

THIS IS HELL NOR AM I OUT OF IT²: RAVENHILL'S PLAYS *THE EXPERIMENT* AND *THE CUT*

This paper analyses two of Mark Ravenhill's plays, *The Experiment* and *The Cut*, the former dealing with the subjectivity and unreliability of truth, ironically used to justify scientific experiments, and the latter with an unspecified operation, the cut, as allegedly the only way out of a dystopian society. The introductory part offers an overview of the impact of society on one's personality through the experience of concentration camps as a kind of experiment by V. Frankl, P. Levi and B. Bettelheim. The secret experiments done by the CIA in the 1950s and 1960s, as a continuation of what started in the 1940s, and, although not so well camouflaged by higher purposes, as precursors to modern experiments, were similarly financed by governments and with a similarly profound toll. The aim is to draw attention to a Ravenhill's warning of how dangerous the absence of moral values, awareness and responsibility can be, and his belief that there are ethical choices both on stage and in life.

Keywords: Mark Ravenhill, Christopher Marlowe, scientific knowledge, dystopian condition, truth, responsibility.

Introduction

"...Father, can't you see I'm burning?" Implored the child, standing at his father's bedside. But his father, sleeping on, dreaming, did not see." (Coetzee: 1990)

If the postmodern condition is a state, then being human is a rebellion, a refusal to compromise and accept the fragmented anti-humanist orthodoxy: "Postmodernism is a turning point not yet an end. It is as if human life were a last dream flickering in the minds of the dead. Soon they will fall asleep forever. For a while we can still hear the echo of human language [...] on the walls of prisons, madhouses, children's playgrounds, the derelict ghettos of our cities..." (BOND 2000: 8-9). A question that Edward Bond raises both in his plays and his theoretical essays is: Is it possible for humanity to survive in

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² Reference to Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.

modern societies that are based on blind obedience, controlled by violence, repression and coercion, where justice is denied and ethical rationalizations that led to Auschwitz and Hiroshima generated and sustained? Portraying characters that struggle to stay human or become human anew in an unhuman situation and rejecting the biological origin as the cause of evil, Bond claims that human nature does not feel at home in this world and, since its demand for justice is its imaginative birthright, a child's cry represents a rebellion against injustice. Unfortunately, very soon that cry will be stifled and adjusted to general social madness. In order for that not to happen, one has to rely on their unconscious and undergo a process of discovering their own humanness, similarly to the soldier in the Palermo improvisation, who, confronted with the choice to kill either his mother's baby or his neighbour's baby, chooses to kill his baby brother. This paradox which is never absent from our mind, represents a rooted urge to preserve an innate sense of justice, i.e. "an expression of the radical innocence that makes us human" (BOND 1998: 251). In other words, suffering and violence are attributed not to human nature but to the arrangement of society, which can be reformed. Thus, despite the proclaimed end of metanarratives, the end of history and the death of man, Bond offers at least some hope that the recovery of humanness is still possible in the postmodern society, even in the liquid society.

Primo Levi, a man who survived Auschwitz and then committed suicide in 1987, warns that it is crucially important not to be seduced by charismatic shamans. Terrified at the new-forming tendency to ignore and forget the existence of concentration camps, Levi argues that if it is impossible to understand such hatred, out of which systematic genocide spread, then "knowing is imperative, because what happened could happen again. Conscience can be seduced and obscured again – even our consciences" (LEVI 1995: 228). It is the eloquence and histrionic abilities of leaders, and not credibility of their speeches, that mesmerise people; therefore, one must be extremely careful before they decide to entrust their ability to judge and their will to them. The adherents of Fascism, loyal executioners of the most horrible orders, were neither "born torturers nor monsters (with the exception of few): they were ordinary people. Monsters exist but there are so few of them that they cannot be really dangerous. Ordinary people are more dangerous," warns Levi, because they are ready to carry out their functions without any questioning.

Bruno Bettelheim, a psychoanalyst who spent two years at camps, wonders: "How should I protect myself from becoming like them?" (BETTELHEIM, FRANKL: 2003). During this period, he noticed that prisoners tend to forget names, places, events from their past, they even avoided mentioning their families - a particularly interesting phenomenon

that, according to Bettelheim, could not be explained by physical exhaustion only. This alienation was in most cases followed by identification with Nazi commanders. There were three phases in the process of adaptation: 1) initial shock, 2) transportation to camps, and 3) successful adaptation (which, obviously, could mean assimilation). For Bettelheim, concentration camps were some kind of experimental laboratories in which monstrous experiments were conducted in order to test man's resistance to various hideous methods for destroying one's dignity and defiance of autonomous individuals and their turning into obedient and apathetic subjects. It was important to, despite the pressure, protect oneself from the disintegration of personality and preserve one's own identity and unity of personality.

Victor E. Frankl, who also experienced the atrocities of concentration camps, believes that in order to be able to do this, either at camps or in real life, one has to have *will-to-meaning*. Contrary to will-to-power, will-to-meaning is an innate desire which is "to give as much meaning as possible to one's life, to actualize as many values as possible." (1986) Frankl stresses the importance of man's *responsibility* to his *conscience*: "being human means being conscious and being responsible. Consciousness and responsibility join to form an entity, together they make up the wholeness of the human being." (1986) This Austrian psychiatrist, who developed a form of existential psychotherapy known as *logotherapy*, finds the second phase of Bettelheim's process of adaptation especially significant: it is characterized by apathy and aggression, the loss of temporal orientation – there is no past, no future, only the unending and unbearable present – so that one's identity and personal integrity start falling apart. One's will-to-meaning is in constant danger of being manipulated, and choosing a wrong person (ideology) to be loyal and responsible to usually implies simultaneous eradication of both conscience and natural tendency to identify with others. The result of propaganda is our refusal to think clearly, i.e. our *unthinking*.

Unfortunately, the idea of having submissive, obedient and controllable people does not remain solely within the domain of manipulative propaganda. About physically induced amnesia talks John Marks in his documentary film *Mind Control: America's Secret War* (MARKS: 2002). The USA Government spent millions on brutal experiments which were part of top-secret mind control projects. The CIA's experiments, the goal of which was to determine whether the human mind can be controlled by using drugs and shocks, were conducted in 1950s and 1960s on "thousands of unwitting citizens [mostly at universities and in mental hospitals] in direct defiance of law, all ethical codes, and the most basic human rights." What began as mesmerism and hypnotism turned into a serious experimental laboratory in which people were changed without their knowledge. The aim of mind control was to extract information,

get people say things they did not think, make them do things which otherwise they would not have done. The first attempts were successful, which encouraged Dr Cameron to proceed and prove the assumption that if it was possible to create an amnesia barrier between the ordinary identity and the new identity by implanting false memories into people, then it was also probable that false emotional conditions could be created. It is unnecessary to mention how similar those experiments are to Bettelheim's idea of concentration camps as experimental laboratories and the three stages of prisoners' adaptation/assimilation. Moreover, one is inevitably reminded of everyday life and various implicit and explicit attempts to brainwash people, develop amnesia, in order to turn them into docile, totally dependable and programmable robots.³

With emotions channelled into hatred and rational thought directed towards new, more sophisticated weapons and strategies to be used against the enemy, amnesia has become a pandemic disease prescribed by society as the best treatment for the general condition of unease. This kind of brainwashing is provided when simple emotional flattening proves not to be enough. Thus, man becomes 'saved', since inability to feel precludes any possibility of suffering. Similarly to those people at camps, a modern man erases his past, but contrary to them, he has his present served in dazzling disguise with a promise of glamorous future. Under the illusion of having an immense choice, bombed every day with massive amounts of data and an infinite number of facts, which, comprehensibly, the brain fails to process, man pursues his future with no moral compass, through egotism and avarice, running further away from his inner self.

The Experiment

Bettelheim's second phase, the process of adaptation, has been an ongoing process, the human condition that proceeds to prevail even in the 21st century. Societies breed apathy and aggression. They either change or erase history. Faced with an uncertain future, one is left to rely on the unbearable present. Levi's fear that people would forget what had happened came true. "What am I?" (RAVENHILL: 1996) cries a girl, Lulu, troubled by her conscience because while she was trying to decide which bar of chocolate to

³ Curtis, in his film *The Century of the Self*, says that Cameron's and almost all CIA's experiments were, in fact, a disaster. The whole idea of creating the person you like by erasing someone's past and memory, and filling in positive material was more successful outside laboratory, in a form of Ana Freud's psycho-treatment, based on the belief that it was possible to change a person in almost limitless ways: by making people, above all children, conform to the society, instead of challenging it. Anyway, the greatest success was achieved by Freud's nephew, Edward Bernays, whose guiding assumption was that through various forms of psychological manipulation, it was possible to make people behave irrationally and thus control the masses (CURTIS 2002).

take since “there’s too much choice,” the counter girl was having an argument with some “wino”; the wino stabbed the girl, and Lulu, instead of stopping him or calling an ambulance, stole the bar of chocolate and walked out. “And I wonder what made me that way,” (RAVENHILL: 1997) asks an adult, who as a boy could not sleep “because of all those bad things going on” in the world. He was “crying night after night... because the world is such a bad place.” His mother promised him that “it’s gonna get a whole lot better.” He taught himself “to cry in a special way that meant she wouldn’t hear [him] ever again.” Now, as an adult, he sees that the world has neither ended nor become better, “it’s just going on, on and on and on. And I wonder if I should feel something about that. But – you want the truth? – I don’t feel a thing... And I wonder what made me that way.” Conscience and responsibility, the two things which, according to Frankle, define humans, lose their functions during the course of forgetting. Once man’s conscience is “put to sleep”, there is nothing to be responsible for and no one to be responsible to. Unlike Shakespeare’s characters, who are, although they have gone far, still redeemable and thus not beyond salvation, there is no promise and hope that a child’s cry will further develop and mature into an active rebellion against the emotional drainage of life; it will rather be stifled by unsexed mothers willing to raise children not on the milk of human kindness but on direct cruelty, dashing their brains out, like Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth (I.v, vii), if not literally, then at least metaphorically.

A tremendous success of his first works, *Shopping and Fucking* and *Faust is Dead*, Mark Ravenhill owes to his talent to bring to the scene exactly what is happening in real life, sparing the audience the unnecessary ornaments and embellishment, and, instead, throwing *in-their-face* the uncomfortable truth so as to shake them back to reality, to involve them with the aim of reminding them that they are also already and equally involved in life, as if saying: “this is Hell, nor is anyone of us out of it” (MARLOWE: I.iii.78). General emotional atrophy, everyday cruelty, the actualisation and rationalisation of appalling atrocities, widespread dehumanization and alienation urged Ravenhill to proceed with writing plays which exude discomfort, discontent and apocalyptic anger: human nature at its worst, people trying to find life by killing it and culture looking away from what needs to be seen.

The Experiment, a play written in 2009, was inspired by Ravenhill’s thoughts about neurology, the brain and memory. Working with a group of college students, he wanted to test their memory by posing a simple question: they were asked to tell him what happened on their very first day at college, which was about eighteen months before. No one could agree, not about one single thing, even though everybody was quite passionate about their view and that the things happened exactly that way. This was both surprising and frightening. Memory is unreliable, truth is relative, everything is utterly

subjective, which means that there can never be an objective recollection of any event. If everything is subjective, Ravenhill warns, then there is a possibility for moral evasion: “How to identify evil and its executors within the slippery subjectivity of our modern world?” Evil does exist, crimes are committed and somebody carries them out.

The second issue that led Ravenhill to *The Experiment* was the question of ethics: Is it ethical to do experiments on animals? This question was actually raised by Peter Singer, an Australian moral philosopher, and afterwards discussed in class by Ravenhill and the students. Singer argues that “many severely intellectually challenged humans show equally diminished, if not lower, mental capacity, and that some animals have displayed signs of intelligence sometimes on par with that of human children,” meaning that “intelligence does not provide a basis for providing nonhuman animals any less consideration than such intellectually challenged humans.” (SINGER 1975) In other words, what if medical experiments and testing were done on disabled children instead of animals?

The Experiment, written to be played by several actors, with no fixed way of dividing the lines among them, and eventually played as a monologue, by Ravenhill himself, is about a man who describes experimenting on children in order to find a cure for an incurable disease. At the beginning he says that he and his partner, who once lived in a modest house, decided to do experiments on their children, by infecting them with viruses or cells of cancer “through the bars of the cage” (RAVENHILL 2013) so that when the day comes they would have a cure. In only a couple of lines “a modest house” changes into a “big old house”, and then into a “great big manor house”. It turns out that there was no cage and, soon afterwards, that the children had a beautiful room; the initial statement of trying to find a cure for an incurable disease that one day the children may suffer from turns to be a disease that his partner is suffering from, which was, at first, incurable, but then it was only “incurable at that time”. On the very second page of the play the reader is told that all this happened to “another person living with another partner”, or to the reader himself, or to a person in a documentary.

“So I went along with it
I remember I strapped the child to the bed
I was very kind, I was soothing, I loved my child but I loved
my partner, we had to find a cure
What you have to do to get through something like that when
you know it’s for the greater good what you do is you numb
your feelings – you cut out your heart, you cut it . . .” (RAVENHILL 2013: 430)

The greatest danger to humanity and the most serious threat lie in empty promises and lame excuses that something is done for “the greater good”, with

a just cause, which should automatically suppress and numb all feelings, and unquestionably and irreversibly justify “something like that”, in other words, any abuse, cruelty, evil, anything as appalling as strapping a child to the bed, infecting them with viruses and conducting these experiments for years and on. The shifting possibilities and the change of the key facts at first leave the reader very suspicious about the narrator: it seems as if he was looking for excuses and modifying his story only to escape the feeling of guilt, the responsibility for being an accomplice in a despicable crime, or even committing one himself. However, as the plot unwinds, the burden on the reader increases. Namely, when Ravenhill’s character addresses the reader or the audience, he does that not to shake off his guilt by passing it on to someone else as much as to make the reader aware of his own responsibility, because all that could have happened or actually happened to him; he is, *everyone* is, if not a killer, then at least an accomplice. Ravenhill wants his audience to open their eyes and see that the things happening on the stage are actually happening around us, every single day, in our neighbourhood, in our families, to us. But not wanting to admit that, we have closed our eyes so as not to see it.

Emotions are subjective, and therefore, subversive and, for this reason, they should be feared and avoided. Ironically, such a suppression of one’s emotional self, instead of leading to pure objectivism, has created utter subjectivism, where everything is relative and unsustainable. Modern societies encourage and promote objectivism as the supreme power of science, technology, law, government, the media, in which emotions represent a subversive instrument which can seriously endanger one’s quest for the absolute truth. This selected subjectivity leaves no room for any objectivism. “Post-modernity makes values relative,” says Ravenhill (2010) and adds that it is “possible for great evil to be committed if nobody can agree.” If memory is unreliable and truth is relative, then there are no absolute values: everything is subjective. Hence, the possibility for acts of cruelty and evil to happen, and for people to evade them and to evade their responsibility, makes way for no moral responsibility: if everything is relative, if nothing is right or wrong, who is going to take responsibility, warns Ravenhill. The ambiguity of memory, its fallibility, as well as the mind’s capacity for denial and the natural inclination of man to distance himself from the horrific allow almost no moral dilemma. The evasiveness of the truth is demonstrated by the character in the play taking a video camera with him when he goes to see what is happening at the neighbours’ house because “after a while you just have to know if this is a real thing you have to have something on record.” (RAVENHILL 2013: 431) In this case, the use of camera has one more purpose, which is to help the person who is recording to distance himself from what is actually taking place in front of him: seen through the camera’s lens, the whole scene takes a form of a documentary and does not demand

immediate reaction on the part of the beholder; he observes it as if happening at the other side of an imaginary, invisible wall. When the child's voice is heard:

“Father, father, the needle is sharp
Mother, mother, cut out your heart” (IBID)
he remembers the intense pain he felt and the urge to act:
“And I remember calling out I:
Dear God, what is this? Has it come to this? Are we animals?
We who are God's creation? We are so close to the angels?
We who are reason and imagination? Is this what we're doing
with all that God has given us? These tests? These experiments?” (IBID: 432)

However, after this burst of rage and rebellion, as if he were somehow aware of what ought to be said, he retreats and says: “I wish I'd said that.” But what he actually said was:

“And this child is. Look at this child. This child is so damaged.
It has no memory. There is no past or future for this child.
This child has no moral sense. This child could not tell you:
this is right, this is wrong. This child has no empathy: this
child cannot feel anything that others feel. Can we really say
that it is wrong to experiment on this child? I would not call
this child an animal because – quite honestly – that would be
degrading to the animal.” (IBID: 433)

This is the final phase of the process of dehumanisation. A Machiavellian question arising here is: “would you kill a child if it meant you would save countless other lives?” (HUNT 2015) To make it even worse, a statement that once somebody (*I, you, they*) approved of experiments on children *if it would find a cure* eventually turns into a statement that somebody approved because *their partner makes their money because he has shares in a company that experiments on children*.

One day it was announced that the experiments ended. The other day, and it was *a beautiful day*, the two partners, visited the shopping centre (and what else? in the culture of consumerism and financial transactions) to celebrate, got home and while he was preparing a drink to have on the balcony, his partner said: “I saw them again”. His reaction was: “I wanted to hit my partner and tell my partner to shut it“, but being *educated* he said just “yes?” Aware that the only way to stay with his partner is if they both remain silent about the preceding and current events, only if they both ignore the truth will they be able to go on together as if nothing had happened and as if nothing was happening, he interrupted her:

“Look the sun is setting
It's very beautiful

And this drink tastes lovely
So let's just . . . Yes?
I won't be with this partner
Nothing lasts for ever
But as long as we don't talk about the experiments
We'll have a few years
And that's lovely" (RAVENHILL 2013: 438)

Being silent about, or blind to what is taking place, makes one more than an accomplice in a perfect crime devised by society, a crime in which there will be no guilty, no one responsible; only the idea of a greater good will be remembered. Such atrocities are being committed every day; such contracts are being devil-signed everywhere. The one and only hope for man to hold on to, although very vague, lies in that discrepancy between the conscious and subconscious, in the fact that man can still feel repulsion, that he is aware that at the moment of crisis he has that other option: to say something else, to halt. And no *being-educated* excuse should stop him. Otherwise, when the split between what was done and what should have been done becomes even more blurred, there will be no way back. It is important not to agree to be euthanized as long as there is any, even the slightest, chance of being awakened.

The Cut

The warning of many, including Margaret Atwood, that the 20th century would have to choose between two contrary dystopias - *1984* and *The Brave New World* – has resulted into a 21st century decision to keep both versions of man-made hell. The modern age witnesses, on the one hand, laboratories and experiments moving from hospitals into homes, where the appropriate number of preferable genes is being decided upon and, on the other hand, the retention of the notorious Room 101 in which, when shopping and pills prove futile, those troubled by traces of conscience are emotionally broken, lobotomised and cut.

The Cut, a 2006 play, which got different critical reception, reduces the whole society to its core unit – the family – and those basic institutions “employing” the family members: the government, university and prison. The play is divided into three scenes, each of them featuring the main character, anti-hero Paul, in dialogue with another character. The context is some unspecified post-Orwellian dystopian city, at indeterminate point of time, which makes it relevant and applicable to any place, any time, any authoritarian regime. It immediately stages a grown-up, middle-aged man, Paul as a link between the family and the government; he is both a decent civil servant of the

system, its executioner – the *cut*-operation performer, and a devoted father but a sexually dysfunctional husband. The first scene stages Paul at work, talking to a prospective “patient”, John, who has voluntarily come to have the cut. John explains that he had previously read the leaflets and books, watched the videos of it and, most importantly, *it* has been in his family for centuries. Whereas John desperately wants the cut to be administered on him, Paul is trying to dissuade him by questioning his reasons and his mental health. Paul, who is supposed to simply perform the operation, and not to question John’s decision, is looking for other, more humane solutions, such as the army, university, or even prison. John refuses. The reader is never told what actually *the cut* is, but John describes it as something liberating: the cut is going to make him free, free from everything, even from himself – he wants to get rid of his body, of the history, poverty, education, relationships, everything – and he eagerly believes that the cut can do it:

“Because I want to be free. Free of, of, of me. Of all this. I want it to be Cut away. I want to be Cut away from this body. Yes – and this history and this wanting and this busyness and this schooling and these, these ties. I want to be released.”
(RAVENHILL 2006: 192)

Despite Paul warning him that this operation, supposed to eliminate emotions or even erase memory, is a brutal one and, what is more important, it may not bring him the salvation he craves for, John stays persistent. Whether the cut stands for a lobotomy or castration, it is, though extremely painful, apparently the only way out of the system and its structures. But is it really?

The guilt Paul feels throughout the first scene, leading him to suicidal despair he confesses to a stranger, remains present in the second scene, which stages Paul and his wife, Susan, in an unhappy, sexually dysfunctional marriage. The entire scene focuses on Paul’s family life tainted by those traces of remorse from his public performance. Paul hurries home after work to find comfort and understanding in his wife, but Susan does not even show interest to listen to him. Being emotional to the degree of crumbling into tears is for Susan, who is, as a matter of fact, on pills, too repulsive. Troubled by the secret he must not reveal to his wife – that he is one of those performing the cut – Paul struggles with his conscience. Telling the truth would reunite him with his wife, since he would no longer feel any shame and any need to close his eyes, or even cry. However, the only thing he succeeds to utter is “I’m a good man”, as if defending himself, aware that he will still be the one clinging to order, administering the cut and thus serving the state. At work, Paul stands for the authority; however, at home, to his wife, he is barely a man.

The circle closes in the third scene in which the reader finds Paul in prison, visited by his son Stephen, who was, until recently, at university and fighting against the cut. The revolution finally occurred and now that the roles

have been swapped, Paul's son is part of a new cleansing order, which delivers punishment to those who served and represented the old system. Contrary to Paul previously trying to persuade himself that, despite administering the cut, he is a good man, his son accuses him of being evil. Similarly to John, who desperately wanted the cut and refused any other option, Paul now refuses to be helped and saved by his son, who can arrange for him to be heard, to acknowledge everything to the Ministry of Forgiveness. When Stephen tells his father that he believes his mother did not know what her husband's job was and that she told the tribunal "there was never the faintest inkling", Paul concludes:

"So – this is the bright new future. This is the new world. Kids who can't tell the difference between a lie and the truth. Oh son. Oh son, I would weep but there's no more fucking tears." (IBID: 228)

Young and gullible, Stephen and his friends believe there is brightness awaiting for them, a new, more prosperous and better world; other characters are either on pills, or they long for the cut, or the darkness. The reader is left with a conviction that there is a new, better world outside the prison, but also with a sinister idea that all new things sooner or later begin to resemble the old ones.

At work Paul represents authority, power, Father, whereas, at home, he is a man who weeps, whose loving and affectionate words are not heard, and who can connect neither verbally nor physically with his wife. In order to be a good servant to the system, more of T. S. Eliot's dissociation of sensibility is required. Ravenhill once again points to weird, cold, distant relations within a family in a modern consumer society, utterly controlled by the system. The true nature of *the cut* is not revealed by the end, but it is something passed on from generation to generation, for centuries, in other words, something that each of the previous governments administered on those who were seeking a way out but did not see a choice. And there has always been a choice: the army, the university, the prison. Ironically, each of these choices has its own doctrines and ways of controlling body and thought, but still, according to Paul, the cut should be the last resort. When in the end the new fractions appear, it is found out that they won what they had been fighting for: the cut has been abolished and some new, gentle methods are used; moreover, they introduced the Ministry of Forgiveness, which reminds one of the indulgences the Roman Catholic Church used to sell. Now, Paul refuses to be acquitted of the guilt and decides to await the old methods to come back, urging his son to leave and avoid being stuck in the darkness of the prison, because out there is a better world. These are the farewell words of a father to his son, not convincing enough, though.

Conclusion

The insatiable scientific curiosity and meticulous work on finding the selfish gene aims to justify all the atrocities allegedly committed in the name of justice and for the good of everyone, and thus absolve the society of all blame. If one needs a memory to understand and explain what happened, they need to be prepared for the fact that their story's reconstruction will almost certainly differ from someone else's memory. And this is where the greatest manipulations have been coming from. Modern societies, referred to as Faustian by a literary critic Tzvetan Todorov, feature a "combination of tremendous technological advancement and profound moral failure (KOSTIĆ 2012: 135). New generations are being indoctrinated and seduced in order to be subjected. What once the Nazis did with memories has become a daily prescribed dose of truth deviation.

Ravenhill's plays are precisely about this: the conditioning process during which biological fathers, brainwashed and disoriented, are replaced by surrogate fathers, who are to instruct and teach the youth the values they should live by, the rules they have to obey, the principles they must not question. In his oeuvre, Ravenhill often depicts a fragmentary post-capitalist world which, run on consumerism, has reached the ultimate level of absurdity and whose inhabitants are desperately seeking freedom, meaning and love. Behind the suffering they inflict upon others lies society-inflicted corruption of their true nature, their energy channelled and redirected towards the actualisation and rationalisation of appalling atrocities, their emotional development enhanced to atrophy. Brought up to believe that any kind of personal attachment should be avoided so as to protect themselves from being hurt, paranoid and suspicious of their own existence, people eventually end up inflicting traumatic pain upon themselves, as the only remaining proof they are still alive. Political systems create an atmosphere of threat, they impose a system of values, which, by cherishing greed, paralyses one's life and leads to general dehumanization and widespread alienation. The goal is to make sure that eventually, with appropriate mind- and heart-control, everyone becomes a good servant. It is precisely the capitalist idea of masters and slaves that Ravenhill places the responsibility on: it is not a desire for self-realization but, actually, its prevention that causes the absence or perversion of feelings and general condition of sickness (PETROVIĆ 2017: 114).

Ravenhill tries to make his readers aware that they do have a responsibility in relation to the system they create because that very system later directs their everyday lives. His characters are, at least at first glance, ordinary people who, in only a couple of pages, start to exude some discomfort, unease, which stems from the discrepancy between, on the one hand, the fact that they feel something is wrong and, on the other hand, the fact that they are not doing anything to change it and are, instead, postponing both verbal and physical acting. Ravenhill shows

that there are ethical choices both on stage and in life. Once a man stops seeing the choices, the system can be sure that it has sealed the victory and that no Big Brother's surveillance is needed: the obedient servants will learn how to cry in a special way so that no one can hear them and thus, hushed up by induced amnesia and the promise of paradise on earth, they make their contribution to sustaining cruelty. In the plays, the only way out is the cut, otherwise one has to stay in, silenced by the position they hold, or by the pills they are prescribed, willing to record but unwilling to see, afraid to close their eyes because the moment they do it the truth will emerge. Modern man seems to be only further and further away from the possibility of salvation, compared to Marlowe's Faustus, whose own body revolted against his decision to sell his soul to the Devil: when Faustus was about to sign the bond with his blood – *the cut*, his blood congealed revealing the true human nature, which refused to accept his damnation (KOSTIĆ 2009: 214). The modern version of the cut is either the last attempt to feel something or the only way anywhere out of the current condition.

'Science without conscience' (222) leads nowhere out. In order for salvation to become possible, and give modern characters back the promise and hope, which Shakespeare never deprived his heroes and anti-heroes of, a child needs a parent who will teach them the right values, preach a lesson which can change the world and reverse history, a parent capable of self-sacrifice so as to save their son. Ravenhill warns against the omnipresent cruelty in humans: the one which equals that of a crime, the one of having a drink, enjoying the sunset and pretending that nothing is happening.

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OVO JE PAKAO, JA NISAM VAN NJEGA⁴: REJVENHILOVE DRAME *EKSPERIMENT* I *REZ*

U radu se analiziraju dva komada Marka Rejvenhila: *Eksperiment*, koji se bavi subjektivnošću i nepouzdanošću istine, čime se ironično opravdavaju naučni eksperimenti, i *Rez*, u kome je predstavljena izvesna operacija – rez, kao

⁴ Preuzeto iz Marlo, K., *Faust*, u *Engleske renesansne tragedije* (prevod Živojin Simić I Sima Pandurović), Biblioteka ORFEJ, Beograd: 1959, str. 181.

jedini mogući izlaz iz distopijskog društva. U uvodnom delu daje se pregled uticaja društva na ličnost na primeru koncentracionih logora kao svojevrstnih eksperimentalnih laboratorija iz perspektive V. Frankla, P. Levija i B. Betelhajma. Tajne eksperimente koje je pedesetih i šezdesetih godina sprovodila CIA, kao nastavak onoga što je započeto četrdesetih, i, mada ne tako dobro zamaskirano višim ciljevima, kao preteča modernih eksperimenata, finansirale su vlade na sličan način i sa sličnim tragičnim ishodom. Cilj rada je da se skrene pažnja na Rejvenhilovo upozorenje na to koliku opasnost predstavlja odsustvo moralnih vrenosti, svesti i odgovornosti, kao i na to da postoje etički izbori, kako na sceni, tako i u životu.

Ključne reči: Mark Rejvenhil, Kristofer Marlo, naučno znanje, distopijsko stanje, istina, odgovornost.