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FOUR PROJECTIONS OF ABSURD EXISTENCE
IN THE MODERN THEATRE

DISSERTATION

 Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * * * *

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Anyone who is even remotely connected with the theatre has, in some way, felt the impact of the Absurd. What seemed to be a localized and more or less minor manifestation of an intellectual avant-garde became, instead, a major and fairly universal force. Writers who consider themselves to belong, in a general way, to the tradition have emerged throughout the Western world. Few topics have so obsessed the critics for the past decade. Some, like Martin Esslin, have named it, defined it, and traced it to its historical roots.¹ Some, like William Saroyan, have hailed it as the wave of the future.² Some, like Walter Kerr, have quarreled with its premises and denounced its values.³ Some, like Lionel Abel, have denied its existence and invented new terms to swallow it up.⁴ What they have not done is ignore it.

As an added implication of its popularity, it is necessary only to glance at a random sampling of undergraduate playwriting efforts. The majority of them will show definite influences of what the student considers, at any rate, to be Absurdist drama. In addition, much of
the experimental work being done in colleges and universities is carried on in this area.

A further proof of the force of the movement is the professional production of many of the works. Such names as Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, Pinter and Albee appear frequently among the theatrical listings of the world's major theatrical capitals. Nor are they week-end curiosities. Many have enjoyed long runs and commercial success.

It is the implication of this acceptance which is the concern of this study. The discussion will be directed not primarily to matters of style and structure or theatrical values, but rather toward the philosophies, or more precisely the world-views, which emerge from some of these representative plays. For, however else these "new" playwrights may or may not resemble each other, they do share a fundamental outlook on the state of existence which is strongly reflected in their works. Just what this outlook is and what variations are played upon it will be the major business of the following chapters.

In order to discuss this outlook and its variations, a few basic truisms of theatre must first be reviewed. One is that a theatrical experience is the result of a group effort unique in the creative world. The irreducible number of constituents in this group include author, actor, and audience; far more often than not this production
committee embraces a much larger number of related artists and craftsmen. Up to a certain point, indeed, the theatre shares this group characteristic with other art forms which combine creative and interpretative elements. Music and the dance come most readily to mind; in each, as in theatre, the original artistic conception is incomplete until executed by the vocalist, the instrumentalist, the dancer. A printed score, no matter how trained the reader, is no more a symphony than a script is a play. There is no way to write the timbre of a French horn; it is impossible to do more than pattern the liquid movement of ballet. The playwright can only describe, at varying levels of abstraction, a play. He provides dialogue, situation, plot. Non-verbal elements in such areas as gesture and setting may be integral to his concept and so be carefully noted. Yet all these things, and anything else the author sees fit or feels compelled to write, only tell about the play. They give it potential for form, dimension, direction and meaning. They confine and structure it. They are essential to it, yet they are not the play in the sense that a picture is a picture or a poem is a poem. The collaboration of performance is a play.

A second truism is that theatre must ultimately be judged in the auditorium, for a play is not complete until performed. Any work of art must, at some level, be an attempt to communicate the vision nourished in the heart
of the artist. Abstractly, it may be possible to defend the thesis that one can create to no other purpose than the act of creation. However, in the realm of appreciation and criticism—the realm, that is, where art functions—this becomes a meaningless concept. The painting destroyed in the studio or the poem burned in the study may be of great significance to the artist or the poet but cannot possibly affect anyone else. The picture or the poem becomes vital only when seen or read. Only then is it possible to respond to it, to absorb it, to be changed by it, to accept or reject it.

In many media, artistic communication is a "one to one" or "one from one" function. Nothing stands between the individual creative artist and his audience but the work of art itself. If there is misunderstanding or doubt in the communicative process it is because of muddled sending, faulty reception or difficulty of transmission. The creation may be well or poorly executed; the recipient may be sensitive or insensitive; the work of art more or less difficult and abstruse. The object, however, exists. It can be seen or heard or read at first hand and at any time, by any number of people. The picture is fixed. The cathedral stands. The story is printed. The receptor looks directly at the building or the painting and, normally, reads the novel or the poem or the short story to and for himself. He may seek guidance in his appreciation, but
nevertheless the creative artist speaks to him directly. Theatre, however, cannot be presented for assessment as a tidy, neatly wrapped, personal creation. In the theatre, communication is not a direct circuit, a "one to one" function. A playwright must assume, as one of the disciplines of his craft, the necessity of reaching and affecting directly a group of people for whom the dramatic experience will be a total one. During the three or four hours of production the communication must occur; one cannot assume a second exposure for any individual in the audience. The minds and the hearts must respond then, or it is quite likely that they will never respond. Some bond of communication must be established at just that precise moment, or, in all probability, the particular work will fail.

All of this leads to still another truism: theatre is by its very nature a conservative art. It cannot race ahead and wait for its audience to catch up with it. Theatre occurs in time as well as space, and the time is an ever-present now. Since at least a significant minority of its audience must respond to the play, the play must somehow strike a meaningful nerve. It must have some significance to the group, or they will reject it, usually not maliciously or stupidly, but merely because they cannot identify themselves or their lives with the play's image.

As an innovator, even the most advanced wing of the theatre usually lags behind most of the other arts. A play
must exist in a climate of sufficient understanding that an audience can respond to it, in one way or another. The form or the content of the play may be rejected, but both must exist in an atmosphere which is theoretically tolerant of them. It is virtually impossible for a play to deviate too widely from the more orthodox artistic, philosophic or social opinions. There would be great difficulty in finding an audience with which to communicate. The more orthodox playwright will generally work in the accepted and entrenched forms most likely to reflect the opinions and tastes of the majority of theatre patrons. The experimenter, if he is to be heard, usually sows in land already cultivated and prepared by workers in other media.

There is nothing particularly revolutionary or original in the recognition of theatre's conservative nature, yet it is often overlooked, especially by those who are impatient of the theatre's relatively slow response to change, or those who take a primarily literary view of theatre. Lionel Abel, for example, notes that the bizarre qualities of some modern drama are years behind similar traits in other forms. He also notes that in the theatre it is necessary to make an immediate impact. Yet he fails to draw this obvious conclusion. 5

Because of its position as a group and popular art, the theatre is especially sensitive to the climate of its time. Thus, it is likely to be, of all the arts, the most
accurate barometer of contemporary thought and opinion. It is not generally a spokesman for radical positions, either of the left or the right. Rather, the bulk of the drama, at any particular period, is likely to register the prevailing "enlightened" atmosphere, while the avant-garde reflects rather than predicts a changing attitude.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, it follows then that there must be something in modern life which has fertilized the soil for the new drama. The Theatre of the Absurd has appeared and flourished during the middle period of the twentieth century. There must be something in modern man's condition which causes him to respond to a theatre which is so strikingly different from the entrenched realism of the first half of the twentieth century. Whether recognized or not, this factor is almost certainly a growing awareness of some form of absurd existence.

It is not the purpose of the present discussion to trace the growth of the philosophy of absurd existence or to identify the men and ideas which have contributed to it. It is, of course, closely identified with existentialism, and the spokesmen for, as well as the popularizers of, this concept of dark enlightenment have been a pair of Frenchmen, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. It was Sartre who made existentialism fashionable in the post-war world. It was Camus who humanized it.

What these men and others did, essentially, was
to re-define and restate an already existing body of thought. They dramatized it, utilized it, in literature and theatre. They managed to communicate to an audience which was, consciously or not, looking for them. They communicated not so much the disciplined intricacy of a structured philosophy as a basic premise, a point of departure.

Any extensive explanation for the current sensitivity to the absurd, both by artists and laymen, lies within the province of the social and behavioral scientists. Many of the contributing factors to man's uneasy sense of anguish, alienation and despair have become commonplaces. Among these factors are the Second World War, with its frustrating, tension-laden aftermath; the development of the bomb and the horror of possible atomic annihilation; the erosion of established social-political and religious groups and systems; science's rapid strides into the unknown, probing at the stars with one hand and gently touching the secret of life with the other.

The idea of the absurd existence has been discussed and defined extensively by a wide variety of authors, who have given shape to its generally accepted conventions. Camus stated this idea tellingly in an often-quoted passage from The Myth of Sisyphus:

What, then, is that insoluble feeling that deprives the mind of the sleep necessary to life? A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a
familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and light, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and the setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.

Sartre has treated the subject often and at great length. In one of his more succinct passages he said, "Man is forlorn, because neither within him nor without does he find anything to cling to." Edward Albee, in a discussion of the theatre for which he writes, spoke of certain existentialist and post-existentialist philosophical concepts having to do, in the main, with man's attempt to make sense for himself out of his senseless position in a world which makes no sense—which makes no sense because the moral, religious, political and social structures man has erected to "illusion" himself have collapsed.

Simplified and condensed, then, absurd existence is existence to no objective purpose, within no objective pattern. Disregarding arguments as to the validity of this position, one can accept the fact that it has become an operative philosophy of contemporary life.

Following the line of earlier discussion, it would appear that the theatre, as a mirror of the time, would respond to this attitude. That the theatre has made such a response has become self-evident. It is a mistake to assume that everyone wrestling with the abstract problem of absurdity will emerge with the same answer. Similarly, it cannot be taken for granted that the image of life sensitized by various writers holding similar views will
be the same. In the following pages the works of four major contemporary playwrights will be considered. Each of the four operates from a basically absurdist orientation. It is the business of this study to determine whether significant differences are apparent, not so much in their styles and techniques, which would inevitably differ, but in the world views projected by the writers.

The four were not chosen arbitrarily. Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus represent the philosopher-artist, men whose works of fiction and drama largely are extensions in another dimension of their previously determined intellectual positions. Further, these two, more than any others, focused and defined the concept of the absurd for the present generation. In the theatre they work generally within the confines of the causally structured play, not technically far removed from the bulk of other contemporary drama. Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco, on the other hand, are first and fundamentally creative artists. If they speak in philosophical terms—and Ionesco, at least, has turned more and more critic in recent years—it is after the fact. Their plays have become standard and classic examples of the avant-garde anti-play: that type of drama which Esslin has labeled, "Absurd." Indeed, they are generally considered to be the most original of the avant-gardists, and the most influential.

While the four are different in many ways, and
have had varying success in the theatre, each is a serious artist trying to face honestly the same fundamental problem: what is the position of modern man faced with the cold smile of absurdity?
The philosopher in the twentieth century seems generally to lead a life of quiet anonymity. Outside of his colleagues, only a few curious laymen are likely to recognize his name or his works; the public at large tends to remain serenely unaware of his existence.

Jean-Paul Sartre, however, falls outside this generalization. While they may not be quite sure of what he has done, a large number of people find his name familiar, in much the same way as they identify Einstein. Sartre has become a kind of symbol for a view of existence which is more often sensed than understood.

The reasons for his surprisingly wide recognition are varied, yet certainly one of the major ones is his versatile involvement with the world. He has not limited himself to academic or ivory-tower isolationism, commenting on a society of which he is not really a part. While Sartre is a philosopher, he is at the same time novelist, playwright, critic, journalist, political thinker, and man of the French Resistance. Indeed, while it may seem an almost heretical observation in the light of his unblinking philosophy, an aura of romance has grown up
around Sartre which has helped to make his name a byword in our time.

It is, of course, as the authoritative voice of French atheistic existentialism that Sartre is most popularly recognized. Since his plays (as well as his novels and short stories) almost invariably serve to exemplify some facet of existential thought, it is not quite possible to discuss Sartre as a writer completely apart from his philosophy. At the same time it would be utterly unrealistic to assay any sort of definitive analysis of that philosophy within the context of this discussion. There is little to be gained from an exhaustive and largely repetitive review of the technical arguments developed in such a work as *Being and Nothingness*. Rather, since Sartre's philosophy is, after all, his view of the world, an attempt will be made to find reflections of that view in representative plays, referring to the philosophical writings and comments for amplification and clarification.

The first existentialist play to be professionally presented in France was *The Flies*. *(Camus' *Caligula* was written five years earlier but not produced until 1945.)* The circumstances of this production, in 1943, have become part of the folklore of modern theatre. It is perhaps fitting that the play was first performed during *The Occupation*, for it seems apparent that it was this period
which incubated the strong post-war interest in existentialism. As Marjorie Grene puts it:

French Existentialism did not begin with the Resistance. . . But Existentialism as a popular movement in French philosophy and . . . as a political philosophy did grow. . . out of the peculiar stresses of the Occupation. . .

The Flies suited the time and conditions admirably. For one thing, it was viewed as a thinly veiled comment on the Occupation. (Thody, as well as other critics, equates Orestes with The Resistance, Aegistheus with the Germans, Clytemnestra with Collaborators.) Further, it presented in an idealized and highly theatrical form a ringing challenge to the French to discard their lives of "bad faith" and accept the sentence of existential freedom.

The story is a reworking of the ancient Greek legend of the vengeance of Orestes and Electra on Clytemnestra and Aegistheus. In Sartre's version, Orestes arrives anonymously in Argos on the great national day of atonement: the anniversary of the murder of Agamemnon. He appears as a highly cultured, well-educated young man, accompanied by his tutor, making what might very well be called a sentimental journey to the land of his birth. Orestes learns from a mysterious old man (who turns out to be Zeus) that the city has been plagued with flies ever since the death of the former king; that the people live in a perpetual state of mournful penance; and that
each year, on this date, the ghosts of the dead are called up to spend the day and night tormenting their living relatives.

Urged by the worldly tutor and the pointed words of the old man to keep himself aloof from the problems of the city, Orestes prepares to leave. However, his sister Electra appears, defiantly defiles the statue of Zeus and, after Orestes has introduced himself as Philebus of Corinth, relates to him how she has been forced to act as a scullery maid to Clytemnestra and Aegistheus. After witnessing a bitter confrontation between mother and daughter, Orestes decides to stay.

At the great religious ceremony of the freeing of the dead, Electra appears, exhorting the people to throw off the weight of fear and superstition and to dance and be happy. She has nearly convinced them when Zeus causes the great stone which blocks the tunnel of the dead to roll away. Left alone, Orestes identifies himself to his sister and asks her to leave with him. He is not, however, the furious and terrible Orestes whom she has dreamed of; she still thirsts for vengeance. Orestes prays for a sign which Zeus obligingly provides. The result, however, is not at all what the god had expected. Orestes, in a great flash of insight, recognizes his position and resolves to kill the king and his mother. He carries out his intentions
surely and with dispatch, but Electra begins to weaken and draw back from her resolve. The deeds are not quite as she had dreamed them, and she finds she is not really free from the fears of the people.

Orestes and Electra spend the night after the killings in sanctuary at the Temple of Apollo, avidly watched by The Furies, who are The Flies. Zeus offers them protection if they will simply repent and disavow the deed. Electra gives in to him, but Orestes will not. Maintaining his freedom, insisting on his responsibility for the deaths, he speaks to the assembled Argives and leaves, with The Flies angrily following him.

The Flies spells out a number of Sartre's basic tenets more simply and straightforwardly—perhaps more naively—than his other major plays. First there is the sense of alienation which Orestes feels in Argos. "I was born here, yet I have to ask my way like any stranger," he complains to his tutor, and, more poetically,

When I was seven I knew I had no home, no roots. I let sounds and scents, the patter of rain on housetops, the golden play of sun-beams, slip past my body and fall round me—and I knew these were for others.

His tutor, the voice of reason, cynical and objective, fosters his aloofness. It is his argument that Orestes is free because of his knowledge, and that this freedom sets him apart from and superior to mankind which allows itself to be caught up in foolish and stupid situations.
"You are free to turn your hand to anything," he tells Orestes, "but you know better than to commit yourself and there lies your strength."7 Orestes is, then, the man of sense, the reasonable man of any time who, recognizing non-reason, is tempted to turn away from it, even at the price of isolation and loneliness. He can return to his life of serenity, beauty and contemplation and refuse to commit himself, but, as Sartre warns often, one cannot avoid a decision. Not to act is also to decide.

In existential language, such a decision by Orestes would be an act of bad faith, a form of self-delusion. Instead, his hero chooses to commit himself, chooses to take an active and positive step, chooses, in short, to become engaged. Sartre's point seems obvious: one cannot, in good faith, refrain from participation. "The intellectual must take sides and, like Orestes, seek for a solution of his own personal problems through trying to help his fellow man."8

Ranged against the intellectual bad faith which Orestes exemplifies until his "conversion" is the emotional bad faith of the Argives. This takes the form of living in "seriousness." That is, they accept a set of objective, external ethics as absolute patterns of behavior. For the Argives, this includes a subscription to a religion which includes elements of ritual, dogma, sin and repentance. They are free, as Orestes is free, but while he at first
disguises his freedom, they refuse to recognize theirs. They cling to the comfort of order and plan, welcoming the physical and mental torment they endure as they attempt to atone for their sins. For even the possibility of damnation is a spiritual moral structure which defines the possibility. Throughout the play Sartre makes quite clear his view of religion, especially formalized religion. A woman, for example, answering her child's plaintive cry, "I'm frightened," says, "And so you should be, darling. Terribly frightened. That's how one grows up into a decent, god-fearing man." His picture of mind-crippling superstition reaches a rather melodramatic peak in the ceremony of the dead, as the priest exhorts the ghosts to re-enter the world from the tunnel.

In the name of anger unappeased and unappeasable, and the lust of vengeance, I summon you to wreak your hatred on the living. Come forth and scatter like a dark miasma in our streets, weave between the mother and the child, the lover and his beloved; make us regret that we, too, are not dead. Arise, spectres, harpies, ghouls and goblins of our nights.

Standing between Orestes and the Argives are Zeus and Aegistheus. They represent the image man has, the image man creates, of power and authority. Both have a passion for order and attempt to establish an illusion of order. This is the illusion worshiped and obeyed by mankind. "Am I anything more than the dread that others have of me?" Aegistheus cries to Zeus, who answers, "and I--who do you think I am?"

This triangular balance is broken at the play's
climax; then Orestes suddenly recognizes that he is free. His description of that recognition is as dramatic and graphic an evocation of the existential feelings of anguish and forlornness as occurs in literature.

Suddenly, out of the blue, freedom crashed down on me, and swept me off my feet. Nature sprang back, my youth went with the wind, and I knew myself alone, utterly alone in the midst of this well-meaning little universe of yours. I was like a man who's lost his shadow. And there was nothing left in heaven, no right or wrong, nor anyone to give me orders.  

Earlier Zeus had warned Aegistheus that once man feels the light of freedom, the Gods—and, by implication, rulers—have no power over him. Certainly this is the message which Sartre is spelling out. "Doomed to freedom," man has no choice but to choose, and by choosing he fashions himself and his world. "The discovery of freedom is also the discovery of a future. And to discover a future means to determine a future."

As a play, The Flies suffers from its over-all tone of oratorical pleading. Much of the dialogue is more self-consciously platitudinous than dramatically moving. As an introduction to the world of Jean-Paul Sartre, however, it perhaps serves as his least complicated guide.

In Camera (Huis Clos) departs radically from The Flies in tone and technique. This play was first produced in 1944 and has been, from the beginning, the most popular of Sartre's dramas.

The audience is faced here not with a remote Grecian
city, but a French Second Empire drawing room, into which is introduced, one by one, three characters: Garcin, Inez, and Estelle. Besides the laconic valet who ushers them in, they constitute the entire case of characters in this short, tightly knit structure.

One becomes aware, slowly, that these people are dead; that they are in what is to be demonstrated as a Sartrean equivalent of hell. And this is precisely what In Camera is: hell viewed through existentialist eyes.

The action, if such it can be called, is composed almost entirely of the gradual revelation of each of the characters to the others. It all starts quite civilly as they attempt to explain why they are there. Garcin was a pacifist, who was shot because he would not fight. Estelle describes how she married a wealthy, elderly man in order to support her younger brother. Later she met and fell in love with Roger, who wanted her to run away with him, but she refused. Her death was the result of pneumonia. Inez evades the first round confessions but coldly insists that these cannot be the real reasons that the three of them have been closed up together in one room.

The tension mounts as the inevitable struggle for dominance begins. Inez, a lesbian, is attracted to Estelle and wants to form a relationship with her, independent of Garcin. Estelle, on the other hand, attempts to shift the balance so that she and Garcin are drawn together.
As the truth begins to dawn on them that they are destined to become each other's tormentors, they grudgingly reveal more of their stories. Garcin, after declaring that he has been damned because he mistreated his wife, at last admits that he had tried to leave the country, was caught and executed, and had died frightened. Inez frankly relates that she had stolen her cousin's wife, Florence, who, tormented by Inez and shaken with guilt, had one night turned on the gas and killed both of them. Estelle, under the relentless probing of the other two, confesses that she had run off with Roger, had an unwanted baby which she murdered, and had gone back to her husband, leaving Roger to commit suicide. Pinned beneath the others' eyes and no longer remembered on earth, the three struggle briefly to escape, then sit back and face each other, each on his own sofa, as the curtain falls.

Once again Sartre has chosen to describe and explain part of the existential rationale by means of the drama. The play makes two primary statements, first, that one defines oneself and can only be judged by one's actions, and second that in any relationship, each person becomes an object when viewed by another. The first of these statements supplies most of the plot material and exposition in the play, the second the ultimate tension and basic theme.

Both Garcin and Estelle rebel against their sentences. They are, again, examples of people living in
bad faith. Each refuses to acknowledge the truth of his guilt or to assume responsibility for his actions. Indeed, Estelle at one point puts it quite plainly: "Isn't it better to think we've got here by mistake?" Only through the most painful prodding will either admit what he has done, and even then each resists being judged on the basis of his acts. Inez, who serves most consistently as Sartre's mouthpiece, makes the point most tellingly. "It's what one does, and nothing else, that shows the stuff one's made of... You are--your life, and nothing else." All three must face the fact, which Inez does willingly, that each of their actions was the result of a free choice, and that the action, not the intent, is the only thing that matters.

The grim irony of all this, however, in the case of these three is that they are dead. So long as one is alive, one always has a chance to choose, an opportunity to make decisions which can alter the future. But once dead, the image is frozen. "They're passing judgement on my life without troubling about me, and they're right, because I'm dead." Garcin says this in a moment of rueful insight. Each of the three experiences the agony of seeing himself first fixed in living eyes, then fading from human thought. This, then, ultimately means that they have only each other, their torturers, to convince. Garcin especially needs desperately to feel he is not a coward, but only Inez
can tell him. "You are a coward, Garcin, because I wish it," she taunts him. Thus, even given a chance to escape, he cannot leave, for his only possible vindication can come in this room.

The variation on the theme of freedom is somewhat more grim than that developed in The Flies, and is obscured to a degree by Sartre's choice of characters. If these are but distorted pictures of all of us, then our freedom of choice is a frustrating one at best. If they are supposed to literally represent the vicious individuals they are, then the piece smacks dangerously of an existential rereading of "the wages of sin is death." At any rate, the point is quite clear: the act is the person.

The second, more inclusive theme rings a number of changes on the basic state of being observed. Sartre devotes much of his major work to this subject of one's relation to others. Essentially, he states that things--including other people--occur as objects to the individual-as-subject. There are certain characteristics and configurations which allow for distinction, but except as things seen and noted, they do not affect the subject. Not, that is, until they look back. At once, then, the individual realizes that he has now become an object within the subjectivity of others.

Thus, there is a constant struggle for domination, an attempt to objectivize the other while defending oneself
from becoming a thing in his eyes. One's attitudes, postures, gestures are constantly threatened by the look of the Other.

*In Camera* is a graphic projection of this hypothesis. There is no way for any of the three to escape the observation of the others. Garcin attempts to ignore the situation, early in the play, by withdrawing, hands over ears and not speaking, from the others. But Inez withers him. "You can nail up your mouth, cut your tongue out—but you can't prevent your being there." Further, since there are no mirrors or other objective measuring devices, each needs the other as proof of his existence, yet this puts him at the other’s mercy. Inez offers to be a looking glass for Estelle and cruelly tells her there is a pimple on her cheek. The horror, of course, is that Estelle has no way of knowing whether there is or not. She is an object to Inez.

Moreover, even if, at times, two of them are able to gain a tenuous relation, it is doomed by the presence of the third. Inez, in a burst of jealousy, hurls the taunt at Garcin as he begins to make love to Estelle:

Very well, have it your own way. I'm the weaker party, one against two. But don't forget I'm here, and watching. I shan't take my eyes off you, Garcin; when you're kissing her, you'll feel them boring into you... We're in hell; my turn will come.

Hell, or existence, becomes then, in Garcin's words, "other people." It is the eternal, tormenting conflict arising out of the Sartrean paradox that one needs to be
recognized by a free consciousness, but if one captures it, it is no longer free—and if one does not capture it, it will attempt to capture in its turn.

Sartre, in *In Camera*, avoids, in the main, much of the self-conscious sermonizing of *The Flies*, but manages to make its image of the two aspects of existence quite clear. We cannot escape the necessity of action. In good or bad faith, it is impossible for him to avoid, and ultimately he is nothing more than the sum of his actions. Further, he can be assessed in the minds of others only by what he does. Indeed, he is not unlike Everyman who finds that he must go to the grave unaccompanied except by Good Deeds.

Further, one's image as a coward, a brave man, a fool or whatever depends upon the existence of others, who in a sense create the individual by the judgments they make of him. However, it is not possible to bear scrutiny by another without conflict arising. So man, needing others, finds in them his tormentors. "My original fall is the existence of the Other."²¹

On 1951 *The Devil and the Good Lord* (Le Diable et le bon Dieu) was presented in Paris. In terms of length, number of characters, and production demands, this is the most complex of Sartre's plays to date.

The action of the drama takes place in the late Renaissance, during, and for a year after, the siege of
Worms. The major character, Goetz, is a mercenary general who has betrayed his half-brother, sold himself and his army to the Archbishop, and defeated the anti-clerical forces. Goetz, the illegitimate son of a nobleman, takes pride in being a man of consummate evil. His evil is monumental, however; he would, in a perverse way, prove God by challenging him. "God hears me," he says, "it is God I am deafening and that is enough for me, for He is the only enemy worthy of my talents." Offered information by the priest, Heinrich, which will allow him to take the city in return for the lives of the imprisoned clergy, Goetz accepts and prepares to attack and sack Worms. The pleas of his mistress and a banker to spare the city are disregarded. So also are those of Nasti, leader of the peasants revolt, who offers Goetz command of the peasant army. It is Heinrich who causes Goetz to pause, when he taunts him by saying that doing evil is not at all unique. Everyone does evil, he says; it is impossible to do good. Intrigued by this thesis, Goetz wagers Heinrich that he can do good, and the priest promises to come in a year and judge him.

Goetz first proposes to give away to the peasants all the estates he has taken from his brother. Nasti attempts to dissuade him, for he fears that it will cause other peasants to revolt prematurely. Ironically, the peasants themselves remain aloof and surly; they find it impossible to understand Goetz and distrust either his
motives or his mind. At last, in order to comfort his ex-mistress, Catherine, who is dying in fear, he asks heaven to heap her sins on him. Not receiving a sign, he acts on his own. Stabbing his hands, he announces that the wounds are miraculous stigmata, whereupon Catherine dies peacefully and the peasants, superstitiously impressed, accept him as divine and cooperate in setting up a small Christian city-state.

His community settles into an atmosphere of brotherly love and pacifism, while elsewhere the peasants break out in revolt. Once again Nasti offers Goetz the leadership of the rebellious army, and once again he refuses, advising them not to fight. Utilizing his reputation as a prophet, he nearly persuades the army, but is confronted and defeated by his own ex-servant, Karl, who despises him. Meanwhile some of the revolutionaries overrun Goetz's village, furious because the inhabitants will not join them. They butcher the entire population except for Hilda, the daughter of a wealthy merchant who for some time had been attempting to aid the peasants.

Goetz abandons all thought of achieving goodness by charity and instead vows to find holiness in isolation. He becomes a hermit in the ruins of his village, fasting and mortifying his flesh with only Hilda, who now loves him, as a companion.

One year from their first meeting, Heinrich,
accompanied by a devil he imagines has possessed him, comes to find and judge Goetz. The confrontation leads to Goetz's realization that God does not exist, or, if He does, He has nothing to do with the affairs of men. The ex-priest, unable to bear the loss of God and the Devil, attempts to murder Goetz, who instead kills him.

Resigned now to act with men, Goetz offers his services to Nasti as a common soldier. But the revolutionaries need a general and Goetz finds that he must choose to accept the responsibility of leadership. The play closes as he kills an officer in order to establish a discipline. He has committed himself.

The sprawling, panoramic, almost cinematic structure of The Devil and the Good Lord is unique in Sartre. Indeed, in 1946 he had written, "Our plays are violent and brief, centered around one single event; there are few players and the story is compressed within a short span of time, sometimes only a few hours." By 1951, however, it would seem that Sartre was willing to experiment further with the possibilities of the modern stage for spectacular effects.

Primarily, this play explores man and society in the broad areas of religion and politics. Goetz stands as a prototype of a naturally active man, eventually forced to take a free position in his relation to God, man, and the world.
Politically, the play is mostly concerned with the ethics of revolution. Here Nasti, as the leader of the peasants, serves as the playwright's most obvious spokesman. He stands firmly on the side of the masses against the common enemies: landlords, merchants, and church. "Your holy church," he says, "is a strumpet; she sells her favors to the rich." He is not opposed to God nor the idea of God but to the strangling power of the clergy and the use of religion to enchain the common man. His god might be called, as Robert Champigny has suggested, "economic determinism."

Nasti's goal is to change the existing order, but he is aware of the dangers of individual, indiscriminate action. Attempting to bring Goetz to his side, Nasti tells Goetz that his brand of personal violence, far from destroying the vested interests, actually strengthens them. It "brings confusion; weakens the weak, enriches the rich, increases the power of the powerful." Further, Nasti is quite willing to compromise a moral conviction in order to obtain a desired result. Contempuous as he is of the ritual and superstition of those he leads, he preys upon it when it serves his purpose. At one point, to halt what he believes will be a premature uprising, he conspires with Heinrich to spirit the clergy away, knowing that the peasants will be terror-stricken without their priests. In the final scene of the play
Nasti allows a witch to rub his men and himself with a magic charm, since they believe it will make them invulnerable.

His relationship to Goetz is in all cases a realistic one. Goetz is the greatest general in the country; therefore, Nasti would have Goetz lead his troops. He is not particularly disturbed by Goetz's politics; actually, he becomes incensed at him only when Goetz proposes to give his land to the peasants, certainly a revolutionary action. Nasti knows, however, that it will cause trouble that he is not yet capable of handling. At this point he turns on Goetz much as a modern communist "deviationist" might on a Stalinist: "False prophet--instrument of the Devil! You are the one who says: I shall do what I think right, though the world perish."27

Finally, at the play's end, it is Nasti who insists that Goetz join the revolutionary movement as a general, not as a common soldier. The fact that Goetz would prefer the anonymity which being a member of the ranks would bring him is of no consequence to Nasti. Effective political action demands that each person serve as he is best suited.

More important than its revolutionary implications, however, is the play's preoccupation with man's relation to God and other men. In The Devil and the Good Lord Sartre levels his most devastating dramatic attack on religion. His target is not only the idea of an instrumental
God, but the didactic church and the concepts of Christian morals.

The members of the clergy emerge from the drama either as venal hypocrites or, in the case of Heinrich, tormented souls who dimly perceive their untenable position but cannot face its consequences. Early in the action he cries, "No! No! I don't understand! I understand nothing! I neither can nor want to understand. We must believe——believe——believe!" Shortly after comes perhaps his most poignant cry. "I believe nothing occurs except by Thy laws, even to the death of a little child and that all is Good. I believe because it is absurd! absurd! absurd!"

Though Heinrich is the only member of the clergy who actively supports the masses, his relationship to them is no more satisfactory than Goetz's is to be. In his case, he is unable to face them as one man to others; his anguished image of God harries him. Heinrich is not able to accept man as good or evil except within a divine framework. "Thou hast permitted men to have their hearts devoured, their intentions corrupted, their actions diseased and stinking; Thy will be done." It is Heinrich who taunts Goetz by insisting that doing evil is no novelty, that all men are evil, yet God has the power to forgive them.

Even when Heinrich feels there is no hope for him he finds it necessary to confure up a devil as his companion and adviser. The concept of a devil, of course, demands
the concept of a God. Faced at last with Goetz's terrifying freedom, Heinrich cannot bear it. "If God doesn't exist, there is no way of escaping men," he cries, and tries to kill Goetz.

If religious dogma is useless, so too are the paths of Christian love and sacrifice. These are the arenas in which Goetz battles throughout most of the play. Accepting Heinrich's challenge that it is impossible to do Good, he sets out first in the most obvious manner—love thy neighbor as thyself. He gives his lands and his money to the poor and receives in return not love but hatred and suspicion. This baffles and enrages him; he is trying to prove himself to God by God's own commandment and finds himself rejected. Like Heinrich, he is going over the heads of the people. It is to God that he is really trying to prove himself, just as he had been in his evil days. Indeed, he seems to suffer from what more orthodox writers would label the sin of pride. "I am going to make you big and fat, and you will love your neighbors. By heaven, I insist that you love mankind!"

He gains the reverence of his peasants, ironically, only through a trick, suggested by the sellers of indulgences whom he despises. Feigning the stigmata, he convinces them that he is a prophet. He is thus able to impose on them a life of "seriousness." They are taught a set of rigid, objective moral codes which break down
completely when faced with the harsh realities of contemporary life. His docile tenants, brainwashed to believe that they can exist in splendid isolation, are butchered by the inflamed masses whom they will not join.

At this point, Goetz tries another conventional path to righteousness. He will humble himself and take man's sins upon his own head. Thus he becomes a martyr, a hermit who fasts and flays his body to atone for the evil in the world. He again goes directly to God, leaving man, except in the abstract, out of their conversations.

But still he is playing a role; still he needs, in the Sartrean paradox, another's eyes to see him.

Hilda, I need to be put on trial. Every day, every hour, I condemn myself, but I can never convince myself because I know myself too well to trust myself.33

He welcomes Heinrich as the judge he longs for, but it soon develops that in spite of all, he must become his own accuser.

It is at this point that his "conversinn" occurs, reminiscent of Orestes.

I supplicated, I demanded a sign, I sent messages to heaven, no reply. Heaven ignored my very name. Each minute I wondered what I could BE in the eyes of God. Now I know the answer: nothing.

At last Goetz is able to face the fact that he is responsible only to himself and other men. He, like Orestes, is condemned to freedom. But where Orestes left Argos, Goetz remains, a part of his time, committed to his


society. "Men of the present day are born animals. I must demand my share of their crimes if I want to have my share of their love and virtue." 35

The picture that emerges from The Devil and the Good Lord is once again that of man, solitary and human, with no one but himself to guide him in his decisions. Not only can he not expect supernatural aid and comfort; he cannot even follow the gentle homilies of virtuous living.

He [Sartre] sets out to show that Christian charity can only humiliate those who receive it, estrange those who practice it from their fellow men, and destroy all possibility of social action. 36

To lead an authentic life one must become involved with and serve mankind on a social-political level, but not under the deluding banner of universal love and brotherhood. The dreadful freedom and the presence of others forces the aware man to confront life as a solitary and anguished figure creating himself and his future by his own actions. Mankind is his business, but he is forever condemned to stand apart from them. Goetz himself sums it up at the drama's end:

I shall make them hate me, because I know no other way of loving them . . . I shall remain alone with this empty sky over my head, since I have no other way of being among men. 37

In September, 1959, Sartre's most recent play, The Condemned of Altona (Les Sequestres d'Altona) was produced in Paris. This, too, is a long work, longer
in the published version than The Devil and the Good Lord. The similarity ends there, however, for in this play Sartre has at once gone back to a tighter, leaner, more classical structure and at the same time moved closer to contemporary theatrical realism in style.

Five characters carry the more than four hours' traffic of the drama, and three settings, all within the same house, serve to confine its action. The house is the mansion of the Gerlachs, a rich shipbuilding family living in Altona, a suburb of Hamburg. Old von Gerlach, who built the empire and has risen, like Krupp, from the ashes of defeat to even greater industrial power, is faced with the certainty of imminent death because of throat cancer. Determined to destroy himself in six months before he becomes an invalid, the patriarch has summoned his daughter, Leni, and his son, Werner, to swear that they will not leave the house after his death. Werner is to have charge of the factory, but must remain in Altona, rather than pursue his law career in Hamburg. Johanna, Werner's wife, is troubled. Here, dominated by his father and the memory of his elder brother Franz, her husband is not the same man she married. Further, she cannot understand the necessity of their staying on in the huge estate. Soon the reason—and the family secret—is exposed. Franz, who supposedly had died in Argentina three years before, has actually been living for thirteen years alone and half mad
in an upstairs room. Only Leni, who brings him his food and is carrying on an incestuous love affair with him, sees him. He never goes out and refuses admittance to anyone else.

In the world of his room, Franz sees Germany as a dying victim of the war, ruined and rayaged. He insists that he will not watch the country perish, and spends his time recording speeches to a fanciful race of crabs who have taken over the world in the thirtieth century. He is speaking, he says, in defense of his time to this tribunal of the future.

Into this land of illusion comes Johanna, urged by old Gerlach to see Franz. Tricked into admitting her, Franz begins to lose the protective self-delusions he has fostered. At last, confronted by Leni, he is forced to admit to Johanna that, while serving on the eastern front he had tortured and killed partisan prisoners. Johanna turns from him in revulsion, and Franz agrees to see his father. He demands now that von Gerlach, rather than posterity, judge him. The old man can only admit that he has been responsible in a large measure for what Franz has done and become, and hints that his son now has only one possible line of action. Franz accepts, and the two of them drive off to destroy themselves in an automobile accident. As one of the recorded speeches of the recluse plays on a tape machine, Leni mounts the stairs to take
Franz's place in the room with the crabs, while Johanna silently exits with Werner, leaving the stage empty except for the voice of Franz.

Technically, Sartre uses a device reminiscent of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. Throughout the play a number of brief flash-back scenes serve to supply, in a highly theatrical fashion, key bits of exposition. Further, in this work he seems much more concerned with fleshing out his people, giving them backgrounds and character and motivations. There are also fewer long, set speeches than in some of his earlier works, and these, largely consisting of Franz's appeals to the crabs, are less intrusive on the action.

All of these elements combine to make *The Condemned of Altona* less of an obvious dramatization of an intellectual concept. It is, perhaps, over-long, but it builds and sustains a dramatic intensity in living, theatrical terms more successfully than most of his former major plays.

Virtually absent in this work is any belaboring of the question of religion, of man's relationship to a deity. Rather, this position is more or less taken for granted. Speaking to his father, Franz asks almost casually, "There isn't a God, is there?" "I'm afraid there isn't. It's rather a nuisance at times," old Gerlach answers. The effects of theology are mentioned peripherally at times, as when the father states, "the
Gerlachs are victims of Luther. That prophet filled us with an insane pride."\textsuperscript{39} But as a whole, the focus is squarely on twentieth-century man as he attempts to relate to himself, his fellows, and to a world in which brutality is sanctioned in the name of political or national expediency.

Sartre has said that "... the play is really about torture,"\textsuperscript{40} and so it is, torture on several levels and by several means. It is also, as the title implies and as Oreste Pucciani argues, a play about sequestration.\textsuperscript{41} Perhaps one could submit that it is a play about guilt and conscience, and the conflict between duty and morality.\textsuperscript{42}

It is all these things and more; in short, it is a Sartrean world in which these all become part of a larger whole--acting in bad faith and making of the Other an object. (Literal torture, of course, is the ultimate attempt to reduce another to the status of a thing.)

This world is best exemplified by Franz, though the other members of the Gerlach clan supply variations on the theme. His desperate need for self-delusion has become externalized. Within his room he has created an existence in which he can avoid facing responsibility for his actions by shifting that responsibility to the times. "His declamations are as much an attempt to flee from his own personal guilt as to defend the general guilt of the century in which he lives."\textsuperscript{43}

Franz's first appearance, early in the play in a flash-back, supplies the clue to his later behavior. Old
Gerlach had leased some land to the Nazis for use as a concentration camp. His son, hurt and disillusioned, reproaches him for so compromising with evil, but one remark is especially significant. He is speaking of having walked along the camp's fence, and suddenly blurts out, "Father, they are no longer men... I am disgusted with myself, but it is they who fill me with horror."

It is then that he makes the gesture of attempting to hide an escaped prisoner. Through his father's intercession he is not punished, though the prisoner is killed in his room as he watches. Even at that moment, as he later confesses to his father, "The rabbi was bleeding, and I discovered at the heart of my powerlessness some strange kind of approval."

These decisions, made by not deciding, establish the pattern of behavior which is to culminate in his career as the Butcher of Smolensk—and his ultimate ruin. So long as he can hide from the Other, so long as he can convince himself that Germany is in ruins, that the world is guilty, that he did what he had to do, so long can he remain in a perilous equilibrium. The closed circle of the Gerlach family (whose pride and power and position symbolize modern, cynical society) can protect and nurture him while the circle is tight. Once the outside is admitted his position becomes unbearable. His illusions are unable to suffer scrutiny.
Structurally, Johanna becomes the agent of that scrutiny. Ironically, it is his attachment to her, his growing love, which becomes his undoing. From the moment he admits her to his room he begins his head-long flight toward destruction. The thesis of his sequestered world of bad faith meets the antithesis of a relationship outside that world, and the dialectic must destroy him.

On the structural level again, it is Leni's possessiveness that forces Franz to admit to Johanna that he is a torturer. But, as a Gerlach, she is part of him. Indeed, her incestuous relationship with him is, besides being theatrically sensational, valid on a symbolic level. The Gerlach pride feeds on itself; the Gerlach concern is for its own. "In Leni the implicit incest of the Gerlach family becomes explicit."\(^{46}\)

Repulsed by Johanna, Franz's carefully constructed world is shattered. With no hope remaining, there is now no reason why he should not see his father and admit to the truth he has really always known. He did not passively allow the torture. "I'll display my power by the singularity of an unforgettable act; change living men into vermin."\(^{47}\) Furthermore, his father had prepared the ground by instilling in him the Gerlach pride and arrogance. This had helped make him a torturer and now made him unfit for anything else. "I made you a monarch, and today
that means good-for-nothing...tell your Court of Crabs that I alone am guilty--of everything. The Gerlach worship of power has been its own ruin.

For father and son, then, there is only one possible decision. In Sartre's words, "Franz comes to face what he has done; so does his father. They have to commit suicide."

Viewed as an evocation of life, The Condemned of Altona is a more somber play than any of Sartre's previous works for the theatre. The themes are not necessarily new: the necessity of choice and responsibility for one's choice; the inevitable tension and conflict arising in one's relationship to the Other; the need to be realized and judged by another. But this time there is no "conversion," no lonely but defiant hero hurling imprecations at an empty sky. Only an old man and his song, at last admitting that they have been guilty of crimes against each other and the world. Again, not in technique but in tone, the final scene of the play echoes Death of a Salesman.

Of the other characters, Leni deliberately takes up her brother's world of illusion. There is no promise of hope there. Only Werner and Johanna are left; it is possible they may find some measure of freedom since Werner has secured their release from their vow. Yet Werner has shown little promise as portrayed in the play. At best, the hope that they might make a world is nebulous.
It is true that Sartre was writing with the thought of France's unhappy and disastrous Algerian conflict uppermost in his mind. This may very well be why the world of Altnna is a dark and cruel one. Franz sums it up as his tape plays at the final curtain.

The century might have been a good one had not man been watched from time immemorial by the cruel enemy who had sworn to destroy him, that hairless, evil, flesh-eating beast—man himself. Perhaps there has never been written a more grim one-line indictment of humanity.

From an examination of these major representative plays of Jean-Paul Sartre a fairly clear picture can be projected of one view of an absurd world.

Above all, it is a human oriented world. The harsh glare of existence shines directly and brilliantly on man, thrust unexpectedly on stage to act a part in a play with no director. In the Sartrean universe there is no help from the wings. Man exists in a situation and can only be defined by himself.

Actually the question of whether there is or is not a god is largely academic, since man is compelled to function as though there is not. Orestes tells Zeus, "What have I to do with you, or you with me? We shall glide each past each other, like ships in a river, without touching. You are God and I am free; each of us is alone, and our anguish is kin." Thus the first condition of
this world is that man cannot look beyond himself for aid and comfort.

It obviously follows, then, that there are no unhuman strictures on man's conduct, no "eternal verities," no essential moral codes determining right and wrong, good and evil. The fact that the physical universe seems to adhere to some sort of natural law does not demonstrate that man also must, for man is not a thing. Again, in Orestes' words, "You are the king of gods, king of stones and stars, king of the waves of the sea. But you are not the king of man." ⁵²

So man is alone under the sky. The moment of deepest anguish comes for the Sartrean hero when he recognizes this fact; he realizes with crushing surety that there is no one higher than himself to whom he must answer. In The Condemned of Altona, Franz, still clinging to his illusion of the crabs, bursts out to Johanna, "and what if they don't even know I exist? . . . what is to become of me without a trial? What contempt! 'You can do what you like; nobody cares.'" ⁵³

Nobody cares. This is indeed a shattering possibility for one to face. And it is precisely the possibility that Sartre insists each of us must face. Indeed, it is not a possibility in the existential cosmos, it is a fact. Nobody cares. Every man is confronted with the staggering awareness that he is free. Every man, that is, who is
able to bear the confrontation; for many the knowledge is too painful.

However, the knowledge of freedom brings freedom, which in turn points the direction out of what seems to be a pessimistic cul-de-sac. For while man has had to give up the security of the comfortable concept of a supra-human creator, he has found that he is, indeed, his own maker. He is free to choose, free to act, and what he is or becomes is nothing more or less than the results of his choices and actions. Actually, of course, whether he knows it or not it is impossible for him not to choose, but acknowledging his freedom, he can make his actions meaningful, responsible, and in good faith. In Edith Kern's words, "But though Sartrean man—as he looks and is looked at—forever loses his Paradise, he may, if he lives authentically, gain a world."^{54}

The individual is faced, then, with an almost overwhelming responsibility. As there is no one to whom he can turn for aid, so there is no one whom he can make accountable for his actions. His choices must be made with the complete awareness that he is solely answerable for them. There is no external yardstick to measure them against, no authority to judge their relative value. He must accept the fact that what he does, what he chooses, will be looked at and will become the only basis upon which
he will be realized in the world. Hazel Barnes has made this point quite succinctly:

What [Sartre] proposes as the true, self-evident irreducible is the original free impulse by which a person has chosen in one way rather than another to relate himself to being. This choice is the person inasmuch as it provides the basic unity on the ground of which he forms all subsequent desires.

The question, of course, is whether man is able to accept the fantastic burden of absolute freedom. It is a pitiless, uncompromising situation, for there is no refuge. The insistence that the possibility of choice is always present leaves nowhere to hide. One might suggest that physical restraint and torture would deny that possibility, but even in this situation, as Franz discovers, the prisoner can choose to talk or not. He can choose to die.

Madness itself offers no escape from this freedom. Franz chose his delirium and his illusions. They were real enough, but they were the result of deliberate action on his part. "He [the existentialist] will never agree that a sweeping passion is a ravaging torrent which fatally leads a man to certain acts and is therefore an excuse." In the world of Sartre man can turn neither to religion nor conventional psychiatry; there is balm neither in Gilead nor on the couch.

Small wonder, then, that some might agree with F. H. Heinemann, who states flatly, "He condemns them to infinite liberty which they are unable to bear." Certainly life for the heroes of Sartre's dramas is one of
anguish and loneliness. "Until now," says Orestes, "I
touched something warm and living around me, like a friendly
presence. That something has just died. What emptiness!  
What endless emptiness. . ."58 At the same time, they are
offered a way toward a kind of salvation if they are
strong enough to follow the path of freedom and commitment.
It is, in fact, a consciously ritualistic, almost mystic
experience, for they must suffer the pain of knowledge
before they may join the ranks of the saved. "They are
free," Orestes proclaims, "and human life begins beyond
despair."59

It is an ironic sort of salvation that can only
be found beyond despair, but it does impose a kind of
pattern on the void.

Man is a useless passion, but only insofar as he
adopts an inhuman ideal, or, which amounts to the
same thing, insofar as he is viewed from the
outside. From the outside, everything will appear
as a useless passion.60

In other words, in the world of Jean-Paul Sartre, man is
a "useless passion" in relation to existence. His is an
absurd position because it is totally contingent. However,
he is not helpless. He can act, or, rather, he must act,
and if he is strong enough and honest enough to act in
good faith, he can escape being a mere object and can
become his own creator. Even in The Condemned of Altona
(which is less hopeful than most of Sartre's other plays),
the implication is plain that the Gerlachs' plight is the
result not of "determinism" nor "human nature" but of deliberate choice.

Hazel Barnes sums up Sartre's answer to absurdity when she writes, "For the existentialist, the greatest creative act of a person's life is the creation of his own Good; that is, the invention of a system of values by which he gives his life meaning and form." 61

This may be cold comfort in the face of nothingness, but at least, while it strips man of his pride in his universal significance, it returns to him something of his individual responsibility. "In choosing myself, I choose man." 62
If it is possible to suggest that an "aura of romance" has grown up around Jean-Paul Sartre, then it must be admitted that a positive glow has developed about the name of Albert Camus. Probably no contemporary figure has so captured and fired the imagination of his generation. His life, his work and his death have all combined to make of him the nearest thing to a literary legend that the mid-twentieth-century world has produced.

His Algerian birthplace, so poetically evoked in his writings, symbolized the tragic paradox he struggled with all his life. On the one hand, Algeria was almost the archetypical pattern of the beauty and the mystery of nature. Throughout his works, like a recurring motif, runs a veritable litany of joy to the warm loveliness of that land. On the other hand, however, Algeria was to become the shocking scene of brutality, torture and murder. This fundamental dichotomy lies at the heart of much of his work and exemplifies the notion of absurdity he felt so keenly.

The word "felt" comes to mind easily when speaking of Camus. For all his intellectual perception, for all
that "For all his intellectual perception, for all that his is 'a universe unspeakably indifferent to the natural aspirations of men,'"^1 Camus' writings are alive with compassion. His works reflect not detached, contemplative compassion, but a deep and emotional involvement with and concern for the desperation of the human condition. This is not to say that he was a sentimentalist; far from it. But, as observed by Germaine Brée, "a major source of Camus' work, which from the very start carried it beyond the frontiers of social satire or recrimination, is Camus' understanding of and sensitivity to that part of all lives which is spent in solitude and silence."^2

Almost inevitably Sartre enters into any discussion of Camus for a number of quite obvious reasons. Both rose to prominence at about the same time. Each was actively involved with the French Resistance Movement. While Camus was not a systematic philosopher, as was Sartre, much of his writing concerned itself with philosophy. He, too, was a writer of novels and short stories, a dramatist and journalist. But while the two had much in common, there are some fundamental differences in their positions which a study of their works makes clear. In the area of theatre this manifests itself with Camus' first play.

*Caligula* was written in 1938 when Camus, a young man of twenty-five, was director of the Algerian Théâtre de l'Équipe, formerly the Théâtre du Travail. However, it
was not presented until 1945, and then was offered in Paris.

The story of Caligula is taken, insofar as its externals are concerned, from Suetonius' *Lives of the Three Caesars*. As the play opens the young emperor, who has been an exemplary ruler, has disappeared from the royal palace following the death of his sister-mistress Drusilla. Upon his return he shocks his friends and subjects by embarking upon what seems to be an utterly insane course of brutal despotism. He arbitrarily puts men to death after forcing them to name him beneficiary in their wills. He abducts the wives of patricians to serve the government brothel, and insists that its patronage be increased. He appears in the masquerade of various gods, demanding not only homage but tribute.

Behind these mad actions, however, is a soul made sick by the discovery of the absurdity of existence. Shortly after his return he tells his friend, Helicon, that he has found "a childishly simple, obvious, almost silly truth, but one that's hard to come by and heavy to endure... Men die; and they are not happy." Therefore he is determined to become absolutely free. His apparently senseless tyranny is the result of this crisis.

At length the patricians, goaded beyond endurance, manage to enlist the aid of Cherea, a philosopher and friend of Caligula's. Along with the poet Scipio, Cherea leads
a group of assassins, and Caligula is struck down as the final curtain falls.

*Caligula* offers several interesting insights into Camus' world structure. One of the most important is its dramatic statement of the recognition of the absurd. The emperor, upon his return to the palace, makes the astonishing pronouncement that he wants the moon. Since he is obviously serious, Helicon asks him why, and Caligula replies:

> Really, this world of ours, the scheme of things as they call it, is quite intolerable. That's why I want the moon, or happiness, or eternal life—something, in fact, that may sound crazy, but which isn't of this world.

What Caesar desperately feels he must do is in some way escape the horrible grotesqueness of the world, break out of the prison of absurdity. Obviously he cannot gain the moon or eternal life, but because he is Caesar he can exercise complete freedom and pursue to its logical conclusion the knowledge that "everything's on an equal footing; the grandeur of Rome and your attack of arthritis."  

*Caligula* makes a grisly and ironic case for logic. Everything he does he is able to defend rationally, even though his actions frame a macabre rationale. If the treasury is of primary importance, then life must be of lesser importance; hence his scheme of murder for profit is a perfectly logical fund raising operation. Cherea points out the problem and indicates the only possible
answer—and, ironically, it is an irrational one: "He
is converting his philosophy into corpses and—unfortunately
for us—it's a philosophy that's logical from start to
finish. And where one can't refute, one strikes."\(^6\)

Here, then, is a man who has had an equivalent of
Orestes' or Goetz's revelation of freedom. He, too,
realizes that he is free, and realizes it at the cost of
accepting the anguish of absurdity. However, Caligula
introduces a disturbing element. "One is always free at
someone else's expense. Absurd, perhaps, but so it is,"\(^7\)
he explains. Freedom now is not so uncomplicated. It
impinges on others. A new concept has been introduced—
the concept of limit. At the same time, Caligula insists,
"Yet who can condemn me in this world where there is no
judge, where nobody is innocent?"\(^8\) Granted the logic of
Caligula's position—and this the author certainly expects
one to do—there is, as Cherea states, no refutation.
Caligula's logic does, indeed, become deadly, given a
world in which men die and are not happy, a world in which,
since nothing can be of any real importance, everything is
of equal importance. It becomes, in fact, the logic of
totalitarianism on the socio-political plane, and the
language of religion on a metaphysical one. This is
strikingly emphasized as Helicon quotes from a book that
Caligula is writing on executions:

A man dies because he is guilty. A man is guilty
because he is one of Caligula's subjects. Now all
men are Caligula's subjects. Ergo, all men are guilty and shall die.°

This logic of total freedom cannot be countered by logic, but at the level of what is popularly called "common sense" it is obviously intolerable. In stating his reasons for opposing the Emperor, Cherea puts it quite simply: "What I want is to live and be happy," he states, ironically echoing Caligula's words, "[buE] neither is possible if one pushes the absurd to its logical conclusions." In other words, while the logic of absurdity insists that there is no logic in existence and that freedom is total and terrifying, life struggles against the argument on the visceral level of humanity. Caligula himself finally admits that he was wrong: "My freedom isn't the right one... how oppressive is this darkness." Henry Popkin summarizes briskly, if a trifle inelegantly, when he writes, "A successful revolt [at the play's end] fortunately reminds us that, all kidding aside, we need to find some compromise between banality and the loss of freedom."12

Here, then, is the first indication of a view which Camus is to expand later, especially in _The Rebel_. Put simply, it is that there are limits beyond which absurd freedom cannot go without becoming oppressive.

However, in spite of the fact that this relatively bright reading of the world of Caligula is possible; in spite, indeed, of the fact that in later years Camus'
introduction urged this reading, it would be a mistake to ignore the chilly humor and grimness of *Caligula*. Throughout the work Camus makes every effort to present the emperor, not as a bloody and capricious monster, but as a man torn by anguish and despair. He has experienced the revelation of the absurd, and the experience has been shattering. Early in the play he confides to his mistress:

> Oh, Caesonia, I knew that men felt anguish, but I didn't know what the word anguish meant. Like everyone else I fancied it was sickness of the mind—no more. But no, it's my body that's in pain.14

There can be little doubt that Camus wishes to present as sympathetic a picture as possible of his central character, sympathetic and at the same time frightening. For certainly Caligula represents a strong protagonist, desperately and disastrously attempting to impose his will on a chaotic universe. He fails, of course, on a personal level, but as a spokesman for the un-logic of the absurd he makes his point with disturbing clarity.

Even as the play closes, with Caligula cut down by friends whom he has driven to the use of his own weapons of violence, he is able to speak the final word. Half laughing, half weeping, he cries, "I'm still alive!"15 It is not possible to assassinate the absurd.

While *Caligula* was the first play written by Camus,16 the first to see Paris production was *The Misunderstanding* (*Le Malentendu*) in 1944. The stark, tight story was
suggested by a newspaper report of a murder. This is, in fact, the story which Meursault finds and reads in his cell in *The Stranger*.

*The Misunderstanding* is almost classic in its unified simplicity. The action takes place between late afternoon of one day and the morning of the next. The setting is an inn in an unspecified, gloomy European village. The proprietress of the inn and her daughter Martha have existed for years by robbing and murdering wealthy travelers who stop at their door unattended. As the play begins, another potential victim has arrived. Although unknown to them, it is Jan, son and brother of the two women, who has been gone for twenty years. He has prospered in an unnamed, sunny southern land, and has come back to aid his family. When he finds that the women do not recognize him, he decides to stay the night without revealing himself. He will observe them, as he says, "from the outside," and see if they will not come to know him. If not, he tells his worried wife, he will stop the charade in the morning.

But by morning he has been murdered and thrown in the river. The silent manservant finds his passport and gives it to the mother. Upon learning the truth, she leaves to die in the water with the son. Martha, left alone, is confronted by the dead man's wife, Maria, who has returned to end the game of make-believe. Martha
tells her of what has happened, then hangs herself in her room, leaving the distraught wife alone with the old servant at the play's end.

It is difficult to believe that this play can be anything but an evocation of despair at the cold, bitter capriciousness of the world. Thody suggests that the pessimism of the piece can be to a large extent explained by the circumstances of its writing. During 1942 and 1943 Camus was away from his beloved Algeria working in France for the Resistance. The separation from homeland and the dismal events of the war could very well have influenced the tone of the work.

Whatever the cause, The Misunderstanding is Camus' bitterest drama. Once again, as in Caligula, he has created a figure who is desperately trying to escape the senseless mockery of meaningless existence. For Martha, it is not the moon which she desires, but an equally unobtainable life in the land of the sun.

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

Again, as in Caligula, she resorts to murder to attain her ends, and again, she fails. However, even at this level The Misunderstanding throws a darker shadow, for Martha shows none of the awareness and concern for
abstract concepts of freedom that the emperor does. Murder for her exists, not on the plane of anguished philosophy, but at the level of a commercial enterprise.

Throughout the play, the most compelling image is that of the village, and more particularly the inn, as the world of everyday, mindless being, the world as it exists. Speaking to Jan, Martha warns him, "As a guest at this inn you have the rights and privileges of a guest, but nothing more," and later, "You are in a home where the heart isn't catered to." She makes the point even plainer when she remarks bitterly, "Of course it isn't his home. For that matter, it is nobody's home. No one will ever find warmth or comfort or contentment in this house." The mother, with something of the resignation of old age, can offer little to soften the melancholy picture of their dwelling. "Indeed, there's something to be said for this ugly brick house we've made our house and stocked with memories; there are times when one can fall asleep in it." Death, it would seem, is the only consolation.

Into this bleakness comes Jan, an emissary from a land which is almost a legend. Martha thirstily asks him to tell her of his country, and, in a burst of lyricism, Jan describes what can only be Camus' Africa.

Spring over there grips you by the throat and flowers burst into bloom by thousands above the white walls. If you roamed the hills that overlook my town for only an hour or so, you'd
bring back in your clothes a sweet, honeyed smell of yellow roses.\textsuperscript{23}

But this is not a land in which he can stay. He can, perhaps, dwell there as an expatriate for a while, but sooner or later extradition is inevitable. "Happiness isn't everything," Jan tells his wife; "there is duty, too. Mine was to come back to my mother and my own country."\textsuperscript{24}

The irony, however, is that even in his own country, he goes unrecognized by his mother and finds no home in his house. "They received me without a word... I was looked at, but I wasn't seen."\textsuperscript{25} These are his first intimations that perhaps his search for a place and for a relationship is to be futile. Later, alone in his room, his suspicions become sharper.

It's always like this in a hotel bedroom; the evenings are depressing for a lonely man. I can feel it again, that vague uneasiness I used to feel in the old days... and I know what it is. It's fear, fear of the eternal loneliness, fear that there is no answer. And who could there be to answer in a hotel bedroom?\textsuperscript{26}

At this point, he pushes the bell, and the old servant appears, but merely stands silently. Jan dismisses him and says, "The bell works, but he doesn't speak. That's no answer."\textsuperscript{27} While Camus has said that the old man does not necessarily symbolize fate,\textsuperscript{28} it is difficult not to read fate, or an unconcerned God, into him.

The inexorable summing up is left for Martha. Confronted near the close of the play by María, she
tells the wife plainly what has happened. Maria's almost hysterical reaction is a typical and pathetically human one: "But you're mad, stark staring mad! People don't die like that—when one's arranged to meet them." Martha's final speeches leave little consolation and less hope. "In the normal order of things," she says, "no one is ever recognized. . . neither for him nor for us, neither in life nor in death is there any peace or homeland." Her parting advice to Maria is grim indeed: "Do as He [God] does, be deaf to all appeals and turn your heart to stone. . . You have a choice between the mindless happiness of stones and the slimy bed in which we are waiting you." 

Once again Camus wrote, after the fact, that an optimistic message could be found in the play:

It [The Misunderstanding] amounts to saying that in an unjust or indifferent world man can save himself, and some others, by practicing the most basic sincerity and pronouncing the most appropriate word.

Maria suggests this early in the drama when she tells Jan, "There are situations in which the normal way of acting is obviously the best. If one wants to be recognized, one starts by telling one's name; that's common sense." However, as Henry Popkin writes, "Surely it is more exact to say that the slightest weakness, the most innocent facetious impulse, will release an absurd and implacable destiny."
The world of The Misunderstanding is a frightening and chilly one where man gropes hopelessly for identity and contact. He moves, unrecognized, through a brutally indifferent universe in which the only logic is perversity.

This story... is nothing but an extended metaphor on the human condition. This is the world without signs or sense, the absurd world in which man is never at home.35

Camus' next play, The State of Siege (L'État de siège), was presented to Paris audiences in 1948. Both in style and in theme it proved to be a quite radical departure from his first two produced works.

In form, the play is a sprawling, multi-layered structure, almost Baroque in its extravagance. The physical versatility of the modern stage is taxed by the use of multiple sets, complex sound effects, and an intricate, fluid use of lighting. Constructed episodically, the drama is made up of a number of brief scenes, flowing one into another, with many of the characters appearing in only one or two of the tiny segments. The cast itself is huge, its bulk being made up of townspeople who function much as a chorus. At times, they speak as a single, massed voice; at other, as an antiphonal, male-female choir. In short, the play bears little resemblance to the classic spareness of The Misunderstanding.

The State of Siege is essentially a dramatic allegory. It is, indeed, reminiscent of Camus' novel, The Plague, which had been published in 1947. However,
even though one of the major characters in the drama is called The Plague, it is not, as Camus insisted it was not, an adaptation of the book. At the same time, it is certainly a re-working of similar materials in a different medium.

The city of Cadiz provides the arena of action for the drama. A comet, appearing suddenly and frighteningly in the night sky, has panicked the citizens. They regard it as a dreadful harbinger of some sort of natural disaster. However, the city officials assure them that all is well; indeed, the good fathers pass a decree that there was no comet. It becomes a crime to mention it.

Soon, however, townspeople begin to die of a swift-striking, mysterious sickness. Into the by now demoralized city comes The Plague, accompanied by his young secretary. She carries the census list, and each time she lightly crosses off a name, a man dies. This demonstration cowards citizens and officials alike, and Cadiz is handed over to The Plague. In short order he sets up a tight, totalitarian rule, aided by the town drunk, Nada, who is a vocal nihilist, cynically professing to believe in nothing.

In all the city, only one man, Diego, actively opposes the dictator. He turns his efforts, first, to the victims of the epidemic, working as a medical orderly among them. His growing horror at the inhumanity of the
despotism leads him first to defy it, then to try to escape it, and finally to stand and fight it. This action loses him the woman he loves and, eventually, costs him his life, but he does deliver the city out of the hands of the tyrant. One man, unafraid, is able to break the dictator's power. As the secretary admits, "the machine has always shown a tendency to break down when a man conquers his fear and stands up to them [the masters]." Diego dies, a final victim of The Plague, just as the city rallies behind him to drive out the ruler. The play ends as Nada, before hurling himself into the sea, sneeringly announces that the same old pack of corrupt officials are back to resume their positions. On this more than slightly ironic note, the curtain comes down.

The most striking thing about The State of Siege is the change in attitude evidenced by the author since The Misunderstanding. Even more than a change in attitude, this is a fairly obvious change in purpose. Caligula and The Misunderstanding both are dramatic underscorings of philosophical positions, true, but each could be viewed, evaluated, accepted or rejected on a purely aesthetic or artistic basis. That is to say, their themes develop more or less naturally out of the action of the drama. With The State of Siege, however, Camus is using the stage more obviously and openly as a platform. There are several major points that he is attempting to make, and, instead
of suggesting them in terms of representational story and staging, he chooses to present them in a frank and straightforward manner.

In the first place, he seems to be saying, so-called "democratic" governments are likely to grow fat, bureaucratic, and self-perpetuating. They are not democratic at all, but their oppression has developed slowly enough and is of such long standing that the people are not even aware that they are not free. When it becomes necessary for them to defend themselves and their institutions, however, their moral and spiritual decay becomes evident.

Second, Camus' stand on permissible limits is demonstrated in this play by the rule of The Plague. Any totalitarian state must inevitably be founded on excess, on outrages against the minds and bodies of the citizens. Such a state, therefore, cannot be tolerated.

A third thesis is that, granted the absurdities and paradoxes of life, nihilism is not the answer. Denying any moral values, the nihilist is bound to be an opportunist, and will align himself with the forces of power and despotism.

A final, major doctrine advanced by The State of Siege is a strong and positive statement concerning man's position in a world of desperation, brutality and death. The individual can give worth and value to his life by the act of rebelling, by resisting any attempts to enslave
him. So long as man is alive, no matter what his position, this possibility is open to him: the possibility of rebellion.

Like the Medieval morality play which it so closely resembles, The State of Siege is not especially subtle in expounding these contentions. The more than jaundiced eye with which Camus viewed bourgeois society and government is quite evident in the early portions of the play. The citizens, upset by the sight of the comet, are reassured by the governor, speaking through his Herald:

Good governments are governments under which nothing happens. Thus, it is the Governor's will that nothing shall happen here, so that his government may remain benevolent as it has always been. . . accordingly. . . each of you is ordered to deny that any comet has ever risen on the horizon of our city.38

The townspeople are at once comforted by the fatuous proclamations of the government, and go on with the small and mundane matters which concern and amuse them. The market booths open as usual, and the people flock to the fortune tellers, astrologers, Gypsies, actors, and other attractions, all of which traffic in lies and deceit and illusion. The Governor views this, of course, with great satisfaction. "I am glad," he says, "to see that nothing's changed, for that is as it should be. I like my habits, and change is the one thing I detest."39

The picture projected is of an entrenched and corruption-
ridden government, one neither of nor for the people, but shrewd enough to maintain the status quo. So long as the economy is fairly stable, so long as the people are diverted and fed, so long as the common men are content with platitudes, the government rests in stupified inertia.

From such a government and such a society, however, moral strength has been drained. Like a blown egg, the shell remains, seemingly intact, until subjected to pressure. At this point, the facade crumbles, exposing the hollow interior. It is only necessary for The Plague to arrange for a few "demonstrations" by his secretary, Death, to force the Governor and the Council to capitulate. The Governor explains his decision in words which must have been, to the French, ironically reminiscent of the era of the Collaboration:

Citizens of Cadiz, I feel sure you understand that a great change has come into our civic life. In your own interests it may be best that I should entrust the city to this new authority that has sprung up in our midst. Indeed I have no doubt that by coming to an arrangement with this gentleman I shall be sparing you the worst; and, moreover, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that a government exists outside your walls which may be of service to you in the future. . . . I am making this agreement of my own free will.

Clearly, Camus has little use for a weak and dishonest government such as this. However, any sort of totalitarian alternative is worse, for it must, by definition be based on unlimited power and freedom of action. It can only function in this manner at the expense of the
people, subjugating them by means of naked and systematic terrorism. The Plague himself describes the method—the classic method—by which power is seized. "The great thing is to secure a majority of slaves by means of a minority of well-selected deaths."^41

Once the totalitarian establishes control he can maintain it only by keeping all others in a literal and humiliating state of enslavement. Short of an actual act of rebellion, the individual is allowed no freedom of choice in any area of existence. Nor is this a random tyranny. On the contrary, it is carefully planned and blue-printed to impose the maximum restriction within the broadest scope. "There will be more dying as the fancy takes you. Lists will be kept up—what admirable things lists are!"^42 No longer can one even be granted the freedom of dying as chance will have it.

The restrictions imposed by a dictatorship are not only physical. The Mind, too, is captured and regimented. While many of the acts and words of The Plague ring of the iron men of the political right, Camus is by no means partial in his hatred of government by excess. The Secretary, patiently explaining one of the numerous bureaucratic paradoxes to a bewildered fisher-
man, plays some variations on techniques of the left.

We start with the premises [sic] that you are guilty. But that's not enough; you must learn to feel, yourselves, that you are guilty. And you won't feel guilty until you feel tired. So really tired, tired to death, in fact, everything will run quite smoothly.  

The Plague himself, at the end of his initial speech to the people after assuming power, best sums up the price and conditions of a doctrine of no limit. "I bring you order, silence, total justice. I don't ask you to thank me for this; it's only natural, what I am doing here for you. Only, I must insist on your collaboration. My administration has begun."  

Faced with these bleak alternatives of a hypocritical democracy on one hand a murderous despotism on the other, it would seem logical that man could have recourse only to total rejection. Indeed, this is the initial position of the historical rebel as Camus sees him, and the figure of Nada early in the play makes a strong case for this philosophy. He insists that he alone in the city is free, because "I alone have kept intact the freedom that comes of scorn." Only Nada appears to be aware of the cynical corruption, and the approaching collapse, of the existing state. However, he evidences that lack of respect for limitations which Camus insists must be avoided by the true rebel. His
disillusion with the world has become twisted into a desire for its destruction.

Death to all the world, I say! Ah, if only I could have the whole world before me, tense and quivering like a bull in the arena, its small red eyes red with fury and the foam on its pink muzzle like a frill of dirty lace! Old as it is, my arm wouldn't falter, I'd slit the spinal cord with one clean cut, and the huge brute would topple over and fall through the abyss of space and time down to the crack of doom.

Thus Nada, who saw so clearly the shortcomings of the existing regime, adapts himself readily as a minor official in The Plague's administration. In view of his realistic appraisal of governments, this attitude seems on the surface surprising. However, it is consistent with his desire for annihilation, since The Plague's government is by far more efficient than the government it displaced. Camus perhaps had Nada in mind when he wrote, "they [the nihilists] are... consumed with desire for the true life, frustrated by their desire for existence, and therefore preferring generalized injustice to mutilated justice."47

Thus the figure of Nada, however correct his appraisal of man's condition may be, does not supply anything but an apocalyptic solution to that condition. "Nihilistic passion, adding to falsehood and injustice, destroys in its fury its original demands... It kills in the fond conviction that this world is dedicated to death."48
Camus, however, in spite of his preoccupation with death, was not dedicated to it and nowhere is this more clear than in *The State of Seige*. For in the character of Diego he supplies, however desperate and lonely, an answer to the paradox of meaningless existence. It is Diego who matures into the true rebel as Camus sees him.

It is necessary for Diego to pass through a version of that strange existential salvation which has been noted in other dramatic figures, both of Sartre and Camus. His awareness begins with the knowledge of his aloneness. This revelation is not as blinding in his case as it is to some of the other heroes, such as Orestes. Rather, the result of the series of lost values eventually leaves Diego only the final alternative of submission or revolt.

Diego's first reaction to *The Plague* is one of bewilderment and shock. He assists the sick initially out of an instinctive humanitarianism. But the brutal horror leaves him shaken and afraid. As he tells his fiancée Victoria, "Never have I been afraid of any human being--but what's happening now is too big for me. Even honor is no help; I'm losing grip of everything I clung to." 49

In a blind attempt to escape responsibility and *The Plague* he first attempts to hide in the house of Victoria's father, Judge Casado. But when the family sees the marks of the epidemic on him, they refuse to harbor him, even though in a moment of panic he threatens
to infect their son. The Judge rationalizes his action by piously reminding Diego that he has broken the law. When Diego insists that the law is not only unjust but criminal, the Judge replies, "If crime becomes the law it ceases being crime."\(^5^0\)

After leaving the Judge's house Diego next tries to bribe a fisherman to take him out of Cadiz by sea. (Throughout the play, as in other works of Camus, the sea represents succor and safety. The Chorus throughout prays for the wind to change and blow in from the sea, a wind which would cleanse the city.) He is interrupted, however, by The Plague's secretary, and it is at this point, balked in every attempt to evade the issue yet refusing to submit, that Diego at last turns and rebels.

The Secretary, admitting to an admiration for Diego, attempts to bring him over to her camp, but Diego is disgusted at Death's distorting her peaceful image in the service of The Plague. Reacting violently to her argument, he pinpoints at least the weakness in their system. Essentially this is that no matter how iron-fisted the tyranny, in the last analysis the individual does not have to submit.

It's easier working on whole generations... but a single person--that's another story; he can upset your applecart. He cries aloud his joys and griefs. And as long as I love I shall go on shattering your beautiful new order with the cries that rise to my lips. Yes, I resist you...\(^5^1\)
Hearing these words, the Secretary now knows that she and The Plague have no power over Diego. The Plague attempts to convince Diego that he is wrong: "No one can be happy without causing harm to others. That is the world's justice." "A justice that revolts me, and to which I refuse to subscribe," is Diego's reply. Even the threat of death does not dissuade him. When The Plague suggests that living is important, Diego answers, "My life is nothing. What counts for me are my reasons for living. I'm not a dog." So, though it costs him his life, by the basically simple act of pure rebellion Diego frees the city from The Plague. His position is perhaps most effectively couched in the words which he speaks to the Secretary: "There is in man... an innate power that you will never vanquish, a gay madness, born of mingled fear and courage, unreasoning, yet victorious through all time."

Nor is Diego's sacrifice entirely lost on the city. For when the cynical Nada sneers that the return to power of the old regime merely means a return of corruption and that there is no justice, the city's answer is a strong reaffirmation of Camus' doctrine of limitation. "No; there is no justice—but there are limits. And those who stand for no rules at all..."
than those who want to impose a rule for everything over-step the limit."

The State of Seige was not successful in the theatre. It has been categorized as lifeless, because of its rather heavy-handed dealing with abstractions. However, in all fairness it must be recognized that Camus was not trying to write anything but an allegorical play. He states, "Hence it is utterly useless to accuse my characters of being symbolical. I plead guilty. My avowed aim was to divest the stage of psychological speculations in muffled voices so that it might ring with the loud shouts that today enslave or liberate masses of men." It cannot be denied that The State of Siege does ring with these "loud shouts," and most unequivocally and triumphantly echoes the strongest affirmation of man's worth in Camus' drama.

In his last play, The Just Assassins (Les Justes), which was produced in 1949, Camus returned in form and style to the spare classicism of The Misunderstanding. There is little action depicted in the play itself, as the author reconstructs a brief period in the lives of a group of Russian terrorists. As a matter of fact, the play is a dramatization of an historical incident which Camus also discusses in The Rebel, the assassination of Grand Duke Sergei in 1905.

The drama is essentially a series of debates con-
cerned with the two central points in Camus' philosophy of the rebel: the doctrine of limits, and the difference (as Camus sees it) between rebellion and revolution. A young member of the terrorist cell, Ivan Kaliayev, has been chosen to blow up the carriage of the Grand Duke en route to the theatre. Ivan is viewed with mistrust by one of the older members of the group, Stepan, because of the younger man's seemingly romantic view of the movement. This mistrust is apparently justified when Ivan fails to hurl the bomb. The reason for his failure, however, precipitates the doctrinal arguments which make up most of the play. For the Grand Duke was not alone in his carriage, as had been expected. Not only was the Duchess with him, but also two children, his niece and nephew. It is the sight of the children in the carriage which causes Ivan to hesitate until the moment for action is past. He puts it to his comrades to decide whether his actions were justified, promising to abide by their decision. Except for Stepan they agree that he acted correctly and he is given a second opportunity two days later. At this time he hurls the bomb, kills the Duke and is arrested. In his cell he is visited first by the Chief of Police who offers him a pardon in return for information concerning the rest of the group. Kaliayev refuses because he feels that his death is necessary in order to justify the act. He is later visited by the Grand Duchess who sincerely
attempts to convince him that for the sake of his soul he must repent for his deed. This Ivan cannot do, not merely because of his disbelief in God, but because such repentance would indeed make him a murderer in his own eyes. He hangs, and the other members of the cell pledge themselves to his memory.

While there is a muted and bloodless romance between Ivan and Dora, another member of the group, this serves only as a pathetic counterpoint to the central conflict which is a conflict of ethical responsibilities in the sphere of revolution. Aligned against each other, much in the fashion of Creon and Antigone, are on the one hand the embittered Stepan and on the other Dora and Ivan. For Stepan there can be no compromise in pursuit of the end. His is the position of the classic revolutionist. For Ivan, however, any temporary betrayal of the ideals of the revolution spells the ultimate betrayal of the entire movement.

Throughout the play the characters assume the oddly stiff-jointed postures of puppets, acting out and verbalizing the earnest dialectics of love, limits, rebellion and revolt.

Love is explored in The Just Assassins in a relatively peripheral manner. The embryonic, pale yearnings which flutter sadly in the breasts of Ivan and Dora are used by Camus on two levels. The first is a rather ob-
viously theatrical one. It adds an element of the pathetic to the drama. While there is a hint of their attraction for each other early in the play, it is made explicit only in the few moments before Ivan leaves for the second time to throw the bomb. The two have been left alone, and Dora tentatively leads the conversation to love. He evades the question with generalities about love in the abstract, but she will not be put off. Finally he is driven to shout, "Keep quiet! My heart years for you and you alone... But a few minutes hence I'll need a clear head and a steady hand."58 At this level, love is used in a frankly sentimental manner. The similarity to a hundred "I could not love thee half so much, loved I not duty more" scenes is painfully apparent. Indeed, Camus makes the point quite openly: "We are the just ones," says Dora, "and outside there is warmth and light; but not for us, never for us. Ah, pity on the just." To which Ivan answers, "Yes, that's our lot on earth; love is... impossible."59

However, Camus is not quite this banal. There is love and love, and this demonstration of romance serves as a variation on a more important theme: love in the almost Biblical sense of charity. What is the rebels' position on this kind of love--love, that is, for Man rather than for a man? For Ivan and Dora this concept is necessary for their struggle to have any meaning. In a sense, this is the cause of the torment and struggle
within them—the reconciliation of violence with love. For Stepan this has ceased to be a problem. He no longer loves. He acts out of hatred. "I... hate, yes, I hate my fellow men. Why should I want their precious love? I learned all about it three years ago, in the convict prison." In him, anger and revolt against injustice have calcified into bitterness. His concern is for the destruction of the system which has hurt him, not the brotherhood of man. Without compassion, the revolution becomes little more than a personal vendetta.

This is, however, only one reflection of the point at issue. The core of the play, the hard, central knot, is implied in the title. What justification can there be for murder? Granted the theoretical freedom of absurd existence, how far, in fact, can that freedom be pushed and still be morally defensible? If, in the face of injustice, tyranny, and brutality, "in order to live, man must rebel," are there boundaries beyond which that rebellion cannot go? These are the questions Camus poses, and the suggested answers go far toward illuminating his position.

The problem becomes acute with Ivan's refusal to hurl the bomb with the children in the carriage. In this microcosmic action, then, the revolution is forced to face its dilemma; what is the allowable price which may be paid for an ultimate hypothetical good? An exchange between
Stepan and Dora tersely states the paradox. "Not until the day comes," he exclaims, "when we stop sentimentalizing about children will the revolution triumph, and we will be masters of the world." Dora's answer is just as plain: "When that day comes, the revolution will be loathed by the whole human race."62

Yet the implications of his problem go far beyond the specific and narrow confines of the life or death of these particular children. Earlier, Ivan, speaking to Dora, had made an elegant plea for his idealistic view of the revolution.

I'm still convinced that life is a glorious thing, I'm in love with beauty, happiness. That's why I hate despotism. . . Revolution, by all means. But we're killing so as to build up a world in which there will be no more killing. We consent to being criminals so that at last the innocent, and only they, will inherit the earth.63

At first glance, this would seem compatible with Stepan's ends-over-means philosophy. But there is one important difference between them, and it is a crucial one. Ivan puts it plainly during an argument after the first abortive attempt at assassination. "Those I love are the men who are alive today. . . I shall not strike my brothers in the face, for the sake of some far-off city. . . I refuse to add to the living injustice all around me for the sake of a dead justice."64 In other words, in the vocabulary of Camus, there are limits beyond which individual action cannot go, and these limits are
defined by others, by their happiness and their well-being. Man does not have an unlimited choice of action, nor can he excuse present evil by possible future good. "Rebellion with no other limits but historical expediency signifies unlimited slavery."  

There is one other dimension implied in The Just Assassins which is of importance in determining Camus' view of man's position in the world. Throughout the play much emphasis is placed on the necessity of the assassin's dying as a part of the total action. "Sometimes at night . . . I'm worried by the thought that they have forced us into being murderers. But then I remind myself that I'm going to die, too, and everything's all right."  

Later in the same conversation Dora makes the point even more sharply: "Throwing the bomb and then climbing the scaffold--that's giving one's life twice. Thus we pay more than we owe."  

This is a thesis to which Ivan holds steadfastly throughout the drama, swayed neither by the dogmatism of Stepan, the cynicism of the prison official, Skuratav, nor the piety of the Grand Duchess. Disregarding any elements of rigid fanaticism, the issue is clear--men must accept the responsibility for his actions. There is, in fact, a curious air of sin and atonement about the play, minus the metaphysics of a god. To the Grand Duchess Ivan states, "In dying, I shall keep the agreement I made with those I love, my brothers."
If one chooses to act, he must choose to accept the consequences of the action.

The world of Camus, as reflected in his plays, is at once more bleak and more human than that of Sartre. The unreasonableness of death hangs like smog over the plays. In each of them there is a tone of melancholy desperation, of the futility of existence on a world hag-ridden by the insulting inevitability of annihilation. "Under the fatal lightning of that destiny, its [life's] uselessness becomes evident. No code of ethics and no effort are justifiable a priori in the face of the cruel mathematics that command our condition."

In the first of Camus' dramas, the action is initiated by Caligula's discovery that men die and are not happy. While the statement is almost banal, the cry of the emperor is a chilling one, for it echoes to the heart of absurd existence. Solitary and unhappy, man moves toward a goal which makes the moving a mockery.

But fix this in your mind; . . . neither in life nor in death is there any peace or homeland. For you'll agree one can hardly call it a home, that place of clotted darkness underground. . . . Try to realize that no grief of yours can ever equal the injustice done to man.78

Nor is it only the journey's end that is absurd. It takes place in a world without reason or purpose, a world of no-sense in which man drifts haphazardly, a victim of blind chance and perverse capriciousness. This
is the world which drives a Caligula, torn by a futile search for order and logic, to excesses of cruelty in order to proclaim his freedom. It is the willy-nilly, monstrous world which destroys a man by the hands of his own mother and sister through a mere whim, a mischance made more horrible by its very mindlessness. Furthermore, it is a world made even more insane by the actions of its inhabitants, where a Plague coldly recruits Death itself to his service. And it is a world which forces men of good will to become murderers, to make the agonizing choice which negates all in which they believe.

In its basic premises, then, the universe of Camus is not fundamentally different from that of Sartre, except for its overt emphasis on the physical reality of death. There is the same aloneness, the same knowledge that man can look nowhere above him for comfort or succor, the same possibility of unlimited choice of action without fear of extrahuman judgment. There is, indeed, the same feeling of nausea when one suddenly finds himself intellectually confronted by the spectre of absurdity.

Oh, Caesonia, I know that men felt anguish, but I didn't know what that word anguish meant.... Pain everywhere, in my chest, in my legs and arms. Even my skin is raw, my head is buzzing, I feel like vomiting. But worst of all is this queer taste in my mouth. Not blood, or death, or fever, but a mixture of all three. I've only to stir my tongue, and the world goes black, and everyone looks... horrible. How hard, how cruel it is, this process of becoming a man!?

These very elements of personally felt grief, which
give to Camus' work a deeper feeling of desperation, indicate paradoxically the distinguishing element of warmth in this theatrical cosmos. Throughout there is a tone of personal involvement with his characters as individual human beings. Even the ever-presence of death in the plays reflects a passionate concern for the hurt and pain of man, not on an abstract or philosophical level, but rather as one reaches out to take the hand of a bereaved and tormented friend who is suffering. The fact that man is unhappy and that man dies is not merely a postulate upon which logical structures may be built. It is a fearful and terrible truth, to be accepted but, nevertheless, to be mourned.

There is that in Camus which not only allows but insists on the dignity and worth of man. Specifically, his answer to the implacable absurdity of existence lies in the areas of rebellion, of individual responsibility, and in the concept of allowable limits of action. This is not to imply that he is optimistic, in the usual sense of the word. He never softens the fundamental realities of the world, as he sees them. "The artist finds in his work no consolation, no reason for hope, no outlet which will enable him to escape the 'absurd walls' and give a meaning to his life." Yet granting this steadfast denial that life can be read with any meaning or congruity, his is a world which offers, within its own bounds and on its own terms, some light to guide the steps of the traveler.
The idea of rebellion is central in this world. The rebel is the man who says "no" to life, who refuses to accept passively his position as a helpless pawn to fate. He is aware that he is doomed to failure, but he grimly asserts his right at least to attempt to imprint his stamp of defiance on an uncaring world. The act of rebellion becomes the only weapon which he owns, a weapon which he can wield, no matter who he is or what his situation, when he chooses to assert himself in the face of a blank and featureless universe. It is a conscious act, a fruitless gesture to force some sort of form on the formlessness of existence. And the very fact that it is fruitless gives the act a stature that it could not have if it occurred with any real hope of success. The act itself is its own justification. "Metaphysical rebellion is the justified claim of a desire for unity against the suffering of life and death." Against all evidence that there is no pattern, man boldly asserts his own pattern by the fact of his defiance. For himself, for no cause or crusade, man turns on the world and insists that he is there, that he can even absurdly deny its absurdity.

There is an implication of freedom of action in this world; indeed, such is the case. Caligula humiliates and murders his subjects by his own decision. Martha robs and drowns the traveler deliberately. Ivan throws his bomb according to his plan. But the important element
in each case is that they all accept the responsibility for their acts. None attempts to excuse himself, and each is willing to, and in some cases demands, that he take upon himself the punishment for his actions. This returns to man a dignity which has been taken from him by modern psychology, by environmental determinism, and, at first glance, by the basis of Camus' thought itself. This responsibility elevates man from his surroundings, and forces him to admit that in spite of the demonstrated fact that there can be no judgment, this cannot be used as an excuse for his actions.

Finally, and most definitively, the view of life portrayed by Camus is one in which man's actions are morally circumscribed by limits. What has always caused a certain amount of uneasiness about the existentialist position has been the concern with unlimited action. In denying any sort of external value, and insisting that man may choose as he will, this philosophy leaves itself vulnerable to criticism.

Sartre and his followers have lost the moral power of rejecting these atrocities; they don't mind them, provided they themselves are the torturers, as they are in their plays.

This criticism, however, cannot be leveled against Camus, for this is the crucial point at which the author leaves the world of Sartre. He postulates that there is an extreme boundary beyond which one is not permitted to move, and this assumes that there are some elements of
general humanity common to all. If there are limits to activity, those limits must be defined by some human criteria, and Camus insists that these limits exist. In spite of the logic of Caligula, he is killed by his subjects because his actions eventually go beyond the permissible bounds of individual decision. Dora makes it most plain. "Even in destruction there's a right way and a wrong way—and there are limits." It is a world of tension, a world in which man must accept the reality of the absurd, but in which he realizes that he cannot push his own actions beyond the limits of the general good.

The world of Camus, then, is one in which man is alone and lost. It is a world of despair and futility. But in his world man is able to find some purpose, some dignity. He is leading a purposeless life, and he knows it, but he chooses to impose on the purposelessness a shape. He refuses to take the convenient escape of extremism: "Excess is always a comfort and sometimes a career. Moderation... is nothing but pure tension." Camus offers man no sanctuary, but he does insist on man's importance.
CHAPTER IV

BECKETT: THEATRE OF MAN IN DESPAIR

There is, of course, no possibility of viewing with any perspective a theatrical tradition which is barely a decade old. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the first and greatest triumph of the Theatre of the Absurd was the production, in 1953, of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

Beckett is not French by birth, but an expatriot Irishman whose first writings were in English. Nor was he originally a dramatist: he turned to the stage after establishing himself as a novelist, critic and poet. His international popularity, however, has been the result of his success in the theatre, especially of his initial success. "Against all expectations, the strange tragic farce [*Waiting for Godot*] . . . which had been scorned as undramatic by a number of managements, became one of the greatest successes of the postwar theatre."¹

*Waiting for Godot* (En Attendant Godot) was written between 1947 and 1949, was published in 1952, and was first produced in 1953.² To the playgoer conditioned to the realistic drama, or at least to drama which is developed in a lineal, causal manner, this play is at
first view a puzzling, if not irritating, creation. Looking for the familiar elements he has come innocently to expect, he finds, instead, what seems to be a confusing and nonsensical vaudeville routine. The stage is designed to portray a vague piece of country road, near which is growing a grotesque, leafless tree. Only one person is discovered, a bedraggled tramp trying desperately to take off his boots. After a few moments of futile effort, he is joined by a second derelict. These are Estragon and Vladimir, though throughout the play they generally refer to each other familiarly as Gogo and Didi. From their conversation, much of which is almost incomprehensible in any contextual sense, a few bits of information begin to emerge—not clearly, not with any certainty—except for one persistent idea. They are waiting for someone, someone named Godot. Who he is, they do not know. What he is to do for them, they are not sure. That he sent for them is not at all certain. Indeed, Estragon himself seriously doubts that they have ever attempted to interview Godot before. (This, however, is not at all conclusive, since both of them display a curious tendency to be disquietingly unsure of where they have been at any particular time.)

So they wait, in an agony of tedium, for some word from Godot. Their vigil is interrupted by the entrance of a man who calls himself Pozzo, driving before him at the end of a rope his burdened slave, Lucky. After Lucky has
performed for the tramps, first by dancing, then by "thinking," he and Pozzo leave. At this point, a boy arrives, announcing that Mr. Godot cannot come that evening, but will next day. As Vladimir and Estragon announce their decision to leave, but make no move to go, the first act ends.

The second act is essentially a variation on the first. Only one visual element has changed; the bare tree has put out "four or five leaves." Once again the two men wait, and once again Pozzo and Lucky pass by. While their relationship is the same, they have changed alarmingly. Lucky is now dumb and Pozzo is blind. Much of the action during the scene concerns itself with the four of them attempting to get up from where they have fallen or been knocked to the ground. After Lucky and Pozzo exit, Mr. Godot's boy returns with his anticipated message: Godot will not come. The curtain closes as it did on Act One. "Vladimir: Well? Shall we go? Estragon: Yes, let's go. (They do not move.)"³

This is what "happens" during the play. What Beckett has done is materialize directly an image of a mode of existence. The important thing is not what happens, or who the two tramps are, but rather, how they are--the state in which they exist. As Esslin suggests, "In Waiting for Godot, the feeling of uncertainty it produces, the ebb and flow of this uncertainty--from
the hope of discovering the identity of Godot to its repeated disappointment—are themselves the essence of the play. In the same vein, Esslin makes one of the most common critical statements about the play, and the most unquestionable. "The subject of the play is not Godot, but Waiting, the act of waiting as an essential and characteristic aspect of the human condition." Beyond anything else, a vision of life as a continuous tension of waiting is the image that Beckett projects in this play. Each day, each hour, is a cameo reproduction of the ultimate wait that is existence. In the agonized words of the blind Pozzo, "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more."

It is the blind helplessness, the savage desperation, the terrible loneliness within which the waiting is endured that gives depth and dimension to this bleak parable. Estragon and Vladimir exist and suffer, unable to help themselves or alter their situation. The drama opens on a scene of frustration, as Estragon attempts to remove a boot which pains him cruelly. He comments, finally, "Nothing to be done," to which Vladimir answers, "I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything." Later another exchange emphasizes much the same thing. "Vladimir: Well? What do we do? Estrogen: Don't let's do anything. It's
safer. 8 Actually, any change in the given spatial or personal relationship is the cause of pain, either physical or mental. Each entrance of Pozzo and Lucky results in one or more beatings. Every night, as he sleeps away from Vladimir, Estragon is thrashed by a group of unknown people. The reappearance of the boy signals anew the frustration of their hopes. Even Vladimir's flights off-stage to urinate result in pain because of his prostate malady. In this world it is, indeed, safer to do nothing. There is no control, no way to impose a will on this impersonal landscape. With curses and a whip Pozzo drives Lucky before him, yet they are bound by a rope and repeat their journey, apparently, over and over. None of the characters is really able to act upon the situation. They are in it and aware of it, but incapable of affecting it. "The despair in the play... which pervades all the lack of action and gives to the play its metaphysical color, is the fact that the two tramps cannot not wait for Godot, and the corollary fact that he cannot come." 9

This desperation manifests itself in several ways throughout the drama. For one, there is the recurring reference to suicide. Within the first few moments of the play Vladimir comments, "Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were respectable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't even let us up." 10 Later they discuss, with the same fixed
intensity (and ludicrousness) of a pair of serious drunks, the feasibility of hanging themselves from the scraggly tree. Finally, at the end of the play, they return to the same alternative, going so far as to test the rope Estragon uses as a belt for its possible use as an instrument of self-destruction. That the belt breaks only adds to the mordant irony of their situation.

Even more than by the references to suicide, the mood of despondency is maintained by the raw recognition by the two of the deadliness of their situation. Time and again they remark on the torment and monotony that they endure and dry out for it to cease. Vladimir's plea, "Will night never come?"\textsuperscript{11} echoes through the play. More and more the fact becomes evident that it is an end which is desired, no matter who or what brings about the end. "We are waiting for Godot. . . or for night to fall."\textsuperscript{12} Godot or night; either will take them out of the grotesquerie which is their life. But there is no end, either from Godot or death, and they are aware of the endlessness. "Vladimir: It's not over. Estragon: Apparently not. Vladimir: It's only beginning. Estragon: It's awful. . ."\textsuperscript{13} Grossvogle sums up this point aptly: "Beckett balances his people on the outermost edge of being, but never gives them the comfort of oblivion: he has achieved the litotes of tragedy, the horror of being—besides which death pales."\textsuperscript{14} It is not merely being which is horrible, but
the chilly knowledge that it is being without purpose or importance. Vladimir's bitterly wry remark, "This is becoming really insignificant,"¹⁵ is more than an observation on the play, ironically directed toward the audience—it epitomizes the vapidity of their actions. This realization of insignificance makes their pain most unbearable and washes through the texture of the play like a corrosive. Senseless and unending—such is the vista of the vagabonds.

Further, they must face this cheerlessness with the dreadful fear of loneliness and the frantic need to establish an identity, the assurance that there is some reality to which they can relate. Time and again, one or the other threatens to leave, yet neither does. They savagely attack each other, only to embrace frantically. Time and again, they attempt to solidify a present and a past that they can believe in, that they can cling to for comfort, only to falter into uncertainty. "Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Don't leave me!"¹⁶ Thus Estragon shrieks his human need to his friend. They cannot recall how long they have been together, where they have been, or even what day it is. When a desperate Vladimir asks Estragon whether he recognizes the landscape, the answer comes back, "Recognize! What is there to recognize?"¹⁷ A short time later, still trying frantically to locate themselves, Vladimir
pursues the point by demanding, "And where were we yesterday according to you?" The answer offers little hope: "How would I know? In another compartment. There's no lack of void." Any evidence of reality is grasped eagerly, and hint of continuity is a major victory in their battle against chaos. In the first act, Estragon is kicked by Lucky. When, in the second act, no one can be quite sure that they have met before, Vladimir insists that Estragon lift his trouser leg and shouts in triumph, "There's the wound! It's beginning to fester!" There is grim significance in that the proof of being should be a running sore.

Even the messenger from Godot, who has presumably come for many evenings, denies ever having met the two men. These memory lapses are as terrifying to Vladimir as Godot's absence is shattering. As the boy leaves for the last time, the tramp pleads with him. "Tell him—tell him you saw me and that... that you saw me. You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me to-morrow that you never saw me!" The boy exits without answering. No promises are made, no reassurances given that anyone, anywhere, is aware of the existence of the two forlorn figures.

This is the stark world of *Waiting for Godot*, faced impotently and dumbly by agonized men. Further, the men displayed in this piece show few of the commonly
accepted characteristics of human dignity. Tramps, they are, and slaves and cruel masters. Physically they show alarming signs of decay. None of the four is healthy, and Lucky and Pozzo disintegrate strikingly between the two acts. Finally, they are cruel, all of them. They insult and taunt each other, and all four resort frequently to blows, kicks, and brutality.

However, dismal as the play may be, it reflects a strange aura of touching, melancholy beauty. The reasons for this are two, primarily. The characters of Waiting for Godot, especially the principals, with all their perplexing actions and language, are alive and real as none of Sartre's or Camus' are. And they are aware.

From the very outset, Beckett invites his audience's sympathetic involvement by using a stage symbol which has become immediately recognizable--the tramp clown. Estragon and Vladimir are all which is gross and put-upon in all of us. They are the victims of agencies which they not only cannot control, but which are often impersonal and invisible, like the law or society. In the face of these overpowering forces they often show a most unheroic adaptability. When Estragon complains that the carrot tastes worse as he eats it, Vladimir replies resignedly, "With me it's just the opposite. . . I get used to the muck as I go along."21 In some context, who has not had to get used to the muck?
Often throughout the play one recognizes, rather wryly, a not very flattering representation of oneself.

The two tramps, furthermore, have moments when they show flashes of compassion. It is true that these moments are often hesitant, sometimes grotesque, and nearly always become ironically distorted. Estragon pleads for a reconciliation after a quarrel, begs Vladimir to embrace him—only to draw back in disgust at the smell of garlic. Vladimir sings Estragon to sleep and covers him with his coat, only to have Estragon suddenly wake with a shriek from a bad dream. One of the most typical exchanges comes near the end of the first act, when Vladimir asks Estragon why he is setting his boots out by the road. "Estragon: I'm leaving them there. Another will come, just as.. as.. as me, but with smaller feet, and they'll make him happy. Vladimir: But you can't go barefoot! Estragon: Christ did. Vladimir: Christ! What has Christ to do with it? You're not going to compare yourself to Christ! Estragon: All my life I've compared myself to him. Vladimir: But where he lived it was warm, it was dry! Estragon: Yes. And they crucified quickly."22 While Beckett uses most of such episodes primarily for their ironic reinforcement of his dark message, the fact remains that they also communicate an appealing tone of warmth and care. Though each sequence ends badly, the initial intention is one of compassion.
Even in the very least attractive traits of these people there are still evidences of humanity, however base. As mentioned earlier, they all lash out in spasms of physical brutality, often shocking in its vicious wantonness. While it may be deplorable, it is still true that of all animals, only man is deliberately cruel. Nature may be merciless, but it is an impersonal thing with no trace of vindictiveness. The people in this play strike out at each other as men, out of fear and distrust and a desire to assert themselves. As Howard Fertig comments, "Victim tears at victim, and Beckett tells us not to berate man's cruelty as 'inhuman,' but rather to see it as all too human." Symbols these characters may be, but they are not bloodless abstractions. In each can be recognized the terrors, futility, imperfection, and something of the dumb yearning for love which is man.

Closely related to these qualities of "aliveness" is the awareness evidenced by this strange assortment of derelicts. Even as they show their humanness by their inhumanity, so, too, do they display it by their consciousness of being. The terror and tragedy of man is his knowledge of fear, pain, loneliness and death. He alone not only experiences these things, but knows he experiences them. Again and again Vladimir and Estragon, and, to a lesser extent, Pozzo, comment on their situation. They suffer and know they suffer, they are helpless and know
they are helpless, they are ridiculous and know they are ridiculous. "The characters of Beckett are not fooled; they know that they are seeking only a brief diversion and are, even so, conscious of the crudeness of their deception."24

Yet in the face of this desperate self-consciousness they dare to wait, dare to impose some meaning, some form on their wretched existence, no matter how patently absurd that existence may be. The attempt is futile and pathetic, for Beckett is not a sentimentalist, but it is a gesture, at least, and one of which they are, again, aware. "We have kept our appointment and that's an end to that. We are not saints, but we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?"25 Esslin, committed to the proposition that only by embracing the knowledge of absurdity can man really be free, suggests that "The routine of waiting for Godot stands for habit, which prevents us from reaching the painful but fruitful awareness of the full reality of being."26 In saying this, he chooses to ignore the paradoxical, odd little dignity with which Beckett has endowed his scurvy heroes. A more apt summation of the agony which is this world is that of Fertig. "If it should all turn out to be an illusion, it is still a little sublime. For at this moment they stand for that stubborn, proud spirit in human beings which, in the face of no matter what defeat, always insists
on resuming the struggle."^27 One finds, greatly to his surprise, that out of this grim, sardonic evocation of despair flickers a glimmer of pride in poor, helpless, hopeless man.

In 1957, the second major play by Samuel Beckett was produced. *Endgame* (Fin de Partie) had its premiere in London, played, rather fittingly, by a French company and in the French language. The title, especially as translated into English, refers to the final portion of a chess game in which one of the contestants is immobilized, disarmed, and finally destroyed. In French, however, a dual image is evoked. Besides the chess reference, there is a suggestion of the last moments of a party as the talk and activity inexorably falter, hesitate, and at last die away, leaving the few remaining guests numb and unmoving.

While at the opening of *Waiting for Godot* the spectator is confronted by an unending emptiness, the curtain of *Endgame* reveals the inside of a room: a bare, forbidding, almost empty room in which stands a man, alone. High up on the wall are two curtained windows, looking for all the world like closed eyes. On one side of the room is a single door, on the other, two ash-cans, covered with sheets, and in the center a chair, also covered with a sheet. The implied terror of limitless space in the first play has been replaced by that of total confinement in the second.

There is even less of a "story" in *Endgame* than
in *Waiting for Godot*. The servant, Clov, at length moves and opens the window curtains, removes the sheets from the ash-cans, and at last from the center chair, in which sits a man in a dressing gown, asleep, with a bloody handkerchief over his face. This is Hamm, paralyzed, diseased and blind, and master of the dismal house. He wakes, and his conversation with Clov suggests that outside the house there is nothing, that somehow the world has died and these are the last survivors. Inside the ash-cans, it develops, live Nagg and Nell, the ancient, legless parents of Hamm. The day passes, a painful day which seems to bring them nearer to destruction; Nagg and Nell, in fact, appear to perish in their bins. Clov, the only one able to move, often threatens to leave, but does not. At last, ordered to look out the windows again (one of which faces the sea, the other the land) Clov sees what looks to be a small boy in the distance. He gets his coat, hat and bag, but only stands in the doorway, watching, as Hamm settles in his chair for the night, covering his face with his bloody handkerchief. And so the play ends, with questions posed, possibilities suggested, but no answers given.

Here is Beckett in an even more sombre mood. The setting itself establishes a sense of restriction and imprisonment. For all the forbidding bleakness of *Waiting for Godot*, its road is at least outside. Some movement, some coming and going is possible, even if it is not advisable.
In *Endgame*, except from one room to another, no one comes and no one goes. Man has taken another giant step toward annihilation and cowers, now, inside a hollow fortress surrounded by nothing. Commenting on this setting, Kenner notes, "It is not for nothing that the place... is more than once called 'the shelter,' outside of which is death..." Grossvogel, too, points out this confining quality of the play, and remarks, with a hint of wry but apt humor, "If Godot represents the pastoral stage of Beckett's dramatic imagery, *Endgame* might be termed his drawingroom play."

Once again the play is concerned with waiting, or, more specifically, with passing the time, enduring the time, between a morning and an evening or a beginning and an end. Once again it is a termination that the characters so desperately desire. The first line of dialogue sets the tone for the entire play. After opening the blinds and removing the sheets from the furniture—and after laughing bleakly as he looks out the window, into the ash-cans, and at the sleeping Hamm—Clov finally speaks. He "turns towards auditorium" and says, surprisingly, "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished." These are strange words to follow an elaborate scene of awakening, of beginning, but the ironic juxtaposition only makes the point sharper. Each new beginning is nearer to an ultimate end, or, at least, is
hoped to be. Each morning may be a sort of symbolic rebirth, but it is also a step nearer evening, just as actual birth is the first necessary movement toward death.

The texture of this waiting, the environment in which it happens, is similar to that of Waiting for Godot, but differs somewhat in degree and emphasis. The most evident elements are the sheer, crushing tedium, the literal aloneness, and the sense of physical decomposition and destruction.

This drama is drenched in an atmosphere of bone-weary boredom. It is as if the characters are moving through a pattern of words and action which has become meaningless through constant repetition. Beckett consistently maintains the convention of a game, a game in which the participants have lost all interest. After Clov has set the stage, Hamm's first words serve to begin the game: "Me--(he yawns)--to play." (Incidentally, Beckett's use of stage directions reinforces the monotony of the action. Over and over he suggests that the characters yawn or repeat movements. A single word is used a staggering number of times during the play, creating an almost musical notation of rhythm: the word "pause." It is used, for example, twenty-four times in the first five pages of dialogue.) Soon after, in words that develop a variation on Clov's initial statement, he suggests something of the repetitiveness of the pattern: "Enough, it's time it ended,
in the shelter too. (Pause.) And yet I hesitate, I hesitate to—(He yawns)—to end."32 Life, for the inhabitants of this house, is a deadly charade which they are forced to play out in the full knowledge that it is an exercise in futility. Kenner, commenting on the game-like structure of the play, notes that "we are reminded at the outset that what we are to witness is a dusty dramatic exhibition, repeated and repeatable."33

This prevailing spirit of ennui is further heightened by the characters' use of time-consuming devices. The two old parents maunder through vague reminiscences of their earlier lives, contradicting each other with a distracted petulance. Nagg, in a grim parody of senile garrulity, tells a long and disjointed joke concerning a tailor who takes three months to make a pair of trousers. In the longest sustained sequence in the play, Hamm relates a story, or part of a story, the creation of which is apparently his major daily occupation. (Significantly, in order to gain an audience for his recitation, he has to bribe his father to listen with the promise of a sugarplum.) In each case there is projected a sense of time-filling, of wearily stuffing the moments with something until they have grown into enough hours to make a day—another finished day.

In *Waiting for Godot*, the tramps are able to find at least some diversion in the visits of Pozzo and Lucky. The messenger arrives. He speaks of his brother and of
Godot. Mysterious men beat Estragon during the night. Pozzo mentions a fair. In other words, barren as it may be, that world is, somehow and somewhere, populated. *Endgame* supplies no such small comfort. One of Clov's first actions, and presumably one of his first each day, is to look out the window. Soon after he awakes, Hamm questions him. "Hamm: (Gesture toward window.) Have you looked? Clov: Yes. Hamm: Well? Clov: Zero." Nothing. Outside the walls of this strange house it is lifeless and barren. These four macabre people exist in a dead world, alone. There is no indication of what has happened, of what has blasted the earth except for this one desperate "shelter." Hamm's story hints at some sort of holocaust, but whether from natural or man-made causes cannot be determined. It does not actually matter. It is simply necessary to know that these characters are terribly, frighteningly alone. There will be no visitors to this place, nor is there any possibility of leaving. Hamm and Clov put it very succinctly, early in the play. "Hamm: Why do you stay with me? Clov: Why do you keep me? Hamm: There's no one else. Clov: There's nowhere else."

No one and nowhere; these words capture the desolation which shrouds the drama. The spiritual sense of isolation and loneliness which is so evident in the earlier play has become now literal isolation. And there is no Godot, nor any possibility of a Godot, whoever or
whatever he may be. There is the house, and an empty world, and four people waiting for an end.

Closely allied to the qualities of suffocating monotony and nightmare aloneness is the horrible sense of disintegration which pervades the play. It is perhaps the cause of, or the sum of the other two. Certainly they are all closely related. They must pass the time in weary desperation because they are alone, and they are alone because the world is dying. Beckett develops this image of running down, of decomposition, in two specific areas. One is the physical universe outside, which is expiring, and the other is the human bodies inside, which are decaying.

The world beyond the wall is lifeless; there are no more people. Actually, the destruction is more serious than that. The whole natural order is running out. Not only are there no more artifacts, such as bicycle wheels, and no more food or medicine, but the sun itself seems to be gone. After demanding that Clov look again from the windows, Hamm at last asks, "And the sun? Clov: Zero... Hamm: Is it night already then? Clov: No. Hamm: Then what is it? Clov: Gray." It is not that the sun has set; it has simply disappeared. Earlier, Clov has, in fact, declared that there is no more nature, and, while Hamm refutes him, the only argument he can muster is a rather morbid one. The fact that they are losing their
hair and teeth proves change, and change proves the existence of nature—hardly a reassuring thesis.

More graphic than the external falling away, which is, after all, only discussed, is the horrible evidence of human putrefaction displayed on the stage. Three generations are represented, and, like some medieval painting of the dance of death, each exemplifies a stage on the way toward the body's dissolution. Most ugly are the parents, legless, white-faced stumps planted in sand in their cans, already half-buried, waiting only death for the lids to be clamped on. Hamm, blind and paralyzed, is able to be moved, but cannot move himself. Further, the bloody handkerchief which covers his face suggests some other, unmentioned but progressive, disease. Only Clov is able to move; only he shows no outward signs of destruction. But the seeds are there. His eyes, he admits to Hamm, are bad; also his legs. In fact, he is unable to sit. It is only a matter of time until he, too, passes through Hamm to Nagg. Hamm reminds him of this in a grim passage: "One day you'll be blind, like me... you'll say, I'll close my eyes... And when you open them again there'll be no wall any more. (Pause.) Infinite emptiness... and there you'll be like a little bit of grit in the middle of the steppe..." The only difference is that Clov will be finally and truly alone, the last human flicker in the universe.

The total image of Endgame is a dying cry of pain.
Pain and death are everywhere in evidence, and an anguished wish for an end. Again and again Hamm begs for his pain-killer, only to be told that it is not time. When at last it is time—there is no more pain-killer. He must wait for the future to finish the game. The hope, or at least pathetic stubbornness, which is evident in *Waiting for Godot*, plays no part in this drama. It is grim, it is pessimistic, and can hardly be read otherwise. Kenner quite matter-of-factly calls it "a play about, it would seem, the end of humanity." \(^{38}\) Tallmer "can only perceive *Endgame* as wholly acrid, stoic, fatalistic, its color and music summoned forth by a sort of perverse inveristy of style." \(^{39}\) Even Esslin is moved to admit, "In *Endgame* we are... certainly confronted with a very powerful expression of the sense of deadness, of leaden heaviness and hopelessness, that is experienced in states of deep depression." \(^{40}\) This is a picture of man, trapped from the moment of his birth in a body which will betray him unto death and a hostile, empty world which crumbles around him. It is an unblinking and wintry view.

Yet for all of this it shares, though not so warmly, something of the odd humanness of *Waiting for Godot*. The characters in *Endgame* are acutely aware of the misery of their situation, as were the tramps in the earlier play. They rail against their misery bitterly now and then, bitterly and futilely, and long for it to end. "Hamm: Have
you had enough? Clov: Yes! (Pause.) Of what? Hamm:
Of this... this... thing. Clov: I always had."41
Throughout the play this motif echoes; theirs is a pointless
and pain wracked existence which must be faced and somehow
endured. "Clov: (Imploringly) Let's stop playing! Hamm:
Never!"42 They must play, even though there is no purpose
to their game, and no hope for them. The appearance of the
child at the close is at best ambiguous. He may be a last
survivor, dying outside the wall. He may have come to be
servant to Clov in a hideous revolution of the old cycle.
He may, in fact, not even be there at all; there is only
Clov's word. Whatever he is, he offers no salvation to
those battered representatives of exhausted humanity.
There is nothing for them. "When I fall I'll weep for
happiness," Clov cries.43 Hamm sums up the vanity of even
this kind of expectation; "You prayed--(Pause. He corrects
himself) You cried for night; it comes--(Pause. He corrects
himself) it falls; now cry in darkness."44 In spite of the
torment and their recognition of futility, however, they
do make the gesture and go through the motions. Kenner
suggests that this may be essentially what the play is
saying. "Whatever we do, then, since it can obtain no grip
on our radically pointless situation, is behavior pure and
simple; it is play-acting, and may yield us the satisfaction,
if satisfaction there be, of playing well..."45 Something
of this explains the perplexing feeling of pity evoked by
these ridiculous, disgusting creatures. They accept the incongruity; they make no attempt to delude themselves, either with illusion or philosophy; and in the midst of their fright and their cruelty, they recognize and grope for each other. Their world is brutal and chilling, but in it, and for whatever it means, they are men. Richard Eastman describes the strange and melancholy tone of *Endgame* most graphically:

Perhaps the basic "truth" of it is that man simply has no identity; there is nothing isolatedly human to which he can cling as a guarantee. There is only—if we can relish this horrible paradox—the moment when he recognizes that he has no essence, like the hypothetical instant when a workman is aware that the dynamite in his hand has begun to detonate. At this tenuous and terribly isolated moment, . . . he may achieve a kind of selfhood. With oblivion exploding in his face, he may invent a posture, he may try half-heartedly to be kind to his fellows, he may practice a mute loyalty. Considering the odds against such a creature, this is enough heroism to evoke tragic pity.

"Heroism" is perhaps a curious word to use in connection with such a bleak and hopeless play, but it is not, in a sardonic sort of way, inappropriate.

In October of 1958, *Krapp's Last Tape* was produced. The play departed from the pattern established by the two that preceded it in that it was written originally in English, rather than in French. It is a brief play, far shorter than the earlier pair, and in technique reflects the influence of the radio medium for which Beckett was also writing at the time.

All the elements of this drama are rigidly scaled
down. The room which contained *Endgame* has become only a part of a room. There is a table, on which is a tape recorder and several reels of audio tape. This table and its immediate adjacent area are in light; the rest of the stage is dark. Whenever the action moves out of the square of light, sound effects from the darkness convey, simply and precisely, the unseen happenings. A cork pops or a bottle clinks against a glass and the meaning is conveyed.

Besides the shortness of the play and its restricted setting, its cast is also reduced to a single character, the old author, Krapp, alone in his den. The entire play, then, is lean and spare, making its point, or establishing its image quickly and economically.

Krapp himself is an odd combination of the tramps from *Waiting for Godot* and the playwright-actor-author, Hamm. His first bit of business, before any words are spoken, is a bit of classic, clown-slapstick humor. He goes through a long and elaborate search for a key, unlocks and opens several drawers, finds, finally, a banana in one of them, eats it with great aplomb—then slips on the discarded peel. At once, as in *Waiting for Godot*, these conventional actions signal something about the character and of the sad-mocking tone of the play. At the same time, like Hamm, Krapp lives in a highly mannered and self-conscious, ritualized existence, one which he has created. Each year, on his birthday presumably, he has recorded his thoughts and observations on
tape. The play recounts a short portion of his sixty-ninth birthday, as he listens to some old reels and records a new one for the future.

Stylistically this is the most conventional of Beckett's plays. The sequence of events follows a generally quite logical, understandable pattern. While it is true that some of Krapp's behavior is bizarre, it is recognizable as the idiosyncrasy of a specific character. Even the initial stage direction, "A late evening in the future," turns out to have a perfectly reasonable rationale. During the play, reference is made to tape which has been recorded at least forty years before the time of depicted action. Since the tape recorder had been in general use about ten years in 1958, the stage direction merely makes plausible its utilization in the play.

Further, Krapp not only has a name, but an age, an occupation, a past, relatives, relationships and habits. He has, in short, most of the necessary hints of character traits that are found in "realistic" drama. He is not a symbolic Everyman, but a specific individual. Grossvogel reads this, somehow, as a hopeful indication that the audience will be "drawn into the stage action." Actually, the device of the tape recorder as the core and creator of his stage image made it necessary for Beckett to be more particular in characterization. In order to make any comparison between two things, it is necessary to know
specific facts about them, and Beckett is, in effect, comparing two different stages in a man's life.

While this is, technically, a monodrama, since only one character appears, a second man is present vocally. There is the Krapp seen on the stage who drinks wine and eats bananas, who plays and records tapes— an old, almost senile man, brooding alone in his room. And there is another Krapp, every bit as real, who lives in box three, spool five of the tape collection and who is thirty-nine years old. This is the Krapp the old man chooses to bring to life on his tape recorder, and the brief, sad drama is played out between the two of them. (There is, in fact, a glimpse of still another man, an even younger Krapp whom the voice on the tape listened to on the night he made his record.)

Essentially, this is a play about alienation and estrangement, not only from others but, more terribly, from self. It is also a low, shuddering sigh of futility and regret. Beckett establishes quite quickly the family resemblances between the men. They drink too much, for one thing, and they have constipation; the character's name, of course, is no accident, but a kind of perverse editorial comment on the human condition. Yet the similarities only serve to define the differences between them. They are literally strangers to each other, suspicious and hostile. The youngest one "sneers at what he calls his youth and thanks to God that it's over." The voice on the tape,
speaking of this younger brother, notes that it is "hard to believe that I was ever that young whelp. The voice! Jesus! and the aspirations!" Krapp himself begins his recording by saying, "Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. Thank God it's all done with anyway." There are only faint echoes of recognition, each for the other, and little or no understanding. What is most pointedly communicated is a sense of relief that the other is gone.

Krapp's world is one of ultimate loneliness. The recorded voice at least made some contacts, moved a little in the world. He speaks of celebrating his birthday in the winehouse, of playing with a dog in the park while his mother died, of getting the inspiration for the book he did, finally, write. When the old man attempts to tape his annual message, however, he can summarize it in three sentences. "Nothing to say, not even a squeak. What's a year now? The sour cud and the iron stool." The book has sold seventeen copies, of which eleven were "at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond the seas." He has left the room only a few times, once or twice to the park, and once to vespers, where he "went to sleep and fell off the pew." But far worse than his lost contact with the world is his loss of himself, or of any continuity of self. The two characters in the play exist independently,
shut off from each other with separate and unrelated identities. Krapp's life is a series of lives, each self-contained and isolated. While the play deals with just two—or, by reference, three—of these lives, the spectator sees, with ever-growing awareness, the stack of unplayed tapes on the table. Commenting on this, Esslin writes, "Beckett has found a graphic expression for the problem of the ever-changing identity of the self... And if this is a problem with an interval of thirty years, it is surely only a difference in degree if the interval is reduced to one year, one month, one hour." In this world there can hardly be said to be any existence since there is never a moment of stability in which that existence can be defined. Desperately, Krapp attempts to impinge himself on reality, to leave some identifying mark that he can recognize, to reassure himself that he is and has been, but he cannot. Only once in the play is the character's name spoken, and the deadly pun underscores the futility of his endeavor to realize himself. "The new light above my table is a great improvement. With all this darkness round me I feel less alone... I love to get up and move about in it, then back here to... (hesitates)... me. (Pause.) Krapp." As in the case of the earlier plays, the desperation of the situation is softened (and at the same time made more telling) by the very humanity of the character. For all his isolation and disintegration, Krapp is recognizably
a man. This is most poignantly demonstrated by the one section of the tape which he deliberately looks for, plays, and then, at the close of the drama, re-plays. Significantly, it is a moment of communication and communion to which he returns again and again—a summer day thirty-nine years before, spent in a boat on a nameless lake, making love to a nameless woman.

I bent over her to get them [her eyes] in the shadow and they opened. (Pause. Low.) Let me in. (Pause.) We drifted in among the flags and stuck... I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved... and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side.

For one moment in his life, no matter how fleeting, Krapp had been able to touch and be touched. Once, at least, he had asked to be let in and had been received. And like us all he clutches that moment to him in a pathetic and ultimately futile attempt to shut out the echoing emptiness all around. It is futile because the grim truth is that the moment, after all, is not his. It belongs to the man in box three, spool five. For Krapp lives in a cruel and terrible world in which he is not even allowed to own his memories.

With his next play, Happy Days, Beckett returned to the "absurdist" style of Waiting for Godot and Endgame. It was, however, written in English, and had its premiere in New York in September of 1961.

In each of the first three plays physical activity
is limited and tends to grow more static as the drama progresses. Furthermore, each successive play is more restrictive than the one before. Happy Days follows this pattern quite closely. While it has two characters, Winnie and her husband Willie, it is virtually a monologue, as Willie has but nineteen speeches in the entire play, many of which are only one or two words in length. The husband is also out of sight much of the time, asleep or resting or reading a paper. Winnie, however, is very much in evidence. The setting is once again outdoors, in the middle of a barren, scorched plain, under a fierce sun. The ground slopes up to a mound in the center of the stage, a mound which hides Willie and in which Winnie is embedded, during the first act to her waist, and in the second, to her neck. Now and then Willie's arm is seen to move, as he turns a page of his newspaper or puts on his hat. Winnie remarks on his crawling in and out of his "hole," and, at the close of the play, he at last comes into view, attempting vainly to creep up the mound to his wife. During the first act, Winnie is able to turn her head and torso, and engages in a great deal of stage business with the contents of her bag and her parasol. Beyond this there is no motion in the play, and Beckett's universe has moved still nearer a dead balance.

Familiarly, the dramatic action of the play concerns itself with a tortuous effort to fill up the time between
two arbitrary moments, in this case the bell which calls her to wake and the bell which allows her to sleep. For Winnie the time is passed in talking and, while she is able, in preoccupying herself with the varied objects contained in her bag. Literally trapped by the earth and progressively disappearing into it, she flutters through the small talk and the ritual gestures which make up her life. Like other Beckett characters she longs, somewhat wistfully, for an end: "poor, dear Willie—sleep forever—marvelous gift—nothing to touch it—in my opinion—always said—so—wish I had it. . . ."59 Until the end, however, it is necessary that she follow the pattern and impose an illusion of meaning on the blatantly barren landscape around her. "Words fail, there are times when even they fail. . . what is one to do then, until they come again? Brush and comb the hair. . . trim the nails. . . these things tide one over."60

While the subject matter is vintage Beckett, the general tone of the play is lighter than the earlier works. The language is gentler and the humor not quite so sardonically devastating. Winnie often seems to become genuinely distracted from the monstrousness of her condition. Early in the play, for example, after brushing her teeth, she becomes intrigued by the writing on the handle of her toothbrush. Time after time she interrupts herself to return to the words, which she finally makes out to read,
"Fully guaranteed, genuine pure hog's setae." Estrogon and Vladimir and Hamm and Clov went through equally ridiculous motions, but never lost a certain sense of objectivity about their actions. Most of all, though, the atmosphere of the play is less grim and forbidding because there is less physical evidence of decay. Neither Winnie or Willie, specifically described by the author as fifty and sixty, respectively, is physically unattractive. Winnie is sketched as being "well-preserved, blond for preference, plump, arms and shoulders bare, low bodice, big bosom..."61 As for Willie, while he may be slightly ludicrous, he is certainly not hideous. "Top hat, morning coat, striped trousers, etc., white gloves in hand. Very long bushy white Battle of Britain moustache."62 Here are no running sores or blindness or diseases of the alimentary system. Though Willie is too weak to walk, and is not able even to crawl up the mound, he is not a cripple and neither of them is noticeably senile. As Grossvogel writes, "for once in a Beckett play, the human being is seen prior to decomposition."63

In spite of its generally lighter tone, Happy Days is hardly a paean of joy and its title is a macabre irony. The play deals with the same anguishes of the human condition as do the earlier ones. Winnie is alone, Winnie is helpless, Winnie is doomed—and Winnie is aware. It is not too fanciful to picture this seared, wasted landscape
as lying somewhere beyond Clov's sight as he looks out the window. In the first place, the land itself is as desolate and unnatural an exterior as the room in Endgame is an interior. Beckett's description of the setting is explicit. "Expanse of scorched grass. . . Maximum of simplicity and symmetry. Blazing light. Very pompier trompe d'oeil backcloth to represent unbroken plain and sky. . . "64 This is no ordinary plain, but someplace artificial and blighted. The sunlight itself is somehow unreal and malignant. A "hellish light," as Winnie repeatedly calls it, which suddenly sets fire to her parasol as she holds it in her hand.

Further, it is an isolated spot, inhabited only by Winnie and Willie, and apparently unvisited. At one time people came by, it would seem, but no longer. Winnie tells a rather vague story about a Mr. Shower, or perhaps his name was Cooker: she is only sure it ended in "-er." He stopped beside her with a woman and remarked, somewhat vulgarly, about her semi-buried condition. "Next thing they're away--and in hand. . . last human kind--to stray this way."65 There is no indication how long ago this occurred, but the implication is that it has been some time. Now no one comes. Mr. Cooker (or Shower) and the woman were carrying bags; Winnie remarks on this several times. Why were they walking with bags? Evacuees, perhaps, leaving Winnie and Willie alone, not only at this spot of
ground but alone in the land—or the world. Beyond that mound there is no indication of life. It is true that Willie reads a newspaper, but it could hardly be current. Under the endless expanse of sky and sun only Winnie and Willie exist.

There are several other dramatic variations on elements used in *Endgame*. Winnie, like Hamm, is a game-player, following a structured pattern through her "day." Her day begins on signal, with the ringing of a bell, and she begins her activities with a ritual and an injunction: "Begin, Winnie. (Pause.) Begin your day, Winnie." This is certainly an echo of Hamm's "Me, to play." Also like Hamm she helps to pass the time by making up and reciting a story. Again, it is not possible to tell how much of the story is autobiographical, but the significant point is that she deliberately fabricates a fiction of life in the face of chaos. She thus becomes a sort of playwright within the play, aware that her tale is nothing more than an artificial escape from the meaninglessness of reality. "What now? (Pause.) What now, Willie? (Long pause.) There is my story, of course, when all else fails."67

Also reminiscent of *Endgame*, with its depletion of bicycle wheels and food and pain-killer, is the fact that Winnie's supplies are dwindling. One of her first acts, upon waking, is to brush her teeth. After she has finished, she looks at the tube and says, "running out--(Looks for
cap.)— ah, well—(finds cap)— can't be helped—(screws on cap)— just one of those old things— another of those old things— just can't be cured— cannot be cured. . . .”68 A little later she finds the nearly empty bottle of tonic in her bag, drinks it off, and breaks the bottle. When she reads the label, the medicine is found to be a cure for “loss of spirits...lack of keenness...want of appetite...”69 The bottle is drained, however; there are no longer remedies for these ills. Soon it is her lipstick; “running out...Ah well...mustn't complain...”70 The objects, the things, the stuff of the world which can be touched and seen and tasted are “running out” and so, by extension, are Winnie and Willie. It is interesting to note that Winnie’s medicine is a tonic rather than a painkiller. She mentions, indeed, that she “mustn't complain—so much to be thankful for—no pain—hardly any...slight headache sometimes...”71 Hamm’s pain-killer, however, is not just a medicine, it is a possible road to oblivion, and Winnie has hers in the form of a revolver which she calls “Brownie” and which she kisses rapidly the first time she takes it from her bag. But also, just as Hamm’s pain-killer betrays him by being gone when the time comes to use it, so the gun, in plain sight by her side, is useless to Winnie when her arms are caught in the earth. The game must be played all the way.

Behind the facade of forced cheerfulness, ritual gestures and fictionalizing, the mocking ghost behind
Winnie's eyes is the terrible need for identity and some sort of relationship. As are Vladimir and Estragon, she is never quite sure of names and events. Was the man's name Cooker or Shower? Has she or has she not brushed and combed her hair? These, however, are only trifling worries. More melancholy is her disassociation from herself. That which she can no longer see or experience has vanished, and, as her view becomes more restricted, she teeters on the edge of vanishing, herself.

To have been always what I am—and so changed from what I was. (Pause.) I am the one, I say the one, then the other. (Pause.) Now the one, then the other. (Pause.) There is so little one can say... And no truth in it anywhere. (Pause.) My arms. (Pause.) My breasts. (Pause.) What arms? (Pause.) What breasts? (Pause.) Willie. (Pause.) What Willie?"2

She lives in a solipsistic nightmare where, as her perceptions dwindle toward nothing, so too does her sense of the reality, not only of the world, but of herself.

Thus it is that Willie, seen and heard so seldom during the play, becomes of utmost importance to her. Without him, she has no assurance that she exists. With him, even though he does not answer or look at her often, she can be reasonably sure that she, too, is there. When he does speak, her reality is confirmed. "Oh, you are going to talk to me today, this is going to be a happy day."73 Cohen makes the point that, "In spite of his [Willie's] limitations as a conversationalist, his presence protects her from becoming Hamm, whose final words are
spoken into the silence, or Krapp, who speaks only to his tape recorder."\(^{74}\) Willie is her defense against the ultimate horror of an aloneness that denies her own existence. The endless chatter, the meaningless motions, all must reflect herself off him. "So that I may say at all times... Something of this is being heard, I am not merely talking to myself... a thing I could never bear to do."\(^{75}\)

Yet the gain is so pitifully small compared to the struggle. Even Willie's last action, his attempt to climb the mound, is ambiguous. Possibly he is coming to her; just as possibly he is coming for Brownie. Cohen suggests that it does not matter whether he comes to kiss or kill, since either would prove that he exists and that Winnie is not alone.\(^{76}\) However, it is not at all certain that he intends to kill her. Winnie originally gained possession of the gun when he begged her to take it from him so that he would not commit suicide. And if he is intending to destroy himself, then he will destroy her also, since she will no longer have anyone whose presence will prove hers.

It can hardly be argued that *Happy Days* is a reassuring picture of a world in which love and togetherness make life tolerable. For while it is true that Willie does enable Winnie to struggle on, what she continually longs for is the bell for sleeping. While Willie's voice causes her to say it will be a happy day, the definition of those
words which whispers through the play is that which Winnie gives first:

... if for some strange reason no further pains are possible, why then just close the eyes—(she does so)—and wait for the day to come—(opens eyes)—the happy day to come when flesh melts at so many hours. (Pause.) That is what I find so comforting when I lose heart and envy the brute beast.??

This is the happy day that Winnie truly awaits, yet, like those before her in Beckett's world, she awaits in awareness, certain only that somehow she must remain Winnie while the time passes under the fantastic sun, and that the time must be filled with something, no matter how foolish. The ironic joke, though, is that, unlike the brute beast, she is comforted to know that the happy day will come—some time. "It is perhaps a little soon— to make ready for the night. . . and yet I do. . . saying to myself--Winnie--it will not be long now, Winnie-- until the bell for sleep."??

In 1963, Roger Blin, the French actor and director who has introduced many of the avant garde plays to the public, was interviewed concerning the state of the movement. One remark he made about Beckett was especially interesting:

Beckett is becoming more and more reserved and enclosed. In Waiting for Godot we are introduced to four mobile characters (Note: there are actually five.); in Endgame, three of the four characters are immobile; in Krapp's Last Tape there are one-and-a-half characters. . . ; in Happy Days there is one motionless character who is slowly sinking into the sand and one invisible character. Where can Beckett go from here??
The answer to this question is most graphically demonstrated by Beckett's latest drama for the stage, *Play*. While written in English, the piece was first performed in German in Ulm-Donau in June of 1963.

In this work, the playwright has come as close as possible to a completely static drama. Far more, even, than *Krapp's Last Tape*, it reflects the influence of radio. There are three characters: First Woman, Second Woman, and Man. Each is encased in a large burial urn, with only his head visible above the neck of his jar. Throughout the play the faces remain impassive, staring directly front, toward the audience. The only light is a very faint, general illumination, and a single spot, which moves from one face to another, occasionally spreading out to include all three heads, and at times blacking out completely. The characters speak only when the light is focused on them; when it encompasses them all, they speak simultaneously. At all times, each is unaware of the other two.

The three, recently dead, are wife, husband and mistress. For the first part of this very brief composition, they relate in a quite straightforward manner the almost ludicrous story of their mortal entanglement. During the remainder of the play—though they occasionally return to the subject—each reacts, in his own way, to his new situation.

Besides the area of physical immobility, another
Beckett characteristic is pushed to its logical—or illogical—extreme in the drama. At the close of the text there appears, suddenly, what must be a unique stage direction, "Repeat play exactly." In Endgame and Krapp's Last Tape the characters go through actions which are obviously repetitive. In Waiting for Godot and Happy Days, which are two-act plays, each act is a close variation of the other. Now, with no interruption, Play simply reproduces itself, as a reprint of a film duplicates the original. The only difference is that, the second time through, instead of returning to the exact beginning, the play closes with four lines of dialogue which start the actual narration of the story. This serves to give the play a finish, yet not weaken the established circular pattern. Leaving aside any considerations of this device in terms of its artistic integrity (considerations which are not particularly relevant to this discussion), it must be admitted that this is certainly close to the dead-end of the cyclic metaphor. Short of repeating a pattern three or more times, there is simply nowhere else to go.

This is actually a fairly slight work compared to the other plays. There is no room in it for expansion or variation; the framework within which Beckett chose to structure it demands a very brief and limited treatment. Also, the play is short enough so that its static visual image does not become unbearable.
Play depicts man in the final state of absolute immobility toward which Beckett had been moving in the previous works. After threatening constantly in the earlier plays, death has finally arrived. Obviously, though, this is far from any sort of conventional paradise or inferno. The wife perplexedly comments on this when she says, "Penitence, yes, at a pinch atonement, one was resigned, but no, that does not seem to be the point either." She can find no explanation of their predicament which is satisfactory. The mistress, who is the most intelligent and objective of the three, speculates that she simply is insane, but she is honest enough to realize that this is hardly likely. "I say, am I not perhaps a little unhinged already? (Hopefully.) Just a little? (Pause.) I doubt it." At the same time, the hope all three had shared—the hope of Winnie and Hamm and most of the rest— is expressed plaintively by the husband. "When first this change I actually thanked God. I thought, it is done, it is said, now all is going out... peace is coming. I thought, after all... I thought... peace is coming. I thought, after all... I thought... it will come. Must come. There is no future in this." It would seem that even oblivion is to be denied.

Then there is the eye, which Time Magazine flatly asserts is "doubtless the eye of God." Granted it is the eye of God, it is hardly representative of any sort
of a beneficent deity. The eye simply sweeps over them with the same detachment of a scientist peering through a microscope. It glances impersonally at them and answers none of their questions. Again each reacts differently to the light. The wife, more traditionally religious, perhaps, fears it and what it might want. "Get off me! ... Is it that I do not tell the truth, is that it, that some day somehow I may tell the truth at least and then no more light at last. . . ?" 80 The second woman hopes that it might someday "go away and start poking and pecking at someone else," but is aware that, on the other hand, "You might get angry and blaze me clean out of my wits." 81 The man wants the eye to recognize him: "Why go out? Why go. . . Why go down? Why not. . . Why not keep on glaring at me. . . ?" 82 To each of them, the eye reacts not at all. It merely looks.

Obviously, however, Beckett is not suggesting that man shall spend eternity in this peculiar fashion. It is life and the world that he is talking about, and very much the same world which is shared by all his characters. For one thing, it is a world in which each man is alone, surrounded by darkness. When confronted by the light, each of the characters is able to discuss former relationships or present circumstance only in terms of himself. Though
the urs are touching each other, though in life these three touched, each is, in fact, completely isolated.

Also, in this world, man seems forever doomed to repeat the same foolish actions. The story these people tell is almost a comic opera treatment of a love affair. The wife threatens suicide to the husband and murder to the mistress. She hires a detective whom the husband buys off. The husband melodramatically confesses, in order to placate his wife, but carries on the liaison just the same. At last he runs away, the mistress disappears, and they all die, each sure the others are alive and in each other's company. Each of the three is shown to be almost a caricature of the role he plays: the bitter wife, the cool, aloof mistress, the sentimental, almost-maudlin husband. Beckett makes sure that their lives cannot be taken seriously.

Finally, these people live without purpose and without reason. Each of the three, just before he must begin his action over again, begins to recognize the futility of expecting any response or reason from the light. The wife, even, can hope that it will "weary of playing with me." The mistress, looking for answers, realizes there are none. "No doubt I make the same mistake as when it was the sun that shone, of looking for sense where possibly there is none." The husband finally knows that the eye is indifferent to him. "On and off..."
Mere eye. No mind. Opening and shutting on me... Am I as much as... being seen? These people, too, live in desperation, not knowing why they must go on and not knowing quite what it is they are supposed to do. But worst of all, they live with the awful fear that there is nobody in heaven or earth who knows. One speech of the mistress's sums up the questions that underlie this fear. "Are you listening to me? Is anyone listening to me? Is anyone looking at me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?" The implied answer, in each case, is no.

The world which takes its definition from the plays of Samuel Beckett is both terrible and terrifying. Terrible because its constant common denominator is pain. Terrifying, because in it man is abused, humiliated and threatened, completely impersonally and simply as a condition of being. With suffering a dimension of existence, man is faced with a grim paradox; he is helpless in the face of his hurt, since to eliminate the suffering would necessarily eliminate existence. So man endures the outrages with a kind of dogged bewilderment, waiting vaguely for the end of the game or for Godot to come or for night to fall. Waiting, in fact, for anything that promises to interrupt the preposterous charade that, for some reason, he is expected to play.

One of the rules of the game is that man must be housed in a shockingly imperfect body. It is, for one
thing, gross and clumsy. Lucky's dance is a grotesque parody, as is Estragon's hapless attempt to do "the tree." All four of the major characters in *Waiting for Godot* have trouble keeping their feet, and poor Krapp is no sooner introduced than he slips on his discarded banana skin. But far worse than the mechanical inefficiency of the body is its corruptibility. Almost without exception Beckett's people suffer from one or more diseases or injuries, generally of a particularly unpleasant sort. They are bleeding, blind, dumb, senile and paralyzed. They have disgusting sores, stumps for legs and blocked bowels. Painfully they are reminded by these insults that decay begins with birth and that it is virtually impossible to die with dignity.

Worse than the physical pain which they must endure is the mental and spiritual agony borne by these characters. Life is constant anguish; the concept of happiness is an inconsistency. A brief exchange in *Endgame* makes the point. "Clv: He's [Nagg] crying. Hamm: Then he's living. (Pause.)" Have you ever had an instant of happiness? Clv: Not to my knowledge." The causes of this misery are several. The fundamental problem is that, in Beckett's world, the game must be played alone, without rules and without a referee. Man is lonely. Throughout the plays characters almost always appear in pairs. Even in *Krapp's Last Tape* there are two Krapps, and in *Play*
there are really two pairs, with the man common to both. Often there is established what seems to be a fairly strong bond between the two. Yet, no matter how hard they strain and struggle toward each other, there is always a puzzling area where no contact is made, where no communication is possible. Even Vladimir and Estragon, who seem to be the closest of all the couples, inexplicably sleep apart at night. They cannot agree on how long they have been friends, or where they have spent time. They embrace, only to be driven apart by foul breath. So between all the characters in the plays there are barriers. Sometimes these are constructed of indifference, sometimes of cruelty, often of language, but whatever the reason, the implication of separateness is always present. They reach for each other, talk to each other, at times even kick and beat each other to prove their own existence. They beg for an answer, they demand a response, they insist that they be seen. Only thus are they able to receive any assurance that they are, that they do, indeed, have an identity. Yet they never can really be sure. The messenger does not remember Didi and Gogo. Blind Hamm cannot know whether Clov has left, Krapp does not recognize himself, and Winnie has moments of panic when she is unable to see Willie. Lonely and alone, each faces the hollow reality that there is, indeed, (in Estragon's words) "no lack of void," and in a void, man is nothing.

The ultimatealoneness of Beckett's world is thus
the aloneness of man in an impersonal universe. Man is not only alienated from other men but also from any sort of supra-humanity. Beckett does not waste time arguing theology; if God does not care, it does not matter much, from a practical standpoint, whether He exists or not. It is obvious that Godot is not going to come. Hamm cries out in fury, after attempting to pray, "The bastard! He doesn't exist!", to which Clov replies laconically, "Not yet." The eye flickers unconcernedly from face to face in Play, offering nothing. Man is simply a thing, of no more importance to the cosmos than any other thing.

Confronted by these conditions of continuous deterioration, of separation, and of total indifference, man is helpless. His tonics and his medicines and his ministrations can do nothing to halt the disintegration of his body, and he cannot force the universe to pay him the slightest attention. These things might be bearable if man could hope that his living had at least some temporary purpose, that, granted the complete arbitrariness of existence, he could function with some meaning. But in Beckett's world the ideas of social action, of engagement, of rebellion are preposterous. There is nothing of any worth to become engaged in, nothing to rebel against. In the teeth of the barren emptiness of this world, a call to action would be an exercise in total futility.

The grim facts of life in this bleak moon-scape
of a universe are plain; pointlessness, pain and putrefaction are its constants. "Beckett's world is doomed at birth. It is a parodic symbol that denotes the same impotence as that of its people."\(^{89}\) This is a fair and restrained evaluation, and yet the miracle is that one cares about the people of his plays. They are not disgusting or contemptible because they are pathetically and recognizably human. They are human, they are conscious, and they persevere. It should be noted that many of them are not very "good" people. They are foolish, unkind, often vicious and cruel, but they are alive, and this in the face of the total absurdity of their lives. In the words of William Barrett, "Even in a formal theological sense, I think we would have to say that man is not dead in Beckett."\(^{90}\) It may be quite true that man is continuously in the process of dying and that no purpose can be demonstrated in living, but the one certainty in Beckett's world is that man is not dead. He is not dead because, ironically, he suffers and he is aware that he suffers and he still, fantastically, continues to play his games and tell his stories. By no stretch of the imagination can he be called heroic, but he does put in his time and keep his appointments and trim his nails, even as we all do. He can only be treated as a joke, because what he is doing is obviously foolish and futile, but the laughter is salted with tears because he is all
of us and we recognize him, and, with Beckett, cannot
help but pity and love him a little. "As long as man
remains ugly, small, poor, cruel, ignorant, miserable,
and vulnerable, Beckett's ironic works will have lively
and deadly relevance for us." There is little hope and
no comfort for man in this world, but there is compassion.
In the words of Hamm, "You weep, and weep, for nothing,
so as not to laugh, and little by little. . . you begin
to grieve."
CHAPTER V
IONESCO: THEATRE OF MAN IN PARALYSIS

The most prolific, as well as the most voluble, of the contemporary French members of the theatrical avant-garde is Eugene Ionesco. A Roumanian by birth, Ionesco, like Beckett, came to the theatre after establishing a minor reputation in other literary forms. Moreover, he did not like the theatre and seldom attended. The circumstances surrounding the writing of his first play have become part of the folklore of modern drama. As he tells the story, he started to learn English and became fascinated by the solemnly ridiculous reading lessons in his textbook. As a sort of private joke, he wrote a play in which the characters not only talk in the style of the exercise-stories, but frequently use their very language. The piece interested some of his friends and eventually caught the attention of a young director, who, with a group of dedicated actors, produced the drama in May of 1950. Thus it was that Ionesco entered the theatre almost by accident; had he chosen a different English primer, perhaps he never would have considered writing for the stage.

The play, improbably entitled *The Bald Soprano* (*La Cantatrice chauve*), was greeted with almost universal
apathy. In spite of the enthusiasm of the youthful director and cast, it ran only six weeks, and then often to nearly empty houses. It was still too strange to a large segment of the public. But the theatrical wind was blowing in Ionesco's direction. In a few years this box office failure was to be hailed as a landmark of a new dimension in theatre.

The incidents which make up The Bald Soprano are perhaps the most widely recognized nonsense since Lewis Carroll. The play is interesting for several reasons, not the least of which is that it can be, and has been, accepted at two levels of intent. Indeed, the author himself has suggested these levels. At one time he wrote, "I fancied myself having written something like the tragedy of language. It is above all concerned with a kind of universal petty bourgeoisie." At another time, however, he commented, "In The Bald Soprano, which is a completely unserious play... some people have seen a satire on Bourgeois society, a criticism of life in England, and heaven knows what."

Actually, the two statements are not necessarily contradictory. The play is not really serious. The tone is too genial, the humor too broad. One need only see it performed to see its relationship to such sketches as The Man in the Bowler Hat, by A. A. Milne, or Shaw's Passion, Poison, and Petrifaction. The language and style border on
the self-consciously coy, at times, and frequently become heavy-handed and obvious. That the work is funny in production is unquestionable. In the theatre it plays as a zany comedy, only very generally burlesquing a familiar society. One can, in fact, recognize oneself in the play and still laugh. In other words, while The Bald Soprano derives humor from life, there is too much of the comic strip about the play's satire for it to be taken very seriously.

On the other hand, under the good-natured farce can be glimpsed several aspects of life which are of obvious concern to the author, some grim observations concerning existence to which he will return often in his later plays. Since Ionesco has written far more for the stage than the other writers who have been considered, and since the plays vary greatly in length and importance, a slightly different approach in discussing them seems appropriate. Instead of investigating each of them in order, it should be less tedious and more clear to examine the principal themes and motifs as they appear and reappear in the major works.

One of the most obvious of these, and the most immediately striking in The Bald Soprano, is the crumbling of language and hence the near impossibility of communication. The final five or ten minutes of this play consist almost entirely of gibberish. At times this takes the form of
perfectly: proper words combined into nonsense sentences, as when Mrs. Smith remarks, "I'm waiting for the aqueduct to come and see me at my windmill." Often the sentences are logical enough in themselves but bear no relationship to their context, as in this exchange: "Mrs. Smith: I don't know enough Spanish to make myself understood. Mrs. Martin: I'll give you my mother-in-law's slippers if you'll give me your husband's coffin." Eventually the dialogue disintegrates to lists of words which begin with the same letter, repetition of the alphabet and the vowels, and wordless babble.

More subtle than this use of nonsense dialogue are a number of other devices which point up the essential meaninglessness of language. The one which opens the play and sets the tone is the bland and blatant exposition in which Mrs. Smith solemnly tells her husband who they are, where they live, and what they ate for dinner. This, of course, was what impressed Ionesco about the stories in his English language primer—the fact that the people seemed to find it necessary to continually remind each other of their situation. A variation of this technique accounts for the funniest single scene in the play. Mr. and Mrs. Martin, guests in the Smith house, conduct a proper and polite conversation, during which they discover that they not only came from the same city at the same time, but now live in the same house and share the same
daughter. This leads to the inevitable conclusion, voiced by Mr. Martin: "Then, dear lady, I believe that there can be no doubt about it, we have seen each other before and you are my own wife. Elizabeth, I have found you again?"  

The conversation in the play also includes many outrageous and uncontested contradictions. Perhaps the most startling of these concerns the death of one Bobby Watson, whose obituary Mr. Smith comes upon in the paper. "Mr. Smith: Tsk, it says there that Bobby Watson died. Mrs. Smith: . . . When did he die? Mr. Smith: . . . he's been dead these past two years. . . . It's been three years since his death was announced. . . ." At no time do those involved in such conversations seem to be aware of the flat impossibility that these remarks can be mutually true. They simply accept the latest version without question. This is, certainly, an obvious comic device, but beyond that it is a comment on the unreliability of language as a record of events.

In all this variety of language techniques, the most telling is the least spectacular. This is the deliberately banal quality of much of the dialogue. The text is littered with cliches and commonplaces. Frequently these are distorted for comic effect, as when Mr. Smith remarks, "All doctors are quacks. And all patients too. Only the Royal Navy is honest in England." Often, however, they simply drop into the conversation as they stand, the more
effective because of their oblique relevance. Mr. Smith, for example, when mildly reproached for wetting his pants, answers, after some thought, "The heart is ageless." Further, the subject matter itself is often deadly in its utter pointlessness. The most striking instance of this is the long, rambling story told by the Fire Chief, containing all the familiar detours of who married whom, and concluding with the simple statement that a certain elderly woman "occasionally in the winter, like everyone else, caught a cold." 

In a number of ways, then, throughout the play, Ionesco batters at the language as a meaningful communicative device. Scarce any of anything these people say makes and sort of referential sense; and the talk becomes almost sinister by its very inanity. Words take on, not only different meaning, but actually different characteristics. Ionesco has made quite clear the fact that something like this was his goal: "the word itself should be strained to its limits. Language should almost explode or destroy itself in its impossibility to contain meaning." 

The play succeeds, certainly, in this distortion of language, but the general air of playfulness tends to blur and soften the ironic intent. The playwright's next two works demonstrate more seriously the impossible struggle for communication. The Lesson (La Leçon), produced in 1951, though still broadly humorous in part, treats the problem,
among others, in a much grimmer manner. While in *The Bald Soprano* the parody is concerned with the casual small-talk of the middle-class living room, in *The Lesson* it is language itself that is dissected. The title of the play sums up the surface action: a tutoring session between a young girl student and a middle-aged professor. This is, then, a formal situation in which precise communication is of utmost importance. The concepts of "teaching" and "learning" are impossible without the presupposition of a transmission and reception of ideas. Thus, Ionesco is dealing here with language which, ideally, should be consciously chosen and structured for a high level of communication. Yet the failure is even greater than before. The pupil cannot learn, the professor cannot teach, and the result of their futile efforts is frustration and death.

Once again Ionesco uses several devices to convey this message. As the tone of the work is quite different from that of the earlier play, he relies far less on puns, non-sequiturs, and verbal horse-play. These techniques are not abandoned completely, but are minimized, so that the effectiveness of the dramatic image is not dissipated. The characters, rather than merely exhibiting the symptoms of the absurdity of language, are engaged in acting out that absurdity.

First, there is the literal inability of the pupil to understand the professor. Early in the lesson the teacher makes a long and earnest attempt to explain the concept of
subtraction to the girl. She is capable of adding numbers, but is somewhat perplexed when asked to subtract. From no matter what direction he approaches the problem, he is unable to make the process clear to her. First, he attempts, in a general way, to explain and define what he means by bigger and smaller in terms of numbers, only to become entangled in his own reasoning. "Professor: Some numbers are smaller and others are larger. In the larger numbers there are many more units than in the small... Unless the small ones have smaller units... Pupil: In that case, the small numbers can be larger than the large numbers?" Shifting to a more concrete level, it is the literalness of her mind which trips him up. "Professor: How many units are there between three and four? Pupil: There aren't any units, Professor, between three and four. Four comes immediately after three; there is nothing at all between three and four." The use of a specific example is even more a disaster, as she reduces the reasoning to shambles. "Professor: If you had two noses, and I pulled one of them off... how many would you have left? Pupil: None... because you haven't pulled off any, that's why I have one now. If you had pulled it off, I wouldn't have it anymore." Throughout these exchanges, the Professor is perfectly "logical." His arithmetical reasoning is perfectly clear, so long as it is viewed from his vantage point. But from her angle, the pupil also makes sense.
After all, there are more units in one quart of sand than in twelve of peaches; when one counts, there is nothing between three and four; and, since he has not taken her nose, she has one, and if he took it, she would have none. Being able to accommodate two mutually exclusive sets of truths (at least acceptable as truths to the individuals), language collapses as a method of definition or description.

More pointed than this portrayal of frustrated comprehension is the section in which the professor actually turns to language, as such, as his subject matter. This is the by now famous lecture on the "new-Spanish" family of languages. The professor sets out to demonstrate that the various tongues have much in common. As a matter of fact, "The differences can scarcely be recognized by people who are not aware of them. Thus, all the words of all the languages... are always the same..."¹⁶ In short, by proving that the languages are identical, yet at the same time assuming their individuality by giving them labels, the teacher simply makes a mockery of the very subject he is attempting to teach. Admittedly this is an ad absurdum, but Ionesco uses such a technique often, since the point he is making is precisely that words are ridiculous.

"However diverse the methods he uses...[they] all consist, in the final analysis, of creating a sort of pushing to the limit...to oblige it [language] to betray to us by itself its own absurdity."¹⁷ It is not merely that words
are often inexactly used and understood, but that they are of themselves meaningless. (In *Jack, or the Submission* (Jacques, ou la Soumission) Ionesco followed this line to its ultimate conclusion by reducing the entire language to the single, all-purpose word, "cat.")

The single most striking example of the utter bankruptcy of communication appears in *The Chairs* (Les Chaises), first produced in April, 1952. Leaving the other elements of the play aside for the moment, the tension which grows throughout the drama is entirely built on expectation. Having once been introduced to the strange old couple who occupy a room in what appears to be a lighthouse, the audience learns that the husband has devoted his life to the preparation of a message which will, it seems, solve all the problems of the world. From this point on, of course, anticipation to learn what this all-important message can be grows steadily. At length the hired orator arrives, and, with a great display of awesome portentousness, faces the mass of chairs in which sit the invisible guests. As he begins to speak, the shocking truth becomes evident; he is a deaf mute, who can only mouth meaningless noises. Even when he attempts to use the blackboard to write the message, the only word which can be deciphered, among the jumble of letters, is "angelfood." There is no great revelation, no omniscient Word to cure man's every ill and answer all his questions. Or if there is such a
disclosure, it cannot be communicated—which comes to exactly the same thing.

Other plays, to a greater or lesser extent, deal also with the problem of language, but the techniques are mainly repetitions or variations on those already noted. The point is that one of the major manifestations of Ionesco's picture of the world is this insistence that words, which man must use to name, describe and define, are at best clumsy and woefully vague, at worst completely useless and terrifying. As Richard Coe suggests, "In Ionesco, language not merely creates existence, but, having done so, proceeds to tyrannise and victimize its own creation." The professor, in The Lesson, though he cannot meaningfully communicate with the pupil, nevertheless uses language to oppress and destroy her. The people of The Bald Soprano are little more than puppets who respond without thought to the meaningless words they speak and hear. Further, one of the most depressing implications of this fragmentation of language is that it leaves man quite alone. "Ionesco's effort consists in helping us to glimpse, upon the ruin of verbal communication, the tragic silence which is that of the solitude of his beings." This solitude of which Vannier speaks is another of the major themes with which the playwright is concerned. The inclusive condition of his characters, a condition which is the result and
total of several contributory elements, is solitude. The
uselessness of language in reaching and receiving is one
of these elements. Another, and closely related one, is
the untrustworthiness of logic as any sort of guarantee
of stability in a lunatic world.

This has already been touched in discussing the
attempt which the professor makes in The Lesson to explain
the process of subtraction to his pupil. The difficulty
there is not only the inherent ambiguity of language, but,
more basically, with the elusiveness of reasoning itself.
There are a number of instances when Ionesco allows his
characters to follow, in all seriousness, a line of argument
which pulverizes and burlesques the logic upon which it
is based. One familiar case occurs in The Bald Soprano.
As the two couples sit chatting, the doorbell rings, but,
when Mrs. Smith answers it, there is no one there. This
happens three times, and each time she discovers the door-
way empty. When the bell rings the fourth time she flatly
refuses to go. In spite of her husband's insistence that
when the bell rings, someone rings it, she can point to
experimental conclusions which refute him. "That is true
in theory. But in reality things happen differently..."
Experience teaches us that when one hears the doorbell ring
it is because there is never anyone there."20 This victory
for the empirical method seems to be shattered when the
fourth ring proves to be the Fire Chief's, but Mrs. Smith
still has a stunning bit of arbitrary illogic that gains her at least a compromise in the argument. When faced with the reality of the Fire Chief, her answer is simple: "Yes, but it was only when you heard the doorbell ring the fourth time that there was someone there. And the fourth time does not count."21 The Fire Chief resolves the argument in a manner which manages to please everybody by cheerfully accepting both points of view. Obviously, when a doorbell rings, sometimes there is someone there and sometimes there is not. This brilliant conclusion not only satisfies the factions in the play but is in itself a triumph for the logical method. It is impeccable, unanswerable, and ridiculous.

A more recent and more celebrated example of logic pushed to the extreme happens early in *Rhinoceros*. This play, first performed in 1959, has been the most successful of Ionesco's more ambitious efforts. It will be examined in more detail later; for the moment let it be enough to say that during the course of the action, the inhabitants of a French provincial town turn to rhinoceroses. When the first beasts are seen, no one is aware, of course, that they are actually fellow townspeople, and a violent quarrel erupts over whether two rhinoceroses have been seen or whether one has been seen twice, and, if there were two, whether one was double-horned and the other single. A Logician (who earlier had proved, among other things, that
Socrates was a cat, since all cats die and Socrates is dead) enters the argument and meticulously describes all the various possible combinations of rhinoceroses which might have been seen, including the unlikely chance that a pair of two-horned beasts each lost one horn. Finally it is suggested that while these possibilities may be valid, they do not answer the question. To this the Logician replies "(with a knowledgeable smile), Obviously, my dear sir, but now the problem is correctly posed." The problem has, indeed, been correctly posed. So correctly, in fact, that it is reduced to an absurdity.

However, the very structure and composition of the plays themselves most clearly depict the complete non-logic of existence. That which makes the works seem, at first glance, so puzzling, so difficult to decipher, is the apparent incongruency of their elements. Plot, dialogue, characterization—none of it makes any sense. Which, of course, is exactly the point. Bernard F. Dukore asks, "is not this lack of plot, this apparent lack of form, this willful lack of meaningful forward action—is it not exactly the right form for a play that reveals lives which are formless...?" The meaninglessness of the dramas becomes a reflection of and a comment on the playwright's view of the meaninglessness of life. Any logic existing within the framework of an absurd universe must be a pseudo-logic, and this is what the reckless fracturing
of possibility in the composition of these plays is all about. Ionesco's people live in a world which obeys no laws and in which, therefore, causal relationships are meaningless. This is well summed up in Coe's words, "logic is destroyed, and nothing is left but an endless series of causeless and unrelated phenomena; a world of infinite coincidence."24

Thus logic and language take on the distorted qualities of a dream. Also dream-like is the important role played by objects, by things, in this disquieting world. As people become more and more like automata, or puppets, the non-human elements interject themselves more and more into their lives. This begins fairly innocently in The Bald Soprano with the celebrated clock which strikes any hour, including seventeen, twenty-nine, and none, at any time. Within the context of this play, the clock has no really sinister or frightening connotation; it becomes merely another amusing element in this fantastical nonsensical work. In the plays which follow, however, this element becomes more evident.

The New Tenant (Le Nouveau Locataire), written in 1953, is practically a single, sustained theatrical metaphor for the bewildering explosion of the material which threatens to bury man. This brief work is at once a prolonged sight-joke and a grim commentary on the gradual submersion of the human in the morass of the non-human. Simple and stark even by Ionesco's standards, it
follows his familiar technique of pushing a simple, commonplace action to such a limit that it becomes not only distorted and ludicrous, but frightening. In this case, the activity depicted is merely that of a man moving into an unfurnished room. The first portion of the piece consists of a virtual monologue by the caretaker as the Gentleman inspects the room. The old woman, in the course of her rambling chatter, tells several different versions of the same incidents, contradicts herself repeatedly, and in general serves to satirize language in the manner of The Bald Soprano or The Chairs. It is the latter part of the play, however, which contains the central and powerful image. The workmen begin to bring in the furniture and arrange it as the Gentleman directs. Slowly it becomes apparent that this activity is not so innocent and routine as it would seem, for they bring, not just the normal complement of furnishings for a room, but literally, a room full. The Gentleman, sitting calmly in a chair in the middle of the stage, is first surrounded, then hidden, then at last engulfed by the mass of objects bustled in by the workmen. As they make ready to leave, one climbs to the top of the enclosure in which the Gentleman sits, and, after taking his hat, throws a bunch of flowers to him. Even more obvious is the closing of the drama:
"First Furniture Mover: Is there anything you want? (Silence) Second Furniture Mover: Is there anything you
want? Gentleman's Voice: (After a silence... ) Put out the light. (Utter darkness) Thank you. 25 Here is the most explicit and graphic theatrical image of man's burial in the trivial, inanimate rubbish of existence. Life is stifled and crushed by the unlive things of the world.

Another variation on this menacing growth appears in Amedee, or How to Get Rid of It (Amédée ou Comment s'en débarrasser). This play, initially performed in April, 1954, was Ionesco's first attempt to write a three-act drama. It concerns an unsuccessful playwright, Amedee, and his shrewish wife, Madeleine. For fifteen years they have lived with a corpse, which occupies one room of their flat. As the play opens, the body has begun to grow; in the second act it pushes down the door of its room and extends its huge legs across the stage. Eventually it becomes necessary for the couple to dispose of it, and, in a virtually unproducible third act, Amedee takes the now block-long body to the river, only to have it suddenly become buoyant and carry him off through the sky as the play ends.

In typical Ionesco fashion, Amedee and Madeleine cannot agree as to the literal identity of the corpse, but the terrifying fact is that it is there and it is expanding at an alarming rate. Now anti-life is not symbolized by chairs or furniture or dishes but by deadness
itself, and, furthermore, a deadness which threatens to cram itself into all the space of the living. Amedee diagnoses the condition as "goemetric progression... the incurable disease of the dead."\textsuperscript{26} Once the expansion begins it progresses at a dizzying pace, a huge oppressive mass, engulfing the living with its weight.

While the identity of the corpse is never ascertained, it symbolizes the body of Amedee's and Madeleine's love, the stillborn dreams of joy and fulfillment in their marriage. During the second act Ionesco utilizes a well-worn theatrical device to make this quite clear. In a rather melodramatic backflash he introduces the Amedee and Madeleine of fifteen years before. Already darkness and decay have begun to settle over them as the young man struggles in vain to retain a vision of delight in life. His thrust toward the light is no match for his wife's bitter view, and the murder of love has been committed. Now the victim lies in their home and on their hearts, always present, ever growing, a macabre triumph of the dead.

Nor is the method of "getting rid of it" particularly hopeful. Esslin reads the ending of the play as "liberation, a dream of a new beginning that will abolish the past."\textsuperscript{27} Writing of the same play, Richard Eastman states that Ionesco can "reawaken in modern man the candid child who treasures life simply because he is alive."\textsuperscript{28} These
observations are unduly optimistic. Certainly Amedee is liberated as he floats in the air, and his last words are, "But I feel so frisky, so frisky." But this sense of freedom and the joy of living occurs ironically as he leaves the world and the company of people. There is no way to escape the burdensome presence of the multiplying cadavers of regret save by withdrawing from existence.

As man, in these plays, is shown to be the victim of the endless spawn of inanimate objects, so too is he shown to be little more than a thing, himself. The interchangeability of people is a recurrent theme in Ionesco. At the end of *The Bald Soprano* there is a brief black-out. When the lights come on, the Martins sit in the same positions assumed by the Smiths at the opening, and the curtain falls as they commence the identical dialogue which begins the play. In the same work, the Bobby Watson whose obituary appears in the paper turns out to be a member of a large family, all of whom, men and women alike, are named Bobby Watson. A similar device is used in *Jack, or the Submission*, where the two families are all named some form of Jack or Robert. In *The Lesson*, the pupil, as it turns out, is the fortieth one killed by the professor during the course of the day. Presumably they all were very much the same.

It is in *Rhinoceros* that the dehumanization of man is shown most overtly. Here, in order to make his
point about conformism and non-conformism, Ionesco turns his characters into animals. Earlier, talking about his first play, he had written, "they can no longer be, they can 'become' anybody, anything, for, having lost their identity, they assume the identity of others..." In that play he demonstrated how people could become "anybody." In *Rhinoceros*, he demonstrates how people can become "anything." The metamorphosis is carried out before the eyes of the audience--man into beast. Not different beasts, various species with recognizable qualities, but all the same. In the last act of the play Berenger, the shabby, little-man "hero" cries out, "They all look alike, all alike... Half with one horn and half with two, and that's the only distinction." As the play draws to a close, more and more stylized heads of rhinoceroses appear, at the doors, at the windows, even along the footlights. Featureless, indistinguishable one from another, they crowd about Berenger in ever-increasing numbers. Rich, poor, intellectual, dolt, old, young--all are the same. They do not threaten or menace, except with the fact of their existence. They are the people, mindless, complacent, and all alike. The exterior facade of reasonableness and individuality is quickly crumbled as they stampede to belong, to adapt, to submerge themselves in the herd. Again the human is buried under the unhuman.

It has been noted earlier that the giant corpse:
in Amedee serves as a theatrical image representing the blasted love of the two major characters. In none of the plays does love appear in any way as ennobling or redemptive. Generally, it proves to be destructive, futile or obscene.

In The Lesson, the murder of the pupil is the culmination of an obvious, though ritualistic, rape. Sex, here, is depicted in its brutalized form, by means of which the professor is able to dominate and demolish the young girl. In Grossvogel's words, "Like all the other overgrown forces, sexuality kills in this drama." Rhinoceros contains what amounts to a parody on love's constancy. Alone in his room, Berenger prepares to hold out against the beasts, when he is joined by his sweetheart, Daisy. In true romantic fashion they first promise each other that they will face the future with each other, without fear. "I'm not afraid of anything as long as we're together. I don't care what happens." Soon, however, confronted by the gathering hordes of animals, Daisy begins to waver. "I feel a bit ashamed of what you call love--this morbid feeling..." They quarrel, and at last Daisy leaves him to go out into the streets with the rhinoceroses. Against the crushing forces of conformity, love proves to be a paper shield.

The least lovely aspects of love emerge in the grotesque scenes of eroticism in The Chairs and Jack, or the Submission. Among the first invisible guests of the
ancient couple of The Chairs is a gentleman (a photo-engraver, though this is of no importance) to whom the lady becomes attracted. Suddenly this ninety-four year old woman commences a series of monstrous, lewd posturings.
"(she raises her petticoats. . . exposes her old breast. . . projects her pelvis. . . she laughs like an old prostitute. . . )"  
While Jack and Roberta are younger, their "love" scene in Jack, or the Submission is scarcely less unpleasant. Urging the reluctant young man on, Roberta murmurs, "don't be afraid. . . I'm moist. . . my breasts are dissolving. . . I've got water in my crevasses. . . In my belly, there are pools. . . There's moss. . . big flies, cockroaches, sowbugs, toads. . . Under the wet covers they make love. . . "  
As the two sink into an embrace, the parents and grandparents enter and dance obscenely around them. In each case, by his familiar technique of emphasizing the ludicrous, of forcing to the limits of recognition, Ionesco presents an essentially disgusting and ridiculous evocation of sex. If love, in its various forms, should be equated with life, vitality, regeneration and joy, these values are denied by the negative view of love which is projected. Barrenness, sterility and death take their place.

What all of these paths lead to is the conclusion, as stated by Leonard Pronko, that "Victory of dead thing over that which is alive, is expressed on many levels in
the theatre of Ionesco." It is small wonder, then, that death plays an important part in the author's works. In some cases, to be sure, as in the Bobby Watson episode in *The Bald Soprano*, it serves primarily as a sort of graveyard humor. In most cases, though, it is a more integral and more serious element of the plot. The entire action of *The Lesson* leads up to the murder of the pupil by the professor. In *The Chairs* the two old people, ironically convinced that the great message is about to be given and received, hurl themselves from the windows, into the sea. The central image in *Amédée*, of course, is the ominous corpse. (In that same play another symbol of death is much in evidence—the mushrooms which first grow in the room with the body and then spread throughout the flat.) It is, however, *The Killer* (*Tuer Sans Gages*), first produced in February, 1959, which deals most exclusively with death.

*The Killer* is chronologically the second of Ionesco's three-act plays, being preceded by *Amédée* and followed by *Rhinocéros*. Its central character, as in the latter work, is an ineffectual common man, also called Berenger. Having come to visit a fabulous residential district called the Radiant City, he is shocked to learn that a mysterious slayer has been terrorizing the area. Setting out to catch the murderer he embarks on a series of Kafkaesque, nightmare adventures which eventually lead him to his goal.

The killer turns out to be "very small and puny, illshaven,
with... only one eye... Or perhaps there is no Killer at all. Berenger could be talking to himself... "38 The only answers the little maniac gives during Berenger’s twelve-page harangue are intermittent chuckles and shrugs. In spite of the fact that Berenger is much larger and stronger, and is armed with two pistols, his demands, his arguments, his pleas falter and crumble. At last he puts down his guns and kneels as the Killer advances with his knife, chuckling quietly.

The Killer, of course, is death, and Esslin is quite right to point out that the English translation of the title “does not quite do justice to the implications of the French, which means Killer Without Reward.”39 For the Killer’s most terrifying characteristic is that he kills without purpose and without cause. During his final speech, Berenger first touches on this frightening quality, ironically, while trying to reason with the dwarf. "If you killed every girl who liked her own way... or the neighbors because they make a noise... or someone for holding different opinions... it would be ridiculous, wouldn’t it?"40 Finally, after argument and logic prove futile, Berenger can only plead, "You kill without reason... and I beg you... please stop. There’s no reason why you should, naturally, but please stop, just because there’s no reason to kill or not to kill."41

This is the ultimate, terrible reality. There is no
reason, for or against. It is precisely this mindless
innocence of the Killer which is so shattering. In this
character, essentially, is bound up the entire anguish of
the absurd. As simple as Caligula's cry are Berenger's
final pain-drenched words: "Oh God! There's nothing we
can do. What can we do... What can we do..." Even he
has run out of platitudes and appeals, bribes and threats,
specious logic and common sense. At one point he even
mocks the Killer because, by killing, he implies a value
to life, a meaning of some sort. "Ha! Ha! Do you want to
hear that said, be taken for an idiot, an idealist, a
crank who 'believes' in something, who 'believes' in crime,
the simpleton!" Even this fails, of course, as Berenger
faces the final truth that this is, truly, a Killer without
reward.

This is the empty face of death in Ionesco. In
every case it is either ludicrous or futile or, more often,
both. It is ludicrous and futile simply because it is pur­
poseless. Coe has summed up this aspect of Ionesco's
theatre plainly and pointedly: "The terror... resides,
not so much in the fact of death, as in its inherent sense­
lessness... The concept of achieving something by death
is totally alien to Ionesco." Thus there can be no real
sense of tragedy, in anything approaching the classic or
Shakespearean tradition, in these plays. Indiscriminate
death becomes at once insignificant and all significant,
but certainly cannot claim any nobility or stature. It becomes, in fact, just such a thing as the Killer—a misshapen, giggling imbecile.

Ionesco has made quite plain some of his thoughts on the subject of tragedy, and they do, indeed, rule out the more conventional distinctions. As a matter of fact, he professes to distrust labels. "Personally I have never understood the distinctions that are made between the comic and the tragic."\(^5\) It is true that he uses some of these labels on his plays, usually in strange combinations, but he does it to point up this very ambiguity. "I have called my comedies anti-plays, comical dramas, and my drama pseudo dramas or tragical farces, for it seems to me that comical is tragic and the tragedy of man derisory; for the modern critical spirit, nothing can be taken entirely seriously, nor entirely lightly."\(^6\) Actually and essentially he is saying that his view of the world is a comic one. If the writer of tragedy deals seriously with a struggle between good and evil, it is implicit in the writing that some sort of distinction does exist and one may possibly dominate the other. The socio-psycho-economical author who deals with man in conflict with himself and his environment assumes that these problems not only exist but are crucial, and the inference is that they can be solved. The writer of comedy, however, tends to see all sides of all things as inherently humorous because they are inherently unimportant; "nothing
can be taken entirely seriously." Hence he may believe in such things as, say, kindness and social justice and equality of opportunity, but he will seldom write earnest plays about them for he knows, in his heart, that they make as much (but no more) sense as any other human activity, which is pathetically little.

The characteristic, then, which becomes more and more evident in the theatre of Ionesco is unhumanness. The forces of the non-human, the non-individual, emerge in almost every case as far stronger than those of men, or, at any rate, of man as anything more than a creature. It is this aspect which leads Coe to remark that "Death is the one constant theme which gives unity to Ionesco's theatre. . ."7 Death is, after all, the ultimate form of non-humanity, the final, triumphant state of isolation, passivity, and unawareness which marks the existence of the people of Ionesco's world. It is this eerie condition of unconcern which is perhaps the most chilling aspect of the lives of these characters.

The great majority of them simply endure, supremely unconscious of the black absurdity of their being. It is a trifle unfair to over-emphasize the lunacy of the Smith-Martin menage, since The Bald Soprano depends, for its burlesque effect, on their remaining utterly serious in the midst of the bizarre circumstances which surround them and to which they contribute. Nevertheless, the obvious
fact remains that this is exactly the point; they see nothing at all out of the way or incomprehensible in the happenings of the evening. To them the fractured language, the nul-logic, and the uncertain relationships are all quite normal and entirely proper. They are, in Ionesco's words, "the personification of accepted ideas and slogans, the ubiquitous conformist..." They are, in fact, very nearly walking ciphers.

Nor are those with formal learning any more aware of the desperation of their situation. The Professor in The Lesson pursues his calamitous course in the face of its inevitable end. Forty fatalities in a single day teach him nothing. It is true that the maid is conscious of the danger. She warns the Professor of it in one of the most quoted lines of the drama: "Arithmetic leads to philology, and philology leads to crime." At the same time, neither appears to feel that the subject matter of the lesson is particularly unorthodox or that the murder is really much more than an inconvenience. The Logician who so brilliantly resolves the question of the number of horns in Rhinoceros proves to be no more immune to the contagion of the animals than any of the other townspeople, but gladly goes off to join the brutes, apparently seeing nothing illogical in men turning into rhinoceroses.

Examples of this incomprehension of the human condition abound throughout the plays. The new tenant imper-
turbably allows himself to be buried under the masses of furniture. The old couple of The Chairs eagerly welcome their unseen guests and, as already noted, happily commit suicide, certain that they have been understood. Writing of this play, the author says, "The characters... are not fully conscious of their spiritual rootlessness, but they feel it instinctively and emotionally." This vague comprehension is as far as most of them go, in any of the plays.

The two characters who exhibit the most sensitivity to the terrors of existence are the Berengers of The Killer and Rhinoceros. To speculate over whether the two are the same person, literally, is needless. They share certain traits which give them a more than superficial resemblance to each other. For one thing, there is nothing particularly distinctive about them. They are ordinary men of quite ordinary circumstances. Neither appears to display any special intelligence or courage. But they are both disturbed and unhappy with life, without being able to understand why. Early in The Killer, Berenger attempts to explain his malaise to the architect of Radiant City. He describes how once, long ago, he had felt alive and light, bursting with the joy of being. Then, suddenly, "everything went grey and pale and neutral again... I was overcome with the immense sadness you feel at a moment of tragic... separation... I felt
lost among all those people, all those things... and since then, it's been perpetual November." In the later play, the second Berenger says much the same thing to his friend Jean. "I'm conscious of my body all the time, as if it were made of lead, or as if I were carrying another man around on my back... I don't even know if I am me... Solitude seems to oppress me. And so does the company of others." This is as close as Ionesco comes to an explicit delineation of Sartrean nausea. These two men have experienced the metaphysical sickness of despair.

Moreover, they are each moved to act. The first Berenger sets out to confront and, if possible, dissuade the Killer. The second determines to hold out against the disease which is transforming his neighbors into monsters. Richard Schechner sees in this a triumph over nothingness; an affirmative note in the drama of Ionesco. Even Grossvogel, an essentially unfriendly critic, suggests that the conclusion of Rhinoceros is an "assertion over the absurd."

These judgements might be more hopeful if the characters were more acutely conscious of their dilemma. When the "protagonist" of The Killer actually faces his adversary and realizes what he is, he does not defy him or struggle with him. Instead he capitulates and bares his throat to the knife. The author makes his position clear in his prefatory stage directions. The last speech,
he says, should show "the vacuity of his commonplace morality. . . In fact, Berenger finds within himself, in spite of himself. . . arguments in favor of the Killer." In *Rhinoceros*, it is true that Berenger remains a man, and insists that he will so remain. Nevertheless, he seems to be spared for no particular reason other than chance, and, indeed, he laments his inability to become one of the pachyderms. As Esslin remarks, "His final defiant profession of faith in humanity is merely the expression of the fox's contempt for the grapes he could not have."

The world view which reveals itself in the plays of Ionesco is a perpetual joke at man's expense. At its heart is a pessimism bitter and implacable. The playwright himself has tersely underscored this in his own words: "I see that something is wrong and I think nothing can be done about it." What is wrong is simply the condition of being. The very essentials of existence are counterfeit. Language and logic, and, by extension, any possibility of communion, are demonstrably ineffectual. This leads, then, to a hollow insularity, a vacuum in which the individual exhausts himself by his futile efforts at breaking through. Under the senseless static of words echoes a ringing stillness. "Being dead, words can communicate nothing; for the only alternative to a dead language is, not a living language (there is no
such thing), but—silence."

Everywhere the non-living suffocates the vital. Man is swamped by the fantastic multiplication of insensitive matter. The thing is triumphant over the being. Spiritually, too, the forces of life are barren and sterile. Love is denied or parodied, and religion not even recognized by denial. Death alone is real; death alone prevails.

Nor, as a final mockery, is man (except in rare cases) even privileged to be aware of his situation. Stripped of the single element which, when all else failed, he could claim as his own peculiar property, self-consciousness, he truly becomes one with the mindless universe. He does not even know that he is ridiculous. Ionesco offers mankind a terrible alternative. "I think that man must either be unhappy (metaphysically unhappy) or stupid."59

The "unhappy" elite of this anesthetized existence are left with a single wry solace—a cosmic sense of humor.

But I do not give up the game entirely with this feeling of distress; and if, as I hope, I succeed in introducing the element of humor... into this anguish, and in spite of this anguish, then humor is my relief, my liberation, my salvation.60

Yet the ultimate joke is that the rest of mankind, the "stupid," at the price of knowledge are granted peace. "Humanity is born dumb, blinded and doomed. And yet, in its very stupidity lies its salvation; for how could it live, were it aware of the truth?"61

Some years ago, an inelegant piece of doggerel
had a moment of irreverent popularity. It ran, "Happy little moron,/ He doesn't give a damn./ I wish I was a moron./ My God! Perhaps I am!" If there was a Rumanian equivalent to that verse, Eugene Ionesco must certainly have known it.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

The initial sentence of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in spite of its rather self-conscious terseness, manages to pose the dilemma of man in its bleakest form. "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide."¹ Given an existence in which all is vanity, an existence devoid of meaning or purpose in which nothing can be weighed or measured against any fixed standard, an existence, in short, which is absurd, what rational argument can be advanced for life? It is easy to level the charge of oversimplification against such a question, yet the most dread universal questions tend to be, essentially, simple. It is the answers which become complicated and abstruse. The schoolboy who looks at the heavens is able to ask quite plainly how it is possible for there to be an end and yet not an end. Science has yet to satisfy him. So Camus may be permitted to suggest that "to be or not to be" is still a question.

In the introduction of this study, the suggestion was made that four of the leading contemporary playwrights shared a fundamental outlook on the state of existence which is reflected in their works. What this outlook is,
and what individual differences of emphases in the total world-view emerge in the works of each writer, has been the concern of the preceding chapters. Each is involved, in his own way, with wrestling with the problem of life in an impersonal universe. Each reflects an image of life lived at the edge of despair.

The world described by the plays of Sartre is uncompromising, and, in the strict sense of the word, awful. Man is utterly alone. He has nowhere to turn for help, for there is nothing outside himself which is capable of giving him help. Most terrible of all is the fact that he is obliged to be his own creator, no matter what his wishes, because he is what he does, and whatever he does is a result of a choice, even the choice not to choose. Thus he not only cannot expect help, externally, but he cannot slough off the responsibility for what he is onto any agent outside himself.

However, this freedom, no matter how terrible, forces him to be a free agent, and this, paradoxically, places him once again in the center of his universe. He is not the victim of forces he cannot control, whether social, economic, political or emotional. It is true that he can live in "bad faith," that is, live according to false and delusive values, and this becomes a sort of original sin in the Sartrean world. Untrammeled by hope of reward or fear of punishment, he can commit himself,
in all his proud loneliness, to the forging of a universe in his image.

For Camus, the world is no less lonely and impersonal than for Sartre. His heroes, too, came to realize that they can look in no direction but inward to find definition and purpose in their lives. Generally it is in a moment of anguished strain that they realize that they alone are responsible, that they can choose to the very moment of death. While these moments are not usually as thunderous as they are in Sartre, they serve the same revelatory function. This responsibility, though, is significantly different for the protagonists of Camus' dramatic universe. For they recognize it, not only toward themselves, but toward others. They display a passionate, almost evangelical concern for the rights and dignity of man, and accept the fact that, regardless of abstract theory, there are acts they cannot justify. The author makes this distinction clear in his preface to his plays, speaking of Caligula.

Caligula is the story of . . . the most human and most tragic of errors. Unfaithful to mankind through fidelity to himself, Caligula accepts death because he has understood that no one can save himself all alone and that one cannot be free at the expense of others.

Ultimately, the freedom wielded by the enlightened man in the drama of Camus simply allows him to assert himself and his being by the pure act of rebellion. In the face of no matter what manifestations of a cruel and
senseless world, he holds the final and absolute power to resist because he is eternally able to say no. The fact that his resistance is pointless only adds to the nobility of the act. The rebellion itself, carried out in the full knowledge of its futility, is an option for life despite the certain victory of death. In this very futility lies its grandeur.

Beckett and Ionesco, on the other hand, are more content to describe their vision of reality than to prescribe remedies for it. The initial premises from which they work are not fundamentally at variance with those of Sartre and Camus, but each, in his way, takes a darker reading of the extensions from that common base.

The theatre of Beckett is one of constant pain. It is not only mental anguish which is manifested by his characters as they face the remote disinterest of hollow existence, but the literal, physical pain which is inexorably inherent in the body of man. Sickness haunts his people, and, indeed, their very lives may be seen as a sickness. The world is hostile and hurtful to them; the sun is too hot, the ground is too hard, and nameless things beat them in the night. Moreover, they are exhausted. Their flesh is not only mortified but decaying. Around them, the world is disintegrating, slipping toward sterility. Man and his universe are both thrust blindly into an existence which is nothing more than a process of
decomposition. Man is utterly helpless to change or alter his situation. He can only suffer it through. Vladimir states the case succinctly, as he echoes the earlier words of Pozzo: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old." 3

It is impossible to conceive of the inhabitants of this world creating themselves, living in absolute freedom. For them there is no freedom or choice simply because existence, in any situation, is pain and await for death. To be is to suffer and die, and, further, to do it in a ridiculous and humiliating manner.

But for all his ludicrous impotence and his crushing wretchedness, Beckett's man is comprehensible and strangely sympathetic. He makes no claims for his intelligence, though now and then he may recall some garbled piece of verse or mangled aphorism. However, he does not evade his situation. He is aware of his pain, aware of his desperation, aware of his helplessness. He does not understand the reason for any of them, nor for himself. He only knows that he has some charade to act out, some time to put in between the dark and the dark. And, against all logic, he does what he must do.

Pain and physical suffering do not figure so prominently in the universe postulated by Ionesco, but in its way it is no less frightening than Beckett's, and in many
cases even more bitter. Its major features include the fragmentation of a useless language, the utter irrationality of logic, and the victory of the elements of the inanimate over life.

Language, in Beckett's drama, is often ineffectual, not through any particular drastic shortcoming of itself, but simply because what it is trying to express is ridiculous. Conversations begin abruptly or dribble off because there is nothing of any significance to say. With Ionesco, however, it is language itself that is ridiculed. Nonsense and non-sequitur at times are almost the entire material from which his plays are made, and they inevitably appear, to some extent, in all the works. Language is just not able to function as any sort of workable communicative device. It is virtually hopeless to attempt to reach another through its use.

This fracturing of language is, essentially, the result of a more fundamental break-down, that of logic. The two, obviously, are inextricably bound up together, since logic is couched in language, and language is, theoretically, a logical structure. Man in this world is confronted with a logic of no logic. Nothing can be proved, therefore anything can be proved. There is no stability, no consistency of cause and effect. When the doorbell rings, sometimes someone is there and sometimes not, but neither can be predicted or accounted for. There are no rules of reason here.
Ionesco's world is one of dead things, of objects which grow and multiply until they have choked off light and life. It may be words themselves that are dead, that drown the speakers in a great sea of banality. It may be the incredible mass of artifacts which literally engulf modern man, and which threaten constantly to make of him simply another object like themselves. Or it may be the great and overriding presence of death itself, which marks man as obsolete at the moment of his birth, and makes useless his works. In Coe's words, "What act or thought of man is not meaningless when the end of all is annihilation?"

The most significant factor in this fearful picture of the human situation, however, and the one which is most peculiar to Ionesco, is its dumb acceptance by the majority of men. They read meaning into the insanity of the language, find the logical idiocies profound, and manage to live with corpses for eighteen years. Only occasionally is anyone aware of the futility of his life, and then it is a dim and fruitless knowledge. To most of mankind, even the dignity of self-awareness is denied. They are not only incapable of imposing their will on their derisive world; they are ignorant of the fact that they are the butt of the joke.

Beckett and Ionesco both deny that man is, in any way, capable of meaningful, directive action in an absurd existence. Thus, they each only observe, rather than
Comment. Ionesco states, "The playwright doesn't answer his own questions—he asks them... if he gives the answers too, he becomes a mere politician... He kills the play." One of the most enthusiastic supporters of their drama, Esslin, goes even further by insisting that, in fact, there are no answers. "The dramatic riddles of our time present no clear-cut solutions. All they can show is that while the solutions have evaporated, the riddle of our existence remains—complex, unfathomable, and paradoxical."

Criticism of the drama of Beckett and Ionesco generally comes from one or more of several basic points of view. The least persuasive of these is that there actually is no such thing as Absurd drama, in the sense that it is unique, or that it is only a variation on a type of theatre which has long been in existence. Lionel Abel, for example, takes the former view. Asserting that the world cannot be absurd, though there have always been absurdities in it, he insists that there cannot be an absurd theatre. Unfortunately, this argument depends, as does much of his book, on the acceptance or rejection of definitions, which makes of it a semantic quibble which can be neither proved nor disproved. On the other hand, Fran J. Warnke, for example, flatly states, "This sort of thing has happened before—Georg Kaiser did it more profoundly in the 1920's." Certainly there are
strong resemblances to Expressionism in these plays, but the attitudes are quite different. For one thing, the Expressionists were above all social critics. Theirs was the basically optimistic criticism of all reformers.

More important reservations have been voiced in the area of the art of theatre itself. For one thing, the playwrights may well be in the position of writing themselves into a corner. It has been mentioned that Beckett's dramas have become progressively more static and would seem to be headed toward complete quiescence, which is hardly dramatic. Ionesco, too, if he followed his annihilation of words to its logical extreme, would reach silence. But, in Vannier's words, "silence is also the absence of theatre: the theatre cannot accomplish the destruction of language without destroying itself."

Objections have also been raised to the subject matter. William I. Oliver voices one point of view:

I have developed an aesthetic allergy to men who gobble bananas, men who vomit, figures who have difficulty excreting or urinating, bums, perverts, human beings who are phenomenally unclean, bloody handkerchiefs, smelly feet, and climactic scenes of castration.

Another, perhaps more vital, point of contention concerning the plays lies with their philosophical bias— with, indeed, the very world-picture that they project. The most obvious attack is, of course, a refusal to admit the premise. Should one be convinced, as assuredly many
are, that there is, in fact, order and purpose in life, then the plays might be interesting but hardly persuasive. However, even assuming that their basic contentions are true, there is still room for questioning their practical application. Their writers' scope is limited. Once a half dozen or so changes have been rung on essentially the same theme, there is, frankly, no place to go. Eventually, even the most sympathetic audience is likely to be surfeited. Granted that it is not necessary for the artist to offer answers, still, a steady repetition of the same question may very well lead to frustration or boredom or both for all concerned.

Finally, such an ideological position must, eventually, engender a pertinent counter-defense, one which has, itself, been the subject for innumerable stories and plays. The question becomes, can man live without illusions; or—does he?

Both Sartre and Camus describe man's position in terms that, in at least this one dimension, may be called romantic. Theirs is a hollow sort of romanticism, to be sure, with no hint of man's perfectibility and no promise of a brave new world. The world-view of these men is romantic, however, in that it makes the individual an exciting instrument for almost limitless action, an absolutely unfettered and unrestricted agent of his own destiny.

These men project a world devoid of any absolutes,
a world of complete self-determination. Yet, as their own plays demonstrate, it is the exceptional man who is able to accept the frightful burden of such liberty. In terms of man's possibilities of living without illusions, they may simply be asking too much. Possibly they are merely substituting one set of arbitrary values for another. If they are unaware of the inherent capriciousness of this course, they fall victim to the same illusions which they deplore in others.

If man cannot accept—or can accept only with phenomenal difficulty—Sartre's and Camus' burden of liberty, is he able or willing to accept existence on the terms demanded by Ionesco and Beckett, terms which leave him alone and helpless? The answer, at least the answer reached empirically, would seem to be "no." Throughout history mankind has had one set of rules and values after another discredited, only to fashion for himself new ones. In other words, if he finds no order in his life, he simply sets about to create it. Coe puts it this way:

In the absence of logic, the freedom of man is literally infinite. . . but. . . his freedom is not joy, but anguish—an anguish so intolerable that he is forced to celebrate his immersion in the absurd with an absurdity, if possible, still greater: the careful and deliberate invention of a pattern of logic to reign where none exists, which he needs and must acquire if he is to preserve his sanity.  

This "pattern" may be elaborate and formalized, as in the development of a religion or an ethical code. It
may be quite personal and pragmatic, as with simply going about the business of living as though there were, in fact, some purpose. Whatever his approach, man generally seeks to mold something out of nothing, to justify his existence in his own eyes.

Certainly the artist himself is the classic example of just this desire for structure. He deliberately creates something which does not occur in nature; an entity with shape and order, which is limited and which obeys some sort of law. Camus mentions this when discussing rebellion, "In every rebellion is to be found the metaphysical demand for unity, the impossibility of capturing it, and the construction of a substitute universe. Rebellion, from this view, is a fabrication of universes. This also defines art." It becomes very difficult, then, for an artist to insist on the utter absurdity of life at the same time he is deliberately attempting to read some meaning into it—even though his meaning is meaninglessness. Robert Corrigan has made very much the same point.

But the final irony is appropriately directed at the playwrights themselves. They are seeking ways to link the contemporary theatre with the traditional theatre, and the traditional theatre is first and foremost a theatre of the celebration of life—that life which the absurdists would deny. . . . The real answer to the despair of the absurdists—and this is the affirmation of our theatre—is that our playwrights. . . . still find human action significant, still find it necessary to write plays, and in the very writing attest to the miracle of life that their philosophy would deny.13

While Corrigan's argument may seem a trifle naive
to the cynic or the scholar, there is a core of shrewd truth
in it. Why, indeed, should a man bother to write a play
depicting, for example, "nothingness," as Ionesco described
in The Chairs? "The subject of the play is... the absence
of people... the absence of God, the absence of matter,
the unreality of the world... The theme of the play is
nothingness."14 This is all well and good, but by con-
structing a play, Ionesco is, in effect, negating his thesis
that there is nothing in the world. His conviction that
the world is unreal becomes a reality for him and does,
in fact, impose a certain pattern on his work.

While it may very well be perfectly true that there
is no coherency, purpose or logic in existence, that con-
cepts of good and evil are meaningless and man is helpless
and unimportant, mankind generally insists on behaving as
though it were not true. Certainly, few would quarrel with
the contention that man should be aware of the threat of
mindlessly succumbing to conventional attitudes and values.
This, however, is not at all the same as insisting that
there are no values. Esslin, for example, in his enthu-
siasm for this modern dramaturgy, utilizes some rather
dubious logic.

Ultimately, a phenomenon like the Theatre of the
Absurd does not reflect despair or a return to
dark irrational forces but expresses modern man's
endeavor to come to terms with the world in which
he lives. It attempts to make him face up to the
human condition as it really is, to free him from
illusions that are bound to cause constant mal-
adjustment and disappointment."
Such a statement may be challenged on several levels. The contention assumes that art is actually an effective agent of persuasion—an assumption extremely difficult to demonstrate. Sartre, who writes with a much more frankly didactic purpose than Beckett or Ionesco, apparently discovered this problem. "Up to the age of forty, I believed that people could be changed through literature. I no longer believe that. I don't know why, people read and they seem to change, but the effect is not lasting." Another weakness in Esslin's thesis is more to the point. Realistically, individuals function, well or ill; to deny that many people who subscribe to one or more of Esslin's "illusions" function very well indeed is to succumb to still another illusion.

Yet this is not to say that these plays do not reflect a very real sense of dislocation in the modern world. They would have passed by with little notice had they not. The question which remains, then, is what their future and their influence may be. From such a short perspective it is not possible to make anything more than a hypothetical case, a conjecture based on incomplete evidence. There is, however, some indication of how the tide is running.

The crisis of the absurd cannot be simply dismissed as inconsequential. It has been to consistently represented in the theatre of the past two decades to ignore. As was suggested in the introductory chapter of this study, the
fact that significant numbers of people have been willing to consider its message is evidence of its relevance to the present situation.

At the same time, a dispassionate view cannot argue that it constitutes the formula for the theatre of the future. Such a position is untenable, either from an historical or a contemporary viewpoint. The theatre of the Western World, from its very inception, has been, fundamentally, representational. It is true that the conventions have changed, but traditionally drama has explored man's problems in terms of individuals involved in specific situations. Whether the individuals have been gods, heroes, or common men, they have been caught in particular instances of tension which demand some sort of resolution. There have been numerous deviations from this norm, but invariably the mainstream engulfed them and carried them along with the current. Among the more recent examples, the Symbolists and the Expressionists have raised their banners proclaiming their search for the inner reality, yet neither was able to establish a strong theatrical tradition. Rather, they have been absorbed and assimilated by the drama which the people accept as the distillation and reflection of life as they recognize it.

A brief glance at the dramatists included in this study supports this same trend. Camus' last play, The
Just Assassins, is almost reportorial. The Condemned of Altona, by Sartre, though dealing with an highly aberrant character in an almost melodramatic situation, still remains within the bounds of realistic drama. Even in the case of the admittedly experimental authors, Ionesco's last popular play was Rhinoceros, in which has been read a clearer parable than in any of his earlier works. As Roger Blin has said, "He (Ionesco) is becoming more and more of a moralist these days." And Beckett, though he has remained true to his vision, has written himself almost to a standstill.

What, then, is to be the influence of the Absurd on the body of modern theatre? Undoubtedly it will further loosen the grip of photographic realism. Similarly, it should serve to free the drama from its clinical dissection of man trapped in the morass of psychological, economic and environmental determinism. At the same time, it will probably help to return the stage to its theatrical basis, to urge the use of more imagination and latitude in the art of playwrighting. As in the past, the main body of the drama will be enriched by the contributions of these innovations, rather than superseded by it. Robert Corrigan has noted that, "The theatre of the absurd has done us a great service by experimenting with non-verbal techniques. In this it has broken down many of naturalism's restrictions, and in so doing has opened up the theatre."
No single play, of Sartre, of Camus, of Beckett, of Ionesco, can be offered as proof of a "new direction" in theatre. The collected weight of their works, however, may serve as the directional signal toward the possible fusion of elements of the Absurd and the more conventional theatre. Accepting the anguish and alienation of Sartre and Camus, utilizing the theatrical freedom of Beckett and Ionesco, playwrights still struggle to impose some human values on existence. Perhaps the words of Jean Paris will prove to be prophetic. "Having brought new tools to the art, the avant-garde will probably turn to tragedy." Perhaps the insights of these artists, distilled through the theatre, will return to man, for all his pain and weakness, some value, some greatness, and perhaps even some mystery.
NOTES

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5. Ibid., p. 146


Chapter II


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7. Ibid.

8. Thody, p. 73


10. Ibid., p. 42.

11. Ibid., p. 73.

12. Ibid., p. 96.


15. Ibid., p. 163.


17. Ibid., p. 164.


20. Ibid., p. 152.


26 Sartre, *The Devil and the Good Lord*, p. 53.

27 Ibid., p. 74.

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30 Ibid., p. 23.

31 Ibid., p. 142.

32 Ibid., p. 78.

33 Ibid., p. 135.

34 Ibid., p. 141.


36 Thody, p. 106.

37 Sartre, *The Devil and the Good Lord*, p. 149.


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43 Thody, p. 124.


45 Ibid., p. 163.

46 Pucciani, "Les Sequestres d'Altona of Jean-Paul Sartre, p. 23."
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1 R. W. B. Lewis, The Picaresque Saint, p. 60.


13 Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays, p. vi.

14 Ibid., p. 15.

15 Ibid., p. 74.

16 He was part author of The Revolt in Austria (La Revolt dan les Austria) which was produced in 1935.


18 Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays, p. 79.

19 Ibid., p. 91.

20 Ibid., p. 96.

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51 Ibid., p. 205.
52 Ibid., p. 221.
53 Ibid., p. 220.
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76Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 50.
77Camus, The Rebel, p. 267.
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