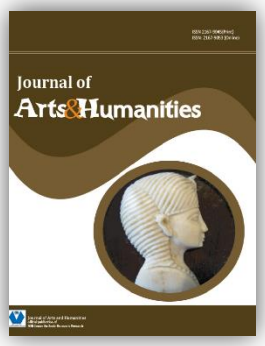

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En dire trop sur les Noirs? Contextualizing Genet's Preface to *Les Nègres*

Brian Gordon Kennelly[1]

ABSTRACT

What does the French playwright Jean Genet accomplish by rewriting the lengthy preface that he had prepared for his play *Les Nègres*? After discussing how the preface contextualizes the play, we consider for the first time the significance of the evolution of Genet's authorial intentions both at the microtextual and macrotextual levels by comparing the full-length preface with its shortened, reordered version. We show that in rewriting his preface Genet endeavored to be more ambiguous as well as to counterbalance the cuts he had also made in rewriting the play for which it was written.

Key words: Ambiguity, Drama, French literature, Jean Genet, Textual revision
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1.0 Introduction

To date very few scholars have examined the French dramatist Jean Genet's lengthy preface to his play *Les Nègres* in any substantial way. Edmund White (1994) finds it to be a "windy" (p. 274) introduction to a dramatic work that itself ironically "plays like the wind" (p. 434). Although in writing the preface

[1] Modern Languages and Literatures, California Polytechnic State University, USA. Email: bkennell@calpoly.edu

Genet might have been "[n]ourri de Sartre" Michel Corvin (2002b, p. 1208), by contrast, deems the text "absolument unique dans toute la production critique de Genet" (2002c, p. 1329). Carl Lavery, the only critic to draw "serious" attention to the preface (Bradby & Finbergh, 2012, p. 72), maintains that it provides additional evidence of Genet's continued interest in politics, aesthetics, and representation (2010, p. 19). What in addition does this posthumously published, if not "unfortunate" prefatory text (White, 1994, p. 274) by Genet reveal? We certainly learn more about artistic expression, about Genet's awareness of the politics of representation and reception. But how, other than by length, does Genet's full-length preface differ from the shortened, reordered version of it that had been published fourteen years before in *Les Nègres au port de la Lune*? Finally, how does the full preface anticipate the "little preface" to Genet's subversive *Les Nègres* which has since 1960 essentially upstaged it?

At the same time as providing a more complete context for the preface of Genet's play than has been provided by critics to date—building, for example, upon the work by Corvin and Lavery—we will argue that Genet's rewriting of his preface was not only an effort on the dramatist's part to be more ambiguous but importantly was also an attempt to counterbalance the cuts he had made to the play for which it was written. After reviewing the inspiration for and political context of *Les Nègres*, we will consider the structure and content of the play's preface in order to demonstrate first the extent to which it too usefully—if not overexplicitly—contextualizes *Les Nègres*. Next, we will demarcate differences between prefatory versions that so far have neither been noted nor discussed by Genetian critics. We will consider the significance both at the micro- and macrotextual levels of the evolution of Genet's authorial intentions. We will show how specifically Genet revised the preface in order to make it more oblique and "diversionary." As a consequence, we will argue that the revised preface and the deliberately disruptive "little preface" by Genet that has long been published in its place best be understood as "recuperative" in light of the revisions that the dramatist made to the play itself.

2.0 Background

Reportedly commissioned in the autumn of 1954 by the Belgian director Raymond Rouleau, who himself had been asked by a Black actor for a script that could be interpreted by Blacks, Genet began writing his polemic play, *Les Nègres*, in the mid-1950s. This was shortly after he had completed the first version of *Le Balcon* and at the same time that he was working on both « *Elle* » and *Les Paravents*. On 23 September 1955, he noted in a letter to his late publisher Marc Barbezat that he had corrected the proofs (1988b, p. 44). Yet in characteristically compulsive fashion, Genet continued to revise the play,[2] which at that time he tentitively titled *Foot-ball*, possibly evoking the white and black patches stitched side-to-side that blur when the ball is kicked (Bradby & Finbergh, 2012, p. 13). In May of the following year, Genet was still reworking the end, "toute la fin" (1988b, p. 52). The full play, ostensibly "la version *dé-fi-nitive*" (1988b, p. 153), finally appeared in print in 1958. But as it turns out, this would not be the definitive version after all; for the play—considered by Genet, as he revealed in a 1959 letter to his American translator Bernard Frechtman, to be "très mauvaise, gonflée, lourde, faite avec des mots et des phrases creuses [...] le type même de la fausse bonne pièce" (2002b, p. 930)—was to be revised at least one more time after its 1959 premiere at the Théâtre de Lutèce in Paris. As a result, it was republished in a different form the following year.[3]

[2] Each of the five plays by Genet that were performed before his death in 1986 exists in more than one published version: *Les Bonnes* (1947, 1954, and 1968); *Haute surveillance* (1949, 1965, 1968, and 1988); *Le Balcon* (1956, 1962, and 1968); *Les Nègres* (1958 and 1960); and *Les Paravents* (1961 and 1976). As Michel Corvin and Albert Dichy point out, Genet obsessively reworked his plays: "[il] s'est livré sans discontinuité à un travail de reprise, voire de réécriture de ses pièces, dont la trace apparaît tant dans les éditions multiples de telle ou telle d'entre elles que dans une masse de manuscrits qui étaient jusqu'à aujourd'hui demeurés, pour la plupart, totalement inconnus" (2002, pp. xcv-xcvi).

[3] Apparently still not satisfied with his work, Genet continued to tinker with it. In August 1961, he thus notes in a letter to Frechtman, "j'en suis encore à retravailler [...] *Les Nègres*" (2002b, p. 949). In fact, as late as 1983, the dramatist was still unhappy with his play's ending and therefore modified it once more. In an interview, Peter Stein, who directed *Les Nègres* in Germany that year, noted to Colette Godard: "J'ai vu Jean Genet. Il a assisté à une répétition, et a écrit pour nous une autre fin: vingt Noirs arrivent derrière les spectateurs. Les uns, sur le plateau, prennent des jumelles, les regardant, disent: 'Ils sont revenus.' Les autres jettent des sacs de jute où sont les ossements recueillis à Verdun, à Douaumont, dans le Transvaal. Les ossements des morts pour les Blancs sont de retour en terre africaine... Je ne pouvais pas faire cette fin: vingt comédiens de

As he had for his earlier play *Les Bonnes*, in 1955 Genet also wrote a preface for *Les Nègres*,[4] whose "context" has not yet fully been explored by critics and will be the focus of this article: the circumstances that inspired Genet to write, then rewrite it; as well as the significance of its changing structure and content. But unlike *Les Bonnes*' prefatory "Lettre à Jean-Jacques Pauvert, which had been published anthumously in 1954 with two versions of the play, the complete preface for *Les Nègres* was not published during Genet's lifetime. In its place, Genet offered two textual "fragments" (Ekotto, 2011, p. 90): one of three sentences in the 1958 version of the play; and the other, the same three sentences followed by seven new sentences, in the 1960 version of the play. In total, these ten prefatory sentences have served as the "pre-text" or "little preface" to *Les Nègres* (Boisseron & Ekotto, 2004, p. 103).

When Barbezat was asked in 1993 to shed more light on Genet's original preface to *Les Nègres*, which Barbezat had long kept from print, he was categoric in his refusal to do so. A much truncated version of Genet's original preface to *Les Nègres* had appeared in print in 1988 as "L'Art est le refuge…" But Genet's protective publisher had hidden the complete original preface from the public eye. Barbezat apparently believed that the dramatist had been unduly influenced when writing his preface by the style of Jean-Paul Sartre, whose "cancerous," "grotesquely verbose" (Sontag, 1966, p. 100) *Saint Genet: comédien et martyr* (1952) had oddly been published as the first volume of Genet's own *Œuvres complètes*. Barbezat was pressed to explain his decision not to share Genet's prefatory remarks to *Les Nègres*. He maintained that out of respect for the dramatist's own change of heart with regard their fate, they would never be published: "Genet a pris la décision de ne jamais publier l'introduction aux *Nègres* ; elle ne sera jamais publiée et vous pouvez considérer qu'elle n'existe pas" (Kennelly, 1998, p. 131). Three years after Barbezat's death in 1999, the original, long-suppressed, long-"inexistent" preface finally saw the light of day. It was published in its entirety in the 2002 Pléiade edition of Genet's *Théâtre complet*.[5]

3.0 Decolonisation and/as Inspiration

Why would Genet have chosen to write a play about Blacks? What do we know about the context of his play's creation? Gisèle Child-Olmsted suggests that Genet's knowledge of Black issues can be attributed to his close connection with Sartre. The celebrated philosopher and "blanc de qualité" (Julien, 1969, p. viii) had introduced Genet's œuvre to the public in his nearly 700-page opus. Moreover, he had in his own works played a crucial role in introducing Black writers to other European intellectuals (Child-Olmsted, 1995, p. 61). Examples include "Orphée noir," Sartre's influential preface to Léopold Sédar Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (1948), of which many of the observations read like a commentary on *Les Nègres* (Little, 1990, p. 18), and Sartre's preface to Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961).

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plus!" However Corvin notes in the "Notice" to the play that this manuscript of what is presumed to be the ultimate version of *Les Nègres* was not included in Stein's archives (2002b, p. 1200). Referring to the various extant versions of the play available for consulation by critics, Corvin summarizes: "En somme, le nombre et la variété de manuscrits et de pages dactylographiées dont nous disposons permettent de suivre, avec un degré de quasi-certitude, le cheminement créateur de Genet. Il en ressort que l'auteur n'a cessé d'enrichir son texte, d'en diversifier les points de vue, d'éviter les développements trop uniformes sur un seul thème. Il s'est surtout soucié d'ouvrir à son œuvre le champ le plus vaste du comique: de l'humour le plus délié à l'ironie cinglante et à la charge la plus grosse, il ne se refuse rien pour interdire au spectateur de prendre sa 'clownerie' au sérieux. Mais c'est moins par besoin de plaire à son public que par son désir de le piéger, en lui assenant les vérités les plus déplaisantes sous couvert de bouffoneries" (2002b, p. 1198).

[4] In his article on politics and betrayal in the preface, Carl Lavery refers to the text as being from 1956. By contrast, Michel Corvin dates the text as being from the end of 1955 (2002c, p. 1329). The preface was included with the the third manuscript version of *Les Nègres* that Genet sent to Barbezat (2002b, p. 1196).

[5] To recap, the full publication timeline is as follows : the first version of the play was published in 1958 with the first piece of the "pre-text" to *Les Nègres* (three sentences); the second version was published in 1960 with the first and second pieces of the "pre-text" to *Les Nègres* (ten sentences); the incomplete and reworked preface ("L'Art est le refuge...") was published in 1988 in *Les Nègres au port de la lune*; and the complete original preface ("Préface inédite des *Nègres*") was published in 2002 in the Pléiade edition of Genet's *Théâtre complet*.

Whatever Sartre's impact on Genet, the period during which Genet wrote *Les Nègres* was also politically charged. The 1930s had seen the emergence in the French capital of the literary and aesthetic movement of negritude, led by black writers such as Léopold Senghor (from Senegal) and Aimé Césaire (from Martinique). Its proponents sought to redefine race and power relations through the humanization, the existential, political, and cultural affirmation of the black subject. As Jeannette Savona explains, all blacks in the world—despite their superficial and geographical differences—had had to contend with the centuries-old "myth" of the Negro, which had been cultivated by white racism and had led to "identical" problems of oppression, discrimination, and exploitation. As such, feelings of shame and inferiority gave way in negritude writings to the "spirit of revolt and pride" (1983, p. 107). The 1950s were a decade marked by the Cold War and the humiliation for the French of the end of the war in Indochina. This was also a period during which French colonies in Africa—Cameroon, Bénin, Ivory Coast, and others—were pushing for their independence. As a result, the problem of decolonisation was a major concern. Together with Sartre, writers such as Albert Memmi denounced what they saw as colonialism's "fundamental injustice" (1983, p. 106). In the midst of this push for decolonisation was the election as *députés* of Césaire, Léon-Gontran Damas (from French Guiana), and Senghor to the French parliament, and which marked the emergence of a new political landscape in France. Race, it seemed, was finally being given a voice (Boisseron & Ekotto, 2004, p. 104).

During these heady years, Genet read several newspapers a day and discussed political events almost incessantly. Indeed, as his biographer notes, nothing seemed to interest the dramatist as much as international politics, questions of social oppression, and the promise of the collapse of what he saw to be the unjust and outmoded colonial system (White, 1994, pp. 424-5). As such, his play—which, as Raphaëlle Tchamitchian notes "interroge l'identité coloniale, trouble, insaisissable et contradictoire" (2013, p. 252)—can be placed right in the middle of the heated racial debates of the time, "s'insérait [...] de plain-pied—fût-ce à son corps défendant—dans les débats du jour" (Corvin, 2002b, p. 1211). Both a reflection on the aesthetic and political ideology that was prevalent among certain radical Caribbean and Black African Parisian groups (Child-Olmsted) and one of the "seminal" works laying the foundation for the discourse on the ever-complex relations between the history of French republicanism, empire, and racial difference, *Les Nègres* remains a "key" text in the history of postwar France anticolonial literature (Ekotto, 2011, p. xix).[6] White points out that Genet blended his obsession with politics and a "resolute aestheticism" in his play in order to produce in *Les Nègres* "an intense negation, a charged vacuum" (1994, p. 425). Moreover, the genius of Genet in writing his play was as Child-Olmsted puts it, to give "violent poetic expression" to these revolutionary concerns (1995, p. 61). Situating the explosive play between *Les Bonnes* and *Le Balcon*, Corvin writes:

> Genet montre que les Noirs, comme les bonnes, ne sont que la mauvaise odeur des Blancs, leur envers dégradé, voué au mépris et à l'esclavage. Les Noirs devenus Nègres ont intégré cette image d'eux-mêmes que leur renvoient les Blancs et ils ne peuvent se voir qu'à travers des yeux qui les aliènent. Cette idée-là vient des *Bonnes*, comme émane du *Balcon* l'idée que la réalité du Nègre est celle d'une image, d'un reflet" (2002b, p. 1208).

Despite its parallels with historical events, however, Genet's play is presented neither as true nor realistic. On the contrary, Lavery explains, Genet is at pains to demonstrate that the victory of the Blacks over their White adversaries in the play is confined to the stage and has no independent reality outside the boundaries of the text. Now while the drama is perhaps not a "documentary" account of anti-colonial revolution (1996, p. 314), it is believed nonetheless that *Les Maîtres fous*, the 1954 documentary film by Jean Rouch, served as the inspiration for *Les Nègres*.[7] Difficult to summarize due to

[6] Other works of note from the period include: Jacques Roumain's *Bois d'ébène* (1945); Damas' *Première anthologie des poètes d'outre-mer* (1947); Césaire's *Soleil cou coupé* (1948) and *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950); Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952); and Memmi's *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du Portrait du colonisateur* (1957). The acute importance of aesthetics and politics both in Genet's own works and in the performing arts in general is eloquently captured in the texts and interviews of Genet's *L'Ennemi déclaré* (1991) and in *Un Captif amoureux* (1986).

[7] Yet according to Claude Sarraute, Genet did not see Rouch's film until after he had written *Les Nègres*: "[Il] avait déjà publié sa pièce quand il vit ce beau film retraçant des faits analogues à ceux qu'il venait de porter à la scène" (1959, p. 13).

its typically Genetian obliqueness, but also intended to rehearse "le délire jugulé [...] qui se cabre" (2002b, p. 936), in Genet's play a mock trial or ritual clown show takes place on-stage, a real trial, or political tale unfolds off-stage, and a romance blossoms between a pair of off-stage characters. Whereas in Rouch's film, as summarized by White, members of the Black urban proletariat of the Ghanaian capital celebrate a ritual, enter into a trance, and perform an exorcism in the bush on the outskirts of Accra.

Sartre's former secretary, Jean Cau began his 1958 article about *Les Nègres* by describing the central mechanism of both Rouch's filmed reportage and Genet's play—Blacks who impersonate Whites in order to re-enact a crime:

> Dans une clairière de forêt vierge, des nègres font les Blancs. L'un est le Gouverneur, l'autre le Général, tel autre la Femme-du-docteur, tel autre enfin la Locomotive qui, bien qu'étant un engin mécanique, est supposée appartenir à juste titre — à juste titre « poétique » — à la race blanche. Étonné, le spectateur croit assister à un jeu. Mal à l'aise, il s'aperçoit bientôt que ce jeu est une cérémonie qui comporte un sacrifice. En effet, les nègres tuent un chien, animal que leur secte entre tous révère et commettent ainsi le plus sacrilège des actes. Par ce crime, les voilà maintenant exilés dans leur couleur, les voilà nègres jusqu'à s'être damnés à force de l'être, les voilà prêts à irréaliser, c'est-à-dire à réaliser jusqu'à sa vérité la plus absolue, le monde des Blancs (pp. 24-5).

While Genet also draws in his plays on devices he had already used in his earlier-written plays *Les Bonnes*, *Splendid's*,[8] and *Le Balcon*, such as dressing up, impersonation, and playacting, Cau's description of Rouch's film fits Genet's play quite well, as White notes. Genet recognized his debt to Rouch. He requested of Frechtman that as clear as possible a parallel between his play and *Les Maîtres fous* be established in the introductory summary he hoped Frechtman would write for the English translation of *Les Nègres*: "Plein de développements, de rapports, d'analogies sont possibles. Montrez-les. Mais dites-vous bien que tout ce théâtre d'exorcismes est déjà mort. Oublié" (2002b, p. 913). Although Frechtman never wrote the summary to which Genet alludes,[9] the dramatist's own prefatory text, available after long last, provides useful additional context for the genesis of the dramatist's multi-layered (Connon, 1996, p. 428) *clownerie*, and which of all Genet's dramas probably treats racism and colonialism the most "frontally" (Bradby & Finbergh, 2012, p. 13).

4.0 Structure and Content

What does Genet actually say in his preface? And how does he say it? He begins the preface with a question. He thereby establishes from the start the interrogative mode that characterizes much of its rhetoric. What will become of *Les Nègres*, he wonders, once the relationship between Whites and Blacks is no longer antagonistic, "quand entre les uns et les autres se tendront des liens d'hommes" Without the contempt, disgust, powerless rage, indeed hatred that in the mid-twentieth century seem still to characterize interracial relations, *Les Nègres* will, he believes, one day surely be forgotten. A similar rhetorical question is used by Genet to set up his second paragraph. But here he moves from the hopeful future tense that we see in the first ("Que deviendra") to the conditional mode ("Quel ton prendrait"). How, Genet asks further, might a Negro[10] address a white audience? For if Genet himself

[8] *Splendid's* was published posthumously in 1993.

[9] In a letter of November 1959, Genet writes: "Pour la réédition des *Nègres*, voulez-vous demander à Blin s'il accepterait de faire un résumé rapide de sa mise en scène, qui serait joint au texte à la fin. J'en serais très content. S'il ne veut pas, accepteriez-vous de le faire? En demandant une somme à Barbezat! Moi je l'aurais fait si j'avais vu le spectacle" (2002b, p. 932). However, neither Blin nor Frechtman accepted. As a result—without having seen Blin's production of the play and having to rely on photographs and drama reviews—Genet wrote his short "Pour jouer *Les Nègres*." Yet in it, no mention is made of Rouch's film.

[10] This is Genet's own choice of words. As Graham Dunstan Martin and others have noted, *The Blacks*, the English title for Genet's play, is actually a mistranslation (1975, p. 517). White, for example, explains that Frechtman chose *The Blacks* at at a time when the term 'Negroes' was still being used by African Americans, for whom the term 'Blacks' was considered

might know what to say and how to say it to an individual black person, he would be hard pressed, he claims, not to seem distantly paternalistic (1991c, p. 50) when addressing an audience of Blacks and would therefore try his best to avoid such a situation: "si je devais m'adresser à un public de Noirs, je me récuserais" (p. 835). Referring to Césaire's neologism from the 1930s[11] both to describe the new black literary movement in French and defiantly, if not violently to affirm a previously shameful noun (White, 1994, p. 435), Genet adds that it would be impossible for him not to feel that he is somehow talking down to them, to have "le sentiment que la Blancheur veut parler à la Négritude" (p. 835).

Having in the first part of his preface's second paragraph thus established that true "dialogue" in such a context would be impossible and that the person accepting such a premise would be foolhardy, Genet proposes drama as a means for exchange. He asserts that art through theater, which does not address the rational faculties of human beings, is the true avenue for mutual understanding and self-expression. Because theatrical expression is a poetic act and not a speech or rant, "[qui] veut s'imposer comme un impératif catégorique devant quoi, sans cependant capituler, la raison se met en veilleuse," it should as a result liberate, empower, and engage. However, just as quickly as Genet privileges the stage as a space for positive change and exchange, in the next paragraphs in which he offers a version of the genesis of *Les Nègres*, he seems to undercut this premise of understanding and exchange arrived at through artistic expression. Less an aesthetic celebration of "l'expression unique qui serait entendue par tous les hommes," the subversive play that Genet claims to have written for a Belgian director's troupe of black actors is intended rather to snub its audience. Indeed, it should catch the audience members off-guard:

Vers le mois de décembre dernier, Raymond Rouleau me fit part de son intention de mettre au point une troupe théâtrale qui ne se composerait que de Noirs. Je connais mal ses raisons. A vrai dire je m'en préoccupai assez peu, croyant deviner qu'il voyait en eux d'admirables objects scéniques jusqu'à ce jour inemployés en Europe. Quand il me demanda d'écrire une pièce pour sa troupe j'acceptai.

« Oui, me dis-je, les Noirs joueront. Mais ils organiseront un spectacle qui sera un camouflet pour les spectateurs »

Genet then builds on the momentum of point and counterpoint that he has established in discussing the purported genesis of his own dramatic work. He lambastes the ballets of Katherine Dunham, one of the primary Afro-American concert dance "trend setters" of the time (Clark, 1982, p. 147), thereby echoing his negative opinion, shared in writing with Frechtman, that they are "de la merde" (2002b, p. 930). This he does in order to explain both what he has earnestly resisted in writing his play, "l'exemple qu'il ne fallait pas suivre, contre lequel il fallait lutter" (p. 836), and as a means ultimately to criticize the inherent betrayal in what he deems to be the seductive exhibitionism of Dunham's performers. Now the Blacks who danced for Dunham's "anthropological" (Strom, 2010, p. 285) composites of actual dance rituals with fiction (Clark, 1982, p. 148) might be irreproachable from the point of view of the aesthetics of music hall. But as they had to some of the renowned dance reviewers of the time, who reportedly found it difficult to reconcile their conflicting responses to Dunham's work—which too often mixed folk culture with theatricalizing tendencies (Clark, 1982, p. 147) and thus did not represent regional dances in purely "documentary" or authentic form (Clark, 1994, p. 191)—in Genet's eyes these

pejorative. Frechtman favored his title, which he felt had "bite" over the more "polite and flabby" *The Negroes*, or the potentially "suicidal," albeit more accurate "Niggers" (1994, p. 435).

[11] This noun is repeated by characters in the play itself. Césaire's famous line from *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939)--"Ma négritude n'est pas une taie d'eau morte sur l'œil mort de la terre"—is parodied in Village's "Notre couleur n'est pas une tache de vinasse qui déchire un visage, notre visage n'est pas un chacal qui dévore ceux qu'il regarde..." (Genet, 2002a, pp. 497-8). As Keith Q. Warner also observes, Diouf's "Je voudrais exalter ma couleur" (Genet, 2002a, p. 492) "appears in concept if not in the same words in a fair number of the black writers, both those who identified with the negritude banner and those who did not" (1983, p. 411). Lavery (2010, p. 146) and Janet Patricia Little (1990, p. 74), for their parts, note the resonances of negritude poetry in the great speech in the middle of the play by Félicité, "la contre-Reine, la Mère Afrique" (Corvin, 2002b, p. 1197). It is a ritualized expression of blackness which does not descend into cliché and avoids the negativity of evocations of the 'Nègre' seen through the eyes of the white world.

black performers seemed entirely disconnected from the ordeal of a non-white world. Further revealing his sensitivity to the politics of representation and reception, Genet wonders what on stage Dunham's black performers showed. From which sovereign empire did they come? Of what were they the ambassadors? Completely decontextualized, he maintains, they surely appeared unreal, if not ectoplasmic:

Pâles, décolorés, ils émanaient d'un monde sans pouvoir terrestre, sans racines, sans douleur, sans larmes, et qui ne veut pas en avoir, d'un monde d'ectoplasmes qui refuse de tenter sa réalisation. Jamais par eux nous ne connûmes le malheur d'un monde nègre qui toujours plus s'irréalise. Ni ses rages, ni ses misères, ses colères, ni ses peurs.

Rather than communicate their true misery and despair, Dunham's performers reassured their audiences of everything the audience members already knew—or thought they knew—of life and of the entire black population. In the performers' *joie de vivre*, their on-stage trading in negrophilia, their offering of blackness as a mere spectacle for consumption (Lavery, 2010, p. 144), these stylized Blacks ultimately betrayed themselves and everyone else. Although he does not directly advocate violence, Genet suggests here that rather than responding to the enmity and the contempt of the white audience with a smile and abundance of talent, Dunham's inoffensive performers might instead have allowed revolt to color their decorum, their poor and pitiful art, which was "né dans l'humiliation, la domestication, et qui refuse de rendre compte de la misère" (p. 836).

As Genet states at the beginning of his preface's eighth paragraph, art is the slave's least dishonorable refuge. It ought not be wasted and ought not only amuse, as in the Dunham performances. Instead, an artistic work should incite active revolt. It should furthermore introduce doubt and unease into the soul of the oppressor—which in this case is the white spectator. Alluding to the Mau Mau uprising that had taken place in Kenya in the 1950s, Genet asks whether one would dare imagine the Kikuyus as strolling players. Would they, for instance, seek to charm their British oppressors with dances before returning to the stage to take a bow?

Oui, peut-être par des danses lascives qui amolliraient et réduiraient plus facilement à merci l'oppresseur apoplectique, non pour être applaudis de lui [...] Pour entraîner avec eux dans la révolte d'autres tribus, ils montent peut-être des spectacles de propagande, mais alors quels sublimes prétextes écrivent-ils dont nous ne saisirons ni le sens ni la beauté formelle puisqu'ils ne s'adressent pas à nous? (p. 837)

These examples and counter-examples not only serve as an aesthetic and political scaffolding for Genet's preface, but the dramatist also uses them as the cumulative logic for why he did not write a play intended to provoke a black revolt. With the transition "donc" in the middle of the first sentence of the ninth paragraph, he deftly ties these examples to his own intentions. Here he turns his attention back to the play for which his text was intended to serve as the preface: "La pièce que vous lirez n'a donc pas pour but d'inciter les Noirs à la révolte" (p. 837). For a white conscience to incite revolt on the part of Blacks would, Genet believes, be impossible in a work of art. Anticipating the question of audience, and which he will take up again at the end of his preface, Genet notes that *Les Nègres* has not been written *for* Blacks at all. For a member of the white community to have written *for* Blacks would, after all, be tantamount to paternalism, "cette abjection morale qui consiste à se pencher généreusement avec compréhension, vers les faibles, à s'accorder bonne conscience, à se tenir quitte de toute action efficace" (p. 838). He insists that Blacks ultimately need to win their freedom themselves, without the aid of people of other races. Moreover, Genet cautions that in enthusiastically embracing magnanimous causes, in rescuing Blacks from the shackles of colonialism for instance, Whites run the risk of complacency, of self-satisfaction. Yet this is not to say that Whites should systematically refuse to aid the oppressed. But such aid would be lent in vain, Genet believes, were it not coupled with efforts to transform the reassuring and charming image of the oppressed person reduced to servility and with attempts to thwart the hegemonic power of the oppressors. Thus he

writes: "elle serait vaine si, dans le même temps, l'on ne s'employait contre la puissance dominatrice qu'on sert, dont on bénéficie, dont on participe; c'est-à-dire contre soi-même" (p. 838).

If as a white man, Genet could not incite revolt among the Blacks by writing a play in which they perform all the parts, what then could he do? He provides the answer in the short eleventh paragraph of the preface which importantly also marks a transition between this questioning of agency and Genet's subsequent discussion of the power and limits of representation. At best, he could try and "wound" the Whites. He could as a result introduce doubt into their minds. In short, he could provoke in their consciousness a sudden transformation of the world (Lavery, 2006, p. 73). As a consequence, he could disrupt the ontological foundations of their subjectivity (Lavery, 2010, p. 93). Thus Genet imagined *Les Nègres* as a play in which a scandalous act would undermine the self-assuredness of the white audience members, "les fasse s'interroger, les inquiète, et relativement à ce problème vrai qui ne cause en leur âme aucun conflit" (p. 838).

Just as Rouleau's invitation to Genet to write a play for his troupe of Black actors ostensibly prompted the dramatist to write *Les Nègres*, an eighteenth-century music box on which four liveried clockwork Blacks were bowing before a little white porcelain princess purportedly provided the dramatist his play's starting point, or "déclic"—and *not* Rouch's documentary film.[12] Although the visual image immediately recalls what Genet imagined for the opening scene of the play, with the Blacks in evening dress dancing a minuet around what the audience supposes to be a white woman's corpse (Little, 1990, p. 16), in his preface's twelfth paragraph, Genet observes that it would be impossible to imagine a modern-day replica of this scene in the real world in which the roles played by these obscure characters—"laquais soumis, rieurs et sournois," and which have been accepted into the imagery of our civilization—were reversed. Because four white servants would surely never bow before a black princess, Genet concludes that nothing about race relations has changed.

With the assertion in the thirteenth paragraph of his preface that for Whites these stylized and soulless figures exist purely in the representational mode, "sont juste l'Afrique en ceci qu'ils symbolisent l'état dans lequel notre imagination se délecte à les amener, à les fixer" in the remaining prefatory paragraphs Genet moves to broaden the scope of his discussion. In the final section of the preface, he therefore broaches questions that range from perception to experience, from seduction to colonization, from humiliation to transcendence. If Blacks can be imagined by even the most obtuse Europeans in their abject poverty and enslavement, they are ultimately viewed by Whites as inferior. Like the servants in theatrical comedies, Blacks are seen as cowardly, lying, shifty, lazy, and naïve, or as Neige—referring to Village in Genet's play itself—delineates as "balafre, puant, lippu, camus, mangeur, bouffeur, bâfreur de Blancs et de toutes les couleurs, bavant, suant, rotant, crachant, baiseur de boucs, toussant, pétant, lécheur de pieds blancs, feignant, malade, dégoulinant d'huile et de sueur, flasque et soumis" (2002a, p. 89). They are deemed incapable of intellectual reflection, "comme du bétail, comme un cheptel qui doit rendre" (pp. 839, 840). In the eyes of Whites, Blacks therefore lack the capacity to persuade. They are little more than de-realized actors, seductive buffoons. Inherently theatricalized (Lavery, 2006, p. 70), "de précis fantômes nés de notre désir" (p. 841), Blacks are in fact always "playing." But what happens inside their heads, Genet asks? Do they have hopes and dreams? And must they exalt their "blackness"?

[12] Jean-Bernard Moraly believes rather that Michel de Ghelderode's *L'Ecole des Bouffons* (1942) was the real impetus, "la véritable source" for Genet's play (2009, p. 110). Elsewhere, Moraly has also suggested that an unusual scene from an earlier version of Genet's *Le Balcon* was a source for the play. Genet ostensibly told Moraly in an interview that he had used the figure of a black man disguised as a White in order to humiliate a white woman made up as a Black. Because the idea seemed so full of potential, Genet removed it from *Le Balcon* in order to develop it into a complete play. Little notes: "If this is so, then the idea has gained immeasurably by its development from what seems to have been portrayed as a private sexual fantasy to something of much broader and more universal significance" (1990, p. 17). But as we caution in our study of the various lists of works announced as forthcoming by Genet, what the dramatist said about his texts, "a stage for [the] rumor [that] shaped the history and/or stories of Genet's theater," should be viewed with skepticism (1995, p. 467).

Despite the dramatist's personal baggage of his being at once a homosexual, thief, outcast, "humilié" (p. 841), as a white man Genet cannot possibly provide answers to these and the many other questions he provocatively raises in his text. Similarly, he cannot act as a spokesperson for Blacks—one in a long line of underdogs, victims, and outcasts put on the stage by Genet in his theater (Martin, 1975, p. 517)—neither in, through his play, nor by any other means. Recognizing his limits, he concludes the preface by reiterating what he has tried to do in writing *Les Nègres*. But in so doing, he also imagines the possibilities to which his play—written not *for* Blacks but *against* Whites—might ultimately give rise. At the very least, Genet hopes, his drama might spur a magnanimous, liberating work of art and through its disruptiveness continue to inspire others.

5.0 Revisions and Differences

Why did Genet rewrite the preface? No matter how earnestly Genet may argue the many points he makes in the preface, the text as a whole has been criticized by the few who have discussed it to date as overly "explicit" (Moraly, 2009, p. 105), "obscure" (Lavery, 2006, p. 69), and "consciously abstruse" (Finburgh, 2010, p. 227). It certainly does not "dire d'une façon simple des choses difficiles," as Genet claimed to Frechtman he always tried to do as an "unexceptional" writer (2002b, p. 949). Instead, Corvin explains, here in his excessive "didacticism" (2002c, p. 1329) Genet gives too much away, "ne peut s'empêcher [...] d'en dire trop sur les Noirs" (2002c, p. 1332). This surely explains why Genet felt the need to return to the preface in order to revise, shorten, and reorder it. In so doing, Corvin surmises, the dramatist fully intended to salvage parts of his meandering text:

> Sans doute Genet, auteur de cette sélection, avait-il l'intention de récupérer des morceaux d'une préface qu'il avait refusé d'utiliser, tant lors de la première édition de sa pièce en 1958 que lors de la deuxiéme en 1960 (2002c, p. 1329).

Although, as Sylvie Chalaye observes, the original preface to *Les Nègres* was at one point slated to appear in the 1963 edition of the play, it evolved like the play itself and exists in several versions. The first is the one we have just discussed; constituting twenty-six-paragraphs, it is archived in the Fonds Genet of the Institut Mémoires de l'Edition Contemporaine in France. Also stored at IMEC, the second is a more recent version in which Genet apparently edited out about three quarters of the text. The third version of Genet's preface is the reworked nine-paragraph "montage" of it that was published in 1988 as "L'Art est le refuge..." In some cases entire paragraphs have been excised, while others have been preserved, reordered, or only parts of them retained. How more specifically do the two versions of the preface that have been published differ? What does Genet's reworking of his text furthermore suggest about how his authorial intentions evolved? What did he accomplish in rewriting it? And do the changes have wider implications?

In order, the nine paragraphs of "L'Art est le refuge..." are made up of the following components from the original preface, published as the "Préface inédite des *Nègres*": part of Paragraph 8 has become Paragraph 1; part of Paragraph 25 has become Paragraph 2; Paragraph 26 has become Paragraph 3; Paragraph 6 has become Paragraph 4; a later part of Paragraph 8 has become Paragraph 5; Paragraph 12 has become Paragraph 6; part of Paragraph 19 has become Paragraph 7; Paragraph 21 has become Paragraph 8; and Paragraph 10 has become Paragraph 9.

In addition to the reduction in length, from twenty-six to nine paragraphs, Corvin—notably the only critic to date to have compared versions of the preface—points to a punctuational difference between the published versions. This, Corvin observes, further implicates Genet in his play, "dans la coloration revendicatrice de la pièce" (2002c, p. 1329). In the second sentence of Genet's final paragraph ("J'y manifesterais encore le ressentiment d'un homme qui fut condamné à l'humiliation et au désespoir?"), the question mark gets edited out. The meaning of this sentence is further altered in the shift Corvin notes from the conditional mood ("J'y manifesterais") to the future tense ("J'y manifesterai") as the sentence appears published in the version in *Les Nègres au port de la Lune*. This difference, as well as

other differences between the two published versions of the text that are not mentioned by Corvin and which have escaped critical notice, reflect the following: changes made as a result of textual excision (Paragraphs 19 to 7 and Paragraphs 6 to 4); changes in number (Paragraphs 6 to 4); changes in agreement (Paragraphs 6 to 4); changes in person (Paragraphs 26 to 3); changes impacting meaning (Paragraphs 6 to 4); punctuational changes (Paragraphs 8 to 5; Paragraphs 26 to 3; Paragraphs 25 to 2; Paragraphs 10 to 9; and Paragraphs 21 to 8); changes in tense or mood (Paragraphs 8 to 5 and Paragraphs 26 to 3); and changes in capitalization (Paragraphs 25 to 2). They are all detailed for reference below:

"Préface inédite des *Nègres*"	**"L'Art est le refuge…"**
Paragraph 6	*Paragraph 4*
On se souvient encore de ses ballets. (line 43)	On se souvient sans doute encore des ballets de Catherine [*sic*] Dunham? (lines 30-31)
J'étais gêné, et jusqu'au malaise, par des Noirs athlétiques qui acceptaient de proposer au public—américain d'abord—un divertissement qui le comblerait, dans lequel ils apparaîtraient débordant de talent, d'adresse, de beauté, et tels afin de se présenter en postures inoffensives, quand leur serait refusée la simple audace de frôler du coude un citoyen Yankee. Non seulement jamais leur spectacle ne nous insultait, jamais n'y apparaissait leur misère ni leur désespoir, mais tout chantait ce qu'on nomme la joie de vivre et nous consolait bassement de tout ce que nous savons de la vie et de toute la population noire en nous disant que rien ne devait les blesser profondément puisque leur joie était si fraîche. (lines 53-65)	J'étais gêné, et jusqu'au malaise, par des Noirs athlétiques qui acceptaient de proposer au public—américain d'abord—un divertissement qui le comblerait, dans lequel ils apparaîtraient débordant de talent, d'adresse, de beauté, et tels afin de se présenter en posture inoffensive, quand leur serait refusée la simple audace de frôler du coude un citoyen Yankee. Non seulement jamais leur spectacle ne nous insultait, jamais n'y apparaissaient leur misère ni leur désespoir, mais tout chantait ce qu'on nomme la joie de vivre et nous consolait bassement de tout ce que nous savons de la vie de toute la population noire en nous disant que rien ne devait les blesser profondément puisque leur joie était si fraîche. (lines 40-51)
Paragraph 8	*Paragraph 5*
Oserions-nous les imaginer à l'état de baladins revenant saluer, perdant ainsi leur âme, leur sévérité, leur violence? Pour entraîner avec eux dans la révolte d'autres tribus, ils montent peut-être des spectacles de propagande, mais alors quels sublimes prétextes écrivent-ils dont nous ne saisirons ni le sens ni la beauté formelle puisqu'ils ne s'adressent pas à nous ? (lines 100-106)	Oserions-nous les imaginer à l'état de baladins revenant saluer, perdant ainsi leur âme, leur sévérité, leur violence. Pour entraîner avec eux dans la révolte d'autres tribus, ils montent peut-être des spectacles de propagande, mais alors quels sublimes prétextes écrivent-ils dont nous ne saisirions ni le sens ni la beauté formelle puisqu'ils ne s'adressent pas à nous ? (lines 64-69)
Paragraph 10	*Paragraph 9*
S'il ne s'en délecte pas, l'oppresseur n'écarte pas facilement de lui l'image d'un opprimé réduit à la servilité — à quoi donc servirait l'oppression, sinon à lui donner de lui-même une idée de force par la faiblesse de ceux qui reconnaissent et vénèrent cette force—, cette image à la fois le rassure et le charme. (lines 137-142)	S'il ne s'en délecte pas, l'oppresseur n'écarte pas facilement de lui l'image d'un opprimé réduit à la servilité, — à quoi donc servirait l'oppression, sinon à lui donner de lui-même une idée de force par la faiblesse de ceux qui reconnaissent et vénèrent cette force—, cette image à la fois le rassure et le charme. (lines 101-105)
Paragraph 19	*Paragraph 7*

Qu'ai-je dit d'autre que ceci : quand nous voyons les Nègres, voyons-nous autre chose que de précis et sombres fantômes nés de notre désir ? (lines 243-245)	Quand nous voyons les Nègres, voyons-nous autre chose que de précis et sombres fantômes nés de notre désir ? (lines 87-88)
Paragraph 21	*Paragraph 8*
C'est dans ma propre langue que je m'exprime, c'est sur elle que je veux agir, et c'est d'elle que j'attends les images, les métaphores qui me serviront à définir les Noirs qui, dans le secret de leur âme, se cherchent, se poursuivent à l'aide de métaphores qui feront d'eux ce que j'ignore. (lines 259-263)	C'est dans ma propre langue que je m'exprime, c'est sur elle que je veux agir, et c'est d'elle que j'attends les images, les métaphores qui me serviront à définir les Noirs qui, dans le secret de leur âme se cherchent, se poursuivent à l'aide de métaphores qui feront d'eux ce que j'ignore. (lines 90-94)
Paragraph 25	*Paragraph 2*
Qu'est-ce donc que cette négritude que je n'ai pas vécue, dont ne se rendra jamais compte l'intuition ? (lines 310-312)	Qu'est-ce donc que cette Négritude que je n'ai pas vécue, dont ne se rendra jamais compte l'intuition ? (lines 7-8)
L'humiliation vécue jusqu'au désespoir par un individu peut se dépasser dans l'œuvre d'art. (lines 314-315)	L'humiliation vécue jusqu'au désespoir, par un individu, peut se dépasser dans l'œuvre d'art. (lines 10-11)
Le désespoir dépassé dans l'œuvre d'art ne permettrait le triomphe que de quelques individus qui, de la sorte, s'évaderaient de la collectivité opprimée, sans bénéfice pour elle qui ne gagnera son salut que par la révolte effective, dans le domaine des faits réels. (lines 319-324)	Le désespoir dépassé dans l'œuvre d'art ne permettrait le triomphe que de quelques individus qui, de la sorte, s'évaderaient de la collectivité opprimée, sans bénéfice pour elle, qui ne gagnera son salut que par la révolte effective, dans le domaine des faits réels. (lines 15-19)
Paragraph 26	*Paragraph 3*
J'y manifesterais encore le ressentiment d'un homme qui fut condamné à l'humiliation et au désespoir ? (lines 326-327)	J'y manifesterai encore le ressentiment d'un homme qui fut condamné à l'humiliation et au désespoir. (lines 21-22)
Mais ne disons pas d'abord trop de mal de la méchanceté, ou plutôt de la cruauté—si c'est contre moi qu'elle s'exerce. En tous les cas, elle a ceci pour elle : plus sûrement qu'un sentiment généreux, elle peut être à l'origine d'une œuvre d'art généreuse, car elle aura tendance à se poursuivre dans l'imaginaire. (lines 329-335)	Mais ne disons pas d'abord trop de mal de la méchanceté, ou plutôt de la cruauté—si c'est contre soi qu'elle s'exerce. En tous les cas, elle a ceci pour elle : plus sûrement qu'un sentiment généreux elle peut être à l'origine d'une œuvre d'art généreuse, car elle aura tendance à se poursuivre dans l'imaginaire. (lines 24-29)

But are these microtextual changes significant? While the addition of commas or the changes made as a result of textual excision, agreement, capitalization, and number might make parts of Genet's preface more readable and can be considered minor, other changes are more meaningful. By removing the conjunction "et" in Paragraph 4 of "L'Art est le refuge…", for example, Genet more tightly focuses his

text. Deploring the artificiality and disingenuousness of Dunham's performers in both versions of the preface, in the first version the Blacks reassure the audience of everything its members know both of life and of the entire black population. By contrast, in the revised version the *joie de vivre* with which these origin-less performers sing more manageably confirms for the audience everything its members know or think they know of the black population alone. Stated as such, it is less general, more appropriately focused on the audience's knowledge of the Black population. Likewise, the change from the future tense ("saisirons") to the conditional mode ("saisirions") in Paragraph 5 of the reworked text renders this section less pessimistic than in the original. If, in the first version, neither the meaning nor formal beauty of the subtle disguises used by the imagined Kikuyus will be grasped by the white oppressors, in the later version the use of the conditional mode at least opens up the possibility that this meaning and beauty might be grasped were conditions among them somehow different. By contrast, the change from the conditional mode ("manifesterais") to the future tense ("manifesterai") and the removal of the question mark in Paragraph 3 of the shortened text suggest a bitterness that is more tempered in the first version than in the second. Genet wonders whether in the play he would still show the resentment of a man who was condemned to humiliation and despair in the first version. But in the second version the evidence of this resentment is more categoric, more definitive. And in the change from the first-person ("moi") to the third-person tonic pronoun ("soi") in this same paragraph, Genet makes his text more universal: here, the nastiness, or cruelty is exerted not against Genet himself but against the less specific or universal "one."

The macrotextual changes between versions of the preface are certainly more significant and impactful. The changes at the microtextual level, and which make certain parts of the preface more readable, can be coupled with the more noticeable changes the dramatist made at the macrotextual level and where his excising and reordering further alter the meaning of his text. By contrast, they render less readable, less explicit what Corvin aptly notes is the "sérieux," "argumentaire serré," "netteté" and "lucidité" of Genet's political engagement in the preface: "La version abrégée qui parut dans *Les Nègres au port de la Lune*, bien qu'elle bouleverse l'ordre des paragraphes [...] brouille la progression et les nuances de l'argumentation [....]" (2002c, pp. 1329, 1330). Gone, for example, are the rhetorical questions by which Genet opens his original preface. Also stripped from the longer version are its most readable, understandable, and useful components: his account of the play's genesis; his insistence that minorities fight for their own freedoms; his apt description of the seductiveness of Blacks as play actors in the world of Whites; and any reference to his own otherness as societal outcast. Yet the most striking omission in this pared-down version of the preface is the key transitional paragraph between Genet's questioning of agency and his subsequent discussion of the power and limits of representation, in which he privileges the idea of the "wound" as introducing doubt into the minds of the spectators, "les [font] s'interroger, les inquiète" (p. 858), and which can free the subject from the "prison house" of language, the "fetters" of discourse, and is, as Lavery rightly notes, "central" to Genet's understanding of the world from the 1950s onwards (2006, p. 74). As such, Genet's reordered "L'Art est le refuge..." is far more impressionistic and less tightly argued overall than the original text. It is also more striking, disarming, if not significant for the disruptiveness—or near absence—of its logic.

For Corvin, the uncharacteristic explicitness of Genet's original preface can be explained by timing. He believes that when writing the text the dramatist was out of synch with his own ambiguous dramatic aesthetic, which was, Genet claimed to Madeleine Gobeil, to "cristalliser une émotion théâtrale et dramatique," "faire entendre [...] tous les êtres aliénés" (1991a, p. 23):

> En 1955-1956, dans sa préface, Genet était sans doute parfaitement d'accord avec lui-même comme homme—y compris dans ses contradictions—mais, en avance, pour ainsi dire, sur lui-même comme auteur dramatique dont l'esthétique exigeait alors davantage de détours et d'ambiguïté (2002c, p. 1330).

In a later interview, Genet defines the form of committed theater that he had set out to develop since *Les Bonnes* in terms of political obliqueness:

[...] toutes mes pièces à commencer par *Les Bonnes* jusqu'aux *Paravents* sont quand même, d'une certaine façon—du moins j'ai la faiblesse de le croire—tout de même un peu politiques, dans ce sens qu'elles abordent la politique obliquement [...] Aborder les situations sociales qui provoqueront une politique (1991b, pp. 284-5).

Just as his plays are at their most political when they avoid dealing with contemporary reality directly, in avoiding here to deal with the content of his play directly, or in a "straightforward" and "frontal" manner (Lavery, 2010, p. 85) in his revised preface, Genet renders it more ambiguous. While it appears to set up the play, in its obliqueness—political or otherwise—it actually punctures the realm of appearances and significantly reveals—or privileges—emptiness, in much the same way as the play itself can be considered distinctive for its "architecture de vide et de mots" (Genet, 2002a, p. 541). Like the characters portrayed in Genet's play itself, the revised text is thus diversionary, a misleading front for a preface, and ultimately not very helpful or revealing for readers wanting better to understand Genet's intentions in the play.

But in the spirit of this deliberate ambiguity, Genet's reordering and cutting up of his text can also importantly be understood as a recuperative gesture. As we have already noted—and as he did for each of the plays performed before his death in 1986—Genet did rewrite the play for which it was intended as a preface. Yet besides various peripheral changes, only four short sequences differ between the first and second published versions of *Les Nègres*. As we argue in our comparative study of the play, the cuts Genet made to these "seemingly superficial" sequences (1998, p. 126) were notably quite significant. They served to render the play *less* ambiguous in its revised version: by eliminating from *Les Nègres* some of the questions they might have raised; by removing some of the mystery surrounding the backstage action, the judgment at hand off-stage left; and by lessening the potential upset, confusion, and threat of the audience (p. 131). Having in sections enhanced the clarity of his drama between its first and second versions, by reordering and cutting his bloated preface to *Les Nègres*, Genet was actually more in line with the detours and ambiguity of his dramatic aesthetic. Lavery notes that at the same time that the black review show made black identity "knowable, locatable and consumable," White audiences were thereby seemingly able to "cross" the color divide, "to experience the seductive *frisson* of being black and primitive, albeit momentarily, and by proxy." The detours and ambiguity of Genet's dramatic aesthetic are importantly revealed in his play through subversive *détournement*, or "diversion," through Genet's decision to locate his critique of racism at the level of theatrical form and medium. In *Les Nègres*, Genet dramatically diverts the context and form, the tropes and clichés of the black review show that gave white audiences the opportunity to reduce their anxieties about Blacks in their presence (2010, pp. 146-8).

6.0 Distillation and Amplification

Since Genet himself never commented on why he suppressed the original preface then decided late in his life to modify it, we can only presume that it was a doubly recuperative move: an attempt both better to get in synch with an ambiguous dramatic aesthetic ironically privileging "décalage," "l'attaque en oblique" (Corvin, 2002b, p. 1210) as well as to counterbalance the cuts he had made to his play in its revised version. By getting away from the initial preface's over-explicitness, by making it less excessively didactic, instead of saying too much about Blacks, Genet ultimately says far less through making the reordered and shortened version of the preface more characteristically obscure. The only absolute, however, is that the prefatory text was neither published as intended nor *as* the preface for Genet's play during his lifetime. In its place, Genet included "Pour jouer *Les Nègres*," in which he focuses on how to perform the drama, and two fragmentary (Ekotto, 2011, p. 90) and initialed epigraphs (Lavery, 2010, p. 148). Printed in capital letters, the original text contains a statement that is followed by two questions, the first of which echoes Sartre's "qu'est-ce [...] [la] négritude" in "Orphée noir" (1969, p. xxix). In it Genet very efficiently captures the essence of his play's genesis, the ontological questions that in his preface he has gone to great lengths to unpack, and the "deliberate ambiguity" (Bradby & Finbergh, 2012, p. 69) at the heart of the play:

UN SOIR UN COMÉDIEN ME DEMANDA D'ÉCRIRE UNE PIÈCE QUI SERAIT JOUÉE PAR DES NOIRS. MAIS, QU'EST-CE QUE C'EST DONC UN NOIR? ET D'ABORD, C'EST DE QUELLE COULEUR ?
J.G.

Only here, Genet renders less explicit the details we see in the preface and that pertain to his invitation to write a play for a theatrical troupe composed of Blacks. The definite "le mois de décembre dernier" of the preface is replaced by the more vague and indefinite "UN SOIR"; the specificity of "Raymond Rouleau" in the preface is replaced by the more anonymous "UN COMÉDIEN"; and the revealing conceit by Genet that "[les Noirs] organiseront un spectacle qui sera un camouflet pour les spectateurs" is removed altogether. Then, in the two questions that follow, Genet efficiently manages first to rehearse a disruption of logic: the question preceded by the temporal marker "D'ABORD" actually comes second. Next, he expediently encapsulates all the absurdities surrounding notions of racial differences. He has attempted to unpack them in the preface by the thorny, uncomfortable questions concerning perception and experience: "comment voyons-nous les Noirs?" and "comment « éprouvons »-nous les Noirs?" (2002c, p. 839).

If the text in capitals distills key ideas of the ill-fated preface, the italicized text that follows it amplifies all the antagonism that Genet has captured in the first sentence of the preface's concluding paragraph: "Cette pièce est écrite non *pour* les Noirs, mais *contre* les Blancs" (2002c, p. 842). As he does in the first text, Genet rehearses a disruption of logic at the start of the second: "*Cette pièce, je le répète, écrite par un Blanc, est destinée à un public de Blancs.*" Since this is the first time in printed form that he points out that the work has been written by a white man, the claim here to be "repeating" himself is clearly both disingenuous and misleading. It interestingly also "plays" on the double meaning in French of the verb "répéter": "to repeat"—a "rigoureuse reprise en boucle d'un même jeu"—and "to rehearse"—a "mise au point artistique" (Corvin, 2002b, p. 1204). In the instructions that follow for how the play is intended to be for a white audience, Genet furthermore cleverly both contradicts and confirms what he has claimed in the preface:

Mais si, par improbable, elle était jouée un soir devant un public de Noirs, il faudrait qu'à chaque représentation un Blanc fût invité—mâle ou femelle. L'organisateur du Spectacle ira le recevoir solennellement, le fera habiller d'un costume de cérémonie et le conduira à sa place, de préférence au centre de la première rangée des fauteuils d'orchestre. On jouera pour lui. Sur ce Blanc symbolique un projecteur sera dirigé durant tout le spectacle.

Et si aucun Blanc n'acceptait cette representation? Qu'on distribue au public noir à l'entrée de la salle des masques de Blancs. Et si les Noirs refusent les masques qu'on utilise un mannequin…. J.G.

The "little" preface concludes with a characteristically Genetian twisting of intention ("non *pour* [...] mais *contre*"). In performance too, it seems, "for" ("*pour*") comes also to mean "against" ("*contre*"). The white audience members are made painfully aware of just how much a part of the spectacle they are as the Blacks who are playing for and against them. Like the play and also Genet's ill-fated longer preface itself, they therefore still have the potential to be both a target and a foil, willing and theatricalized spectators, "peu[vent] être à l'origine d'une œuvre d'art généreuse, car elle[s] aur[ont] tendance à se poursuivre dans l'imaginaire" (2002c, p. 843). Since they are not in a superior position to the work being performed on stage both for and in spite of them, and are thus neither complacent nor self-satisfied, "n'ont d'être que pour autrui" (Corvin, 2002a, p. lxvi), they can, as Genet hopes, be affected by and changed through the aesthetic experience that reconfigures their sensitivity (Lavery, 2010, pp. 81, 84) and which, when all is said and done, can be considered both magnanimous *and* inspirational.

7.0 Conclusion

Genet's rewriting of the preface was, as we have seen, not only an effort to be more ambiguous but was importantly also an attempt to counterbalance the cuts he had made within the script of *Les*

Nègres. In revising the preface he succeeded in making it more diversionary. As a consequence, the revised preface and the deliberately disruptive "little preface" that has long been published in its place can now best be understood as "recuperative" in light of the revisions that the dramatist made to the play itself. Much more revealing of the dramatist's intentions than has previously been understood by critics, these shorter, if not more oblique texts ultimately speak volumes and should be considered henceforth in their proper context.

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