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Appetite and Aspiration in Modernist and Postmodernist Plays:

King Ubu (1896), *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1949),
Top Girls (1982) and *'night, Mother* (1983)

Yuko Hori

Almost all literature scholars agree that *King Ubu* by Alfred Jarry is, along with Guillaume Apollinaire's *The Breasts of Tiresias* (1917), a turning point for modernist theatre. These plays had a huge impact on Antonin Artaud, who was inspired by Jarry and developed some of his ideas into his *Theatre of Cruelty* in the 1930s. Jarry's anarchism and absurdity also influenced the Theatre of the Absurd in the mid-twentieth century. The common characteristic among these plays includes disgust for "conventional bourgeois theatre, scientific logic and middle-class ethical restrictions" (Banham 262). Amongst the different ways used to challenge social norms, their depictions of food consumption are notable: F.T. Marinetti declares in *The Futurist Cookbook* (1932) that it is important to pay attention to food because cooking and eating habits are affected by people's "class, culture and nationality" (Novero 2). This essay will discuss the modernist plays, *King Ubu* (1896), *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1949), and two postmodernist plays, *Top Girls* (1982) and *'night, Mother* (1983), and will

focus on the representations of the characters' desire for food and the carnivalesque aspects of these plays.

1. The “Grotesque Body”: Mikhail Bakhtin

Before beginning the argumentation concerning the usage of food in the plays, it is necessary to offer a brief overview of the carnivalesque as described by Mikhail Bakhtin. According to Bakhtin, carnival laughter “builds its own world in opposition to the official world, ... its own state versus the official state” (88). Whilst official feasts reproduce “the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms and prohibitions” (9), in carnival or marketplace festival, cultural norms are turned upside down and people are allowed to enter the “utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance” (Duncombe 87).

Bakhtin argues for the importance of eating and drinking in carnival: the carnival feast fills the role of subverting the existing social hierarchy temporarily because when people eat and drink copiously, the body is barely controlled. According to him, a grotesque realism can be found in the material bodily images, such as the fat physical appearance of Sancho (Panza) in *Don Quixote*. He argues that, along with Sancho's materialism and defecation, his big belly, appetite and thirst are an “absolute lower level of grotesque realism” (22). All the main life activities of the grotesque body are connections “between the bodies and between the body and the world” (317):

Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing) as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body – all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body. In all these events the beginning and end of life are

closely linked and interwoven. (317)

Carnavalesque forms and images are practicable means for playwrights who try to rebel against the traditional political and social views and to describe the new world. The authors who will be studied in this essay convey their assertions by depicting what and how the characters eat and drink, actions that are the most essential actions required to survive.

2. Appetite in *King Ubu*

Alfred Jarry's *King Ubu* is acknowledged as one of the predecessors of Dadaism because of its revolutionary satire. This five-act play, opening with "Merdre," "shit" in French, caused a riot in the audience during the first performance in Paris in 1896. Jarry shook the middle-class audience's conventional thought about what the theatre should be. Therefore, several years before the historical avant-garde movements such as Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism appeared, as Marinetti marked in his manifesto, Jarry had already replenished the "deep wells of Absurd" (Marinetti 1). As Jeanette R. Malkin points out, through Pa Ubu's behaviour, Jarry challenged the "conventionality of the theatre and the hypocrisy of bourgeois morality" (164).

Bakhtin explains that Alfred Jarry marks the first generation of the literary genre of "grotesque realism," followed by the second generation with writers such as Thomas Mann, Bertold Brecht, Pablo Neruda and many others (46). Bakhtin regards Jarry's work as vital to the carnival spirit due to its radical laughter, and the fact that the grotesqueness of Pa Ubu has "the potentiality of an entirely different world" (48). He states, "Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed" (10). The grotesque figure of Pa Ubu is the most conspicuous modern instance of this idea because his

surreal depictions are certainly funny and, at the same time, his appearance fulfills the role of alienating the audience.

The appearance of Pa Ubu is impressive and essential in this play. Usually he is cast as a fat man whose belly is much more grotesquely swollen than Sancho's potbellied body. According to Jarry's notes on the costumes, Pa Ubu should wear a casual grey suit, a bowler hat and a cane in his right pocket (Hill 33). Through this outward appearance he demonstrates the fact that he is from the middle classes and that he eats too much. In the opening lecture of the first performance, Jarry declares that Pa Ubu's abdomen is "far more swollen with satirical symbols than we have really been able to stuff it with" (Melzer 76). He prefers modern and "shoddy" costumes because his satire is on the situation at that time and he wants to make the play more "wretched and horrible" ("A Letter to Lungé-Poe" 111). Jarry's obsessive attention to the detail of the costumes and the performance indicates that the fat figure of Pa Ubu sends a strong message: the author's bitter irony on bourgeois patriarchal norms. The physical and mental emptiness of "Pa" (father) Ubu equals the patriarchal conventional social structure.

From the late nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century there emerged gradually, in France, new thoughts on the body in medical science and fashion. According to Peter N. Stearns, fatness was undoubtedly a major new issue between the 1890s and 1914 (167). Around the time Jarry produced his play, people started to consider that being slim was good for the health as well as fashionable. Before that, the French thought that a traditionally well-fed body was a "sign of prosperity and good humor" (Stearns 155). In this particular atmosphere, Jarry makes his character fat and ugly on purpose. Pa Ubu's overweight figure shows that he cannot control his appetite and that he lives a degenerate life. His appearance emphasizes his untrustworthy personality.

Pa Ubu's voracious appetite makes a strong impression on the audience in a very early scene of the play. In Act One, Scene Two, he steals a roast chicken and a slice of meat even though their guests had not yet arrived, and gets yelled at by his wife, Ma Ubu. These menus refer to the bourgeois' preference for foods. Stearns points out that the French had an unusual strong fondness for meat and that it was essential in their meal, even though vegetarian diets were proposed around 1900 (155–56). What Pa Ubu grabs from the table symbolizes his status and nationality. In the *Futurist Cookbook*, Marinetti declares that people should abandon bourgeois dishes, rich with fat and carbohydrates (Novero 3). This scene indicates not only his childishness but also his bourgeois vulgarity. One study reveals, in fact, that between 1873 and 1953, French middle-class households had changed. According to this study, around 21.5 to 25 per cent of a family's income was used for food (Zeldin 404). It follows that at the time when *King Ubu* was first performed in the Nouveau Théâtre (1896), the two to three thousand middle-class audience spent approximately one fourth of their money to eat. Pa Ubu mirrors the reality of the elites' lives.

It is also important to note that, like Falstaff in William Shakespeare's plays, Pa Ubu is tremendously fat even though his position of the Captain of the Guard should imply a physical presence. His portly form is emphasized when he cannot sit down in the chair:

PA UBU. Pff! Any bigger, I'd have smashed the chair.

DOGPILE. Oi, Ma Ubu, what's for dinner?

MA UBU. I'll tell you.

PA UBU. I like this part.

MA UBU. Baloney soup. Calfcollops. Chicken. Pâté de dog. Turkey bum. Charlotte Russe.

PA UBU. That's enough. Snurk! More?

MA UBU. (*Continuing.*) Ice cream, lettuce, apples, hotpot, tartyfarts, cauliflower shikt (shit). (193)

Ma Ubu's menus and her language are filled with a mixture of disordered nonsense. It is interesting that the person who makes him much fatter is Ma Ubu. As can be seen in Pa Ubu's words "That's enough. Snurk! More?" he knows that it is disgusting and that the amount of food is as much as required.

Through the whole play, food is linked to money. For instance, in Act Two Scene Six, after Pa Ubu kills King Wenceslas and takes over his throne, he acts like a child, saying that he wants the money and food all to himself (196). And in Act Three Scene Three, he sings a silly song about "beer," "pee" and "tax" with his soldiers (201). In *King Ubu*, along with money, food and drinks are mentioned to emphasize Pa Ubu's behavioural need to cling on to power.

Malkin suggests that Pa Ubu's gross appetite is similar to the one to be found in *Macbeth* (191). In *Macbeth*, eating is strongly connected to the ambitions of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth and Malcolm to take the throne from Duncan. However, the most different characteristic of the protagonists from those present in *Macbeth* is that they eat ridiculous foods, saying indecent things and spouting swear words. Like Pa Ubu, whose vocabulary of rude words is mainly "Shikt (Shit)," Ma Ubu also uses bad language such as "Shikt" "a tight-arse." Combined with swear words, Pa Ubu's large appetite and the Ubus' ambitions show their abilities to continue to live and make the play farcical and more absurd.

Just like Lady Macbeth, Ma Ubu motivates her husband's intentions to murder the King. However, compared to Lady Macbeth's plan to kill Duncan in order to catapult her husband onto the throne, Ma Ubu's words are significantly demeaning.

LADY MACBETH. Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since?
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would,"
Like the poor cat i' th' adage?

MACBETH. Prithee, peace.

I dare do all that may become a man:
Who dares do more is none.

LADY MACBETH. What beast was't, then.

That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you dust do it, then you were a man: (*Macbeth* 1.7.38–48)

MA UBU. So, do in the lot of them (King Wenceslas' kids). Take over.

PA UBU. Watch it, Ma Ubu, or it's jug for you.

MA UBU. Idiot! If I'm in jug, who'll patch your pants?

PA UBU. So let'em *see* my bum.

MA UBU. No: plant it on a throne. Just think of it. A pile of cash, big as
you like. Bangers for breakfast. A golden coach.

PA UBU. If I was king, I'd have a big hat. Like that one I had in Four-
door, till those bastards nicked it.

MA UBU. *And* a brolly. *And* a cloak so long that it brushed the floor.

PA UBU. I can't resist. Shickastick, if I catch him on his own, he's for it.

MA UBU. At last, Pa Ubu. A proper man at last. (*King Ubu* 192)

The difference between them is not only that Lady Macbeth uses a blank verse while Ma Ubu speaks in prose, but also how they put their husband upon their mettle. As can be seen above, all of the material reasons that drive Pa Ubu to rampage – a pile of money, bangers, golden coach, a big hat and an umbrella– suggest that the motivation for his assassination of King Wenceslas is just to have a more splendid life. Needless to say, this scene is a parody of *Macbeth*. However, the behaviour of the protagonists in *King Ubu* totally lacks dignity, his motivations descending from crown to sausages. This scene stresses the fact that their ambition is animalistic. Moreover, the most absurd aspect here is that Pa Ubu forces the guests to eat a toilet brush still covered with stools, causing several of them to die.

Jarry expects the actors to use a special “accent” or “voice” for the principal characters (“A Letter to Lungé-Poe” 111). The purpose of this direction is to make a burlesque play. Here the author exaggerates Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s serious conversations completely and turns them into ridicule. Bakhtin argues that the “essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (19–20). In this play, Jarry absolutely degrades the meaning of taking the throne and turns it into a farce.

Pa Ubu’s fat appearance as well as the fact that he eats and says a lot of silly things show that he is from a bourgeoisie that can afford enough food, just like the middle-class audience of his play. His swinish appetite implies that the pompous attitude of the elite is utter nonsense. By making the characters eat strange and unhealthy foods, Jarry satires a middle-class lifestyle and its aspiration to rise in the social hierarchy.

3. Food in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

In Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1949), there are several portrayals of the characters eating. In this play, Brecht uses some alienation effects as in his other works. For example, the Singer, who works as a narrator, directly addresses the audience throughout the play to prevent people's emotional involvement. The opening scene is set in a Soviet Georgia that has been liberated from the Nazis. The story of a biological mother and a stepmother fighting over a son is based on an old Chinese drama. However, unlike the original version, Brecht ends the play not with the biological mother's victory but the stepmother's, who really loves the child.

It is remarkable that Brecht describes the characters' eating behaviour throughout the whole play. In Scene One, workers leave the stage to enjoy a meal in the clubhouse (148), and in the next scene the governor is eager to have a banquet without knowing that he is caught (154). In the following scenes the main characters are constantly depicted eating something. In Scene Two, Grusha, who rescues an abandoned baby Michael from the chaos, tries to feed him using her dry breast even though he is not her own child (167). At the end of the play, Azdak, a fair judge who makes decisions based on human kindness and warmth, shares his cheese with the old man who is later exposed as the infamous fleeing Duke, in Scene Five (201).

The most grotesque and significant cameo is a wedding feast in Scene Four. After Grusha gets married to Yussup, a dying soldier, Mother-in-law and Grusha hold a reception to impress people. They both have ulterior motives; Mother-in-law wants to get a marriage portion, and Grusha tries to buy a secured position as a married woman because her brother feels uneasy that she is a single mother. When they serve cakes to the guests at the feast, they have already planned Yussup's funeral:

MOTHER-IN-LAW. They (the guests) are gossiping already. And stuffing themselves with the funeral cakes at the same time. And if he (Yussup) doesn't die today, I'll have to bake fresh ones tomorrow.

GRUSHA. I'll bake them. (191)

Even though their behaviour is inhuman, Brecht advised his scenographer to make this scene comical (Payne 22). On the stage, the characters at the wedding feast are jammed into a small room and eat the cakes Mother-in-law and Grusha prepared whilst Yussup is lying alone in the bed in the adjacent room.

Darwin Reid Payne points out that Brecht found his inspiration from the Stateroom scene in Marx Brothers' *A Night at the Opera* (1935), an American comedy film (22). The Stateroom scene is one of the funniest and most famous parts of the film, and there is also a portrayal of a lot of food. Groucho, one of the main characters, orders enormous amounts of food such as two fried eggs, two poached eggs, two scrambled eggs, two medium-boiled eggs, several hard-boiled eggs and some roast beef which should be rare, medium, well-done and over-done. After that, many people continuously visit his tiny cabin and eventually the room is filled with fifteen people, including the three porters who carried all of the ordered foods. Like this scene, the huge visual impact of the feast scene in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* stresses its farcicality and a carnivalesque principle. Moreover, by adding the dying Yussup's bed next to the small room in which the chaotic feast is held, Brecht emphasizes black humour.

Another scene where the remarkable representation of food appears is after Yussup gets up from a bed and shows that he pretended to be severely ill:

YUSSUP. The funeral supper! That's what you'd like! Get out before I

kick you out!

The guests stampede from the house.

YUSSUP *grumpily to Grusha*. That puts a spoke in your wheel, eh?

Receiving no answer, he turns round and takes a cake from the tray which his mother holds. (194)

In this scene, the audience comes to know that Yussup faked being sick to avoid going back to the war. Immediately after he learns about the end of the war, he begins to behave outrageously. Here Brecht ostentatiously displays his vitality by making him eat a cake that his mother prepared for the guests as wedding and funeral food.

It is interesting that in both scenes, cakes are used to show the characters' dark sides. As Denis M. Calandra states, one of the themes is that all human need the same essential things, "shelter and sustenance" and the eating actions on the stage add realistic aspects to the play (30). At the same time, it can be said that Brecht uses eating carefully in the significant scenes. By showing how the characters eat, he expresses not only their humanity but also a notion of their energy. As can be seen in one of the most famous lines by Brecht, "Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral" (Eat first, morals later) in *Threepenny Opera* (1928), in his plays, food portrays the characters' boldness and determination to survive in a chaotic world.

4. Food and women in *Top Girls*

Eighty-six years after the premiere of *King Ubu*, in 1982 *Top Girls* was performed at the Royal Court Theatre, and was transferred to Joseph Papp Public Theatre in New York in the same year. In the play Caryl Churchill deals with various subjects such as social class, the relationships between career women and their families, and contemporary political issues in the United Kingdom such as Thatcherism. In *Top Girls*, the author represents

female appetite in order to dramatize women's vitality in a period of monetarist retrenchment.

In Act One Scene One, the famous historical women of each generation over the world appear and celebrate Marlene's promotion with a party. From Act One Scene Two, the stage takes place at the employment agency or at Marlene's sister's house in the real world. This section will focus on Act One Scene One as there are numerous descriptions of actions related to food and alcohol. And, added to that, what Marlene and other women order shows their vitality and their ambition to be successful in the world.

The very first lines of this play are Marlene's words, "Excellent, yes, table for six. ... I'd like a bottle of Frascati straight away if you've got one really cold" (1). Marlene, the main character, pays considerable attention to every detail concerning food and alcohol. She orders Frascati instead of just calling it white wine. This Italian dry still wine is generally light-bodied, because its alcohol percentage is around 11–13, and has good crisp acidity and delicate fruity flavours (Fischer 143), which means it is easy to drink. By the end of this scene, for alcohol, Marlene orders five bottles of Frascati and six double brandies. As these female characters are getting drunk, they become much lustier and overlapping dialogues occur more frequently. It can be said that drinking alcohol emphasizes the women's energetic behaviour. While drinking, Isabella has a new appreciation for vivaciousness, remembering the time when she saw the Emperor of Morocco at the age of seventy: "I knew my return of vigour was only temporary, but how marvellous while it lasted" (29). It is notable that this scene ends with these words. Churchill impresses for the audience the image of lively women who eat and drink a lot from the beginning to the end.

As the party progresses, the stage descends into chaos. In the end of this Scene, Nijo loses control of her emotions and starts laughing and crying,

whilst Joan continues to recite the Latin words from Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* without talking to other people until she eventually throws up in a corner and Marlene grabs Isabella's brandy. Bakhtin's carnival aspect can be found in the portrayals of drunken women as well. Bakhtin states that carnival has a characteristic of a celebration for "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" and that it marks "the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (10). Women in Scene One of *Top Girls* are distinguished for their accomplishments; Isabella is well-known as a Victorian lady explorer and writer who was the first woman to become a fellow in the Royal Geographical Society; Joan is believed to have been the first female Pope by hiding her sex; Gret is a powerful female peasant who leads an army of women to Hell fighting the devils in a painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder; finally, the behaviour of Nijo, a former concubine of the Emperor, writing a diary about her private life and travelling across Japan as a Buddhist nun, is rare in classical Japanese literature. Griselda is also famous for her extreme patience and obedience. Their backgrounds show that they are "top girls" in various fields, and so, the audience has a preconceived image of them. Churchill breaks such social norms by turning the scene bacchanalian. The characters' speaking, eating and drinking actions, barely pausing for breath contributes to the carnivalesque nature of the play.

Even when they talk about the deaths of their nearest and dearest, they do not stop looking through the menu and ordering. For instance, Isabella orders a starter and a main dish: "But my father was the mainspring of my life and when he died I was so grieved. I'll have the chicken, please, and the soup" (4). Nijo also orders Waldorf salad immediately after she regrets that she disturbed her father's prayers when he was dying (4). The contrast between the food they intake and the episodes about death highlight their

vigorous attempts to hold on to life and draws laughter from the audience.

The only person who does not eat as much is Patient Griselda from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The difference between Griselda and Marlene is shown in their ways of eating. After Griselda mentions that she is not hungry, Marlene suggests some pudding:

MARLENE. Well have some pudding.

GRISELDA. I never eat pudding.

MARLENE. Griselda, I hope you're not anorexic. We're having pudding, I am, and getting nice and fat.

GRISELDA. Oh if everyone is. I don't mind. (20)

It is important to note that Marlene thinks that getting fat is "nice," and mocks Griselda's small appetite as "anorexic." In addition, what Marlene and other women order after Griselda eats also shows their large appetites. While Griselda just wants cheese and biscuits, they decide to eat profiteroles, zabaglione, apple pie and cream, and cake. All of them are rich in calories, more than 300 kilocalories per 100 grams.

According to Ina Zweigiger-Bargielowska, ever since the 1960s, in Britain, the ideal female body has been regarded as thin and many females, notably models, dancers and actresses, have suffered from anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders (189–90). In fact, from the 1960s to the 1980s, the ideal image of female body had become thinner and thinner which can be seen in models in *Vogue* (Grogan 15). In the United States, on the other hand, since the rise of the women's movement, feminist studies and literature had focused on "how patriarchal society (men) abhors fat women and thus causes all women to hate their own bodies" (Gilman 1). As can be seen in Kim Chernin's *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness* (1981), in the early 1980s, many feminists pointed out the cultural construct of the ideal female body which was made by men.

Eating so much high-calorie food in the party that celebrates Marlene's promotion in her company represents her defiance toward such a prescriptive patriarchal social system and shows that she has her own independent sense of values. To eat and drink voraciously and grotesquely is to be freed from the oppressing image of the ideal woman.

5. Anorexia in *'night, Mother*

As contrasted with the representations of greedy appetite of Pa Ubu and Marlene, Jessie, the main character of *'night, Mother*, loses any desire for food and commits suicide at the end of the play. *'night, Mother* (1983) is a play written by Marsha Norman, an American playwright, and it won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in the same year. It is noteworthy that *Top Girls* and this play were produced around the same period even though their representations of the protagonists' appetite and ambitions are different. As mentioned in the previous section, according to Bakhtin, by eating and drinking abundantly people become unable to control their bodies, which leads to carnivalesque. Norman dramatizes an opposite type of "grotesque body" which leads to liberating the assumptions of the dominant style.

Sarah Reuning argues that Jessie's decreased appetite is a symptom that is actually caused in her body by her depression. At the same time, the conflict between mother and daughter is illustrated by the contrasting descriptions of their desire for food. While Jessie has not been interested in hot chocolate, Thelma, her mother, has a sweet tooth and always has sweets such as "cupcake," "snowball," "Hershey bars" and the "peanuts brittle" (9). All of the products Thelma offers her daughter are sugary, high-calorie and childish. Even though Jessie lost her taste, Thelma tells her inconsiderately that, "You won't like the apple either. It'll be just like the cocoa. You never liked eating at all, did you? Any of it. What have you been living on all these

years, toothpaste?" (36). Food cannot fill Jessie's emptiness. While in *Top Girls* Griselda's small appetite symbolizes her obedience, Jessie's anorexia comes from her desire to kill herself.

Jessie's fasting stems not from a desire to give up life but a way for her to become more of herself. When Thelma tells Jessie not to commit suicide, Jessie expresses her thought that she would like to be sincere and be herself:

MAMA. If you've got the guts to kill yourself, Jessie, you've got the guts to stay alive.

JESSIE. I know that. So it's really just a matter of where I'd rather be.

MAMA. Look, maybe I can't think of what you should do, but that doesn't mean there isn't something that would help. *You* find it. *You* think of it. You can keep trying. You can get brave and try some more. You don't have to give up!

JESSIE. I'm *not* giving up! This *is* the other thing I'M trying. And I'M sure there are some other things that might work, but *might* work isn't good enough anymore. I need something that *will* work. *This* will work. That's why I picked it. . . . Just let me go easy, Mama. (49)

For Jessie, refusing food doesn't mean giving up life but living the way she likes. The gap between her and her mother will never be bridged because, as a mother, Thelma never accepts to simply look at her daughter's act of taking her own life. Jessie explains that she wants to get away from the world, giving the example of riding and getting off the bus:

JESSIE. Mama, I know you used to ride the bus. Riding the bus and it's hot and bumpy and crowded and too noisy and more than anything in the world you want to get off and the only reason in the world you don't get off is it's still 50 blocks from where you're going? Well, I can get off right now if I want to, because

even if I ride 50 more years and get off then, it's still the same place when I step down to it. Whenever I feel like it, I can get off. As soon as I've had enough, it's my stop. I've had enough.
(24)

Jessie's paradoxical desire to kill herself in order to get better at being herself reflects a kind of energetic attitude to live.

Jessie's behaviour is similar to that of the main protagonist in Franz Kafka's short novel "A Hunger Artist" (1922). The hunger artist earns money from the performance of fasting in a cage in front of the spectators. However, at the same time, he tries to develop greater self-awareness by refusing to eat because eating nothing as long as he can makes him feel that he is a sole entity. In the end, he dies after he pushes himself to the limit of life. Benno von Wiese regards positively the artist's suicidal death as a sort of self-fulfilment (339). He claims that his death is an accomplishment of self-expression and a success in proving himself. Paul Heller also points out that Kafka often uses the motif of food in his novels. According to Heller, the world where people eat meat operates under the law of the jungle. The hunger artist refuses the world because he has an insight into the true nature of society. His fasting shows his aim to break away from the world.

Like the hunger artist, Jessie also tries to self-actualize by eating nothing and eventually she reaches her objective of suicide. However, her adverse reaction to food shows her maladjustment to the world. In this play, fasting represents that the person who does not eat at all is eager to break off from the world and to become one's self.

Conclusion

As has been discussed, the portrayals of eating can be used to throw doubt on the prevailing social norms of those times. Jarry describes Pa

Ubu's greediness as absurd in order to satirize the elite. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Brecht reveals a difficult situation in which people have to survive after the exodus of the Nazi army. In Churchill's play, women drinking a lot of alcohol and having plenty of food criticizes the conventional and ideal image of women. At the same time, it is also noteworthy that in these plays the scenes in which the characters eat something ravenously show their vitality. Norman's description of Jessie underlines her urge for survival in the world in her unique way.

The representations of the characters' eating and drinking are strongly connected to carnivalesque spirit. During a carnival, all people are seen as equal and people could thus create "purely human relations" (Bakhtin 10). In this situation, people are able to be freed from existing social norms. These modernist and post-modernist playwrights put the carnival experience on the stage in order to contest the validity of the conventional social system.

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