

ANTONIN ARTAUD

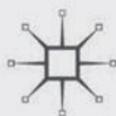
THE SCUM OF THE SOUL



ROS MURRAY



PALGRAVE STUDIES IN MODERN EUROPEAN LITERATURE



Antonin Artaud

Palgrave Studies in Modern European Literature

Published in association with the Centre for Modern European Literature, University of Kent, UK

Series Editors: **Thomas Baldwin, Ben Hutchinson, Anna Katharina Schaffner and Shane Weller**

Editorial Advisory Board: Brian Boyd, Michael Caesar, Claus Clüver, Patrick ffrench, Alison Finch, Robert Gordon, Karen Leeder, Marjorie Perloff, Jean-Michel Rabaté, Andrew Michael Roberts, Ritchie Robertson, Hubert van den Berg

Many of the most significant modern European writers and literary movements have traversed national, linguistic and disciplinary borders. *Palgrave Studies in Modern European Literature* is dedicated to publishing works that take account of these various kinds of border crossing. Areas covered by the series include European Romanticism, the avant-garde, modernism and postmodernism, literary theory, the international reception of modern European writers, and the impact of other discourses (philosophical, political, psychoanalytic and scientific) upon modern European literature.

Titles include:

Thomas Baldwin, James Fowler and Ana de Medeiros (*editors*)

QUESTIONS OF INFLUENCE IN MODERN FRENCH LITERATURE

Ros Murray

ANTONIN ARTAUD

The Scum of the Soul

Anna Katharina Schaffner and Shane Weller (*editors*)

MODERNIST EROTICISMS

European Literature After Sexology

Claire White

WORK AND LEISURE IN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY

FRENCH LITERATURE AND VISUAL CULTURE

Time, Politics and Class

David Williams

WRITING POSTCOMMUNISM

Towards a Literature of the East European Ruins

Forthcoming titles:

Larry Duffy

FLAUBERT, ZOLA AND THE INCORPORATION OF DISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE

Righting the Epistemological Body

Palgrave Studies in Modern European Literature

Series Standing Order ISBN 978-1-137-02455-8 (hardback)

(outside North America only)

You can receive future titles in this series as they are published by placing a standing order. Please contact your bookseller or, in case of difficulty, write to us at the address below with your name and address, the title of the series and the ISBN quoted above.

Customer Services Department, Macmillan Distribution Ltd, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS, England

Antonin Artaud

The Scum of the Soul

Ros Murray

Queen Mary University of London

palgrave
macmillan





© Ros Murray 2014

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No portion of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The author has asserted her right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2014 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978–1–137–31057–6

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Murray, Ros, 1982– author.

Antonin Artaud : the scum of the soul / Ros Murray.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Includes filmography.

ISBN 978–1–137–31057–6

1. Artaud, Antonin, 1896–1948—Criticism and interpretation. I. Title.

PQ2601.R677Z7426 2014

848'.91209—dc23

2014022064

Typeset by MPS Limited, Chennai, India.

For my brother Patrick

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	viii
<i>Series Editors' Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
Introduction	1
1 The Limits of Representation	10
2 Through the Digestive System	36
3 Theatre, Magic and Mimesis	58
4 Artaud on Film	87
5 Artaud on Paper	117
6 The Machinic Body	140
Conclusion	163
<i>Notes</i>	167
<i>Bibliography</i>	183
<i>Filmography</i>	187
<i>Index</i>	188

List of Illustrations

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 3.1 | Artaud, Antonin, <i>Sort remis à Roger Blin</i> . Signed, not dated (estimated 22nd May 1939) © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2014. | 83 |
| 5.1 | Artaud, Antonin, <i>La Maladresse sexuelle de dieu</i> . Signed bottom right, not dated (estimated February 1946) © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2014. | 128 |
| 6.1 | Artaud, Antonin, page from notebook number 310 © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2014. | 150 |

Series Editors' Preface

Many of the most significant European writers and literary movements in the modern period have traversed national, linguistic and disciplinary borders. The principal aim of the Palgrave Studies in Modern European Literature series is to create a forum for work that takes account of these border crossings, and that engages with individual writers, genres, topoi and literary movements in a manner that does justice to their location within European artistic, political and philosophical contexts. Of course, the title of this series immediately raises a number of questions, at once historical, geopolitical and literary-philosophical: What are the parameters of the modern? What is to be understood as European, both politically and culturally? And what distinguishes literature within these historical and geopolitical limits from other forms of discourse?

These three questions are interrelated. Not only does the very idea of the modern vary depending on the European national tradition within which its definition is attempted, but the concept of literature in the modern sense is also intimately connected to the emergence and consolidation of the European nation-states, to increasing secularisation, urbanisation, industrialisation and bureaucratisation, to the Enlightenment project and its promise of emancipation from nature through reason and science, to capitalism and imperialism, to the liberal-democratic model of government, to the separation of the private and public spheres, to the new form taken by the university, and to changing conceptions of both space and time as a result of technological innovations in the fields of travel and communication.

Taking first the question of when the modern may be said to commence within a European context, if one looks to a certain Germanic tradition shaped by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), then it might be said to commence with the first 'theoretical man', namely Socrates. According to this view, the modern would include everything that comes after the pre-Socratics and the first two great Attic tragedians, Aeschylus and Sophocles, with Euripides being the first modern writer. A rather more limited sense of the modern, also derived from the Germanic world, sees the *Neuzeit* as originating in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Jakob Burckhardt, Nietzsche's colleague at the University of Basel, identified the states of Renaissance Italy as prototypes for both modern European politics and modern

European cultural production. However, Italian literary modernity might also be seen as having commenced two hundred years earlier, with the programmatic adoption of the vernacular by its foremost representatives, Dante and Petrarch.

In France, the modern might either be seen as beginning at the turn of the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, with the so-called 'Querelle des anciens et des modernes' in the 1690s, or later still, with the French Revolution of 1789, while the Romantic generation of the 1830s might equally be identified as an origin, given that Chateaubriand is often credited with having coined the term *modernité* in 1833. Across the Channel, meanwhile, the origins of literary modernity might seem different again. With the Renaissance being seen as 'Early Modern', everything thereafter might seem to fall within the category of the modern, although in fact the term 'modern' within a literary context is generally reserved for the literature that comes after mid-nineteenth-century European realism. This latter sense of the modern is also present in the early work of Roland Barthes, who in *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) asserts that modern literature commences in the 1850s, when the literary becomes explicitly self-reflexive, not only addressing its own status as literature but also concerning itself with the nature of language and the possibilities of representation.

In adopting a view of the modern as it pertains to literature that is more or less in line with Barthes's periodisation, while also acknowledging that this periodization is liable to exceptions and limitations, the present series does not wish to conflate the modern with, nor to limit it to, modernism and postmodernism. Rather, the aim is to encourage work that highlights differences in the conception of the modern – differences that emerge out of distinct linguistic, national and cultural spheres within Europe – and to prompt further reflection on why it should be that the concept of the modern has become such a critical issue in 'modern' European culture, be it aligned with Enlightenment progress, with the critique of Enlightenment thinking, with decadence, with radical renewal, or with a sense of belatedness.

Turning to the question of the European, the very idea of modern literature arises in conjunction with the establishment of the European nation-states. When European literatures are studied at university, they are generally taught within national and linguistic parameters: English, French, German, Italian, Scandinavian, Slavic and Eastern European, and Spanish literature. Even if such disciplinary distinctions have their pedagogical justifications, they render more difficult an appreciation of the ways in which modern European literature

is shaped in no small part by intellectual and artistic traffic across national and linguistic borders: to grasp the nature of the European avant-gardes or of high modernism, for instance, one has to consider the relationship between distinct national or linguistic traditions. While not limiting itself to one methodological approach, the present series is designed precisely to encourage the study of individual writers and literary movements within their European context. Furthermore, it seeks to promote research that engages with the very definition of the European in its relation to literature, including changing conceptions of centre and periphery, of Eastern and Western Europe, and how these might bear upon questions of literary translation, dissemination and reception.

As for the third key term in the series title – literature – the formation of this concept is intimately related both to the European and to the modern. While Sir Philip Sidney in the late sixteenth century, Martin Opitz in the seventeenth, and Shelley in the early nineteenth produce their apologies for, or defences of, 'poetry', it is within the general category of 'literature' that the genres of poetry, drama and prose fiction have come to be contained in the modern period. Since the Humboldtian reconfiguration of the university in the nineteenth century, the fate of literature has been closely bound up with that particular institution, as well as with emerging ideas of the canon and tradition. However one defines it, modernity has both propagated and problematized the historical legacy of the western literary tradition. While, as Jacques Derrida argues, it may be that in all European languages the history and theorisation of the literary necessarily emerges out of a common Latinate legacy – the very word 'literature' deriving from the Latin *littera* (letter) – it is nonetheless the case that within a modern European context the literary has taken on an extraordinarily diverse range of forms. Traditional modes of representation have been subverted through parody and pastiche, or abandoned altogether; genres have been mixed; the limits of language have been tested; indeed, the concept of literature itself has been placed in question.

With all of the above in mind, the present series wishes to promote work that engages with any aspect of modern European literature (be it a literary movement, an individual writer, a genre, a particular topos) within its European context, that addresses questions of translation, dissemination and reception (both within Europe and beyond), that considers the relations between modern European literature and the other arts, that analyses the impact of other discourses (philosophical, political, scientific) upon that literature, and, above all, that takes each

of those three terms – modern, European and literature – not as givens, but as invitations, even provocations, to further reflection.

Thomas Baldwin
Ben Hutchinson
Shane Weller

Acknowledgements

My first and most significant debt is to Johanna Malt, whose expert guidance, fascinating intellectual insights and all-round encouragement have been a continual inspiration during the development of this project. I am also deeply indebted to Patrick French, who first introduced me to Artaud's work as an undergraduate and subsequently provided detailed feedback on early versions of the book, coming up with many productive ideas during its initial stages. The French Department at King's College London was an exciting, intellectually challenging and fun research environment and I would like to thank Léa Vuong, Cécile Bishop and Zoe Roth for making it so enjoyable. I would also like to thank Gözde Naiboğlu for her comments on chapter four and Gill Partington for her input on chapter six, and Stephen Barber and Martine Beugnet for their suggestions for improvement overall. Many thanks also to Penelope Murray for her invaluable advice on Plato. Cécile Bishop patiently answered many of my persistent and often virtually impossible to answer translation questions, for which I am extremely grateful. Guillaume Fau at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France helped me access material and answered many copyright queries and I am grateful to him for his patience and efficiency. I would like to thank the anonymous reader and the series editors at Palgrave Macmillan. Finally, and by no means least, I would like to thank my family and above all my partner Ochi.

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

In one of his early texts, *Le Pèse-nerfs*, Antonin Artaud summed up his entire life's work, most of which was yet to come, in a single sentence: 'ce que vous avez pris pour mes œuvres n'était que les déchets de moi-même, ces raclures de l'âme que l'homme normal n'accueille pas' ('what you mistook for my works were merely the waste products of myself, those scrapings of the soul that the normal man does not welcome').¹ Artaud's life and his work are intricately bound, and everything he wrote was a direct result and expression of his own corporeal experiences. Much later on at the Rodez psychiatric hospital, following several bouts of electroconvulsive therapy, he wrote 'Je suis mort sous un électro-choc. Je dis mort. Légalement et médicalement mort' ('I died under an electroshock treatment. I was dead. Legally and medically dead'),² yet despite claiming to have died on various different occasions, he continued to write with ever-increasing ferocity, his words, drawings and gestures scattered in fragments around his body like fallout from an explosion. The body from which these fragments emerged is, read through the fragments themselves, barely recognisable as human, described famously in *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu* (*To Have Done with the Judgement of god*) as a perpetual striving towards an anti-anatomical 'corps sans organes' ('body without organs').³

Who is Antonin Artaud, and how are we to read such declarations? What is the relationship between the 'author' of these texts and the texts themselves? Where can we locate this strangely elusive writing body? These are problems that never cease to be discussed in relation to Artaud. His name is constantly reiterated, effaced and re-written throughout his work, and it is a name that is entwined with his own body; 'Artaud' designates a corporeal experience, and his many imagined deaths often coincide with real or imagined violence to his body. Yet the death of

this figure called 'Artaud' that is written into the texts also has profound implications for the outside world; when 'Artaud' dies, or when his name disappears, this is often a sign of imminent catastrophe, for example in his text *Les Nouvelles révélations de l'Être* (*The New Revelations of Being*), a prophetic instruction manual mapping out a timeline for the end of the world, which is simply signed 'LE RÉVÉLÉ' ('THE REVEALED ONE'). Indeed much of Artaud's work seems to announce, with an urgent, impending sense of doom, a vastly destructive, all-engulfing apocalypse. Of course, one of the defining features of the apocalypse as it is written about is, inevitably, that it never quite materialises. But this sense of urgency pervades all of Artaud's texts, and the fragmentary nature of his *Œuvres complètes* makes them resemble a series of hasty, incomplete sketches for what would later become a life's work, or the 'œuvre'.

(i) Artaud's work

What characterises Artaud's publications from the very beginning, as will become clear throughout this book, is the difficulty of categorising them. His first significant publication, *Correspondance avec Jacques Rivière* (*Correspondence with Jacques Rivière*, 1924), is a collection of letters that arose from the failure of his poetry; when Rivière rejected his poems for publication in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Artaud responded with a series of letters in which he explained in great detail the anguish of being unable to find the right words. Rivière offered to publish the entire correspondence between them and, perhaps unwittingly, put into motion the difficulties that would torment Artaud throughout his life, and would make it both impossible and absolutely crucial for him to continue writing: the imperative to find the corporeal genesis of thought, and to express this directly through his writing.

The *Œuvres complètes* is a vast collection of fragments, letters, manifestos, adaptations of other texts, glossolalic outbursts and descriptions of gestures. Volumes 1 to 14 are collections of his previously published work alongside documents and letters related to these, whilst volumes 15 to 26 are transcriptions of the notebooks Artaud wrote in during the last few years of his life. Only half of these notebooks were included in the *Œuvres complètes*; in total, Artaud produced 406. The texts that were prepared for publication during his lifetime make up a small portion of what later became his complete works and were themselves often produced in very limited editions. In addition to the published works, Artaud appeared in 23 films between 1924 and 1935, including Abel Gance's *Napoléon* (1926) and Carl Theodor Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne*

d'Arc (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1927), and he worked between 1926 and 1930 on his theatre project alongside Roger Vitrac and Robert Aron, *Le Théâtre Alfred Jarry*, later, in 1936, producing his own play (based on the work of Shelley and Stendhal), *Les Cenci*. Towards the end of his life he produced a series of drawings and portraits, and there have been several significant exhibitions of his artwork; during his lifetime just one, at the Galerie Pierre in 1947, but there have since been a number of large-scale exhibitions including at the Centre Pompidou in 1987 and 1994, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1996 and more recently at the Bibliothèque Nationale in 2006.

There are perhaps two initial points to be made about Artaud's work: firstly, the impossibility of separating Artaud's own corporeal experiences from the 'œuvre', and secondly, closely related to this, the question of how to approach Artaud's self-proclaimed 'madness'. To attempt to separate or place a value on Artaud's texts according to what his mental state was when he was writing them is futile, because the same issues concern both 'mad' and 'sane' Artaud. All of his work deals with questions surrounding the origin of thought, the very possibility of creation and the threat of the work's self-annihilation which are relevant to any creative endeavour. The figure that recurs throughout Artaud's work is the 'double', drawn from the Ancient Egyptian 'Kah', a spirit that accompanies human beings throughout their lives and lives on after death; in *Le Théâtre et son Double* Artaud writes that theatre is the double of life, and one has the sense that for Artaud his work was the double of his own body, constantly drawing on both the 'Kah' as a creative force, and playing on the homonym 'Caca'/'Kah Kah'. If Artaud makes constant references to 'caca' ('shit') in his work, it is to break down the distinction between what is to be rejected and what is to be maintained, between, as he writes, the 'raclure' ('scraping' or 'scum') and the 'œuvre', and indeed between reason and insanity.

(ii) Artaud and Surrealism

No account of Artaud's work would be complete without some mention of the Surrealist context in which he began writing in the early 1920s. Artaud had a rather ambivalent relationship to the Surrealists, having fallen out with them very publicly in 1926, but still maintaining a close, if sometimes fraught, relationship with André Breton throughout his life. Artaud became involved with the Surrealists in 1924, later becoming the head of the *Bureau de Recherches Surréalistes* and editing *La Révolution surréaliste*, a journal in which much of his work at this

time appeared. Artaud's brand of Surrealism was far more violent than Breton's, and Breton himself admitted, in retrospect, that he found some of Artaud's work rather too extreme, stating in a radio interview with André Parinaud that 'sous l'impulsion d'Artaud des textes collectifs d'une grande véhémence sont à ce moment publiés [...] ces textes sont pris d'une ardeur insurrectionnelle' ('under Artaud's direction some extremely vehement collectively signed texts were published [...] these texts are infused with an insurrectionary ardour').⁴ According to Breton, it was Artaud's language that distinguished his work from more restrained versions of Surrealism such as Aragon's: 'le langage s'est dépouillé de tout ce qui pouvait lui prêter un caractère ornemental, il se soustrait à la "vague de rêves" dont a parlé Aragon, il se veut acéré et luisant, mais luisant à la façon d'une arme' ('language was stripped of anything that could lend it an ornamental air, it rejected the "wave of dreams" that Aragon spoke of, it became sharp and glistening, but glistening like a weapon').⁵ Artaud's break from the Surrealists occurred in November 1926, as he became increasingly interested in the theatre, which the Surrealists viewed as bourgeois and counter-revolutionary, around the same time that Breton's Surrealism began to take on a more political direction, notably with its affiliation with the PCF (French Communist Party). Artaud was fiercely opposed to any kind of party politics, and was hostile to all forms of ideology, which for him, perhaps perversely, included Marxism.⁶

Although he denounced the Surrealists and much of what they stood for, arguably Artaud's work continued to have a distinctly Surrealist edge to it, particularly through his privileging of the irrational over the rational. Indeed Thévenin argues, echoing Artaud's own words, that his work was too Surrealist for the Surrealists: 'Artaud s'affirme, face aux surréalistes, plus surréaliste qu'eux' ('Artaud, faced with the Surrealists, turned out to be more Surrealist than they were').⁷ One important aspect that distinguishes Artaud's writing from that of the Surrealists, however, comes down to the question of the unconscious, and the influence of Freud. Artaud was not interested in the unconscious, but in conscious thought as it emerged from and was mediated through the body, and he had no time at all for Surrealist practices such as automatic writing. But perhaps the most important distinction between them lies in Artaud's insistence on the more abject and material processes of the body through which thought was expressed. Roland Barthes says, in an interview from 1975: 'si les "surréalistes" n'ont pas ou ont peu déconstruit la langue, c'est parce qu'au fond ils avaient une idée normative du corps – et pour tout dire, de la sexualité' ('if the Surrealists did not manage, or

only barely managed, to deconstruct language, it's because ultimately they had a normative idea of the body – and of sexuality'). He adds: 'ils ont, me semble-t-il, *manqué le corps*' ('it seems to me that they *missed* the body out').⁸ This is the crux of the distinction between Artaud's language and that of the Surrealists. If Artaud's work was sidelined by the Surrealists, one could say that to some extent the reverse happened in French theory of the 1960s, where the presence of those critical of or excluded from Surrealism (particularly Artaud and Bataille) whose texts were seen as more transgressive and revolutionary, predominantly through their advocating of a politics of the body, eclipsed that of more conventional Surrealist figures such as André Breton or Louis Aragon.⁹

(iii) Artaud's afterlives

Artaud's work has been read in a variety of contexts, the most significant being Surrealism, critical theory, anti-psychiatry and theatre and performance studies. In the years following his death there was a marked division between how his work was taken up in France and how it was taken up in the US, as chapter 3 will discuss: broadly defined, in France there was an emphasis on theory, whilst in the US it was on practice. In the French context, Artaud is one of the key figures to be taken up in the emerging critical theory of the 1960s and 1970s, inspiring the work of Maurice Blanchot, Philippe Sollers and the *Tel Quel* theorists, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and, most significantly, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. This context is important because it has to a large extent shaped how the work has been received, as the emphasis has been placed on the text, and particularly on the later poetry. Even Deleuze and Guattari, with all their emphasis on the body, tend to concentrate solely on Artaud's texts, and Derrida, whilst paying close attention to Artaud's drawings, for example, still reads these as if they were texts. In the US, then, the context was rather different, as it was Artaud's theatre writings which were initially to have the most impact, and these were translated and read by practitioners such as those associated with Black Mountain College, Instant Theatre, Living Theatre, the Happenings movement and the Beat generation, interested in how Artaud's gestures might be performed, reworked, integrated into new forms of corporeal dissidence. Whilst some French theorists were highly critical of the ways in which Artaud's work was being appropriated and mistranslated in the US, there was an equal abuse of Artaud's texts going on in France, arguably, where it formed the basis of critical theory to which they have a marked resistance. If in the North American context