

Aesthetic Codification of the 'Unsavoury' from *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the *Poetics* to Postdramatic Theatre

In examining the notion of entelechy – defined by Aristotle as the 'final cause' in drama – Zornitsa Dimitrova shows that depictions of 'unsavoury' content are only justified insofar as they are part of larger networks of aesthetic codification. The unsavoury cannot be an end in itself; neither can it function as an aesthetic category in its own right. Rather, it is a means related to *pathos*, or suffering, in Greek tragedy and *bībhatsa*, the 'odious sentiment' of the Sanskrit drama. Within such networks of codification, the purpose of the unsavoury is to carry forward the drama to an emotionally uplifting end: *katharsis* in the *Poetics* and *ananda* in *Nāṭyaśāstra*. This purposiveness – already visible in the entelechial nature of the dramatic plot – relates to a concept of mimesis implicitly understood as a term actional and interactionist in character. But only with the emergence of postdramatic theatre and the dissolution of plot does the unsavoury begin to function as an aesthetic category in its own right. Zornitsa Dimitrova is a doctoral graduate of Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster and holds degrees in Indology, Philosophy, and English Literature from the Universities of Sofia and Freiburg. Her research interests include performance and ritual studies, dramatic theory, and mimesis.

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THIS ARTICLE is concerned with two early texts of dramatic criticism: Aristotle's *Poetics* (335 BC) and Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* (second century BC). They were the products of two very different dramatic traditions, yet they share an ontological commonality. Both put on display the importance of plot and insist on its strict mechanics. And both rely on the entelechial nature of the dramatic plot. The *Poetics* and *Nāṭyaśāstra* thus pertain to an analogical ontology that works by means of linear progression, purposiveness, and a causal arrangement derived from the interaction of grades of probability and necessity. The dramatic plot becomes the very embodiment of this ontological design.

Although the *Poetics* and *Nāṭyaśāstra* derive from two different dramatic traditions, they define drama in similar terms. First, the formal becoming of drama is shown in the evolution of an entelechial plot out of a transition from potentiality to actuality. Second, the emotive becoming of drama is shown in the congealing of an impersonal aesthetic

state (respectively, *katharsis* and *ananda*).

Here 'the unsavoury' does not operate as an autonomous aesthetic category. It partakes in a plot mechanics that makes it a means to an end. In this capacity, the unsavoury becomes subservient to a plot arrangement that thrives on the imitation of purposive action and emotive mimesis. Depictions of that which is unsavoury thus become part of a codified network of probability and necessity, serving the advancement of the plot and forwarding both its formal (*anagnorisis*, *phala*) and affective (*katharsis*, *ananda*) becoming.

Here the unsavoury, exemplified by the *pathos* of tragedy and *bībhatsa rasa* in the Sanskrit drama, is an auxiliary category. Even the concept of *rasa* and Bharata's equivalent to the aesthetic category of the unsavoury, *bībhatsa*, are only quasi-autonomous. They are present in the plot machinery only insofar as they can serve as a means to achieving the aim of drama – an impersonal aesthetic bliss called *ananda*.

It is exactly in depictions of unsavoury content, however, that the problematic nature of this system of dramatic codifications becomes visible. Once the unsavoury loses its direct link to this codified network of aesthetic and formal conventions, its status as a constituent of drama becomes contentious. The reception of the phenomenon of in-*yer-face* theatre becomes a telling example in this respect for two reasons.

First, in-*yer-face* theatre does not subscribe to an entelechial drama mechanics. As a form of postdramatic theatre, in-*yer-face* rather shows the dissolution of the notion of plot. Postdramatic theatre does not follow a purposive scenario; dialogue is not necessarily present. A postdramatic play may do without any particular interactions on stage, distinct characters, or time progression. Known for its qualification as 'theatre without drama', postdramatic theatre is profoundly non-Aristotelian.¹ It relies on a single event rather than on a plot and readily dissolves networks of codification.

Second, in-*yer-face* theatre insists on an aesthetics that foregrounds depictions of all things unsavoury, such as bodily mutilation, as in Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* and *Blasted*, disturbing emotional content, as in Anthony Neilson's *Normal*, or fraught ethics, as in Martin Crimp's *The Country*. A common feature of in-*yer-face* productions remains the unsettling quality of the material presented on stage. Without a network of codification, however, this 'unsettling' aesthetics quickly drives critics and audiences to rejection. As shown in the instance of Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, critical response to in-*yer-face* productions becomes affirmative only after a redeeming quality can be identified and foregrounded. Still, this paper suggests that in-*yer-face* is perhaps the only phenomenon in contemporary theatre and drama that treats the unsavoury as a standalone aesthetic category.

Movement and Growth in the *Poetics*

One prominent feature of Aristotelian tragedy is the entelechial nature of the dramatic plot. The plot is thus constructed around the

metaphysical concept of *entelecheia* – the assertion that each thing contains its purpose within itself and that it takes a movement toward this purpose to effect a thing's complete actualization. Entelechy – or what Aristotle defines as the 'final cause', the 'being-at-an-end' of an entity – is the purpose of actualization. According to Aristotle, each entity has its own immanent entelechy, that is, it contains its end within itself and naturally strives toward self-completion; for instance, the tree is already contained in the seed and the butterfly in the cocoon. Greek tragedy replicates this purposive scenario inasmuch as the outcome of the drama, though yet unseen, is already prefigured in *hamartia*. *Peripeteia*, the moment of tragic realization or turn of events, marks the final transition from potentiality to the actualization of *hamartia*, from probability to (tragic) necessity.

Entelechy is directly linked with the metaphysical notions of potentiality and actuality. Aristotle differentiates between two types of actuality, a processual and a final one, *energeia* (being-at-work), and *entelechia* (being-at-an-end).² The plot as motion (*kinesis*), or 'the actuality of that which potentially is, *quasuch*',³ can be associated with the first actuality as 'being-at-work'. At the same time there are two types of potentiality: inactive and active, potentially potential and actually potential. In entelechial scenarios, this motion from potentiality to actuality translates into a causal motion that forwards the formal and emotive becoming of the dramatic plot. Here one could speak of immanent causality. As the plot motions forward, it retains its purpose within itself, that is, the purpose (being-at-an-end) inheres within the plot and the plot becomes the carrier of this purposiveness.

In turn, Aristotelian potentiality and actuality find direct application in the dramatic notions of probability and necessity. The 'law of probability and necessity' in the *Poetics* can be defined in terms of actuality and potentiality. Here, necessity aligns with a play's end as it marks a depletion of its various grades of probability. The moment of tragic reversal, *peripeteia*, signals an equili-

brium of probability and necessity. At the same time, *peripeteia* marks the initiation of a movement toward necessity. A play's beginning, on the other hand, contains a maximum of probability.

The Aristotelian plot structure is thus defined by movement (*kinesis*) and transformation. It employs two components defined by change – reversal (*peripeteia*) and recognition (*anagnorisis*). Another constituent of the Aristotelian plot is *hamartia*, an error in judgement. A last component is suffering (*pathos*), a destructive or painful act that carries *hamartia*. *Peripeteia* is the plot device that effects the final unravelling of the tragic. It is described as 'a change by which the action veers round to its opposite, subject always to our rule of probability and necessity' (1452a 22–23).⁴ *Anagnorisis* is 'a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune' (1452a 29–31), and *pathos* can be a) intended with full awareness; b) intended with full awareness then not performed; c) an act done unwittingly; d) intended out of ignorance, then not performed (1453b 30–3).

Pathos, the third component of the tragic plot – traditionally translated as 'suffering' (by Malcolm Heath), 'the thing suffered' (by Gerald Else) or 'the tragic incident' (by Butcher), and described as 'a destructive or painful action, such as death on the stage, bodily agony, wounds and the like' (1452b 10–11) – is the final receptacle into which all tragic action fuses. While *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* are 'invisible events, transactions which take place in the realm of the mind',⁵ *pathos* is a visible surplus. Though not necessarily enacted, it serves as the very spot around which the tragic action revolves.

Movement and Growth in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*

Plot progression in *Nāṭyaśāstra* follows a similar mechanics. In Aristotle, the entelechy of the plot ascertains that the causal network of probability and necessity veers the action toward one particular – and ultimately tragic – outcome. *Nāṭyaśāstra* equally foregrounds the element of action and focuses on the

exertions of a hero. With this emphasis on action, the paradigmatic scenario of the Sanskrit drama assumes the shape of a quest narrative composed of five successive stages and culminating in attainment.

The five junctures of the plot enumerated in Chapter XXI.8 of *Nāṭyaśāstra* are beginning (*ārambha*), effort (*prayatna*), possibility of attainment (*prāpti-sabhava*), certainty of attainment (*niyatāpti*), and attainment (*phalaprāpti*). Five thematic plot elements (XXI.20–1) correspond to these, namely the seed (*bīja*), the point of junction (*bindu*), the episode (*pātakā*), the incident (*prakāri*), and the denouement (*kārya*). Their formal counterparts are the opening (*mukha*), progression (*pratimukha*), development (*garbha*), pause (*vimarśa*), and conclusion (*nirvahaṇa*). It is attainment that infuses the dramatic action with subject matter (*vastu*).

As laid out in Chapter XXI of *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the whole composed of the five junctures of the plot (*itivyṛta*) is called the body of the drama. It is divided into five junctures (*sandhi*).⁶ The five successive stages of action – the beginning, effort, possibility of attainment, certainty of attainment, and attainment of the result – are defined as follows. Whereas a beginning is associated with an 'eagerness about the final attainment with reference to the germ (*bīja*)' (XXI.9), under 'effort' one understands a 'striving towards attainment when the result is not in view' (XXI.10). The possibility of attainment is a thing 'slightly suggested by an idea' (XXI.11). Certainty of attainment occurs when 'one visualizes in an idea a sure attainment' (XXI.12), and attainment takes place 'when the intended result appears in full' (XXI.13).⁷

Here one observes a motion from potentiality to actuality, from probability to necessity. In the exposition of the five junctures of the plot, then, there prevails an entelechial tinge. The latter is to be understood as a thing directed, purposive, striving towards, and revealing a certain tension because of this purposiveness.

Whereas the five stages of the plot exhibit a dominant movement, the five corresponding plot elements (*arthaprakṛti*) clearly demonstrate a prevalence of the notion of growth.

What both foreground, then, is the becoming of an entity which already contains its purpose within itself. Whereas *bīja* (lit. 'seed') is 'that which scattered in small measure expands itself and ends in fruition' (XXI.22), the prominent point (*bindu*) is 'that which sustains the continuity (lit. non-separation) till the end of the play' (XX.23).

In other words, here we have the seed of an action and the condition allowing us to speak of the same entity at each stage of its progress, regardless of the metamorphoses it undergoes. The two elements that follow present us with the stages of this metamorphosis that are available to the viewer. The episode (*patākā*) exemplifies 'the event introduced in the interest of the principal plot' (XXI.24), and the episodic incident (*prakāri*) occurs 'when merely the result of such an event is presented for the purpose of another and it has no secondary juncture' (XXI.25). *Kārya*, or the action in its entirety, is defined as 'the efforts made for the purpose of the principal plot' (XXI.26).

At this point, it becomes clear that the traditions both of Aristotelian and the Sanskrit drama rely on a concept of transformation grounded in the notion of entelechy. In addition, both exemplify a change of state, yet with a tinge of *purposiveness*. In order to have impact, this exemplification follows a mechanics aided by the employment of *movement* and *growth*. Both Aristotle and Bharata Muni see drama as a narrative of becoming that is strictly purposive in character. Further still, both employ a calculated concoction of formal elements and, in the case of the Sanskrit drama, suggestive material (gesture, gait, and make-up) to instruct audiences about the nature of action and to glean insights about the causal network of probability and necessity.

Mimesis and Anukaraṇa

Both the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the *Poetics* have an entelechial vision of the dramatic plot. Herein the notion of plot advancement through purposive action remains of utmost priority. In insisting on the primacy of action (*praxis*), Greek poetics puts forward an autonomous

subject. This subject is characterized by free will and uses one's capacity for action to propel the dramatic plot. What is foregrounded here is exactly 'action', as it is by action that the plot follows its entelechial path:

Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all. Again, without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character. (1450a 20–25)

The classical definition of tragedy and the adjacent concept of mimesis are direct consequences of this view:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate part of the play in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. (1449b 30)

It is here, with the inclusion of pity and fear, that Aristotle evokes the notion of an entity that we call 'the unsavoury'. The latter pertains to depictions of content that is unpleasant, revolting, shocking, and horrible. It directly relates to *pathos*, which we understand to be the emotional exemplification of the unsavoury. The unsavoury here is part of the teleological agenda of the dramatic plot. Its exemplification, *pathos*, serves as the means through which *katharsis* is reached. Depictions of that which is unsavoury thus become part of a codified network of probability and necessity, serving the advancement of the plot and forwarding its becoming.

Let us see how this movement unfolds. 'Tragedy is an imitation not only of a complete action but of events terrible and pitiful' (1452a 1–3), says the *Poetics*. Depictions inspiring 'pity and fear', however, are not arbitrarily dispersed throughout the plot. They are invested with purposiveness. That is to say, they are incorporated into the well-wrought network of cause and effect, probability and necessity: 'Such an effect is best produced when the events come on us by surprise; and the effect is heightened when, at the same time, they follow as cause and

effect. The tragic wonder will then be greater than if they happened of themselves or by accident; for even coincidences are more striking when they have an air of design' (1452 10–15). Such artistically constructed incidents have the aim of establishing a relation to 'the proper purgation of these emotions'.

Herein one observes how the plot governed by entelechy begins to strive towards the attainment of an affective constituent, *katharsis* (1449b 21–28), the extinguishing of emotion. In this moment, *pathos*, the scene of suffering, comes to the fore. *Pathos* has the quality of a pacifying ritual. In purging the emotions of spectators, it restores equilibrium. Out of calamity there ensues peace. Any inclusion of unsavoury content – death, loss, injustice, turns of fate: all in all, the stuff of tragedy – becomes a means to an end. Ultimately, then, the unsavoury is extinguished in the emotionally uplifting. Just as the complete unravelling of the plot is the formal entelechial goal of tragedy, so does *katharsis* embody a concept of emotive entelechy.

The Primacy of Attainment

The Sanskrit notion of drama (*nāṭya*), on the other hand, manifests the primacy of attainment (*phala*) arising out of a concoction of intricately welded formal elements (*rūpaka*). A certain entelechial tinge is retained here as well: a resolution is already contained in the drama in the form of a seed (*bīja*), and a prominent point (*bindu*) marks the transitions from one state to another. In addition, the so-called elements of the spectacle – decoration, costumes, and make-up – as well as the presentation of gesture (*āṅgika*), words (*vācika*), and the representation of the four principal temperaments (*sattva*), gain significance.

Out of these elements, the Sanskrit drama distils a wider concept of representation (*anukaraṇa*) that incorporates interactive and affective constituents. Aristotle's contention that 'the power of the tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors' (1450b 18–19) feeds into the definition of Greek tragedy as 'the imitation of

an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude' (1449b 30). Here a theory of mimesis based on action (*mimema*) comes to the fore. The Sanskrit drama with its principle of *anukaraṇa* (lit. 'doing after'), in contrast focuses on the impact and heavily relies on an interaction with an audience.

In this way, the Sanskrit drama retains the Greek notion of mimesis with its actional focus and yet surpasses it. The definition of *anukaraṇa* can be found in that of drama at the outset of *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Here the representational and narrative character of a performance is given primacy:

119. Stories taken out of Vedic works as well as semi-historical tales (*itihāsa*) [so embellished that they are] capable of giving pleasure, is called drama (*nāṭya*).

120. A mimicry (*anukaraṇa*) of the exploits of gods, Asuras, kings as well as householders in this world, is called drama.

121. And when human nature with its joys and sorrows, is depicted by means of representation through gestures, and the like (i.e. words, costume, and temperament or *sattva*), it is called drama. (I.119–21)

Section I.121 already shows that the principle of *anukaraṇa* in the Sanskrit drama intertwines with the capacity of drama to impart sentiment. The latter is an element that is non-representational and supra-narrational. It works entirely by means of suggestion.

To this end, Bharata introduces a catalogue of eight *bhāva* or principal states (lit. 'feelings') and eight aesthetic sentiments, *rasa* (lit. 'taste', 'juice'), distilled out of *bhāva*. Each *rasa* represents the consolidation of a permanent sentiment, or a *sthāyibhāva*, and exemplifies eight principal moods enumerated in *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The eight *rasa*, or principal aesthetic moods, are *śṛṅgāram* (love), *hāsyam* (humour, laughter), *raudram* (rage, fury), *kāruṇyam* (compassion), *bībhatsam* (disgust), *bhayānakam* (fear), *vīram* (the heroic), and *adbhutam* (amazement). The *bhavas* or transient feelings out of which *rasa* arises are, accordingly, *rati* (love), *hasya* (laughter), *soka* (sadness), *krodha* (anger), *utsaha* (vigour), *bhaya* (fear), *jugupsa* (disgust), and *vismaya* (astonishment).

The eight *rasa* have the status of aesthetic emotions of a quality and composition that is more or less 'universal'. Their ideal recipient, the spectator best equipped to taste a particular aesthetic emotion, is called *sahṛdaya*, 'the like-hearted one'. Only a *sahṛdaya* is perfectly attuned to relishing the dramatic performance and the congealment of *rasa* out of *bhāva* in its fullest flavour. It is in this interaction – the savouring of the ideal recipient and his or her registering of a certain aesthetic emotion – that *anukarāṇa* is achieved.

Accordingly, the concept of *anukarāṇa* or mimicry in the Sanskrit drama does not entirely conform to the notion of representation proper – that is, the life-emulating depiction of a given actional reality. It presents us with a concoction of conceptual groupings that has its roots in the very idea of dramatic convention ubiquitous in the Sanskrit drama. Thus, it not only pertains to the plot, but also touches on notions of spectatorial success. *Anukarāṇa* is, then, actional and interactionist in character, as it pertains to the special type of congealment that arises out of the communication between the aesthetic emotion represented on stage and the receptive activity of *sahṛdaya*. To this end, *anukarāṇa* produces aesthetic effects as different as the recipients that have come under the influence of the drama:

This [the *Nāṭya*] teaches duty to those bent on doing their duty, love to those who are eager for its fulfilment, and it chastises those who are ill-bred or unruly, promotes self-restraint in those who are disciplined, gives courage to cowards, energy to heroic persons, enlightens men of poor intellect, and gives wisdom to the learned. This gives diversion to kings, firmness [of mind] to persons afflicted with sorrow, and [hints of acquiring] wealth to those who are for earning it, and it brings composure to persons agitated in mind. The drama which I have devised is a mimicry of actions and conducts of people, which is rich in various emotions and which depicts different situations. This will relate to actions of men good, bad, and indifferent, and will give courage, amusement and happiness as well as counsel to them all. (I.108–12)

This interaction assumes the shape of selective 'contagion' as each spectator receives

that to which he or she is best attuned. The dominant notion here, as in Greek drama, remains the uplifting and redeeming quality of *nāṭya*, its sheer ethical charge. Its role, roughly stated, is to present us with various actional and emotional scenarios, show us what it is like to be a human being, and suggestively teach us to be better ones.

Rasa as Interactionist Mimesis and the Aesthetic Emotion of Aversion

Let us examine the notion of the uplifting and redeeming quality of drama more closely. As laid out in Chapter VI.23 of *Nāṭyaśāstra*, *rasa* is conveyed by means of suggestion. The evocation of this sentiment is imparted through the colour of the costumes and the make-up, as well as by means of speech, gait, and gestures. These follow a strict classification. The rules accompanying the prescribed concoctions of gesture and gait (*āṅgika*), clothing (*āhārya*), vocal expression (*vācika*), as well as the depiction of temperamental dispositions (*sattvika*), deserve a theory in its own right.

Arising out of this amalgam, *rasa* can similarly be ascribed to all areas of life: in it, 'sometimes there is [reference to] duty, sometimes to games, sometimes to money, sometimes to peace, and sometimes laughter is found in it, sometimes fight, sometimes love-making and sometimes killing [of people]' (I.107). In all cases, however, the purpose of drama is clearly defined in terms of its enlightening quality:

The drama will thus be instructive to all, through actions and states (*bhāva*) depicted in it, and through sentiments, arising out of it. It will [also] give relief to unlucky persons who are afflicted with sorrow and grief or [over]-work, and will be conducive to observance of duty (*dharma*) as well as to fame, long life, intellect, and general good, and will educate people. There is no wise maxim, no learning, no art or craft, no device, no action that is not found in the drama (*nāṭya*). (I.113–16)

As an aesthetic emotion or a sentiment, *rasa* is produced (*rasa-nispattih*) from a combination (*saṃyoga*) of the so-called determinants (*vibhāva*), consequents (*anubhāva*), and transitory states (*vyabhicāri-bhāva*). The compari-

son that Bharata Muni provides is a culinary one. He shows that *rasa* emerges out of the various emotive and formal elements of drama just as a dish is the concoction of various foodstuffs and yet is more than its ingredients. Just as a dish is cooked from a combination of various spices, vegetables and other articles, so do the dominant states (*sthāyibhāva*), on coming together with other auxiliary states (*bhāva*), become consolidated in a compound called *rasa*:

Now one enquires, 'What is the meaning of the word *rasa*? It is said in reply to this [that *rasa* is so called] because it is capable of being tasted (*āsrādyate*). How is *rasa* tasted? [In reply] it is said that just as well-disposed persons while eating food cooked with many kinds of spices enjoy (*āsvādayanti*) its tastes (*rasa*) and attain pleasure and satisfaction, so the cultured people taste the dominant states (*sthāyi-bhāva*) while they see them represented by an expression of the various states with words, gestures, and the temperament and derive pleasure and satisfaction. This is explained in [the Memorial Verse ending with] *tasmān nāṭyarasā iti*. For in this connection there are two traditional couplets.

32–33. Just as connoisseurs of cooked food (*bhakta*) while eating food which has been prepared from various spices and other articles, taste it, so the learned people taste in their mind the dominant states (such as love, sorrow, etc.) when they are represented by an expression of the states with gestures. Hence these dominant states in a drama are called the sentiments. (VI.32–33)

This ethical and interactionist charge of *anukarāṇa* gains primacy with an eleventh-century commentary of *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Abhinavagupta's *Abhinavabharati*. This tract extends the notion of *rasa*, putting on display the process of universalization of the aesthetic emotion under portraiture. It instigates new debates on Chapters VI and VII of *Nāṭyaśāstra* by proposing a ninth *rasa*, *shanta* (lit. 'tranquility'). Rather than being an addition to the list, however, *shanta* has more of a meta-function as it serves as an exemplification of the remaining *rasa*, pervading them all. *Shanta* thus acquires the status of a 'supreme' *rasa* that is in need of a special type of attunement and a particularly refined spectatorial sensibility for its effects to take place.

Here Abhinavagupta endows the well-attuned spectator, *sahṛdaya*, with a status

equal to the status of the represented in drama. The affective potential of the drama – its ability to impart sentiment – becomes just as important as its formal constituents. The mechanics of the Sanskrit drama here are even more forcefully merged with a participatory model that is affective in character. To this end, Abhinavagupta adds that the purpose of art is the conveyance of an impersonal aesthetic enjoyment called *ananda* (lit. 'joy', 'bliss'), and that the participatory work of *sahṛdaya* is to achieve this state. Other than the strictly technical attainment ubiquitous to the dramatic plot, this type of affective attainment becomes the benchmark of artistic, but also of spectatorial, success.

According to *Nāṭyaśāstra*, *ananda* can also be derived from the unpleasant:

72. Now the odious (*bibhatsa*) sentiment has as its basis the dominant state of disgust. It is created by determinants like hearing of unpleasant, offensive, impure, and harmful things or seeing them or discussing them. It is to be represented on the stage by consequents such as stopping the movement of all the limbs, narrowing down of the mouth, vomiting, spitting, shaking the limbs [in disgust] and the like. Transitory states in it are epilepsy, delusion, agitation, fainting, sickness, death, and the like.

73. The odious sentiment arises in many ways from disgusting sight, taste, smell, touch, and sound which cause uneasiness.

74. This is to be represented on the stage by narrowing down the mouth and the eyes, covering the nose, bending down the head, and walking imperceptibly. (VI.72–4)

Similarly, the dominant state (*sthāyibhāva*) that corresponds to *bibhatsa rasa* is *jugupsā*, or disgust. It responds to the same prescriptive pattern:

Disgust (*jugupsā*) . . . is caused by determinants such as hearing and seeing unpleasant things, and the like. It is to be represented on the stage by consequents such as, contracting all the limbs, spitting, narrowing down of the mouth, heartache, and the like.

26. Disgust is to be represented on the stage by covering the nose, contracting all the limbs, [general] uneasiness, and heartache.

In this sense, Bharata's inclusion of *bibhatsa*, the 'odious sentiment' or the aesthetic emo-

tion imparting disgust and aversion, has a democratic edge to it. It is fully incorporated into the general theory of *rasa* and, although Bharata dedicates only two small passages to the aesthetic emotion of aversion, it is put on equal footing with the remaining seven types of sentiment laid out in *Nāṭyaśāstra*. *Bībhatsa* arises out of the same codified framework as the remaining *rasa* and is associated with a similar prescribed amalgamation of emotive elements such as gesture, gait, and mimic set to impart a purely affective state. Once its recognizability is ensured in this way, *bībhatsa* can become a full-blown constituent of the theory of aesthetic emotion. It is thus equally capable of providing access to *ananda* – the impassive, non-purposive aesthetic pleasure of Abhinavagupta.

On viewing these passages, one is almost led to believe that in the theory or *rasa*, *bībhatsa* enjoys a degree of independence and acts on its sheer aesthetic value. More poignantly, however, the ‘odious’ sentiment yields to the overarching programme of *Nāṭyaśāstra* – attainment of *phala* on the level of the plot, and attainment of the impassive state of *ananda* on the emotive level. Here depictions of the unsavoury become part of the very mechanics of the plot, well incorporated into the entelechial fabric of the Sanskrit play. Because of this auxiliary, means-to-an-end quality, the portrayal of the unsavoury does not threaten the overarching stature of drama as an art form of a redemptive and elevating quality. Even *bībhatsa* is made part of the machinery set to impart *ananda*. In becoming subservient to the plot mechanics, it is deemed recognizable and thus innocuous.

Incorporating the Unsavoury

Looking at the origins of dramatic theory, one notices that the depiction and reception of unsavoury material has invariably been incorporated into larger frameworks of aesthetic codification. These ultimately justify the inclusion of unsavoury content by making it accessory to the attainment of aesthetic bliss (*ananda*), as in the case of Bharata Muni and Abhinavagupta, or emotional purgation (*katharsis*), as in the case of Aristotle. The

unsavoury is there, yet it can only be there as long as it offers itself as an ingredient pointing to the redeeming quality of drama. This utilitarian tinge is only slightly disrupted with the inclusion of *bībhatsa* in the theory of *rasa*. Even here the unsavoury performs an auxiliary role similar to that of *pathos* in Greek tragedy. It helps an audience to reach a state of emotional extinguishment and disinterested aesthetic bliss.

If this network of codifications becomes somewhat unhinged, however, the unsavoury can no longer rely on its status as an aesthetically acceptable category. Once an entelechial plot is absent and the concept of action becomes optional, there is nothing to secure a connection between unsavoury content and the purpose of drama – to be uplifting, instructive, and impart a message of redemption. Where the notions of plot and action gain new dimensions, this aesthetic mode no longer has a strictly ordained place. The problem: the unsavoury is no longer part of a justificatory network that would affirm its presence on ethical grounds.

The following passages introduce an aesthetics of the unsavoury that disentangles itself from the concepts of entelechial plot and purposive action. Examples of critical responses to drama that foreground unsavoury content but fail to impart a justification for its inclusion attest to a certain spectatorial confusion in this respect. Both examples from the early twentieth century and the 1990s show that the unsavoury is problematic. It cannot act on its sheer aesthetic value, but needs to be part of a codified network that – just as in Aristotle’s *katharsis* and Bharata’s *ananda* – will lead somewhere else.

Unsavoury is ‘that which is insipid’, a thing ‘without taste’. In keeping with the culinary stance of *Nāṭyaśāstra*, we can call it ‘that which is unappetizing’, whereby the aesthetics it builds becomes the aesthetics of the ‘disagreeable’. The unsavoury is ‘repugnant’, and it does not seek affiliation with the pleasant. The following examples show how the unsavoury becomes displaced and ethically fraught in cases where it can no longer lean on interactionist or actional mimesis for its recognition. Without a codified network

additive to drama's entelechial narrative of ethical instruction and redemption, the unsavoury can no longer claim a rightful place in the mechanics of drama. We often observe how, because of this, artworks choosing the unsavoury as a main aesthetic category are systematically pushed to the fringes. This is particularly visible in British theatre of the twentieth century.

Reception of the Unsavoury

Looking at Britain's history of censorship, we can identify a certain zest to search for an instructional quality in art. Accordingly, confusion as to the role of the unsavoury can be felt when it comes to less typical examples of drama. In *Theatre Censorship in Britain: Silencing, Censure, and Suppression* (2009), Helen Freshwater explores several productions by London's Grand Guignol. Exposing the interdependence of transgression and taboo,⁸ Freshwater shows how such plays thrived on a certain 'affective immediacy' that induces a 'physical rather than an intellectual response'.⁹

The controversy they caused in the 1920s is telling in this respect. The Grand Guignol's concoction of using actors such as Sybil and Russell Thorndike, sensational material, audience exposure to 'sustained and explicit violence', scenes of eye-gouging and strangling, or depictions of madmen posing a threat to the sane, left audiences in dismay. Voices echoing Barish's antitheatrical prejudice were quick to point out 'the causal connection between exposure to the portrayal of violence and its subsequent perpetration'.¹⁰ The Lord Chamberlain banned four plays, *Euthanasia*, *Dr Gourdon's System*, *Blind Man's Buff*, and *Coals of Fire*.

Subsequently, theatre reviews relished the use of adjectives such as 'horrible' and 'revolting'. Criticisms took such a form as: 'I see no reason why this loathsome nightmare should be inflicted on the public. It has no excuse. It is devised with some ingenuity, of course, but apart from that its only appeal is to brutish or degraded natures'.¹¹ Here the reviewer insists that the work presented in the Grand Guignol cannot be called art. This

view relies on the assertion that the presented work has 'no redeeming feature'.¹² Even well into the twentieth century, theatre criticism, it seems, was resistant to granting legitimacy to an aesthetics that thrives on unsavoury elements. If one such aesthetic mode was to exist at all, it had to be instructive in some way. A 'redeeming feature' becomes a justification for both its existence and for audience exposure to 'repugnant' contents.

In this perspective, it is almost unremarkable that contemporary criticism continues to question the autonomous aesthetic value of the unsavoury. In the 1990s, postdramatic theatre began to test out the possibilities of an affective aesthetics thriving on the presentation of 'unpleasant' material. More than seventy years after the Grand Guignol, critical responses continued to be harsh when it came to playwrights choosing to work with the unsavoury and its aesthetics. Criticism appeared to take the unspoken stance that unpleasant, even repugnant, material can be there, yet a purposiveness has to be attached to it.

Let us look at one example in this respect – Sarah Kane's debut *Blasted* (1995), a play that marked the beginnings of 'in-yer-face theatre'. On 19 January 1995 Nick Curtis in his review of *Blasted* for the *Evening Standard* insisted on the play's 'sheer, unadulterated brutality'.¹³ His article, 'Random Tour in a Chamber of Horrors', stated that the play is 'no more than an artful chamber of horrors designed to shock and nothing more'.¹⁴ A review by Charles Spencer titled 'Awful Shock' and written for the *Daily Telegraph* of 20 January 1995 claimed that the play 'isn't just disgusting, it's pathetic . . . a lazy, tawdry piece of work without an idea in its head beyond an adolescent desire to shock'.¹⁵

Michael Billington's *Guardian* review on January 1995 followed a similar line:

I was simply left wondering how such naive tosh managed to scrape past the Royal Court's normally judicious play-selection committee. . . . There is no sense of external reality – who exactly is meant to be fighting whom out on the streets? [The play is] so full of horrors that we are reduced to bombed-out indifference.¹⁶

The *Evening Standard* said the play's final scenes were 'a systematic trawl through the deepest pits of human degradation'.¹⁷ The *New York Times* insisted that *Blasted* was a 'sordid little travesty of a play'¹⁸ and The *Sunday Telegraph* called it a 'gratuitous welter of carnage'.¹⁹ 'This disgusting piece of filth', was Jack Tinker's summation in his review for the *Daily Mail* on 19 January 1995: he proclaimed himself 'utterly disgusted . . . by a play which appears to know no bounds of decency yet has no message to convey by way of excuse. . . . Utterly without artistic merit'.²⁰

The Unsavoury Redeemed?

This confusion persisted even after Kane became an established dramatist. Here, however, the tactics are different: the unsavoury is undeniably there, yet a redeeming quality has to be attached to it. For example, in a review of *Blasted* from 2 November 2010, Billington says: 'I have long since repented of my initially dismissive tone and this revival could hardly be better done.'²¹ But this transformation is only possible once an acceptable moral stance is put on display: 'Kane's essential point is that the seeds of war can be found in peacetime.'²²

Other early reviewers of the play also began to praise the work, yet were quick to pounce on an ethical message: 'How shrill and silly the 1995 hullabaloo and hysteria seemed last night when *Blasted* returned to the Royal Court. It is, and always was, a play with a fine, moral purpose,'²³ said Nicholas de Jongh in the *Evening Standard* on 4 April 2001. Another review that encapsulates the demand for a redeeming quality was the playwright Simon Stephens's 'Sarah Kane's Debut Play *Blasted* Returns' on 25 October 2010, which included the following:

Fifteen years on from that explosive world premiere, what is alarming now is how prescient *Blasted* seems. It was written out of an attempt to synthesize two nations' horrors: the ethnic cleansing that Kane saw in the catastrophe of the Bosnian civil war, and racism and sexual abuse in Britain. Now such horrors seem far closer to us. Where once images in the play were received as being heightened almost to the point of absurdity, now they

have the smoke of realism about them. To watch the rehearsals in the same week that the inquiry into the 7/7 bombings opened was disquieting. In November 2008, when al-Qaida terrorist attacks ripped into the luxury hotels of Mumbai, the atrocities the play imagines seemed almost to be coming to life.²⁴

Even here the aesthetic charge of a play is compromised for the sake of societal relevance and claims to ethical pertinence.

Mary Braid's review in the *Independent* of 20 January 1995 also confirms that aesthetic value is contingent on a justification. Again, a redeeming quality is attached to unsavoury portrayals:

Yesterday, James Macdonald, *Blasted*'s director, defended the play – which focuses on an abusive relationship against the background of war – as a 'deeply moral and compassionate' piece of writing by a playwright of great promise.²⁵

According to this stance, the unsavoury is a surface under which the discerning spectator will uncover an ethical message and ultimately learn that in spite of everything the work does not fail to respond to a moral code.

A similar attitude is observed even in works of literary criticism. Müller-Wood, for instance, says that 'in-yer-face' is distinguished by its ability to 'bring us to deeper insights about human existence'.²⁶ One significant feature that in-yer-face borrows from Expressionism is the preoccupation with the vulnerability of being human. In this context, verbal and physical cruelty onstage become, according to Ken Urban, 'a means of both reflecting and challenging the despair of contemporary urban life'.²⁷ For him, this is an approach that reaches toward 'the ethical possibilities of an active nihilism'.²⁸ Yet again, the unsavoury becomes part of a critical discussion only when its redeeming potential can be identified and foregrounded. In order to be deemed valid, the aesthetic code of the unsavoury must receive auxiliary features such as societal embeddedness, and must present itself as a narrative of redemption. Let us see, however, if it is not possible to find a type of theatre that actively pursues and thrives on this particular type of aesthetics.

Tracing the way the unsavoury is incorporated in Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Nāṭyaśāstra* by Bharata Muni show us that for its recognition to take place, the unsavoury needs to become part of a codified network. Once theatre shifts toward postdramatic forms, this category can no longer function as part of a prescriptive codified framework for the simple reason that there is none. So one is faced with the challenge of establishing the category of the unsavoury positively, acknowledging its presence as an aesthetic reality in its own right. One testimony to this difficulty is the case of in-*yer-face* theatre of the 1990s and, in particular, the initial responses to Sarah Kane's first play discussed.

In-Yer-Face and 'Postdramatic' Theatre

Here I would put forward the suggestion that as postdramatic theatre, in-*yer-face* is the first type of drama that has systematically sought to establish an aesthetics of the unsavoury without reliance on established formal and emotive codification. Postdramatic theatre can successfully do so precisely because it no longer adheres to the mechanics of drama. Because of its non-adherence to dramatic elements such as a teleological plot, the primacy of action, and an entelchial focus, postdramatic theatre has also removed formal and ethical justificatory frameworks from its depictions of unsavoury content. It is precisely because of this non-dramatic quality of in-*yer-face* that the unsavoury gains the capacity to open up to its full potential as an aesthetic category.

Because of its emphasis on interaction with an audience and affective aesthetics, in-*yer-face* can be described as a kind of postdramatic theatre. Hans-Thies Lehmann observes that '*4.48 Psychosis* by Sarah Kane would almost have to be invented as one of the great texts in analogy to postdramatic theatre if it did not already exist'.²⁹ The postdramatic more than any other type of theatre lays bare a theatrical reality composed of an irreducible event structure: the 'predominance of the theatron-axis' aligns with an 'emphasis on the shaping of a situation and an Ereignis (event) instead of a work'.³⁰

Rather than the advancement of a plot line, postdramatic theatre seeks 'the paradigm of the dream as a formal means of suspending the thematic flow of time'.³¹ Against this backdrop, theatre no longer requires action, a causal sequence, or the category of character. Even interaction becomes supra-linguistic and shifts to the ritualistic communion between stage and audience. In this way, theatre can take place without the articulation of dialogue to become 'no longer dramatic' (Poschmann), 'without drama' (Lehmann), or 'anti-theatrical' (Puchner).

Apart from the formal features that disengage in-*yer-face* from models based on Aristotelian drama, this new type of theatre manifests a clear preference for depictions of the unsavoury. In-*yer-face* is rooted in a tradition marked by productions such as Edward Bond's *Saved* (1965) or Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* (1980). Yet it also shares many features ubiquitous in Renaissance drama, such as sheer relish in bloodshed. In this respect, in-*yer-face* is reminiscent of works such as Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, Marlowe's *Edward II*, Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Changeling*, or Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. Its stagings of cruelty and vengeance also attest to an inheritance from Greek and Jacobean tragedy.³²

Judged as 'blatant, aggressive, emotionally dark',³³ this challenging phenomenon has been designated 'new brutalism', 'nihilism' or given such labels as 'neo-Jacobeanism',³⁴ 'Theatre of Urban Ennui', and 'Cruel Britannia'.³⁵ Aleks Sierz's publication of *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (2000) established the term in-*yer-face*. To Sierz, in-*yer-face* is the substrate of a certain theatrical continuity that involves the staging of emotionally disturbing material and extends back to plays as early as Bond's *Saved* (1965). To him, the first production of *Blasted* (1995) by Sarah Kane 'publicized both the idea of transgression and the notion that a new sensibility had arrived'.³⁶ As a carrier of this new sensibility, in-*yer-face* becomes associated with 'disturbing subjects'. It refashions the divide between spectatorship and performers by shock infusions aiming to 'disturb

the spectator's habitual gaze' and 'violate one's sense of safety'. Stagings of violence become 'an essential part of confrontational sensibility'.³⁷

In-*yer-face* can be related to Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty', an 'anti-psychological, anti-rational theatre of ritualistic therapeutics which called for heightened language awareness'.³⁸ One specific quality of in-*yer-face*, however, is its unsettling effect, distinguishing it from the Theatre of Cruelty experiments of the 1960s and shifting towards the work of dramatists such as Bond or Howard Barker.³⁹ Images of transgression, while a perennial presence that hearkens back to Renaissance drama, acquire a new dimension. Not only do they 'tap into more primitive feelings . . . creating discomfort',⁴⁰ but they also compel audiences to 'see something close up' and 'react'.⁴¹

In the light of this, Sierz emphasizes the non-dogmatic and non-programmatic character of in-*yer-face*, refusing to create a list of characteristics or contain it within a solid definition. Rather, he turns to a more elusive capture of the phenomenon as a 'sensibility' an atmosphere, and a mood.⁴² Here, we could align in-*yer-face* sensibility with the aesthetic mood inherent in *bībhatsa rasa*. An aesthetic charge is foregrounded and, in this way, the unsavoury is claimed back as an affective category in its own right. Confrontation, shock effects, and a wish to unsettle spectators remain parts of this aesthetics. Yet what distinguishes in-*yer-face* theatre is not necessarily the taste for physical and linguistic mutilation, but the articulation of a theatrical immediacy that allows exposure to the unsavoury and affirms this as an aesthetic code.

Conclusion

In examining the role of the unsavoury in drama, I have looked at two early works of dramatic theory, the *Poetics* and *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Both discuss the social significance of drama and approach the presence of unsavoury content. Both works show how the unsavoury becomes part of a network of codifications whereby it serves as a means to

an end. In the *Poetics*, the cathartic quality of tragedy is distilled out of the unsavoury element of suffering (*pathos*). *Nāṭyaśāstra* foregrounds the bliss (*ananda*) of experiencing a universalized aesthetic emotion (*rasa*). Here the aesthetic mood *bībhatsa*, or aversion, showed that the unsavoury can be a category in its own right (*rasa*), yet only insofar as it leads to the impersonal and uplifting *ananda*.

In these aesthetics the unsavoury only operated within pre-established networks of codifications whereby it served as a means to an end. Nowhere in the tradition of dramatic criticism has it been allowed a stand-alone status. Instead, both *pathos* and *bībhatsa* are entwined in a teleological motion leading to *katharsis* and *ananda* respectively.

But I would depart from the assumption that inclusions of unsavoury content are justified insofar as they serve the teleology and entelechy of drama. That is to say, the unsavoury has legitimacy as long as it is an intermediary stop in a plot designed to be instructive and uplifting. In both the Greek and Sanskrit traditions, the dramatic plot traces the coming to fruition of a situation. This process inheres in both the Aristotelian transition from potentiality to actuality and in the presence of plot elements such as *bīja* (lit. 'seed') and *phala* (lit. 'fruit') in the Sanskrit drama. Only by dint of its inclusion in this plot machinery does the unsavoury gain ethical and emotional relevance. With postdramatic theatre, however, this network of codifications dissolves. The unsavoury becomes an aesthetic mood in its own right, as in the case of in-*yer-face* theatre.

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