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Donald B. Beard  
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**A HOUSE OF CONCEITS**

**A Study of the Drama of Jean-Paul Sartre,  
Albert Camus, Eugene Ionesco, and Samuel Beckett**

**Donald B. Beard**

**A dissertation presented to the School of Graduate Studies,  
University of Redlands, in partial fulfillment of the re-  
quirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**1969**

THE UNIVERSITY OF REDLANDS

REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE DISSERTATION ENTITLED

A HOUSE OF CONCEITS

A Study of the Drama of Jean-Paul Sartre,  
Albert Camus, Eugene Ionesco, and Samuel Beckett

by

DONALD B. BEARD

HAS BEEN ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DATE

May 13, 1969

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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To 



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful to Professor William W. Main, a valued mentor, whose quiet counsel and steady encouragement afforded a species of star I wisely let be my guide.

Sincere thanks go also to Professors Frederick S. Bromberger and Ralph E. Hone, to the former for his considerable assistance with matters of form, style, and tone, and to the latter for his scholarly insights and helpful suggestions.

I wish to thank, too, Dr. Richard Barnes, especially for his help with the chapters on metaphor and Beckett, and Mr. Clarence E. Downing, particularly for his comments concerning the chapter on Sartre.

I am indebted as well to Professor William E. Umbach, Dean of Graduate Studies, for his timely counsel and his willingness to compare perspectives. And, of course, I appreciate the several grants made available by the University of Redlands IPGS, which came at crucial times and made a necessary difference.

D.B.B.

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## PREFACE

This study is an effort to define and demonstrate the convention of the conceit as it is employed in the drama of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Eugene Ionesco, and Samuel Beckett. Critics such as Martin Esslin and Jacques Guicharnaud have complained, somewhat bitterly at times, that one or the other of the "schools" to which these playwrights are assigned belongs to a relatively new convention, which has not been widely understood or even adequately defined. Each of these experts, of course, has attempted to lessen this lack, Esslin with The Theatre of the Absurd and Guicharnaud, Modern French Theatre: from Giraudoux to Genet. I intend "A House of Conceits" to be another framework of reference showing the works of Sartre, Camus, Ionesco, and Beckett within their own convention.

Meaning in drama, as in fiction and poetry, is conventionally treated under the heading of theme, particularly when the concern is with the central notion of the work. I subscribe to Thrall, Hibbard, and Holman's view, outlined in A Handbook to Literature, that theme is an abstract concept rendered concrete largely through its representation in person, action, and image. Because of the peculiar difficulties posed by the existential-absurdist

playwrights, e.g., their penchant for radical similitudes and actualizations, I find image to be at once the most promising and problematic of the representational forms. Thus, I proceed from the premise that significance in the works of these men is conveyed primarily through images, that is, figurative images, or "turns," the most common of which are metaphorical in nature. So disparate, so extreme, so extensive are the elements and implications of these "turns," however, that I characterize them as "conceits," for they resemble remarkably the elaborate and far-fetched tropes which over the centuries have been employed to point up complex and startling analogies between seemingly dissimilar phenomena. In apprehending the tenor of these playwrights' similitudes, therefore, I have had to recognize their having yoked together experiences normally kept apart by the mind or, in the words T. S. Eliot employs to describe the modus operandi of the so-called metaphysical poets, their having amalgamated "disparate experience." To a certain extent the process dictates a breakdown of mental habits; but from time to time it does afford a fresh, new, and unusual view of man and his condition.

This, then, is a study of meaning in the dramatic works of Sartre, Camus, Ionesco, and Beckett. As major aspects of my thesis, I attempt to discredit the reliability of existing statements of meaning as regards the works

of the four playwrights; to review and illustrate the conventional means of deducing theme in literary works; in the face of a lessening emphasis upon plot, characterization, meaningful dialogue, and discursive and rational devices, to offer the concept of the hyperbolic metaphor as an aid in discerning significance, and to demonstrate the practicability of this approach; to detail, as background, an abridged history of metaphor, in order to fix the several gradations of tropes -- timid, conventional, and far-fetched (hyperbolic); to demonstrate the difference between conventional metaphors and conceits (i.e., far-fetched, hyperbolic tropes) and, in turn, to establish the difference between metaphysical and dramatic conceits; to analyze in depth the plays of Sartre, Camus, Ionesco, and Beckett by identifying dramatic conceits, positing their apparent tenors, and then justifying those meanings in terms of plot, character, and other distinguishing elements of the respective works; and to introduce appropriate ad hoc critical notions and commentary to obviate the authors' particular perspectives and/or modes of doing drama.

The duty of a critic, I feel, is to comprehend, and to help others to comprehend. Thus in works which on occasion seem nonsensical, confusing, abstruse, or whatever, I seek patterns and significance, at least where the evidence suggests their presence. If this study has a

main assumption, it is that meaning derives from the content of the plays themselves. Except in the case of Ionesco, who confesses the confidential quality of his theatre, therefore, I have given scant attention to matters of biography and history. In the cases of Sartre and Camus, I have elected to discuss in some detail their philosophic notions; but, again, I do so in terms of their literary works and only because they have an immense bearing on the substance in their plays, matter which is reflected, too, in their selection of conceits. Aside from these exceptions and the occasional instances when I inject ad hoc critical notions, whose propriety will be apparent in each case, I have focused almost totally on the plays themselves.

## I. BEYOND MERE METAPHOR

He also said to the multitudes, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, 'A shower is coming'; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. You hypocrites! you know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky; but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?"

--Luke 12:54-56

\* \* \*

Hamlet. Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?

Polonius. By the mass, and 'tis a camel indeed.

Hamlet. Methinks it is like a weasel.

Polonius. It is backed like a weasel.

Hamlet. Or like a whale?

Polonius. Very like a whale.

--Shakespeare, Hamlet

\* \* \*

Siebel. It's magic, as I said.

He is an outlaw. Strike him dead!

Mephisto. False images prepare

Mirages in the air.

Be here and there!

--Goethe, Faust

\* \* \*

### A. Critical Chaos

Since time immemorial man has shown a peculiar penchant for signs. Like his brothers before him, however, twentieth-century man daily discovers his humanity when he picks his way through existence and, particularly, when he assigns meaning to phenomena. A sometimes infinite faculty

permits him to discern what lurks beyond the horizon or plumb in veritable flashes of intuition the heart of sundry matter. A seemingly flawed being, unfortunately, he is equally inclined to move unawares among stark signs emblazoned with significance. There is the endless urge to see and know; but too often his vision is impaired by the smoke of humanity -- callousness, aversion to unpleasantness, distrust, cynicism, etc.

The so-called existentialist and absurdist drama of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Eugene Ionesco, and Samuel Beckett constitutes a confrontation with the signs of the time, with respect both to the being of man and his day in time. However, in re-presenting what they have apprehended, the playwrights themselves have been received variously by a divided chorus of critics. Rather typical of their detractors is Joseph Chiari, who, in reference to the absurdist, complains of a new school of dramatists in France, a gathering of writers specializing in "twitches, whispers, and silence."<sup>1</sup> Warning that the test of reality must lie in the authors' glimpses of separation and/or union with mankind and, as such, must have about them an "informing glow" (p. 13), Chiari opines that the new breed baffles and frustrates its audiences. Since theatre patrons seldom pay to be bored and frustrated, it seems to follow that

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<sup>1</sup>The Contemporary French Theatre (New York, 1959), p. 12.



such dramaturgy is doomed to failure.

I would not be the first to proclaim Chiari's insights (offered in 1959) all that enlightening, for the supposed bastard brand has since come to herald the Gallic House of Thespis. In other words, as Jacques Guicharnaud now concedes, the "avant-garde or 'new theatre' or 'anti-theatre' of the fifties has quite simply become the theatre of our times."<sup>2</sup> Despite the dearness of hindsight, one must nonetheless acknowledge Chiari's remarks as characteristic of those who level the charge of obscurantism.

Defenders and derogators of the modern French theatre do not stop here by any means. They attack the playwrights repeatedly for their gross exhibitionism and sensationalism; commend them for their refreshing spectacle and ingenuity; blame them for sundering ancient truths believed essential to sustain order, commitment, vitality; praise them for raising honest doubts and reflecting shifting attitudes; hail them for diverting minds wrought by excessive stress and endeavor; demean them for ignoring the seriousness of life and overlooking the need to uplift those who avail themselves of the theatre; honor them for faithfully recording existence familiar to mankind in general; disparage them for straying into strange and fantastic arenas that never were; and so on, ad infinitum.

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<sup>2</sup>Modern French Theatre: from Giraudoux to Genet, 2nd ed. (New Haven, 1967), p. 216.

Practically speaking, then, the drama of this era is vibrant, vital, novel, courageous -- dull, extraneous, redundant, timid. It is the godliest of sanctions, the most Mephistophelean in design, the clairvoyant with the surest signs, a mountebank trafficking in camels, weasels, and whales, however much the gullible and patronizing crowd will bear.

So much for delicious hobgoblins. But "How," one asks, "is such a divergence of opinion possible? After all, the critics are seeing the same performances, reading the same plays. Why such violently opposed reactions?" Perhaps the drama falls within the great tradition of good theatre, and as such stimulates healthy controversy. Possibly, too, it is merely a matter of personal preference. Still, one suspects, the varied response has to do with the relative newness of the art -- the seeming novelty of the existentialist-absurdist perspective and the absurdist's modes of doing drama. It is of change, one may recall, that Ortega y Gasset observes, "It might be said that every newcomer among styles passes through a stage of quarantine."<sup>3</sup> Modern art, he adds, will likely face hostile masses. Since it is basically unpopular (indeed, anti-popular), any of its representations produces a curious effect upon the general public. Predictably, while a small

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<sup>3</sup>The Dehumanization of Art and Other Writings on Art and Culture, trans. Willard R. Trask (Garden City, New York, 1956), p. 4.

group is favorably impressed, a hostile majority really wants to ring down the curtain, as it were. Unfortunately, a further complication may arise, that is, a split occurring

in a deeper layer than that on which differences of personal taste reside. It is not that the majority does not like the art of the young and the minority likes it, but that the majority, the masses, do not understand it. (p. 5)

Nor need one probe profoundly to evolve serious doubts concerning respectable critics' ability to understand modern French drama. A rapid scanning of critical interpretations of Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot, for example, surely encourages just such doubts. Charles S. McCoy, a professor of religion, calls attention to several of the play's allusions, the kinship of elements in the play with the thought of Christian existentialists such as Kierkegaard and Tillich, and the sermon-like structure of the play, observing eventually that Didi's line "Hope deferred maketh the something sick" likely alludes to the verse in Proverbs "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; but when a desire cometh, it is a tree of life" (13:12) and concluding that since the barren tree of Act I has sprouted leaves in Act II, Beckett really means to imply that Godot has indeed kept his appointment.<sup>4</sup> The implication of this find-

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<sup>4</sup>"Waiting for Godot: A Biblical Appraisal," Religion in Life, XXVIII (Fall, 1959), 595-603.

ing, of course, is that the pair of vigilantes has not been sufficiently alert. "Considering the large amount of Christian mythology distributed throughout the play," observes Leonard Pronko, it is natural and reasonable to take the tramps as representations of western man, creatures committed to hope and awaiting with some patience the arrival of a savior.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the Pomona professor sees the tree as a kind of cross or gallows and acknowledges Rosette Lamont's suggestion that "Got-ot" be treated as a diminutive meaning "the little God."<sup>6</sup> He concedes, rather conservatively, that a Christian interpretation of the play is justified. However, a more promising approach, he advises, is to take Estragon and Vladimir as reflections of a writer nurtured in the Christian tradition. This being the case, it is possible to appreciate the tramps' hoping and anticipating, yet not to fight the fact that they

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<sup>5</sup>Avant-Garde: The Experimental Theatre in France (Los Angeles, 1964), p. 35.

<sup>6</sup>p. 35. It might also be well to emphasize the disparaging aspect of diminutives; that is to say, "God-ot" may just as well refer to "the inept God." In view of Pronko's later comments concerning Godot's failure, this interpretation seems sensible. Jacques Guicharnaud, too, appears to support this idea when he mentions the relation between Godot and certain pejoratives in French, e.g., godiche, which implies clumsiness or stupidity (Guicharnaud, p. 247). I might note further that one constantly has the feeling that Sartre, Camus, Ionesco, and Beckett are extremely harsh on conventional concepts of God and traditional notions of conduct proper to man. These last statements will be borne out by the analyses of the plays of these men in later chapters.

are being left in the lurch, so to speak. Godot, observes Pronko, will never come: that much is clear. Thus McCoy's assertion regarding Godot's having come, Pronko openly questions, for the bums' persistence and ultimate disconsolation would surely imply a condemnation of Godot.

Frederick Lumley is neither reluctant nor patient in his approach to Beckett. Accusing the playwright of heedlessly striking out beyond mapped territory, he asserts that the expatriate Irishman continually spins dramatic yarns featuring mysterious strangers, always spelled with a large S; and there can be no doubt about the meaning of Godot.<sup>7</sup> Lumley leaves the interpretation at that, apparently choosing not to dignify a point of view highly distasteful to his sense of propriety. The Greeks, he recalls, frequently reiterated the notion, "call no man happy until he be dead," giving to drama and mankind a proper sense of pessimism. He declares himself against the modern "fashionable cult of pessimism," however, an impulse which he pronounces both powerful and negative, but "not a genuine pessimism" (pp. 4-5). Beckett is obviously one of Lumley's playwrights with the narrowest horizons, one to be counted among those

who see and depict life only in the grotesque phase of its sordidness, who distort it unsparingly so that the humanity of the great

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<sup>7</sup>New Trends in Twentieth Century Drama (New York, 1967), p. 203.

dramatists of the past is no longer recognizable, where the characters are neither life-size nor exceptional beings, but puppets. (p. 4)

Lionel Abel, like the others, wonders about the identity of Godot, raising the pregnant possibility of Lucky's "thinking speech" as a parody of James Joyce.<sup>8</sup> Endgame, Abel announces, affords the answer to Godot. Pozzo, he recalls, comes to terrify, entertain, even console the tramps, then as a blind individual returns later to speak of the non-existence of time and the pervasive power of eternity. "Hearing that speech in the theatre," confides Abel,

I had a distinct impulse to believe that Pozzo himself was Godot, the Mysterious Personage the two tramps were waiting to see . . . .  
(p. 135)

In the end, he admits, this does not seem accurate. From Endgame, however, he apparently learns that Pozzo is "none other than Beckett's literary master and friend, James Joyce" (p. 135). What tells him this? Hamm's name calls to mind simultaneously the names "Shem" and "Shaun," Hamm is blind and tyrannical, he is a writer, and he holds the crucial key (that is, the key to literary pre-eminence). Conclusion: Clov-Beckett is Hamm-Joyce's son. Thereafter, Abel further concludes that in Godot, the playwright portrays a Pozzo-Joyce reigning supreme over a Lucky-Beckett. What of Godot himself? Why, Abel suggests,

Godot would be Joyce if Beckett had never met him; Godot would be Beckett if Beckett had never had to admire Joyce. (p. 139)

Some might be tempted at this juncture to break off the business of sampling Godot scholarship. More remains, however, George Wellwarth leads a list of critics who see bleakness, acknowledge its validity, and treat the matter for what it is -- and probably was intended. Many so-called experts, he complains, merely seek to substantiate their own preconceived notions; and if certain works fail in this regard, the experts insist the views therein either lack validity or something quite else is in fact being said.<sup>9</sup> Lumley, he charges, is most uncomprehending, seeing Beckett as he does wilfully plunging into a non-negotiable abyss of false pessimism. Others, such as Professor McCoy, get "hung up" on the playwright's espousing Christian principles, despite the weighty evidence in Godot and his other plays, affording overwhelming indications of Beckett's lack of faith. Moreover, critics like Abel focus upon biography and fantasy to evolve disappointing and dubious trivia. A more profitable approach to Godot and Beckett in general, Wellwarth advises, is to take the dramatist's matter for what it is, sheer nihilism. Thus the passage regarding the evangelists, for example, not only establishes the Biblical concern over one

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<sup>9</sup>The Theater of Protest and Paradox (New York, 1964), p. 37.

of four saying one of two was saved, but in addition emphasizes implicitly that three of the four say nothing of this or, again, that the other of the two was not saved. All becomes clouded by uncertainty. One has difficulty knowing or believing. Perhaps one need not despair. Nor, possibly, may he presume. Recalling, too, Lucky's babble, Wellwarth cites a similar view in Conrad's Heart of Darkness: "Droll thing life is -- that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose" (p. 44). The French playwright, Wellwarth concludes,

holds out no hope to humanity, only a picture of unrelieved blackness; and those who profess to see in Beckett signs of a Christian approach or signs of compassion are simply refusing to see what is there. (p. 51)

More briefly, Charles Glicksberg sees the conversations of the tramps as "a blasphemous satire on theological jabberwocky," Pozzo as power personified, and Lucky as a driven slave.<sup>10</sup> Nothing meaningful is to be said of or for life. Wallace Fowlie rather amazingly notes the obvious interpretation of Godot as God and declares the fundamental imagery to be Christian, yet insists that if Godot is indeed God, he possesses none of the characteristics of the God of Christendom.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps he means to say that Beckett's insinuations are distorted. J. L. Styan

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<sup>10</sup>The Self in Modern Literature (University Park, Pa., 1963), p. 119.

<sup>11</sup>Dionysus in Paris (New York, 1960), p. 214.



sees Beckett readily supplying questions and generously holding back answers, a committed audience viewing the work of an uncommitted playwright. Godot he calls a parable; as "an extended metaphor, it makes itself felt at several levels."<sup>12</sup> Since only half of the equation is given, however, the audience is left to puzzle out the other half. More immediately, of course, the play depicts life-in-godlessness, perhaps the Christ and anti-Christ in everyone.

All these bolts from the critical heights, unfortunately, have awesome potential, especially among supplicating students of drama who have come seeking enlightenment. Some will depart, perhaps pleased to discover a drama full of meaning and diversion. Others will leave, aware of the work's pointlessness and distressing bleakness. Some, too, may turn away in awful dismay, possibly even fleeing in panic and disgust from critics whose science only produces contradictions, confusion, literary chaos. Yet Godot is only one play among many, and the wide range of reactions attending its performance is characteristic of the reception of others as well.

Jean-Paul Sartre's The Flies may serve as a further illustration of critical divergencies. Frederick Lumley sees the play as a twofold study -- one concerning the Greeks in Argos and the other concerning the united front against the enemy, which is apparently the Germans occupy-

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<sup>12</sup>The Dark Comedy (Cambridge, England, 1962), p. 227.

ing France during World War II. He proceeds to condemn the play for its "failure to treat the enemy with any sympathy or respect" (Lumley, p. 147). Wallace Fowlie goes a bit further in crediting Sartre with retaining some of the elements of the Oresteia, but notes the addition of Jupiter and the swarm of flies, observing also the latest theme of the play to be Orestes as redeemer. "This concept of redemption," he emphasizes, "brought about by crime, is of course the opposite of the Christian concept of redemption, of sanctity and martyrdom" (Fowlie, p. 171). Other than these remarks touching the periphery of Christian reference, Fowlie sees the work pretty much as Lumley sees it, that is, a study of Jupiter and, by inference, a comment upon the situation in France during the German occupation.

Joseph Chiari notes that Sartre's characters are those of the old Oresteia, "but the theme, the atmosphere, the emotions, and the thoughts involved," he declares, "are completely different, and bear no resemblance at all to the work of Aeschylus."<sup>13</sup> Although he mentions All

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<sup>13</sup>Chiari, p. 150. Later, he adds of Orestes, "He bleeds his mother and Aegisthus with less concern than a normally kindhearted Englishman would show for a bleeding chicken" (p. 155). Chiari, it seems to me, is somewhat incautious here, for there is the reasonable possibility that Sartre had Sophocles' Electra in mind when he wrote The Flies. Inclusions such as the Tutor, Electra's obsession with revenge, Orestes' lust for blood and vengeance, and even the notion of the cave are logically accounted for when one views Sartre's play in terms of Sophocles' version of the Argive tragedy. No wonder, then, that the play resembles so little the work of Aeschylus!

Souls' Day in Argos, Chiari says nothing of such substance as original sin, rolling the stone away from the tomb, the crowing cock, declaring instead

The insistence on guilt and repentance which pervades the beginning of the play belongs more to the time when it was written and produced, in occupied France in 1942, than to Christian or mythological atmosphere. (p. 151)

In short, the haunted populace of Argos is best understood as the French people living under a German Jove and certain Gallic collaborators.

Hazel Barnes, it seems, manages to account more adequately for the specific substance of The Flies. She sees, for example, the Sartrean characterization as bearing a remarkable resemblance to Sophocles' in Electra, what with the person of Electra being little more than the embodiment of vengeance.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, while she acknowledges a divergence from the theme of the Oresteia, which stressed justice through divine sanction and intervention, she would make allowances for Sartre's existential perspective. Indeed, she insists,

Sartre is launching a violent attack on Aeschylus and saying essentially, "For man as we know him in the twentieth century this basic human situation no longer holds the same significance. For us Aeschylus neither posed the question correctly nor gave the right answer." (p. 22)

She proceeds further, virtually dismissing, as does Chiari,

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<sup>14</sup>Humanistic Existentialism (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1959), p. 19.

the Olympian Jove. "Part of the time," she observes,

he seems to represent Jehovah, but he is too much lacking in moral fervor to fit either the Jewish or the Christian God precisely. So far as the plot is concerned, it is perhaps more accurate to say that he represents not God himself but the traditional concept of God in Christianity. (p. 85)

Such a notion makes remarkably good sense, she feels, in terms of the play's attacks on Christian doctrine and religious attitudes, e.g., original sin and atonement (p. 86), a too traditional alliance of Church and State as protectors of a minority viewpoint (p. 89), the inexorable appearance of Christian justice in the fullness of time (p. 90), miracles (p. 90), and the claims of God as creator of the universe (pp. 91-94).

The difficulty of ascertaining meaning is further underscored in the case of Eugene Ionesco's The Killer, which portrays, as Bérenger's adversary, a puny, deformed, one-eyed dwarf who manages daily to slay several of the radiant city's citizens. How do critics react to this miniature monster? Frederick Lumley merely refers to him as the "mysterious killer" with whom Bérenger chooses to debate, and to whom the reformer loses the case for humanity (Lumley, p. 212). Richard Coe acknowledges the problem of the fiend's identity at least by referring to the "dream sequence" apparent in the play. He does, nonetheless, pursue the matter more generally, seeing the play as another instance of Ionesco's use of antitheses and

opposites; thus the true and the false of the matter are not so apparent as "an intolerable recognition of the absurd, and an equally intolerable refusal to admit it."<sup>15</sup> Coe cites death as a constant theme serving to unify the work of Ionesco. It is not surprising, then, that most of the expatriate Rumanian's plays feature a corpse or a killer, and the question on everyone's lips may well be "What's the good of it all?" Man seems, on the one hand, made for immortality; yet, on the other, he appears merely destined to die. Their bleak prospects before them, many of Ionesco's characters accept their lots, but not without a considerable show of revulsion.

While Martin Esslin suggests that the killer represents the inevitability of death and the absurdity of human existence,<sup>16</sup> he argues that Ionesco is not, as certain critics have thought,

trying to tell us through three long acts that death is inevitable, he is trying to make us experience what it feels like to be grappling with this basic human experience; what it feels like when at the end we have to face the harsh truth that there is no argument, no rationalization that can remove that stark, final fact of life. When Bérenger, at the end, submits to the knife of the killer, he has finally fought through to the recognition that we must face death without evasion, prettification, or rationalization. (p. 134)

George Wellwarth shifts the emphasis considerably

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<sup>15</sup>Ionesco (London, 1961), p. 61.

<sup>16</sup>The Theatre of the Absurd (Garden City, New York, 1961), p. 121.

when he insists the theme to be the "moral spinelessness of society, personified in men like Bérenger . . ." (Wellwarth, p. 67). To the question of the reformer's powerlessness, then, Wellwarth offers Bérenger's commonplace morality. Thus while the killer's identity is not explicitly given, Wellwarth implies that he is the personification of evil.

Leonard Pronko, too, asks "Who?" The freak is certainly not Edward. "But then," he wonders,

why does he carry a brief case exactly like that of the killer? And why does the Architect carry a brief case? And the drunkard, the lost old man, and Mother Pipe? Because we are all killers.  
(Pronko, p. 101)

The Architect, Pronko argues, is implicated by his inhumanity, cold systematization, capitulation to his role as official functionary. Mother Pipe is guilty, for her ideology blinds her to the individuality of men. And Edward, with the others, is to blame for his resignation, indifference, and apathy.

What is to be learned from the foregoing critics' reactions to Godot, The Flies, and The Killer? Surely I must not object in principle to objections regarding "twitches, whispers, and silence." Nor do I wish to insist that no one consider Godot a positive statement of hope in the tradition of the existentialism of Kierkegaard and Tillich. Nor a negative comment on misplaced hope. Nor an improper and inappropriate delineation of the human

condition. Nor do I desire to outlaw the use of intuition, biography, or imagination in apprehending the meaning of Godot, to disregard the play as sheer nihilism, blasphemy and satire leveled at theological complacency and jabberwocky, a wayward insinuation demeaning the God of Christendom, a parable, an extended metaphor, a puzzle affording challenge to a seeking audience.

Neither must I insist that The Flies says nothing of the French and Germans in World War II, or properly depicts a morality condoning crime, or rightly deviates from the framework and concept of Aeschylus' Oresteia, or inappropriately makes allowances for an existential perspective and outrageously implies a rejection of the traditional notion of the Christian God. Neither is Ionesco's killer necessarily not merely mysterious, not clearly a figure from a dream sequence, not inevitable death personified, nor a metaphor for every human walking the face of the earth.

These stances in themselves are not my primary concern. What is at stake is the crucial content of these plays, and indeed many others created by the playwrights under consideration, which has somehow caused critics to evolve clearly opposite conclusions. What is bothersome, then, is critical interpretations insisting that Godot surely does come and indeed will never come, that The Flies has everything to do with the German occupation of France

in World War II and is just as certainly and exclusively an attack upon the traditional concept of Christianity, and that the killer is obviously inevitable death personified and solely a metaphor for all of mankind.

At this juncture the avenues for proceeding are several. It is possible, for example, to re-examine the claims of the various critics, eventually selecting those which appeal most to my own critical sense and best account for the content of the works themselves. And, surely, this approach has something to commend it, for I personally find certain of the critics quite enlightening -- Hazel Barnes, for instance, when she views Sartre's The Flies as a justified reinterpretation of Greek myth or, again, Leonard Pronko when he delineates the case for the killer as a metaphor for everyone. Yet the conviction persists, that something should be done to resolve the confusion and contradictions arising from identical content available to all the critics. This is why I desire to return to the plays themselves. It may be that the authors are deliberately ambiguous in their representations. Or that they avoid discursiveness and seem therefore to say nothing, when in fact the implications are profound. Or perhaps they are by and large capricious, given to banter and frivolity, quite content to avoid seriousness in a world where truth cannot be apprehended, where programs are futile, where commitment is inappropriate and ill-advised,



where the traditional business of the theatre is hardly worth the time.

### B. Meaning through Metaphor

I have been speaking of meaning. In literature, of course, meaning is conventionally treated under the heading of theme, especially when the concern is with the central or dominating notion in a literary work. In drama, as in poetry and fiction, theme is the "abstract concept which is made concrete through its representation in person, action, and image in the work."<sup>17</sup>

Person (or characterization) may refer, practically speaking, to the cumulative impression of a character gained through what he says, what is said of him, and what he does. Moreover, such external details as costumes, color of skin, facial expressions, and so forth contribute to the audience's knowledge of the characters. Also, what an individual chooses or avoids, what apparently means most to him is a key factor in apprehending the reality of person.

Action, the second consideration relating to theme, commonly designates a

planned series of interrelated actions progressing, because of the interplay of one force upon another, through a struggle of opposing forces to a climax and a dénouement. (p. 356)

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<sup>17</sup>William F. Thrall, Addison Hibbard, C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature, rev. ed. (New York, 1960), p. 486.

The word "planned" suggests matter preconceived on the author's part, growing out of his conscious thought and reflecting in varying degrees selectivity and arrangement. Moreover, the phrase "a series of interrelated actions" assumes material characterized by incipience and a subsequent chain of events leading to a logical and natural outcome. Taking very much the form of a cause-to-effect argument, a well-managed plot precludes the removal of any single incident, the loss of a part threatening the collapse or distortion of the entire work. Finally, the phrase "interplay of one force upon another" implies the notion of conflict, the clash of wills, opposition (either physical or spiritual) so essential to plot for knitting incident to incident, dictating causal relationships, and advancing the struggle toward the crisis and eventual dénouement or catastrophe.

Image, the last consideration relating to theme, originally designated a sculptured, cast, or modeled likeness of a person; and even now, in sophisticated critical circles, retains this basic meaning, in the sense that it literally and concretely represents a sensory experience or an object which can be apprehended through one or more of the senses. It functions, according to I. A. Richards, "by representing a sensation through the process of being a 'relict' of an already known sensation" (p. 232). As one of the elements distinguishing language common to art,

the image affords a means through which experience in its emotional complexity and richness can be communicated and stands in sharp contrast to the conceptualizing and simplifying process which often characterizes science and philosophy. Thus it is not properly decorative; but, rather, a portion of the very essence of the meaning of a literary work.

Images may be "tied" or "free," literal or figurative (pp. 232-233). The "tied" image is so employed to give associated value or meaning which is the same or somewhat similar to all readers. In Carson McCullers' last novel, for example, J. T. Malone contemplates his leukemia and the obsessive question: how long? Will he die next month, next year, or the year after? Left to glare upon his numbered days, he is starkly portrayed as "a man watching a clock without hands."<sup>18</sup> The "free" image is not nearly so fixed by context. Since its potential associational values and meanings are less limited, it is quite capable of having various values or meanings for different people. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil,"<sup>19</sup> it is clear enough that the Rev. Mr. Hooper's emblem typifies secret sin, yet the kind of corruption is not specified. On the day that he dons the mysterious

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<sup>18</sup>Clock Without Hands (New York, 1963), p. 23.

<sup>19</sup>Twice-Told Tales and Other Short Stories (New York, 1960), pp. 19-33.

veil, for instance, he delivers a sermon on hidden sin and behaves strangely at the funeral of the young lady. Then, too, when his plighted wife Elizabeth demands that he cast aside the symbol, he refuses and elects instead to end their relationship. These circumstances may suggest to some that the minister's admitted secret sin involves unknown, but specific transgressions. Yet the day he dies, Hooper asks his visitors why they tremble at him alone. Men, he recalls, have avoided him, women have withheld their pity, and children have fled before him. Why? The answer must be the veil and its significance: "What but the mystery which it obscurely typifies has made this piece of crape so awful?" They should, he says, tremble at each other; "I look around me, and, lo! on every visage a black veil" (p. 33)! Ultimately, one cannot say for sure whether Hawthorne is talking about hidden, but real corruption or original sin.

A literal image is one requiring no change or extension in the apparent meaning of words, because the words call to mind a sensory representation of the object or sensation itself. Hence, in Coleridge's lines,

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea,

one clearly grasps in his mind's eye, as it were, a regal figure, a stately dome, a river, caverns, and a sea beneath

possibly overcast heavens. He may, moreover, hear with his mind's ear the sound of the sacred Alph, and experience with his mind's touch the spray from the river's racing waters and, again, feel the chill air deprived of the absent sun's warmth.

A figurative image is one involving a "turn" or play on the literal meaning of words, as opposed to literal images, which mean virtually what they say. Alfred, Lord Tennyson's fragment "The Eagle" affords evidence of several of the more common "turns."

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;  
Close to the sun in lonely lands,  
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;  
He watches from his mountain walls,  
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

While the word "crag" is properly taken literally, the phrase "crooked hands" is not, for the eagle possesses, strictly speaking, claws rather than hands. Yet the phrase does evoke a comparison which renders the object more remarkable. Hands, of course, are familiar to virtually all humans; and they have a symmetry, a quality retained as part of the residue in the memory. Thus the hands grasping the crag evoke not only the grip of the bird, but more importantly the crookedness of those hands simultaneously calls to mind a distinctive quality of the eagle's feet. The clause "Close to the sun . . . he stands" involves a "turn" because the eagle is not liter-

ally close to that heavenly body at all. Indeed, he is millions of miles from it. The exaggeration, however, does serve to underscore the tremendous height of the crag upon which the predator has perched himself. Furthermore, the use of the word "sun" along with the phrase "Ring'd with the azure world" rather subtly evokes the notion of a kingly round. There are, obviously, a number of additional "turns" in the poem -- the "azure world" is in fact the azure sky, but the word "world" quite effectively implies a domain over which the bird is unquestioned master; the "wrinkled sea," of course, adds to the earlier impression of height; the sea which "crawls" evokes the motion characteristic of beings capable of such movements and implies the slow undulations of the waves; the "mountain walls" suggest the sheerness of the cliff above which the eagle is situated; and "like a thunderbolt" is a "turn" on the phenomenon of lightning to indicate the swiftness with which the bird plummets for prey, not "falls," from his privileged heights.

Perhaps the commonest of all "turns," or tropes, is the metaphor, which later in this study will be the subject of rather lengthy consideration. Here it will be helpful to establish its broadly accepted meaning, for an understanding of its application will be an aid to apprehending the sample analysis of theme in Euripides' Helen, which is to follow shortly. An implied comparison imagin-

actively identifying one object with a second, metaphor ascribes to the first, one or more of the second's qualities or invests the first with imaginative or emotional qualities attributable to the second (Thrall, pp. 281-283).

I. A. Richards' differentiation between the two parts of the metaphor, that is, the tenor and the vehicle, permits one to fix, in the former instance, the idea to be expressed or the subject to be compared and to establish, in the second, the image through which the idea is to be conveyed or with which the subject is to be compared. In Oedipus Rex, for example, the sight of the humiliated monarch is juxtaposed, implicitly, with insight; and the resultant analogy, had Sophocles handled it in the manner commonly employed by users of metaphors, would have had perfect sight implying perfect insight (i.e., awareness, comprehension, foresight). The Greek tragedian, however, combined metaphor with irony, affording students of literature an analogy which at once fascinates, yet often defies literal statement. In the end, though, the ironical metaphor reasonably conveys the following tenor: sighted, Oedipus picks his uncertain way through crisis after crisis; blind, he "sees" with awful clarity the shambles of his life, comprehends the condition shaming him before men and gods. The eyes, it goes without saying, serve as the vehicle for Sophocles' analogy.

Having now cited theme in literature as an ab-

stract concept rendered concrete by an artist's representing it in person, action, and image and having fixed the sense in which these three elements are generally employed, I think it desirable, for the purpose of illustration and clarification, to apply this concept of analysis to a dramatic work, to derive a statement of the play's meaning (i.e., its theme). I turn now to Euripides' Helen.

Perhaps the most singular element relating to theme in this play is characterization. Interestingly, the costume of Menelaus aids immensely in his portrayal, for it clearly (even grossly, perhaps) marks his reduced station in life. He is a king of rags and tatters, surely! His "ragged state" is noted by the portress,<sup>20</sup> who dismisses him by loudly insisting that although he may have been a great man once, he counts for nothing in Egypt. This reminder brings tears to the eyes of the hardened Menelaus. Later, when Helen first meets him, she wonders whether he is a beggar, for the "clothes that cover him are poor and mean" (l. 554). Even Menelaus himself speaks of the fishing net of rags" (l. 1079) covering his body. Finally, Theoclymenus exclaims in the presence of the beggared Greek, "the rags of clothing he is in" (l. 1204)! Despite his tattered raiment, Menelaus is nonetheless the warrior of old. For instance, when faced with sure death at the hands of Theoclymenus, he insists upon standing like a man -- "I

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<sup>20</sup>Helen, trans. Richmond Lattimore, The Complete Greek Tragedies (Chicago, 1959), III, l. 417.



will not shame my glories of the Trojan War" (l. 805). Moreover, he terms Helen's plea urging him to flee "cowardly counsel, unworthy of the siege of Troy" (l. 808). Thus one sees Menelaus as a still proud and heroic figure, yet one pathetically reduced in condition and esteem. The audience experiences as a result, I think, some incipient misgivings about war and the awful costs it exacts from its participants.

Helen, like Menelaus, affords evidence of a degraded existence. Her reputation, though, is the object of obsession. Her beauty, she argues, and Hera are to blame, not she herself; and she can only wish that like a picture, she had been "rubbed out and done again, made plain," without her loveliness (ll. 261-263). She moans that she has done no wrong; yet her reputation is bad. The implications of her situation go beyond Egypt, where she is currently situated, for even if she returns home, she will be "crushed by scandal" (l. 288). Helen, understandably, is most perturbed that "while for other women beauty means their happiness," it is beauty that has led to her ruination (ll. 303-305); yet she is ambivalently torn between the dread of returning to Sparta and the anxious need to go there to restore once again her reputation. What is of interest here is the close proximation between the conditions of Menelaus and Helen, for both have only a portion of what they formerly possessed, indeed commanded. Their

meager powers, abridged resources, and painful memories all serve to haunt them surely; but more importantly, their circumstances cause the audience to wonder how this came to be. Thus it is possible to have second thoughts concerning the so-called classic combat on the windy plains of Troy. And it is possible to have second thoughts regarding all wars as well.

Metaphor in this play is rather rare, but a single figure serves well to convey a crucial notion. That is to say, Helen is identified as "an idol in the clouds" (l. 705). First, the figure embodies the notion of Helen's having escaped Egypt, while Paris in fact made off with a mock Helen, a mere shade of the real daughter of Tyndareus. Second, the metaphor has a tenor conveying a good deal of what the characters of Helen and Menelaus have already represented, that is, what the Greeks and Trojans took as an object of contention was only a pander, a guileful shade compelling commitment doomed to ring hollow and reduce thoughtful men to dismay.

The plot of Helen is unusual because it depicts a sequence of action which departs from the conventional story of the Spartan beauty. Now settled in Egypt, Helen recalls Aphrodite's bribing Paris. Hera, however, voided the Trojan dandy's designs by creating a likeness, the real Helen being spirited away to Egypt by Hermes. Since then, her guardian, Proteus, has died; and Theoclymenus, the son, has sought her affections. During the present

action of the play, Teucer brings word of the victory at Troy, Menelaus' subsequent disappearance, and the deaths of Castor and Polydeuces, the brothers of Helen. The Chorus and Helen weep; and she anticipates her own death.

Menelaus has in the meantime arrived in Egypt. Shipwrecked, he hides his men and Helen (her copy, that is), then sets out to seek help. He meets the real Helen, attempts to puzzle out the matter of identities, and eventually is informed of the copy's escape from the cave and its subsequent admission of Hera's ruse. They devise a stratagem calling for the burial of an effigy at sea, a scheme affording the Spartans the necessary boat, a chance to pick up Menelaus' stranded crew, and sufficient lead time to elude Theoclymenus' pursuing agents. To insure the success of Menelaus' flight, the Dioscuri (Castor and Polydeuces) intervene to restrain Theoclymenus.

While the basic conflict is apparent in the drama, the theme does not arise clearly and unmistakably from it. Often, as a matter of fact, the key points are made in a rather oblique fashion. The impending clash with Theoclymenus, for instance, seems only remotely and incidentally connected with the Trojan War; yet when the Chorus rejects Menelaus' suggestion to kill the Egyptian leader with the words "Our hopes for safety depend upon our doing right; / Bloody debates don't settle issues" (ll. 1154-1155), one aware of current or historical militancy might

well find a topical and significant content somewhat different in tenor from the common matter of the drama. And when apprised of the cloud image, Theoclymenus can only exclaim, "O Priam, O Troy, how you were brought down in vain" (l. 1240)!

In conclusion, it seems fair to say that Helen is a propagandistic play, rather anti-war in its social pitch. Its theme may be stated something like this: when men hazard their lives and armadas in pursuit of objects of dubious worth and substance, they run the risk of losing not just their lives and their fortunes but they incur the additional and perhaps more awesome risk of humiliation once the hollowness of their pursuit becomes apparent. Surely, then, war encompasses more than mere valor upon the field of battle.

Euripides' Helen obviously lends itself well to an analysis of theme as it is represented by person, action, and metaphor. Indeed, the only clearly objectionable aspect of the play is the author's use of deus ex machina to assist in the resolution of the work's climactic action. More specifically, the literal dropping (by the use of a mechanical device, of course) of the Dioscuri from the heavens to assist the fleeing Greeks cannot be considered fitting, because the pair of demi-gods has not up to that juncture figured directly or significantly in the plot. A work's resolution, common and proper theory

has it, should evolve naturally and reasonably from the interactions of the several principals driven by their particular motives; there appears to be little justification for the brothers' sudden appearance and assumption of a crucial role.

The theme of Helen nonetheless remains intact. Many students of drama, moreover, wish devoutly that all themes were so readily ascertained. Unfortunately, in addition to the problem of perspectives which are constantly undergoing change, modes of doing drama have been evolving rather spectacularly in recent years. Martin Esslin, I feel, establishes this point effectively when he confides his reasons for writing The Theatre of the Absurd. He recalls the considerable incomprehension with which the works of writers such as Ionesco, Beckett, Genet, and Adamov are being received, observing further that much of the bewilderment stems from these writers' deviation from traditional forms. It is their misfortune, from a critical standpoint, to be part of a novel and still developing stage convention which has been generally misunderstood and hardly even defined. It is no surprise, then, that plays created in this new convention are, when judged by the criteria and standards of another, regarded as outrageous and impertinent impostures. Thus, Esslin observes in a sometimes imprecise assessment,

If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of; if a good play is judged by subtlety of characterization and motivation, these are often without recognizable characters and present the audience with almost mechanical puppets; if a good play has to have a fully explained theme, which is neatly exposed and finally solved, these often have neither a beginning nor an end; if a good play is to hold the mirror up to nature and portray the manners and mannerisms of the age in finely observed sketches, these seem to be reflections of dreams and nightmares; if a good play relies on witty repartee and pointed dialogue, these often consist of incoherent babblings.  
(Esslin, pp. xvii-xviii)

Esslin proceeds to suggest a framework within which works of the absurd may be judged against their own standards, rather than criteria which the artists have not in fact sought to satisfy. The absurd, he argues, reflects an attitude, a "sense that the certitudes and basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away" (p. xviii). The works, therefore, evidence a devaluation of ideals, purity, and purpose. The inadequacy of the rational approach and the senselessness of the human condition are somewhat muted, however, because the writers forego the more traditional rational devices and discursive thought. Rather than argue about the absurdity of man's condition, then, they merely present it "in being, that is, in terms of concrete stage images of the absurdity of existence" (p. xx).

Meaning, I must reiterate, continues to be the primary concern of this study. And meaning in dramatic

works, whether one likes it or not, is tied to the notion of theme. It seems, however, that the nicely-packaged approach to theme through its representation by person, action, and image is in need of appropriate modifications, certain timely adjustments which will afford clearer hope of discerning meaning in the plays of the French moderns. Esslin does mention the absurdists' concern with man's condition and their representation of that condition "in terms of concrete stage images" (p. xx). This comment I find useful, remarkable even, for it is the very kernel implanted and nurtured to promising growth by Jacques Guicharnaud. Recalling the achievement of the French theatre in the past several decades, he notes that

Its objective has not been to offer ready-made solutions on the level of either form or substance: it does not give reassuring answers to everyday problems, nor does it flatter the public's aesthetic lethargy with established forms. Each writer, rather than just tell a story in more or less dramatic form, has tried to express the human condition metaphorically. (Guicharnaud, pp. vii-viii)

The effort has not gone unrewarded. There has come from men of varied talents an impressive array of truly original works reflecting the important trends of thought in the past forty years -- nihilism to counter religious and political optimism, earnestness in opposition to the victory of humor and irony, a free and absurd world as an alternative to a world of fixed essences, and aestheticism as a foil to praxis (p. 279). Confronted with distinctly

unique matter and a diversity of content, the spectator has been hard-pressed to improvise, led perhaps

more than ever in the history of the theatre, to consider each play as a possible metaphor, an objectivized hypothesis of man's and the world's condition. Not only is each adventure exemplary, as in all theatre, but the play's universe itself is a metaphor of the hidden structure of a possible universe, proposed among many. (p. 280)

What arises here is the clear prospect of ascertaining meaning through metaphor, not just meaning through metaphor in support of representations by person and action, but meaning represented spectacularly and often primarily by metaphor. In the face of a lessening emphasis upon plot and characterization, upon clearly meaningful dialogue, upon discursive and rational devices, the modern playgoer is bidden to contemplate more profoundly the element in the arsenal of art long predisposed to indirect and frequently subtle communication. He is urged to seek meaning through metaphor.

While Guicharnaud suggests enlarging the role of metaphor as an approach to meaning, he does not in his work Modern French Theatre apply his concept as generally as one might expect, nor does he press its application in certain specific cases to its fullest possible conclusions. Nevertheless, what he has done is of interest here, especially insofar as the previously considered Godot, The Flies, and The Killer are concerned. I think it desirable to examine briefly his remarks regarding those three plays.



He notes that some critics prefer to interpret Godot as an allegory. The allegorical approach, however, is characterized by analysis, exteriorization, and a concrete representation of the elements fixed by analysis. Since it is difficult to discover such elements in the play, he discounts the notion of Godot as allegory (pp. 230-231). The tramp, though, he sees as a "modern metaphor for universal man" (p. 237). Once there was the king in tragedy, the figure raised above common humanity, one conducting his politics for himself, sealed within his own glory, standing in sharp contrast with Fate and Values. He represented in its pure state the condition of man, a being acting without intermediaries and freed from bondage (p. 237). It is generally conceded that times have changed drastically, evolving a state of affairs leaving humanity face to face with itself. "The tramp," argues Guicharnaud,

has become the image of our condition laid bare, with everything else a mere secondary quality or anecdote. He is the image of humanity reduced to zero, about to start again from nothing.  
(p. 238)

Thus the tramps represent man detached from society; and their frequent falls upon the stage in Godot, which figure so prominently in the stage business, are to be taken as a "most highly developed metaphor of the human condition" (p. 244). Beckett's play, then, is not allegory; rather, it is "a concrete and synthetic equivalent of our existance"

in the world and our awareness of it" (p. 248)

The Flies Guicharnaud calls

a sumptuous metaphor intended to show man that responsibility is not synonymous with guilt and that the world of men is made up of the impact of actions whose meaning comes only from the men who committed or suffered them. (p. 142)

The play suggests, further, that the "plague" only exists to the extent that men accept it. Since it is in fact viewed as no more than the forcible imposition of responsibility upon others from the outside, man is portrayed as having the power to offset that act with another, contrary, act (p. 142). The forcible imposition of responsibility on others in The Flies comes from the outside in the form of the tyrant Aegisthus and Jupiter, the latter of whom, Guicharnaud insists, "represents no more than a satirical allegory of the idea of God . . ." (p. 282).

Finally, Guicharnaud calls Eugene Ionesco's works in general "poetic, in the modern sense of the term. They represent a concrete realization of metaphors" (p. 216). The Frenchman's mode of doing drama is by now well known: he begins with the intangible elements of a highly personal vision of the world, proceeding then to render those elements concrete on the stage in the form of objects and acts. In The Killer, for instance, the intangible elements are easily identified as Bérenger's euphoria and melancholia; their concretization, their exteriorization comes in the forms of the city of the sun and the killer, respec-

tively, for

Just as the new city is the hyperbolic realization of the force of joy within him, so the presence of the Killer and the final murder will be the amplified and extreme realization of the opposite force. (pp. 187-188)

Guicharnaud's findings are appealing, surely. And while his observations are only briefly touched upon here, they do bear up well under closer scrutiny of the specific content of the several plays. Already, however, I have noted that he neither applies his concept as generally as one might expect, nor does he press its application to its fullest possible conclusions in those cases in which he does invoke its use. Thus, I am moved not only to employ his notion in approaching the works of Sartre, Camus, Ionesco, and Beckett but to rely, as well, to a considerably greater extent upon its use as an aid to discovering meaning in the works of these authors.

An additional aspect of Guicharnaud's application of the concept of metaphor as an aid to analysis further fascinates me. That is to say, his use of certain phrases as synonyms for the word "metaphor" and his addition of descriptive and qualifying adjectives reflect, I believe, more than a desire to emphasize the use of mere metaphor in the various works. They underscore, too, the special character of the metaphors employed. For example, the phrases "an objectivized hypothesis" and "a concrete and synthetic equivalent" suggest the use of metaphor to

represent the thing which is not, as Jonathan Swift has Gulliver say of the unthinkable practice of committing falsehood among the Houyhnhnms.<sup>21</sup> This is, of course, quite in keeping with Guicharnaud's suggestion that metaphor is being used to represent possible worlds, potential universes, one or several among many. More significantly, his phrases "sumptuous metaphor" (used in reference to The Flies), "a hyperbolic realization," and "an amplified and extreme realization" (the latter two phrases being employed as synonyms for "metaphor" in reference to Ionesco's city of the sun and the killer, respectively) indicate "turns" of considerable dimensions, tropes characterized by exaggeration and disparity, even perhaps an extremeness. This I find remarkable because Guicharnaud operates on the very fringes of a type of metaphor known as the conceit. And while he never actually uses that particular reference, I think he ought to, for the reason that it would open up an even more useful dimension in apprehending meaning in the existentialist-absurdist realm of the French theatre.

What I propose to do at this time is to demonstrate the kinship between Guicharnaud's hyperbolic metaphor and the so-called metaphysical conceit, to the end that I might put into proper focus the extent to which the selected

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<sup>21</sup>Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings (New York, 1958), p. 191.

French playwrights have gone in search of metaphors to convey and render remarkable their distinctive views on man and his condition in the twentieth century. To begin with, the task seems to call for a historical background of metaphor, both conventional and far-fetched, to enable one to see clearly the framework within which phenomena have been and are presently being apprehended metaphorically. Moreover, such a background should afford a kind of template useful in discerning gradations of metaphor. Then, to make these gradations even more apparent, I will examine appropriate literature for evidence of conventional and far-fetched metaphor. Finally, it appears advisable to determine in what special sense the term "conceit" may be applied to modern French drama, for it does seem that the metaphysical conceit differs somewhat, perhaps even considerably, from the kind of hyperbolic metaphor frequently found in the modern French plays.

### C. A Historical View of Metaphor

Under the heading of style, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) expresses his concern not so much over what to say, but how to say it. It is simply clearer to express oneself in this or that manner. Yet a certain strangeness or deviation from the ordinary tends to add distinction to one's expression. All words, he notes, are current (i.e., in general use among one's countrymen), strange (in common

use among given foreigners), metaphorical, ornamental (e.g., embellishing epithets or synonyms), and newly-coined (not in local use, but adapted by poets, e.g., "sprouters" for "horns").<sup>22</sup> Metaphor involves the application of an alien name by transference 1) from genus to species (e.g., "There lies the ship," lying at anchor being a species of lying), 2) from species to genus (e.g., "10,000 noble deeds hath Odysseus done," the number being substituted for "many"), 3) from species to species (e.g., "With blade of bronze drew away the life," the word "bronze" suggesting both the blade and the cupping bowl), and 4) by proportion (e.g., "The shield of Dionysus," which implies the equation, shield:Ares::cup:Dionysus). Aristotle comments further with respect to proportion, citing such examples as old age:life::evening:day, and concluding that old age may be termed the evening of life. Sometimes, he adds, no words exist for the terms in a proportion, yet it is possible to state the equation. For instance, while a man's act of scattering seed is known as sowing, the sun's scattering its rays has no known reference. The poet, however, might refer to the latter as "sowing the god-created light." Another use of proportion, Aristotle notes, is to apply an alien term, then deny it one of its proper attributes. Thus, love may be called "Venus' bloodless war."

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<sup>22</sup>S. H. Butcher, ed., Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art (London, 1927), ch. XXI.

While the clearest style, then, is one "which uses only current or proper words," the use of unusual words serves to elevate expression. "Yet a style wholly composed of such words," warns Aristotle,

is either a riddle or a jargon; a riddle, if it consists of metaphors . . . . .  
 For the essence of a riddle is to express true facts under impossible combinations. Now this cannot be done by any arrangement of ordinary words, but by the use of metaphor it can. Such is the riddle: -- "A man I saw who on another man had glued the bronze by aid of fire."  
 (ch. XXII)

Moderation, therefore, should be the byword. Otherwise, expression tends toward the grotesque. The wise individual will test questionable substitutions by reintroducing the current or proper term to ascertain whether the metaphor indeed improves particular expression. When one takes proper precautions,

the greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor. This alone cannot be imparted by another; it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblance.  
 (ch. XXII)

Whereas Aristotle freely focuses on the tragic genre, Horace (65-8 B.C.) points his comments toward poetry. Obviously interested in giving freshness to language, adding a twist to the familiar, he confides,

I shall follow a poetic style from well-known material, just the same as anyone may expect to do himself; and just the same, if he tries it, he will perspire freely and make little progress: that's how difficult the order and connections of words are . . . .<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ars Poetica, trans. Norman J. DeWitt, in Roman Drama (New York, 1966), p. 373.

Although he does not comment directly on metaphor, Horace does afford some interesting insights concerning images and poetic license. Suppose, he suggests, a painter's attaching to the head of a man a horse's neck, and putting on limbs of random creatures fancy-work of multi-colored feathers, the kind of thing featuring the torso of a shapely maiden merging into the darksome rear portion of a fish. Such a creation might well evoke laughter. Yet

a book will be very much like that painting if the meaningless images are put together like the dreams of a man in a fever, to the end that the head and foot do not match the one body. (p. 366)

Quite possibly one of the most extensive attempts by a writer to give the figurative a cognitive basis is offered by Quintilian (1st century after Christ) in his Institutio Oratoria, where he dwells upon the merits of multiplying the particulars of description. "The mere statement that the town was stormed," he observes,

while no doubt it embraces all that such a calamity involves, has all the curtness of a dispatch, and fails to penetrate to the emotions of the hearer. But if we expand all that the one word "stormed" includes we shall see the flames pouring from house and temple, and hear the crash of falling roofs and one confused clamour blent of many cries; we shall behold some in doubt whither to fly, others clinging to their nearest and dearest in one last embrace, while the wailing of women and children and the laments of the old men that the cruelty of fate should have spared them to see that day will strike upon our ears. Then will come the pillage of treasure sacred and profane, the hurrying to and fro of the plunderers as they carry off their booty or return to seek for more, the pri-



soners driven each before his own inhuman captor, the mother struggling to keep her child, and the victors fighting over the richest of the spoil.<sup>24</sup>

The foregoing "turn" is not necessarily beneficial to the user, because the single word precludes much desirable detail for rendering the description vivid. Or, in the least, it points up the need for an alert, imaginative audience capable of visualizing the scene implied. The metaphor Quintilian, nonetheless, calls "the commonest and by far the most beautiful of tropes" (p. 303). And, as he conceives it, the metaphor is a verb or a noun transferred from the place where it properly belongs to a second where either the transferred term is better than the literal or there is no literal term available. Or it makes the meaning clearer. Or, possibly, it produces a decorative effect. If none of these needs are invoked and subsequently satisfied, the metaphor may be inappropriate. Thus, while a timely and temperate use of metaphors adds considerably to style (e.g., speaking of crops being thirsty, of fruit suffering, of men being kindled to anger), their frequent use

serves merely to obscure our language and weary our audience, while if we introduce them in one continuous series, our language will become allegorical and enigmatic. (pp. 308-309)

Metaphors, Quintilian observes further, may be harsh, that

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<sup>24</sup>Institutio Oratoria, trans. H. E. Butler (London, 1920), p. 249.

is, far-fetched, e.g., phrases such as "the snows of the head" or, again, "Jove with white snow the wintry Alps bespewed" (p. 309). Finally, the phrase "swim through the air" may describe the flight of bees, but it is both needless and improper, for

metaphor should always either occupy a place already vacant, or if it fills the room of something else, should be more impressive than that which it displaces. (p. 311)

One contemplating metaphor, then, should desire to move feelings, to give a special distinction to things, to make content vivid to the eye.

Longinus (d. A.D. 273), while speaking of the technicalities and definitions of rhetoric, is often primarily concerned with the non-rhetorical dimension encompassing the great soul and its thoughts and passions. He sees the sublime as being distinguished by "a consummate excellence and distinction in language," noting moreover that the effect of such genius "is not to persuade the audience but rather to transport them out of themselves. Invariably," he concludes,

what inspires wonder casts a spell upon us and is always superior to what is merely convincing and pleasing. For our convictions are usually under our own control, while such passages exercise an irresistible power of mastery and get the upper hand with every member of the audience.<sup>25</sup>

Not surprisingly, one of the genuine sources of the

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<sup>25</sup>"Longinus" on the Sublime, trans. W. Hamilton Fyfe (London, 1939), p. 125.

sublime in literature is the appropriate use of figures of thought and speech. Metaphors often afford fine phrasing (e.g., Anacreon's "No more care I for the Thracian colt."<sup>26</sup>) and sometimes vulgar (e.g., Theopompus' "Philip had a wonderful faculty of stomaching things," indicating that insults:Philip::training breakfasts: oarsmen, which is to say that the participants look beyond the "feast" itself to some more compelling goals). Thus, Longinus emphasizes,

the vulgar phrase sometimes proves far more enlightening than elegant language. Being taken from our common life it is immediately recognized, and what is familiar is halfway to conviction. (p. 211)

The concomitant of this, it would appear, is that the unfamiliar is the far way to conviction.

How many metaphors ought one use together? Perhaps, reckons Longinus, two or three. On what occasions? "Why, the right moment, when emotion sweeps on like a flood and inevitably carries the metaphors along it" (p. 211). Demosthenes' indignation against traitors, for instance, is emotion enough to screen the metaphors when he says,

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<sup>26</sup>p. 211. The colt, a metaphor suggesting a young girl, is cited as a common trope in Greek and Latin lyrics and is given as the probable source of the word "filly," which Victorian humorists applied to the same species. And while many women today would likely bridle at the use of such terms, their application is still every bit proper in rural and western United States -- in the main, that is.

Men of evil life, flatterers, who have each foully mutilated their own country and pledged their liberty in a cup of wine first to Philip and now to Alexander, men who measure happiness by their bellies and their basest appetites, and have strewn in ruins that liberty and freedom from despotism which to Greeks of older days was the canon and standard of all that was good. (p. 213)

Constantly, then, there is the question of so-called bold metaphors. Sometimes they may be softened by inserting such phrases as "if one may say so," "if one may risk the expression," "as if," and "as it were," thereby mitigating the audacity of language. The proper antidote for a series of daring metaphors, however, is strong and timely emotion, the agitation sweeping everything forward in the surge of its current and being fed further by additional bold imagery, that agitation moreover depriving the hearer of "time to examine how many metaphors there are, because he shares the excitement of the speaker" (p. 213). There may, nevertheless, arise an excess of metaphors; and this is a common temptation, admits Longinus, which critics see despoiling the fruit of Plato. For, truly, "it is by no means easy to see," he says,

that a city needs mixing like a wine-bowl, where the mad wine seethes as it is poured in, but is chastened by another and a sober god and finding good company makes an excellent and temperate drink. (p. 217)

Calling water "a sober god" and mixing "chastisement," complain some critics, is the language of a bard far from sober himself.

The great soul should refuse to allow the sin of excessive metaphors to haunt him, counsels Longinus, for grandeur with flaws still holds sway over correct mediocrity. Nonetheless, he concedes, it is perhaps

inevitable that the humble, mediocre natures, because they never run risks, never aim at the heights, should remain to a large extent safe from error, while in great natures their very greatness spells danger. (p. 217)

Another work contributing to a brief history of metaphor is the Euphues: The Anatomy of Wyt of John Lyly (1554? - 1606), who left a text which has survived to enjoy among moderns a dubious reputation for artificiality.<sup>27</sup> My interest, of course, lies in his use of numerous and occasionally far-fetched images, many of which are drawn from mythology and natural history. For example, Lyly indicates that the rakish Euphues has frequenting his Neapolitan lodgings

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<sup>27</sup>See, e.g., The Complete Works (Oxford, England, 1902), pp. 189-190.

Bee merrye but with modestie, be sober but not sulloume, bee valiaunt but not too venterous. Let thy attyre bee comely but not costly, thy dyet wholesome but not excessive, vse pastime as the woorde importeth, to passe the tyme in honest recreation: mistrust no man without cause, neither bee thou credulous without prooffe, bee not light to followe euery mans opinion nor obstinate to stande in thine own conceipte.

Here, Pelenius the Olde Gentleman of Naples serves up some not-too-welcome nor easily-implemented advice to the wayward Euphues. Most noteworthy, of course, is the author's undue stress upon balanced construction, antithesis, and transverse alliteration.

as well the Spider to sucke poyson, of his  
 fine wyt, as the Bee to gather hunny, as well  
 the Drone as the Doue, the Foxe as the Lambe,  
 as well Damocles to betraye hym, as Damon to  
 be true to hym . . . . (p. 186)

Or, again, the Olde Gentleman frets over the youth's slide  
 into gluttony, sin, shame:

Alas Euphues by how much the more I loue thy  
 highe climbinge of thy capacities by so muche  
 the more I feare thy fall. The fine christall  
 is sooner crazed then the harde marble, the  
 greenest Beeche burneth faster then the dryest  
 Oke, the fairest silke is soonest soyled, and  
 the sweetest wine tourneth to the sharpest  
 vineger, the pestilence doth most ryfest in-  
 fect the cleerest complection, and the catter-  
 piller cleaveth vnto the ripest fruite . . . .  
 (p. 189)

Lyly's tropes, it is all too apparent, are decorative  
 rather than useful. First, he obviously introduces se-  
 veral figures when one would serve his purpose. Secondly,  
 of course, he needlessly introduces "turns" repeating, in  
 effect, the notions conveyed in the literal or near-literal  
 passages, which are in themselves perfectly clear. The  
 implication of Euphues' "highe climbinge" and anticipated  
 "fall," for instance, betrays a "turn"; yet its meaning  
 is easily grasped, especially in view of Lyly's qualify-  
 ing phrase, "thy highe climbinge of thy capacities."  
 Thus, the subsequent flood of analogies merely serves to  
 adorn and, indeed, obscure Lyly's expression.

John Donne (1571-1631) created a kind of poetry  
 and especially metaphor which must be considered crucial  
 for this study, because his images represent the range,

ingenuity, discordance, and intellectuality which so often characterize the hyperbolic metaphors in modern French drama. I am speaking here of the so-called metaphysical conceit. The peculiarity of the poetry of Donne and those who wrote under his influence (this "school" being commonly known as the metaphysical poets) is that perceived relations are more frequently logical than emotional or sensual, more often an attempt to connect the abstract and the concrete, the remote and the near, the sublime and the commonplace.

How far afield these conceit-seekers range is illustrated in the last four quatrains of Donne's "A Valer-diction: Forbidding Mourning."

Our two soules therefore, which are one  
 Though I must goe, endure not yet  
 A breach, but an expansion,  
 Like gold to ayery thinnesse beate.

If they be two, they are two so  
 As stiffe twin compasses are two,  
 Thy soule the fixt foot, makes no show  
 To move, but doth, if the'other doe.

And though it in the center sit,  
 Yet when the other far doth rome,  
 It leanes, and hearkens after it,  
 And growes erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to mee, who must  
 Like the'other foot, obliquely runne;  
 Thy firmnes draws my circle just,  
 And makes me end, where I begunne.<sup>28</sup>

The speaker in the poem advises the beloved to derive sus-

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<sup>28</sup>John Hayward, ed., John Donne: A Selection of His Poetry (Baltimore, 1950), p. 55.

tenance from their requited bliss and to accept separation most casually, for their souls are truly one; and while the speaker may depart, they will "endure not yet a breach," because as parts of one common soul, they will undergo a mere expansion, their mutual and visible linkage evanescing to seeming invisibility, "Like gold to ayery thinnesse beate." Or as the fixed foot of a compass, the remaining soul-part will serve to anchor the extended and complementing part, moving at one with the other, standing firm as the other stands firm, the two together irrevocably connected, their motions eternally harmonized. Thus, while the one moves circularly about the fixed foot, the latter "leanes, and hearkens after it," growing once more erect as the former comes again home. The poem, many will concede, requires careful reading and some re-reading, possibly because the complicated lines of Donne do not lend themselves to immediate apprehension. However, a considerable part of the difficulty lies with the poem's conceit, for it is neither the most spontaneous of mental reflexes to think that the tie between the beloved and the departed is very like an imperceptible sheet of gold beaten to the fineness of air itself, nor is it force of habit to apprehend the separated parties in terms of distended compass points, whose upper structures move visibly as one and cause in the lower portions harmonious motions. Once his mind overleaps, as it were, the restraints of habit and conven-



tion, the reader to his joy and edification may grasp of a sudden Donne's concept of temporary and qualified separation, of dimensions at once individual and one, of accord, and of eventual union. Complex? Indeed! Far-fetched, yes. But it is nothing if it is not fresh and striking.

Among Donne's successors, George Herbert (1593-1633) affords, in "The Pulley," an equally illuminating illustration of the metaphysical poets' modus operandi.

When God at first made man,  
 Having a glasse of blessings standing by;  
 Let us (said he) poure on him all we can:  
 Let the worlds riches, which dispersed lie,  
 Contract into a span.

So strength first made a way;  
 Then beautie flow'd, then wisdome, honour, pleasure:  
 When almost all was out, God made a stay,  
 Perceiving that alone of all his treasure  
 Rest in the bottome lay.

For if I should (said he)  
 Bestow this jewell also on my creature,  
 He would adore my gifts in stead of me,  
 And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:  
 So both should losers be.

Yet let him keep the rest,  
 But keep them with repining restlesnesse:  
 Let him be rich and wearie, that at least,  
 If goodnesse leade him not, yet wearinesse  
 May tosse him to my breast.<sup>29</sup>

The pulley, while not referred to in the body of the poem, serves as a curious conceit; and as is typical of such tropes, it dominates the entire work and affords a considerable challenge in its being worked out. Once com-

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<sup>29</sup>Joan Bennett, ed., Four Metaphysical Poets (New York, 1953), pp. 196-197.

prehended, however, the conceit's meaning, and hence the poem's, embodies a remarkable statement.

Rather than leave one such abstractions as strength, beauty, wisdom, honor, pleasure, and rest, Herbert renders them concrete and somewhat more familiar by making them a portion of the fluid in God's "glasse of blessings." Before the precious liquid entire is poured forth, though, the Almighty stays the flow; for rest, the luxurious and concentrated residue settled on the container's bottom, would put man upon a bed of ease, thereby freeing him from the wearying process of seeking and endeavoring. This God must preclude; thus, rich without rest, weary with restlessness, man will be impelled to labor beneath his burden, to bear alone the weight of his salvation. The notion of the pulley, suggested in the poem's title, creates a further problem for the reader, because in addition to its involving a trope, it is used ironically as well. Pulleys, of course, are devices intended to bear and raise weights easily, and, as such, serve as labor-saving engines for those who employ them. Offhand, then, it would seem that by making man's life restless rather than restful, wearying rather than relaxing, God is creating labor for man, not freeing him from it. It appears ironical, therefore, that the image of the pulley should be invoked.

It is apparent, however, that Herbert depicts man's relationship to the pulley on two levels -- here below,

man must mount the effort needed to power the pulley, the act serving to sap his energies; and above, man is the beneficiary of the very force which he himself supplied earlier. Herbert, then, is clearly concerned with the hereafter; and he addresses himself to the labor of God, which is to entice man to serve Him (and, hence, himself). How best to do this is the question. Perhaps the total bestowal of blessings would render man's earthly stay more enjoyable without diminishing his chances for heavenly rest in the least. But that seems risky. To assure man greater hopes of salvation and eventual rest, it is better that he experience less earthly ease and attempt additional endeavor and labor. Man's restlessness, therefore, is visualized as an impelling engine, a motivating force to be translated into effort, which in turn will toss him heavenward into the waiting embrace of his Creator. Thus the pulley is the Almighty apparatus easing God's labors and, ironically, man's as well. It is possible to derive from Herbert's poem an equation delineating the terms of the poet's conceit, the pulley:man's physical labors:: man's restlessness: salvation. The terms, even at second sight, remain somewhat disparate, possibly even far-fetched; yet logic permits one to discover a concordance between the abstract and the concrete, the remote and the familiar, the sublime and the commonplace, and allows him to appreciate how Herbert renders man's restlessness

remarkable and desirable.

Often considered a latter-day metaphysical poet, Abraham Cowley (1618-1667), leaves in The Mistress, a collection of love-verses, certain tropes reflecting an attempt to pursue real and fancied likenesses to their last ramifications. In one selection, "Written in Juice of Lemmon,"<sup>30</sup> for example, he develops the notion of varied phenomena's being recorded invisibly, fixed in lemon, as it were, and thus open to apprehension only by their being subjected to the heat of life, love, judgment, whatever. Thus, he says, "Whilst what I write I do not see," he continues to create poetry, knowing it will be subjected to the flame of love's scrutiny. Or, again, his "silly Paper," as he calls it, is very like "Hypocrites, which seem unspotted here," facing death; "And the last Fire their Truth must try, / Scrauld o're like thee, and blotted they appear." It (the letter) is bidden to expose itself to the flames of trial and knowledge and advised that if goodness comes not to the surface of its character (the page upon which the invisible judgment is writ?), it is not to be "discourag'd, but require / A more gentle Ordeal Fire, / And bid her by Loves-Flames read it again."

Joseph Addison (1672-1719) specifically addresses himself to the poetry of Cowley, seeing in the poet's work

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<sup>30</sup>Poems, A. R. Waller, ed. (London, 1905), pp. 72-73.

a considerable neglect of True Wit (the resemblance and congruity of ideas) in favor of False Wit (i.e., the resemblance of single letters, syllables, words, sentences, or whole poems), the result being a species of Mixt Wit depending partly on ideas, partly on words (e.g., puns).

With The Mistress uppermost in mind, Addison recalls,

The Passion of Love in its Nature has been thought to resemble Fire; for which Reason the Words Fire and Flame are made use of to signifie Love. The witty Poets therefore have taken an Advantage from the doubtful Meaning of the Word Fire, to make an infinite Number of Witticisms.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, he complains, Cowley's mistress reads the letter first by holding it to the fire, then by exposing it to love's flames; ambitious love is characterized as fire mounting upwards; happy love, as the beams of heaven; unhappy love, as the flames of hell; a love refusing counsel and advice, as a flame raging in the wind; attempts to drown one's love in wine, as throwing oil on the fire; and so forth. In all instances, says Addison,

the poet mixes the Qualities of Fire with those of Love; and in the same Sentence speaking of it both as a Passion, and as a real Fire, surprizes the Reader with those seeming Resemblances or Contradictions that make up all the Wit of this Kind of Writing. Mixt Wit therefore is a Composition of Punn and True Wit, and is more or less perfect as the Resemblance

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<sup>31</sup>Addison and Steele: Selections from "The Tatler" and "The Spectator," Robert J. Allen, ed. (New York, 1957), p. 107.

lies in the Ideas or in the Words: Its Foundations are laid partly in Falsehood and partly in Truth: Reason puts in her Claim for one Half of it, and Extravagance for the other. (p. 108)

Lest Addison be cited as an enemy of metaphor, however, it is wise to acknowledge his admiration of Locke's distinction between wit and judgment. Wit lies most clearly in the assemblage of ideas, and in putting them together with variety and quickness, a practice leading to varied resemblances and congruities, thereby making up "pleasant Pictures and agreeable Visions of the Fancy" (p. 104). Judgment, in contrast, leads to the separation of ideas on the basis of the smallest discernible differences, the intent being to avoid being misled by affinity and similitude, which cause us to take one thing for another. Thus, judgment as a way of proceeding goes quite contrary to metaphor and allusion, which lie at the core of wit and which please and entertain by striking so lively on the fancy.

Resemblance and congruity of ideas, Addison notes in Locke's definition, do not always insure wit. Delight and surprise are also essential. It is necessary, argues Addison,

that Ideas should not lie too near one another in the Nature of things; for where the Likeness is obvious, it gives no Surprise. To compare one Man's Singing to that of another, or to represent the Whiteness of any object by that of Milk and Snow, or the Variety of its colours

by those of the Rainbow, cannot be called Wit, unless, besides this obvious Resemblance, there be some further Congruity discovered in the two Ideas that is capable of giving the Reader some surprise. Thus when a Poet tells us, the Bosom of his Mistress is as white as Snow, there is no Wit in the Comparison; but when he adds, with a Sigh, that it is cold too, it then grows into Wit.  
(p. 105)

Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), in Lives of the English Poets, also reacts to the work of Cowley; but more than that, he addresses himself to the entire race of metaphysical poets. Calling them "men of learning," he notes wryly that "to show their learning was their whole endeavour . . . ." <sup>32</sup> Aristotle, he recalls, defined poetry as an imitative art; yet the metaphysical poets failed to imitate anything -- not nature, nor life, nor the forms of matter, nor the operation of the intellect. If wit, he continues, is characterized by the natural and the new (Pope: "ne'er so well expressed"), the metaphysical poets experienced a further failure, because

Their thoughts are often new, but seldom natural; they are not obvious but neither are they just; and the reader, far from wondering that he missed them, wonders more frequently by what perverseness of industry they were ever found. (pp. 152-153)

However, as wit treated apart from its effects upon readers, their work may be considered a kind of discordia concors, "a combination of dissimilar images, or occult resemblances

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<sup>32</sup> Samuel Johnson, Alice Meynell and G. K. Chesterton, eds. (London, 1913), p. 151.

in things apparently unlike," creations in which

The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased. (p. 153)

Wholly committed to the unexpected and surprising, then, the metaphysical poets tend to overlook the sentiment which enables artists to conceive and excite pleasure and pain in others. Nor are they much concerned with the propriety of acts and statements, writing "rather as beholders than partakers of human nature; as beings looking upon good and evil, impassive and at leisure . . ." (p. 153), their wish being "only to say what they hoped had never been said before" (p. 154). Still, Dr. Johnson refuses to dismiss these poets altogether, conceding that

if they frequently threw away their wit upon false conceits, they likewise sometimes struck unexpected truths; if their conceits were far-fetched, they were often worth the carriage.  
(p. 155)

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) reflects the continued trend toward more conservative tropes, arguing for and employing as he does images and statements joined naturally in the mind, the images rising unsought for, being virtual exhalations, as it were. If the bard's subject is judiciously chosen, he observes,

it will naturally, and upon fit occasion,  
lead him to passions, the language of which,



if selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures. I forbear to speak of an incongruity which would shock the intelligent Reader, should the Poet interweave any foreign splendour of his own with that which the passion naturally suggests: it is sufficient to say that such addition is unnecessary. And, surely, it is more probable that those passages, which with propriety abound with metaphors and figures, will have their due effect, if, upon other occasions where the passions are of a milder character, the style also be subdued and temperate.<sup>33</sup>

Here one senses a virtual return to the concepts of Longinus, for tropes are tied closely to emotion, the rule calling for frequent "turns" to mark greater excitation and a more temperate application to accompany milder passions. What is additionally pertinent here is Wordsworth's practice of deriving, in a parallel process, both his tenor and vehicle from the same material. This technique is apparent in "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," in which a youthful, reflective William Wordsworth recalls having returned after five years to the landscape and the heavens, the lofty cliffs, the murmur of the Wye, the copses and groves, there again to repose under a dark sycamore, "well pleased to recognize / In nature and the language of the sense, / The anchor" of his purest thoughts (ll. 107-109), to savor once more the rich land and taste the tender past, to formulate a portion of his haunting vision of nature and to insist that nature never betrayed

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<sup>33</sup>"Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," in The Romantic Poets, Albert Granberry Reed, ed. (New York, 1929), pp. 172-173.

The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,  
 Through all the years of this our life, to lead  
 From joy to joy; for she can so inform  
 The mind that is within us, so impress  
 With quietness and beauty, and so feed  
 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,  
 Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,  
 Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all  
 The dreary intercourse of daily life,  
 Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb  
 Our cheerful faith that all which we behold  
 Is full of blessings. (ll. 122-134)

In addition to the release from the onslaught of routine, which many readily recognize and, indeed, actively seek, Wordsworth's lines speak of the more profound antithesis which pits nature, the ministering agent and guardian, against ravaging society, the wayward child whose presence wears and weakens man. Thus the Englishman depicts nature as a kind of mentor who through the years leads man from joy to joy, impresses the mind with quiet and beauty, informs the intellect, and touches the embers of noble thought. By acknowledging nature's power to shape and mold human character, and by accepting it as his anchor and guide, Wordsworth hopes to shore up his mind against the threat of society, whose evil tongue, rash judgments, cynical sneers, empty greetings, and dreary harangue of daily life serve to distress and lessen the best of men. His philosophic education, properly gained through tutoring nature, will afford even "in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din / Of towns and cities . . . / In hours of weariness" (ll. 25-27) the sustenance, the "beauteous forms" to insure his equanimity and cheerful faith.

Here, obviously, the landscape is at once the occasion for the author's subjective reflection and the source of the figures by which that reflection or insight is defined. This technique stands, it seems, in sharp contrast to the metaphysical poets' mode of doing poetry, largely because the element of disparity is no longer prominent. It goes without saying, too, that the poem reveals a close liaison between feeling and image, the former welling up in the poet and being rendered discernible in both the poem's statements and its images.

Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) levels perhaps one of the most devastating assaults upon critical complacency and blandness, especially as regards such fixtures of literary tradition as classical figures of speech and thought, classical literary genres or species, and rules of decorum long attached to them. Declaring his opposition to all classes of expression and to all intellectualization of artistic meaning, he begins by perhaps overstating the case for adornment, taking to task such categories as the simple and the ornate, the proper and the metaphorical. These, he argues, and

all other determinations of modes or degrees of expression reveal their philosophic nullity when the attempt is made to develop them in precise definitions, because they either grasp the void or fall into the absurd.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Aesthetic As Science of Expression and General Linguistic, trans. Douglas Ainslie, 2nd ed. (London, 1922), p. 69.

As a typical example of this, Croce cites the common definition of metaphor as another word used instead of the proper word. Why all the bother? Why use an improper word for a proper one? Why pursue the worse and longer course when the shorter and better is known? It is commonly said, and perhaps it is true, that the proper (literal) word is in given instances

not so expressive as the so-called improper word or metaphor. But if this be so the metaphor is exactly the proper word in that case, and the so-called "proper" word, if it were used, would be inexpressive and therefore most improper. (p. 69)

Croce, it seems to me, places undue emphasis upon real or supposed opposites, assuming as he does that what is not expressive is inexpressive, that what is not proper is improper. The terms, especially in view of what one grasps from the historical survey, might well be rated variously on a more positive scale; that is to say, what is not merely proper may be taken to be more fitting, what is not merely expressive may be taken to be most appropriate in certain instances. In this case, one may find himself disagreeing with Croce's characterization of critical language, but very much in agreement with his notion that what is commonly known as metaphor reflects in cases of successful application a very sensitive and most fitting selection of language: it says well what the author intends.

Although he acknowledges that metaphors may be illustrative or diagrammatical, providing as they often do

concrete instances of relations which would otherwise need to be expressed in abstract terms, or, again, indicators of an attitude of the user toward his subject (e.g., Gibbon's comment, "The freedom of my writings had indeed provoked an implacable tribe; but as I was safe from the stings, I was soon accustomed to the buzzing of the hornets."), I.A. Richards (b. 1893) cites their further uses. For example, he says, metaphor is

the supreme agent by which disparate and hitherto unconnected things are brought together in poetry for the sake of the effects upon attitude and impulse which spring from their collocation and from the combinations which the mind then establishes between them. There are few metaphors whose effect, if carefully examined, can be traced to the logical relations involved.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, it may afford a semi-surreptitious means by which a variety of elements is woven into the fabric of experience. While variety is not in itself a virtue, metaphor may come to an experience wanting a natural wholeness and lend to it what is needed. This, it appears, is part of the strange phenomenon in the arts --

What is most essential often seems to be done, as it were inadvertently, to be a by-product, an accidental concomitant.  
(p. 240)

Richards' comments point up several things. First, his mention of disparateness, of course, calls to mind the more daring tropes of the metaphysical poets; and this would reflect the modern swing back to increasingly ad-

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<sup>35</sup>Principles of Literary Criticism (New York, 1925), p. 240.

venturous metaphors. Second, he underscores the magic of the metaphor, the elusive qualities which serve at once to imply variety and yet escape the gropings of logic. Thus, metaphor is characterized as a kind of linchpin joining two contexts, two which may be wholly unlike and, conventionally, unrelated. The meaning achieved need not be a prettified version of a previously stated meaning, but a new significance, one in which the imagination presses forward and commands new ground.

As the last authorities to be cited in this abridged historical survey of metaphor, W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. (b. 1907) and Cleanth Brooks (b. 1906) take time to praise metaphor. Observing that it combines the element of specificity or concreteness with the element of universality or necessity, they see in it the union of philosophy and history. Indeed, they argue, metaphor affords perhaps the sole structure promising to accomplish this feat. "We can have," they note,

our universals in the full conceptualized discourse of science and philosophy. We can have specific detail lavishly in the newspapers and in records of trials and revelations of psychiatric cases. But it is only in metaphor . . . that we encounter the most radically fused union of the detail and the universal idea.<sup>36</sup>

Detail per se, of course, is contingent on information and

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<sup>36</sup>Literary Criticism: A Short History (New York, 1967), p. 749.

it is the very stuff of the historian's research. It gets into literature, however, and while literature does start with it, detail undergoes change and assumes peculiar shapes and meaning in the process. Metaphor, say Wimsatt and Brooks, is

the universal amber for the preservation  
and enhancement of the scraps and trifles  
of historic fact. (p. 749)

Although a summary may not properly account for all of the foregoing historical matter, it seems desirable at this juncture to draw some conclusions from the more than a dozen authors cited in this rather loose survey. First, concerning metaphor as a trope, all of the writers, save Croce, openly embrace the notion of two or more (e.g., the proportion) images being juxtaposed, at least one of them "turning" on the meaning, assigned characteristics, imaginative and emotional implications of the other(s). And Croce, too, admits the substitution fitting and expressive when it is well chosen; only he opposes some critics' use of the word "proper" to identify the literal image and he unnecessarily and unwisely chides them for implying that the substitute word, the metaphor, is improper. While it is true that categorization and classification tend to simplify what otherwise is chock-full of variety, other critics (e.g., Quintilian and Richards) refuse to raise the same objections to the use of figurative concepts as an aid to criticism and yet they speak

of the same myriad elements and facets of phenomena, which Croce feels are somehow suffering some sort of abridgement.

Second, the survey reveals discernible shifts in attitudes toward reason and emotion over the years dating from Aristotle. That is to say, depending on the time, the logical implications of metaphor may hold sway over the emotional, or vice versa. Thus Aristotle recommends the pursuit of resemblances within the confines of good sense, as does Horace when he suggests reasonable combinations of images. Quintilian and Longinus, however, represent a shift, for the former argues in favor of emotions, while the latter speaks approvingly of the capacity of metaphors (particularly those in a series) to transport the audience and sweep away the restraints of reason. With his emphasis on balanced construction and tropes drawn from mythology and natural history, it appears that Lyly constitutes a shift to a more neutral position, because he still condones metaphor by flood, as it were. The metaphysical poets, of course, restore logic and reason to a foremost station, seeing concordances, as they do, between things seemingly quite unlike and, in many cases, pursuing these real or assumed likenesses to their last ramifications. Addison and Johnson, in turn, criticize the extravagance of the metaphysical poets; and in so doing, they speak of a reason within limits or, in Dr. Johnson's case, fault the previous movement for overlooking



the emotional dimensions of poetry. Later, Wordsworth reflects a swing again to the emotions, virtually echoing Longinus' dictum: the greater the passion, the more numerous the metaphors; and conversely, the less the passion, the fewer the metaphors. And, in the twentieth century, Richards, Wimsatt, and Brooks represent the swing once more to reason, embracing as they do the doctrines of fusing seemingly disparate and, by nature, unconnected phenomena for purposes of pointing up previously unsuspected but illuminating parallels.

Third, it is possible to evolve from the survey a species of template for discerning gradations of metaphor. Few of the writers, curiously, assume that once committed to using metaphor, an individual will err on the side of conservatism. One of them, Longinus, contrasts correct mediocrity with daring grandeur, suggesting that while the latter bears the greater risk, it is to be recommended for its better prospects for achieving greatness. A second writer, Addison, also warns against the commonplace, the apparent cliché, which points up likenesses obvious to everyone (e.g., calling something white as snow, as many-colored as the rainbow, etc.) and advises twists favoring surprise. By and large, then, there seems to be little fear among them that tropes will suffer from timid dispositions. More apparent is a far greater concern over out-and-out adventuresomeness. Thus, Aristotle admires the

inherent genius which calls forth resemblances, but frets over a tendency toward riddles; Horace commends freshness and novelty, yet worries about combinations of images which result in grotesquery; Quintilian praises metaphor for the clarity, expressiveness, and adornment which it affords expression, but counsels against harsh, far-fetched choices which promise merely to obscure communication, to weary and puzzle audiences; Longinus, while lauding the metaphor's great capacity to "transport," mentions the danger attending daring selections (e.g., Plato's comparing a city to a wine bowl, which is to say that the less inhibited souls [mad wine] mingle with mellow ones [sober wine, water] to constitute a proper mix); Addison, though seeing metaphor as a key to wit, evidences an awareness of undesirable extravagance; Johnson, of course, stops just short of berating the metaphysical poets' apparent obsession with reaching far afield for metaphors complicated in the extreme, tropes requiring labor much exceeding their worth.

Conventional metaphor, it seems, falls somewhere between characterizing a maiden's bosom as being snow-white and calling man's restlessness a pulley, somewhere between describing a reflection as rainbow-hued and offering twin compass points as an imaginative equivalent for the inseparability of lovers, somewhere between declaring leukemia a clock without hands and suggesting that

one's love letter to a mistress is a note written in lemon, to be exposed only by its being subjected to love's flames -- or, again, a lover's character as being imprinted in lemon, to be given form, like the hypocrite's character, in the face of judgmental fire; or, once more, a lover's message as being designed to be apprehended first by real fire and then, more sympathetically, by the ordeal fire of his mistress. In other words, gradations of metaphor depend largely upon kind and degree. Longinus praises the vulgar metaphor because its substance is of a kind familiar to people in general and, as such, is halfway to conviction. Johnson criticizes the "school" of Donne for failing to imitate nature, life, forms of matter, the operation of the intellect -- in effect, condemns them for dealing in a kind of "phenomena" remote to the experience of most people. Wordsworth draws from the landscape not only the subject for his poetry but evolves from it his metaphors as well, again underscoring a passion for a kind of trope potentially more familiar and therefore apprehendable to the reader. As concerns degree or extent, Longinus advises using only two or three metaphors together, those being dictated by the strength of the user's emotions. Addison chides Cowley for drawing endless parallels between images of dubious likeness.

Thus, I think, one has evidence enough to bear away some rough approximations of what constitutes the full

range of metaphor, that is to say, the timid, the conventional, the far-fetched. The last of the three, far-fetched, is of primary interest here because it best suggests the kind and degree of application apparent in the modern French theatre. The term "far-fetched" has rather disparaging connotations, unfortunately; and at this point I think it desirable to jettison the phrase "far-fetched metaphor" in favor of the word "conceit." And, here, I mean to use "conceit" in its more respected modern sense, a sense which isolates the tropes of Donne and Herbert as an ideal, a sense which focuses upon their successes (e. g., the twin compasses and the pulley) rather than some of their notorious attempts, a sense which honors their daring and acknowledges the hazards crowding the path of high achievement. I will consider, with T. S. Eliot, the virtue of these poets as "something permanently valuable, which subsequently disappeared, but ought not to have disappeared."<sup>37</sup> The yoking and uniting, then, are to be conceived as natural inclinations, for

When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes. (p. 247)

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<sup>37</sup>"The Metaphysical Poets," in Selected Essays (New York, 1950), p. 245.

The notion of new wholes, of course, merely anticipates other modern critics, such as Richards, Wimsatt, and Brooks, who see the metaphor as a fusion of contexts, the resultant meaning being derived neither wholly from the one nor the other, nor the sum of the two, that meaning instead being a significance which presses forward in the imagination and occupies new territory, as it were. He who would accomplish this end must, as Eliot observes,

become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning. (p. 248)

#### D. Toward the Dramatic Conceit

So much for timid tropes, conventional metaphors, and conceits employed in expression generally from the time of Aristotle and before. It remains, however, to demonstrate the continuation of their use into modern drama, for little has been said as yet of their specific use in modern theatre. Thus I turn to Luigi Pirandello's It "Is" So! (If You Think So) and Jean Anouilh's Becket for samples of conventional metaphors. Later, I will examine Becket, Arthur Adamov's Professor Taranne, and Arthur Kopit's Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad for indications of the conceit's presence in the modern theatre.

In It "Is" So! (If You Think So) one discovers a

metaphor of the controlling type, one which functions as the dominant image in the play and serves to summarize and embody the substance of the entire work. Subtitled "A Parable in Three Acts," the drama depicts a search for truth "with a capital T,"<sup>38</sup> a quest which serves only to reveal many lesser and unsatisfying truths, which in turn raise even more torturous and frustrating questions. When a Signora Frola, believed to be the mother-in-law of Signor Ponza, the new secretary to the Provincial Councillor, moves into the same apartment building as Commendatore Agazzi and fails to pay his family a visit, Amalia Agazzi and her daughter attempt to approach the lady and are turned away. There follows much perturbation; and soon all sorts of rumors and tidbits of information are being circulated. Why Ponza lives with his wife elsewhere while himself making frequent visits to his assumed mother-in-law and yet permitting his wife but distant contact with the same woman haunts the city fathers. Surely there is an answer; and just as surely they mean to discover it. Signora Frola reveals it to be devotion: her son-in-law desires his wife to live apart from her mother; and all accede to the arrangement. However, Ponza later intimates to the citizens athirst for truth that Signora Frola is really mad, that her daughter died four years earlier, that he

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<sup>38</sup>It "Is" So! (If You Think So), trans. Arthur Livingston (New York, 1952), p.101.

then courted another woman whom the distraught mother took for her deceased daughter, and that he nurtures the present life-lie as a "beneficial illusion in her" (p. 87), that is, the mother. Thus, to prevent her discovering the truth sure to be harsh in the extreme, he must keep Signora Frola locked up and isolated. Signora Frola subsequently attempts to rebut this argument: she knows his tale, but he is deluded; her daughter had merely suffered a loss of sanity, had been committed, and had been returned to Ponza, who refused to believe that she still lived, accepting her back only when she took the guise of another woman and ostensibly became his second wife. Now the truth-seekers, those persistent probers among the provincial Italian populace, have their dilemma cut out for them. Is Signora Ponza the daughter of Signora Frola and the phantom of Ponza's second wife, or is she the second wife of Ponza and merely the phantom of Signora Frola's daughter? Various stratagems devised to uncover the truth meet with failure. Documents and testimonials only serve to heighten the tension. Finally it is agreed that in the presence of the concerned officials, Signora Ponza will confront both Signora Frola and her husband. Surely Truth will out!

The stage is set. The truthsayers gather. Mother and husband are there. Then Signora Ponza arrives, garbed in a "thick, black, impenetrable veil" (p. 136). She

first answers to the name "Lena," thereby acknowledging the Frola woman to be her mother. Thereafter, she responds to "Julia," in turn identifying herself as Ponza's second wife as well. The mother and husband then depart; and for the sake of the truthsayers, Signora Ponza reiterates that she is the daughter of Frola. And the second wife of Ponza. "For myself," she concludes, "I am nobody" (p. 138).

Truth, in metaphorical terms, is the lady in the veil. Abstract truth, Pirandello is saying, eludes man's zealous grasp; indeed, while he seeks the Truth, he merely discovers the truth -- "a truth that is: something specific; something concrete" (p. 117). Something which satisfies him personally, not necessarily or even likely that which will endure the test of valid and objective criteria for gauging phenomena. This failure to attain truth with a capital T, however, is not to be construed as something undesirable. The lady in the veil, one is reminded, acknowledges the truth of Frola and truth of Ponza. As for herself, she declares, she is nobody; that is to say, she (Truth) is not important. What is important is that Frola and Ponza be spared an awareness which might certainly threaten their sense of well-being. Unfortunately, the inquiries of the townspeople do more harm than good, causing Ponza as they do to resign his post and prompting Signora Frola to leave town as well. Thus



the cold, calculating seekers of Truth come bursting into the security and contentment of the Ponzas. much like that "quack" Gregers Werle comes out of the cold Scandinavian night bearing his glad tidings of great Truth to the Ekdals in Ibsen's The Wild Duck. The interesting thing about the truthsayers is that the price of admission is normally underwritten by someone else -- say, the Ponzas and the Ekdals of this world, who are not in need of the Truth, nor can they very well contend with it. The life-lie serves them far better. At any rate, in Pirandello's drama, the two persons best equipped to discern Truth are mercifully denied access to its visage by the forbidding, impenetrable veil; consequently, they bear away an imperfect conception of Truth, one lacking in their mind's eye, so to speak, its most remarkable features, those surest to serve proper identity. Thus the lady in the impenetrable veil serves well to characterize Truth which eludes the clutches of the townspeople.<sup>39</sup> And perhaps mankind in general. But, then, having it, whatever would they do with it?

In Becket, Jean Anouilh employs some rather orthodox metaphors, unfolding himself as perhaps one of the most conservative of the moderns, at least with respect to figurative language. Early in the drama, for example,

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<sup>39</sup>Cf. meaning in "The Minister's Black Veil," above, pp. 21-22.

King Henry II meets with the Council of Bishops and reminds them that landholders are bound either to send men fully equipped to serve the King's adventures or to pay an absentee tax. The Church, he feels, is hardly beyond the pale of this custom; therefore, it had better release the appropriate funds for the crown's coffers. He remains adamant on this point; and when he bolts the parley for lunch, the bishops are left to mull over smoldering aggravations. Folliot urges an appeal to Rome. York is for excommunication. Oxford, however, advises the members to bide their time, for "The King's rages are terrible, but they don't last. They are fires of straw."<sup>40</sup> In this instance, one has little difficulty in visualizing fires of straw. The dry, gold-ripe grain stalks, of course, heat easily and thus lend themselves to sudden and brilliant combustion; but because the fuel is consumed most rapidly, the flame soon subsides. Thus the character of Henry's rages becomes clear to anyone who ventures, even momentarily, to work out the equation. And for those who bother not at all, Anouilh includes a proper substitute, permitting Oxford to characterize those rages directly: they are terrible; however, they don't last for long. Hence, if the analogy is appropriate, it is also redundant.

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<sup>40</sup> Becket, trans. Lucienne Hill (New York, 1960), p. 24.

Later, while they are awaiting word to enter a cathedral somewhere in France, Becket is concerned lest the English Church usurp Henry's primacy. As Lord Chancellor of England, he estimates that in five years Church and King will contend as rivals for ascendancy among the people and in a decade the monarch will be subservient to the power of Canterbury. Perhaps, Becket counsels, wisdom dictates seizing the initiative to forestall this likelihood. Henry is indifferent; "things," he says, "always work out." "Yes," counters Becket, "but badly." Then courting the King where it counts the most, he cites the game of tennis. Would the player-King sit and let the play unfold itself? "Are we," the Lord Chancellor queries, "going to let the others smash the ball into our court . . . or shall we try to score a point?" Henry becomes ecstatic. "The point, Begod, the point!" he cries;

You're right! On the court, I sweat and strain,  
 I fall over my feet, I half kill myself, I'll  
 cheat if need be, but I never give up the point!  
 (p. 55)

Thus it is that Henry evolves a strategy of government calling for exertion of authority, cheating, all manner of machinations divined to deny his opponents, later to number Becket, any advantage whatever. As was the case in the previous example, the metaphor is clear and conservative, for the equation is spelled out in detail

and the items of the analogy are, to begin with, innately similar, largely because both activities are highly competitive, victory being foremost in the minds of the combatants. Indeed, a tennis buff is very like a military fanatic, what with both planning their strategy assiduously and pressing home their points with killer instinct. Little exhilarates so much as smashing home a decisive point over an opponent sprawled upon his defensive court. Little, unless it is the triumphant surge which carries the conqueror through the shredded defenses of an out-gunned and prostrated foe.

Eventually, the King's affection for Becket undergoes alteration. Stunned by his friend's independence and seeming disloyalty, he conspires with several collaborating bishops to discredit Becket. Although the proud Saxon, now Archbishop of Canterbury, had resigned his post as Lord Chancellor and had been cleared subsequently by the Grand Justicer of all dues and claims, Folliot intimates that recent audits have uncovered a shortage of forty thousand gold marks. Becket smiles. "I don't believe," he says,

there was ever so much money in all the coffers of all England in all the time I was Chancellor. But a clever clerk can change that . . . . .  
The King has closed his fist and I am a fly inside. (p. 88)

In arbitrarily likening himself to the fly facing imminent

annihilation, Becket portrays his existence as miniscule, one possessed of poor powers to resist a force and intelligence far beyond his ken. For the moment, at least, he experiences the futility of wriggling within the insistent grasp of the malevolent monarch.

In one of the later scenes, Henry and the young Queen quarrel vehemently over Henry's ambivalence with respect to Becket. She appears to gloat over the demise of her husband's closest friend and fellow adventurer. Wounded, he rails against her ubiquitous mediocrity. She protests: after all, had she not sacrificed her youth for the King! This, Henry cannot resist. "As for your youth," he chides,

that dusty flower pressed into a hymnbook  
since you were twelve years old, with its  
watery blood and its insipid scent -- you  
can say farewell to that without a tear . . . .  
Your body was an empty desert, madam! --  
which duty forced me to wander in alone.

(pp. 91-92)

Anouilh employs in this passage one of his more complicated nonce metaphors. While superficially the dusty flower and the empty desert suggest a sterility and a qualifiedly unproductive relationship, the flower in the hymnbook since age twelve alludes to more than a mere souvenir to be drawn out from time to time for display and remembrance; it also suggests an early and short-lived passion, which possibly for reasons of conscience or an attack of piety assumed restraint, perhaps even

evanesced into frigidity. And, of course, the watery blood implies an undesirable dilution, a tamer disposition, which supports the idea of a passion devoid of substance and vigor and, again, implies a coolness running retrograde to ardor. There is some cause to blush here, unfortunately, because talk of frigidity and water do not go well with the mention of deserts and dust; obviously, between Anouilh and me, we have managed to mix metaphors. Regardless, one may note further that although Henry is ostensibly making a pitch for Becket's lust for life, he is insinuating simultaneously a defense of his own whoremongering and adventuring; and, at least in part, one can appreciate how even duty alone might compel rare forays into the wasteland of the Queen's boudoir.

So much for conventional metaphors in modern drama. Most of what has been cited here constitutes, I feel, analogies common to everyday patterns of thought and statement in literature. It is apparent, too, that they are used to characterize matter of the moment or content which is dispersed throughout an entire work. Candor has it that metaphor is occasionally deceptive. Like Proteus, it is apparent here, then there, here all of it, there its entirety, here-there, there-here. Then maybe gone. It sometimes bewilders. Concerning those cited above, however, I enjoy reasonable certainty. Now.

Whatever the difficulties with conventional metaphor,

the problems attending the conceit are considerably more challenging, with respect both to the kind of analogies invoked and to the complications which arise in the course of working out their meanings. Becket, again, will serve to illustrate my point.

Anouilh employs the conceit of cold to parallel large segments of the drama dealing with indifference. Throughout the play the French dramatist painstakingly chronicles the chill which invariably plagues Henry in the presence of his beloved Becket. In the opening scene of the play, which is chronologically the last episode in the Henry II-Becket association, the King enters the cathedral where, beside the coffin of Becket, he is to be flogged by Saxon monks. There, "shivering in the draughts" (p. 11), he observes,

How cold it was on that bare plain at  
La Ferte-Bernard the last time we met!  
It's funny, it's always been cold, in  
our story. Save at the beginning, when  
we were friends. (p. 12)

Henry, for once, very nearly hits upon the truth. He errs only when he excepts the beginning, for even then it was cold. Almost immediately the King makes this observation, the action flashes back in time to the earliest scene depicted in their relationship: in it Becket has risen early for a ride in the chill air and has returned to massage the King's sluggish body; and in it Henry complains, "There's a divine nip in the air," and adds, "To

think that you actually like the cold" (p. 14)! Later, in the Saxon's hut, where he and Becket seek refuge from the storm, the King is the one to say, "It's freezing cold in this shack" (p. 28). Henry shivers on the battlefield when Beaumont's death is reported. Again, he protests freezing to death in the cathedral in France. Then, too, at La Ferte-Bernard during their meeting prior to Becket's homecoming, he complains,

I'm freezing stiff. You love it of course! You're in your element, aren't you? And you're barefoot as well!  
(p. 108)

One suspects eventually that Anouilh is interested in more than mere meteorology. Cold has, as a matter of fact, much to do with Becket's detachment; however, such a claim takes a bit of demonstrating. To begin with, it is interesting to note that while the King cites the cold as Becket's element, the Archbishop recalls a curious strategy:

I always told you, my prince, that one must fight with the cold's own weapons. Strip naked and splash yourself with cold water every morning. (p. 110)

Then he speaks further of the King, the ship's captain, whose job it is to steer the vessel England. God, "the absurd wind" (p. 111), affords him preferred treatment when the two together, ship and wind, run mutual courses. It is when Henry directs the England into the wind that it and those who honor it (e.g., Becket, possessed of "a



frail, incomprehensible honor, vulnerable as a boy-king fleeing from danger" [p. 112]) do oppose him with both fury and entreaty.

In the foregoing illustration, Anouilh's conceit emerges the more clearly, for the hint at an absurd God tends to color the entire universe with absurdity, incomprehensibility, and indifference. The last characterization, indifference, equates nicely with coldness. One might fight the indifference of the universe with its own weapon, indifference. In doing so, he need only divest himself of whatever clings to the affections (i.e., strip himself naked, as it were). Detachment, after all, plays a key role in Becket. The head of the Church, on the occasion of Becket's appointment as Lord Chancellor, urges his bishops to withhold their judgment of the young Saxon, because "he is as it were detached. As if seeking his real self" (p. 25). The King is unsettled by such remoteness, so much so that he puts the question directly: "Do you love me, Becket" (p. 27)? Such bald demands for declarations of affection bewilder Becket. Love? He is more inclined to esthetics -- "Doing what I have to do and doing it well" (p. 54). Thus he responds to the King's question: "I am your servant, my prince" (p. 27). Or to the query concerning Gwendolen: "She is my mistress, my prince" (p. 27). In brief, servants, lovers, kings, mistresses, or whoever, should fulfill their functions well.

The rest should be let be.

This characterization of Becket's values is probably too harsh. He deserves better. Indeed, the briefest review of the world in which he moves cries out for a more sympathetic reception. In his youth, for example, he had put to flight the would-be Norman seducer of his sister, knowing full well that such violations were common and that other attempts would likely follow. As a companion of the King, he enters a Saxon hut, where the members of the family are addressed as "it," where death may be freely dealt to any who resists, and where the Saxon's daughter is ordered to the King's court to serve his pleasure (an act Becket manages to forestall by claiming her for himself). Later, Henry claims a return favor by taking Gwendolen from him. The world of the Saxons, then, is one of rampant contingency. On the merest of whims, firebolts may be rained upon the heads of a humbled people. How to survive becomes the foremost question. Swords may serve Saxon as well as anyone; but the Normans are skilled and numerous. Indifference, however, may insure peace from pain, especially for one of Becket's disposition. If a sister's seduction means nothing, then one is less likely to grieve. The loss of a mistress being relatively meaningless, the lover may take it more casually. Thus when Gwendolen, prior to departing, asks Becket, "My Lord cares for nothing in the whole world, does he?" the very phrasing of her

question anticipates his resounding "no" (p. 44)!

Yet it might be otherwise. While the King slumbers in Becket's chamber, the Saxon opens his heart: "How tenderly I would love you, my prince, in an ordered world" (p. 46). Really, there are the two worlds. Henry, as Norman King and perpetrator of many Saxon sufferings, is subject to fewer contingencies, hence familiar with a world which, at least on the surface, appears ordered. Becket, not so much as an individual but as a member of the race of Saxons, discerns a world full of whim and accident, one disordered and filled with awful threat. The dichotomy of Henry's and Becket's universes in large measure explains the error implicit in the King's outburst upon the return of the Chancellor's Seal. "I loved you," he says to an imaginary Becket, "and you didn't love me . . . that's the difference" (p. 79). The King continues to skim surfaces, unfortunately, persisting as he does in citing effects, that is to say, loving or not loving. The cause lies in the world of which he is king. Would he but grant equality and justice to the Saxons, in other words, order the English world of Becket, then might he experience the bliss of requited love.

Much of the secular period of Becket's life is chronicled in terms of his honor, or better, his improvised honor (p. 47). Eventually, of course, he is appointed Archbishop of Canterbury and does assume a visible and sin-

cere stance. (The play is subtitled "The Honor of God.") Again he finds himself opposed to the King. Becket says of the later turn of events, "We loved each other and I think he cannot forgive me for preferring God to him" (p. 105). Here it is the prelate's turn to grasp truth partially. They have always clashed, just as Henry has always suffered from the cold. If now Becket prefers God to Henry, earlier he had preferred justice to his prince. Of course, the previous stance was not very open and visible, so Henry may have missed the preference he could not tolerate. Or the difference might really be that the King could forgive a preference for man's justice, but not God's.

Arthur Adamov's Professor Taranne depends upon a somewhat less complicated use of conceit to convey the idea of a pedagogue's being exposed for what he really is. The play opens with Taranne's arrest on the charge of displaying himself naked before a group of young boys on the beach. Outraged by the Police Inspector's insistence, the professor attempts to "clothe" himself in his reputation, arguing "The way I have lived is enough to prove" innocence,<sup>41</sup> citing his position of leadership among the faculty, and recalling with pride that the young men "fought to get into my courses and to have a sheet

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<sup>41</sup>Professor Taranne, trans. Albert Bermel (New York, 1960), p. 129.

with my handwriting on it" (p. 130). The police persist, however; and Taranne requests that they call his friends to testify to his morality and renown, then sputters his challenge, "Bring them here, all of them. Bring anybody! And you'll soon see . . ." (p. 132).

The audience soon sees, of course. In a dream sequence, Taranne is confronted first by a lady journalist who has apparently written a thesis for him. She fails to recognize him, however. Two gentlemen subsequently appear; and although Taranne claims them as former students, they depart, leaving him to stand stupidly alone. A society lady acknowledges having attended one of his lectures, but then insists that it was Professor Menard's, not Taranne's. And two other gentlemen also shrug him off.

Later, in his hotel room the police question him about several notebooks apparently left on the beach. While he argues that they belong to him, he is unable to read them. "I deliberately tried to disguise my handwriting" (p. 141) is his feeble defense. Curiously, the notebooks contain a first and last page, the space between being devoid of any content whatever. After the police depart, Taranne receives a letter from the Dean. His lectures, he is informed, have been improperly scheduled; moreover, his discussions have been unnecessarily prolonged; his lecture halls, singularly deserted; his points, astoundingly lacking in precision; his ideas, obviously

plagiarized from Menard; and his work, the cause of an avalanche of complaints. In fact, the Dean concludes, he is being dismissed.

In a closing scene, in which the only props are the notebooks and the Dean's letter, Taranne turns away from the audience and begins to undress. Thus events have come full circle, for the audience has seen the professor stripped naked both physically and metaphorically. The former students who fail to recognize him, the notebooks revealing both plagiarism and a lack of substance, and the Dean's letter are all separate vehicles, yet they bear the same tenor, for all cut through the façade of fame, brilliance, wit, and popularity to reveal a dull, incompetent plagiarist. In brief, Taranne is unmasked for all the world to see, denied the concealment of his sham respectability.

Even more accessible and, perhaps, vulgar as well are the conceits in Kopit's Oh Dad. Madame Rosepettle has discovered her virgin son studying the seductive Rosalie from afar through his home-built telescope. Fearing the imminent loss of her son's virtue, she arranges to have the girl sit with him (he is seventeen!) while she is ostensibly away on business. Once the appropriate accommodations have been made, the inevitable very nearly happens, a turn of events affording Madame Rosepettle the opportunity to burst in and deliver, for her

son's edification and enlightenment, a sermon on the corruptness of Rosalie and existence in general. Life, she insists, is a lie.

It builds green trees that tease your eyes and draw you under them. Then when you're in the shade and you breathe in and say, "Oh God, how beautiful," that's when the bird on the branch lets go his droppings and hits you on the head.<sup>42</sup>

Such a view of life, obviously, dictates a certain wariness, especially among the initiated. More generally, of course, the trees (shades of Eden!) bespeak a time of innocence and spontaneity, whereas the droppings allude to misfortune and evil. Rosalie, one may surmise, is the enticing equivalent of the grove and son Jonathan is the uninitiated who would seek the shade and the aroma, only to be felled by misfortune. However, Madame Rosepettle intervenes soon enough; and the only fallout appears to be her dropping in.

The past in Oh Dad is worth some consideration, too, for it is something less than a secret solace and a source of sustenance. Once the Rosepettles arrive in Havana, Jonathan diligently sees that his stamp, coin and book collections are accounted for and properly placed. Madame Rosepettle, in turn, makes appropriate arrangements for Albert Edward Robinson Rosepettle III, her husband,

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<sup>42</sup>Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad (New York, 1960), p. 44.

who happens to be dead. Having had him embalmed to perfection, she brings him along wherever she goes. Once settled, she places his coffin in the master bedroom and hangs him in the closet, where he is cause for some wariness. After all, she confides,

Open the door without your customary cup of coffee and your whole day's shot to hell. But open the door just a little ways, sneak your hand in, pull out your dress, and your day is made. Yet he's still there . . . , and sooner or later the moth balls are gone and you've got to clean house. (p. 63)

While the Rosepettles are doubtlessly eccentric, their objects of fascination all do have something in common: they are relics of the past. Madame Rosepèttle, of course, is quite secure with the past, literally carting it -- casket and all -- wherever she goes. Her son Jonathan, however, makes tentative overtures toward the living. For example, he has built a telescope to enable him, he says, to watch the airplanes overhead "with hundreds of people . . . ," pathetically intimating,

I thought to myself, if I could just see . . .  
if I could just see what they looked like . . .  
. . . , then I might . . . know what I . . . what  
I . . . . (p. 36)

Soon, to his credit, Jonathan is using the telescope to view Rosalie from afar, an interest which is soon returned with something more than tentative and hesitant posturing. A confrontation is inevitable; and it is in Madame's bed-chamber itself that the very living, breathing Rosalie



almost smokes Jonathan out of the tangled past. Not once, but twice! the embalmed Albert Edward Robinson Rosepettle III, a dandy in his own day, tumbles from the closet onto the bed. Undaunted, Rosalie pushes him aside, imploring Jonathan to "stop looking at him! He's dead! Listen to me. I'm alive" (p. 86). Jonathan smothers Rosalie to death. Madame returns to discover her son at his telescope scouring the heavens for airplanes and Rosalie lying upon the bed, buried beneath the collections of coins, stamps, and books. Events suggest that Jonathan prefers to savor the living from afar or, again, that Rosalie fails to substitute the present for the past in his life. And while the action itself depicts Jonathan smothering the girl, the conceits go far to implicate the dead past in this case of simple suffocation.

Earlier, I established that the conceit, particularly as it is found in poetry, commonly implies a frequently elaborate comparison which points up a complex and startling analogy between two seemingly dissimilar things. Now, I find certain modern playwrights betraying in their works a similar penchant. On the one hand, one sees how Pirandello portrays Protean Truth as a face behind a veil; how Anouilh depicts Henry's rages as fires of straw, political and military strategy as very like tactics employed

on the tennis court, Becket's helplessness before the maneuvering of Henry as akin to the fly's feebleness in the fist of man, and the Queen's sterile love as a desert flower, her body as a wasted land. On the other hand, one apprehends Becket's strategy for overcoming the effects of cold as an imaginative equivalent of the prelate's means of coping with the indifference of the universe and Norman rule in England; Taranne's being caught naked as a circumstance paralleling and insinuating his being exposed as a plagiarist and being divested of the "garb" of illusion and sham respectability; a bird's droppings from a tree as a fanciful likeness of the misfortune come to haunt Adam of Eden, and the Rosepettle coins, stamps, books, and body as aspects of an actualized past serving to suffocate an innocent youth.

While steady-gazing Candor requires an admission that the line separating conventional metaphors and conceits can never be discerned with perfect satisfaction, there does nonetheless appear to be a distinction between the first and second groupings of analogies. And that difference seems to be one largely of degree. It is my contention, of course, that the comparisons in the second collection are elaborate, complex, disparate, occasionally shocking, stark, gross -- in short, they betray the sort of science associated with the conceit and the modus operandi of the metaphysical poets. And, indeed, a number of other

instances of the conceit's use in modern theatre come to mind. Genet's The Balcony, for example, in which the beneficial life-lies of society are depicted as certain indulgences in a brothel. Also, Adamov's Ping Pong, which chronicles indirectly the drift away from constituted, ordered worship by implying its likeness to a shift from a preference for pinball machines to the anarchy of a ping pong match in which anything goes. And, again, Albee's The Zoo Story, which depicts the walls separating man from man as identical to the bars in the zoo separating beast from beast. Nowhere, however, is the penchant for employing conceits, the virtual obsession with yoking together phenomena normally kept apart in the mind, the practice of "amalgamating disparate experience" more evident than in the drama of the French existentialists and absurdist. The forthcoming chapters on Sartre, Camus, Ionesco, and Beckett, I believe, will bear out this assertion.

Finally, it is possible and, surely, desirable to make a distinction here between the metaphysical conceit and the dramatic conceit. The latter, of course, immediately implies an analogy rendered through character and action, two literary elements which do not always nor even commonly figure prominently in the poetic genres. The typical drama, moreover, is considerably longer than the typical poem, a fact which must surely imply an arena

multiplied in size, so to speak, and a ground upon which idea might reasonably discover for itself a greater obscurity and anonymity. There is, too, a marked subtlety about the conceit in drama which sets it apart from the metaphysical conceit. One should recall, for example, that Addison complains of Cowley's conceits, seeing in them endless parallels delineating doubtful likenesses (see p. 55 above). Dr. Johnson, too, cites these poets' practice of pursuing parallels to their last ramifications and introducing particulars beyond the call of good poetry. "Great thoughts," he insists,

are always general, and consist in positions  
not limited by exceptions and in descriptions  
not descending to minuteness. (Johnson, p. 154)

Johnson's point here is particularly significant because the kind of subtlety which he desires is often of the order one discovers in the work of the French existentialists and absurdists. That is why this work is so frequently incomprehensible! As I inferred earlier from Guicharnaud's comments, then, the key to meaning is often the conceit; yet the individual tropes must be discerned and worked out with care. Subtlety has, as it were, chosen up sides, for she is the ally of the playwright. And, in a sense, the enemy of the critic. But now, at least, I am armed for the fray.

## II. SARTRE

### "ENTERPRISES OF GREAT PITCH AND MOMENT"

#### WINNING THE NAME OF ACTION

In one of the best-known of Shakespeare's soliloquies, Hamlet ponders the merits of self-slaughter in a world of pain and contingency, eventually deducing that it is "the dread of something after death" which compels man to bear the ills of this existence rather than fly to others he knows not of. Thus, the youthful Dane observes, man is rendered a coward and his resolution, dissipated. Things to be done, "enterprises of great pitch and moment," lose their aura of urgency and conduct does "lose the name of action" (Hamlet.III.i.64-96).

Like Hamlet, the humanistic French existentialists contemplate the ills of this world and discover in them the seeds of despair. Moreover, while they deny a dread of anything after death, they nonetheless confess the anxiety which compels man to pirouette, to turn away from enterprises harbored in head and heart. In a world where each man has a darkening hill to climb, then, the challenge is to win the name of action, a feat mostly affording disturbing prospects for success and implying that the self as well as a summit must be scaled. How to confront, ac-

knowledge, and assimilate the bleakest of prospects and still discover and retain a courage to be, a disposition to affirm oneself through action, that is the considerable project set before an otherwise reluctant and recalcitrant race of men.

Of continuing concern, of course, is the term "existentialism," clamoring as it does for clarification and commentary. It applies, practically speaking, to a set of attitudes which have pervaded philosophic, religious, and artistic thinking during the past several decades, its period of greatest vitality being the years during and after the Second World War. The movement subordinates essence to existence and declares reason inadequate to explain the enigma of the universe (Thrall, p. 192). The term is, unfortunately, quite comprehensive and rather loosely applied. For example, it is somewhat facetiously defined as the "clandestine wedding of nordic melancholy and Parisian pornography."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, its fairly weathered and misshapen canopy shelters a variegated spectrum of sensuousness, eroticism, nocturnal dialogues, glances and words which open doors and afford the consolation of companionship, threats rivaling those experienced by living over earth shivered by bolting quakes, by residing at the base of active volcanoes, or by dwelling in lands where

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<sup>1</sup>Carl S. Michalson, ed., Christianity and the Existentialists (New York, 1956), p. 2.

one endures two wars within his lifetime. Yet, while the term virtually defies strict definition, the problem of existentialism, according to William Barrett, can be assigned the following characteristics:

Alienation and estrangement; a sense of the basic fragility and contingency of human life; the impotence of reason confronted with the depths of existence; and the threat of nothingness, and the solitary and unsheltered condition of the individual before this threat.<sup>2</sup>

While it is difficult to subordinate these problems one to another, it is apparent that they have a common locus. Each is attended by the same chill blast: the oppressive and wounding weight of human finitude. Just as Matthew Arnold, in "Dover Beach," sensed the "Sea of Faith's" retreat before the breath of the night-wind, leaving man to grope aimlessly upon the darkling shorelines of existence, modern man has seen his religious fortress come under siege; and the assault has deprived him of his "concrete connection with a transcendental realm of being," loosing him "to deal with this world in its brute objectivity" (Barrett, p. 25). Homelessness it is that pervades such a world, man frequently becoming a drifter and a wanderer in an unfriendly sphere.

Generalization, unfortunately, is a Poor Relative of Particulars. For just as there are shades of difference among the views of various politicians espousing similar

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<sup>2</sup>Irrational Man (Garden City, New York, 1962), p. 36.

commitments, so too there are differences among the views of the various existentialists. Thus, a more detailed, if not broader, treatment of particular ideas is needed here to establish clearly the scope and commitment of individual authors, in this case Jean-Paul Sartre; consequently, some attention will be directed toward his views on God, on freedom and responsibility, and on bad faith, because these notions not only characterize his particular brand of existentialism, but also have a very direct bearing on the content of his plays and, in turn, on the conceits employed therein.

To begin with, says Sartre, by existentialism is meant

a doctrine which makes human life possible and, in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity.<sup>3</sup>

Whether those who hold to this perspective be Christian (e.g., Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel) or atheistic (e.g., Heidegger and Sartre himself), they do have something very much in common: they believe that essence is preceded by existence, or if one prefers, that "subjectivity must be the starting point" (p. 34). Thereafter, a distinction is desirable. Sartre cites the example of a paper-cutter, an object made by an artisan and a creation arising from

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<sup>3</sup>"The Humanism of Existentialism," trans. Bernard Frechtman, in Essays in Existentialism (New York, 1967), p. 32.



a concept. The reference of the concept, of course, includes what the paper-cutter is and the method by which it is produced. Moreover, it is intended for a certain purpose, for it is difficult to postulate the device's having no use. In this case, then,

essence -- that is, the ensemble of both the production routines and the properties which enable it to be both produced and defined -- precedes existence. (p. 34)

As Creator of the world, God may be considered a superior artisan. He knows from the outset exactly what He is creating. Therefore, the concept of man in God's mind is comparable to the blueprint of the paper-cutter in the manufacturer's mind; and just as the human artisan follows a definition and a technique to produce a paper-cutter, so also does God follow a certain conception and techniques to create man. Individual man is thus the realization of a given concept in the divine intelligence.

His own brand of existentialism, Sartre insists, is "more coherent," for it is less speculative, less dependent upon assumptions of powers above.

It states that if God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept, and that being is man, or . . . human reality. (p. 35)

Man appears on the earthly scene, turns up, as it were.

If he is indefinable, as the existentialists conceive him,

it is because in the beginning he is nothing. He may become something, in which case he will have made what he has become. This view, therefore, fails to acknowledge any human nature, since there is no Being capable of conceiving one. Whatever blueprint comes into being, man authors it; and whatever structure of existence arises, man builds it as well. Thus, concludes Sartre, God is really not the issue.

Existentialism is nothing else than an attempt to draw all the consequences of a coherent atheistic position . . . . .  
Existentialism isn't so atheistic that it wears itself out showing that God doesn't exist. Rather, it declares that even if God did exist, that would change nothing. (p. 62)

What man makes of man -- that is the first principle of existentialism. Unlike other existences, he hurls himself toward a future, and is conscious to the point of imagining himself in that future. In effect, then, man is a species of plan aware of itself. In conceiving, he emerges. In willing, he chooses. And in choosing, he is responsible. Hence, it should be no surprise that

existentialism's first move is to make every man aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him. And when we say that a man is responsible for himself, we do not only mean that he is responsible for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men. (p. 36)

Responsible for all? Surely! For in conceiving, in willing, and in creating the man he wishes to be, there is not a solitary act which fails to evoke an image of man as his

maker believes he ought to be. Whatever the choice, it affirms at once the value of what a man chooses. The further assumption, of course, is that the image valid for him is good for all.

Man, as conceived by the existentialists, has a responsibility greater than commonly supposed, and he is bound to feel the totality and depth of the burden haunting his actions. For him,

everything happens as if all mankind had its eyes fixed on him and were guiding itself by what he does. And every man ought to say to himself, "Am I really the kind of man who has the right to act in such a way that humanity might guide itself by my actions?" (p. 39)

This, predictably, will lead to anguish, since there can never be complete justification for one's decisions. Angels might ease anxiety. The Word, too, could be most encouraging. Yet the existential world of Sartre is devoid of such phenomena. There is only man, and a craving for exemplary acts. Alone he stands, obliged on the one hand to perform such acts, and equally obliged on the other to forego soothing justifications for those acts.

Man is not alone with his anguish. He has his forlornness as well. His, solely, is the tableland, uncharted tableland, where a priori Good has withered under the glare of scrutiny. Nor are there honored scrolls amid the ruins. Indeed, there is nothing to cling to. Not even excuses! Gone are the fixed values; gone, the commands often used to legitimize conduct. With no excuses behind him, and no

justification before,

man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet, in other respects free, because, once thrown into the world, he is responsible for what he does. (p. 41)

And he is compelled to act. "Things will be," argues Sartre, "as man will have decided them to be" (p. 47). He is a creature in the world. He will involve himself. There is, for example, the question of socialization. One cannot say whether such a system will come to be. Yet, he may say, "I'm going to do everything in my power to bring it about" (p. 47). Thus, the only reality is in action; and man only exists authentically insofar as he fulfills the plans he projects. He is solely "the ensemble of his acts, nothing else than his life" (p. 47). Love, then, is measured only by one's actual loving. Genius, strictly by works created. Cowardice, singularly by "the act of renouncing or yielding" (p. 49).

The existentialist's basic truth is "I think; therefore, I exist" (p. 51). It implies, of course, that dignity and existence apart from being a mere object lie in the consciousness' becoming aware of itself. Moreover,

Every theory which takes man out of the moment in which he becomes aware of himself is . . . a theory which confounds truth . . . . (p. 51)

In anguish, it has been noted, man apprehends himself as totally free and simultaneously, as being unable to derive meaning from the world, except as it comes from himself.

In the face of this potential dilemma, he evidences various types of conduct -- often, for example, patterns of flight. Such is the game of excuses. Circumstances are unfortunate. One's true worth is being overlooked. A failure in love is the fault of an unworthy woman. Determinism is to blame: one can never be anything than what he is. "Most of the time," Sartre emphasizes, man flees "anguish in bad faith" (p. 68).

What is bad faith? Some suggest that it corresponds to conventional falsehood. Good faith, though, has already implied possession of the truth, that is to say, an awareness of a situation in which the individual is involved. The act of lying indicates an awareness of the truth, for there is an attempt to conceal that consciousness from others. Therefore, awareness being tantamount to keeping faith with oneself, the act of conventional lying cannot be construed as bad faith. To be sure, says Sartre,

the one who practices bad faith is hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a pleasing untruth. Bad faith then has in appearance the structure of falsehood. Only what changes everything is the fact that in bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, bad faith differs from conventional falsehood in that the party telling the lie and the party being told it are at once the same.

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<sup>4</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Problem of Nothingness," trans. Hazel Barnes, in Essays in Existentialism (New York, 1967), p. 150.

To illustrate what he means by bad faith, Sartre cites the rather humorous case of a woman who agrees to date an appealing would-be lover. As an aware individual, she knows his intentions; and knows, moreover, that she must eventually make a decision. Yet, she postpones the moment of choosing. In her subsequent relations, she facilitates this delay by focusing only on "what is respectful and discreet in the attitude of her companion" (p. 160). He indicates that she is attractive, for example. And while this comment is a part of a larger pattern intended to bring about her seduction, she disarms it by overlooking its sexual implications, for "the desire cruel and naked would humiliate and horrify her" (p. 161). The lover's indication that she is attractive, therefore, is fine with her; it merely reflects baldly his admiration, respect, and esteem! Later, he takes her hand. Is this part of his routine? Must she now make a decision? Heavens, no! She does not notice the hand. Instead, she engages herself in conversation on matters of the intellect. Thus, various procedures are employed to maintain herself in bad faith; that is to say, patterns of behavior are invoked in order to suppress a full awareness of her situation, the imminence of decision, her responsibility for choosing.

The real problem of bad faith is that it is faith.

The decision to be in bad faith does not dare to speak its name; it believes itself and does

not believe itself in bad faith; it believes itself and does not believe itself in good faith. (p. 181)

It simply believes. In doing so, it does not hold to the common norms and criteria of truth. Bad faith apprehends truth, surely,

but it is resigned in advance to not being fulfilled by this evidence, to not being persuaded and transformed to good faith . . . . .  
It stands forth in the firm resolution not to demand too much, to count itself satisfied when it is barely persuaded, to force itself in decisions to adhere to uncertain truths.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>P. 182. In view of Sartre's observations here, one can, I think, appreciate the husband's mounting frustration in Act V, Scene iii of Molière's Tartuffe. Orgon, who has just witnessed Tartuffe's proposal to his wife, seeks to persuade his own mother of the impostor's ingratitude. He has, he insists, come to the aid of a miserable fellow, entertained him, treated him as a brother, given him his daughter and, indeed, his whole fortune. And what are the results? The wretch forms designs on his wife, menaces his host, and threatens to turn him out of his own estate. Orgon reveals all this as an eye-witness; but his mother, a religious fanatic, is most uncomprehending.

Mme P. I can never believe, son, he could commit so black an action.

Orgon. How?

Mme P. Good people are always envied.

Orgon. What would you insinuate, Mother, by this discourse?

Mme P. Why, that there are strange doings at your house; and that the ill-will they bear him is but too evident.

Orgon. What has this ill-will to do with what has been told you?

Mme P. I have told you a hundred times when you were a little one,

That virtue here is persecuted ever;

That envious men may die, but envy never.

Orgon. But what is all this to the present purpose?

Mme P. They have trumped up to you a hundred idle

Here ends the summary of Sartre's explicit views on God, on freedom and responsibility, and on bad faith. These views, of course, will be recalled from time to time in the forthcoming analyses of his plays; and they should prove useful in establishing both the author's intentions and the implications of the conceits employed in the several works. Now it is time to turn to the plays themselves, which will be treated in the order of their publication. First, The Flies.

A notion highly espoused by Jean-Louis Barrault seems quite pertinent to any consideration of The Flies. The Gallic man of the theatre speaks of studying, with Sartre, the preface of Bajazet, in which Racine advises authors against selecting recent situations for tragedy, if they intend to set them in the countries in which they occur; and further advises against employing heroes known

stories against him.

Orgon. I have told you already, that I saw it all my own self.

Mme P. The malice of scandal-mongers is very great.

Orgon. You'll make me swear, Mother. I tell you that I saw with my own eyes a crime so audacious --

Mme P. Tongues never want a venom to spit; nothing here below can be proof against them.

Orgon. This is holding a very senseless argument! I saw it, I say, saw it; with my own eyes saw it. What you call, saw it. Must I din it a hundred times into your ears and bawl as loud as four folks?

Mme P. Dear Heart! Appearances very often deceive us. You must not always judge by what you see.

Orgon. I shall run mad. (Tartuffe, trans. H. Baker and J. Miller, in Molière's Comedies, vol. II [New York, 1929].)



to the audience. The implication here is that characters in tragedy should be viewed differently than people near at hand. The theory serving that end Barrault calls "distance," a species of separation designed to put "space" between the audience and the stage event. It may be accomplished either by setting the play in a distant country or a distant time. One will do as well as the other, apparently, for people commonly fail to distinguish between what lies a thousand miles distant and what lies a thousand years away.<sup>6</sup>

Dealing with the actual, the present, is a problem. Subjects chosen from epochs too near our own, whether in place or time, may fail to inspire the audience's respect. Evidently recalling the modus operandi of the Greek playwrights, Barrault then adds,

Strictly speaking such a subject can only succeed if treated satirically. For all grandeur is summarily excluded from a subject too near ourselves in time and place.  
(p. 132)

Often the playwright desires the spectator to throw himself utterly into the events of the play, to abandon himself to compassion or fear; and if this is to be accomplished, there must from the very beginning be distance. This is the technique employed in The Flies, concludes Barrault, where Sartre invokes the intermediary of time (p.

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<sup>6</sup>Reflections on the Theatre, trans. Barbara Wall (London, 1951), p. 130.

132).

The concept of distance surely seems appropriate, for the conceit employed in The Flies, were it baldly delineated, could hardly be offered in hopes of inspiring respect or sweeping the audience into the events of the drama. Indeed, the content of the play itself suggests that Sartre is nominating a mortal candidate for a position of primacy held by an incumbent god whose tenure has been marred by scandal and ineptitude. And while the Frenchman seems primarily concerned with a classical deity, a close reading of the text reveals his pattern to be euphemistic. His real target is Christianity. Couched as they are in the classical vernacular, however, his circuitous representations are more palatable than they might otherwise be.<sup>7</sup>

Superficially The Flies is an adaptation of portions of the legend of Atreus, as it is found variously in the last two plays of Aeschylus' Oresteia trilogy and Sophocles' Electra. Both Greeks feature Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as the killers of Agamemnon and the rulers of Argos for the past dozen or so years, Orestes as the long-absent son of Agamemnon and the person obliged by tradition

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<sup>7</sup>Sartre's strategy is reminiscent of the tactics employed in King Lear, in which Shakespeare mingles pagan and Christian content. As Professor William W. Main points out, however, the Englishman's use of pagan references possibly reflects an effort to avoid government censure. (William W. Main [ed.], King Lear [New York, 1962], pp. 223-224n.)

to avenge his father's murder, and Electra as the sister of Orestes awaiting her brother's return and anticipating the inevitable vengeance sure to topple her mother and Aegisthus. In both versions the murder is accomplished. Aeschylus, of course, portrays a matricide immediately set upon by the Furies and haunted to the verge of madness by the guilt and condemnation arising from his acts of violence. Only through the intercession of Apollo and the compassion of Athena is he afforded relief from his torturous ordeal. Sophocles' treatment, which lies closer to Sartre's in certain aspects of plot and characterization, features the revenge slayings of the usurping pair and disregards the remorse studiously exploited by Aeschylus.

Sartre's remarkable adaptation has Orestes returning to the fly-plagued city of Argos, there to discover the usurpers of his father's power being aided and abetted by the father-god Zeus. Confronted with this triumvirate, however, the heir to the Argive throne wills his acts of vengeance and assumes responsibility for them, refusing at a crucial time to cower in fear and self-rejection. Rather, he argues the crying necessity to relieve his people of Zeus' tyranny. While he acknowledges the deity's role in creating the planets, the music of the spheres, man, and all, he insists as well that man, a creature with free will, may choose to serve Zeus or oppose him. In

this case, Orestes has obviously elected to kill his father's slayers in defiance of Zeus. As author of that act, he accepts the burden, come what may.

The Greek milieu renders the play somewhat innocuous, affording as it does the seeming security of remoteness. The audience, after all, is safely distant from those gods and that ruling pair. Maybe. But certain hints suggest otherwise. The custom of the cavern, the flies, and the obsession with free will have grave implications as regards the audience's own time and place. The custom of the cavern, one discovers, is a tradition which permits the dead to return one day annually to haunt the Argives. Above the town there is a hollow, presumably an entrance-way opening into a corridor leading to hell itself. The High Priest has had a huge boulder emplaced there to seal off the passageway; but once a year, the Argives gather about the opening, soldiers remove the stone, and the spirits of the dead ostensibly emerge from within. For an entire day they remain as guests of their respective families, moving freely among the townspeople and subjecting them to appropriate tortures. Then, when a cock crows the following morning, the spirits return to their cavern, there to be sealed up for another year. One learns eventually that the custom was instituted fifteen years earlier, its inception coinciding with the killing of Agamemnon. Predictably, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra invented the fable, and in doing so, managed to eliminate individual

guilt in favor of collective guilt and condemnation.<sup>8</sup> Aspects of this description, despite the ironic coloring, are remarkable indeed. Mention of hell, the stone being rolled away, the annual repetition, and the cock crowing evoke concepts long associated with Christianity. Here, of course, the run-together notions touch at once the hopes resting with Christ and the horror promised those refusing certain compliance.

In addition to the cavern, there are the ubiquitous flies, big as bumblebees, buzzing, disturbing the peace, stinging without surcease the harried and helpless Argives. One crone, bloodied and swollen beyond recognition, apparently senses the power of Demetrios (Zeus in disguise) and praises her condition highly, recalling moreover her daughter's goodness, her son-in-law's sacrifices, and her grandson's purity (only seven, "he never plays or laughs, for thinking of his original sin" [p. 56]). The connec-

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<sup>8</sup>One of the play's fine ironies has Aegisthus, the fable's founder, himself being drawn into the collective dys-ease haunting the Argives. After the ceremony at the cavern, for example, Aegisthus finds himself alone with the Queen, who approaches him affectionately. He is aghast.

Aeg. Keep off, you whore! Are you not ashamed --  
under his eyes!

Cly. Under his eyes? Who can see us here?

Aeg. Why, the King. The dead came forth this  
morning.

Cly. Sire, I beg you -- the dead are underground  
and will not trouble us for many a day. (The  
Flies, trans. Stuart Gilbert [New York, 1949],  
p. 98.)

tion between the flies and original sin evolves here, appropriately so, for sin is seen as the devil's doing and is, at least poetically, attended by suitable suffering. Also, flies gather about corrupted flesh and filth, both of which are commonly equated with wickedness.<sup>9</sup> The devil, moreover, enjoys a reputation as lord of such. The play abounds with allusions to the same end. Zeus, for instance, admits that the flies are a god-send, confiding further, "They are a symbol" (p. 55). Later, he causes them to fall down and "to crawl on the ground like caterpillars," then brags, "I'm a fly-charmer in my leisure hours."<sup>10</sup> Not quite so insightful, the soldiers merely see the insects as "something wicked" (p. 97).

One may, I believe, accept the flies as the almighty means of keeping the townspeople at moral attention, the original root cause of all those

creeping, half-human creatures beating their  
breasts in darkened rooms, and those shrieks,  
those hideous, blood-curdling shrieks . . . .  
(p. 57)

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<sup>9</sup>A not-too-remote association is possible here, too, because offerings made to the gods were subject to decay, which could quite literally draw flies! Thus, it is possible to evolve some further notions about Zeus' complicity. From an imaginative standpoint, what is done in the name of gods and in honor of them might well be polluted. Worse than that, the pollution may be tacitly sanctioned by indiscreet deities.

<sup>10</sup>p. 59. The implication here is that as a spare-time activity, Zeus gives himself to easing man's torment, which he instituted in the first place!

Sartre, in fact, encourages implicitly the temptation to apprehend Aegisthus as a half-penny Zeus, the cavern as a human version of the fly torture. For instance, Aegisthus confides that the custom of the cavern was instituted to make the individual citizen "to feel, even when alone, that my eyes are on him, severely judging his private thoughts" (p. 103). Thus, it appears that the ruler has legislated a version of original sin among the Argives, which mirrors that of Zeus. In this respect, Zeus' comment to the King is quite meaningful:

You may hate me, but we are akin; I made you  
in my image. A king is a god on earth, glorious  
and terrifying as a god. (pp. 102-103)

Acceptance of the man/classical-gods motif as a euphemistic conceit for the man/Christian-God relationship makes good sense in view of the play's ending as well.<sup>11</sup> All the talk about free will, of course, is singularly Christian in conception. Sartre confronts one of

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<sup>11</sup>Much of the content cited, of course, can hardly be classified among the staples of the Greek intellectual and religious milieu. In addition, while the play is said to suggest a parallel between the Zeus-Aegisthus relationship and the German-French (Nazi-collaborator) association during the occupation, still this parallel would seem to require little of the content mentioned above. The conceit, I feel, is a justified attempt to meet Sartre honestly on the implicit intentions of his play. Some critics, understandably, attempt to suggest this same notion, but do so by making a moderate case, one which demeans Sartre's viewpoint and effectiveness as a playwright, I think. Hazel Barnes, who generally meets the French existentialists forthrightly and knowledgeably, reflects one of the most tasteful approaches when she says of Zeus, "he represents not God himself but the traditional concept of God in Christianity" (Barnes, p. 85).

the bugaboos of Christianity when he has Orestes imply the choiceness of Zeus' choice: man as a creature free to serve his Creator, but condemned to eternal damnation if he elects to do otherwise. It is almost like offering man as ostensibly equal options a summer place in Suburbia Eden or the Ghetto Watts to the east. Only a remarkable obtuseness would permit one to imagine anyone's hesitancy to choose. The answer is implicit in the terms. Orestes simply proposes to make free will fact as well as dogma. His first action is to oppose Zeus, and thus incur whatever consequences the god can in fact effect. But his next is even more significant. He leads the flies out of Argos!

In No Exit, Sartre depicts a modernistic version of hell by thrusting into an exit-less, window-less enclosure three persons, each to serve as the others' torturer and inquisitor, an economical scheme employing "the same idea as in a cafeteria where the customers serve themselves."<sup>12</sup> There, subject to light without end, sight without interruption, and days without ceasing, are Joseph Garcin, a man of letters and a journalist executed for desertion; Inez Serrano, a lesbian post-office clerk victimized in a murder-suicide, which also took the life of her lover Florence; and Estelle Rigault, an adultress, murderess, and victim of pneumonia; they discover to their

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<sup>12</sup>No Exit, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York, 1949), p. 18.



dismay and unrelenting torment that while each has a particular lust and real need, each must endure eternal frustration because the presence of a divisive third party precludes fulfillment (i.e., Garcin's presence frustrates Inez's perverse designs on Estelle; Inez's capacity to judge impartially draws Garcin away from Estelle, who desires only a lover and cares nothing for Garcin's obsessive need for moral justification; and Estelle's preference for conventional sexual accommodation causes her to spurn Inez's advances and betray a desire for Garcin). While all three obviously suffer for their several sins in life, Garcin especially bears the burden of negative self-judgments, for his motives in fleeing his homeland remain an enigma and a source of considerable doubt. He fled Rio, supposedly to enter Mexico that he might continue his crusade for pacifism. Once captured, tried, and sentenced to die, however, he passed ingloriously, an unsettling fact which haunts him even now in hell, since he can never know for sure whether his desertion was motivated by implacable commitment or sheer cowardice. Thus he turns to Estelle, who cares only for a man and who despises his preoccupation with the past. Rebuffed, he turns to Inez, who is capable of a more reliable judgment but who is good only for "making people suffer" (p. 27). There is evidently no balm to soothe his uncertainty; and he appears doomed to an eternity of condemnation, an in-

finitude of self-rejection.

Many familiar with The Inferno may be irresistibly tempted to apprehend the trio's predicament in terms of Dante's ordered system. And, surely, the victims seem rightly assigned in such a case, because they have lived unreasoned, unrestrained, world-oriented existences; for them, there have been no stars, no heavenly buttons to serve as guides and badges for higher seeking, no upward aspiration. When one dons the robes of righteousness and presumes to judge, he finds Garcin a stranger to heroics. Moreover, Inez eschews concordance, besides betraying a violence against the very nature of mankind. Estelle, too, is violent, as well as cowardly, lustful, wrathful, and treacherous. "These creatures," one finds himself saying, "belong."

More specifically (The Italian visionary is always more specific!), it is possible to see Garcin as a sure candidate for the Vestibule or Round two; Inez, a case for Round seven or eight; and Estelle, a qualifier for Round nine, among others. In cases of multiple consignments, of course, Dante resolves the problem quite easily: newcomers are committed to hell on the basis of their severest violation. There, they conduct themselves, at least symbolically, as they did in life. Only, the pleasure has gone, leaving the self-victimized inhabitants to indulge, on the one hand, their compulsions and to endure,

on the other, the inevitable torment arising therefrom.

Dante's system, then, posits hell as an end-stop for unrepentant doers of evil; and the punishment meted out serves to exemplify the wages for conduct unbecoming of creatures in a God-oriented universe. And, at least superficially, this seems to be the case with Sartre's modernistic system. Both hells are peopled by defective humans. Both, too, feature punishment suitable to the inmates. Both, moreover, afford internment throughout eternity. Both, finally, underscore a canon against bad faith. For Dante, such faith suggests a life rendering man, at best, unfit to move among the elect and, at the worst, unsuitable for purgation among the salvageable human wreckage hoping eventually to attain heaven. For Sartre, however, bad faith makes all the difference, not just the difference between being committed to hell and, by implication, being consigned to some more promising arena, but the difference between Sartre's hell and Dante's. Indeed, while Dante features sinners living as they did in life, Sartre depicts the incipient stages of an existence which his trio refused to live on earth, that is to say, a life full of awareness. Ironically, Dante seeks to effect awareness of sin and violation; yet he aims to bring this about by shocking his audience to a consciousness of the ugliness of a life apart from God. Sartre may incidentally have the improvement of his audience in mind,

but his characters themselves are the primary target of his awareness therapy. His canon, therefore, is remarkably different from Dante's, for it reads, "As you failed to live in life, so shall you exist in death."

One should recall here Sartre's so-called concept of good faith, which envisions a consciousness ruthlessly aware of itself -- aware of an existence alone, aware of a life of decision and action, aware of one's total responsibility, and aware of the absence of any justification for behavior other than what man himself evolves. Theories taking man out of such moments of consciousness, Sartre insists, merely confound truth. Many men, unable to cope with the anguish attending an existence of fullest awareness, attempt to flee. Thus, they may constantly shield themselves with excuses, hide the displeasing, or represent the unpleasant as pleasing. Such is the practice of bad faith.

No Exit abounds with evidence suggesting the flight from awareness. For example, Estelle, the most shallow of the three tenants, barely establishes herself before surmising that the employees in the labyrinth are stupid, quite capable of making sorting errors. "Anyhow," she rationalizes, "isn't it better to think we've got here by mistake" (p. 16)? Then, when she recalls her marriage to an older, wealthy man, she notes how they did enjoy six happy years prior to her "fated" love for Roger. Later,

she tells of the six large mirrors in her bedroom. These were handy because they always permitted her to get a glimpse of herself. "I watched myself talking," she confesses. "And somehow it kept me alert, seeing myself as the others saw me . . ." (p. 20). This is all very quaint, until one remembers that the truly conscious individual seeks an awareness of himself, his potential, and a seriousness and decisiveness in terms of his goals and progress toward them. The conduct before mirrors smacks of posturing. It is not surprising, therefore, when Estelle resists being revealed, only after long provocation admitting that she did have a lover by whom she had a baby secretly in Switzerland. Never having wanted the child, however, she drowned it, an act causing Roger to take his own life. Here is a clear instance of bad faith, for Estelle reveals she had not desired the baby, but had it anyway because Roger wanted one. Thus, she is shown to have an awareness of her own preference, yet shown as well to be indecisive, electing rather to delay her moment of choosing, that moment coming tragically when she "rejected" pregnancy by drowning the child. Nor is it surprising to discover Estelle's dependence upon flattery and diversion, as when she recalls fondly another lover's descriptive epithets "my glancing stream" and "my crystal girl," further characterizing herself as a small sparrow fallen from its nest. "So gather me up," she advises Garcin, "fold me to

your heart -- and you'll see how nice I can be" (p. 34). And, she might add, "divert me from whatever awareness haunts these halls hereabout."

Inez, too, betrays a flight from existential consciousness. Curiously, she shows deceptive promise in the beginning. For instance, she is the first to wonder if the three will have the "guts to tell" the others of their circumstances in life (p. 15). Estelle and Garcin, moreover, perturb her with their talk of saintliness and nobility. "Look here!" she cries, "What's the point of play-acting, trying to throw dust in each other's eyes?" They are in hell. There have been no errors. "People aren't damned for nothing" (p. 17). Again, she observes, "I'm always conscious of myself -- in my mind. Painfully conscious" (p. 19). Just as one is tempted to award Inez a citation for awareness at least equal to the call of existence, however, she confesses her cruelty and dedication to sensitivity in others. "I mean," she confides,

I can't get on without making people suffer.  
Like a live coal. A live coal in others'  
hearts. When I'm alone I flicker out.  
(p. 27)

Existential canon, of course, commends coals which flicker among others, but much more highly recommends those that glow in the solitude of one's own existence.

Garcin affords the same incipient promise as Inez, and the same disappointment. Having just arrived, for

example, he brags to the Valet that there is always "broad daylight in my eyes -- and in my head" (p. 7). Then, too, he is cautious but confident in the presence of the newly-arrived Inez: "Not that I take my position lightly; I realize its gravity only too well. But I'm not afraid" (p. 9). Again, he is at one with Inez when she recommends a confrontation with the truth. They must, he announces, make a clean breast of everything. Yet, here he reveals his weakness, for he retreats in the face of Inez's blunt comment, "No need to tell us that. We know you were a deserter" (p. 24). Not so, insists Garcin; he is here for treating his wife abominably. The other charge is merely a side-issue.

For a side-issue, however, the alleged desertion is terribly dominant. The question, in fact, arises repeatedly. Seeing Gomez in his mind's eye, Garcin reviews his own so-called pacifism. Fight? To tell the truth, he says, "I didn't exactly refuse" (p. 37). But, then, he could not approach the general to indicate his refusal, he reasons, for "they'd have promptly locked me up" (p. 38). Not wishing to be silenced, he boarded a train, only to be intercepted at the frontier. Thereafter, he gave himself to introspection. His mind, nonetheless, always hearkened back to one thing. The train. Then he dwelled upon his forthcoming execution. That would vindicate him, establish once for all the courage of his existence. Thus,

he died. Miserably! But, he pleads, it was a physical lapse.

At this juncture it is possible to fix the terms of Sartre's conceit. It is a proportion which implies that hell: evildoer::the "lighted" labyrinth:practitioners of bad faith. Within this framework, one can well appreciate the enforcement facility's peculiar regimen: no night, no sleep, constant light, no blinking of the eyes, no books, no days off. And, as already indicated, no diversions among the inmates themselves. Garcin is quite observant when he declares it "life without a break" (p. 5). Such an environment is obviously different from the one in which the three moved on earth; and it haunts them, surely, because they are unable to drift into the supposed security of diversion, as they did in life. Here, Garcin witnesses veritable Klieg lights brought to bear upon his existence. He would be smug. "A man," he says, "is what he wills himself to be." Not so, counters Inez; "It's what one does and nothing else." No, argues Garcin, "I died too soon. I wasn't allowed time to -- to do my deeds" (p. 44). Inez is adamant: "You are -- your life, and nothing else" (p. 45). Poisonous! protests Garcin. What he might cry, however, is "Cut the Kliegs and give me good night!"

There will be no help from Inez, none from Estelle, nor any from introspection. Indeed, existential canon



has it that one's acts only mean what their author wills them to mean. Garcin, unfortunately, has indulged himself in "a thousand petty lapses" (p. 44) in life; and he apparently missed the crucial truth about justification. For him, his final surmise is most correct: "Hell is -- other people" (p. 47)! And, to correctly worsen that surmise, one might add, "Hell is -- being dependent upon other people for justification!"

The conceit, hell:evildoer::the "lighted" labyrinth: practitioners of bad faith, implies that the Kliegs remain on, which is to say that awareness ever hovers about the inmates of the existential facility. For most, living with one's eyes open all the time can be intolerable; and Garcin reflects the anguish of all who wish otherwise when he wails,

Anything, anything would be better than this agony of mind, this creeping pain that gnaws and fumbles and caresses one and never quite hurts enough. (p. 42)

Dirty Hands is a political drama depicting Bolshevik intra- and extra-Party struggles in Illyria during the closing days of World War II. The play opens with Hugo Barine's arrival at Party headquarters. Newly-released from prison after serving only two years of a five-year sentence for slaying Hoederer, the Party's former leader, Hugo has come to "wonder" about a gift-box of chocolates which had "a bad effect" on his cell-mate and to seek a

reconciliation through Olga Lorame, a lesser functionary in the movement. The assassin's "salvageability" hinges on whether he killed Hoederer in a fit of jealousy or for strictly political reasons. There, in Olga's room, with four Party members surrounding the cottage, Hugo and Olga have three hours in which to reminisce the events of two years ago and to determine the answer upon which the former's life hangs.

During the subsequent five acts, the action flashes back to Hugo's first days as a revolutionary. Code-named "Raskolnikov" after "some guy in a novel,"<sup>13</sup> Hugo is portrayed as an idealist tired of scribbling for the Party newspaper and devoutly wishing to take far greater physical risks for the cause. This request Louis, his immediate superior, is willing to grant, for it appears that Hoederer is about to engage in some highly controversial negotiations with the Prince (representing the Regency, which has been collaborating with the Axis Fascists) and Karsky (representing the Pentagon, a coalition of liberal nationalists); and in that case, an assassin acting as the leader's male secretary will be needed to prevent the inauguration of such talks.

Hugo succeeds in getting placed as Hoederer's secretary; however, he becomes increasingly ambivalent in his attitude toward the Party chief, admiring him, on the

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<sup>13</sup>Dirty Hands, trans. Lionel Abel (New York, 1949), p. 143.

one hand, for his capacity to command and despising him, on the other, for his unhesitating propensity to sacrifice the Party rank and file for political expediency. Ten days pass. Still Hugo is unable to perform his crucial deed. Concerned lest her comrade be discredited for his inability to act, Olga sets off a bomb, which fails to kill Hoederer. In the wake of this aborted attempt, Hugo confronts Hoederer directly with the charge of "class traitor," an accusation which the latter largely refutes. During the exchange, unfortunately, Hugo is too much the protestant, too full of threat: his role as would-be assassin surfaces. Forewarned by both his own suspicions and the treachery of Jessica (Hugo's child-bride), Hoederer disarms his secretary and then, magnanimously, offers to aid him in restoring his reputation. This offer Hugo considers. He returns, though, to discover Jessica in Hoederer's embrace; and of a sudden he finds assassination no problem whatever.

In Act VII, during which time the action flashes back to the present, Olga is ecstatic, because now she believes Hugo's act to be a crime of passion. Since the Party has in recent days adopted the very policy initially advocated by Hoederer, it is essential to restore the former leader to Party favor. Thus, while everyone knows that "Raskolnikov," a Party member, slew Hoederer, it is better that the slaying be attributed to a fit of jealousy,

not to an order sanctioned by key members opposing Hoederer's politics of compromise. Just as Olga is about to proclaim her comrade's reconstructability, however, Hugo senses demeaning implications in her readiness to accept passion as the simplistic motive behind the killing. Indeed, he had opposed Hoederer's ideas of compromise and expediency. Moreover, he opposes those same notions, as they are now being espoused by the other wing of the Party. If he failed, therefore, to own up to his act in the past, he now will claim unmistakable responsibility. He shouts, "Unsalvageable!" knowing full well that Party assassins are outside the door ready to destroy the one of their number whose existence bodes embarrassment to mindless commitment to cause.

Dirty Hands is a study of Being, the Being of the Bolshevik Party in Illyria. Before one can appreciate entirely Sartre's vicious attack on Communism, however, it is essential to review briefly what he has in mind when he depicts Being. All forms of existence, of course, he classes under Being. Beyond that, though, he makes a distinction. That is to say, there exists Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself. The former is non-conscious Being, a species of plenitude, of which one can say only that it is. The latter, in contrast, is conscious Being, a kind of vent in Being-in-itself, an awareness capable of self-interrogation as well as judging what it is not. To

understand more clearly these two aspects of Being, one might recall the diary entry in Nausea, an entry detailing Antoine Roquentin's vision in the Bouville park. The young man sits on a bench next to a chestnut tree. Bending forward, head bowed, he notices the huge roots of the tree, "a black, knotty mass, entirely beastly," which frightens him.<sup>14</sup> Until the past several days, when his life entered a critical period, confides Roquentin, he had understood existence like almost everyone else, in a dis-tracted sort of way. Thus, while it was around him, in him, was he, its implications touched him but indifferently. Now, however, it becomes possible to confront existence, see it in a species of dream-haunted moment, apprehend it in miniature, in the roots of the chestnut tree, for example; suddenly it appears obtrusive, moldy, bloated, obscene even, knotty, nameless, clutching soil and grasping life like some giant crab claw. Existing, concludes Roquentin, is merely Being there (Being-in-itself). This epiphany, unfortunately, is cause for nausea, what with that "enormous presence," the "tons and tons of existence, endless . . . ," the stark "naked world suddenly revealing itself" being enough to choke one with rage at "this gross absurd being" (p. 180). Roquentin's entry obviously reflects a consciousness aware of itself and its relation to the world

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<sup>14</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, Nausea, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York, 1964), p. 171.

in which it moves (Being-for-itself). His mind seeks, on the one hand, to order and arrange; the world, on the other, defies ordering and arrangement. Consequently, while Roquentin is aware of his condition, he is unable to understand it.

I emphasized earlier that existentialism's first move is to make man aware, aware of what he is and the responsibility he bears for his existence. Action is considered crucial to such a life; but in willing, choosing, and proceeding, individual men are always to ask if theirs is the right to act as a guide for all of mankind. Once aware, moreover, they are not to suppress consciousness, because this constitutes the grossest act of bad faith.

The aspects of Being having been delineated, one can appreciate the depiction of the Bolshevik Party in Dirty Hands. In a pair of elaborate and unusual personifications, Sartre rather blatantly characterizes the Party as an actualized conceit for Being-in-itself, Hugo as an actualized conceit for Being-for-itself. The substance of the play clearly bears out this assertion. As regards the Party, for example, Olga reflects the mindless commitment of its constituency when in the opening scene she admits the lack of instructions, adding nonetheless that she will comply with whatever come. "You must know," she cautions,

I will do as I am told. And if anyone from the party asks me, I should say that you are here,

even if they were to shoot you down before my eyes. (Dirty Hands, p. 136)

The importance of the Party's existence and the single-minded pursuit of expedient ends is again underscored in the meeting attended by Hoederer, Karsky, and the Prince. On the question of which view is to prevail during the postwar days of coalition government, Hoederer is adamant: the Party shall hold half of all the votes. Karsky, the leader of the Illyrian nationalists, is incredulous.

Karsky. We fought for three years for the independence of our country. Thousands of young men died for our cause. We've won the respect of the whole world. And now all of this is to go for nothing so that the pro-German party can join with the pro-Russian party and shoot us down in some dark corner.

Hoed. Don't be sentimental, Karsky. You've lost because you played a losing game. "Illyria, and Illyria alone" -- in that slogan there's small protection for a tiny country surrounded by powerful neighbors. (p. 199)

Hugo later reproaches Hoederer for compromising the ideals of the Party, a charge he brushes aside with unblushing candor: "A party is always a tool. It has only one goal: power" (p. 222). What of lies to the Party faithful? "But," protests Hoederer, "we have always told lies, just like any other party." Besides, "All means are good if they are effective" (p. 223). Then, somewhat perturbed by Hugo's insinuations regarding contaminated ideals, Hoederer rails against his being pure, so pure. "How afraid you are to soil your hands!" he chides. Purity!

You intellectuals and bourgeois anarchists use it as a pretext for doing nothing. To do nothing, to remain motionless, arms at your sides, wearing kid gloves. Well, I have soiled hands. Right up to the elbows. I've plunged them in filth and blood. (p. 224)

As a consciousness within the Party, Hugo begins as a practitioner of bad faith, which is to say that although he has misgivings about the Party, he seeks to repress them, to enforce an inner quiet to silence whatever doubts haunt his consciousness. For example, when Hoederer asks why he relinquished the editorship of the Party organ, Hugo confesses having had too many ideas. Now, however, he cultivates discipline. Lest the ideas return, he adds,

I have to protect myself. By installing other thoughts in my head. Assignments: "Do this. Go. Stop. Say such and such." I need to obey, just like that. To eat, sleep, obey. (p. 177)

At the time of Olga's attempt on Hoederer's life, Hugo was reaching for his pistol. Would he have killed his chief, had not she intervened? He cannot say for sure. Cowardice? Courage? They hang in the balance. "I should like to go to sleep," he says,

and dream that I'm Slick. Look at him: two hundred and twenty pounds of meat and a peanut for a brain. He's a real whale. The peanut sends out signals of fear and rage, but they're lost in all that mass. (p. 202)

Then, seeing himself in the mirror, he notes how calm he appears. Indeed, his is "Impenetrable! An absolute poker face. A mug like everyone else's" (p. 203).



Would that his were a mere member mug; or his, an awareness either gone dead or never come alive. Then might he be a portion of all that meat and muscle, a solitary sinew within the Party mass, whose fitful and involuntary twitches serve as a kind of physiological counterpoint for an unhealthy store of word-commands like "duty," "discipline," "expediency," "power." Hugo may have temporary lapses and may, therefore, betray from time to time promising loyalty to the cause; yet he has a consciousness which the others lack, and this awareness surfaces at certain crucial moments. In one instance, George and Slick, submachineguns in hand, seek to search his room. They manage, in the process, to insult Hugo's credentials as a revolutionary. Their subsequent exchange effectively suggests consciousness as opposed to mere Being.

Hugo. You stupid fools! I joined the party so that all men, secretaries or not, could have the right to respect themselves some day.

George. Make him cut it out, Slick, he's making me cry. No, kid, people join the party because they get fed up being hungry.

(p. 166)

This exchange is of further significance because it reveals Hugo's peculiar concept of the Party. For him, equality is not a purely economic matter; rather, the classless society is envisioned as one affording parity on all levels, a distinction obviously too sophisticated for the likes of George and Slick, and Hoederer, too, for that matter. He, of course, is not so base and graceless

as the two bodyguards. Yet, he has his own notions of a hierarchy within the Party, as when he advocates lying to rank and file members, or demeans Hugo's ideals as merely a sign of weakness, intellectualism, anarchism, inaction, filthy purity!

The difficulty with which Hugo struggles so long, really, is the question, "Am I the sort of man who can kill in the name of a truly classless society?" He assassinates Hoederer, who does not hesitate to compromise the ideal of a classless society. Jessica, unfortunately, manages to muddle the motivation for that slaying by introducing the element of passion. Ultimately, however, Hugo gets an answer to his question. Olga desires to salvage him "On condition," he says, "that I change my skin -- if I could develop amnesia, that would be better still" (p. 246). His was not a crime of passion. He may never know precisely why he killed. Yet he knows that the act was right. Hoederer's policy was wayward. Thus, he rejected the policy and the man. Moreover, now that Olga and her colleagues espouse that same policy, they also must be rejected. This time, though, there will be no muddling the motives. "I have not yet killed Hoederer," he tells Olga. "Not yet. But I am going to kill him now, along with myself" (p. 248). Immediately he summons the thirsting assassins with his cry of defiance, "Unsalvageable!" Thus, as an actualized conceit for Being-in-itself,

the Party purges itself of awareness, whereas Hugo, as an actualized conceit for Being-for-itself, commits himself to awareness and turns away from bad faith.

Superficially, The Respectful Prostitute constitutes a brief episode in which Lizzie MacKay, a northern prostitute newly-arrived in the South, sleeps with Fred Clarke, the mock-pious son of the hypocritical Senator Clarke, and in which Lizzie is pressured into signing a statement falsely swearing to a Negro's effort at forced seduction. The bogus testimony will have the likely effect of freeing a white man, whose alleged justification for killing a Negro is that he was assisting a lady in distress. More to the point of this study, however, Lizzie's prostitution emerges as an imaginative equivalent for her participation in judicial perversion. This being the case, the play affords another Sartrean illustration of bad faith, first as it has to do with the initial sexual transaction and, second, as it has to do with Lizzie's ordeal in the face of a white-supremacist by-law, my Race -- Right or Right.

The morning after affords a marked contrast between good and bad faith. Fred is full of dys-ease; and he seeks to hide this awareness. For instance, he instructs Lizzie to cover the bed, because "It smells of sin."<sup>15</sup> Then, too, he insists upon keeping the shade

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<sup>15</sup>The Respectful Prostitute, trans. Lionel Abel (New York, 1949), p. 253.

down. Sunshine? No, he says, "I'll find the sunshine again when I go out" (p. 255). When Lizzie recalls his amorous avowals of the previous night, he denies all, then blames them on drunkenness. Moreover, in the face of Lizzie's recitation of specific details, he is most abrupt. "I've forgotten about it," he says, "your wonderful night. Completely forgotten it" (p. 257). Fred, in fact, is so deliberately diverted that at the end of the play when he describes the lynching of a Negro, he fails to grasp the scapegoatism implicit in his own behavior. "I looked at the nigger," he tells Lizzie, "and I saw you. I saw you swaying above the flames. I fired" (p. 279).

Lizzie, ironically, is a prostitute in good faith. As such, she is aware of her chosen condition and she openly acknowledges her situation whenever circumstances permit. To Fred's order to cover the bed of sin, for instance, she responds, "You know, it's your sin, honey." He shakes his head, and she withdraws only slightly: "Yes, of course, it's mine too. But then, I've got so many on my conscience" (p. 254). The desire to raise the window shade, moreover, suggests her willingness to subject her situation to the light of day, as it were. Again, she has the sweet remembrance so often associated with consciousness, what with her reminiscence of Fred's blushing, the love-play in the dark, the pleasure, and the release. Fred's subsequent effort to purchase her testimony for \$500.00 also serves

to underscore her respect for her vocation, because she immediately senses that he had a more compelling motive for spending the night, this realization, in turn, causing her to weep.

The question of rendering her services in support of unworthy racial purposes causes Lizzie far greater difficulties than does her vocation. Indeed, it is in this regard that she drifts into prostitution, that is to say, "prostituted" faith or, again, bad faith. Initially, of course, she has an awareness and a healthy respect for that awareness. When Fred suggests that two Negroes attempted to rape her, that several whites prevented their doing so, and that in the subsequent fray a razor was drawn and a Negro slain, Lizzie is firm. Four drunken whites, she insists, made a pass at her, and in a separate incident, they tried to shove two Negroes through a window of the train, this attempt causing a disturbance which ended in the shooting of one Negro and the flight of the other. Fred then tries another tack. Thomas, the gunman, is his cousin; the dead man, a Negro. "Guilty or not," he argues, "you can't punish a fellow of your own race" (p. 262). Besides, Thomas belongs to a good family, is a leading citizen. Lizzie mocks Fred: that fine fellow put a hand under her skirt and later killed a Negro.

Lizzie can be "had," however. And the proper pander is the old-school orator Senator Clarke. Thomas is

his sister's son, he reminds Lizzie. Also, while the Negro did not attempt to rape her, that is only a truth of the first degree. Suppose, he says, Uncle Sam were to stand before her. How would she respond to his alternatives?

There are two of his children. The Negro --

he dawdles, he chisels, he sings, he buys pink and green suits. He is my son, and I love him as much as I do my other boys. But I ask you: does he live like a man? I would not even notice if he died. (p. 270)

The other, the white child, of course, is 100% American, Harvard-educated, the employer of two thousand factory workers, and a dedicated enemy of both the Communists and the Jews. Thus, Lizzie is asked to choose between the sons of Sam. She signs the counterfeit statement. The Clarkes withdraw hastily. Then she reconsiders. They have gone, however; and she is left to mutter, "Something tells me I've been had -- but good" (p. 271).

Lizzie has one opportunity to reaffirm her faith. Seeking refuge from the dogs and men who desire his death as a would-be violator of a white woman, the Negro comes to Lizzie. She responds appropriately enough, promising as she does to hide him for a day. Fred returns, unfortunately, discovers the Negro, and sets off a fresh pursuit. When he comes again, a resolute Lizzie confronts him with a revolver: she will be rid of this patchwork puritan once for all! There follows a pleading recitation of the Clarke family's past, a pitifully vain account of

settlers, builders, warriors, vigilantes, politicians, imperialists. Lizzie falters and lowers the gun. Fred wins. Moreover, he promises her a house in the family garden, where he will maintain her as a mistress and visit her on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and weekends.

In sum, it is possible to accept Lizzie as a species of sweet tart, for she does practice her vocation in good faith. On the more crucial question of her consciousness with respect to racial justice, though, she submits ingloriously and passionately: therein lies the respectful wanton's prostitution.

The Devil and the Good Lord Sartre sets in Renaissance Germany, about the time of the Peasants' Revolt and the inception of the Lutheran Reformation. The work is unquestionably another philosophic drama, this time an inward odyssey which ignites an awareness unlikely to burn itself out. In some respects, this analysis will cheapen and simplify Sartre's extremely complex treatment of good and evil, as those facets of human conduct are conjured up and honored in the minds of men. This analysis, for instance, largely overlooks Heinrich as a Christian existentialist who eventually loses his shaken faith in God, his bad faith in the Devil, and his very life in the face of an impossible awareness. It slights as well Nasti, who as an evolving "Lutheran" and a practitioner of bad faith has an amazing penchant for moving people to action

and an equally amazing lack of facility to predict or control the outcome of that action. Despite its obvious arbitrariness, however, my approach to the play can claim as virtue a saving practicality, because it desirably focuses on Goetz, the central figure; and in the process, aids in apprehending the fantastic flux of a character in three aspects, that is, Goetz as Devil, as good Lord, and finally as Man born to awareness. It serves, moreover, to identify Goetz's earthly bastardy as an irreverent conceit for the lack of a "legitimate" heavenly Father in the home of man.

In the beginning, Goetz evolves from a mere doer of evil to the picture and embodiment of Evil itself. The banker Foucre, for example, sees him as a boon to the Church's cause when he is depicted as the Archbishop's commander in the siege of Worms. Goetz, though, is not all that worthy, cautions the prelate, because he first violated the Church's trust and then betrayed his own brother Conrad, whom he slew in battle. "He has a changing humor," says the Archbishop, "which is the least one can say of him."<sup>16</sup> More to the point, he is an SOB; and he "takes no pleasure in anything but evil" (p. 8).

Thus, Goetz makes a ruthless interrogator for Heinrich, the very heart and mind of goodness gone awry. The distraught priest is entrusted by the Bishop with a

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<sup>16</sup>The Devil and the Good Lord, trans. Kitty Black (New York, 1960), p. 7.



key, an engine insuring Goetz's besiegers private passage into the city of Worms, where they will disarm and slaughter the twenty thousand rebellious burghers and save the lives of two hundred priests. The choice having been his alone, Heinrich betrays his supposed allies, the people, and brings the instrument to Goetz. Once there, however, he withholds crucial information. "Hypocrite!" cries Goetz. "Tonight you have power of life and death over twenty thousand men." "I refuse to accept that power," replies the priest. "It comes from the devil" (p. 29). Then, projecting himself as Superior Goodness and Goetz as Wayward Nature itself, Heinrich declares, "You are my creature, and your thoughts come only at my bidding. I am daydreaming, the world is dead, and the very air is full of sleep" (p. 31). Goetz forbids any such drift into bad faith.

You are awake, you impostor, and you know it.  
 Everything is real. Look at me, touch me, I  
 am flesh and blood. Look, the moon is rising,  
 your devilish city emerges from the shadows;  
 look at the town. Is it a mirage? Come now!  
 It is real stone, those are real ramparts, it  
 is a real town with wreal inhabitants. And you  
 -- you are a real traitor. (p. 32)

Thereafter, Goetz's mood waxes confessional. He is a bastard, he confides, the offspring of a mother and a no-account father. Worse yet, he says, "I am composed of two halves which do not fit together; each of those halves shrinks in horror from the other" (p. 33). His propensity for evil is apparently evidence of one of those halves,

for it is in this context that he proclaims his and Heinrich's brotherhood. "Since the day of my birth," he says,

I have only seen the world through the keyhole;  
it's a fine little egg, neatly packaged, where  
everyone fits the place God has assigned to him.  
But I give you my word we are not inside that  
world. We are outcasts. (p. 33)

Nor does Goetz care much for Heinrich's talk of the Devil.

"I refuse to deal with anyone but God," he insists.

Monsters and saints only exist through God. God  
sees me, priest, He knows I killed my brother, and  
His heart bleeds. Yes indeed, O Lord, I killed  
him. And what canst thou do against me? I have  
committed the worst of crimes, and the God of jus-  
tice is powerless to punish me . . . . (pp. 34-35)

More and more one sees Goetz as the bastard child, the son  
born of shame, shut out by scandal and human obtuseness  
from an "ordered" world too ready to accept a son of sin  
as a sinful son. Cast out from goodness, as it were, he  
reverts to an archetypal antagonism. This fact is quite  
obvious when he tells Catherine, the paramour whom he won  
for whoredom, why he must destroy Worms.

Goetz. Because it is wrong.  
Cath. Why should you want to do wrong?  
Goetz. Because Good has already been done.  
Cath. By whom?  
Goetz. By God the father. Me, I invent.  
(p. 46)

Goetz, then, holds impeccable credentials in the legions  
of Evil. Where he places in that hierarchy, though, is  
open to speculation. In a characteristic understatement,  
the religious reformer Nasti says to Goetz, "You are not  
a man of God. At the very most, His hornet" (p. 53). As

such, Goetz would appear to be a near-relative of the gadfly, what with his irritating, bothersome conduct having the ironic effect of driving men to God. A Devilish effect, when one thinks about it. Yet, one must fix his enemy with singular sight; and Goetz reiterates that God alone is his adversary. "He is the only enemy worthy of my talents. There is only God, the phantoms, and myself" (p. 55). Who the phantoms might be is somewhat unclear; but the juxtaposition of God and Goetz does meaningfully suggest the latter's place in the hierarchy of Evil. And as one laboring in the vineyards of perversity, he is ecstatic about bursting into an arena ostensibly ordered and refined by God. Armed with Heinrich's gift, he declares, "I am going, the men are waiting, the fine key is luring me -- it wants to go home to its keyhole" (p. 61). So long cast out from God's neatly packaged world, Goetz appears ready to burst upon its threshold, bringing with him sad tidings of great chaos and confusion.

Goetz never destroys Worms. The player of great roles, he readily relinquishes the Child of Chaos' paraphernalia for the garb of Favored Son. Heinrich loosens his resolve. This he does by implying Goetz's utter lack of uniqueness. All mankind, he declares, is doing Evil. All! "And," Goetz asks, "no one has ever done Good?" "No one," insists Heinrich (p. 63). Their exchange gives rise to a curious wager. The militant feels he can do

Good, can become a saint; and Heinrich himself may judge the results one year and a day hence. There will be two throws of the dice, Catherine's and Goetz's. A win will call for a continuance of Evil; a loss, a transformation to Good. Catherine garners a deuce and a singleton,<sup>17</sup> for an unpromising total of three. Goetz, however, manages a mere one and one.

Goetz next appears several months later at Heidenstamm, where he moves among "brothers" with talk of love and charity. His conduct has inspired no universal sympathy, though. While the Barons' lackey Karl complains of such unlikely practices as washing feet and distributing the family lands, Goetz's real problem arises in regard to his fellow nobles. One of them, Nossak, warns darkly, "You're digging the grave of all the German nobility" (p. 69). Another, Schulheim, demands that he renounce his behavior and then knocks him to the ground. For a moment, Goetz seems ready to rise and attack his adversary. Then he flings himself to earth again, appealing instead to his ministering angels. Schulheim administers a parting kick.

All the bother is worth it, Goetz tells Nasti. The land distribution and the establishment of equality

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<sup>17</sup>The deuce, one should note, not only denotes a double counter in dice, but also connotes the lowest throw, bad luck, and more significantly the Devil. In this case, the deuce score is garnered in behalf of Good.

invoke for the peasants the Kingdom "at least in a single corner of the world" (p. 70). Yet, Nasti would have him forego his city of the sun, have him retain his lands, to manage them and watch them grow, to afford their reformist movement in the meantime a sanctuary and a place of assembly. Once sufficiently strong, surely in seven years, the awakened peasant populace will sweep to inevitable victory. As it now stands, Nasti cautions, Goetz's generosity can only provoke massacre, because the giving of lands, castle, and all will undermine the barons' security and arouse them to blood-letting. Goetz is adamant: "It suffices for one man to love mankind with an undivided love for that love to spread from one to another throughout humanity." He, Goetz, is that man. His is the vocation to dazzle. "I am a glowing coal," he enthuses, "the breath of God fans my flame, and I am being consumed alive" (p. 74).

Here, Goetz credits God with stoking. Soon he will forge for himself. Catherine, his former concubine, lies near death; and he arrives just as she is being set before the image of Christ upon a cross. Left alone with her, Goetz prays that Christ's burden be transferred to himself, then draws a dagger and pierces each of his own hands. Catherine has her relief and seeming salvation.

Cath. Your blood, Goetz, your blood. You have shed it for me.

Goetz. The blood of Christ, Catherine.  
Cath. Your blood . . . . (pp. 102-103)

She dies; but one senses the incipient ascendancy of Goetz the God. Months later, at Altweiler, there is considerable talk of the monk with bleeding hands, the holy man of miracles. In the city of the sun, moreover, there is no drinking, thieving, wife-beating; and while others threaten war, the burghers speak of prayer and pacifism. It is to Hilda, herself a great lover of unhappy people, that Goetz confides the evolving solitude of his ministry.

The more they love me, the more I feel alone.  
 I am their roof, and I have no roof. I am  
 their heaven, and I have no heaven . . . .  
 Heaven is an empty hole. I even wonder where  
 God lives. (p. 112)

Goetz's utopia and ascendancy are short-lived. He is cried down by charlatans and laughed off by impatient peasants. Soon, too, his Altweiler pure folk are slaughtered by revolutionaries from Walsheim. Amid the ruins of their lost paradise, Hilda proposes that she and Goetz resort at last to love, for there will be none of that in heaven. "Here you are," she argues,

a little flesh, worn-out, rough, miserable --  
 a life, a wretched life. It is this flesh and  
 this life I love. We can only love on earth,  
 and against God's will. (p. 125)

Goetz, however, loves only God; and his body will be an instrument solely for scourging the sins of mankind.

Six months later, the scourging has proceeded to the sorest of states. Pursuing a methodism verging on

madness, Goetz goes about with whip and pitcher, his goad and temptation. "Water," he confides, "makes a heavenly music; I have a Hell in my throat and Paradise in my ears" (p. 130). When he does partake of the water, he has the energy and urge for Hilda, a more trying temptation, which elicits from him obscenities, insults, and self-flogging. "The body is disgusting," he moans. "The body is good," counters Hilda. "It's in your soul that there's rottenness" (p. 131).

What's to come of all this? How shall it be with Goetz, who has been the Devil, the good Lord, and now man enduring the sorriest of soul-searching. There will be, it appears, an inquiry into Being, in the form of Heinrich's interrogation of Goetz, a procedure set a year and a day previously at the time of the original wager. As their private hearing gets under way, Goetz advises the defrocked priest,

Half of myself is your accomplice against the  
other half. Begin, search me to the depths of  
my being, since it is my being that is on trial.  
(p. 136)

Goetz's words call to mind his earlier characterization of himself as a divided creature, a being of two halves standing in horror of each other. The halves, of course, suggest several things, e.g., warring aspects of personality arising from his having a legitimate mother and a no-account father, a dichotomous character evidencing at

once a disposition toward Evil and a desire for Good. More to the point of Sartre's philosophic position, however, they suggest Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself.

The subsequent inquiry touches upon such matters as good deeds, the land distribution, intentions, an earlier past nurtured in Evil. Goetz's consciousness, his Being-for-itself, prompts the most potentially damaging questions. Imitating Heinrich, the defendant thrusts at himself:

You didn't change your skin, Goetz, you altered your language. You called your hatred of men love, your rage for destruction you called generosity. But you remained unchanged; nothing but a bastard. (p. 139)

Heinrich holds to select illusions. Good is simply impossible, he says. God does exist. Only, "He doesn't give a damn" (p. 140). The orders guiding Goetz? They were merely self-instructions arising from his own mind.

That's it! cries Goetz.

Every minute I wondered what I could BE in the eyes of God. Now I know the answer: nothing. God does not see me. You see this emptiness over our heads? That is God. You see this gap in the door? It is God. You see that hole in the ground? That is God again. Silence is God. Absence is God. God is the loneliness of man. There was no one but myself; I alone decided on Evil; and I alone invented Good. (p. 141)

Such candor astounds Heinrich and threatens to crush his bad faith, for if God is a nothingness, so too will be Heinrich's Devil. Goetz persists. All has been one



colossal joke; "God doesn't exist" (p. 141). Heinrich rains blows upon him, pleading in the process, "If God doesn't exist, there is no way of escaping men." This correct surmise signals Goetz's rebirth.

Goetz. I am beginning again.

Hein. Beginning what?

Goetz. My life. (p. 142)

Heinrich wants none of such awareness. They struggle; and Goetz is forced to stab him.

The inward pilgrim has apparently been freed to love this world; also, another creature in this world. "We have no witness now," he tells Hilda; "I alone can see your hair and your brow. How REAL you have become since He no longer exists" (p. 143).

As a child of sin, a son born without the benefit of a proper father, Goetz found himself for thirty-six years an outcast from the supposedly ordered world of man. Ironically, his ultimate awareness reveals his bastardy as a badge of brotherhood, because all humankind, not just Goetz and numbered unfortunates, is brought into life without the benefit of a "legitimate" Father, that is to say, God. Or so Sartre seems to say.

Kean, one of Sartre's more entertaining works, affords a diverting interest in at least two respects. First, it is an absorbing story of a renowned Shakespear-

ean actor whose life of drink, debt, debauchery, double identities, and multiple triangular entanglements (Kean, Count de Koefeld, Elena; Kean, the Prince, Elena; Kean, Lord Neville, Anna) is at once the object of fascination and repulsion; whose career is in the process of eclipse; and whose future lies in a plain land (America) with a common woman (Anna Danby). Second, the play is largely biographical, portraying as it ostensibly does the life of the English tragedian Edmund Kean (1787-1833). Thus, the audience may find itself engrossed in the likenesses between Sartre's Kean and the real actor, those similarities being apparent in the pair's uncertain parentage, their early vocation as tumblers, their initial success at the Drury Lane Theatre, their rivalry with John P. Kemble, their ill-starred final appearance in Othello, their journey to America, and, more generally, a life brimful of passion both on and off the stage. Or, again, the audience may find itself intrigued by certain distinct departures, that is to say, how in Sartre's play the impending match with the unsuccessful novice actress Anna Danby contrasts sharply with Kean's real-life marriage to the prominent actress Mary Chambers, how Sartre's Kean suffers a seemingly fortunate "breakdown" in Othello as it is played in England whereas the real Kean experienced an actual breakdown in America, and how finally Sartre largely ignores Kean's tours in America, where he

was plagued by difficulties arising from a divorce scandal.

Behind these diverting aspects of the drama, however, lies another study of bad faith, flawed awareness as it applies to Elena, the Prince of Wales, and Kean. Most of all, of course, the play is a depiction of Edmund Kean's conversion to existential consciousness; and for this reason, my analysis will focus upon his situation as it evolves during the course of the drama. The conceit, I believe, is another proportion, this time implying that cheesemongering:awareness::histrionism:bad faith.

Sartre assigns Act I to the portrayal of Kean, the dandy, who evades the pursuit of Anna Danby, the would-be bride of Lord Neville, in order to burst upon a dance at the Danish Embassy, where he cleverly arranges an assignation with the Ambassador's wife, Madam Koefeld, under the very nose of her husband, as it were. Kean, the practitioner of bad faith, begins to emerge in Act II, when on the following evening he anxiously awaits his lady Elena and simultaneously seeks to prevent Solomon's recital of the facts of fortune. The conflict arises after Kean instructs Solomon to toss a musician his purse. The factotum divides the coins, retains half, then attempts to counsel his superior on the condition of their finances. The subsequent exchange identifies Kean as an escapist, an artist in dread flight from awareness.

All senseless generosity must cease, warns Solomon; they are already six years in debt. It is wise to distribute the bounty of creditors, counters the actor; "I'm saving their souls."<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, he will heed Solomon's advice. Tomorrow. Today? Today, he awaits Elena's coming, and he is bored and restless. An excellent opportunity! observes his servant.

Let me give you a statement of your financial position, and I promise you won't find it boring -- the time will slip by like a dream. (p. 173)

Kean declares a preference for boredom, however. They are bankrupt, Solomon insists. "You shouldn't have told me," moans Kean. "How do you expect me to make love to her now" (p. 173)? Besides, this drift into insolvency has been going on for twenty-five years. When Kean subsequently attempts to invoke his childhood, Solomon stops him.

I respect it, I pity it, but I know your childhood by heart. We'll never get anywhere if you insist on telling me the story every time I want to discuss money matters. We are not talking about the child now, but the man. (pp. 173-174)

For Kean, though, there are other ploys. The necessity of an artist's being free from money concerns, for example. Or the need "to live from day to day in a fabulous imposture" (p. 174). Or the wisdom of enjoying what they in fact can never hope to possess. Or the virtual obliga-

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<sup>18</sup>Kean, trans. Kitty Black (New York, 1960), p. 172.

tion to take their debts as gauges of love, "proofs of human generosity" (p. 175). This being the case, he advises Solomon, "You must love those who love me. Instead of reproaching me for my debts, help me to multiply them" (p. 176).

Thus it goes, on and on. Occasionally Kean approaches incipient sense, then hastily retreats. He seems ready, for example, to forego supper parties. What of the one scheduled for the Black Horse this very evening? asks Solomon. That is not a party, Kean argues; it is a mere gathering of two or three dozen companions.

Old Bob and his company. To me, they are sacred. I touched the depths of poverty with them, I begged, I danced at street corners, they taught me everything. Do you expect me to forget them? All my childhood, Solomon. Do you insist I renounce my childhood . . . ? (p. 178)

Kean obviously counterfeits his reality, seeking as he does to avert confrontations with unsettling awareness. Here, of course, he thwarts the promising thrusts of Solomon by invoking the strategy of circularity, which is to say that he counters the factotum's arguments by proceeding from his unthinkable childhood all the way to his childhood. Still, the truth of his condition hovers on the brink of revelation. After tossing the remaining half of his coins to the musician, Kean charms Solomon: "You'll lend me a guinea tonight, for my cigars" (p. 181).

There follows a visit by the Prince of Wales. Himself desirous of Countess Elena's favors, he insinuates a knowledge of her assignation with the actor. The implication is startling. Might she have betrayed his confidence? Kean is dumfounded.

Let a sham prince steal my sham mistress, you would see if I knew how to lament. But when a real prince tells me to my face: "You trusted a woman and last night she and I made a fool of you," anger turns my limbs to water, and I am incapable of speech. I have always said that Nature was an inferior copy of Art.  
(p. 184)

Kean stuns one by speaking a truth he has not yet fully apprehended. What occurs on the boards is above reproach, of course, for Kean the performer merely demonstrates his excellence by his complete mastery of the situation there. It is his off-stage performance, rather, which requires schooling and development. At present, the role of Kean the man simply overwhelms him; and he confesses his inadequacy for the part. By pronouncing Nature an inferior re-presentation of Art, moreover, he at once identifies illusion as his ideal and implies that his existence is visualized almost solely in terms of the sham world of the theatre.

Kean continues to flirt with good faith. In the face of the Prince's offer to pay £6,000 if he will withdraw as Elena's suitor, for instance, Kean angrily denounces society's hypocritical attitude toward actors and declares his intention to indulge whatever urgings others

do. The system has taken a child, he argues, and turned him into an actor:

an illusion, a fantasy -- that is what you have made of Kean. He is a sham prince, sham minister, sham general, sham king. Apart from that, nothing. Oh, yes, a national glory. But on condition that he makes no attempt to live a real life. In an hour from now, I shall take an old whore in my arms, and all London will cry "Vivat!" But if I kiss the hands of the woman I love, I shall find myself torn to pieces. Do you understand that I want to weigh with my real weight in the world? (pp. 188-189)

The mock Kean, unfortunately, is neither prepared to embrace full awareness, nor truly convinced that he must cease strutting and fretting upon the boardwalks of life. Indeed, after he reads Elena's note canceling the private hour in his dressing room, Kean apologetically bares his anguished heart before the Prince. "Come, sir," he advises, "you need not be afraid. It is only Kean the actor, acting the part of Kean the man" (p. 191).

So much for the private histrionics largely responsible for Kean's bad faith. As an actor who makes himself vanish night after night, he badly needs someone to help insure his reappearance in the light of day, in the disconcerting light of awareness, that is. Solomon failed such a mission. Anna Danby does not.

In her first interview with Kean, Anna reveals the steady gaze essential for his therapy. She has kept a diary on each of his performances at the Drury Lane Theatre, she confides. And his drunkenness has hardly been

obscured. For example, on December 15 he bowed to Gertrude and addressed her as "Polonius." Moreover, on December 18 he delivered the Fortinbras (4th) soliloquy so beautifully that the entire audience wept. Only, the play was Lear.

Kean shifts the conversation away from such threatful reportage. Why her visit? She wishes to become an actress, she says; and she will succeed through hard work. Kean toys with this notion.

You have to be strong-minded to grow rich among cheese: and the daughters of cheese-mongers inherit their strength of will from their fathers. You will try and acquire your talents in driblets, as your father amassed his pennies. (p. 199)

Systematization, therefore, appears to have its uses and its promises. But it also has limits, because in some vocations birth ranks far and away above worth. "With determination," he tells Anna,

you can even get the moon which, after all, is only made of green cheese. But you cannot BECOME an actress. Do you think you have to act WELL? Do I act well? Do I look as though I work hard? You are born an actor as you are born a prince. And determination and hard work have nothing to do with that fact.  
(p. 199)

Again, one might find it difficult to fault Kean's notions of talent. And, surely, even if he were to counter with certain concepts of method and system, his efforts would be utterly wasted, for the foregoing conversation is deliberately ambiguous. Indeed, under the guise of his-trionics in the theatre, Sartre is in fact offering exis-



tential insights as regards the conduct of real life. Thus, while it may be true that actors are born to their calling, that they cannot come by their talents solely or even primarily through hard work, existentialism maintains that the converse is true of existence: man is not born into awareness; rather, he achieves it solely through determination and hard labor.

Sartre's mots à double entente are equally transparent in Kean's rationale for action.

You act to lie, to deceive, to deceive yourself; to be what you cannot be, and because you have had enough of being what you are. You act because you want to forget yourself. You act the hero because you are a coward at heart . . . . You act because you are a born liar and totally unable to speak the truth. (pp. 199-200)

This characterization, of course, says a good deal about acting, and it implies much about bad faith as well. For what is histrionism in the day-to-day trafficking upon the boardwalks of life if it is not a deliberate attempt at self-deception? What is it, if not an effort to be what one is not? What, if not the representation of the unpleasant as pleasing, the undesirable as non-existent? What, if not the intentional forgetting of oneself, the inability to come to grips with the truth?

Kean is no easy convert. What he sees in the theatre, he comprehends with amazing clarity. Reality proves far more elusive. After Anna departs and Elena makes no last-minute appearance, Kean reverts to posturing before

his mirror:

Elena, you hurt me very much . . . . Hurt me  
ve-ry much . . . . Ele-na, you hurt me ve-ry  
much. (p. 204)

Then he exits to play Romeo to an anxious audience.

Awareness, Sartre repeatedly implies, is the product of hard work. And Anna, a dairyman's daughter, knows the value of determination and constant effort. At the Black Horse Inn, she again unfolds reality. She has made inquiries, she confides. Moreover, her findings are pertinent to Kean.

Anna. I found you were a drunkard, a libertine, crippled with debts, melancholy and mad by turns, and I said to myself: "That man needs a wife."

Kean. Indeed!

Anna. A wife. A cheesemonger's daughter, willful and stubborn, to bring a little order into your ways.

Kean. Order! I see! And genius? What happens to that while my life is being ordered?

Anna. You don't understand. I shall supply the order, and you will supply the genius. (p. 213)

How much effect Anna has is difficult to say; but on the third night, the uncertain flicker of Kean's consciousness acquires a discernible steadiness. It is the nightmare of the benefit performance of the last act of Othello which prompts Kean to improvise new lines -- seeming attempts to rescue a faulty stage performance, yet in fact a successful effort to confront and to grasp finally the long-ignored truth of his existence.

The events of the evening are wild beyond belief.

Hardly the most likely prospect for the key role of Desdemona, Anna loses her composure and requires repeated prompting. Moreover, Lord Neville, scorned earlier by the maid, seeks to disrupt matters by tooting a whistle. Then, too, Kean orders the Prince of Wales to stop talking in the Ambassador's box; and when his rival refuses, the actor draws his sword. (The blade is broken!) Kean thereafter tosses Elena Desdemona's pillow, daring her to leave her box and come enact the role on stage, for real. A constable steps forward to halt the proceedings, only to be waved off by the Prince himself.

There, at center stage in the Drury Lane Theatre, in the most imperfect performance of his career, Kean proceeds toward existential perfection. He answers the cat-calls.

I know you all -- but this is the first time  
I see you with murderous faces. Are these  
your real aspects? You come here each night  
and throw bouquets at my feet, crying bravo.  
I thought you really loved me . . . . .  
But who were you applauding? Eh? Othello?  
Impossible -- he was a sanguinary villain.  
It must have been Kean. (pp. 250-251)

The real aspects of apparent admirers may be impossible to discern; but Kean feels compelled to reveal his own. Smearing his make-up, he cries,

Behold the man. Look at him. Why don't you  
applaud? Isn't it strange. You only care  
for illusion. (p. 251)

Kean is probably right about his followers. Ironically,

what is true of them is true of himself, because to this juncture he has cared only for illusion. For him, however, there is never a middle course. As an actor, he strutted and fretted upon boards and boardwalks, and in doing so, came finally to the realization of his own sham existence. Now he struggles for awareness, and verging on reality, he declares unequivocally against all manner of illusion. Henceforth, he will no longer wax histrionic, neither in society nor on the stage.

A subsequent irony is that having come to his senses (awareness), he is considered mad. But that may remain as it seems. As for himself, he observes, Kean is at one with Fortinbras: "They know who they are and they say only what is" (p. 255). Reality, that is to say Nature (what is), certainly lacks appeal, just as it did earlier when Kean called it a poor copy of Art. It will require getting used to, says the actor, for

Kean's sun was painted on a stage canvas. . . .  
When the man himself is a sham, everything is  
a sham around him. Under a sham sun, the sham  
Kean cried a tale of sham sufferings to his  
sham heart. Today, the star is real. How flat  
the real light is. (p. 255)

Sartre continues to let Kean speak puns. Beneath the painted sun, of course, Kean (the star) was unreal, yet he basked in the brilliance of acclaim. Today, in the inescapable glare of truth, the star player has become real; and the light of his true condition seems very flat,

for his world no longer scintillates as once it did. More to the point, he is to be banished from royal circles, sent from England itself. Also, the woman of his life, Anna Danby, is common by his previous standards. America, moreover, is a plain land. The utter homeliness of Kean's projected future, in other words, suggests the very aura of reality, affording as it does the prospect of at last coming to grips with true existence and of forestalling a return to bad faith. Thus the play's conceit implying that cheesemongering:awareness::histrionism:bad faith indirectly emphasizes that awareness comes to those who labor diligently at self-examination and that bad faith is the lot of those who pursue deliberate diversions in hopes of averting painful self-awareness.

Nekrassov, a farce in eight scenes, is Sartre's now-humorous, now-serious satire discrediting governmental organs (in this case, Soir à Paris) and national policies (e.g., German re-armament, anti-Communism), the respective administration and initiation of which so engross chauvinistic functionaries that all sense of balance, objectivity, fair play, and truthfulness becomes an easy sacrifice. The play depicts a temporary alliance between the swindler Georges de Valéra<sup>19</sup> (alias Nekrassov) and the

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<sup>19</sup>As Professor Ralph E. Hone suggests, there appears to be a connection between the Irish statesman Eamon

Soir à Paris Board, an unholy arrangement which precipitates a McCarthy-style inquisition and brings chaos and paralyzing fear to the country itself. Figuratively, the drama "turns" on the notion of swindling. That is to say, de Valéra's dealings in sham titles and properties is a rather elusive conceit intended as a parallel for "Nekrassov's" dealings in bogus Soviet secrets (hence, bogus Soviet threats to French security). De Valéra, of course, realizes money and property from his fraud; the Board (and ostensibly France) hopes to procure a national commitment through its "swindle" of the French people. Sartre again treats the conceit on a philosophic level, this time bringing de Valéra, a practitioner of bad faith, into collusion with the Board, whose membership is collectively immersed in bad faith, the effect of their combined deceit being to stir the populace to hysteria and to threaten everyone, even the most comprehending and honorable, with impressment into bad faith.

Georges' flawed awareness is apparent from the outset. Seemingly intent upon suicide, he carefully folds his jacket before leaping into the Seine. Then, instead

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de Valéra (b. 1882) and Sartre's protagonist. The former's less than legal efforts to raise money in the United States c. 1920, his support of intensely nationalistic policies, and his opposition in 1942 to the landing of American troops in northern Ireland reflect the kind of financial and patriotic perversion which characterizes the career of Georges in Nekrassov. Perhaps, too, Sartre has in mind the Russian poet Nikolai A. Nekrasov (1821-1878), who edited several publications, who bitterly opposed administrative abuses, and who depicted the discontent and suffering of all classes (Who Can Be Happy in Russia?).

of embracing his watery grave, he proceeds to swim, eventually taking a rope thrown to him by the beggar couple, Robert and Irma. Once ashore, the swindler denounces the bums for denying his final desire. But was it his final wish?

Robert. It wasn't, you were swimming.

Georges. A fine thing! I was swimming just a little, while waiting to go under. If you hadn't thrown the rope . . .  
[sic, passim]

Robert. Eh! If you hadn't taken it . . .

Georges. I took it because I was forced to . . .

Robert. Forced by what?

Georges. By human nature, of course. Suicide is against nature.<sup>20</sup>

Sartre's authentic man, of course, is a creature of choices. If he elects death, he may take his own life. If he chooses to live, on the other hand, he implies acceptance of his birth and the responsibility for his own existence. Here, Georges is obviously something less than the measure of Sartrean man. Like many another practitioner of bad faith, he manages to cast doubt upon the sincerity of his actions and surely fails to own up to his decisions, especially when responsibility for specific conduct is to be fixed.

Robert and Irma are stunned. Soon, however, they offer him full access to the Seine, vowing no further efforts to retrieve him. Georges retreats to excuses again, this time citing chance.

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<sup>20</sup> Nekrassov, trans. Sylvia and George Leeson (New York, 1960), pp. 286-287.

I had the rare opportunity of crossing a bridge and of being desperate at the same time. Such coincidences don't often occur. (p. 290)

If Georges is a man of little existential faith, the Soir à Paris Board is hardly any better. By depicting a series of humbled appeals upwards from writer Sibilot to editor Palotin to Board chairman Mouton and, in turn, shallow appeals to loyalty and love, followed by arrogant orders downwards from Mouton to Palotin to Sibilot, Sartre manages to delineate a flawed hierarchy, the upper echelons of which maneuver in a climate of bad faith. Mouton seems to be joking when he announces that the French Minister of the Interior plans to grant the Soir à Paris exclusive rights to publish governmental appointments, in other words, the Minister's intention to "let the daily rag become the daily flag" (p. 309). The chairman is quite serious, however. He craves the government's imprimatur and consequently shares its concern with a by-election in Seine-et-Marne, a forthcoming test of strength pitting the endorsed candidate Mme Bounoumi, who favors German rearmament, against a Communist, who advocates friendship with the Soviets. Perdrière, a third candidate, is considered a threat, because he promises to garner enough votes to force a second ballot, a circumstance increasing the risk of a Communist victory. The goal is to have Perdrière stand down; but in reviewing their adversary's case, the Board pair betray



their own obtuseness and flawed awareness.

- Jules. Perdrière? But I know him. He's an avowed enemy of the Soviets. We've dined together.
- Mouton. I know him even better. He is my neighbor in the country.
- Jules. He said some very sensible things.
- Mouton. You mean he condemned the policy of the U.S.S.R.?
- Jules. Exactly.
- Mouton. There's a man for you! He detests the Communists and doesn't want to rearm Germany.
- Jules. Astonishing contradiction!
- Mouton. His attitude is purely sentimental. Do you know what's at the bottom of it? The Germans plundered his estate in 1940, and deported him in 1944.
- Jules. So?
- Mouton. That's all. He won't learn anything and he won't forget anything.
- Jules. Oh!
- Mouton. And mark you, it was nothing much. He was only deported for eight or ten months. Proof of that is that he returned.
- Jules. [Shrugging his shoulders] Well, there you are. He obstinately sticks to his memories. He has Germanophobia. What is even more absurd is that history does not repeat itself. In the next war, it will be Russia that the Germans will plunder and Russians whom they will deport.
- Jules. Why, of course! (pp. 311-312)

Sartre's irony is effective. If Perdrière has mere memories of real experiences under German military rule, Mouton and Jules have far less, that is, fancied notions of the Soviet system. Mouton, for instance, berates Jules for publishing a photo showing Russian housewives lined up in front of a food store. While the idea had promise, Mouton acknowledges, the women were smiling and wearing shoes. Imagine! Smiles in the U.S.S.R. And shoes. The

Soir à Paris must cultivate new virulence; and the first task is to persuade Perdrière to stand down, in other words, to make him (and the French, really) fear the Soviets more than the Germans. Mouton gives Palotin till ten the next day to devise a new journalistic horror. Palotin, in turn, gives Sibilot the same deadline to accomplish the same end.

The crisis is set. And a coming together seems likely. Georges de Valéra, the perverse genius of the Parisian underworld, is free about town. The Board desperately needs an idea, some miraculous engine born of genius. Circumstances have it that Georges hides in Sibilot's home, there meets Veronique, who grants him temporary asylum, and eventually discovers her father's need of an idea. Word about Paris is that Nekrassov, the Russian Minister of Interior, has been absent from Moscow for several days. Rumor inevitably has placed him anywhere from the Crimea, where he is said to be taking the cure, to Western Europe, where he is said to have defected.

Nekrassov? Nekrassov!

The next day Georges de Valéra accompanies Sibilot to Palotin's office. The former has a new identity -- Nikita Nekrassov. There follows one of those great moments when bad faith meets bad faith. Palotin proposes to test the defector's knowledge.

Georg. A sample of what I know. Good. Well,  
I can reveal the details of the famous

Plan C for the occupation of France in the event of world war.

Jules. There's a Plan C for the occupation of France?

Georg. You mentioned it in your paper last year.

Jules. Did we? Oh, yes, but I was awaiting confirmation.

Georg. Didn't you write at that time that Plan C contained the list of people to be shot? Well, you were right.

Jules. They're going to shoot Frenchmen?

Georg. A hundred thousand.

Jules. A hundred thousand!

Georg. Did you write that? Yes or no.

Jules. You know, one writes without thinking. Have you the list?

Georg. I have learned the first twenty thousand names off by heart. (pp. 354-355)

At this juncture, one virtually anticipates something equivalent to Jackie Gleason's cry of comic departure, "And away we go!"

Soon there is talk of the seven Communists on the staff of the Soir à Paris. Talk of Soviet agents, who have situated themselves in towns across the land and who await a coded message ordering them to release a radioactive powder designed to kill 100,000 persons daily. Talk of Board members' names on the black list, a revelation which gives rise to great fellow feeling and a sense of sacrifice. "Nekrassov" cannot recall seeing Mouton's name, so naturally the chairman loses his standing. Perdrière's name, on the other hand, is said to be on the list; consequently, he immediately comes over to the government's position on Germany, since Russia now looms as the primary threat to France.

Their work hardly constitutes a start, warns  
"Nekrassov."

When you mistrust your own son, your wife,  
your father, when you look in the mirror  
and ask yourself whether you aren't a Com-  
munist without knowing it, then you are  
beginning to get a glimpse of the truth.  
(p. 366)

As for himself, the Board's "benefactor" wants nothing --  
"A flat in the Avenue Georges V, two bodyguards, decent  
clothes, and pocket money" (p. 361). Also, a journalist  
to write his mémoires, preferably Sibilot, whose salary  
must be trebled to 210,000 francs monthly.

These proceedings border on the hilarious and for  
a time divert one from the serious implications of the  
play. Indeed, it is easy to agree with Georges when he  
tells Veronique that his actions pose no problem, incur  
no obligations whatever. "When you knew me," he says,

I was a smart crook, working alone; a self-  
made man. Well, I still am. Yesterday I  
was selling bogus properties and bogus titles,  
and today I am selling bogus secrets on Russia,  
Where's the difference? (p. 384)

Besides, he adds, only the rich lose. Veronique, a  
Leftist, is not so sure. The poor, after all, depend to  
a certain extent upon the Soir à Paris for their picture  
of reality; consequently, if peasants elsewhere are shown  
to have no hope either, one wonders who pays. Veronique  
argues that confronted with wholly bleak prospects, the  
French poor

would have no alternative but to drink themselves to death or put their heads in the gas oven. But even if one in a thousand swallowed your claptrap, you would be a murderer.

(p. 385)

Gradually the drama's serious aspect unfolds.

Sartre is talking swindle and inquisition on a national scale. Perhaps a commitment is being wrought. Yet, people are being hurt. The commoners, as Veronique points out, are being driven to despair. Others suffer as well. Some, like Mouton, get what they deserve. His removal from the Board, for example, is hardly cause for uneasiness. Later, though, even his situation touches the chords of pathos. Obsessed with his absence from "Nekrassov's" black list, he has come to believe his whole life a sham. Thus he says to Demidoff,

Tell me frankly; if everyone takes me for a revolutionary, and if all my actions are those required by the Party, what distinguishes me from an active Party member?

"Nothing," responds his companion. "You are an objective Communist." Shaken, the deposed chairman mops his brow, then stares at his handkerchief in horror.

They have arranged for me to give the signal. What signal? To whom? To you, perhaps? How do I know that you aren't one of their agents?

(p. 394)

Mouton, of course, does not know; and offered in a pathetic-humorous moment, this is Sartre's point. The most terrifying outcome of political witch-hunts is that men lose their certainties. The unkindest hurt of all,

existentially speaking, is the erosion of incipient or actual good faith. Mouton may well deserve his anguish. But Sartre intends his hurt as only one among many. On a larger scale, the audience is bidden to imagine a stir, a hue and cry echoing and re-echoing across the land. Much faith succumbs in the attending reverberations.

Sibilot's, for instance. Realizing his initial error, the writer threatens to tell all. Georges has a new base of support, however. Soir à Paris has two million readers; France, forty million people. All take him for Nekrassov. "Lunatic" -- that is the word for one "trying to deny truths founded on universal assent." Moreover, Georges displays a telegram from McCarthy, offering him "an engagement as a permanent witness" (p. 375). There are others from Franco and Adenauer. Also, the NYSE is up. Sibilot capitulates, asks to be cured, re-educated. Georges offers him black faith.

Leave aside your personal convictions, and tell yourself that they are false because no one shares them. They exile you. Rejoin the flock. (p. 376)

Perdrière, too, is divested of his faith. Once a clear-eyed politician who saw Russia as a threat, but who clung to historical and personal evidence of Germany's even greater danger, Perdrière has experienced a change of heart. Now a mere shell of his former self, he attends Mme Bounoumi's party and toasts his "benefactor."

I was an old fool. I drink to the man sent by Providence to strip the wool from my eyes. (p. 390)

Then he weeps.

Not everyone capitulates before the "Nekrassov"-Board pressures, fortunately. Favoring the Party in Nekrassov in terms as strong as those employed to oppose it in Dirty Hands, Sartre portrays the Leftists as persons of substance. They endure. Thus, when Georges experiences pangs of conscience because the Board has dictated in his name a denunciation of the Communist journalists Duval and Maistre, the swindler urges Duval to flee. The writer shrugs him off. Veronique explains.

You have nothing except your own skin, and you want to save it. That's quite natural. Duval wants to save his skin, but he doesn't keep thinking about it. He has his Party, his work, and his readers. If he wants to save all that he is, then he must stay where he is. (p. 423)

The play's conceit, one recalls, has de Valéra's criminal swindles imaginatively paralleling "Nekrassov's" political swindle. The first, of course, bring money and property to their perpetrator. The second is aimed at the French people in hopes of wringing from them a commitment, a national dedication born of fear and rage, a declared stance fully embracing France's vested interest in a resurgent Germany. The Board's conduct in this matter is shallow and short-sighted, hardly the kind of action promising to insure a strong and permanent dedication to

national purpose. The Leftists, in contrast, have an essential higher commitment to the Party and their work; consequently, they are less susceptible to the inquisitional plague. Indeed, they even afford hope for de Valéra, who announces that he will go into seclusion, making himself available only to Veronique, who will publish his series of interviews under the title, "How I Became Nekrassov."

Farces do not generally end on such a deadly serious note. There follows a wild pursuit, in which Georges manages to escape his former bodyguards, Inspector Goblet, and Demidoff. The next day, de Valéra's whereabouts are a mystery; but things are humming at the Soir à Paris. Sibilot confesses the hoax, and is rewarded with the editorship, from which Palotin is fired. Mouton is restored to the Board. A cover story is to be issued, revealing that "Nekrassov" has been kidnapped by the Soviets and announcing that a new list has been found among the "defector's" papers, this one containing Mouton's name. Sartre thereby once more underscores the difference between persons with a true commitment and those concerned primarily with saving their own skins.

Sartre's "turns" appear to meet the standards established earlier for the dramatic conceit. For one thing,



they obviously constitute elaborate parallels which form the framework of each of the plays analyzed. The man/classical-gods motif in The Flies, for example, can be simply and briefly cited as a euphemistic conceit for a man/Christian-God relationship; yet Sartre introduces allusions hinting at the parallel throughout his plot. At one point, there is mention of hell, the stone, the crowing cock, collective guilt; at another, talk of suffering and original sin; at still another, lengthy ruminations on free will. All of these references, of course, suggest notions peculiar to Christianity and thereby aid in unfolding the key analogy. Again, in Kean,<sup>21</sup> Sartre takes pains to evolve the connections between histrionism and bad faith, cheesemongering and awareness, eventually drawing the two figures together in the implicit proportion, cheesemongering:awareness::histrionism:bad faith, to imply that man must labor diligently and then expect to accumulate consciousness in mere dribblets if he hopes to attain authentic existence. The proportion accounts for the play's content and structure from beginning to end, as do the conceits in the other six plays as well.

Second, the conceits constitute, more or less, witty perceptions and telling analogies between seemingly

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<sup>21</sup>Because the hero lacks authentic consciousness, "Kean" constitutes a strikingly ironic appellation. At the end, of course, he manages to refine his perception and at last become keen.

disparate things. Three of the plays afford unquestionably striking parallels. Sartre yokes together quite dissimilar notions in The Respectful Prostitute when he implies that Lizzie's sale and sacrifice of her consciousness in giving counterfeit testimony is a terrifying species of existential "prostitution," and therefore a valid imaginative equivalent for her vocation itself. Goetz's earthly bastardy in The Devil and the Good Lord, moreover, affords a remarkable parallel for mankind's birth and subsequent life in a Fatherless (Godless) world. And, of course, the cheese-mongering and histrionics in Kean immediately suggest an unlikely pair of notions.

Although three other dramas do not yield conceits whose terms are nearly so unlike, the analogies themselves, once delineated, evidence the same striking qualities as the previous group. The classical-gods/Christian-God parallel in The Flies, for example, is predicated upon items of the same species, that is, deities. Thus, while the implications of the analogy have a shocking potential, the terms themselves lack the dissimilarity commonly associated with conceits. The same is true of the proportion in No Exit (hell:evildoer::"lighted" labyrinth:practitioners of bad faith); for there is an immediate, albeit superficial, likeness between both the places themselves and the persons interned therein. It is only after care-

ful examination that the labyrinth's unusual significance unfolds. In other words, by invoking his audience's remembrance of common notions of hell, Sartre underscores his facility's unique character as a place of enforced awareness, one which affords no breaks (i.e., night, sleep, darkness, blinking of the eyes, books, excuses, forgetfulness, flights into lovers' embraces, etc.). Nekrassov, too, "turns" on a less singular notion, the parallel between de Valéra's criminal swindles and the "Nekrassov"-Board swindle of an entire nation. Sartre, however, manages to imply, remarkably, the despicable means by which a commitment is wrung from the people and to suggest further the bewilderment and rage to be experienced, once the populace knows it has been "taken."

Dirty Hands stands apart from the other works because the analogy is developed through the use of personification.<sup>22</sup> That is to say, the Party is an actualized conceit for Being-in-itself, Hugo an actualized conceit

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<sup>22</sup>The discussion of metaphors, and hence conceits, has obviously assumed that these figures take various forms. If there remains any question of the validity of this assumption, the reader should consult appropriate proofs, as they are cited in the earlier section of this paper titled "A: Historical View of Metaphor." As regards proportions, see Aristotle's comments, pp. 40-41, and Richards' use of the word "diagrammatical," p. 62; concerning personification, see Aristotle's illustration of the first type of transference, p. 40, and Quintilian's illustrations, p. 43. In addition, it is possible, on occasion, to treat other tropes (e.g., puns, hyperboles, similes) as conceits without annihilating the traditional distinctions between these types of figurative language.

for Being-for-itself. As such, Hugo evolves as a consciousness, an awareness capable of interrogation and objectivity, a being existentially disposed toward challenging the Party, which evolves as a mass of muscle and nerve-endings, mere matter given entirely to twin impulses -- survival and ascendancy.

A consistently clear aspect of Sartre's conceits is their implicit declaration of values. Thus, when he implies that Lizzie's sham statement is a form of prostitution, that man's earthly condition is that of bastardy, or that certain means of securing a national commitment constitute swindling, Sartre not only puts select situations in a clearer light, as it were, but insures appropriate negative reactions to those situations. Not all the plays are so openly denunciatory; yet once the conceits are worked out in terms of plot and character, the judgmental dimension becomes equally apparent. In his oblique portrayal of the God of Christendom, for instance, Sartre features an inept and indifferent deity, whose quickest reaction is always to whatever challenges his power and whose slowest response is to whatever will serve or better mankind's condition. After bad faith is apprehended as the inmates' problem in No Exit, one sees the complete justice in their internment, for he understands how diverted souls go astray and, moreover, why enforced awareness is such a terrible form of punishment. Again,

in Dirty Hands, the identification of the Party with Being-in-itself insures that one apprehends the organization as callous, unresponsive, and self-serving. Cheesemongering and histrionics in Kean pose an initial problem; however, once histrionism is equated with bad faith, it is only a matter of time before cheesemongering (awareness) assumes a position of primacy.

A question which arises concerning Sartre's mode of doing drama is the so-called objective correlative. It arises, I think, because of Sartre's use of emotionally charged terms as "prostitution," "bastardy," and "swindling." Curiously, T. S. Eliot, who has done much to revive interest in the metaphysical poets and their use of the conceit (see pp. 70-71 above), is the critic who has given the objective correlative a new meaning in this century.<sup>23</sup> Insisting that Hamlet the play is the problem, not Hamlet the actor, Eliot argues that one finds Shakespeare's Dane "not in the action, not in any quotations that we might select, so much as in an unmistakable tone . . . ." <sup>24</sup> Lest one misses the importance of tone in Shakespeare's plays, Eliot notes that all the Elizabethan dramatist's intelligible, self-complete tragedies are developed around emotionally weighted phenomena, e.g., the suspicion of

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<sup>23</sup>See Thrall, pp. 325-326.

<sup>24</sup>"Hamlet and His Problems," Selected Essays (New York, 1950), p. 124.

Othello, the infatuation of Antony, the pride of Coriolanus. In Hamlet, he adds, there is the guilt of Gertrude. In this last instance, unfortunately, the playwright fails to create an appropriate vehicle for the Queen's emotion; consequently, the entire work fails as well.

How does Shakespeare go awry? Obviously, it has to do with emotions. "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art," declares Eliot,

is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately invoked. (pp. 124-125)

The objective correlative admittedly poses special difficulties as regards the drama of Sartre, particularly when one sees it as a vehicle conveying emotions. All along, of course, the insistence has been that the conceit implies a "hardware" and effect primarily involving the intellect. Now, however, the conceits "turning" on such concepts as prostitution, bastardy, and swindling suggest connotation as well as denotation. It would be folly, surely, to maintain Sartre's indifference to a careful selection of terms for his analogies. Whether he intends his terms and parallels as a formula to convey particular preconceived emotions, though, is another question. I believe that the evocation of given emotions is only incidental to his intention. There are at least two reasons for believing

this.

First, the connection between Sartre's conceits and his philosophic position has been amply demonstrated. Philosophy, of course, suggests a content aimed primarily at the intellect, not the emotions. True, existentialism stresses subjectivism; yet, this study has clearly established, I believe, that Sartre consistently operates from a basis of certain specific ideas, e.g., an existence without God, an individual's freedom and responsibility, bad faith. These ideas do not readily surface during the course of his plays. Rather, he submerges and obscures them, re-presents them through action and character to the extent that the audience only gradually becomes aware of them. And that is only the beginning. The ideas require a good deal of subsequent probing and contemplation; their full significance being apprehended only after substantial labor. ("Excessive" would be Samuel Johnson's likely adjective [see pp. 57-58].) The conceits themselves, especially when they are sufficiently startling to signal something remarkable in the way of phenomena and notion, serve to embody succinctly and effectively the ideas crucial to Sartre's essentially philosophic statements. The implications of mankind's "bastardy" in the Godless universe of The Devil and the Good Lord, for example, are offered during the course of 150 crowded pages; and unquestionably, the intellect arises as the foremost

tool in apprehending Sartre's key analogy and implicit statement. Once the audience grasps Sartre's view of man's condition, it may experience bewilderment, horror, nausea, whatever; but the emotions seem somewhat incidental and, even then, the form of those emotions seems quite unpredictable.

Second, Sartre declares existentialism's first interest in making man aware of what he is and of the responsibility he bears for his existence. The tremendous stress on consciousness, it appears, argues against the objective correlative, for if authentic existence is based upon contemplation, upon the storing up of awareness in veritable dribblets, upon the constant projection of oneself into an apprehended reality, the emotions must by implication be subordinated.

Without intending to deprecate Eliot's critical notion, I would attempt to modify its wording, that it might more accurately account for Sartre's modus operandi. Sartre's way of expressing an idea in the form of art is to devise an appropriate analogy; in other words, a conceit which shall be a shorthand formula of that particular idea. His mode of doing drama, implicit in the longer formula, is to weave crucial content into the plot and character of his plays, then to embody that content in the much more compact form of the conceit, the terms of which are often sufficiently uncommon to signal the audience,



to warn that audience of a work's peculiar significance. The warning being properly apprehended and heeded, and the implications being successfully worked out, Sartre's philosophic statement becomes apparent. The process, I feel, is both a labor and joy of the mind, in that order.

III. CAMUS  
ROCK OF ATHEISTS

In a much-revered hymn of penitence, Augustus M. Toplady characterizes Christ as a "Rock of Ages," One whose ritual touch and blood sacrifice ensure spiritually beleaguered souls a fastness in a storm-plagued universe. Knowing that neither countless labors, nor perfect zeal, nor endless tears suffice as salve for sin, and sensing, therefore, his abysmal nakedness and foulness, the wayfarer clings to the solitary cross and sues for spiritual "garb" and grace. Even as the breath flees and the light fails, he petitions,

When I soar to worlds unknown,  
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,  
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee.<sup>1</sup>

The lyric, of course, speaks of a haunted existence, an anguished ordeal implying a helplessness and humility virtually beyond reckoning. Amid that threat-filled turbulence, however, there yet remains the ancient Rock, a secure sanctuary for committed suppliants. More generally, too, the lines indicate a reverence of God, an indifference to death, and a passion for life after death.

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<sup>1</sup>"Rock of Ages," in The Hymnal, ed. Clarence Dickinson (Philadelphia, 1950), no. 237.

Reverend Mr. Toplady's hymn has, I think, a special significance in certain approaches to the literature of Albert Camus, because it serves as a remarkable foil for the Frenchman's basic notions as regards authentic existence, that is to say, his philosophic position with respect to suicide, hope, and the absurd. Since these notions figure prominently in the content of his plays and, from a critical standpoint, often serve as aids in identifying and unraveling the conceits employed therein, it seems advisable that I first address myself briefly to his philosophy, just as I earlier concerned myself initially with the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre.

In the first three chapters of The Myth of Sisyphus ("An Absurd Reasoning," "The Absurd Man," and "Absurd Creation"), Camus discusses in detail his basic ideas; but the four-page essay "The Myth of Sisyphus" is his philosophic nugget, for it embodies those fundamental concepts. Sisyphus, of course, is the Greek rebel condemned in Hades to roll for ever a huge rock up a hill; and Camus acknowledges him as such. "Myths," says Camus, however, "are made for the imagination to breathe life into them."<sup>2</sup> The story of Sisyphus, he feels, is a parable in praise of freedom, rebellion, and passion.

First, his freedom is apparent when he betrays a certain levity toward the gods, as when he steals Jupiter's

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<sup>2</sup>The Myth of Sisyphus, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York, 1955), p. 89.

secret. The father-god has, on this occasion, carried off Aegina, a fact unknown to her father Aesopus, who merely complains of her disappearance. Knowing of the abduction, Sisyphus offers Aesopus information, provided that the latter give water to the citadel of Corinth. Thus, "to the celestial thunderbolts," Camus concludes, "he preferred the benediction of the water" (p. 88). Second, Sisyphus demonstrates his hatred of Death by clapping him in chains. Unable to endure a silent, deserted empire, Pluto dispatches the god of war to liberate his menial, and provides for the rebellious Sisyphus' punishment in the underworld. Third, the Corinthian treasures earthly life. Faced with imminent death, however, he orders his wife to cast his unburied body into a public square. Later, in the nether darkness, he is annoyed that she should have honored such a request, for her obedience runs retrograde to the dictates of human love. Consequently, he asks, and secures, Pluto's permission to return to chastise her. Once he again sees his beloved world, though, Sisyphus has no desire for darkness. Ignoring all appeals and warnings, he clings passionately to his second earthly life, a persistence eventually eliciting from the gods a decree ordering his seizure and forcible return to Hades, where his rock awaits him.

"The Myth of Sisyphus" reveals that Camus, like the Reverend Mr. Toplady, takes as his key metaphor a rock of

ages. In this case the stone of Sisyphus comes to imply freedom, rebellion, and love of life, just as the wayfarer's Rock suggests submission, renunciation, and a passion for afterlife. Thus, while the clergyman commends his pilgrim's spiritual foresight, Camus sees Sisyphus as the wisest and most prudent of mortals. Indeed, he idealizes the Greek as the absurd hero, namely one who scorns the gods, hates death, and commits himself solely to life. Moreover, Top-lady's hero would hide himself in Christ, whereas Sisyphus experiences the silent and solitary joy of consciousness, an awareness of despair,

which remains lucid -- polar night, vigil of the mind, whence will arise perhaps that white and virginal brightness which outlines every object in the light of the intelligence (p. 48),

a tragic awareness born in that breathing-space when, no longer straining near his stone, he leaves his height to retrieve once more his burden in the lair below.

In his considerably longer delineation of absurdity, Camus contends that suicide is the only serious philosophic question. The voluntary death he has in mind, however, is twofold -- that is to say, physical self-slaughter and philosophical self-destruction, the latter being the annihilation of the intellect. Both, insists Camus, are extreme reactions to the absurd. "But," some ask, "what is the absurd?"

Camus begins with the silent mind.<sup>3</sup> Everyday man,

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<sup>3</sup>The silent mind, apparently, is equivalent to what

not cognizant of the absurd, has aims, lives with  
 a concern for the future or for justification.  
 . . . He weighs his chances, he counts on  
 "someday," his retirement or the labor of his  
 sons. (p. 42)

Awareness, that is to say the apprehension of the absurd,  
 is quite another matter. Flaws appear in once seemingly  
 monolithic systems. Indeed, long-honored rationales com-  
 mending the worthiness and reasonableness of both life  
 and afterlife tumble under the weight of pressing con-  
 sciousness.

The absurd, according to Camus, is a paired situa-  
 tion. Involving neither lucidity alone nor the world solely,  
 but the two together, the intellect and the world, the ab-  
 surd is the confrontation between mind and matter. Reason,  
 on the one hand, yearns for unity, longs for clarity; the  
 universe, on the other hand, is crammed with irrationals,  
 chock-full of chaos, which resists ordering and denies  
 answers to mankind's profoundest questions. This coming  
 together -- rational man and the irrational world -- consti-  
 tutes a divorce, a disparity and an inconsistency, which  
 Camus calls "the absurd." The situation, like Hamlet's  
time, is "out of joint"; and, Camus would especially empha-  
 size, no mortal can ever "set it right" (cf. Hamlet, 1.5.  
 215-217). Thus the world may be described, even classified

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Sartre terms "Being-in-itself," an existence which has not  
 yet come to awareness and which is, therefore, a stranger  
 to self-interrogation. The quiet mentality may be con-  
 trasted with the annihilated intellect, for the latter ap-  
 pears to approximate roughly what Sartre calls "bad faith."

within uncertain limits, but it cannot be fully understood. In the end, it is simplistically a case of matter over mind.

Authentic existence, then, finds itself saddled with absurdity, the simultaneous awareness of an

appetite for the absolute and for unity and  
the impossibility of reducing this world to  
a rational and reasonable principle . . . .  
(The Myth, p. 38)

Philosophical suicide may be a direct consequence of this realization. An existentialist like Kierkegaard,<sup>4</sup> for example, may acknowledge that intellect denies the orderliness of this world, and is useless in apprehending whatever may lie beyond it. Rather than endure the throes of absurdist tension, however, he elects to deny what reason tells him: he submits his intellect to a species of self-slaughter. Thus, while the universe seems unjust, incoherent,

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<sup>4</sup>Camus, unlike Sartre, believes that all existential philosophies imply the existence of God. "All of them without exception," he declares,

suggest escape. Through an odd reasoning, starting out from the absurd over the ruins of reason, in a closed universe limited to the human, they deify what crushes them and find reason to hope in what impoverishes them. That forced hope is religious in all of them. (p. 24)

Camus, of course, does not mention Sartre, who divides existentialists into two kinds -- Christian and atheistic (see "The Humanism of Existentialism," p. 34). It is also worth noting that Sartre's essay (issued in 1947) followed by five years the publication of Camus' collection. Moreover, it is Sartre's classification which is most commonly invoked today (see, e.g., Hazel Barnes' Humanistic Existentialism, in which "humanistic" is employed as a euphemism for "atheistic"). In brief, therefore, Sartre's existentialism and Camus' absurdity are virtually synonymous.

and incomprehensible, and God improbable, Kierkegaard o'erleaps all that for an apparent antidote. By sacrificing intellect, by permanently bracketing what his reasoning reveals, he concocts a cure for despair and then wagers everything on its efficacy.

Physical suicide may arise as a second alternative to the agony of absurdity. Recognizing the absence of any profound reason for living, the inane character of daily agitation, and the uselessness of pointless suffering culminating in nothingness, man may well apprehend time to come as death itself. Once sufficiently obsessed with his destiny,

his unique and dreadful future -- he sees and rushes toward it. In its way, suicide settles the absurd. It engulfs the absurd in the same death. (The Myth, p. 40)

Camus eventually rejects both varieties of voluntary death. Thus he returns to the absurd. Always the rational creature confronting the silence of the universe, he knows "reason is useless and there is nothing beyond reason" (p. 27). Preferring an inferior engine to none at all, however, he elects to go the full way with intellect. His reasoning, wanting "to be faithful to the evidence that aroused it" (p. 37), affords him facts from which he refuses to be separated. What is known, certain, cannot be denied nor rejected, he stresses --

this is what counts. I can negate everything of that part of me that lives on vague nostalgias, except this desire for unity, this longing



to solve, this need for clarity and cohesion. I can refute everything in this world surrounding me that offends or enraptures me, except this chaos, this sovereign chance and this divine equivalence which springs from anarchy. I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it. (p. 38)

So, reasoning facilitates authentic existence, that condition of being at once aware of the mind's craving for clarity and cohesion, and a world brimful of irrationals and chaos. There is no resolving the absurd tension. Camus, in fact, honors anguish. "What I believe to be true," he concludes,

I must therefore preserve. What seems to me so obvious, even against me, I must support. And what constitutes the basis of that conflict, of that break between the world and my mind, but the awareness of it? If therefore I want to preserve it, I can through a constant awareness, ever revived, ever alert. (p. 38)

Having chosen life, the absurd man comes to value persistence. Constantly tempted by nostalgias, he is bidden to leap.

All that he can reply is that he doesn't fully understand, that it is not obvious. Indeed, he does not want to do anything but what he fully understands. He is assured that this is the sin of pride, but he does not understand the notion of sin; that perhaps hell is in store, but he has not enough imagination to visualize that strange future; that he is losing immortal life, but that seems to him an idle consideration. An attempt is made to get him to admit his guilt. He feels innocent. To tell the truth, that is all he feels -- his irreparable innocence. This is what allows him everything. (p. 39)

Seeking to live only with what he knows, attempting to adjust to what is, and refusing to bring in whatever is uncertain, Camus' hero stands, as it were, eyeball to eyeball with absurdity. Awareness is his thing. Persistence, his strength. His challenge, the curiosity of all: to know whether he can sustain a life utterly without appeal.

Having apprehended and embraced absurdity, Camus' authentic man becomes one with Sisyphus. That is to say, he idealizes freedom, rebellion, and a passion for life. First of all, as a man acknowledging no master, he neither lives with hope, nor frets about his way of being or creating, nor arranges his life as though it had meaning. He is free, therefore, in the sense that he is not constrained to act simply as the father (or engineer, or postal clerk, or political leader) that he is, or is seeking to become. Second, though seeing only a dreadful and hopeless future, he loathes death and rebels against the impulse to flee. Thus he reveals at once an awareness and rejection of death. And, surely, this fact underscores the majesty of his life. Though devoid of blinders, he nonetheless commits his intelligence to a struggle against a reality which transcends it. "The absurd," says Camus,

is his extreme tension, which he maintains constantly by solitary effort, for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day-to-day revolt he gives proof of his own truth, which is defiance. (p. 41)

Finally, Camus' authentic man stands for passion or, if one

prefers, vitality. What counts in his life is the most living. Thus the highest value is placed on the quantity and variety of his experiences, which afford him the means of constantly reviving his awareness. It is up to him, of course,

to be conscious of them. Being aware of one's life, one's revolt, one's freedom, and to the maximum, is living, and to the maximum. (p. 46)

Camus' foremost concern with awareness, and its continual renewal, having been endlessly reiterated, his characterization of absurd creation as a form of living doubly is the least of surprises. Initially, he notes, the work of art lives with its creator, the absurd man. For him, "it is not a matter of explaining and solving, but of experiencing and describing" (p. 70). The process does not, by any means, cease with the description's merely being set down. Indeed, he continues, creation

marks both the death of an experience and its multiplication. It is a sort of monotonous and passionate repetition of the themes already orchestrated by the world . . .  
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Absurd creation, then, is just another mode of experience. As such, it adds to the quantity and variety of experiences available to man and should ostensibly serve to awaken him, constantly renew his awareness, and help in sustaining his

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<sup>5</sup>p. 70. These lines actually imply an idea at least as old as Aristotle, namely the concept of art as a re-presentation of nature. This fact, of course, does nothing to demean Camus' observations as regards absurdist themes.

life in freedom, revolt, and passion.

Here ends the summary of Camus' position on suicide, hope, and the absurd. These notions figure prominently in the content of his drama and, moreover, frequently serve as aids in identifying and interpreting the conceits employed therein; consequently, they should prove useful in the forthcoming analyses of his plays, which now will become my singular concern.

Caligula, like Sartre's The Flies, is set in a distant time and place. Purporting to portray the life of Gaius Caesar (A.D. 12-41),<sup>6</sup> the play says nothing about his rivalry with his cousin Tiberius Gemellus, nor does it say anything specific about the "nature-defeating" construction of a bridge between Balae and Puzzoli, nor his expedition across the Rhine with a force exceeding 200,000 men, nor his plunder of Gaul, nor his "feint" at Britain. The play, in fact, seems largely inspired by Caligula's reputation for corrupt morals, by his apparent madness, by his causing divine honors to be paid him, and by his early death at the hands of conspirators.

The real Caesar suffers from a severe illness in the second year of his reign (A.D. 37-41). Thereafter,

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<sup>6</sup>"Caligula" is the nickname given to him by the men in his father's legions. It is evidently derived from the caligae, a common issue of military sandals, which he wore as a boy.

his conduct changes radically; and he exhibits signs of insanity. Cruel and tyrannical, he comes to relish tortures and beheadings,, especially at banquets. On one occasion he devoutly wishes that his entire people had but one head, that he might sever it with a single blow.

In Camus' portrayal, the incestuous Emperor, distraught over the death of his beloved sister Drusilla, returns from a three-day debauch. Declaring the state (hence himself) to be all, he initiates a series of outrages which in subsequent years features such acts as committing Octavius' wife to a brothel, creating an order of merit based on patronage of prostitutes, having the tongue torn from the mouth of the poet Scipio's father, and accepting a patrician's offer of anything by taking his life, despite the stunned noble's protestations. Eventually finding himself too far out and in quite deep, as it were, he resolves to go the whole way: "Power to the uttermost; willfulness without end."<sup>7</sup> He culminates his chronicle of outrages by killing Caesonia, the sole being to share his life and abet his perverse designs. Conspirators finally slay him.

Caligula, I think, "turns" on the notion of lunacy. That is to say, the Emperor's mania for the moon affords an imaginative equivalent for his yearning to be God. His madness, however, has a special significance, as his first

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<sup>7</sup>Caligula, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York, 1958), p. 50.

comments attest. Having returned by stealth to the palace from whence he fled three days earlier, a draggled Caligula is confronted by Helicon, who recalls the former's absence. After a pause, the burdening begins.

Calig. It was hard to find.  
Helic. What was hard to find?  
Calig. What I was after.  
Helic. Meaning?  
Calig. [in the same matter-of-fact tone]  
 The moon.  
Helic. What?  
Calig. Yes, I wanted the moon.  
Helic. Ah . . . . [Another silence. Helicon approaches Caligula.] And why did you want it?  
Calig. Well . . . it's one of the things I haven't got.  
Helic. I see. And now -- have you fixed it up to your satisfaction?  
Calig. No, I couldn't get it.  
Helic. Too bad!  
Calig. Yes, and that's why I'm tired. [Pauses. Then] Helicon!  
Helic. Yes, Caius?  
Calig. No doubt, you think I'm crazy.  
Helic. As you know well, I never think.  
Calig. Ah, yes . . . . Now, listen! I'm not mad; in fact I never felt so lucid. What happened to me is quite simple; I suddenly felt a desire for the impossible. That's all. [Pauses.] Things are, in my opinion, far from satisfactory.  
Helic. Many people share your opinion.  
Calig. That is so. But in the past I didn't realize it. Now I know. [Still in the same matter-of-fact tone] Really, this world of ours, the scheme of things as they call it, is quite intolerable. That's why I want the moon, or happiness, or eternal life -- something, in fact, that may sound crazy, but which isn't of this world.  
 (pp. 7-8)

The Emperor's remarks touch upon two of Camus' basic notions, absurdity and nostalgia. The simultaneous awareness of a

desire for something unattainable (the moon) and of a loathing for this intolerable world, of course, constitutes absurdity itself. In this regard, the irony of Caligula's insanity is rather important. Much in the manner of Sartre in Kean, therefore, Camus employs madness to emphasize an absurd irony: slumbering, the ruler seems sane; conscious, he is considered crazed.

A pun, however, reveals an incipient nostalgia. The urge to possess the lunar sphere, obviously, goes far to suggest insanity. More than this, though, madness is synonymous with lunacy, which formerly identified a mental imbalance supposed to be influenced by changes of the moon. The pun is further reinforced when Scipio characterizes Caligula's plans for "making the impossible possible" as "a lunatic's pastime" (p. 13).

The irony and the pun together, then, imply that Caligula's lunacy is first lucidity, then madness. Just so long as Caesar maintains absurdity's delicate balance, so too he retains his lucidity. Longing for the moon, or happiness, or eternal life is one thing; believing that he can attain it is quite another. Unfortunately, he contracts a bad case of nostalgia. His lunacy thus assumes a form of existential madness, that is to say, a rage for an absolute. Before very long, in fact, his "moon" takes the form of God, for just as he lusts after the moon, so does he seek to become omnipotent. His tacit reshaping of

himself in the image of God and his comments with respect to original sin both imply such an analogy.

Because he has just lost the woman he most loved, of course, Caligula is not so ready as his advisers to submit to the purported will of whatever powers be. Indeed, the death of young Drusilla is beyond acceptance. Since everyone else seems to acquiesce, however, Caligula determines to press such reasoning to its fullest possible conclusions. Only, henceforth contingency will be an imperial prerogative. He thus begins to re-mold himself in the likeness of God, a move ostensibly sanctioning his own right "to tamper with the scheme of things" (p. 16).

Scipio charges him with blasphemy. By that time, though, Caesar has achieved virtuosity. "For someone who loves power," he intimates,

the rivalry of the gods is rather irksome. Well, I've proved to these imaginary gods that any man, without previous training, if he applies his mind to it, can play their absurd parts to perfection. (p. 43)

The usurpation is openly acknowledged when he eventually sets Scipio straight on the matter of fate. There is no understanding it, he notes;

therefore, I choose to play the part of fate. I wear the foolish, unintelligible face of a professional god. (p. 44)

While such a characterization of the gods is ironic and irreverent, it is rather typical of Camus to take the concept of man created in the image of God, observe that



God is inept and cruel in His conduct toward man, and thus portray Caligula (who simulates the role of God) as whimsical, violent beyond belief, unconstrained to act with apparent care or concern.

It is through his treatment of inherent guilt that Camus encourages most strongly the temptation to take Caligula as a representation of the Christian God. Once determined to promulgate his omnipotence, he clangs a gong, calling,

Let the accused come forward. I want my criminals, and they are all criminals. [Still striking the gong.] Bring in the condemned men. I must have my public. Judges, witnesses, accused -- all are sentenced to death without a hearing.  
(p. 17)

Three years later this very concept is etched in the legal logic of the "Monograph on Execution":

A man dies because he is guilty. A man is guilty because he is one of Caligula's subjects. Now all men are Caligula's subjects. Ergo, all men are guilty and shall die. It is only a matter of time and patience. (p. 29)

The conceit, we recall, has Caligula's lusting after the moon paralleling his pursuit of omnipotence. Both betray a rage for the impossible. Caesar, of course, never does possess the lunar sphere. Nor is he able to sustain his self-deification. On the contrary, he even gets his species straight. He is not God, merely another anguished human anticipating his own imminent death. Thus he peers into a mirror and shouts, "Caligula! You, too; you, too, are guilty" (p. 72).

For Caesar there has been neither peace from pain, nor respite from fear, nor immunity from ultimate contingency. Before him, joy alone, lies "that emptiness beyond all understanding, in which the heart has rest" (p. 73). Dying is the final hurdle. There, among his race of guilty folk, he receives the thrusts of Scipio, Cherea, and the others. Choking, laughing, scorning to the very end, he cries, "I'm still alive" (p. 74).

Not Caligula, but God perhaps, or chaos.

The Misunderstanding is a tragedy of errors. Set in central Europe, the play depicts Jan's homecoming and ensuing death at the hands of his mother and sister Martha. Against his wife Maria's wishes, Jan chooses to return incognito after an absence of twenty years, hoping at once to fulfill a felt duty to bring them money and happiness, and to ascertain from the outside, so to speak, how things are. What he does not know, of course, is that his mother and sister deal in tea and treachery, which is to say they accommodate guests at their inn, "toast" the apparently wealthy ones with drugged tea, cast them into the river, and then confiscate their money and belongings. Jan they take for rich; consequently, it is mere hours before he goes to a watery grave. A passport among his papers subsequently makes known his identity, a revelation which triggers his mother's suicide and dooms Martha to seeming despair.

On a figurative level, the drama affords certain enticements. Jan's name (meaning "God is gracious") and mention of him as a prodigal son, for example, induce tentative hypotheses as regards his implicit identity. His eventual death at dusk, moreover, and the various responses to it by such characters as the mother, Martha, and Maria also encourage an incipient impulse to treat The Misunderstanding as an elaborate allegory. Once that task is attempted, however, the effort becomes labored and simply bogs down.

A more promising tack, I believe, is again to approach the work through its conceits, the imaginative equivalents this time being two -- the inn, for the world; and the old manservant, for God. The discernment and interpretation of these tropes constitute a rewarding venture, affording as they eventually do another glimpse of the contours of absurdity. At that juncture, too, the entire work becomes accessible; for given the familiar context of Camus' absurd universe, one of a sudden comprehends the significance of the mother's voluntary death, Jan's and Maria's nostalgias, and Martha's conversion to awareness.

Comments by several characters tend to confirm the inn as an absurd microcosm. The setting's unique aspects begin to surface when Jan seeks to undermine Martha's disinterest through familiarity, by speaking of his marriage and by calling attention to his wedding band. Her response

is curt: "It's none of my business to look at your hands . . . ." <sup>8</sup> She then reaffirms his rights as a guest, noting that he will be granted every attention to which he is entitled; but, she emphasizes, "I fail to see why we should go out of our way to give you special reasons for satisfaction" (p. 91). Jan persists in probing her aloofness, however, and later wonders aloud how she would receive the long-absent brother, whom she mentioned earlier. He would find "exactly what an ordinary guest can count on," declares Martha: "amiable indifference, no more and no less" (p. 96).

Later, in his bedroom, Jan looks across the way at Maria's window. Sorely tempted to quit his unpromising venture, he clings precariously to his resolve. "When a man starts something," he argues, "he has no business to look back. It's in this room everything will be settled" (p. 101). He stays for tea with Martha. Before losing consciousness, though, he announces his intention to leave immediately. A future visit is possible; but just now, he confides,

I feel that I have made a mistake, I have  
no business being here . . . . I have a  
feeling that this house isn't for me.  
(p. 110)

He remains, of course. Though touched by his passing, the mother sees it as a relinquishment of life's burdens,

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<sup>8</sup>The Misunderstanding, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York, 1958), p. 90.

as a release from anxious decision-making, as a welcome reprieve from stress, strain, and things to be done. The final mention of the house's not being for him, nonetheless, continues to haunt her. Martha forbids sympathy with tea, however. "Of course it is not his home," she counters.

For that matter it is nobody's home. No one will ever find warmth or comfort or contentment in this house. Had he realized that sooner, he'd have been spared, and spared us, too. He would have spared our having to teach him that this room is made for sleeping in, and this world for dying in. (p. 117)

The foregoing remarks depict the inn as some kind of place, hardly the warm, friendly, pleasing, accommodating establishment commonly envisioned and anticipated by one set to journey. The irony, obviously, is that the inn is a similitude for the world, for it has all the markings of the absurdist chaos of things, what with its coldness, indifference, alienation, estrangement, antagonism, irrationality, uncertainty, injustice, and death.

To enhance his depiction of bleak reality, Camus offers the old manservant as a concrete equivalent for the God obvious in an absurd universe. The old man speaks but once, and then only to utter the final negative of the play. Otherwise he merely sits in the public room, wanders aimlessly about, or startles the guests by his abrupt appearances. In other words, he is silent and awfully conspicuous. Two incidents, though, more than tacitly encourage his being taken for a kind of absurd God. In one

instance, Jan is in his bedroom, mulling over his desire to leave. Lonely, he voices his anxiety.

I feel it again, that vague uneasiness I used to feel in the old days -- here, in the hollow of my chest -- like a raw place that the least movement irritates . . . . And I know what it is. It's fear, fear of the eternal loneliness, fear that there is no answer. And who could there be to answer in a hotel bedroom?

(p. 107)

At this point he tests the bell. That done, the old manservant responds, then departs without speaking a word. Jan's reaction is curious: "but he doesn't speak. That's no answer" (p. 107).

In the second instance suggesting the servant's implicit identity, Martha nags the grieving Maria with absurdity. While the widow continues to weep for lost love, Martha offers cold advice.

Pray your God to harden you to stone. It's the happiness He has assigned Himself, and the one true happiness. Do as He does, be deaf to all appeals, and turn your heart to stone while there is still time. (p. 133)

Left alone, Maria ponders the shambles of her life, now a desert too harsh for solitary venturing. Her thoughts flee upward.

I place myself in your hands. Have pity, turn toward me. Hear me and raise me from the dust, O Heavenly Father. (p. 133)

Immediately a door opens; and the old manservant steps forth. In a clear, firm tone, he asks if someone called. Then to Maria's ensuing request, "Be kind and say that you

will help me," he answers, "No" (p. 134).

The old manservant emerges as something less than a menial's glass of fashion, surely; yet his silence, aloofness, and indifference seem to qualify him eminently for the kind of innkeeping practiced by the mother and Martha. Within the figurative scheme of things, moreover, he suits his role perfectly. The inn, of course, has already been fixed as an absurd microcosm and as such, stands for a reality devoid of purpose and meaning, a reality in which the silence of the universe precludes utterly the obviation of anything remotely resembling omnipotence. Here, then, the old fellow acquires another significance, for his silence implies dumbness; his failure to answer, deafness; his inability or unwillingness to act, ineptitude or indifference. Thus as a species of God impotent, he is a suspect servant of man and an appropriate adjunct to the chaos pervading a hostile habitat.

Having glimpsed the visage of Absurdity, virtually everyone's darkling wallflower, the beholders react verily. The mother, for example, elects suicide. Prior to Jan's death, she apparently maintains herself somewhere between hope and silence. On one occasion she tells Martha of her weariness and desire for peace, then further confides, "some evenings I feel almost like taking a religion" (p. 78). This nostalgia she considers frivolous, however. Indeed, silence is her secret solace: she culti-

vates quietude. Thus to Martha's inquiry concerning the newly-arrived guest, she responds,

My sight's none too good, you know, and I didn't really look at his face. I've learned from experience that it's better not to look at them too closely. It's easier to kill what one doesn't know. (p. 79)

Whereas her comments reveal an anticipated desire to avoid the dys-ease of a murdering conscience, they imply much about the quiet mentality and absurdity as well. The absurd, of course, can also be quite unsettling; and for the faint-hearted, a tactical distance often affords seeming safety. The mother, therefore, could just as well say, "It is easier to cope with what one doesn't know." Word of Jan's identity, unfortunately, shatters her silence.

Absurdity is an almost equally difficult realization for Jan and Maria, for both are virtually immersed in personal nostalgias. Jan's chimeras are happiness and God. Maria opposes his obsession with so-called duties. When she cites his plan's likely hitches and identifies his inspiration as "the voice of . . . loneliness, not of love," however, he dismisses her counsel.

God will see to the rest and He knows, too, that in acting thus I'm not forgetting you. Only -- no one can be happy in exile and estrangement. (p. 87)

He proceeds with his scheme and, in time, comes to apprehend absurdity. In the moments preceding final slumber, he confesses the truth implicit in every absurd consciousness: "this house isn't for me" (p. 110). Unable to ac-



cept this realization like an absurd man, he expresses a wish to depart forthwith.

Maria's fancies surface during the accounting of her and Martha's respective losses -- for her, Jan; for Martha, the mother. Her persistent mention of love, accidents, misfortune, and sorrow, though, frustrate Martha. Eventually the latter goes for the jugular, as it were, declaring, "I have yet to drive you to despair" (p. 131). The love and tears, she observes, are odious. And there has been no accident. "On the contrary, it's now that we are in the normal order of things . . ." (p. 132). Moreover, she insists,

neither for him nor for us, neither in life  
nor in death, is there any peace or homeland.  
(p. 132)

After advising Maria to sue her God for a matching heart of stone, she leaves. Maria's prayer, as indicated earlier, is for a reversal of Martha's "normal order of things." The invocation, unfortunately, brings only the manservant and his subsequent refusal to help.

Martha emerges as Camus' absurd heroine. To begin with, she is an unlikely candidate, doting as she does on "someday." "Once we have enough money in hand," she tells her worried mother,

and I can escape from this shut-in valley; once we can say good-by to this inn and this dreary town where it's always raining; once we've forgotten this land of shadows -- ah, then, when my dream has come true, and we're living beside the sea, then you will see me smile. (p. 79)

It is the "land of endless sunshine beside the sea" (p. 84), in fact, where ostensibly "the sun kills every question" (p. 81), from whence Jan has come. Martha, however, misses the irony implicit in her brother's unhappiness. Instead, she apprehends only the soothing intimations of his remembrance. Shamelessly confessing her longing for the golden sun, the sea and the sand, she adds, "what I picture makes me blind to everything around me" (p. 104).

The morning after Jan's death, she is ecstatic. "I feel," she declares, "as if I'd been born again, to a new life; at last I'm going to a country where I shall be safe" (p. 119). On the matter of place and security, obviously, she is dead wrong. Ironically, though, she is right about being born again, for her imminent conversion to awareness constitutes life in another dimension.

Death comes first to her mother, then to her dream. The second passing is an especial tragedy. "All my life," she protests,

was spent waiting for this great wave that was  
to lift me up and sweep me far away, and now  
I know it will never come again. (p. 124)

The dream may have vanished; but Martha's mind shows new signs of vitality. That dread valley and sunless existence may well be exile itself, and be irremediable in addition. Nonetheless, she will embrace neither voluntary death nor philosophical self-annihilation. "I have no intention," she announces,

of rolling my eyes heavenward or pleading for forgiveness before I die. In that southern land, guarded by the sea, to which one can escape, where one can breathe freely, press one's body to another body, roll in the waves -- to that sea-guarded land the gods have no access. But here one's gaze is cramped on every side, everything is planned to make one look up in humble supplication. I hate this narrow world in which we are reduced to gazing up at God. (p. 125)

While she continues to speak of her dream world and even God, her words really depict the absurd balance, that is, a yearning for monolithic creation (to which, significantly, the gods have no access) and a loathing for the bleakness, chaos, and hostility of her present world.

In sum, then, the conceits imply that this world is the worst of all possible worlds and the obvious God, the most impotent of all possible gods. To see existence as other than futile, to see normality as other than hopeless, to see life or death as other than unreceptive and antagonistic: these are man's illusions. And they constitute the misunderstanding.

Martha now comprehends. Hers is a life utterly lacking in appeal. Yet she persists in rebelling against death and in scorning God. She elects to preserve the absurd tension of longing and loathing.

State of Siege is an allegory which conveys meaning on at least two levels, social and political. Superficially the play depicts a crisis in a fortified Spanish city. Af-

ter a comet flashes overhead and local officials have momentarily reassured the restive citizens, The Plague and his Secretary arrive, vividly demonstrate their destructive capabilities, and issue an ultimatum demanding the government's forfeiture of authority. Compliance comes quickly. The pair then proceed to institute and consolidate a rule based upon the abolition of private life, total submission to the state, busy silence, and rigid regulation. Smilers, they enforce acquiescence through fear. Eventually Diego emerges as a leader to inspire the cowering masses; and resurgent forces sweep The Plague from power, not before he strikes down Diego, however.

On the social level, the drama delineates how disease (The Plague) and death (The Secretary) come to an ignorant and subjugated people; how an inept officialdom (the Governor and the alcaldes) attempts, in turn, to ignore their presence, dismiss their significance, eradicate, contain, and minimize them; how, after having failed dismally, society senses the mastery of the pestilence (i.e., efforts to deal with it collapse); and how only through time and amendment do confidence and normalcy return.

As a political allegory, the play represents the displacement of a backward regime (the Governor and his supporters) by an ascendant tyrant (The Plague), who employs fear of death (The Secretary) to establish a system which

primarily serves to perpetuate his rule and only incidentally seeks to improve the quality of life. Aided and abetted by collaborators (e.g., Judge Casado and Nada), he retains power until Diego (whose name, being the equivalent of "Jaime," "James," and "Jacob," means "the supplanter") and his cohorts (the resistance) overthrow his government (in this case, reclaim Victoria).

State of Siege may also be a philosophical allegory. As such, it appears to represent an encounter with absurdity (death and disease), days of anguish (seeming loss of Victoria), a time when nothing seems forbidden (Diego's attempt to save his own life by threatening another's), the acceptance of absurdity (repudiation of *The Secretary* [voluntary death] and *The Plague* [nostalgia, philosophical suicide]), and absurd heroism (Diego's sacrifice for Victoria). The philosophical substance, unfortunately, does not lend itself to the orderly and easy apprehension which characterizes the social and political content of the work. Indeed, one must extend himself unnaturally to discover the systematization necessary to justify this third type of allegory.

The conceit, I feel, affords a more effective means by which the drama's philosophical implications may be identified and worked out. First, it permits the apprehension of *The Plague* as an actualized equivalent of mock-absurdity. That accomplished, the other aspects of the

play become reasonably accessible, for what *The Plague* offers is false hope or, if one prefers, nostalgia. Thus the people become significant as silent minds; Judge Casado, as a self-seeker wavering between absurdity and nostalgia; Nada, as a cynical collaborator vacillating between silence and absurdity; and Diego, as an absurd hero. Not surprisingly, then, State of Siege embodies certain notions strongly resembling the concepts outlined in The Myth of Sisyphus.

As a species of mock-absurdity, *The Plague* betrays two distinctive aspects. First, he bears all the markings peculiar to the absurd -- coldness, indifference, antagonism, uncertainty, insecurity, injustice, and death. Second, and this is what exposes him as a nostalgia in disguise, he professes a system ostensibly affording a degree of certainty and security. In return, of course, he requires total submission.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Among certain French existentialists and absurdists, "pestilence" has become a virtual neologism having three common referents -- absurdity, injustice, and tyranny. Antonin Artaud (The Theater and Its Double, trans. Mary C. Richards [New York, 1958]) implies its use in the first sense when he calls it a "double" for the theatre. Conditions under the contagion constituting the most obvious illustration of absurd existence, it follows that Artaud, like Camus, sees art as a representation of absurdity. The plague, according to Artaud, divests society of its façade. It signals the collapse of order, "every infringement of morality, every psychological disaster . . ." (p. 15). Among the living, frenzy prevails:

the obedient and virtuous son kills his father;  
the chaste man performs sodomy upon his neigh-

Abundant evidence bears out this characterization of The Plague. When he first arrives, for example, he

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bors. The lecher becomes pure. The miser throws his gold in handfuls out the window. The warrior hero sets fire to the city he once risked his life to save. (p. 24)

And so it goes, on and on, this confusion, this chaos, this epiphany. Thus the plague causes the mask to fall, revealing "the lie, the slackness, baseness, and hypocrisy of our world . . ." (p. 31). The opportunities for awareness are, in turn, multiplied because the pestilence

shakes off the asphyxiating inertia of matter which invades even the clearest testimony of the senses; and in revealing to collectivities of men their dark power, their hidden force, it invites them to take, in the face of destiny, a superior and heroic attitude they would never have assumed without it. (pp. 31-32)

In The Plague (trans. Stuart Gilbert [New York, 1948]), Camus uses the contagion as a metaphor for both absurdity and injustice. During the ordeal in Oran, for instance, Dr. Rieux speaks of his continuing struggle against "a never ending [sic] defeat" (p. 118), observing further that "since the order of the world is shaped by death," it is better even for God

if we refuse to believe in Him and struggle with all our might against death, without raising our eyes toward the heaven where He sits in silence. (pp. 117-118)

When all is done, Rieux sides with the victims and shares with the survivors

the only certitudes they had in common -- love, exile, and suffering. Thus he can truly say that there was not one of their anxieties in which he did not share, no predicament of theirs that was not his. (p. 272)

Being plague-stricken, then, implies an encounter with absurdity, for lacking divine assistance, the people are confined to Oran (i.e., exiled to the world), suffer injustice on all sides, and daily have their awareness of death renewed. Rieux and his breed of decent humanity, fortunately,

is accompanied by The Secretary (Death), who is remarkably presentable. "Smiling, punctual, trim, tidy," and exuding

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add love, that charity which makes absurdity the more bearable. The chronicler Jean Tarrou, in contrast to Rieux, equates the plague with all earthly evils, a fact increasingly evident in the account of his agonized and haunted past: of how he one day visited his father's assizes only to see a "poor owl" sentenced to death by a blood-lusting jury; of how he realized his own complicity in the murders of thousands of people by failing to resist "acts and principles which could only end that way" (p. 227); of how he set about the wearying business of fixing the plagues of this world and refusing, insofar as possible, "to join forces with pestilences" (p. 229), electing rather to identify himself with the victims and restricting his odyssey through life to the path of sympathy.

The closing parable in Sartre's The Flies, moreover, implies a parallel between tyranny and pestilence. Having declined his victims' throne, Orestes stays long enough to proclaim a kingdom without subjects, a people abiding in freedom. Then he tells of the "plague of rats in Scyros" (The Flies, p. 127) and of the flute-player who led them away. In recounting the tale, however, the prince acts out the part. Thus just as the man of Scyros trooped through the marketplace, so does the son of Agamemnon; and just as the musician led the rats from Scyros, so too Orestes leads the flies from Argos. The parable, which might well be titled "The Flutist and the Flies," tacitly characterizes the Zeus-Aegisthus dictatorship as a plague of blowflies, and appropriately so, for the all-seeing flies of fear have been a veritable gag for the people of Argos.

Eugene Ionesco's Rhinoceros (see chapter IV), too, "turns" on the notion of contagion, depicting as it does a story in which one, then several, and eventually all but one solitary individual are smitten by the raging "rhinocerotitis," which transforms them into crude and bludgeoning pachyderms that thunder in the streets, causing the very foundations of society to tremble and collapse. Here, however, it is the outsider Bérenger who becomes the exile and the sufferer. The converts themselves dwell in brutish and aggressive voluntarism. Their implicit short-sightedness (cf. with the near-sightedness of rhinoceroses), though, is a likely indication of a coming ordeal.



the "sunny temperament" common to virtually all of Camus' nostalgias, she selflessly credits the current ease of her work to being "surrounded by fresh flowers and smiles."<sup>10</sup>

Once enshrined in the palace, The Plague offers organization. "As from today," he lectures, "you are going to die in an orderly manner" (p. 171). Previously felled by cold, accidents, loneliness, murder, honor, et cetera, now they will have the security of the lists. The guesswork gone, anything beyond earthly life will be no one's illusion. So, he adds,

you are going to be rational and tidy; the wearing of badges will be compulsory. Besides the mark on your groins you will have the plague star under your armpits, for all to see -- meaning that you are marked down for elimination. (p. 172)

The dynamics of the system eventually emerge. All men are mortal -- period. They have only life itself; and knowing that, they treasure it above all else. Death fills their days with dread. The Plague heightens this awareness of nothingness and thereby reduces them to a state of debility and dependence. Then he eases their anxiety by offering them a relatively meaningful and secure existence. Obviously emphasizing this advantage and implying, moreover, his system's harmony with the way of the world, he appeals for cooperation.

I bring you order, silence, total justice. I don't ask you to thank me for this; it's only

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<sup>10</sup>State of Siege, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York, 1958), p. 162.

natural, what I am doing for you. Only I must insist on your collaboration. (p. 173)

Nostalgias, one may recall, are for silent mentalities, or ones effecting quietude. Such minds fail to observe or deny what they observe. Under the glowing scrutiny of consciousness, however, chimeras betray their monstrous aspects. Hence Nada depicts another version of mock-absurdity in his advice to a petitioner at the food office. "Choose to live on your knees rather than to die standing," he says;

thus and thus only will the world acquire that neat, nicely ordered layout whose template is the gibbet, and be shared between well-drilled ants and the placid dead: a puritan paradise without food, fields, or flowers, in which angel police float around on pinions of red tape among beatific citizens nourished on rules and regulations and groveling before this decorated God, whose delight it is to destroy and doggedly to dissipate the dear delusions of a too delicious age. (p. 186)

The Plague's implicit identity continues to surface. A fancy masquerading as reality, he has insinuated his worthiness and become increasingly strident in the insistence upon universal servility. "Decorated God" that he is, he stakes his incumbency on fear, trading heavily upon the people's disposition to kneel "rather than to die standing."

Diego, a convert to absurdity, is not one to bend at the altar of fear. He knows voluntary death and philosophical self-annihilation as mere temptations. Now, however, dictatorial nostalgia threatens to impose itself upon his existence. A species of death in life, it affords no

choice whatever. Thus Diego protests to The Secretary:

I am of a race that used to honor death as much as life. But then your masters came along, and now both living and dying are dishonorable. (p. 205)

How to cope with enforced nostalgia being the problem, Diego hits upon a saving strategy. He treats it as fear, and deals with it accordingly. That is, he confronts, acknowledges, and assimilates it, then disavows the very human tenet of life at any rate. He thereby discovers the courage to be. At this point, significantly, he sheds his plague mask, which provides protection from forces outside his being. It is, after all, the enemy within that poses the main threat. The rage for life no longer aborting his every affirmative gesture, he sustains his absurd awareness. The Plague, that is to say paternalistic tyranny, like many another self-announced panacea, holds no sway, The Secretary concedes, "when a man conquers his fear . . . ." (p. 207).

Confronting his adversary, Diego repudiates the former's claim to uniqueness. "For centuries," he declares,

gentlemen of your kind have been infecting the world's wounds on the pretence of healing them, and none the less continuing to boast of their treatment -- because no one had the courage to laugh them out of court. (pp. 121-122)

Now properly diagnosed, The Plague senses the coming cure. He shamelessly defends his system's policy of limited salvation, insisting like most obsessed dictators that his

worldly ways best suit the times and the nature of man.

"In the old days," he reminds Diego,

you professed to fear God and his caprices.  
But your God was an anarchist who played fast  
and loose with logic. He thought He could be  
both autocratic and kindhearted at the same  
time -- but that was obviously wishful thinking,  
if I may put it so. I, anyhow, know better. I  
stand for power and power alone. Yes, I have  
chosen domination which, as you have learned,  
can be more formidable than Hell itself. (p. 226)

The "decorated God" (i.e., chaos with window-dressing) may simulate absurdity, but he still traffics in wishful thinking; that is, he panders to mankind's desire to evade the coming nothingness. The elixir of old was grace, for it promised immunity from the rigors of almighty Hell. In His expansive omnipotence, God pledged an infinite lease on life. Now the diluted elixir is The Plague's favor, affording as it purportedly does some measure of freedom from fear. With its limited potency, it promises a restricted lease on life.

If caprices do not wear well, the creations of dread seriousness are utterly unfitting. Mod-absurdity proving a short-lived fad, the true article reappears. The Secretary returns to the House of Absurdity. The smile, trimness, and tidiness go; "with a death's-head face" (p. 224), she accentuates the realistic lines of former years. "I have not forgotten what I was before you came along," she tells the deposed designer.

Then I was free, an ally of the accidental. No one hated me, I was the visitant who checks the

march of time, shapes destinies, and stabilizes love. I stood for the permanent. But you have made me the handmaid of logic, rules, and regulations. And I have lost the knack I had of sometimes being helpful.  
(p. 225)

Thus ends her affiliation with fashionable nostalgias.

What we have here is a happy ending, as happy an ending as absurdity implies. God is nostalgia; earthly systems, wishful thinking. Annihilation of the mind and voluntary death are unsatisfactory solutions. There is only the reasoning that yearns for cohesion and the world which nullifies every effort to comprehend. Thus with his longing and loathing, and with the restoration of his freedom to choose, Diego is the ally of absurdity. One imagines him, like Sisyphus, to be happy.

State of Siege, then, "turns" on The Plague, who is a personification for simulated absurdity. Once this conceit is discerned and interpreted, the other aspects of the drama fall into place. The common citizens, for instance, become the very model of silent minds, what with the administration's slogan of "One plague, one people" (p. 189) and its issuance of vinegar pads for mouthpieces, which will serve not only as a protection against disease, but also aids to "discretion and the art of silence" (p. 169).

Within the absurdist framework, moreover, Judge Casado is guilty of promiscuous nostalgia, foully whispering his momentary commitment into first the ear of the Church,

then the ear of Tyranny, but in truth indulging his own desire for diversion. (His wife classes him among "those who count their pennies and cling to their miserable hoard" [p. 192].) Nada, too, is indiscriminate. An avowed adherent of nothing, he is cynical, whereas the Judge is hypocritical. Thus when Casado accuses him of irreverence, Nada does not hesitate to approve of God. "I read in books," he adds,

that it's wiser to be hand in glove with Him than to be his victim. What's more, I doubt if God is really to blame. Once men start upsetting the apple-cart and slaughtering each other, you soon discover that God -- though He, too, knows the ropes -- is a mere amateur compared with them. (pp. 140-141)

The passage reveals two of Nada's foremost impulses, a disposition to collaborate and a tendency toward absurdity. A felt commitment to nothing, of course, suggests the ease with which he can embrace evolving nostalgias. In addition, his iconoclasm places him on the fringes of awareness. There, unfortunately, he pirouettes.

It is significant, I think, that Nada believes "in nothing in the world, except wine" (p. 141). This significance, moreover, is heightened immeasurably when he climbs from among the victims on the death-cart. Outraged, he tells The Secretary that he is drunk, not dead. When she asks his reasons, he explains, "It's my way of suppressing" (p. 178). The meaning here is too clear to mistake. Called "half-wit" (p. 139) by his fellow citizens, Nada is exis-

tentially just that -- half aware and half silent. His need of a suppresser, however, suggests an awareness too grim to preserve. Thus, with his artificially imposed silence, in another sense he seems properly placed among the dead.

Diego, finally, becomes especially important as Camus' first truly engaged dramatic hero. As such, his self-proclaimed truth "neither fear, nor hatred" (p. 216) might well become the tenet of every aspiring absurd hero.

Without recounting here Diego's initial time of troubles, it is possible to apprehend his moment of crisis. A fugitive who has failed to enlist the aid of the panicky Casado family, he confides his anguish:

it's as if the bottom had dropped out of the world I know, and everything were falling in ruins. My mind is reeling. (p. 191)

Thereafter comes an intimacy with fear, and the resolve to treasure life, but not too much. Then, having regained his courage to be, again confident and rebellious, he tells The Secretary of man's hidden solace,

an innate power that you will never vanquish,  
a gay madness born of mingled fear and courage,  
unreasoning yet victorious through time.  
(p. 206)

Diego's crucial realization is the place of both fear and hatred in the life of man. Thus he fears death, but not to the extent of ceasing to affirm himself through action; hates death, but not to the extent of preserving his life at any price. Clearly, then, he stands apart

from Judge Casado and Nada, who readily submit to nostalgia and silence in order to preserve life alone.

Diego's opportunity for heroism arises when he is offered his life, provided that he leave and, in effect, cede the city to The Plague. He balks.

Dieg. But those men's freedom belongs to them;  
I have no rights over it.

Plag. No one can be happy without causing  
harm to others. That is the world's  
justice.

Dieg. A justice that revolts me and to  
which I refuse to subscribe. (p. 221)

There will be no collaborator's security for Diego. He knows by now that man lives in fret alone, and that his adversary's offer of ease is the disease of every absurd "halfwit" who rightly sees the world's chaos and disorder, but who wrongly assumes that nothing is forbidden. The world may lack justice, as the Chorus observes,

but there are limits. And those who stand  
for no rules at all, no less than those who  
want to impose a rule for everything over-  
step the limit. (p. 231)

Thus, in the dawn of absurd indignation, The Plague goes with the wind and Nada commits himself to the sea.

Set in czarist Russia, The Just Assassins represents an episode in the emergence of the Communist Party. Boris Annenkov's section has the Grand Duke Serge marked down for execution; and all arrangements are complete. Ivan Kaliayev, a sensitive idealist with a flair for individuality, is to be the bomber, a choice challenged by



Stepan Fedorov, a hard-lining comrade just released from prison. Boris, nonetheless, upholds the selection of Ivan.

Kaliayev encounters difficulties. Seeing the Grand Duchess and two children in the death carriage, he balks at throwing his explosive. This failure to proceed, understandably, triggers a heated debate at headquarters, where the reactions range from Stepan's charge of faint-heartedness to Dora's praise for sparing innocents.

A second attempt succeeds. Subsequently captured and confined to Pugatchev Tower, Kaliayev disdains tenders of leniency and fanatically proceeds to a death which he accepts in the coldly logical terms of murder for murder -- his own for the Grand Duke's.

First performed twenty months after the staging of Sartre's Dirty Hands, Camus' play bears a remarkable resemblance to its predecessor. Sartre's work is a study of the Party in Illyria; his, the Party in Russia. Sartre's features a perceptive idealist (Hugo Barine, code-named "Raskòlnikov") craving a chance to act; his, a sensitive visionary (Ivan, called "the poet") thirsting for martyrdom. Sartre's turns on a crisis having ambiguous implications (Hugo's hesitancy to kill Hoederer); his, on a contingency fraught with controversy (the unexpected appearance of the children, whom Ivan spares).

The portrayal of the Party reveals an even more striking parallel. Sartre characterizes it as Being-in-

itself (i.e., existence without awareness); Camus, as a nostalgia nurtured in a conspiracy of silence. Both playwrights, moreover, limn mindless adherents (Sartre, George and Slick; Camus, Stepan Fedorov and Alexis Voinov); partisan arbiters (Sartre, Hoederer; Camus, Boris Annenkov); and discerning skeptics (Sartre, Hugo; Camus, Dora Dulebov and, to some extent, Ivan Kaliayev).

Camus' Party is an actualized conceit for nostalgia. An examination of the organization's aims, its means, and its reception among adherents bears out this contention. Initially the Party's goal is given as mere freedom. Boris, for example, announces that the execution of Serge will "bring nearer the day when the Russian people are set free," adding that killings will continue "until the land is given back to its rightful owners, to the people."<sup>11</sup> Later, when Dora inquires about the recipients of the coming freedom, Annenkov envisions a martyred membership.

The path we have chosen . . . leads to life.  
To life for others. Russia will live. Do you  
remember what Yanek used to say? "Russia will  
become the land of our dream." (p. 295)

Dreams and, particularly, martyrdom pervade the dialogs of devotion. The adoration of the Party, though, has a deeper significance, as events at Pugatchev Tower indicate. Kaliayev seeks to persuade Foka that a socialistic world is for everyone. A fellow inmate and also the prison's executioner, the latter shrugs him off as a wayward

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<sup>11</sup>The Just Assassins, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York, 1958), p. 237.

noble who should be back home luxuriating in preferment.

Kali. No. It is made for you, my friend. There are too many crimes, there's too much poverty in the world today. When some day there is less poverty, there will be fewer crimes. If Russia were free you would not be here.

Foka. That's as it may be. One thing's sure: whether one's free or not, it doesn't pay to take a drop too much.

Kali. That's so. Only a man usually takes a drink because he is oppressed. A day will come when there's no more point in drinking, when nobody will feel ashamed, neither the fine gentleman, nor the poor devil who is down and out. We shall be brothers and justice will make our hearts transparent. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Foka. Yes. The Kingdom of God, they call it.

Kali. No, you're wrong there, brother. God can't do anything to help; justice is our concern. (p. 278)

Mingling serious commentary with effective humor, Camus rather cleverly implies the nostalgic nature of Ivan's profession. All these impending alterations in man's condition Foka has obviously heard recited before and, ironically, he spontaneously equates them with divine intervention. His apparent indifference, of course, suggests two things -- 1) the unlikelihood of the Kingdom of God and 2) the improbability of Ivan's Kingdom of Man. In another sense, therefore, Foka is an executioner, for the apprehension of nostalgias as such bodes their eventual death.

In a subsequent confrontation with the Grand Duchess, who has come to offer pardon, Ivan repudiates her characterization of his deed as "crime," declaring rather, "All

I remember is an act of justice" (p. 286). Despite his protestations of freedom and deliverance, however, the widow classes him with the very man he slew. (Stepan earlier calls Serge "that bloodthirsty tyrant" [p. 236].)

"The same voice!" she cries.

You have exactly the same voice as his. But, I suppose, all men use the same tone when they speak of justice. He used to say "That is just," and nobody had a right to question it. (p. 286)

The several aspects of Kaliayev's surrogate become increasingly evident. Having substituted Party for God, justice for heaven, Ivan has little interest in forgiveness and traditional salvation. This the Duchess momentarily realizes when she says,

I came to lead you back to God, but now I realize that you wish to be your own judge; to save yourself, unaided. (p. 290)

"Dreams," "martyrdom," "justice," and "salvation" are, in a sense, code-words for nostalgia. The absurd, it should be remembered, is a paired situation, the simultaneous awareness of a world brim full of chaos, on the one hand, and a reasoning yearning for cohesion, on the other. Authentic man maintains life and struggles against creation as he finds it, but he has no illusions about resolving the tension between his craving and his loathing. The unity he desires, he knows he can never have. Inauthentic man, in contrast, sometimes unwisely translates "The Lament of Longing" as a mandate for seizing authority and forcibly implementing systems ostensibly affording order, answers,

and even salvation. Ignoring the evidence of the world and capitulating to the impulse to unify and clarify, and thus profaning absurdity as only a consciousness out of kilter can, he mistakes nostalgia for mission, mission for license, and eventually enshrines his kind as The Righteous (Les Justes).

The Party's aims, in fact, reflect that dangerous mix of high intentions and low means which commonly impels aspiring moguls and hoodwinks a credulous public. Freedom, of course, is a precious commodity, especially among those impoverished by the demands of tyranny. But deliverance is seldom gratuitous. More often, the price is high, occasionally prohibitive. The needy, unfortunately awed by glossy "new and improved" systems, often waive their right to know and make hasty commitments.

The proffered freedom and justice are attended by certain liabilities, which can only be discerned by scrutinizing the fine print of Party policy. Vowing obedience to Boris and brushing aside his reminder that such oaths are unnecessary among "brothers," Stepan Fedorov proclaims the movement's first requirement, discipline.

The Revolutionary Socialist Party cannot do without it. We must be disciplined if we're to kill the Grand Duke and put an end to tyranny. (p. 236)

The regimen envisioned by Stepan obviously implies total subservience to the Party. The organization, in turn,

seems best served by deceit, suppression of individuality, and murder.

Duplicity plays an integral part in this system dedicated to saving mankind. Voinov, a perceptive former student who misses the candor of past debates, complains of this when he tells of his uneasiness among police agents, further confiding, "It's not that I'm afraid; only somehow I can't get used to lying." Stepan, though, reassures him: "Everybody lies. What's important is to lie well" (p. 239).

Suppression of individuality is another seeming dictate of the Party. Thus while Ivan's "private signal" (p. 240) of three rings, evident pride over his peddler's disguise, and poetic talk of quiet places and eternal summer noticeably perturb him, Stepan will not tolerate gallant pronouncements concerning voluntary death. "To commit suicide," he interjects, "a man must have a great love for himself. A true revolutionary cannot love himself." Then he offers Ivan some pointed advice: "We haven't joined together to admire each other. We have joined together to get something done" (p. 243). To put to rest any doubts as regards the threat of personality cults, Stepan recounts the evidence.

You change signals, you enjoy dressing as a peddler, you recite poems, you want to throw yourself under horse's feet, and now you're talking about suicide. [Looks him in the

eyes.] No, I can't say you inspire me with confidence. (p. 243)

Deceit and the cultivation of sameness are really means to a greater means, assassination. Murder, not just the execution of Serge alone, but systematic slaughter is the Party's design from the very outset, as the words of Boris attest when he proclaims that the Duke's passing will hasten the day of freedom and will serve notice of the larger campaign, for

the Imperial Court will learn that we are resolved to carry on the reign of terror, of which this bomb is the beginning . . . .  
(p. 237)

Several matters seem quite clear at this juncture. First, the Party does appear to possess the desire and the means to seize authority, its means especially indicating an eventual tyranny of The Righteous. Second, the Party's goals mark the organization as nostalgia itself, and as such, it constitutes a fancy exceeding the achieving powers of man. The continued pursuit of this nostalgia, moreover, depends upon a mindless commitment to "someday," a blind dedication mostly sustained by the membership's silent disposition (i.e., unquestioning attitude).

Stepan's inflexible views have already surfaced to a certain extent. It is his denunciation of Ivan's hesitancy to slaughter children, however, that betrays the extremity of his silence. Reminding Ivan of his duty to obey and thrusting aside Boris' disclaimer of total permissiveness, Stepan declares, "Nothing that can serve our

cause should be ruled out" (p. 257). If in fact convinced of the Party's redemptionist role, he lectures his comrades,

Surely you would claim for yourselves the right to do anything and everything that might bring that great day nearer! So now, if you draw the line at killing these two children, well, it simply means you are not sure you have the right. So, I repeat, you do not believe in the revolution. (p. 259)

Stepan shames the Party, Kaliayev argues, because behind his blood-lusting is "the threat of another despotism" (p. 259), one sure to mark them as men of blood, not the instruments of justice. Kaliayev's fine distinctions between selective execution and wholesale murder, between innocence and guilt, however, are not for Stepan. "Innocence?" he asks rhetorically.

Yes, maybe I know what that means. But I prefer to shut my eyes to it -- and to shut others' eyes to it, for the time being -- so that one day it may have a world-wide meaning.  
(p. 259)

Thus we have Stepan's shameless confession of silence, for what is the shutting of his eyes, but a deliberate effort to kill every question? No man of self-interrogation, he commits himself wholly to the revolution which forbids nothing and promises everything.

Voinov's silence is more uneasy than Stepan's. He joined the Party, he confides, after he realized that denunciations of injustice were not enough; "one must give one's life to fighting it. And now I'm happy." "And yet,"



Stepan reminds him, "you have to lie"? It is then that Voinov, too, grasps for the straw of "someday": "For the present, yes. But I'll be done with lying on the day I throw the bomb" (p. 239). This enforced silence requires some later shoring up. Admitting his inability to commit open acts of terror, he requests reassignment to the propaganda section, where one does not see what happens. "You risk your life, of course," he tells Boris, "but there's a sort of veil between you and the -- the real thing" (p. 265).

Boris, too, experiences flashes of lucidity; but all things considered, he retreats at last to silence. Not given to the extremes of Stepan, he repudiates the Party's right to murder children. "I can't allow you to say that everything's permissible," he cautions the zealot; "thousands of our brothers have died to make it known that everything is not allowed" (p. 257). Having explicitly set a limit on what the Party may do, Boris implicitly sets a limit on what its members may think. After he delivers a fine speech about how Ivan's death will serve to achieve their dream, Dora asks the question:

But, Boria, suppose . . . suppose that, after all, the others did not live? Suppose he is dying for nothing?

Annenkov's answer is nostalgia's very own -- "Keep silent" (p. 295)!

Kaliayev cuts a considerably more appealing figure

than his three comrades, but in the end, he is equally disappointing. Impressively given to individuality amid sterile sameness and attuned to Dora's tenet of murder for murder (their own for another's), he sometimes verges on awareness. When Stepan pooh-poohs the lives of innocents, for example, Ivan touches the chords of absurd heroism. There is something beyond frigid righteousness, he insists.

I shall not strike my brothers in the face for the sake of some far-off city, which, for all I know, may not exist. I refuse to add to the living injustice all around me for the sake of dead justice. (p. 260)

This, existentially speaking, is Ivan's great moment, for he seems to grasp at once the exile and suffering so common to absurdity, and yet manages to question the efficacy of the Party's dream.

Kaliayev, though, is not absurdity's darling. Confronted with Dora's characterization of their executions as mere murder, he seeks to make a distinction.

When we kill, we're killing so as to build up a world in which there will be no more killing. We consent to being criminals so that at last the innocent and only they, will inherit the earth.

"And suppose it didn't work out like that?" asks Dora. Ivan's response is the very model of nostalgic indignation: "How can you say such a thing? It's unthinkable" (p. 245). The fact is, Ivan shrouds his mind in a species of quiet, which he maintains by declaring certain questions "unthinkable" and by reaffirming his readiness to pay for

whatever murders he commits. Thus, he says,

I remind myself that I'm going to die, too, and everything's all right. I smile to myself like a child and go happily to sleep. (p. 246)

Kaliayev has one last opportunity to embrace absurdity. When the Grand Duchess visits him, he employs the familiar strategy of distance, persisting as he does in seeing Serge's execution as merely the abstract elimination of despotism and in counselling the widow that her husband died suddenly and unaware, hardly a passing in the normal sense of the word. She, however, endeavors to bring the event nearer. "I'm told," she says,

that you made speeches while the police officers were surrounding you. I understand. That must have helped you. But it was different for me. I came some minutes later, and I saw! I put on a bier all that I could collect. What quantities of blood! [Pauses.] I was wearing a white dress. (pp. 286-287)

Kaliayev, like his comrades before him, invokes nostalgia's own instruction: "Keep silent" (p. 287).

Dora's alone is the mind within the maelstrom. Stepan may stifle the question of innocence; Voinov, veil the "real thing"; Annenkov, command the quiet; Ivan, declare his "unthinkables" and seek his slumber; but Dora is the consciousness that sees, hears, and thinks all, especially that which threatens it. Awed neither by flawed nostalgias nor death itself, she questions their progeny's prospects of inheriting the earth, doubts future generations' immunity from murder, besieges Annenkov for particulars of

how Ivan's death will be ("And the hangman leaps onto their shoulders, doesn't he? The neck cracks, like a twig" [p. 298].), and demands to hear from Stepan the full details of her comrade's death. "Tell everything," she orders him. "I have the right to know, and I insist on hearing all. Down to the last detail" (p. 299).

Dora, moreover, has a commitment to decency. For the present, the Party's procedure seems orderly enough: he who kills accedes to being killed. Obviously haunted by the ease with which the membership murders, however, she foresees an ominous whirlwind. "Are you sure that no one can go further?" she asks Annenkov, then adds,

Sometimes when I hear what Stepan says, I fear for the future. Others, perhaps, will come who'll quote our authority for killing; and will not pay with their lives.

Possibly, she continues, "that is what justice means -- in the long run. And then nobody will want to look justice in the face again" (p. 296).

The path of decency, of course, is strewn with love, or should be. This, for Dora, makes all the difference. She hears much talk of love for humanity, but overhears more of murder. "Too much blood, too much brutal violence," she protests to Ivan:

there's no escape for us. Those whose hearts are set on justice have no right to love. They're on their toes, as I am, holding their heads up, their eyes fixed on the heights. What room for love is there in such proud hearts? Love bows heads, gently, compassionately. We, Yanek, are stiff-necked. (p. 269)

What interests Dora is the politics of the possible. One yearns for justice, surely; but the dream of order and clarity too often prefigures an impossible nightmare. What is accessible, though, is love, love in the "human sense," that is, "all tenderness and gentleness and self-forgetting" (p. 270). This kind of care and concern she commends to Ivan, characterizing it as the favor with which he might court the Russian people or even "Dora -- the living woman," who could mean more to him than a "fouly unjust world." Already promised to Nostalgia, unfortunately, Kaliayev rings down the silent curtain: "Keep quiet" (p. 271).

Human love having strayed, Dora mourns what remains, a love that's half frozen, because it's rooted in justice and reared in prison cells . . . . Summer, Yanek, can you remember what that's like, a real summer's day? But -- no, it's never-ending winter here. We don't belong to the world of men. We are the just ones.  
(pp. 271-272)

There will be no summer of their content, neither now nor someday, neither for them nor the organization itself. Annenkov speaks for the life of the Party, when he responds to Dora's question of whether he has ever loved, really loved.

Annen. Yes. But so long ago that I've forgotten all about it.

Dora. How long ago?

Annen. Four years.

Dora. And how long have you been head of the organization?

Annen. Four years. [Pauses.] Now it's the organization that I love. (p. 297)

There seems to be no escaping it, this destiny to be greater than themselves. Desiring to love life rather

than justice, Dora eventually discovers her secret impasse. On the verge of absurd heroism, she would preserve at once the awareness of the dream and the impossibility of achieving it, and yet love her fellow humans and do whatever possible to relieve their suffering. And even when murder alone affords relief from tyranny, she would embrace the justice implicit in the killer's also dying and, most of all, she would forget nothing, not even death itself.

In many respects, Dora emerges as a female counterpart of Jean Tarrou and Dr. Rieux, who see only exile and suffering and who commit their entire energies to combating the "pestilences" of this world. It is during a swim in the forbidden coastal waters of plague-ridden Oran, after all, that Rieux senses a strange happiness. Turning to Jean, he catches "a glimpse on his friend's face of the same happiness, a happiness that forgot nothing, not even murder" (The Plague, p. 232).

The Party, unfortunately, makes Dora's odyssey increasingly difficult, managing as it does to overshadow the irrationalities of this world with the niceties of the dream, to pooh-pooh the place of love amid injustice, and to raise the specter of murder with impunity. Dora, it appears, will be deprived of Dr. Rieux's happiness, for her sympathy and love are severely restricted by Party policy. Thus when Boris questions her loyalty, she reaffirms her faith, and disenchantment:

it was with a happy heart that I embarked on our great adventure, and it's with a sad heart I keep to it. (Just Assassins, p. 297)

Her final request, after learning of Ivan's hanging, is to be designated the next bomber. The significance of this, I think, is that she has confronted absurdity, has discovered that she cannot live without nostalgia, and therefore elects voluntary death. The bomber, of course, always dies; consequently, the acceptance of this role signifies, at least in her case, a species of superior suicide.

The Party, we recall, is an imaginative equivalent of nostalgia. When Dora reaffirms her faith in the Party, she implicitly, albeit reluctantly, reaffirms her faith in nostalgia. By this same act, conversely, she renounces absurdity. Her impending death, moreover, will still her consciousness forever. Thus she will join the ubiquitous voices of silence, which have conspired all along to sustain nostalgia and keep alive the nightmare of righteous tyranny.

While it would require considerable effort to summarize fully the foregoing content, it is possible and, surely, desirable to draw certain conclusions as regards Camus' "turns." The analyses unquestionably disclose figures satisfying the standards established previously for the dramatic conceit. To begin with, they constitute ex-

tensive analogies which undergird the plays themselves. Caligula, for instance, seems for a time to splinter into separate plots -- one in which an imbalanced ruler spends three days seeking the moon, later commissions Helicon to procure her, and finally concedes the futility of this endeavor; the other in which Caesar becomes distraught over the death of Drusilla, vows to make contingency his province, assiduously simulates the role of God, and eventually goes to a disappointingly human death. The fact is, each story has much to do with the other, the mania for the moon prefiguring the pursuit of omnipotence.

Again, in The Misunderstanding, Camus takes pains to develop two elaborate parallels. First, he represents the inn as an establishment where minimal efforts are made in behalf of sojourners, where everyone is treated as "ordinary," and where everything in fact exudes the indifference, antagonism, injustice, and finality which characterize the world itself. Second, he portrays the old manservant as one who moves aimlessly and unpredictably, who fails to come when called, who declines to speak when addressed, who refuses to help when asked. The result of Camus' substantial efforts, of course, is that the inn emerges as a concrete equivalent of the world; the old manservant, as a personification of the God obvious in an absurd universe. The inn and the old man together, then, afford a structure and a significance from which the play's entire content



derives its form and meaning. The conceits in the other three works serve this same purpose.

In addition to their constituting elaborate analogies, Camus' "turns" bring together superficially disparate phenomena, which upon closer examination reveal unusual parallels. By yoking Caligula's lust for the lunar sphere together with his campaign to supplant God, for example, Camus effectively suggests a consciousness gravitating toward lunacy. The dynamics of this madness, though, are somewhat complicated. The emperor's disaffection for the world and his yearning for an absolute, of course, are the very stuff of absurdity; thus the mere desire for the moon or for God are normal in the sense that every absurd man longs of clarity, cohesion, unity, something beyond this world. The active pursuit of such illusory goals is quite another matter, however, one implying a form of existential lunacy. The conceit, therefore, emphasizes the folly implicit in Caligula's aspiration for deification, because just as he can never possess the moon, neither can he become the master of contingency, the author of fate.

The inn and the old manservant in The Misunderstanding seem at the outset singularly unlikely conceits for the world and God, respectively. Once the habitat's notoriety for hostility and death becomes apparent, however, Jan's and mankind's discomfiture is understandable. In such a setting, moreover, it is easy to doubt the existence

of God and, more importantly, quite impossible to assign Him anything beyond a token role, one reflecting a limited participation remarkably akin to that of the old manservant, whose seeming deafness, dumbness, ineptness, and indifference suggest virtual senility.

State of Siege, too, unites phenomena of disparate appearance. That is to say, The Plague seems quite unpromising as a personification of nostalgia. Deeper probing, nonetheless, identifies him as a species of mock-absurdity, a scourge with two aspects. First, in an age of incredulity, he deigns to being absurdity's own self, evidencing as he does the tell-tale coldness, cruelty, injustice, and death. Second, in order to form a more perfect tyranny, he professes nostalgia, promising as he does to temper indifference, mitigate cruelty, abate injustice, and regulate death. A chimera in the guise of reality, he insinuates his worthiness by pandering to a fearful people who dread nothingness and treasure life alone. Not surprisingly, he holds sway until the sufficiently perceptive and daring Diego discerns the nature of man's agony, on the one hand, and The Plague's illusory cure, on the other. Only with the end of mockery, then, is absurdity restored.

The Just Assassins also poses an initial problem; but when one apprehends the Party as an actualized conceit for nostalgia, he can appreciate the self-delusion implicit in its promises of freedom, deliverance, inheritance,

and justice, indeed, its pledge of a veritable Kingdom of Man, which substitutes the Party for God, justice for heaven, self-adjudication for the last assizes.

Camus' conceits, like Sartre's, consistently imply value judgments. These stances, however, can only be discerned through considerable sifting. In Caligula, for instance, Caesar reveals a correct awareness when he tells of his disaffection for the world and his yearning for the moon, happiness, something eternal. It follows, then, that his subsequent campaign to render contingency an imperial prerogative is a form of existential lunacy, subverting as it does a healthy absurd balance by sacrificing consciousness to nostalgia. Thereafter, the most he can hope for is a deserved death among those whom he despises, perhaps a superior kind of suicide.

In The Misunderstanding the emergence of the inn as an absurd microcosm signals a variety of responses, only one of which reflects anything resembling courage. Thus Jan declares the world not to his liking and expresses a desire to flee. Maria seeks escape through prayer. The mother rushes to a voluntary death. Martha alone struggles against creation as she finds it. Divested of her rage for shorelines and sunshine, she preserves her simultaneous awareness of what is, but ought not be and what should be, but never will. The Plague in State of Siege escapes censure until his identity as mock-absurdity sur-

faces. Then his villainy is only too apparent; and his demise, a mere matter of time. Promises of freedom and justice do much to lionize the Party in The Just Assassins. Talk of murder, of the seizure of authority, of harsh reforms, unfortunately, serve to tarnish the Party image and discredit its sought reality as nostalgia itself. Ultimately the Party emerges as an incipient tyranny whose silent supporters insure its coming ascendancy and whose disillusioned supporters submit to voluntary death.

Inevitably a comparison between Sartre's and Camus' conceits arises. And here, I think, one of Longinus' observations is especially pertinent. Sometimes, he notes, the vulgar phrase is superior to elevated language, because it is drawn from common life; and as such, it is readily recognized. Moreover, the writer's chances for success are enhanced, for "what is familiar is halfway to conviction" (see above, "A Historical View of Metaphor," p. 45). Sartre, we recall, employs "turns" such as prostitution, bastardy, cheesemongering, histrionism, and swindling, all of which are more or less familiar to everyday people; consequently, he needs only to invoke his phenomena by name and he has a ready characterization. His main task thereafter is to demonstrate how Lizzie's bogus testimony is a mode of prostitution, how Goetz's bastardy reflects mankind's condition in a Fatherless universe, how Anna Danby's cheesemongering implies a gradual accumulation of awareness,

how Kean's histrionism in real life constitutes bad faith, and how swindling properly characterizes the Board's chauvinistic appeals for support and commitment.

If Sartre wisely elects a shortcut to conviction, Camus chooses the far way. Thus, while he occasionally invokes a familiar figure (e.g., calling Nada a "halfwit," which is to say that he has a partial awareness of absurdity), Camus commonly employs conceits, both elements of which require substantial characterization. In Caligula, for example, he must, on the one hand, depict the emperor's mania for the moon and, on the other, delineate the craving for deification. Moreover, the inn and the old manservant in The Misunderstanding require considerable characterization before they emerge as unique equivalents for the world and God, these latter two phenomena also having to be appropriately characterized before their special significance within an absurd framework can be apprehended. A similar difficulty arises in State of Siege, in which Camus must endow The Plague with both the qualities of absurdity and nostalgia. This done, he must then depict pure absurdity to afford a suitable foil for The Plague and to justify the emergence of Diego as an absurd hero.

The foregoing comparison is not intended to demean the effectiveness of Camus' drama, surely. It can, however, serve to deplore or praise his choice of conceits. On the one hand, Sartre reveals a seemingly superior wisdom by employing "turns" readily accessible to his audience. Camus,

in contrast, virtually doubles his labors by selecting apparently meaningless or insignificant phenomena to represent other phenomena, themselves requiring characterization and clarification. That Camus' drama is an effective statement of absurdity, then, is a tribute to his handling of a superficially unpromising collection of conceits.

On the other hand, Camus in fact may evidence the wiser strategy. Longinus, after all, idealizes the emotional potential of metaphor, praising its capacity to transport an audience beyond the limits of intellect. Already, of course, I have encountered a problem arising from Sartre's use of emotionally charged terms (e.g., "prostitution," "bastardy," etc.) and argued against them as so-called objective correlatives (see pp. 175-179 above). Caligula's lust for the moon, the inn, the old manservant, and The Plague constitute conceits relatively free from connotation. Indeed, the most emotionally weighted conceit of all, The Plague, is used ironically; that is to say, it implies nostalgia and, for a time anyway, it loses most of its traditional connotations. Thus it appears that rather than reflecting a carelessness on his part, Camus' selection of conceits reveals a wish to avoid undesirable connotations, that he might be free to characterize his phenomena as he chooses and thereby exercise more control over their emotional impact.

#### IV. IONESCO

##### THE THREAT TO SPIRITUAL SELF-AFFIRMATION

Even a cursory scanning of Eugene Ionesco's Notes and Counter Notes discloses a reality transitory in the extreme. "Dark shapes," he recalls in one reminiscence of his boyhood walks on an ill-lit Parisian street,

were flitting along the pavements, people hurrying by: hallucinating ghostlike shadows. When memory brings back a picture of that street, when I think that almost all those people are now dead, everything does indeed seem to me to be shadow and evanescence. My head spins with anguish. Really, that is the world: a desert of fading shadows.<sup>1</sup>

Manhood has brought few additional revelations; indeed, he continues,

Everything has merely confirmed what I had seen and understood in my childhood: futile and sordid fits of rage, cries blanketed by the silence, shadows swallowed up forever by the night. What else have I to say?

(p. 154)

In his own poetic and confidential manner, Ionesco in fact depicts an incomprehensible universe strikingly similar to the one apprehended by Camus, the former's arena teeming as it does with uncertainty, hostility, suffering, and death. Moreover, like his fellow playwright, he con-

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<sup>1</sup>Notes and Counter Notes, trans. Donald Watson (New York, 1964), p. 154.

templates the conceivable power that holds it all together, the possible meaning obscured by appearances of light and movement, by apparent objects, by the seeming world. Thus he, too, experiences simultaneously a repulsion and a craving:

here I am, surrounded by the halo of creation, unable to embrace these insubstantial shades, lost to understanding, out of my element, cut off from something undefinable without which everything spells deprivation.  
(p. 157)

Some may ask, "But what has this to do with Ionesco's drama?" The answer is, "Almost everything." His revelation of his most complete moments of truth, of his states of mind, of his being on the fringe of existence where he stands paralyzed in "a state of primordial stupefaction" (p. 158) is part and parcel of his modus operandi. "For me," he confides,

the theatre -- my own drama -- is usually confession; I do nothing but make admissions (incomprehensible to the deaf, that is inevitable), for what else can I do? I try to project onto the stage an inner drama (incomprehensible to myself) and tell myself that in any case, the microcosm being a small-scale reproduction of the macrocosm, it may happen that this tattered and disjointed inner world is in some way a reflection or a symbol of universal disruption.  
(pp. 158-159)

Thus, he concludes, "I want only to render my own strange and improbable universe" (p. 159).

Rife with antagonism, threats, fear, and anxiety, Ionesco's curious and unlikely theatrical world does in-



deed afford a reflection of "universal disruption." And while his puzzling plots and frequently ghoulish characterizations serve to underscore his protagonists' alienation and estrangement from a disintegrating world, his conceits suggest most effectively the extent of the disorder and tumult, and especially the judgmental dimensions of his work. For the proof of this last assertion, however, it is necessary to examine the evidence in the plays themselves.

On the surface, The Lesson<sup>2</sup> seems devastating enough. A teen-age student, who is scheduled in three weeks to take her orals for a "total doctorate," presents herself at a pedagogue's office-dining room for tutoring. Initially timid and noticeably hesitant, the Professor probes her general knowledge; thereafter becoming more nervous, aggressive, and insistent, he systematically undermines her gaiety and confidence by posing a series of arithmetical problems, a number of which she cannot solve. Disregarding his maid's urgent pleas for restraint and brushing aside

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<sup>2</sup>This work, of course, has a predecessor. Ionesco, however, characterizes The Bald Soprano as an "anti-play"; and I have no particular reason for challenging his categorization. The work's single allusion to the bald singer, who always wears her hair the same way, might identify a kind of anti-conceit appropriate to an anti-play, lacking as it does a specific reference to anything whatever in the play itself and constituting as it does the very antithesis of the elaborate "turns" treated elsewhere. This tack, obviously, would be facetious.

the Pupil's complaints of physical discomfort, he fanatically proceeds with a lecture on the basic principles of the comparative philology of the neo-Spanish languages. More and more the breach between pedant and pupil widens: his zeal signals her disinterest; his pleasure, her pain; his pugnacity, her passivity; his surgence, her submission. Eventually, he instructs her in the translations and pronunciations of "knife"; and as they stand face to face, he thrusts the instrument home. Together they emit a climactic "Aaah!" after which she slumps backward, her legs divaricated and hanging over the sides of a chair. He thrusts again, this time dehiscing her de bas en haut. The maid upbraids him and rejects his protestations, then assists with the necessary preparations. Not long afterward the doorbell rings, portending another arrival and ensuing lesson.

Superficially, then, The Lesson relates an episode of nightmarish tutelage, a single instance selected from a series of sessions which have brought death to at least forty pupils. Taken literally, unfortunately, the drama creates little more than passing interest. The figurative elements of the play, however, suggest something a bit more substantial. Indeed, the key to the work appears to be a proportion, pedagogy:the pupil::cupidity:the victim. In other words, pedantry is implicitly depicted as a species of rapacity and a tyranny in its own right. The setting,

Ionesco's instructions for the players, the form of the lesson itself, and the dénouement afford sufficient evidence to support this contention.

The setting, an office which also serves as a dining room, can surely be justified on the basis of convention and convenience, perhaps even thrift. Immediately the Professor betrays his practice of lying in wait for innocents, though, the dining room takes on another significance. That is, it becomes a roost for the rapacious, affording as it does a sanctuary from which the pedant of prey may swoop and seize the unsuspecting.

The detailed instructions for the actors, moreover, aid in equating pedagogy with cupidity. Vivacious, smiling, well-brought-up, the Pupil is to lose progressively her rhythm of movement and to become morose, fatigued, and withdrawn. At the time of attack, she is to be depressive, aphasic, virtually paralyzed, and quite incapable of resistance. At first timid and polite, the Professor is to rub his hands constantly and effect occasionally a 'gleam, which is to be repressed forthwith. Gradually, the timidity is to evanesce and "the lewd gleams in his eyes will become a steady devouring flame in the end."<sup>3</sup> Becoming increasingly agitated, aggressive, and

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<sup>3</sup>The Lesson, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York, 1958), p. 46.

domineering, he is to render the Pupil helpless and rant over her with a powerful, ringing voice.

The Professor's method, too, suggests cupidity. The form of the lesson in fact discloses a three-part strategy: winning the girl's confidence, weakening her resistance, and forcibly seducing her. The Professor seeks to achieve rapport, his initial goal, by noting his long presence in her town and by praising her slightest show of knowledge. For example, her guess of "Paris" to the question "What is the capital of France?" brings his immediate approval and declaration that she does indeed know her chief cities. A subsequent question concerning the seasons proves more difficult; although she readily responds with "winter" and "summer," she hesitates on "spr . . . ing" and requires assistance with "autumn" (sounds like "automobile"). The Professor nonetheless terms her answer "smashing," then commends her intelligence, memory, store of information, and evident progress. Almost on cue, she exudes confidence and confesses her thirst for knowledge, recalling moreover the imminence of her orals and indicating the extent of her tutor's initial success: "I am at your disposal." Surprised, he asks, "At my disposal?" Then he makes a gesture, suppresses a gleam, and protests, "Oh, miss, it is I who am at your disposal" (p. 50).

Thereafter, he invokes the second phase of his strategy, reduction. They will switch to arithmetic, he announces, a

new science which exceeds the old and is a therapy besides. The maid's plea for calm and restraint provokes a curiously indignant response:

I will not stand for your insinuations. I know perfectly well how to comport myself. I am old enough for that. (p. 51)

After dismissing Marie, he poses a series of problems for his student, soon discovering that she cannot subtract. When he asks which is larger, a three or a four, she wonders in what sense he means "larger." Some numbers, he explains, are smaller, others larger -- unless, of course, the small ones have smaller units, in which case they may represent more units than the larger ones. All this, furthermore, is complicated by

magnitudes, totals, there are groups, there are heaps, heaps of such things as plums, trucks, geese, prune pits, etc. (p. 54)

Assuming that the four and the three have the same proportionate number of units, he continues, which is the larger, the smaller or the larger?

Pup. Excuse me, Professor . . . What do you mean by the larger number? Is it the one that is not so small as the other?

Pro. That's it, miss, perfect. You have understood me very well.

Pup. Then, it is four.

Pro. What is four -- larger or smaller than three?

Pup. Smaller . . . no, larger.

Pro. Excellent answer. (p. 54)

What constitutes excellence, obviously, is a matter of some interest here. Taken at face value, the Pupil's un-

certainty as regards the four's being smaller or larger than the three rather misses the mark of outstanding achievement. However, in another sense, probably the intended one, her response represents excellence, for it betrays just the lack of sureness which portends weakening resistance.

The Professor eventually adds philology to his weaponry and prepares for the final push. Again he dismisses Marie's counsel ("Philology leads to calamity" [p. 60].) and plunges on toward the prize. Ostensibly speaking of the fate of some words, but inadvertently alluding to their seductive capacity, he tells the Pupil,

By themselves, words charged with significance will fall, weighted down by their meaning, and in the end they always collapse, fall. (p. 63)

Her toothache he discounts as a trivial inconvenience, hardly sufficient cause for interruption. There follows the ominous antagonism which brings the adversaries head to head. He talks of Grimm's law; she, of her toothache. He, of pronunciation; she, of pain. He, of language likenesses; she, of teeth and aches. And so it goes, on and on. To her resistant "teeth!" "teeth!" "teeth!" he responds by demanding silence, threatening to bash her head, and twisting her wrists. Clearly, though, she will not willingly submit. "Marie!" he cries. "She doesn't understand anything, that girl. She doesn't understand" (p. 72).

His protest notwithstanding, he presses his advan-

tage. Uttering "knife!" "knife!" "knife!" in orgiastic cadence, he batters down her feeble denials. The ache spreads to her head, ears, eyes, throat, neck, breast, hips, thighs, thighs, stomach, breast. Exhausted, weeping, desperate, she meets his thrust, emits then the climactic "Aaah!" and sinks backward. He stands over her, breathing with difficulty and mopping his brow.

The seeds of pedantry sown, Ionesco proceeds to class this strain among the Tyrannies, whose varieties are legion. Thus, I think, he has the Professor thrust a second time. In doing so, the playwright cuts away from the violation, as it were, and reverts to the original narrative, that is to say a wayward intellectual exercise. The lesson, it becomes obvious, is a moral: tyrannies perch themselves in the midst of mankind, insinuate their worthiness, become increasingly strident, and eventually press their prey, either through spurious persuasion or naked power.

The moral, I believe, is consistent with the dénouement. There the Professor expectedly defends his actions, arguing that he is not to blame, that the Pupil resisted learning, that she was disobedient. Or, in modern parlance, to save her it became necessary to destroy her. The moral, moreover, explains the struggle with Marie. When she calls him "liar," he attacks her, only to be slapped down and forcibly subdued. In this instance, power meets power, the asserting engine then exercising restraint in the presence of the only thing it respects, superior force.

The maid's advice, too, serves the moral. People will not ask questions, she assures the worried pedant; they are used to it. Then, offering him an armband (which, the dramatist suggests, bears an insignia, perhaps a Nazi swastika), she adds,

Wait, if you're afraid, wear this, then  
you won't have anything to be afraid of.  
(p. 78)

Such identification she pronounces "good politics" (p. 78).

The proportion pedagogy:the pupil::cupidity:the victim, it appears, identifies The Lesson as a primer on tyranny, and as such, it affords a detailed treatment of pedantry as a species of rapacity. From there, the playwright proceeds to generalities, implying as he does that this small-scale despotism is not unlike other tyrannies, political ones, for example -- specifically, fascism or, more precisely, Nazism.

A tragic farce, The Chairs depicts a general factotum and his wife Semiramis' eventful night of seeming fulfillment and death. Enscorced on a kind of l'île de l'ennui, the aged couple mark the day's passing, contemplate life's earlier promises, and ritualistically reminisce "The Garden Episode," a fragmented vignette hinting at bygone days when they had sought sanctuary in a garden and a city, the lushness and the light, then to be repelled by a forbidding barrier and left to despair their ever securing access.



Suddenly waxing messianic, the old man discloses his message and mission, announcing moreover that he has engaged the services of the Orator, to articulate his views and to promulgate his system's efficacy. Indeed, he confides, this very night will bring celebrant and suppliants together for the revelation of his lifetime of light.

Soon invisible patrons begin to arrive, slowly at first, but with increasing rapidity; and the hosts move constantly from the assembly room to the door, to the room, to the closet, from which they extract additional chairs to accommodate the gathering throng. Madams, a colonel, a former sweetheart, a photo-engraver, newsmen, the Emperor -- they and others present themselves for the epiphany. And the Orator does come. Visible, embarrassingly conceited, seemingly unreal in contrast to the apparent reality of the seekers "seated" in the chairs, he stations himself on the dais and offers autographs. The grateful couple commit their hopes to his skills, then plunge to death in the water outside their home. Their benefactor, unfortunately, is a deaf mute, and illiterate besides. Thus he can neither address the throng directly nor communicate by using the chalkboard. Sensing failure, he abruptly halts his labors and departs. There follow murmurs, laughter, coughs, and shushing, the hubbub becoming progressively louder, then subsiding. Silence signals the curtain.

The Chairs is a haunting drama, one which evokes to an extent the kind of fear and pity traditionally associated with classical tragedy. More in keeping with the absurdist wave of modern French dramaturgy, though, it constitutes a fairly typical blend of longing and loathing, affording as it does glimpses of a world which repels and a chimera that beckons. It is within this context that the Orator emerges as an actualized conceit for the meaning obvious in an absurd universe.

The world's repulsiveness is not immediately apparent. For example, when Semiramis, frightened by the old man's window-viewing antics, pulls him into the room and complains,

Ah! this house, this island, I can't get used to it. Water all around us . . . water under the windows, stretching out as far as the horizon,<sup>4</sup>

her words seem merely to characterize their habitat as something less than accommodating. In another sense, however, her depiction effectively exposes the world, whose exile, hostility, and ubiquitous threats serve to alienate and estrange, a condition one surely experiences difficulty getting used to. The larger implications of her statement, I think, are borne out by subsequent revelations concerning the couple's predicament.

Discord has marked their past. "You'd have done

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<sup>4</sup>The Chairs, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York, 1958), p. 113.

much better," Semiramis reminds her husband,

if you had got along with other people, like  
other people do. You've quarreled with all  
your friends, with all the directors, with all  
the generals, with your own brother.

(p. 119)

Moreover, she feels obliged to justify their "good life," telling the stage audience, "My husband's not really misanthropic, he just loves solitude" (p. 125). The fact is, both are quick to contend, they have a full life, what with a radio, fishing, boat service to the mainland, the moon, books, and memories, to say nothing of the two hours devoted "every day to work on his message" (p. 126).

The world is not for them, however, their protestations of intended harmony and the merits of seclusion notwithstanding. Buoyed by seeming triumph, they speak their true hearts. Thus when the Emperor joins his assembly, the factotum exclaims, "Oh! Savior, in my life, I have been humiliated" (p. 150), confiding further that his enemies have been rewarded, that his friends have betrayed him, that he has been the victim of persecution, preferment, robbery, assassination. "I've been the collector of injustices," he tells his royal confessor, "the lightning rod of catastrophes" (p. 151).

Such circumstances give rise to loathing, and within an absurdist framework, predispose one to the panders of nostalgia. Thus the old man's resolve to communicate a message implies as well the sacrifice of his consciousness to his craving. "All my life," he observes, "I've

felt that I was suffocating; and now, they will know all . . ." (p. 121).

What there is to know, of course, is a matter of increasing speculation. But whatever the revelation, it is obscured by a collection of elusive tag ends, a curious mix of gardens and cities, luxuriance and light, apples and orators, all of which and whom evoke an aura of Edenic and idyllic idolatry. In the beginning, there was a garden, upon which they ruminant nightly. Soaked and frozen, they found themselves outside a "big fence," where they remained hours, days, nights, weeks, months; yet the factotum recalls, "They wouldn't let us in . . . they might at least have opened the gate to the garden" (pp. 115-116). Through the garden, where the grass was wet, ran a path which led to a square, in the center of which lay the village church. The place? Possibly Paris, he suggests.

O.W. Paris never existed, my little one.

O.M. That city must have existed because it collapsed . . . It was the city of light, but it has been extinguished, extinguished, for four hundred thousand years . . . Nothing remains of it today, except a song.

O.W. A real song? That's odd. What song?

O.M. A lullaby, an allegory: "Paris will always be Paris."

O.W. And the way to it was through the garden? Was it far?

(p. 116)

The memory fades; and the factotum seems unable to affirm the connection between the garden and the city. Later, though, he ventures that and verges on more.

O.M. [as in a dream]: At the end of the garden there was . . . there was . . . there was . . . there was . . . was what, my dear?

O.W. The city of Paris!

O.M. At the end, at the end of the end of the city of Paris, there was, there was, was what?

O.W. My darling, was what, my darling, was who?  
(p. 120)

Ever the unwitting gadfly, Semiramis presses her husband for answers, urging besides that he share his message with mankind. "It's in speaking that ideas come to us," she observes,

words, and then we, in our own words, we find perhaps everything, the city too, the garden, and then we are orphans no longer.

(p. 121)

What a curious lot of odds and ends! Discord, the garden, the church, Paris the city, waifs -- what have they to do with one another? Perhaps Ionesco means to mix myth with Christian tradition. The city of Paris, after all, has a namesake, a shepherd better known for resolving an apple controversy and indirectly rendering assistance to Eris (Discord). This allusion apprehended, the tag ends acquire some coherence, for in the Garden man's existence was at first full of grace, then disturbed by discord, and thereafter shattered by disinheritance and abandonment. Alteration and compassion brought a subsequent promise of a greater Eden, a land of lights, the access to which lay through the Church. In a spiritual sense, then, Semiramis has reason to eschew their condition as cast-offs, seeing as she does that the city and the garden can dispel once

for all their agonizing dys-grace.

Other content in The Chairs reinforces the juxtaposition of myth with tradition. In greeting one aging charmer, for instance, the factotum repeatedly addresses her as "La Belle," recalling moreover his admiration of earlier times and insisting that despite her long nose and white hair, she is still "Belle" to him. Occurring simultaneously with this reminiscence is Semiramis' flirtation with "La Belle's" husband. After exposing her red stockings and underskirt full of holes, she utters erotic cries, laughs lasciviously, indulges herself shamelessly, then sobs,

My conscience causes these tears to flow.  
For me the branch of the apple tree is broken.  
Try to find somebody else.

(p. 134)

The myth-tradition motif seems consistent with the handling of the stage audience as well. The rows of chairs, of course, suggest a theatre. While no mention is made of a charge for chairs, such a fee would be in keeping with the aged pair's practice of selling programs, eskimo pies, caramels, fruit drops, etc. This being the case, Semiramis and the factotum emerge as une couple de chaisiers, a unique breed who commonly let their product for use in gardens and churches.

The very least impression to arise from these tag ends is an awareness of the couple's fallen condition and their thirst for grace. Enamored by the promise of the

garden and the city and apparently denied access to those hallowed regions, they have spent long years enduring exile and suffering, and a lifetime awaiting death. Whether they are merely to slip into silence and nothingness evolves as a foremost consideration.

Not one to leave off with a whimper alone, the factotum extols his inner life, austerity, philosophy, message -- "All the preoccupations," he says expansively, "of a superior order" (p. 134). His a heritage not to be wasted, he cites his credentials and the urgency of his findings.

I've had a rich experience in life. In all walks of life, at every level of thought . . . I'm not an egotist: humanity must profit by what I've learned.

(p. 146)

The world can be saved, he insists, through his "One truth for all" (p. 146)!

The Orator's coming, of course, signals the imminence of that "one truth." Hamlet-like, the factotum instructs his benefactor to play Horatio, as it were, to report him and his cause aright to the unsatisfied, those who are but mutes or audience to his passing (cf. Hamlet 5.2.354-361). Unfortunately, this "Horatio" is one of the mutes; and the audience has the more reason to pale and tremble at awful chance!

The Orator, ironically, is a personification of the couple's truth. That is to say, he is undeservedly lionized and he exudes overweening self-esteem, bowing as he does to

a throng he privately considers his inferiors and patronizingly offering as he does his precious autograph. The fact is, like his retainers before him, he has nothing coherent to say. Sensing the failure of his initial address "He mme, mm, mm" (Chairs, p. 159), he titles his chalkwork "Angelfood" and writes, "NNAA NNM NWNWNW V" (p. 159), to which he later gestures and reads, "Mmm, Mmm, Gueue, Gou, Gu, etc." (p. 160). After his ignominious departure, the audience is left with a hodgepodge of letters and sounds, the only ones of which "He," "Angelfood," and "ADIEU" can be discerned. Since he is an actualized conceit for the meaning obvious in an absurd universe, however, this may make perfect sense, for authentic existence affords little meaning other than a consciousness of man (He), the irrational world (the gibberish), a yearning (Angelfood -- heady stuff, that), and inevitable death (ADIEU).

And Ionesco, I think, prepares his audience for this tragic awareness. As a species of busybody, after all, the factotum emerges as a meddlesome old man who has collected the tidbits of life -- mere "leftovers" sufficing to whet the appetite, but never substantial enough to satisfy the deeper hunger of humanity. Nor does Semiramis more than complement her husband's inadequacy. She is, as her name suggests, a "partial heap," a supposed heritage antiquated by time and cheapened by changing values.



Victims of Duty begins somewhat innocuously. With newspaper and darning, respectively, M. Choubert and his wife Madeleine relax and exchange chit-chat about comets, dogs, the government's appeal for detachment and renunciation among the citizenry. As for the theatre, observes Choubert, every play ever penned has been a thriller, each posing as it does a riddle which is eventually solved. The classics? "Refined detective drama,"<sup>5</sup> he tells Madeleine.

Almost immediately an inspector knocks. He seeks the man called "Mallot," the spelling of which he is uncertain, he announces; and when the husband says it is Mallot with a "t," the Detective requests additional details. Choubert begins to sift his consciousness; and there follows a mimed journey, which first takes him to the very bowels of the earth, where he becomes mired in mud, and which later leads him to the peak of a mountain, where he experiences giddiness and discovers his ability to fly. Along the way, he encounters an older Madeleine, his mother and father, some theatre-goers, and eventually a pink village bathed in blue light. Despite constant coaching and chiding by the Detective, however, never once does he meet Mallot.

At this juncture Nicolas D'Eu, a poet friend of the family, interrupts the proceedings to lecture to no one in particular on the irrationalist theatre, an ideal based

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<sup>5</sup>Victims of Duty, trans. Donald Watson (New York, 1958), p. 120.

upon the psychology of antagonism, dynamic characterization, and a reformed concept of plot and motivation. Indicating his own preference for an "Aristotelologically logical" theatre (p. 159), the investigator begins to force feed Choubert, to plug the gaps in his consciousness, he says, and to revive his memory of Mallot. His chew! swallow! chew! commands frustrated by his subject's anorexia, he prepares to thrust his fist down the gagging Choubert's throat. Nicolas intervenes and, the despotic Detective's protestations of duty notwithstanding, slays his friend's tormentor. Remorseful, he hesitates momentarily. Thereafter buoyed by Madeleine's encouragement, he carries on the search for Mallot. Soon it is his turn to demand that Choubert swallow! chew! swallow!

While Victims poses myriad interpretive problems, a promising tack is to treat Choubert's mimed journey as an actualized similitude for an odyssey into absurdity.<sup>6</sup> This approach adopted, the work mainly constitutes a voyage into the consciousness of Choubert, whose mind fails to produce an answer to the supposedly urgent question of

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<sup>6</sup>Ionesco obviously desires to exteriorize his protagonist's psychic expeditions. During the descent, for instance, he has Choubert bend his knees and grip Madeleine's arm, which is extended to simulate a handrail. Even after the arm is withdrawn, Choubert continues to cling to the "rail" and proceed down the "stairs." Also, the dramatist calls attention to M. Mauclair's production, in which Choubert's ascent was mimed in this manner: "he first crawled under the table, climbed on to it and then stood on a chair that he had placed on the table" (p. 148n).

Mallot's whereabouts, but does disclose a loathing for earthly existence and a craving for another condition.

Choubert's descent is in effect an introduction to the world's repulsiveness. His encounter with an aging Madeleine, for example, affords a shocking glimpse of life's transitoriness. "When did it happen?" he asks.

Why didn't we stop it? This morning our  
 path was strewn with flowers. The sky was  
 drenched in sunshine. Your laughter rang  
 out. Our clothes were brand new, and we  
 were surrounded by friends. Nobody had died  
 and you'd never shed a tear. Suddenly it  
 was winter and now ours is an empty road.  
 (p. 130)

He would become the master of contingency, bring her dresses, primroses, and jewels, insure that her skin "find its bloom again" (p. 130) -- if only he could. They try to skip about, even sing,

Fountains of spring . . . and fresh young leaves  
 . . . The enchanted garden has folded into night,  
 has sunk into the mud . . . Our love in the night,  
 our love in the mud, in the night, in the mud . . . .  
 (p. 130)

Their voices crack. They shake with sobs.

Choubert pushes on. Mud to his chin, he encounters himself at the age of eight. There are hints of marital difficulties, of his mother's threats of suicide, of his father's veiled eagerness to cooperate in that venture. The boy confronts the father whom he despised but desires to forgive. Outwardly indifferent, the father seemingly rejects Choubert; yet he privately recounts a powerful

vignette of how he endured wretched pay, poor clothing, bad health, powerful enemies, failure, and of how he eventually learned to hate the world. "The good I did turned to evil," he confides,

but the evil done to me never turned to good. Later I was a soldier, I was compelled, ordered to join in the massacre of tens of thousands of enemy soldiers, of whole communities of old men, women, and children.  
(p. 137)

Thus he came to know mankind, to stand in horror of the race.

I loathed the earth, the sun and its satellites. I longed to go into voluntary exile, to another universe. But there is no other.  
(p. 137)

Choubert's birth brought reconciliation, continues the father, and bound him to the history, crimes, hopes, despair, disasters of humanity. Grateful to God and forgiving of the world, he learned to accept.

Choubert, unfortunately, sees only his father's impenetrability and does not hear his confession; consequently, he misses a dramatic testimonial on absurdity and the "leap" that followed. Himself mired in bleakness, as it were, the boy senses his own alienation and estrangement, his solitary and unsheltered condition, his fragility and porousness. The mud, then, aptly images his mood, for his powers are inadequate to cope with the forces drawing him into despair.

A state of mind, the mud lacks permanence. Moving

toward ground level, Choubert apprehends "sorts" of streets, roads, lakes, people, night, skies, the world -- "shades waking to life," phenomena boding "nostalgia, shreds and fragments of a universe" (p. 141). He feels the wind, detects a hopeful horizon where "a gigantic curtain of darkness is heavily lifting" (p. 142), and anticipates a magic city, bubbling springs, fountains, flowers of flame.

The promise of ground zero, so to speak, nears fruition during Choubert's ascent. Through gorges, up one slope, then another, he plunges on toward the sun, the trees, the blue light, the pink village. Higher, higher he goes, clawing at stones and groping for the heavens. Still he presses forward. He becomes breathless, and lighter besides. He floats, he says, and flies as well. Suddenly distressed, he leaps -- and lands in a huge wastebasket.

The conceit, it appears, is a kind of counterpoint composed of twin odysseys. On the one hand, there is a mimed expedition into nether mud and muck, a return to a surface blend of discord and harmony, and a subsequent probe of burdenless and gleaming heights. On the other hand, there is an inward odyssey, which affords glimpses of Choubert's states of mind. The latter journey reveals a despair arising from the world he despises, a mixture of trepidation and hope born of an absurd balance, and a euphoria actuated by access to the condition he craves.

The notion embodied in the conceit, I think, con-

stitutes Ionesco's theatrical ideal. The playwright's own theory and the rationale for the play's subtitle substantiate this contention. "All my plays have their origin in two fundamental states of consciousness," Ionesco notes:

now the one, now the other is predominant, and sometimes they are combined. These basic states of consciousness are an awareness of evanescence and of solidity, of emptiness and of too much presence, of the unreal transparency of the world and its opacity, of light and of thick darkness.

(Notes, p. 162)

There are, he adds, times when the world is dreamlike; and it is then that the whole of life "becomes useless, senseless, impossible" (p. 163). Such an existence may evoke

a feeling of anguish, a form of giddiness. But all this may equally well lead to euphoria: the anguish suddenly turns into release; nothing counts now except the wonder of being, that new and amazing consciousness of life in the glow of a fresh dawn, when we have found freedom again . . . .

(p. 162)

The foregoing comments, it goes without saying, are a veritable scenario for Choubert's experience.

Ionesco, moreover, characterizes Victims as a "pseudo-drama." The subtitle, it seems, arises from Choubert's opening observations. All plays ever written, he tells Madeleine,

from Ancient Greece to the present day, have never really been anything but thrillers. Drama's always been realistic and there's always been a detective about. Every play's an investigation brought to a successful conclusion. There's a riddle, and it's solved in the final scene. Sometimes earlier. You seek, and then you find.

(Victims, p. 119)

Judged by this standard, of course, Victims emerges as a sham drama, for while Mallot's whereabouts is posited as the problem, no solution is forthcoming. Such an outcome, though, is perfectly consistent with Ionesco's ideal of depicting "a mood and not an ideology, an impulse and not a program" (Notes, p. 164).

Victims offers two alternative modes of doing drama, both equally tyrannical. "Aristotelologically logical," the Detective opts for traditional dramaturgy. He seeks Mallot alone and eschews whatever deviates from his paragon of single-minded pursuit. Thus Choubert's talk of detachment he stanches with "That is not the point we're discussing now" (Victims, p. 125)! Or Choubert's mourning with Madeleine he berates as softness and sentimentality, an indecent diversion accommodating Mallot's flight from justice. Or Choubert's vision of the magic city he pronounces sheer waywardness. "You must realize," he reminds Choubert,

Mallot's got to be found again. It's a question of life and death. It's your duty. The fate of mankind depends on you.

(p. 144)

His appeals availing nothing, he eventually determines to force his fare down his theatrical subject's throat.

Nicolas, a poetic soul, is more deceptive than the Detective. His irrationalist theatre, after all, is consistent with Choubert's apprehension of absurdity; his psychology of antagonism, quite in keeping with Choubert's

dichotomous despair and euphoria, pain and joy, darkness and light; and his reformed principle of identity, an enticing justification for the temporal fluidity of the play and the multiple roles of Madeleine and the Detective, who portray the mother and father, respectively, and theatre-goers as well. His promising theories notwithstanding, Nicolas departs from Ionesco's theatrical ideal. For when he expropriates the pursuit of Mallot, he in fact embraces a dramaturgy committed to problems and solutions. And his chew! swallow! commands to Choubert mark him as the despotic inspector's equal.<sup>7</sup>

At this juncture, Madeleine's opening observations as regards the government's advice on renunciation assume increasing significance. Such an appeal, she notes, begins as a friendly recommendation, evolves into an order, and eventually becomes law. People then have a duty to obey. These observations seem to apply to the theatre and drama-

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<sup>7</sup>The alternatives of the conventional theatre with a program and the absurdist theatre committed to ideology are, I believe, oblique characterizations of the dramaturgy of Brecht and Sartre. Thus the Detective's preference for traditional drama, his obsessive search for solutions, his indifference to the characters themselves, and his disposition to force feed his theatrical subject are harsh equivalents of supposed Brechtian practices. Sartre, of course, espouses a brand of existentialism similar to Ionesco's absurdity. Unlike Ionesco and quite like Nicolas, however, he is ideologically oriented and program-prone. For Ionesco's personal estimates of these playwrights, see e.g. Notes, pp. 91, 134-135, 202, 219, 221, 229, 231.

The business of eating to stop up the gaps in Choubert's consciousness, moreover, seems to be a satirical allusion to Sartre's notion that the gaps and holes which separate human reality's present from its past are a manifestation of nothingness (see "The Problem of Nothingness," esp. pp. 116 ff.).



tists as well. The pièce à thèse, after all, began merely as one genre among a variety of theatrical fare. As time passed, unfortunately, the models assumed more and more the aspect of law and dramatic deviates were declared outside the pale of propriety. In a sense, then, Madeleine's declaration, "We're all victims of duty" (p. 166), is profoundly accurate, for both the Detective and Nicolas rationalize their zeal on the grounds of duty, Madeleine herself collaborates out of deference to the dictates of renunciation, and Choubert is set upon by despots who see no merit whatever in his meandering and serendipitous states of consciousness. The husband's experience, of course, is absurdity itself, and is effectually imaged by the actualized conceit, that is, his mimed journey.

A playlet, The Leader features a newsman who moves off-stage, on-stage, up-stage, down-stage in a frantic effort to chronicle the doings of a politicastro. Himself frequently carried away with adulation, he reports the Leader's activities down to the last trivia -- signing autographs, stroking a hedgehog, reading a paper and drinking coffee, accepting a bouquet, suffering "little children to come unto him,"<sup>8</sup> ad nauseam. Coincidentally the Admirers emerge occasionally to shout hurrahs, strain for glimpses of the "great one," and applaud his political

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<sup>8</sup>The Leader, trans. Derek Prouse (New York, 1960), p. 113.

artistry. The Lovers, too, appear on the scene, but they seem oblivious to the proceedings. Eventually, though, they are overtaken by the hubbub and find themselves paired with the Admirers. At this point the Leader makes an appearance. He is headless. Only briefly stunned, the Announcer, Admirers, and Lovers, all of whom until now have seemed more or less familiar, accept their idol's disability and inquire of one another's identity.

Ionesco employs two conceits in the drama, the headless helmsman and the Lovers, which together image the dynamics of a relationship between politico and partisan. The Leader, an actualized equivalent for senseless political practices, depicts that odd mix of symbolic and small-minded acts common to electioneering. Thus he signs autographs, and strokes hedgehogs; accepts bouquets, and nibbles at roots of trees; reads poetry, and sucks his thumb.

Besides the Leader's senseless conduct, there is the heedless behavior of the supporters. When the Admirers edge along a wall to see their savior and shout praise, for instance, the Announcer curiously warns them to beware, then adds, "It's better if he doesn't see us . . ." (p. 109). A subsequent glimpse of the Leader elicits from the newsman the cries "That's him now! There he is! Hip! Hip! Hurrah! There he is!" and another warning to the Admirers, "Hide yourselves" (p. 111)! This time they shudder.

In addition to the superficial adoration of the ad-

mirers, then, there emerge indications of subliminal trepidation, the causes of which can be linked to the Leader's actions. Zealous to report everything, the Announcer unwittingly affords hints of these causes. "He's jumping," he says on one occasion.

He's crossed the river. They're shaking his hand. He sticks out his thumb. Can you hear? They're laughing.

(p. 111)

Later he tells of the Leader's posing for a photograph,

with his dancer on the one hand and the hedgehog on the other . . . He greets the crowd . . . He spits a tremendous distance.

(p. 111)

The foregoing remarks, I think, disclose actions at once inspiring fear and fascination. Pandering to his people's yearnings, the Leader does what they desire, says what they seek; and they adore him for it. Yet he sometimes errs, betraying as he does an arrogance and indifference boding potential abuse. For the moment, however, the heedless crowd indulges its craving, and in effect stifles its shudders, which may be manifestations of better instincts, and represses its incipient loathing.

The second conceit, the Lovers, is a deprecating similitude for the Admirers. Having just met, the former pair vow eternal love and loyalty. Later they participate in a bumping episode with the Admirers, and thereafter play a species of lovers' tag, racing about and shouting, "You won't catch me" (p. 114)! Their cries of "I'll get you!"

eventually intermingle with the Admirers' chants, "Long live the Leader! We'll get him" (p. 115)! Very soon, moreover, Lovers and Admirers meet, swap partners, and profess devotion (Admirer and Girl-Friend: "My dear, my darling"; Girl Admirer and Young Lover: "My dear, my darling" [p. 116]!).

The meaning of the run-together business and interchangeable lines seems obvious enough. Capitulating to the urgings of infatuation, the Lovers form indiscriminate attachments and heedlessly profess fidelity, only to sacrifice such tenders of affection to subsequent urgings of the moment. This conduct effectively parallels the fervid and fickle behavior of the Leader and the Admirers, who meet at random, foster hasty and transient commitments, and readily shed old allegiances for new, the latter portending the fatuity of the former.

Amédée concerns a crisis in the lives of M. Buccinioni and Madeleine, a couple being harassed by a white-bearded corpse, whose tenure in their household spans fifteen years. A playwright, Amédée has written during that time a mere two lines (Old Woman: "Do you think it will do?" Old Man: "It won't do by itself."<sup>9</sup>), the latter of which he has composed this very day. He fidgets and occasionally glares toward the bedroom, where Madeleine spends an inordinate

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<sup>9</sup>Amédée, trans. Donald Watson (New York, 1958), p. 8.

amount of time with "him." They squabble, then return to their labors, he to his drama and she to her switchboard.

Crackling startles them. The corpse is growing! Mushrooms, moreover, are spreading into the living room. Sure of their own complicity, they feel rightly persecuted. Crashes follow. The corpse's head emerges through a bedroom window, his feet through the living room wall. "He's got geometric progression," moans Amédée, "the incurable disease of the dead" (p. 28).

The protagonist pledges action. During a subsequent delay for darkness, he conjures up Amédée II and Madeleine II, newlyweds who betray irresolvable antagonisms, he being optimistic, she pessimistic; he a visitant to valleys where lilies bloom, she a treacher of marshlands and swamps; he a child of harmony, she a daughter of discord. He would wager all for love; but she has none to give. The apparitions gone, Amédée himself urges love, an appeal Madeleine pronounces "rubbish," then insists, "Love can't help people get rid of their troubles" (p. 53)!

After evicting the body from his home, Amédée drags it into Torco Square. Befriended and aided by an American soldier, he is at first stunned, later pleased to discover his ability to spin like a top and coil the corpse about him. The body subsequently plumes parachute-like, rises, and hoists him heavenward. Cheered by onlookers and scolded by Madeleine, he throws kisses, shoes, cigarettes, then

evanesces upward.

Again, obviously, Ionesco employs phenomena which dictate a figurative approach to meaning. Not surprisingly, therefore, the body is commonly apprehended as the metaphorical remains of departed love.<sup>10</sup> Considerable evidence justifying that interpretation notwithstanding, the corpse as a conceit for death itself has much to commend it, for it is at once profound, comprehensive, and consistent with Ionesco's version of absurdity. As the analysis of Victims previously demonstrated, the French dramatist depicts both phenomena and moods. Indeed, it is a virtual commonplace to anticipate in any of his works a repulsiveness which actuates anguish, an absurd blend of discord and harmony which occasions a mix of happiness and melancholia, and a

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<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., David I. Grossvogel, The Blasphemers: The theater of Brecht, Ionesco, Beckett, Genet (Ithaca, N.Y., 1965), p. 73, and Pronko, p. 95. On the surface, of course, the play is largely concerned with love. Critics, in fact, have either missed or ignored some of the most compelling evidence in support of this theme. The name "A-médée," for example, suggests a male counterpart of the legendary Thracian princess celebrated for sorcery. The fact is, the hero's preoccupation with love, his capacity as a conjurer (pp. 46ff.), his mate's coldness and eventual threat of divorce (p. 33), the constant concern with mushrooms and poison, and the emphasis upon midnight and moonlight all effectually allude to the myth of Médée. The extraordinarily long body that winds its way out of the room and tumbles into the street, moreover, images a huge snake or dragon. About to be apprehended by the police, Amédée curiously enlists the aid of a foreigner, coils himself in the corpse, and is carried into the heavens. Thus the drama ends with a kind of deus ex machina humorously reminiscent of Euripidean tragedy.

In sum, then, I fully embrace the play's literal interpretation as a study of unrequited love. Figuratively, however, the work implies something quite different; hence my disagreement with Grossvogel, Pronko, et al.

charismatic condition which evokes euphoria. Conceived within this framework, Amédée constitutes a quick study of absurdity, what with Madeleine emerging as veritable chaos boding despair unto death and the protagonist surfacing as correspondence presaging exhilaration. The flashback and the parallel ascendancies of Madeleine and the corpse warrant such a generalization.

The portent of the couple's plight is the flashback, in which Amédée II's love is his mate's sting; his embrace, her strangulation; his earth and light, her mud and night; his happiness, her madness. Thus his lyrical vision,

Every voice echoes ours. Everything corresponds. We take each other by the hand. There is space, . . . , but no distance (pp. 50-51),

provokes her plaint, "I am an orphan, I am poor, sick, old, the oldest orphan in the world" (p. 51)! Yet he would restore, heal.

Am. II. What is far can be near. What is withered can grow green again. What is separated can be reunited. What is no longer can be again.

Ma. II. It's not true! It's not true! Stop saying that. You're breaking my heart!

Am. II. We love each other. We are happy. In a house of glass, a house of light.  
(p. 51)

Though at first he persists, it is Madeleine II who nonetheless prevails. She eventually curbs his call for glass and light, converting him as she does to the litany, "brass and night, alas" (p. 52).

Here, then, upon the mellowing grounds of marriage, the absurd extremes are initially joined, with discord confronting concord, anguish confronting euphoria. Compatibility, of course, would signify an absurd balance, a condition constituted by a blend of chaos and accord, one accommodating simultaneously a loathing of life and a longing for liberation. In this first engagement, unfortunately, Madeleine II prevails; and by implication, chaos and its companion despair achieve ascendancy.

As things turn out, the flashback but foreshadowed the future, because Madeleine continues to eschew ardor and optimism. When Amédée addresses her as "my love," for instance, she counters curtly, "I'm not your love" (p. 6). Or, again, when he recalls their wedding and touches her hand, she draws away, then complains, "Brrr! . . . I feel terribly cold" (p. 21). She likewise undermines his hopefulness. Thus to his observation that perhaps the corpse and the mushrooms are largely an imagined threat, she responds;

Optimism as usual, looking at the bright side!  
I know where that lands us. There's no point  
in deluding ourselves, we've got to face facts.  
(p. 10)

Constantly confronted by his absurd nemesis, as it were, Amédée becomes increasingly alienated and estranged, and in effect promises to become an apt mate for the self-proclaimed orphan Madeleine. Once the herald of harmony, the harbinger of happiness, he now sounds a more plaintive



note. "We never go out," he says. "We never visit anyone. We've been shut up here for fifteen years" (p. 11). Later, when the postman stops by, Madeleine inadvertently confirms her husband's assessment of awful isolation:

No one ever writes to us! Not a single soul!  
We haven't a friend left. We broke with every-  
one! We couldn't invite them home.

(p. 25)

From such solitude ensues Amédée's sense of precarious and tenuous existence. The continuing growth of the corpse, for example, elicits his confession, "This life is not worth living" (p. 17)! And later, when the body has burst into the living room, he confides his virtual debility.

I'm like a helpless child, I'm defenceless.  
I'm a misfit . . . I wasn't made to live in  
the twentieth century.

(p. 31)

Madeleine, it seems, has played the role of the great teacher, for during her tenure spanning a decade and a half, she has managed to color Amédée's every apprehension, to alter his every mood. Where she found unity, she taught chaos; where she encountered harmony, she professed discord; where she discovered light, she preached darkness; where she discerned love, she practiced rejection. With her perverted Midas touch, so to speak, she has managed to convert vitality to inertia, euphoria to despair, sureness to uncertainty and has very nearly rendered Amédée one with herself.

What emerges in the play is a parallel between Madeleine's ascendancy and the corpse's predominance, a parallel which traces to the Buccinioni's black honeymoon. "We put him in the best room," Amédée recalls of the corpse, "our bedroom when we were first married . . ." (p. 21). In other words, when Madeleine (repulsiveness and despair) secured access to Amédée's life, so too came awareness of death. Like Madeleine, moreover, mortality at first merely insinuated its ubiquity, and only later betrayed its ubiquity, a fact borne out by Amédée's comparative observations.

He's grown again. Soon, the divan won't be big enough for him. His feet are over the end already. I seem to remember fifteen years ago he was rather short. And so young. Now he's got a great white beard. He's quite imposing with that white beard.

(p. 14)

The analogy between Madeleine's and the corpse's presences is further reinforced by her confessed anticipation. Faced with the delay for darkness, for example, Madeleine confides,

Oh dear, I'm so used to waiting, waiting, waiting, long uncomfortable years of waiting, that's what my life has been . . . . (p. 41)

"So has mine," Amédée concedes (p. 42). This exchange is ironical, of course, for while both have lingered in anticipation, their expectations have differed markedly. Possessed by rejection and anguish, Madeleine has fretted the final contingency, death itself, whereas Amédée, a creature of love and ecstasy, has craved consummation.

The stage business attending the disposal of the body also affirms the connection between Madeleine and the corpse. Although she is ostensibly allied with Amédée, Ionesco's instructions require that she impede his progress, complicate his task, get in his way and for a time frustrate his efforts, the husband virtually having to drag her along with the dead body (p. 61).

The insistence all along has been that the flourishing corpse is a "turn" for death; and at this juncture, the implications of that conceit seem evident enough. While Amédée has been living shut up, "wed-locked" for fifteen years with Madeleine, yearning and euphoria have been figuratively joined in furious combat with repulsiveness and despair; and as the loathsome aspects of existence have achieved ascendancy, death has loomed as the inevitable and imminent outcome. Denied any detente with despair and sensing the loss of his will to live, Amédée experiences a dramatic shift in mood, one which enables him to shed the shackles of both Madeleine and the corpse.

The climax of Amédée, I think, deserves some comment, for it seems to hold the key to the hero's play and Ionesco's use of deus ex machina. The husband's drama, it should be recalled, has but two lines:

Old Woman. Do you think it will do?  
Old Man. It won't do by itself.  
 (p. 8)

Later, when Madeleine declares that love is useless, that

he knows nothing of real people, that he ought to "write an ordinary sort of play," Amédée defends his current work.

It's just the way it turns out. After all,  
I wanted to write a sociological play.  
(p. 53)

In Torco Square, moreover, he tells the American soldier of his drama in which he takes

the side of the living against the dead. One of Madeleine's ideas . . . . It's a problem play attacking nihilism and announcing a new form of humanism, more enlightened than the old.

(p. 69)

Within the context of Ionesco's play, curiously, the foregoing remarks make reasonable sense, what with Amédée in fact opposing Madeleine's nihilism and the death that it implies, and what with his announcing as well an altered concept of humanism, apparently one limited to what can be attained through love alone. It is worth noting, I think, that openness and rapport afford the sole relief from Amédée's otherwise unrelenting despair. Thus when he thinks upon another place, an earlier time, he relaxes and probes the peripheries of bleakness. "The horizon's a ring of dark mountains," he reveals; "thick clouds are sweeping over the ground . . . smoke and mist . . ." (p. 46). The subsequent remembrance of his apparitional counterpart's idealization of affection enables him to cut through the emotional overcast, as it were; consequently, he appeals for a return to love. "Do you know," he says to Madeleine,

if we loved each other, if we really loved  
each other, none of this would be important.  
(p. 52)

She, unfortunately, attributes to love no powers sufficient to dispel a sea of troubles.

Perhaps charity is merely incidental to the myriad everyday problems which humans encounter and solve; but with respect to the larger, more profound questions for which no answers are forthcoming, love can satisfy a crucial need. "All this might have turned out differently," Amédée says after Madeleine's final rejection,

not much better, of course, but we ought to have tried to accept things . . . We never tried everything, never did all we could to make him feel at home . . . We've all behaved badly at some time or other, so we ought to be more tolerant . . . Otherwise, otherwise, life is impossible . . . We can't be expected to understand everything . . . so we ought to be more broad-minded . . . .  
(p. 58)

Thus the playwright-character seems to say that while there is obviously no denying death, openness and charity can ease the pain of existence, for they can liberate mankind from the solitary agony of paralyzing fear and enhance the race's prospects of proceeding with the projects of the living.

Amédée (and Ionesco), then, proposes a sociological play, not one propounding the panaceas of programs and prophets, but one restricted to the limits and promises of love. The logic of this drama appears to dictate one of two outcomes, either that Madeleine accept or reject

Amédée's tenders of affection, the former alternative portending a reconciliation which in effect constitutes an absurd balance, the latter alternative presaging a further plunge into despair and perhaps a rush to embrace death. The limits of plausibility notwithstanding, Amédée does encounter rejection -- then release! The beneficiary of a species of inverted deus ex machina, he of a sudden is divested of his darkling consciousness and hoisted heavenward to an euphoric reward.

Ionesco's seeming strategy is reminiscent of tactics attributed to Euripides. For as regards the Greek's use of so-called deus ex machina, Moses Hadas notes,

When a play has so developed that its logical conclusion would be at variance with the traditional myth, a divinity appears to restore the appropriate direction for the ending. But surely the "wrong" direction was not due to accident; what the poet does, in effect, is to provide endings on two planes, one for the devout or for those who prefer a happy ending, and the other (always easily supplied by easy logic from the point where the god appears) for those willing to imagine the conclusion of the tragedy on its own terms.<sup>11</sup>

Hadas' theory of "endings on two planes" is rather intriguing because it nicely characterizes the climax of Ionesco's play. Literally, of course, the consequences of Amédée's unrequited love should be despair and possibly even suicide. Figuratively, and here that implies the plane of the Frenchman's two fundamental states of con-

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<sup>11</sup>A History of Greek Literature (New York, 1950), p. 92.

sciousness (see above, p. 264), Amédée wins miraculous respite and reprieve, his heaviness suddenly changing to lightness, his anguish to euphoria, his difficulty of being to the wonder of existence. Not for the first or last time, it seems, Ionesco has tantalized our interest with a literal ordeal, only to flee finally into the fantastic realm of states of consciousness.

A frolic interlaced with puns, malapropisms, and neologisms, Jack begins ambiguously, an entire household voicing displeasure over Jack's failure to acknowledge somehow his familial heritage. Jacqueline declares her brother "chronometrable,"<sup>12</sup> thus eliciting his bewildered, but affirmative statement: "Oh well, yes, yes, na, I adore hashed brown potatoes" (p. 87)! The family joyfully pronounces his Jackhood restored, then plots his marriage to Roberta I. Again reluctant, he insists upon a wife with three noses; and Robert I, having but two, is woefully lacking. The Roberts' "second only daughter" (p. 95), Roberta II, is "trinary" and therefore quantitatively qualified; however, he thinks her merely half homely, bordering in fact on the beautiful.

Roberta II reveals a preoccupation with creation, recounting as she does a series of vignettes about guinea

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<sup>12</sup>Jack, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York, 1958), p. 86. The term possibly suggests that he is subject to temporal considerations, that is, mortal (Esslin, p. 97).

piggies, puppies, foals, and babies. She subsequently uses her tale of a solitary stallion with a flaming mane to fascinate her champion, her account of the creature's movements, whinnies, and cries of fear evoking Jack's own vigorous "Haan! haan! haan" (p. 106)! Her quarry near collapse, she flourishes her fecundity, tantalizes him with talk of water and wetness, moistness and mud. She lulls him to lethargy, induces him to uncover (i.e., remove his cap), and encourages his embrace. To the accompaniment of familial miaows, she snakes the nine fingers of her left hand about his being.

Subtitled The Submission, the drama depicts the defloration of Jack's independence. The second episode, the seduction, moreover, constitutes a kind of echo to the hero's conversion to conformity, and as such, affords a conceit which more fully characterizes his fall from selfhood. To grasp the significance of the alteration in Jack's situation, though, requires that we first establish the nature of his estrangement.

The protagonist's environment virtually reeks with repulsiveness, a fact borne out by the ubiquitous sameness, dreariness, and decadence which pervade his household. In addition to the family's addiction to clichés and its abhorrence of the son's uniqueness, for example, the likeness in given names suggests its communal and conforming disposition. The advent of the Roberts, of course, signifies



more of the same. The setting, moreover, reflects the dreariness of Jack's habitat, the stage being cluttered with dirty old armchairs, collapsed sofas, old slippers, etc. Then, too, the Jacks are all shabbily clothed.

If such surroundings portend Jack's alienation, his being the sole maskless character and his wearing a costume obviously intended for a smaller man suggest as well his singular humanity and his disposition to burst the confines of his existence, as it were. These impressions are reinforced later when he relates to Roberta II how he came to distrust mankind, how he was promised a "remedy," a "change," "useful measures," how he was implored to hope (p. 103). "People," he adds, have "the word goodness in their mouths, a bloody knife between their teeth" (p. 104), for they have shamelessly deceived him.

And how to escape? They've boarded up the doors, the windows with nothing, they've taken away the stairs . . . One can't get out through the attic anymore . . . .  
(p. 104)

"I absolutely want to go away," he concludes. "Anything is preferable to my present condition" (p. 104).

The foregoing comments are ambiguous, surely. While Jack ostensibly speaks of physical barriers, he in fact delineates his circumscribed spiritual existence, a compelling condition which has become synonymous with estrangement. All prospects of rapport and harmony seemingly denied him, he uneasily probes the peripheries of his alien habitat

for the saving possibility of exodus. His commitment to selfhood notwithstanding, he submits not once, but twice to the panderings of mediocrity and sameness.

His first indiscretion is a return to dreariness and decadence, or if one prefers, his reconciliation with his fellow Jacks. To his credit, though, he does not succumb to the usual assaults upon his so-called miscreance. When Mother Jack recounts how she housebroke him, taught him to progress and transgress, schooled him in trilling his "r's," for example, he speaks not a word. Nor does he break silence when Jacqueline calls him "a naughty boyble," then declares that she "exeecrates" him (p. 82). Not even the paternal threat of disinheritance seems to move the recalcitrant youth. Pronouncing him unworthy of his "bear-fors," Father Jack speaks menacingly, "I'm blowing this joint. Frew it" (p. 83)! Then sounding like a veritable expatriate Hjalmar Ekdal, he warns darkly,

I'll pack my bags and you'll never see me  
again except at mealtimes and sometimes  
during the day and in the night to get a  
bite to eat.

(p. 84)

Like the Pupil in The Lesson, unfortunately, Jack has a fatal weakness -- language. Thus when Jacqueline vows to teach him one thing and then announces, "History has her eyes on us," Jack counters ominously, "Oh words, what crimes are committed in your name" (p. 86)! Not surprisingly, the subsequent charge of chronometrability is his undoing. Momentarily reduced to trembling and mutter-

ing, he splutters his adoration of hashed brown potatoes, a most meaningful affirmation which converts the Jacks to jubilation. Buoyed by the plasticity of Jack, who continues to repeat his statement "like an automaton" (p. 87), Father Jack speaks for all when he says,

I take back my renunciation. I am happy  
that you adore hashed brown potatoes. I  
reintegrate you with your ancestors. With  
tradition. With hashing. With everything.  
(p. 88)

Thereafter, the expansive Jacks seek a second success, the rebel's marriage to Roberta I, who represents an extension of the sameness and ugliness of Jackness, as it were. Again, Jack begins as the eccentric. Thus while his family succumbs to touching and sniffing the prospective bride, and lionizing her physical attributes, he remains scornful. Even the advent of the "trinary" Roberta II fails to assuage his appetite, he insisting, "I want a homelier one" (p. 97), and adding pointedly, "She's not ugly! She wouldn't even sour milk . . ." (p. 99).

Once more, language is Jack's undoing. Roberta II begins harmlessly enough, diverting him as she does with vignettes about birthing and babies. Subsequently spinning her story of the flaming stallion, an ordeal of heat and horse, she induces thirst and exhaustion, then entices him with talk of breasts and crevasses, softness, coolness, moistness. Having roused his ecstasy, she beguiles him with a litany of rapture and rapport, she evoking his series

of abridged responses with her repetitious and orgiastic outpouring of queries -- castle, camel, capricorn, cata-pult, catarrh, catfish, et cetera? Soon Jack capitulates, letting fall his cap and submitting to her caress.

Superficially two remotely related episodes, the respective indiscretions with Jacqueline and Roberta II, in effect, depict the subversion of Jack's selfhood. This impression, I think, is substantiated by the parallel patterns inherent in the episodes. That is to say, in both instances there is an initial ideal, a subsequent show of rigid resistance, and ultimately a submission wrought through the pandering propensities of language.

As a conceit for Jack's conversion to conformity, the seduction affords an extension as well as an echo. Thus while analogous patterns link the episodes one to the other, the earlier shift to sameness evolves later as an addiction to ugliness, the earlier resignation to dreariness re-emerges as an appetite for the grotesque. Moreover, the embarrassment and shame provoked by the satirical dancing, gesturing, miaowing, moaning, and croaking which accompany the seduction belong, by implication, to Jack's greater submission, which signals an abridgment of selfhood.

Once the anathema of Jackdom, the deflorated rebel has lost the purity and promise of former times. His current stirring, therefore, is worthy of scant attention, perhaps a peek into the night and an occasional "non, c'est le chat."

As a sequel to Jack, The Future Is in Eggs calls for the same décor and characters. Still locked in the embrace assumed three years earlier at the time of their mating, the lovers remain engrossed in each other, caterwauling without surcease and purring their affectionate "pusspuss-pusspusspuuuuusss....."<sup>13</sup> Father Jack nonetheless accuses them of "neglecting production," then emphasizes that the passing of Grandfather Jack prescribes actuation of appropriate replacement procedures. Predictably capitulating to family pressures, Jack soon experiences his first labor pains; and his cries of "Aie! Aie! Aie!" induce Roberta's responsive "Co-co-codac! Co-co-codac" (p. 134)! And once he utters his "Ah!" of deliverance and falls into a faint, Roberta (off-stage) begins laying eggs -- dozens, baskets, heaps of eggs. The produce is hauled on-stage for hatching. As the dutiful son broods and simulates the "Tuff! Tuff!" sounds of a steam-powered incubation engine, the families contemplate the future and foresee a generation of cannon fodder, officers, opportunists, popes, policemen, existentialists, etc. Reverting to his former recalcitrance, Jack interjects the possibilities of pessimists, anarchists, and nihilists, or in other words, beings of his own stripe. The families express momentary horror, then signal the curtain with their mindless chant: "Long

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<sup>13</sup>The Future Is in Eggs, trans. Derek Prouse (New York, 1960), p. 120.

live production! Long live the white race! Keep it up!  
Keep it up" (p. 141)!

Just as the story of Jack is continued into Eggs, so too is the defloration conceit. Again, then, there is a pattern disclosing an initial stance, a subsequent show of resistance, and eventually a submission wrought through the use of logic and language.

As before, Jack does not immediately capitulate. Charges by the families of unrestrained indulgence and idle caterwauling, for example, he ignores entirely. Neither does Father Jack's insistence that production is his "main duty" rouse him from lethargy or elicit from him more than a perfunctory "It's our duty" (p. 123)!. The father persists, however, employing the remembrance of Grandfather Jack's passing to reduce the household to tears and to provoke a spate of "heartiest cordolences." "You see how it is," he says to Jack;

we all have to go! You're our one and only hope! It's essential, absolutely essential, that we replace those that pass away.

Still the rebel resists.

Jack. Why?

Fath. We must assure the continuity of our race.

Jack. Why?

Fath. The continuity of our race . . . the white race! Long live the white race!  
(p. 131)

Thus, amid the hubbub and roar of clichés and slogans, the objections of incipient individuality are swept aside.

Poor protestant that he is, Jack quickly finds himself participating in the production processes.

It is worth noting that Jack does retain a semblance of selfhood. In the first play, of course, his portrayal as the sole maskless character suggests his singular humanity. The sequel depicts the re-emergence of that humanity through the juxtaposition of his labor pains and simulated delivery with Roberta's cackling and egg-laying. In other words, his ordeal is characterized by human pains, mortal exclamations, and fainting, whereas the bestial Roberta, who typifies Jackdom, emits animalistic "co-co-codacs!" and delivers animal produce. Then, too, when Jack envisions future pessimists, anarchists, nihilists, and their ilk, he in effect foresees the preservation and continuation of the very nonconformity which characterizes his own healthy "miscreance." Jack's selfhood, moreover, is manifested by his reversion to yearning. "I want a fountain of light," he tells his fellow Jacks, "incandescent water, fire of ice, snows of fire" (p. 141).

The son's humanity notwithstanding, Ionesco's final instructions portend a classic victory for the forces of sameness and the tyranny of tradition. The playwright's suggestion is that through the manipulation of scenery and/or the use of trapdoors, the phenomena of collapse and/or sinking be effected, these phenomena being discernible to the audience, but not the players. Thus Jackdom's

rage for conformity and continuity reveals not only a partiality for dreariness and ugliness, decadence and grotesquery, but also a propensity for mindless proliferation and unwitting self-destruction.

Improvisation is a polemic, and as such, represents a spirited critical exchange between Ionesco and the Soiristes, Bartholomeus I, II, and III. Awakened by Bart I, the playwright is asked about his forthcoming The Shepherd's Chameleon, a work he characterizes as revolving around the images of shepherd and chameleon, one presenting his points of view and constituting an improvisation. A partial reading of the play discloses Ionesco's being awakened by Bart I, who inquires about a future play. At this juncture it is obvious that Ionesco's tragic farce is identical to the real Ionesco's Improvisation. The arrivals of Barts II and III, moreover, actuate two repetitions of this same scene.

The Barts desire to teach Ionesco theatricality. Declaring Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides "outdated,"<sup>14</sup> Aristotle irrelevant, Shakespeare dangerously poetic and Polish (perhaps Russian, but surely not French [pp. 120-122]), and Molière a dreadful writer, who "failed to express the social gestus of his age" (p. 121), the triumvirate promulgates a didactic drama, a kind of "night

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<sup>14</sup>Improvisation, trans. Donald Watson (New York, 1960), p. 120.



school" (p. 126) in which the director serves as vice-principal and the audience must take notes and raise their hands for permission to leave the theatre. After a quick study of costumology, historicization, decorology, audienco-psychology, ad nauseam, they alter his costume, give him a dunce's cap, hang a sign reading "scientist" over his chest, join with him for a chorus of hee-haw's, and admit an "audience," which happens to be Marie, the cleaning lady. The group's braying and gambolling provokes Marie to berate Ionesco for foolishness and lecture the tutors on good-for-nothingness, after which she puts the latter to flight.

The improvisation ended, Ionesco summons the critics, then delivers a harangue, in which he rationalizes the non-social aspects of his theatre, acknowledges his preoccupation with moods, and alludes to mythic and archetypal tendencies which render his insights universal. Himself accused of pedantry, he apologizes and promises no recurrences.

Perhaps the work in which Ionesco most explicitly identifies his "turns," Improvisation revolves about the image of a shepherd embracing a chameleon, the referents for which are deliberately ambiguous. When questioned about this figure, Ionesco tells Bart I,

You can say I am the shepherd if you like,  
and the theatre's the chameleon. Because  
I've embraced a theatrical career, and the  
theatre, of course, changes, for the theatre  
is life.

(pp. 113-114)

Interpretation of Improvisation within this framework, in

fact, insures Ionesco's portrayal as an enlightened caretaker, because he emerges as one espousing reasoned, temperate, and flexible views as regards the theatre. To begin with, he honors his heritage, his luminaries being Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; his formal authority, Aristotle; his poetic ideal, Shakespeare; his master of effect and amusement, Molière. Then, too, when the Barts demean the public as stupid, as capable of little "intelligent variation to the expression of their feelings . . . ," as largely given to responding through applause, bravos, catcalls, whistles, and stomping, Ionesco wonders aloud,

What else do they want them to do! Hiccup,  
belch, click their tongues, whoop like Red  
Indians or break their wind?

(p. 126)

Even his veritable manhandling by the despotic Barts he initially tolerates. Accepting their contention that he is "not dressed like an author of our time . . . ," he lets them remove his jacket, tie, shoes, "which they promptly put back as before" (p. 141). Their extra pair of trousers he wears, their dunce cap he dons, their sign he displays. Thus burdened, unfortunately, he drops down at the table, is raised up by his instructors, only to fall forward and again require assistance. Ordered to be "Ionesco not being Ionesco" (p. 143)! he learns to take one step forward, two backwards, one forward, two backwards, etc., eventually eliciting Bart II's joyful ejaculation, "That's

it . . . He's alienated himself" (p. 144)! He quickly progresses to braying; and when the masters accept him as part of a gambolling foursome, he in effect becomes every bit the jackass the learned doctors are. Yet, he rebukes Marie for her ridicule, insisting, "They cure the theatre's ailments . . ." (p. 146).

The least impression arising from the foregoing blend of serious commentary and farce, then, is the portrayal of Ionesco as a sensitive caretaker, one quite capable of appreciating and tolerating the myriad shades and adaptations attending the chameleon theatre's passage through variegated time, as it were. In other words, he embraces a wide spectrum of dramatic practices, ranging from the ancient to the modern, the classic to the realistic and fantastic, the tragic to the comic, the didactic to the diverting. This groundwork laid, he can in good conscience step forward to rationalize his own mode of doing drama, for within his flexible framework there is also room for Ionesco. Proclaiming the artist "the only reliable witness of his times" (p. 149), he argues that the former alone, working mysteriously and in perfect freedom, can express his day and age. He subsequently proceeds to the kind of confession which commonly characterizes his autocriticism:

For my part I believe sincerely in the poverty of the poor, I deplore it, but it is true and can serve as material for the theatre; I also

believe in the grave cares and anxieties that may beset the rich; but in my case it is neither from the wretchedness of the poor nor the unhappiness of the rich that I draw the substance of my drama. For me, the theatre is the projection onto the stage of the world within: it is in my dreams, my anguish, my dark desires, my inner contradictions that I reserve the right to find the stuff of my plays. As I am not alone in the world, as each of us, in the depths of his being, is at the same time: everyone else, my dreams and desires, my anguish and obsessions do not belong to myself alone; they are a part of the heritage of my ancestors, a very ancient deposit to which all mankind may lay claim. It is this which, surpassing the superficial diversity of men, brings them together and constitutes our deepest fellowship, a universal language.

(p. 150)

As indicated earlier, the conceits in Improvisation are ambiguous. Thus while Ionesco offers himself as an example of the shepherd, the theatre as an illustration of the chameleon, he insinuates as well the Barts' roles as chameleons. This second equation may, I think, be inferred from the response to Bart I's inquiry about who Ionesco is, the shepherd or the chameleon? "I don't change colour every day," the playwright retorts; "I'm not always being towed along by the latest fashion, like . . . but I'd rather not say who" (p. 113). The implication of his remark is that certain critics become the unwitting sycophants of theatrical rages, the instigators of which are clearly identified in the play itself. "Bart," the clipped form of "Bartholomeus," for example, appears to be a portmanteau name derived from "Brecht" and "Sartre." This being the case, the talk of a theatre for the masses, the emphasis

upon man's social nature, the premium on didacticism, the disparagement of diversion, and the instruction in alienation at once become significant, because they allude to ideals attributed to Brecht. Moreover, the "philosophistic" delineation of alienation, the phenomena of being outside when inside, inside when outside, which, "dialectically speaking," may be called "The Being-In-on-the-Outside-and-Out-on-the-Inside" or, again, the "Being of not-Being and the Not-Being of Being in the Know" (p. 118) is an obvious, if uncharitable, gibe at Sartrean existentialism. The Barts, therefore, surface as chameleon critics securely in the tow of a fashionable and faddish wave of Brechtian and Sartrean theatrical practices.

The fact is, the Barts are also perverse shepherds, self-styled saviors who would destroy the theatre to save it. The music adapted from seventeenth-century scores, the scholars' gowns modeled after those worn in Molière's times, and the concept of an improvised performance dealing in dramatic criticism clearly suggest a literary period when cliques, coteries, and cabals exercised a considerable and probably unhealthy control over the theatre. The Barts' emergence as mindless purveyors of rules and regulations, therefore, evokes the specter of critical tyranny.

At first, they appear relatively harmless. Bart I, for instance, sounds like an avant-gardist when he promises to produce The Shepherd's Chameleon in a new theatre, "with

a scientific director and a company of scientific actors," where there are "seats for twenty-five and standing room for four" and where Ionesco will get "scientific treatment" (p. 111; cf. Notes, p. 222). Soon, however, he betrays his excessive zeal with pronouncements such as "I'm here to pass judgment on you. And put you right" (Improvisation, p. 114).

By summarily dismissing the Greeks, Shakespeare, and Molière, of course, the critics effectually divorce themselves from theatrical tradition. More than this, though, their folly runs to rigidity and ignorance. Thus when Bart III is asked to substantiate his tautology, "What is theatrical is theatrical," he counters, "I can't find an example that springs to mind, but I'm right . . . All that matters is that I'm always right" (p. 123). Or again, when Ionesco cites Aristotle's conception of drama as an action at a given time and place, Bart I attributes the notion to an earlier writer -- Adamov. Despite their humor and topicality, then, the foregoing exchanges besmirch the Barteans' critical qualifications.

True believers nonetheless, they have other sensibilities to violate. They go on to condemn laughter, weeping, forgetting, then set forth a didactic scheme based upon the concept, "Boredom is entertainment" (p. 125). Feeling keenly a sense of mission, they promise to re-educate audiences, delineating a plan which entails compulsory attendance, note-taking, a pass-fail system, and

citations calling for medals or punishment. Their advocacy they culminate with cries of "Write! Write!! Write!!! Write!!!!" which elicit from the brain-washed Ionesco an accommodating, "Hee . . . haw . . . hee . . . haw . . ." (p. 144), a response implying that Bartean theory makes of drama un travail de routine.

The episode involving Marie reveals, I think, the real Ionesco's ideal of an assize of last resort. Identified as the cleaning lady, she is mysteriously announced by Bart I as "the audience" (p. 144). And once she enters, she declares the Barts' teachings "rubbish" and uses her broom to put the pedagogues to flight. In a figurative sense, therefore, Ionesco has the audience judge theatrical practice, the results being that it derides the playwright for heeding wayward criticism and that it turns indignantly upon those who seek to control the theatre through jejune prescripts. A kind of mother shepherdess, then, Marie distinguishes between her ministering sons, recognizing as she does the kindly caretaking of Ionesco and the perverse guidance of the Barts.

The New Tenant opens with a confrontation between the Gentleman and Mrs. Fairchild. Neatly attired in dark clothing, the newcomer startles the caretaker, who confesses not expecting him for a day or two. Upset by his careful perusal of the premises and his studied indifference

toward her, she becomes flustered; and when he offers her money and requests that she leave, she goes reluctantly, complaining the while that he would make her "a proper tart"<sup>15</sup> and lead her on with false promises, despicable conduct which she threatens to report to "the hinspector."

Bill and Fred, two furniture movers, begin carting in vases, stools, pedestal tables, taking care to place each object where the Gentleman desires. Meanwhile, the latter traces two circles in the middle of the stage, one inside the other, then has an armchair centered in the former. Soon the walls are lined with furniture, the window covered with a sideboard and picture, the stage cluttered with wardrobes, tables, settees, wickerwork baskets, the armchair backed and flanked by screens, the constant traffic resulting in an ever-diminishing space. The stairway and the street clogged, the movers open the sliding ceiling, from which they lower planks to complete the tenant's enclosure. Finally they toss flowers atop the heap, and before departing, comply with the Gentleman's final "Put out the light" (p. 116).

While the play ostensibly recounts the Gentleman's resettlement in Mrs. Fairchild's apartment house, there are indications of his relocation's being a conceit for entrance into le domicile mortuaire. The portrayal of the

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<sup>15</sup>The New Tenant, trans. Donald Watson (New York, 1958), p. 101.



caretaker, the costume and conduct of the Gentleman, the setting, and the movers' activities bear out this assertion.

Mrs. Fairchild's surprise, of course, underscores the tenant's unexpected arrival. Indeed, her shock is such that she begins to hiccup. Moreover, her talk of pensions is meaningful, especially the observation concerning her guest, "Oh, but not yet, you're too young for that, though you never know, some of them give up early when they're tired . . ." (p. 93), for she alludes at once to money and retirement, and an abrupt and unexpected leaving off as well. The collective impression at this juncture is that the anonymous Gentleman's entrance into the house of the dead comes suddenly, and is accompanied not by mere les hoquets but le hoquet de la mort. This being the case, the caretaker's welcoming comments become significant. "Of course, you're at 'ome now . . . ," she tells the tenant.

Last week, it wasn't your 'ome yet--there's always change--it was their 'ome--well, can't be helped--you 'ave to get old--it's a question of age--now this is your 'ome . . . .  
(p. 93)

Again her words are ambiguous, for while she seems to cite the newcomer's taking over an old couple's room, she effectually implies an alteration in the middle-aged Gentleman's attitude toward death, his former notion of its belonging to the province of others having been supplanted

by the realization of his own mortality.

The Gentleman's dark clothing is, obviously, appropriate for the occasion. His interest in the two paintings of hideous old men, whom he identifies as "ancestors" (p. 107), also reinforces the burial motif, insinuating as it does that death affords oneness with his forbears. Then, too, his obsession with arranging the armchair in the center of the room suggests, in effect, a desire to place his bier at bottom-center of the cavity. Moreover, securing the window and closing the sliding ceiling, both matters of peculiar concern to the tenant, simulate the phenomena of lid- and grave-sealing, respectively.

The setting, too, strengthens the play's dominant motif, what with the room's being on the sixth floor and the ceiling's facilitating the "filling" operation. And the background of voices, snatches of song, barrel-organ piping, hammering sounds, and later exterior noises "transformed into music" (p. 107) cleverly suggest activities and obsequies preliminary to interment. The movers, fittingly, image gravediggers, for they open and close the ceiling, cart the armchair to its resting place, heap the room with clutter, express concern over contents exceeding the capacity of the chamber, and decorate their work with flowers. As very human gravediggers, moreover, they declare the assignment "thirsty work" (p. 108), and empty a bottle during the course of their labors.

"That's all very interesting," some will say; "but the burial seems somewhat premature. After all, the Gentleman is very much alive!" What we have, I think, is another instance of Ionesco's merging fantasy with relative reality, the result being that we have neither one nor the other but an unsettling blend of the two. The burial motif, nonetheless, does contribute to the drama's effect, because it implicitly underscores the Gentleman's spiritual alienation. His indifference to Mrs. Fairchild, for example, betrays his aloofness; and when he dismisses her, he effectually announces that he wants no "care-takers" violating his solitude. This rage for existential apartheid is further shown by his insistence that the window be sealed and boarded over, after which he declares expansively, "Won't have any more trouble from the neighbours now" (p. 109). Then, too, his accepting a radio set only after hearing that it does not function and his taking a second clock with an indifferent "But wait . . . after all, why not" (p. 112)? after having rejected a first are further indications of his estrangement, more fully characterizing as they do a dissentience which encompasses an aversion toward contacts with mankind as well as antipathy toward engines which facilitate and regulate human intercourse.

The burial motif as a conceit for the Gentleman's inability to live spontaneously, either in action or reaction, with the contents of his cultural life is quite con-

sistent with Ionesco's stated dramatic theory. For in speaking of the props in The Chairs, the playwright says,

They express the proliferation of material things. The obtrusive presence of objects expresses spiritual absence.

(Notes, p. 132)

The furniture, therefore, along with his treatment of Mrs. Fairchild, his hostility toward neighbors, and his apprehensions as regards radio sets and clocks all serve to portray the tenant as one so spiritually alienated as to be already dead.

The Killer depicts an idealist's sojourn in the radiant city, a place of incomparable whiteness and brilliance. Treated to a tour of the model district by the Architect, Bérenger is enthralled by the ubiquitous quiet, blue heavens, magnificent lawns, and fragrant flowers. Soon, however, the miracle's limitations surface, the host proving insouciant; the streets, dangerous; the entire district, hostile. Worst of all, citizens are plagued by the Killer, a one-eyed fiend that frequents a tram-stop, feigns a beggared condition, appeals for alms, eventually engages their interest with a photo of the colonel, and subsequently drowns them in an ornamental pool. The death of Dany, the Architect's secretary, provokes Bérenger's denunciation of the founder's complacency and elicits his vain plea for action.

Momentarily defeated, he returns to his home district, where the blend of snow and drizzle affords a stark contrast to the immaculate whiteness and glaring blue of the radiant city. In his apartment he finds his shrivelled and sickly friend Édouard, to whom he confides the recent ordeal, only to encounter the same indifference shown earlier by the Architect. During the subsequent stage business, Édouard's briefcase is upset, and from it tumbles a flood of photos, sweets, money-boxes, children's watches, diaries, address books, maps -- items long associated with the Killer himself. The effects, Édouard explains, were mailed to him, and accompanied by a request that he write an article recounting the monster's strange and twisted career. Bérenger insists that they report their findings to the police.

In the third act, after witnessing the demagoguery of Mother Peep, instructing Édouard to retrieve the briefcase which he has misplaced, and tangling with a pair of arrogant traffic policemen who refuse to assist in the apprehension of the Killer, Bérenger wanders up a dark road toward the setting sun. At first singularly committed to ridding the city of the murderer and enhancing the prospects of radiant cities everywhere, he gradually weakens, even considers abandoning the quest altogether. Suddenly the Killer appears. Puny and shabbily attired, he is Bérenger's apparent inferior in both stature and strength. The cru-

sader attempts to reason with him, employing as he does a considerable store of arguments normally addressed to creatures of understanding: threats; appeals to patriotism; demands for a definitive philosophy; pleas for compassion, brotherhood, mercy, justice. To all the Killer responds with sneers and derisive laughter. Ultimately, no arguments remain. Bérenger, in fact, seems more convinced of his adversary's rights than his own. Unable to use his revolvers, he drops to his knees and curses, all the while awaiting the knife of the Killer, who stands and snickers.

The drama is evidently developed around two elaborate actualized conceits -- the radiant city and the fiend. Not surprisingly, each seems to arise from a state of consciousness, the city representing a condition devoutly to be wished, one capable of evoking boundless euphoria, and the Killer imaging a hostility, irrationality, chaos, and imminent destruction deservedly loathed, yet capable of eliciting anguish and melancholia. The content of the play substantially delineates both of these conceits.

Quite in keeping with the characteristic absurdist craving for unity and clarity, the "smiling city"<sup>16</sup> at first promises the perfect order frequently envisioned by mankind in its more nostalgic moments. "It's all calculated, all intentional," says the Architect. "Nothing was left to chance in this district . . ." (p. 12). And when Bérenger contemplates the flowers, lawns, blue skies, perfect weather,

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<sup>16</sup>The Killer, trans Derek Prouse (New York, 1960), p. 16.

greenhouses for plants requiring cooler temperatures, and fresh air borne through concealed ventilators, he readily agrees: "Ah, everything's been thought of . . ." (p. 15).

A chimera "wished-for come," the city is a realization of Bérenger's ideal. "I knew," he confesses to the Architect,

that somewhere in our dark and dismal city, in  
all its mournful, dusty, dirty districts, there  
was one that was bright and beautiful, this  
neighbourhood beyond compare, with its sunny  
streets and avenues bathed in light . . . .  
(p. 11)

Basking in the warmth of consentience, he declares the haven "a world that was made for me" (p. 22). The onset of euphoria, moreover, insulates him from the final contingency, the airiness, plenitude, and perfect balance reassuring him that he is, that he has always been, that he is "no longer going to die" (p. 23).

The radiant city's actual existence is questionable of course. It is worth noting that Bérenger moves about an empty stage and perceives "real houses and stones and bricks and cement . . . ," creations which are "concrete, solid, tangible" (p. 26). Although this may reflect the playwright's way of overcoming technical difficulties, the dream-haunted hero's comments imply that the city is merely an actualization of his inner vision. Proclaiming it "Another universe, a world transfigured," for example, he adds significantly,

And just that very short journey to get here,  
a journey that isn't really, since you might  
say it takes place in the same place . . . .  
(p. 17)

It is the "unfindable," he tells Édouard later, "the dream, the key," indeed,

All our muddled aspirations, all the things  
we vaguely yearn for, from the depths of our  
being, without even realizing . . . .  
( p. 61)

The radiant city, therefore, constitutes "that other place," to which he has "tried consciously and unconsciously to find the way" (p. 16); and the audience's impression is that of one more inward odyssey, one of the veritable trademarks of Ionesco's drama.

The fact is, the Architect's creation is the most tantalizing of illusions, a notion substantiated by remarks concerning the ventilation and shelter afforded by the city. When his host notes that his apparatus simulates the phenomena which result in

those oases that crop up all over the place in the desert, where suddenly out of the dry sand you see amazing cities rising up . . ." (p. 17),

Bérenger interjects, "mirages," then adds, "mirages . . . there's nothing more real than a mirage" (p. 18). Expansive and preoccupied, the latter foresees a new life in this setting which answers "some profound need inside"; fancies a transformation in this sanctuary auguring a projection, a continuation of the universe within himself; envisions a consociation with the

Gardens, blue sky, or the spring, which corresponds to the universe inside and offers a chance of recognition, which is like a trans-



lation, or a mirror in which its own smile could be reflected . . . in which it can find itself again and say: that's what I am in reality and I'd forgotten, a smiling being in a smiling world . . . .

(p. 19)

The wording here is noteworthy; and when considered in light of Bérenger's portrayal of the city as "a sheltered spot" (p. 17), his disinterest in food and drink (p. 42), and his experiences involving echoes (pp. 29, 94-97), the comments evoke the myth of Narcissus. It is, after all, in such a setting that the lovely youth peers into a clear spring. What he sees enamors him, of course; and unable to tear himself from his reflection, he remains by the water, suffers increasingly from exhaustion and frustration, and eventually dies. Together the images of mirage and pool convincingly characterize Bérenger's crisis, for it is a vision, surely, which entrances him and seduces his mind, bringing the increased frustration and despair which attend an unsatisfied longing to embrace the insubstantial reflection of the loveliest of apparitions.

While the radiant city is an actualized conceit for unity and clarity, the Killer emerges as a concrete equivalent of hostility, irrationality, chaos, and death -- the darkling forces which render the impossible dream impossible. The fiend, like the city, has attributes of reality. Thus when Bérenger proceeds to the perilous plain, he does encounter a puny, ill-shaven subhuman wearing a torn hat, shabby gaberdine, and old shoes, from which

his toes protrude. Having but one eye, the latter stares fixedly and utters not a word.

As anticipated, Bérenger is deeply affected by the Killer. News of his adversary's remarkable string of homicides, for example, noticeably perturbs him. The discovery of three bodies in the ornamental pool, moreover, curbs his lust for life and evokes his anguished plaint.

There's no point in living! What's the good of it all, what's the good if it's only to bring us to this? (p. 34)

And during the ordeal on the plain, when rationality fails him utterly, he bends at the altar of unreason:

You kill without reason . . . , and I beg you, without reason I implore you, yes, please stop . . . There's no reason why you should, naturally, but please stop, just because there's no reason to kill or not to kill. (p. 108)

Confronted with the Killer's persistent chuckles and indifferent shrugs, Bérenger agonizes, "Oh . . . how weak my strength is against your determination . . . ," then stammers, "Oh God! There's nothing we can do" (p. 109).

As in the case of the radiant city, the Killer's actual existence is questionable. Ionesco himself suggests, for instance, that the play may be performed with or without him (p. 98). Although such instructions may indicate a way around an obvious credibility problem, an examination of Bérenger's past and present circumstances points to the fiend's non-existence. Enthralled by the city of light, the hero reminisces, recalls life elsewhere -- the dirty

snow, bitter winds, whole districts of people

neither ugly nor beautiful, creatures that are  
dismally neutral, who long without longings as  
though they're unconscious, unconsciously suf-  
fering from being alive. (pp. 19-20)

If the radiant city affords a springtime experience, the other constituted "the winter of the soul" (p. 20), creating as it did a kind of "chaotic vacuum" precluding the immense sadness one feels in "the moment of tragic and intolerable separation" (p. 24). Lost "among all those people, all those things . . . ," he dwelled in "perpetual November, perpetual twilight . . ." (p. 25).

His present circumstances and reaction coincide remarkably with those he imputes to the past. Apprised of the violence in the streets, for example, he complains to his host, "You're clouding the whole place over" (p. 31)! and then adds, "I can feel the darkness spreading inside me again" (p. 32)! Later, moreover, when he talks to Édouard, his words betray a peculiar urgency.

Do you know the things that happen in the world,  
awful things, in our town, terrible things, you  
can't imagine . . . quite near here . . . compa-  
ratively close . . . morally speaking it's actually  
here! [He strikes his breast.] (pp. 60-61)

"Here," of course, is ambiguous, for it alludes at once to his home district, which lies near the other, and to the anguish, which shrives the heart of its inmost yearning. Upset with Bérenger's failure to distinguish dream from reality, Édouard reproves his friend.

What in fact are you talking about? Is it your dreams that are being killed? Generalities don't mean a thing. (p. 62)

In reality not the slayer of countless radiant citizens, then, but a conceit for those forces which divest dream-carriers of their nostalgia, the Killer derives from the race of man, constituting as he does an amalgam of the tribe's darkest impulses. Indeed, among Bérenger's own associates are to be found the portfolios of spiritual homicides, their complicity being betrayed by their penchant for briefcases. The Architect, for example, carries a thick and heavy serviette, "like the one Édouard has in Act II" (p. 10). Its obtrusiveness, of course, insures the audience's noticing it and associating it with the city's creator. Later, Édouard's briefcase is featured in the stage business; and, more importantly, the case's contents implicate their owner, for the maps, photos, diaries, etc. are employed by the Killer in his reign of terror. Also, there is the spate of briefcases in Act III, all of which are mistaken for Édouard's, which has been left at the apartment. Struggles ensue, first for the Man's case, then the Old Man's, and finally Mother Peep's. Like Édouard and Bérenger, the audience eventually associates all briefcases with the Killer, the several episodes in fact subtly suggesting a syllogism: owners of briefcases are Killer partisans; the Architect, Édouard, Mother Peep, and the throng are owners of briefcases; therefore,

they are Killer partisans. And given the slightest encouragement, beholders will take the partisans for the Killer himself. Thus does Ionesco employ the fiend to portray the darkling impulses of every man. For much like the viewers at Manor Farm, who cannot distinguish man from beast,<sup>17</sup> Ionesco's audience looks from Killer to man, and from man to Killer, and from Killer to man again, eventually to discover that it cannot say which is which. The Architect's indifference ("Don't take it to heart so" [p. 36]!), the sickly and deformed Édouard's blandness ("I've come to terms" [p. 62]), and Mother Peep's cynicism (evidenced by her call for revolution, for soup kitchens, for "goosestepping" in her honor, for propaganda to make exploitation seem to be productiveness, compulsion voluntarism, colonization liberation, persecution justice, and tyranny discipline) -- it is, after all, these phenomena which undermine Bérenger's nostalgia. These, then, are the engines the Killer images, for they generate the kind of hostility, irrationality, chaos, and destruction which uproot the tentative structures of dream-carriers and light-bearers everywhere.

The name "Bérenger" is an interesting selection, really, for it links the protagonist with the French politician Alphonse M. M. T. Bérenger (1785-1866) and his son,

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<sup>17</sup>George Orwell, Animal Farm (New York, 1946), p. 128.

the jurist René Bérenger (1830-1915). The former was concerned with the reclamation of criminals and wrote several books on the suppression of crime and the institutionalization of offenders, while the latter sought to reform the French judicial and penal systems. The younger, according to The Encyclopedia Americana,

was the author of the so-called "Bérenger laws" [sic] designed to give immunity to first offenders. He was also a leader in campaigns for the suppression of vice.<sup>18</sup>

Ionesco's Bérenger, curiously, is committed to the suppression of evil; and it is noteworthy that his final appeal to the Killer calls for immunity: "Let's forget the trouble you've already caused . . ." (The Killer, p. 107). The hero's name, it seems, invokes historical figures, who personify the very notions borne by the conceit of the radiant city and its subsidiary "turns," the mirage and Narcissus' pool, because collectively they suggest the idle dream of a projector, who is at once fortified by his chimera and pathetically vulnerable to debilitating dissentience, a species of black nemesis imaged by the Killer.

Probably the best-known of Ionesco's works, Rhinoceros depicts the conversion of one, then several, and ultimately all but one of a provincial town's populace to rhinocerosism, which infects people and transforms them into

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<sup>18</sup>"René Bérenger," The Encyclopedia Americana, III (1957), 540.

crude and bludgeoning pachyderms that thunder in the streets. Bérenger,<sup>19</sup> the protagonist, is alcoholic, ill-groomed, and indolent, the very antithesis of Jean, a well-adjusted type who dresses impeccably and thrives on an eight-hour work day. While Jean decries his friend's slovenliness, a rhinoceros rumbles past, creating considerable consternation among the grocery and cafe patrons, except for Bérenger, who remains curiously indifferent. Within minutes another beast gallops by, this time in the opposite direction. Again Bérenger stands undismayed. A debate concerning the pachyderms' unicornity and bicornity ensues, the friends' exchanges becoming especially acrimonious. Jean takes exception to charges of pedantry and storms off in a fit of anger.

The next day, at the law-publishing firm where

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<sup>19</sup>While acknowledging the possibility of this Bérenger's being the same character encountered in The Killer, Martin Esslin cites subtle personality differences and altered circumstances, and suggests 1) that the two are not necessarily the same person, or 2) that the Bérenger of Rhinoceros is a younger version of the other (Esslin, pp. 124-125). I favor the first, for several reasons. The present hero's talk of attacking evil at its roots and Dudard's portrayal of him as a "Don Quixote" (Rhinoceros, trans. Derek Prouse [New York, 1960], p. 80) effectively link him to the historical Bérengers mentioned previously. Moreover, Ionesco goes on to create Bérenger I in Exit the King and Bérenger the playwright in A Stroll in the Air. Rather than identifying a continuing character, it seems, "Bérenger" is the French playwright's code-name for "visionary," a notion easily substantiated by the content of the four Bérenger dramas. Also, Ionesco often arbitrarily employs the same name to identify different characters in his several plays (see, e.g., Marie in The Lesson, Improvisation, and Exit the King; and Madeleine in Victims of Duty, Amédée, and Thirst and Hunger).

Bérenger is employed, another disputation arises, this one's heat and direction being affected largely by Botard, who ridicules the reports of stray rhinoceroses. His objections are soon dispelled by Mrs. Boeuf, however. Having come to explain her husband's absence from work, she at first complains of being chased by a pachyderm, then discovers the beast to be her missing mate. She elects to join him and the host below. While Botard speaks darkly of plots and subversion, the staff flees the besieged government office.

Bérenger subsequently visits Jean. Bed-ridden, the latter has obviously contracted rhinoceritis, his symptomatic headache, hoarseness, swollen forehead, and green coloration worsening alarmingly. Extolling veterinary surgeons, nature, and the swamps, Jean charges about the room and makes an occasional run at Bérenger. Dismayed, the hero flees, but not without difficulty, for the quadrupeds infest the building and surrounding area.

Back home, he falls into an uneasy sleep, writhes in agony, and shouts warnings about dangerous beasts. Awakened, he frets over his ominous headache and cough. Dudard, Deputy-Head of the firm, stops by to report that Papillon, their supervisor, has converted. During a muted debate, the guest belittles Bérenger's fears and commends the pachyderms' harmlessness. Daisy, the firm's typist, brings news of more conversions, particularly Botard's. Obviously confused and perturbed by her interest in Bérenger, Dudard departs to join



the flock. Thus the lovers alone remain; and a momentary surge of confidence notwithstanding, Daisy weakens, betraying as she does a fascination for herd habits and a fear of the price of nonconformity. When she deserts, Bérenger becomes a bundle of contradictions. Torn between selfhood and conformity, at once desiring to persevere and to capitulate, he persists uncertainly to the very end.

Rhinocerism, of course, must be taken as a conceit. Ionesco, in fact, delineates one intended parallel in a preface to an American edition of the play. Citing Denis de Rougemont's stay in Nuremburg in 1938, he recalls the writer's participation in a Nazi demonstration. The arrival of Hitler created an immediate wave of agitation, which gradually grew to hysteria and frenzy. De Rougemont was at first astonished; but as the mania built and inundated the throng, he felt the "same raging madness in himself, struggling to possess him, a delirium that electrified him" (Notes, p. 198). Nearly capitulating to the spell, he was saved by some miraculous power from the depths of his being, a force which caused his entire personality to bridle. Uneasy, utterly alone, hesitant to resist, his hair virtually on end, he understood once for all the meaning of Holy Terror.

Ionesco is quite explicit as regards this parallel, surely, for he proceeds further in his preface:

There, perhaps, is the starting point of Rhinoceros; when one is assailed by arguments, theories, intellectual slogans and all kinds of propaganda, it is

probably impossible to give any explanation for this refusal. Later on, discursive reasoning will doubtless lend support to this natural instinctive resistance, this spiritual rejection. (p. 199)

Thus the playwright prescribes one of the analogies implied by rhinocerism. De Rougemont, after all, has much in common with Bérenger, because each fails initially to comprehend the full significance of the phenomena, each perceives later the rampant hysteria, and each inevitably senses the awful broil within. Each, moreover, experiences the mysterious force which counteracts his own incipient madness. Then, too, Bérenger becomes one with de Rougemont when he withdraws from the debate with Dudard, insisting as he does, "I refuse to think about it!" and adding that the rage is wrong, for he can "feel it intuitively" (Rhinoceros, p. 85). Both men, therefore, character and writer, afford remarkable testimony concerning the dys-ease, agonizing solitude, and moral paralysis which afflict dissenters. The parallel between the ordeal of Bérenger and the real experience of de Rougemont, between the provincial town's rhinocerism and German fascism becomes the more striking when we indulge in some word-play, because Ionesco's title Rhinoceros can be readily clipped to "rhino," lengthened to "rhinoland," and changed, significantly, to "Rhineland."

Though the play is clearly anti-Nazi, it is, in a larger sense,

an attack on collective hysteria and the epidemics that lurk beneath the surface of reason and ideas but are none the less serious collective diseases passed off as ideologies . . . .  
(Notes, p. 199)

At this juncture, the habits and characteristics of the Indian rhinoceros become significant, because they aid in identifying certain subsidiary "turns" which distinguish the broader conceit, rhinocerism. The pachyderm's fondness for wallowing in mud, to begin with, implies an intriguing similitude for the intellectual floundering of Bérenger's associates. The cases of the Logician and Bortard, two converts to rhinocerism, afford illustrations of this phenomenon.

An advocate of rationality, the Logician comes to rescue the party stranded, as it were, on the terrace. "Fear is an irrational thing," he announces. "It must yield to reason" (p. 10). He subsequently instructs the Old Gentleman in the use of syllogisms. Here, it is worth noting that Ionesco juxtaposes this pair's conversation with Jean and Bérenger's dialogue, a strategy which permits the playwright to expose simultaneously the inanities of both exchanges. For example, when Jean says, "You don't exist, my dear Bérenger, because you don't think," the Logician tells his pupil, "All cats die; Socrates is dead; therefore, Socrates is a cat" (p. 19). The audience, of course, catches the basic absurdity of the syllogism. More than this, though, the lesson contradicts Jean's counsel (start thinking, then you will exist), for while Bérenger struggles with an existence which defies thought (meaningful statement), the Logician offers a rationale which de-

fies existence (i.e., Socrates' being as a cat). Later, Jean advises his friend to become a "keen and brilliant" scholar (p. 21). Coincidentally, the Old Gentleman responds to the Logician with "It may be simple for you, but not for me," the very words Bérenger uses to answer Jean (p. 21). In this instance, the lines accomplish two ends. First, they disclose conversations so devoid of content and meaning that they can be interchanged without alteration. Second, they establish a pattern, insuring that the audience will apprehend the more significant inferences which follow. Thus when Jean fairly inundates Bérenger with programs for personal betterment and then admits that he cannot accompany him to either the museum or the theatre because he plans to attend a cocktail party, Bérenger, on the one hand, exclaims, "Ah, now it's you that's setting the bad example!" while the Logician (ostensibly speaking to his student regarding an entirely different matter), on the other hand, declares, "You're already making progress in logic" (p. 24).

Once he seeks to explain the rhinoceroses' unicornity and bicornity, the Logician wallows gloriously. The essential question, he notes, is whether the second rhinoceros was the same as the first, or different. The patrons may have seen on two occasions a single rhinoceros with a single horn. Or in two instances a single rhinoceros with a pair of horns. Or one quadruped with one

horn and a second with two. Or initially one pachyderm with two horns, followed by another with two. If the first had two horns and the second but one, that would be inconclusive, because the same rhinoceros could have appeared with two, lost one, and then returned, the same beast bearing a single horn. Moreover, a second quadruped may have lost a horn, and appeared the second time, a different beast than the first. Yet if the first had a solitary horn and the second had two, they must be different, for the first could not have grown a second horn within so brief a time. When Bérenger protests, "That seems clear enough, but it doesn't answer the question," the Logician flashes a knowledgeable smile, then observes, "Obviously, my dear sir, but now the problem is correctly posed" (p. 37).

Botard affords another study in mental thrashing about. A former teacher, he "knows everything, understands everything, judges everything" (p. 39). Rejecting the news accounts of unloosed pachyderms, he grandly dismisses journalists and proclaims, "I like things to be precise, scientifically valid; I've got a methodical mind" (p. 40). This profession is impressive, surely; but the joker is, he proceeds to cloud and confuse the issue with irrelevancies and biases -- a conglomeration of considerations calling for an understanding of pachyderms; for a knowledge of male and female cats; their breed and their coloration; for an appreciation of the color bar, "one of the great stumbling blocks of our time" (p. 40); for an acknowledgment that he

is a Northerner, implying that the others are Southerners and therefore incompetent witnesses; for an admission that the observers were really idlers and, consequently, unreliable reporters; and for a repudiation of Dudard's and Bérenger's testimony, the former's because he is a product of the university and therefore clearly out of touch with the practical world, and the latter's because he is a notorious dipsomaniac. Branding the alleged sightings as sheer propaganda, Botard finds himself face to face with Mrs. Boeuf -- and her complaint concerning the rhinoceros downstairs. Immediately he terms the phenomena "an infamous plot" (p. 49), even insisting, "I never denied it" (p. 53). He vows, naturally, to secure the "names of the traitors," a simple matter since "Even the man in the street knows about it. Only hypocrites pretend not to understand" (p. 54). "I hold the key to all these happenings," he tells Dudard expansively, "an infallible system of interpretation" (p. 55).

If the Logician, Botard, and their pachydermic ilk disclose a propensity for intellectual wallowing, they betray as well acute "shortsightedness" and extreme reactions to provocation, two additional "turns" which subserve rhinocerism as a conceit for the populace's submission to mass hysteria. In terms of human conduct, these traits prefigure singularly rash and ill-considered actions. As regards Boeuf, for instance, Bérenger suggests that his co-

worker "didn't want a change," arguing that if his defection were purposeful, "I'd be very surprised" (p. 65). Moreover, his wife seems wholly ignorant of the matter. She may well have been taken in, Jean concedes later, for "She's just a fool" (p. 66)! This appellation is significant, of course, because the word "boeuf" means figuratively "a lout" or "a bumpkin." Thus the couple's conversion is implicitly tainted, and indirectly characterized as the handiwork of hasty and foolish conception.

Jean's defection, too, is flawed. For one thing, he is thoroughly humiliated by Bérenger; and because the latter frequently recalls his friend's subsequent fit of temper, the audience believes that frustration plays an inordinate part in his demise. Also, Bérenger attributes Jean's conversion to several causes -- spite, his being "temporarily imbalanced" (p. 75), and his rage stemming from the charge of pedantry. Each of these possibilities, significantly, implies impulsive and extremist behavior, just the kind of conduct commonly associated with the rhinoceric syndrome.

Papillon's desertion, Bérenger feels, is an "involuntary act" (p. 81), probably a mistake arising from hidden complexes. It is noteworthy that the hero accuses Daisy of treating the former harshly and thus being partly responsible for his metamorphosis. In doing so, Bérenger alludes to the ordeal at the office, when the staff sought ways of escaping the building. At that time Papillon at-

tempted to caress Daisy, jokingly remarking, "I'll take you in my arms and we'll float down together." Her response was curt, and ironic: "You keep your horny hands off my face, you old pachyderm" (p. 50)! The name "Papillon," interestingly, derives from "papillonner," which means "to trifle" or "to flirt." Again, then, the character's demise seems to stem from rashness and excessive reaction.

Dudard is apparently the victim of "thwarted love" (p. 94). Obviously unsettled by Daisy's unmistakable interest in his rival, he blurts, "Do you often visit Bérenger" (p. 87)? Later, when she grips the latter's arm, Dudard suddenly announces that he does not wish to dine with them, confessing rather his urge to join the multitude below and insisting, "I feel it's my duty to stick by my employers and my friends . . ." (p. 93).

Rhinocerism, as noted earlier, is a conceit for the collective hysterias which plague organized society. The overriding concern in such an eventuality is whether individuals can resist the pressures to conform. Here, the provincial townspeople betray their intellectual floundering, inherent shortsightedness, and heedless and extremist responses to trifling provocations; and in so doing, they disclose their susceptibility to the mania of massification.

The epidemic of defections, moreover, underscores the supreme paradox of the drama. The fact is, no one performs according to initial expectations. All of Bérenger's



associates are poor players given to strutting and fretting their time upon the stage, veritable shadows vulnerable to rhinoceritic sound and fury. Each capitulates -- Boeuf, despite his "united family" (p. 66); Jean, despite his "keen and brilliant intellect" (p. 21); Papillon, despite his pre-ferment (p. 81); Botard, despite his analytic genius (p. 40); the Logician, despite his philosophy; Dudard, despite his legalistic disposition; and Daisy, despite love. Considering the citizens' collective position and status, unique capacity of mind, commitment to order and process, and idealization of charity, one has reason to expect the wherewithal and engines with which to combat and eventually overcome rhinocerism. The cadres lionized by critics and rulers alike, the proud and ostensibly invincible shock-troops of society, the sure legions trusted on the far frontiers, the cream of provincial citizenry succumbs ingloriously, along with its sophisticated weaponry.

Only Bérenger remains. Simply equipped with centuries-old intuition, a supposedly obsolete system long anathematized by contemporary tacticians, he epitomizes the reluctant irregular. An "eight-ball" sloppily attired, addicted to alcohol, inclined to be late and surely undependable, lacking utterly in special skills or training, and fearful even of his own shadow, he seems suited for street cafes and morning pastis. Only of him is nothing expected. Yet it is he who best serves.

Exit the King represents a levee, in this case an informal gathering at which Bérenger I is apprised of his imminent demise. Marie, "Second Wife to the King, but first in affection,"<sup>20</sup> arrives early for the audience, and is immediately set upon by Marguerite, the harsh First Queen, who decries her tears, youth, and beauty, then accuses her of so diverting the monarch with fun and games, dances, processions, dinners, displays, and quarterly honeymoons that he is wholly unprepared for his summoning. Bérenger must die decently, the ranking Queen insists, for the kingdom direly needs a triumph, what with the palace crumbling, the fields lying fallow, the mountains sinking, the dikes bursting, and the country going to rack and ruin.

The Doctor, ominously costumed as astrologer and executioner, announces new portents and reaffirms the prognosis of the King's death. Arriving barefoot, Bérenger complains of an uneasy night, and suggests that the deluge of quakes, bellowing cattle, and screaming sirens be looked into. Told by Marguerite that he is going to die, he is in no mood for commonplaces.

But I know that, of course I do! We all know  
it! You can remind me when the time comes.  
(p. 21)

She persists, however, reiterating gravely, "You're going to die in an hour and a half. You're going to die at the end of the show" (p. 24). When the Doctor corroborates

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<sup>20</sup>Exit the King, trans. Donald Watson (New York, 1963), p. 7.

this claim, Bérenger becomes increasingly agitated -- and anxious. He brands his associates traitors, but lacks the power to arrest them. Moreover, he seeks to demonstrate his virility and vitality, only to stumble repeatedly and, worse yet, drop both his scepter and his crown.

Bérenger's mortality being apparent, the ceremony commences. First, there is the Doctor's irrevocable pronouncement: "In the annals of the universe, his Majesty has been entered as deceased" (p. 35). There follows Bérenger's succession of "perfectly normal" asseverations -- death's utter undesirability, its pernicious instaneity, his parents' culpability, the people's poor remembrance, the propriety implicit in extending his life, and so on. The court's assurances notwithstanding, he experiences small consolation. Indeed he concludes, "It's not natural to die, because no one ever wants to. I want to exist" (p. 57).

His porousness and fragility becoming more evident, Bérenger weakens. Amid contradictory claims of his greatness and pettiness, his vision and his political myopia, he drifts into forgetfulness and inertia. Marie vanishes, as do the Guard and Juliette. After the Doctor's departure, Marguerite releases Bérenger from his imaginary cords, ball and chain, pack, and weapons. At first leading him, then urging him to press on alone, she guides him to a "foot-bridge"; and once she sees him enthroned in "the other

place," she also vanishes. Soon the doors, windows, and walls of the palace evanesce. Thereafter Bérenger disappears as well.

Exit the King bears a superficial likeness to Everyman. To begin with, Bérenger is told of his imminent doom; and convinced eventually of this assessment, he seeks extenuation, insisting that he has forgotten, that he is unprepared, that his parents are culpable. This effort failing, he becomes increasingly dependent upon Marguerite (Knowledge) and, in effect, adopts her as his guide. And although they attend him during the early phases of his passing, Marie (Beauty), the Guard (Strength), Juliette (Five-Wits), and the Doctor (Discretion) quit his company before he crosses the final footbridge.<sup>21</sup>

Certain discrepancies, crucial ones, mark Exit the

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<sup>21</sup>Among the various characters, only Juliette fails to evidence an immediate resemblance to her counterpart in Everyman. Through the King's peculiar interest in his menial's daily routine, however, Ionesco does suggest such a parallel. For while Juliette recounts what she considers a boring, wearying, and painful travail, Bérenger is inexplicably enthralled by her account of icy cold mornings, of wash-house labors which leave her hands raw, of household and gardening chores which make her back ache, of early-morning and late-evening walks which afford the palest of light, of selecting foods from among a "medley of green lettuce, red cherries, gold grapes and purple eggplants" (p. 63), and of sitting down to her staple stew, "with vegetables and potatoes, cabbage and carrots all mixed up with butter, crushed with a fork and mashed together" (p. 64). Despite the Doctor's conjecture that this interest is a ploy "to gain time" (p. 60), one feels that the King's remarks constitute a kind of ironic hymn to existence, in which Juliette represents the senses (Five-Wits), because it is through her that Bérenger momentarily revives his awareness of life.

King as something less than a latter-day Everyman. For one thing, Everyman offers a portion of his wealth in lieu of his life, whereas Bérenger tenders a good deal more. Desperately pleading with the sun to dispel the gathering shadows, the King betrays a supreme selfishness. "If you're in need of some small sacrifice," he declares unequivocally,

then parch and wither up the world. Let every human creature die provided I can live forever, even alone in a limitless desert. I'll come to terms with solitude. (p. 52)

Everyman, of course, has incurred the wrath of God for sinning with impunity. Later repentant, he confesses his waywardness, asks forgiveness, does penance; and attended by Good-Deeds, he eventually goes to his grave assured of salvation. In contrast, Bérenger has, according to Marguerite, "got stuck in the mud of life," so much so that he "felt warm and cozy" (p. 36). Condemned to die by virtue of his being born, he has neglected to prepare himself for death; and because of this tardiness, he "must do it all in an hour" (p. 38). Aside from the portents apprehended by the Doctor through his telescope (e.g., the collision of Mars and Saturn) or observed by all in nature (e.g., cows calving twice a day), the drama contains little as regards theology and theodicy. Indeed, one explicit exchange clearly distinguishes Exit the King from Everyman. Having just arrived for the levee, Bérenger senses the un-

easiness among his court.

King (to Marie). What's wrong with you, my  
love?

Marie (stammering). I don't know . . . no-  
thing . . . nothing wrong.

King. You've got rings around your eyes. Have  
you been crying? Why?

Marie. Oh God!

King (to Marguerite). I won't have anyone upset  
her. And why did she say, "Oh God?" [sic]

Marg. It's an expression. (p. 20)

Exit the King, it appears, affords two statements, one explicit and the other implicit. Literally, the drama portrays a monarch who has two wives and who presides over a land in disarray, or a kingdom, by Marguerite's estimate, "as full of holes as a gigantic Gruyère cheese" (p. 14). Figuratively, the play depicts an absurdist Everyman "wed" to two perspectives -- 1) Marie, who is an actualized conceit for consentience and euphoria, and 2) Marguerite, who is a concrete equivalent of dissentience and despair, a viewpoint and reaction which render Bérenger "full of holes," transform him into "a honeycomb of cavities" which widen and deepen into bottomless pits (p. 68).

There are ample indications that Bérenger is an Everyman in his own right. The Doctor's remembrance of the King's one hundred and eighty wars, two thousand battles, and fearless forays (p. 46) obviously suggests a universal hero. This catholicity is further substantiated by the Guard's recitation of the monarch's exploits -- how he invented gunpowder, stole fire from the gods, and "nearly

blew the whole place up" (p. 73); how he fitted the original forges and made the first steel; how he invented the balloon and airplane, even flying the latter after the failure of Icarus and other test pilots; how he designed the first wheelbarrow, railroad, automobile, harvester, tractor; how he founded Rome, New York, Moscow, Geneva, and Paris; how he created revolutions, wrote Shakespeare, et cetera. Not surprisingly, therefore, when he considers his place in history, the King suggests that his subjects learn to read by spelling his name: "B, E, BE for Bérenger" (p. 49). Nor is his remark unexpected when he contemplates his countless precursors:

Thousands and millions of the dead. They multiply my anguish. I am the dying agony of all. My death is manifold. So many worlds will flicker out with me. (p. 56)

While Bérenger emerges as an absurdist Everyman, his wives surface as actualized conceits for life's inveigling and repulsive aspects. One passage concerning death particularly dramatizes the queens' respective penchants.

Marie (standing up, to the King). Until Death comes, you are still here. When Death is here, you will have gone. You won't meet her or see her.

Marg. The lies of life, those old fallacies! We've heard them all before. Death has always been here, present in the seed since the very first day. She is the shoot that grows, the flower that blows, the only fruit we know.

Marie (to Marg). That's a basic truth too, and we've heard that before!

Marg. It's a basic truth. And the ultimate

truth, isn't it, Doctor?  
Doct. What you both say is true. It depends  
 on the point of view. (pp. 66-67)

Herein lies the crux of the drama's figurative statement, for the exchange constitutes an illuminating juxtaposition, one in which Marie is equated with consentience, on the one hand, and Marguerite is identified with dissentience, on the other. The fact is, these dichotomous dispositions represent the forces which struggle intensely for the being of Bérenger. Attracted first by the one and then compelled by the other, enticed again by the former and later obliged by the second, the King wavers between understanding and puzzlement, hope and despondence, vitality and inertia, indeed life and death.

Quite appropriately, therefore, Marie is young and beautiful, whereas Marguerite is the very picture of severity. Then, too, while Marie weeps, her nemesis counsels, "What's the use? It's the normal course of events, isn't it?" -- a callous remark, which provokes the Second Queen's charge, "You've been waiting for it" (p. 10)! Nowhere, perhaps, are the darkling inclinations of Marguerite more apparent than in her responses to the Doctor's portentous pronouncements:

Doct. In point of fact, there is, if you like, something new to report.

Marie. What's that?

Doct. Something that merely confirms the previous symptoms. Mars and Saturn have collided.



Marg. As we expected.

Doct. Both planets have exploded.

Marg. That's logical.

Doct. The sun has lost between fifty and seventy-five percent of its strength.

Marg. That's natural. (pp. 16-17)

Once more, Marie's reaction is predictable: "It's not true, you're exaggerating. You must be" (p. 17).

Thus it goes, on and on. Contemplating Bérenger's uncertainty, Marie exclaims, "Don't give in!" whereas her rival interjects, "Stop trying to distract him" (p. 34). And while Marie depicts the King's 287 years of life as "a brisk walk through a flowery lane, a promise that's broken, a smile that fades" (p. 45); declares "exist" and "die" mere words, "figments of our imagination" (p. 51); and entreats Bérenger to cling to life's wonder, surprise, strangeness, and indefinability, Marguerite characterizes her as a woman of tears, one whose actions only push their husband "deeper into the mire, trap him, bind him, and hold him up" (p. 53).

There is no question, of course, as to which perspective a vital Bérenger prefers. Rallying briefly and momentarily regaining his alertness, he recognizes Marguerite.

You hateful, hideous woman! Why are you still with me? Why are you leaning over me? Go away, go away!

Heartened, Marie cries,

Don't look at her! Turn your eyes on me, and keep them wide open! Hope! I'm here. Remember who you are! I'm Marie. (p. 83)

Unfortunately for Bérenger, Marguerite is correct about "the ultimate truth," for it is her viewpoint which eventually prevails. Thus the Guard observes the failing ruler and proclaims, "The Charm of Queen Marie no longer casts its spell over the King" (p. 67). This claim Marie herself soon acknowledges. Realizing that Bérenger cannot remember who she is, she concedes,

He's forgetting me. At this very moment he's forgetting me. I can feel it, he's leaving me behind. I'm nothing if he forgets me. (p. 81)

If the King ultimately spurns Marie, in his infirmity he submits to Marguerite's advances. An actualization of the darkling aspects of existence, she has from the first advocated preoccupation with death. "He should have his eyes fixed in front of him," she tells Marie,

know every stage of the journey, know exactly how long the road, and never lose sight of his destination. (p. 11)

Later, when the King pleads unpreparedness, she reiterates her characteristic hard line.

You'd been condemned, and you should have thought about that the very first day, and then day after day, five minutes every day. It wasn't much to give up. Five minutes every day. Then ten minutes, a quarter, half an hour. That's the way to train yourself.  
(p. 37)

Having achieved ascendancy, she calls the others a "nuisance," promising, "I'll take their place. I'm the queen of all trades" (p. 88).

She is, curiously, the last word in efficiency, cutting as she does the King's restraining cords, undoing his chains, stripping away his weights, taking his weapons, loosening his grip -- in effect, enticing him "to let go." Nearing the footbridge and royal bier, Bérenger apprehends "the other place," a peerless Empire with two heavens, two moons, two suns, then a third, and still another. And blue (p. 93)!

Thus with Marguerite's triumph over Marie, dissentience and despair have wrought the dissolution of consentience, the ascendant bleakness ironically dissolving of itself and making possible a surgence of consentience and euphoria. So goes the fantastic combat between Ionesco's states of consciousness.

Set on a visional grassy down overlooking a valley near Gloucestershire, England, A Stroll in the Air mainly concerns Bérenger's amazing aerial antics and subsequent disillusioning glimpse of a world to come. Having been traced by the persistent and enterprising Journalist, the famed playwright shares several choice reflections -- that there is no reason for doing anything, despite his weaker brethren's rumored rationales for acting; that writing has ceased to be a game; that even a triumphant ideology is suspect, for "it's just when it's victorious and comes to

power, that it starts going wrong"<sup>22</sup>; that he has not forsaken the theatre, but is "renovating inside" (p. 9); that "truth is to be found in a kind of neurosis . . ." (p. 9); that while programs violate his dramatic principles, he hopes something underlies his "apparent message" (p. 9); that literature lacks the power, vivacity, and intensity of life, and however harsh it becomes, it can only give "a very dim and feeble picture of how cruel life is in reality, or how marvellous it can be too" (p. 10; cf. Artaud, pp. 30-31); and that he is paralyzed by the knowledge of his inevitable death.

The interview ended, a plane roars overhead and drops an explosive, which makes a shambles of Bérenger's cottage. "It's a German bomber," the refugee tells his wife Josephine and daughter Marthe, a remnant "from the last war" (p. 15). Shaken by the blast and disturbed, moreover, by Josephine's report of recurrent dreams involving her dead father, the family elects to ramble about the undulating upland. While strolling English folk speak of barriers and the necessity of beginning life anew, talk too of "indescribably beautiful" streets and existence at the center of things, the Bérengers view the river below, hear rustic melodies, and stand in awe of phenomena imaged upon a moving screen -- woods, water falls, rockets spewing

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<sup>22</sup>A Stroll in the Air, trans. Donald Watson (London, 1965), p. 9.

sparks, a blue lake.

A combination of setting, utopian and metaphysical speculations, and singular relaxation enthralls Berenger; and when Marthe lovingly offers him a daisy, he is overcome. Giddy with "divine intoxication" (p. 37) and further titillated by the image of a "very large silver bridge" spanning the valley and affording access to the hills beyond (p. 38), Bérenger becomes hopelessly euphoric, jumping and hopping about, flapping his arms, skimming first over the grassstops, then leaping three feet, later six feet in the air, subsequently rising higher to circle overhead, and eventually soaring into the distant heavens.

Immediately the light becomes blood-red and there follow rumbles of thunder or bombardment. Utterly alone, Josephine senses at once her unsheltered condition. And despite Marthe's several reminders that all is a nightmare, Mme Bérenger finds herself before a "monumental judge" and two assessors (p. 63), who mime proceedings which imply some cryptic charge, a verdict of guilt, and a sentence of death. Desperately pleading for time, she gains a temporary stay of execution. The vignette ends with the portentous glimmering of red lights and far-off rumbles.

Thereafter Bérenger returns from his adventure-turned-nightmare and reluctantly recalls visions of humans "with the heads of geese" (p. 74); "columns of guillotined men, marching along without their heads" (p. 74); "whole conti-

nents of Paradise all in flames, where "the Blessed were being burned alive" (p. 75); splitting earth, sinking mountains, bloodied oceans; bombardments everywhere; and, worst of all,

Deserts of ice, deserts of fire battling with  
each other and all coming towards us . . .  
nearer and nearer and nearer. (p. 76)

Josephine and Marthe urge flight; but Bérenger insists there is nowhere to go, neither on earth nor on the "other side of Hell," where there is only "abysmal space." Heads lowered, they trudge off, Marthe alone speaking hopefully, "Perhaps it will come right in the end . . ." (p. 77).

Really a political apocalypse, Bérenger's account prefigures an Armageddon which promises not so much a clash between the legions of good and evil as a struggle between the engines of uncertainty and clarity, of chaos and order, of tyranny and freedom, a conflict whose implicit outcome ominously favors the forces of darkness. Two phenomena especially subserve the play's ironical implications. The first of these, a gigantic silver bridge, is depicted on the moving screen. Dazzlingly brilliant,

like some ship in the shape of an arch, which  
seems to be suspended very high in the air above  
the river, leaping from one gleaming hilltop to  
the other (p. 39),

it connects the two sides of the gorge bordering the abyss. An object of fascination for the Bérengers and the English folk alike, the span is obviously taken for real. The sec-

ond phenomenon subserving the drama's closing irony is, of course, Bérenger's flight, during the course of which he actually takes to the air, soars overhead, and vanishes into the heavens.

The reality of the bridge and the aerial adventure notwithstanding, these phenomena are evidently actualized conceits for the race's psychical links to another place or condition, or if one prefers, the fantastic means affording access to the hills beyond, the far heavens, or whatever. Thus the upland throng may marvel at the sun-reflecting bridge, even "ooh" and "ah" in admiration; but when the Journalist solicits Bérenger's reaction, Josephine oddly intervenes.

Leave him alone, Monsieur, he's not an engineer, he's not an architect, he knows nothing about structures. (p. 39)

Although her comment may merely indicate the poet-playwright's ignorance as regards composition and design, strength and materials, more likely it betrays the span's figurative significance, rather subtly implying a metaphoric intent, the effect of which will be compromised and circumscribed by needless specification.

Bérenger's hegira seems to be a concrete equivalent for an unburdened state of consciousness. Having for the present set aside his writing woes, shaken off the effects of the blast, dispelled Josephine's dream-induced fears, and persuaded her to forego the day's domestic routines,

Bérenger gradually succumbs to the lure of utopian speculations, idyllic surroundings, and utter calm. Marthe's daisy he accepts as the ultimate gesture of love. "Ah!" he cries,

If only everyone was like you! Then we'd all be so gentle. Life would be possible and we'd even die peacefully, without regrets. (p. 36)

Declaring that he has seldom felt so happy, "so light, so weightless" (p. 36), he reveals his novel exhilaration, his

feeling of joy that's been forgotten, forgotten yet still familiar, like something that's belonged to me from the beginning of time. You lose it every day and yet it's never really lost. And the proof is that you can find it again, that you can recognize it. (p. 37)

His euphoria becomes acute, of course; and later, having glimpsed the wondrous bridge and taken to the airway, he denies any impropriety or uniqueness, insists rather, "everyone knows how to fly," then adds,

It's an innate gift, but everyone forgets.  
How could I have forgotten the way it's done?  
It's so simple, so clear, so childish.  
(p. 47)

Characterized as it is by a feeling of divine intoxication, of consentience, of union and reunion, of boundless love, and of joyful remembrance, Bérenger's experience is curiously reminiscent of the lived reality William Wordsworth depicts in his ode, "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood." From birth, which the Englishman defines as "a sleep and a forgetting" (l. 58), man is gradually weaned of his divine tendance and inured



to worldly ways, eventually knowing only "earthly freight" and "custom," which weigh him down, "Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life" (ll. 126-128)! Still, there are flickers of hope, stirrings in the embers of youth, glints of the race's first condition, indeed remembrances of things past, "shadowy recollections," those

Blank misgivings of a creature  
 Moving about in a world not realized,  
 High instincts before which our mortal nature  
 Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised.  
 (ll. 149, 144-147)

These are the sure ciphers, these the "master light of all our seeing," that discloses truths

Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavor,  
 Nor man nor boy,  
 Nor all that is at enmity with joy,  
 Can utterly abolish or destroy!  
 (ll. 152, 157-160)

As mentioned earlier, A Stroll in the Air ends ironically. The bridge and Bérenger's flight, after all, relate well to the feeling of power, mastery, and exceeding great joy. Wordsworth, of course, sings of joining, in thought, those that pipe and those that play and those that in their hearts do feel "the gladness of the May" (l. 174), whereas Bérenger soars, in flight, beyond the bounds of his present condition. Yet, and this is the irony, he and Josephine subsequently apprehend not their anticipated deliverance, but their doom instead.

This outcome is nicely foreshadowed. Surrounded by sympathizers and scoffers, the airborne hero offers ad-

vice.

It's perfectly simple. All you need is the will to do it. You've got to have confidence. You only come down when you lose confidence.

(Stroll, p. 50)

Here we have the faintest of hints about the consequences of flying. The fact is, while the airways afford liberation from the woes besetting mankind, they imply as well the risk of settling again to earth, sometimes precipitously in time of trouble and without choice. In other words, just as the bridge and flight image psychical links to a nostalgia craved by the dream-haunted Bérengers, Josephine's trial and the dramatist's black vision constitute "mental flak," contrary elements antithetical to consentience and euphoria, indeed a fretted chaos capable of plunging them into despair.

Josephine's "bad scene" is the inquisition. Momentarily forgetting her father and domestic chores, glimpsing too the fantastic bridge and experiencing a measure of joy, she speaks hopefully. Bérenger's departure, however, signals a loss of confidence. Immediately she laments, "I'm alone. I'm quite alone, cast off into the darkness and abandoned" (p. 59). Then, amid foreign talk of self-interest, she declares herself friendless and proclaims all beings

Empty vessels in a desert. Monstrously indifferent, selfish, cruel and enigmatic. Each confined to his own little shell. (p. 60)

Tiny in a gigantic world, motherless and fatherless, unloved, she has no one. And she is frightened! Marthe vainly seeks to buoy her confidence, fuel her flight, as it were.

You must love people. If you love them, they won't be strangers to you any more. If you stop being afraid of them, they won't be monsters any more. Deep down in their shells they're frightened too. Love them. Then hell will exist no more. (p. 61)

What Josephine encounters, really, is the bleakness of absurdity, the loathed aspect of existence, the irrationality and uncertainty which expose mankind's porousness and unsheltered condition. Worst of all, of course, is the death which must come to everyone -- and to practically everyone unawares. This, I think, is the significance of the kangaroo court. Summarily charged, convicted, and sentenced to death, Josephine is bidden by the Hangman to proceed, and reminded by the hulking Man in White not to put it off indefinitely. To her request for a delay, the former responds, "Madame, why put off till tomorrow what you might just as well do today? Why not get it over" (p. 69)? The Man in White is even harsher, reasoning,

You know very well you can't escape. You know very well that everyone goes the same way. You don't gain anything really, only a little time. (p. 69)

Thus Josephine, like so many existential and absurdist heroes, encounters mankind's unpromising condition, awful solitude, and ultimate prospect of death; and like others before her, she rejects the emptiness beyond all understand-

ing and clings, rather, to the life which promises never-ending defeats. In the process, of course, she has "flown," risen to a mental state characterized by power, mastery, and euphoria, only to be plunged into a consciousness of chaos, impotency, and despair.

Paralleling her experience is Bérenger's adventure in space. Briefly liberated, he soars to worlds previously unknown to discover decapitated humans, endless turmoil, bombardments without surcease, and encroaching flames fringing upon earth itself. He, too, loses his crucial willpower and confidence, capitulates to fear and trembling, then tumbles to earth, there to share his revelations with an incredulous throng.

Thus, during the course of a day, which in the vernacular of Ionesco is no more than the full range of mental states, the Bérengers experience anguish, progress to sunshine and songs, graduate to sun-lit spans and fantastic flights, and eventually plunge into darkness and despair, a gloom and melancholia worse than before. Just as the so-called Pepsi generation has learned that "speed kills," then, the Bérengers discover that flyers fall. And "bad trips," it seems, are worse than none at all.

A species of interlude, Frenzy for Two represents the continuous combat of He and She, a middle-aged pair who readily assail each other, but fear to venture into the

streets, where open warfare prevails. Initially their controversy concerns snails and tortoises, she maintaining that they are creatures of a kind, what with their shells, their inclination to withdraw beneath protective covering, their sliminess and creepy-crawliness, their rage for lettuce, and their edibility. Ignoring epithets such as "seducer" and "Don Juan," he declares that snails can be distinguished by their horns, an argument which elicits her rather characteristic counter: the latter have horns only when they show them; "A tortoise is a snail that doesn't."<sup>23</sup>

In this fashion the struggle proceeds, their weaponry eventually numbering name-calling, insults, insinuations, challenges, demeaning comparisons, threats, et cetera. Their conflict is marred by numerous hiatus, now an explosion, a burst of gunfire, a hand-grenade, now a collapsing door, flying debris, a shower of tea cups, now cheers, victory songs, a parade. The apartment reduced to rubble, the fighting subsides, both there and elsewhere. After they dismiss the Soldier seeking his love and the two Neighbours returning from a holiday, the pair barricade the window and door; then, beneath a flurry of bodies and heads, fallout from a guillotine installed upstairs by peace administrators, they renew their family feud.

The conceits in Frenzy for Two are reasonably apparent. The dual combats, of course, constitute a kind of counterpoint, the struggle in the streets serving to char-

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<sup>23</sup>Frenzy for Two, trans. Donald Watson (London, 1965), p. 83.

acterize the clash between He and She. Thus while the lovers exchange relatively heatless barbs, there are mere explosions, occasional bursts of gunfire, and shouts elsewhere. Later, though, when the two become angered to the point of slapping each other, the hubbub outside appropriately intensifies, as Ionesco's instructions indicate.

The noise . . . gets louder: the shouting and gun-fire that could be heard vaguely in the distance have got nearer, and now come from beneath the window. (p. 86)

Subsequent juxtapositions extend the analogy. The pair's self-interrogation as regards their prospects in life, for example, immediately precedes a house search by a combat party. Moreover, when He threatens to explode their marriage by deserting She, a hand-grenade lands in the room and very nearly blows them to bits. For a time, peace comes to the streets, as it does to the household -- but briefly! Significantly, he mistrusts the lull.

It can't last for long. I know them! It's frightening enough when they've got something in mind, but when there's nothing, then they start looking round . . . They might dig up anything. God knows what they might invent. At least, when they're fighting, even if they don't know why at the start, they always find some reason. (p. 101)

What is worth noting in the foregoing passage is that "we" and "us" may be substituted for "they" and "them," because whatever is true of those in the streets applies as well to the couple. While the militants may elect a grenade or a burst of machinegun fire, then, the private combatants may

employ a slur or emulate an earlier spouse. Moreover, just as the causes below are confused, the pair improperly identify the snail-tortoise controversy as the source of their problem, there being subliminal manifestations of a basic incompatibility.<sup>24</sup> As to what the several parties might "dig up," the answer is clear enough. The inquisition upstairs begins to lop off heads and thus initiates aggression of another sort, whereas the couple renews its bitter feud.

He. Tortoise!  
She. Slug! [They slap each other's faces and without pausing set to work again.]  
 (p. 104)

Eventually one is impressed by the fact that He and She's relationship is very like open warfare, constituting as it does more of a bondage than a bond and characterized as it is by martial discord rather than marital accord.

Two other conceits in the playlet are the snail and the tortoise, which are "turns" for He and She. Thus they are virtual prisoners in their mere shell of an apartment, venturing cautiously into the Neighbours' larder for a feast of beer and sausage, later withdrawing into their own shell when the Soldier and the two Neighbours come by, He dismissing the former's request for help in finding Jeannette,

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<sup>24</sup>See, e.g., her frequent taunts of "seducer," "lover," "Don Juan," etc. Also when she imagines violation at the hands of the victors, She cries,  
 Oh no! Not with anyone, I'd rather have an idiot, at least an idiot doesn't have intentions. (p. 101)

declaring, "It's no business of mine, you must mind your own business" (p. 103). It is quite appropriate in the end, therefore, that He call her "Tortoise" and she respond with "Slug,"<sup>25</sup> for that is what they are. And there is no distinction to be made after all. Poor creatures given to dawdling and probing, they seek to counter their latest "fix" by blocking off the window and stopping up the doorway -- in effect, frantically restoring their protective "shell," that they might practice the first commandment of the molluscan race: "We'd better hide" (p. 104).

La soif et la faim depicts Jean's abortive quest for spiritual fulfillment. Recoiling from his somber surroundings, he blames the family apartment for his nightmares, even characterizes it as "un sous-sol," for the whole slimy place seems to be sinking into the ground. Notwithstanding his wife Marie-Madeleine's reminder that others live as they, he declares,

Je n'aime que les maisons avec des murs et des toits transparents, ou même sans murs et sans toit, où le soleil entre par vagues de soleil, où l'air entre par vagues d'air.<sup>26</sup>

[I care only for houses with transparent walls and roofs, or even without walls and roof, where all is bathed in sunlight, where everything is caressed by air.]

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<sup>25</sup>She employs "slug" as yet another synonym for "snail" (see, e.g., pp. 82, 84).

<sup>26</sup>La soif et la faim (Paris, 1966), pp. 79-80.



Here, he laments, they live without hope, indeed endure perpetually

une seule saison morne, mélange d'automne et d'hiver. (p. 82)

[a singular condition, the gloomy season, a blend of autumn and winter.]

When his aunt Adélaïde comes by unexpectedly, Jean is scandalized by remembrances of her culpability in his parents' divorce, of her alleged arson, and of her reputation as a street-walker. He rids himself of her, but not the cinders in his heart. Again he speaks of his characteristic craving.

J'ai froid, et j'ai trop chaud, et j'ai faim. J'ai soif. Et je n'ai pas d'appétit et je n'ai aucun goût pour rien. (p. 93)

[I am cold, and hot, and I am hungry. I am thirsty, And yet, I have no appetite, nor taste for anything whatever.]

Quite incapable of thinking the good thoughts necessary to overcome his melancholia and nonetheless unwilling to resign himself to humiliated existence, he announces a pilgrimage in search of

un pays où la loi vous interdit de mourir. (p. 97)

[a land where the law forbids you to die.]

To begin with, he renounces the past, vowing to retain only that portion necessary to continue his self-identity.

Otherwise, he says,

je ne suis rien d'autre que moi, je ne dois être que moi-même. (p. 98)

[I am nothing other than me, I have to be myself only.]

After he departs, Marie-Madeleine discovers in the background a radiant garden replete with a ladder of gold, the top of which cannot be seen. Sensing this to be her husband's goal, she regrets his lack of foresight and patience.

Jean's odyssey eventually brings him to "un site sublime," a museum situated on a vast plain. Proclaiming "la longue nuit" ended, he marvels at the promised attraction and awaits his wife, whose coming will, in effect, join the real to the ideal. She never arrives, however; and Jean, who has sacrificed the past to the present, remembrance to hope, can give the inquiring door-keepers neither a photo nor a useful description. Unsure of the appointed hour, or month even, he confesses the tragedy of pursuing passion and euphoria.

J'ai voulu la vie et la vie s'est jetée sur moi de toute sa force. (p. 114)

[I sought life, and it has hurled itself upon me full force.]

Unable to help, the guardians close the museum, it being time for their evening repast.

In the fifteenth year of his journey, Jean arrives at "la bonne auberge," a kind of monastery-barracks-prison, where the monks subject visitors to certain purgative routines. After welcoming Jean, Brother Tarabas vainly endeavors to stanch his guest's appetite, and elicit word of

the outside world. Only momentarily disappointed, the monks propose a spectacle, an exercise in education/re-education featuring the clowns, Brechtoll and Tripp. The two are carried on-stage in cages, where they proceed to beg for food and freedom. Now cheered by a sympathetic clique of monks, now mocked by a hostile faction, the unlucky pair at first arrogantly defend their own beliefs and deny God, later waver in the former and tentatively acknowledge the monks' master, and eventually succumb to mouthing myriad repetitions of the first part of the "Lord's Prayer."<sup>27</sup> Tarabas at last ordains that they be fed, then expansively declares the hospitality proof of God's existence and adds,

Quand Il m'a donné cet ordre, j'ai été obligé d'obéir. Il ne laisse pas mourir de faim ses fidèles. (p. 159)

[When He gave me that order, I was compelled to obey. He never permits the faithful to perish of hunger.]

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<sup>27</sup> Ionesco seems to have in mind two of his pet aversions. The name "Brechtoll," of course, blatantly suggests his German rival. Moreover, the concept of education/re-education (p. 136), the mention of social solidarity (p. 150), and the spectacle in thirty episodes (p. 162) firm up this identity. Tripp is more problematical. However, if his name is pronounced like the French word "tripe," which seems likely, Ionesco may be alluding obliquely to Sartre, by way of the latter's novel Nausea (see above, pp. 128-129). Tripp's immediate insistence upon freedom (p. 134), his indifference to traditional notions of good and evil (p. 146), and his dilemma over getting the monks to do good voluntarily (p. 147) support such a hypothesis. The irony of all this is that two foremost exponents of didactic drama should find themselves tyrannized by a program-prone playwright. (For Ionesco's estimates of these two men and their theatrical practices, see above, pp. 266, 294-295.)

The prisoners fed and the performance ended, Jean seeks to leave, only to be restrained by an armed monk. Soon he realizes that he must serve the brothers until his debt is paid. Almost simultaneously, he discovers in the background Marie-Madeleine and Marthe, who await him in the symbolic radiant garden. Torn between his duties and his desire, he pleads for an accounting of his obligation. How long? he asks; how many hours must he tarry? Bells toll. And the brothers count, endlessly: seven, two, nine . . . .

The subject of La soif et la faim is obvious enough. On the literal level, most of the characters have physical needs to be satisfied. Adélaïde, for example, talks of being mistreated by ungrateful relatives, of being abandoned, of being destitute, and thus offers an implicit justification for her vagabond behavior, although she does protest that she seeks not bread alone, but evening exercise and material for books about life, society, morals. The guardians at the museum, too, speak of sustenance, anticipating as they do the soup and wine awaiting them at home. Moreover, Brechtoll and Tripp repeatedly request food and drink, the promise of which the brothers employ to elicit desirable denials and confessions, the end result constituting a kind of forced conversion or, as the monks say, "re-education."

More important than any literal lack of food and drink, of course, is the insufficiency of spiritual suste-

nance, which famishes Jean's soul and occasions his extended foraging in worldly wastelands. Thus, in the beginning, he tells Marie-Madeleine of his hunger and thirst, then confides his utter lack of appetite or taste for anything near at hand. And, later, when the brothers lavish him with numerous helpings of food and drink, he understandably complains,

Je bois, je mange, je bois, je mange. J'ai encore soif, j'ai encore faim. (p. 125)

[I drink, I eat, I drink, I eat. Still I am thirsty, still I am hungry.]

It goes without saying, then, that Jean's hunger and thirst are a collective conceit, a "turn" for his unfulfilled craving.

Superficially, the play appears to treat a notion central to the "Sermon on the Mount." Aside from any other considerations, the emphasis upon spiritual impoverishment and the "Lord's Prayer" strongly suggests the source of Ionesco's title. More than this, of course, the fourth line of Christ's discourse, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matt. 5.6), at first glance affords a statement of the drama's theme. Jean, after all, is haunted by earthly errors and injustices. For instance, while Adélaïde intensifies his unhappiness and provokes his anger, she evokes his guilt as well. Almost immediately she leaves, he begins to tremble and gnash his teeth. Soon he is cowering

before a mysterious apparition, la femme dans les flammes, who, he admits,

est devenue cendres à mes pieds; elle renaît de ses cendres chaque fois comme un reproche. (p. 93)

[has become ashes beneath my feet, ashes from which she constantly rises as if in condemnation.]

The fact is, Adélaïde, the home-wrecker, the arsonist, the mental incompetent, the street-walker, is the mother-figure in his life; and what he confesses familiarly to the apparition is true of the aunt as well.

Oui, je sais, tu me tendais les bras, tu criais, tu avais peur, tu avais mal. J'aurais bien voulu, je n'ai pas pu. Pardonne. (p. 93)

[Yes, I know, you held me in your arms, you wept, you were frightened, you were ill. I meant well, but had not the power to do good. Forgive me.]

On another occasion, when he realizes that Brechtoll and Tripp will be denied succor until they feast "pédagogiquement," Jean rises and asks Tarabas,

Dois-je assister à toute la scène? (p. 145)

[Must I remain for the entire scene?]

The impression one gets, then, is that Jean yearns for righteousness; and constantly confronted with injustice, he knows only dys-ease and nostalgia. Indeed, each new human profanation stirs again his pangs of spiritual hunger and urges him elsewhere in the quest for fulfillment.

Ironically, while he has the appetite of the archetypal pilgrim, Jean is possibly more cursed than blessed,

because he seems doomed never to be satisfied. It is this prospect, in fact, which identifies La soif et la faim as a classic exercise in absurdity. For, on the one hand, the protagonist encounters a reality too loathsome to tolerate; and, on the other, he seeks an ideal condition, which forever eludes his persistent probing.

In an aside prior to Jean's leave-taking, Marie-Madeleine expresses her dismay.

Il pense que cette maison est un tombeau. Pourquoi se met-il dans un tel état? Toutes les maisons sont des tombeaux. (p. 97)

[He thinks this house is a tomb. Why does he depart in such a state? All houses are tombs.]

Perhaps more than any one statement, this best depicts Jean's attitude as regards their apartment and reality itself.

That their mode of existence is to be despised as a species of death in life can be inferred from his abhorrence for their surroundings, a loathing which extends to the world and society in general. Though they reside on a ground floor, for example, Jean calls their flat "un sous-sol" (a basement) or, again, "ce rez-de-chaussée funèbre" (this funereal floor). Later, he gestures toward the bed, observes,

Les draps sont humides,  
[the sheets are damp,<sup>28</sup>]

and then adds,

le bas des murs humides! C'est sale, c'est gras,  
c'est encombré et ça continue de s'enfoncer.  
(p. 79)

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<sup>28</sup>Fig. "the pall is moist."

[Wet walls! This place is dirty, slimy, heavy,  
and it continues to sink.]

Such comments, of course, strongly suggest a parallel between loathsome life and living burial. Not surprisingly, therefore, Jean's hostile habitat oppresses him, indeed threatens to collapse upon him.

Ce plafond s'effrite, il s'affraisse, je le sens déjà qui pèse sur mes épaules, les taches d'humidité s'agrandissent sur les murs. (p. 82)

[The ceiling is crumbling, settling upon us, I feel it as though it were pressing on my very shoulders, and pustules of water are forming on the walls.]

Not so ready as Jean to condemn their life as a cesspit of vile and degraded existence, Marie-Madeleine belittles his preoccupation as the product of dreams and a morbid imagination. He persists, however, and proceeds to enlarge his condemnation.

Ça crève les yeux! Ça arrive tout le temps!  
Des rues entières, des villes entières, des  
civilizations entières se sont englouties.  
(p. 79)

[It's here, under our very noses! Not just at night, not only in my dreams, but all the time! Entire streets, complete cities, whole civilizations are swallowed up.]

Here, Jean betrays his total alienation, for it is really the human condition which he loathes, really society, the past, and the coming death which he basically despises. Quite appropriately, therefore, the postman never comes to their house; nor do they maintain a telephone (p. 81). When considered along with his attempts to repudiate Adélaïde



and the past, these seemingly inconsequential phenomena underscore his extreme estrangement and his penchant for existential apartheid. Moreover, his sole source of solace seems to be slipping away from him, he seeing in Marie-Madeleine the work of age -- wrinkles and white hair. Already, he tells her,

Ta tête s'incline, trop lourde fleur pour la tige (p. 82)

[Your head is bowed, a flower too heavy for its stem.]

Indeed, death dogs his days, and it moves at no petty pace.

Rather, he says,

Chaque jour est un anniversaire. Chaque jour me parle de la vieillesse, chaque matin me désespère, bientôt je m'écroulerai. (pp. 95-96)

[Each day is an anniversary. Each day speaks to me of old age, and each morning I am in despair; soon I shall not have the means to endure.]

Thus, if theirs is "un appartement normal" (p. 81), as his wife insists, then all houses are veritable tombs, in which the occupants are doomed to a living burial. And though commonplace existence affords relative calm, and is ostensibly the end for all, it is not for him. "Ce n'est pas la paix que je veux," he declares,

ce n'est pas le simple bonheur, il me faut une joie débordante, l'extase. Dans ce cadre, l'extase n'est pas possible. (p. 82)

[It isn't peace that I desire, nor simple happiness even, but euphoria, ecstasy. As things are, ecstasy isn't possible.]

The others? They may do as they wish, he allows; but

Mon destin n'est pas le leur, mon existence est ailleurs. (p. 96)

[My destiny isn't theirs, my existence is otherwise.]

At once confronted with the world's peasant fare and his own kingly appetite, as it were, Jean contracts "une nostalgie ardente." Consequently, he rejects ugliness and anguish, and goes up from the wasteland in search of a healthful place "où personne ne meurt" (p. 97), a continent beyond compare, where he may dwell in a kind of Wordsworthian reminiscence, amidst

Les souvenirs d'une vie que je n'ai pas vécue. Non, ce n'est pas ce que je veux dire: des souvenirs que je n'ai jamais eus, des souvenirs impossibles . . . . (p. 93)

[Recollections of a life that I haven't lived. No, that's not what I wish to say: remembrances that I've never had, impossible remembrances . . . .]

He departs, of course. And eventually he does discover a promising place. A museum and its surrounding domain, the loveliest in the world, fill him with unbounded joy. Moreover, his lost remembrances begin once more to stir. "Je me souviens," he tells the guardians,

toutes ces images étaient enfouies quelque part dans la nuit de la mémoire. Elles me reviennent une à une; elles surgissent de plus en plus pures, comme lavées par les eaux d'un oubli provisoire.  
(p. 93)

[Now I remember, all these images were lurking somewhere in the darkness of my memory. Only now they are surfacing one by one, emerging more and more plainly, as if washed from the waters of ebbing forgetfulness.]

Enthralled, he proclaims his own rebirth, declares himself

another and yet the same, and promises to start life anew, that is, to begin again immediately Marie-Madeleine arrives. Her presence -- there's the idyllic rub! For she does not come. Nor does she send word of her whereabouts.

The appointed place of rendezvous, it appears, is both fitting and ironic. In one sense, the museum is appropriate because it is a repository for a select past, as it were; and Jean has, as regards his own life, repudiated all but a select portion of his past. In another sense, unfortunately, he has not the power to dictate the real objects to be enshrined in the ideal place. He has, then, access to a paradise without love, and that is a worse hell than before.

During his long wait, Jean flirts with a new awareness. Life with Marie-Madeleine was preferable, he announces, for there, at least,

j'étais confortablement installé dans l'inconfortable! (p. 114)

[I was comfortably installed in the uncomfortable!]  
 During the ensuing flight from living entombment, old age, despair, and death, he lost as well his former weapons and security, such as they were. In other words, the melancholy, fear, remorse, anguish, and nostalgia of the past were the forces impelling him to struggle, to persevere, to preserve his precarious and absurd existence. These, he insists, were the fortress around him, adding,

La craint de la mort était mon bouclier le plus solide. Les murs se sont écroulés et me voici, vulnérable. (p. 114)

[Fear of death was my surest shield. Now the walls are coming down and here I am, vulnerable.]

Momentarily resembling Camus' authentic man, Jean verges on the simultaneous awareness of the world's unreconstructibility and his own rage for clarity and unity. Thus he was correct in despising life, correct too in longing for a better way; but he erred in his pursuit, because it led only to greater frustration, or as he puts it,

J'ai cherché l'accomplissement et je trouve torture. (p. 114)

[I sought fulfillment and I found torture.]

The guardians prepare to seal off the radiant preserve. Unable to join the real to the ideal, Jean laments the sterility of the latter. Recalling again his characteristic lack, he mumbles, "Soif et faim, soif et faim . . . ," then wishes the wish that can no longer be:

Si je pouvois au moins retrouver cet abri où j'étais si bien calfeutré dans ma fatigue de vivre, où j'étais emmuré dans ma peur de mourir . . . . (p.117)

[If only I could find once more that refuge where I was so secure in my weariness of life, where I was fortified in my fear of death . . . .]

Jean's odyssey does not cease here. But subsequent years are burdened mostly with nostalgia, and relieved by temporary and fleeting fulfillments. The monks at first afford some hope; but as their black mass unfolds, their

self-righteous, jejune, and sadistic conduct classes them among the race's practitioners of injustice. Confronted by such brotherly beastliness, Jean feels the urge to resume his quest, to see what he has not already seen.

It is at the monastery that the pilgrim emerges as something of a cross between Tennyson's Ulysses and Al Capp's Joe Btfsplk. On the one hand, for example, he virtually echoes the restless Ithacan's sentiments,

Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough  
Gleams the untraveled world, whose margin fades  
Forever and forever when I move ("Ulysses," ll. 18-20),

when he says to Brother Tarabas,

Tout ce que je désirais s'évanouissait à mon  
approche, tout ce que je voulais toucher se  
flétrissait. (p. 165)

[All that I desire vanishes immediately I approach,  
all that I seek to touch eludes my grasp.]

Like the cartoonist's doomsday figure, however, misfortune hovers over him like a private cloud. "Dès que j'avancais dans une prairie ensoleillée," he complains,

le ciel se couvrait de nuages. Jamais je n'ai  
pu me réjouir. L'herbe se desséchait sous mes  
pieds, les feuilles des arbres jaunissaient,  
tombaient dès que je les regardais. Si je  
voulais boire à la source la plus limpide, l'eau  
devenait impure, nauséabonde. (p. 165)

[Let me set foot in a sunny meadow, and at once  
clouds darken the sky. For me there is no joy.  
Grass withers beneath my feet, leaves turn yellow,  
fall before my very eyes. If I seek to  
drink from the purest spring, the water becomes  
foul, contaminated.]

Still, he confides, there were times during the odyssey

when things were better, moments when he felt in tune with the universe and experienced a corresponding euphoria. Sometimes the treasured mood was evoked by a forest; other times, by a street, or a train, or a lake. In such moments, he says,

Tout suffissait, tout était plein. Je n'avais pas faim, je n'avais soif, ou, plutôt, c'était cette joie qui était mon pain, qui était mon eau . . . . Pourquoi, tout à coup, y a-t-il eu ce changement? Pourquoi, tout à coup, cette absence? . . . . Pourquoi cette soudaine faim, cette soudaine soif? Cette insatisfaction et l'angoisse . . . ? (p. 166)

[Everything satisfied, all was complete. I was no longer hungry, no longer thirsty, or, rather, it was that joy which was my bread, which was my drink.....Why, suddenly, was there that change? Why, suddenly, that absence? . . . . Why that sudden hunger, that sudden thirst? That dissatisfaction and anguish . . . ?]

Here Jean struggles with archetypal absurdity; and unlike Camus' authentic man, he cannot fully appreciate his absurd condition. Thus, in the end, he has at once his duties and his desires, has simultaneously the obligation to serve interminably the brutish brothers and the longing to join Marie-Madeleine and Marthe in the radiant garden, where at last he may luxuriate in Edenic consensience and perhaps prepare for an even higher climb (the ladder of gold). His hopes notwithstanding, the presence of the armed monk and the brothers' bewildering account of his future obligations suggest an endless and forced exile, one in which he will always know nostalgia and never

experience fulfillment. This, it seems, is the gist of Ionesco's implicit "Sermon from the Abyss."

Ionesco's tropes easily qualify as dramatic conceits. To begin with, they are undeniably elaborate in the sense that they account for virtually all the content in each of the fifteen plays analyzed. Sometimes these similitudes are developed in a conventional manner (i.e., through the juxtaposition of two notions, two situations, or a notion and a situation); more often, however, they are developed through actualization (i.e., personified or given some other physical form). The first category includes The Lesson, in which the setting (a dining room), the inverse evolutions of character (the meek Professor becoming aggressive and strident, the vivacious Pupil waxing depressive and silent), and the lengthy process through which the pedant wins her confidence, weakens her resistance, and eventually overwhelms her effectually suggest and dramatize the proportion, pedagogy:the Pupil::cupidity:the victim. Again, in The New Tenant, the newcomer's relocation is implicitly characterized as an entrance into the house of the dead, this analogy being cleverly suggested by his unexpected arrival, his dark costume, the cover over the window (lid of the coffin), the veritable mound of furniture, the replacement of the roof (top of the grave), the flowers, and the final "Put out the light." Frenzy for Two also

evidences the conventional approach, what with He and She's struggle paralleling the combat in the streets, their verbal exchanges corresponding to the gunfire outside; their self-interrogation, to a house search; his threat to quit the marriage, to a grenade tossed in their midst; their momentary harmony, to a declaration of peace; and their renewal of hostilities, to the inquisition which lops off heads.

In addition to juxtaposition, Ionesco often employs actualizations, in which cases he endows concepts and/or states of consciousness with physical presences. In The Killer, for example, he introduces the radiant city and the fiend, which are concrete equivalents for antithetical moods, the former being a conceit for consentience and euphoria, and the latter, for dissentience and despair. Literally, then, the Killer dooms the Architect's utopia, whereas, figuratively, Bérenger's darkling perspective achieves ascendancy over his sense of mastery and release. These same dynamics are evident in Exit the King, in which Bérenger I is "wed" to two viewpoints, the beautiful Marie, who represents life's inveigling aspects, and the severe Marguerite, who epitomizes the repulsive elements of existence. Interestingly, it is the latter that again triumphs.

Besides their being elaborate in conception, Ionesco's "turns" almost invariably constitute striking parallels and/or actualizations. Some reflect relative subtlety,



e.g., The Lesson, in which pedantry is depicted as a species of rapacity. Others, like The Chairs, betray Ionesco's propensity for singular tropes, what with the deaf-mute Orator emerging as the embodiment of the meaning obvious in the old couple's existence. More extreme and characteristic, though, are the Frenchman's grotesques. In The Leader, for instance, he offers the headless helmsman as the physical equivalent of mindless political practices. Then, too, in Amédée the mushrooming corpse images the advent and eventual ascendancy of Madeleine in the life of the protagonist. And so it goes, in play after play, disparate phenomena are employed to point up remarkable and unusual likenesses -- the shepherd and the chameleon in Improvisation representing Ionesco and the theatre, respectively; the one-eyed freak in The Killer mirroring the destructive capacity of darkling and irrational forces; the popularity of pachydermism in Rhinoceros paralleling the people's inherent shortsightedness and penchant for intellectual wallowing; and Bérenger's apocalyptic flight in A Stroll in the Air imaging the psychical links to another place or condition.

Much like those of Sartre and Camus, Ionesco's plays consistently evidence a judgmental dimension. Values he commonly promulgates in one of two ways. First, through the conceits themselves. The Orator in The Chairs, for example, obviously suffers from a severe case of overween-

ing self-esteem, smugly smiling and patronizingly offering his autograph as he does. Thus, when he speaks gibberish and writes nonsense, he rates no sympathy whatever, nor do his aged sponsors, who have foolishly lionized his (and their own) anticipated message. Moreover, the headless politician in The Leader constitutes a valid burlesque of senseless and petty electioneering practices. Then, too, the portrayal of Ionesco as a kindly shepherd ministering to a chameleon theatre in Improvisation affords a sharp contrast to another and bleaker depiction, which has the chameleon Barts being towed along by proponents of fashionable theatrical practices. And, of course, the characterization of He and She as snails and/or tortoises in Frenzy for Two critically underscores their timidity and inclination to withdraw from social commerce.

Ionesco's second mode of promulgating values is through the spiritual alienation of his protagonists. Here, I think, some of Paul Tillich's pronouncements concerning self-affirmation are pertinent, for they can serve to identify and to fix the extent of one of the playwright's pre-occupations. The authentic being, Professor Tillich believes, dwells in restlessness and yearning, moves toward encounters, pursues projects, and affirms himself through action. The potential fly in the existential ointment, so to speak, is anxiety, the "awareness of nonbeing."<sup>29</sup> Un-

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<sup>29</sup>The Courage to Be (New Haven, 1952), p. 35.

like fear, which has a specific object (e.g., pain, rejection by someone, the moment of death, etc.), anxiety lacks clear outlines, its effect being "the negation of every object" (p. 36), the denial of every concept; consequently, prospects for effective action are virtually precluded. Not surprisingly, therefore, anxiety results in a "loss of direction, inadequate reactions, and lack of intentionality" (p. 37). The foregoing differentiation notwithstanding, fear and anxiety are not entirely separate entities. Rather, it is

the anxiety of not being able to preserve one's own being which underlies every fear and is the frightening element in it. (p. 38)

To counter the simplistic notion of nonbeing as solely death, as opposed to being as wholly life, Tillich distinguishes three kinds of anxiety (awareness of nonbeing) -- ontic, moral, and spiritual. The first arises from the dread of fate and death. The most basic, universal, and inescapable, ontic anxiety is existential, in the very pulse of man and constantly available to his everyday experience. Fate, a relative situation, is comprised of myriad interim contingencies, whereas death is absolute, the final contingency. Thus man finds himself in a "whole web of causal relations," he being "determined by them in every moment and thrown out by them in the last moment." (p. 44).

The second type of anxiety, moral, has as its well-

springs guilt and condemnation. The former, a relative predicament, arises from negative self-judgments and nullifies in part the process of self-affirmation. Condemnation, on the other hand, is an ultimate situation, one resulting in self-rejection and serving to paralyze action and intentionality.

Spiritual anxiety constitutes the third peril to authentic existence. Hopefully, man will discover himself "living spontaneously, in action and reaction," with the contents of his cultural life (p. 46). Such a state of affairs will imply a degree of attunement to, and sympathy for, what he finds to be the human condition. If disenchantment and alienation should arise, if the give and take should cease, emptiness and meaninglessness will become predominant factors in his life.

Whereas fate and death often plague Ionesco's heroes (see, e.g., the contingency-ridden existence of Bérenger in The Killer or the death-haunted moments of Jean at the outset of La soif et la faim) and whereas guilt and condemnation are occasionally significant factors (see, e.g., the ready acceptance of culpability by Madeleine and her husband in Amédée or Jean's shame arising from confrontations with Adélaïde and the apparition in La soif et la faim), Ionesco's foremost concern is with spiritual alienation. Rather typically, then, the old couple in The Chairs live alone on an island; and despite their claim of unparal-

leled popularity, the audience that fills their auditorium is not visible, nor can the factotum recite anything but a chronicle of quarrels involving friends, directors, generals, even his own brother. In like manner, the father in Victims of Duty speaks of poor pay, shabby clothing, bad health, and powerful enemies, a combination of circumstances causing him to loathe life. His son Choubert, in turn, himself experiences the anguish that attends existence in a repulsive and threat-filled universe. Moreover, the playwright and Madeleine in Amédée curse life as no longer worth living, then confide that they never go anywhere and never receive visitors in their home. In Jack, of course, the protagonist at first refuses to talk with anyone; and later, in The Future Is in Eggs, he deliberately goes contrary to Jackdom's desires by advocating the continuation of his preferred breed of pessimists, anarchists, and nihilists. That he is the sole maskless character and that his apparel is too tight imply at once his singular humanity and his disposition to burst the confines of an alien condition, as it were. Again, in The New Tenant, the Gentleman wants no care-takers interfering with his life, nor does he desire contact with the neighbors; indeed, his entire posture indicates that he is so alienated from society as to be already dead. Bérenger in The Killer, of course, is completely undone by the fiend's reign of terror, and cannot conceive of life as worthwhile until his adver-

sary is utterly destroyed. Thus he clashes with everyone, even such seeming allies as the Architect, Édouard, and the police, all of whom unsettle him with their intolerable complacency. Then, too, Bérenger in Rhinoceros initially stands apart as a misfit who requires alcohol to fortify him against life's daily routines. Eventually his estrangement assumes an aura of virtue, however, for he has not the vocation or the inclination to capitulate to the rhinocerosism sweeping the provincial town. And confronted with the harsh reality mirrored in the visage of the severe Marguerite in Exit the King, the momentarily lucid Bérenger I shrieks and demands that the hateful, hideous woman immediately leave his presence. Also, the Bérengers in A Stroll in the Air obviously despise their critics, their bad dreams, and the ubiquitous threat of death. They seek relief upon the radiant green, from which they are launched on welcome flights of release and deliverance, only to be tumbled into an even more compelling bleakness than before. Easily as estranged as most of their absurdist brethren, He and She in Frenzy for Two stay very near their confining "shell," cautiously venturing next door, then retreating in near panic to patch their protective window and door, and insisting that the searching soldier and returning neighbors mind their own business. Finally, Jean in La soif et la faim is hardly at ease in the world, obsessed as he is with visions of sinking apartments and living entombments, and

seeking as he does to stanch his spiritual hunger and thirst by endlessly foraging in earthly wastelands.

The foregoing citations, it seems, afford a considerable catalog of evidence suggesting that Ionesco's protagonists do not live spontaneously, either in action or reaction, with the contents of their cultural life; rather, they constantly find themselves out of tune, even wholly out of sympathy with the human condition. And whether they elect to flee (e.g., the old couple in The Chairs), to endure merely (e.g., the son in Jack and The Future Is in Eggs), to seek deliverance elsewhere (e.g., Bérenger in A Stroll in the Air or Jean in La soif et la faim), or to take corrective action (e.g., Bérenger in The Killer), all clearly reflect values in the sense that they act and react on the basis of what means most to them. Because their ideals are so terribly at odds with what they find to be reality, unfortunately, their days are filled with emptiness, dissatisfaction, and meaninglessness. For them there is precious little spiritual fulfillment.

Perhaps a word concerning the quality of Ionesco's conceits is in order here. Many of the pronouncements cited in the section titled "A: Historical View of Metaphor" (see above, pp. 39-71) could be profitably invoked at this juncture; but several observations by Aristotle, Horace, Addison, and Johnson seem especially pertinent to an evaluation of the Frenchman's "turns." It is Aristotle, after

all, who warns against a style too dependent upon metaphor, because it tends to pose riddles, that is, express true facts under impossible combinations (see above, p. 41 ). At their worst, I think, Ionesco's tropes are enigmatic. In Victims of Duty, for example, the force-feeding of Chou- bert by the detective and Nicolas can be comprehended as such, but its intent as a conceit to characterize and satirize the dramatic inclinations of Brecht and Sartre requires considerable working out. Or, again, the corpse as an actualization of Madeleine's place and significance in Amédée's life emerges only after lengthy contemplation and labor. Such puzzles are the exception and not the rule, fortunately. More often, Ionesco is careful to prove out his parallels. Thus, in The Lesson, for instance, he employs the setting, the studied evolutions of the characters, and the simulated violation to establish unmistakably the likeness between pedagogy and rapacity. Moreover, the playwright explicitly offers himself as an example of the shepherd in Improvisation, and further implies that some critics are being "towed" along by certain dramatists.

A second critic, Horace, mentions meaningless images, like the head of a man attached to the neck of a horse, as the sort of thing sure to excite laughter and raise questions concerning the artist's sanity (see above, p. 42). What is at stake, of course, is verisimilitude; and while Ionesco does not indulge in out-and-out grotesquery, a



number of his creations do pose special difficulties. Sometimes he presents his actualizations directly to the audience. As regards the headless politician in The Leader, for instance, he indicates that the actor is to button his coat around his forehead and wear a hat over the collar. More often than not, however, he suggests that the unbelievable elements be kept off-stage. Thus Roberta II in The Future Is in Eggs does her egg-laying elsewhere. Or, in The Killer, Bérenger is afforded the chance to address a fiend that is not visible to the audience. Or, in Rhinceros, sounds, reports, and superficial characteristics (e.g., Jean's headache, movements, and skin coloration) are employed to create the impression of an entire town's conversion to rhinocerism. Or, in La soif et la faim, Marie-Madeleine and Marthe are shown in the symbolic garden, but in the alternate ending are not required to speak, the variant scene more clearly conveying the playwright's figurative intentions. Given Ionesco's fantastic array of conceits, then, I believe that he generally succeeds in maintaining a desired degree of verisimilitude.

Speaking of Abraham Cowley's figures in The Mistress, Joseph Addison notes that the poet constantly mixes the qualities of fire with those of love, and complains that too often he does so in the same sentence (see above, p. 55). The point seems to be that Cowley does not sufficiently distinguish his literal usages from the figurative, a judg-

ment which can sometimes be rendered against Ionesco. In *Amédée*, for example, he dedicates much of the play to the protagonist's dilemma and subsequent labor, during which time he succeeds in moving the corpse into Torco Square, where suddenly, in a humorous rendition of deus ex machina, the body plumes into a kind of parachute and carries the besieged hero heavenward. Just then the audience is left to reconsider the playwright's tour de force, and perhaps realize that Ionesco has not been talking about a body at all, but, instead, states of consciousness, among which consentience and euphoria have won ascendancy over dissentience and despair, the result being that *Amédée* achieves a species of "upward release." A similar complicating blend of literal and figurative representation emerges in The New Tenant, in which all indications point to the Gentleman's entrance into the house of the dead -- except for the fact that the newcomer is very much alive! Obviously, the audience must forge further, possibly to discover that the tenant's demise is spiritual, he being so alienated as to be effectually dead. The problem again arises in Exit the King, when Bérenger I capitulates to the persistent Marguerite, who images dissentience and despair. Having utterly let go, as it were, he comes once more to consentience and euphoria, leaving the audience to puzzle over the play's irony and perhaps at last to comprehend the protagonist's final shift in mood. Each of these three "turns"

can easily confuse and unsettle any audience, and bring virtual calamity to a gathering of neophytes.

Finally, there are the observations of Samuel Johnson, who argues that the Metaphysical Poets literally ransack nature and art in their single-minded pursuit of illustrations and allusions (see above, p. 58 ). Curiously, Ionesco does range rather freely afield for the material in his plays. For example, in The Chairs, he employs substance from Christian tradition and Greek mythology; in Amédée, content from Greek mythology and tragedy; in Exit the King, matter from Everyman; in A Stroll in the Air, material from Biblical literature and perhaps Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood"; and in La soif et la faim, content from Biblical literature. What must be emphasized, however, is that while Ionesco frequently makes use of other works and other traditions, his own plays occupy new territory, as it were. Thus in The Chairs, for instance, he suggests that the old couple have fleeting remembrances of a grace that has been lost and can never be regained; in Amédée, he makes of the Greek tragic lovers a pair of perspectives, among which consentience and euphoria finally win dominion and afford the haunted hero the wherewithal to flee; in Exit the King, he employs the irrevocable sentence of death not as a vehicle for making pronouncements as regards salvation, but to initiate another combat between antithetical states of

consciousness; in A Stroll in the Air, he alludes to apocalyptic visions and Wordsworthian landscapes not as a device to insure purgative alterations in behavior and to call forth saving remembrances, but, rather, to underscore the utter absurdity and bleakness of the human condition; and in La soif et la faim, he invokes the classic spiritual hunger and thirst, then implies that the pilgrim will always possess the appetite, and eternally lack fulfillment.

A literary forager, so to speak, Ionesco appears to move freely among the masterworks of western literature, there to identify appropriate material, and thereafter to adapt and reinterpret it, that he might reflect his own unique absurd perspective. And if he does in fact ransack his literary heritage, he also subjects his "booty" to a process of modernization, a treatment he evidently considers superior to the more typical restoration anticipated by many. Therein lies the key to his irony.

V. BECKETT  
SPATIAL FORM  
AND THE PERIPHERY OF CHRISTIAN REFERENCE

In its own way, the jumpy, nonlinear mode of storytelling employed in films such as Paul Newman's Rachel, Rachel and Richard Lester's Petulia is reminiscent of the method of Samuel Beckett, for in representing significant threads of their narratives they employ the art of disconnectedness, that is to say, they have their stories continually allude to themselves and continually break off short. And though the staging of Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman, in which the past is mixed with the present, is proof of the practicability of using visual discontinuity on the stage, film is obviously the freer medium with respect to mingling distinct aspects of the same story. Indeed, film makers are now using this technique with an almost bewildering frequency and abruptness, as witnessed by Rachel's vision of feeding her mother an overdose of pills while lying that the latter's dependence is no bother at all, or Petulia's fleeting visual remembrance of throwing a rock through a window while she fibs to Archie about having borrowed her tuba from an acquaintance. Probably because of the disparate tastes and varying levels of per-

ceptivity among moving picture audiences, however, directors continue to employ a series of story threads which together constitute a whole and convey some meaning.

Beckett's drama is no neat bundle. His anecdotes, like those found in contemporary motion pictures, may begin somewhere, emerge again in other places, and end elsewhere; or they may come to no discernible end, or bear any apparent significance whatever. His dependence upon verbal discontinuity notwithstanding, it is the enigma of his often incomplete and seemingly pointless anecdotes which is at once the fascinating and detracting feature of his plays and which distinguishes his work from that of contemporary practitioners of the art of disconnectedness.

As regards the foregoing art, Joseph Frank's essay "Spatial Form in Modern Literature"<sup>1</sup> is worth considering here, because his findings suggest a helpful approach to Beckett's drama. Harkening back to Laokoon, Professor Frank credits Lessing with meaningfully re-demarcating time and space as they relate to literature and the plastic arts. Frank recalls the German critic's argument that poetry employs articulated sounds in time and painting utilizes form and color in space, these modes of representation being entirely different from each other. Accordingly, if the respective symbols are to have an appropriate relation to the things they symbolize, it appears that symbols in jux-

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<sup>1</sup>Sewanee Review, 53 (1945); 221-40, 433-56, 643-53.

taposition can only express subjects of which the parts or the wholes exist in juxtaposition, whereas consecutive symbols can only express subjects of which the parts or the wholes are themselves consecutive. For Lessing, therefore, form in the plastic arts is necessarily spatial, Frank concludes, "because the visible aspect of objects can best be juxtaposed in an instant of time" (p. 223). In contrast, literature makes use of language, which is

composed of a succession of words proceeding in time; and it follows that literary form, to harmonize with the essential quality of its medium, must be based primarily on some form of narrative sequence. (p. 223)

At this juncture, Dr. Frank reverses his field somewhat, contending that the revolutionary aspect of literature exemplified by the works of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust arises from a formal shift to spatialization. The Imagist movement, Frank feels, accommodated this trend. Pound's definition of the image ("that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time"), he insists, implies not a pictorial representation, but "the unification of disparate ideas and emotions into a complex presented spatially in an instant of time" (p. 226). Such a complex, obviously, does not proceed discursively, in accordance with the laws of language, but strikes the reader's sensibility with instantaneous impact.

All images, unfortunately, are not so singular as

this discussion may imply. What happens, for example, when a work contains images in a sequence? Perhaps, Frank suggests, the work itself is to be apprehended as one vast image, whose separate components are parts of a unity. Indeed, he eventually argues, this is what Pound and Eliot intend in their major works, seeking as they do

to undermine the inherent consecutiveness of language, frustrating the reader's normal expectation of a sequence and forcing him to perceive the elements of the poem juxtaposed in space rather than unrolling in time. (p. 227)

In The Waste Land, for instance, the reader comes upon a series of relatively isolated fragments, eventually senses the space-logic implicit in Eliot's conception of poetry, likely finds himself waxing increasingly reflexive, and thus discovers a truth basic to much contemporary poetry:

the meaning-relationship is completed only by the simultaneous perception in space of word-groups which, when read consecutively in time, have no comprehensible relation to each other. Instead of the instinctive and immediate reference of words and word-groups to the objects or events they symbolize, and the construction of meaning from the sequence of these references, modern poetry asks its readers to suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern can be apprehended as a unity. (pp. 229-230)

Frank is not particularly interested in spatialization as it applies to a single genre of literature, nor does he value it as an instrument for rating individual works on the basis of how closely they adhere to its requirements. Rather, he sees awareness of spatial form as an aid in deciphering meaning in modern literature. Thus



fortified, he moves with ease from poetry to Joyce's Ulysses, Proust's monumental Remembrance of Things Past, and Djuna Barnes' Nightwood, and discovers in them more of the continual reference and cross-reference of symbols and images which, when referred to one another spatially throughout the time-process of reading, may form a pattern.

My concern is with drama, of course, and of drama, Frank says nothing. It is my contention, nonetheless, that his findings are equally valid as regards certain modern plays, e.g., Ionesco's The Chairs. In that work one encounters a collection of elusive tag ends, a curious mixture of gardens and cities, luxuriance and light, apples and avatars. Early in life, the old couple fondly and frequently recall, there was a garden, from which they were restrained by a forbidding fence (The Chairs, pp. 115-116). And through the garden ran a path leading to the village church. The place? Perhaps Paris, ventures the old man. Yes, the way to Paris, the city of lights, lay through the garden (p. 116)! Later (p. 120), he reaffirms the connection between these sanctuaries; and Semiramis subsequently (p. 121) derives comfort from their speaking of such things, for in their own words, she insists, they may find everything (the city, the garden), and then they will cease being cast-offs.

Discord, the garden, the church, Paris the city, waifs -- what do these odds and ends have to do with one

another? Here, I think, one may consciously employ his knowledge of modern form and seek in the play a pattern arising from the spatial interweaving of phrases and images independent of any time-sequence. Thus disposed, he may discover in Ionesco's work a blend of myth and Christian tradition. Paris the city is the namesake, after all, of a shepherd famous for resolving a controversy involving an apple and inadvertently abetting Eris (Discord). This allusion apprehended, the tag ends assume reasonable coherence, because in the Garden man's existence was at first full of grace, then disturbed by strife, and eventually shattered by disinheritance and abandonment. In time there arose the prospect of a greater Eden, access to which lay through the Church.

One may eventually extract from all this an impression of the couple's fallen condition and their thirst for grace. Enamored by the promise of the garden and the city and evidently denied admission to these hallowed regions, they have obviously spent long years enduring solitude and suffering, and a lifetime awaiting death. From a spiritual standpoint, therefore, Semiramis has reason to execrate their plight as foundlings and exiles, intuiting as she does that access to the inner sanctums can dispel their agonizing dys-grace.

The foregoing analysis by no means exhausts the interpretative possibilities of The Chairs,<sup>2</sup> but it does

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<sup>2</sup>For fuller consideration, see Chapter IV, pp. 250-258.

afford an illustration of a critical approach informed and inspired by spatial form in modern drama. I think it significant, moreover, that Ionesco's work precedes Waiting for Godot by less than a year (April, 1952, versus January, 1953), for it is in the plays of Samuel Beckett that spatialization fructifies abundantly and becomes an obtrusive element in modern drama. This crucial aspect of his modus operandi being properly identified, I will now proceed to the plays themselves, focusing, as in the previous chapters on Sartre, Camus, and Ionesco, on the conceits which undergird each of his works and which, in large measure, hold the key to meaning therein.

Commonly considered the epitome of absurdist theatrical fare, Waiting for Godot represents a slice of the static ordeal of Estragon and Vladimir, a vagabond pair who frequent a barren landscape and solitary stretch of road in anticipation of the imminent and improbable appearance of His Mystery Godot, a nebulous figure who inevitably violates his appointments, but relays again his pledge to appear on the morrow. A perverse rendering of a concept so well expressed in Epistle I.3 of An Essay on Man ("Hope springs eternal in the human breast"), the drama, like Alexander Pope's letter, portrays humans as creatures at once living in profound ignorance of future events yet basing their hopes for happiness on those events. Quite

unlike his optimistic predecessor, however, ("Man never Is, but always To Be blest" [see ll. 96-97]), Beckett leaves his audience with the distinct impression that his tramps Are, but Never To Be blest!

Godot is remarkably ambiguous, of course, and may therefore serve as a species of silhouette for myriad phenomena of like pattern. Thus a prisoner in San Quentin penitentiary (see, e.g., Esslin, pp. xv-xvii), a doctoral candidate awaiting confirmation of his first professional appointment, or a soldier overseas anticipating the letters promised by a "barfly" in San Diego might well find the play charged with a significance especially applicable to his own situation. Others prefer to confine the work to more recondite arenas. Eric Bentley, for instance, suggests that Godot is a modern adaptation of Balzac's Mercadet, in which the protagonist ascribes his financial predicament to Godeau, a former partner who ostensibly fled with their joint capital (Esslin, p. 16). As one might anticipate, Mercadet rests all his hopes for repayment and restoration to economic well-being upon the re-emergence of his spurious colleague, even unto the final curtain.

More to the point of Beckett's play, though, I think Godot can be taken as an absurdist conceit for the man-God relationship associated with traditional and latter-day Christianity. A despair arising from their solitary and unsheltered condition and a perilous hope, effectively

delineated through Biblical allusions and the person of Godot, tend to substantiate this hypothesis.

Despair virtually shrouds the lives of Beckett's hapless vagabonds. In the beginning, for example, Estragon vainly tries his boot, eventually quitting with the explanation, "Nothing to be done."<sup>3</sup> Just then his comment apparently applies solely to his immediate situation. Later, however, these words assume a larger significance when Vladimir removes his hat, peers inside, strikes the crown as if to loosen a foreign body, replaces the gear, and declares, "Nothing to be done" (p. 8). Almost at once he tells Estragon to put on his boot (which, by then, he has managed to remove); and when the latter announces his desire to air it, Vladimir observes, "There's man all over for you, blaming on his boots the faults of his feet" (p. 8). Thereafter he repeats the routine with his own hat, causing the audience to expand on the preceding generalization: there, too, is man, faulting his hat for the flaws of his head.

Implicitly, Beckett goes far beyond this. When eventually Estragon cites their dependence upon Godot and complains of their daily fare, Vladimir says resignedly, "I get used to the muck as I go along" (p. 14). Both then acknowledge the futility of struggling, wriggling, after which Estragon concludes, "Nothing to be done." Greater

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<sup>3</sup>Waiting for Godot, trans. Samuel Beckett (New York, 1954), p. 7.

anguish is yet to come, unfortunately. During his initial stay, for instance, Pozzo talks of the deceptive dusk and tells them how it is with darkness:

behind this veil of gentleness and peace night is charging (vibrantly) and will burst upon us (snaps his fingers) pop! like that! (his inspiration leaves him) just when we least expect it. (Silence. Gloomily.) That's how it is on this bitch of an earth.  
(p. 25)

Pozzo's words signify more than the day's decease, of course. And in Act II, while he contemplates his visitor's second departure and the reality of all that has passed, Vladimir philosophizes darkly, but more pointedly.

Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (p. 58)

It is doubtless a cliché to speak of life as a journey from the womb to the tomb; however, by dramatically juxtaposing the two phenomena and by implicitly characterizing the grave-digger as the midwife, Vladimir underscores the awful transience of human existence.

All the bitter "nothing's" and the utter bleakness of their circumstances which pervade the foregoing illustrations are a fitting prelude to the closing conversation between Vladimir and Godot's herald.

Vlad. What does he do, Mr. Godot? (Silence.)  
Do you hear me?  
Boy. Yes Sir.  
Vlad. Well?  
Boy. He does nothing, Sir.  
Silence. (p. 59)

In this moment worthy of deepest despair, one may sense how

far he has come, for at the outset the problem concerned boots and hats; and Beckett had his tramps blaming on their livery the faults of their anatomy. Gradually, however, the arena has been enlarged and the logic expanded, until one is moved to modify Vladimir's original observation: there's man all over for you, ascribing to his environs the agony of existence. Perhaps, too, one may suspect that truly there is nothing to be done, neither by Estragon nor Vladimir, nor by Godot on their behalf, neither now nor later.

Their bleak prospects seen as such, the vagabonds might easily despair beyond all hope. The fact is, they have long verged on suicide. For example, Estragon remembers the time, possibly fifty years earlier, when he threw himself into the Rhone, only to be rescued by Vladimir (p. 35). Time has apparently intensified this proneness to self-slaughter. Thus, even now, Estragon pooh-poohs the merits of long life, his sentiment unsettling Vladimir, who questions the good of losing heart at this juncture. "We should have thought of it a million years ago, in the nineties," he counsels his companion hyperbolically.

Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower,  
among the first. We were respectable in those days.  
Now it's too late. (p. 7)

Here, I think, Vladimir's remarks afford an appropriate image for the religious debacle which occurred in the last half of the nineteenth century. The only "nineties" in

the chronology of La Tour Eiffel, after all, were the 1890's; in those days, soul-searching was more unique, and its effects were often considered more courageous and perhaps even conscionable, hence "respectable." However, Estragon and Vladimir belong to the arrière-garde and, as such, are among the very last to abandon the old. Indeed, they have logged so many additional decades awaiting His Worship Godot that to cease their vigil now seems senseless.

Still the porous pair dwell in the shadow of self-slaughter. Angered by Estragon's story of the Englishman in the brothel, Vladimir makes peace reluctantly, then advises that they resume their wait. Estragon, in turn, proposes that they hang themselves immediately. This they fear to do, however, because of the fragile bough of the solitary willow tree: it may not hold them, or it may bear the one and not the other, thus leaving the heavier to live alone. "Don't let's do anything," concludes Estragon. "It's safer" (p. 12). Later in the day, Estragon alludes to the rope/hanging (p. 35); and the following day, after the second herald's departure, he removes the cord from his trousers and requests that Vladimir pull to test its strength. The weapon breaks, unfortunately, and their day is all but done. Undaunted, they decree death for the morrow, that is, unless Godot comes. In that case, reasons Vladimir, "We'll be saved" (p. 60).

Eventually there emerges from this chaos a sense



of the constant ebb and flow of shallow faith, the vital tide at first withdrawing to expose the sands of suicide, as it were, and then easing again shore-ward to immerse despair in the waters of life and hope. To do nothing, as Estragon urges, is safer. Thus they may at least endure, and enduring, perhaps see Godot, who may yet save them. Therein lies their hope; consequently, into Godot's hands they commit themselves reluctantly, uncertainly, and, very likely, momentarily.

The quality of the pilgrims' precarious hope cannot be easily ascertained. However, it is possible to infer something of its nature from the drama's Biblical allusions and frequently fleeting references to Godot. In one instance, for example, Vladimir emerges from deep thought to announce, "One of the thieves was saved. (Pause.) It's a reasonable percentage" (p. 8). Then he waxes conciliatory.

Vlad. Suppose we repented?

Estr. Repented of what?

Vlad. Oh . . . (He reflects.) We wouldn't have to go into the details.

Estr. Our being born? (p. 8)

Vladimir pauses for laughter and pain, then returns to his concern of the moment: "But one of the four says that one of the two was saved" (p. 9). While two others make no mention of the thieves and the third reports that they abused Christ, he continues, everyone believes the first account; "It's the only version they know" (p. 9). As he is wont to do, Vladimir rather freely colors his report,

for his statement that believers are unfamiliar with the other versions borders on hyperbole. Moreover, his account appears distorted, because while Luke does record that Christ promised the second criminal a place in Paradise that very day, Matthew and Mark mention the two thieves as well.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, Vladimir's observations have merit, for while the Gospel according to Luke may well serve to mitigate the despair of the unworthy, together the Gospels constitute something less than a license for presumptuousness.

On another occasion, when Pozzo asks his name, Estragon inexplicably replies, "Adam" (p. 25). The inquisitor is not listening just then, so the response goes unnoticed. Later, though, Estragon behaves in a most curious way. Anticipating the arrival of one/several Vladimir believes to be Godot, he cries, "I'm accursed" (p. 47)! Vladimir wants only to welcome the party; but Estragon shouts, "I'm in hell!" and recoils in horror. Subsequently heeding the advice of his companion, the latter "goes and crouches behind the tree" (pp. 47-48), only to re-emerge almost immediately because there is nothing to be done.

Again, in Act II, when Pozzo, now blind, proves unresponsive, Estragon proposes they ply him with other names.

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. Matt. 27:38; Mark 15:27; Luke 23:39-43; and John 19:17 (Revised Standard Version).

Vlad. I tell you his name is Pozzo.  
Estr. We'll soon see. (He reflects.) Abel!  
 Abel!  
Poz. Help!  
Estr. Got it in one!  
Vlad. I begin to weary of this motif.  
Estr. Perhaps the other is called Cain. Cain!  
 Cain!  
Poz. Help!  
Estr. He's all humanity. (pp. 53-54)

The temptation to discover Biblical equivalents for the several characters notwithstanding, Godot simply lacks the discernible systematization expected of allegory. A more promising tack is to seek in the play a series of references and cross-references which, when apprehended spatially, suggest a pattern. What pattern? Thus far, it is known that the vagabonds hope to be saved by Godot, that Vladimir is impressed by Christ's relationship with the second thief, and that he contemplates repentance, that Estragon usurps the name "Adam" and later simulates his namesake's behavior in the Garden, and that Pozzo is, in Estragon's words, "all of humanity."

What can one make of such tag ends? Given their bleak circumstances, it is understandable that Estragon and Vladimir crave deliverance. Therefore, they dwell in a Godot-centered world. Yet their sustainer's favor is somehow withheld. Might repentance spell the difference? Vladimir is awed by the unworthy thief's winning Christ's favor. Perhaps contrition would seal their salvation, which in their case implies Godot's coming. But what is their transgression? Vladimir reflects, yet cannot say.

Estragon is almost cynical: their being born? Curiously, what he cites is near to original sin and, as such, would account for Vladimir's irrational notion of their being sinful without having sinned. The idea of inherent corruption, moreover, is consistent with Estragon's simulation of Adam's role, his obsession with damnation and hell, and his ambivalent attitude toward Godot, whom he at once reveres and dreads. The foregoing, too, would be in keeping with the confusing use of "he" and "they" to specify Godot (see p. 47), for the tactic merely borrows on the concept of the Trinity.

At this juncture, obviously, one verges on equating Godot with God, a similitude which constitutes the core of Beckett's conceit. And why not proceed? After all, Godot saves. And even though Estragon would not know him if he saw him (p. 16) and though the tramps twice mistake Pozzo for Godot (pp. 15 and 47), still they make of him an object of veneration, prayer, supplication (p. 13). Indeed, he compels their obsequiousness. For example, when Estragon wonders if they should "drop" him, Vladimir is quick to cite the consequences: "He'd punish us" (p. 59). Moreover, to Godot is attributed the power to consign them to hell. Small wonder, then, that Vladimir should consider repentance, even when personal and specific sin is not apparent. Besides, Godot has a white beard (p. 59).

The Godot-God parallel is further substantiated by

Pozzo's familiar, if jaded, observation in Act I. Having carefully examined the pair, he pronounces them

Of the same species as myself. (He bursts into an enormous laugh.) Of the same species as Pozzo! Made in God's image! (p. 15)

These remarks, when coupled with Estragon's conclusion, Pozzo is all of humanity, leads logically to the premise, all humanity is made in God's image.

This generalization, it seems, includes Lucky, Pozzo's man-beast servant. Lowly Lucky poses the absurdist perspective most starkly. Grossly abused by his master, he suffers from sores, slavers profusely, sees dumbly through bulging eyes, gnaws greedily at the refuse of his superior, bears without surcease the burdensome basket of Pozzo, and constantly cowers under the imminent lash of the whip. What a scandal! protests Vladimir, "to treat a man . . . like that . . ." (p. 18). One not stymied by the vagabond's aposiopesis might easily be tempted to add, "like God, almost!" Such, at least, is the likeness that lurks beneath the surface of Beckett's drama. Pozzo's response comes later, of course, when he confides of Lucky, "He wants to impress me, so that I'll keep him" (p. 21). It is Lucky who affords an appropriate rationale for tolerating his condition, however, when he finally shares his rare thoughts.

. . . divine apathia . . . divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell and suffers like the divine Miranda

with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment . . . .<sup>5</sup>

The lines, of course, speak of divine indifference and silence, of an abiding faith in the divine's concern and love, of suffering and torment without apparent reason, of an absurd condition perhaps one day to be vindicated.

Although Lucky's situation tends to mirror their own, it is ironic that Estragon and Vladimir can merely discern the tyranny of Pozzo. Thus while they frequently stumble upon tell-tale inconsistencies and genuine causes for doubt, they seem incapable or unwilling to press their insights to their fullest possible implications. Behind this dramatic masterpiece, naturally enough, lurks the well-concealed person of Beckett, who somewhat cavalierly treads the uncharted buffer between permissible innuendo and outright blasphemy, and survives to insinuate an irreverent absurdist tripartite conceit -- Lucky:Pozzo::the pilgrims: Godot::the devout:God.

Set in an especially unpropitious time in history, Endgame constitutes a kind of anti-dénouement to the life and impending cessation of Hamm and Clov's arrant arrange-

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<sup>5</sup>P. 28. Cf. with ll. 289-294, Epistle I, of Alexander Pope's An Essay on Man:

All nature is but art, unknown to thee;  
 All chance, direction, which thou canst not see;  
 All discord, harmony not understood;  
 All partial evil, universal good:  
 And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,  
 One truth is clear, Whatever Is, Is Right.

ment. Hamm is blind and crippled, and thus a recluse of sorts, who depends on Clov for occasional trips around the room in his chair, reports on the state of the world outside, doses of pain-killer, and rituals intended to ready him for wakefulness and slumber. Their "thing" breeds friction, unfortunately; and though both ostensibly crave an end to their affiliation, each admits his lack of alternatives.

Hamm. Why do you stay with me?

Clov. Why do you keep me?

Hamm. There's no one else.

Clov. There's nowhere else.<sup>6</sup>

Eventually Clov spies a child upon the beach, "a potential procreator" (p. 78); and at this point, Hamm declares, "It's the end, Clov, we've come to the end. I don't need you any more" (p. 79). The latter's departure seems imminent at curtain's close.

Endgame is chock-full of obscure hints, tantalizing

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<sup>6</sup>Endgame, trans. Samuel Beckett (New York, 1958), p. 6. The Frenchman's lines are hauntingly reminiscent of several in T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men,"

In this last of meeting places  
We grope together  
And avoid speech. (ll. 57-59)

Interestingly, the play's indeterminate outcome could be most aptly characterized by the closing lines of this same poem,

This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper (ll. 97-98),  
or lines 329-330 of The Waste Land,

We who were living are now dying  
With a little patience.

redundancies, clipped characterizations, and, above all, an elusive spatiotemporal form; consequently, it poses horrendous problems for critics. On the surface, the play strikes me as a portrayal of un amour intéressé, a classic case of cupboard love. Virtually all pretense and subtlety having been abandoned, little remains to disguise the players' selfish designs. When Clov fails to respond to Hamm's command to fetch him a sheet, for example, the master threatens him: "I'll give you nothing more to eat" (p. 5). Or, again, when Hamm questions Clov's hesitancy to slay him, the menial confesses, "I don't know the combination of the cupboard" (p. 8), a need Hamm seeks to satisfy in a later reiteration of his request.

Hamm. Why don't you finish us?

(Pause.)

I'll tell you the combination of the cupboard if you promise to finish me.

Clov. I couldn't finish you.

Hamm. Then you won't finish me.

(Pause.)

Clov. I'll leave you, I have things to do.

(p. 37)

Hamm's initial use of the pronoun "us" compounds the mystery of their relationship, because it implies that his death entails the demise of Clov as well, this despite the latter's probable access to the cupboard. One senses, therefore, a selfish motive for Clov's otherwise admirable attitude. Altruism and cynicism aside, the arrangement reflects the mutual dependence of master and menial, each relying upon the other for sustenance.



Cupboard love permeates the entire play and thus goes beyond the principals. In one inane instance, Nagg, who like Nell lives in a bin, pops his lid to eavesdrop, scratch, and retell old stories, rejects Hamm's bribe of a bon-bon for hearing his chronicle. He demands instead a sugar-plum; and when his son accedes, he speaks doubtfully: "You'll give me a sugar-plum?" Subsequently reassured, he tries for two, and failing there, listens awhile, then interrupts several times to shout, "Me sugar-plum!" Eventually he is silenced by Hamm's triumphant revelation, "there are no more sugar-plums" (see pp. 49-55).

Clov's having to die, even while possessing the combination to Hamm's cupboard, is one of numerous puzzling aspects of Endgame, the pair's arrangement posing perhaps the greatest riddle of all. Sometimes a statement of their relationship seems forthcoming. Once, for example, Hamm asks whether Clov has had enough. The latter agrees and then inquires, "Of what?" The master responds evasively, "This . . . this . . . thing" (p. 5). A subsequent allusion proves equally equivocal.

Hamm (anguished). What's happening, what's happening?

Clov. Something is taking its course.  
(p. 13)

The anticipated clarification never comes; but in time the audience learns to appreciate Beckett's strategy of occasional advances and timely retreats, these tactics be-

ing all too evident in a later Hamm-Clov exchange.

Hamm. Do you not think this has gone on long enough?

Clov. Yes!  
(Pause.)  
What?

Hamm. This . . . this . . . thing.

Clov. I've always thought so.  
(Pause.)

You not?

Hamm (gloomily). Then it's a day like any other day.

Clov. As long as it lasts.  
(Pause.)

All life long the same inanities.

(p. 45)

Confronted with such studied, yet tantalizing in-direction, one finds cupboard love insubstantial -- at least as an éclaircissement to the play's meaning. Artfully obscured, it seems, is a more profound significance, which must be sought in certain references and cross-references, these in turn, when apprehended spatially, constituting a relatively coherent pattern. To begin with, a review of pertinent facts concerning the participants is necessary.

Nagg and Nell are blind. Overly fond of the past, together they recount their misfortune of long ago, when they rode tandem in the Ardennes, crashed, and lost their shanks (p. 16). There are accidents, of course; and there are accidents. Not unreasonably the couple's tandem venture in the forest, their fall, their forfeiture of freedom (mobility), and eventual loss of vision is the genesis of considerable wonderment. Eden? Adam? The pair's names shore up such conjectures. "Nagg," for instance, is con-

sistent with the obsessive past and cleverly suggests original sin as well. The ageless Nagg, it is worth remembering, still dwells with Hamm, who may in fact be his surviving son. Or he may be one of the countless sons of Nagg/Adam, a relationship which would explain his use of the epithets "Progenitor" and, particularly, "Accursed fornicator" (pp. 9 and 10). Moreover, "Nell" evokes at once the race's complicity and potential doom.

Like his forbears, Hamm lacks vision and freedom. Dependent upon Clov for his turns about the room, he curiously orders the latter to push his chair "right around the world!" He further instructs him to "hug the walls"; checks to insure that the rampart is near at hand; touches it and cries, "Old wall!"; declares, "beyond is the . . . other hell"; and commands, "Closer! Closer! Up against" (pp. 25-26)! Satisfied, he orders Clov to return him to the exact center of the chamber. Hamm's disabilities, it goes without saying, render his world a hell; and his fascination for the "other hell" can be construed as an urge to probe the periphery of nonbeing, without yet compromising his present existence. While this morbid fancy overwhelms him, it is fleeting: he soon retreats to securest center, the point farthest removed from death's encroachment.

Clov's situation is cause for further wonder. In one instance, Hamm talks of a madman, whom he knew when Clov was not "in the land of the living" (p. 44). Later,

in sharing the chronicle which he is currently writing, Hamm recalls a man on his belly crawling, asking "bread for his brat" and entreating him to take the child into his home (pp. 52-53). The time of this incident? Christmas Eve (p. 51). The suppliant's vocation? Gardening. Hamm laughs at his reminiscence, but implies a tender of employment.

Hamm. Before accepting with gratitude he asks if he may have his little boy with him.

Clov. What age?

Hamm. Oh tiny.

Clov. He would have climbed the trees.

(p. 61)

What is to be said of Clov, of his prior existence elsewhere, his relationship with the gardener, his arrival on Christmas Eve, his status as foundling? Perhaps Beckett intends to insinuate that Clov/Christ is Hamm/egocentric man's wayward projection. How convenient for him to weave his own wonders, to chronicle his own creation! And how appropriate that there should be a gardener/father, a tandem venture among the trees, a fall, a forfeiture of freedom and loss of vision! The rest is remarkably commonplace, what with Hamm/man's knowing the onus of Nagg/Adam and Nell/hell and with his ushering Clov/Christ into his home/world to act as his eyes (vision) and legs (guide), to serve in his kitchen (sustain him), to clean and arrange his house (order his world and give meaning to life), to secure his home for habitation, to the point of exterminating crablice and rats (safeguard him from evil), and ease his hours

with pain-killer (Cf. Marx's pronouncement, "Religion is the opium of the people.").

Such a chronicle, one might say, is immaculate in its conception. In practice, unfortunately, Hamm's thing has proven more topical than eternal. Already he is weary of his personages. Thus when Clov asks, "Do you believe in the life to come?" Hamm becomes coy.

Mine has always been that.

(Exit Clov.)

Got him that time!

(p. 49)

And if the son merits small respect, the father is now assumed to be spurious. In one instance, for example, Hamm insists that everyone prepare to pray, then abruptly cancels the project and proclaims, "The bastard! He doesn't exist" (p. 55)! Clearly, though, the chronicle is nearing completion; and when Hamm anxiously ponders its end, Clov reassures him: "Pah! You'll make up another" (p. 61).

Their arrangement, then, is "taking its course." Clov is aging. His eyes and legs, he confesses, are "bad" (p. 35). Moreover, he announces, "There's no more pain-killer" (p. 71). Earlier Hamm had asked, "Why do you stay with me?" In the old days Clov could have cited how at home he was, how crucial he was to Hamm's existence, and how instrumental he was in the conduct of life. Now, however, his eyes and legs going bad and his means of easing pain exhausted, his days seem numbered. To Clov's original question, "Why do you keep me?" Hamm formerly could have

responded, "Because you afford me sustenance, vision and direction, security, and love; you ease the pain of my existence." Lately he has retained his menial because there is "no one else." Thus, when a boy, "a potential procreator," appears in the vicinity, the keeper of Clov gives his foundling notice: "I don't need you any more."

Ultimately, I think, it is possible to accept Hamm and Clov's "thing" as an ironic absurdist conceit for the inception, life, and impending demise of Christianity. While Beckett's innuendoes verge on harshness, and injustice even, they are nonetheless attended by all the compassion and depth of feeling which pervade the following portion of the closing scene.

Hamm. Clov!  
 (Clov halts, without turning.)  
 Nothing.  
 (Clov moves on.)  
 Clov!  
 (Clov halts, without turning.)  
Clov. This is what we call making an exit.  
Hamm. I'm obliged to you, Clov. For your services.  
Clov (turning sharply). Ah pardon, it's I am obliged to you.  
Hamm. It's we are obliged to each other.  
 (p. 81)

This exchange is not the trifle of an impish playwright, but the veritable distillment of an earthly passion eroded to the brink of collapse.

All That Fall, a play for radio, depicts a tragic day in the life of Maddy Rooney, an aging and obese matron

("Two hundred pounds of unhealthy fat!"<sup>7</sup>), who honors her blind husband Dan's birthday by floundering down a country road to meet his train at Boghill. In the process she encounters several local folk, including Christy, a carter, who seeks to sell her a supply of stydung; Mr. Tyler, a former bill-collector, who stirs her sexual impulses; Mr. Slocum, Clerk of the Racecourse, who gives her a "lift"; Mr. Barrell, the stationmaster, who ignores her request for assistance up a stairway; Miss Fitt, a smug and puritanical maiden, who attempts to insinuate Maddy's inferiority; and Jerry, a boy retained to accompany Dan home. Mrs. Rooney's humiliations are legion, e.g., literally having to be forced into and out of Slocum's car, having to bear the crowd's laughter while she laboriously scales the "cliff" to the station platform, and having to suffer the jeers of the Lynch twins on the journey homeward. Nonetheless, she endures the indignities, along with the 12:30's mysterious delay and Dan's irascible and aloof manner, eventually convoying him down the road toward safety, only to be stunned by Jerry's belated revelation that a child's death caused the hitch, the report implying as well that Dan somehow wrought the calamity.

The play abounds with images and allusions. The name "Dan," for example, suggests prophetic inclinations,

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<sup>7</sup>All That Fall (New York, 1960), p. 73.

which would be in keeping with Maddy's claims to being a "seer" (e.g., p. 61). Thus, it is reasonable to suspect the couple of clairvoyance, especially in light of Dan's suggestion that they proceed backwards.

Mad. Backwards?

Dan. Yes. Or you forwards and I backwards. The perfect pair. Like Dante's damned with their faces arsy-versy. Our tears will water our bottoms.<sup>8</sup>

The drama's title, a phrase extracted from a portion of Psalm 145 ("The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that are bowed down" [p. 88].), suggests a somewhat different basis for the pair's predicament. In addition to praising the Lord as savior and preserver, it should be noted, the psalm proclaims his dedication to the destruction of the wicked. Therefore, one quick to judge might readily accept the protagonists as victims of the Almighty's righteous wrath. Maddy's relations with Mr. Tyler and Mr. Slocum imply as much. To begin with, when the former, wobbling on his bicycle, asks to rest a hand upon her shoulder, she declines.

No, Mr. Rooney, Mr. Tyler I mean, I am tired of light old hands on my shoulder and other senseless places, sick and tired of them. (p. 39)

The excess of protest and the Freudian slip encourage second thoughts concerning Maddy, suspicions borne out later when she refuses to speed her pace. "Will you get along with

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<sup>8</sup>pp. 74-75. Cf. Inferno, Canto XX.



you now and cease molesting me" (p. 42)? His subsequent gesture to leave, however, elicits evidence of Maddy's ambivalent urgings.

Heavens, you're not going to ride her flat! (Mr. Tyler mounts.) You'll tear your tube to ribbons! (Mr. Tyler rides off. Receding sound of bumping bicycle. Silence. Cooing.) Venus birds! Billing in the woods all the summer long. (Pause.) Oh cursed corset! If I could let it out, without indecent exposure. Mr. Tyler! Mr. Tyler! Come back and unlace me behind the hedge! (She laughs wildly, ceases.) What's wrong with me, what's wrong with me, never tranquil, seething out of my dirty old pelt . . . . (p. 43)

Maddy's darker designs are further revealed in her dealings with Mr. Slocum. Having offered her a lift, he pushes from behind and struggles mightily to boost her in to a seat. Maddy directs.

Oh! . . . Lower! . . . Don't be afraid! . . . We're past the age when . . . there! . . . Now! . . . Get your shoulder under it . . . Oh! . . . (Giggles.) Oh glory! . . . Up! Up! . . . Ah! . . . I'm in! (Panting of Mr. Slocum. He slams the door. In a scream.) My frock! You've nipped my frock!  
 . . . . .  
 What will Dan say when he sees me? (p. 46)

The connotations of the foregoing illustrations, I think, effectually betray Maddy's wayward propensities. Harshly judged, her implicit wantonness and Dan's likely culpability in the child's demise expose the two as exceedingly wicked, just the sort of people whose "Rooney-ous" conduct brings down the Lord's wrath and, surely, beings undeserving of the ministrations pledged to the faithful who fall or become bowed by the burdens of existence.

This last judgment seems unduly stern, failing as it does to take adequate stock of the Rooneys' extreme suffering. A more promising tack, I believe, is to concentrate on the rampant contingency and inescapable tragedy which constitute the climate of Boghill, as it were, and which render them virtually helpless. To characterize their condition, Beckett employs the conceit of the dung-heap as it relates to the hinny and the hen, the dual and dichotomous roles being enacted by Maddy herself.

It is perhaps advisable to begin with the ride to the station. Seeing disaster ahead, Maddy cries, "Mind the hen!" The brakes squeal. The creature squawks. "Oh mother," exclaims Maddy, "you have squashed her, drive on, drive on" (p. 47)! The collision continues to haunt her, however.

What a death! One minute picking happy at the dung, on the road, in the sun, with now and then a dust bath, and then -- bang! -- all her troubles over. (pp. 47-48)

Here, obviously, she speaks of the dung which delights. There is also the dung to be drawn, the burdensome refuse desirably consigned to willing bearers. Such is the commodity of Christy, the carter, who offers Maddy a load of stydung. "What," she asks,

would we want with dung, at our time in life?  
 (Pause.) Why are you on your feet down on the road? Why do you not climb up on the crest of your manure and let yourself be carried along? Is it that you have no head for heights?  
 (pp. 35-36)

Still the hen, she would climb to the crest, there to revel

and scratch without surcease. When Christy commands the hinny to proceed, though, Maddy becomes noticeably upset, sensing as she does the awful anguish in the beast's "moist cleg-tormented eyes."<sup>9</sup> Christy's welt sharpens that anguish. "No, no," Maddy protests.

Take her by the snaffle and pull her eyes away from me. Oh this is awful! (She moves on. Sound of dragging feet.) What have I done to deserve all this, what, what? (pp. 36-37)

The dungheap, then, is Beckett's conceit for the world of Maddy Rooney ("née Dunne" [p. 56]), and as such it can be the source of extreme pain or eminent pleasure. And it implies as well the roles of Maddy as hinny and hen. Unfortunately, she has not the power to select her part. As hinny, she bears incalculable burdens. For example, in the beginning she complains to Christy that she is aging, aching, and childless, then cries, "Minnie! Little Minnie" (p. 37)! Later she informs Mr. Tyler that she cannot go on and asks that he tell Dan "it all came over her again" (p. 42). Once more she cries, "Minnie! Little Minnie!" and adds brokenly, "In her forties now she'd be, I don't know, fifty . . ." (p. 42). Thus it appears that one of Maddy's crosses is the loss of her only child, a daughter,

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<sup>9</sup>p. 36. Again, Beckett's situation is tantalizing. Does he wish to imply that Christ(y) carts, or bears, the unwanted or offensive matter of existence? In an apparent reference to the animal, Maddy later says to Dan,

Yes, it was a hinny, he rode into Jerusalem or whatever it was a hinny. (Pause.) That must mean something. (p. 86)

whose memory haunts her even today, perhaps fifty years later.<sup>10</sup>

There are, of course, the myriad indignities attending her passage to the Boghill station; and it is no surprise, therefore, that when Dan prepares to descend the "precipice" and insists that she count the steps for him, Maddy begs off.

Not steps, Dan, please, I always get them wrong. Then you might fall on your wound and I would have that on my manure-heap on top of everything else. (p. 71)

Here, then, is the dung that diminishes, harries the hinny, the burden that bows the bearer.

The dung which delights? The unwanted refuse of others: this is Maddy's revel, the heralded heights which evoke the hen in her. Initially her probings seem like any other -- for example, the question put to Christy.

Mad. . . . . .  
 How is your poor wife?  
Chr. No better, Ma'am.  
Mad. Your daughter then?  
Chr. No worse, Ma'am.

Silence. (p. 34)

Gradually, however, a pattern emerges. "What news of your daughter?" she asks Mr. Tyler. "Fair, fair," he replies.

They removed everything, you know, the whole . . .

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<sup>10</sup>Since the hinny is the hybrid offspring of a jennet and a stallion, Maddy's childlessness would be foreshadowed by Beckett's image.

er . . . bag of tricks. Now I am grandchildless.

Dragging feet. (p. 38)

Again, of Mr. Slocum, she inquires, "How is your poor mother?" His answer is almost disappointing.

Thank you, she is fairly comfortable. We manage to keep her out of pain. That is the great thing, Mrs. Rooney, is it not? (p. 44)

And so it goes. At the station she cannot resist recalling Mr. Barrell's deceased father, a "small ferrety purple-faced widower, deaf as a doornail" (p. 52). Neither can she contain her enthusiasm over a possible collision involving the train carrying Miss Fitt's mother (p. 63). Nor can she curb her curiosity regarding Jerry's "poor father," whom "they" took away (p. 67).

Her compulsion has predictable consequences. For instance, Mr. Barrell turns away, a discourtesy which causes Maddy to reflect.

(Silence.) I estrange them all. They come towards me, uninvited, bygones bygones, full of kindness, anxious to help . . . .  
(p. 53)

Here, I think, is the tragedy of Maddy the hen. An unpleasant old woman, she seeks out the dungheaps, the unwanted litter, of others, there to scratch and feast, seldom appreciating the agony she unearths.

Hen or hinny, Maddy is a creature with poor powers to cope with life's contingencies. Confronted with something akin to fate, she and Dan have before them an ancient choice, whether to endure outrageous fortune or to act

against an alien universe. They do have a source of solace, an imperiled one. If they hurry, she advises Dan, they will soon be "safe to haven." Dan ponders the phrase, and sensing the significance of her language, observes, "Maddy, sometimes one would think you were struggling with a dead language." Her agreement evokes his further comment.

Well, you know, it will be dead in time, just like our own poor dear Gaelic, there is that to be said. (p. 80).

Though the language still lives, the Rooneys consider its tenets something less than viable. This truth is all too apparent when Maddy recalls the preacher's announced text for the Sunday meeting.

"The Lord upholdeth all that fall and raiseth up all those that be bowed down." (Silence. They join in wild laughter. They move on. Wind and rain. Dragging feet, etc.) Hold me tighter, Dan! (Pause.) Oh yes! (p. 88)

Merely enduring has its indignities. Dan is blind. Both are lame. Hope of deliverance seems fleeting. Deprivation and humiliation go endlessly on. Finally, after being jeered by the Lynch boys, Dan forestalls a mud-pelting by lifting his cane threateningly. Then he confides his darkest thoughts. "Did you ever wish to kill a child?" he asks Maddy.

(Pause.) Nip some young doom in the bud. (Pause.) Many a time at night, in winter, on the black road home, I nearly attacked the boy. (Pause.) Poor Jerry! (Pause.) What restrained me then? (p. 74)

His closing line becomes the more meaningful when he later

recounts his day on the train.

I had the compartment to myself as usual. At least I hope so, for I made no attempt to restrain myself. (p. 76)

Shortly thereafter Jerry comes with Dan's "thing," a "kind of ball," yet "not a ball," which was forgotten on the train. "Give it to me," demands Mr. Rooney. "It is a thing I carry about with me" (p. 89)! Then when Maddy inquires about the hitch, Dan interrupts: "Leave the boy alone, he knows nothing! Come on" (p. 90)! Jerry tells of the little child who fell from the carriage, however -- under the wheels of the train. Dan groans.

The ending is indeterminate, but the evidence suggests that Dan has elected to act out his hostility toward an alien universe, in this case blindly striking out against the most vulnerable of worldly forces, a little child. For one brief moment in June, it seems, he has freed himself from the fanatical clutches of fate.

Krapp's Last Tape depicts a "wearish old man's" evening of agitation and painful reminiscence. An extremely nearsighted person with a cracked voice and purple nose, Krapp occupies himself with bananas, "booze," and les bandes. His obsession is the tapes, however, especially spool five, "the little rascal" in box three.<sup>11</sup> Cut when

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<sup>11</sup>Krapp's Last Tape (New York, 1960), p. 12.

he was thirty-nine, the tape alludes to his laxation difficulties, weakness for bananas, dipsomania, mother's death, and an earlier spool made when he was perhaps twenty-seven and more idealistic. What absorbs his interest, though, is a sequence titled "farewell to . . . love" (p. 13), an account of an outing on a lake, during which time he and his companion acknowledge their doomed love and take their silent farewell. After replaying the segment, Krapp switches to a virgin spool to denounce his earlier stupidity, note his present age (69), and discover that he has very little to say. Casting aside the new, he returns to the old, to hear again the tragic sequence, which is followed by an ironic afterthought:

Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance for happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back. (p. 28)

Krapp sits motionless, staring. The reel runs in silence.

The protagonist's name tends to polarize the play's somewhat disparate content, invoking as it apparently does several slang uses of the word "crap." For example, Beckett's hero is a loser. Already a storied drinker at twenty-seven, he brags of spending 20-40% of his waking life "on licensed premises alone" (p. 16). Moreover, he has lived "on and off" with the likes of Bianca (p. 16), Effie (p. 25), and other easy women. Although these indulgences do not by themselves constitute failure, they prefigure his



present predicament. For now he lives alone, and drinks in solitude. Indeed, his is an agonizing solitude characterized by a dependence upon the once-rejected past, his hunger for human contacts being such that the mere thought of his favorite tape elicits the epithets "the little rascal!" "the little scoundrel!" and, easily as affectionate, "Spoooool" (pp. 12-13)!

Empty talk, or "bull," is another slang usage evoked by the hero's name. At age thirty-nine, for instance, he admits to being, intellectually, at the "crest of the wave -- or thereabouts" (p. 14). That birthday, he confides, was celebrated alone at the Winehouse, where he sat thinking, "separating the grain from the husks" (p. 14), the former ostensibly being

those things worth having when all the dust has  
-- when all my dust has settled. (p. 15)

Again, while speaking of the "hopeless business" with Bianca, he is obviously touched, yet concludes coldly and curiously,

These old P. M.s<sup>12</sup> are gruesome, but I often find them -- (Krapp switches off, broods, switches on) -- a help before embarking on a new . . . (hesitates) . . . retrospect. (p. 16)

Then, interlacing his entry with whimsical statistics and snickers, he recalls his aspirations and resolutions, such as the desire to curb his drinking and "plans for a less . . . engrossing sexual life" (p. 16).

The foregoing thoughts, each given in a particular moment and context, are individually unobjectionable. None-

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<sup>12</sup>Post-mortems.

theless, in retrospect, and especially in view of the final irony, they ring hollow. Perhaps Krapp's own judgment is more to the point, though. Of the younger man, he observes, "Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp" (p. 16). He is even more critical of the middle-aged manifestation:

Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. (p. 24)

Regularity, or lack of it, is a third slang usage suggested by the protagonist's name and is the basis for an apparent conceit. There is, of course, the malady itself, of which Krapp speaks frequently. Early in spool five, for instance, he announces, "Slight improvement in bowel condition" (p. 13). Later he reports, "Thirty-nine today, sound as a bell, apart from my old weakness"; and then, after admitting eating three bananas, he observes, "Fatal things for a man with my condition" (p. 14). Hardly peculiar to middle-age, the affliction is cause for the younger Krapp's complaint of "unattainable laxation" (p. 17) and the older incarnation's succinct summation:

What's a year now? The sour cud and the iron stool. (p. 25)

The hero's stasis appears to be a similitude for an erotic impasse. Thus the dietary intemperance, which aggravates his condition and causes discomfort, effectually parallels the sexual indulgence, which obviates loneliness and gives rise to dys-ease. The latter imprudence, it

seems, is the outcome of opposing inclinations. On the one hand, he fondly recalls an engrossing sexual life, easy women, the "dust" and "fire" of younger years. Much as he has devoured forbidden fruit and cast aside the unwanted peel, then, he has appeased his erotic appetite only to abandon his mistress of the moment. A contemplative protagonist, on the other hand, leans toward temperance, desiring as he does to blunt his baser urges, that he might gain something worth the having once his ardor has abated. This is the man who would opt for happiness, the brooder uncertain and adrift with his lady on the lake.

I said again I thought it was hopeless and no good going on, and she agreed, without opening her eyes. (pause.) I asked her to look at me and after a few moments -- (pause) -- after a few moments she did, but the eyes just slits, because of the glare. I bent over her to get them in the shadow and they opened. (Pause. Low.) Let me in. (pp. 22, 27)

Therein lay his hope for happiness. This he knew at thirty-nine, yet he abandoned her and elected instead to fuel his flame, as it were. Now his premature "farewell to love" has returned to haunt him, and he seems beyond purgation. A shriveled old man, he subsists on bananas, "booze," and the insubstantial embers of the past. As he has indulged, it seems, so he suffers.

Henry, also an old man, is the rejected hero in Embers, Beckett's second play for radio. Paradoxically

drawn to the sea, which he dreads, he broods over myriad matters, especially his fantasies and his father. Still agonizing over his deceased forbear's condemnatory epithet "washout,"<sup>13</sup> Henry seeks on the strand the sociality of his silent shade. Wearying of that, he reverts to an unfinished story, one which concerns Bolton, "an old man in great trouble" (p. 98), who has summoned Holloway, a doctor, ostensibly to treat him for some unspecified affliction. Eventually, the composition goes, Bolton lights a candle,

walks over and looks Holloway full in the eye.  
 (Pause.) Not a word, just the look . . . .  
 (Pause.) Tears? (Pause. Long laugh.) Good  
 God no! (p. 120)

Parent and healer of no avail, he appeals to Ada, his wife, perhaps also a shade. ("She speaks in a "low remote voice throughout" [p. 103] and makes no sound when she sits [p. 104].) His quick study of rejection,

What turned her against me do you think, the child  
 I suppose, horrid little creation, wish to God we'd  
 never had her (p. 102),

effectually foreshadows the subsequent revelation of diminished ardor and Ada's unsettling interest in Addie, their only child. They talk, too, of the torturous sea, the hooves of horses, the father's fatal day, and Henry's disoriented soliloquies ("Roaring prayers at God and his saints" [p. 111], he says of them). Growing impatient,

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<sup>13</sup>Embers (New York, 1960), p. 101.

Ada suggests he see Holloway, then fades from the scene. Henry remains on the strand near the sea, with his horses and Holloway, anticipating the while the emptiness to come -- tonight, tomorrow, Saturday, Sunday.

Nothing, all day nothing. (Pause.) All day all night nothing. (Pause.) Not a sound.

Sea. (p. 121)

Among the play's several images is a pair of "turns," the embers and the sea, both of which aid in the depiction of Henry's predicament, but neither of which fully accounts for the work's disparate content. It is the second similitude which obviates Henry's problem, for he emerges as one who follows the sea (fig. he is bewildered, at a loss). The cleavage with his father and his dread of the sea substantiate this notion.

An object of challenge, and a place for venturing and danger, the sea fascinated the father, afforded him a haven for basking and bathing. Quite appropriately, therefore, when he disappeared without a trace, no one could be sure whether he had drowned or merely elected to live "under a false name in the Argentine for example" (p. 97). Henry resembles him, and yet is wholly different, as his confession to the shade suggests.

I'm like you in that, can't stay away from it, but I never go in, no, I think the last time I went in was with you. (Pause.) Just be near it. (p. 97)

Here, of course, the problem barely surfaces. The cleavage

is still to come. "You wouldn't know me now," Henry later says to the specter;

you'd be sorry you ever had me, but you were that already, a washout, that's the last I heard from you, a washout. (Pause. Imitating father's voice.) "Are you coming for a dip?" "No." "Come on, come on." "No." Glare, stomp to door, turn, glare. "A washout, that's all you are, a washout!" (Violent slam of door. Pause.) Again! (Slam. Pause.) Slam life shut like that! (Pause.) Washout.  
(pp. 101-102)

Well chosen, it seems, the father's epithet at once portrays Henry as a failure and an outcast, in this case a being unworthy of the water or, again, unequal to the tests of life.

Henry's flaw thus established, much of the drama's content fits into place. In speaking of the father's last day, for example, Ada recalls coming to fetch Henry, "as arranged," that they might go bathing together. His bed had not been slept in, however, his implicit cowardice going far to explain why his father arose, "went out, slamming the door," to go sit "on a rock looking out to sea." His posture she never forgot, she says.

And yet it was a common one. You used to have it sometimes. Perhaps just the stillness, as if he had been turned to stone. I could never make it out. (p. 117)

Whether it be contemplative, foetal, or otherwise, the father's attitude betrays his brooding and the urge to be elsewhere. Also, it underscores again his rejection of Henry.

Embers abounds with indications of Henry's dread. For example, he comes down to the beach at ebb tide, when he

has the strand to himself, the sea being "out as far as the island" (p. 96). Once there, moreover, he moves with extreme caution, for whether he proceeds, halts, or sits, he invariably situates himself on a shingle (see pp. 95, 109, 110, 111, 121). Then, too, any venturing is subject to considerable deliberation. Thus when he rises to go, he tells Ada,

I thought I might try and get out as far as the water's edge. (Pause. With a sigh.) And back.

Her impatience, by then, is understandable.

Well why don't you? (Pause.) Don't stand there thinking about it. (Pause.) Don't stand there staring. (p. 110)

The sounds haunt him, surely; and this day is particularly trying. Usually he walks "with a gramophone" (p. 114), but he has somehow forgotten it. Eventually Ada asks the question for all:

And if you hate it why don't you keep away from it? Why are you always coming down here?  
(p. 112)

Henry's answer comes much earlier, though: it is "some old grave" from which he cannot tear himself (p. 106).

Ashore and alone, repelled by a life beyond his understanding and appetite, Henry is at a loss, bewildered. Rejection and perplexity, then -- these are his embers, the chilled effects of a life apart. His father has cursed him, and since become a silent specter. Ada hears and humors him for awhile, but eventually waxes impatient and advises him to summon Holloway. Thus he has come full cycle,

driven as he is to the only outlet he knew as a child.

"Stories, stories," he recalls,

years and years of stories, till the need came  
on me, for someone, to be with me, anyone, a  
stranger, to talk to, imagine he hears me, years  
of that, and then, now, for someone who . . .  
knew me, in the old days, anyone to be with me,  
imagine he hears me, what I am now. (Pause.)  
No good either. (p. 100)

There is only Holloway. And he is no help, there in the  
darkling setting where one hears

not a sound, only the fire, no flames now, embers.  
(Pause.) Embers. (Pause.) Shifting, lapsing,  
furtive like, dreadful sound . . . . (p. 99)

Bolton (Henry?) lifts the candle and looks the healer in  
the eye. He finds there neither the tears nor the peace  
he seeks, only the glare attending an angry offer of tem-  
porary relief: "If you want a shot say so and let me get  
the hell out of here" (p. 120). Bolton/Henry would have  
more.

"Please!" (Pause.) "Please!" (Pause.) "Please,  
Holloway!" (Pause.) Candle shaking and guttering  
all over the place, lower now, old arm tired, takes  
it in the other hand and holds it high again, that's  
it, that was always it, night, and the embers cold,  
and the glim shaking of your old fist, saying, Please!  
Please! (Pause.) Begging. (Pause.) Of the poor.  
(Pause.) Ada! (Pause.) Father! (Pause.) Christ!  
(pp. 120-121)

Even now, in old age when his energies are ebbing  
and care for life cooling, Henry is afflicted by the per-  
plexity that passes all understanding. But it is a dys-  
ease rooted in rejection and, as the conceits suggest,  
renewed by egregious embers and the stultifying sea.



Happy Days features Winnie and Willie, an old couple literally fixed in the foreground of an unbroken plain, where the earth and sky recede to meet in the far distance. "Imbedded up to above her waist" in the exact center of a mound,<sup>14</sup> Winnie dwells in desperation, what with her admitted dependence on such rituals and routines as praying, reminiscing affairs and courtships, anticipating her and her husband's deaths, fantasizing, brushing her teeth, downing her medicine, applying lipstick, combing her hair, donning her hat, doing her nails, cleaning her spectacles, studying labels, fondling the family revolver, etc. In contrast, Willie prefers to sleep, anoint his chafe with vaseline, peruse the Reynolds News, and ply Winnie with pornographic cards and coarse comments about sex.

Evidently set in a later time, Act II reveals changes in the couple's condition. Winnie is imbedded up to her neck, and keeps the revolver conspicuously displayed. Then, too, her remarks are more clipped and subject to rapid shifts. No longer preferring prayer, she opens her day with a primitive apostrophe, "Hail, holy light" (p. 49), and consumes the hours with her vignettes, e.g., the tale concerning the Showers or the Cookers who encounter them on the plain, react disparately to their arrangement, and

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<sup>14</sup>Happy Days (New York, 1961), p. 7.

plunge onward with their own busy-ness. Winnie describes an increasingly overpowering existence: "No, something must move the world, I can't any more" (p. 60). Shortly thereafter, Willie, "dressed to kill" (p. 61), emerges from his backhole on all fours, gestures affectionately, and just audibly speaks his only word of the entire act -- "Win." She experiences momentary euphoria.

Win! (Pause.) Oh this is a happy day, this will have been another happy day! (Pause.) After all. (Pause.) So far. (p. 64)

Another of Beckett's dramatic studies of eroded faith, Happy Days juxtaposes two slices of a process which ultimately threatens to immerse Winnie in l'abîme du désespoir. Her mound, in turn, appears to be a similitude for the murk and mire of life, that is to say, those emasculating aspects of existence which sunder mankind from its aspirations and reduce the race to resignation and indifference. Not surprisingly, her situation is marked by repulsion and craving, commonplace characteristics of absurdity.

The loathsome aspects of her life emerge gradually. At first it seems almost a case of "tired blood." Winnie, for example, glances toward the backhole and experiences pity.

poor Willie -- (rummages in bag) -- no zest -- (rummages) -- for anything -- (brings out spectacles in case.) -- no interest -- (turns back front) -- in life . . . . (p. 10)

Later, though, her own malady is equally apparent when she reads the label of her medicine bottle ("Loss of spirits . . . lack of keenness . . . want of appetite"), contemplates the promise of "instantaneous . . . improvement," unscrews the cap, and "swigs it off head well back" (pp. 13-14).

Willie, an extremely coarse fellow, is another of Winnie's burdens. Sometimes he is the epitome of the so-called dirty old man. The postcard which titillates him, for instance, elicits from her the observation, "No but this is just genuine pure filth!" precisely the kind of thing to make "any nice-minded person want to vomit." Eventually she takes her nose between her forefinger and thumb, drops the card, and demands, "Take it away!" While she proceeds to other matters, however, Willie studies the card further and varies its "angles and distance from the eyes" (p. 19). Later, when Winnie spies an emmet with "like a little white ball in its arms," her husband responds readily.

Will. Eggs.  
Winn. (arresting gesture). What?  
Pause.  
Will. Eggs. (Pause. Gesture to lay down glasses.)  
 Formication.  
Winn. (arresting gesture). What?  
Pause.  
Will. Formication. (p. 30)

They burst into laughter, but Winnie quickly senses that their pleasure derives from disparate sources.

(Pause.) How can we better magnify the Almighty than by sniggering with him at his little jokes,

particularly the poorer ones? (Pause.) I think you would back me up there, Willie. (Pause.) Or were we perhaps diverted by two quite different things? (p. 31)

Another of her inquiries, "What is a hog, Willie, please!" brings an almost predictable reply: "Castrated male swine" (p. 47). Winnie smiles; but by then the audience knows her glee arises from a source other than Willie's. (Already she has noted that hardly a day passes "without some addition to one's knowledge however trifling . . ." [p. 18].)

Willie's vulgarity goes beyond prurience. On one occasion, for example, he blows his nose "long and loud," then spreads the handkerchief over his skull (p. 20). Moreover, in a later instance, he catches Winnie's eye and thoroughly shocks her.

Oh really! (Pause.) Have you no handkerchief, darling? (Pause.) Have you no delicacy? (Pause.) Oh, Willie, you're not eating it! Spit it out, dear, spit it out! (p. 42)

One certainly wonders about Winnie, about the murk and mire of her life, about the rituals and routines which occupy her hours, about the waning keenness and the coarse old man that so unsettle her. There was a time, she reminds Willie, when things were different.

(Pause.) I speak of when I was not yet caught -- in this way -- and had my legs and had the use of my legs, and could seek out a shady place, like you, when I was tired of the sun, or a sunny place when I was tired of the shade, like you . . . .  
(p. 38)

Winnie is ostensibly speaking of the sun and shade; yet

her words have overtones as regards the dys-ease which arises from adversity and which anticipates responses intended to overcome and alleviate. Obviously, however, she no longer subscribes to the ancient cause-effect/reaction-solution methodology.

Curiously, she speaks of being caught. Perhaps her vignette concerning the Showers/Cookers is worth reviewing here. That couple, whatever their name, comes to gape, his one hand in hers, their others bearing brown bags. What, asks Shower/Cooker, does Winnie's semi-burial signify? And why does Willie make no effort to free her? "And you," replies Shower/Cooker's spouse,

what's the idea of you, she says, what are you meant to mean? It is because you're still on your two flat feet, with your old ditty full of tinned muck and changes of underwear, dragging me up and down this fornicating wilderness, coarse creature, fit mate -- (with sudden violence) -- let go of my hand and drop for God's sake, she says, drop! (p. 43)

The anecdote is repeated later (p. 58); and then, as before, the pair are portrayed receding, hand in hand, with their bags, the "last human kind -- to stray this way," observes Winnie (p. 59).

The pilgrims, it appears, afford an earlier glimpse of Winnie and Willie. After all, they possess the ubiquitous bags and lug themselves about the worldly wilderness. Moreover, he is a "coarse creature, fit mate." And it is easy to fancy a younger Winnie tiring of it all, demanding that they leave off, drop! Ultimately, I think, it is fair

to characterize Winnie's being caught as a consequence of a process which began with a cessation of endeavoring and seeking and which led to her gradual submission before life's endless spew of murk and mire, to the extent of not much caring any more, at least as regards things of this world.

The foregoing conclusion is quite in keeping with Winnie's reaction to the revolver in her bag. Early in Act I, for example, she "holds it up, kisses it rapidly, puts it back" (p. 13), then immediately proceeds to her medicine, as though it were a substitute of sorts. Thus the weapon emerges as the engine by which she might take her quietus, a notion not discouraged by her later remarks to Willie.

Remember how you used to keep on at me to take it away from you? Take it away, Winnie, take it away, before I put myself out of my misery. (Back front. Derisive.) Your misery! (p. 33)

About Winnie, then, is the shroud of loathsome life -- its causes, consequences, and possible correction. She has a longing, however, a craving, the wellsprings of which are at once the moon and the Almighty. She talks, for instance, of those times when she turns away from excessive pain, closes her eyes, and awaits the day to come,

the happy day to come when flesh melts at so many degrees and the night of the moon has so many hundred hours. (Pause.) That is what I find so comforting when I lose heart and envy the brute beast. (p. 18)

What a deliverance that will be! Life draws one downward.

But the other? "Is gravity what it was?" she asks Willie rhetorically.

I fancy not. (Pause.) Yes, the feeling more and more that if I were not held -- (gesture) -- in this way, I would simply float up into the blue. (Pause.) And that perhaps some day the earth will yield and let me go, the pull is so great, yes, crack all round me and let me out. (p. 33)

If Winnie is inclined astrologically, she betrays a Christian orientation as well. At the beginning of Act I, for example, she assumes for a time the attitude of prayer, then audibly closes the exercise with "For Jesus Christ's sake Amen" (p. 8). This ritual she caps with an "inaudible addendum," at the end of which she is heard to say, "World without end Amen" (p. 8). Then, too, she does imply that supplication is the "first thing . . . last thing" in her day (p. 12), and she does end Act I with the self-command, "Pray your old prayer, Winnie" (p. 48). Moreover, from certain of her expressions, such as "so much to be thankful for" (p. 11), "prayers perhaps not for naught" (p. 12), "when two are gathered together" (p. 28), and "not a day goes by . . . without some blessing . . . in disguise" (p. 24), it is possible to infer something of the quality of her orientation. Such is her commitment, in fact, that when she contemplates her bag, which contains her material treasures, she experiences mortification:

something tells me, Do not overdo the bag, Winnie, make use of it of course, let it help you . . . along, when stuck, by all means, but cast your mind forward . . . . (p. 32)

Thus, almost inundated by the murk and mire of existence (the mound), Winnie is besieged by despair (the revolver), on the one hand, and hope (the moon and the Almighty), on the other. How shall it be with her? Beckett ends as he began -- ambiguously. There is reason to despair, surely. Winnie is buried to her neck. Then, too, the revolver is more conspicuous than ever. And she opens her day with an ominous "Hail, holy light," a salutation which appropriately presages her subsequent confession:

I used to pray. (Pause.) I say I used to pray.  
 (Pause.) Yes, I must confess I did. (Smile.)  
 Not now. (Smile broader.) No no. (p. 50)

Her smile fades, however. The problem is life, she seems to say. "Then . . . now . . . what difficulties here, for the mind" (pp. 50-51).

Still. Still there is reason to hope. The moon, reverence for God -- they meant release, deliverance. But what of love, the care and concern of another being? "One does not appear to be asking a great deal," she observes on one occasion,

indeed at times it would seem hardly possible --  
 (voice breaks, falls to a murmur) -- to ask less  
 -- of a fellow creature -- to put it mildly --  
 whereas actually -- when you think about it --  
 look into your heart -- see the other -- what he  
 needs -- peace -- to be left in peace -- then per-  
 haps the moon -- all this time -- asking for the  
 moon. (p. 29)

Just then Winnie's words speak mostly of sentiment. Later, though, they prove prophetic, for Willie comes to court, to gesture affectionately, to listen, to look her in the



eye, to utter his triumphal "Win." There, it seems, is the power to melt the flesh, power to give her moon "so many hundred hours," power to comfort her when she loses heart and envies "the brute beast." And, best of all, his is the power to win Win peace; and in doing so, he evokes her grateful admission,

It's true, it's true  
You love me so!  
(p. 64)

Being both elaborate and unusual, Beckett's similitudes satisfy the standards established for the dramatic conceit. As regards the extended analogies the evidence is ample. For instance, while the situation in Waiting for Godot can be characterized as an absurdist "turn" for the man-God relationship associated with traditional and latter-day Christianity, the parallel's power derives from a considerable body of direct depiction, images, and allusions. Thus, the tramps' very lives indicate the ebb and flow of shallow faith. Moreover, the two dwell in a Godot-centered world, where the revered being "does nothing," yet saves, and curses those who neglect obsequiousness. Run together with all this is Vladimir's talk of the Gospels, thieves, and repentance, as well as Estragon's simulation of Adam's role, his obsession with damnation, and his ambivalent attitude toward Godot, whom he reveres and dreads. In addition, of course, there is the outrageous

ascendancy of Pozzo, whose menial suffers unspeakable miseries, yet seeks to impress his master to insure retention. Significantly, the unfortunate Lucky talks of a loving, concerned Almighty who dwells in silence and indifference, tolerates his lowly race's torment, and promises in the fullness of time to vindicate the divine strategy. Ultimately, the evidence suggests a complicated three-part similitude, Lucky:Pozzo::the pilgrims:Godot::the faithful:God.

A similar finished analogy is apparent in Endgame, in which Hamm and Clov's arrangement evolves as a subtle absurdist "turn" for the inception, life, and impending demise of Christianity. Again Beckett takes pains to prove his parallel, this time undergirding his structure with portrayals of a gardener/Father; forbears who venture into a forest, experience a fall, forfeit their freedom and lose their vision; Clov, a foundling, who arrives on Christmas Eve; and Hamm, who knows the onus of Nagg/Adam and Nell/Hell and who turns to Clov/Christ for guidance, sustenance, safety, and comfort. In Endgame, then, the conceit in large measure accounts for the play's content and structure from beginning to end, as do the conceits in Waiting for Godot and the other four works as well.

In the management of his tropes Beckett not only effects extension, but also collocates disparate phenomena, with the result that he evokes some remarkable analogies.

In All That Fall, for example, he yokes together existence and the dung-heap, and implies that Maddy Rooney (née Dunne) enacts at once the roles of the hen (unpleasant old woman) reveling in the refuse of others and the hinny forced to bear incalculable burdens of her own. Then, too, the hero's stasis in Krapp's Last Tape affords a striking similitude for an erotic impasse, his dietary intemperance, which aggravates his condition and causes him discomfort, effectually paralleling his sexual indulgence, which in turn obviates his loneliness and brings him dys-ease. Again, in Embers, the sea and the embers betray Henry's life-long perplexity, the former imaging his fetishism and the latter representing the chilled effects of a life apart. Moreover, the mound in Happy Days constitutes an unusual imaginative equivalent for the murk and mire of life, that is, those emasculating aspects of existence which divest the race of its aspirations and reduce its members to resignation and indifference. Quite understandably, then, Winnie's is an ancient choice -- whether to quit in despair (use the revolver) or to cling to her craving (anticipate the moon and/or the Almighty). And although the "turns" in Waiting for Godot and Endgame lack the superficial singularity that characterizes the conceits in the other plays, the tramps' predicament and Hamm and Clov's arrangement, once subjected to close examination, emerge as shocking concrete equivalents for the man-God relationship associated with

Christendom and the ascension, dominion, and decline of Christianity, respectively.

As an aspect of Beckett's conceits, value is somewhat muted. What he does promulgate is suggested in two ways. First, through the "turns" themselves. Within the elaborate parallel in Waiting for Godot, for example, Godot evolves as an arch-violator of pledges, Pozzo as an arrogant abuser of servants, and Lucky as a lowly beast that rewards kindness with a kick in the shins. Or, again, in All That Fall, the dungheap insinuates Maddy the hen's reveling in the agony of others, a propensity which portrays her none too favorably. Moreover, in Krapp's Last Tape, the analogy which equates the hero's dietary intemperance with his sexual indiscretion implies as well that his current discomfort is the deserved fruit of life-long imprudence.

Beckett's second mode of promulgating value is to obviate his characters' spiritual alienation. It is not surprising, therefore, that none of his protagonists lives "spontaneously, in action and reaction" with the contents of his cultural life.<sup>15</sup> The fact is, they dwell on the fringe of emptiness and meaninglessness. Vladimir and Estragon, for example, constantly reiterate their refrain "nothing to be done" and their intention to commit suicide.

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<sup>15</sup>For a review of Paul Tillich's remarks on alienation, see above, pp. 364-366.

Then, too, Hamm continually asks his menial to "finish him off"; and while Clov does not comply, he himself speaks of fleeing to the "hell outside," which presages his own demise. In All That Fall, of course, Maddy confesses that she estranges everyone -- Christy, Tyler, Slocum, Barrell, Fitt, the best of Boghill, to whom she might instead turn for aid. And Dan's apartheid is singular in the extreme, as witnessed by his aloofness in the presence of Maddy, his confessed hatred for the boy paid to lead him home, and his probable complicity in the little child's death. Moreover, in Embers, Henry is alienated from his father, his wife Ada, Holloway, and even his daughter Addie, the "horrid little creation," whom he regrets having. Again, in Happy Days, Winnie and Willie have simply quit, she to live on the verge of despair and he to dwell mostly in sleep and silence.

Nurtured in theatrical circumstances predisposing them to disenchantment and alienation, it seems, Beckett's protagonists almost predictably acquire an unbalanced repertoire of reactions, whose limited range lies largely between indifference and revulsion. Notwithstanding their betrayal of what means least to them, which is life itself, they evidence affirmative, albeit tenuous, urgings. Several reveal a Christian orientation. To offset their bleak prospects, for instance, Vladimir and Estragon have their Godot, much like the faithful their God. Then, too, Hamm

and Clov have their arrangement, which in years past has been a source of ease and elevation. Maddy, of course, speaks of being eventually "safe to haven." And Winnie prays, seeks to discover her unseen blessings, and anticipates the day of deliverance.

Unfortunately for each of these heroes, his source of sustenance proves insubstantial, for Beckett, a raconteur operating on the periphery of Christian reference, writes again and again the tragedy of eroded faith. Thus while the tramps derive occasional inspiration from the Godot to come, the chronicle of unbroken pledges virtually assures the triumph of despair. Moreover, Hamm and Clov's "thing" has run itself down; and both anticipate its imminent end. Dan and Maddy, of course, sense that theirs is a "dead language," or one soon to die; and when they recall the sermon topic regarding the Lord's concern for those who fall or become bowed by the burdens of life, they cannot contain their laughter. And Winnie, late in her ordeal, confides that she no longer prays.

Beckett's apparent moral stance almost inevitably evokes Samuel Johnson's stricture as regards the metaphysical poets' seeming indifference to the propriety of acts and statements, that is to say, their tendency to write as beholders rather than partakers of human nature, as individuals "looking upon good and evil, impassive and at leisure . . . ," their only wish being to "say what they hoped had never been said before" (see above, p. 58).

That Dr. Johnson's observation constitutes a valid characterization of Beckett's drama is at least arguable. I prefer to attribute his stance to an abiding interest in absurd portrayals of essentially tragic characters. Recruited from the lowly ranks of humanity, his heroes are neither eminently good nor bad. Thus while Vladimir and Estragon are loyal to Godot, they constantly consider quitting him altogether; while they emphasize the necessity to endure, they continually plot suicide; while they commend reverence and supplication, they can be irreverent in the extreme. These same contradictory urgings toward good and ill are betrayed by each of Beckett's other protagonists. The cleavage between Hamm and Clov, for example, is awful, and they treat each other as little more than pawns in a tiresome game; yet in the face of the imminent dissolution of their arrangement, each has the decency to acknowledge being obliged to the other. Moreover, while Maddy is portrayed as an unpleasant old woman, delighting in unearthing the agony of others, she is also characterized as a being with great burdens of her own. Then, too, if Krapp has lived unwisely and deservedly suffers, he has desired a degree of reform -- and now has the capacity to sense the loss of his lady on the lake. Or, again, if Henry has proved cowardly and hateful, he nonetheless has continued to seek the answers unlikely to come. And though Winnie and Willie disclose the depths

of their despair and betray their vulgarity and baser impulses, they also reveal a spontaneous care and concern capable of touching the hearts of many.

Aside from their show of inherent good and ill, Beckett's heroes may or may not err. Almost always, though, they prove inadequate. Whether it be Estragon or Vladimir, Pozzo or Lucky, Hamm or Clov, Nagg or Nell, Maddy or Dan, Krapp or Henry, Ada or Holloway, Winnie or Willie, each comes inevitably to the time when he can speak from the heart the refrain of Beckett's foremost creations: nothing to be done. Only Winnie and Willie salvage a semblance of peace. All, however, experience a tragic psychological paralysis, for theirs is the perplexity that passes human understanding. And theirs is as well the pathos of summer's last leaves, clinging precariously, but doomed by the inexorable winter wind. It is only a question of which blow it will be.



## VI. DRAMATIC MIRACULISM

In a rather intriguing essay, "Poetry: A Note on Ontology,"<sup>1</sup> John Crowe Ransom delineates the cleavage between idea and image,

between the Platonism in us, which is militant, always sciencing and devouring, and a starved inhibited aspiration towards innocence which, if it could only be free, would like to respect and know the object as it might of its own accord reveal itself. (p. 40)

He goes on to enumerate the metric, fictive, and figurative engines poets employ to increase the volume of sensibilia and percipienda in their creations. Tropes, the last of these devices, he acknowledges as improper for the definitive utterances of scientific communication, because they

twist accidences away from the straight course, as if to intimate astonishing lapses of rationality beneath the smooth surface of discourse, inviting perceptual attention, and weakening the tyranny of science over the senses. (p. 41)

The "climactic figure" of all, of course, is the metaphor, whose consequential Camelot, so to speak, was a "beautiful and abundant exhibit, called Metaphysical Poetry" (p. 41). Interestingly, Ransom defines "metaphysical" as Dryden did, i.e., as "miraculism" or "supernaturalism." "For the

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<sup>1</sup>Critiques and Essays in Criticism, ed. Robert W. Stallman (New York, 1949), pp. 30-46.

critical mind," he notes further, "Metaphysical Poetry refers perhaps almost entirely to the so-called 'conceits' that constitute its staple" (p. 43). And the conceit? It originates in a metaphor, being but the latter if the latter is meant, that is to say, "if it is developed so literally that it must be meant, or predicated so baldly that nothing else can be meant" (p. 43). But just where does metaphor wax miraculous? This occurs, the critic observes,

when the poet discovers by analogy an identity between objects which is partial, though it should be considerable, and proceeds to an identification which is complete. (p. 45)

Though Ransom's concern is poetry, the foregoing characterization constitutes a quick study of the elaborate tropes detected in the dramatic works of Sartre, Camus, Ionesco, and Beckett. The Flies, for instance, initially seems to be an adaptation of the legend of Atreus, there being but the remotest relation between Zeus and the God of Christendom. Eventually, however, one detects content touching on such matters as hell, a stone emplaced in the entranceway to the domain of the dead, a crowing cock, collective guilt, original sin, free will, etc. -- substance which appears misplaced in the Greek milieu. The fact is, the man/classical-gods motif emerges as a euphemistic conceit for the man/Christian-God relationship. Moreover, in Kean, there are at first the innocent portrayals of Anna Danby, a dairyman's daughter, and Kean, the Shakespearean

actor. Slowly, though, Sartre evolves the connections between cheesemongering and awareness, histrionism and bad faith; and, in time, he draws the figures together to suggest a proportion, cheesemongering:awareness::histrionism:bad faith, implying that consciousness is the consequence of self-examination and the slow accumulation of self-knowledge, whereas bad faith is the lot of beings engaged in endless diversions serving to preclude painful confrontations with reality.

Again and again the playwrights start with analogies which are partial and proceed to identifications which are complete. In The Misunderstanding, Camus begins with an inn and old manservant that are like many another guest house and menial, their true import being but a matter for reserved speculation. Gradually, though, they surface as extensive "turns" for the world and God, respectively. The inn arises as a hostile habitat where minimal accommodations are available, where everyone is treated as "ordinary," and where coldness, indifference, irrationality, uncertainty, injustice, and death prevail. And "pervading" this worst of possible places is the most impotent of manservants, who moves aimlessly and unpredictably, who fails to come when called, who refuses to answer when addressed, who affords no aid when asked. Such is Camus' actualization of the God obvious in an absurd universe. In The Killer, Ionesco offers the radiant city and the fiend as concrete

equivalents for antithetical states of consciousness. The former he assigns the qualities of sunshine, brilliant light, blue skies, blissful days, flowers, lawns, ornamental pools, city-wide ventilation, then implicitly equates it with mirages and Narcissus' pool, and further characterizes it as a tantalizing illusion, a dream, a key, the sum of muddled aspirations, everything yearned-for, that is to say, whatever predisposes man to hopefulness and the euphoria it presages. Opposed to the ends of the city, of course, is the killer, a misshapen, one-eyed subhuman, a veritable amalgam of the race's dark impulses, who emerges amid sickness and tyranny, who signifies injustice, destruction, and death, and who dissipates mankind's sense of mastery and release. Then, too, in Rhinoceros, there are initially the separate entities of pachyderms and provincial townspeople, yet by curtain's close Ionesco has equated the beasts' penchant for wallowing with the citizenry's intellectual floundering, their nearsightedness with the mass's shortsightedness, their extreme reaction to provocation with the populace's rash and ill-considered actions. Indeed, the identity eventually is so complete that man merges with monster. Godot, too, begins innocently enough, but by the time Beckett has depicted the ebb and flow of faith in the lives of Estragon and Vladimir; has characterized Godot as a deity that does nothing, yet saves, and requires reverence; has introduced Vladimir's observa-

tions as regards the Gospels, the cross, the thieves, and repentance; has permitted Estragon to simulate the role of Adam, to reveal his fear and reverence, and to betray his horror arising from possible damnation; and has allowed Lucky to confide his love for a silent and indifferent Almighty who nonetheless tolerates his torment -- by this time, Beckett's representation arises as an absurdist "turn" for the man-God relationship associated with traditional and contemporary Christianity, a connection substantiated by his implicit, if complex, conceit Lucky:Pozzo::the pilgrims:Godot::the faithful:God. Again, in All That Fall, Beckett yokes together existence and the dungheap, implying that Maddy Rooney (née Dunne) enacts dual roles. Like Christy's hinny, she is the "beast" bowed by incalculable burdens, her figurative load of dung being the weight of childlessness, the endless indignities suffered at the hands of the people of Boghill, and a life utterly devoid of promise. As hen, on the other hand, she emerges as an unpleasant old lady picking and happy in the "dung" of Christy, Tyler, Slocum, etc., for she "scratches" none but painful surfaces and revels in the anguish she unearths.

In these plays and so many others, then, the four dramatists have discovered by analogy identities between objects which are partial, and have proceeded to identifications which are complete. In doing so, they disclose

several inclinations. First, they actualize, that is, represent the thing that is not. In other words, they give form to what otherwise exists as abstraction, e.g., consentience and dissentience in The Killer, which are antithetical moods imaged by the radiant city and the fiend respectively. Second, they re-portray, represent one thing that is, as another that is. Thus, in Rhinoceros, e.g., the associates of Bérenger are at first depicted as townspeople, but later more meaningfully portrayed as pachyderms. Then, too, in All That Fall, Maddy's roles as hen and hinny are considerably more significant than are her solitary roles as Dan's wife or citizen of Boghill. Third, the conceits mitigate meaning, that is to say, represent it euphemistically and circuitously, the effect being to render it more palatable. Thus, I think, the authors of The Flies, The Misunderstanding, and Godot insure for themselves a fairer hearing than they would if the import of their plays were baldly represented.

But, some may ask, why miraculism instead of naturalism? Why reject the full conceptualized universals offered by philosophy and science? Why turn from the avalanche of specific detail available in the newspapers, in the records of trials, in the revelations of psychiatric cases, etc.? Two reasons come immediately to mind. First, the miraculism exposes the playwrights' estrangement, for as Joseph Frank argues,

when the relationship between man and the universe is one of disharmony and disequilibrium, we find that non-naturalistic, abstract styles are always produced. (Frank, p. 647)

Moreover, naturalistic representations often prove unsatisfactory, because on the one hand they may be overladen with physical content, which becomes laborious and pointless, or because on the other hand they lack such content and thus starve the sensibility.

Whatever their reasons, however, Sartre, Camus, Ionesco, and Beckett have obviously opted for a radical union of detail and universal idea. Thus they have produced the psychological device of miracle, which has permitted them to initiate the act of attention. Where successful, they leave their audience looking, marveling, and reveling in the substance just given its peculiar representation. It is not science, but as Ransom says of Metaphysical Poetry, it is true enough,

true in the pragmatic sense in which some of the generalizations of science are true: it accomplishes precisely the sort of representation that it means to. It suggests to us that the object is perceptually or physically remarkable, and we had better attend to it. (In Stallman, p. 46)

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