SATIRE IN SELECTED PLAYS OF EUGENE IONESCO

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PREFACE

In view of the fact that M. Eugène Ionesco, French playwright and representative of the theatre of the absurd, is still living and productive, an attempt to analyze his complete works would be impractical for this study. This thesis is an attempt, not to analyze from a theatrical standpoint, the validity of these plays as literary works, but to categorize, with the aid of some previously published criticisms, the satire contained in them and to comment upon their relationship to life and to man's ceaseless search for absolutes.

The plays have been divided, by the author, into several definitive groups indicative of the nature of the plays. Deviating from the conventional pattern of classifying plays as either comedy or drama, M. Ionesco has subdivided his works into the categories of Anti-pièce, Drame comique, Comédie naturaliste, Farce tragique, Pseudo-drame, Comédie, and Pièce [1]. His reasons for these seemingly contradictory titles may be summed up in his statement that "me semble-t-il, le comique est tragique, et la tragédie de l'homme, dérisoire." [2] Although numerous critics have attempted to place the works of Ionesco into various arbitrary categories, the writer of this thesis will adhere to the above categories.

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[1] cf. list in appendix.

[2] Eugène Ionesco, Notes et contre-notes (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1962), p. 14.

The Anti-pièces of Ionesco arose from the hostility with which he viewed the theater before he became an integral part of it himself. The mechanical movements of the characters and the speeches, composed mostly of meaningless slogans, reflect his unwillingness to accept the truth of theatrical reality.

The Drames comiques usually begin on a note of reality, of light comedy, which builds to a moment of tenseness, then gradually deteriorates into a chaotic, unreal, and often tragic, ending. The surprise endings typical of these plays, when considered along with the category into which these plays have been placed, point out a principal theme of many of the plays of M. Ionesco--the inability to communicate with language.

The Comédies naturalistes tend to indicate the results of a half-hearted attempt by man to resist conformity. When faced with prospect of resisting the dictates of nature and of his society, the less determined nonconformist usually capitulates and becomes another faceless member of the masses, devoid of individuality.

The Farces tragiques are concerned with man's relationship to his society, his inability to divert the flow of things, and the futility of hope. The tragic part of the play issues from the seriousness of the so-called plot, whereas the farce is usually the incongruity of the action and the dialogue. Although they are said to be more socially significant than the earlier plays of Ionesco, the presentation resembles that of the Drames comiques in progressing from the realistic to the utterly absurd. They go a bit beyond the "social commentary" implicit in the other plays and into the realm of metaphysics, tending to point

out "man's ultimate meaninglessness and the uselessness of his existence, since at last he must die having said nothing, having found nothing."[3] The pessimism in the Farces tragiques is apparent.

The Pseudo-drames of M. Ionesco resemble the conventional drama in having a riddle at the beginning which must be solved at the end; but, in the plays of Ionesco, the riddle is not solved, but is left to the imagination of the audience. The problems posed concern conformity, the dangers of indoctrination, lack of ability to communicate effectively through the use of language, and the imbalance of intellect and emotion.

In the Comédies of M. Ionesco there is, at the beginning, a feeling of contentment, even ecstasy, which leaves the audience unprepared for the main part where "two tensions play constantly against each other, bouncing events and people off into the air in dazzling or grotesque gyrations."[4] Surrealism is used more extensively in the Comédies than in any of the other plays of Ionesco.

The works of M. Ionesco categorized as Pièces have no common distinguishing characteristics except that they do not fit into the previously mentioned categories. Due to their many differences, each will have to be considered separately.

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[3]Leonard C. Pronko, Eugène Ionesco (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 18.

[4]Josephine Jacobsen and William R. Mueller, Ionesco and Genet: Playwrights of Silence (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), p. 103.

Having selected sixteen plays as representative of the author's work through the 'Bérenger' series,[5] the writer of this thesis will attempt to treat the principal themes involved in each category. As the plays tend to exhibit several themes and commentaries simultaneously, the writer has attempted to categorize the types of satire employed into the following classes:

1. The Tragedy of Language
2. The Proliferation of Matter
3. The Futility of Hope
4. The Absurdity of Conformity
5. The Imbalance of Intellect and Emotion
6. The Dangers of Indoctrination

Each play, regardless of the different types of satire involved, will be treated separately under each category of satire found in the play.

M. Ionesco's success in the theatre is due, in large part, to the controversies created by his plays. His plays, and even his personal views, have been attacked by a prominent critic as no more than "a fun-fair ride on a ghost train, all hooting waxworks, from which we emerge into the far more intimidating clamor of diurnal reality."[6] By a no less prominent critic he has been praised for creating plays that

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[5]The 'Bérenger' series includes Tueur sans gages (1959), Rhinocéros (1959), Le Roi se meurt (1962), and Le Piéton de l'air (1962). The series is so named because the principal character in each play is named Bérenger.

[6]Kenneth Tynan, "Ionesco: Man of Destiny" The Observer, London, June 22, 1958.

"present a concrete realization of metaphors and an immediate experience of existence, grasped in the relations of the individual to his surrounding world."[7] By others he has been alternately praised and disparaged, sometimes both by the same person. Although not completely immune to the reactions of the public to his plays, M. Ionesco seems to be a playwright, though far from typical, who has something to say and is saying it--his way.

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[7]Jacques Guicharnaud, "A World out of Control: Eugène Ionesco", Modern French Theater from Giraudoux to Beckett (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961). p. 178.

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CHAPTER I

THE LIFE OF EUGÈNE IONESCO

Eugène Ionesco is a product of a background that may be considered as unusual and as nonconformist as some of the plays he writes. Although he is usually referred to as a French playwright, he was born in Slatina, Rumania, on November 26, 1912. His father was Rumanian. His mother, whose maiden name was Thérèse Icard, was French, which probably accounts for the fact that his early childhood, from immediately after his birth, was spent in Paris. His native language is French, and his first memories and impressions are of his childhood in Paris.

The apparent superficiality of some of the characters in his plays may stem from some of his earlier experiences while accompanying his mother through the streets of Paris during the First World War where, as a child on the dimly lit streets, the figures of the passers-by impressed him as "sombre silhouettes in agitated movement, people in a hurry--phantom-like, hallucinatory shadows."[1] This evanescent quality is apparent in Ionesco's earlier plays; less so in his later works.

The seemingly senseless cruelty displayed in some of Ionesco's plays (Tueur sans gages, Victimes du devoir)appears to stem from his early admiration and appreciation of the guignol shows that were frequently shown in the vicinity of the Luxembourg gardens where he

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[1]Martin Esslin, "Eugène Ionesco: Theatre and Anti-theatre", The Theatre of the Absurd (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1961), p. 84.

was often taken by his mother. As Ionesco describes it:[2]

> Le spectacle du guignol me tenait là, comme stupéfait, par la vision de ces poupées qui parlaient, qui bougaient, se matraquaient. C'était le spectacle même du monde, qui, insolite, invraisemblable, mais plus vrai que le vrai, se présentait à moi sous une forme infiniment simplifiée et caricaturale, comme pour en souligner la grotesque et brutale vérité.

The perpetrators of cruelty in the plays of Ionesco are as insensitive to the feelings of others as are the puppets of the guignol shows.

At the age of nine, after having spent a few years in the local école communale in Paris, little Eugène became anemic and was sent, in the company of his sister, to the village of La Chapelle-Anthenaise. It was while he was there that he showed the first inclination toward actual participation in the theater, the make-believe theatre of the children of the village school. This ambition was short-lived, abandoned in favor of sainthood. Through the reading of religious books available to him, he decided that to seek after the glory of saintliness was wrong. From his next childhood ambition, that of becoming a great warrior, arose his first play, a patriotic drama. This was written in Paris when he was thirteen.

Shortly afterwards he was persuaded to return to Rumania to visit his father, from whom his mother was separated. While attending school in Rumania, Ionesco learned the Rumanian language. He learned also some harsh lessons in reality, from the brutality and hatred present in the world. M. Ionesco explains:

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[2]Eugène Ionesco, Notes et contre-notes (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1962), p. 8.

> Je n'avais pas dépassé l'âge de l'enfance lorsque, dès mon arrivée dans mon second pays, je pus voir un homme assez jeune, grand et fort, s'acharner sur un veillard, à coups de pieds et de poing. . . Je n'ai pas d'autres images du monde, en dehors de celles exprimant l'évanescence et la dureté, la vanité et la colère, le néant ou la haine hideuse, inutile. C'est ainsi que l'existence a continué de m'apparaître. Tout n'a fait que confirmer ce que j'avais vu, ce que j'avais compris dans mon enfance: fureurs vaines et sordides, cris soudain étouffés par le silence, ombres s'engloutissant, à jamais, dans la nuit (Notes et contre-notes, p. 132).

It was also during this period in his life that he experienced an inability to relate effectively to a person important to him, his father. This inability to communicate with his father was to be presented later as a theme in his play Victimes du devoir.

Ionesco remained long in Rumania where he became a student of French at the University of Bucharest. While a student, he wrote some of his first poems and also ventured in the realm of literary criticisms. He wrote and published a criticism of three of Rumania's leading literary figures in which he vehemently attacked their works and their views. Later he published a second criticism of these same authors in which their works were praised for its originality and profundity. Still later he published these two pamphlets side by side in an effort "to prove the possibility of holding opposite views on the same subject, and the identity of contraries."[3]

In 1936, after having finished his studies and become a teacher of French at the Bucharest lycée, Ionesco married Rodica Burileano, who has been often thought to be Chinese because of the oriental cast of her features. In 1938, Ionesco returned to Paris, ostensibly to do

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[3]Esslin, op.cit., p. 86.

research under the sponsorship of a French government grant. It is said that he has yet to write the first line of this thesis, which was to have dealt with "the themes of sin and death in French poetry since Baudelaire."[4]

In 1939, at the age of twenty-six, he returned to the village of La Chapelle-Anthenaise in an attempt to find some significance in the memories of his childhood experiences. In the diary that he was keeping at the time, he indicated the degree of significance he attributed to his contributions to the literary world and to society, by the statement that although he is a writer, not a public figure, he is like all the others, an easily recognized nonentity."[5]

Ionesco was in Marseilles at the outbreak of the Second World War, but he later returned to Paris where he worked in the production department of a publishing house. During the war, in 1944, his daughter, Marie-France, was born. At the end of the war Ionesco was nearly thirty-three and he had not yet shown any indication that he was destined to become a famous dramatist. At the time he even had a rather deep-seated dislike for theatrical performances. He was repelled by the obvious attempts to portray reality on the stage in contrast to the guignolades of his childhood in which there was no attempt to portray reality, but rather to caricature real-life situations. He found unacceptable the idea of the actors repudiating their own personalities in favor of that of the characters they were portraying. Instead of seem-

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[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

ing to be a representation of art, as a painting or a piece of music, or a two-dimensional mode of entertainment, such as the cinéma, the stage representations impressed him as cheap, vulgar tricks which bore little relationship to actual life.

In 1948, at the age of thirty-six, Eugène Ionesco decided to learn English. While conscientiously copying sentences from his text-book, L'Anglais sans peine, which used the Assimil method, he discovered that in addition to assimilating some English, he was learning some astonishing truths:

> En les relisant attentivement, j'appris donc, non pas l'anglais, mais des vérités surprenantes: qu'il y a sept jours dans la semaine, par exemple, ce que je savais d'ailleurs; ou bien que le plancher est en bas, le plafond en haut, chose que je savais également, peut-être, mais à laquelle je n'avais jamais réfléchi sérieusement ou que j'avais oubliée, et qui m'apparaissait, tout à coup, aussi stupéfiante qu'indiscutablement vraie (Notes et contre-notes, pp. 155-56).

From these "astonishing truths" he wrote an anti-pièce, La Cantatrice chauve, using the same characters employed in his text. M. Ionesco considered this play a serious dramatic effort in criticism of the contemporary theatre, although he did not consider it worthy of being performed. However, when he read it to some friends they found it extremely amusing and suggested that he have it presented on the stage. Due to the peculiar nature of this anti-pièce, the directors were reluctant to become involved with it. Nicolas Bataille, with the aid of some dedicated actors, agreed to present it in the small Noctambules Théâtre in the Latin Quarter. The audience complained that the title, La Cantatrice chauve, was misleading since nowhere in the play

does a soprano of any sort appear, and only once is she mentioned. With the exceptions of Jacques Lemarchand and Armand Salacrou, the critics were quite firmly opposed to the play, which ran for only six weeks.

Through this rather discouraging venture Ionesco seemed to have rediscovered his childhood passion for the theatre. He agreed to play the part of Stepan Trofimovich in an adaptation of Dostoievski's The Possessed, which was being presented by Nicolas Bataille and Akakia Viala. On February 20, 1951, two days after the completion of the run of The Possessed, Ionesco's second play, La Leçon, was presented at the Théâtre de Poche. This play, called a Drame comique, again caught the audience unprepared. Being familiar with the nature of La Cantatrice chauve, the audience came with no expectations of seeing a lesson of any kind; but instead, they were presented with a play consisting solely of an hour's lesson. La Leçon was as unsuccessful financially as was his first play, yet Ionesco persisted in his interest in the theater.

His third play, Jacques ou la soumission, which he called a Comédie naturaliste, was written shortly after La Leçon, in the summer of 1950, but was not presented until five years later. His third play to be presented was Les Chaises, which he called a Farce tragique. This play is often considered one of Ionesco's greatest dramatic achievements, despite the early difficulties encountered during its first presentation, which was April 22, 1952, at the Théâtre Lancry. Most of the critics were unfavorably disposed toward it, but it attracted some

rather distinguished supporters. A defense of Les Chaises was published in Arts, a well-known literary magazine of Paris, and signed by several prominent figures of the time, including Arthur Adamov and Samuel Beckett. In spite of this show of support the performances were discontinued after a rather short run, only to be revived four years later by Jacques Montclair. By this time the tide of opinion had changed so that the play was quite well received by all except the most stubborn critics.

The next play presented by M. Ionesco, Victimes du devoir, was placed in the category of Pseudo-drame. This is the first play in which he attempts to present directly to the audience his ideas on the theater. It was modelled after the French conventional drama, having a riddle posed at the beginning, but it contains numerous commentaries on various aspects of society, with the additional Ionesco-like characteristic of leaving the riddle unsolved. Several of the ideas which serve as the major themes of some of his other plays are combined in Victimes du devoir, which probably warrants its being described as "certainly among his most significant statements."[6]

In September of 1953, the same year as the first presentation of Victimes du devoir, seven of Ionesco's short plays were presented at the Théâtre de la Huchette by Jacques Polieri. Of these seven, only three remain in print, Le Salon de l'automobile, La Jeune Fille à marier, and Le Maître. All of these plays deal with the confusion between

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[6]Esslin, op.cit., p. 101.

animate and inanimate objects and their importance in the scheme of things.

Ionesco's first attempt to write a three-act play resulted in Amédée ou Comment s'en débarasser (1953), a comedy in three acts. Amédée was first performed at the Théâtre de Babylone on April 14, 1954, under the direction of Jean-Marie Serreau. The principal themes deal with the problems of communication, the imbalance of intellect and emotion, and proliferating matter. Later in the same year Ionesco wrote another play dealing with the proliferation of matter, Le Nouveau Locataire, which took him only three weeks to write.

In 1955 Ionesco wrote his openly polemical play, L'Impromptu de l'Alma, a direct attack against some of his critics. L'Impromptu is considered by some to be the signal by Ionesco of a break from his former style of writing. His next four plays (Tueur sans gages, Rhinocéros, Le Roi se meurt and Le Piéton de l'air), sometimes referred to as the "Bérenger series", show a considerable development in the story line, contain at least one character with a more realistic psychology than we have seen until now, and present ideas in a somewhat more explicit manner.[7]

After completion of the Bérenger series in 1962, Ionesco did not write another play until 1966, when he wrote La Soif et la Faim. He has since been engaged for a journalistic enterprise by Esquire magazine.[8] Whether covering a news event, answering his many critics

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[7]Leonard C. Pronko, Eugène Ionesco (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 23.

[8]"The Peanut Vendors", Newsweek, May 6, 1968, p. 96.

in publications, or presenting his socially significant plays, M. Eugène Ionesco is a significant figure in the literary world.

CHAPTER II

THE TRAGEDY OF LANGUAGE

Ionesco's first play, La Cantatrice chauve, was presented in 1950 and was meant as a parody on the superficiality of language and its failure to communicate intensities of emotions and profound sentiments. Ionesco labelled this play an Anti-pièce because of its dissimilarity to the conventional type of theatrical production. In spite of this label, the audience viewed the play with hostility, considering its nature an attack on one of the sacred cows of society, language. Although the ridiculousness of attempting to rely upon language as a means of communication was still evident in the presentation, the label, Anti-pièce, indicated that the theater, not society in general, was the target of the attack.

The beginning dialogue of the first scene of La Cantatrice chauve consists primarily of a description, by M^me^ Smith, of the events surrounding their existence "dans les environs de Londres"[1] and the meal which they have just finished. M. Smith's responsive clacking of the tongue conveys his feelings toward the situation as eloquently as does the constant chattering of M^me^ Smith.

The discussion of the Bobby Watsons shows the chaos that can result from depending upon language for identification. All the members of a large family have the same name, Bobby Watson. This leads

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[1] Eugène Ionesco, "La Cantatrice chauve", Théâtre I (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1954), p. 19.

To inevitable confusion in distinguishing between members of the clan, and even in describing a single member of the family, as is shown in M. Smith's description of Bobby Watson, the wife of the deceased Bobby Watson:

> Elle a des traits réguliers et pourtant on ne peut pas dire qu'elle est très belle. Elle est trop grande et trop forte. Ses traits ne sont pas réguliers et pourtant on peut dire qu'elle est très belle. Elle est un peu trop petite et trop maigre. Elle est professeur de chant(La Cantatrice chauve, p. 23).

The nonchalant manner in which M. Smith conveys this contradictory information is indicative of the relationship between one's ability or lack of ability to communicate and one's desire or lack of desire to communicate anything of consequence. The breakdown of communication and the lack of emotion between this aging couple is apparent in their lack of interest in what each other is saying.

The arrival of the Martins leads to another display of how complete reliance upon language as a means of communication may lead to false conclusions. The Martins, who arrive together, convey the impression that they are strangers at first; but, with the aid of some clever deductions, almost Aristotelian in their logic, they arrive at the conclusion that they are husband and wife. This seems quite logical considering that they came to London from the same city, at the same time, in the same coach of the same train, in adjacent seats. They live at the same address, in the same apartment, in the same room with identical furnishings. They sleep in the same bed and they both have a daughter named Alice who has a red eye and a white eye. However, the Smith's maid, Mary, quite easily invalidates this collection of

syllogisms with her assertion:

> Mais tandis que l'enfant de Donald a l'oeil blanc à droite et l'oeil rouge à gauche, l'enfant d'Elisabeth, lui, a l'oeil rouge à droite et le blanc à gauche! Ainsi tout le système d'argumentation de Donald s'écroule en se heurtant à ce dernier obstacle qui anéantit toute sa théorie (La Cantatrice chauve, p. 31).

This is the first direct suggestion of the unreliability of language as a means of communicating and forming conclusions.

The Smiths and the Martins resort to language as if in a desperate attempt to fill a void in their lives. The ineffective manner in which they use language indicates that they are not sure of their identities and of their relationships to each other. The maid, who seems to be the only character who is not going through an identity crisis, is the one who uses language most effectively. She functions as the voice of reason and the personification of reality.

The arrival of the fireman leads to a discussion of the value of language and the reasoning process as opposed to practical observation. M^me^ Smith is of the opinion that the ringing of the doorbell means that there is no one there, based on her previous observations prior to the arrival of the fireman. M. Smith is of the opposite opinion because, in his response to the fourth ringing of the doorbell, the fireman was there. The fireman settles the argument with his astute observation that when the doorbell rings sometimes there is someone and sometimes there is not.

After the departure of the fireman, the conversation between the two couples shows a rapid deterioration from the merely silly to the utterly absurd:

> Mme Martin: Je peux acheter un couteau de poche pour mon frère, vous ne pouvez pas acheter l'Irlande pour votre grand-père.
> M. Smith: On marche avec les pieds, mais on se rechauffe à l'électricité ou au charbon.
> M. Martin: Celui qui vend aujourd'hui un boeuf, demain aura un oeuf.
> Mme Smith: Dans la vie il faut regarder par la fenêtre(La Cantatrice chauve, p. 51).

Whereas these sentences have some validity individually, in the conversation they show no relationship at all to each other, unless it is in their inaneness.

The words are used as objects to fill a void in the lives of the characters and as the void becomes more evident, the desperation of the characters to fill it becomes more apparent as is indicated in their abandonment of all rules of grammatical structure in their haste to keep the stage alive with symbols of language, sound, no matter how disjointed or incongruous.

The relationship between the characters' inability to communicate with each other and the breakdown of the language is suggested in Ionesco's statement:[2]

> . . . Pour moi, il s'était agi d'une sorte d'effondrement du réel. Les mots étaient devenus des écorces sonores, démues de sens; les personnages et le monde m'apparaissait dans une lumière insolite, peut-être dans sa véritable lumière, au-delà des interprétations et d'une causalité arbitraire.

Near the end of the play, a complete failure of the language occurs when the lights are dimmed and all the characters chant a chorus of nonsense syllables more and more rapidly as if by increasing the speed of the utterances light may be restored to their trivial and uninterest-

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[2]Eugène Ionesco, Notes et contre-notes (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1962), p. 159.

ing existences.

In Ionesco's next play, La Leçon[3], which was presented in 1951, the parody on language is not the main theme but there are certain evidences of the failures of language and the difficulties that may result from it. The lesson begins with the arrival of a bright young female student at the home of a timid professor who is to prepare her for her doctorat total. There is sufficient communication between the professor and the pupil as long as the pupil seems to be in command. However, when the lesson turns to philology, the maid attempts to warn the professor that philology leads to calamity. This is the first indication that any mischief might lie in a simple lesson. As in the previous play, the maid, Marie, serves as the voice of reason and the personification of reality.

As the professor becomes more involved in his element, there is a transformation of personality characteristics. The professor, who was the meek follower, exerts his dominance over the student, in the form of the pedantic language with which he showers her mercilessly. As the language of the professor goes beyond the mental depth of the student, the student, due to her failure to understand, mentally rejects his premises. Her mental rejection of the ideas of the professor manifests itself in the form of physical symptoms such as the assorted aches and pains of which she complains.

Near the end, the professor, seeing that the student is unable or unwilling to accept his ideology, resorts to the ultimate form of

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[3]Eugène Ionesco, "La Leçon", Théâtre I pp. 57-93.

oppression by destroying the pupil morally and physically in the symbolic rape-murder scene. As the confusion of the student increases, so does the frustration of the professor as he sees the symbols of language, upon which he has based his life work, lose their effectiveness when used excessively. In a frenzied attempt to restore communication with the now thoroughly disinterested student, the professor brandishes a knife which is invisible to the audience. The apparent invisibility of the knife serves to confuse further the student who is then stabbed and killed by the professor with the unreal knife. The position of the body of the student relative to the professor is symbolic of an orgiastic experience by the professor following the murder. The indication is that our moral standards are based on our ability to communicate them, so when communication by language fails, our moral standards become, therefore, invalid.

Later the maid informs the audience that this was the fortieth victim for today. The play ends with the arrival of the forty-first pupil who will undoubtedly suffer the same fate as the others, despite the maid's attempts to prevent calamity. In spite of the maid's sense of perspective and of reality, even she cannot halt the inevitable disaster which results from relying too heavily upon language for communication.

Les Chaises[4], which was presented in 1952, shows a similar result of an over-dependence upon language. An old man, having spent

[4]Ionesco, "Les Chaises", Théâtre I pp. 129-80.

his life in a round tower on an island with his wife, realizing that death is approaching, decides to leave to the world the message that he has learned from life. Due to the importance of this message, an illustrious group of persons, including the emperor, has been invited to the presentation. The old man, not wishing to rely upon his poor language abilities, has summoned a specialist, an orator, to deliver the message. The guests, invisible to the audience, arrive and their presence is indicated by the chairs that accumulate on the stage, hampering movement and eventually separating the old man and his wife from each other.

With the arrival of the emperor and the orator, the old man feels that his life has reached its highest point and that an exit is in order. He and his wife leap to their deaths in the sea, content in the knowledge that the orator will relay to society the legacy that the old man wishes to leave. Although death has removed them from the misery of their existence, it has cheated them out of the immortality inherent in the message he has proposed for, when the orator attempts to speak, he can only mumble incoherent sounds. He is a deaf-mute.

Both the spectators on the stage and the audience in the theater must leave disappointed, because, in the moment when the only means of communication was through language, it has failed them. In relieving himself of the responsibility of directing the delivery of his legacy, the old man surrenders what little control he has over his destiny.

Ionesco wrote two plays which he called Comédies naturalistes. In the first, Jacques ou la soumission[5], the family is trying to persuade the son, Jacques, a young man of marriageable age who has not spoken since he was fourteen, to utter the words that will indicate that he is willing to live by their standards. Jacques, who is sometimes presented as the only unmasked character, is the only one with any depth of character or individuality. As Leonard Pronko describes it:[6]

> As with Bobby Watson, the anonymity of humanity is pointed up by the names of the characters. All Jack's family bear the name Jack or some derivative, while Roberta's parents are Robert father and Robert mother.

After constant harassment from his relatives, Jacques submits and utters the phrase, "J'aime les pommes de terres au lard", which signifies his absorption into a clan of nameless nonentities.

When his father presents him with a fiancée, Roberte, Jacques makes another rather feeble attempt to assert his individuality by refusing to be betrothed to a girl with less than three noses. Roberte I, who has two noses and is the "only" daughter of the Robert family, is replaced by Roberte II, the tri-nasaled "only" daughter of the same family. After having gained the sympathy of the recalcitrant Jacques, Roberte II proceeds to seduce him with some rather violent

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[5]Ionesco, "Jacques ou la soumission", Théâtre I pp. 95-128.

[6]Leonard Cabell Pronko, Avant-garde: The Experimental Theater in France (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), p. 74.

erotic insinuations, which are suggested in the dialogue between them. Jacques, weakened by the barrages of persuasive tactics from the two families and from his fiancée, finally capitulates. He agrees to accept Roberte II as his bride. He signals his capitulation by shedding his last symbol of rebellious individualism--he removes his hat.

During the seduction scene the hat serves as another symbol of the insignificance of language. When Roberte II asks Jacques what is on his head, he replies that it is a kind of chat. This leads to the revelation that in the basement of her château, everything is symbolized by the word chat. All of the objects are called chat and all language is composed of the single word chat. If one wishes to say, "J'ai sommeil, allons nous coucher", he simply says, "Chat, chat, chat, chat, chat". Jacques, realizing the insignificant status to which language has sunk, states that it is easy to talk now, that in fact it is scarcely worth the bother. Pronko describes it in these terms:[7]

> In these plays it(language) has become the symbol of that anti-spiritual, antihuman presence that inevitably wins out. Words no longer have any profound meaning, or stand for any real idea. Rather they have become objects, things, that by their very presence crowd out the meaning that might otherwise have existed.

Thus, by relinquishing their individual meanings, the words of language also lose their effectiveness.

Just as the language loses its meaning and therefore its effectiveness as a means of communication, Jacques, in submitting to the standards of conformity advocated by the two families, loses his meaning and identity as a person, an individual.

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[7]Pronko, op.cit. p. 76.

In the sequel to Jacques, L'avenir est dans les oeufs ou il faut de tout pour faire un monde[8], the same characters are involved in the same theme after an interval of three years. Jacques and Roberte II, now happily married, have not changed their positions since the end of Jacques, in which they were locked in each other's embrace, seeming oblivious to the chanting of the other characters dancing around them, The families are now concerned with the couple's failure to produce offspring. Jacques, who is not yet at the mercy of the brutal indoctrination to which he has been subjected, is reluctant to acquiesce completely.

The incongruity of the language and the action is evident in the rather confusing status of the grandfather, who, although described by the family as dead, exhibits as much life as he does in Jacques, in which he is as much alive as are the other characters. At the beginning of the play, grandfather Jacques is a living portrait of himself framed on the wall of the set. As the play progresses, he leaves his frame and joins in the conversation despite the family's insistence that he is dead:

> Jacques-grand-mère: C'est parce que ton grand-père est mort(Jacques-fils ne réagit en aucune façon).
> Jacqueline, à Jacques-fils: Grand-père est mort(Elle donne un violent coup de coude à Jacques).
> Jacques-père: Ton grand-père est mort(Coup de coude à Jacques-fils).
> Jacques-mère: Ton grand-père est mort(Coup de coude au même. Jacques-fils ne réagit toujours pas. Dans le coin des Robert, on entend).
> Robert-père: Son grand-père est mort.
> Roberte-mère: Son grand-père est mort.
> Roberte: Oui, papa, oui, maman.

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[8]Ionesco, "L'avenir est dans les oeufs", Théâtre II (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1958). pp. 205-31.

> Jacques-père, à son fils: Tu n'entends pas que grand-père est mort?
> Jacques-fils: Non, je n'entends pas que grand-père est mort(L'avenir est dans les oeufs, p. 215).

Under this barrage of evidence Jacques accepts the fact that his grandfather is indeed dead and he proceeds to shed tears in great racking sobs, completely devoid of emotion. This leads to the whole family joining him in crying over the dear departed. The Robert family expresses its regrets:

> Roberte: Chaleureuses condoléances!
> Tous les Jacques, sauf le grand-père, en choeur: Enchantés(L'avenir est dans les oeufs, p. 216).

Whether the grandfather is alive or dead is irrelevant to the reality or lack of reality of the play. The fact that he does not behave like a dead person according to our standards is just another indication that the language symbols have lost their meanings and cannot be relied upon.

The superficiality of communication through the use of language is presented as one of the themes in several of the plays of Ionesco. In one of Ionesco's more recent plays, Rhinocéros,[9] which was presented for the first time in 1959, there is a scene in which the interchangeability of language is very vividly indicated. Several people are gathered in front of a small café on a Sunday morning in a provincial town in France, when a rhinoceros runs headlong through the streets. Among the witnesses to this event are Bérenger, the principal character,

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[9]Eugene Ionesco, Rhinocéros, eds. Reuben Y. Ellison and Stowell C. Goding (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 212 pp.

his friend Jean, an old man, and a logician. Prior to the arrival of the rhinoceros, Jean, seated at a table with Bérenger, is trying to persuade Bérenger to use his time more constructively in order to improve himself socially. At a nearby table, the logician, seated with the old man, is trying to persuade the old man to use his time more constructively in order to develop his ability to reason. Although the discussions are on different subjects, the phrases used are so similar as to seem parts of the same conversation:

> Le vieux monsieur (au logicien): Il y a plusieurs solutions possibles.
> Le logicien (au vieux monsieur): Dites.
> Bérenger (à Jean): Ensuite, que faire? Dites. . .
> Le logicien (au vieux monsieur): Je vous écoute.
> Bérenger (à Jean): Je vous écoute.
> Jean (à Bérenger): Vous êtes timide, mais vous avez des dons.
> Bérenger (à Jean); Moi, j'ai des dons?(Rhinocéros, p. 63).

A little later in the same conversation:

> Bérenger (à Jean): J'ai si peu de temps libre.
> Le logicien: Vous avez des dons, il suffisait de les mettre en valeur.
> Jean: Le peu de temps que vous avez, mettez-le donc à profit. Ne vous laisser pas aller à la dérive.
> Le vieux monsieur: Je n'ai guère eu le temps. J'ai été fonctionnaire.
> Le logicien (au vieux monsieur): On trouve toujours le temps de s'instruire.
> Jean (à Bérenger): On a toujours le temps.
> Bérenger (à Jean): C'est trop tard.
> Le vieux monsieur (au logicien): C'est un peu trop tard pour moi.
> Jean (à Bérenger): Il n'est jamais trop tard.
> Le logicien (au vieux monsieur): Il n'est jamais trop tard(Rhinocéros, p. 64).

The interchangeability of the language symbols is, in this case, indicative of the assembly-line nature of language, and the fact that any objects, conditions, or situations so devoid of personality, reduce the people who depend upon it entirely to a similar statue devoid of individuality.

Although in Rhinocéros the characters have more psychological depth than the Jacques, the Smiths, the Martins, etc. of the earlier plays, by using language in a similar manner, they are reduced almost to the state of automatons. The deeper character of Bérenger, of Rhinocéros, enables him to communicate deeper feelings to his friends through his behavior and his personality than is possible in characters such as Jacques, whose means of communication is limited to language. As is indicated in each case where there was a breakdown in the ability to communicate between people, the language symbols that were being used were simply not sufficient to convey the depths of emotions of which people are capable.

CHAPTER III

THE PROLIFERATION OF MATTER

The use of material objects to symbolize some weakness or absurdity in the human character is at times represented by an increase in the number of objects, sometimes by an increase in the size of the objects, and sometimes by an unusual number of identical objects. Sometimes the objects are used to show simply the results of uncontrolled increase of matter, and sometimes there is a more symbolic meaning.

In Le Nouveau Locataire[1], which was presented in 1955, we see a man become literally buried by his own insignificance. The new tenant arrives at the apartment where he is met by the concierge who has her own ideas about how the apartment should be kept and who would like to exert her influence upon the tenant. The tenant, however, is quite firm in his refusal to allow her to interfere in his life except in her professional role.

After having decided that the apartment is acceptable, the tenant begins to direct the placement of the furniture which is being brought in by two movers. As the furniture becomes more massive, the tenant exhibits more pronounced symptoms of withdrawal from society. Even before the arrival of the furniture, he has insisted that the one window be closed, thereby effectively shutting out the outside world. Later he begins to show an uncommon interest in matters of little significance.

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[1]Eugène Ionesco, "Le Nouveau Locataire", Théâtre II (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1958), pp. 173-203.

With the reduction of his universe even the little things assume massive importance. Each object must be placed on a certain designated spot, and on no other. It becomes very important to him that a table is placed an inch or two to the left or right of the door. The radio must be placed near the chair in the center of the floor because it does not work.

As the furniture continues to accumulate, there is a moment of doubt as to which is the dominant force, the man or the furniture. With the increase in tempo of the arrival of the furniture the tenant becomes more robot-like in his directions to the movers:

> Le Monsieur, tandis que les déménageurs apportent toujours les meubles, qu'ils lui posent la demande silencieuse, qu'on voit les meubles entrer, poussés du dehors, etc., est au centre, une main sur le dossier du fauteuil, l'autre indiquant.--Là... là...(Le Nouveau Locataire, p. 197).

It is as if the pieces of furniture have assumed command of the situation, as if they are rebelling against the position to which they have been assigned. They become the adversary of man because "they have escaped from their proper position of subservience to the now-threatened human values"[2]. In shutting himself off from the rest of society, the tenant has rejected the standards of society and by living alone he is subjected to allegiance only to his own values.

Near the end of the play we are informed that the house, the corridor, the streets,and even the Thames is jammed with furniture.

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[2]Josephine Jacobsen and William R. Mueller, Ionesco and Genet; Playwrights of Silence (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), p. 99.

This proliferation of furnishings might be interpreted as the omnipresence of society pressing down upon conformist man. The tenant, seeing that he can retreat no further to avoid the stifling effects of society, cuts himself off from it, figuratively, by instructing the movers to extinguish the lights and leave him to himself.

Some critics see in the attitude of the tenant and in his manner of dress a suicidal tendency of conformist man to surrender to oblivion in the face of unbearable adversity. The tidy black suit, the gloves, and the shiny shoes of the tenant in combination with his rather resigned manner, remind one of the atmosphere of a mortuary. At the end of the play the first mover climbs a ladder and throws some flowers down to the tenant, indicating that the tenant has accepted the "living death that the universe seems to force upon us; he has come prepared for his own funeral. . ."[3]. The tenant has thus resigned himself to the living death of solitude.

In Les Chaises[4], the stage literally fills up with apparently empty chairs. To the audience they seem empty, but that raises the question of what is real on the stage, that which is conceived by the audience or that which is conceived by the actors. On the stage, the occupants of the chairs are as real to the old couple as the chairs are to the members of the audience.

The chairs are as real as is the underlying tone of estrange-

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[3]Leonard C. Pronko, Avant-garde: The Experimental Theater in France (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), p. 91.

[4]cf. pp.15-16.

ment between the old man and his wife. They have spent a lifetime together, bound by a type of love which, while holding them together and making them interdependent, will eventually separate them emotionally, in much the same manner as they are separated by the chairs in the last moments of their lives. At the time when togetherness was for them very important, their dead love, the chairs, hampered their communicating with each other, so that, while dying simultaneously, each one died alone.

In losing control of the proliferation of the chairs, the old couple conceded defeat to the factors which made them simultaneously emotionally interdependent and emotionally estranged from each other. They were dependent upon each other's illusions that their lives were still useful to society and that they were still capable of influencing future events. That they are alienated in their sense of perspective and their ideas regarding reality is evident when the old woman tells one of the invisible guests that the old couple had a lovely son who left home at the age of seven, only to have the old man deny that they ever had a son. The old woman insists that the old man was a good and faithful son to his parents. The old man admits that he left his mother alone, dying in a ditch. Whether either is being truthful or not is irrelevant. The relevancy is only that they are alienated by conflicting conceptions of reality, represented by the chairs.

The dead love of the couple in Amédée[5] is represented by the

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[5]Eugène Ionesco, "Amédée ou comment s'en débarasser", Théâtre I (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1954), pp. 273-333.

steady growth of a corpse in the bedroom. This corpse has been there since their wedding night, fifteen years ago. During this time Amédée, who is a playwright, has written only two lines of a play. Madeleine, his wife, must eke out for them a meager existence by operating a switchboard in the living room. His failure as a playwright and her failure as a wife are constant sources of irritation for them.

There have been numerous references attached to the corpse in the bedroom. In the play there are some suggestions that it may be the corpse of a lover that came to call fifteen years ago and was killed by Amédée in a fit of jealousy. Or it might have been the corpse of a baby, belonging to a neighbor, for whom they were caring. Of course, there remains the question of why the baby died. Neither of the principal characters seems willing to admit that it is really the corpse of their dead love, killed on their wedding night by the repulsion of an ardent lover, Amédée, by a frigid wife, Madeleine.

In a flashback scene, depicting the couple as they were as newlyweds, it is evident that their love was the victim of sexual incompatibility. During this scene Madeleine complains of his piercing voice and the pain he is causing her while Amédée begs her for love. While Amédée sees in their marriage the voices of spring and of children, Madeleine sees only the unpleasant aspects of marriage. While Amédée dreams of a house of glass and of light, Madeleine dreams of a house of brass and of night.

In this scene we see presented simultaneously the two basic

moods of Ionesco's experience of the world[6]. The heaviness and the proliferation of matter represent the depressive, antispiritual aspect of life. The lightness and evanescence represent the fleeting moments of relief from the oppressive heaviness. As we can see in Amédée, the existence of the couple has been in the shadow of this depressive or antispiritual aspect. In an effort to conceal from their neighbors the death of their love, the couple has remained inside the apartment, with the corpse, during the last fifteen years. As their incompatibility becomes more apparent, their mere presence near each other becomes an irritant of gigantic proportions. That this relationship between them is beyond saving is evidenced by the growth, in their apartment, of mushrooms, which grow only on dead matter.

Despite their efforts to conceal the corpse, the rate of its growth increases in relative proportion to the length of time that it has existed, so that after fifteen years it is now threatening to break down the walls and expose its presence to the public. The couple is now faced with the dilemma either of allowing their old love to expose itself to the public as a corpse or of facing up to the death of their love and starting a new relationship on a different basis.

Due to her having become accustomed to the situation, Madeleine is reluctant to part with the corpse. Although not preventing Amédée from attempting its removal, she is not much help, constantly getting in the way, reminiscing over the past. Indicating the part played by

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[6]Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1961), p. 109.

emotion in giving meaning to life, Madeleine states that the house will seem quite empty without the corpse. which has been "le témoin muet de tout un passé"(Amédée, p. 296). Their deep attachment to the ghost of their love is evident in the stage directions involving the removal of the corpse, which states that the corpse must give the impression that the house is being dragged along with it and that it is tearing out the entrails of the characters.

Amédée succeeds in removing the corpse from the house, but in the street he encounters numerous other difficulties. A group of revelers including two American soldiers, a prostitute, and the bar-owner, who is also Amédée's landlord, notice the corpse being dragged through the streets by Amédée, but no one is alarmed by the presence of a corpse. They are all, due to their present vocations, quite familiar with the sordid aspects of life. One dead love more or less is nothing to cause them any alarm.

Upon the arrival of the police, Amédée resorts to evasive action. However, the secret is now out, the corpse is plainly visible. The main concern of Amédée now is to avoid paying the penalty for having caused the death of a young love. The corpse itself soon relieves him of this anxiety. With the knowledge of its existence made public, the corpse no longer weighs heavily upon Amédée. It becomes light, and evanescent and carries him away in the manner of a balloon or a parachute. The indication seems to be that it was not the corpse of his love that oppressed him and held him in a dull, uncreative existence, but rather the secret surrounding it, and the presence of Madeleine,

the unresponsive object of his affection.

Amédée was Ionesco's first attempt at writing a three-act play and the transition, from a feeling of heaviness and claustrophobia in the first two acts to one of openness and lightness in the last, is a difficult one to stage. Consequently, Ionesco has tended to avoid such complicated requirements in his later plays.

In L'Avenir est dans les oeufs ou il faut de tout pour faire un monde[7], the mechanical, unemotional movements of the characters plus the production of a seemingly infinite number of eggs give the appearance of an assembly-line production unit. This is essentially the role of Jacques in his relationship to society. Throughout his existence, as is indicated in Jacques ou la soumission, he has been subjected to external forces which would force him into a pattern of conformity in accordance with the standards of his immediate society. Having acquiesced to the wishes of his family that he express a desire for hashed brown potatoes and that he accept a bride, he has not yet become fully automated until he fulfills his function as a unit of production. He must produce, not only an heir for the family, but as many offspring as it takes of types to make a world.

Roberte, who is offstage, is producing eggs at an alarming rate and the other members of the families are bringing them in by the basket and dumping them into the hatching basket where Jacques is contributing his part to production by fertilizing the eggs. Jacques is again

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[7]cf. pp. 19-20.

reluctant, as in the previous play. to become just another character-less nonentity, but in the face of his relatives' insistence he proceeds to hatch eggs destined to become

> Des opportunistes! Des nationalistes! Des internationalistes! Des révolutionnaires! Des antirévolutionnaires! Des radis! Des radicaux! Des populistes! Des actionnaires! Des réactionnaires! . . . (L'avenir est dans les oeufs, p. 229).

At first the rate is slow if not reasonable. As the time passes the rate of production of the eggs increases until Jacques is in danger of being completely buried by his yet unborn offspring. The eggs in this instance represent the antispiritual presence which has materialized so as to drown out any last traces of individuality in Jacques. Jacques attempts to express some last traces of individuality near the end of the play when he indicates a desire that some of his progeny should be pessimists, anarchists, and nihilists. To the reproaches of his family and his in-laws, he expresses a sentiment similar to that exhibited by Amédée in the play of the same name[8], when he states, "Je veux une fontaine de lumière, de l'eau incandescente, un feu de glace, des neiges de feu"(Jacques ou la soumission, p. 230). Jacques is also seeking relief from the oppressive forces of life.

Unfortunately, however, Jacques has become just another robot-like automaton for, amidst the cries of "vive la production! Vive la race blanche!"(Jacques ou la soumission, p. 230), the stage upon which he is seated begins slowly to sink under the oppressive heaviness of the eggs of yet unborn generations of conformists.

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[8]cf. pp. 26-30.

In 1953 Ionesco wrote Victimes du devoir[9], which adhered to the structures of the conventional theater more closely than his previous works. The major theme seems to be the loss of individual liberty resulting from too close observance of the duties assigned to one by society. In each of the characters this loss of liberty is manifested in a different manner. In the detective and Madeleine the loss of liberty is indicated by a transformation of character, from the dominated to the dominant. The detective, despite his wishes to be on friendly terms with Choubert and Madeleine, must resort to his official personality of rudeness and arrogance in order to extract from them the information his superiors have assigned him to obtain.

Madeleine's loss of liberty results from her eagerness to accept the dictates of society. It is expressed in her movements becoming more mechanical as she responds to every wish of the detective.[10] Her character changes to fit the occasion. At the beginning of the play she is wife to Choubert. Later she becomes his mother and, even later, mistress to the detective. Being a victim of duty, she no longer has the right to decide on her personality.

Choubert is presented at first as a mild sort of nonconformist who is skeptical even of the recommendations of society because of their tendencies to turn into orders and the suggestions which seem suddenly to resemble rules. Because of his nonconformist attitude, Choubert

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[9]Ionesco, "Victimes du devoir", Théâtre I (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1954), pp. 181-235.

[10]Leonard Pronko, op. cit., p. 87.

becomes the victim of the victims of duty. The detective forces him to delve deep into his subconscious in an effort to locate the detective's quarry, Mallot, with a t or a d. The detective feeds Choubert great quantities of bread in an effort to plug the holes in his memory. This materialization of bread represents Choubert's loss of liberty, not only does he become subservient to Madeleine and the detective, but also to the dominance of inanimate objects, such as coffee cups and bread.

Meanwhile Madeleine begins to serve coffee to the detective in an interminable array of cups which pile up on the sideboard and threaten to overrun it to the floor. Madeleine's eagerness to obey the rules of society has subjected her to dominance by the inanimate objects which are symbolic of that society. By cooperating unthinkingly with the establishment she unwittingly brings out her machine-like qualities which are manifested in the shuttling action between kitchen and living room in her quest for coffee cups.

Choubert is finally rescued from the tortures of the detective by a friend and poet, Nicolas d'eu, who kills the detective. The detective's words, "Vive la race blanche", are reminiscent of L'avenir est dans les oeufs in which Jacques succumbs to the dictates of society to the accompaniment of the cries, "Vive la race blanche". The references to the continuation of the white race might be interpreted as an allusion

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*Nicolas d'eu is a parody on Nicolas Deux, last Czar of Russia (Pronko, op. cit., p. 86).

to the crimes and atrocities that have been perpetrated in the name of keeping a supposedly superior race pure.

The uselessness of the detective's sacrifice of his life is apparent in that little note is taken of his demise except to remove his body to the sofa so that it would not present an obstacle to the continued persecution of Choubert. Nicolas' reason for killing the detective seems at first to be the torture to which Choubert was being subjected, but this is quickly forgotten as Nicolas himself takes the place of the detective in forcing Choubert to attempt to plug the gaps in his consciousness by feeding him hunks of coarse bread. As in previous plays of Ionesco, the tempo of conformity(adherence to duty) increases to almost fever pitch. The chant of "Mastiquez! Avalez! Mastiquez! Avalez!" becomes contagious and infects the impassive woman who has been sitting unconcernedly on the stage. The mass hysteria has now involved all the participants on the stage in an effort to divest Choubert of the last vestiges of his liberty by figuratively stuffing him with conformity.

Tueur sans gages[11], which was written in 1959, was the first of the Bérenger series to be staged by Ionesco. It is concerned less with man's dominance by objects than with urban man's nonchalance and his policy of noninterference on the individual level. In a recent review by Marcel Lasseaux of an American film, The Incident, a phrase used by him seemed equally applicable to the play Tueur sans gages.

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[11]Ionesco, "Tueur sans gages", Théâtre II (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1958), pp. 59-171.

M. Lasseaux's assertion that "ce film hallucinant ne relève pas de la fiction pure, mais s'inspire directement de la mentalité new-yorkaise, faite de violence, de couardise et de totale indifférence aux tribulations des autres"[12] describes quite well the attitude of the citizenry of the radiant city of Ionesco's play.

Bérenger, a tragi-comical little figure who has a tendency to exaggerate the importance of things, is at first very impressed with the radiant city until he discovers that a killer stalks the streets, murdering several persons a day. Despite the physical attractiveness of the city, it is spiritually dead because of the lack of human feeling and concern on the part of the citizens. Those who are members of the administration are quite immune to the threat of the killer. It is only those who must depend upon the administration or those who withdraw from it who are subject to attack from the killer.

Bérenger is being shown around the city by the architect, who is also the police superintendent. Bérenger shows mild concern for the situation at first, but after the murder of Dany, the architect's former secretary, with whom he has fallen in love, he engages himself passionately in an effort to capture and punish the killer. Upon returning to his apartment he encounters Edouard, a friend of his, who bears some characteristics similar to those of the killer. However, Bérenger fails to notice this. Even when Edouard's brief case falls open revealing the various paraphernalia connected with the killer, Bérenger exhibits

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[12]Marcel Lasseaux, "Cinéma", Plaisirs de France, Mai, 1968, p. 61.

not the slightest bit of suspicion toward Edouard. They both set out for the police station to report the evidence to the proper authorities. On the way they encounter a political demagogue whose entire platform is based on a reversal of existing values. At an intersection they become engaged in a traffic problem where the dominance of matter over human interests becomes apparent in the traffic policeman's refusal to help Bérenger because "Je-suis-dans-la-circulation"(Tueur sans gages, p. 156). Traffic is at a standstill yet the policeman refuses to help Bérenger to get to the superintendent because of his obligation to his duty which makes him a victim of the objects symbolizing his duty, the traffic.

In the scene immediately preceding the traffic problem, Bérenger realizes that he has lost the evidence in the form of the brief case. However, he then realizes that nearly everyone around him has a similar brief case. One brief case is hardly distinguishable from another as there is no distinction between the apathy and nonchalance displayed by the citizens in allowing the killer to continue undeterred.

In the plays of Ionesco no special significance is given to proliferating matter except as it applies in each individual case. In Les Chaises the apparently empty chairs represent the stifling and estranging effect of the relationship between the two old people. The furniture in Le Nouveau Locataire represents conformist man shutting off and limiting his potential by allowing society to close in around him and bury him. A useless and dead relationship between a man and his wife is manifested in the corpse in Amédée. The antispiritual

presence represented by the eggs in L'avenir est dans les oeufs threatens to bury Jacques by its dominance over him. In Victimes du devoir the accumulating coffee cups symbolize the mechanical characteristics assumed by Madeleine, whereas the bread being fed to Choubert is indicative of the length to which society will go to stifle individuality. The apathy and nonchalance of modern urban man is pointed up by the similarity of the brief cases in Tueur sans gages.

There are sometimes controversies arising over the question of the true significance of matter in certain plays, but an interpretation of the role played by objects is valid only as it is conceived by the interpreter, whether it is a critic, a playwright, an intellectual, or simply a member of the petty bourgeoisie. Whether accumulating masses of matter represent simply the effect of proliferating matter or some symbol of the relationships between members of humanity, it is sufficient to make the audience become concerned about the role of inanimate objects in life.

CHAPTER IV

THE FUTILITY OF HOPE

Ionesco has often been accused of diagnosing the ills of society without prescribing any probable cures. He points out the ineffectiveness of language, but he offers nothing with which to replace it. He indicates the absurdity of conformity, yet his nonconformists are also confronted with problems of adjustment. He satirizes our value system while admitting that any system of values is inherently justifiable. We are urged to hold out for individuality, but we are given no hope--because there is no hope.

The old couple in Les Chaises[1] has placed all of its hope for the future upon the appearance of an orator who would present to the world the message from the old man. The old man has spent his entire life in the acquisition of the knowledge which would now be passed to future generations; a message that would insure peace to the men of the future and immortality to the old man. He and his wife make elaborate preparations for the deliverance of the message and are quite content to die in the knowledge that the message would be delivered in the most effective manner possible. However, he fails to take into consideration that realization is not based upon justification. Despite the sacrifices he and his wife had undergone for this supreme moment, the climax of an otherwise useless existence, they are denied the immortality inherent in the message. Their hope has been based on an illusion, for the orator

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[1] cf. pp. 15-16 and 25-26.

is incapable of communicating any message. He is a deaf-mute. There is even some doubt that there ever was a message. If there was a message, it was not a message of hope. The message is a symbolism typical of Ionesco, that there is no message, and therefore, there is no hope, for the past, present, or future.

A person viewing the play for the first time might be inclined to consider the invisible guests as simply figments of the demented minds of the old couple, but after the double suicide of the old couple and the departure of the orator, the only other visible member of the cast, one would have doubts. There is evidence that, although invisible, the unseen guests are indeed real:

> On entend pour la première fois les bruits humains de la foule invisible: ce sont des éclats de rire, des murmures, des "chut", des toussotements ironiques; faibles au début, ces bruits vont grandissant; puis, de nouveau, progressivement, s'affaiblissent (Les Chaises, p. 180).

This situation is prolonged sufficiently to impress upon the minds of the members of the audience that this is not an instance of unreal detached absurdity. It is the human condition. We are all subjected to situations in which the only solution is to rely upon hope. Whether this hope will release us from our anxieties or not depends upon arbitrary chance. Neither society nor fate owes us a second chance. Man is inclined to place his hope in an organization representing a higher power, such as religion, or other socially sanctioned organizations. Ionesco's premise is that hope placed in such a higher power is not a guarantee of hope fulfilled.

The old man of Les Chaises is sometimes looked upon as a kind of

meddling do-gooder who would reform the world, a savior, for whom the world has been waiting. His failure to cause any change in the structure of society and of the world is evidence of the contempt that Ionesco has for the saviors-of-the-world:

> Si la planète est aujourd'hui en danger mortel, c'est parce qu'il y aura eu des sauveurs: un sauveur hait l'humanité, puisqu'il ne l'accepte pas (Notes et contre-notes, p. 103).

Thus all saviors are automatically destined for failure of a sort because of the contempt in which they hold the objects of their own efforts, humanity.

Choubert, in Victimes du devoir[2], seems at the end of his ability to bear torture by the detective, when the arrival of Nicolas d'eu gives him temporary relief. One would think that one so firmly set against the principles practiced by the detective as was Nicolas would be very hesitant about applying the same principles himself. This is not the case as it is not the case in similar real-life situations. In gaining release from one sort of adversity one only becomes available to a number of others. Nicolas d'eu kills the detective who represented the forces of the establishment; but, almost immediately, he begins to continue the persecution of Choubert in the same manner as had the detective.

Choubert, representing nonconformist man is subjected to anti-spiritual forces regardless of his inclinations. When one rebels against the establishment he receives from it the special treatment which is reserved for rebels. When one is no longer able to communicate effec-

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[2]cf. pp. 32-34.

tively with one's own colleagues, he receives a like kind of persecution. The differences between these two types of persecution are so negligible as to be indistinguishable, one from the other. Choubert, representing an Ionesco-type theater, becomes subjected to the ostracism of the established society. However, when the oppression of the establishment is removed, he is still persecuted, because it is the fate of the nonconformist to be persecuted.

In the scene depicting the fantasied conversation between Choubert and his father, a role here played by the detective, one is led to believe that there is a probability of real communication between the child and the father but, before any real communication can be achieved, the father becomes again the rude, arrogant servant of the people, the detective, adhering to his Aristotelian logic, faithful to his duty, and full of respect for his bosses(Victimes du devoir, p. 227). Choubert's hopes of achieving some meaningful relationship with his father are, like his hopes of becoming freed from the influence of established society, based on insubstantial illusions, which, at the moment of truth, collapse into nothingness.

The scene depicting a failure to communicate between father and son is probably a product of the lack of communication between Ionesco and his father. At the age of thirteen Ionesco went to Rumania to live with his father who was estranged from his mother. He spent the next fourteen years in Rumania, but there still existed a gap in the communication between him and his father. Choubert's excursion into the past reveals that the generation gap is as much a deterrent to the establishment

of effective communication as is the language gap[3].

In Tueur sans gages[4] Bérenger is the only credible character who has not yet lost faith in hope. An old man expresses concern over the capture of the killer, but the fact that he is looking for the Danube in France raises doubts as to his credibility. The citizens of the radiant city, devoid of any hope for release from the terror of the killer, have resigned themselves to their fate. Constantly reminded of his presence by the news item about his most recent victims, the citizens regard his presence as just another risk involved in living. Their nonchalance is quite well explained by the architect to Bérenger:

> Il faut vivre! Tout le temps il y a des enfants égorgés, des vieillards affamés, des veuves lugubres, des orphelines, des moribonds, des erreurs judiciaires, des maisons qui s'effondrent sur les gens qui les habitent. . . des montagnes qui s'écroulent. . . et des massacres, et des déluges, et des chiens écrasés. . . De cette façon les journalistes peuvent gagner leur pain. Toute chose a son bon côté. Finalement, c'est le bon côté qu'il faut retenir (Tueur sans gages, p. 91).

Bérenger's encounter with the killer seems to substantiate only too well this feeling of fatalism.

On his way to deliver evidence of the killer's identity to the superintendent of police Bérenger encounters numerous difficulties, the final one of which is the killer himself. Alone, in the presence of the killer, Bérenger realizes that his salvation depends upon him alone. Although very recently in the midst of a heavily congested traffic jam, in his confrontation with the killer, Bérenger, as are all men in their inevitable confrontation with fate, is alone.

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[3]cf. chapter II.

[4]cf. pp. 34-37.

Noticing the puniness of the killer, Bérenger mocks him at first:

> Vous ne me faites pas peur! Regardez-moi, regardez comme je suis plus fort que vous. D'une chiquenade, je peux vous faire tomber. Je vous mets dans ma poche (Tueur sans gages, p. 162).

The killer's reply, as is his reply to all that Bérenger says, is an emotionless chuckle. Bérenger, being a civilized man, attempts to reason with the killer. He tells him about the anguish and anxieties suffered by the people who are affected by the murders. He mentions the incongruity of such monstrous deeds taking place in the radiant city. He mentions the unpleasant aspects of his probable capture and punishment. He tries to instill in the killer some respect for the brotherhood of man. He even offers to pay the killer to stop the killings. The ridiculousness of this proposition is evident in the title of the play, Tueur sans gages. The killer has no interest in monetary rewards. Bérenger then resorts to ridicule in an effort to sway the killer from his self-appointed mission. He threatens him with massive reprisal from society itself. In answer to all these reasons the killer merely shrugs his shoulders, chuckles, and advances nearer to Bérenger.

Near the end, Bérenger realizes that all of his arguments have been in an effort to justify to himself the reasons for the killer's behavior. He suddenly realizes that he can find no reason why the killer should kill, but neither can he find any reason why the killer should not kill. Bérenger's system of values forbids indiscriminate taking of human life, but the killer is burdened by no such conventions. Although neither system of values can compromise itself with the existence of the other, each is justifiable by its mere existence.

Bérenger finally concedes that all of his good intentions are of no avail in the face of unreasoning and unbiased fate. He lowers his defenses and allows the killer to approach him. Martin Esslin describes the effect of the killer upon Bérenger in this manner:[5]

> The killer (who, Ionesco suggests in a stage direction, might not be seen at all, only his giggle heard in the shadows) represents the inevitability of death, the absurdity of human existence itself. This is the murderous presence that lurks behind even the most euphoric moods of lightness and radiant happiness and turns them back into the cold, gray rainy November of our everyday existence.

The last scene leaves no doubt that Ionesco considered death as an inevitability against which any efforts at resistance would be futile to the point of seeming ridiculous.

The inevitability of death seems to be the theme of another of Ionesco's plays, Le Roi se meurt[6], which was presented for the first time in 1962. As in Tueur sans gages, the central character is named Bérenger, but this time he is a king of a small country which is becoming progressively smaller, due to internal conflicts and corruption. After having lived for several centuries as the lord of all that he surveyed, King Bérenger I is informed that he shall die in one and one-half hours, or at the end of the play. The royal surgeon, who is also bacteriologist, executioner, and court astrologer, apprises him of the situation and suggests that he take it easy, wait calmly for the

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[5]Martin Esslin, The Theater of the Absurd (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1961), pp. 122-22.

[6]Ionesco, "Le Roi se meurt", Théâtre IV (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1966), pp. 7-74.

end. Bérenger's first wife, Queen Marguerite, likewise suggests that it is the inevitable result of living and that the significance of death lies in the dignity with which one meets it. The king's second and favorite wife, Queen Marie, refuses to recognize the inevitability of death. She insists that love can conquer all adversities.

Throughout the one and one-half hours of the play, there is presented physical evidence of the collapse of the reign of Bérenger I. Cracks appear in the walls of the palace, royal orders from the king go unheeded by his subjects, Bérenger experiences assorted aches and pains, he loses control of his physical being, and he is informed of the continual shrinkage of the frontiers of his country, the desertion of the principal officials, and the repeated defeats sustained by his army. Finally, in the face of all this evidence, Bérenger concedes that he is, as are all men, mortal and that the hour of death is indeed upon him. This realization weakens him, causing him to lose some of the dignity of his position, therefore becoming easy prey to death. Thus Bérenger fades into the mist of nothingness from which he came.

King Bérenger has been taken to represent the decline of royal power in government and in society[7], but this seems to be too limiting an interpretation to be placed on the work of an author such as Ionesco. The characteristics of his disintegration could be as easily applied to nearly any aspect of society, or of man. There is even something of

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[7]Josephine Jacobsen and William R. Mueller, Ionesco and Genet: Playwrights of Silence (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), pp. 69-70.

the Nietzschean "death of God" philosophy presented. Jacobsen and Mueller describe King Bérenger as "an allegorical catchall, representing individual man, society in the form of the state, and God"[8]. Thus the apparent demise of Bérenger I indicates that the usual end of a reign, whether it be political, social, ethnical, or spiritual, is not with a bang, but with a gradual fading away into the nonexistence of its origin.

The principal character in Le Piéton de l'air[9] is again named Bérenger, Herbert Bérenger, an English dramatist, feeling that he is going to die, is vacationing with his wife Josephine and their daughter Marthe in France. While out for a stroll in the countryside, Bérenger discovers that he can fly. To the consternation of the spectators, he takes off and disappears over a hill. Upon his return he reveals to the spectators that his journey was through the dimensions of time more so than those of space. He has indeed been given a glimpse into the future of our society and our world. He reports sadly that his vision into the future revealed no possibility of relief from the turmoils and difficulties now persisting in the world. His descriptions of the other world make the petty disturbances of this one seem inconsequential.

One would be inclined to apply the revelations in Piéton de l'air to the physical world to which we are confined, but the theme in Piéton, as in Tueur sans gages and Le Roi se meurt, is the relationship of life to death. Jacobsen and Mueller quite effectively state the implications

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[8]Ibid. p. 69.

[9]Ionesco, "Le Piéton de l'air", Théâtre III (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1963), Pp. 106-66.

of Bérenger's vision:[10]

> A Stroll in the air suggests that the intimations of the world beyond death are to be found not in the occasional joys of this earth but in its griefs and sufferings; that the desert wastes of this world are but dim adumbrations of the full horror and nothingness which is to come; that to see face to face will reveal a terror, the clarity of which our present dark mirror gently obfuscates.

This revelation makes Bérenger's fear of his own approaching death seem groundless and of little consequence. Death itself is merely another experience of life.

Ionesco seems less concerned with the complete elimination of reliance upon hope as he is with placing it in its proper perspective relative to reality. The failure of fulfillment of the hopes of his characters is not a condemnation of all hope. It is merely an indication of the difficulties that can result from placing one's destiny in the control of a power other than oneself. In placing all of one's hope in a higher power, self-control is surrendered, thereby rendering one devoid of what little mastery he had over his destiny.

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[10]Jacobsen and Mueller, op. cit. p. 69.

CHAPTER V

THE ABSURDITY OF CONFORMITY

Eugène Ionesco has been typed as a firm believer in nonconformity, but somehow his rebelliousness heroes seem to end up by conforming or being defeated by the forces of conformity. Ionesco's plays are concerned, not as much with espousing nonconformity as with emphasizing the dehumanizing effects of conformity.

Jacques, of Jacques ou la soumission and L'avenir est dans les oeufs[1], is remarkable, not because of his final submission to the persuasions of his relatives, but because of his initial refusal to submit. He is not guided by any creed, but by a simple aversion to the mechanical aspects of his relatives and acquaintances, to the almost complete lack of individuality among his family and that of his fiancée.

The two families have one well-defined and unalterable goal, the production of more members of the white race. Anything which posed a threat to the realization of this ambition had to be "programmed" so as to remove all of its distracting facets. Jacques' behavior towards hashed brown potatoes has deeper implications than a simple distaste for a dish favored by the family. Jacobsen and Mueller make the following statement regarding Jacques and the potatoes:[2]

> That such issue should be made of so trivial a matter as one's culinary taste bears a fine ridiculousness. The serious implication is that, for would-be-oppressors, no matter is so trivial as to be left to the discretion and choice of the individual.

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[1]cf. pp. 17-20 and 30-31.

[2]Josephine Jacobsen and William Mueller, Ionesco and Genet: Playwrights of Silence (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), pp. 38-39.

Thus, by transforming the situation into one of comedy, Ionesco succeeds in establishing that there is no fine line distinguishing between the comedy of nonconformity and the tragedy of conformity.

The removal of Jacques' hat near the end of Jacques ou la soumission is more than a symbol of acquiescence to the demands of his family and the family of his fiancée. It is a total subjugation to the system as personified by the families. Quite often in totalitarian governments the removal of the hat is an indication of passivity and subjugation.

This scene may be taken as a sign of submission also when related to an incident which occurred during the adolescence of Ionesco. Shortly after returning to Rumania he witnessed the brutal assault of an old man who neglected to remove his hat during the passing of a parade[3]. Although the old man was not consciously defying the authorities, the penalty was the same, as is the usual case with totalitarian societies, conform or be crushed.

Jacques' role in L'avenir est dans les oeufs ou il faut de tout pour faire un monde is similar to that in Jacques ou la soumission, except here he is concerned not only in conforming himself , but he is urged to aid in the production of more conformists. The families call for the production of the numerous types of petty bourgeois who would be content, productive members of society. Although Jacques has capitulated physically, he is still mentally averse to their ideas of conformity. He expresses a desire for the production of nihilists, anarchists,

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[3]Bettina Knapp, "Eugène Ionesco", Anthology of 20th Century French Theater (Paris Book Center Inc., 1967), p. 597.

ano others who would not be satisfied with the status quo.

The play ends, as do most of Ionesco's plays, with no solution to the quandary of Jacques. He has committed himself to a life of physical conformity, while unable to commit himself mentally. Ionesco does not attempt to prescribe a cure for conformity, he simply diagnoses its presence.

The unending cycle that results from conformity is stated rather forcefully by M. Smith in La Cantatrice chauve when he says, "Prenez un cercle, carressez-le, il deviendra vicieux "(La Cantatrice chauve, p. 52). The viciousness of personalities which have become devoid of color is illustrated in the last scene of the play during which the characters rather forcefully bombard each other with the sounds of meaningless syllables. The cycle becomes complete at the end of the play when the curtain is raised to reveal the Martins in the same relative positions as were the Smiths at the beginning of the play. Their personalities are so lifeless and devoid of individuality that either couple may replace the other with no loss of identity.

With La Cantatrice chauve being labelled an anti-pièce, it is often presented as Ionesco's personal attack on the conformity practiced by some of his colleagues. However, the objects of the satire in La Cantatrice chauve is the petty bourgeoisie in general. The fact that the setting was in London does not limit the idea of bourgeois man to the Englishman, but rather the type of man Ionesco describes in his Notes et contre-notes:

> . . . la petite bourgeoisie à laquelle je pensais, n'était pas une classe liée à telle ou telle société car le petit bourgeois était pour moi un être se trouvant dans toutes les sociétés, dites révolutionnaires ou réactionnaires; le petit bourgeois n'est pour moi que l'homme des slogans, ne pensant plus par lui-même, mais répétant les vérités toutes faites, et pas cela mortes, que d'autres lui ont imposées. Bref, le petit bourgeois, c'est l'homme dirigé (Notes et contre-notes, p. 49).

Ionesco's contempt for this sort of nonentity is the basic theme of La Cantatrice chauve.

In Tueur sans gages[4] Ionesco's satire seems to be aimed at the results of conformity, not in the sense of the physical, but of the mental apathy which becomes a part of the conformist. In this situation none of the citizens are in overt support of the killer, yet none, except Bérenger, is attempting to do anything to change the situation.

One is inclined, all too readily, to relate Tueur sans gages to Nazi Germany, as is often the case with Rhinocéros, but Ionesco has stated repeatedly that his plays are universal, not limited to any particular didactic polemicism. The radiant city is any city or group whose citizens or members are guilty of a similar apathy. The guilt of apathy, although not legally punishable, is morally equivalent to being an accomplice.

The brief cases in Tueur sans gages are Ionesco's finger of accusation, pointing out the killer's accomplices. The killer is known to carry a brief case containing various paraphernalia, including the photograph of a colonel. Bérenger first encounters such a brief case in the possession of his friend, Edouard. He recognizes the objects as

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[4] cf. pp. 34-37 and 42-44.

belonging to the killer; but, blinded by the fervent desire to capture the killer, he does not once suspect Edouard, even when Edouard conveniently forgets to bring along the incriminating brief case when they go to see the superintendent of police.

In the streets of the radiant city Bérenger encounters several other persons carrying identical brief cases. Somehow, still not suspecting either of these persons is the actual killer, he begins to suspect a conspiracy of complacency among the citizens, even the members of the administration. He now realizes that he must stand alone in his struggle against the killer, who in not being opposed by the citizens, receives their unspoken support.

The Bérenger of Rhinocéros[5] is quite a contrast to the confident, enthusiastic Bérenger that we find in Tueur sans gages. This Bérenger is an indolent, easygoing near-drunkard who, instead of rebelling against a society of which he disapproves, hides behind the euphoria of a continous alcoholic daze. His friends and colleagues, more accepting of and more accepted by society, are more inclined toward adjusting their lives to fit the dictates of society and therefore more susceptible to rhinoceritis. Oreste Pucciani explains this susceptibility:[6]

> . . . la rhinocérite n'est rien d'autre que la conformisme social. C'est clair comme le jour, prétend-on. Ces rhinocéros, c'est la grande masse des humains qui bêtement--c'est bien le cas de le dire--se ruent et foncent, les uns à la suite des autres, dans une grande entreprise de destruction. Mais justement, si les hommes deviennent

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[5]cf. pp. 20-22.

[6]Oreste F. Pucciani, "Où va Ionesco?", French Review, October, 1961, p. 69.

> parfois des rhinocéros, pourquoi ne deviendraient-ils pas aussi des moutons ou, à la rigueur, des licornes?

A mass of rhinoceros is more destructive than their equivalent in sheep, just as a mass of uni-directional conformists is potentially more dangerous than the relatively feeble mass of resistance which it encounters. The rhinoceros' reliance upon brute force to communicate its feelings and opinions is more representative of the behavior of conformists than would be the behavior of sheep.

At the presentation of Rhinocéros in Berlin, any implication that could be a reference to the Nazi régime and its degrading effects was quite loudly applauded by the audience. However, the universal significance of Rhinocéros is not limited to the nazis; but, as Professor Pucciani states it:[7]

> Capitalistes à Moscou, Nazis ou Parachutistes à Paris, Américains à Cuba, Cubains à New York, ces rhinocéros sont universellement coupable et universellement innocents. Ils sont là pour notre confort et pour le repos de nos consciences. Ils sont là surtout pour nous divertir et s'ils n'y réussissent pas, c'est que M. Ionesco a porté un peu trop loin un calcul de provocation.

Without attacking any certain group, M. Ionesco effectively condemns all such groups, impersonally and unemotionally, as does the killer of Tueur sans gages; and, like the killer, he offers no alternatives to their cries of "Que peut-on faire? ... "(Tueur sans gages, p. 171). He diagnoses, but he does not prescribe.

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[7]Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

THE IMBALANCE OF INTELLECT AND EMOTION

In September of 1953, at the Théâtre de la Huchette, seven short plays of Ionesco's were presented by Jacques Polieri. Of these seven, the manuscripts to four have been lost. The three remaining plays, Le Maître, La Jeune Fille à marier, and Le Salon de l'automobile, seem to have as their basic themes the superficiality of the value system of supposed civilized societies and the incongruities that can result from an imbalance of intellect and emotions.

In Le Maître[1], an announcer repeatedly informs a couple of fans of the leader that their idol is approaching. The admirers, a male and a female, express reactions mixed with fear and awe. They seem unable to resist making an effort to see the approaching master, yet they must try to remove themselves as far from his path as the walls of the set will permit. Several times, when it appears that the leader is about to make an appearance--the announcer describes minutely the action of the leader in his approach--he is delayed or detoured, causing the announcer and the admirers to run off-stage in an attempt to come into his presence.

During the first diversion, while the stage is vacated, another young man and young woman meet onstage and decide to get married. After their departure from the stage the announcer and the two admirers of the leader return to await the approach of the leader. The announcer describes

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[1]Ionesco, "Le Maître, Théâtre II (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1958). pp.233-43.

to the two admirers the behavior of the leader which includes signing autographs, dancing with a partner while stroking a hedgehog, being photographed, greeting the crowd, spitting a great distance, changing his shirt behind a red screen, putting on his tie, reading his newspaper while drinking his morning coffee, getting up unaided after falling from a broken parapet, accepting a bouquet of flowers from a little girl, having his trousers pressed, tasting flowers, fruits, and the roots of trees, and suffering little children to come unto him. Again, just as the leader seems at the point of showing himself, he detours, causing them to chase after him and the lovers to chase each other across the stage. After a third such incident the lovers, the admirers, and the announcer meet on the stage simultaneously. At this moment the announcer declares the arrival of the leader. In an effort to prevent blocking his path, the two couples embrace each other against the wall, the young lover embracing the girl admirer and the young man admirer embracing the girl-friend of the young lover.

At long last, the leader arrives, in full view of the actors and of the audience, but to the consternation of everyone, except perhaps the announcer, the leader is headless. After the departure of the leader the girl admirer comments upon his lack of a head to which the announcer replies, "Il n'en a pas besoin, puisqu'il a du génie"(Le Maître, p. 117). This leads everyone to inquire into the identity of the others. Because of their total immersion into the life of follow-the-leader, no one had taken the time to establish any individual identity. Upon becoming disillusioned with the leader, each one recognizes a need to relate to the other person as an individual instead of as a member of a group.

There is no clear reference indicating whether the leader is a literary figure, a celebrity, or a political figure; however, the total immersion of the participants in the admiration of the leader with the resultant alienation from each other may be related to an idea expressed by Ionesco concerning the alienating effects of politics:

> Je crois que ce qui nous sépare les uns des autres est cette "politique", qui élève des barrières entre les hommes et est une somme constante de malentendus (Notes et contre-notes, p. 73).

Although involved with each other physically, the minds of the leader's subjects are almost totally in the possession of the leader.

The reactions of the characters point out the manner in which some people neglect their own individuality by becoming too much absorbed by the groups of which they are members. The group members begin to think of themselves only in term of how they relate to the group, not in terms of the most important basic relationship, that of individual to individual. The members who hold the more exalted positions are the ones who become the most absorbed by their own work. In reference to this M. Ionesco states:

> Je crois que toute société est aliénante, même ou surtout "socialiste" (en Occident, en Angleterre, en France, les classes se nivellent ou s'interpénètrent davantage) où le chef politique se pense élite parce que chef éclairé, et où il est absorbé par sa fonction. Où il y a fonction sociale, il y a aliénation (le social c'est l'organisation des fonctions) car encore une fois l'homme n'est pas que fonction sociale (Notes et contre-notes, p. 89).

In becoming a social function, man voluntarily rescinds his own individuality, therefore his own liberty.

The members of a group will often become so absorbed by the group and the ideals of the leader that they will become blind to the faults

and/or weaknesses evident in the ideals and policies of the group. This is apparent in the reaction of the announcer to the revelation that the leader is headless. He intimates that the leader's other qualities compensate for his lack of a human characteristic such as a head, which would be a superfluity on the machine which the leader has become.

The three characters in La Jeune Fille à marier[2] are satires on our value system and the arbitrary manner in which importance of situations or objects is established. The play opens with a conversation between a woman and a man in which the woman is describing to the man the many assets of her daughter who has just finished hes studies and is about to take a job as a typist at a firm which deals in fraudulent transactions. The conversation skips erratically from banality to more banality until the arrival of the daughter of the woman. The daughter is a man, about thirty years old, robust and virile, with a bushy black moustache, wearing a grey suit.

The fact that the gentleman is not surprised at the appearance of a man as the daughter of the woman is indicative of the trend throughout the play. Things that would under ordinary circumstances be considered trivial in their importance are given the greatest significance in this play. The statement by the woman, "Il n'y a pas de sots métiers!"(La Jeune Fille à marier, p. 254), is considered by the man to be significant enough to merit the croix d'honneur. Yet, in speaking of the atom bomb, the woman ignores its tremendous destructive possibilities and dismisses

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[2]Ionesco, "La Jeune Fille à marier", Théâtre II (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1958),pp. 245-56.

it with the exclamation, "Ah! Celle-là, alors. . . , Il paraît qu'il nous a changé le temps! Les saisons, on ne sait plus ce que c'est, ça a tout bouleversé!"(La Jeune Fille à marier, p. 250). The major part of the play is concerned with a discussion of children, because the woman understands them, therefore, to her, they are important. The atom bomb, which she does not understand, is not considered of sufficient importance to warrant discussion.

Society burdens us with certain standards to govern our system of values while allowing us a number of choices within this limitation. Values are therefore relative to the society in which the practitioner finds himself. In certain societies the physical characteristics of an ideal young woman would be blonde hair, blue eyes, height of five feet five inches, weight of 110 pounds, and measurements of 34-22-36. In other societies this type of young woman would be considered underfed, underdeveloped, and altogether unacceptable in appearance. Perhaps, in the society in which La Jeune Fille à marier was set, the typical young lady is robust, virile, moustachioed, deep-voiced, and has all of the physical characteristics we usually attribute to a man. Judging from the reactions of the characters in the play, this was quite a usual situation, to the actors if not to the audience.

M. Ionesco's theme here seems to be a repudiation of the idea that our civilized society is based on intellect. His allegation is that values in society are established arbitrarily, and are justifiable only due to their existence, not by any intellectual, logical evaluation of them.

The third of this trilogy, Le Salon de l'automobile[3], is a potpourri of incongruities. The three principal characters are a man, a lady, and an automobile salesman. Although assorted animal sounds are heard in the background, the opening lines establish the setting as the showroom of a car lot. The young lady introduces the customer to a saleaman who begins to describe the various attributes of each model. In order to aid his vision, not his smell, the customer borrows the young lady's nose, with the assurance that "un bon nez vaut mieux que deux tu l'auras(sic)"(Le Salon de l'automobile, p. 196). In demonstrating an automobile, the salesman pinches it causing it to emit the sound of a trumpet. When the customer pinches the same car it emits the sound of a horse's whinny. Other sounds heard throughout the play are those of a railroad, a guitar, how do you do?, a saw, "mince alors, ça coupe", a trumpet, scrap-iron, and a heavy body falling on the floor. When the customer decides to buy a male car, the salesman suggests that he buy also its female counterpart. The female counterpart to the car is, of course, the young lady to whom the customer was speaking at the beginning of the play and from whom he has borrowed a nose. He decides to buy the female instead of the male car and to marry her himself. They leave the showroom amidst the sounds of a farmyard, frogs croaking, horses whinnying, cows mooing, and best wishes from the salesman.

An audience watching a performance of Le Salon de l'automobile would be inclined to find the incongruities comic, but this comedy is

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[3]Ionesco, "Le Salon de l'automobile", Théâtre IV (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1966), pp. 193-99.

valid only when using our system of values and identities as the standard of measurement. Regardless of the seeming incongruities present in Le Salon de l'automobile, in a system based on different values the entire production could be a model of logic and feasibility. In this play, not only is there a credibility gap of identities and values, but, there is also a language gap[4]. The characters seem to be speaking the same language as the audience, but words seem to have different meanings. The comic effect results from the incongruities between the audience's conception of the meanings of the words and the apparent meanings as indicated by the actors.

In Le Roi se meurt[5], King Bérenger is quite aware of his condition from an intellectual point of view, but he is reluctant to accept it because it is more pleasant to contemplate it from the emotional viewpoint. The evidence of the degeneration of his power is all around him: desertion of his lieutenants, mutiny of his subjects, defeat of his armies, deterioration of his castle, and his own physical disintegration. The realists among his subjects, the Queen Marguerite, and the surgeon, try to prepare him for his inevitable demise in an intelligent and dignified manner. However, the sentimentalist, Queen Marie, appeals to his instinctive desire to remain alive by reminding him of the pleasures of his younger days and that he is the master of his own destiny. Despite

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[4] cf. chapter II.

[5] cf. pp. 44-46.

Bérenger's preference for the emotional viewpoint, the realistic viewpoint is the one to which he is subject. It is logical that mortals should eventually die, and being mortal he must die.

Although logic triumphs over emotions in this play, it is not a testimony by Ionesco of the inherent logic of existence. Ionesco is well aware of the existence of justifiable contrasts. As he states in Notes et contre-notes:

> Rien n'est atroce, tout est atroce. Rien n'est comique. Tout est tragique. Rien n'est tragique, tout est comique, tout est réel, irréel, possible, impossible, concevable, inconcevable. Tout est lourd, tout est léger. . . (Notes et contre-notes, p. 194).

The satire is not on the human condition being constantly controlled by logic, but rather on the human weakness of emotion.

The basic premise of the four plays treated in this chapter is that reliance upon intellect is reliance upon a system based upon previous arbitrarily established standards, whereas an emotional response is individual and is dependent upon the individual's own interpretation of the situation and the probable results of his response. According to Ionesco's inferences, neither system is superior to the other; and, in spite of the contrasts, either is or both are inherently justifiable, in any given play.

CHAPTER VII

THE DANGERS OF INDOCTRINATION

Of the plays written by Ionesco many have touched upon the subject of indoctrination. The satire involved in these works is not limited to the types of indoctrination associated with politics, but to various situations in which the opinions or doctrines of a group are being forced upon another group or an individual.

As a result of the controversies that often center around his plays, Ionesco himself has often been the subject of attempts at indoctrination, especially by proponents of certain literary ideals. In spite of his repudiation of any claims to association with any type of theatrical movement, he is repeatedly typed as a founder of the avant-garde theater[1]. In an effort to show the traditional basis of his works, he wrote L'impromptu de l'Alma[2], which was presented for the first time at the Studio des Champs-Elysées in February, 1956. The similarity of the title to previous literary works, Molière's L'impromptu de Versailles and Giraudoux's L'impromptu de Paris, did not go unnoticed by his critics, as was the intention of Ionesco in choosing that title.

L'impromptu de l'Alma is Ionesco's most polemical play in which he responds to some of his critics in the guise of the character who is presented in the play as Ionesco. The other characters are Bartholomeus I,

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[1]Ionesco, Notes et contre-notes (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1962), p. 25.

[2]Ionesco, "L'impromptu de l'Alma", Théâtre II (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1958), pp. 7-58.

Bartholomeus II, Bartholomeus III and the maid, Marie, who, as in La Cantatrice chauve and La Leçon, serves as the voice of reason. Each Bartholomeus[3] presents the voices of the various critics of Ionesco's type of theater.

The play opens with Ionesco asleep in his room, his head on his desk, a ball-point pencil sticking out of one hand. The bell rings, awakening Ionesco, who goes to the door and opens it to Bart I. Bart I, who is wearing a scholar's gown of the time of Molière, inquires about the play which Ionesco is in the process of writing for him. He explains that he is a representative of a new-type scientific theater which would to have one of Ionesco's plays with which to experiment in the little theater. To Bart I's insistence that he read the play, Ionesco reads the first lines which are the same as the first lines for L'impromptu de l'Alma, and, as in L'impromptu de l'Alma, a Bartholomeus, Bart II, appears at the appropriate moment. Bart II and Ionesco then repeat the same lines which had been spoken by Bart I and Ionesco at the beginning of the play. When Ionesco reads the play for Bart II, at the appropriate moment another Bartholomeus, Bart III, appears. After salutations all around, Bart III and Ionesco go through the same dialogue as had the two previous Barts. During the third reading of the play there is again knocking on the door, but this time it is ignored by the three learned scholars and the playwright, Ionesco.

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[3]As a matter of convenience, the three Bartholomeuses will be referred to as Bart I, Bart II, and Bart III.

The scholars then subject Ionesco to a long term of indoctrination during which each scholar attempts to impress upon Ionesco the validity of his(the scholar's) doctrines of theatrology, which are usually in conflict with the doctrines of the two other scholars.

Ionesco is informed by the scholars that all of his previous preparation for his vocation was ineffectual since he is not a scholar but a playwright and therefore inherently stupid. When he reminds them that he has read the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides he is told that they are all dead, outdated, and of no use whatsoever. When Ionesco refers to Shakespeare he is told that Shakespeare was not a French writer, but Russian and therefore irrelevant. Molière is ridiculed as a reactionary who got his inspiration from Italians--Foreigners. Aristotle is accused of having copied from Adamov*.

As soon as the scholars determine among themselves that the theater of Ionesco is based on irrelevancies, they begin to vie for acceptance of their individual ideas by Ionesco. He is held a virtual prisoner in his own room, even when the maid seeks entry. When it seems apparent that the maid would have to be allowed to enter, the learned scholars begin to make elaborate preparation to construct a theatrical set of Ionesco's room. The furniture is rearranged, signs are posted, and Ionesco is recostumed as a scholar. The maid finally forces entry into

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*Arthur Adamov (1908-)contemporary avant-garde dramatist. His works include L'Invasion, La Parodie, Le Sens de la Marche, Tous contre tous, Le Ping-pong, Paolo Paoli, etc.

the room and aids Ionesco in regaining dominance in his own room. Ionesco explains to the audience the significance of the activities that have just occurred and in so doing so launches into a long tirade quite indistinguishable from the pedantic utterances of the three learned doctors of theatrology. The maid indicates this by draping around his shoulders the robe of a scholar.

The three doctors of theatrology represent the various types of criticisms to which Ionesco had been subjected. Their arguments for a certain type of theater and against certain other types of theater are valid only when viewed relative to certain predetermined standards. Each seems to have his own special set of standards according to which his arguments are valid; but, in the light of the other standards, the other arguments are just as valid. Each critic, while justified in criticizing, may do so only by objective standards. Ionesco states it thusly:

> Si le critique a tout de même bien le droit de juger, il ne doit juger que selon les lois mêmes de l'expression artistique, selon la propre mythologie de l'oeuvre(L'impromptu de l'Alma, p. 56).

Therefore, the critic may express his opinion concerning the artistic value of a work of art; but, in suggesting ways of improving or altering the work, the critic becomes a pedant thereby loses his objectivity.

Ionesco's pedantic attitude at the end of the play indicates the result of forcing an artist to defend the standard by which he creates his work. In defending his work, he becomes pedantic, like the critic, and the work loses its effectiveness as a work of art. The patrons are no longer allowed to enjoy their individual artistic experiences, but

must interpret the work according to the didactic standards of the author or artist.

The author cannot limit himself to standards which might have been created for a situation quite remote from the situation in which the author finds himself. As the times change, the modes of artistic expression must change accordingly. This is evident in Ionesco's reference to the subtitle of L'impromptu de l'Alma, Le Caméléon du Berger:

> Si vous voulez, je suis tout de même le berger, le théâtre étant le caméléon, puisque j'ai embrassé la carrière théâtrale, et le théâtre change, bien sûr, car le théâtre c'est la vie. Il est changeant comme la vie. . . Le caméléon aussi c'est la vie!(L'impromptu de l'Alma, p. 15).

In order for their criticisms to be valid, the critics must also change with the times or they will be outdated as are the three scholars in L'impromptu de l'Alma.

Whereas, in the above-mentioned play the theme is the pressures to which an artist is subjected, in Jacques ou la soumission and l'avenir est dans les oeufs[4] the subject of the indoctrination is the average member of society. In the first play, Jacques is pressured by his family into uttering the phrase "J'aime les pommes de terre au lard" which indicates his acceptance of their standards. He is pressured also, through the erotic overtures of his fiancée, into accepting a wife against his initial impulse. In the second play Jacques is again subjected to pressures from his family and his in-laws to produce

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[4]cf. pp. 17-20, 30-31, and 48-50.

offspring.

The indoctrination to which Jacques is subjected is of two types, intellectual and emotional. At first the parents and his sister berate him with reasons why he should accept their standards. When it seems that he is immune to their line of logic, his father plays upon his feelings for the family by threatening to leave home, thereby breaking up the family. His sister, Jacqueline, then appeals to his self-consciousness by suggesting that he is subject to the workings of time, chronométrable. From his fiancée, Roberte II, he receives the most basic and least resistant type of indoctrination--she appeals to his sexual instincts.

Although Jacques has spurts of rebelliousness, at the end he is overwhelmed by the sheer weight of the indoctrination to which he is subjected. The eggs with which he is being covered symbolize not only the triumph of the anti-spiritual over the human, but also the triumph of indoctrination over individuality.

That there is also some social significance in the play is evident in the cries of "Vive la race blanche" from the families during the production scene of L'avenir est dans les oeufs. The source of the indoctrination is not just the family but the entire social structure to whom Jacques finally submits. His avowal of a liking for hashed brown potatoes was the equivalent of a pledge of allegiance, and his reluctant agreement to produce more eggs was not just to produce an heir for the family, but more subjects for the state, or whatever type of totalitarian society under which he existed.

In Ia Leçon[5] Ionesco shows the ultimate degradation suffered by a victim of indoctrination. Not only is the victim of the indoctrination degraded and dehumanized but so is the perpetrator of the indoctrination process. The one who has become so much a part of the system that he thinks only of the system becomes dependent upon it, as is the professor in Ia Leçon. After having systematically reduced the bright, confident pupil to a whimpering puppet, the professor symbolically rapes and murders her. Caught up in the fervor of his beliefs, he does not realize the possible consequences of his act until afterwards. In the last scene, the maid gives him an armband, perhaps a Nazi swastika, telling him that he would be safe while wearing it. The indication is that, regardless of the apparent immorality of an act, if it is sanctioned by the system under which one lives, it is justifiable.

The significance of communications to indoctrination is pointed up by the maid's wariness of the lesson on philology. However, the professor, heedless of the warning, continues the lesson with disastrous results. The professor's resort to violence might have been the result of his inability to communicate with the student. By depending upon philology he unwittingly submits himself to this frustration, for "The apex of philological art is reached when nothing is communicated"[6]. When communications between the professor and his pupil cease, the only alternative is calamity.

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[5]cf. pp. 14-15.

[6]Josephine Jacobsen and William R. Mueller, Ionesco and Genet: Playwrights of Silence (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), p. 36.

The admirers of the leader in Le Maître[7] have become so indoctrinated by the announcer, perhaps a party subordinate, that they have lost all perspective of each other's identity and of their relationships to each other. The announcer, being closer to the leader from an official point of view, is not even aware of the weakness of the leader. The fact that the leader is headless is quite excusable to the announcer. After all, the leader is a genius.

The many trivial acts of the leader offstage are considered of more importance than the attempts of the lovers onstage to communicate with and relate to each other. Even the changing of his shirt by the leader is considered immensely more important than the proposed marriage between the young couple. The leader, representing the established order of society, is the one to whom all the characters must relate. They may find some relationship to each other only when it no longer interferes with or go contrary to the doctrines of the society represented by the leader, that is established society.

The detective of Victimes du devoir[8] is the primary instrument of society whose duty it is to indoctrinate others into acceptance of the society represented by him. In his efforts to cause Choubert to conform to his standards, the detective becomes oblivious to human suffering and humiliation as he forces Choubert to plug the gaps in his memory with hard, coarse bread. The detective, being a victim of a duty which includes indoctrination, becomes also a victim of indoctrination.

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[7]cf. pp. 54-57.

[8]cf. pp. 32-34, and 40-42.

Victimes du devoir is also, as is L'impromptu de l'Alma[9], a statement by the author of his opinions towards the theater, but it is not so polemical in its statement as is L'impromptu de l'Alma. The voice of the Ionesco-type theater is represented in Victimes du devoir by the character of Nicolas d'eu who attempts to explain the basis for the type of theater advocated by Ionesco. The many theatrical problems posed in the play allow Ionesco to demonstrate the solutions to these traditional problems which have confronted dramatists from Aeschylus to the present.

At the beginning of the play, when Choubert types all the plays from Ancient Greece to the present as thrillers, the foundation is laid for a refutation of this opinion. The entire play follows the general format of a thriller with one exception. As in the thriller, a problem is presented near the beginning, whether Mallot is spelled with a t or a d. As in the thrillers, numerous efforts are made to solve the problem. However, unlike the traditional thriller, Ionesco leaves the problem unsolved in Victimes du devoir, as there are more pressing problems at hand. Ionesco is more involved with the problems of existence in the theater and the solutions to these problems.

Whether these problems are solvable to the satisfaction of the general public is still left unanswered. The detective, a representative of the general public, is killed by the dictatorial Nicolas d'eu, who then begins to subject Choubert to the same kind of indoctrination

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[9]cf. pp. 62-66.

as did the detective. He is still forced to plug the gaps in his memory with bread. Nicolas, representing the colleagues of Ionesco, shows that the proponents of the experimental theater are as unrelenting and as dictatorial in their standards as are the members of the theater-going general public. Whereas they might be inclined to defend a colleague against criticism from an uninformed public, they are just as insistent that that colleague adhere to the standards proposed by them.

The political implications of Rhinocéros[10] may be easily associated with the Rumania of 1938, just before Ionesco left there to return to France. The Fascist movement of the Iron guard was becoming increasingly popular among acquaintances of Ionesco.[11] In an interview in 1960 Ionesco gave a basis for associating his Rhinocéros with popular movements:

> Les gens tout à coup se laissent envahir par une religion nouvelle, une doctrine, un fanatisme. . . On assiste alors à une véritable mutation mentale. Je ne sais pas si vous l'avez remarqué, mais lorsque les gens ne partagent plus votre opinion, lorsqu'on ne peut plus s'entendre avec eux, on a l'impression de s'adresser à des monstres. . .
>
> A des rhinocéros?
>
> Par exemple. Ils en ont la candeur et la férocité mêlées. Ils vous tueraient en toute bonne conscience si vous ne pensiez pas comme eux. Et l'histoire nous a bien prouvé au cours de ce dernier quart de siècle que les personnes ainsi transformées ne ressemblent pas seulement à des rhinocéros, ils le deviennent véritablement (Notes et contre-notes, p. 182).

The ease with which Rhinocéros may be associated with recent historical events probably accounts for its popularity with audiences in every

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[10] cf. pp. 20-22, and 52-53.

[11] Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1961), pp. 125-26.

country in which it has been performed.

Ionesco's satire in Rhinocéros is not concerned with the methods of indoctrination, but, rather with the average human's weakness for and susceptibility to the appeals of popular movements. Bérenger's resistance to the symptoms of rhinoceritis is not a triumph of humanity, but rather an indication that a perpetual misfit is so because of personal preference, not because of society's rejection of him. Bérenger's self-righteous stand at the end of the play, where he cries, "Je je capitule pas.", is definitive only after he realizes that he is no more capable of catching rhinoceritis than are the other members capable of resisting it. The rhinoceritis of his former fellow-humans simply gives him reason for behavior for which he did not previously have reasons.

The reasons why the characters succumbed to rhinoceritis are varied, a different reason for each person. Jean joins the movement because of admiration for the brute force represented by the pachyderms and because of a disenchantment with the overtenderness of human feelings and sentiments. He sees in rhinoceritis the simplicity of a return to a state of nature. In this state he does not have to reason nor tax his intelligence, he simply relies upon instinct. Botard was overcome by his tendency to join anything that seems contrary to the established management. His last words, "Il faut suivre son temps"(Rhinocéros, p. 167), are typical of that type of human flotsam that is swept along with the tide, regardless of the ultimate results. Dudard joins out of loyalty to his friends who are already members of the movement. Statistical reports indicate that the movement is overwhelming and Dudard's loyalties,

sentiments, and other personal feelings are regulated by those of his friends. Daisy joins because she simply cannot bear to be outside of the current stream of things.

The refusal of Bérenger to join the throng of pachyderms is indicative of the tragedy of the individualist who cannot bring himself to concede and join the relative contentment of less sensitive people. This comment on the inability of the sensitive person to ignore the misgivings of society and to succumb to the doctrines of the masses may be applied to the difficulties encountered by Ionesco in his controversies with his critics and his fellow dramatists. He did not refuse out of stubbornness or recalcitrance. Being an individualist, he simply could not ignore his own convictions.

As in his commentaries on various other social weaknesses, Ionesco offers no prescribed cure for the ills of society. He diagnoses because of man's tendency to overlook the more unpleasant aspects of his existence. The less sensitive person, instead of analyzing his condition and offering alternatives, simply rides the current of popular opinion, with a resultant loss of his own individuality.

The mechanical, slogan-chanting petty bourgeois so abhorred by Ionesco, is the easiest victim of massive indoctrination. He accepts unquestioningly the dictates of his superiors, completely ignoring his own inherent ability to reason for himself. By rescinding his own humanity, by joining the herd, an individual perpetrates the ultimate act of surrender to the forces of society.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS

In summarizing the effects of the satire in the works of Eugène Ionesco, one is inclined to ask, "But what is the use of it all?". The answer to this question is left to the choice of the individual. Ionesco has implied in many of his responses to criticism, that his plays are not designed to prescribe, simply to diagnose. His plays are presented as objective descriptions of the world, presented to a public, who, either through apathy or ignorance, seems unaware of the weaknesses inherent in their society. In an interview, Ionesco defended his work thusly:[1]

> Je tâche de dire comment le monde m'apparaît. ce qu'il me semble être, le plus honnêtement possible, sans souci de propagande, sans intention de diriger les consciences des contemporains, je tâche d'être témoin objectif dans ma subjectivité.

Instead of presenting didactic treatises on the social ills of today, Ionesco has chosen as his technique, satire, a well-blended mixture of the comic and the tragic.

In Ionesco's satire on the tragedy of language, he is concerned primarily with an over-dependence upon the merits of language to the exclusion of man's other, usually more effective, means of communicating. From the nonsense syllables of La Cantatrice chauve to the overly pedantic rantings of the professor in La Leçon, the results are still a

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[1]Eugène Ionesco, Notes et contre-notes (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1962), p. 131.

catastrophe when the last hope is a reliance only upon language.

Ionesco's treatment of the proliferation of matter is an effort: 1) to show some relationship between proliferating matter and human emotions by using objects to represent various emotional relationships between people, and 2) to indicate some probable results of an uncontrolled accumulation of material objects.

The major premise, in Ionesco's satire on the futility of hope, is that there is no hope. Any release from the adversities that are a part of the human condition is based upon probabilities, not a responsible destiny. If we sometimes lose and sometimes we gain, it is the result of pure chance, not an orderly arrangement of losers and winners.

The absurdity of conformity is made quite apparent in the works of M. Ionesco, but only so far as it concerns the individual. Problems of adjustment and matters of choice are conditions which help to make the human condition interesting and challenging. Under the yoke of conformity one is relieved of these responsibilities, but in losing his responsibilities, he loses also his individuality.

The imbalance of intellect and emotion is presented in two manners in Ionesco's plays. In the three short plays[2] the audience is presented with situations that defy logic, as the usual audience is accustomed to it. The resultant incongruity creates, for the audience, a comical situation, but the comedy of the situation is dependent upon the system of logic and values used. In the play Le Roi se meurt, the principal character, King Bérenger I, is presented with two choices, the logical,

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[2]cf. chapter VI.

with its unpleasant aspects, and the emotional, which would promise only pleasures. Despite his preference for the emotional choice, he succumbs to the logical one, not because of any inherent virtues in logic, but because in this case, the logical side is the stronger one.

Although Ionesco offers no escape from the pitfalls of indoctrination, he does offer the consolation that the persons who indoctrinate are no less victims than the objects of the indoctrination. They are more deserving of sympathy, because they are often more absorbed in the ideals and policies that they advocate than are the persons who are merely being introduced to them. As a result of this absorption into the group, the indoctrinator's life is no longer entirely his own, but owes its allegiance to the group.

Because of the nature of his plays, Ionesco has been grouped with several other French dramatists under the label avant-garde dramatist. Ionesco repudiates this label on the premise that avant-garde does not exist and is detectable only after the event is past. Referring to the Larousse[3] definition of avant-garde as "ce qui précède son époque par ses audaces", Ionesco contends the label is valid only after public acceptance of the medium employed by the dramatists so labelled.

The theater of Eugène Ionesco seems to have as its basic motive that of shocking the audience into an awareness of the absurdity of the reality as portrayed by the conventional theater. Some of the basic modes of the conventional theater, such as the congruity of action,

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[3]Nouveau Petit Larousse (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1968), p. 88.

language, and objects, have been rearranged or ignored to such an extent as to cause a shock impact upon the audience. A reversal of values and of identities is in effect so that there is often a confusion of animate and inanimate objects. Much importance is attached to objects or conditions which would not ordinarily warrant such a degree of significance. This is evident in the scenes in Le Maître during which the announcer describes minutely the behavior of the approaching leader. In Rhinocéros, much importance is placed on determining whether a certain rhinoceros is bicorned or unicorned. In La Jeune Fille à marier one is led to expect the arrival of a ravishingly attractive young lady, only to be presented with a grey-suited, virile, moustachioed man of thirty. These strategies are not employed for their own sake, but to shock the audience into an awareness of the absurdity of reality as it is usually portrayed.

There is often a juxtaposition of concretions and abstractions so that language is used to fill a space on the stage to a point where its presence bears down upon and oppresses the audience and the actors alike. Language is sometimes employed in very much the same manner as material objects, handled, accumulated, tossed back and forth, and frequently discarded negligently when its uselessness and ineffectiveness become apparent.

The characters and situations created by Ionesco tend to portray a "world out of control". Jacques Guicharnaud states his opinion about the theater of Ionesco thusly:[4]

Ionesco thus uses nonsense as a counterpart of reality. The

[4]Jacques Guicharnaud, "Eugène Ionesco: A World out of Control", Modern French Theatre from Giraudoux to Beckett (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 180.

> spectator bounces back from the play into his own universe with the greater knowledge that one system is worth another on the level of underlying justifications and reasons for being.

In this manner Ionesco justifies the action on stage and its relationship to real life.

Ionesco has shown a steady progression towards more conventional theater techniques since his earlier plays, in which both the characters and the situations were mechanical and unreal. His first attempt to write a three-act comedy, Amédée, showed quite an improvement in the depth of the characters involved. The problems presented were a bit more real and offered more opportunity for audience empathy, although it was still quite a change from the conventional theater.

The Bérenger series presented a deeper insight into the problems confronting man in his relationship to his society and the conflicting emotions which result. M. Ionesco seems to have finally arrived at a character which represents for him the typical man. Bérenger, who may or may not be the same character in each of the four plays, is an individual who is at the same time both comic and tragic. His opinions towards society and the part he should play in shaping it are comical whereas the situations forced upon him by this society indicate the tragedy of man's infinite insignificance.

The outstanding significance of the plays of Ionesco is that he presents to the audience some of the ills of society, but in such a manner as to merely make it aware of what could otherwise quite easily be overlooked. He offers no didactic prescriptions, nor any escape plans. Ionesco's theater is a theater of awareness, not of reform.

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An analysis of the significance of the material objects in these two plays and how certain scenes relate to events from the earlier life of Ionesco.

Lasseaux, Marcel. "Cinéma", Plaisirs de France. Mai, 1968. P. 61.
An excerpt from one of his reviews was used to try to relate an American movie to the attitude of the people in Tueur sans gages.

Pucciani, Oreste F. "Où va Ionesco", French Review, XXXV October, 1961. Pp. 68-71.
A review of Rhinocéros and an analysis of its effects on its audiences.

Schechner, Richard. "An Interview with Ionesco", Tulane Drama Review, VII Spring, 1963. Pp. 163-68.
The dramatist expresses his ideas on the theater and on the character Bérenger.

_____. "The Inner and the Outer Reality", Tulane Drama Review, VII Spring, 1963. Pp. 187-217.
An analysis of the Ionesco characters and how they relate to Ionesco's views on the theater and on life.

Vannier, Jean. "A Theater of Language". Tulane Drama Review, VII, Spring, 1963. Pp. 180-86.
An evaluation of the value of language in the theater represented by such dramatists as Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, etc.

SELECTED WORKS OF EUGENE IONESCO

Ionesco, Eugène. Théâtre I. Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1954. 333 pp.
Contains "La Cantatrice chauve", "La Leçon", "Jacques ou la soumission", "Les Chaises", "Victimes du devoir", and "Amédée ou comment s'en débarasser".

_____. Théâtre II. Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1958. 256 pp.
Contains "L'avenir est dans les oeufs", "La Jeune Fille à marier", "Le Maître", "Le Nouveau Locataire", "L'impromptu de l'Alma", and "Tueur sans gages".

_____. Théâtre III. Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1963. 267 pp.
Contains "Rhinocéros", "Le Piéton de l'air", etc.

_____. Théâtre IV. Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1966. 246 pp.
Contains "Le Roi se meurt", "Le Salon de l'automobile", etc.

_____. Rhinocéros. Eds. Reuben Y. Ellison and Stowell C. Goding. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961. 212 pp.

TRANSLATED WORKS OF EUGENE IONESCO

Ionesco, Eugène. Four Plays. trans. Donald Allen. New York: Grove Press Ins., 1958. 160 pp.
Contains "The Bald Soprano", "The Lesson", "Jack or the submission", and "The Chairs".

_____. Three Plays. trans. Donald Watson. New York; Grove Press Inc., 1959. 166 pp.
Contains "Amédée", "The New Tenant", "Victims of duty".

_____. The Killer and other plays. trans. Donald Watson. New York: Grove Press Inc., 1960. 159 pp.
Contains "The Killer", "Improvisation or the Shepherd's Chameleon".

_____. Rhinoceros. trans. Derek Prouse. New York: Grove Press Inc., 1960. 141 pp.
Contains "Rhinoceros", "The Leader". "The Future is in Eggs or it takes all sorts to make a world".

_____. Plays VI. trans. Donald Watson. London: John Calder, 1965. Pp. 1-77.
Contains "A Stroll in the Air", etc.

APPENDIX

LIST OF SELECTED PLAYS OF EUGENE IONESCO BY CATEGORIES

Anti-pièce:

La Cantatrice chauve

Drame Comique:

La Leçon

Comédies naturalistes:

Jacques ou la soumission

L'avenir est dans les oeufs

Farce tragique:

Les Chaises

Pseudo-drame:

Victimes du devoir

Comédie:

Amédée ou comment s'en débarasser

Pièces:

La Jeune Fille à marier

Le Maître

Le Salon de l'automobile

Le Nouveau Locataire

L'impromptu de l'Alma

Tueur sans gages

Rhinocéros

Le Piéton de l'air

Le Roi se meurt