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**EXISTENTIALIST ETHICAL THOUGHT IN THE  
THEATRE OF GABRIEL MARCEL, ALBERT CAMUS,  
AND JEAN-PAUL SARTRE**

**Helen Tattam, BA.**

**Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for the  
degree of Master of Arts by Research (in French)**

**October 2007**

## **Abstract**

The Existentialist thought of Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), Albert Camus (1913-1960), and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) is dominated by a concern for the ethical, and Marcel, Camus, and Sartre all explored questions of morality in the works they produced for the theatre. Not only does this suggest that a particular appreciation of their ethical thought is necessary for their drama to be fully understood; an investigation of their dramatic works might equally provide a privileged access to their ethical thought. The study of Existentialist drama has been somewhat neglected – and what research has been undertaken focuses on the work of the three individual playwrights, rather than offering a comparative analysis. No study to date has focused on Existentialist drama purely in relation to the ethical. Furthermore, existing studies tend to address *either* the aesthetic *or* the philosophical dimension of Existentialist theatre. But as this dissertation will argue, theatre is not a straightforward medium of expression; the discussion of a play's philosophical 'message' must take this into account. The aims of the dissertation are to (i) analyse the fundamental concepts applied by Marcel, Camus, and Sartre in the field of ethics; (ii) examine the ways in which each adapts and experiments with the dramatic genre to address ethical issues; (iii) explore and compare the interplay of philosophy and drama in their respective *œuvres*, in order that theatre's influence on each philosopher's ethical voice might be reconsidered. The dissertation will be divided into two major parts: Section 1 will introduce the plays selected for analysis, aiming to identify the ethical discourse present in the theatre of each Existentialist philosopher; Section 2 will then explore the inter-relations between these ethical discourses, and consider how the three Existentialists' dramatization of the ethical is reflective of their theoretical ethical discussions.

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## Abbreviations of Frequently Cited Works

<i>C I</i>	<i>Carnets: mai 1935 – février 1942</i>
<i>C II</i>	<i>Carnets: janvier 1942 – mars 1951</i>
<i>CPM</i>	<i>Cahiers pour une morale</i>
<i>CRD I</i>	<i>Critique de la raison dialectique, Tome I</i>
<i>DBD</i>	<i>Le Diable et le bon dieu</i>
<i>E</i>	<i>L'Emissaire</i>
<i>EA</i>	<i>Etre et avoir</i>
<i>EH</i>	<i>L'Existentialisme est un humanisme</i>
<i>EL</i>	<i>L'Existence et la liberté humaine chez Jean-Paul Sartre</i>
<i>EN</i>	<i>L'Etre et le néant</i>
<i>EPR</i>	<i>Entretiens Paul Ricœur Gabriel Marcel</i>
<i>ES</i>	<i>L'Etat de siège</i>
<i>Ess</i>	<i>Essais</i>
<i>HC</i>	<i>Huis clos</i>
<i>HR</i>	<i>L'Homme révolté</i>
<i>JM</i>	<i>Journal métaphysique</i>
<i>LJ</i>	<i>Les Justes</i>
<i>LM</i>	<i>Le Malentendu</i>
<i>ME II</i>	<i>Le Mystère de l'être II</i>
<i>MS</i>	<i>Le Mythe de Sisyphe</i>
<i>PA</i>	<i>Positions et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique</i>
<i>RI</i>	<i>Du refus à l'invocation</i>
<i>RR</i>	<i>Rome n'est plus dans Rome</i>
<i>SA</i>	<i>Les Séquestrés d'Altona</i>
<i>SC</i>	<i>Le Signe de la croix</i>
<i>TRN</i>	<i>Théâtre, récits, nouvelles</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Un théâtre de situations</i>

Full details of these works can be found in the bibliography.

## Introduction

Theatre has always been an important form of expression for Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), who published his first two plays (*La Grâce* and *Le Palais de sable*) in 1914, the year he began writing his first philosophical work (*Journal métaphysique*). In his autobiographical essay, 'Regard en arrière', Marcel describes how it was through the dramatization of ideas in his mind that he first came to understand and subsequently clarify his own philosophical thought,<sup>1</sup> and thus his theatre held greater significance for him than did his philosophical writings.<sup>2</sup> Albert Camus (1913-1960) also regretted that his dramatic works were not a greater success, as the theatre was one of the places where he felt most at home;<sup>3</sup> and Verstraeten, like Jeanson, considers the theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) to be the most complete expression of Sartre's philosophical thought:

si elle [la partie théâtrale de l'œuvre de Sartre] peut apparaître comme la transcription dramatique des différents thèmes philosophiques animant sa pensée, elle n'en reste pas moins, par sa nature même, l'expression la plus totalisante de son œuvre.<sup>4</sup>

The Existentialist thought of all three philosophers is dominated by a concern for the ethical, and Marcel, Camus, and Sartre all explored questions of morality in the works they produced for the theatre. Not only does this suggest that a particular appreciation of their ethical thought is necessary if their drama is to be fully understood; an investigation of their

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<sup>1</sup> 'Ce que j'aperçois [...] avec une très grande netteté, c'est que le mode de penser dramatique [...] illustre et justifie à l'avance tout ce que j'ai pu écrire plus tard dans un registre purement philosophique' (Gabriel Marcel, 'Regard en arrière', in Etienne Gilson (ed.), *Existentialisme chrétien: Gabriel Marcel* (Paris : Plon, 1947), p. 297).

<sup>2</sup> 'Mon théâtre garde à mes yeux une sorte d'intérêt vivant ou de fraîcheur qui fait pour moi un défaut dans mes écrits philosophiques' (Gabriel Marcel, *Entretiens: Paul Ricoeur Gabriel Marcel* (hereafter *EPR*), (Paris : Aubier-Montaigne, 1968), p. 68).

<sup>3</sup> 'Une scène de théâtre est un des lieux du monde où je suis heureux' (Albert Camus, *Théâtre, récits, nouvelles* (hereafter *TRN*), (Paris : Gallimard, 1962), p. 1720).

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Verstraeten, *Violence et éthique: essai d'une critique de la morale dialectique à partir du théâtre politique de Sartre* (Paris : Gallimard, 1972), p. 8. This is reminiscent of Jeanson's earlier statement that Sartre's theatre 'a le mérite d'illustrer, de mettre en scène, la quasi-totalité des thèmes sartriens' (Francis Jeanson, *Sartre par lui-même* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1955), p. 7).

dramatic works might equally provide a privileged access to their ethical thought, with the confrontation of ideas that is the very nature of drama helping to translate the situational implications of their more abstract, theoretical concepts.

The study of Existentialist drama has in fact suffered a general neglect – particularly in recent years – and what research has been undertaken focuses on the work of the three individual playwrights, rather than offering a comparative analysis.<sup>5</sup> This dissertation, on the other hand, aims to explore how the three Existentialists can be discussed *together*, rather than siding with one particular perspective and setting it up against the others. No study to date has focused on Existentialist drama purely in relation to the ethical. Furthermore, existing studies tend to address *either* the aesthetic *or* the philosophical dimension of Existentialist theatre; very rarely are the two related.<sup>6</sup> I find this rather striking, for surely the philosophical content of a work cannot adequately be addressed without a simultaneous investigation of the constraints and implications of its genre. As will become evident as this dissertation progresses, theatre is by no means a straightforward or predictable medium of expression; the discussion of a play's philosophical 'message' must take this into account.

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<sup>5</sup> Existing studies include: on Marcel: Chenu (1948), Lazon (1978), Hanley (1997); on Camus: Cruickshank (1959), Gay-Crosier (1967), Coombs (1968), Freeman (1971), Lévi-Valensi (1992); on Sartre: Champigny (1959; reprinted 1968), McCall (1971), Verstraeten (1972), Lorris (1975), Galster (1986), Ireland (1994), O'Donohoe (2005). See bibliography for full details.

<sup>6</sup> No existing study on the theatre of Marcel relates aesthetics to the philosophical. Cruickshank's *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* (1959) is quite exceptional in its simultaneous treatment of both theoretical and theatrical content and context, characterization, and reception. Freeman's *The Theatre of Albert Camus: A Critical Study* (1971) also offers an extremely detailed, critical analysis; and the breadth and analytical depth of Margerrison's entry in the recent *Cambridge Companion to Camus* (2007) is admirable, considering and problematizing the relation between dramatic form and theoretical intention. In *Sartre: Literature and Theory* (1984), Goldthorpe's chapter on *Huis clos* reflects on how the expectations of the audience might differ to the perceived message of the play, discussing not only Sartre's theory regarding the function of theatre but also dramatic technique and staging, the consideration of which Goldthorpe argues are crucial if the full message of the play is to be appreciated. Galster's *Le Théâtre de Jean-Paul Sartre* (1986) observes the lack of attention that has been paid to the theatrical form of Sartre's theatre, outlining the complexity of the medium and the many different factors that might influence the reception of a play in her introduction. However, only the first volume of her projected series currently exists, examining *Bariona*, *Les Mouches*, and *Huis clos*.



Thus, rather than immediately attempting to determine *how* the plays of each are able to engage with ethics, the focus will instead be on the *extent* to which the plays discussed are able to do this, if at all.

The aims of the dissertation will therefore be to (i) analyse the fundamental concepts applied by Marcel, Camus, and Sartre in the field of ethics; (ii) examine the ways in which each adapts and experiments with the dramatic genre to address ethical issues; (iii) explore and compare the interplay of philosophy and drama in their respective *œuvres*, in order that theatre's influence on each philosopher's ethical voice might be reconsidered. The main content of the dissertation will be divided into two major parts. Section 1 will be a discussion of the theatre of the three Existentialist thinkers, as represented by three dramatic works for each, and its aim will be to determine the nature of the ethical discourse present in the selected plays. The ethical thought of Marcel, Camus, and Sartre will be explored specifically in relation to dramatic works from the 40s and 50s, as this was the time when all three were simultaneously producing works for the theatre, and also the period during which ethics was a primary concern in their writings. The plays that have been selected for analysis are: for Sartre: *Huis clos* (1944), *Le Diable et le bon dieu* (1951), *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* (1959); for Camus: *Le Malentendu* (1944), *L'Etat de siège* (1948), *Les Justes* (1949); for Marcel: *L'Émissaire* (1949), *Le Signe de la croix* (1949), *Rome n'est plus dans Rome* (1951).<sup>7</sup> The plays will be examined in chronological order, so as best to follow any development or evolution in each writer's representations of the ethical, and conclusions drawn from these investigations will then be synthesized, to reflect on the

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<sup>7</sup> The dates refer to the first performance of each play, with the exception of *L'Émissaire*, for which no record of performance has been traced, and *Le Signe de la croix*, which has never been performed. It should also be noted that although originally published with *L'Émissaire* in 1949, *Le Signe de la croix* was republished with an epilogue in 1953. My analysis will therefore consider the modified version of the play.

dramatic *œuvre* of each as a whole. Marcel, Camus, and Sartre will be considered individually in Section 1, so as to allow for a clear and coherent introduction to their theatre and ethical theory. This will then set the scene for subsequent analytical comparison in Section 2.

## **Section 1: French Existentialist Ethical Thought in the Theatre**

### **1.1 Existentialist Ethical Thought in the Theatre of Gabriel Marcel**

Unlike Camus or Sartre, Marcel did very little *direct* writing on the subject of ethics. Nevertheless, as Sweetman argues:

[Marcel's work is] deeply ethical and is very much concerned with correct ethical behaviour; indeed, from one point of view, the whole of his thought is a sustained discussion on the issue of how to live ethically in a world that is making it increasingly difficult to do so.<sup>1</sup>

This said, the plays selected for analysis do contain more overt references to the ethical than his earlier works; written in the 40s and 50s, Marcel's experience of the Second World War placed ethical concerns at the forefront of his mind, and all three plays (*L'Emissaire*, *Le Signe de la croix*, *Rome n'est plus dans Rome*) are directly concerned with Second World War issues. Since the three plays occupy a relatively late position in his *œuvre*, they will not, on their own, be representative of any evolution that occurs in Marcel's ethical thought. However, it is not believed that their analysis will be especially narrow in scope: if Marcel's thought developed and progressed, the movement of his thought was principally on a vertical axis; as Marcel writes in his *Du refus à l'invocation* (1940): 'Il ne s'agissait plus tellement d'édifier que de creuser; oui, c'est comme un forage bien plutôt que comme une construction que l'activité philosophique centrale se définissait pour moi'.<sup>2</sup>

#### ***L'Emissaire***

Set in 1945, the action of *L'Emissaire* is situated entirely within the Ferrier family household. The play opens with the return to his family of Clément

<sup>1</sup> Brendan Sweetman, 'Gabriel Marcel: Ethics within a Christian Existentialism', in John J. Drummond and Lester Embree (eds), *Phenomenological Approaches to Moral Philosophy: A Handbook* (Dordrecht : Kluwer, 2002), p. 271.

<sup>2</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Du refus à l'invocation* (hereafter *RI*), (Paris : Gallimard, 1940), p. 23.

Ferrier, a Jew who has escaped death in a Nazi concentration camp. The action focuses on the family's different reactions to Clément's unexpected homecoming, and the various ways in which its members struggle to re-establish some sort of family life. Marcel does not present us with any straight-forwardly positive characters in *L'Émissaire*; all are flawed in some respect, thus forcing any conception of ethical authenticity to be built up by indirect means. In fact, Marcel's ethical discourse in this play is actually more apparent with regards to its other major subject of concern: the French Resistance movement during the Occupation, which it attempts to demystify through the dramatization of its internal dynamics and complexities of its reception. Emphasis on this second theme has the effect of making some characters appear rather resigned to the suffering they are confronted with in Clément, in contrast to the heated animation they display when arguing their particular position concerning the Resistance. Acting to undermine the Gaullist myth – which downplayed conflicts within the Resistance and heralded the movement as a manifestation of the Good and Glory of France – *L'Émissaire* reveals the grey areas that lie between the black and white division of resisters and traitors.<sup>3</sup>

As well as being presented with a man of the Resistance (Bertrand) and a collaborator (Roland), we are also confronted with individuals who are more difficult to categorize. Sylvie Ferrier, for example, has been a member of the Resistance but was forced to leave for health reasons; and her fiancé Antoine, despite being quite fiercely criticized for his non-involvement in the Resistance, is still someone to whom one would want to attribute high moral calibre because of his noble service to the military before being wounded, and his general sensitivity of character. Neither is a stereotypical 'hero' of the Resistance, nor a traitor or collaborator; thus

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<sup>3</sup> For a study of the French Resistance, see for example Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2001).

Marcel's characterization questions the extent to which preconceptions concerning the ethical are a transparent reflection of moral standing. Antoine voices this himself when he says: 'ce serait tout de même un peu trop simple si d'un côté il y avait la sagesse, la vérité, l'héroïsme, que sais-je? la foi... et de l'autre le cynisme, la lâcheté, la trahison'.<sup>4</sup> Overly aware of the corruption and inhumanity that can be found on *both* sides, Antoine does not want to guarantee his support for any defined cause.

Although Bertrand represents the 'man of the Resistance', he is not an unambiguous embodiment of the 'Good'. In fact, Bertrand and his wife Anne-Marie (Sylvie's sister) – the two main advocates of the Resistance – are criticized by the mother, Mathilde, for their ideologically-conditioned opposition to the marriage of Sylvie and Antoine: 'Par fanatisme, vous vous évertuez à détruire un bonheur' (*E*, p. 56). One might also expect the 'man of the Resistance' to be the character who confidently provides answers to moral dilemmas; but Bertrand has a surprisingly low profile, and is not given any major lines of wisdom in the play. Rather, he is often the one asking questions, seeking clarification for what he has not quite understood.

Similarly, even though Roland de Carmoy is guilty of collaboration, he is not a straightforward personification of immorality. Roland actually helped to ensure Antoine's return from the army; in Antoine's eyes Roland is not a traitor, but someone deserving of great admiration for his bravery. At the end of Act II we learn from Roland's mother that he has been arrested for his treachery. Bertrand is in favour of this condemnation, however Madame de Carmoy contends: 'Il [l'événement, i.e. Roland's arrest] n'a rien prouvé du tout; ou plutôt si, il est en train de prouver que mon fils et ses amis

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<sup>4</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *L'Émissaire* (hereafter *E*), in his *Vers un autre royaume* (Paris: Plon, 1949), p. 79.

voyaient parfaitement clair lorsqu'ils annonçaient que la défaite allemande livrerait la France au communisme' (*E*, p. 70). Such an unequivocal judgement overlooks the reality of Roland's situation, where *voir clair* would have been the last thing he or his companions were able to do. This difficulty in determining right from wrong thereby raises the question as to how it is possible, or rather, *justifiable* to judge the actions of another. *L'Emissaire* therefore severely problematizes any conception of authenticity, or indeed *inauthenticity*. Marcel emphasizes the important distinction between *être* and *avoir*: unlike material possessions, ethical status is not something that an individual can simply 'have'; rather, it is a continual, and thus elusive, state of *being*.

The misjudgement and misunderstandings which create moral obscurity in *L'Emissaire* are shown to emanate from fundamental problems of communication. Anne-Marie proclaims: 'On ne connaît personne. Pas même les plus proches' (*E*, p. 18), and characters frequently fail to understand each other in the play.<sup>5</sup> The theme of misunderstanding equally extends to Clément's return, and the reasons surrounding the possibility of his release cause much speculation in the play. Rather than a source of joy, Clément's reunion with his loved ones is actually a source of isolation. Incapable of participating in family or communal life, Clément dies a few weeks later without having shown any signs of happiness. This inability to participate distances him from others, so that he laments: 'Questionner, répondre... On ne peut tout de même jamais [...] communiquer' (*E*, p. 40). Marcel's philosophical writings highlight the importance of intersubjective *participation* – which necessitates genuine understanding and dialogue – as an essential element of authentic Being or 'être', as Marcel refers to it. Clément's despair can be understood as a direct expression of the

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<sup>5</sup> Phrases such as 'Vous ne voulez pas comprendre' (*E*, p. 48), 'Je ne te comprends pas' (*E*, p. 53), and 'Vous n'avez jamais compris' (*E*, p. 93) are common currency.

ontological *exigence* to achieve this *participation*; for Marcel, all humans feel such *exigences*, and ontological authenticity is dependent on their fulfilment.<sup>6</sup> However, such an interpretation cannot be derived directly from the play, which places little emphasis on the positive potential of Being. Indeed, for Clément, to hope to achieve *être* in any true sense of the word is futile. It is felt at the end that Clément never did return; the real Clément died in the concentration camp, overcome by the suffering he both witnessed and experienced.

The theme of tragedy and suffering in the contemporary world permeates *L'Emissaire*. All characters acknowledge this suffering, which they rather fatalistically accept because of the extent to which they recognize their displacement from others; in their isolation they feel powerless to alter their situation, each left – as Sylvie expresses – ‘dans sa propre nuit, dans son propre chaos’ (*E*, p. 29). The figure of the Other merely serves to make the tragedy of human existence all the more complex, a good example being Mathilde’s reaction to her husband’s return. Mathilde ‘ne connai[t] que [son] devoir qui est de le guérir’ (*E*, p. 12), and sets out on a frenzied mission to cure him. ‘Elle a été partout: au Ministère, à la Croix-Rouge, au Consulat de Suède...’ recounts Anne-Marie (*E*, p. 7). But as Sylvie points out, Clément is not ‘une espèce de pendule ou de radio qu’il s’agit de remettre en état’ (*E*, p. 11). This is a reference to what Marcel calls ‘le monde cassé’: Marcel argues that society has become overly dependent on rational thinking, attempting to understand everything in terms of logical problems, which can then be solved through the application of reason. This mindset has been reinforced by the ever-increasing importance society places on technology, encouraging us to view the world

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<sup>6</sup> Colin summarizes Marcel’s position well here: ‘L’exigence ontologique me tourmente, mon activité demande à s’exercer dans un *plein* (Pierre Colin, ‘Existentialisme chrétien’, in Gilson, p. 99).

in purely functional terms, and to assume that all difficulties are resolvable if one only has the right tool. But although such scientific method has its uses, it is not a means to *all* ends, and particularly not with respect to the human dimension of existence.

For all Mathilde's presumption to know what is best for Clément, she makes some rather spectacular blunders. When Antoine is introduced to Clément as Sylvie's fiancé, Sylvie remarks that her father has always liked this particular name. Clément does not remember this, and so Mathilde reminds him of how their child Maurice was going to be called 'Antoine'. But Maurice was the son they tragically lost at a very early age, the reminder of whom causes great distress to Clément. Earlier, Mathilde explains to Sylvie that her actions for Clément are motivated by 'une question de conscience' (*E*, p. 11), but such events rather undermine the notion that this *conscience* represents genuine concern for Clément the individual – hence Sylvie's contention that 'on n'a pas *le droit* de le traiter comme [ceci]' (*E*, p. 11; my emphasis). This illustrates the immediate ethical implications of *le monde cassé*; indeed, for Mathilde, caring for Clément seems to be more of an obligation than anything else. Preoccupied primarily with herself, Mathilde is what Marcel would term 'indisponible' to others; her actions are driven by the desire to *appear* concerned for Clément's well-being, but in practice they only reinforce his Other-ness and illuminate in turn her own alienation.

Although principally dominated by pessimism, the play does offer some hints of the positive: Antoine, who is Catholic, states: 'il n'y a pas que ces eaux inexplorables. Il y a le monde de la lumière' (*E*, p. 107); and Sylvie hints at what authenticity might consist of when she describes 'la réalité' as 'un monde où on puisse grandir, aimer, créer...' (*E*, p. 24). However, her



brother Régis' immediate response to this is to say, 'Je te rappellerai simplement que la guerre n'est pas terminée' (*E*, p. 24).

### ***Le Signe de la croix***

The tragedy of human existence is equally prominent in *Le Signe de la croix*. The first two acts are set in 1938 and centre on a Jewish family who are eventually forced to leave their home (just outside of Paris), on account of the pressures of the Nazi regime. Act III takes place in 1942 in unoccupied France, where the Bernauer family temporarily reside before deciding to flee to the United States; and the epilogue marks the family's return home in 1948. With Nazism as a backdrop, the threat of death is ever-present, its menace augmenting as characters are confronted with acts of anti-Semitism until it strikes the Bernauers themselves. One of the children – David – who stays in the occupied zone out of pride, is arrested and deported to Drancy when he refuses to let Nazi restrictions prevent him from going to a concert. Simon, the father, is also killed: deciding not to leave France when the rest of the family escape to America, he is murdered before they return.

As in *L'Émissaire*, individual isolation is greatly accentuated in the play. Tante Léna, who previously lived in Vienna but is now staying with the Bernauer family, tells the Pauline (the mother): 'Il y a longtemps que je n'ai plus de chez moi'.<sup>7</sup> The figure of the Other, again, acts to emphasize the alienation of individuals, and is particularly evident in the lack of communication or sympathetic understanding between Simon and Pauline. They do not appear to share anything in common except for their marital home – and even then, Simon does not accompany Pauline when she and the rest of the family leave the country.

<sup>7</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Le Signe de la croix* (hereafter *SC*), in his *Cinq pièces majeures* (Paris: Plon, 1973), p. 456; original publication: 1949; republished with epilogue in 1953.

But *Le Signe de la croix* portrays alienation on a greater scale than in *L'Emissaire*. The Bernauer family are all Jewish; yet this label of sameness masks what is predominantly difference between the set of characters in Marcel's play. In fact, none of the family are practicing Jews; Simon does not feel any affiliation to the Jewish people at all, and Jean-Paul, the younger son, is about to be baptized a Protestant. Simon's refusal to recognize a Jewish consciousness powerfully challenges the significance of terms that seek to classify individuals into definable groups.<sup>8</sup> 'Alors je suis condamné à penser, à sentir en Juif? Tu prétends me parquer dans une certaine façon de juger? Dans une espèce de ghetto mental?' (SC, p. 489) he exclaims in a moment of frustration, when David questions his fidelity to the Jewish people.

Simon's contention is that, in their efforts to assert Jewish solidarity, Jews are actually reinforcing their separation from the rest of society. On hearing news of a marriage between a Jew and a Catholic, Pauline expresses outrage – and therefore her rigid notion of Jewishness – to which Simon responds with heated criticism: 'Puis-je te demander ce qu'il a trahi! Il ne s'agit évidemment pas d'obligations religieuses. C'est donc un devoir de solidarité raciale qu'il a enfreint d'après toi?' (SC, p. 496).

However, Simon's position is also undermined when tante Léna says to him, 'Mon pauvre Simon, je crois qu'un faux patriotisme vous égare' (SC, p. 522). Simon thinks of himself as French citizen, through and through. But if it is not clear what significance the word 'Jew' can hold, it is no less clear what it means to be 'French'. During an earlier conversation, tante Léna asks: 'Vous dites: ils [les Juifs] veulent. Est-ce que vous vous mettez à part?' 'Vous venez de mettre le doigt sur une plaie très douloureuse',

<sup>8</sup> 'Comprendre objectivement, c'est user de catégories qui ne sont à personne' (Gabriel Marcel, *Journal métaphysique* (hereafter JM), (Paris : Gallimard, 1927), p. 227).

replies Simon (*SC*, p. 474). He too has wrongly abstracted himself, acting as a spectator and judge of others. But as indicated by the above response, Simon cannot truly assume this spectator's position, as he is also inextricably bound to their *situation*.

Thus *Le Signe de la croix* continues *L'Emissaire's* discourse on the impossibility of objective judgement. Not only is categorical definition or judgement presented as an absurd misrepresentation of reality, but also as something dangerous. For tante Léna, absolutist conceptions of 'justice' and 'vérité' are a source of fear. This surprises Pauline: 'Je m'étonne que vous qui avez fait l'expérience de la dictature...'. Tante Léna interrupts her however: 'Une terrible expérience, Pauline, je vous l'accorde; mais beaucoup de chemins peuvent y conduire, et les plus dangereux sont ceux qui ne portent pas d'écriteaux' (*SC*, p. 467). Evil is not definable in terms of set behaviour; if the significance held by abstract terms always fails to be sufficient, the same applies for Justice and Truth, thereby leaving the terms open to abuse due to the lack of objective division between 'good' and 'evil'.

Pauline is particularly guilty of seeing things in terms of absolutes, announcing for example: 'Je ne sais qu'une chose: à l'heure où nous sommes, un Juif qui se convertit passe à l'ennemi' (*SC*, p. 503). But this extreme rigidity causes her to turn against her own son, Jean-Paul, who wishes to convert to Protestantism. For Marcel, the mistake that is made in adhering to absolute principles is to dissect into *parties* what is essentially *un tout*.<sup>9</sup> The real is grounded in sensory experience, which is infallible. But 'le drame de la sensation, c'est qu'elle doit être réfléchie, interprétée; par là l'erreur devient possible' (*JM*, p. 131).

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<sup>9</sup> This distinction is made in *JM*, p. 89.

The expression 'le drame' is used on several occasions during the play as a description of social reality, one example being when Simon says:

Le racisme, tante Léna, ce fléau, cette peste... c'est nous qui en avons déposé le germe dans ce peuple épuisé, saigné à blanc, presque étranger à lui-même, qui nous a accueillis et que nous n'avons même pas su respecter. Voyez-vous, le drame à présent...

(SC, p. 482)

Marcel's theatre is literally a performance of this *drame*, in which various examples of interpretive objectification act to show how such dissection of experience is not only inauthentic in terms of ontology, but also in terms of ethics. However, the irreducibility of the real renders ethical notions equally indefinable and thus, in keeping with its problematization of 'Justice' and 'Truth', *Le Signe de la croix* also undermines conceptions of *immorality*. The 'anti-Semitic' label given to Odette and Xavier, for instance, is also challenged. Xavier is condemned to death for his anti-Semitic involvement; but at the end of the play he repents and L'Abbé speaks very highly of him, testifying to corroborate the genuine nature of Xavier's conversion. It must also be noted that it was only thanks to Xavier and Odette's help that it was possible for the Bernauer family to leave for America in safety.

Faced with the injustices that human society breeds and the accompanying impossibility of freedom these seem to entail, as seen (to a lesser extent) in *L'Émissaire*, *Le Signe de la croix* also argues for the necessity of faith. But whereas in *L'Émissaire*, hope is only presented in relation to a reality that transcends the here and now, *Le Signe de la croix* hints that there is a possibility for hope in *this* world, as is manifest in the positive human relations between Simon and tante Léna. With their seemingly genuine ability to communicate and understand one another, Lazonon observes: 'utter loneliness is missing for almost the first time in any play of

Marcel's'.<sup>10</sup> In presenting us with an example of a relationship we might be encouraged to emulate, *Le Signe de la croix* therefore offers a much more substantial discourse on authenticity, for which intersubjectivity – or 'disponibilité' to others – is shown to be key. True respect, fidelity, and a love that is non-egocentric lay the ground for the authentic recognition of the Other not as a functional object, but rather a subject in their own right, a *tu* instead of a third-person *lui* or *elle*.<sup>11</sup> It is suggested that when the rest of his family leave France, Simon stays behind because of the extent to which he is moved by the 'présence' (SC, p. 533) that tante Léna represents for him, the complete lack of such a 'nous' experience with Pauline having comparatively little value. But it is not only for tante Léna that Simon remains in France; through the reciprocal *je-tu* encounter he experiences in her presence, Simon comes to experience a unity beyond that which exists between two individuals – what Marcel would refer to as a communion with the *Toi absolu* (God). Thus, the figure of the Other is rendered just as ambiguous as the significance of actions; for Marcel, the Other does not inevitably reinforce individual alienation, but may also provide a glimpse as to what human existence can potentially be (*être*). This may then stimulate further transcendence, which extends beyond the individual *nous* experience and encourages a wider *disponibilité* towards the *tout* of existence itself.

However, the addition of an epilogue to the play in 1953 – which Marcel considered to be 'la conclusion indispensable de la pièce' (SC, p. 551) – replaces the original, rather uplifting ending, where the last words are those of Simon to tante Léna regarding the 'lumière' (SC, p. 537) she embodies, with one that is more sombre. The epilogue mainly presents us

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<sup>10</sup> Hilda Lazonby, *Gabriel Marcel the Dramatist* (Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1978), p. 121.

<sup>11</sup> This is comparable to Buber's *I-Thou* encounter (Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Edinburgh : T. & T. Clark, 1959)).

with discussion regarding Xavier's death sentence and Simon's funeral. Although death is not altogether negative for Marcel, given the lucidity that a confrontation with mortality can stimulate, there is nevertheless an overwhelming atmosphere of tragedy relating to the suffering of those still alive. Consequently, the hope that the original ending expressed in relation to the living world is transferred by the epilogue to the hereafter.

### ***Rome n'est plus dans Rome***

*Rome n'est plus dans Rome* is set in France in 1951 and, again focusing on one particular family's inter-relations, explores various possible reactions to a perceived threat of Communism following World War II. Pascal Laumière, the protagonist, is a political writer who has recently written a series of articles regarding *l'Épuration* – the pursuit of French collaborators after the Occupation. Just prior to the beginning of the play he receives an anonymous letter which reads: 'Les communistes arrivent. Vous êtes sur la liste de ceux qui doivent être déportés. Prenez vos précautions'.<sup>12</sup> The letter terrifies his wife Renée who, without Pascal's consent, writes on his behalf to a new university in Brazil to arrange a teaching position for him there. The news of this appointment is not gratefully received by Pascal. Renée has little respect for Pascal's journalistic articles, believing them to be written out of self-indulgence more than anything else. However, for Pascal, his writing is a form of political action towards which he feels great responsibility. To leave France strikes him as disloyal and cowardly, and all the more so given France's potentially unstable political situation; in Pascal's eyes, it is during such uncertain times that France needs commitment from its people the most.

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<sup>12</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Rome n'est plus dans Rome* (hereafter *RR*), (Paris : La Table Ronde, 1951), p. 11.

Pascal's commitment to France is very similar to that of Simon. However, his predicament is complicated by the question of additional loyalties towards his family which, although acknowledged, is less explored in *Le Signe de la croix* (when Simon is considering whether or not to accompany his family to America). The first three acts of *Rome n'est plus dans Rome* address Pascal's difficult process of deliberation, whereby he tries to identify where exactly his responsibilities lie. His search for clarification is dramatized by means of the different conversations he has – most notably with Renée's widowed half-sister Esther with whom Pascal shares a particularly close friendship, and Esther's son Marc-André for whom he also feels great affection. Pascal eventually agrees to leave France, hoping that this will still be compatible with his loyalty to France and his heritage. However, during the final two acts, set in Brazil, Pascal comes to realize that his consenting to leave France has failed to live up to his own needs and values. The decision was made out of a sense of duty to provide his children and Marc-André – whom he also accompanies abroad and helps Esther to support – with the opportunity for a better life than the socio-political situation of France could promise; but Pascal had failed to attribute any meaning to this flight for *himself*.

In Brazil the Laumière family acquire the status of refugees, and are expected to act in compliance with the customs of the host culture in exchange for their hospitality. But these expectations become more and more oppressive for Pascal: the time he spends in the company of Esther is frowned upon, his non-attendance at Church encourages further disapproval, and he is informed by the community's priest that he may teach Gide and Proust only on condition that he denounces the 'errors' with which their works are riddled. The Church's rules and controls anger Pascal, and he exclaims to the priest: 'Mon Père, il y a entre nous un

effroyable malentendu. Je n'ai pas choisi contre la liberté' (RR, p. 119).

Pascal, whose freedom is even more limited in Brazil than it risked being in France, realizes that he was wrong to have left. Consequently, when he comes to give his fortnightly radio broadcast back to France, he announces that the famous declaration made in Corneille's *Sertorius* – that is, that Sertorius is the incarnation of Roman values: 'Rome n'est plus dans Rome, elle est toute où je suis' (RR, p. 148) – is false:

Nous avons eu tort de partir: il fallait rester, il fallait lutter sur place. L'illusion qu'on peut emporter sa patrie avec soi ne peut naître que de l'orgueil et de la plus folle présomption. Vous qui peut-être hésitez devant la menace de demain, restez, je vous en conjure [...].

(RR, p. 148)

Before his departure Pascal discusses his fears with Esther:

PASCAL: [...] Beaucoup me blâmeront je le sais, vous le savez aussi. Puis-je prétendre que cette réprobation est négligeable?

ESTHER: Le courage consiste peut-être à la juger en effet.

PASCAL: Mais ce *peut-être* est effrayant! N'y a-t-il pas moyen de l'oblitérer, d'être sûr?

(RR, pp. 89-90)

What the play goes on to show is that unfortunately, there is no way to obliterate this 'peut-être'.

If Pascal feels he should not have left France, this is not to say that, for Marcel, he was objectively wrong to have done so. Indeed, had he not left, it is doubtful whether he would have achieved this greater lucidity. Pascal recognizes this himself when he declares: 'la lucidité n'est possible qu'au prix de dépaysement' (RR, p. 114). Nor does this mean to say that it is necessarily wrong for others to have emigrated; in Marc-André's case, the move seems to have been his salvation. As Lazon notes: 'Removed from the atmosphere of the preceding years in his own country, with its climate of defeatism, and from his Communistic friends whose credo he could not accept, [Marc-André is] able to establish himself happily in the New



World'.<sup>13</sup> So whereas Pascal feels that his new situation is requiring him to choose 'contre la liberté', Marc-André has actually been released from certain pressures that previously restricted his freedom.

Such parallel and yet opposing perspectives are characteristic of the very conscious anti-dogmatism observable in all three of Marcel's plays. Right from the introduction to his first philosophical work, Marcel describes 'la répugnance que [s]'inspirait en soi un procédé d'exposition dogmatique' (*JM*, p. ix); to attempt to objectify in such a way is, for Marcel, to betray the reality of Being. Marcel's denunciation of the didactic continues throughout his philosophical *œuvre*, and is even manifest in the structure of his writing itself: continually critical of his own temptation to make declarative statements, he often replaces sentence endings with suspension points or question marks, or qualifies his statements so that they no longer express anything universal.<sup>14</sup> Marcel explicitly insists in a 1951 lecture that 'dans les perspectives dramaturgiques qui sont les miennes il ne peut être question qu'à aucun moment l'auteur prenne un de ses protagonistes comme porte-parole' (*RR*, p. 154). Thus *Rome n'est plus dans Rome*, as with his other plays, is for Marcel, 'essentiellement symphonique' (*RR*, p. 155):<sup>15</sup> rather than relating exclusively to the protagonist, the message of his plays is intended to be a polyphonic symphony of all the voices presented. Not only are the words and actions of the later Pascal significant; the earlier Pascal also bears witness to human lived experience, as do the earlier and later Marc-André, Renée, Esther, and every other character.

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<sup>13</sup> Lazon, pp. 127-8.

<sup>14</sup> 'Je m'en tiens pour le moment à des points de suspension; si je les remplaçais par la mention d'une donnée objective ou objectivable, je retomberais en effet dans les contradictions que j'ai repérées précédemment' (*RI*, p. 43).

<sup>15</sup> An extract from the 1951 lecture is included as an accompaniment to the play.

The lucidity gained by Pascal at the end – where he finally clarifies the significance of his emigration for himself – is accompanied by a religious awakening, through which he is able to transcend his previous tendency to see things in a very rigid light (attempting to determine whether it is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ to leave France, for example), and accept the uncertainty that prevails. This Marcel refers to as ‘le mystère’ of existence. Not everything is rationally explicable; if we are confronted with what seem to be irreconcilable dilemmas, it is because we are performing what Marcel calls ‘réflexion primaire’ and confining ourselves to the realm of ‘le problème’. We should instead seek a transcendent form of reflection – ‘réflexion seconde’ – which does not insist that everything be explicitly definable, concretely representable, or conceptualizable.<sup>16</sup> Although Pascal decides that the move to Brazil was not in keeping with his personal values, he also realizes that his departure has closed off further possibilities for action back in France:

Rentré en France, qu’y ferai-je? reprendre mes chroniques? écrire... tout ça n’a plus aucun sens. Entrer dans la lutte? m’embrigader dans un parti, rejoindre Malraux et ses amis? C’est impossible. [...] Je suis voué à l’inefficacité, et à présent je le sais. Je dois le reconnaître avec une humilité absolue. Mais peut-être est-ce à partir de là qu’on peut monter vers Lui, être plus près de Lui...

(RR, p. 145)

*Rome n’est plus dans Rome* thus provides the clearest illustration of how, for Marcel, authentic being and the freedom it implies are indissolubly linked to faith; it is from this faith that Pascal will draw the strength to continue his difficult existence in Brazil. The play also suggests that an authentic understanding of one’s self and *situation* is crucial if any form of genuine action is to be possible: it is only when Pascal ceases to make choices for others and turns his attention towards himself that he is able to experience any kind of liberation.<sup>17</sup> Thus, even if freedom cannot be

<sup>16</sup> ‘J’appelle cette puissance de transcendance liberté’ (JM, p. 72).

<sup>17</sup> ‘L’obscurité du monde extérieur est fonction de mon obscurité pour moi-même’ (Gabriel Marcel, *Etre et avoir* (hereafter EA), (Paris : Aubier-Montaigne, 1935), p. 16).

defined in absolute terms, it appears that one thing its possibility does require is 'fidelity' (as Marcel terms it) to the values one intuitively feels are important. But as illustrated by this change in the possibles open to Pascal, what constitutes such fidelity cannot be translated into any one form of action; it must instead be 'creative', depending not only on each individual, but also each individual situation.

However, as was the case in the other two plays, such genuine comprehension of one's self and *situation* is portrayed as extremely rare. Until Pascal's conversion at the end, all the characters are presented as lost and alienated owing to their misunderstanding of both themselves and others. The relationship between Pascal and Renée illustrates this the most clearly. As the only married couple in the play, one might expect their relationship to be the closest - on the contrary, it is the most antagonistic.<sup>18</sup> Renée is utterly selfish and constantly acts to undermine Pascal's confidence; but Pascal's weak character does not particularly redeem him, his response being to label himself the victim and evade confrontation by seeking support from Esther. Yet even Esther, with whom Pascal does appear to share some reciprocal understanding, is unable to identify with Pascal's spirituality at the end. She in fact decides to return to France, whereas this is no longer an option for Pascal. Thus, the predominant discourse in the play is still one of individual isolation and loneliness. In spite of Pascal's increased lucidity he is just as alienated - if not more so, considering Esther's planned departure. So authentic Being, in the Marcellian *intersubjective* sense, is not presented as any more possible at the end of the play than it is at the beginning; if any form of

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<sup>18</sup> Here, a direct parallel can be drawn with Pauline and Simon. The characterization in both cases is typical of Marcel's efforts to undermine any preconceptions we might have about the nature of Being. In *Homo viator* Marcel discusses 'le mystère familial', denouncing the notion that inter-family relations are inherently privileged: 'les relations familiales, comme les choses humaines en général, ne présentent par elle-mêmes aucune consistance, aucune garantie de solidité' (Gabriel Marcel, *Homo viator* ([Paris] : Aubier-Montaigne, 1944), p. 11).

liberating transcendence is possible, *Rome n'est plus dans Rome* offers no suggestion that this can be anything beyond psychological release.

In all three of the plays discussed, objective conceptions of authenticity have been severely problematized: 'il n'y a pas de technique morale' (*JM*, p. 210), Marcel writes. Any 'technique', concrete system or principle, by definition 'sert le péché'<sup>19</sup> due to the intellectualizing and therefore dehumanizing effect characteristic of such *réflexion primaire*. In keeping with this refusal of didacticism, no character is judged or condemned any more than another; even the more negative characters are justified with respect to their particular capacities or *situation*. Pauline (*SC*), for example, is very narrow-minded and judgemental. Yet tante Léna still offers some defence on her behalf: 'Je suppose qu'on aime comme on peut, comme on est...' (*SC*, p. 514). As Clouard notes: 'L'auteur ne les [ses personnages] juge point, il les fait s'affronter pour découper en reliefs significatifs quelques grands aspects de la bataille éternelle de l'âme avec la chair, de l'amour avec l'égoïsme, de l'héroïsme avec toutes sortes d'inconscientes contraintes'.<sup>20</sup> The symphony of different *situations* created leaves all the moral questions raised open for the audience to reflect upon for themselves. Thus Marcel's theatre itself aims to encourage *participation*. But such an approach has proved problematic for Marcel, resulting in various misunderstandings on the part of the audience. Pascal's final message that 'Nous avons eu tort de partir' (*RR*, p. 148), for example, was taken very literally, so that Marcel was forced to speak out in his play's defence. Simon's refusal to recognize a common Jewish consciousness in

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<sup>19</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Les Hommes contre l'humain* (Paris : La Colombe, 1951), p. 72.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in Lazaron, p. 28.

*Le Signe de la croix* also caused controversy and resentment, to the extent that the play was never actually performed.<sup>21</sup>

The plays do hint that intersubjective *disponibilité* is something Marcel wishes to link to authenticity; as Marcel writes in *Le Mystère de l'être II* (1951): 'tout péché [...] est au fond l'acte de se refermer sur soi ou de se prendre pour centre'.<sup>22</sup> Such egoism discourages recognition of incarnate Being proper which, for Marcel, has immediate moral implications, turning others into inaccessible objects of consciousness and therefore encouraging *indisponibilité*. However, the plays' overwhelming emphasis on the individual and situational dependency of moral decisions actually creates the impression that it is a case of everyone for themselves: all three plays suggest that we are not in a position to sufficiently appreciate another's *situation*, and thus have no authority to make judgements.

This refusal to judge seems to leave us with an ethical philosophy of interiority, which is incapable of addressing questions of morality on the wider societal plane. The character who is most consistently presented in a positive light, tante Léna, also presents us with a weary and resigned acceptance of injustice, making it difficult to see her as an entirely exemplary character when her behaviour implies that the unethical is unavoidable and inevitable.<sup>23</sup> 'La moralité est-elle vraiment? [...] Elle est dans la mesure où j'affirme qu'elle est, où j'ai foi en sa réalité' (*JM*, p. 208), writes Marcel. Indeed, confronted with omnipresent tragedy, faith in pure defiance of human suffering and isolation appears to be the only positive response that can be drawn from Marcel's theatre.

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<sup>21</sup> Lazaron, p. 120. This is not surprising given that *Le Signe de la croix* was first published in 1949 – only just after the Holocaust.

<sup>22</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Le Mystère de l'être II* (hereafter *ME II*), (Paris : Aubier-Montaigne, 1951), p. 182.

<sup>23</sup> 'Dans ce monde-ci on ne peut en vérité que subir, même lorsqu'on proteste... et je crois qu'on garde plus de force si on s'épargne la peine ou le plaisir de protester' (*SC*, p. 515).

## 1.2 Existentialist Ethical Thought in the Theatre of Albert Camus

In comparison with Marcel, analysis of Camus' plays purely in terms of their ethical content is much more straightforward. Camus' plays were all produced during the 40s and 50s; thus the plays selected for examination have been chosen in order to represent different stages in the evolution of his ethical thought. *Le Malentendu* was first produced soon after the publication of Camus' first philosophical work, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942), and will provide an opportunity to introduce the distinctive concepts relating to Camus' ethical position.<sup>24</sup> *L'Etat de siège* and *Les Justes* will then be analysed in order to explore the progression of Camus' moral philosophy towards his other major work, *L'Homme révolté* (1951).

### ***Le Malentendu***

*Le Malentendu* tells the story of Jan – a young man who returns home rich after having spent twenty happy years abroad in the sun. His hope is that, with his new prosperity, he will now be able to bring happiness to his widowed mother and sister Martha, who keep a guesthouse in a depressing region of central Europe. However, in order to maximize their joy he decides to stay at the inn under a different name, so that he can best choose the moment to reveal his identity. As he predicts, Martha and his mother do not recognize him; but as he has made allusions to his wealthy status, they drug and drown him for his money, ironically so that they might escape to a warmer country. His true identity is then revealed when the old servant – 'le Vieux' – finds his passport. The discovery is too much for the mother, who subsequently commits suicide. Martha follows suit,

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<sup>24</sup> For this reason, *Le Malentendu* will be discussed in slightly more detail than the other two plays.

feeling that she has been rejected in favour of the returned prodigal son; and Jan's wife Maria is left all alone.

This play represents the stage in Camus' *œuvre* concerned with 'négation'<sup>25</sup> and the 'absurdity' of existence. What is absurd, for Camus, is the futility of man's search for a meaning to existence. 'J'ai besoin de ma lucidité' (*Ess*, p. 30), he writes in his first collection of essays, *L'Envers et l'endroit* (1937), but the world he is confronted with appears unintelligible and indifferent to his confusion concerning human purpose; 'cette épaisseur et cette étrangeté du monde, c'est l'absurde'.<sup>26</sup> Camus famously begins *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* with the assertion that 'il n'y a qu'un problème philosophique vraiment sérieux: c'est le suicide. Juger que la vie vaut ou ne vaut pas la peine d'être vécue, c'est répondre à la question fondamentale de la philosophie' (*MS*, p. 17). The paradox that Camus cannot resolve is how we can value human life so highly, whilst at the same time being fully aware of our mortality, for this would seem to render life's endeavours meaningless; life must have meaning in order to be valued, so if life appears essentially devoid of meaning does this then justify suicide?

As will become evident, questions regarding the justifiability of death are of primary importance to Camus' ethical reflection.<sup>27</sup> *Le Malentendu* however, is not so much a philosophical enquiry into how we might respond to the Absurd as it is a dramatization of its very experience. In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* Camus describes how 'un jour [...] le "pourquoi" s'élève' (*MS*, p. 29): this 'pourquoi' then becomes an inescapable preoccupation and source

<sup>25</sup> 'Je voulais d'abord exprimer la négation. Sous trois formes. Romanesque: ce fut *L'Etranger*. Dramatique: *Caligula*, *Le Malentendu*. Idéologique: *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*' (Albert Camus, *Essais* (hereafter *Ess*), (Paris : Gallimard, 1965), p. 1610).

<sup>26</sup> Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe: essai sur l'absurde* (hereafter *MS*), (Paris : Gallimard, 1942), p. 31.

<sup>27</sup> 'Le seul problème qui m'intéresse: y a-t-il une logique jusqu'à la mort?' (*MS*, p. 24).

of anxiety, for once it is recognized, all decisions seem completely arbitrary and necessity of choice transforms human freedom into a burden. All of the main characters in *Le Malentendu* express frustration and despair, as they do not quite feel in control of the freedom that in principle they ought to possess. Somehow the world's strange and opaque ways always seem to scheme against them, causing them to feel dislocated and alone, and raising the question as to what freedom even means. As Freeman has noted, *Le Malentendu* presents the Absurd 'almost as if it were a comprehensive malevolent force'.<sup>28</sup> Martha 'à hâte de trouver [un] pays où le soleil tue les questions'<sup>29</sup> that plague her, but for which the world offers no clarification; and the mother, now too old and weary of life's incessant questions 'aspire seulement à la paix, à un peu d'abandon' (*LM*, p. 158). Jan, who returns home because he has realized that 'le bonheur n'est pas tout et les hommes ont leur devoir' (*LM*, p. 169), nevertheless remains torn between the responsibility he feels towards his mother and the responsibility he also has towards his wife. 'O mon Dieu! [...] Donnez-moi alors la force de choisir ce que je préfère et de m'y tenir' (*LM*, p. 209), he cries. Maria, on the other hand, despairs at Jan's whole enterprise: not only does Jan's renunciation of their happy situation appear sudden and arbitrary; she also cannot understand why Jan must complicate things further by not initially revealing his identity.

But if absurdity makes the experience of life feel contrived and false, for Camus there are also ontologically false ways of responding to this metaphysical reality. In his *Carnets* (1935-42) Camus summarizes the

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<sup>28</sup> E. Freeman, *The Theatre of Albert Camus: A Critical Study* (London : Methuen, 1971), p. 65.

<sup>29</sup> Albert Camus, *Le Malentendu* (hereafter *LM*), in *Caligula, suivi de Le Malentendu* (Paris : Gallimard, 1958), p. 164; original publication: 1944.



content of *Le Malentendu* as follows: 'Sujet de pièce. L'homme masqué'.<sup>30</sup>

This is precisely the role that Jan plays, masking his identity in order to act out the idealistic scenario of surprise he imagines will bring the greatest happiness to his mother and sister. But, argues Camus:

Nous finissons toujours par avoir le visage de nos vérités. L'existence toute entière, pour un homme détourné de l'éternel, n'est qu'un mime démesuré sous le masque de l'absurde.

(MS, p. 130)

Jan's role play is a form of what Camus calls 'le suicide philosophique'. Acting out this new identity is a way of *détourner de l'éternel* (the ontological truth of existence's absurdity) and pretending that his actions have a significant purpose, when intrinsically they have none. Camus' description of this as 'un mime' is particularly apt, for Jan's attempt to act out his self-attributed part, which he thinks '[peut] tout concilier' (LM, p. 171), speaks no words to anyone else in the play; he only alienates himself further from his family and wife, his death giving him the supreme 'visage' of the *vérité* of his alienation.

Martha and her mother are equally misguided in believing that they will finally be content once they have secured enough money to allow them to live in the sun. Says Martha to her mother: 'le jour où nous serons enfin devant la mer dont j'ai tant rêvé, ce jour-là, vous me verrez sourire' (LM, p. 160). But in practice, Martha's and her mother's project does nothing but postpone their existence, and any freedom they might enjoy is put on hold in the name of a dream that has no actual reality. Furthermore, Freeman points out that 'Jan's dissatisfaction with this Utopia [in the sun], and migration back from the south to the north, points to the illusory nature of Martha's goal in the first place'.<sup>31</sup> In Camus' eyes, 's'il y a un

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<sup>30</sup> Albert Camus, *Carnets: mai 1935 – février 1942* (hereafter *C I*), (Paris : Gallimard, 1962), p. 157.

<sup>31</sup> Freeman, pp. 66-7.

péché contre la vie, ce n'est [...] pas tant d'en désespérer que d'espérer une autre vie' (*Ess*, p. 76).

In fact, the mother is not altogether convinced that their goal 'vaut la peine' (*LM*, p. 164). Here, 'la peine' seems primarily to refer to effort: the harsh existence she has led has cultivated in her a death-wish, so that she ends her life rather willingly once she has learnt Jan's true identity. It is also possible that 'la peine' might refer to a *moral* burden, resulting from their plan's dependency on murder. However, if the mother is not convinced that there is any need to perform such murders, neither is she convinced that there is any particular reason not to; she may not exhibit the same drive to execute their plans as Martha, but she does not display any strong objections either.

The pessimism of the play is most apparent regarding Maria, who is not in pursuit of any ideal; she is completely innocent. Yet this innocence does not spare her any suffering – if anything it only increases it. The fact that she has done nothing to deserve her pain merely renders the anguish of absurdity all the more acute for her. Maria spends all her time trying desperately to convince Jan that his 'méthode n'est pas la bonne' (*LM*, p. 173). 'Tu pourrais faire tout cela en prenant un langage simple' (*LM*, p. 173) she insists, so at the end of the play when Martha informs her that her husband is dead, Maria howls: 'Oh! mon Dieu, je savais que cette comédie ne pouvait être que sanglante' (*LM*, p. 238). Jan's tragic end is the result of a misunderstanding he himself engineered; it seems that if Jan had only kept things simple and told the truth, all this suffering could have been avoided.

In an un-dated archival text, Camus writes:

*Le Malentendu* est certainement une pièce sombre. [...] Mais je ne crois pas qu'elle soit une pièce désespérante. [...] il serait faux de croire que cette pièce plaide pour la soumission à la fatalité. Pièce de révolte au contraire, elle pourrait même comporter une morale de la sincérité.

(TRN, p. 1793)

For Camus, the authentic man – or 'l'homme absurde'<sup>32</sup> – must face up to the truth of absurdity: 'il suffit de [...] ne rien masquer' (MS, p. 125). Only in doing this will it be possible to appreciate, and therefore *live* the here and now.<sup>33</sup> However, Freeman is not satisfied with Camus' justification of the play's underlying optimism, seeing it as 'a facile argument [which] would only work if *Le Malentendu* were centred on Jan as the sole tragic hero'.<sup>34</sup> But the tragedy of the play is collective. In fact, as Freeman points out, 'for much of the play Jan is not in the main focus [; ...] the agony of these three women [...] is the prominent theme'.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, Freeman draws attention to the brutal line spoken by Martha when she finds out that it is her brother who she has killed: 'si je l'avais reconnu, [...] cela n'aurait rien changé' (LM, p. 230), she maintains.<sup>36</sup> Martha blurs Camus' conception of the authentic *homme absurde* due to the lucidity she possesses: 'J'ai toujours trouvé de l'avantage à montrer les choses telles qu'elles sont' (LM, p. 183), is ironically her motto, so despite her murderous crimes, in this respect she is arguably more authentic than Jan.

Another 'serious defect' of the play in Freeman's eyes 'is that Maria does not exist on the same plane of reality [...] as the other three main characters'.<sup>37</sup> Instead, she is a relative outsider to the play's action, and

<sup>32</sup> As referred to in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*.

<sup>33</sup> 'Vivre, c'est faire vivre l'absurde. Le faire vivre, c'est avant tout le regarder' (MS, p. 78).

<sup>34</sup> Freeman, p. 69.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>36</sup> Margerrison writes similarly: 'Camus' retrospective claim that in an unjust world a man can save himself and others through sincerity [...] is even less convincing if we believe Martha's declaration that she would have killed her brother even had he identified himself' (Christine Margerrison, 'Camus and the theatre', in Edward J. Hughes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Camus* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 70).

<sup>37</sup> 'Maria, far from helping the audience to "get in" to this difficult play, serves only to keep it out' (Freeman, p. 68). Margerrison also notes how Maria 'is not integrated on the same intellectual level as the other characters' (Hughes, p. 70).

this detracts all the more from any underlying discourse of optimism. Thus any positive ethic presented in *Le Malentendu* is not one which can leave a lasting impression; at the end of the play we are still left feeling that murder and suffering are inevitable.

Under the reign of absurdity, human freedom is portrayed as non-existent, thereby undermining the possibility for any genuine choice or responsibility; despite Maria's desperate attempts to alter Jan's course of action, Jan 'ne [sait] pas mieux [s]'exprimer' (*LM*, p. 185). The role of the Other in the play only serves to reconfirm human isolation. Indeed, Martha thought that she and her mother were acting together to realize a common dream, but even this is not the case; Martha is not enough of a reason for her mother to stay alive when she finds out that it is her son she has helped to murder.<sup>38</sup> Any dialogue seems impossible between characters so locked up in their solitude, and there is little hope for change: the wisdom the mother has gained from her life experience is that 'quand les choses s'arrangent mal, on ne peut rien y faire' (*LM*, p. 213). Camus therefore presents the tragedy of the play as *metaphysical*, so that, for East, the entire play is a metaphor for the human condition.<sup>39</sup> The end of the play suggests the natural order of things to be 'celui où personne n'est jamais reconnu' (*LM*, p. 242).<sup>40</sup> In the final moments, Maria calls out to God to help her bear her pain, in response to which le Vieux appears, asking if she has called for him. Maria is initially unsure as to how to respond, but begs for his help anyway. To this however, the old servant bluntly replies, 'Non!' (*LM*, p. 245). Thus the play also implies that there is not even a God that

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<sup>38</sup> 'J'imaginai que le crime était notre foyer et qu'il nous avait unies, ma mère et moi, pour toujours. [...] Mais je me trompais. Le crime aussi est une solitude, même si on se met à mille pour l'accomplir. Et il est juste que je meure seule, après avoir vécu et tué seule' (*LM*, pp. 240-1).

<sup>39</sup> Bernard East, *Albert Camus, ou l'homme à la recherche d'une morale* (Paris : Editions du Cerf, 1984), p. 37.

<sup>40</sup> Phrases such as 'Je vous reconnais mal' (*LM*, p. 158), 'Je ne te reconnais plus' (*LM*, p. 224), and 'Je ne reconnais pas vos mots' (*LM*, p. 226) permeate the entire play.

humans can turn to when in despair, or at least if God does exist, He is not a God of justice or compassion.

### ***L'Etat de siège***

While *Le Malentendu* focuses on the metaphysical and abstract nature of the Absurd, *L'Etat de siège* reveals a much greater concern for its political and social consequences. The play presents a more positive stage in Camus' ethical thought, which can be identified with the philosophical shift that *L'Homme révolté* represents when compared with *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*.<sup>41</sup> *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* places great emphasis on the logic of the Absurd: 'Si je juge qu'une chose est vraie, je dois la préserver' (*MS*, p. 51). Camus then encourages us to make the present our own and *defy* absurdity, as opposed to committing physical or philosophical suicide. However, Camus himself came to recognize the unsatisfactory nature of his former, overwhelmingly fatalistic discourse, confessing in a 1943 letter that '[*Le Mythe de Sisyphe*] n'aborde pas en réalité le problème de "ce qu'on peut faire"' (*Ess*, p. 1423; my emphasis). Facing up to absurdity is 'rien d'autre qu'un point de départ [...]; il faut briser les jeux fixes du miroir et entrer dans le mouvement irrésistible par lequel l'absurde se dépasse lui-même',<sup>42</sup> so that *l'homme absurde* ceases to be paralysed in the present by the Camusian imperative to maintain the Absurd. *Le Malentendu* can therefore be seen as setting the scene for a second stage in Camus' thought, which moves forward from this *point de départ* to present us with a more constructive ethic. *L'Etat de siège* is Camus' first dramatic attempt to do this.

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<sup>41</sup> 'Je prévoyais le positif sous les trois formes encore. Romanesque: *La Peste*. Dramatique: *L'Etat de siège* et *Les Justes*. Idéologique: *L'Homme révolté*' (*Ess*, p. 1610).

<sup>42</sup> Albert Camus, *L'Homme révolté* (hereafter *HR*), (Paris : Gallimard, 1951), p. 23.

At the beginning of the play the Spanish town of Cadix is invaded by an epidemic of the plague, which is personified and presented in the form of a political dictator. The play dramatizes the effect of La Peste on the town, and the ways in which different members of the community react to this *état de siège*. La Peste's cruel dictatorship seizes control of any individual autonomy, and thus – as with *Le Malentendu* – lack of recognition features as a predominant theme, acting as a metaphor for the absence of human freedom. In addition, the play features various actual mime scenes, further emphasizing the disastrous effect of totalitarianism, which cuts individuals off from each other and leaves them powerless and helpless in their solitude. 'Où est l'Espagne? Où est Cadix? Ce décor n'est d'aucun pays!'<sup>43</sup> cries the protagonist Diego in dismay.

If authenticity only necessitated recognition and acceptance of absurdity, La Peste's actions would be justifiable, for life's meaninglessness and the lack of any fundamental human purpose would imply that all action is equal in value:

Le sentiment de l'absurde, quand on prétend d'abord en tirer une règle d'action, rend le meurtre au moins indifférent et, par conséquent, possible. Si l'on ne croit à rien, si rien n'a de sens et si nous ne pouvons affirmer aucune valeur, tout est possible et rien n'a d'importance. [...] Malice et vertu son hasard ou caprice.

(HR, p. 17)

However, the rest of the play serves to elaborate on what Camus expressed in a more abstract context in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* – that is, how 'tout est permis ne signifie pas que rien n'est défendu' (MS, p. 96); and *L'Etat de siège* introduces Camus' notion of 'révolte', which was only hinted at in Camus' attempted defence of *Le Malentendu*. While La Peste's authoritarian reign serves to illustrate Camus' argument (in *Actuelles I* (1944-8)) that 'la vie de chacun ne peut pas être autrement qu'abstraite à

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<sup>43</sup> Albert Camus, *L'Etat de siège* (hereafter ES), (Paris : Gallimard, 1998 [original publication: 1948]), p. 114.

partir du moment où on s'avise de la plier à une idéologie' (*Ess*, p. 401), Camus' conception of revolt will aim to demonstrate how this abstract idea of life might be transformed into a reality.

Thus returns the question as to what 'morality' might consist of, when the logic of the Absurd seems to entail that *tout est permis*; does this not mean that, 'faute de valeur supérieure qui oriente l'action, on se dirigera dans le sens de l'efficacité immédiate' (*HR*, p. 18)? Indeed, this is the line of argument manifest in *La Peste*, whose rule prioritizes efficiency above all else, so that bureaucracy and its calculated, impersonal rationality become the supreme order. *La Peste* institutes 'l'absolue justice' (*ES*, p. 88), which he uses to organize the deaths of the town's people – effected by his secretary – in an equal, orderly, and respectable fashion: 'vous allez apprendre à mourir dans l'ordre' (*ES*, p. 87). His response to the Absurd is to legitimize the suffering and murder which *Le Malentendu* presented as inevitable, so that instead of being the source of tragedy, murder is integrated into the order of things and becomes an acceptable, universal logic. However, that his 'ordre' might be considered a true form of logic is ridiculed in the play, and is a principal source of humour.<sup>44</sup> *L'Etat de siège* then aims to replace the logic of *La Peste*'s rationalism – merely another form of philosophical suicide – with the authentic *ontological* logic of revolt, consistent with humanity's natural order.<sup>45</sup>

The intellectual despair of Nada, the nihilist, is equally condemned in the play. Nada may seem to express *Le Malentendu*'s ethic when he says,

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<sup>44</sup> *La Peste*'s 'ordre' is ridiculed by the absurdity of the certificates of existence instated, for example (*ES*, pp. 92-8). The application form requires citizens to declare their 'raisons d'être' and their 'motifs de l'union' if they are married; not only this, the certificate received is only 'provisoire et à terme', and in order to collect it a health certificate must first be acquired. As *Le Pêcheur* mutters: 'Jusqu'ici nous avons très bien vécu sans ça' (*ES*, p. 92).

<sup>45</sup> That Camus' revolt is still grounded in logic is illustrated in the following examples: 'La révolte, quand elle débouche sur la destruction, est illogique' (*HR*, p. 356); 'Le révolté exige sans doute une certaine liberté pour lui-même; mais en aucun cas, *s'il est conséquent*, le droit de détruire l'être et la liberté de l'autre' (*HR*, p. 355; my emphasis).

'N'espère rien. La comédie va commencer' (*ES*, p. 45), but his understanding of this does not lead him to encourage life *malgré tout*. On the contrary, he advocates instead: 'Vive rien puisque c'est la seule chose qui existe!' (*ES*, p. 99), and he welcomes La Peste's destructive order. The chorus in the play consequently argue: 'il y a des limites. Et ceux-là qui prétendent ne rien régler, comme les autres qui entendaient donner une règle à tout, dépassent également les limites' (*ES*, p. 186). Thus *L'Etat de siège* explicitly denounces the mother's resignation to suffering and failure to oppose murder in *Le Malentendu*.

It now starts to become evident how the ethical discourse in *L'Etat de siège* builds on what is expressed in *Le Malentendu*. Lucid maintenance of the Absurd is not sufficient, for this is what La Peste, his secretary, and Nada do; absurdity is only one part of the *éternel* that Camus wants to be recognized. The second metaphysical truth that must be preserved is humanity's innate innocence and dignity. Diego protests: 'Nous sommes innocents!' (*ES*, p. 115). La Peste's régime can therefore be condemned for the *ontological* injustice it performs. Throughout the play runs a sustained criticism of the inhumanity of La Peste's absolute principles, which he upholds as objective truths. Such principles do not take into account the needs of specific individuals.<sup>46</sup> 'L'absolue justice', which is not in fact justice at all, awakens in the people a realization of that of which they are being deprived, and the true voice of the human speaks out when the chorus say:

Nous, nous sommes devenus sages. Nous sommes administrés. Mais dans le silence des bureaux, nous écoutons un long cri contenu qui est celui des cœurs séparés et qui nous parle de la mer sous le soleil de midi, de l'odeur des roseaux dans le soir, des bras frais de nos femmes. [...] notre cœur refuse le silence. Il refuse les listes et les matricules, les murs qui n'en finissent pas [...].

(*ES*, pp. 116-17)

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<sup>46</sup> 'Ah! Vous [La Peste et La Secrétaire] ne tenez compte que des ensembles! Cent mille hommes, voilà qui devient intéressant' (*ES*, p. 144).



This is the stirring of revolt, 'le mouvement qui dresse l'individu pour la défense d'une dignité commune à tous les hommes' (HR, p. 33). Whereas *l'homme absurde's* authenticity was solitary defiance, Camus now argues for a revolt in the name of the collective:<sup>47</sup> 'la solidarité humaine est métaphysique' (HR, p. 31), and this is the value that *l'homme révolté* must strive to uphold. Once Diego realizes this he is able to forget his fear, and as a result La Peste and La Secrétaire lose their powerful hold and the town is freed.

This illustrates how, for Camus, freedom and revolt are one and the same. As well as absolutist notions of justice, absolute liberty is also denounced by the play; both have their limits. In *L'Homme révolté* Camus writes:

La révolte n'est nullement une revendication de liberté totale. Au contraire, la révolte fait le procès de la liberté totale. Elle conteste justement le pouvoir illimité qui autorise un supérieur à violer la frontière interdite. Loin de revendiquer une indépendance générale, le révolté veut qu'il soit reconnu que la liberté a ses limites partout où se trouve un être humain, la limite étant précisément le pouvoir de révolte de cet être.

(HR, p. 355)

During his final confrontation with La Peste, Diego is forced to make a choice. His beloved Victoria is amongst those dying from the plague, and so La Peste offers to save her life and let the two of them escape in return for his maintained power over the rest of the town. However, Diego refuses and gives up his own life out of his love for the community. Unlike La Peste, Diego has respect for humanity, and out of this respect comes the recognition that he has no right to make a decision that would result in the loss of others' freedom.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Note that Camus has chosen to voice his principles of revolt in the plural, by using the chorus.

<sup>48</sup> 'L'amour de cette femme, c'est mon royaume à moi. Je puis en faire ce que je veux. Mais la liberté de ces hommes leur appartient. Je ne puis en disposer' (ES, p. 172).

It is actually Victoria's insistence on the value of love that guides Diego towards a greater authenticity; yet interestingly, although this might suggest Victoria (like Maria in *Le Malentendu*) to be a voice of reason in the play, as Margerrison notes, in this final scene Victoria objects to Diego's chosen course of action, 'insisting he should put their love before heaven and earth, [... for] she would willingly sacrifice the entire town in exchange for his life'.<sup>49</sup> The conception of love she possesses is but another empty absolute. Indeed, love is never actually portrayed as anything more than a cliché in *L'Etat de siège*,<sup>50</sup> and thus it is difficult for the audience to take the play's ethical discourse very seriously.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Les Justes***

*Les Justes* performs an even closer examination of the political and social consequences of the Absurd, staging the historical story of a group of socialist Russian revolutionaries who assassinated the Grand Duke Sergei Romanov in 1905. These assassins Camus refers to as 'les meurtriers délicats', and praises them for the purity of their revolt against the oppressive political rule under which Russia lived (*HR*, pp. 211-21). The play continues Camus' argument regarding the limits of human action, which are needed in order to be able to reject 'tout est permis' as a consequence of the Absurd. However, the play furthers the discussion by problematizing *L'Etat de siège's* simplistic ethic of limits, addressing the difficulties involved in actually placing these limits.

That a group of assassins could still be referred to as 'les justes' is immediately indicative of the evolution of Camus' ethical thought. This play

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<sup>49</sup> Hughes, p. 74.

<sup>50</sup> See *ES*, p. 50 for example:

DIEGO: 'Est-ce l'eau claire et la nuit qui ont laissé sur toi l'odeur du citronnier?'

VICTORIA: 'Non, c'est le vent de ton amour qui m'a couverte de fleurs en un seul jour!'

<sup>51</sup> When La Secrétaire interrupts one of Diego and Victoria's love scenes and asks, 'Que faites-vous?' Victoria responds: 'L'amour, bien sûr!' (*ES*, p. 130). 'But no one can have been convinced', dismisses Freeman humorously (Freeman, p. 96).

illustrates how he (reluctantly) came to accept that violence might have ethical uses. Like *L'Etat de siège*, the action of *Les Justes* is set under an authoritarian rule, and again, a general pessimism concerning the socio-political reality pervades. 'La liberté est un bain aussi longtemps qu'un seul homme est asservi sur la terre',<sup>52</sup> states Stepan, and at this particular moment in time there are no immediate prospects of release from this servitude. 'Je crois que la violence est inévitable, les années d'occupation me l'ont appris' (*Ess*, p. 355), writes Camus earlier in his *Actuelles I*. However, *Les Justes* argues that, when confronted with human suffering, individuals have a responsibility to fight to reduce this; not to do this would be to choose to accept the present injustice of the world, and thereby effectively promote its duration. As Voinov says: 'J'ai compris qu'il ne suffisait pas de dénoncer l'injustice. Il fallait donner sa vie pour la combattre' (*LJ*, p. 25). This was not expressed at all in *Le Malentendu*; and although human responsibility for absurdity is recognized in *L'Etat de siège*,<sup>53</sup> this discourse has no overt voice in comparison with *Les Justes*, where Kaliayev cries out: 'La justice est notre affaire!' (*LJ*, p. 102).

*Les Justes* also dramatizes Camus' concept of revolt more clearly than *L'Etat de siège*. The suffering and death propagated by the regime in power arouses anger in the revolutionaries against such a fundamental disregard for humanity. But an emotional reaction is not enough; the 'just assassins'<sup>54</sup> realize the additional need for action proper, and are consequently driven to plot the death of Le grand-duc – the political figure representative of the oppression that revolts them. As *L'Etat de siège* illustrated, a feeling of solidarity is denied to people governed by an

<sup>52</sup> Albert Camus, *Les Justes* (hereafter *LJ*), (Paris : Gallimard, 1977), p. 17.

<sup>53</sup> The human origin of the Absurd is alluded to at the beginning of *L'Etat de siège* when Nada says, 'J'ai l'impression d'ailleurs que le ciel n'est pas en cause' (*ES*, p. 40). It is then illustrated again at the end, when the citizens get hold of La Secrétaire's directory and seize the opportunity to rectify their personal grievances. 'Et voilà! Ils font eux-mêmes le travail!' (*ES*, p. 164), exclaims La Peste as he watches them kill each other.

<sup>54</sup> This is how the play's title has been translated into English.

authoritarian dictatorship. *Les Justes* then argues that the shared goal of the revolutionaries can allow this sense of solidarity to be regained.

Annenkov, the leader of the group, expresses this when he makes the following affirmation:

Vous souvenez-vous de qui nous sommes? Des frères, confondus les uns aux autres, tournés vers l'exécution des tyrans, pour la libération du pays! Nous tuons ensemble, et rien ne peut nous séparer.

(*LJ*, pp. 34-5)

*L'Homme révolté* states that 'le mouvement de révolte n'est pas, dans son essence, un mouvement égoïste' (*HR*, pp. 30-1); instead, it is 'l'aventure de tous' (*HR*, p. 38). However, although this characterizes the *motivation* behind the assassins' revolt, Stepan and Kaliayev illustrate how its reality is somewhat different; unlike *L'Etat de siège*, *Les Justes* informs us of how things are not so simple in practice, and the majority of the play consists of a series of dramatic confrontations which embody the tensions and dilemmas involved.

Kaliayev – 'le Poète' – is a symbol of optimism, who declares: 'Il faut être gaie, il faut être fière. La beauté existe, la joie existe!' (*LJ*, p. 28) This gaiety is manifest in his actions as well: he often laughs, he likes to quote verse, and he even has his own special signal to announce that he is at the door because 'il s'est amusé à le [le signal du groupe] changer' (*LJ*, p. 26). Stepan, on the other hand, is deeply suspicious of Kaliayev's romanticism and lightness of spirit, and accuses him of not taking things seriously: 'la haine n'est pas un jeu. Nous ne sommes pas là pour nous admirer. Nous sommes là pour réussir' (*LJ*, p. 33). The contrast of Stepan's sober and practical realism against Kaliayev's laughter is so great that we too are initially reluctant to take Kaliayev seriously. However, when the terrorists make their first assassination attempt, Kaliayev (who is in charge of throwing the first bomb at the Grand Duke's carriage) is unable to follow

through because he notices that the Duke is accompanied by two young children, and cannot bring himself to be responsible for their deaths. Stepan is furious: this inaction merely confirms to him Kaliayev's lack of courage, which he has suspected all along; Kaliayev's cowardice, dressed up as compassion for the innocence of these two children, will postpone the group's revolutionary action for a further two months, during which thousands more children will die of starvation under Russia's unjust rule. However, the rest of the group side with Kaliayev. Dora explains:

[Kaliayev] accepte de tuer le grand-duc puisque sa mort peut avancer le temps où les enfants russes ne mourront plus de faim. Cela déjà n'est pas facile. Mais la mort des neveux du grand-duc n'empêchera aucun enfant de mourir de faim. Même dans la destruction, il y a un ordre, il y a des limites.

(LJ, p. 62)

Stepan's fault is that he is overly zealous in his support of their revolutionary cause and, as Annenkov observes, is effectively promoting the forbidden ethic where *tout est permis*.<sup>55</sup> If it were up to Stepan, the terrorists would end up over-stepping the limits of just action; but as Dora points out, 'ce jour-là, la révolution sera[it] haïe de l'humanité entière' (LJ, p. 59). Thus Stepan does not embody Camus' understanding of justice, for he does not have any genuine love for life or humanity – only an abstract love for an *idea* of justice in his mind. Camus thereby continues his critique of action in the name of abstract ideals, which ignores the present and postpones a more authentic existence indefinitely. We are therefore encouraged to identify with Kaliayev instead of Stepan.

So Kaliayev represents 'la révolution pour la vie' (LJ, p. 36). But the play then complexifies this ethical message when Dora questions whether the group's actions are in fact consistent with this principle. Initially in agreement with Kaliayev she then adds: 'Et pourtant, nous allons donner la

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<sup>55</sup> 'Stepan, tout le monde ici t'aime et te respecte. Mais quelles que soient tes raisons, je ne puis te laisser dire que tout est permis. De centaines de nos frères sont morts pour qu'on sache que tout n'est pas permis' (LJ, p. 61).

mort' (*LJ*, p. 36). Kaliayev immediately protests: 'Ce n'est pas la même chose. [...] nous tuons pour bâtir un monde où plus jamais personne ne tuera! Nous acceptons d'être criminels pour que la terre se couvre enfin d'innocents'. However, Dora remains doubtful – 'Et si cela n'était pas? - and it seems that Kaliayev (on some level) also shares the same reservations; he just desperately wants to believe. 'Tais-toi, tu sais bien que c'est impossible', he brusquely retorts (*LJ*, p. 37).

The abstract idea of love that we are presented with in *L'Etat de siège* is also questioned in *Les Justes*. Dora even goes as far as to say: 'L'amour? Non, ce n'est pas ce qu'il faut' (*LJ*, p. 83). Her contention is that there is too much suffering and injustice for any genuine conception of love to be imaginable, let alone realized. Again, Kaliayev objects: 'Mais nous aimons notre peuple' (*LJ*, p. 84). But, replies Dora:

Nous l'aimons, c'est vrai. Nous l'aimons d'un vaste amour sans appui, d'un amour malheureux. Nous vivons loin de lui, enfermés dans nos chambres, perdus dans nos pensées. Et le peuple, lui, nous aime-t-il? Sait-il que nous l'aimons? Le peuple se tait.

(*LJ*, p. 84)

If *Les Justes* questions 'love' as a motivation for revolt in a more direct way than *L'Etat de siège*, it also poses the problem of absolutes in a more subtle and complex way. Dora recognizes that *l'amour* they are fighting for is still an absolute, but this is not to say that she has another suggestion as to how they might try and act authentically; she confesses that this same ideal also motivates her own actions: 'l'amour absolu, [...] c'est celui qui me brûle en effet' (*LJ*, p. 84). It seems that the assassins' 'seule vertu sera, plongé dans les ténèbres, de ne pas céder à leur vertige obscur; enchaîné[s] au mal, de se traîner obstinément vers le bien' (*HR*, p. 357). The group's second assassination attempt succeeds, and Kaliayev is taken to prison and condemned to death. Although he is given the option to repent and save his life, he does not accept. Kaliayev 'essaie d'être un

justicier' (*LJ*, p. 63), and so he explains: 'Si je ne mourais pas, c'est alors que je serais un meurtrier' (*LJ*, p. 119). If he lived he would fail to act in accordance with his principles, for this would effectively legitimize the death he was responsible for and therefore turn him into a murderer. If he dies, however:

Fidèle à ses origines, le révolté démontre dans le sacrifice que sa vraie liberté n'est pas à l'égard du meurtre, mais à l'égard de sa propre mort. Il découvre en même temps l'honneur métaphysique. Kaliayev se place alors sous la potence et désigne visiblement, à tous ses frères, la limite exacte où commence et finit l'honneur des hommes.

(*HR*, p. 357)

In all three of the plays discussed, Camus undermines the human hope that one might simply be able to *tout concilier*; ethical authenticity is dependent on the reality of absurdity being accepted, and this means that absolutist conceptions of justice and freedom must be rejected. Camus does not pretend that recognition of this metaphysical truth is easy, this difficulty being most clearly expressed by the tragedy of *Le Malentendu*. But as demonstrated by the above discussion, tragedy not only stems from anguish in the face of absurdity; it also arises as a consequence of actions which interpret the Absurd as meaning *tout est permis*.<sup>56</sup>

In both *L'Etat de siège* and *Les Justes* Camus argues that 'la lutte elle-même [...] suffit à remplir un cœur d'homme' (*MS*, p. 168). But an overwhelming ambience of pessimism still remains, preventing us from being convinced. The emphasis at the end of *L'Etat de siège* is on the tragedy of Diego's death rather than the release of the town from La Peste's siege; and the final scene in *Les Justes* focuses on Dora's re-

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<sup>56</sup> Camus' theatre as a whole is in fact an attempt to modernize the classical form of tragedy ('Notre époque est tout à fait intéressante, c'est-à-dire qu'elle est tragique. Avons-nous du moins [...] le théâtre de notre époque ou pouvons-nous espérer l'avoir? Autrement dit la tragédie moderne est-elle possible, c'est la question que je voudrais me poser' (*TRN*, p. 1701)), and the plays analysed represent a variety of different dramatic approaches to achieving this aim. *Le Malentendu's* abstract and heavily ironic form is replaced by the grandiose *spectacle* of *L'Etat de siège*, which makes use of a more light-hearted, ridiculous humour reminiscent of the Theatre of the Absurd. Like *L'Etat de siège*, *Les Justes* then adopts a more traditional, highly dialogical structure in order to explore the possibility of moving beyond tragedy, in spite of tragedy.

questioning of justice and the future possibility of happiness in response to Kaliayev's death. Maria, Victoria, and Dora are all left alone without the men they loved. All experience love and appreciate its value, but such recognition only increases their pain; as Freeman puts it, in Camus' theatre 'the mask of the absurd has been put on human relations'.<sup>57</sup> The mask may slip or be temporarily removed in an attempt to reveal a positive ethic for action, 'but is soon clamped back on after it has become apparent that alienation is irrevocable'.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Freeman, p. 151.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p. 152.



### 1.3 Existentialist Ethical Thought in the Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre

As with Camus, Sartre's ethical philosophy is often discussed in relation to various stages. The plays selected for discussion have therefore been chosen in order to bear witness to this progression of thought. The first performance of *Huis clos* closely followed the publication of Sartre's first major philosophical work, *L'Être et le néant* (1943); *Huis clos* thus allows valuable access to Sartre's early theory and so will provide an opportunity to introduce the key philosophical concepts relating to Sartre's reflections on morality. The development of Sartre's ethical thought will then be traced through analysis of the other two plays, *Le Diable et le bon dieu* and *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*.

#### ***Huis clos***

Having recently died, *Huis clos*' three main characters – Garcin, Inès, and Estelle – are introduced by a valet into a Second Empire-style drawing-room, the rather alternative Hell to which they have been eternally condemned. Their situation is initially perplexing: the characters expect a torturer to arrive, yet no one else appears; and although they feel somewhat uncomfortable in this stark, claustrophobic room, the overall impression is surprisingly *un-Hell-like*. Gradually however, their conversations and interactions reveal to them the true nature of their damnation: their Hell is in fact each other.

The fact that the play is set in Hell suggests, from the start, that we will not be presented with any exemplary characters as far as ethics is concerned. Nevertheless, it is still possible to learn something about authentic action indirectly, by establishing what authenticity is *not*. The

first question we must therefore ask is why these three characters merit eternal damnation. Garcin has been shot by a firing squad for attempting to desert the army, revealing him to be guilty of cowardice in addition to callous marital infidelity, where the emotional torture to which he subjected his wife was of such magnitude that it led to her death. Inès, a lesbian, declares herself to be responsible for three deaths: that of her cousin, his wife Florence, and also her own. Inès seduced Florence whilst staying with her cousin, wrecking the couple's former happiness. Shortly afterwards, her cousin was run over by a tram and killed. Inès, who confesses that she has always felt the need to make others suffer, describes how she then taunted Florence with the idea that the two women were to blame for his death. This eventually became too much for Florence and one night she turned on the gas, resulting in Inès' death as well as her own. Finally, Estelle has two deaths on her conscience. Marrying an old friend of her father's for money, she then fell in love with a younger man and became his mistress. On discovering she was pregnant, she escaped to Switzerland to conceal the birth from her husband. She felt no love for the baby however, and when she drowned it by tying a stone around its neck and dropping it from a balcony, her lover subsequently took his own life.

As Kern writes, 'condemnation on the play's melodramatic level is obvious and simple. For each one of the three characters has committed the most outrageous crimes'.<sup>59</sup> However, if these crimes were to account for the three characters' sentence completely, this would leave the way in which they manage to act as each other's torturers – Hell's 'économie de personnel'<sup>60</sup> – unexplained. Kern continues:

That Sartre's reasons for condemning his characters are not exhausted by our general feelings of what is right or wrong is indicated by the fact that, at the climax of the play, the door of hell opens and the

<sup>59</sup> Edith Kern, 'Abandon Hope, All Ye...', *Yale French Studies*, XXX, J-P Sartre (1963), p. 56.

<sup>60</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Huis Clos* (hereafter HC), (Paris : Gallimard, 1947), p. 42.

characters are given a chance to escape. It is their inability to do so that makes them truly and finally guilty in Sartre's eyes. For at this moment of free choice, all three betray their total lack of authenticity, their inability to assume their human freedom which would enable them to reassume life and change.

(Kern (1963), p. 57)

Their more fundamental crime is in fact ontological. For Sartre, human existence is contingent: nothing about human nature is given, and so nothing can ever truly *determine* human action. With no fixed essence that might predispose us to act in a certain way, human existence is therefore grounded in absolute freedom: 'il n'y a pas de différence entre l'être de l'homme et son "être-libre"',<sup>61</sup> states Sartre in *L'Être et le néant*. Thus Sartre sees it as our duty not only to recognize, but also to *live* this freedom, in order that we might realize our full potential as human beings.

Similar to Camus, for Sartre the acknowledgment of the true nature of existence results in a feeling of absurdity and futility. Forced to make choices about one's actions and orientation in the world, yet with the ever-present uncertainty of the future ahead, the attribution of any concrete significance or direction to one's acts is impossible.<sup>62</sup> Self-definition – as the sort of person who 'does this', or 'is that' – is a way of fleeing the *angoisse* this creates, the framework its objectification provides offering a release from the burden of having to continually choose oneself. But this fails to recognize the essential contingency of existence and thus effectively removes, or at least refuses to consider, the full array of possibilities open to us. Such failure to assume the full *responsibility* of one's freedom is what Sartre refers to as 'mauvaise foi'; authentic identity on the other hand, requires what Friedman terms a corresponding 'authentication' of our

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<sup>61</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le néant* (hereafter *EN*), (Paris : Gallimard, 2004 [original publication: 1943]), p. 60.

<sup>62</sup> 'La liberté [...] se caractérise par une obligation perpétuellement renouvelée de refaire le *Moi* qui désigne l'être libre' (*EN*, pp. 69-70).

ontological condition,<sup>63</sup> whereby the actions we make in the world serve to make the freedom of Being our own.

Garcin's inauthenticity stemmed from his self-definition as a courageous pacifist hero; but as his act of desertion demonstrates, when the time came for him to defend this pacifism he was unable to live up to his idealist conception of self. Still refusing to recognize the truth of his cowardice at the beginning of the play, Garcin continues his bad faith, trying to justify why he should be thought of as courageous: 'Je n'ai pas rêvé cet héroïsme. Je l'ai choisi. On est ce qu'on veut' (*HC*, p. 90). However, the one person he cannot succeed in convincing is himself, and he eventually comes to realize the bad faith in which he has been acting. Indeed, although bad faith may appear to be a form of ontological self-deception, it cannot be equated with a lie; the fact that it is from his *self* that the truth is hidden changes everything. As the deceiver, he is required to know the truth in order to be able to conceal it,<sup>64</sup> but if he is to be genuinely deceived, the truth must be unknown to him. So the duality of the deceiver and the deceived present in a typical lie cannot exist here; for Sartre, bad faith implies *unity* of consciousness, and thus when acting in bad faith one is always, on some level, aware that one is doing so.<sup>65</sup> It is this paradoxical *use*, yet simultaneous *denial* of freedom, that explains precisely why it is in 'bad' faith the characters are acting, and therefore why their inauthenticity is condemnable.

Estelle's bad faith is her self-objectification as the embodiment of femininity. Obsessed with her self image as it appears to others, she is

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<sup>63</sup> Maurice Friedman, *The Worlds of Existentialism: A Critical Reader*, Phoenix ed. (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> 'Je dois savoir très précisément cette vérité *pour* me la cacher plus soigneusement' (*EN*, p. 83).

<sup>65</sup> 'L'acte premier de mauvaise foi est pour fuir ce qu'on ne peut pas fuir, pour fuir ce qu'on est' (*EN*, p. 105).

therefore devastated by the absence of mirrors in the room. Her superficial, narcissistic pride extends even to the language she uses: rather than refer to themselves as 'morts' for example, she requests that they instead use the term 'absents': 'S'il faut absolument nommer cet... état de choses, je propose qu'on nous appelle des absents, ce sera plus correct. Vous êtes absent depuis longtemps?' (*HC*, p. 31). Her use of euphemism presents what Redfern refers to as a 'cosmetized version of reality',<sup>66</sup> which is just another device for evading the truth about the way things are.

However, Inès is able to see through the inauthenticity of both Garcin and Estelle. She immediately notices the fear underpinning Garcin's bravado, and is not fooled by the sensational tales Garcin tells about his death early on in the play:

GARCIN: Je dirigeais un journal pacifiste. La guerre éclate. Que faire? Ils avaient tous les yeux fixés sur moi. 'Osera-t-il?' Eh bien, j'ai osé. Je me suis croisé les bras et ils m'ont fusillé. Où est la faute? Où est la faute?

[...]

INÈS: [...] Pour qui jouez-vous la comédie? Nous sommes entre nous.

(*HC*, p. 40)

Inès also sees how utterly dependent Estelle is on appearances; indeed, during her earthly life Estelle relied on mirrors to confirm the 'reality' of her existence, where the mirrors reflected back the image of the constructed 'feminine' object she wished to identify herself with: 'quand je ne me vois pas, j'ai beau me tâter; je me demande si j'existe pour de vrai' (*HC*, p. 44). What this reveals is that Garcin and Estelle are acting 'pour autrui' – for *others*, and not for themselves. Because of the non-transparent nature of an individual's consciousness, others do not have the same access – and therefore knowledge – of anyone else's self. The Other's gaze is

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<sup>66</sup> Walter Redfern, '*Huis clos*' and '*Les Séquestrés d'Altona*' (London : Grant & Cutler, 1995), p. 21.

inescapably objectifying, fixing one's identity and confining it to the mode of the 'en-soi': being-in-itself, the realm of the inert. Thus, to act solely for others is to imprison oneself in bad faith; authenticity requires action 'pour soi', which stays true to the self's lack of intrinsic essence, and undertakes the continual project of shaping its own identity by exercising its freedom.<sup>67</sup>

*Le regard de l'Autre* is crucial to understanding the dynamics of this infernal triangle. Although self-objectification is often a source of comfort and security, McCall notes how 'the look becomes Hell when the Other refuses the image of myself I want him to see'.<sup>68</sup> Because Inès sees Garcin for the *lâche* that he is, it would not have made any difference had Garcin left the room when the door opened. He says to Inès:

C'est toi que je dois convaincre [...]. T'imaginais-tu que j'allais partir? Je ne pouvais pas te laisser ici, triomphante, avec toutes ces pensées dans la tête; toutes ces pensées qui me concernent.

(HC, pp. 88-9)

The power of *le regard* is equally demonstrated when Inès offers to act as a mirror for Estelle, and pretends to notice a smear of lipstick on her cheek. The very thought of this horrifies Estelle, who is then tormented all the more by her inability to establish the truth or falsity of Inès' claim.

At this stage one might wonder why Inès has been condemned, if she possesses the lucidity that the other two have been damned for lacking. Again, the role of the Other is critical for understanding her inauthenticity. Inès too is guilty of self-objectification: 'Moi, je suis méchante: ça veut dire que j'ai besoin de la souffrance des autres pour exister' (HC, p. 57).<sup>69</sup> The

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<sup>67</sup> 'Le pour-soi est l'être qui se détermine lui-même à exister en tant qu'il ne peut pas coïncider avec lui-même' (EN, p. 114).

<sup>68</sup> Dorothy McCall, *The Theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 113.

<sup>69</sup> Note the use of the eternal present, which signifies how Inès chooses to set these characteristics in stone.

satisfaction of her sadism hinges on the suffering of others – and for this, she depends on the others' recognition of herself as a torturer. When the door to Hell opens Inès also has the chance to escape, but she does not, *cannot*. So although lucidity is necessary for authenticity, it is not enough; Inès also fails to live the freedom she possesses, for as Redfern writes: 'the only freedom she will imagine is that of choosing her own hell'.<sup>70</sup>

The possibility of achieving authenticity is never questioned in *Huis clos*; if the characters are not free, it is because they have limited their freedom themselves. As Sartre explains in a spoken preface to the play:

Quel que soit le cercle d'enfer dans lequel nous vivons, je pense que nous sommes libres de le briser. Et si les gens ne le brisent pas, c'est encore librement qu'ils y restent. De sorte qu'ils se mettent librement en enfer.<sup>71</sup>

Although Garcin attains a more authentic level of consciousness at the end, it is too late; that this can no longer make a difference is part of his damnation. As Kern writes: 'This lack of authenticity is at the root of their crimes and [...] it carries within itself the very nature of the punishment that is meted out to them'.<sup>72</sup> Now deprived of freedom, they have to suffer the resultant loss of the possibility to act for themselves.<sup>73</sup> However, when speaking of *l'homme de mauvaise foi* in *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* (1946), Sartre states: 'je n'ai pas à le juger moralement, mais je définis sa mauvaise foi comme une erreur';<sup>74</sup> and in *Réflexions sur la question juive* (1946) Sartre explains how 'le terme d'inauthentique n'impliqu[e], bien entendu, aucun blâme moral'.<sup>75</sup> But if Garcin, Inès, and Estelle have been condemned for their bad faith, and bad faith's

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<sup>70</sup> Redfern, p. 24.

<sup>71</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Un théâtre de situations* (hereafter *TS*), (Paris : Gallimard, 1973), p. 283.

<sup>72</sup> Kern (1963), p. 57.

<sup>73</sup> Indeed, in terms of action, nothing takes place in this play.

<sup>74</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* (hereafter *EH*), (Paris : Gallimard, 1996 [original publication: 1946]), p. 68.

<sup>75</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive* (Paris : Gallimard, 1954 [original publication: 1946]), p. 113.

inauthenticity is not supposed to be a moral judgement, this raises the question as to whether morality is even addressed in *Huis clos*.

Many commentators are rather quick to dismiss the significance of the characters' earthly crimes in favour of a discussion of bad faith. I would argue, however, that it is precisely these earthly crimes that introduce the play's moral dimension. If the inauthenticity of bad faith is not in itself ethical inauthenticity, it is nevertheless as a result of bad faith that moral sins were committed against others whilst the characters were alive. The reason why Inès caused others to suffer was because of her sadistic choice to be a 'femme damnée' (HC, p. 55). As for Garcin, McCall explains that 'although [he] is aggressively heterosexual, he is not really concerned with women [...]; it was in the world of men that he wanted to make his mark'. Therefore, 'since his wife in no way contradicts the image he holds of himself, his treatment of her becomes in his mind merely an aspect of his virility', and it is because of this that he treats her like an object and causes her to suffer in the way he does.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, Estelle is fixated with appearances to such an extent that the only emotion she displays is in relation to things which affect the 'purity' of her aesthetic being – her melodramatic response to Inès' claim that she has lipstick on her cheek, for example. Her unwanted baby also disrupts this 'purity', and that is why it is murdered. So although bad faith may only be an ontologically inauthentic relation between one's self and one's being, this ontological inauthenticity seems to be transformed into moral inauthenticity when other people enter into the equation.

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<sup>76</sup> McCall, p. 115.



### ***Le Diable et le bon dieu***

*Le Diable et le bon dieu* is set in the period of the Reformation, during the sixteenth-century peasants' revolt in Germany. Unlike the characters in *Huis clos*, its main protagonist, Goetz, has a conscious desire to *embrace* his freedom. Goetz, as he is initially presented to us, has decided to assume the identity of pure Evil, claiming all his actions to be manifest of this 'evil', and therefore an assertion of his freedom and individuality with respect to God, the author of the Good. 'Moi, j'invente',<sup>77</sup> he explains to his mistress, Catherine. However, Goetz is running out of inventive ways to perform his Evil, and so beginning to tire of this project. Thus when Heinrich – a disillusioned priest – declares that it is not Evil which is exceptional on Earth, but rather Good that it is impossible for humans to achieve, Goetz jumps at the challenge to assert his freedom and bring this impossibility about. However, because Goetz has made a bet with Heinrich that he will succeed, any good he brings about cannot be 'good' for its own sake, as part of the motivation driving his actions will be his desire to win the wager. So Goetz proposes to make his choice of Good depend on the roll of two dice. But actually, Goetz has already decided what he wants the outcome to be, and cheats to ensure that the Good wins. O'Donohoe captures the contradiction involved:

Several paradoxes reflect the over-arching self-contradiction of this pseudo-conversion. On the one hand, Goetz freely accepts the challenge to achieve the impossible; on the other, he tosses [two dice] in order (apparently) to make providence (God) responsible for the outcome. Then again, he cheats, making *himself* responsible again, but does not admit his trickery, allowing providence to take the blame [...].<sup>78</sup>

The contradiction embodied by Goetz in this scene illustrates the tension that results from a confrontation with existence's contingency, and of the unity of consciousness implicit in bad faith. *L'Être et le néant* states:

<sup>77</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Le Diable et le bon dieu* (hereafter *DBD*), (Paris : Gallimard, 1951), p. 81.

<sup>78</sup> Benedict O'Donohoe, *Sartre's Theatre: Acts for Life* (Oxford : Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 148-9.

si j'essaie [...] de me mentir, j'échoue complètement dans cette entreprise, le mensonge [...] est ruiné, *par-derrrière*, par la conscience même de me mentir qui se constitue impitoyablement en deçà de mon projet comme sa condition même.

(*EN*, p. 84)

Although Goetz wishes to assert his freedom, he is still guilty of self-objectification. Goetz's true identity is neither 'good' nor 'evil', as there is no reason why he could not have been otherwise or could not still *be* otherwise. As Sartre writes in *L'Être et le néant*: 'il s'agit de constituer la réalité-humaine comme un être qui est ce qu'il n'est pas et qui n'est pas ce qu'il est' (*EN*, p. 93). Recognizing the reality of human freedom entails recognizing that one's identity is not just constituted by what one *is* at any particular moment, but also by everything one is *not* - that is, by everything that one is *not yet*, but might still *choose* to be in the future. Indeed, were 'Evil' truly Goetz's *raison d'être*, as he claims it to be at the beginning of the play, he would not be in a position to renounce it in favour of the 'Good'.

If, through identification with his systems, Goetz's mistake is to define himself as Other, this is not to say that others will define him in the same way. When attempting to be the epitome of goodness and charity Goetz offers his lands as a gift to the peasants. But the offer is dismissed by their leader, Nasty: handing over his lands is not a solution to the social inequalities that separate the peasants from the rich, but will only provoke more violence by introducing further inequalities into the community. Champigny makes the distinction between a 'good' *gesture* and good *action*, and sees Goetz as performing the former.<sup>79</sup> Goetz's offer is not something intrinsically good and therefore, as this case illustrates, whether or not it *is* 'good' cannot be determined by his judgement alone. Goetz decides to give up his lands anyway, declaring that he is not just going to

<sup>79</sup> Robert J. Champigny, *Stages on Sartre's Way, 1939-52*, reprinted edition (New York : Kraus Reprint Corporation, 1968), p. 117.

do Good 'à la petite semaine' (*DBD*, p. 124), and he proceeds to set up his 'Cité du Soleil' – his 'perfect' society. He teaches his citizens to love all men and never to commit violence, so when a rebel peasant group invades he commands that non-violence be practised in response. His people are all slaughtered. For Sartre, this disaster was inevitable: in pretending to speak and hold true for *all* men, these idealist ethical values hold true for *none*, for as soon as reality is objectified in such a way, the generated image ceases to be representative of the actual situation in all its complexity.

As Goetz comes to discover, his new project is no less destructive than the former in terms of the consequences it has for others' lives,<sup>80</sup> nor does he gain any more satisfaction from it. Goetz plays the roles of Good and Evil as a means of realizing himself as an absolute object, where God is the Other he is acting for: 'His crimes are meaningless without the principle of God to make his evil metaphysical', observes McCall,<sup>81</sup> and the same applies to his 'good'. But the fixed, eternal nature that Goetz craves does not exist on Earth, only in his imagination. In mimicking this relation to God, the Absolute, 'Good' and 'Evil' coincide; the more faithful Goetz is to his ideological systems, the more his identity belongs to this imaginary object, and the *less* it belongs to himself. Thus Goetz demonstrates the inevitable failure of what Anderson calls the 'God project'.<sup>82</sup> As Sartre writes in *L'Être et le néant*: 'L'homme se fait pour être Dieu [...]; mais précisément parce qu'il n'y a aucune commune mesure entre la réalité-humaine et la cause de soi qu'elle veut être, on peut tout aussi bien dire que l'homme se perd pour que la cause de soi existe' (*EN*, p. 674).

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<sup>80</sup> 'Et voilà. Que je fasse le Mal, que je fasse le Bien, je me fais toujours détester' (*DBD*, p. 158).

<sup>81</sup> McCall, p. 26.

<sup>82</sup> See Thomas C. Anderson, *Sartre's Two Ethics: From Authenticity to Integral Humanity* (Chicago : Open Court, 1993).

Such conscious ideological subscription is therefore the very opposite of authentic, free action. As Champigny suggests: 'Goetz enters the stage as a project not to be',<sup>83</sup> and this is something which rings true on several counts: his project is 'not to be' in the sense that it is a project undertaken in bad faith, inconsistent with the true nature of Being, and therefore his project is 'not to be', that is, it is bound to fail. Goetz eventually comes to realize this, and the play ends with a conversion that is arguably genuine – one in which Goetz rejects the God in relation to whom he has always defined his identity, and sees himself as human for the first time.<sup>84</sup> Goetz is therefore able to start acting more authentically, as 'un homme parmi les hommes' (*DBD*, p. 245).

Goetz's final conversion merely seems to require recognition of the error in seeking an absolute, objective identity: for Goetz to take his freedom into his own hands does not appear fundamentally problematic; the limiting factor is only himself. For this reason, the ending is often interpreted as positive and optimistic. However, closer inspection of the play reveals how Goetz's realization of the error of his ways does not mean that his actions are no longer open to criticism. In his reformed state Goetz joins forces with Nasty and, reputed for being the greatest military captain in Germany, Goetz is elected leader of the peasants' revolt. But in the final moments of the play an officer rejects Goetz's authority, and is stabbed by Goetz as a consequence. Not surprisingly, Nasty is somewhat taken aback. In response to this scene, Howells remarks:

Goetz may be the last-act 'hero' of *Le Diable et le bon dieu*, but [...] even his 'conversion' is marked by an inglorious murder and a readiness to be both 'bourreau et boucher' in a revolution that is bound to fail. Sartrean drama is essentially ambiguous, unresolved and unsynthesised.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Champigny (1968), p. 130.

<sup>84</sup> 'J'avais trahi tout le monde [...] je voulais être inhumain' (*DBD*, p. 234).

<sup>85</sup> Christina Howells, *Sartre: The Necessity of Freedom* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 74.

If the relationship between ontological inauthenticity and moral inauthenticity was questionable with respect to *Huis clos*, the ending of *Le Diable et le bon dieu* blurs the boundaries between these supposedly separate notions even further.

Wherever the divide lies, both *Huis clos* and *Le Diable et le bon dieu* suggest that authentication of one's freedom proper is at least a prerequisite for ethical action. However, Sartre's war experiences revealed to him the realities of oppression, exploitation, and persecution: true freedom was not in fact possible in the world such as it is. Sartre came to recognize the extent to which the individual's ontological freedom was inescapably caught up and limited by 'facticité'; always embedded in a particular temporal moment, individuals could not be abstracted from their socio-historical situation, and thus no individual was ever in a position to be completely responsible for their freedom. This was to become the basis of Sartre's 'second ethics' – a direct reaction against the more abstract and individualistic 'first ethics', which may be identified with the moral discourse in *Huis clos*.<sup>86</sup> *Le Diable et le bon dieu* can be understood as marking the shift to this more realistic, contextualized ethics, beginning to problematize the possibility of *living* the freedom which (in principle) all humans possess. If *Huis clos* introduced the figure of the Other as the complexifying element, *Le Diable et le bon dieu* reiterates this message but with much greater force. Goetz may have shed his ideological conceptions about reality, but there is still a war to be waged. In keeping with marxist analysis, by the early 1950s Sartre sees the *real* problems as being *real* socio-economic contradictions, such as exploitation and poverty; mistaken ideas are what arise as a consequence of these contradictions, and their

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<sup>86</sup> 'Qu'on n'aïlle pas nous faire dire, surtout, que l'homme est libre dans toutes les situations [...]. Nous voulons dire exactement le contraire; à savoir que les hommes sont tous esclaves' (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique, Tome I* (hereafter *CRD I*), (Paris : Gallimard, 1960), p. 369).

inauthenticity resides in how they obscure, conceal, or misrepresent the actual situation, therefore maintaining the status quo. But as Bottomore writes, 'ideological distortions [...] can disappear only when the contradictions which give rise to them are *practically* resolved'.<sup>87</sup> Freedom thus becomes a goal as opposed to a given.

### ***Les Séquestrés d'Altona***

*Les Séquestrés d'Altona* reinforces the message of Sartre's second ethics, further emphasizing the complexities of Being *en situation* by illustrating how the objectification of *le regard* not only operates on the level of the individual, but also on the wider societal plane. Thus authenticity is rendered more difficult still, owing to the impersonal and consequently more elusive nature of the social systems that condition us. In his *Questions de méthode* (1957), published as an introduction to the *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1960), Sartre aligns himself with Marx, quoting *Das Kapital* when he writes: 'Ce règne de la liberté ne commence en fait que là où cesse le travail imposé par la nécessité et la finalité extérieure; il se trouve donc par-delà la sphère de la production matérielle proprement dite'. Sartre then adds: 'Mais nous n'avons aucun moyen, aucun instrument intellectuel, aucune expérience concrète qui nous permette de concevoir cette liberté ni cette philosophie'.<sup>88</sup>

The main protagonist in *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, Frantz von Gerlach, is guilty of an obsession with the Absolute similar to that of Goetz, namely his craving for *grandeur* – power for its own sake. This lust for power has resulted in his committing crimes of torture, and he has been living in voluntary confinement in his room for the past thirteen years in an effort to

<sup>87</sup> Tom Bottomore *et al.*, *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 220; my emphasis.

<sup>88</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Questions de méthode* ([Paris] : Gallimard, 1960 [original publication: 1957]), p. 50).

escape his guilty conscience. The play is set in the von Gerlach household and, dramatizing a complex network of inter-family relations, explores the impact of Frantz's solitary confinement on the rest of the family, and the succession of events which lead to a destruction of his sequestered world.

Goldthorpe describes how Frantz's room has become the 'material analagon'<sup>89</sup> to the imaginary world he has created for himself: a world in which Germany is ruined, and therefore a world in which justice has been brought to Germany for Nazi acts of torture, including those committed by Frantz. In the words of O'Donohoe, Frantz is trying to 'deny the tide of history' by inventing a complete 'counter-history'.<sup>90</sup> For actually:

the 'real' world outside displays the perverse socio-economic consequences of defeat: Germany is booming. This would be intolerable to Frantz, because wickedness should be punished not rewarded. If Germany wins the peace by virtue of having lost the war, then there is neither logic nor justice: 'qui perd gagne'.

(O'Donohoe, p. 229)

As with Goetz, Frantz's fault lies in trying to impose a false, abstract system of coherence on the world. Goldthorpe points out that 'Frantz's determination to respond to [this] image as though it were perception [...] eclipse[s] the spontaneity which initially created the image'.<sup>91</sup> One of the observations she makes in her detailed discussion of *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* and Sartre's theory of imagination is that of the causal inefficacy of the imaginary object.<sup>92</sup> An imaginary construct cannot *determine* action; Frantz chose to commit his acts of torture just as he now chooses to deny their significance, and he must therefore take personal responsibility for these choices.

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<sup>89</sup> Rhiannon Goldthorpe, *Sartre: Literature and Theory* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 148.

<sup>90</sup> O'Donohoe, p. 231.

<sup>91</sup> Goldthorpe, p. 148.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*, p. 146.

However, as mentioned above, what becomes evident in *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* is the extent to which freedom and responsibility are *not* as transparent as they are presented in *Huis clos*. The play's discourse on freedom is one of extreme pessimism, where the attention paid to the conditioning forces of Society and History – the 'practico-inert' – in addition to the power-relations within the von Gerlach family itself cause one to question whether any freedom is involved at all.<sup>93</sup> Contat and Rybalka summarize the significance of the play:

Volontairement ambiguë, la pièce met en scène des personnages totalement impuissants qui sont les victimes consentantes d'un processus sur lequel ils n'ont aucune prise et dont ils restent pourtant entièrement responsables [...].<sup>94</sup>

Frantz, with his thirst for power, has been created in the image of his father, an influential industrial magnate who views himself as omnipotent. For Sartre, von Gerlach typified the bourgeois world he lived in – the same world that created Hitler and which sought greatness for its own sake, regardless of the means used to this end. For much of the play Frantz suffers from a feeling of impotence because it is his father who constructs his life for him. In his early twenties Frantz witnesses the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp, built on land sold to Himmler by his father. Realizing the consequences of his father's actions he is appalled and tries to rescue a Polish rabbi, whom he hides in his room. But his father finds out and, to protect his son, calls the S.S., who then massacre the rabbi while Frantz watches, helpless to intervene. 'Owing to the power of his father, Fran[t]z is left unpunished for what he has done', McCall explains; 'The dangerous risk he thought he was taking existed in fact only for the rabbi. Fran[t]z sees then that he is not responsible for his acts because, as his father's

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<sup>93</sup> 'Le champ practico-inerte se fait en chaque *praxis* objectivée *sa négation* au profit de l'activité passive comme structure commune des collectifs et de la matière ouvrée' (*CRD I*, p. 359).

<sup>94</sup> Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, *Les Ecrits de Sartre: chronologie, bibliographie commentée* (Paris : Gallimard, 1970), p. 325.



son, he himself counts as nothing'.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, it seems in response to this that Frantz pursues absolute power so resolutely, desperately seeking to act for himself.

But if Frantz's identity can, in part, be seen as conditioned and defined by his father's will, the same can be said of his father's identity with respect to larger social systems that extend beyond his control. As well as von Gerlach's own power-driven agenda, Capitalism, Nazism, and Lutheranism are also key operators in the play, though what we come to realize is that none is so easily distinguishable in practice; the von Gerlach's family relations present us with an internalization of all these ideological systems inextricably combined. Whereas Lutheranism was presented as a positive liberating force from Catholicism's dominance and elitism in *Le Diable et le bon dieu*,<sup>96</sup> *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* offers an entirely different discourse. Emphasis on the individual as opposed to the Church has not diminished Man's desire for the Absolute, which has only become manifest in other new social systems. Lutheranism is even explicitly blamed by the father: 'Les Gerlach sont des victimes de Luther: ce prophète nous a rendus fous d'orgueil'.<sup>97</sup> Thus, for Pucciani, Frantz was condemned to sequestration long before he bolted the door to his room upstairs; and his feeling of impotence and acts of torture carry the implication that one cannot pursue the Absolute without resultant violence, or violation of human freedom.<sup>98</sup> The play's central theme of sequestration can therefore be understood as an illustration of how Man is alienated by the universalizing systems he creates; and Pucciani sees Frantz's and his father's joint suicide at the end

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<sup>95</sup> McCall, p. 132.

<sup>96</sup> *Le Diable et le bon dieu* significantly takes place in the city of Worms – most famously known in association with the Diet of Worms, during which Martin Luther was trialed prior to his excommunication from the Church. For Sartre, this historical moment, along with the subsequent rise of Protestantism, would have represented a liberating moment in history with respect to the class relations Catholicism's elitism served to perpetuate.

<sup>97</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* (hereafter SA), (Paris : Gallimard, 1960), p. 49.

<sup>98</sup> Oreste F. Pucciani, 'Les Séquestrés d'Altona' in Edith Kern (ed.), *Sartre: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey : Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 94.

as the only authentic act open to them,<sup>99</sup> necessary for the denunciation of ideology's vicious circularity and imprisoning effects.

A critique of action in bad faith is thus sustained all the way through Sartre's theatrical *œuvre*; but with the shift observed in Sartre's conception of *liberté*, in his later works it is no longer clear whether one should feel responsible for ontological infidelity – that is, to what extent this critique can still apply. Indeed, Camus accused Sartre of contradicting his own basic principles, reducing Man to History and thus denying him his fundamental freedom: 'L'existentialisme [de Sartre] a gardé du hegelianisme son erreur fondamentale qui consiste à réduire l'homme à l'histoire. Mais il n'en a pas gardé la conséquence qui est de refuser en fait toute liberté à l'homme'.<sup>100</sup> Weber echoed this criticism in his analysis of *Le Diable et le bon dieu*, describing Goetz's final conversion as an act of surrender rather than a triumphant liberation.<sup>101</sup> The futility of Frantz's efforts to save the rabbi in *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* then seem to suggest that individual concern for the ethical ultimately makes no difference with respect to the wider situation. Thus Howells writes of Sartre's theatre:

His plays [...] show a clear evolution away from the drama of the individual and his or her existential dilemmas [...] towards an equation of History with Fate, in which drama is replaced by necessity, free choice by inevitability, praxis by the practico-inert.

(Howells (1988), p. 89)

As Sartre becomes more aware of the importance of man's socio-historical *situation*, not only does it become increasingly difficult to understand the relationship between the ontological and the ethical; what the two notions might refer to themselves also becomes increasingly difficult to pinpoint. If establishing what authentic behaviour might constitute in light of

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<sup>99</sup> Kern (1962), p. 102.

<sup>100</sup> Albert Camus, *Carnets: janvier 1942 – mars 1951* (hereafter *C II*), (Paris : Gallimard, 1964), p. 180.

<sup>101</sup> Eugen Weber, 'The Surrender of Goetz', *Symposium*, XIII (1959).

situational complexities proves problematic, determining the nature of *inauthenticity* becomes equally so. However, what is clear is that, for Sartre, ethics is no science. *Le Diable et le bon dieu* and *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* both illustrate the impossibility of formulating any fixed, universal code by showing all subscription to objective systems as necessitating failure. And in all three plays, the Other – whether this be an individual or a social Other – is presented as being pivotal with respect to the moral, as it facilitates disclosure of the ambiguity and complexity of ethics.

The introduction to this dissertation suggested that analysis of Marcel's, Camus', and Sartre's dramatic works might be a profitable approach to understanding their ethical thought. On reflection, theatre does appear to be a suitable choice of genre as far as their ethical philosophies are concerned. Marcel, Camus, and Sartre all emphasize the situational relativity of the ethical over absolutist conceptions such as those of 'Justice', 'Good', and 'Evil'; and it is apt that the plays of all three sustain a critique of action as 'role play' – that is, action performed out of a sense of duty to maintain some perceived objectivity, or motivated by an aspiration to bring about a certain objective state of affairs. In addition, the physical presence that theatre grants each individual character would seem especially complementary for Marcel, considering his desire for his philosophical message to emerge as a polyphonic symphony of different voices. This suggested relationship between Existentialist ethical thought and theatre will be further explored in Section 2.

## Section 2: Dramatizing French Existentialist Ethics

### 2.1 A Staging of Conflict?

Having analysed the fundamental ethical concepts applied by Marcel, Camus, and Sartre in their theatre, Section 2 now aims to address the inter-relations between the ethical discourses identified in Section 1, and consider how the three Existentialists' dramatization of the ethical is reflective of their theoretical ethical discussions. As Section 1 demonstrated, analysis of the representation of action in the theatre of all three has not provided a straight-forward discourse on ethical choice. Yet without an adequate suggestion as to *ce qu'il faut faire*, the ethical position of the plays risks collapsing into moral relativism, rendering an existential ethics futile and meaningless. Section 2.1 will explore the conflictual nature of the ethical thought expressed in the theatre of Marcel, Camus, and Sartre. Section 2.2 will then consider whether it is nevertheless possible to see their theatre as contributing to the elaboration of their Existentialist ethical thought.

Section 1 described how both Sartre and Camus argue for a lack of intrinsic meaning to life. With this ontological *point de départ*, values, for Sartre, ultimately depend on human choice *en situation*. Camus' position is slightly different however, arguing that absurdity is not a characteristic of existence itself, but rather the resulting sensation of a confrontation between Man and the world:

Je disais que le monde est absurde et j'allais trop vite. Ce monde en lui-même n'est pas raisonnable, c'est tout ce qu'on peut dire. Mais ce qui est absurde, c'est la confrontation de cet irrationnel et de ce désir éperdu de clarté dont l'appel résonne au plus profond de l'homme. L'absurde dépend autant de l'homme que du monde.

(MS, p. 39)

Camus distinguishes between a lack of meaning and a lack of value.<sup>1</sup> Although life may be devoid of any essential meaning, this is not to say that values are equally arbitrary; on the contrary, Camus believes in an innate human dignity and metaphysical innocence which, along with associated values of life and love, the act of revolt simultaneously reveals and defends, thus grounding an intrinsic sense of human solidarity. Marcel provides no equivalent argument regarding the absurdity of existence but, like Camus, considers values (such as intersubjective respect, love, and fidelity) to be more discovered than chosen, recognizable through what he calls an 'intuition réflexive' (*JM*, p. 69).<sup>2</sup> As has been noted, all three positions prove to be problematic when it comes to determining their precise consequences for action. In Sartre's case, if existence really is contingent, it is not obvious on what basis one is to make decisions about what to value in the first place. Heinrich (*DBD*) offers a prime example of what Sartre terms 'l'angoisse éthique':

Il y a angoisse éthique lorsque je me considère dans mon rapport originel aux valeurs. Celles-ci, en effet, sont des exigences qui réclament un fondement. Mais ce fondement ne saurait être en aucun cas *l'être*, car toute valeur qui fonderait sa nature idéale sur son être cesserait par là même d'être valeur et réaliserait l'hétéronomie de ma volonté.

(*EN*, p. 73)

This *angoisse*, Sartre argues, is a revelation of human freedom and thus of 'l'idéalité des valeurs [fixes]' (*EN*, p. 73), which ought to then act as an incitement for *l'homme authentique* to take freedom into his own hands and create his own values. Thus Sartre argues in *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* that 'il n'y a pas de doctrine plus optimiste, puisque le destin de l'homme est en lui-même' (*EH*, p. 56). But this recognition of freedom

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<sup>1</sup> 'On a jusqu'à ici joué sur les mots et feint de croire que refuser un sens à la vie conduit forcément à déclarer qu'elle ne vaut pas la peine d'être vécue. En vérité, il n'y a aucune mesure forcée entre les deux jugements' (*MS*, p. 23).

<sup>2</sup> It must be noted, however, that Marcel is not satisfied with this description: 'L'expression *intuition réflexive* n'est certes pas heureuse. Mais voici ce que je veux dire [...] Cette intuition ne se réfléchit pas et ne peut pas se réfléchir directement [...]. Je pense qu'à la racine de toute fidélité il existe une intuition de cette sorte – mais dont la réalité peut toujours être remise en question. Je peux toujours dire: "oui, j'ai *cru* voir, mais je me suis trompé..."' (*JM*, p. 69).

only paralyzes Heinrich. He cannot decide whether to identify with the values of the Church or with the values of the peasants, and so he tries to value both perspectives. As the following two passages illustrate, this only results in contradiction:

NASTY: Es-tu pour nous ou contre nous?

HEINRICH: Je suis pour vous quand vous souffrez, contre vous quand vous voulez verser le sang de l'Église.

NASTY: Tu es pour nous quand on nous assassine, contre nous quand nous osons nous défendre.

HEINRICH: Je suis d'Église, Nasty.

(DBD, p. 35)

And yet in a previous conversation with L'Evêque, Heinrich did not express such certainty:

HEINRICH: Je suis d'Église d'abord, mais je suis leur frère [le frère des pauvres].

L'EVÊQUE, (*fortement*): D'Église d'abord.

HEINRICH: Oui. D'Église d'abord, mais...

(DBD, p. 30)

Condemned by both sides as a traitor, Heinrich is not presented favourably. However, if he is disingenuous it is not as a result of deliberate malice; his dilemma is clearly a source of great anguish for him. What is not clear is how he might resolve his contradictory position; his situation appears hopeless.

As for Camus, he does not provide any philosophical foundation for the innate values he postulates, merely taking them as a given. In Camus' theatre his philosophy seems to have been transferred straight from his theory to the mouths of his characters, thus leaving us none the wiser as to the origin or substance of the values he argues for. Barilier writes:

Camus prend ses émotions pour des raisons et ses idées pour des valeurs. Et si Platon non plus, en dernier ressort, ne prouvait pas ses

valeurs, il les fondait. Camus ne les fonde ni les prouve. Il en est réduit à les désirer.<sup>3</sup>

Marcel, on the other hand, *does* offer some theoretical underpinning with which to legitimize his intuitive values:

[La sensation] est à proprement parler immédiate et ne peut en aucune façon être regardée comme l'interprétation de quelque chose qui ne serait pas elle. Elle est à la base de toute interprétation et de toute communication et ne peut donc être elle-même une interprétation ou une communication.

(JM, p. 270)

The immediacy of existential sensation renders it infallible, thereby providing metaphysical justification for the upholding of values which are intuitively recognized. Section 1 described how, for Marcel, authenticity involves a 'creative fidelity' to these values but again, it is not clear what fidelity to human values actually consists of in terms of action; indeed, this is a principal source of anguish for the characters in his plays.

The seeming incoherence of an Existentialist ethics is particularly apparent with respect to Camus. Champigny argues that if Camus' theatre is philosophical, his moral philosophy is also theatrical. In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus compares the absurd punishment of Sisyphus to the absurdity of human existence. Sisyphus – 'l'homme absurde' – becomes the embodiment of Camus' early form of revolt, and Camus imagines Sisyphus proudly choosing to push his rock in defiance of the task's absurdity, thus allowing for the possibility of happiness because absurdity has been accepted.<sup>4</sup> However, for Champigny, Sisyphus' revolt still acts out a role, and thus involves no true action for himself: 'From the attitude of the tragic actor, one cannot draw a morals of active compassion, "proud" or not'.<sup>5</sup> Sisyphus may recognize himself to be this actor, but this

<sup>3</sup> E. Barilier, cited in East, p. 172. Cruickshank also talks of Camus' 'failure to separate clear thinking from an emotional attitude' (John Cruickshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 47).

<sup>4</sup> 'Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux' (MS, p. 168).

<sup>5</sup> Robert J. Champigny, *Humanism and Human Racism: A Critical Study of Essays by Sartre and Camus* (The Hague : Mouton, 1972), p. 73. It is striking that very little critical discussion makes reference to this text.

is not enough. Identifying one's self as an actor as opposed to a particular character does not remove the element of role play Camus wished to condemn; the role of the actor remains, and the emphasis placed by Camus on *l'homme absurde's* defiant pride still implies a certain fixity.

Camus acknowledged *l'homme absurde's* undesirable theatricality and subsequently tried to modify his approach in *L'Homme révolté*.<sup>6</sup> However, Champigny does not believe that Camus appreciated the full extent of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe's* inadequacy. Champigny sees the theatricality of Camus' notion of ethical action as originating specifically from Camus' conception of death, the injustice of which incites the revolt of both *l'homme absurde* and *l'homme révolté*. In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, death is portrayed as the original evil: 'Dans l'univers du révolté, la mort exalte l'injustice. Elle est le suprême abus' (MS, p. 123); and similarly in *L'Homme révolté*, Camus argues that 'dans son principe, [la révolte] est protestation contre la mort' (HR, p. 356). It is this 'concentration on the idea of death which [...] is maintained in *L'Homme révolté* [that] does not allow moral sense to liberate itself fully from an estheticism',<sup>7</sup> for Champigny argues that one cannot generalize about death as the absolute injustice.<sup>8</sup>

Camus' reaction against the injustice of death is particularly apparent in *Les Justes*; but, continues Champigny, 'not to kill so as to bear witness to the honor of the revolted man [is] not [a] moral [decision] in the strict sense. Neither suicide nor murder, nor the rejection of either, can be

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<sup>6</sup> 'D'une certaine manière, l'absurde qui prétend exprimer l'homme dans sa solitude le fait vivre devant un miroir' (HR, p. 21).

<sup>7</sup> Champigny (1972), p. 70.

<sup>8</sup> 'This generalization about death does not take into account the diversity of experiences. From a moral standpoint, death could, on the contrary, be considered as the only equalizing factor in this world. It comes to everyone and puts a stop to suffering as well as pleasure' (ibid., p. 71).



generalized as moral principles'.<sup>9</sup> On the contrary, as far as Champigny is concerned, this idealist 'positing [of] non-violence [...] as a practical moral principle is to present suicide as the only possible moral action',<sup>10</sup> and this is effectively what Kaliayev (*LJ*) and Diego (*ES*) demonstrate. Not only this; Kaliayev and Diego display no significant ethical *angoisse* and agree to die rather too easily, so that Margerrison concludes her discussion of *Les Justes* by agreeing with Bradby that Camus' plays are 'melodrama[ti]c' as opposed to tragic, as their heroes are not 'torn apart by their contradictions' but rather all manage to achieve some form of resolution. Margerrison consequently writes that Kaliayev, 'in his "limited revolt", [dies] not as a tragic figure but as an exemplary rebel'.<sup>11</sup> Dora, it must be said, does struggle between her love for Kaliayev and her commitment to the group's revolutionary cause. But this does not weaken Margerrison's argument: Dora may indeed be 'less crude' in this sense, but Kaliayev's 'death resolves this conflict with her decision to rejoin him by volunteering to die throwing the next bomb'.<sup>12</sup> Thus both Margerrison and Champigny demonstrate how Camus fails to dissociate himself from absolutist ideals when addressing questions of ethics. Margerrison sees this ethical idealism as characteristic of Camus' theatre, and Champigny blurs the dividing line between theatre and philosophy by observing how Camus' ethical philosophy may also be understood as theatrical, because of the role play that Camus' conception of authenticity fails to escape.

It must be noted that Champigny's argument does not recognize the complexity of Camus' position regarding death. Camus actually uses death in two senses - death as the ultimate absurdity (hereafter 'death<sup>abs</sup>'), and death as injustice (hereafter 'death<sup>inj</sup>'). Champigny's understanding of

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<sup>9</sup> Champigny (1972), p. 71.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>11</sup> Hughes, p. 74.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

'death' is only that of death<sup>inj</sup>, but actually the 'logic of absurdity' which grounds Camus' revolt has *death<sup>abs</sup>* as its foundation. Suffering is only a secondary consideration to 'le suprême abus' that is death because, as the culmination of absurdity, death prevents any justification for action or sense of purpose in life. Camus states:

Le révolté ne demande pas la vie, mais les raisons de la vie. Il refuse la conséquence que la mort apporte. Si rien ne dure, rien n'est justifié, ce qui meurt est privé de sens. [...] La protestation contre le mal qui est au cœur même de la révolte métaphysique est significative à cet égard. Ce n'est pas la souffrance de l'enfant qui est révoltante en elle-même, mais le fait que cette souffrance ne soit pas justifiée.

(HR, p. 132)

So whereas death<sup>abs</sup> signifies the fundamental meaninglessness of life, death<sup>inj</sup> implies that life is *the* absolute value; only death<sup>abs</sup> is consistent with Camus' logic. The fact that these two senses of death exist in Camus' work is not in itself contradictory, due to the distinction Camus makes between meaning and value. However, because Camus uses the word 'death' in both cases, it is unclear as to which sense is intended. In *Les Justes* the assassins' revolt actually seems to be driven in response to death<sup>inj</sup>; Camus appears to have smuggled death<sup>inj</sup> into his logic of absurdity so that his *angoisse* concerning life and its meaninglessness (which stems from death<sup>abs</sup>) equivocates to become *angoisse* about the reality of death (i.e. death<sup>inj</sup>). Davis believes that 'much of Camus [...] can be read as staging the impossibility of maintaining oneself unflinchingly in the domain of the Absurd',<sup>13</sup> or at least, Camus' own inability to unflinchingly confront absurdity. As illustrated by Kaliayev's desperate outbursts, in spite of the Absurd, Camus *needs* to be able to justify why life should be valued. Even *Le Malentendu* expresses this, for as Davis notes, 'ambiguity is associated with death'.<sup>14</sup> But in the words of Champigny: 'If my decision to go on living derives from the judgement that human life in

<sup>13</sup> Colin Davis, 'Violence and Ethics in Camus', in Hughes, p. 110.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 113. In *L'Homme révolté* Camus also writes: 'Chaque équivoque, chaque malentendu suscite la mort' (HR, p. 354).

general is worth living, then I do not exactly decide to go on living my life: I decide rather to play the part of Life'.<sup>15</sup>

The theatricality of Diego's death at the end of *L'Etat de siège* might almost be undermined by the females in the chorus, when they lament:

Puisque tout ne peut être sauvé, apprenons du moins à préserver la maison de l'amour! [...] Mais les hommes préfèrent l'idée. Ils fuient leur mère, ils se détachent de l'amante, et les voilà qui courent à l'aventure [...] appelant sous un ciel muet une impossible réunion et marchant de solitude en solitude, vers l'isolement dernier, la mort en plein désert!

(*ES*, p. 184)

However we are not able to take their suggestion of authenticity seriously either, as the notion of love *L'Etat de siège* presents us with is no less of an 'idée' than Diego's 'aventure'. In his theoretical writings Camus plainly states: 'Je n'ai rien à faire des idées ou de l'éternel' (*MS*, p. 123); but in spite of such arguments against objectification a residual idealism permeates his thought, asserting itself particularly when questions of ethics or values are involved. Thus, even Camus' later 'heroes' live as if in front of a mirror, acting as spectators to their own idealized conception of authentic action. Ironically, despite the strong emphasis Camus places on logic in wanting to uphold a consistency between metaphysical truth and his notion of revolt,<sup>16</sup> not only does Camus fail to ground the moral values with which he presents us; the fact that he presents us with such universal values at all renders his ethical thought philosophically inconsistent and thus incoherent because *in theory* he argues against such objectification. Regarding the ethical message in Camus' theatre, audiences to his plays are consequently spectators twice over: firstly, of the action on stage, and secondly, of an abstract and idealist morality that does not sufficiently relate to the complex, diverse realities of individuals *en situation*.

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<sup>15</sup> Champigny (1972), p. 56.

<sup>16</sup> 'Mon raisonnement veut être fidèle à l'évidence qui l'a éveillé. Cette évidence, c'est l'absurde' (*MS*, p. 73).

The notion of spectatorship has numerous applications with regard to Existentialist ethical thought in the theatre. Spectatorship may represent the passive observation of the action and characters on stage by an audience, wherein no *participation* takes place; or it may refer to the rigid objectification of a play's ethical message, be it by the audience, the producer, or the playwright. Spectatorship may also apply to internal relations between the characters themselves, whereby certain characters either view themselves as performing a specific role (Camus' 'heroes', Goetz's objectification of himself as 'Evil' or 'Good' (*DBD*)), or objectify other characters and reduce their existence to one role in particular (labelling Roland as 'the collaborator' (*E*)). The one-dimensional characters in Camus' theatre force a spectator's perspective on the audience with respect to his moral philosophy, as the objectified ethical message they represent does not allow the audience room for active involvement.

This seems to be a failing of Camus' in particular, for paradox and ambiguity appear to be inherent in the very structure of Sartre's and Marcel's theatre, thus preventing such unequivocal interpretation. Ethical questions in Sartre's and Marcel's plays are often explored by presenting moments of choice in terms of binary oppositions. Although a sustained criticism of absolute judgement is maintained in all three of Marcel's plays, there is nevertheless a strong sense of the necessity of choice. Contrary to what one might expect, Antoine (*E*), who fails to pronounce himself for or against the Resistance, does not become 'the strong character' as a result; and Simon (*SC*) and Pascal (*RR*) must both make a definitive choice as to whether to remain in France or to leave, in spite of the conflict in values (between a feeling of duty both to their 'patrie', and to their family) that either decision will entail. In response to this ethical anguish, Marc-André (*RR*) consequently despairs at how he is 'double et pourtant le même' (*RR*,

p. 80) – an emotional outburst which Marcel himself echoes when he writes:

Nous vivons hélas! dans un monde de plus en plus coupé en deux [...]. Les positions intermédiaires, [...] tendent de plus en plus à disparaître et ceux qui veulent à tout prix les maintenir [sont] condamnés à être pris dans cette sorte d'étau.

(RR, pp. 162-3)

The ethical is presented using similar conflict in Sartre's theatre. Heinrich (DBD), who is in possession of the key to an underground passage leading into the town of Worms, must decide whether to safeguard the key and allow the peasants to massacre the clergy in revolt, or give the key to Goetz, whose entrance into the town will entail the massacre of the peasants. And Frantz (SA) is forced to choose between two principles which circumstance renders incompatible – his own moral feelings regarding his father's involvement with the Nazis, and love for his father along with familial respect for his authority. Furthermore, not only does Sartre embrace contradiction in the structure and characterization of his plays; Sartre's relationship to the theatrical medium itself is also paradoxical, wanting his theatre to be one of both distance and of *participation*.<sup>17</sup> The element of *participation* was important in order for the audience to be able to identify with the action and for the play to speak to them on some level; yet a certain element of distance was also necessary so that a play was not taken too literally and its message objectified. However, the financial viability of a play – and hence its existence altogether – rested on its acceptance both by a producer and the public themselves, thereby entailing a certain loss of control over its presentation, which is then further magnified by subsequent reproductions of the play. As Sartre regrets: 'le théâtre est tellement la *chose publique*, la *chose du public* [...]. Mes pièces [...] m'ont presque toutes échappé. Elles deviennent des *objets*' (TS, p. 101).

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<sup>17</sup> 'J'aimerais que le public voie, du dehors, notre siècle, chose étrangère, en témoin. Et qu'en même temps, il participe, puisqu'il fait ce siècle' (TS, p. 112).

Ireland views Sartre's ambiguous relationship with theatre very negatively, arguing that 'le théâtre figure un microcosme où se trouvent condensés et intensifiés les divers éléments du problème obsédant pour Sartre de l'écriture et de l'engagement'.<sup>18</sup> 'Sartre veut que le théâtre, en posant des problèmes politiques actuels, parvienne à rendre aux mots un pouvoir *effectif* [et ...] les débarrasser de leur dimension imaginaire'.<sup>19</sup> However, Ireland attributes the failure of Sartre's plays to significantly further his political activism – indeed, many were misunderstood – to Sartre's inability to dissociate himself from *l'écrit*, thus rendering his theatre the representation of '[une] confusion idéologique'<sup>20</sup> because of the fundamental incompatibility between *les mots* and *l'engagement*.<sup>21</sup> So although Camus has been criticized for his failure to present us with true contradictions, Ireland's analysis now causes us to question whether the presence of the paradoxical is any more desirable, for Ireland's suggestion is that ambiguity in Sartre's theatre might only be indicative of Sartre's own unresolved struggle concerning *ce qu'il faut faire*.

As regards Marcel, the paradoxes his plays present us with (which tend to be predominantly psychological in nature) curiously seem to shift, so that a character who appears to be very complex in certain respects may also appear very rigid in a different situation. Sylvie (*E*), for example, is initially presented as quite a wise and understanding character, who has an open mind. However, when Antoine comes to pick her up for an arranged visit to see his uncle, she suddenly, and rather surprisingly, becomes very difficult, insisting that he cancel the arrangement at the last minute for no apparent reason. Although confrontations and conflicts both within and between

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<sup>18</sup> John Ireland, *Sartre: un art déloyal, théâtralité et engagement* (Paris : Jean-Michel Place, 1994), p. 40.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14.

characters raise *questions* about the ethical status of actions, for Marcel, no character is beyond blame, nor can any be completely condemned. Marcel's deliberate refusal to objectify seems to have gone to the extreme, so that we are made to feel that he ought to have offered some form of judgement – at least of his most negative characters such as Pauline (SC) and Renée (RR). One is thus left wondering what ethical message Marcel offers at all, and whether Marcel's moral position might in fact stem from a more personal ethical *angoisse*, which his principle of anti-dogmatism then attempts to alleviate.<sup>22</sup> So the ethical thought in the theatre of *all three* Existentialist philosophers seems open to the charge of subjectivism, which would therefore make it of little use as a general approach to ethics.

Not only is the subjectivism of the playwrights problematic regarding the ethical discourse of Existentialist theatre; the subjectivism of the audience is also of concern. Although Marcel may not wish for characters such as Pauline and Renée to be objectively condemned, how the audience respond to such characters is not something which can be controlled. Thus the creation of an Existentialist ethical discourse is significantly complexified by the theatrical medium itself. At the end of Section 1 it was suggested that theatre might be particularly complementary to Existentialist ethical thought; but if all three philosophers' conception of moral authenticity is (at least in theory) opposed to objectification, the spectatorship imposed on the audience by theatre's inherent distance raises the question as to whether theatre is consistent with Existentialist ethical thought at all. Indeed, as mentioned in Section 1, their plays were not always received as intended: Marcel had to speak out in defence of *Rome n'est plus dans Rome*, and *Le Signe de la croix* was so controversial that it could not actually be staged; Camus also felt the need to defend *Le Malentendu*

<sup>22</sup> Lazon is of a similar opinion: 'Gabriel Marcel has brought to his theatre his own anxiety' (Lazon, p. 32).

against charges of pessimism; and Sartre's plays have caused much controversy – *Huis clos* in particular, as will later be discussed. Do such examples of objectification on the part of the audience not therefore suggest the theatre to be a rather *inappropriate* medium for voicing Existentialist ethical thought?

McCall identifies a tension between theatrical form and Existentialist ethical thought in relation to Goetz's final 'conversion' in *Le Diable et le bon dieu*. Although the ending seems to be one of optimism, McCall observes an underlying negativity with respect to the grandiose language of Goetz-the-converted, which she argues does not actually register his conversion: 'Goetz's rhetoric indicates that he is still performing for an audience'.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Goetz seems to dismiss his former actions a little too readily in his newly 'converted' state, the wisdom of which he almost boasts. Goetz still appears to be acting *pour-autrui*, so that it is not evident that his project has fundamentally changed at all. The protagonists in all three of Sartre's plays (Garcin, Goetz, Frantz) all undergo some kind of conversion, but Goetz's conversion is the only one for which the timing is not obviously too late. However, it now seems that if Goetz is any kind of hero, it is only in the theatrical, role-playing sense. The question we are then left with is on how many levels Goetz's role play operates. Are the members of the audience merely spectators to a rhetoric which is in keeping with the theatrical genre, or does Goetz's role play extend beyond his character on stage to the authentic character that Sartre was attempting to represent? If the latter were the case, Sartre would be no more successful than Camus, as he himself would contribute an additional dimension to the spectatorship of his theatre: not only would the play's theatrical form

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<sup>23</sup> McCall, p. 41. Howells argues similarly: 'even Goetz's eventual conversion from pride to modesty is transformed by the dramatic process into a rhetorical heroics of modesty' (Howells (1988), p. 76).



present the audience with an *objectifiable* Goetz; Sartre would be writing an *objectified* Goetz, thus contradicting his own Existentialist principles.

Marcel has condemned Sartre's philosophy in general for being essentially the philosophy of a spectator. For Marcel, to subscribe to the dualistic opposition between subject and object as he accused Sartre of doing – most notably in *L'Être et le néant* when Sartre discusses *le regard* and relations with the Other – is one of 'les plus grands erreurs dont aucune métaphysique se soit rendue coupable' (*EA*, p. 26). Marcel argues that this Cartesian outlook breeds subjectivism in taking the 'I' (or the 'eye') as its first point of reference, whereas true contact with the real involves *participation*. For Marcel, reality is not an object I can behold from the outside, but rather something in which I, and others, are completely embedded, and so by nature distinctly '*non-optique, non-spectaculaire*' (*ME II*, p. 18; my emphasis). It is this state of 'incarnation' that we must recognize if we are to appreciate what it is to *be* in any authentic sense,<sup>24</sup> as opposed to the inauthentic "'oubli de l'être", oubli donc de fraternité', as Parain-Vial puts it,<sup>25</sup> which the spectator's perspective propagates. Marcel writes in *Être et avoir*:

Si j'admets que les autres ne sont que *ma pensée des autres*, mon idée des autres, il devient absolument impossible de briser un cercle qu'on a commencé par tracer autour de soi – si l'on pose le primat du sujet-objet – de la catégorie du sujet-objet – l'existence des autres devient impensable.

(*EA*, p. 74)

One could even go as far as to say that in Marcel's view, *je pense, donc je ne suis pas*: whereas Sartre and Camus use 'être' in quite an everyday sense, built in to Marcel's conception of *être* is a rejection of the distance and objectifying judgement of individual reflection so that it already implies

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<sup>24</sup> 'La réalité que le cogito révèle [...] est d'un ordre tout différent de l'existence dont nous tentons ici [...] de reconnaître' (*JM*, p. 315).

<sup>25</sup> Jeanne Parain-Vial, *Gabriel Marcel et les niveaux de l'expérience* (Paris : Seghers, 1966), p. 72.

a *disponibilité* towards others, which recognizes them as subjects rather than objects.<sup>26</sup>

Marcel does not only object to the way in which Sartre's philosophical dualism forces a spectator's perspective with respect to the Other; further still, Sartre's objectifying *regard* excludes the possibility of knowing the Other as *toi*, due to the pessimistic way in which it defines human relations. Marcel sees Sartre's use of 'être' as degrading; for Marcel, *être* involves living the full potential of existence, unlike *faire*, which is the superficial, automaton-like performance of the functional. For Sartre however, *être* often refers to the stagnant, inactive occupation of the *en-soi*, in contrast to *faire*, which involves the active, engaged use of freedom by the *pour-soi*. Marcel's outrage at Sartre's failure to acknowledge the positive potential of *être* is illustrated particularly well in his fierce criticism of *Huis clos*:

Ce nihilisme moral est à mon avis tout à fait apparent dans *Huis clos*; il me paraît évident que l'auteur, en mettant exclusivement l'accent sur la dépendance de l'individu par rapport au regard et au jugement d'autrui, escamote systématiquement le 'nous' véritable qui est celui de l'amour ou de l'amitié.<sup>27</sup>

For Marcel, this play is a schematic representation of the spectatorship he attributes to *L'Être et le néant's* claim that:

nous [autrui et moi] ne pouvons jamais nous placer concrètement sur un plan d'égalité, c'est-à-dire sur le plan où la reconnaissance de la liberté d'autrui entraînerait la reconnaissance par autrui de notre liberté. Autrui est par principe l'insaisissable: il me fuit quand je le cherche et me possède quand je le fuis.

(*EN*, p. 449)

Inès' desire for Estelle cannot be satisfied as it was with Florence, for Estelle only seeks self-confirmation in the eyes of men, and so desperately hankers after Garcin's recognition of her femininity. Garcin, however, is

<sup>26</sup> 'Une fiction [...] prend naissance dans l'acte arbitraire par lequel la pensée prétend transformer en affirmation d'objet ce qui est une connaissance immédiate et une participation' (*JM*, p. 315).

<sup>27</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Théâtre et religion* (Lyon : Vitte, 1958), p. 47.

obsessed with coming to terms with his cowardice and, already semi-aware of the truth, can only receive the reassurance he needs from Inès, in whom he detects the ability to see things for what they are. But Inès, bitter that Estelle has eyes only for Garcin, also takes sadistic pleasure from Garcin's suffering and will never tell Garcin what he wants to hear. And so the cycle begins again. Thus for Marcel, *Huis clos* illustrates that 'le conflit est le sens originel de l'être-pour-autrui' (EN, p. 404), and this vicious circularity of relations traps each character in their inauthenticity without hope of escape, reinforcing ontological inauthenticity, or *indisponibilité*.

In Cooney's opinion, 'Marcel's warning and reaction against optical or spectacular thinking forms the vehicle through which his philosophy can best be understood'.<sup>28</sup> Such an approach then becomes all the more illuminating when applied to Marcel's theatre: not only was Marcel determined that his own philosophy would not display such objectifying spectatorship; he was equally determined that his plays would not permit passive spectatorship on the part of the audience. Indeed, Marcel saw it as the fundamental duty of a dramatist to present a range of different perspectives and *situations* within the unified whole of a single play, thereby putting the true dramatist at odds with a moralizing discourse.

Marcel consequently writes of Camus:

[Camus] ne me semble pas authentiquement dramaturge, je ne vois pas qu'il ait évité nulle part l'écueil de la pièce à thèse; je ne trouve pas chez lui ce respect absolu de ses personnages et de leur liberté qui doit apposer son sceau à une œuvre dramatique.

(RR, p. 151)

With such conscious awareness of the problems of spectatorship when dealing with ethics, one might expect Marcel's theatre to be more successful than that of Camus or Sartre; but as has already been observed, even if the ethical message Marcel has written into his theatre escapes

<sup>28</sup> William Cooney (ed.), *Contributions of Gabriel Marcel to Philosophy: A Collection of Essays* (Lewiston, NY : Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), p. iii.

spectatorship, his plays have nevertheless still fallen prey to problems associated with the audience's response.

It must also be said that Marcel himself occasionally 'spectates' and objectifies. For example, although Marcel refuses to officially condemn *Renée* (*RR*) within the play itself, in his 1951 lecture Marcel refers to her as 'l'odieuse Renée' (*RR*, p. 154), which would imply that he does actually judge her. Similarly, Marcel declares that he does not wish his philosophy to presuppose a religious outlook, pronouncing that his position 'n'entraîne [...] aucunement l'adhésion à une religion déterminée'.<sup>29</sup> He also states that he has no wish for his thought to be defined as essentially distinct from Sartre's atheistic Existentialism: 'il ne me serait jamais venu à l'idée de doctrinaliser, si j'ose dire, l'opposition qui pouvait exister entre Sartre et moi'.<sup>30</sup> Yet in response to *Huis clos*, Marcel writes: 'Nulle part [...] n'apparaît plus nettement l'incompatibilité radicale entre la position de Sartre et de ses disciples [...] et une métaphysique ou une éthique chrétienne quelle qu'elle soit';<sup>31</sup> and in reference to *Le Diable et le bon dieu*'s 'proof' of atheism, he talks of the play's 'caractère blasphématoire', which is 'proprement odieux'.<sup>32</sup> So despite his claims otherwise, Marcel does appear to view this religious distinction as a fundamental opposition between his position and Sartre's. It is as if, in the heat of the moment, Marcel's concentration has lapsed, and a partiality masked by his usual extreme tolerance is able to speak through.

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<sup>29</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Positions et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique* (hereafter *PA*), 2<sup>e</sup> ed. (Paris : Louvain, 1967), p. 91.

<sup>30</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *L'Existence et la liberté humaine chez Jean-Paul Sartre* (hereafter *EL*), (Paris : Vrin, 1981), p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *L'Heure théâtrale* (Paris : Plon, 1959), pp. 190-1.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 214. Although Marcel did not address Camus' thought so directly, one can assume that the ending of *Le Malentendu* and Kaliayev's exclamation that 'Dieu ne peut rien' (*LJ*, p. 102) in *Les Justes* (to cite but a few examples) would incite a comparable response.

Although the theatrical works of all three Existentialists seem to suggest that there are certain moral limits - *tout n'est pas permis* - it has been noted that all three argue very strongly against objectifying values, so that identifying where these ethical limits might lie becomes extremely problematic. A pronounced moral pessimism emerges in Section 1, for the dramatic works of all three seemed to present humans in a helplessly exiled state. Marcel's philosophical writings put great emphasis on hope, however, this optimism is not expressed in his plays. Instead, the message in Marcel's theatre appears to be one of resignation to the overwhelming presence of suffering and moral anguish that he sees in humans, where the only possibility of hope emanates from *un autre royaume*. Similarly, the life-affirming aspects of Camus' philosophy, which also appear in his prose, do not shine through in his theatre. In *Le Malentendu*, not even the pride that Camus attributed to Sisyphus is present, so that its message can express nothing other than despair in the face of absurdity. Camus' later works then portray violence and suffering as inevitable regardless of efforts made to combat this reality. Finally, with respect to Sartre, if the optimism that *Le Diable et le bon dieu's* ending might propose has been challenged by McCall, it is destroyed altogether by *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* which, according to Contat and Rybalka, 'représente le moment le plus pessimiste, le plus sombre, de toute l'œuvre de Sartre'.<sup>33</sup> Thus the theatre of all three seems unable to offer any hope that the unethical acts with which we *feel* we are being presented can ever be justifiably condemned in the name of an ethical outlook.

Furthermore, while all three thinkers seem to share a similar philosophical vocabulary, this often conceals quite different philosophical positions. Firstly, there is the religious division between Sartre's and Camus' atheism

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<sup>33</sup> Contat and Rybalka, p. 325.

and Marcel's Christian Existentialism: despite Marcel's insistence that his philosophy does not presuppose a religious outlook, the ethical discourse in all three of Marcel's plays seems to be inextricably linked to an argument for a role for faith. In addition, the discussion concerning his reactions to *Huis clos* and *Le Diable et le bon dieu* revealed an extreme discomfort with Sartre's atheism.

Secondly, not all are in agreement over the origin of moral values: whilst Marcel and Camus both believe that values are innate, Sartre denies that there is any human nature at all. The difference between Sartre's and Marcel's position is indicated particularly clearly by their different uses of 'reconnaître'. In *L'Être et le néant* Sartre writes:

La valeur tire son être de son exigence et non son exigence de son être. Elle ne se livre donc pas à une intuition contemplative qui la saisirait comme *étant* valeur [...]; elle ne peut se dévoiler, au contraire, qu'à une liberté active qui la fait exister comme valeur du seul fait de la reconnaître pour telle.

(*EN*, p. 73)

Contrast this with Marcel's account of the origin of values:

En réalité, si je m'interroge sincèrement et sans me référer à une philosophie préconçue, je m'apparais non pas du tout comme choisissant mes valeurs, mais comme les *reconnaissant* [...].

(*EL*, p. 86)

Marcel's understanding of *reconnaître* is clearly not the meaning Sartre has in mind. And as has also been noted in this section, Sartre's and Marcel's understanding of *faire* and *être* seem equally at odds.

With respect to Sartre and Camus, Royle also observes 'basic disagreements often masked by an overlapping of subjects of concern, similarities of climate and vocabulary'.<sup>34</sup> For example, the revolutionary message at the end of *Le Diable et le bon dieu* portrays violence as necessary. Additional support can also be drawn from the *Cité du Soleil*

<sup>34</sup> Peter Royle, *The Sartre-Camus Controversy: A Literary and Philosophical Critique* (Ottawa, Canada : University of Ottawa Press, 1982), p. 1.

massacre, which presents the citizens' attempt to maintain the moral high ground in practicing non-violence as supremely naïve. Camus, on the other hand, remains convinced that no human ever has the right to take the life of another, arguing that in order for Kaliayev's assassination to be genuinely 'juste', Kaliayev must sacrifice his own life in order to demonstrate that he recognizes life's value. In fact, this difference in position regarding the status of violence was so deep-set that it was responsible for creating an irreparable rift between Sartre and Camus; after 1952 they never spoke again.<sup>35</sup>

Not only do intra-Existentialist tensions seem to undermine Existentialism as a coherent approach to ethics; these *inter*-Existentialist tensions then raise the question as to whether it is even meaningful to speak of 'Existentialist' ethical thought. In addition, it has been suggested that the various forms of spectatorship which may be associated with the theatrical medium (regarding the audience and the action, the playwrights or producers and the plays, or even theatrical rhetoric and the characters themselves) are fundamentally inconsistent with Existentialist ethical thought: conflict is not merely presented *on* the stage, in the ethical discourses which emanate from the plays; it also occurs *with* the stage, where the Existentialist opposition to objectification clashes with the differing kinds of spectatorship that theatre seems to encourage. How, therefore, can Existentialist thought, and especially Existentialist thought in the *theatre*, make any valuable contribution to ethics?

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<sup>35</sup> Aronson's recent publication, *Camus and Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel that Ended It* (2004) gives an excellent account of the quarrel. Santoni also discusses Sartre's and Camus' dispute in the second part of his *Sartre on Violence, Curiously Ambivalent* (2003), and Royle takes a literary approach in his study of the controversy (1982). See bibliography for full details.

## 2.2 In Defence of Conflict and the Stage

In Section 2.1 Existentialist ethical thought was portrayed as deeply problematic, not only in terms of the philosophical inconsistency and subjectivism of its phenomenological approach, but also due to conflict between the positions of these three Existentialist thinkers themselves. That such differences exist is no great revelation in itself; yet what *is* puzzling is the fact that Marcel, Camus, and Sartre have been and are still all referred to as Existentialists, despite what seems like a considerable set of *disagreements*. Characterizing their philosophies as 'Existentialist' would surely lead us to expect some common denominator to unite their thought. Is this purely the aforementioned phenomenological approach, whereby all three give primacy to existence and its experience in their philosophical reflection? Or can they be said to agree on something more substantial, which might allow us to refer to their ethical concerns as 'Existentialist' in a more significant way?

Section 2.1 did detect a common opposition to objectification in the philosophies of all three, identifying the process of objectification with the spectator's perspective. However, Section 2.1 also suggested that, in some way or another, all three thinkers failed to consistently uphold this opposition to spectatorship. In addition, the spectatorship necessitated by theatre itself, encouraging the audience, the producer, or even the playwright to label the message of the plays, seemed to undermine the theatre entirely as a vehicle of expression for Existentialist ethical thought; spectatorship appeared inescapable, and doubly so when their thought was translated into theatrical form. And yet the ethical thought of Marcel, Camus, and Sartre is an undeniable driving force behind the dramatic works they produced. Is their choice of theatre as inconsistent as Section



2.1 implied? Can the ethical discourses in their plays be defended? These are the questions that Section 2.2 will explore.

Section 2.1 presented the ethical thought in Camus' theatre as the most problematic, failing to provide a coherent discourse on ethics because of an omnipresent idealism. Indeed, unlike in the plays of Marcel or Sartre, whose characters present moral decisions as wrought with tension, the confrontations with which we are confronted in Camus' theatre seem to be false oppositions: Maria's lack of integration into *Le Malentendu's* plot prevents her from representing a genuine challenge to Jan and his 'devoir'; Victoria and the women in the chorus do not offer an effective counter position to Diego in *L'Etat de siège* as their ideals lack substance, and so cannot outweigh the 'heroics' of the protagonist; and the bias towards Kaliayev and his ideals in *Les Justes* makes it difficult to see any other character as offering a legitimate, alternative position.<sup>36</sup> Camus defined theatre as 'la réalisation collective de la pensée d'un seul' (*Ess*, p. 1405), and this certainly seems to be the case as far as his dramatic works are concerned. Margerrison writes: 'the major challenge Camus faced as a playwright [...] lay in putting himself in the place of others to bring opposing views to life'.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the only life which seems to be on the stage is his own, thus prompting Freeman to criticize *Les Justes* for 'not weight[ing] circumstances heavily enough against Kaliayev', and allowing Kaliayev 'to be [the hero] Camus obviously believed him to be in real life'.<sup>38</sup> Whilst Sartre and Marcel tried to reduce the spectatorship encouraged by theatre by creating a theatre of *participation*, Camus only seems to reinforce it. This didacticism is then bolstered further by Camus' anxious endeavours to clarify the meaning of his plays – the optimism of *Le*

<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Kaliayev's main opposition, Stepan, later admits to having wrongly judged Kaliayev (*LJ*, p. 89).

<sup>37</sup> Hughes, p. 68.

<sup>38</sup> Freeman, p. 115.

*Malentendu* for example. As Margerrison notes, Camus 'was quick to correct what he perceived as misinterpretations of his work, or to insist on what he had "really" meant'.<sup>39</sup>

However, although the ethical message in Camus' theatre may appear one-dimensional and unambiguous, in his theoretical writings there is evidence to show that he too argues for the paradoxical nature of morals. In a 1943 letter Camus wrote that the human experience of values is inevitably one of contradiction: 'L'effort de la pensée absurde [...], c'est l'expulsion de tous les jugements de valeur [...]. Or, nous savons, vous et moi, qu'il y a des jugements de valeur inévitables' (*Ess*, p. 1423). And as he argues that 'aucune morale, ni aucun effort ne sont *a priori* justifiables' (*MS*, p. 32), there are bound to be occasions when these value judgements, which we cannot help but make, come into conflict with each other, thus rendering moral principles forcibly ambiguous.<sup>40</sup> As regards tragedy, the genre of which all his plays were intended to be a modern example, Camus also wrote: 'les forces qui s'affrontent dans la tragédie sont également légitimes, également armées en raison. [...] Autrement dit, la tragédie est ambiguë' (*TRN*, p. 1705). Significantly, in the first draft of *Le Malentendu* Maria had even less of a presence. Camus then developed her character in order to give her role greater weight and philosophical depth; only he does not appear to have succeeded.<sup>41</sup> In *theory* therefore, Camus seems to share a similar position to Marcel and Sartre, but his discourse highlighting contradiction and paradox is obscured in the dramatization of his thought. This therefore suggests that the principal difficulty lies not so much in a

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<sup>39</sup> Hughes, p. 69.

<sup>40</sup> 'Si j'essaie de saisir ce dont je m'assure, si j'essaie de le définir et de le résumer, il n'est plus qu'une eau qui coule entre mes doigts' (*MS*, p. 36).

<sup>41</sup> See Freeman (pp. 67-8), and Margerrison (Hughes, p. 70).

fundamental disagreement between Camus, Sartre and Marcel, but more with Camus' theatrical method.<sup>42</sup>

Closer examination of Camus' plays does in fact reveal instances of genuine confrontation, the best example of which being perhaps the prison conversation between Skouratov and Kaliayev in *Les Justes*. In this scene Skouratov offers Kaliayev the chance to escape his death sentence if he agrees to repent, encouraging him to choose life 'pour réparer' (*LJ*, p. 111). Skouratov makes reference to Kaliayev's 'assassinat', which Kaliayev cannot bear: 'Je vous interdis d'employer ce mot'. Kaliayev then 'justifies' himself in response to this accusation of murder with the stubborn, childish insistence that 'Je rectifie' (*LJ*, p. 108). Kaliayev tries to maintain that 'J'ai lancé la bombe sur votre tyrannie, non sur un homme...'; 'Sans doute,' replies Skouratov, 'Mais c'est l'homme qui l'a reçue'. Regardless of the way in which Kaliayev chooses to refer to his act, 'il y a eu mort d'homme' (*LJ*, p. 109), and Skouratov's concerns are with individual people, not ideas.

Although Skouratov's role is one of temptation in a way similar to that of La Peste at the end of *L'Etat de siège*, whereas La Peste's offer was not difficult for Diego to reject (La Peste causes nothing but suffering in the town, thus giving him an unequivocally 'evil' status), Skouratov is harder to dismiss. In this scene Kaliayev, who has previously been very convincing in his arguments, loses all power of persuasion in his attempts to defend his position against Skouratov; he can offer no real grounding for the principles he is adamant to uphold, thereby seriously undermining his conception of justice. However, the final moments of the play return us to Dora who re-affirms Kaliayev's heroism, removing any emphasis on this questioning of Kaliayev's ideals as a result. The overriding dramatic bias

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<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Camus' theatre is widely seen as a failure (see Gay-Crosier, for example), with criticism focusing primarily on his dramatic technique (e.g. Cruickshank, Freeman).

towards Kaliayev's perspective similarly prevents the complexities raised by Dora (her suggestion that the group's 'révolution pour la vie' is paradoxical; her problematization of the 'love' motivating the group's actions) from being of much consequence. Nevertheless, these scenes provide evidence to show that the ethical discourse in Camus' theatre is not as one-dimensional as it may first appear. As far as the audience is concerned, 'les forces qui s'affrontent' in his plays do not appear 'légitimes'; if they did, and other characters were allowed to speak out more, Camus' ethical discourse would not seem quite so distinct from Sartre's or Marcel's.<sup>43</sup>

A refusal to allow any one character to be dominant is clearly communicated by Marcel's emphasis on symphonic expression, where a play's message is composed by the whole *ensemble* of characters. But Camus (again, in his theoretical writings) also argued that his position was not reducible to the voice of one particular character. In his *Essais critiques* he states: 'Sans doute, un romancier se traduit et se trahit dans tous ses personnages en même temps: chacun représente une de ses tendances ou de ses tentations' (*Ess*, p. 1143). This idea of *trahir* is common to Camus, Marcel, and Sartre, all three arguing for the impossibility of objectivity when it comes to trying to describe human experience. Nevertheless, it is human to be tempted by objectivity. For Sartre, the need to attribute some graspable meaning to existence is the immediate response to contingency and the *angoisse* which it incites; and in *Etre et avoir* Marcel declares:

Ce n'est pas assez de dire que nous vivons dans un monde où la trahison est possible à tout moment et sous toutes les formes [...];

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<sup>43</sup> This is not to say that Camus' theory always presents us with true paradoxes. Indeed, there are many instances where phrases whose syntax implies the paradoxical do not express true contradictions, e.g. 'L'explication est vaine, mais la sensation reste' (*MS*, p. 131); 'L'existence est mensongère et elle est éternelle' (*MS*, p. 152). However, the discursive nature of Camus' theory means that its message is not dominated by the same dogmatism as his theatre.

cette trahison, il semble que la structure même de notre monde nous la recommande.

(EA, p. 68)

As Sartre says, 'il est dangereusement facile de parler trop vite de valeurs éternelles',<sup>44</sup> and Camus expresses the same in *L'Envers et l'endroit* when he confesses: 'A cette extrême pointe de l'extrême conscience, tout se rejoignait et ma vie m'apparaissait comme un bloc à rejeter ou à recevoir. J'avais besoin d'une grandeur' (*Ess*, p. 39). This 'grandeur' is what seems to be expressed by the leading protagonists in his plays; indeed, it seems precisely *because* of Camus' underlying recognition of the paradoxical that he shies away from contradictions. Scenes such as the prison conversation between Kaliayev and Skouratov are thus not given the weight which they are due; the play has to end with some form of resolution.<sup>45</sup> 'Cette nostalgie d'unité, cet appétit d'absolu illustre le mouvement essentiel du drame humain' (*MS*, p. 34), writes Camus. The ethical thought in Camus' theatre can therefore be interpreted as a literal manifestation of this 'drame humain', the drama on the stage being illustrative of Camus' inner *drame* as he struggles (unsuccessfully) to fight this human desire for clarity.

This global form of interpretation actually seems a more appropriate approach to understanding Existentialist ethical thought, as it remains faithful to the three thinkers' *critique* of objective principles. Furthermore, this form of 'réflexion récupératrice' can be likened to the Marcellian notion of secondary reflection,<sup>46</sup> and is also in line with the way in which Verstraeten analyses Sartre's *morale*:

si le sartrisme se veut essentiellement une leçon d'existence, il importe, peut-être aujourd'hui, plutôt que d'en server à titre de

<sup>44</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* ([Paris] : Gallimard, 1948), p. 87.

<sup>45</sup> In this sense, *Le Malentendu* is Camus' strongest play, for no such resolution is offered at the end.

<sup>46</sup> 'La réflexion seconde est essentiellement récupératrice, elle est une reconquête' (Gabriel Marcel, *Le Mystère de l'Être I* (Paris : Aubier-Montaigne, 1951), p. 98).

précepte, de nous en distancier [...], d'en trahir l'exigence pratique par un recours réflexif [...], et ainsi peut-être en assurer une pénétration [...].

(Verstraeten, pp. 7-8)

Verstraeten analyses Sartre's theatrical *œuvre* in terms of two stages, which progressively develop an argument for the dialectical nature of ethics. The first stage begins to question the universality of moral values, constituting 'une *dialectique critique* contestant l'attitude éthique'.<sup>47</sup> Verstraeten then argues for the necessity of 'une *critique de la dialectique*': 'Il ne suffit pas en effet d'opposer à la vision éthique l'efficacité de l'attitude dialectique, il faut en assurer la validité pour éviter de la voir glisser dans son antithèse'.<sup>48</sup> The second stage, with which he identifies *Le Diable et le bon dieu* and *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, therefore illustrates how this 'attitude dialectique' must be dialectical in itself. Despite Goetz's insistence that, 'Moi, j'invente', his projects of Good and Evil are actually defined in relation to, and thus dependent upon, pre-existing societal notions of these values. Goetz's acts do not involve any creativity, and he in fact ends up having difficulty distinguishing between 'Good' and 'Evil': 'il faut avoir bonne vue pour distinguer le Bon Dieu du Diable' (*DBD*, p. 224). However, Goetz's last conversion is arguably different because he no longer treats such accepted values as a given; he opts instead to make use of his freedom, and decide what to value by considering the specific requirements of the surrounding situation. The assumed incompatibility of 'Good' and 'Evil' is consequently refuted, thereby allowing for the possibility 'd'être mauvais pour devenir bon' (*DBD*, p. 245). Whereas one might initially be tempted to reject this as a nonsensical contradiction in terms, the purpose of *Le Diable et le bon dieu* is to demonstrate the need to accept the inverse; the true nature of reality is dialectical and situationally dependent,

<sup>47</sup> Verstraeten, p. 71. To this stage Verstraeten assigns *Les Mouches*, *L'Engrenage*, and *Les Mains sales*.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.* Gabriel Marcel was similarly critical of the first part of his *Journal métaphysique*, confessing to Paul Ricoeur that, 'c'est par les moyens mêmes de la dialectique que je m'efforçais très gauchement, me semble-t-il, de me délivrer de la dialectique' (*EPR*, p. 14).

so it is actually these absolute divisions between concepts such as good and evil that are meaningless, not the paradoxical combination of the two.

One might be tempted to see Goetz's existential development as paralleling the Hegelian dialectic, eventually resulting in synthesis with Goetz's final conversion.<sup>49</sup> In one sense, Goetz does seem to have attained a more authentic state of being through his final renunciation of absolutes; but closer inspection reveals evidence in support of a Hegelian synthesis to be rather superficial: the final and allegedly 'authentic' conversion presented in *Le Diable et le bon dieu* is simultaneously undermined – both by Goetz's continuing rhetoric *pour autrui* (as illustrated by McCall's reading of the ending of the play), and also by the wider, unresolved socio-historical situation. *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* then takes one step further, presenting only the *irreconcilability* of a socio-historical dialectic, aiming to express in its entirety 'le sentiment de l'ambiguïté de notre temps. La morale, la politique, plus rien n'est simple' (*TS*, p. 363). The ethical notion of dialectics which emerges is thus Kantian rather than Hegelian - a dialogical oscillation between opposing forces that will never reach absolute synthesis, for the ethical contradictions arise from a use of human reason (which translates experience into the objective and the logical) that extends beyond its limits.<sup>50</sup> As Simont writes: 'there is no total rationality in the world that is not a part of the world, hence that does not fall short of its own totality'.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Bell, for example, holds such a position (see Linda Bell, *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity* (Tuscaloosa : University of Alabama Press, 1989)). Bell's primary example is actually that of Jean Genet in Sartre's *Saint Genet, comédien et martyr* (1952). However, Goetz's development in *Le Diable et le bon dieu* is a widely accepted close parallel to this; indeed, *Le Diable et le bon dieu* can be seen as a literary preface to this subsequent longer, biographical work.

<sup>50</sup> For Kant, his 'transcendental dialectic' is 'a critique of understanding and reason in respect of their hyperphysical employment' (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), e-text based on 1929 Norman Kemp Smith translation, <<http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/~ppp/cpr/toc.html>> [accessed 31 July 2007], pp. 100-1).

<sup>51</sup> Juliette Simont, 'Sartrean ethics', in Christina Howells (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 208.

Sartre's desire to emphasize the ambiguous and the contradictory can be further confirmed by the development of his thought in his theoretical writings. Stone and Bowman view Sartre's unpublished 1964 Rome Lecture notes and 1965 Cornell Lecture notes as preparing the ground for a dialectical ethics. The Rome Lecture notes are more fully argued through than Sartre's *Cahiers pour une morale* (composed 1947-8), making them a more suitable source for gaining an understanding of Sartre's ethical position. Importantly, Sartre is not documented to have made any significant criticism of these writings. Stone and Bowman therefore suggest that the ensemble of Sartre's unpublished writings from this period 'might even be called the missing center of Sartre's project as a philosopher. They were certainly much more satisfactory to him than either his lecture on humanism or the notes he made on ethics after finishing [*L'Être et le néant*]'.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, in a 1978 interview with Sicard, Sartre referred to his *Cahiers pour une morale* as a failed effort:

j'ai essayé après *L'Être et le néant*, en 44, 45, 46... de faire une morale, dans la même direction, avec les mêmes principes originels et pour marquer ce qu'il y avait de proprement moral à la suite de *L'Être et le néant*. J'ai rédigé une dizaine de gros cahiers de notes qui représentent une tentative *manquée* pour une morale.<sup>53</sup>

This would therefore rank these two sets of lecture notes amongst the most important theoretical writings on ethics in Sartre's *œuvre*.

In the second section of his Rome Lecture notes entitled 'Expérience de la morale',<sup>54</sup> Sartre presents a detailed discussion of the phenomenology of ethical norms, attempting to discern the basis for their existence and to understand how they function. In so doing, Sartre identifies 'le paradoxe éthique', which is rooted in the 'two-sidedness' of norms. Stone and

<sup>52</sup> Robert V. Stone and Elizabeth A. Bowman, 'Sartre's *Morality and History*: A First Look at the Notes for the Unpublished 1965 Cornell Lectures', in Ronald Aronson and Adrian Van den Hoven (eds), *Sartre Alive* (Detroit : Wayne State University Press, 1991), p. 56.

<sup>53</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, 'J.-P. Sartre & M. Sicard: Entretien', *Obliques*, 18-19 (1979), p. 14.

<sup>54</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, cited by Bob Stone and Elisabeth Bowman, in Gilbert Hottois (ed.), *Sur les écrits posthumes de Sartre*, Annales de l'Institut de Philosophie et de Sciences morales (Bruxelles : Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1987), p. 11.



Bowman describe how Sartre argues, on the one hand, that 'norms prescribe acts, and hence futures, that are given as unconditionally possible'.<sup>55</sup> In choosing to obey a norm I make myself a subject, this subject being defined (in part) by the future I have created for myself in making this choice. For Sartre, 'this pure future in which I produce myself in interiority is the original and fundamental aspect of the experience of the normative'.<sup>56</sup> However, as Stone and Bowman also explain, 'the *content* of a norm can involve alien, inert elements, such as repetition and social roles',<sup>57</sup> that is, norms often occur in the imperative mode and are adopted accordingly. In this case, upholding a certain norm is not an instance of personal creativity, but instead action under the influence of the practico-inert: 'In obeying such a norm I do not produce *myself*, as a pure future, I repeat the past *praxis* of others'.<sup>58</sup> The fact that action in the name of ethical norms can possess both these aspects is Sartre's ethical paradox.<sup>59</sup>

The value conflicts presented in *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* can be understood as leading directly towards this analysis, as the characters who suffer them are shown to be both products and producers of systems (such as capitalism and Nazism). This is illustrated particularly clearly by the anguish experienced by von Gerlach and Frantz, demonstrating the inadequacy of social imperatives originating from the structural organization of society when it comes to determining ethical conduct. Frantz and von Gerlach represent morality in terms of objective value conflicts, but ethical conflicts cannot be objectified in this way.

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<sup>55</sup> Robert V. Stone and Elizabeth A. Bowman, 'Dialectical Ethics: A First Look at Sartre's Unpublished 1964 Rome Lecture Notes', *Social Text*, no. 13/14 (Winter-Spring, 1986), p. 197.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 197-8.

<sup>59</sup> The ethical paradox is also discussed by Verstraeten and Simont (see Hottois (ed.), (1987)). It is significant that Verstraeten discusses the importance of the paradoxical with respect to Sartre's ethics, given that this dissertation has identified with his interpretative approach to Sartre's philosophy.

Structuralism tends to 'collaps[e] the norm into its imperative aspect',<sup>60</sup> write Stone and Bowman; and this reduction then neglects the other dimension of ethical norms, namely, that conforming to a norm also involves an element of choice.

This is not to say that one can completely escape the practico-inert. Indeed, it is due to the inescapability of its influence that the characters in *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* are described as being 'séquestrés'. Within the circle of the von Gerlach family, the father may seem to pull the strings; but what the play then reveals is how von Gerlach is not the chief puppet master – rather, he is perhaps the greatest *séquestré* of them all, a mere pawn controlled by the ruthless systems which created him. Indeed, the business von Gerlach created himself has come to control him: 'Il y a beau temps que je ne décide plus rien. Je signe le courrier' (SA, p. 22), he confesses. Even after von Gerlach's death, the liberation of the remaining characters is not assured; the influence of these authoritarian systems on von Gerlach has entered the family household, passed on through the father's mimetic rule. There is no clearer example of this ideological infiltration than when the daughter, Leni, takes Frantz's place at the end of the play and locks herself in his room: 'Il faut un séquestré, là-haut. Ce sera moi' (SA, p. 221), she says. Nevertheless, one would be mistaken to conclude that there is no room for the personal creation of one's future or values at all. The reality concerning ethical norms just *is* this paradoxical two-sidedness. One is still 'condemned' to make choices (EH, p. 39), however, instances of personal creativity with respect to moral values are not guaranteed to be applicable beyond the situation in which they were originally made.

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<sup>60</sup> Stone and Bowman (1986), p. 198.

Despite their very different approaches, Sartre and Camus can therefore both be understood as illustrating the dialectical nature of ethics. This then allows a direct parallel to be drawn with Marcel, who argues that 'le point de vue dialectique est le point de vue de l'expérience' (*JM*, p. 144), and who therefore '[s'incline] à concentrer [sa] réflexion sur les anomalies que tout rationalisme escamote' (*JM*, p. x). As suggested by the discourse on the impossibility of absolute judgement in Marcel's plays, concepts such as good and evil are merely the result of an arbitrary dissection of experience, so that it does not actually make sense to talk of anything or anyone as decidedly 'good' or 'evil'. As Marcel writes in his *Journal métaphysique*: '[Le problème] se présente sous la forme d'une question portant sur une relation entre des termes distincts; mais les termes eux-mêmes ne sont distincts que parce que le problème est posé' (*JM*, p. 25). It is therefore wrong to reify these notions and view paradoxes as definitively problematic; instead, the realm of *le problème* must be transcended and the more elusive *mystère* of existence embraced.<sup>61</sup> It is for this reason that Pascal's conversion coincides with the realization that he must accept 'l'insécurité absolue' (*RR*, p. 146).

But what of the problem of pessimism identified in Section 2.1? The above analysis may have helped to elucidate the notion of authenticity, linking it to an acceptance of the dialectical nature of existence; but the question as to the possibility of this authenticity still remains. Indeed, the theatrical works of all three emphasize nothing but the difficulty, if not impossibility, of overthrowing the temptation to objectify. It has been suggested, for example, that *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* succeeds in conveying the true ambiguity of reality; and yet the ending of the play has only ever been regarded as pessimistic. So in this respect, the play is decidedly

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<sup>61</sup> Thus Marcel goes even further than Sartre when arguing for the transcendence of contradiction.

*unambiguous*. If the systems which dominate the actions of the play's characters are, in the end, shown to succeed, how then is the play able to demonstrate the two-sidedness of norms?

It is my belief that there is a further ambiguity which needs to be brought to the fore, specifically in relation to the ending of *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, which uncovers a possibility for optimism and thereby reinstates the dialectical in Sartre's theatre. To view the play's ending as entirely negative rests on an interpretation of the play which centres on Frantz and his father, focusing on their joint suicide and the tragedy of the fact that, for them, this seems the only action open to them. However, this is not how the play ends for all of the characters. Out of the three von Gerlach children, Frantz is clearly the favourite; indeed, the entirety of the play's action is driven by von Gerlach's burning desire to be reunited with his eldest son before he dies. Consequently, Frantz's younger brother Werner is on a continual quest to prove his worth to his father,<sup>62</sup> which causes strain in his relationship with his wife Johanna. But the ending of the play actually marks a liberation with respect to Werner and Johanna, as Werner is released from this need to try and be 'the perfect son' through absolute devotion to his father.<sup>63</sup> Werner and Johanna's situation is not immediately hopeful, as their relationship deteriorates progressively throughout the play. However, the play's ending is nevertheless left open as far as they are concerned, leaving room for speculation about their particular situation and the options available to them. Thus, a possibility for optimism remains. This possibility is reinforced by Sartre's assertion that, 'Quand je parle de l'ambiguïté de notre temps, je veux dire par là que jamais l'homme n'a été aussi prêt qu'aujourd'hui à conquérir sa liberté' – even though 'il se trouve

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<sup>62</sup> Being the only daughter, Leni is not so deprived of her father's attention; whilst von Gerlach is dismissive of Werner altogether, he does have a soft spot for Leni. However, Leni is still in a different 'category' to Frantz in terms of von Gerlach's affections.

<sup>63</sup> 'Père, je vous approuve sans réserve' (SA, p. 55).

en même temps plongé dans les combats les plus graves' (*TS*, p. 366). It is then consolidated all the more by Sartre's declaration that he would have liked to develop the character of Werner further:

J'aurais voulu qu'il représente, jusqu'à la fin la possibilité d'un choix<sup>64</sup> [...]. Sa libération, précisément à cause de la mort de son père et de son frère, lui donne la possibilité de penser sa vie à neuf, même sa vie avec Johanna. C'est ainsi qu'eût été la personnalité de Werner si on m'avait donné cinq heures de représentation.

(*TS*, p. 407)

But even without the additional scenes there is still an element of ambiguity at the end of the play. Werner's and Johanna's undetermined future can then act as a counterbalance to Leni's sequestration, and thus the contrast which the ending sets up between these two different stances can be interpreted as an illustration of Sartre's ethical paradox and the two-sidedness of norms. So not only is it important to pay attention to the multitude of voices in Marcel's and Camus' theatre in order to fully appreciate their philosophical content; the same applies to Sartre's plays as well.

It is for this reason that McCall believes *Huis clos* to be Sartre's theatrical masterpiece: '[*Huis clos*] is the only Sartrean play to contend successfully with the problem of dramatic language',<sup>65</sup> that is, its rhetorical didacticism. *Huis clos*' mastery lies in the impossibility of reducing the play to the perspective of one main character and thus, for McCall, Sartre has succeeded in 'translat[ing] philosophy into dramatic form'.<sup>66</sup> Although Sartre did not state anything directly analogous to Marcel or Camus regarding the importance of *all* characters' positions in his literary works, his success regarding *Huis clos*' dynamic structure can be seen as representative of a similar aim. Sartre's criticism of the omniscient narrator

<sup>64</sup> This 'possibilité d'un choix' is expressed to some extent in the play, such as when Johanna says: 'Werner, le tour est joué. A nous de choisir' (*SA*, p. 34).

<sup>65</sup> McCall, p. 125.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, p. 111.

in Mauriac's works is also indicative of this. Sartre disagreed that there could be any absolute 'truth' concerning a certain succession of events and their significance. However, for Sartre, 'l'introduction de la vérité absolue, ou point de vue de Dieu, dans un roman est une *double* erreur technique':<sup>67</sup> 'un roman est une action racontée de différents points de vue', and so in order to avoid any bias or partiality, 'chacune de ces interprétations doit être en mouvement'.<sup>68</sup>

Section 2.1 described how Marcel attacked Sartre's account of human relations for its representation of an insurmountable gap between the self and others. Sartre's account was a denigration of *être* owing to its refusal to promote the possibility of dialogue between human beings,<sup>69</sup> and for Marcel, intersubjectivity was the true meaning of *être*. However, not only has the possibility for optimism just been demonstrated with respect to human relations in *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*; a similar optimism is also present at the end of *Le Diable et le bon dieu*. Goetz and Hilda become a couple at the end of the play, thereby suggesting that, for Sartre as well as for Marcel, intersubjectivity is pivotal to authenticity and the future possibility of freedom. Both *Le Diable et le bon dieu* and *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* emphasize the individual's need to recognize and communicate with others as a prerequisite for any form of authenticity. Referring to the failure of Goetz's project to do Good, Champigny writes:

Goetz's dialogue with men has proved a failure [...]. Goetz returns to his old ways: a dialogue with God. God is a much more agreeable interlocutor. He remains absent from the stage, and one can make Him say whatever one wishes Him to [...].

(Champigny (1968), p. 121)

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<sup>67</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, 'M. François Mauriac et la liberté', in his *Situations I: essais critiques* ([Paris] : Gallimard, 1947), p. 47; my emphasis.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>69</sup> 'Là où aucune réponse n'est possible, il n'y a place que pour le "lui"' (*JM*, p. 138).

Neither of these alleged 'dialogues' has involved any *real* communication or contact with the world, thereby excluding the possibility of authentic action. Similarly, Frantz's confinement in *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* isolates and cuts him off from reality; he invents creatures (crabs) in his mind, to whom he justifies himself, highlighting his need for others while at the same time, as McCall notes, the inhumanity of his self in this sequestered state, as pointed to by the crabs' inhuman form.<sup>70</sup>

To view Sartre's position on human relations as diametrically opposed to that of Marcel because of its 'spectatorship' is therefore a rather superficial judgement, which rests on a very literal interpretation of the Sartrean analysis of *le regard*, and of the chapter on 'les relations concrètes avec autrui' in *L'Être et le néant*. The same can be said regarding the criticism that has been directed at *Huis clos*, in response to which Sartre felt that he had been grossly misunderstood:

Les gens ont d'ailleurs très mal compris ce que j'avais voulu dire, car on s'est surtout gravé dans la mémoire que 'l'enfer, c'est les autres' – ce qui voudrait dire que nous devons passer notre temps à être chacun le bourreau de l'autre. Ce n'est pourtant pas du tout ce que j'ai voulu dire.

(TS, p. 405)

As Jeanson emphasizes, the 'situation *morte*' of the characters must not be ignored.<sup>71</sup> Jeanson explains: 'le fait d'«être morts», d'être «en enfer», sont directement applicables à cette *mort vivante* à quoi se condamnent les hommes lorsqu'ils renient leur propre liberté et s'efforcent de nier celle de leurs semblables'.<sup>72</sup> But this is not to say that other kinds of human relations are impossible. The play is only an analysis of the *potential* for conflict, given the human need for objectification and the first-person perspective that constitutes our most immediate view of the world, which

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<sup>70</sup> McCall, p. 143.

<sup>71</sup> Jeanson (1955), p. 27.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, p. 26.

can make the self feel like an isolated reality; *Huis clos* is *not* a description of a universal, eternal human condition.

In fact, Sartre's position in *L'Être et le néant* seems to be rather misunderstood in general. In *Cahiers pour une morale* Sartre writes: 'Ils me disent: [...] *L'Être et le néant* est une ontologie d'avant la conversion',<sup>73</sup> and indeed, there are many instances where *L'Être et le néant* is referred to as if it were a complete ontology which Sartre later overthrows. Champigny, for example, overly rigidifies Sartre's moral thought in *L'Être et le néant* when he refers to 'the failure of [*L'Être et le néant*'s] ontology [in general] to provide us with a valid concept of morals';<sup>74</sup> in a recent article Jones questions whether later discussions of human relations, such as those in *Cahiers pour une morale*, are 'compatible' with Sartre's earlier account in *L'Être et le néant*;<sup>75</sup> and Zheng's analysis of Anderson's *Sartre's Two Ethics* describes Anderson as arguing that *L'Être et le néant*'s entire ontology is to be rejected in authenticity.<sup>76</sup> In my opinion however, this was not Anderson's position. Anderson's principal aim was to trace Sartre's ethical thought as it was formed and reformed over his lifetime, and to understand the reasons behind its evolution so that his moral philosophy might be understood in terms of a coherent *progression*.<sup>77</sup>

Zheng's criticism mistakenly targets Anderson's analysis of *L'Être et le néant*'s conception of authenticity; what his argument really reveals is the

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<sup>73</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Cahiers pour une morale* (hereafter *CPM*), (Paris : Gallimard, 1983 [composed: 1947-8]), p. 13.

<sup>74</sup> Champigny (1968), p. 9.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas Jones, 'Useless Passions?', in Giles, James (ed.), *French Existentialism: Consciousness, Ethics and Relations with Others* (Amsterdam : Rodopi, 1999), p. 175.

<sup>76</sup> Yiwei Zheng, 'Sartre on authenticity (1)', *Sartre Studies International*, VIII, no. 2 (December, 2002), accessed online, <[http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary\\_0286-10060326\\_ITM](http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-10060326_ITM)> [accessed 30 November 2006]

<sup>77</sup> Indeed, in his book Anderson continues to note continuity in Sartre's later works with *L'Être et le néant*. For example: 'it is important to note that in the area of human relationships the *Critique* remains in some important respects within the parameters of *Being and Nothingness*' (Anderson, p. 102).



unsatisfactory nature of *Sartre's* notion of authenticity at this time. But Sartre by no means declared *L'Être et le néant's* analysis to be complete, and as was mentioned in Section 1, Sartre himself later declared that he was not content with the analysis it gave. Yet, even at the time Sartre recognized the need for further development – particularly with respect to ethics. Noting that the emphasis in *L'Être et le néant* was on conflict and inauthenticity, Sartre consequently announced that another work would be needed in order to address all the questions which arose regarding the nature of authenticity.<sup>78</sup> Sartre's later ethical discussions should therefore be understood as a response to, and projections *beyond* his early work; *L'Être et le néant* 'laisse entrevoir [...] ce que sera une éthique qui prendra ses responsabilités en face d'une *réalité-humaine en situation*' (*EN*, pp. 673-4; first italics my emphasis), but this situating of the individual had yet to be fully developed.

Marcel was right to argue that the ego and its spectator's view was an obstacle to authentic action but, as has just been demonstrated, this is precisely what Sartre himself argued. It must also be noted that Marcel recognized the inevitability of considering others as *lui/elle* before any relationship with an Other as *toi* could develop.<sup>79</sup> This is only reinforced by the characters in his plays, most of whom have no such reciprocal relations with others at all. And even though the relationship between Simon and tante Léna (*SC*) appears to embody the intersubjective understanding that Marcel wished to advocate, it is significant that neither Simon nor tante Léna shares such a relationship with other characters. Intersubjectivity is a two-way relation, requiring the *disponibilité* of both parties; if Marcel's theoretical writings strive to emphasize the possibility for such *disponibilité*,

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<sup>78</sup> 'Toutes ces questions, qui nous renvoient à la réflexion pure et non complice, ne peuvent trouver leur réponse que sur le terrain moral. Nous y consacrerons un prochain ouvrage' (*EN*, p. 676).

<sup>79</sup> See *JM*, p. 208, for example.

the same does not apply in his theatre, which displays only a predominant *lack* of successful inter-personal relations.

With respect to Sartre, Barnes argues that a more positive role should in fact be attributed to the ego in his works. Barnes contends: 'the ego is not only a possible trap and an evasion; it is also the instrument that allows Sartrean *comprehension* to function'.<sup>80</sup> Importantly, Barnes notes that Sartre's discussions of reciprocity and authentic love in his *Cahiers pour une morale* state that although the objectification of the Other makes hostility and oppression possible, conflict is not the inevitable consequence. 'The authentic encounter of freedoms', as Barnes phrases it, still occurs via objectification, in that what the self understands of the Other is defined by the ego, body, and bodily expressions with which it is confronted.<sup>81</sup> But if this allows the self to comprehend what the Other *is*, such objectification also enables the self to comprehend what the Other is *not*. Consequently, the self is able to situate the Other's existence and understand their character not only in terms of their conditioning, but also in terms of the possibles which are open to them. Barnes argues:

The other's body and the other's ego are to me what he is. It is through them that I involve myself. But I do not thereby limit him to being only what he is. Through his body and ego, as expressions of his consciousness, I comprehend the other 'in terms of his enterprise, that is, in terms of what he is not'. My awareness of the other as body and as ego does not ensure my respect for him as subject, but here is the only pathway to such recognition.

(Aronson and Van den Hoven, p. 157)

Thus, there is no essential link between objectification and inauthenticity; the self's limited access to the Other does not automatically imply a denial of the Other's freedom, for although the Other's ego will always be something that is taken into account, this is not to say that it cannot be grasped in terms of a project in the making. As Sartre writes in *Cahiers*

<sup>80</sup> Hazel Barnes, 'The Role of the Ego in Reciprocity', in Aronson and Van den Hoven, p. 152.

<sup>81</sup> Aronson and Van den Hoven, p. 157.

*pour une morale*: 'Si nous avons assumé le fait d'être liberté et objet pour autrui [...] il n'y a plus aucune raison ontologique de rester sur le plan de la lutte. *J'accepte mon être objet et je le dépasse*' (*CPM*, p. 26). So both Sartre and Marcel argue for the need to transcend the initial dualistic outlook of the self, and strive to enter into dialogue with other human beings.

As regards Camus, if, as Margerrison believes, 'Camus declines a dialogue with his audience, denying them sufficient information to participate actively in the interpretative process',<sup>82</sup> this is not to say that Camus did not consider dialogue to be important.<sup>83</sup> On the contrary, Camus argues that 'il n'y a pas de vie sans dialogue' (*Ess*, p. 401) – a phrase reminiscent of the Marcellian understanding of *être* and our 'sub-human' status without such intersubjective dialogue – and all of his plays express this need for genuine communication. *Le Malentendu* provides what is perhaps the clearest example, taking a similar approach to Marcel's plays (*L'Émissaire* in particular) in presenting a clear absence of communication, which is then explicitly lamented by Maria (and by Clément in *L'Émissaire*) in order to advocate the human need for dialogue. Camus writes in his *Carnets*:

Si le héros du Malentendu avait dit: 'Voilà. C'est moi et je suis votre fils', le dialogue était possible et non plus en porte à faux comme dans la pièce. Il n'y avait plus de tragédie puisque le sommet de toutes les tragédies est dans la surdité des héros.

(*C II*, p. 161)

The importance of dialogue is also argued for in *L'État de siège* when, for example, the chorus pronounce that 'notre cœur refuse le silence' (*ES*, pp. 116-17); and when Dora questions the authenticity of the 'love' driving the group's revolutionary actions in *Les Justes*, '[elle se] demande si l'amour

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<sup>82</sup> Hughes, p. 75.

<sup>83</sup> It must be noted that even if Camus' theatre provided no opportunity for audience participation, the rehearsal and production of his theatrical works did constitute such participation for Camus and his fellow actors. Indeed, this is why Camus valued theatre so highly: 'Pour moi, [...] le théâtre m'offre la communauté dont j'ai besoin' (*TRN*, p. 1723).

n'est pas autre chose, s'il peut cesser d'être un monologue, et s'il n'y a pas une réponse, quelquefois' (*LJ*, p. 84).

'Le progrès et la grandeur vraie est dans le dialogue à hauteur d'homme et non dans l'évangile, monologué et dicté du haut d'une montagne solitaire' (*C II*, p. 162), states Camus. Rather than focus too closely on the contrast between Sartre's and Camus' atheism and Marcel's religious perspective then, might we not instead understand Sartre's and Camus' rejection of God as representing a more general criticism of dogmatism and action in the name of absolutes? Hanna and Onimus in fact blur the boundary between the religious and the atheistic when they assert their belief that Camus' fundamental concerns are of a religious nature,<sup>84</sup> and East argues: 'Camus ne s'est jamais installé de façon confortable dans son incroyance et, même s'il refuse Dieu, il se pose néanmoins des questions sur Dieu'.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, in his *Carnets* Camus summarizes the significance of his work as follows: 'Sens de mon œuvre: tant d'hommes sont privés de la grâce. Comment vivre sans la grâce?' (*C II*, p. 129). Camus never renounces God in the same categorical way as Sartre, choosing to focus instead on the problem of suffering. As was noted with respect to the ending of *Le Malentendu*, for Camus it is still possible that God might exist; what is not possible is that God simultaneously incarnates the attributes traditionally assigned to Him, given the suffering that exists in the world: 'Devant Dieu, il y a moins un problème de la liberté qu'un problème du mal. [...] ou nous ne sommes pas libres et Dieu tout-puissant est responsable du mal. Ou

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<sup>84</sup> 'The "heart of the problem" in Camus is "religious" if one refers by this term to what is at the origin of religions: existential anguish, the sense of guilt, the horror of death, the atrocious experience of the Absurd' (Jean Onimus, *Albert Camus and Christianity* (Alabama : University of Alabama Press, 1970), p. 4);

'To characterize Camus as a religious-moral philosopher means to say that his preoccupation is with questions of the nature and meaning of men, their hopes, their possibilities, and their destiny' (Thomas L. Hanna, 'Albert Camus and the Christian Faith', in Germaine Brée (ed.), *Camus: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 48).

<sup>85</sup> East, p. 44. It is interesting that, as a Catholic, Bernard East is still able to identify with Camus' thought to the extent that he does in this work.

nous sommes libres et responsables mais Dieu n'est pas tout-puissant'  
(*MS*, p. 81).

As regards Sartre, Ricœur suggests an interpretation whereby the question of the existence of God raised in *Le Diable et le bon dieu* merely transposes problems of our own age onto the play's particular historical setting, so that God and the Devil become 'the figuration of an ethical, not of a religious problem'.<sup>86</sup> As O'Donohoe's analysis of Goetz's 'conversion' from 'Evil' to 'Good' (cited in Section 1) shows, Goetz can be understood as embodying the contradictions of this particular historical moment. Throwing the dice so that God can determine his course of action and yet deciding to cheat, thereby determining the outcome himself, illustrates the paradoxical middle ground between reliance on a pre-established order and choosing a course of action for one's self. Importantly for Sartre, Protestantism's liberation implied a transferral of responsibility from authoritative mediators such as bishops and priests to the *individual* believer, who then became entirely accountable for their actions. Goetz's final conversion, with its overt assertion of atheism, can therefore primarily be understood in this light. In contrast to Heinrich, whose faith is purely a mechanism and welcomed reinforcement of bad faith,<sup>87</sup> Goetz's rejection of God is indicative of how he recognizes the responsibility he has for his actions, and of a desire to embrace the freedom he realizes he possesses. So although Sartre's Existentialism is nominally atheistic, Sartre is not especially interested in the existence of God *per se*. As he writes in his *Carnets de la drôle de guerre* (composed 1939-40): 'Que Dieu existe ou

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<sup>86</sup> Paul Ricœur, 'Sartre's Lucifer and The Lord', *Yale French Studies*, XIV (1954), p. 87.

<sup>87</sup> 'Si Dieu n'existe pas, plus moyen d'échapper aux hommes. [...] Notre Père qui êtes aux cieux, j'aime mieux être jugé par un être infini que par mes égaux' (*DBD*, p. 239). As a parallel to Goetz's 'dialogues' with God, Heinrich in fact converses with his own Devil in order to confirm his chosen reality – that is, unreality – of Being.

n'existe pas, la morale est une affaire "entre hommes" et Dieu n'a pas à y mettre son nez'.<sup>88</sup>

Goetz's attempted dialogue with God is not only shown to prevent him from being in communication with others, but also himself, as illustrated by Goetz's underlying uncertainty about the reality of the various identities he tries to embody: 'Je me demandais à chaque minute ce que je pouvais être aux yeux de Dieu. A présent je connais la réponse: rien. [...] Dieu, c'est la solitude des hommes' (*DBD*, pp. 237-8). Indeed, one ought to question the extent to which one's self is any less elusive than that of the Other, for as demonstrated particularly well by *Huis clos*, objectification is just as much a problem with respect to one's self as it is with respect to other people.

Sartre consequently argues:

les autres sont au fond ce qu'il y a de plus important en nous-mêmes pour notre propre connaissance de nous-mêmes. Quand nous pensons sur nous, quand nous essayons de nous connaître, au fond nous usons des connaissances que les autres ont déjà sur nous.

(*TS*, p. 282)

Marcel argues an almost identical point when he writes: 'les moyens par lesquels nous communiquons avec nous-mêmes ne sont pas vraiment différents de ceux qui nous permettent de communiquer avec les autres' (*JM*, pp. 174-5), and the difficulty of communication with one's self as well as with others is equally emphasized in his plays. 'C'est cela qui est intolérable. [...] nous ne communiquons même plus avec nous même [sic]' (*E*, p. 98), says Sylvie in *L'Emissaire*. In *Rome n'est plus dans Rome* Pascal then illustrates how a more authentic understanding of one's *situation* is necessary if any form of genuine action is to be possible; it is only when Pascal ceases to act *pour-autrui* and turns his attention towards himself that he achieves any lucidity. And a similar emphasis on the importance of resolving the self's *inner* conflict is also voiced by Camus in *L'Etat de siège*:

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<sup>88</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Carnets de la drôle de guerre: novembre 1939 - mars 1940* ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1983), p. 138.

DIEGO : 'Qu'ai-je donc à vaincre en ce monde, sinon l'injustice qui nous est faite.'

VICTORIA : 'Le malheur qui est en toi! Et le reste suivra.

(*ES*, p. 134)<sup>89</sup>

It is on this account that Marcel's position can be defended against accusations that his philosophy is one of interiority, having no contribution to make to the social dimension of ethics. As he says to Ricœur in an interview: 'on commettrait une erreur profonde, une erreur extrêmement grave en prétendant que ma pensée s'est vraiment concentrée d'une façon exclusive sur la vie intérieure et sur tout ce qui s'y rattache' (*EPR*, p. 99). Social concerns in fact underpin the entirety of Marcel's thought. However, as the rigidity of specific moral principles immediately abstracts their content from reality and its ambiguity, Marcel believes that ethical authenticity cannot be dictated and imposed from an exterior source; rather, it must begin with the self.

Consequently, it no longer makes sense to talk about the possibility of authenticity *in general*, as this would assume that there is some definable state of being which could be described as 'authentic'; the situational dependency and dialectical nature of ethics that all three philosophers argue for excludes such a conception from the start. Sartre writes: 'Il faut *la tension*: maintenir les deux faces de l'ambiguïté [...]. Il n'y a pas de synthèse donnée à atteindre' (*CPM*, p. 430). To see differences in perspective and contradictions within Existentialist ethical thought as a genuine problem regarding Existentialism's approach to ethics is therefore to misunderstand its message entirely: all three playwrights demonstrate that questions of morality are something *lived*, not a set of problems for reason and logic to solve. If characters in their plays struggle with the paradoxical, this is only a direct illustration of the dialectical nature of

<sup>89</sup> Camus also writes in his *Carnets*: 'Ce n'est pas le monde qu'il s'agit de refaire, mais l'homme' (*C II*, p. 148).

ethical norms and the ethical *angoisse* this brings, an incarnation of the *drame humain* that is the very essence of their drama. And whilst paradoxes are not inherent Camus' theatre as they are in that of Sartre and Marcel, they are nevertheless implicit in their absence. The intra-tensions and inter-tensions Section 2.1 identified in Existentialist ethical thought also convey this. Indeed, they could even be said to serve as further evidence for the dialectical nature of existence: the *point de départ* for all three is existence and its experience, and this then has the effect of producing a dialectic within Existentialist philosophy itself. Rather than being seen as negative and grounds for criticism, these inconsistencies can therefore be understood as *consistent* with Existentialism's approach. Thus, conflict within and between the thought of all three thinkers can be regarded as founding a dialogue which illustrates their common belief that ethics is not about universals but about particulars.

On this interpretation, the further tension created by the theatrical medium and the spectatorship it encourages could actually be considered a success, as could the tensions concerning the intended message and the received message of many of these plays. Neither Marcel, nor Camus, nor Sartre would wish the audience to leave the theatre feeling that everything had been resolved; their message is precisely that this could never be the case. The criticism Section 2.1 saw Ireland make of Sartre's theatre fails to recognize the central importance of ambiguity with respect to Sartre's Existentialism as a whole. As Bell emphasized, Sartre discovered that ambiguity was something real which needed *accepting*;<sup>90</sup> Sartre's theatre is first and foremost a presentation of this ambiguity. Ireland suggested that the tensions in Sartre's theatre were illustrative of how Sartre was unable

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<sup>90</sup> 'For Sartre, a human being is an ambiguous being' (Bell, p. 19). One of Bell's main arguments concerns the need to recognize the centrality of ambiguity in Sartre's thought.



to 's'éclipser et laisser le spectateur face à face avec son époque';<sup>91</sup> but actually, Sartre is confronting spectators with what was, for him, *the* fundamental feature of *l'époque*. If Sartre fails to 's'éclipser' and his own ambiguous feelings towards theatre contribute to the ambiguity of his plays, in exactly the same way as Camus has been interpreted, this is nothing but proof that Sartre was right about the paradoxes that *are* human experience. Contrary to what was suggested in Section 2.1, the paradoxical nature of the theatrical medium therefore appears very appropriate for voicing Existentialist ethical thought. Thus Marcel pronounces: 'Je demeure persuadé que c'est dans le drame et à travers le drame que la pensée métaphysique se saisit elle-même et se définit *in concreto*' (PA, p. 67).

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<sup>91</sup> Ireland, p. 17.

## Conclusion

la symphonie, je ne peux la casser: ni l'objet dramatique. C'est de là qu'il [l'univers présenté] tire sa réalité.

(*TS*, p. 96)

This study has revealed a common tendency to equate the 'message' of a play with that of the main protagonist, and critical analyses of theatre and its philosophical content often neglect to consider other characters in very much detail. However, when considering the ethical significance of Existentialist theatre, it is important not to disregard the contribution of other characters too hastily. Indeed, an attention to the multiplicity of voices in the theatrical works of Marcel, Camus, and Sartre has been shown to be crucial for a full appreciation of the ethical thought they present - particularly with respect to Camus, for it is only in paying attention to the message of other characters that evidence of the complexity of his moral philosophy may be found.

Attention paid to the *ensemble* of Sartre's characters has also helped expose the continuity in Sartre's ethical thought. Stone and Bowman argue that Sartre's unpublished works from the 1960s 'compel a re-reading, and perhaps a re-interpretation, of Sartre's works'.<sup>1</sup> They see works such as *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* and *Cahiers pour une morale* as transitional works, being 'conceptually torn, attempting, on the one hand, to fulfil the promise of an ethics of individual "radical conversion" inherited from [*L'Être et le néant*], and, on the other, to do justice to social-historical conditioning', and thus propose that such works might be transitions 'precisely to dialectical ethics'.<sup>2</sup> *Le Diable et le bon dieu* has proved to represent a similar transition; and the existence of such transitional works

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<sup>1</sup> Stone and Bowman (1986), p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

therefore makes reference to any definable 'stages' in Sartre's thought misleading. As Contat writes:

En effet, il n'y a pas de rupture de continuité entre le premier et le second Sartre [...]. Il y a, au contraire, un dépassement et un élargissement [...]. Loin de le contredire, *La Critique* valide rétrospectivement *L'Être et le néant* en intégrant dans une compréhension plus large, totalisante, une compréhension dont la faiblesse était d'être partielle.<sup>3</sup>

There is, in fact, evidence to suggest that Sartre's early ethical thought was not as individualistic as it is generally portrayed. Goldthorpe argues that far from being an 'unambiguous thesis play', whose content may be summarized with the single line 'l'enfer, c'est les Autres' (*HC*, p. 93), *Huis clos*' context is actually 'highly specific and remediable'.<sup>4</sup> For Goldthorpe: 'It has not been sufficiently recognized that *Huis clos* presents a triple image of the bourgeoisie: the bourgeois intellectual (Garcin), the "petite bourgeoise" (Inès, *employée des postes*), and the "grande bourgeoise" (Estelle)'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the characters' inability to recognize themselves (as expressed by Estelle's 'Je me vois très mal' (*HC*, p. 46), for example) can be elevated to the social level. If *Huis clos*' Hell is situated in a Second Empire-style drawing-room, this is no coincidence. For Goldthorpe, the *prise de conscience* that Sartre hoped to induce in his audience is specifically a bourgeois one, and 'an ambiguous refusal, because those who indulge in it are both "victimes" and "complices"'.<sup>6</sup>

Stone has argued that *L'Être et le néant*'s theoretical account of bad faith is also ambiguous, believing that 'if we re-examine some of Sartre's examples we shall find a blurry line between the lie to oneself and the lie to another',<sup>7</sup> which then discloses a simultaneous *interpersonal* origin of bad

<sup>3</sup> Michel Contat, *Explication des Séquestrés d'Altona de Jean-Paul Sartre* (Paris : Archives des lettres modernes, no. 89, 1968), pp. 15-16.

<sup>4</sup> Goldthorpe, p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>7</sup> Robert V. Stone, 'Sartre on Bad Faith and Authenticity', in Paul A. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (La Salle, IL : Open Court, 1981), p. 249.

faith; even in the nominally 'individualistic' *L'Être et le néant*, the original situation of bad faith is within a *social* context. Stone sees the role play of bad faith as a double performance: a performance that is first and foremost an attempt to persuade an *Other*, so that he/she may confirm the reality of this objectified image before it is re-routed back to the self as 'fact'.<sup>8</sup> For Stone, playing any particular role is 'first a *social* reality'<sup>9</sup> and so, similar to Section 1.3's argument that the significance of the earthly crimes of *Huis clos*' characters is too easily dismissed, Stone argues that Sartre neglects to give the social contexts which (always) initially set the scene for *L'Être et le néant*'s theoretical discussions of bad faith (drawing on examples such as slaves and masters, jailers, the waiter) the recognition they are due.

Section 1.1 introduced the Marcellian method of *creuser* where, in the words of Mounier, Marcel's thought represents 'un *cheminement* plus qu'une mise en ordre, [...] un *déchiffrage* toujours repris sur place, plus qu'un parcours'.<sup>10</sup> Such an approach is also applicable to Camus' thought.

In a 1955 interview with Nicolas, Camus declared:

Je peux en tout cas vous dire que tout écrivain se répète en même temps qu'il progresse, que l'évolution d'une pensée ne se fait pas en ligne droite, [...] mais selon une sorte de spirale où la pensée repasse par d'anciens chemins sans cesser de les surplomber.

(*Ess*, p. 1614-15).

The fact that ambiguity can already be detected in *L'Être et le néant* and in *Huis clos* then allows for a similar interpretation of Sartre's work, supporting Sartre's assertion in an interview with Lévy that: 'malgré tout je suis toujours resté sur une ligne continue'.<sup>11</sup> That Sartre's thought evolved to recognize sociality to a much greater extent cannot be denied; in a 1975

<sup>8</sup> Schilpp (1981), p. 250. Indeed, even if there is no *actual* Other to act for, Goetz's God, Heinrich's Devil, and Frantz's crabs illustrate how the notion of an Other is still a necessity.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>10</sup> Emmanuel Mounier, *Introduction aux existentialismes* (Paris : Editions Denoël, 1947), p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Espoir maintenant: les entretiens de 1980 [entre] Jean-Paul Sartre et Benny Lévy* (Lagrasse : Verdier, 1991), p. 26.

interview Sartre himself declared that he did not engage with the dialectic until after *L'Être et le néant*.<sup>12</sup> But his thought should be seen more as a 'coming to understanding' of complexities and contradictions of which there are glimpses from the very beginning.<sup>13</sup> Section 2.2 exposed Marcel's overly rigid and (therefore) superficial understanding of Sartre's ethical thought, which resulted from a failure to see such complexities. As Bell remarks, 'Philosophical reputations have been made by showing Sartre to be a wildly inconsistent thinker – sometimes by reading him superficially, sometimes by taking what he says out of context, sometimes, as Sartre himself observes, by stopping "too soon" and not following the "evolution" of his philosophical thought'.<sup>14</sup> Yet Sartre himself thought it odd that critics studied him in this way.<sup>15</sup> Thus it occurs to me that disagreements which exist between the ethical positions of Marcel, Camus, and Sartre, might be primarily surface misunderstandings, which act to mask an underlying *agreement* in their moral thought.

This totalizing form of analysis reveals how the notion of 'symphony' is not only applicable to the theatre of all three Existentialists in terms of a 'sounding together' of the characters' different voices, but also in terms of symphonic *movement*.<sup>16</sup> As would a musical symphony, both the theoretical and the theatrical works of all three revisit and replay motifs within different surrounding contexts, creating complexity with the depth that is produced. And Camus' dramatic *œuvre* broadens this further still with the symphony of theatrical forms that it constitutes.

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<sup>12</sup> Schilpp (1981), p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> In the same 1975 interview, Sartre declared: 'I think I underwent a continuous evolution beginning with *La Nausée* [1938] all the way up to the *Critique de la raison dialectique*. My great discovery was that of the sociality during the war, since to be a soldier at the front is really to be a victim of a society that keeps you where you do not want to be and gives you laws you don't want. The sociality is not in *La Nausée*, but there are glimpses of it...' (ibid., pp. 12-13; my emphasis).

<sup>14</sup> Bell, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> See the interview in Schilpp (1981), p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> This interpretative method is in line with Jeanson, who attempts to 'dégager le mouvement' in Sartre's moral thought (Francis Jeanson, *Le Problème moral et la pensée de Sartre* (Paris : Editions du Myrte, 1947), p. 18).

In the introduction it was stated that whether or not these Existentialist plays are *able* to engage with ethics was something to be questioned. However, as with discussions about 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity', what has been revealed is that there can be no straightforward answer to this; the Existentialist theatre of Marcel, Camus, and Sartre does engage with the ethical, and it does not. But I have argued that, in the case of the Existentialist ethical thought of all three, this ambiguity is precisely what their moral theory expresses, and thus their theatre is entirely complementary, if not a further elaboration of their ethical thought. This then blurs the boundaries between Existentialist moral 'philosophy' and 'theatre'. Thus, in a 1960 interview with Chapsal, Sartre declares:

Aujourd'hui, je pense que la philosophie est dramatique. Il ne s'agit plus de contempler l'immobilité de substances qui sont ce qu'elles sont, ni de trouver les règles d'une succession de phénomènes. Il s'agit de l'homme – qui est à la fois *un agent* et *un acteur* – qui produit et joue son drame, en vivant les contradictions de sa situation [...]. Une pièce de théâtre [...] c'est la forme la plus appropriée, aujourd'hui, pour montrer l'homme *en acte* (c'est-à-dire l'homme, tout simplement). Et la philosophie [...] c'est de cet homme-là qu'elle prétend s'occuper. C'est pour cela que le théâtre est philosophique et que la philosophie est dramatique.<sup>17</sup>

Exploring the ethical on the stage also draws attention to the performative aspect of identity, and the difficulty in establishing the relationship between the normative (as pertaining to norms) and the *ethically* normative (as pertaining to ethical justification), as highlighted particularly clearly in Section 2.1's discussion of Goetz's final conversion in *Le Diable et le bon dieu*.<sup>18</sup> Thus, one possibility for further study would be a closer investigation of the extent to which philosophical ambiguity may be

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Les Ecrivains en personne', in his *Situations IX* (Paris : Gallimard, 1972), pp. 12-13.

<sup>18</sup> Here, a parallel can be drawn with Butler's theory of (gender) identity as performance, in relation to which she discusses how the representation of identity in terms of categories calls into question the distinction between what is real and what is *unreal*, what is natural fact and what is socio-cultural performance (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York : Routledge, 1990)). Application of Butler's theory to Existentialist thought might therefore prove fruitful as a new line of investigation. In fact, Inès (HC) is arguably already 'une femme damnée' as a result of being a lesbian (see for example: Goldthorpe, pp. 94-5; Kern (1963), p. 59); and the same has been suggested with respect to Goetz (DBD), whose lack of social integration is linked to his status as 'un bâtard' ('C'est un bâtard de la pire espèce: par la mère. Il ne se plaît qu'à faire le mal' (DBD, p. 17). See also Jeanson (1955), p. 87; Verstraeten, p. 74).

introduced by the performativity inherent in the theatrical genre itself. One thing is certain, philosophical content cannot be discussed in isolation of genre; the theatre and the dynamic inter-relations it involves (as revealed by the numerous applications of the notion of spectatorship) is an extremely ambiguous medium, and this ambiguity must be taken into account.

Finally, this dissertation has uncovered a surprising number of similarities between the Existentialist ethical thought of Marcel, Camus, and Sartre. The question which therefore arises is whether it has not blurred one further boundary still, namely, that which divides 'Christian Existentialism' from 'atheistic Existentialism'?

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