

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2017.1.6.05>

## **A Critique on Nazism: A Study of *The Dog Beneath the Skin* and *Rhinoceros***

**Dr. B. Mangalam**  
Aryabhatta College,  
University of Delhi,  
Delhi, India

### **Abstract**

This paper looks at English Poetic Drama and its influence on Absurd Drama, in its evocation of anti-totalitarian structure of power in Europe between the Inter-War period. The plays of Auden & Isherwood are examined to analyse their use of fantasy, animal imagery to critique the rise of Nazism. A Comparative reading of Ionesco's use of fantasy and animal image to depict ideological transformation of people at any given time, is undertaken to compare and contrast the two major theatre traditions of Poetic Drama and Absurd Drama. Ionesco had subsequently commented that he was depicting Nazification of a country in his play *Rhinoceros*. The specific, historical markers and ideological standpoint of Auden & Isherwood's plays are juxtaposed to an ideologically non-committed representation of fear and herd mindset through fantasy in Ionesco's play. The paper looks at the thirties to sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as reflected in the plays of the three playwrights under study.

**Keywords-** Poetic Drama, Absurd Drama, Nazism, Fantasy, Animal Image, Resistance

The plays of W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood reflect upon a very wide canvas and deal with a variety of themes. They also posit multiple levels of meaning. The playwrights weave into the dramatic texture, the ideas of Marx as well as the findings of Freud. Hence, the plays' focus constantly shifts from the individual to the society at large. The plays, as a matter of fact, elude generic categorisation. They can be read as satires, as topical reportage, as political propaganda, as a study of pathological characters or as technical experimentation in form. Besides, the plays make significant interventions in the domain of English Poetic drama. This paper indicates the multifaceted nature of Auden-Isherwood's plays, but focuses on one particular aspect that is integral to them. The plays voice a strong critique of totalitarian states. They censure German fascism and expose the tenets of the Nazis. In the canon of English poetic drama, the plays of Auden-Isherwood stand out as exploration of the political unrest of the thirties in the twentieth century. It is interesting to study the playwrights' attempt to integrate topical, volatile issues and the craft of poetic drama. Unlike the plays of other English poetic dramatists, the plays of Auden-Isherwood boldly survey the

contemporary political scene and pass strictures against fascist regimes. Stephen Spender's play, *Trial of a Judge* is, of course, a notable exception. This paper shall study the representation of fascism, its critique and an alternative political vision embedded in the plays of W.H. Auden & Christopher Isherwood. The play under consideration is a collaborative one, written by both the writers, embodying their shared conviction in terms of form and content.

The playwrights' portrayal of the Nazi forces is, interestingly, a non-realistic one, as they resort to a mode of fantasy. Auden's admiration for Kafka and Lewis Carroll is well-known. (Ursula Neibhur in Spender ed., 1975: 115) The artistic preoccupations of Kafka and Carroll are, admittedly, very different but both the writers employ fantasy. Auden imbibes their mode of presentation and it is most evident in the scenes depicting the fascists. The deployment of fantasy to depict Nazism, is a striking feature of Eugene Ionesco's play, *Rhinoceros*.

This paper examines Auden-Isherwood's *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1935/36) and Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* (1958/59). *On the Frontier* (1938) by Auden-Isherwood would be studied to examine a variant use of fantasy in the context of Nazism. Ionesco as well as Auden-Isherwood take recourse to fantasy for depicting Nazism. It would be interesting to compare and study this common pursuit in the English poetic drama of Auden-Isherwood and the French Absurd Drama of Ionesco. The term fantasy is used in this paper to denote the playwrights' concern with a level of reality that transcends common sense and natural law. Fantasy, as used in this paper does not denote wish-fulfilment but reflects the definition of this term as used by Spears in his study of Auden's poetry. (Spears, 1963:10)

*The Dog Beneath the Skin* was written for the group theatre and was first performed in 1936. The play is a meandering narrative with a picaresque structure. The central issue of the play draws upon the age-old quest theme. The hero's search for the runaway baronet, Francis Crewe, becomes a convenient pretext, a take-off for the playwrights' panoramic examination of contemporary society. The paper shall examine those scenes in which the playwrights deal with Nazism and totalitarianism. It shall study their success in using fantasy for this purpose.

Alan begins his search at Ostnia, a decadent monarchy. Its ruler is a dilettante and shrewdly masks his totalitarian designs behind the façade of grand rituals and fine arts. The king conducts the execution of revolutionary workers as an elaborate ceremony. He delivers a pompous speech and even wishes the victims a 'Bon voyage and every happiness in the next world.' (*The Dog Beneath the Skin or Where is Francis?* 1968 ed., p.47). The victims' wives and mothers are served champagne and cakes, to be followed by more fantastic rituals. The ladies of the court admire the corpses and judge their physiognomy. The scene is ludicrous yet chilling.

Through the fantasizing of such a world, the playwrights underline the ruthlessness of totalitarian regimes. The king's firmness in putting down resistance is cloaked in fantastic ceremonies. The playwrights, however, seem almost to delight in fantasy for its own sake. They do not use it with a critical consciousness. The world pictured by them has shades of

Lewis Carroll's fantasy land. John Fuller draws attention to the likeness between the king of Ostria and the king of Hearts (Fuller,1970:84). The playwrights explore the potential of the fantastic mode for critical purposes with greater success in the scenes representing the Nazis.

Alan's next major halt is at the lunatic asylum in westland. The scene is a brilliant spoof on the Nazis. Auden-Isherwood present Nazism as madness. The lunatics' activities forcefully evoke the mob hysteria, jingoism and menacing cult worship of the leadership and the race theories characteristic of the Nazis. The lunatics instinctively obey the voice they hear on the loudspeaker. It underlines the power of Nazi propaganda and the amount of brainwashing that the subjects of a fascist state undergo. In fact, there is no man behind the loudspeaker. The lunatics respond most zealously to a "portrait of a man in uniform", beneath which is written, "our leader". "The man has a loudspeaker instead of a face" (*The Dog*, 1968:II, i, 65).

It is a brilliant stroke and a pungent comment on the Nazi adulation of the leader figures. Madness becomes a forceful metaphor for Nazism. The lunatics' behaviour in the asylum is hilariously fantastic. One might forgive a madman's fantasies. But in equating madmen with the Nazis, the playwrights alert the audience to the frightening consequences of the ascendancy of Nazi Power in the international arena. The lunatics at the asylum can be contained within the room but a whole nation of hysterical, racist and insane fascists is a very serious and menacing challenge to world peace.

The lunatics' intolerance and cruelty towards Alan are quite disturbing. As soon as they notice Alan, they pounce on him with the choicest abuses:

"He's been sent here to spy on us!  
He's been hoarding the butter!  
He's insulted the Leader!  
Rumour-monger!  
Non-Aryan!"

(*The Dog*, II, i: 75)

They sound funny but their language evokes well-known Nazi sentiments and convictions. The Leader's speech is a cacophony of jingoism, outlining horrific warnings against enemy nations and an appeal for sacrifice of individual and familial interests in the cause of Homeland. It is a patterned speech and incorporates the typical features of Nazi ideology. The lunatics' response to it illustrates the collective hysteria that ensues propaganda camouflaging as political rhetoric. The Leader's verbal picture of "simple old westland inn", the "westland tenderness" of "westland mothers" of "westland peasants" and "westland swallows" leaves a powerful impression on the lunatics. "They sigh, shed tears and embrace each other with loud smacking kisses". (*The Dog*, II, i:70)

Their periodic response to the Leader's speech provides a revealing insight into the working of fascist minds. They are "violently agitated" at hearing about the enemy country's defence preparedness and the imminent threats of war. Their reaction highlights the abject

fears and anxieties of the common people in a Nazi state. They “moan and shiver with fear, lie flat on the floor or crawl under the beds” (*The Dog*, II, i:71). Such a crowd can easily be manipulated by a powerful and charismatic leader. The lunatics’ enthusiastic response confirms this. At the call for sacrifice for the Homeland, there is “tremendous enthusiasm”. The lunatics jump up and down in delight or cheer, embrace, pillow-fight, and box each other’s ears’ (*The Dog*, II, i: 73).

The general hysteria and delirious enthusiasm prevalent at the asylum is a dramatic representation of the welcome that was accorded to Hitler at Nazi demonstrations in Germany. Ionesco provides a lucid narrative of one such instance (*Notes and Counter Notes*, 1964: 205). He even acknowledges it as the “starting point” of his play *Rhinoceros*. (*Notes and Counter Notes*, 205). Ionesco as well as Auden and Isherwood censure collective hysteria and the subordination of individual identity to jingoistic ideals. While Ionesco probes this aspect of Nazism seriously and at great length, Auden-Isherwood represent it in incidental scenes and with a not sustained dramatic focus. For all its sinister parallels, the lunatic asylum scene reflects a high-spirited, light-hearted atmosphere.

The lunatics’ acrobatics, their ridiculous attempt at plane-building and their petty quarrels are hilarious. One does not forget the fascist undertones of their conduct and conversations. Nonetheless, they are enjoyable on their own account. The sheer physicality of their conduct is highly amusing. They sound so remote, devising fantastic schemes of punishing Alan or showing their solidarity to their leader in ingenious ways. In fact, the bitterness and gloom that pervade Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros* are totally absent in the asylum scene of *The Dog Beneath the Skin*. In attempting to expose the irrationality and insanity of Nazi ideology, Auden-Isherwood blunder into fantasizing Nazis as ludicrous madmen. Their ludicrousness is an implied criticism of Nazis. Nevertheless, the conflation of Nazis and lunatics mitigates the sinister implications of Nazism.

Auden had stated in his programme at the production of *The Dance of Death* (1933) that “Drama is essentially an art of the body. The basis of acting is acrobatics, dancing and all forms of physical skill” (*The English Auden Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, 1988: 273). The statement throws light on the high spiritedness and the slap-stick action of the asylum scene. The serious criticism of Nazis is presented in the familiar mode of the music hall. Of course, Auden had recognised, “the music hall, the Christmas pantomime, and the country house charade” as “the most living dream of today” (*The English Auden*, 1988: 273). Interestingly, this aspect of *The Dog beneath the Skin* underlines its connection with the French Absurd drama. The action in the plays of Beckett and Ionesco, for instance, has a marked resemblance to the music hall and the pantomime. In addition, the action in Auden-Isherwood’s play is vitalised by the use of fantasy, a feature that it shares with some of the plays of Ionesco.

This is even better illustrated in the concluding scene of *The Dog Beneath the Skin*. On Alan’s return to the village of Pressan Ambo he finds it totally transformed. The village is

bubbling with feverish activities reminiscent of the gusto that prevailed at the asylum. It is decorated with banal, patriotic banners. The vicar has taken the role of the leader. His sermon is a variation of Nazi leader's speech. Only, it is even more disturbing owing to his position in the church. The incoherence of his sermon is a comment on Nazi ideology. In its appeal to patriotic sentiments, it reaches frenzied scales.

The vicar is surrounded by the lads of Pressan, wearing military uniform and playing the military music. The scene is representative of a fascist demonstration of strength. The vicar begins his sermon in his usual manner of delivery at the pulpit but increasingly turns hysterical and incoherent. He becomes "more excited, more histrionic, more daring in his gestures and poses. The final passage is wailed rather than spoken. Tears pour down his cheeks, saliva runs from his mouth. He has worked himself up into a hysterical frenzy". (*The Dog*, III, v: 162). This is an apt illustration of Nazi parade of their leader's charisma.

At the end, the villagers and their leaders are portrayed as animals. The playwrights' use of fantasy sharpens the satire. The General is marked as a Bull, the vicar as a goat, Iris as a cat and the villagers as various animals. The use of fantasy is more pointed here than it was in the asylum scene. The fantasizing of fascists as animals draws attention to the herd mentality of the Nazis. It effectively exposes the depravity and inhumanity of Nazi ideology. To depict a whole village transformed into an animal kingdom is fantastic. Fantasy is used for a critical purpose. Unlike in the asylum scene, the above representation of the Nazis is not hilarious. The fantasizing evokes Nazism as a menacing movement.

The following passage captures the dehumanisation of man under the onslaught of propaganda and political idolatry: "The General is addressing them, but only a bellowing is audible. His hearers respond with various animal noises, barking, mewing, quacking, grunting, or squeaking. According to their character. Gestures and cries become more incoherent, bestial and fantastic..." (*The Dog*, III, v: 178). Auden-Isherwood see Nazism as precipitating the erosion of man's sanity as well as his humanity. People are used as a herd by the leader and man loses his individual dignity.

Auden-Isherwood employ fantasy as a tool of exposure and criticism. Yet the inherent geniality renders the criticism less. Ionesco uses a similar technique with greater consistency and seriousness. While the portrayal of the Nazis by Auden-Isherwood is satiric in intention, Ionesco presents the spread of Nazism as a tragic phenomenon. Commenting upon his play, Ionesco states, "the play really was meant to show the Nazification of a country" and further elaborates, "my play is not even a satire, it is a fairly objective description of the birth of totalitarianism" (*Notes and Counter Notes*:214, 216). The play, *Rhinoceros* depicts the mental transformation of a whole community, the mass hysteria that is whipped up by Nazism. The play was first performed in January, 1960 in Paris and in London in April, the same year.

Ionesco represents this phenomenon by way of fantasy. Like Auden-Isherwood, he too fantasizes Nazis as men transformed into animals. Men turning into rhinoceroses is a

bizarre spectacle and here a whole community catches rhinocerotitis. The Rhino is not commonly found and is untameable. Hence, it is easily amenable to fantasizing. The play concentrates on the actual working of Nazism on people's minds, how it spreads like an epidemic. Only one man, Berenger, refuses to endorse this mass metamorphosis.

Ionesco's dramatization of the actual metamorphosis resembles a fantastic fable. The very notion of man turning into a rhinoceros is fantastic. Ionesco presents the various stages of this process on stage and makes it at once comic and sinister. He concentrates on the physical features of the rhinoceros and presents those as representative features of Nazism. The ferocity, the blinding speed and thick skin of the rhinoceros is repeatedly underlined to comment upon the Nazis' fierce adherence to abstractions and their callousness towards others. Ionesco's emphasis on the green colour of the rhinoceros is revealing. The colour green is strongly associated with the Nazi tanks used in the World War II. By drawing out attention to the green skin of men transformed into rhinoceroses, Ionesco subtly underlines their conversion to Nazism.

Ionesco represents the gradual indoctrination of Nazi ideology in the physical transformation of Jean, a close friend of Berenger. The two friends are engaged in a conversation. Gradually, there emerges a gulf between the two which culminates in the transformed Jean's frightening trumpeting and his threat to trample down Berenger: "I'll trample you, I'll trample you down" (*Rhinoceros* tr. Derek Prouse, 1962: 81)' Jean's voice turns hoarse and ultimately becomes totally unrecognizable. He paces up and down like a wild beast. The bump on his forehead is revealed as a rhino's horn. His skin turns green and hard. The physical changes are utterly fantastic and they stand for principles that characterise Nazism. (*Rhinoceros*, 1962: II, ii).

Ionesco's fantasizing of the Nazis as rhinoceros illuminates the pitfalls of Nazism. The specific use of if the rhino figure is very apt. Rhinoceroses are notorious for their thick, insensitive skin, limited perception and their tendency to rush at their enemy with great ferocity. Their horns signify aggressiveness, the trait to trample down enemies. The above qualities act as a comment upon analogous traits of the Nazis. The Nazis' intolerance, blind devotion, aggressiveness and propensity to stand by the crowd are reflected in the image of the rhinoceros. The fantasizing of men as rhinoceroses thus, effectively exposes the Nazis.

The transformation of Jean deeply distresses Berenger. It causes him much anguish and pain: "I never would have thought it of him – never!" (*Rhinoceros*, II, ii: 82). It is a deep personal loss to him. The subsequent transformation of his colleagues is a further jolt to him. He helplessly witnesses his entire world transformed. He tries his best to dissuade his colleagues but is unable to stop them. One by one, individuals turn into rhinoceroses and Berenger is "frightened of catching it" (*Rhinoceros*, III: 88). His utter panic and feverishness are proportionate to the alarming increase of men joining the rhino fold. Even institutions are impacted by the transformation: broadcasting station, the telephone department, the fire

services, church men, members of the municipal corporation, none remains unaffected. By this, Ionesco brilliantly illustrates the contagious nature of Nazi ideology.

The spectacle of Berenger surrounded by the rhino pack is distressing but fantastic. When he tries to report Jean's metamorphosis to his neighbours, "Get the police" he is greeted by rhinoceros heads from each part of the building. He wails, "There's a whole herd of them in street now!... (he looks all around). Where can I get out? Where can I get out?" (*Rhinoceros*, II, ii: 83). He attempts to counter this mass conversion by relying on the potential of inter-personal relationship. But Daisy is not convinced to stay on to regenerate a world where everyone has transformed into rhinoceroses. Berenger at the end, stands all alone, the only human being in a town of Rhino population. This is seen as deeply tragic. This tragic strain of the play subdues the comic potential inherent in the fantasizing of men into animals. Ionesco observes, "Although it is a farce, it is above all a tragedy." (*Notes and Counter Notes*: 216)

The phenomenon is shocking as well as absurd, funny as well as cruel. Fantasy in *Rhinoceros* evokes gloom and oppression. It is used as a tool to denounce Nazism and expose it as menacingly absurd as well as frighteningly dangerous. Ionesco excels in presenting a comic superstructure to his serious, critical perspective. The housewife's ludicrous lament for her cat or the logician's ingenious verdict on Socrates is superbly comic. But Ionesco admits, "Laughter... Laughter... certainly I cannot say I do not try to arouse laughter; however, that is not my most important object... laughter comes as a reprieve. We laugh so as not to cry" (*Notes and Counter Notes*: 117-18).

Ionesco does not offer any alternative system to counter Nazism. He resists giving any ideological answer. He prefers to leave the audience "in a vacuum supplying no other ideology" (*Notes and Counter Notes*: 218). He expects the audience to find an answer to the problem posed in the play. Each individual has to come to terms with the evil depicted in the play and evolve a course of action. Ionesco believes that to provide an alternative ideology would precipitate yet another variety of rhinocerotitis.

The play denounces Nazism but supplies no ready-made system of belief to root it out. This enhances its dramatic power. It forces the audience to think, to engage his analytic faculty and recognise the urgency to resist the evil portrayed. Any kind of authorial solution would have undermined dramatic intensity.

Berenger's resistance, it is argued, is the only possible and effective solution. He has been presented as a weak-willed, alcoholic, apathetic man. He is an unambitious, unheroic, ordinary clerk. Yet he is the only individual who successfully resists rhinocerotitis. His act is an assertion of the dignity of the individual. It is not motivated by intellectual arguments, by political or philosophical system of belief. He is not guided by any ideology. He resists the collective hysteria rather instinctively. Ionesco's play resists collective action and resistance based on an ideological standpoint. This pushes the play to the domain of the Absurd, to an ahistorical, apolitical vision. Auden & Isherwood's play represents a political standpoint

towards the rise of a totalitarian ideology in the 1930s. Ionesco, notwithstanding his subsequent claim of depicting Nazism in his play, leaves its representation deliberately vague, non-specific to include all categories of political belief systems.

Berenger's resistance is posited as the plausible countering of Nazism. At the same time the play stresses the tragic price that such a man has to pay. Berenger is alienated from his fellowmen and is left companionless. Without invoking any ideology and without turning didactic, Ionesco shows a way of countering the evil he has dramatized. However, he does not demarcate a difference between the opposing systems of belief, as he focuses only on gestural difference, not on ideological difference. Hence, his play offers no explanation regarding the phenomenon of men turning into rhinoceroses or to a man's refusal to become one.

*The Dog Beneath the Skin* exposes the herd mentality and misplaced zeal of the Nazis as insane and ludicrous. Against this the playwrights postulate Marxism as a counter force. While Ionesco incorporates the counter movement within the dramatic action of his play, Auden-Isherwood do not integrate the postulated alternative with the play's action. The action of *The Dog Beneath the Skin* nowhere indicates the efficacy of Marxist ideology in rooting out Nazism. It is simply stated, not dramatized. And even this movement falls outside the dramatic action of the scenes representing the Nazis. The chorus states in the epilogues, "To each his needs from each his power" (*The Dog*: 180). This cryptic statement merely restates the principle central to Marxist ideology.

While quitting a fascist Pressan Ambo, Francis declares that he has chosen to be "a unit in the army of the other side." A handful of villagers join him and they "come down from the stage and go out through the audience" (*The Dog*, III, v: 176). This is intended to be taken as a counter movement by the proletariat. The playwrights expect the audience to be aware of the possibilities of change through a Marxist praxis at this juncture. Auden-Isherwood's presentation of the alternative, regarding the course of resistance to Nazism is almost a wish-fulfilment. It is not prepared for in the action of the play. The efficacy of a Marxist course of action in countering Nazism is assumed rather than dramatized, stated rather than enacted.

At this juncture, a brief examination of *On the Frontier* would be appropriate. This play by Auden & Isherwood was first performed in London in 1936. It dramatizes the contemporary European situation. It is primarily an anti-war play. It does not deal with Nazism incisively. As its portrayal of the westland leader is modelled upon Hitler it deserves a closer study. The playwrights expect the actor portraying the leader to avoid resemblances to living personages. Nonetheless, the audience easily recognises the similarity to Hitler.

The leader in this play is a typical Nazi head. He is represented as an insecure, lonely man, eager for power and eccentric in temperament. He is always in uniform and turns hysterical at the bare mention of Ostnia. His speeches are neat summarisation of well-known Nazi sentiments. He is almost carried away by his invocations to westland. Stahl exclaims,



“Why, he isn’t a man at all: he’s a gramophone!” (*On the Frontier*, 1958:124). The detail links him up with the leader in *The Dog Beneath the Skin*. The playwrights have attempted to humanise him revealing his anxieties, his nervousness, by focussing on his inner loneliness and by outlining his humble background. Nonetheless, the leader remains a caricature, a simplistic presentation of the Nazi leader.

The play does not fantasise the Nazi figure. However, it does invoke fantasy in positing an alternate structure to the fascist ruled, war ridden situation. While *Rhinoceros* and *The Dog Beneath the Skin* use fantasy to expose Nazism, *On the Frontier* uses it to represent the way this evil can be in the times to come, overcome. Stephen Spender has observed, “There are two approaches to the contemporary political scenes: the one is direct, or partially satiric, external presentation: the other is fantasy or allegory”. (Spender, *W. H. Auden: The Critical Heritage*, 1983: 197) Auden-Isherwood do satirise the political scene. They attack vigorously the conjunction of power and money. Spender is right in recognising the directness of the attack. They evoke a vivid picture of the existing political situation. Yet, they counter this realistic and harsh world with a fantastic construct.

The play posits romantic love as a solution to the crisis at hand. This is a fantastic vision which is fostered on a volatile, political situation. The playwrights idealise their love and present it as a positive force which would pave a life of peace and freedom. Eric and Anna are portrayed as romantic lovers, whose love for each other is thwarted by historical forces. It cannot blossom in the contemporary world. But in another world where love would be recognized and they could live happily.

The lovers understandably die but with the hope that they would meet in a later world when the world would be fit enough to receive them:

“Europe lies in the dark” but the lovers hope  
to build the city where  
The will of love is done  
And brought to its full flower  
The dignity of man.”

(*On the Frontier*, III, iii: 190-91)

The play, here, moves into an altogether different plane and is totally unrelated to the harsh, real political world presented in the earlier part. The idealised lovers are totally passive and ineffectual. They accept defeat rather too easily.

‘We could not meet  
They were too strong.  
We found our peace  
Only in dreams.’

(ibid.)

To read hope for a better future in such a love is a kind of fantasizing of the concept of romantic love. This love cannot survive in the world of power and politics. It cannot combat

the existing reality. Hence, it exalts itself into a higher plane of reality which transcends the laws of the everyday world, of a historical, socio-political reality. Thus, it falls within the purview of fantasy as defined in this paper. In their death, the playwrights perceive a hope for a better world:

“but in the lucky guarded future  
Others like us shall meet, the frontier gone,  
And find the real world happy.  
The piece of love, the good place”

(*On the Frontier*, III, iii, 190)

Fantasy, here, helps in fostering a hope, a vision of a brighter future. It totally ignores the facts of life. It does not take into account the challenge posed by the system it seeks to counter. The fantasy is used at its most simplistic level—as a wish fulfilment. It does not provide a critique on either fascism or on the war precipitated by it—the central issues of the play. It, thus, becomes, a vehicle for self-indulgence.

While Ionesco as well as Auden-Isherwood resort to fantasy in exposing Nazism, their respective plays evoke different worlds. *The Dog Beneath the Skin* denounces the Nazis but does not become as oppressive as *Rhinoceros*. On the other hand, fantasy in *On the Frontier* elevates the play to a visionary plane. *The Dog Beneath the Skin* has a buoyancy, a hilarity which is not be contained. The characters are what Auden believed dramatic characters ought to be, “simplified, easily recognisable and over life-size” (*The English Auden*: 273). Ionesco’s play is more tightly structured and carefully written. The characters are invested with attributes of ordinary, normal human beings but are subtly twisted to make them credible inhabitants of a fantastic world. Ionesco and Auden-Isherwood, in providing a critique on the Nazis, represent them as animals. It is a striking similarity in perspective and imaginative vision. The titles of both the plays foreground the animal image as a motif of fantasy to capture the human condition. Auden-Isherwood’s attempt in 1935-36 which Ionesco elaborates in 1960, is a significant achievement of English Poetic Drama and its impact on the French Absurd theatre in the 1950s/60s.

### References

- Auden, W.H. & Isherwood, Christopher. *The Dog Beneath the Skin or Where is Francis?*.1935; London: Faber & Faber, 1958.
- Auden, W. H. & Isherwood, Christopher. *On the Frontier*. 1938; London, Faber & Faber, 1958.
- Ionesco, Eugene. *Rhinoceros*.tr. Derek Prouse. Middlesex: Penguin, 1962.
- Bradby, David. *Modern French Drama*. Cambridge: CUP, 1984.
- Fuller, John. *A Reader’s guide to W. H. Auden*. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1970.
- Haffenden, John ed. *W.H. Auden The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983.

- Hogart, Richard. *Auden An Introduction, Essays*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1965.
- Ionesco, Eugene. *Notes and Counter Notes: Writings on the Theatre*. tr. Donald Watson. London: John Calder, 1964.
- Ionesco, Eugene. *Present Past Present: A Personal Memoir*. Tr. Helen r. Lane. New York: Grove Press, 1971.
- Mendelson, Edward ed. *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*. London: Faber & Faber, 1988.
- Monroe, Spears. K. *The Poetry of Auden: The Disenchanted Island*. New York: OUP, 1963.
- Neighuhr, Ursula. 'Memories of the 1940s' in *W. H. Auden A tribute*. ed. Stephen Spender. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975.
- Spender, Stephen. *The Thirties and After: Poetry, Politics, People (1933-75)*. London: Macmillan, 1978.