12, page 12):

A) *Rest position:*

CYRANO: J'ai senti le tremblement adoré de ta main descendre tout le long des branches du jasmin. (*Du lierre, grimpe au mur, du jasmin enguirlande le balcon de Roxane, frissonne et retombe.*)

ROXANE: Oui, c'est bien de l'amour...

B) *Attack position:*

CYRANO: Je ne demande plus qu'une chose... et c'est...

ROXANE: C'est?

C) *Greeting position:*

CYRANO: Un baiser! (*Elle lui envoie un petit baiser de la main.*) Un baiser est une communion ayant un goût de fleur, une façon d'un peu se respirer le coeur, un point rose qu'on met sur l'i du verbe aimer!

ROXANE: Oui, parlez-moi d'amour.

The replies in *Cyrano's perfume* proceed, as seen, according to Joseph-Angel's selection of a few of the main scenes from Rostand's play. This selection supposes a simplifying process by which Joseph-Angel dispenses with all anecdotal elements that are secondary or external to the intrinsic development of the amorous conflict. Sheltered by the darkness of the friendly night, penetrated by the suggestive perfume of jasmine, Cyrano's passion progresses and he speaks to her of love.

Coinciding with the blind man's survival strategy, symbolized by the use of Braille in Act I, the hero commends his achievement of happiness to the impassioned complicity of the night ("... in the shield of the night, I dare to be 'myself'...", Act III, scene VII). He immediately receives a piece of her clothing as a reward after his moderate proposal in the *greeting position* (reply 1) and the prudently errant persistence in the *attack* (reply 3). Roxane's gift, a little perfumed bag, is in fact the case to the origami figure that occupies the central position in the play. Its perfume is physically incorporated into the play as an olfactory didascalia which requires an aromatic reading. The person who smells the bag that Roxane extends to Cyrano and the person who holds this play (whose nucleus must be read by smelling) in his hands converges and becomes equal to the other. By luck of the Post-theater's frequent referential unfolding, the play and stage directions coincide, protagonist and receptor overlap, interpretation and reception mutually imbricate. Actually, Roxane offers Cyrano the same *Cyrano's perfume* that the post-theatrical reader holds in this moment between his hands and his pituitary.

Roxane asks him to open and *read* his present, and the reader is surprised to find the aromatic receptacle before him in the shape of an origami flower bud waiting to become a fragrant rose. Joseph-Angel has arranged this central motif in his play in the form of an origami case which the reader opens upon turning the page and which physically contains a real perfume: *Cyrano eau de toilette* of the commercial brand called *Post-theater*. The perfume that the reader actually smells is an olfactory didascalía (voluminous though ethereal) that must be read with the nose. Thus, the act of reading is identified in the background with the act of smelling. Hence, the Post-theater plays with a facet of the viewer's senses which traditional theater has rarely dealt with. The transmission of olfactory signs, whose final traces are aromatic sensations, is well suited to the Symbolist aesthetic. The author subtly condenses the legend about the development of Cyrano's love into this central page/receptacle in which the words are stamped, "*Je vous aime, c'est-à-dire, je t'aime.*"

The passion, captured by the post-theatrical reader/viewer thanks to the olfactory stage direction inserted in the central pages, invades the protagonists' hearts with an exquisite alchemy. But the perfume's lack of substance like the inner beings that populate the Symbolist sensibilities cause Cyrano to fear that it might disappear (reply 5). Roxane attests to this same olfactory impression (reply 6) by externalizing this tremor and transmitting it by jasmine. The aromatic case (hence this trembling feeling) is smelt more than touched by the excited lover (reply 7.)

The replies that follow develop a suggestive theory within a short intense period about the amorous feeling expressed quite essentially in the "*C'est?*" that the post-theatrical creator took from the beautiful penultimate line in Rostand's play. The metaphorization by which the indescribable meaning of the kiss is barely recovered (reply 11) is paralleled by a series of non-verbal references in the post-theatrical text: while the flower is represented in a little perfumed bag and the heart becomes a recurrent symbol throughout the text, the emphatic dot over the *i* in the verb *aimer* (*to love*) becomes dramatic material in the following act.

Roxane discovers in Act 4 of Rostand's play that the true message of love comes not through physical beauty but through eloquence. The amorous word, while barely a transmitter of the inner essence in the symbolist aesthetic, is the true seed of love's passion. Though the word is an important instrument for the expression of the rich interior of the human being, its efficiency does not depend as much upon meaning as it does upon the suggestion of a meaning that may animate the soul. The kind of eloquence that Roxane demands intertwines the auditory values of words with their musical and rhythmic qualities. The suggestive power derives from the connotations of the verbal elements. Joseph-Angel had discovered these values of words in other post-theatrical plays. In his *Berenice in Blah*, the onomatopoeic sound fills the text completely except for one graphic stage direction in the shape of a chair. The theatrical game is one of shapes and relationships more than a set of meanings.

Following this aesthetic-ideological line, Roxane simply asks Cyrano to speak to her of love...

The title of the third act comes from the last third of the greater subtitle of the work:...*Cyrano conjugue le verbe aimer*. It is the materialization of the primarily phonic amorous discussion in which Cyrano responds to Roxane's request in the previous act. In contrast with the predominantly visual and olfactory elements in the first two acts, the auditory portion of the senses becomes the predominant one in the third act. The odd pages in Act III are a post-theatrical transcription of the verbal-phonic melody of Cyrano's love. If the kiss, the essence of love, were a rose-colored dot over the *i* in the verb *aimer*, the act of loving would consist of intemperately and eternally conjugating the present, past and future of the verb (pages 13, 15 and 17.) The forms (in French) that constitute the text of the third act are partially deverbilized, invested with meanings that exceed the direct semantic of the term, and given values different from the grammatical contents of the verbal morphism. The number and grammatical person work together such that the personal selection (which stands out on the page more) joins with the numerical alternation (singular/plural) in order to intuitively and physically express the root of the dramatic conflict. The typographic intensification thus shows the grammatical variation in relief which Joseph-Angel uses to symbolize the essence of the loving process: from *vous* to *tu* (an effect that we know occupies a central position in the perfumed heart within the play.) The grammatical tense (present, past, future) expresses in its own tripartied succession the implicit *process* of conflict. Post-theatrical grammar does not always follow the conventional morpho-syntactical rules. In Cyrano and Roxane's case, the conjugation of the verb *to love* is the practical development of the verb *to kiss*.

In addition, the immensely rich connotations of this monophologic-semantic complex are reinforced considerably in the plastic-visual area by the placement of a small rose-colored heart over the dot on the *i*. By means of the frequent caligraphic letters used in the post-theatrical aesthetic, the graphical treatment of the vowel *i* serves as an element of connection in the metonymic relation between the *love* and the *kiss*.

A new level of meaning seen in other parts of the play joins with the previously mentioned set of connotations. Pointing her weapon of affective grammar in all directions in order to conquer love, Roxane challenges Cyrano to use this technique. Cyrano begins to practice the metaphorical meaning of the verb *esgrimir* (to fence.) From this verb's etymological origin in Provençal, "*escribir*", there is a meaning which has been forgotten, "to practice the game of fencing." But the verb "*escribir*" in French still has this same meaning. While Cyrano conjugates the verb *to love* he practices, with a swordsman's dexterity, the amorous game that consists of touching his beautiful contendor's heart and closing the perfect compositive structure of the play the same way that it was opened.

If loving were smelling and reading were olfactory, then love is also a kind of "fencing." Practicing fencing, then, is writing with the incorporeal foil on the ethereal page of the atmosphere of love. To write perfumed words with the foil is to practice the captive eloquence that Roxane's love manages to conquer.

The symbol of the art of fencing runs throughout the play. And, adding to the set of symbols, is the external materialization in the section of layered tabs on each page. These give clues about the evolution of the fencing game. By *fencing* his love to Roxane, Cyrano, a master swordsman, also appears to be a master of eloquence; the proverbial encounter occurs when he generously takes Christian's place (the slow disciple who cannot learn the dialectic rules of the amorous language.)

The external appearance of *Cyrano's perfume* fits the regular qualitative characteristics in the post-theatrical play. Joseph-Angel views theater as a general artistic phenomenon. He inscribes his creations within the framework of the rest of the Arts without submitting to any one of them in particular. Hence, he publishes his volumes in such a way that they are, in themselves, true works of volumetric art. As a set the publication of his *Complete Work* of thirty-three beautiful triangle-shaped books makes a sculpture, the compendium of his entire creation.

The cover of *Cyrano's perfume* has the shape of a heart embossed on it which serves as an interactive symbol to the reader. The reader must open each half of the heart which represents the two parts of Roxane's balcony. Upon opening them, the curtain opens and the post-theatrical stage is set. There, the reader finds the embossed legend, "*Je vous aime.*" The center word *vous* disappears and is substituted by "*t*" when the reader moves the index tag hidden below the heart.

The title of the play, *Cyrano's perfume*, appears to be emblematically calligraphied to unite the letters *C* and *E* in the beginning and the end. This is repeated with the *C* and *E* in the replies in Act II.

The author inserts a graphic *mutis* (exit) in the last page in the form of an incensory. It is the play's thematic and aesthetic finale in which the following commandment is recited like a logo: "*Don't throw this play in the trash, burn it in an incensory.*" The reader, the active protagonist in setting the aromatic stage for *Cyrano*, must also close the play with a ceremonial gesture intertwining the post-consumist arena from which it came and the universe created by the brands of perfume inserted in the hearts. From the incensory, represented here adorned by the heart/balcony that opened the play's curtain, surges the receptor's aromatic response like an olfactory applause that responds to a theatrical message that has also been essentially olfactory.

The author completes the book's artistic presentation with intensely symbolic colors of paint that connote the play's dramatic universe: green delineates Roxane's balcony, surrounds the ivy and jasmine, and is set next to the rose of the hearts which are located over the dot on the *i* in the verb *aimer* (to love.)

Cyrano's perfume, as we have seen, is a play conceived of as a dramatic representation, a post-theatrical stage set by the reader which he actively protagonizes and controls. He opens and closes the process, reading the perfume of a heart in love olfactorily as Cyrano would. To identify with the hero, the reader must completely change the actor's interpretive costume. The false nose accompanying the book is not just another decorative or symbolic element; the reader must put this nose on to proceed with the

olfactory text. Thus, he assumes Cyrano's identity for whom the nose was not only a physical impediment but also an indispensable organ for smelling the fragrance of love.

Cinematography, one of the artistic developments most affected by the *Post-modern* aura (with regards to its strong productive and receptive consumism) turns to the world of Art in search of increasingly scarce original motifs. Thus, the classics are reinterpreted through today's sensibilities. They return to celluloid stages with projection rooms- the new substitute for theater.

In this context, Cyrano becomes a hero of the masses one hundred years later through Jean-Paul Rappeneau's film. His *Cyrano de Bergerac* has connected with the contemporary viewer's sensibilities. Gerard Depardieu has managed to transmit the most attractive nuances of a character gifted by genius, tenderness and a slight humoristic touch that barely manages to cover his intimate bitterness. He also reveals the part sanctuary, part archeological demeanor that defines most of today's cinematography. Unsurprisingly, since its debut in 1990, the film has collected a wide spectrum of prizes and awards.

Along with this "popular collective" version made possible by the camera, our turn of the century also recuperates Cyrano's character thanks to Joseph-Angel's post-theatrical recreation. His olfactory and essentialist interpretation of Rostand's theme is a cultural and poetic activity. It is also a personal and intimate activity according to the individual sensibilities of the Post-Modern viewer. Thus Joseph-Angel offers us the marvelous experience of a solitary staging made to the likes of today's viewer. However, this staging is made according to the aesthetic specificity that commands his whole work -the Post-theatrical theatricality, Post-theatricality.

While Rostand's text coincides chronologically with the intellectual atmosphere and the sensibilities that bore Modernity, Joseph-Angel's creation coincides with a moment in the Arts and thought similar to its antecedent- *finisecularity*. Between both, Modernism has left a trail of undeniable feats for the future creator. But, now that the Modernist cycle has been exhausted, the artist of our new milenium is set free to explore and to steady the conquest of new artistic languages. Among these is the Post-theater which recognizes traditional and Avant-Garde drama but is perfected, nonetheless, as the future theatrical language.

One hundred years later, in another turn of the century -the twentieth century- Joseph-Angel inscribes his recreation of Cyrano in the heart of another spiritual category intimately related to the new turn of the century process, *Post-Modernity*.

A cycle has ended. Thus, Post-Modernity is related to the beginnings of its antecedent movement. Joseph-Angel can be connected to Rostand insofar as the aesthetic climate at the turn of the century. Rostand opened Modernity, Joseph-Angel contemplates that period from the vantage point of Post-Modernity. However, the undeniable achievements of the past century of innovation and progress remain. The historical Avant-Garde founded the movement and the Post-Avant-Garde must set out to gather its achievements and to restore the fruits of past movements with a comprehensive historical

perspective. In the current social and economic decadence, synthesis and integration tend toward the finisecular elements that had been developed one hundred years earlier in another, similar period.

4. POST-SYMBOLIST AESTHETIC AND POST-THEATRICAL AESTHETIC

Cyrano's perfume is the twenty-fifth of Joseph-Angel's plays designed to form a whole- one single book composed of thirty-three volumes (the third being, as we know, the Post-theater.) According to Xavier L. Pol.lina, the Post-theatrical *Complete Work* is composed of the *Post-theater Manifesto* in origami and the thirty-two triangular books which, when put together like the pieces of a puzzle, become the post-theatrical *macro-page*.

Each of these volumes presents a problem in dramatic theory and makes reference to the major periods and works in the universal History of Theater. The post-theatrical creation makes allusions to the tradition of drama, while it's themes follow the path from Greek tragedy to Brecht, self-sacrifice to romantic drama, Racine to Goldoni and Shakespeare to Strindberg. In this long walk through the genres and figures of universal theater, *Cyrano's perfume* is situated within finisecular theater which coincides with the crisis of conscience that occurred between the juncture of Decadentist sensibilities and the turn of the century. This crisis recalls an interesting moment in drama: the genesis of the contemporary theatricality between the crossroads of Naturalist aesthetic and the dramatic application of Symbolism.

Joseph-Angel's recreating activity applies a common denominator to all the great works of theater: essentialization. The nature of post-theatrical signals like the incidence of pre-existing plot structures, applies an economizing treatment to the dramatic elements. Post-theater usually reduces the characters in the recreated drama, distills the anecdotes and accessories to the central plot, and concentrates the dramatic tension around an internal conflict. This effect is shown in the integration in one sentence of the titles that precedes the three acts in *Cyrano's perfume*, "*Au coeur de la nuit parfumée du jasmin, Cyrano conjugue le verbe aimer*" ("*In the heart of the jasmine scented night, Cyrano conjugates the verb to love.*")

This legend summarizes the thematic and developmental nucleus of the drama. The hero's intense conflict is emphasized, brought to the fore, and put in relief owing to this process of distilling exterior elements and concentrating the perfume's aromatic didascalía. As a result, the visual form of the play distills by condensing that which constitutes the basic essence of Cyrano's drama.

The post-theatrical creation grapples with the argument that the word is the principal instrument of dramatic language by drawing mainly upon the field of visual arts thus substituting signals pertaining to similar codes for the verbal element. This anti-verbal revolution not only causes the elimination of the word from the principal text or dramatic

dialogue but also the very act of creation. This is achieved by processes that play with the gamut of man's perceptions. While Joseph-Angel maintains the verbal text in Act II of *Cyrano's perfume* according to the aesthetic virtue of the Act, the rest of the play includes expressive resources of graphic-plastic, tactile and mainly olfactory natures. This diversification of signals mainly affects the stage directions and textual didascalia including the aromas (that must be read with the nose), objects (the rubberband surrounding the book, the origami rose containing the aroma) and tactile things (signs in Braille.) Thus, the Post-theater constitutes a new model of dramatic text, a new paradigm of composite codes offered to the theatrical creator as an instrument that is more in tune with man's diverse senses than the traditional works were.

However, the plural treatment of dramatic language does not imply that the word can be discarded. Rather, it remains incorporated among the expressive codes and is reinvested with a new, non-exclusive functionality related to the process of essentializing implicit in the post-theatrical creation.

The twelve verbal replies in Act II of *Cyrano's perfume* demonstrate this new treatment of the verbal element especially when considered from the moment Joseph-Angel selected the elements from Rostand's text. The post-theatrical playwright has taken the liberty to pick out the brief fragments of the original text that best suit his bare, intensified presentation of dramatic conflict. While the verbal replies formulate the brief development of Cyrano's intimate conflict within the dimension of time (from the veiling night to the aromatic bewitchment and final invitation to amorous dialect,) they also constitute a linguistic counterpart to the intense symbolization made by the olfactory and objectual signs (when eloquence opens Roxane's heart.) Like the rest of the post-theatrical signals, the words are also reinvested with several connotations to make them intensely symbolic: for example, the erotic charge implied in the reply prior to the amorous climax, "*Ouvrez...(fermant les yeux) et lisez*" ("Open...(close your eyes) and read.") By maintaining the word in Joseph-Angel's *Cyrano*, it becomes tainted by profound post-theatrical ideology: the replies are highly symbolic, essentialized, their content embossed by the aromatic stage effects. They constitute a double level of theatricality planted over the intertwining of parallel, expressive codes. The post-theatrical hero's eloquence is not just a verbal exercise; it is, above all, symbolic and visual.

Moreover, Joseph-Angel places the words that shape the essence of the process that summarizes Cyrano's passion in the center, "*Je vous aime, c'est-à-dire, je t'aime.*" They are stamped in triplicate in the flower/heart that emanates the aroma of love. Thus, the post-theatrical hero evolves from his voluntary concealment in the shelter of the night to the intimate verbal relationship of a direct, personal nature. The word, the essential element in Cyrano's amorous game, becomes a post-theatrical symbol.

An expressive parody is completed this way. Considering the importance of the word in the Symbolist aesthetic, theorists Mallarmé and Wyzewa prefer the drama that is read while Lugné-Poe and Maeterlinck accentuate the predominance of the poet's words as fundamental dramatic elements. In effect, in his play, Joseph-Angel demonstrates the

efficiency of the post-theater's textual model. It is capable of replacing the traditional language formed solely by words even in the aesthetic field in which it has reached considerable heights. In *Cyrano's perfume*, the post-theatrical graphic, the image, equals the word in the process of attaining the greatest aspiration of symbolist communication: the expression of the characters' desires and intimacies. Thus, by virtue of its essence, the Post-theater becomes a sublimating dramatic language of Symbolism. By creating new, not exclusively verbal symbols to establish relationships or correspondences with physical sensations and interior realities, the Post-theater appears as a *sublimated symbolism* - an effective substitute, after a one-hundred year artistic cycle, for the aesthetic movement that occupied the center of finisecular creative activity in its day. Foreshadowed by the Symbolist experience, Post-theater has captured the central position in the new artistic context of our turn of the century.

While primarily a new tool for dramatic creation, the post-theatrical creation, as a revolutionary movement among the theatrical Avant-Garde, profoundly and extensively affects the greater nature of drama. Each post-theatrical creation consists of a play in itself which creates a theatricality that alters the traditional functions of theater. The kind of staging implicit in the post-theatrical creation is most immediately designed to be contemplated by the individual viewer, a single receptor of these modes of dramatic communication which can be called *solidramas*.

Perhaps the mode of reception is among the elements of the act of post-theatrical communication that reveals the greatest difference from the conventional play. In *Cyrano's perfume*, the complication of the receptive process is a constant implicit in the very aesthetic of the play. The publication is adapted to a small paper theater which has a door that opens when the reader removes the rubberband that covers it, a curtain that opens when the reader/viewer moves the parts of Roxane's heart/balcony, and a function that begins when the reader activates the alternating mechanism that replaces "vous" with "t'." Thus the reader initiates a play in which he himself acts out Cyrano's character in response to Roxane's command, "*Ouvrez...et lisez*" (reply 6.) Like the hero, the reader/viewer/actor aromatically reads the olfactory annotation inserted in the little origami bag, thus inhaling Cyrano's perfume. And, like Cyrano, he feels the worshipped tremolo of Roxane's passion descend through the essences of jasmine. The same reader/viewer will end the play burning the book/stage according to the instruction on the last page.

The profoundly meaningful relationships between the categories of reader/hero and reading/acting form a differed mode of reception. For example, the amorous response that Cyrano obtains, reflects a love that was destined for Christian (because Cyrano lives in a differed reality.)

In addition, it deals with an interactive staging in which the receptor (who is director, stage manager, stagehand, actor and viewer simultaneously) can control and intervene in the development of the play.

Thus the post-theatrical receptor takes part in the characteristics and attributes of the rest of the human elements on stage. The Post-theater profoundly alters the rhetoric of

drama in one aspect that was rarely permeated by the innovations in the traditional creations.

From a formal point of view, *Cyrano's perfume* is constructed like a framework of elements intensely related due to a complex web of meanings that intertwine in multiple directions. Tending towards signals of a graphic-plastic nature to express the drama, the Post-theater loads these with references that surpass the simple denotative plane. Proceeding mainly from the area of the image, the signals in the post-theatrical creation become post-theatrical *symbols* in the context in which they are inscribed in the play. As these symbols are charged with *connotations* that sometimes coexist in the same meaning, they, in turn, enrich the object referred to.

These intensely connotative signals, the post-theatrical symbols, thus acquire a great suggestive capacity, an enormous power of evocation. An image in the shape of a heart divided appears on the cover of *Cyrano's perfume*. Its embossed form reproduces the organ of emotion. The graphic immediately becomes a symbol of passion reinvested with a meaning that can often be found in literature. Nevertheless, new meanings overcome it immediately like a cascade of other meanings that overcome the primitive global signal (the heart-shaped drawing plus the concept of a human heart.) By separating the two halves of the heart, the signal signifies Roxane's balcony and the lateral sides that cover it. But at the same time, the heart acquires a new reference in theater that functions like a front curtain splitting the stage in two. When drawn open by the reader/viewer, it presents him to the staging after which the book becomes a paper theater for individual use. Finally, the words written inside the heart/balcony/front curtain ("*Je vous aime/Je t'aime*") function as a hand device with which the reader/director stage designer/stage manager controls the beginning of the play. Moreover, the heart symbol acquires a second objectual materialization within the little origami bag (the heart of the play and the garment Roxane surrendered.) It acquires a physical connotation when impregnated by Cyrano's perfume and when unfolded like the blossom of a rose. Finally, the connotative capacity increases infinitely if we consider that the heart is the post-theatrical symbol par excellence. It's not surprising that the volumes which form Joseph-Angel's *Complete Work* have cardio-triangular shapes and the *Post-Theater Manifesto* has the shape of Hamlet's heart. The signal-become-symbol becomes intensely connotative through the multiple planes and environs of the post-theatrical creation.

The heart not the only example. There is also the road. Conceptually complex between the image and connotative symbolization, it (the road) offers similar levels of effective realization. It obtains these levels of realization from the elements incorporated in the art of fencing; the foils are post-theatrical pencils and fragments of the amorous eloquence with which Cyrano touches Roxane's heart. The fencer's mask refers to the adventurously blind complicity of the night, Cyrano's concealment behind Christian's figure, and the eternal mask of theatrical art. The page tabs are the clues to the contents of the lovers' aromatic dialect and they are also the stairs by which Cyrano proceeds toward Roxane's balcony.

The image of the final incensory is loaded with evocations. Its smoke -a product of burning the paper play- functions as the final draw of the curtain. It completes the complication of the symbolizing connotations through perceptive elements of an aromatic nature. The rubberband around the book that allows the Post-theater to open and the nose that must be worn by the viewer also function as post-theatrical symbols in the incredibly rich context of the play.

Many of these symbols are beautiful non-verbal metaphors. Braille is employed in relation to the semantic proximity of the night. However, the process of symbolization also affects the verbal element. This occurs calligraphically with the initials *C* and *E* wrapped around the title of the play.

Finally, the compositive symmetry becomes in itself one of the most powerful symbols of the post-theatrical creation. Well demonstrated in the structure of *Cyrano's perfume*, the play is overcome with a quasi magical presence assumed by the number three. Examples include the distribution of the conflict in three acts (one as a diptych and the other two as triptychs,) and the presentation of Braille in three series of nine signs each (three by three.) The very order of things corresponds to the alternance of meanings between the odd and even pages, the inversion of the triangle represented by the even pages (using the symmetrical axis as a mirror), and the insertion of cover sheets in the beginning and end of the book.

The ultimate value of this post-theatrical symbolism belongs to the irrefutable capacity to evoke, to refer indirectly to the most hidden intimacies of man's sensibilities. Like the Symbolist aesthetic from the previous century, the Post-theater of today relies heavily on human perception and on the array of sensations. Overcoming the audio-verbal nature of the traditional drama, the Post-theater makes use of the viewer's senses and perceptions. In *Cyrano's perfume*, this sensorial stimulation ranges from the implication of a lack of sight and the affirmation of the sense of touch (Act I), to the requisite sense of smell (Act II and the whole play in general), to the predominance of the sense of hearing in the special treatment of the verbal element in Act III.

However, unlike the Symbolist School of the past century, Post-theatrical Symbolism almost completely dispenses with sentimental symbols in favor of intellectual symbols. Post-theatrical Symbolism does not stimulate the viewer's affective fibers by means of activating his range of emotions which go from laughter to sobs. On the contrary, it attempts to stimulate the receptor's mind whose capacity to reason, discern and identify is constantly engaged by the complex web of associations implied in the process of post-theatrical symbolization. Built upon the image, broadly related to the area of Visual Arts, and greatly concerned with the recreation of great figures and moments of drama, the thematic and compositive universe of Post-theater acquires a markedly *textual* component. With respect to its intra-artistic references, Post-theater is intensely formal which follows the creative line of post-modernity.

The surprised and atypical reader, intoxicated by *Cyrano's* captivating perfume, holds before him the center page of Joseph-Angel's play. Since the end of the previous

century many creators have attempted to seize and transmit the most hidden and profound facets of man's soul, and in this instant, the reader witnesses the final realization of their dreams. A subtle fiber weaves together the handywork of many playwrights who had the common undertaking of probing the intimacies of the individual -the most arcane mysteries of the human being- with their works.

Once the cycle ended, which took place after Symbolism in the evolution of Art, the new turn of the century -and of the milenium- offers us another precious demonstration of the desire that animated the aesthetic creation one hundred years ago. This demonstration is a new kind of Symbolism whose rhetoric feeds more upon visual and verbal meaning and reveals to the reader/viewer the essences of creation through which it is possible to clearly glimpse the enlightenment of the future.

One of the Post-theater's defining characteristics is its decided will to place itself indefatigably on the limits of the theatrical *future*. Loyal to its time, the post-theatrical Avant-Garde fulfills its promise of advancement in dramatical creation and research through the special relationship it holds with *Post-Modernity*.