

BI-MONTHLY REVIEW ON ANTONIN ARTAUD

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ECHO  
ANTONIN ARTAUD

For this 9th issue of the Écho Antonin Artaud review, we invite you to immerse yourself in the universe of Antonin Artaud through various literary and historical perspectives. The central theme of this issue is Heliogabalus, a controversial figure to whom Artaud dedicated one of his most iconic works. We are pleased to offer you an exclusive preview of excerpts from our forthcoming book, Heliogabalus, or the Crowned Alchemist, scheduled for publication in 2025 by Philomène Alchimie.

We will also explore the latest play by Jean Genet, Heliogabalus, recently published by Gallimard, examining the intricate and fruitful connections between Artaud, Genet, and Arthur Rimbaud. To deepen this exploration, essayist Patrick Sindhler provides us with a compelling article.

This issue is further enriched with excerpts from Patrick Pognant's latest book, Antonin Artaud: The Defeat of Medicine, as he prepares for the upcoming publication of an unpublished text by Dr. Latrémolière on Artaud.

Finally, we are delighted to present a detailed report by François Audouy, who attended the Antonin Artaud conference held at Kingston University in London in late July 2024, offering insights into the latest research and discussions surrounding Artaud's work.

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# Héliogabale ou l'alchimiste couronné

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Éditions Philomène Alchimie



# Heliogabalus: The Sovereign Who Defied Roman Norms

Heliogabalus, also known as Elagabalus, was a Roman emperor who reigned from 218 to 222 AD. Born Varius Avitus Bassianus in 203 AD in Emesa, Syria, he ascended to the throne at the age of 14, largely due to the influence of his mother, Julia Soaemias, and his grandmother, Julia Maesa, both prominent members of the Severan dynasty. Heliogabalus' reign is often regarded as one of the most scandalous and controversial in the history of the Roman Empire. As a priest of the sun god Elagabal, he attempted to impose the worship of this Eastern deity in Rome upon becoming emperor, causing significant discontent among the Roman elites. Notably, he installed a large sacred black stone, representing the god Elagabal, in a temple dedicated to this deity on the Palatine Hill.

Heliogabalus is also infamous for his eccentricities, perceived decadence, and blatant disregard for Roman social and religious norms. He is said to have engaged in homosexual and transgender relationships, married a man, and frequently dressed as a woman. These actions shocked the Roman elite, who viewed him as a deviant and corrupt ruler.



## **In Search of Lost Meaning: A Decade Deciphering Heliogabalus**

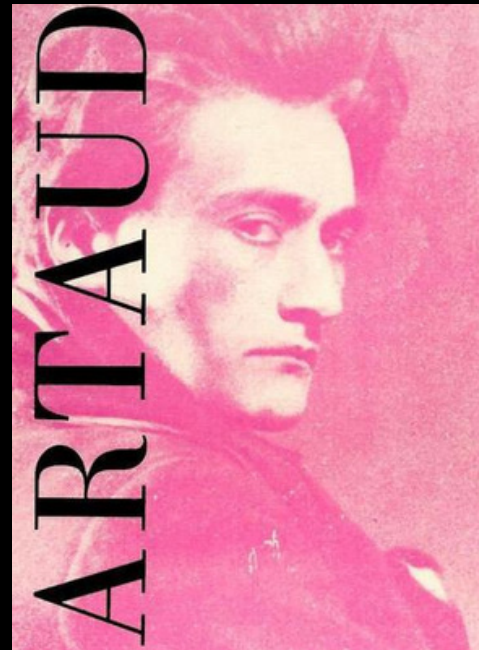
My awareness of the difficulty in understanding Antonin Artaud's work *Heliogabalus, or the Crowned Anarchist*, published in 1934 by Denoël, struck me with particular force on December 12, 2011. On that day, during the defense of my thesis, Ms. Banu Borie, a member of the jury, rightfully criticized me for having neglected two of Artaud's essential texts: *The Theater and Its Double* and *Heliogabalus*. Deeply affected by this critique, I decided to reread them that very evening and realized that my apparent disinterest in these works was actually rooted in my inability to fully grasp their meaning. Despite numerous careful readings, I had not found satisfactory answers to the fundamental questions raised by these texts: What exactly is the Double? What do the "god principles" mean? Why the plague? What connections might exist between cruelty and alchemy? What is the Schism of Irshou?

After long and arduous attempts to clarify these many questions about Artaud's universe, a bright idea occurred to me: since I couldn't find satisfying answers in the books written about Artaud, why not delve into the authors who influenced him by reading the texts he himself studied? However, this approach proved more complex than I had imagined. If reading the works of René Guénon, René Allendy, Plato, Iamblichus, Fabre d'Olivet, Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, or even Marcel Granet already posed a challenge, grasping their full depth was an entirely different matter. This revelation marked the beginning of a decade of intense research, from 2011 to 2021, a period during which I devoted all my time to answering the questions raised by this intellectual confrontation. It is from this intense period of research that my book *Heliogabalus, or the Crowned Alchemist* was born.

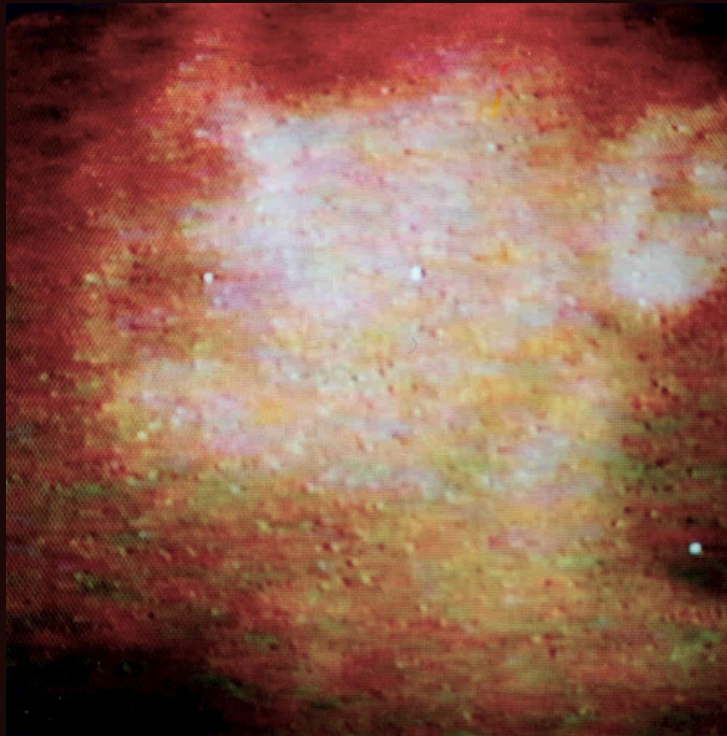
## Works on Artaud's Heliogabalus

In 1980, within the Department of Philosophy at the University of Paris VIII, philosopher Kuniichi Uno defended a thesis under the supervision of Gilles Deleuze, titled *Artaud et l'espace des forces*. The third part of this thesis, titled *Heliogabalus, the History of Forces*, is dedicated to the study of the Roman emperor of Syrian origin. Antonin Artaud specialist Florence de Mèredieu also devotes an article to the figure of Heliogabalus, titled *Corps solaire / Pierre de lune*, in her book *Antonin Artaud, les couilles de l'Ange*. Excerpts from this article were published in the special issue of the journal *Obliques* in 1986..

Among the works dedicated to exploring the figure of Heliogabalus in Antonin Artaud's oeuvre, notable examples include *Antonin Artaud, le théâtre et le retour aux sources* by Monique Borie (Gallimard), *Le nom d'Héliogabale dans le texte d'Artaud* by Dadou Roger, *Nietzsche et Artaud: pour une éthique de la cruauté* by Camille Dumoulié, *Heliogabalus, Travestissement* by Xavière Gauthier (Artaud, collection 10/18), *Moi, Antonin Artaud, homme de la terre* by Olivier Penot-Lacassagne, and *Sol Elagabalus* by François Lenormant, published in the *Revue de l'histoire des religions*.



# HELIOGABALUS, OR THE CROWNED ALCHEMIST



Excerpts

## Heliogabalus: A God Who Wanted to Become Emperor

"Moreover, from a historical point of view, the entire life of Heliogabalus demonstrates the theory that history does not unfold on its own, and that industrious minds are present to plan long in advance, with a dizzying sense of the subtlest maneuvers of the spirit immersed in life, guiding the course of events." (VII, 234)

It is 179 AD. All of Syria is occupied by the Romans... All of it? No! One city—or rather, one temple—still maintains its local priest-kings. Is this because the province of Emesa is populated by indomitable Syrians who continue to resist the invader? Not at all. These priest-kings remain in power solely because they have never resisted anyone. Their presence has always been convenient for the conquerors.[1].

The priest-king of Emesa, Julius Bassianus, has two daughters: Julia Domna, the eldest, who has just turned eighteen, and Julia Maesa, who is celebrating her thirteenth birthday. One fine morning, they walk along the banks of the Orontes River to consult the hydrometric oracle of the Temple of Apamea [2]., an oracle renowned for its infallibility. Once at the temple, the young girls, followed by their father, approach the sacred pool. At noon, the oracle speaks! Julia Domna's horoscope is consulted, and it predicts that she will become the wife of an Emperor. Informed of this prophecy, Septimius Severus (commander of the 4th Scythian Legion in Syria) asks for Julia Domna's hand in marriage. He marries her not only for her beauty but also for her horoscope—a prediction that will come true, as in 193 AD, Septimius Severus will be crowned Emperor of Rome. Julia and the Emperor have two sons, Caracalla and Geta. When Septimius Severus dies in 211 AD, the brutal Caracalla, unwilling to share the empire, murders his brother. According to the historian Dio Cassius (155-235 AD), not only did Julia Domna witness the fratricide, but she also allegedly slept with Caracalla (her son) in the blood of her other son, Geta.

Caracalla has only two loves: his soldiers and war. His reign lasts only six years. One evening, during a journey in Mesopotamia, he stops a few steps from the Temple of Lunus to relieve himself. His former praetorian guard commander, Macrinus, cowardly stabs him from behind and proclaims himself Emperor. Macrinus sends Caracalla's ashes to Empress Julia. For Julia Domna, a life without a crown is unbearable, so she starves herself to death (read: Herodian, History of the Roman Emperors).

[1] The strength of this kingdom lies in its pettiness, its lack of national unity, and its willingness to sell itself to the highest bidder. But if this kingdom and its principles have endured over time, it is precisely because these priest-kings have always submitted. Why fight when others do it better? Honor, for what purpose? For these priests, only one thing matters: the preservation of the great principles of their tradition. The primordial tradition.

[2] A city located north of Emesa, famous for its sun-moon temple.

## Preparation of the Plot

For Julia Maesa, relinquishing the throne to a foreigner is out of the question. The kingdom must remain within the family. As cunning as a fox, she, with the help of her two daughters<sup>[1]</sup>, prepares a plot against Macrinus that will pave the way for Heliogabalus to ascend to royalty. The honor of the ancient lineage of the priest-kings of Emesa will be cleansed in the blood of traitors. Soon, the Bassianids will become emperors of Rome and rulers of the world..

Julia Domna's<sup>[2]</sup> foresight always operated in the abstract, while her sister Julia Maesa's, by contrast, was always tied to the concrete. Farsighted, Heliogabalus's grandmother did not wait for Caracalla's demise to start devising her plan. She had been secretly working on it for a long time. The vast quantities of gold that Severus and Caracalla had brought back from their conquests were already hidden, unbeknownst to everyone, in the temple's underground vaults. "Julia Maesa has this superiority over Domna, her sister, in that she never sought anything for herself, never confused Roman royalty or the solar royalty of the Bassianids with her own person, and she knew how to depersonalize herself. Sent back to Emesa by Macrinus, she transported there both the empire's treasure amassed by Julia Domna and the treasure of the Syrian priesthood, which was moldering somewhere in Antioch; and she locked it all within the temple's walls, regarded by all as inviolable and sacred. Like a mouse, she does her work as a mouse, ceaselessly circling around things." (VII, 41)

After Caracalla's death, all the traditions of Emesa were upended. The annual parades of the priest Heliogabalus became daily occurrences. "Every day, Elagabalus ascends to the temple. He dons the solar tiara, which bears a ram's horn." (VII, 68). Julia Maesa, on the temple steps, displayed him as a marvel of nature. She amplified his glory by extolling his beauty and the precocity of his intelligence. And it's true... At this time, Heliogabalus was radiant, sublime, astonishing! This mischievous boy attracted all eyes. "She (Julia Maesa) boosts, she feeds Heliogabalus's glory from beneath, nurturing it from all sides and by every possible means. And she is not picky about the quality of those means." (VII, 41)

Generous, old Julia distributed the temple's gold to the people. Without restraint? At least in appearance, for she was very aware of what she was doing. Every night she meticulously calculated what could be given and what must be kept. Nothing was left to chance. "Maesa, who knows how to rekindle enthusiasm, distributes the solar gold lavishly and without counting, but when night falls, she descends into the temple's tiered cellars to supervise the sorting of the ingots: she labels them and gathers them like a warehouse worker or a customs officer. All her life, Julia Maesa gave proof of this meticulous foresight, of an intelligence that sees far and knows how to prepare things from afar." (VII, 68)

[1] Heliogabalus's mother, Julia Soaemias, and his aunt, Julia Mamaea.

[2] If Julia Soaemias chose as lovers Gannys the Subtle and Eutychian the Grotesque, it was not by chance. Gannys was an excellent orator. He was charismatic, concrete, and convincing. His practical intelligence proved very useful. But why Eutychian, a grotesque clown? Because she sensed "the deep versatility, the spasmodic and slippery nature of Heliogabalus's mind, which needed, alongside the seriousness of Gannys, a kind of official jester to balance it out." (VII, 67)

The End Justifies the Means. Even if it tarnishes her daughter's reputation, Julia Maesa insinuates that her grandson was fathered by the great Caracalla. Is Julia Soaemias offended by this? Not at all. As an accomplice to her mother, she plays along. Standing on the temple steps, presenting her son, she theatrically declares, "Yes, I loved him; yes, I was Caracalla's lover." It's over the top, exaggerated, and rather poor theater... but it works! These lies are what will make her son an emperor. Recently widowed, Julia Soaemias couldn't care less about what others say. "She takes pride in what, for any other woman, would be proof of her disgrace." (VII, 65)

Everyone (and everything) works for Heliogabalus's benefit... Even that fool Macrinus! Instead of establishing himself as emperor in Rome, he prefers to live the good life and play the fool in Antioch. Macrinus is a low-class emperor with very little personal ambition. If he seized power, it was only out of caprice and a sense of inferiority. Artaud believes that Macrinus killed Caracalla out of cowardice—because he feared him! Macrinus is so ill-suited to his role as Emperor that he becomes the laughingstock of his court. Frivolous, he spends his days in front of the mirror grooming his goatee and imitating the mannerisms and voice of Marcus Aurelius. He is pathetic... Even his own soldiers despise him and think he's an idiot. "The soldiers surrounding him in Antioch have learned to scorn him. Though he mimics aristocratic dignity by walking slowly and speaking in a subdued voice, his manners impress no one, nor do his golden clasps and the jewels on his belt. Musicians and jesters help him forget the bad rumors circulating about him." (RT, 71-72)

Once the ground is prepared and minds have been influenced... it's time to act.

## Convincing the Soldiers and Seizing Power

On May 16, 217, near Emesa, the three Julias, along with their lovers Gannys and Eutygian, infiltrated the camp of the 3rd Legion. This camp was not chosen by chance; it housed the most loyal and fanatical soldiers of Caracalla. To these brutes, Caracalla was equivalent to a god. Perched on a rock, Gannys addressed the soldiers. He was an excellent orator and knew how to capture their attention, using just the right words. Meanwhile, Eutygian entertained, engaged, and flattered them. Thanks to Eutygian, the soldiers relaxed and listened to Gannys's words with much more focus. During Gannys's speech, Julia Maesa weaved through the crowd, distributing gold coins. Julia Soaemias charmed and excited them with her voluptuous figure, her magnificent large breasts. It took just a bit of propaganda and glitter; the soldiers' credulity did the rest. And what about Varius Avitus Bassianus? For now, he was kept in the background.

On a magnificent night in June 217, young Heliogabalus was brought into the camp. Renamed Marcus Aurelius Antoninus after three months of waiting, he was finally presented to the soldiers. Julia Maesa left nothing to chance. A talented director, she hired the best musicians and the finest decorators in the province. Constantly hidden behind her grandson (the protagonist), she instructed him in every detail of what to do and, above all, what to say. The young adolescent allowed himself to be guided and played his role to perfection... For now, all that was required of him was to use his charm and youthful beauty. As night fell, the musicians played a mysterious Roman military melody punctuated with mystical Assyrian sounds. The setting was sumptuous. "Ten thousand torches blaze in the camp, reflected by tall mirrors brought in under cover of night." (VII, 89)

Heliogabalus appeared! He was mesmerizing, serene, and calm. Although the imposing red cloak of Caracalla, in which he was draped, was far too large and heavy for his frail body, he wore it magnificently. The drums accentuated his slow and majestic stride. Heliogabalus faced the crowd, and the miracle happened. Was it a trick of the light? A collective hallucination? All the soldiers saw Caracalla on the stage! The soldiers were struck speechless. For a brief moment, they believed he had been reincarnated. The "dantesque" music quickened. Heliogabalus raised his arms. Abrupt silence! The camp, in a trance, erupted in frenzied applause. It was grand theater! Gannys seized this moment of collective amazement and climbed onto the stage. Addressing the soldiers, he passionately shouted: HERE IS THE SON OF CARACALLA!!! Julia Soaemias, mingling with the crowd, screamed: YES, HERE IS THE SON OF CARACALLA, The God I conceived in his arms! Gannys piled on: Who do you want? The true son of Caracalla or this Macrinus, son of Nobody? The assassin of Caracalla. The one who rose to the throne of Rome by killing him? It was over the top, but it worked. The audience was won over. The soldiers fell for the ruse. Enthralled, they exploded with joy: Long live Caracalla!!! Long live the fruit of his loins!!! The game was won. Julia Maesa secretly rubbed her hands in satisfaction.

Thanks to this theatrical display, Heliogabalus gathers a small army, and it is with this handful of fearless soldiers that he will conquer Rome. Some might say this is impossible, but for Heliogabalus, nothing is impossible! A few days later, Heliogabalus's men are at the gates of Emesa. The moon (Julia Domna) shines so brightly that night it seems to imbue them with extra strength. Determined, Heliogabalus's fighters battle like mad dogs and win this first confrontation. Ulpius Julianus, the leader of the opposing legion, flees in cowardice but is soon caught by emissaries who behead him without hesitation and send his head to Macrinus.

Taken aback, Macrinus struggles to comprehend how an army led by three women, two eunuchs, and an adolescent could create such chaos in his territory. The time for jokes is over; things have gone too far! It's time to regain control of the situation. This time, the rebels will face the Roman army. A formidable force of 500 loyal praetorians marches toward Emesa. All seems lost... And all would have been lost if Gannys hadn't devised a plan. Gannys is a master strategist who knows the region like the back of his hand. He decides the location and timing of the battle. He approaches the soldiers and tells them: "They are 500, and we are only about fifty. But we fifty are worth a thousand! We will wait in this valley below; at noon sharp, we will attack from three sides." Macrinus's impressive army appears! With the sun at their backs, Gannys's troops engage in combat. Caught off guard, unaccustomed to such intense heat, and blinded by the sun, the "fortress of the praetorians seems to tremble at its foundations, shudder, and spin on itself like the head of a horse shaking itself" (VII, 90).

The overwhelming numbers seem to give Macrinus's soldiers the advantage... But then, a twist of fate! Heliogabalus appears! Riding a magnificent white horse and clad in Caracalla's epic armor, he is dazzling. It doesn't matter if he can't fight or if he struggles to wield his uncle's heavy sword. He is beautiful, radiant, and fiercely determined. His mother, grandmother, and aunt fight like lionesses. The image of an adolescent and three fearless women leaves a lasting impression. The soldiers take heart. Even though the opposing army far outnumbers them, Macrinus is not the type to withstand pressure. Panicked, he loses his nerve and throws his crown at the feet of the first officer he sees. Leaderless and disoriented, Macrinus's men gradually abandon the fight. Heliogabalus has won the battle and will be the next emperor of Rome!

Macrinus (the caricature), Julia Maesa (the mastermind), Julia Soaemias (the seductive enveloper), Gannys (the foresighted, wise, and bold executor), Eutychian (the public entertainer)—each protagonist in this drama has played their role to perfection. This plan, conceived and willed by the heavens, is executed flawlessly. Soon, through Varius Avitus Bassianus, the god-principle Elagabal will be master of the world.

[1] Eutychian—the one who brings happiness.

## A Bedouin-Origin Emperor of Rome

Heliogabalus prepares his entrance into Rome with the grandeur of a true Solar King. His coronation begins in Antioch in 217 and culminates in Rome in the spring of 218. But since one doesn't turn 16 every day, he makes a stop in Nicomedia. There, he organizes unforgettable festivals where he indulges in "keif" (كيف) by cross-dressing as a woman. "He also delighted in performing the tale of Paris; he himself played the role of Venus, and suddenly letting his garments fall at his feet, entirely naked, one hand on his breast, the other on his genitals, he would kneel and, lifting his posterior, present it to his debauched companions." (VII, 92) The soldiers begin to have doubts. They expected a Caracalla, but instead, they got someone more akin to Marilyn Monroe—or perhaps more fittingly, Marilyn Manson (The Pale Emperor). Was replacing Macrinus really a good idea after all?

March 218. The day has just dawned. Heliogabalus finally enters Rome! A triumphant entry. His massive chariot, pulled by 300 bulls, is followed by dozens of frenzied dancers, musicians, and other carnival performers. This spectacle is immersed in intoxicating scents, adorned with vibrant costumes, and accompanied by unusual music mixed with the cries of orgies, the sounds of animals, birds, and the howls of hyenas. Frenzy and ecstasy in all their glory. The atmosphere resembles that of the Rio Carnival, but this is a pagan carnival! And Heliogabalus? Painted with kohl (كحل), Heliogabalus dances alone in a state of trance atop his enormous chariot. In front of his massive black phallic-menhir baetyl, he swings his gold-painted genitals in every direction. Shining, majestic, he is draped in silk. His cloak is encrusted with gemstones, his thighs dusted with saffron, and a spider-shaped piercing gleams on his pubic area. Atop his head rests the legendary solar tiara of Ram. Heliogabalus's chariot moves backward. The Romans, puzzled, wonder why? Heliogabalus knows! It is so he never loses sight of his god Elagabal, the sun.

Upon entering the city, Heliogabalus gracefully descends from his chariot to explore his brand-new palace. The three Julias take over the imperial residence and impose their Berber customs. The servants are bewildered. Heliogabalus is presented with his new imperial garments. He throws them aside. Such plain Roman togas horrify him. Heliogabalus prefers to don Phoenician purple and drape himself in precious pearls. What do the Romans think? He couldn't care less, treating their opinions with absolute indifference!

[1] Antonin Artaud compares Nicomedia to Deauville. Personally, I compare it to Ibiza—a degenerate and uncontrollable city where Rome's money flows freely. Heliogabalus's nights in Nicomedia are far more extravagant than the flashy party at Fouquet's on May 6, 2007.

He is Led to the Senate. The ceremonies for the transfer of power bore him. During this first assembly, the senators approach Heliogabalus, and he asks them if they have practiced sodomy, vampirism, or fornication with animals. The old codgers look at each other in astonishment. Heliogabalus is disappointed. Away with these third-rate legislators, these old, moralistic fuddy-duddies lacking in imagination! Enraged, he throws a tantrum and drives them all out, replacing them with women. For Heliogabalus, "it is women, the first born, the first to appear in the cosmic order, who should make the laws" (VII, 109). Feminist? I wouldn't go that far... At the Bibliothèque nationale de France, there is still an ancient medal on display today, depicting Heliogabalus sprawled on a handcart pulled by naked women..

When the time comes to form his new government, Heliogabalus is not one to stress over such trifles. He chooses his ministers based on the size of their genitals. The best ministries, of course, are awarded to the most well-endowed. "Promotions, appointments, and special favors are granted based on the size of one's sex" (RT, 175). At the head of the Roman army, he appoints a "madman." The soldiers, all macho brutes, are bewildered. The minister of provisions will be his personal hairdresser. He appoints a circus acrobat to lead his personal guard. Millers, animal trainers, clowns, cooks, locksmiths, and dancers become his governors, consuls, and army chiefs. "He recruits actors and gladiators from the theater or amphitheater, assigning them positions of trust and importance. Herodian mentions a comedian tasked with overseeing the Senate and knights as 'prefect of morals'" (RT, 173).

In the early days of his reign, Heliogabalus presents himself to the people: He appears on the balcony of his palace and begins to perform obscene gestures, mimicking fornication with exaggerated movements. The audience is stunned. "This is not mere childishness, but a profound desire to violently assert his individuality and his appetite for primal instincts: nature in its rawest form." (VII, 99)

And thus begins the reign of Heliogabalus in Rome.

## Heliogabalus' Actions in Rome

As Emperor, Heliogabalus consistently behaved like a "rascal and an irreverent libertine." He was constantly surrounded by extravagant young men and cared for nothing but indulging in pleasure. During his marriage ceremony with the shy and timid Cornelia Paula, his friends teased him, shouting: "Go on, get in there! Do it!"—an attitude that scandalized the ladies of Roman high society. Disrespectful and insolent from the moment he ascended to power, Heliogabalus believed himself to be a god and acted accordingly. He replaced the temple of Jupiter in the heart of the city with a replica of the temple of Emesa. Out with the Greco-Roman gods: there was to be only one god, one cult, and his monolith! The gods of Olympus were reduced to mere ministers of his rock. Jupiter and Apollo became his chamberlains, while Mars and Mercury served as his household officers.

Heliogabalus was selfish. Convinced that only he should copulate, he considered imposing mandatory castration on the male population. From the towers of the temple, he hurled calves, gold, and phalluses—not just the genitals of his opponents, but large, well-filled sacks. The walls of his palace's underground chambers were stained with blood, semen, and the screams of tortured men. Heliogabalus was both generous and cruel, grand and childish, serious and grotesque, poetic and dissonant, orderly and chaotic, mad and lucid. "A strange rhythm emerges in the cruelty of Heliogabalus; this initiate does everything with art and in pairs. I mean everything on two levels. Each of his gestures has two edges." (VII, 102)

During the chariot races at the Circus Maximus, Heliogabalus was always accompanied by young ephebes. Sometimes, when the mood struck him, he would openly indulge in their charms before a stunned crowd! But it was at night that he truly let loose. When the city slept, he dressed as a woman and prostituted himself in front of Christian churches, charging passersby 40 coins. A nymphomaniac and bisexual, the Romans nicknamed him the effeminate barbarian, but Heliogabalus couldn't care less. He despised those Romans and their customs.

Sacrilege! To create a jewel, he ordered the sacred stone, the omphalos, to be taken from the temple of Diana at Leucothea, where it had been placed by Orestes. The ultimate sacrilege! He had the guardian of the sacred fire torn from the "holy asylum of the virgin" and raped her. Unlike Nero, who committed a similar act out of passion, Heliogabalus did so solely with the intention of fathering divine children with her. When he later realized his own sterility, he placed his hopes on his baetylus. But to birth beautiful children, he needed to find the perfect mate for his rock. "But Heliogabalus' zeal for his god, his love for rituals and theater, found their fullest expression in the marriage of the Black Stone to a worthy bride. He had this bride searched for throughout the empire." (VII, 102) The lucky chosen one was a magnificent African stone named Astroarché (mistress of the stars). A precursor to "marriage for all," he organized a grand ceremony. That evening in the Elagabalium, he delicately placed the two stones on a magnificent bridal bed entirely covered in rose petals. Unfortunately, Astroarché did not become pregnant, and Heliogabalus blamed her for not being feminine enough to please his rock.

Heliogabalus Does Not Get Discouraged. To have children as divine as himself, Heliogabalus resorts to the only solution he believes is left: self-procreation. A pioneer of cosmetic surgery, he orders his personal physician to graft female genitalia above his penis. The Roman historian Dio Cassius writes, “He became so disordered that he begged the physicians to create for him a female sex through a surgical incision, promising them generous rewards for this operation.” [1]

Anarchy resides within him, ravaging his body and driving his mind into early madness. The pride of his solar lineage prevents him from tempering his megalomania. “I see a dangerous monomania, both for others and for the one who indulges in it, in the act of changing clothes every day, and placing on top of each garment a stone, never the same, corresponding to celestial signs. There is much more than a taste for expensive luxury, a propensity for unnecessary waste—there is the testimony of an immense, insatiable fever of spirit, a soul thirsty for emotions, movements, changes, and which loves metamorphoses, whatever the price to be paid, and the risk involved in doing so.” (VII, 106)

Heliogabalus is not monotheistic only in words but also in actions. He has no difficulty adopting the motto: “Neither god, nor master, only me.” Heliogabalus does not submit to any law or authority. His law is the law, and his will is everyone's command. Gannys, his father-in-law, tries to reason with him, but Heliogabalus's concept of reason differs vastly from Gannys's. Although Heliogabalus is fond of his tutor, he can no longer tolerate his advice. Overcome with anger and in a fit of madness, he kills him. A few minutes later, he regrets the act but remains devastated. While this seemingly gratuitous crime may appear incongruous, in reality, Heliogabalus, driven by the principle of boundless fertility (Elagabal), was merely acting under what he believed was divine command. If Gannys had sacrificed his life in the service of this god, his “common sense” remarks now hindered Heliogabalus. In removing this obstacle, Heliogabalus believed he was clearing the way for the full expression of his creative spirit—his very reason for existence and his archetype.

[1] The words of Dio Cassius are quoted by Jean Zonaras, a 12th-century Byzantine historian. Regarding Heliogabalus's desire to embody both man and woman, the Byzantine chronicler Kedrenos offers an interesting perspective: “Avitus, as Dio tells us, begged his physician to ensure that he had a dual nature, through an incision made from the front.” Heliogabalus did not want to change sex but sought an additional opening above his male genitalia.



Heliogabalus is a lover of love. Even though his romances last only a few moments, he cannot live without them! One day, he falls madly in love with a slave, the brutal Hierocles. The palace constantly echoes with their terrible and theatrical quarrels. Hierocles is naturally jealous, and Heliogabalus delights in playing the role of a wanton woman just to drive him mad. Hierocles strikes him! "He bears the marks of blows around his eyes, and he flaunts them." If Heliogabalus had lived in Artaud's time, he might have sung to Hierocles the famous song "Mon Homme" by Mistinguett: "He hits me. He takes my money. I'm at my wit's end, but despite it all, what can I do? I have him so deep in my skin that when he approaches, it's over, I'm his. When his eyes settle on me, it makes me feel all sorts of things..."

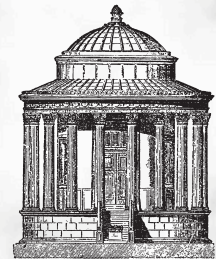
Heliogabalus loves Hierocles so much that he names him as his successor—his Caesar! During Heliogabalus's reign, all noble titles are shared among prisoners, murderers, and handsome, muscular sailors. Heliogabalus's main political project is to corrupt the youth. "He had the plan," writes Lampridius, "to establish in every city people who make it their job to corrupt the youth, in the capacity of prefects." (VII, 100) He then assembles a team of agents who travel across the empire to recruit the most virile men. "Agents of the emperor scour Rome, Italy, and the provinces in search of well-endowed, handsome young men whose futures are now secure. It's a recruitment criterion that breaks from routine and is no worse than the cronyism seen in modern democracies." (RT, 175)

In the port of Smyrna (Izmir), the handsome Zoticus, the son of a cook, is recruited. Strong and well-endowed, he is presented to the emperor. Heliogabalus observes him for a long time before approaching him "with a lively, rhythmic dance step, as if in a pantomime performance."

Zoticus: Emperor, my master, I salute you!

Heliogabalus: Do not call me master, the emperor responds, I am your mistress!

With Zoticus, Heliogabalus inaugurates what he calls the "nepotism of the phallus!" (VII, 104). Zoticus is so well-endowed that Heliogabalus decides to marry him. From then on, in the palace, "Zoticus reigns as the husband of Madam Heliogabalus." (RT, 194)



[1] "He loved a certain Hierocles with such passion that, shameful as it is to relate, he kissed his private parts, saying that in doing so, he was celebrating the mysteries of Flora." (Lampridius, *Historia Augusta*)

## Personality of Heliogabalus

Like Sardanapalus, the "drag queen" emperor, Heliogabalus loves to flaunt himself, applying makeup and dressing up as a woman. A man of spectacle, he is always on stage. In his palace, he has his subjects address him as wife, mistress, empress, or Bassiana. His costumes are eccentric, kitschy, and unusual. Heliogabalus adores gold. He orders entire galleries in his palace to be dusted with gold glitter. He loves gold so much that his wardrobe includes an outfit where every thread is made of pure gold. Heliogabalus never wears the same outfit twice. "There's no question of putting washed clothes on his voluptuous skin: 'That's for beggars!' he says, horrified by poverty." (RT, 180)

Heliogabalus's mind is constantly sharp yet troubled. All the colors, shapes, and sensations around him push his spirit to embark on strange journeys (VII, 31). Perpetually dissatisfied, Heliogabalus "jumps from stone to stone, from brilliance to brilliance, from form to form, and from fire to fire, as if he were running from soul to soul, in a mysterious inner odyssey that no one after him has ever replicated." (VII, 132). Eternally unfulfilled, he never wears the same jewelry or eats the same food twice. His performances are always different, and his lovers are never the same. For him, routine is abnormal. He craves action and movement: chariot races, captivating performances, varied concerts, and orgiastic nights. In all these manias, "there is testimony of an immense, insatiable fever of spirit." (VII, 106) His doctrine? To realize every oddity and whim that crosses his mind. "One day, he whimsically decides to gather all the spider webs in the city at the Palatine. Imperial slaves are assigned to this task and are rewarded for bringing in entire bundles. It is said that Heliogabalus managed to accumulate up to ten thousand Roman pounds (over three tons). This leads him to proclaim: 'One can judge the greatness of Rome by this!'—a way to mock the old beards of the traditionalist opposition, but a rather unappetizing spectacle for his guests." (RT, 190)

[1] Sardanapalus, also known as Ashurbanipal, was one of the last great kings of Assyria, ruling from 669 to 631 BCE. Sardanapalus has often been portrayed as a debauched, lazy, and effeminate king.

Luxury, Lust, Excess. Extravagant spending! Donkeys are replaced by elephants, dogs by horses, and cats by lions. Everywhere, there is grandeur, excess, extravagance, and madness. "He defecated in gold cups and urinated in vessels of myrrh and onyx." (Lampridius, *Historia Augusta*.) Heliogabalus is passionate about exotic animals. The temple of his *baetylus* is populated with monkeys, crocodiles, snakes, and other reptiles. In the gardens and inside his palace, one might encounter bears, ostriches, peacocks, hippopotamuses, and other wild animals. If Heliogabalus ever invites you to dinner, don't be surprised if a leopard rubs against your legs or gently licks your feet. In his madness for grandeur, he organizes naval battles (*naumachiae*) in basins overflowing with wine. His menus? Peas seasoned with gold coins, fish in azure sauce, lentils peppered with precious stones, rice with pearls, beans sprinkled with amber. "He scattered roses over the dining rooms, the beds, and the porticoes, and walked on flowers of all kinds—lilies, violets, hyacinths, and daffodils... He served the palace officers enormous dishes filled with mule entrails, flamingo brains, partridge eggs, parrot heads, pheasants, and peacocks. He presented mule phalluses in such great quantities that they were served like watercress, celery, and fenugreek, filling pots and dishes, which is truly astonishing." (Ibid.)

Memorable theme nights: Evenings where only white, black, or purple dishes were served; nights reserved solely for the bald; receptions where entrance was only permitted if you were a one-eyed prostitute. At official dinners, he forced his guests to dress in drag. Heliogabalus could not stand dining alone. Since the upper class bored him, he invited beggars, vagrants, drunks, and other outcasts to his table. If Caracalla was the emperor of soldiers, Heliogabalus, long before Coluche, became the emperor of the lazy, the filthy, the homeless, the addicts, the perverts, the alcoholics, the queers, the parasites, the artists, the prisoners, the madmen, and the transvestites. "One day, he bought prostitutes from their pimps to emancipate them. He had them sought out in all the neighborhoods of Rome—around the Circus Maximus, the stadiums and theaters, the baths, and other seedy places—to gather them in a general assembly in a large public building... Heliogabalus summoned the pimps, the great specialists of debauchery, for technical conferences. He appeared before them dressed as a woman, with his breast exposed, to preside over these prostitution congresses... One night, under a muleteer's cloak, he visited all the courtesans of Rome. To each one, without making love, he gave a gold coin, saying: 'Shh! Let no one know: it's a gift from Antoninus...'" (RT, 175) The Roman Empire's treasury benefited "not only the prostitutes of the City and its suburbs, but also the inverts, the transvestites of the nightlife, and their employers!" (RT, 176) Poverty disgusts him; misery disturbs him. "Generosity and the purest pity, which counterbalance a spasmodic cruelty." (VII, 104)

## The End of a Mad Reign

Heliogabalus, always in search of new sensations, eventually wears himself out. Constantly trying to surpass himself, he ends up repeating the same antics. Once the balance between the concrete and the abstract is restored in the world, the god Elagabal considers his divine mission complete. What is necessary today may be useless tomorrow. Heliogabalus's excesses become almost routine. His madness no longer piques interest; it no longer fascinates anyone. Boredom takes over. The charade has gone on long enough! Julia Maesa, his grandmother who once secured the throne for him, now plots against him in favor of her other grandson. When Alexander Severus, the young boy with the "pure rod" and "curly lamb's head," becomes emperor, order is restored. But Heliogabalus, the rebel, is not one to compromise. With him, it's all or nothing! Even if he had been locked in an asylum, even under the threat of electroshocks, fanatical as he is, he would have continued. For Heliogabalus, living like everyone else is dying. A Heliogabalus never saves his own skin.

Born to cause chaos, Heliogabalus, in seeking and stirring up trouble, ultimately drowns in it. In March 222, after a night of drinking with drunken beggars, he attempts to reclaim his palace. His pitiful coup fails. He and his mother are hunted through the streets of Rome. "They emerge into the gardens that slope down towards the Tiber under the shade of tall pines. In a secluded corner, behind a thick row of fragrant boxwoods and holm oaks, the soldiers' latrines are laid out in the open air with their trenches, like furrows plowing the ground." (VII, 109). The soldiers surround him. Panicked, Heliogabalus throws himself into sewers filled with filth. It's the end! The soldiers brandish their swords and pierce his body. Excrement and blood mix. His foul-smelling corpse is dragged through the city. The crowd, which once benefited from his generosity, now cheers his death. Born in light, Heliogabalus, the child-chemist who once formed and attracted gold, as emperor of filth, attracts only trouble and dies in his own excrement.





# HELIOGABALUS, THE ALCHEMY OF CRUELTY

Heliogabalus is, above all, a howl of sorcery, a plunge into the abyss of the darkest thoughts that flash through our minds like sudden lightning, never truly belonging to us. These thoughts arise from a cosmic ocean, from the collective unconscious, an electromagnetic field buried deep within us, vibrating at such high frequencies that they only crystallize when they find an echo in the abyss. What we are is what we connect to—or rather, what we are chained to by forces we do not understand. What we are is what we have become accustomed to connecting with. A new thought, when it emerges without conditioning, unleashes its forces like a catalyst of the universe, influencing all reality. Artaud whispers to Prevel: "When a thunderclap strikes, it's because a thought has sprung up somewhere" (p.89).

Heliogabalus embodies a fury, a torrent of unprecedented images so intense that they shatter all sense of reality, reaching a vibrational frequency so immense it could bend the entire universe to its will. However, the true essence of this power does not lie simply in the ability to accomplish everything; what truly matters is the chaos one chooses to unleash. The reign of tyrants is but a fleeting breath in eternity without a perverted morality to support it. If Rama's reign endured, it is because the material world and the world of thought were inextricably fused. Power, without reason and knowledge, is merely a force of total destruction. Aspiring to master one's destiny is a grand ambition, but Heliogabalus, consumed by his passion for endless transcendence, is doomed to fail. He drowns in excess, unable to find a limit in his devouring quest.

Heliogabalus loathes the demiurge, that "powerless and malevolent figure" (VII, 39), destroying the decaying order to reconnect with the brutal and primal essence of cosmic life, reuniting with the ancestral and chaotic forces of the universe. His madness terrifies the Romans because it reflects an unforgiving nature, not the death-dealing constructs of their institutions. Rome is an aberration. The corrupted dream of the Roman people—this nightmare that gave birth to Rome—is an insult to nature itself.

Heliogabalus is an abyss of thirst, a chasm of hunger. It is this emptiness that fuels his existence. Heliogabalus yearns to destroy the judgment of the gods, to shatter Roman laws in order to preserve his inner power.



Heliogabalus embodies a raw, untamed force, akin to a surge of solar energy radiating a harsh light, reviving a dying world. He does not merely harmonize with natural forces; he embodies them, absorbs them, and redirects them with an almost terrifying organic intensity. His mastery of occult energies allows him to draw from the earth and the betyl powers that surpass human understanding. Through this intimate connection with the cosmos, he becomes illuminated from within, transcending the limitations imposed by a world that oppresses him from all sides.

Heliogabalus is a virtuoso of symbols, wielding their power to keep the nerves of civilization in a constant state of tension and excitement. Absurdity, far from being a mere whim, is his most formidable weapon; it is through absurdity that he pierces the veils of consensual reality, revealing a hidden order—a sacred chaos that defies rational logic. The unconscious, which he unleashes, becomes flesh, and illogic becomes the key to an archaic wisdom, to a life lived with intense immediacy.

In liberating life from its chains, Heliogabalus acts like a surrealist. He restores life's natural order, disrupted by the chaotic anarchy imposed by norms. Under Heliogabalus's rule, life regains its primordial vigor, its divine anarchy, in direct opposition to the rigid and sclerotic social order. What he proposes is not a utopian vision but a return to a primal balance—an exorcism of collective apathy. Heliogabalus's reign is not the cause of Rome's decadence, but like the plague of 1720, it is the symptom, the double, the mirror, the exaggerated reflection of a society already in decay. His reign, theatrical and ruthless, is merely a natural reaction to the disease that plagues Rome. Under his rule, Rome burns like a pyre-stage, not because of the destructive excesses of a teenage emperor, but because of the Romans' inability to take control of their destiny and counter his absurd whims.

The theater of cruelty he establishes in Rome is not merely a manifestation of barbarism, but a necessary catharsis—a purifying fire. In this organized chaos, social norms are overturned, hypocrisy is unmasked, and souls burn to be reborn. By embodying the absurd, Heliogabalus restores life to its full intensity, its brutal truth. He is not just a fallen emperor but an alchemist of chaos, an avatar of renewal through destruction. His reign is a theater of the plague, a disruption of conventions that shakes our worldview. Thus, the theater of cruelty he instates in Rome proves to be both salvific and cathartic.

Constructing a body without organs, in pursuit of new intensities, is a perilous endeavor, fraught with obstacles. Like Cenci, Heliogabalus is without faith or law; he embodies a wild law—the law of nature itself. Heliogabalus is a plague, a rebalancing force, a hero who follows the only true law: the unforgiving law of nature.

Evil is a monstrous hydra with two heads: on one side, dark and depressive crime; on the other, unbridled and exuberant creative force. Artaud, like a mad alchemist, attempts to extract this jubilant energy through his theater of cruelty, while struggling not to be consumed by its devouring flames. Although he fails, his intention is bold, and the message he leaves us is of paramount importance. The real dilemma lies in our condition: we are not nature, but beings tortured by its relentless cruelty. Artaud contrasts the tyrant Heliogabalus—the madman who has turned theater into raw reality—with the necessity of keeping the theater of cruelty as an art, an illusion. The theater of cruelty, capable of tearing the veil of reality and freeing us from the chains of our narrow perception, must remain an art. Turning this art into reality opens the door to absolute madness. Artaud reminds us that to engage in this existential bullfight, it is not necessary to descend into crime, but one must dare to confront the abyss. In this context, good and evil fade away; the absolute evil of nature is a pure force, distinct from the calculated evil of the tyrant. Regenerating life to heal oneself while keeping an eye on the tyrant, the madman, the pervert that lurks within each of us, is essential.

Heliogabalus is not a model to follow, but a primordial force, a wild entity, an eruption of chaos that opens up unsuspected abysses. He is a creature of nature, not shaped by human society. His cruelty is not merely a transgression of human laws; it is a transcendent force, a raw energy that tears through the veil of reason to unleash the absurd and sublime forces of existence. Yes, cruelty is formidable, but it is also the source of a terrifying vitality, a pure and unbridled life force.

We are beings of images, but these images are never fixed. They are in perpetual metamorphosis, twisting, breaking, and being reborn at every moment, defying the rigidity of reality and plunging into the infinity of possibilities. What fascinates Artaud in the cruelty of Heliogabalus is not just the upheavals it causes, but above all the new dimensions it opens, the unprecedented possibilities it generates. This cruelty acts like a plague; it devours the material body to liberate the spirit, true freedom. But this freedom is not an instant revolution; it is slow, tortuous, because we are chained to time, prisoners of its relentless continuity. Heliogabalus's quest for a body without organs, this frantic search for ever-greater intensities, is an act of cosmic devouring. The first danger is exhaustion, the extinction of possibilities through satiety. He stands against the idea of a fixed, predetermined universe, for "man has never succeeded in establishing his superiority over the empires of possibility." (The Theater of Cruelty, XIII, 107).



# The Primary Gods

The word "principle" originates from the Latin *principium*, meaning "beginning" or "origin." This term itself is derived from *princeps*, which means "the first." Conceptually, a principle is therefore the first cause, the origin, or the foundation from which something arises. In Greek, the word for principle is *Αρχή* (*arché*), which also means "beginning."

The etymology of the word "Dieu" is more complex. It may derive from the Sanskrit *Deva* (meaning "daylight" or "divine"), which became *Daiva* in Old Persian and is likely the root of the Greek word *Δίας* (*Dias*). In this context, the expression "Dieu-principe" can be interpreted as "principle of light," with this light having multiple levels.

Associated with light, a god-principle is a bearer of life, which explains why, in antiquity, the god *Δίας* (*Dias*) was also called *Ζεὺς* (*Zeus*) or *Ζεὺς Πάτερ* (*Zeus Pater*), meaning "the father of life." This is how the Roman god Jupiter was named.

Plato, in his dialogue *Cratylus*, offers another intriguing interpretation: according to him, *Δίας* (*Dias*) comes from *Δί'ον* (*Di'ón*), meaning "the principle from which all things come."



In his lecture on February 29th 1936, titled "Theater and the Gods," delivered at the Bolívar Amphitheater in Mexico, Antonin Artaud describes the Mexican gods not merely as idols but as living forces, symbolized by shadows where life rumbles. He asserts that the Mayan codices conceal a science of space. Contrary to Western understanding, Artaud emphasizes that the Indigenous peoples of Mexico, through their rituals, know how to invoke and resonate with these divine forces. By seeking to appropriate their power, they manage to harness the strength of these gods. Those who succeed in connecting with and mastering these forces can transcend their own limitations and conditioning, thereby becoming masters of their destiny.

For Artaud, true pantheism is not merely a philosophical system but a dynamic means of investigating the universe. The Ancients viewed the gods not as beings to be worshiped but as instruments of a science with practical implications. This science, as Artaud wrote in his "Open Letter to the Governors of the States of Mexico," kept "the nerves in a state of perpetual excitement."

In many ancient cultures, the gods had practical functions, and their veneration was tied to daily needs. Every thought, action, or intention emitted a vibration or frequency that resonated in a universal field, reinforcing archetypes present in the collective unconscious. The gods were manifestations of these universal archetypes and could be perceived as egregores—collective thought-forms influencing reality. The Gnostics referred to harmful egregores as the "demiurge." If Artaud's theories are accurate, this raises the question: who is feeding these egregores today—healthy or unhealthy spirits? Shouldn't we reinvent our gods, replacing these fear-fed deities with divine figures advocating peace and well-being?

If the principal gods of the Ancients are indeed egregores, they are not ordinary entities but belong to the animated realm of nature. Connecting to their movements and interactions in space constitutes a way to gain a profound understanding of the mechanisms of life's formation. As microcosms of nature, we humans carry these principal gods within us, and it is crucial to understand that their forces must be revealed within ourselves. The German mystic and theosophist Jacob Böhme (1575-1624), admired by Artaud, claimed that God (the creative principle) and creation are inseparable. Nature is a manifestation of this creative void, and humans are its sparks. Thus, the gods do not exist to assist us but to infuse us with certain forces, regenerate our "human magnetism," and enable us, through mastery of reality and the elements, to become the masters of our lives and destinies.



ILIOS CHAILLY

# HÉLIOGABALE OU L'ALCHIMISTE COURONNÉ

If you have just finished *Héliogabale ou l'anarchiste couronné* by Antonin Artaud and are wondering about questions such as: Who is Ram? Who is Apollonius of Tyana? What is the Schism of Irshou and what was the purpose of the Gods-Principles in the past? Read *Héliogabale ou l'alchimiste couronné*.

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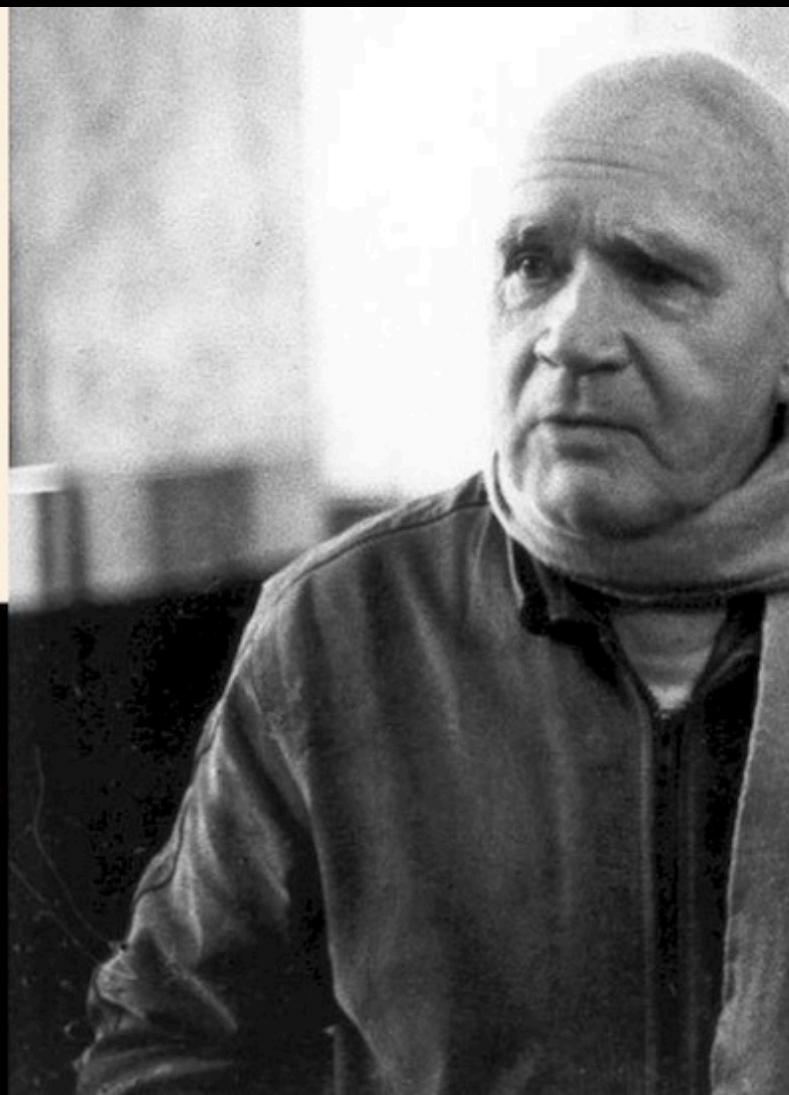
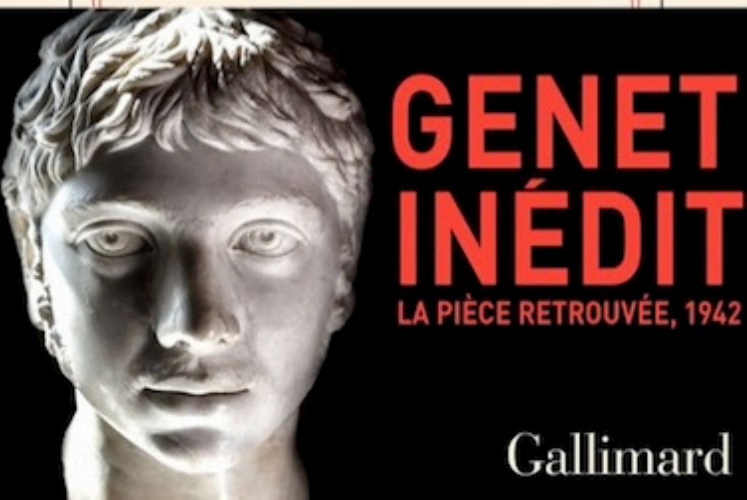
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# Héliogabale by Jean Genet



## **Jean Genet's Héliogabale Rediscovered**

On April 14, 1942, Jean Genet was arrested for stealing books from the Stock Library. The very next day, he was incarcerated at Fresnes prison, where he devoted himself to writing. Behind bars, Genet composed *Le Condamné à mort* and *Notre-Dame des Fleurs*, and also created several plays, including *Héliogabale* in June 1942. Long thought to be lost, this play was recently rediscovered in the heritage collections of the Houghton Library at Harvard University.

Fascinated by *Le Condamné à mort*, Jean Cocteau intervened to help Genet secure a publishing contract on March 1st through his secretary, Paul Morihier. Genet harbored hopes of seeing Jean Marais, with whom he was secretly in love, in the lead role. However, Marais, fearing that the play might be too risky for his career, declined the offer. Rumor has it that Genet, disappointed by this refusal, burned the manuscript. Regardless, the publication project failed, and *Héliogabale* fell into obscurity... until now. In the spring of 2024, this little-known work is finally being published by Gallimard, offering the public a new opportunity to discover the creative genius of Jean Genet.

## Héliogabale de Jean Genet

In Jean Genet's *Héliogabale*, themes of secrecy, conspiracy, violence, and derision intertwine, much like in *Les Bonnes*, offering a profound exploration of power struggles and dynamics of domination. The stage, reduced to a mere 3 by 3 meters, evokes the narrowness of a cell, symbolizing both psychological and physical confinement, reminiscent of Genet's own experiences in prison. This oppressive setting heightens the sense of suffocation that permeates the entire work, reflecting the context of the 1940s—a period marked by tyranny and isolation—during which Genet met Jean Marais, who himself was involved in this atmosphere of tension by staging Racine's *Britannicus* in 1941.

The crimes and excesses of Emperor Heliogabalus seem to stem from a profound boredom and an urgent need to transcend an empty existence, echoing the existential angst of our own era, saturated with the omnipresence of screens and an insatiable quest for meaning. Genet uses this historical figure to question the human condition: the god-emperor, much like the maid Solange in *Les Bonnes*, is burdened by his own status—both exalted (as Solange is granted Madame's dresses) and constraining.

The emotional and physical suffocation that characterizes *Héliogabale* resonates as a projection of Genet himself. The rain, omnipresent in the play, accentuates this atmosphere of claustrophobia, while the dialogues unfold in a nearly suffocating proximity, creating palpable tension. This closeness suggests an intense, almost interrogative confrontation. Like Artaud's work, Genet's *Héliogabale* plays with conventions: Heliogabalus defies God and all forms of authority. Both monstrous and elegant, he transcends titles and roles, whether imperial or priestly, thus breaking all established rules.

Act 1: The play begins with an augur who, on a propitiatory altar, reads the future by examining the entrails of a chicken. He predicts that Heliogabalus will meet a shameful death. Meanwhile, a plot is brewing between Heliogabalus's aunt, a general, and his grandmother. To ensure they are not overheard, the grandmother walks around the room shouting: "Echo! Echo! Oh! Oh! Oh!" Varius's excesses threaten the Empire, and she must protect Heliogabalus. His latest folly? An affair with his lover, the charioteer Aeginus. To her, preserving the empire is a divine duty, a mission for which she was born.

**Act 2:** In Heliogabalus's chamber, where a black phallic stone is displayed, a priest warns Heliogabalus of a plot against him. Heliogabalus then contemplates poisoning his grandmother.

Aeginus: "I find it hard to accept the idea of killing her. Especially poisoning her. Poison is the weapon of cowards..."

Heliogabalus: "Yes, and that's probably why I instinctively chose it. I want to be a coward. A capon. And you too, I want you to be a capon. I want you to be a coward and a capon, and for me to love you that way."

The grandmother enters, and Heliogabalus confesses his intention to poison her and distribute her wealth to the prostitutes and thieves of the city.

**Act 3:** In the Hall of Echoes, also called the Hall of the North Winds, the grandmother plots. She has had a slab removed from a balcony overlooking the sewers of Rome, intending for Heliogabalus to fall through it, screaming, and die suffocated by the stench.

Heliogabalus and his mother enter the scene. The play takes on the tone of *The Cenci*. The legions are present and demand Heliogabalus. He approaches the window, but instead, his grandmother's leopard falls through. Heliogabalus had a rat bite the leopard to transmit rabies to his grandmother.

During this act, many secrets are revealed. Let us not forget that we are in the Hall of Echoes: the soldiers discover that Heliogabalus is not Caracalla's son and decide to kill him.

Divinity begins to abandon Heliogabalus. He becomes aware not of God, but of man. He transforms into a theatrical god. Feeling forsaken by the gods, Heliogabalus utters a Christ-like phrase: "Father, why have you forsaken me?" Desperate, the grandmother then presents her grandson to the soldiers as the new emperor.

**Act 4:** Heliogabalus and Aeginus are cowardly locked in the servants' latrines. Heliogabalus hides with Aeginus and considers fleeing by boarding a felucca, like Rimbaud, to escape to Africa, where he would trade and prostitute himself.

"Boys like me can only bring anarchy, and as long as they are children, they have the audacity to play with sacred things."

Heliogabalus frees himself from the burden of being emperor: "Forget Rome. Leave behind the god that once animated it, and like anyone else, mourn its lost powers."

# Two Excerpts from the Play

## Excerpt 1: Act Two

Heliogabalus: "That's what terrifies you. I don't know what kind of man my father was. (...)"

Aeginus: "But I don't know my father either. Not even my mother. They say I was found at the gate of Juno's temple. That's already quite an old legend. Women raised me too. But think, Varius, how wonderful it could have been—two orphans, without family, leading the world..."

## Excerpt 2: Act Four

Aeginus: "Don't worry, kid, I still love you, but..."

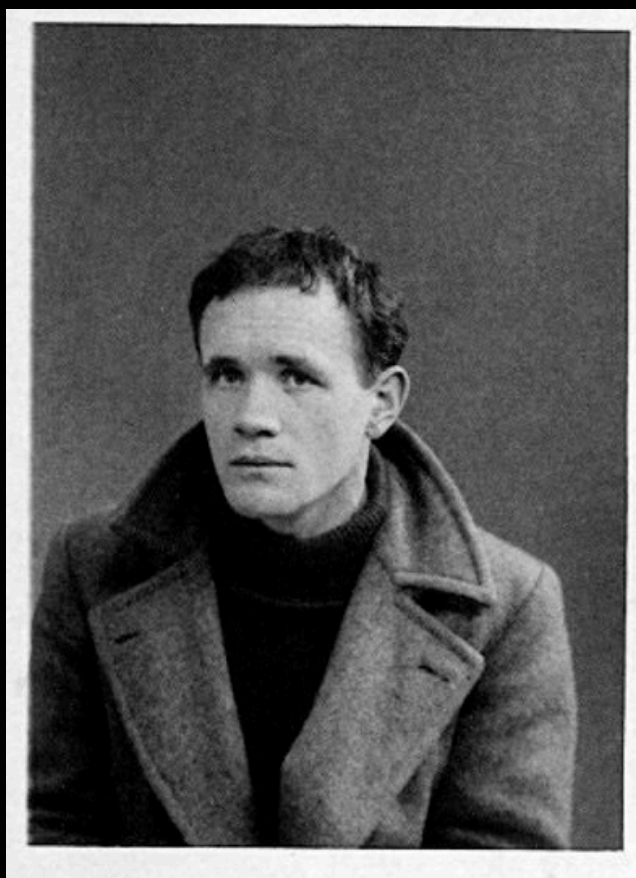
Heliogabalus: "You love me, but... I've lost my prestige."

Aeginus: "Not entirely, since it's enough for me to think that you were Emperor of Rome and god of the Sun for you to still dominate me. You have a past."

Heliogabalus: "You'll have one too tomorrow, when we leave this hovel. We'll live together in Subura for a while, then we'll part ways: you will have been loved by Heliogabalus, that dead dog."

Aeginus: "What will you do?"

Heliogabalus: "I'll board a ship at a port, a felucca. I'll go to the land of the Blacks. I'll trade. I'll sell them Syrian charms. You know very well that I'm not the kind of man to reclaim my empire and my sky. Boys like me can only bring anarchy, and as long as they're children, they have the audacity to play with sacred things. And you, what do you plan to do once you leave me?"



# Artaud and Genet: Intertwined Fates of Imprisoned Writers

Artaud and Genet both spent significant portions of their lives confined within four walls: Artaud was institutionalized from 1937 to 1946, while Genet was imprisoned sporadically between 1937 and 1944. However, their confinement, which coincided with World War II, was not limited to this period. From adolescence, Artaud was frequently a resident of mental health facilities. As for Genet, he was taken in by the public welfare system from birth, which placed him successively with a family in the Morvan region, at the Mettray Penal Colony, and then at the d'Alembert School, from which he repeatedly attempted to escape until he eventually joined the military and ended up in prison.

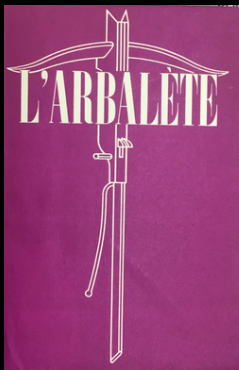
Moreover, even after their "liberation," neither writer ever had a permanent residence of their own. Both also consumed dangerous amounts of opiates. Marc Barbezat, the director of the publishing house L'Arbalète, which was the first to officially publish excerpts of Jean Genet's *Les Bonnes* (as well as Antonin Artaud's *Les Tarahumaras*), and Paule Thévenin, who was responsible for compiling the twenty-six volumes of Artaud's *Œuvres Complètes* for Gallimard, were not only collaborators with Artaud and Genet but also close friends. Barbezat, for example, sent packages to the young Genet during his imprisonment and, along with other influential intellectuals, helped secure a presidential pardon for Genet from Vincent Auriol as a writer. As for Thévenin, she worked closely with Artaud and Genet, transcribing their texts as they dictated them. During the period of *Les Paravents*, she insisted that Genet publish his *Lettres à Roger Blin* and typed out some of the letters he dictated to her over the phone.

Finally, Barbezat, a pharmacist, and Thévenin's husband, a doctor, used their respective professions to clandestinely supply laudanum to Artaud and Nembutal to Genet. In a letter to Barbezat, Jean Genet criticized a critic's style and compared it to that of Artaud and Sartre: "He is an aesthete. His sentences don't move forward. It's not like Sartre when he writes. You move forward. With Artaud, you also get that sense of moving forward." (Jean GENET, *Lettres à Olga et Marc Barbezat*, in: Marc BARBEZAT, *Comment je suis devenu l'éditeur de Jean Genet*, p. 263.)

If Jean Genet wrote *Héliogabale* in 1942, it can be assumed that his interest in Artaud dates back at least to that period. What is certain is that by 1948, they were both published in the same journal. Furthermore, in 1955, in a letter to Barbezat, Genet asked his publisher to send him a copy of Artaud's *Les Tarahumaras* (Jean Genet, *Lettres à Olga et Marc Barbezat*, Paris, L'Arbalète, 1988).

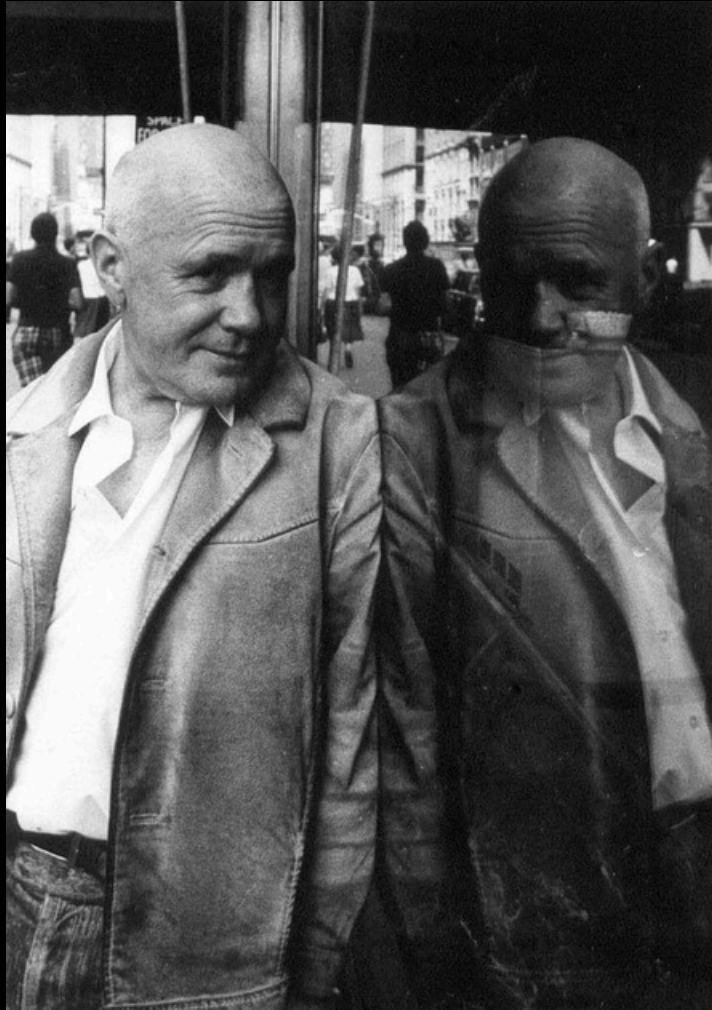
In an interview with Albert Dachy, Paule Thévenin emphasized just how profoundly Genet was influenced by Artaud: "Genet had been dazzled by certain texts of Artaud that were recently published. I remember giving him a text by Antonin Artaud on *Les Chimères* by Nerval. I asked him to tell me what he thought of it. He left my house at six in the evening. Around ten, I received a phone call. And for an hour, he read Artaud's text on Nerval back to me over the phone." (Paule THÉVENIN, *Textes* (1962-1993), Lignes & Manifestes, 2005, p. 216).

Paule Thévenin had a very close relationship with Jean Genet at a certain point in his life. However, due to a disagreement between them, Genet explicitly refused to allow her to oversee the complete edition of his works. As a result, Albert Dichy took on that responsibility at Gallimard. Nevertheless, out of respect for Paule Thévenin's work, Albert Dichy sought her assistance for this editorial project. Thus, although it is rarely mentioned, Paule Thévenin also made an unofficial contribution to the complete edition of Genet's works.



12	♣
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Recommended reading: *Tenir l'évanouissement. Entre maîtrise intégrale et abandon anéantissant: Jean Genet et Antonin Artaud*, doctoral thesis by Véronique Lane, presented at the Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Montreal, 2011.



Jean Genet and His Double



# Patrick Schindler



## Rimbaud, Artaud, Genet & co., the first dark-skinned targets?

A few days ago, my friend Ilios Chailly suggested that I send him an article on Arthur Rimbaud and Jean Genet for the upcoming issue of his monthly journal on Antonin Artaud. I hesitated, unsure of how to approach the piece—until the "shockwave" of Sunday, June 9, 2024. And I'm still reeling as I write this. In the face of the horrors and chaos looming ahead, there is indeed cause for concern. Deep concern, especially with the rise to power (amid widespread abstentions) of authoritarians of all stripes. Whether red or brown, fascist or otherwise (neo- or post-fascists, as today's populist forces around the young Bardella are labeled), they all fall under the Le Pen stable, whether they admit it or not. And don't try to convince me that, once in power, these folks will be content with empty promises and continue to hide their true nature... of being fascists. Because sooner or later, once they're in control, they will have to take a stand on everything related to culture (or, as they might prefer: "Kultur"! ). It's a consistent pattern with them. They need targets quickly. And what a prime trio for them: Rimbaud, Artaud, and Genet!

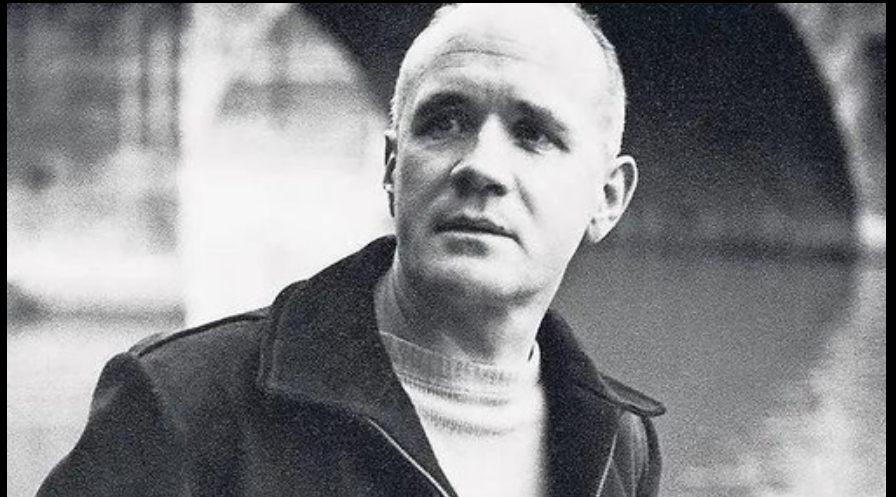


Let's start with what they might despise most about the first of the three. About fifteen years ago, I offered my potential readers a vision of Arthur Rimbaud who "could have" become an anarchist, particularly during the Paris Commune. But, as the saying goes, "One is not serious when one is seventeen!" Or perhaps the young Rimbaud was too serious when contemplating his future as a poet. The legacy of a childhood spent under the rule of a mother who preferred to call herself a widow rather than admit she was abandoned by her military husband, and who, being overly loving, was therefore "inevitably" (as Marguerite Duras might have said) castrating? There's certainly some truth to that, though it didn't stop young Arthur from quickly spreading his giant wings. Regardless, Madame Rimbaud, "firm in her convictions," had given herself the "divine mission" of leading her four children along the "straightest of paths." Above all, her two eldest sons. A near-complete failure! When you read *L'autre Rimbaud* by David Le Bailly, it becomes clear that Frédéric Rimbaud, the firstborn, was "the unloved one," "the alcoholic abandoned by his wife," who died alone of septicemia. Then came the younger ones: Arthur, his mother's "beloved," who escaped her grasp early on and caused her endless grief. Following them were the two sisters. The tender Vitalie, adored by Arthur, who unfortunately died too young at 17.

And finally, "the self-righteous little pest," Isabelle. The poet's abusive executor, who, with the complicity of her falsifying husband Paterné Berrichon, purged all the periods of her brother's life and work that she deemed too scandalous. She never ceased trying to transform him into a "Catholic angel," even on his deathbed in Marseille. This version, corroborated by Paul Claudel, would surely appeal to Bardella's clique. A clique that, despite their denials, secretly supports (this is no scoop) the *Manif pour tous* and its fundamentalist Catholics. Not to mention the few thugs from the RN and GUD who, in the euphoria following June 9th, beat up and insulted a gay man on his way home. If Macron had provocatively proposed to enshrine Verlaine and Rimbaud in the Panthéon, it's certain that the contenders for the Assembly wouldn't be pushing for a "polymorphously perverse alcoholic" and a "sodomite" to rest in this "sacred place"! One would have loved to know what the two concerned individuals might have thought of this "republican honor." Cain, Cain!

In the same vein, it's highly likely that Jean Genet, the renowned novelist, poet, and writer, is also on the blacklist of homosexual writers condemned by the neo-fascists, post-fascists, or simply plain fascists. In his case, there's no need for debate—they only have to dig up some old, foul-smelling files from the closet. For instance, the one from April 30, 1966, when the OAS showed up "in force" in front of the Odéon to boycott Jean Genet's play *The Screens*, directed by Roger Blin, accusing it of "ridiculing the French army" (which it did!). However, what these culture-hating fascists would find even less forgivable are Genet's antisocial tendencies, his positions, and his active solidarity with the Black Panthers, the Prisoners' Action Committee (CAP), and the Palestinian people (during a very different historical context, after the Sabra and Shatila massacres, long before the emergence of the terrorist group Hamas).

As for Antonin Artaud, I don't know enough about his life and work, but Ilios Chailly can provide more insight than I can into his tendencies as a repressed homosexual—that's not my focus here. However, it's certain that this libertarian surrealist, expelled from the movement by the "Jefe" Breton, possesses all the qualities to disgust the fascists, starting with his "sulfur-scented" writings, but especially his "raging, hallucinatory, and misanthropic madness," and so on.

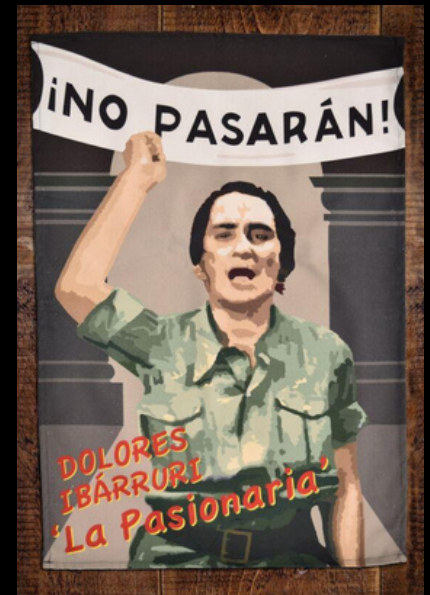


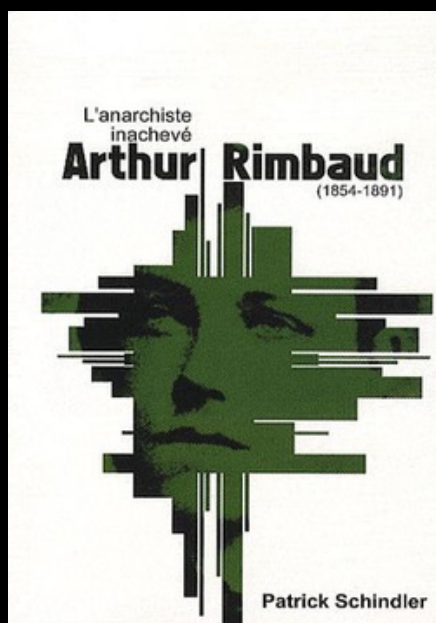
In any case, without delving further into the libertarian tendencies of these three brilliant writers, it suffices to recall some contemporary historical facts. Consider what the SA did under Goebbels' orders, who himself was following the commands of the little corporal-turned-Führer, on May 10, 1933, when they threw twenty thousand volumes of poetry, philosophy, literature, and science into a massive bonfire in Berlin's Opernplatz! A similar atrocity was carried out, albeit more insidiously, by the Chekist troops serving Lenin and his henchman Stalin. And then, more "discreetly" if you will, because it wasn't books but their authors that they sent by trainloads to freeze in Siberia! The same purge scenario played out in every country where a dictator, whether small or large, reigns. It is, indeed, the priority of all authoritarian systems, whether they call themselves popular, populist, or otherwise. Their primary hatred is directed at all the Arthur Rimbauds, the Franz Kafkas, the Emma Goldmans, the Antonin Artauds, the Erika and Klaus Manns, the Jean Genets, the Yevgeny Zamyatins, the Karel Capeks, the Aldous Huxleys, the George Orwells, etc., etc. In short, all those who continue to scream from the depths of their pages: "¡NO PASARAN!".

Athens, June 10, 2024.

1. One-third of his poems and two-fifths of Rimbaud's correspondence have thus vanished from the public eye. We can take some solace in the fact that these two censors, more foolish than malicious, overlooked the many poems in which Rimbaud praises the Communards!
2. The main coalition of associations (allied with anti-abortion groups) that organized protests against the law allowing same-sex couples to marry and adopt in France.
3. A radical and ultra-violent far-right splinter group.
4. A secret far-right armed organization that was pro-French Algeria, created in the early 1960s.

Patrick Schindler, born on March 7, 1956, in Le Perreux-sur-Marne (Val-de-Marne), is a writer and journalist, and a militant of the Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire (FHAR) and the Fédération Anarchiste, where he served as Secretary General. He is the author of *Arthur Rimbaud ou l'anarchiste inachevé* (published by Monde Libertaire), *Jean Genet, Traces d'ombres et de lumières* (published by Libertaire), *Contingent rebelle* (published by L'Échappée), and *Klaus Mann ou le Vain Icare* (published by L'Harmattan).

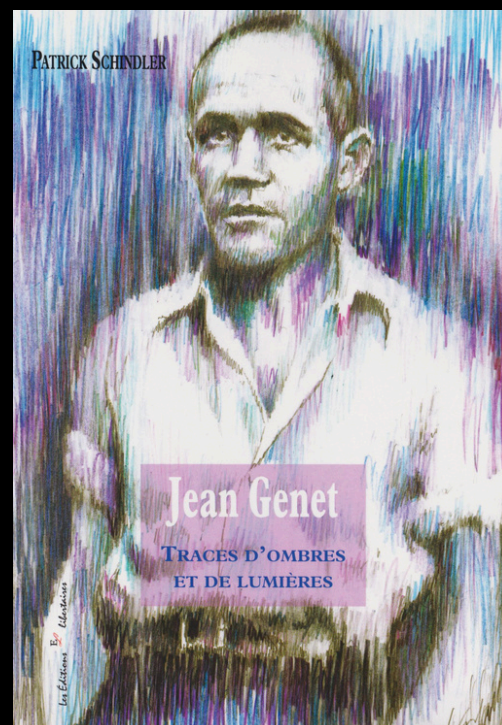




Another book on Rimbaud? Yes, another one! The goal of this essay is to distinguish itself from the trend that often results in saying anything about anyone. My research seeks to understand why the teenager who embodied all the elements of anarchism turned away from social struggle, love, and eventually poetry, to plunge into a life of wandering individualism. If this humble contribution to his story could inspire adolescents to step into his "wounded shoes, one foot close to their heart," and follow in Rimbaud's anarchistic footsteps, may he continue to lead them ever deeper into the darkest depths of poetic creation, toward ecstasy, toward the impossible. And let us finally allow Rimbaud, who sought to become someone else entirely, to remain just that! Arthur Rimbaud, the unfinished anarchist—yes, indeed... Because, one hundred and twenty years later, he still stirs!

## Patrick Schindler

Who is hiding behind this immense provocateur? A child of the state, runaway, prostitute, traitor, thief —Jean Genet wandered across 1930s Europe. While in prison, he wrote his first novels. His sharp and raw style earned him the wrath of the far-right. In the 1970s, he became involved with the Black Panthers, the GIP, and the Palestinian cause, always with his characteristic excess. He was labeled an anti-Semite, an apologist for young collaborators, and a lover of beautiful murderers. Just that! At 17, P. Schindler...






ILIOS CHAILLY

ANTONIN ARTAUD,  
OU L'ANARCHISTE COURROUCÉ



Les Éditions  libertaires

Ilios Chailly offers us a raw, poetic approach to Artaud's work—sometimes crude, funny, blunt, awkward, but sincere. Artaud? What a character, what a face, what a hammer blow! An anarchist? He's not the kind of guy you can put in a box. However, since he dared to label Heliogabalus as a "crowned anarchist," the author takes the liberty of calling him an "enraged anarchist"! Artaud left us one morning in March 1948... but how could we ever forget him?

Column by Thierry Guilabert (Monde Libertaire No. 1793, March 2018): [https://www.monde-libertaire.fr/?articlen=&article=Antonin Artaud lanarchiste courrouce](https://www.monde-libertaire.fr/?articlen=&article=Antonin+Artaud+lanarchiste+courrouce) (Les Editions libertaires) d'Ilios Chailly



Hijikata Tatsumi (1928–1986), the creator of *ankoku butō* (dance of darkness) in early 1960s Japan, revolutionized the concept of modern dance by imposing a phantasmagorical and transgressive universe, overturning conventional notions of choreographic harmony and beauty. A visionary artist, he brought forth a deformed, suffering, orgiastic, and impious human body—an obscenity unacceptable to a society undergoing consumerist normalization. (...) Through a nuanced philosophical analysis, intertwined with his own experience as a poet of the flesh—whom he met during the latter part of his choreographic activity—Uno Kuniichi offers a deterritorializing interpretation of the genius of Asbestos-kan, linking him to other heretical figures such as Genet and Artaud, while restoring a subjective specificity to this extraordinary Japanese artist. This unique approach to Hijikata, by a renowned Japanese specialist in francophone countercultural authors (Artaud, Genet, Beckett, Deleuze), for whom he is both translator and thinker, marks the first publication of a series of texts on Hijikata, written or translated into French by Uno Kuniichi himself.

# THE ART-HUR RIMB-AUD

For Patrick Schindler

«New facts of thought, movement, animation of relationships—relationships not of feelings, from the inside of one feeling to the inside of another feeling, but from the outside of a feeling, of the place, the rank, the importance of one feeling with the importance of another feeling, of the external, figurative value of a thought in relation to another thought—and of its reactions in relation to it, of their admission within it, of its folds, its slopes—this is Rimbaud's contribution. »,

Antonin Artaud, revue personnelle Bilboquet (1923)



Artaud - Rimbaud was the first to focus on restoring to each word its full weight of meaning, arranging them as values that exist independently of the thoughts they express. He alone was capable of performing those strange syntactical inversions where each syllable seems to take on a life of its own and become dominant. A disordering of words aimed at externalizing the self. A disruption of the senses intended to de-automate man and liberate him from the collective consciousness of society. The one that imposes itself. The one of the "I of the other" that prevents us from being ourselves.

Only five years apart!

Rimbaud died in Marseille in the autumn of 1891

Artaud was born in Marseille in the autumn of 1896.

Eh ben si j'étais ART-hur Rimb-AUD ...

Je serais !

# FRAGMENTS OF A “IF I WERE..”

If I were a revolt...

I would burn: Because ART-hur Rimb-AUD leaves no one indifferent.  
And sometimes, he leaves a mark!

"I began reading Rimbaud in 1969. I was thirteen. Although I didn't always understand the ins and outs of the wondrous paths he would accompany me on throughout my life, he instantly became a confidant, a friend, the witness to my own inner struggles. As a teenager, he hated everything I despised: religion, family, the bourgeoisie, backwater towns, the lack of adventure, and narrow-mindedness..."

- Patrick Schindler -

And sometimes, when we are not strong enough, he can also burn us...

**Beware of Artaud, he burns!**  
**(Gaston Criel)**

**"With wild, sprawling arms, Rimbaud gesticulating seems to sweep away the planets (...) It is he, Rimbaud, with hands scorched by sand, who dared to plunge infinitely deep into the self, with images where Life, trembling, begins to sketch itself on the edge of Nothingness—he, Rimbaud, and Novalis before him, who said: A style is all the more perfect as it approaches Nothingness."**

**Antonin Artaud - Les livres dont parler**

**« "The poet becomes a seer through a long, immense, and reasoned derangement of all the senses."**

**(Rimbaud's letter to Paul Demeny, May 15, 1871)**



**If I were a youthful poem,**

**I would be The Mystic Ship! A poem in which Artaud reveals his dream of setting off into the unknown. Coincidence or not, Artaud wrote this poem at 17—the same age when Rimbaud penned The Drunken Boat.e.**

### **The Mystic Ship**

**It the ancient ship will have lost its way,  
In seas where my lost dreams will stray,  
And its towering masts will have merged,  
With the mists of a sky from Bible and Hymn emerged.**

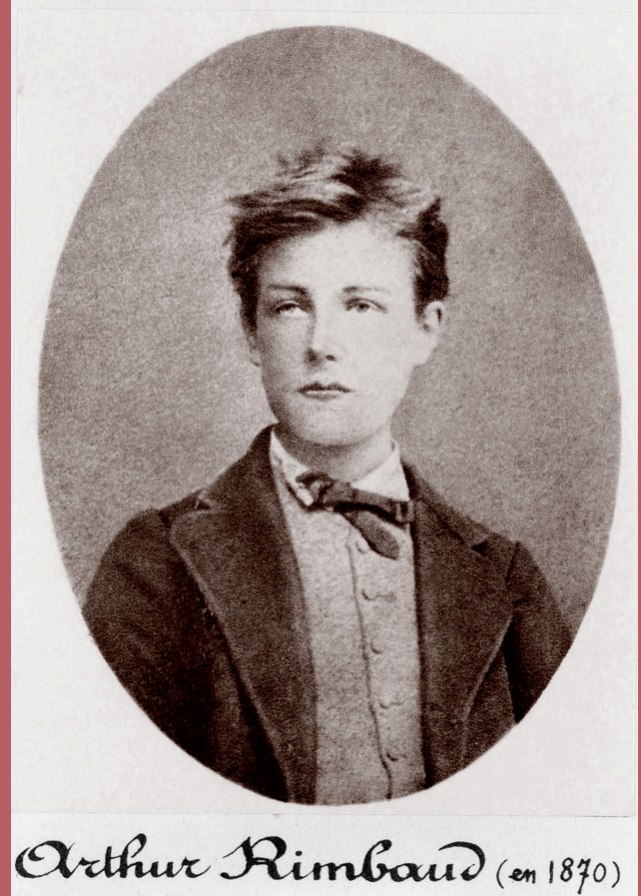
**And it will not be the pastoral Greek,  
Who gently plays among the trees bleak;  
Nor will the Holy Ship ever trade,  
The rarest goods to exotic lands displayed.**

**It knows not the fires of earthly bays,  
It knows only God, in endless, solitary ways,  
It parts the glorious waves of Infinity's rays.**

**The tip of its bowsprit plunges into mystery,  
And every night, at the mast's peak,  
Trembles the pure, mystic Silver of the Polar Star's streak.**

**Antonin Artaud - 1913**

**One of the many interpretations of The Drunken Boat is that it is a call to the sea and to freedom in all its violence. Artaud retains this idea of a journey as a metaphor for life, but, according to Élise Guerrero's personal analysis, in The Mystic Ship he speaks of a faith that has gone astray, a religion too vast and disorienting, where man, to avoid losing himself, fixes on a false point of reference he names God. Obsessed, he blindly and stubbornly heads toward this point, without appreciating or even seeing the landscapes he passes by.**



## **If I Were an Assassin-Enchanter:**

JI would be Mr. Everyman! In *Suppôts et Supplications* (1947), Artaud reveals that Rimbaud did not die from rage, illness, despair, or poverty. If Rimbaud died, it's because someone wanted to kill him. And the sanctified masses of fools who saw him as a troublemaker united against him:

"What I mean, André Breton, is that like a formidable leaven of obscenity, the mass of consciousness rises at times, revolted, in the atmosphere—not as a supposition but as a being, as a sort of immense thinking and speaking vagina, a vagina with a billion heads that threaten Gérard de Nerval, Charles Baudelaire, Edgar Poe, the Marquis de Sade, the Count of Lautréamont, Arthur Rimbaud, André Breton, Antonin Artaud." (Letter to André Breton, June 2, 1946)

## **If I Were an "I" :**

I would be someone else! Because for ART-hur Rimb-AUD—"I is another."

"I think? One should say 'I am thought!'"

If ART-hur Rimb-AUD gives up poetry, it's to stop being like another.

If ART-hur Rimb-AUD ventures carelessly into the desert, it's to exist. For surrounded by these fools, one cannot exist.

«"To each being, several other lives seemed owed to me. This gentleman doesn't know what he's doing; he's an angel. This family is a nest of dogs." (Delirium II)

-----  
"A certain someone thinks they are a man," says Rimbaud. "No, they are a dog. And I, Artaud, add: that someone knows they are a dog (and that someone is everyone) but has passed themselves off as a man to better impose their dog on me." (*Suppôts et Supplications*)

"I believe Rimbaud thought they were unaware of it; I say they know it and cultivate it, and they know it because they cultivate it and make it so." (Vieux-Colombier Conference)

-----  
"This lion thinks it is a man," Rimbaud essentially says, "but I teach it that it is only a mongrel." (*Revolutionary Messages*)

## **If I Were a Point:**

**I would be nowhere! ART-hur Rimb-AUD is a true nomad! And as such, he cannot stand any city, any family, any school, any circle, any ideology, any form, any initiation, any style.**

**"I don't want the heart emasculated by the mind to be passed on to Arthur Rimbaud, and I don't want the literary style of Antonin Artaud either. I have another way of writing, without the mind, with the heart, in a language other than French." (Cahiers de Rodez, 1945)**

## **If I Were an Exaggeration:**

**I would be on everyone's lips! ART-hur Rimb-AUD is surrounded by an elusive mythical aura—the misunderstood poet who behaves provocatively, dangerously, antisocially, and self-destructively.**

**People have said everything about ART-hur Rimb-AUD: this seer, rascal, angel, man with windblown soles, impatient genius, will to live, or poetry in action..**

**A cursed poet (P. Verlaine)**

**The Man-Theater (J.L. Barrault)**

**A mystic in a wild state (P. Claudel)**

**The war on words (Gérard Mordillat)**

**A monster of purity (J. Rivière)**

**An immortal, hallucinated Gulliver (Pierre Minet)**

**A visionary of his own life (V. Segalen)**

**The torn victor of natural laws (Marthe Robert)**

**An adventurer of the ideal (J-M. Carré)**

**A surrealist in the practice of life and beyond (André Breton)**

**The Poet, that suffices, that is infinite (René Char)**

**"He pushed the experiment of language beyond what we know. But we, we can only speak of Artaud in our own language, according to our own measure." —Alfred Kern**

## If I Were a Myth:

I would be that of a true rock star! ART-hur Rimb-AUD captivates with his image as a young, handsome, and passionate scholar. Sometimes, myths are built on a collective unconscious fascination, sparked by an excessive life, an atypical personality, or the impact of a portrait..

"The myth is built elsewhere: first on the fascination exerted by the famous portrait by Carjat, totally ambiguous... This sexual ambiguity, this beauty, this eternal youth—it's his Dorian Gray side. Yes, for today's youth, he's like James Dean or Jim Morrison." Pierre Slama

Staying a rock star is a race against death and against drugs.

"It's better to burn out than to fade away," wrote Kurt Cobain in his suicide note.

Burning out young—Isn't that the price to pay for winning a chimeric eternal memory?

## If I Were a Destiny:

I would be that of a fallen angel! For ART-hur Rimb-AUD, "real life is elsewhere." One must have the courage to surpass oneself! "Life must be changed," even at the risk of burning one's wings! The unfinished anarchist, ART-hur Rimb-AUD.

Ironically, the man with windblown soles dies from knee cancer at 37, while the author of *The Search for Fecality* dies from inoperable rectal cancer at 52.



A black and white portrait of a man with dark, wavy hair, wearing a dark beret and a light-colored scarf. He is looking upwards and to the right with a contemplative expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

TO BE PUBLISHED

Laurent Vignat

**Lire Antonin Artaud**  
aujourd'hui

A stylized logo consisting of a five-petaled flower on the left and a curved line resembling a leaf or a stylized 'J' on the right.

ÉDITIONS DU JASMIN

# ARTAUD QUEER ?

A provocative title aimed at those trapped by rigid perceptions and who have lost control over the meaning of words. The term "queer" finds its origins in the Old English word "cwer/cwier," meaning strange, bizarre, or unusual.

In the early 19th century, the word "queer" in English was used to describe something singular or abnormal, without any specific connotation related to sexuality or gender. It simply expressed a deviation from established norms. However, from the late 19th century and particularly in the 20th century, "queer" became a pejorative term in England and the United States, used to stigmatize what was perceived as sexual deviance. In the 1980s and 1990s, with the emergence of the queer movement, LGBTQ+ activists reclaimed this term to assert a collective identity encompassing all forms of sexual and gender non-conformity.

**Artaud—Queer?** While it might be assumed that Antonin Artaud would have violently opposed any attempt to organize or define concepts such as gender, it is not inappropriate to explore the term "queer" in relation to his work. Indeed, Artaud's thoughts and writings, which reject all forms of rigid classification, resonate with the fundamental principles of queer theory, particularly regarding the deconstruction of norms and the fluidity of identities.

In this article, our goal is not to reduce Antonin Artaud's sexuality to mere categorization. We do not dissect the individual but analyze the broader concept he embodies. Artaud becomes a symbolic figure, a catalyst for reflection, whose significance lies less in his real life than in the myth he constructed.

# Freedom of the Body: Rethinking Artaud's Sexuality through Deleuze

Questioning Antonin Artaud's sexual orientation—whether heterosexual, asexual, or possibly homosexual—risks oversimplifying a complex issue. By employing Deleuze's notion of the "body without organs," sexuality can be understood not as a series of fixed identities but as a dynamic flow, a force in perpetual motion that unfolds beyond the rigid structures imposed by society. The "body without organs," in liberating itself from socially determined functions, becomes a boundless space of exploration, where the individual escapes not only heterocentric and conservative frameworks of sexuality but also LGBTQIA+ labels. These labels, whether originating from these movements or their opponents, risk locking the body into predetermined forms, easily co-opted by the system (see the 2024 Olympic Games), thereby hindering its potential for perpetual reinvention.

Artaud sought precisely to transcend these limitations, to deconstruct the organs, and to free himself from prescribed social roles in order to reach a state of pure intensity—a desire in constant motion. From this perspective, sexuality, and specifically in Artaud's case, the absence of sexuality, can be conceived as an experimentation of forces, a space of continuous transformation. It is no longer a matter of conforming to norms imposed by movements, whether activist or reactionary, but of conceiving the body as a creative process in perpetual mutation, refusing to be constrained by reductive categories.

In Heliogabalus, or the Crowned Anarchist, Artaud shows how Heliogabalus defies the controlled and state-organized homosexuality that excludes women and maintains social order. By adopting a different sexuality and becoming a woman, Heliogabalus disrupts this established order and challenges the sexual norms of his time: "Heliogabalus thus denounces the homosexual principle within the State: a homosexuality that functions differently from that which Heliogabalus experiences throughout his life; the former is hidden, exclusive, and organizes the state apparatus. By excluding women as objects of exchange, this homosexuality fixes and secures the state apparatus as the organizer of flows by first determining sex and the body as homogeneous flows. In contrast, Heliogabalus' homosexuality lies in becoming-woman, disorganizing sexual flows. Heliogabalus opposes his pederasty, which deterritorializes sex, to homosexuality, which confines sex and supports the State as the organizer of all flows of desire." (Artaud and the Space of Forces, Kunichi Uno)

## Artaud's Feminine Spirit: Analyzing His Sexual Ambiguity through His Writings

The study of artistic figures, beyond their works, often raises personal questions that can seem intrusive. As a researcher, I sometimes feel uneasy about the voyeuristic nature that exploring the most intimate parts of a creator's life can take on. My approach usually prioritizes the analysis of the work rather than the personal orientations of the author. However, in the case of Antonin Artaud, it is almost impossible to separate his private life from his work, as the two are so deeply intertwined.

For a long time, I hesitated to address the question of Artaud's possible homosexuality. Nonetheless, in the context of a special issue dedicated to Artaud, Genet, and Rimbaud, it seemed inevitable to delve into this subject. After unsuccessfully trying to assign this task to another specialist, I finally decided to tackle it myself. My analysis is based on the work of Patrick Pognant, who extensively studied Artaud's sexuality in his book *Antonin Artaud, La mise en échec de la médecine*. It also incorporates my own notes, taken in preparation for a book on Artaud's sexuality, which is currently in progress.

Let's get to the heart of the matter: In *C'était Antonin Artaud*, Artaud's biographer Florence de Mèredieu writes: "Certain rumors (later echoed in Anglo-Saxon circles) suggest an established homosexuality of Artaud. However, apart from the famous text of Heliogabalus and Artaud's overt self-identification with Heliogabalus, there is no declaration on his part regarding real-life experiences and no testimony supporting this claim. Should we, in this case, rather speak of 'homosexual tendencies'? And if so, could it be that Allendy is the source of these rumors, based on some confidences?"

Indeed, Florence de Mèredieu's assertions concerning Dr. Allendy, a friend of Artaud, are not without basis, as Anaïs Nin writes in her diary about Dr. Allendy: "Now he warns me against Artaud. He tells me that he is a drug addict and a homosexual." (*Journal 1931-1934*, 280). However, can we fully trust this testimony, knowing that Dr. Allendy was probably influenced by excessive jealousy toward Anaïs Nin, who was becoming increasingly close to Artaud?

In the 2010s, during a literary gathering in Ciudad Juarez, Renée Acosta, a scholar from Chihuahua, had the opportunity to interview Erasmo Palma, who, until his passing in 2016, was considered the last Rarámuri to have known Artaud. During their conversation, Don Palma spoke of a "conflict between feminine and masculine forces within Artaud," clarifying that this was not a case of repressed homosexuality but rather an encounter with Artaud's inner feminine spirit. (Renée Acosta, *De la crueldad y lo sagrado*, Premio Malcolm Lowry, 2021)

While it is difficult to scientifically verify such a claim, it is undeniable that Artaud consistently embraced a certain femininity. "I am a woman, and I engender my homme (man), my being, my work through my cunt (...) I have a woman's sexuality that is grounded because my spirit does not descend into my body, but my body raises me into consciousness." In *Cahier de Rodez* No. 12, he adds: "I am neither male nor female, but the woman is my expression, the man is my nature." Of course, this statement may be purely symbolic, as Artaud often associates the soul with femininity and the spirit with masculinity in his work.

In her diary, Anaïs Nin writes: "Artaud at La Coupole pouring out a torrent of poetry, speaking of magic: 'I am Heliogabalus, the mad Roman emperor,' for he becomes everything he writes about." Is this identification of Artaud with his character Heliogabalus, an extravagant homosexual figure, purely coincidental? Could it suggest a latent attraction of Artaud toward men? Patrick Pognant, in his book *Antonin Artaud, La mise en échec de la médecine*, explores this hypothesis: "The possibility that Antonin Artaud may have been attracted to boys, without it making him a homosexual, deserves consideration as it could shed light on his lack of interest in women."

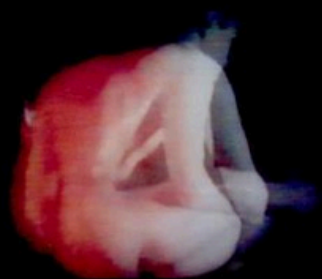
Could this possibility of an unspoken attraction also extend to his friendship with Balthus? Artaud writes: "Balthus never committed suicide over a woman but due to the dissatisfaction of my desire, which yearned for love and received nothing." Even in *Rodez*, Artaud mentions the influence of a demon affecting his masculine sexuality: "He is a blond, light-brown man with short hair and a small waxed mustache." (XXV, 237)

Personally, I do not believe that Artaud was homosexual or had a deviant sexuality. An examination of his life reveals that he had numerous short- and long-term relationships with women. Despite his efforts to remain chaste, even during his time in an asylum, he continued to masturbate frequently, and his erections persisted into his later years. According to an account shared by Paule Thévenin with Gérard Mordillat and Jérôme Prieur, after sharing a bed with Anie Bernard, Artaud reportedly woke up in the morning "striking his erect penis."

It is worth noting that his drug dependency and excessive consumption likely affected not only his sexual performance—evidenced by his unsuccessful encounter with Anaïs Nin, as described in her diary—but also his overall behavior. Under the influence of drugs, Artaud sometimes found himself engaging in actions beyond his control. A Marseille-based author told me that his mother, or perhaps his grandmother of Greek origin, was close to Artaud's mother. She often lamented having to frequently find her son lying in the city's public urinals. Although I do not believe that Artaud was definitively homosexual, this does not rule out the possibility that he may have had homosexual experiences under the influence of drugs.

Even if one should not take everything he wrote at face value, Artaud repeatedly mentions in his notebooks experiences that could suggest a homosexual relationship. For example, in his final notebooks from Ivry, he writes: "Do not forget the two enormous sins I consented to, letting others fuck me" (XXIV, 118). In notebook No. 120 from Rodez, he also mentions: "Under the influence of heroin and the defenselessness caused by heroin, I loved evil for two moments, but that's not it, it's that, with the drug in me, evil pounced on me to derive pleasure in my body, and it was stronger than me and made me bind evil twice between my thighs. I accepted evil twice between my thighs" (XXII, 234).

It is clear that not everything written should be taken literally, but the question is worth considering. In another passage, Artaud writes: "The anchor of the anus, well, what I did that night didn't say what I did wrong with a man, six years that I found my nature again and six months that I found myself again" (XVIII, 182). In notebook No. 70 (Rodez, March 20–22, 1946, O.C. XX), he states: "I was touched, kissed, raped, and fucked; it was me, but it won't happen again, and that's that" (XX, 377).



# La mise en échec de la médecine



# Excerpts

## Excerpt 1

Contrary to popular belief, despite his repeated claims to the contrary, Antonin Artaud did not entirely reject sexuality. In fact, his writings suggest that he was at least a masturbator and may have had sexual experiences beyond simple heterosexual encounters, though he rarely mentioned them. Indeed, the possibility of homosexual relations (whether consensual or not) cannot be dismissed, given his statements on anal excitement, sodomy, inter-femoral pleasure, and other such experiences that he might have had during his stays in health institutions or hospitals—places conducive to such encounters. He appeared to have an attraction to young men, as evidenced by his relationships with, among others, young interns at the various hospitals where he stayed, young artists like Balthus and Prével, publishers, and more generally, young men, particularly masculine ones, who visited him in Ivry. However, this does not necessarily classify him as homosexual; he might have been bisexual, a repressed homosexual, or more accurately, asexual. One of the letters he wrote at Sainte-Anne, due to the elegant yet awkward insistence with which he expressed his request, is explicit on this matter: "[...] While awaiting intervention from Professor Claude [to release me], I beg you [s.p.n.] once again to do everything possible [s.p.n.] to find the young doctor who questioned me upon my arrival here in front of Dr. Vercier and with whom we discussed Kabbalah, occultism, and the Science of Religions. You told me it must have been Dr. Freté. Whoever he is, please ask him to come see me. He can do a lot for me, knowing my background [s.p.n.]2."

## Excerpt 2

The stance adopted by the poet in advocating asexuality in a frenzy of bodily reinvention allowed him to mask his own suffering and the deadlock he found himself in regarding religion and hygienist theories, neither of which tolerated the so-called shameful sexuality he practiced. Under these conditions, with his mind caught in a vice, it was not easy for him to masturbate serenely. Moreover, in this regard, contradictory positions have been found in his writings (see above). Nevertheless, he found a solution to protect himself from this burdensome sexuality. Indeed, he wrote: "All sexuality and all eroticism, Dr. Latrémolière, are a sin and a crime for Jesus Christ, and the antidote to eroticism and the occult enchantments of the devil is opium!..."

### Excerpt 3

Antonin Artaud's troubled sexuality—didn't he repeatedly mention in his writings that his puberty only occurred at the age of 18 or 19?—would torment him until the end of his days, which is why his writings on sexuality naturally intertwine with his writings on pain. The significance of what could be called "the deflowering of 1915" should be assessed, and why it is inaccurate to label Antonin Artaud as impotent, contrary to the belief of Dr. Latrémolière, who stated, "I am convinced he was impotent!" To be fair, Artaud himself made similar claims. However, it might be more accurate to say today that he "lacked desire for a 'normal' relationship with a partner." Nevertheless, many of his writings are imbued with libidinous themes. These texts also raise questions about Artaud's actual sexual life and his sexual orientation—didn't René Allendy spread rumors that he was homosexual? Even today, many psychiatrists assert that profound sexual disorders can lead to psychological issues; this is particularly true with obsessive repression, such as the inhibition of homosexuality, which Freud considered a gateway to paranoid psychosis.

Before delving further into this chapter, it is crucial to remember how deeply Antonin Artaud was affected, scarred, and wounded by the diagnosis of heredosyphilis in 1917, which could be one of the main reasons for his rejection of sexuality. Finally, a significant portion of these writings might be viewed as part of the poet's delirious expressions, given the exaggerated, excessive, and often untenable positions he took—was it the hubris of a poet or the hubris of a madman?



# Echoes of Écho

(Patrick Albert Pognant)

## An Unpublished Typescript on Antonin Artaud by Dr. Jacques Latrémolière

We are excited to announce, for the first time, the upcoming release in a few months of a book that will gather all the writings of Jacques Latrémolière, the 25-year-old intern who administered all the electroshocks to Antonin Artaud. In addition to Latrémolière's thesis on electroshock therapy, reprinted for the first time, the book will notably include a previously unpublished typescript titled Antonin Artaud, the Abandoned by God?, whose existence was revealed in Patrick Pognant's work (Antonin Artaud: Medicine's Checkmate), where he included some excerpts. Stay tuned...

### Patrick Albert Pognant's Blog

By clicking on this link, you'll find a photo of Jacques Latrémolière along with a 2011 notice written by Patrick Pognant, a professor and researcher at the University of Paris Descartes, Sorbonne Paris Cité, with the assistance of Olivier and Tristan Latrémolière, Jacques' son and grandson.

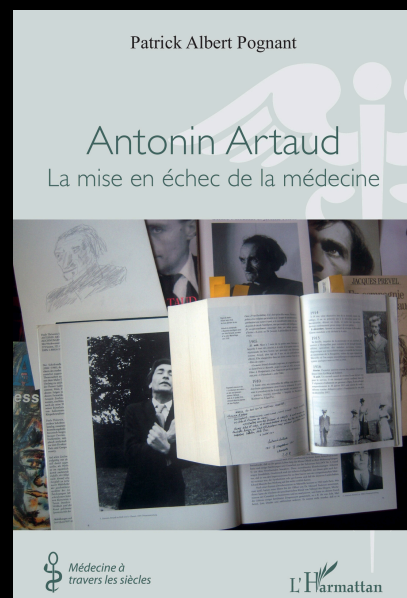
<http://ppognant.online.fr/latremoliere.html>




### Antonin Artaud: Medicine's Checkmate by Patrick Albert Pognant

This book offers an in-depth analysis of the hypothesis that Antonin Artaud's (1896–1948) madness may have been intentionally simulated, based on a contextualized reading of his writings. It highlights Artaud's resistance to the medical and psychiatric practices of his time, despite undergoing intensive treatments, including 58 sessions of electroshock therapy, which proved ineffective. Special attention is given to the examination of treatments administered for diagnoses such as syphilis, melancholia, and luxuriant delusion, which marked the years of suffering and despair he endured.

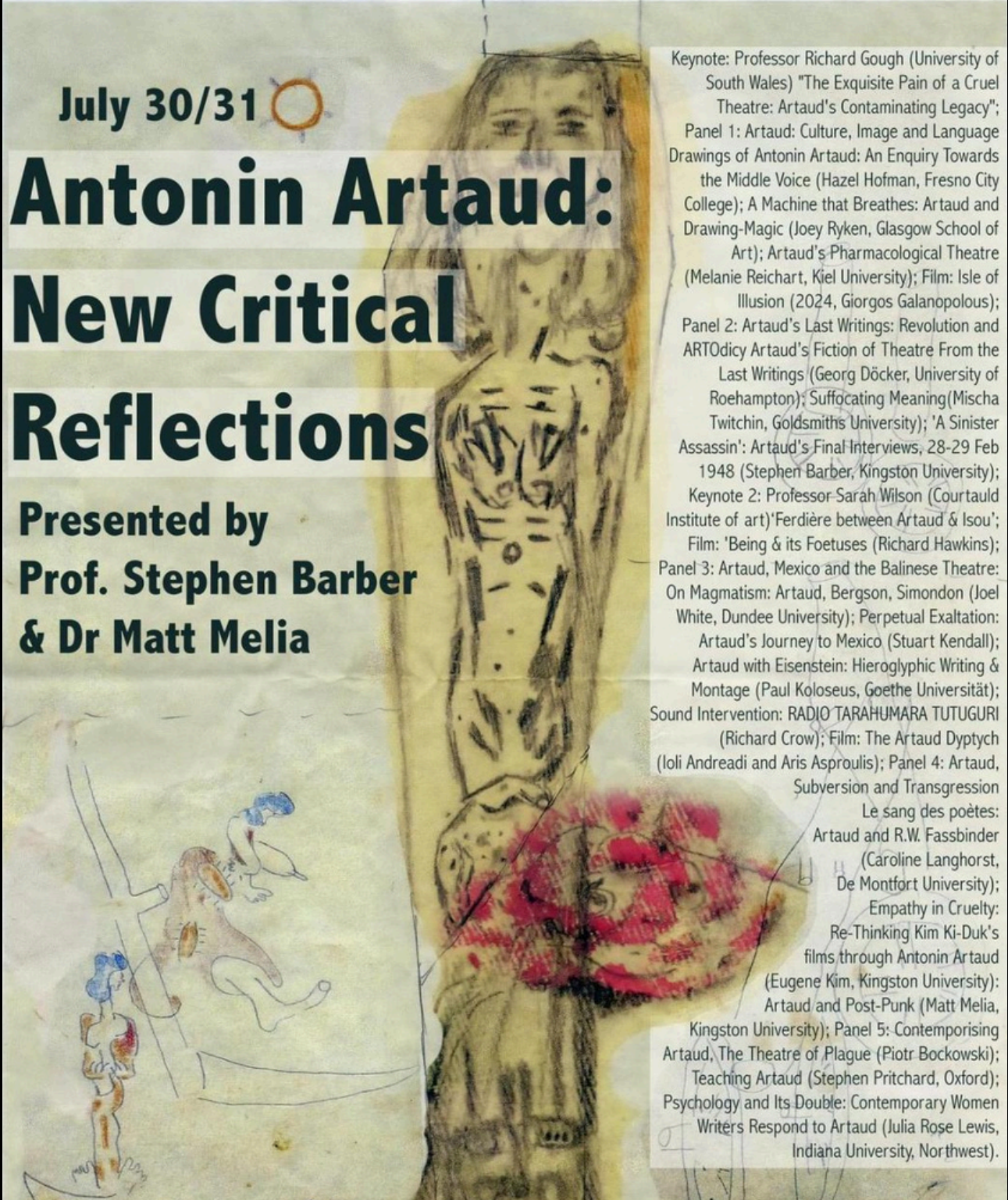
Furthermore, this work is enriched with a brief biography of Artaud, a critical review of his works, and numerous excerpts, often unpublished or rarely reproduced, organized thematically. It thus provides a comprehensive view of Antonin Artaud, paying tribute to this intellectual whose unclassifiable work places him among the major artists of the 20th century, with international recognition that sometimes surpasses that in his own country.



July 30/31 

# Antonin Artaud: New Critical Reflections

**Presented by  
Prof. Stephen Barber  
& Dr Matt Melia**



Keynote: Professor Richard Gough (University of South Wales) "The Exquisite Pain of a Cruel Theatre: Artaud's Contaminating Legacy";  
Panel 1: Artaud: Culture, Image and Language  
Drawings of Antonin Artaud: An Enquiry Towards the Middle Voice (Hazel Hofman, Fresno City College); A Machine that Breathes: Artaud and Drawing-Magic (Joey Ryken, Glasgow School of Art); Artaud's Pharmacological Theatre (Melanie Reichart, Kiel University); Film: Isle of Illusion (2024, Giorgos Galanopoulos);  
Panel 2: Artaud's Last Writings: Revolution and ARTodicy Artaud's Fiction of Theatre From the Last Writings (Georg Döcker, University of Roehampton); Suffocating Meaning (Mischa Twitchin, Goldsmiths University); 'A Sinister Assassin': Artaud's Final Interviews, 28-29 Feb 1948 (Stephen Barber, Kingston University);  
Keynote 2: Professor Sarah Wilson (Courtauld Institute of art) 'Ferdrière between Artaud & Isou';  
Film: 'Being & its Foetuses (Richard Hawkins);  
Panel 3: Artaud, Mexico and the Balinese Theatre:  
On Magmatism: Artaud, Bergson, Simondon (Joel White, Dundee University); Perpetual Exaltation: Artaud's Journey to Mexico (Stuart Kendall); Artaud with Eisenstein: Hieroglyphic Writing & Montage (Paul Koloseus, Goethe Universität);  
Sound Intervention: RADIO TARAHUMARA TUTUGURI (Richard Crow); Film: The Artaud Dyptych (Ioli Andreadi and Aris Asproulis); Panel 4: Artaud, Subversion and Transgression  
Le sang des poètes:  
Artaud and R.W. Fassbinder (Caroline Langhorst, De Montfort University);  
Empathy in Cruelty:  
Re-Thinking Kim Ki-Duk's films through Antonin Artaud (Eugene Kim, Kingston University);  
Artaud and Post-Punk (Matt Melia, Kingston University); Panel 5: Contemporising Artaud, The Theatre of Plague (Piotr Bockowski); Teaching Artaud (Stephen Pritchard, Oxford); Psychology and Its Double: Contemporary Women Writers Respond to Artaud (Julia Rose Lewis, Indiana University, Northwest).

François Audouy

# Report on the Artaud Seminar

From July 30 to 31, Kingston University in the southern suburbs of London hosted the most significant conference on Antonin Artaud held in Britain in the past thirty years. The event brought together around thirty participants from various fields—authors, filmmakers, musicians, translators, publishers, and academics—hailing from countries including the UK, Germany, Greece, the United States, and South Korea. The symposium was organized by Stephen Barber, a British biographer and translator of Artaud, and Dr. Matt Melia, both faculty members at Kingston. The seminar opened with an inaugural speech by Barber, followed by an introduction to Artaud's work by Professor Richard Gough. Gough's talk primarily focused on Artaud's influence on future generations, from Peter Brook to Grotowski, particularly in the realm of theater. He highlighted how Artaud's theater, inspired by Balinese dances and painting (notably *Lot and His Daughters* by Lucas van Leyden, as studied in *The Theater and Its Double*), might have lacked the strictness of its cruelty but served as a visionary foundation for the future of performing arts. Was Artaud more a poet and prophet of the theater than a director? This provocative question marked the end of the first presentation.

The conference appeared to aim at honoring the multifaceted creative legacy of the Marseille-born artist, as the first panel focused on Artaud's drawings. Hazel Hofman, a professor at Fresno's American University, explored this practice as a search for the inner voice, quoting Jean Dequeker's striking phrase: "I saw him create his double." Joey Rynken, an artist and lecturer at Glasgow School of Art, discussed Artaud's drawing as a magical process linked to the creation of new and supernatural bodies, particularly in works like "The Projection of the True Body" and the 50 drawings published in 2004 under *50 Drawings to Murder Magic*. The morning session concluded with Melanie Reichhart from Kiel University, who returned to the topic of theater to discuss the concepts of "loud writing" and "pharmakon" (the idea that our own creations escape our control).

The afternoon resumed with a second panel that began with a focus on the "theater of reflection" by Georg Döcker of Roehampton University. Artaud has been the subject of intense debate for a century, starting with his correspondence with Jacques Rivière in 1924—this year also marks the centennial of the Surrealist Manifesto. One hundred years of "religious confrontation," as seen through the lens of Jacob Rogozinski—Jacques Derrida described Artaud as a "privileged enemy"—a confrontation that remains fruitful for anyone grappling with questions of being and literature. In the *Cahiers d'Ivry*, Döcker noted, Artaud challenges the critical world and sees himself as his own source, one he can stop, divert, or reform at will. Glossolalia, the ultimate stage in the quest for the "blown word" (in Derrida's terms), is no longer a reflection but a distortion of language, echoing the distortion of the body. Artaud creates a suffocation of meaning, Mischa Twitchin from Goldsmiths, University of London, added, attacking the grammar that chains sentences together at the expense of a free verb, a dangerous vector of anarchy.

For Artaud, death is never more than a collective illusion that prevents us from unleashing our deep forces, an unproductive terror imposed by society: "It is always out of pity for others that we allow ourselves to be laid in the coffin, to be lowered into the grave, hollowed out with camphor and reddened blood" (*Henchmen and Supplications*). The last speaker, Stephen Barber, read excerpts from his translation of *A Sinister Assassin*, the script of Artaud's final interview with two journalists in February 1948, just days before his death—two journalists whom Artaud simultaneously fascinated and terrified, and whose traces have been lost to time.

On July 31, the same group of personalities, or nearly so, gathered at the same location for additional speeches. Professor Sarah Wilson from the Courtauld Institute of Art offered an original perspective by focusing on the controversial Dr. Ferdière as seen by the Lettrist poet Isidore Isou, who was also a victim of the psychiatrist. Isidore Goldstein, a Romanian Jew who settled in France in 1945 and chose his pseudonym in tribute to Tristan Tzara, authored a scathing yet little-known critique of Ferdière titled *Antonin Artaud Tortured by Psychiatrists* (the ignoble errors of André Breton, Robert Desnos, and Tristan Tzara in the case of Antonin Artaud's internment). While the chief doctor of Rodez, who was close to the Surrealist movement but quick to use electroshock therapy, is harshly criticized, it is important to place this within the context of World War II and the "soft extermination" policy against the mentally ill, which resulted in nearly 40,000 deaths. A famous photograph taken the day before Artaud's return to Paris on May 24, 1946, shows Artaud and Ferdière smiling, but the poet later settled scores with the scientist, calling him "a born and innate enemy of all genius"—a phrase used earlier by Artaud to describe Dr. Gachet in Van Gogh: *The Man Suicided by Society*. Sarah Wilson revealed that the use of medical electricity in France was pioneered by Marat, ironically portrayed by Artaud in *Abel Gance's Napoleon*. Another revelation from the conference was an image of Artaud's grave in Ivry-sur-Seine before his remains were transferred in 1975 to the Saint-Pierre Cemetery in Marseille at his family's request. In this photograph, taken by the Lettrist poet Jean-Louis Brau, strange symbols dominated by a Christian cross appear in the background—the kind of symbols Artaud himself might have described in *Heliogabalus* or other texts. These vaguely esoteric symbols, even posthumously, do not surprise us, as Artaud was always both actor and author of his own transcendence, keen to create his myths and triumph over matter. Perhaps marked by Artaud's ghost, Jean Dequeker, then an intern under Gaston Ferdière at Rodez, devoted a 1948 medical thesis to the case of another asylum artist, Guillaume Pujolle, whose reputation would later spread in Surrealist and Art Brut circles. Transitioning from asylum to museum (as Sarah Wilson puts it), this painter from the Southwest was a unique character, also a carpenter and customs officer. Was he unconsciously guided by the fever of the madman from Rodez, his disease healthier, holier than any form of mental health?

Another dense lecture was delivered by Joel White from the University of Dundee in Scotland, on the notion of magnetism in Artaud, Bergson, and Simondon. White also introduced the concept of logomachy (from the Greek *logomakhia*, "combat in words"), the war with and against the lying word ("All writing is pigshit"), an essential tension in Artaud, where theoretical language clashes with pulsional and animated language (in the sense of being endowed with a soul), as if the "A" of Antonin confronted its schizophrenic double formed by the "A" of Artaud. A strong conceptual shock within the grand Artaudian magma, succinctly summarized in this passage from *Suppôts et Supplications* (another title with schizo-symmetrical double S): "The night Anarchy The revolution Logomachy."

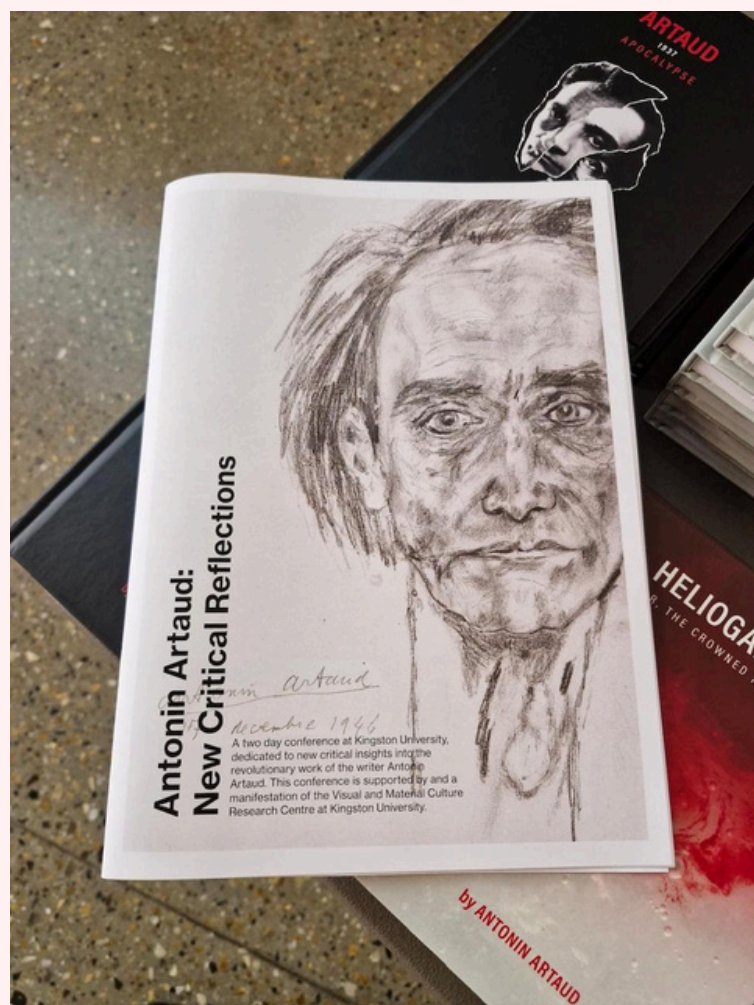
The magma of the word turns into lava, just as Freud compares the unconscious to successive eruptions of lava. In the Mexican writings, the volcanically named Popocatepetl, which obsesses Artaud until Van Gogh, creates these eruptions of raw energy, a concept akin to *Teotl* in Aztec philosophy (a moving and sacred energy that encompasses all the energy in the world). In the *Revolutionary Messages*, translated by Joel White (we will return to this), Artaud explicitly cites Bergson: "We separate consciousness from the state of consciousness. But consciousness is in reality what the philosopher Bergson called pure duration." As for Simondon, a thinker from the 1950s heavily influenced by Bergson, he defined the energetic conditions of possibility. The *Revolutionary Messages*, White concludes, are among Artaud's most political texts, particularly in their advocacy for the organic against the machine, the culture of Mexico's red earth against that of industry and ersatz—a theme that would haunt Artaud until *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*. In today's context of ecological urgency, this theme seems to me one of his most relevant messages.

This is precisely the topic that Stuart Kendall will address, focusing on Artaud's Mexican period and the ecological question. Kendall is also the translator of *Messages révolutionnaires* this year, but for an American edition that includes later texts concerning the Indian question. When Artaud arrived in Mexico at the beginning of 1936, the Mexican Revolution of 1910 was already losing momentum, at least in the sense that Artaud understood revolution—as a revolution of the spirit rather than the dialectical materialism that characterizes Marxism. The texts in *Messages révolutionnaires* are well-known for discussing the dilution of the Surrealist ideal within communism and Artaud's strong condemnation of this lack of spiritual elevation. Artaud's first disappointment: Mexican elites had forgotten Indian culture, with their eyes fixed on Europe. However, what Artaud came to Mexico to find was not Diego Rivera's murals but the indigenous culture, as seen in the work of painter Maria Izquierdo, whose red hues roar and whose Indian soul emerges more vividly after long fermentation. The Mexican Revolution could be about the land, not, as in Russia, about the machine, Artaud claimed. Still on revolution, still on Mexico: Paul Koloseus from Frankfurt University draws a parallel between Artaud and filmmaker Eisenstein. While Eisenstein produced Soviet propaganda films as Artaud was renouncing Marxism, the two share an interest in Mexico, to which the filmmaker devoted a documentary shortly before his death in 1948, the same year as Artaud's. They also share a taste for a writing of signs, "hieroglyphic" as Koloseus describes it, which characterizes the art of montage theorized by the creator of *Ivan the Terrible*. Choreography (the writing of circular dance) and cinematography (the writing of movement) complement each other. In the spirit of the *Theatre of Cruelty*, the actor's body becomes just another signifier. Both contemporaries sought to create stimuli, sources of conflict that awaken the viewer, using for this purpose "the musical quality of gesture." If the art of montage evokes Japanese Kanji—two associated signifiers creating another signified (knife + heart = grief; infant + cry = hunger)—meaning sometimes goes astray, and it is there that art emerges.

CinéArtaud again: Caroline Langhorst from De Montfort University in Leicester presented a conference titled "Artaud-Fassbinder: The Blood of Poets," discussing the author's influence on the German filmmaker via the *Living Theater*, his desire to organize and disorganize bodies, to contrast the purposeless body of bourgeois art with the active and vital body of the *Theatre of Cruelty*. Artaud's tormented body is a cinematic body, one of extra-verbal communication. Caroline Langhorst uses the example of Fassbinder's character Petra Van Kant, who physically takes power. More surprising is the intrusion of Korea, via speaker Eugene Kim from Kingston University, into Artaud's universe. While Artaud had an Eastern inclination that leaned more towards India, China, or Tibet, filmmaker Kim ki-Duk, described as a "Buddhist punk," assaulted the audience by filming debauchery and incest, similar to *Les Cenci*, the 1935 play. However, Kim notes, one can detect empathy in his films' cruelty as well as a reinterpretation of the Korean concept of "yopki," which denotes both the grotesque and that which exceeds the imagination.

The final presentation I had the pleasure of attending—unfortunately, I could not stay for the last three—shifted from the visual to the auditory, comparing Artaud with post-punk through Dr. Matt Melia. Post-punk as a musical genre has the peculiar feature of emerging almost simultaneously with the genre it is supposed to follow (English punk dates back to 1977, while post-punk arose in 1978 with bands like Siouxsie and the Banshees, Magazine, or Public Image Limited), just as Artaud may have already been post-Surrealist around 1927. While Matt Melia pertinently references the German band *Einstürzende Neubauten*, the epileptic convulsions à la electroshock of Ian Curtis of Joy Division, or the punk rockabilly fetishism of Nick Cave's first Australian band, *The Birthday Party*, which makes the Sex Pistols seem like choirboys, I wonder if the true disciple of Artaud, with his theatricality and successive changes of persona, isn't David Bowie, whose late 70s Berlin Trilogy (*Low-Heroes-Lodger*) can be considered post-punk. We know Bowie was an avid reader of Brecht, Mishima, and Genet ("Jean Genie"). Stephen Barber, in an interview with Echo Antonin Artaud, highlighted Bowie's participation in 1996 at the previous major London symposium on Artaud. Bowie, a disciple of the Mōmo? His posthumous album, *Blackstar*, hallucinatory and hallucinogenic, staring death in the eyes with quintessential British class, might provide a clue. Artaud, Bowie—beings from another world who illuminate this one differently.

I hope that this summary, as incomplete and subjective as it may be, remains true to the spirit of the symposium. Before concluding, I would like to mention the recent or upcoming English translations of Artaud's work, including *Messages révolutionnaires* by Joel White for the Methuen Drama collection by Bloomsbury, in which I had the pleasure of participating; Stuart Kendall's translation of the Mexican texts in the United States (*Journey to Mexico—Revolutionary Messages and the Tarahumaras*); *A Sinister Assassin* by Stephen Barber; and finally, Peter Valente's translations of *Nouvelles Révélation de l'être*, *La Conférence du Vieux Colombier*, and *Cahiers d'Ivry* (*The True Story of Jesus Christ*) by the remarkable Infinity Land Press. Founded in 2013 by Karolina Urbaniak and Martin Bladh, Infinity Land Press has published numerous works by Artaud, from *Héliogabale* to *Lettres d'Irlande*, as well as works related to Artaud, including the poems of Prével and Peter Valente's essay. As I left the university and headed towards Surbiton station through the English suburbs, I felt that our presence in these places had meaning, that Artaud's work is indeed alive and conducive to lively and enriching exchanges. Far from any morbid fetishism, it seems to me more than ever to be a path for new explorations and a way out of the morass.





methuen | drama



THEATRE  
MAKERS

# REVOLUTIONARY MESSAGES

ANTONIN ARTAUD

TRANSLATED AND INTRODUCTION BY  
JOEL WHITE

## **A Groundbreaking Edition for the British Public**

**On September 18, 2024, Bloomsbury Publishing, the renowned publishing house best known for the Harry Potter series, will release a new translation of Antonin Artaud's *Messages révolutionnaires*, translated by Joel White. This publication marks a significant contribution to Artaud studies, as it is the very first English translation of these texts to be published in the UK. The groundbreaking aspect of this edition lies in the inclusion, for the first time in English, of four articles by Artaud discovered in Cuba in 2009 and translated by François Audouy. These four texts, originally published in the magazine *Grafos* and not published in French until 2021, hold an importance on par with Artaud's *Theatre and Its Double* and other texts from the *Messages révolutionnaires* collection. They have also been published in Spanish and Italian.**

# KATONAS ASIMIS

