

# Althusser's Criticism of 'Piccolo Teatro'

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**Abstract**— This paper examines Althusser's theatre critique, which is to excavate his possible continuities around the theme. Althusser, regarded as a Marxist philosopher, also reveals his apprehension of the theatre criticism besides his critical encounters with Marxist reinterpretation. His critique of "Piccolo Teatro" incorporates and manifests various theoretical concepts and viewpoints useful for researching theorist and academics, particularly in theatre studies. Althusser's *Piccolo Teatro* -aesthetics proves to be the powerful testimony modern writers to follow and use to his critique with the uniqueness of his fresh approaches.

The paper argues that Althusser in his ingenious critique of *piccolo Teatro* shares a dominant critique of theatre, setting up the new dramaturgy rules and ideas, besides reflecting diverse themes and approaches any of which can neither, in a closer observation, be the only underlying meaning as attempted by many.

**Keywords**— Althusser, Theatre Criticism, Materialist Theatre, Theatre of Ideology, time in theatre.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Contrary to the general opinion, Althusser manifests a strong critical prowess, particularly in his critiques to *Piccolo Teatro* (Criticism of *Piccolo Theatre*). The work which is notable for its ingenuity and criticism unorthodox also manifests the trends Althusser enforces in his critique of theatre. Since Althusser's original commitments were the Marxist reinterpretation, the piece of his rare criticism besides his scanty literary comments and analysis was not the primary objective

of his works. However, his criticism has a distinctive style, form, texture, and objectives too, as seen by his evaluation of a drama and other texts.

His critiques to *Piccolo Teatro* are rare and exceptional constituting not only what we know as the "Althusserian criticism" (Balibar, Etienne 2015, 3), but also the new rules of dramaturgy, relatively uncommon yet dominantly forceful. His criticism, mainly his theatre criticism, offers a defence of Strehler's theatrical art, intending to defend Strehler's choice and his production to "far from diverting our attention from the problems of modern dramaturgy with tired, anachronistic entertainment, take us to the heart of these problems" (L. Althusser, *The 'Piccolo Teatro': Bertolazzi and Brecht 1963*).

Thus, Althusser's critique on drama, 'for Marx' exhibits his exceptional critical acumen as a critic of drama. His first piece of theatre criticism, "The 'Piccolo Teatro': Bertolazzi and Brecht, notes on a Materialist Theatre' (1962), significantly reveals his critical "analysis of a melodrama", a 'popular' form of cultural production (Ferreter 2006). Termed as insignificant in 'for Marx', by many critics, it, however, formed the "geometrical and theoretical centre of the book" (Balibar, Etienne 2015).

To trace the history of *Piccolo Teatro* notably, Paolo Grassi (1919–1981) and Giorgio Strehler (1921–1997) founded the *Piccolo Teatro di Milano* in 1947, to provide a theatre for an educated mass audience. Althusser, however, used his theatre criticism-as reflected in his criticism on *Piccolo Teatro*, to advance his critical notion and values-quite unconventional yet forceful, but also reveals many perspectives and approaches concerning his theatre criticism. For Etienne Balibar, one of co-authors and students of Althusser observes:

*Piccolo Teatro represented for Althusser not only a compelling critique of Ideology, particularly the dominant 'humanist' Ideology of bourgeois society but also an alternative way of understanding the structure of*

*ideological relations, compared to the scientific one otherwise advocated in his works as an "epistemological break" with theoretical humanism (2).*

However, admissibly, Althusser reflects ideological perspective in his criticism, although dominant, it can neither assume to be the only the focal point of his criticism of theatre. For, his criticism of the piccolo Teatro with its diverse and varied meanings, 'symptomatic' (L. B. Althusser 1970) offers no conditionality to be tied with any specific perspective. The paper thus argues that Althusser in his ingenious critique of piccolo Teatro shares a dominant critique of theatre, setting up the new dramaturgy rules and ideas, besides reflecting diverse themes, any one of which can neither, in a closer observation, be the only underlying meaning as attempted by any. As noted by Althusser, the themes of the play and the order in which they appear, can "foster misunderstandings", but also can clear them up, and discover beneath them an astonishing depth (L. Althusser, 3).

The essay, "The 'Piccolo Teatro': Bertolazzi and Brecht," as neglected as Streheler's stagecraft Nonetheless, it is a 'rare gem' (Bargu, ITP 2012) as an invaluable piece of Althusserian criticism incorporates materialist aesthetics as political practice with possibilities of critique and resistance besides demonstrating the scope of aleatory materialism, within the criticism.

Althusser's criticism of theatre, as usual, received more of a criticism than that of the appreciation. As unperturbed by the voice of the critics, Althusser sailed through his intellectual world, the expression sometimes resulted in the complexity. His criticism is thus, with its scope for varied interpretation, does not align with the conventional theatrical criticism; instead, it conveys the meaning, however abstruse sometimes. Thus, his critic dramaturgy often termed as a freak of his insanity is demonstrative of the rules and principles, against the ideas ordinary. In another summarising of his theatre criticism by Warren Montag, who calls Althusser's endeavour as a theatre critic – "as a philosophy by its nature compelled to act out its theses in the field of visibility, that is, the theatre proper to it" (Robbins 2015). The essence of his theatre critic is a conflictual reality, with the 'fleeting presence' of tangibility unperceived. Althusser's work on theatre criticism, with its focus on the stage action and uncommon characterisation, played significantly as the

plot within a plot, characterise his work as the theatre "authorless".

His theatre criticism began with a detailed narration of the play, also bringing forth the significance of the minor social character, constituting and deciding the essentiality of the plot. Therefore, perhaps for many critics can see the "spostamento" as a theme of his theatre criticism (Statkiewicz 1998). Thus, Althusser's criticism piccolo Teatro proves to be one his most important piece of criticism, accommodating and reflecting diverse, varied and often contradictory themes. Although a few works, causally related to this work is available, it is essential to mention and analyse some of them.

## II. RELATED WORKS

Since Althusser is famous as a Marxist philosopher who contributed to reinterpret the Marxist theories, few works have attempted exploring Althusser's theatre or artworks as the distinct subject to study. Muhammad Kowsar in his 'Althusser on the theatre' attempts to trace the rich and important contexts of the criticism of the Althusser concerning the study of 'The Piccolo Teatro,' by providing a detailed description of the original observation of Althusser's theatre criticism. He appears to be excellent in his studies, emphasising to a large extent, the analysis of the ideological significance and reflection in Althusser's critique of the play. While he undermines the necessity of conjecturing temporalities besides overlooking elements for aleatory materialism in Althusser's criticism of the play, he focuses on describing Althusser's analysis of the play. As Althusser in his criticism of 'Piccolo Teatro' displays many relevant themes, approaches and interpretations, Kowsar confines himself to highlight the ideological argument in Althusser's critique of drama.

Banu Bargu emphasises the philosophy of aleatory materialism concerning Althusser's study of artistic practice in his paper "In the Theater of Politics." In his other essay, 'Althusser's Materialist Theater: Ideology and Its Aporias,' he discusses Althusser's theories and ideas of materialist theatre. While there are some minor concerns the theatre criticism regarding Althusser's criticism of the theatre, the most notable is Étienne Balibar's thesis, "Althusser's Dramaturgy and the Critique of Ideology." the essay provides new insight into Althusser's theory of Ideology, correlating Ideology, and ISA as the deductive framework of Althusser's theatre criticism. Therefore, given the approaches of the sources about his

aesthetics, no specific work attempts to shed light on Althusser's theatre criticism, its meaning, associative themes, and his contribution to literary theory through the theatre criticism.

Many believe that reading Althusser means undergoing such a delusional, mad activity that he seems to imply that even Marx's *Capital* is in danger of being exploited as a form of political fetishism by bourgeois sensibility (10). Althusser recognises textual ideological aberration, as the sense of his criticism of the *Piccolo Teatro* essay in its emotional aspect which is: 'philosophical ideas are at test against a real phenomenon which is a cultural occurrence in this case'. His thoughts and critical style reflect his dominant and in-depth sense of critique. His ideas and significant style represent his authoritative and profound observations into criticism, presenting the additional set of aesthetics focused on novel ideas and concepts. The traditionalist will abjure entertainment in favour of a dramatic performance that can speak to an epoch's main critical issues; Althusser, however, prefers to set forth his materialist criticism with realistic yet dominant critical assumptions (Kowsar 86).

The criticism on "*Piccolo Teatro*": Bertolazzi and Brecht, has a unique significance as it is perhaps, the only piece of Althusser's critique reflecting diverse theatrical critical perspectives and aspects. First, it provides invaluable insights for a materialist analysis of aesthetic production. Second, it unearths his dominant critical aptitude and abilities with a display of uncommon yet 'real' critique of theatre, throwing up the recent trends and principles of criticism. Third, 'the essay is a testimony to how Althusser's study of artistic practice (in this case materialist aesthetics as political practice)' Hence, it contains essential elements that predict Althusser's fascinating theory of aleatory materialism established in the 1980s. Furthermore, it reveals the Althusserian aesthetic critique capable of inspiring and directing the concepts of materialist theatre, which give significance to various theatrical themes such as consciousness, philosophy, use of time, significant space, characterisation, and critical philosophical terminology. The works, as mentioned above, specifically focused on one of the aspects of the Althusser theatre criticism, which neither seems congruent nor aligning with the criticism that Althusser reflected.

#### **Overview of the Play**

*El Nost Milan* is a melodrama and a bad one as it cannot impress according to the tough Parisian audience (in the theatre of politics 46). It is about the life and ties between

the Italian sub-proletariat at the end of the nineteenth century—a seduction went wrong between three characters — the father, his daughter, and her seducer. The melodrama unfolds as an act of desperation by a father to save his daughter's reputation. He murders her seducer to face, a defiant disavowal from Nina for his actions and values. However, the attention of Althusser is not on the plot. At the start of his critical work, Althusser with little digressions and interpretations, and narrative style, describes a peaceful description of the play's events as he found them in Strehler's production. Unlike other theatrical performances where capitalist artificial tastes and high-brow characters fill the stage space, Althusser here appreciates the 'true' presentation of life on stage. He describes the first act "set in the Milan Tivoli... a cheap, poverty-stricken fun-fair in the thick fog of an evening" is "an Italy unlike the Italy of our myths" (For Marx 131). Since Strehler compressed the disjointed four acts of Bertolazzi play into a three-act production, with the latter title, Althusser praises the play for it is 'remarkable for its internal dissociation' (For Marx 134).

Strehler maintains three acts identical in structure and performance. For the rest of each act, various anonymous characters take part. Instead, in a few minutes, at the end of each act, a tragic tale is played out between three characters, a proletarian girl, her father, and the Togasso, the typical 'worthless' character trying to seduce her. Althusser identifies characters in the binaries of the class. Thus, he describes Act one, 'the scene is a cheap fairground during the 1890s. A wave of proletarian and sub-proletarian characters — unemployed, beggars, robberies, prostitutes — comes and for much of the action moves through the fair's various stalls (143).

The story of the play revolves around three principal characters, correlated with forty-odd characters who filled the space with their non-actions. These characters in extreme penury, utter misery and wretchedness represent the submissiveness and helplessness owing to the capitalist conditions of existence. The wretched and ruined lives wander on stage in despair aimlessly, for they have lost their way and their consciousness. In the first act, Togasso notices a girl, Nina, who wants to seduce her. She defies him and quickly departs. Her father Peppon, the fire-eater, who has seen everything, appears.

Following the previous structure, Act 2 features the same idle interaction between anonymous sub-proletarian characters, except this time, the scene is a soup kitchen. At the end of the act, Nina reappears, and we hear that the clown

is dead whom Nina liked. Tomasso forces her to kiss him and give him what little money she has. Pepper then appears, and, after a struggle, kills Togasso and flees away. This slow-moving structure, as we witness, also continues with Act three. This time, the scene is the night-shelter of women. When all the characters leave at the end, Nina, who slept there, stays. Her father comes to see her, to make her realise that he killed Togasso for her honour before he goes to jail. Nevertheless, she turns on him for bringing her up with lies (read bourgeois moralities here). Her father leaves shattered, but Nina goes out into the daylight, cherishing her freedom amidst abject poverty.

In short, a formal simplicity governs the design of the essay: it opens with a brief introduction, followed an ordered sequence by plot synopsis (of the play as staged), extended discussion of Strehler's achievements as the interpreter of the text, and a culminating argument to support Bertold Brecht's pivotal role in Marxist theatre practice

#### **Althusser's Criticism of Theatre**

In his introductory paragraph, Althusser calls Strehler's production "extraordinary," because it avoids "tired, anachronistic entertainment" in favour of confronting its audiences with "the heart" of the problems apparent in modern dramaturgy (Althusser 131).

The essay on Teatro, as incorporated in Althusser's most famous work 'for Marx' not only occupies an essential place in 'for Marx' but also reveals his theatrical criticism. For many, his criticism leads to the theory of aleatory materialism, whereas some find it associative to ideological dominance presented in the text.

In his remarkable work-Althusser has discouraged the use of selective use of quotations to define anything. What he proposes in his criticism of Teatro is the traits and features of materialist theatre, contrastive to fantastic bourgeois entertainment and not the comments of Bertolazzi or Strehler. His creative, analytical ability using dialectical understanding marks his criticism of Piccolo Teatro. For his handling of many theatrical terms and complex ideas advocate his case as a theorist, not only a Marxist theorist but also a critic.

Althusser's critique views the disjointed acts, identical structure and space on the stage filled with the insignificant people, proving only to be significant to the unity of the act. The inaction on the stage, which nowhere treated as the vital dramatic tool for Althusser, adds more meaningful integration to the play. The paradoxes, presenting a dialectical structure,

exposes the conflict of consciousness, which Althusser calls the elements of dialectics. Althusser notes the philosophy of encounter in the paradox of El Nost Milan– as the confrontation between the characters producing its plot at the end of the act. What appeals to Althusser about the on-stage dispute is that 'it is nothing but a consciousness' dialectic, that of Nina and her father (114).

Althusser notices characters living as the representative in the chronicle's time. The dialectic of the tragic plot, Althusser writes, 'turns in a void, since it is only the dialectic of the void, cut off from the real world forever' (For Marx 140).

Strehler's stage art influences by the opposing consciousness and portrayal of the characters. It depicts their wretched living conditions on stage. The consciousness which characters display is something that is not normal but foreign to their immediate living conditions. However, the framework of linguistic principles or morality cannot replace the living and complex reality, the wretchedness of life on the stage in its live mode, contrasts with the characters representing the stage of consciousness. Althusser contemplates:

The dialectic of the melodramatic consciousness is only possible at this price. This consciousness must be borrowed from outside (from the world of the alibis, sublimations and lies of bourgeois morality), and it must still believe as the consciousness of a condition (that of the poor), even though this condition is foreign to the consciousness (For Marx 139).

Pepper, as he lives his melodramatic Ideology as the truth of his place in society, converges with Nina's world of consciousness. However, the Ideology that moves the tragic plot has no connection to the social relationships in which the characters in the play operate and are depicted throughout the chronicle era.

The play, with its inherent paradoxes, the ideological characters and disjointed structure, as approached by Althusser, shows the coherence of purpose, which is to challenge what concede reality. Here reality is an awakening to the real-life conditions of existence devoid of any ideological interpellation. Therefore, as Althusser writes: 'At the end, the last scene provides an answer to the play's paradox and structure' (For Marx 140). As Nina turns against her father at the end of the play for bringing her up in a system of delusions and lies, she criticises and breaks his melodramatic Ideology. She breaks from the tragic narrative that it has guided, preferring to enter the real world, albeit



exploitative, rather than staying within the boundaries of the Ideology of her father. The dialectical elements; Nina and her father, representing contrastive consciousness, reflect the quasi-null relationship. Althusser writes:

This dialectic, which only comes into its own at the ends of the stage, in the aisles of a tale that it never penetrates or conquers, is a very detailed picture of the quasi-null relationship of false consciousness to a real situation (For Marx 140).

The play shows us, argues Althusser, that Ideology can be called a false consciousness of the real world, which capitalism's exploitative relations of production run to their purposes. (141). Althusser's interpretation of materialist theatre obliterates his famous theory of ideological interpellation and subject formation. Materialist theatre functions like Ideology; it interpellates spectators through the activation of unconscious processes that recruit, shape, and incite them. The theatre, as expected to Althusser, offers a mirror to the spectator not to see others but to their; to recognise themselves as the ideological products. Ideology, therefore, represents the main "object" of theatrical practice (Bargu 66).

If in classical theatre spectators identify themselves with the hero, Althusser expects materialist theatre to effectuate non-identification or de-recognition on spectators. The incitement of materialist theatre is a play on the instability of self-recognition, igniting doubt about misrecognition, on the one hand, providing assurance by displacing and diverting that misrecognition to others, both in the audience and on stage, on the other.

The Teatro criticism of Althusser presents the asymmetrical juxtaposition of the eternity of the present—the current situation of the ordinary life of the masses—and a dramatic event in the wings, a latent (though absent) structure. Thus aesthetic -reality -and not realism, grow with encountering values and principles. It challenges the traditional aesthetic that always deludes spectator with great lies and dreams romantic and ideological. The conjecture critique that arises from Althusser's reflections on aesthetics conceives an encounter with bourgeois morality and art, bringing into light the wretchedness of living under the capitalist regime.

### **On the Organization of Play**

Althusser identifies the organisation of the play as the "dialectic-in-the-wings" structure (*la dialectique à la*

cannonade), which incorporates both linear and dialectical time, the open centre and the full margin meeting each other. This meeting is asymmetrical, delayed and delaying, decentered and decentering (For Marx 142).

For Althusser, the play uniquely displays the integration of the disjointed elements. He finds the play "remarkable for its internal dissociation" (For Marx 134). However, these disassociations have more considerable significance as they force the heart of the play if appropriately seen.

The play presents many characters- nameless, purposeless idlers who occupy the space on the stage. Then, in the last few moments of the act, action erupts with the three characters involved in direct operations. Nina has to suffer as a victim, with no place to go, the play as found melodramatic *Misérables'* by many, Althusser, however, justified its disjointed structure as dialectic.

### **The Significance of Time in the Play**

Time plays a significant part in the play. Althusser finds that Strehler manages the time theme which maximises the effects of the drama, bringing its many aspects, manifestations, and meanings to bear. Althusser appreciates the requisite dynamic and multilayered embodiments of time. Time has no prejudicial impact on its neutrality, except for the lives of the characters.

Therefore, the imperceptible time itinerary, influenced by 'its ostensible absence,' should not correspond with 'the slow-moving chronicle of the everyday lives of the common folk,' nor should it correlate with the rapid time of the experiences of Nina; instead, it is the two opposing mechanisms that forecast invisible time.

However, the time invisible does not spring before the real limits of the time of melodrama appears. This "articulated time;" "moved from within by an irresistible force," appears at the outset as "the dialectical time par excellence"(For Marx 137). The period within which two-dimensional entities in their conceptions of consciousness contend against each other is complex. This dialectical and complex time indicates that the two opposing worlds, the one with the marked suffering, idle and leisurely, on the other, albeit impoverished, exist relatively inactive at the beginning yet dominant enough to heighten the effects of the play.

Invisible time is to take precedence over paradoxical temporality. The stage setting, operations of the second act-demonstrates the proletarian character parade uniquely juxtaposing the Spatiotemporal elements in the soup kitchen. Althusser explains the theatrical setting of Strehler in detail, praising how the director inserts significance into it. He describes:

A cavernous room overwhelms and dwarfs the characters that appear on the stage; the appearance of a massive, dilapidated back-wall, rising to a high ceiling, reinforces the sense of austerity; large, heavy benches ...' In the second act, it becomes painfully clear that the hollow, closed cube of this cheap restaurant is an illustration of the time in which these people find themselves.

Althusser acclaims a complex, 'irregularly punctuated notion of duration' (Kowsar 64), even as he doubts a "centred" space, the necessity of compound, 'irregularly punctuated notion of duration' (Kowsar 64), even as he doubts a "centred" space, the necessity of the unity structures. His criticism on theatre serves as an influence of time but also his style of theatrical criticism and methods. The ideological interplay of the character and the play almost functions independently, outlining the very structure of the play. Further, Althusser concludes: "I can think of no comparable representation in spatial structure, in the distribution of men and places, of the deep relations between men and the time they live" (For Marx 137).

For Althusser, the sense of empty time is to understand the chronicle of a miserable life, which makes up most of the story. The object of the theatrical devices, he writes, is to reflect the nature of time. He signifies the importance of time:

*It is a moment when nothing happens, a time without hope or a future, a time when only the past is repeatedly set ... Moreover, in the political stammering of the factory-building labourer, the future is hardly groped for. ... In a term, a time of stagnation in which nothing like history will happen, an empty time, known: the time of history.*

*An empty time, acknowledged as empty: the moment of their condition call, a time of stagnation in which nothing like history will happen, an*

*empty time, known: the time of history*  
(136).

Althusser argues that time, as a dynamic concept of length, is, in fact, different from the balanced divisions one identifies with clock time. Althusser exposes the second time structure that takes place in the Bertolazzi play, which Strehler manipulates in its development. For proletarian characters, (we mean the character not engaged in direct actions), time eternal -a slow-moving time exists whereas for three main characters (Nina, Peppon, Togasso) the chaotic, hurried time show its presence.

Althusser states, 'Slow-passing, empty time and lightning-short full time,' downplaying any hope for those miserable characters leads to consciousness on the stage to erupt outbreaking action notions of bourgeois Ideology. Thus, the notion of freedom replaces miserably of consciousness amid poverty. The course of action in the play reveals an ordinary, conjectural time and prime, actual time, besides altering its outcomes.

The last period during which the tragedy breaks out and unfolds through the locomotion of its internal dynamics is just a timely minimum moment. With time delayed, the "history" of the people is visible as a-historical. The repetitive acts that define their everyday lives remain irrelevant to the case of Nina's vivid life. The two temporalities coexist not only unequal but also with no "explicit relationship"(For Marx 134). Their only relation is the absence of a real relationship (15). With its varied forms and mechanisms, the theory of time provides Althusser with the necessity to conjecture. The juxtaposition in time of multiple points of view, often giving divergent views for Althusser, serves a purposeful theatrical tool.

#### **Alienation: Within and Outside the Play**

Alienation, as a motivation or effect, has a dominant role in the criticism of the Althusserian Teatro. Alienation is visible in rupture, also in the character descriptions, which portrays around forty odd characters inactive contrasting the three active agents Nina, her father and Togasso. This contrast brings out the suffering of the commoners as they- being the weak force; they do not command the actions but remain silent on the stage. Perhaps this is how Brecht discusses how social reality affects the characters on stage, calling our attention to the alterability of social situations, relationships, and roles.

However, the alienation, as reflected in the depiction, also alerts spectators of their worldview and lack of consciousness. Since materialist theatre believes that the dramatist is aware of their consciousness' spectators. The critique of Althusser has an aim-the exposition of Ideology

Therefore, Herbert Blau comments that in Althusser's research, Althusser "shifts the emphasis from Alienation's theoretical elements to its role in critique shaped and implemented in the spectator's consciousness" (63).

In an unfinished essay written in 1968, Althusser again discusses the Piccolo Teatro, describing the alienation effect, he says, "It is not a matter of changing the position of some small elements in the actors' performance," but "a matter of a displacement that affects the conditions of the theatre as a mature" (Bargu 64). Althusser appreciates Brecht for his revealing the underlying Ideology that no other form of drama dares to touch upon fearing the possibility for monetary loss. The Brechtian plays are remarkable; they create what should be of people's interest, as truth. Not only does Brecht attempt to wake the spectators to the unclaimed reality, but also warn them to be unattached to the play, to see it as a play.

No good philosophical concept can substitute reality. Truth is more fluid, live and actual, whereas the idea is dead and conceptual. For Nina, with her sudden exposure to reality, whatever her father said reflects philosophical-ideological doctrines, hindering her freedom and individuality. Althusser terms this rupture essential to the climax since he noted that the 'consciousness of the event opposes the actual living experience of the people in the idiom of moral certitude and religious conscience'.

Brecht believes the consciousness of individual characters, in whose words they experience and behave in their lives, coexists with no direct connection to the historical nature of the social structure in which they do so. For Brechtian plays follow the identical structure- decentered structure with the illusion-wrapped, naïve consciousness as his starting-point. Althusser comments, 'Brecht refuses to make it that centre of the world it would like to be'. That is why in these plays, the centre is always to one side (For Marx 145).

Althusser suggests that this structure's role is like that of the play of Bertolazzi: we see the characters as unaware of their historical reality, just as their development is. The play framework shows criticism of the Ideology and an account of its real circumstances. Above all, Althusser argues, this

structure makes up the alienation effect generated in their audience by the works. As Althusser writes, 'What else is he, if not the brother of the protagonists, caught up as much as they are in the spontaneous myths of Ideology, its delusions and privileged forms?' (For Marx, 148).

### **The Problem of Ideology in the Piccolo Theater.'**

Bruce Robbins in his "The Performance of Poverty: On Althusser's Dramaturgy and the Critique of Ideology,' noted that Althusser's thinking on theatre and art 'was not intended for readers concerned with theatre and art. Rather, it was intended as an indirect way of solving the problem of ideology' (107).

The problem of Ideology has been an inherent part of Althusser's works, since theatre as categorised as a part of the cultural industry. It cannot claim to be un-ideological or apolitical. Ideology defines a person the same as the colour added to water, and it is a colour that defines water then. Water is colourless. Ideology functioning, in the same way, controls their consciousness to prevent them from confronting the truth. However, Althusser does not denounce Ideology altogether; instead, he considers it essential to make people 'become conscious' of their class conflict and 'fight it out'; in its religious, ethical, legal, and political forms (). He delineates the difference between Ideology as a social reality and Ideology in its theoretical effects as later always prevent gaining correct knowledge.

In criticism of piccolo theatre, we can identify ideological elements in characterisations, social positioning of the characters, contrast in the stage occupation by the chief actors and rest, or the disavowal by Nina in a play. However, Stankiewicz claims that 'Althusser's theory of ideology is implicit in his analysis of theatre', (40) considering Althusser criticism of drama, we yet cannot equate Ideology with that of Althusser's criticism of piccolo theatre. While criticising the classical aesthetics which emphasises controlling other unities, Althusser detested its content -as the theme ideological and unquestioned (For Marx 144).

Althusser praises Brecht for his novel attempt to reveal the underlying consciousness and keep it at the corner, never allowing it to centre. The play does not show a complete ideological composition, preferably the events, actions and character reveal their ideological consciousness in a play. For Althusser, ideology functions indirectly. Ideology needs people, actions to functions through, although it is never

outside. In the criticism on piccolo Teatro, Althusser assumes the inevitable rupture that can shake ideological fantasies. Althusser's innovation is that he places the critique of Ideology in the ability of the Bertolazzi play to show the dissociation between reality and its consciousness (Balibar 40-42).

The question in analysing the theatre for historical materialism is not, as Brecht suggests, whether the audience can identify with the characters. It is, instead, about what the product does with this ideological self-recognition is in place even before the curtain rises. Brecht achieves his alienation-effects, Althusser argues, less through his technical devices than through the structure of his plays, in which the audience watches the forms of ideological consciousness that have brought them to the theatre in the first place criticised the stage (112).

Althusser reveres Bertolazzi, Brecht and Strehler because in each of them he sees the legacy of an epic battle in which the arch-critical spectator dislocates the artist in a fight of equal forces. That they can mediate in themselves so between opposite characteristics enables them to research unique objects according to the principles derived from Marxist aesthetics.

Althusser wrote the Piccolo Teatro essay in 1962, which proves to be a tremendous theoretical critique manifesting varied interpretations and perspectives. Whenever the history of theatrical criticism as a study is documented, Althusser's views, his observations and understanding of theatre criticism will feature on top. In his critique of piccolo Teatro, Althusser kept his thoughts on Carlo Bertolazzi to a minimum, analysed the production of Strehler rather than the script, and interpreted the play. Folco Portinari, the editor of the Bertolazzi set, thus wrote in 1971: "It is paradoxical enough that Bertolazzi's only significant critical study should be the work of *El Nost Milan* written by a French philosopher, one more indication that the prophets are absent from the fatherland" (Kowsar 472).

We consider Althusser a Marxist interpreter, a philosopher, and a critic of Marxist works that contradicted much of his research on critique, dramatic aesthetics, capable of constituting his theoretical stance. His criticism of the theatre, however, exposes not only his theoretical ideas but also as poses him as a reformer-perhaps politico-literary besides a theorist. His criticism has a meaning, productivity,

contesting interpretations and far-reaching influences, begetting more questions than answers.

Last, let us recall the final paragraph of "The 'Piccolo Teatro': Bertolazzi and Brecht," written three years before Reading Capital:

*"I look back, and I am an irresistibly assailed by the question: are not these few pages, in their maladroit and groping way that unfamiliar play, *El nost Milan*, performed on a June evening, pursuing in me its incomplete meaning, searching in me, despite myself, now that all the actors and sets have been cleared away, for its silent discourse? (Althusser, 151).*

### III. CONCLUSION

Althusserian criticism on the piccolo Teatro: is an important, multifaceted, and short work began with Strehler's critique of an Althusser on a play. Although the play with its character and plot has no clear theme, three main characters caught up in tragedy correlating the other forty commoners occupying the stage, the critique on play shows many theatrical and philosophical concepts ranging from the dramatic tools to the aesthetic materialist theatre. Therefore, it seems fallacious compared to the current notion that Althusser has no substantial theoretical works at all. Criticism in its political context, conjectural overtones, the struggle of consciousness and social reality as defined by Althusser, lay down the principles of aesthetics compared with melodramatic bourgeois ideologies. The research continues to inspire other theoretical works on the stage, though limited, with its underlying varied scope and meaning. His study of theatre reveals him above all as a critique of aesthetics and philosophy, not just of works on Marxism. Besides, his criticism also reflects the underlying themes not explicitly related to the criticism theatre. His criticism thus uniquely presents significant a case for Althusser's literary criticism.

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