FROM FREEDOM TO COMMITMENT

The Theatre of

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: This thesis is an attempt to discuss, by reference to Sartre's dramatic works, his ideas on freedom, its difficulties and problems, and the solution which he offers to these problems in the complete commitment of individual freedom to a just cause.

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CHAPTER I

THEMES IN SARTRE'S THEATRE

In an article entitled "Le Théâtre de Sartre", [1] Francis Jeanson, a friend and critic of Sartre, finds three basic themes in this theatre:

> 1° la liberté; 2° la contingence originelle (le fait d'etre né, d'être déjà là par rapport à la conscience que nous pouvons prendre de nous-mêmes); 3° l'existence des autres. 1

From Sartre's philosophical writings we know that these are among his fundamental concerns, and in his ten plays, written and produced from 1942 to 1965, he presents the problems of fully realizing one's freedom in a given historical context and in a world peopled by beings whose presence and individual freedom conflicts with and curbs one's own. In some plays he shows a man's failure to do this, (Les Mouches, Huis-Clos, La Putain Respectueuse, Les Séquestrés d'Altona,) and in others some characters at least are successful in the undertaking (Morts sans Sépulture, Les Mains Sales, Le Diable et le Bon Dieu). I will discuss later the way in which this is demonstrated with regard to the particular plays.

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[1] Francis Jeanson, Le Théâtre de Sartre ou "Les Hommes en Proie a l'Homme", Biblio, Vol. 34, No. 1, January 1966, p. 8.

The plays are, of course, only one way in which Sartre expresses his thought. The same questions are worked out theoretically in his philosophical works and in a more intellectual fashion in his novels, but it is in his plays that they find their most striking and directly effective expression, as is fitting in the theatre. Writing for the stage, he has had to appeal to a wider and much more varied audience than the smaller public which buys his books.

Many critics have contended that it is solely "un théâtre d'idées". If this were so, his plays would not affect an audience as powerfully as they undoubtedly do. In illustration we may quote the effect of Morts sans Sépulture, which caused an uproar both in the theatre and in the Parisian newspapers. [1] Sartre had written the play in 1945, immediately after the war, when susceptibilities were still raw. Simone de Beauvoir describes Sartre's intentions:

> Au moment où les anciens collaborateurs commençaient à relever la tête, il avait envie de rafraîchir les mémoires. [2]

Torture and collaboration were still burning issues and Sartre's treatment is brutal and frank (although most of the

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[1] First produced at the Théâtre Antoine on 8th November 1946.

[2] Simone de Beauvoir, La Force des Choses, Paris, Gallimard, 1963, p. 127ff.

torture takes place off-stage). The inquisitors are French collaborators and are ready to despise the maquisards if they talk. It was then (and one may suspect now, with the memory of Algerian and other atrocities still fresh) too close to many people for them to regard it with equanimity and to reduce it to a "piece à thèse". They knew that it resembled many incidents which had actually happened during the war. Madame de Beauvoir, who had been present at rehearsals and who had seen the transposition of the written word to the stage, was herself affected and recounts her own and other reactions in the first-night audience:

> Les entendant à travers des oreilles etrangères, les cris de Vitold (an actor who played Henri, a maquisard being tortured) me parurent presque insupportables. Madame Steve Passeur se leva et clama, toute droite dans son chapeau: 'C'est honteux!' A l'orchestre, les gens en vinrent aux mains. La femme de (Raymond) Aron partit à l'entr'acte, ayant manqué s'évanouir, et il la suivit. Le sens de cet esclandre était clair: la bourgeoisie se préparait à se réunifier et elle jugeait de mauvais goût qu'on réveillât de désagréables souvenirs. Sartre lui-même fut saisi par l'angoisse qu'il suscitait. [1]

I have quoted at some length here, but I feel it is necessary to refute the criticism that Sartre's plays are reducible to ideas alone. One could also note the reaction to, in particular, Les Mouches, Les Mains Sales and Les Séquestrés d'Altona, all of which provoked much controversy and criti-

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[1] Simone de Beauvoir, La Force des Choses, p. 128

cism. Nevertheless, in the view of many people, this is the best kind of theatre, one which provokes and stimulates readers and audiences to cries of indignation and horror, for this shows that it affects them in areas which they wish to ignore or gloss over. If literature does not concern itself with problems vital to man, what purpose does it serve? Plays which are simple amusement can certainly entertain - but for how long? Probably not more than the length of the performance. The serious purpose of literature is fully discussed by Sartre in Qu'est-ce que la Littérature? [1] and most people who accord an important place to literature would agree with him. The success of his works, the controversy connected with his name and his reputation bear witness to the fact that he may well be right.

One play which could with justice be thought of as a play built around a philosophical concept is Huis-Clos. This was, and has been since its first production, such a striking success that it would give the lie to any contention that a play of ideas cannot hold the stage. But this is a special case, concerned particularly with one aspect of Sartre's thinking, that is, the effect of "le regard" of others and their judgment, as well as the way in which they infringe on the freedom of the individual, and I intend to discuss it later in greater detail.

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[1] In Situations II, Paris, Gallimard, 1948

One of the most remarkable features in Sartre's theatre is that, in almost every play, one of the main characters (and in one case, more than one) is outside a group or society. Maybe he wishes passionately to enter this group or society (in this category are Oreste in Les Mouches, Jean in Morts sans Sépulture, Hugo in Les Mains Sales and Kean in the play of the same name [1]); or the society has rejected him (here we may cite both Lizzie and Le Nègre in La Putain Respectueuse, Kean again, Georges de Valera, who, in an amusing satirical comedy, Nekrassov, gets back at the society from which he is excluded, and to a certain extent, Oreste); or he has, of his own accord, rejected the society, (here we find Goetz, in the early parts of Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, and Frantz von Gerlach in Les Séquestrés d'Altona.) These last two cases are special and much to be condemned in Sartre's view, for to reject a society is to refuse one's function as a man who must live out his life in a given society at a given period of time.

Jeanson's way of describing these outsiders is to call them "bâtards" [2], not given the name by an accident of

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[1] An adaptation of a play by Alexandre Dumas, but it is so different from the original that I consider it a full play by Sartre.

[2] Francis Jeanson, Sartre par lui-même, Paris, Seuil, 1955, (rev. 1961), p. 64ff.

birth (only Goetz and Kean are true bastards), but in their situation with regard to the rest of society. Sartre, who was born of bourgeois parents, has on several occasions called himself "le faux bâtard", for, while accepting his staus as "un petit-bourgeois intellectuel", he has for many years attempted to understand and identify with, and even to engage in the struggle for the improvement of the lot of the working classes and oppressed nations, and for the creation of a classless society. Any kind of oppression whatever concerns him deeply and he has condemned it strongly and unequivocally (witness his play, La Putain Respectueuse, and his short story, Le Mur). Not only does he condemn torture and oppression in his fictional works, but also in newspaper articles and interviews, for example, at the time of the Algerian War, the Cuban crisis, and at present, in his concern with the state of affairs in Vietnam and in the Middle East. The physical action is and can only be significantly undertaken by those who are being oppressed or by those who have made the struggle their struggle; Hugo, in Les Mains Sales, cannot feel and fight like those whose stomachs are empty and whose freedom is directly threatened or withheld, but people like him can help enormously with aid and support. [1]

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[1] As the French and English could have helped the Spanish Republicans by sending arms and food in 1938.

Sartre, as an influential and important writer, has his part to play in this process, by showing and publicizing the struggle that underdeveloped and oppressed peoples are having in producing a better standard of living for themselves and by showing that thinking people are behind them in their endeavours. The part that a writer can play is evident in Les Mains Sales, where Hugo, the young intellectual, has a place in the Communist Party, not as a killer, as he wishes, but as a party journalist, writing of their struggles. In this capacity he has a part to play, and an important one, but he has no future as a killer. Perhaps the clearest example of all is to be found in the confrontation and conflict between Jean Aguerra, the practical leader, and Lucien Drelitsch, the idealistic writer, in the scenario, L'Engrenage. Lucien believes that literature, "les livres! Les journaux! Le théâtre" [1] will be able to change conditions and so he accepts to become a writer for the revolutionary government. When he disagrees with Jean as to the wisdom of Jean's policy, his paper is a powerful voice of dissent and so Jean has to silence him. Literature can be a powerful weapon in the right hands, for example, those of Lucien or of Sartre himself, and a writer has a duty to speak out in the name of justice, and against what he knows to be wrong.

A man can write authentically only of what he knows

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[1] Sartre, L'Engrenage, Paris, Nagel, 1962, p. 162.

to have happened in his own lifetime and of the issues at stake at this time in history. This is, for Sartre, of paramount importance, and this is why most of his plays treat subjects of contemporary relevance and of people who have problems of individual freedom, of relationships with modern society and politics and with other people. When he writes of outsiders, of "bâtards", of people who have difficulty in trying to live in accordance with their society, he is describing his own condition; despising the class he was born into, and indeed belongs to, and sympathizing with the underprivileged classes, he presents the very modern preoccupation with the alienation of an individual from his society. His difficulty, and that of many others, is that, never having been oppressed, underprivileged or undernourished, he cannot feel and experience their condition as they do, however much he sympathizes with and tries to help them. Again, his scenario, L'Engrenage, gives the best expression of this. Jean, a product of the working classes, says to Lucien, who cannot condone violence in any form:

> Tu es tout de même un bourgeois, Lucien. Ton pere n'a jamais battu ta mère. Il n'a jamais été rossé par les flics, ni renvoyé d'une usine sans explication ni préavis, simplement parce qu'elle réduisait son personnel. Tu n'as pas subi la violence. Tu ne peux pas le sentir comme nous. [1]

Not only in this scenario, but in several plays, Sartre presents

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[1] Sartre, L'Engrenage, p. 162.

both sides of the problem: Hugo is set against Slick and Georges in Les Mains Sales, Lizzie and Le Nègre against Fred and his father in La Putain Respectueuse. This makes for a wide variety of problems, from those of an individual to those of a society or a class, from those of a strong man to those of a weak, uncertain one. He treats of his own experience, yet sets it in a wider context of problems which need attention and his way to get this attention is to stimulate his audience and readers to take some kind of action against existing oppression, abuse and torture. One of the reasons for the scandal of his works is that the problems they treat, such as the Algerian question or the colour situation in the United States , are a disgrace to a "humanitarian" society.

Nor does he content himself with showing problems. Although in some plays, characters fail in their undertakings, in several we are led to a solution, both personal and collective. Evil does exist, in the form of torture, oppression, cruelty; problems do exist, especially that of fully realizing one's freedom in the world of today, where there are so many limitations imposed on this freedom, and, most important, that of achieving a useful and valuable life, but there are ways to overcome evil and banish existing oppression, if we engage our freedom in a meaningful way. This means to engage it in a way which will help to assure that all men may have enough food and the chance to live a decent and happy life, instead of some (the few) being overprivileged and

overnourished and others (the many) kept down and undernourished. In this way, the individual life may not be devoid of purpose and can be used to further the progress of all men.

But I think the time has come to discuss in more detail how Sartre demonstrates these ideas in his dramatic works. I have chosen to concentrate on his theatre in this study as I feel he is more likely to influence people in this way than in his novels and works of philosophy. The same themes do, however, pervade all his works for they are his overriding concerns and are both important and valuable and indeed fundamental in the world today where there is so much concern with individual freedom and with the millions who are oppressed and underprivileged.

CHAPTER II

FREEDOM

The development of Sartre's ideas on freedom and involvement can be profitably studied by following his drama through the years 1942 to 1959, and I propose to begin this process with his first published play, Les Mouches. [1] Not only chronologically, but logically, this play comes first, for it deals with the basic Sartrian concept of human freedom, its importance and its insufficiency alone. Jeanson, in the article already cited, describes the situation from which Sartre starts out:

> J'observe...que ces trois thèmes (la liberté, la contingence, l'existence des autres) se répartissent en deux camps inégaux, en tant que la position du premier entre immédiatement en conflit avec celle des deux autres. [2]

Therefore, I shall begin with a study of this first concept, "la liberté", and subsequently show it "en conflit avec les deux autres".

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[1] A play, Bariona, which he wrote and produced while in a prison camp during the war, has recently been published for restricted circulation.

[2] Francis Jeanson, Le Théâtre de Sartre ou "Les Hommes en Proie à l'Homme", Biblio, Vol. 34, No. 1, January 1966, p. 8.

Oreste is one of the first characters in drama to realize fully his freedom and to try to come to terms with his responsibility in and for that freedom. He is, too, one of the outsiders in Sartre's theatre, for although Argos was his birthplace and Clytemnestre and Electre are his family, he has been raised far from them and from the situation. The society of Argos is not his society, however much he may want it to be. He feels that he should belong there by virtue of his birth but knows that he does not. This is particularly evident in his despairing use of the possessive article in the second scene of the play. [1] He wants desperately for Argos to be his town and the people to be his people. His education has been exemplary, he is well versed in all the important sciences of the day and is a perfectly rounded young man. He has been taught that the wise man knows much and yet commits himself to nothing. And so he is:

> Un homme...libre pour tous les engagements et sachant qu'il ne faut jamais s'engager, un homme supérieur enfin. [2]

It is a widely-held modern opinion that a well-educated person should see all sides of a question and not judge one to be right and one wrong: but who is to speak out with most justice if not the man who has considered the question

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, Paris, Gallimard, 1947, p. 22ff.

[2] Ibid., p. 24.

deeply? Sartre treats the same problem in his novel, L'Age de Raison, where Mathieu refuses to join the Communist Party, with whose ideals he agrees, because he thinks it will curb his freedom, and it is only when he realizes that this freedom of which he is so proud is empty and meaningless unless something is done with it, unless it is employed consciously and usefully, that he discovers the true meaning of the word.

Even in this second scene, Oreste is aware that the education and attitude that he has been given are not enough. He has a need to identify himself with some cause, or some people, and this is why he has come to Argos, because he feels dimly that he has a role to fill and a part to play there. Although he has no home or family which is truly his, his most passionate wish is to make one for himself. This desire is expressed in his angry reply to the "pédagogue": "Au moins serait-il à moi." [1] He has nothing, he is nothing: "Mais moi...Moi, je suis libre, Dieu merci. Ah! comme je suis libre. Et quelle superbe absence que mon âme." [2] It is this feeling of emptiness and bitterness that will lead him to his act. The irony of his wonderful education is its effect. In his misery he envies those born in a situation

[1] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 25

[2] Ibid., p. 24

where their acts and their lives are decided for them:

> Il y a des hommes qui naissent engagés: ils n'ont pas le choix, on les a jetés sur un chemin, au bout du chemin il y a un acte qui les attend, leur acte. [1]

What he does not understand is that such men do have a choice. One can be born into a situation, like that of Negroes in the Southern United States, and suffer the situation to remain as it is or one can fight for justice and survival. One must choose to act, and only the individual can decide if he will act or not act. Oreste's choice comes in his confrontation with Electre. It is because of her that he makes his choice, just as, in life, we are influenced in our acts and decisions by other people and their judgment of us. But Electre does not only force the choice, she reveals also the necessity for choosing.

Before he has even met her, Oreste wishes to be able to act: "Ah, s'il était un acte, vois-tu, un acte qui me donnât droit de cité parmi eux", [2] but he is an early Sartrian character in that his act will be for himself and himself alone and so not really a valuable one. Later we shall see the value of an action for others, which renders its perpetrator a useful person; probably the best example of this is Hoederer,

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 24.

[2] Ibid., p. 26.

whose freedom has been fully and completely given to the party of the lower classes. Oreste realizes that only by making the history of Argos his history can he become a part of the city, but at the close of the play, he fails to carry through his responsibilities. He is an outsider because he has not shared the experiences of the people, just as Jean, in Morts sans Sépulture, has not undergone the same experiences as his comrades and so is excluded from their group. Oreste gives his reason for wanting to force a place for himself in Argos; it is to "combler le vide de mon coeur". [1] In existentialist philosophy, in order to have any hope of salvation, one must look outside oneself, to others, to act with them, and only then is there any hope of overcoming the solitude of human existence. Oreste, however, has been trained to consider the individual mind as all-important and self-fulfilment as his main objective and this may be one of the reasons that he cannot carry through the consequences of his act. Yet he is an existential hero in that he realizes what is necessary. He fails where others, like Hoederer and Goetz, succeed, because his way is only halfway. He has roots like the men he envies, he has a "situation" (his mother's lover has killed his father and his sister is a servant), but he has to be forced to take action because they are not really

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 26.

his, none of the acts in this drama have been his, he has had no active part of it. His upbringing has replaced his acts, but the situation still awaits him. He must, however, act to have any rights therein.

It is interesting to note that we know next to nothing about Oreste's "character" from the first act. Comparing this act with the first act of Racine's Britannicus, (or, for that matter, almost any seventeenth-century tragedy) we see the difference immediately. By the end of the first act of Britannicus, we know almost all that we shall ever know of the character of Néron and Agrippine. But, as regards Oreste, we cannot say anything about his "character" until he acts. Sartre has said many times that man is his acts, or his freedom to act, which comes to the same thing, and it is indeed true that we can only talk of people's characteristics with regard to what they have done. As a child is naughty because he does not come home at the time he should, as a soldier is brave because he carries a wounded companion from the battlefield, so Oreste is just because he rights an injustice by his act. And, as he himself says, he was nothing before his act but "une superbe absence".

This brings up an important feature of Sartre's drama, and although it does not play a very large part in this play, in others it will be a major theme. It is the inevitable fact that others will always judge an act and the person

who committed it. It is other people who are the final arbiters. For others Oreste will be forever an assassin and a parricide, even if for him it was an act of justice. [1]

Oreste, believing in the justice of his act, can shoulder the responsibility for it, but his mother, Clytemnestre, like so many people, acts freely and consciously, (she wanted her husband, Agamemnon, to be killed and was glad when she saw him lying dead), and yet she spends the rest of her life in remorse and repentance. In retrospect it seems to her that it was "un crime irréparable" [2] and she cannot accept that she willed it. This dual attitude of wishing the act and not wanting to be defined by it will be Electre's after Oreste has committed the murders. She has spent her early life wishing for Oreste to come and avenge her family and when he does, she recoils from the enormity of the deed after inciting him to do it. For her and her mother, in acting they have "engagé (leur) vie sur un seul coup de dès, une fois pour toutes." [2] But an act is not a game, it must be seriously and consciously undertaken and a man must be prepared to be judged for it, as is Oreste. He is not afraid of the immensity of his "crime", as it will be judged, because it was through

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[1] Just as for others Hitler was the supreme criminal, for himself he was the great and glorious Fuehrer, the leader of a pure Aryan race.

[2] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 37.

his will that it was committed. He used his discovered freedom to do what he knew to be right and therefore there could be no regretting it: "Nous ne pouvons jamais choisir le mal," says Sartre, [1] and so, whether an act is in one's own interest or that of others, as a choice which is fully conscious (and such choices are rare) it is right. The notion of being defined in the eyes of others will be of paramount importance in later plays. Here it is only in germ, although for every other character in the play, except perhaps Jupiter, Oreste is judged and condemned for his act, and when he leaves the people at the end, he is judged by us, the readers, which I will come to later.

Early on, Electre too knows, or thinks she knows, that she has freedom and choice. When she appears in white and dances at the Festival of the Dead, she is acting in accordance with her will, in revolt against her situation as servant of Egisthe and her mother. For years she has dreamed of this act against the hypocrisy and remorse of the people and she has also dreamed of killing the usurper, the murderer of her father. She incites Oreste to fulfil this dream but because she does not physically help him to kill Egisthe and Clytemnestre, she is unable to share his achievement and all she can feel is horror and fear. Hers is a double attitude, one step forward and one step back. She urges Oreste on and

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[1] Sartre, L'Existentialisme est un Humanisme, Paris, Nagel, 1964, p. 25.

yet immediately after begins to see it through others' eyes as "un crime irréparable" and shies away from the responsibility: "J'ai peur...ô moment tant attendu et tant redouté." [1] We shall see the consequences of her fear when she has not the courage to follow Oreste. She can only go a little way along the road, and although Oreste goes somewhat further, even he does not reach the end.

Even before his act, Oreste realizes why he will not fully succeed. He is incapable of identifying himself completely with his people:

> Pour aimer, pour haïr, il faut se donner...qui suis-je et qu'ai-je à donner, moi? J'existe à peine: de tous les fantômes qui rôdent aujourd'hui par la ville, aucun n'est plus fantôme que moi. [2]

These are his doubts before the act, he does not know that his act will make him capable of giving himself, because in it he will use his freedom for the sake of others. He wants personal satisfaction and fulfilment, not really the welfare of the people of the city: "Je veux tirer la ville autour de moi et m'y enrouler comme dans une couverture." [3] Unless he and Electre act together, they will judge each other and condemn one another to solitude, as happens when Electre

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 66.

[2] Ibid., p. 60.

[3] Ibid., p. 61.

judges the act and abandons Oreste. He cannot (has not the right to) judge Electre, if he has not done something to join her in her situation (as a child of the murdered king) and they are both doomed to solitude because their experiences and their acts are not the same, neither are their attitudes to one another's acts the same.

What finally decides Oreste to act (he is already almost convinced) is his confrontation with "leur bien", [1] the good of others, obedience to absolute standards (represented by Jupiter), repentance, remorse. In his revolt against this, he finally understands freedom, the ability to decide for oneself what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil. This is when Jupiter (who may be the Gods, God, Society, the Ruling Powers, or anything which opposes an absolute standard to individual free choice) loses his power over Oreste who has realized that his is the choice, not Jupiter's. He has found that "il y a un autre chemin." [2] Now he is on his own, he has found his way, but the immensity of his possibilities, the choices he can make now he is free and knows he is free, frighten him: "Comme tout est vide...Ah!

[1] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 63.

[2] Ibid. The association of words recalls Les Chemins de la Liberté, parts of which were being written at this time - an indication that it was an important part of Sartre's thinking during the war years. The French people could submit to the Occupation or they could rebel and those who read this into the play may be quite justified.

quel vide immense à perte de vue." [1] But this does not deter him from starting out on the road; at last he has something of his own, choice. The next step is to "se donner" and this he attempts to accomplish in the assassination and matricide.

The scene between Egisthe and Jupiter confirms what Oreste has discovered, that men are free, but we learn that Egisthe also knows this: "Voilà quinze ans que je joue la comédie pour leur masquer leur pouvoir"; [2] he knows too something that Oreste does not and this will be a cause of Oreste's failure. Egisthe has so identified himself with his subjects in their eyes (because of his crime) that they work together for a common goal, even though this goal is eternal remorse and designed to keep them under control. Egisthe's own failure is that his crime does not belong to him (as Oreste is what he has done) and it is therefore false and meaningless. He chose his act but threw the responsibility for it on the people. It is the role of tyrants to hide from men that "ils sont libres" [2] for once they realize this there can no longer be a tyrant or a God. Here again this play resembles Le Diable et le Bon Dieu. The aim of everything Egisthe has done has been to "composer mon

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 63. These words are very reminiscent of those of Goetz, in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, when he realizes that absolutes do not exist.

[2] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 77.

image" [1] while Oreste's aim was to create himself by his acts. This illustrates the important difference between the Sartrian concepts of "authenticité" and "mauvaise foi", represented here by Oreste and Egisthe respectively, (although later Egisthe does act freely and authentically when he disobeys Jupiter and allows his own assassination.)

As for Oreste, Jupiter describes his situation:

> Quand une fois la liberté a explosé dans une âme d'homme, les Dieux ne peuvent rien contre cet homme-là. Car c'est une affaire d'hommes, et c'est aux autres hommes - à eux seuls - qu'il appartient de le laisser courir ou de l'étrangler. [2]

Oreste is responsible to himself alone and he is completely alone to answer for the rights and the wrongs of his actions. Yet he will be judged and condemned or approved by other men. Freedom and responsibility are personal but their effects bring man automatically into contact with others, for he can never act in a void or not influence the lives of others, thus attracting their judgment. The only way to suspend this judgment is to act <u>for</u> others (which Oreste says he does) and <u>with</u> them (which he does not do). [3]

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[1] Sartre, <u>Théâtre</u>, p. 77.

[2] Ibid., p. 79.

[3] The effect of others' judgment is most evident in <u>Huis-Clos</u>, where characters are fixed for eternity by others in a mould. The necessity to act with and for others is played out in, among others, <u>Les Mains Sales</u>.

The act of killing Egisthe is over in two pages, whereupon the consequences of it begin to appear. As soon as it is accomplished, Electre begins to repent and baulks at killing Clytemnestre. Oreste's reply to her introduces the dominant theme of the last part of the play: "C'est bon; j'irai seul." [1] Solitude will be his lot from now on. For him there will be no half-acts (as with Electre). That would be to betray his freedom and his will but, like Tchen, in La Condition Humaine, he is immediately made aware of how his crime condemns him to isolation from his fellow men. Like Tchen, he realizes that "il y a des souvenirs qu'on ne partage pas;" [2] Electre cannot share his act because she did not plunge a dagger in Clytemnestre. His freedom has been completely engaged in an act but hers has not; for her it was just a dream, as Jupiter is quick to notice. Oreste tries to draw her with him but all his efforts come to nothing. From then on, the references to his solitude are constant and striking, made dramatically visual by his isolation in the midst of the Eryinnes.

Just as her mother was afraid to be defined for ever by her past actions, so Electre is terrified by the thought that she and Oreste will be labelled for all eternity as the killers of their mother. She is already seeing herself and

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 81.

[2] Ibid., p. 83.

him through others' eyes and is well on the way to the traditional remorse of the rest of the people. To avoid this, she, like Oreste, would have to consider only her choice, which was good because it was just. Oreste is ready to live a life affected and determined by his act: "Aujourd'hui, il n'y en a plus qu'un (chemin); et Dieu sait où il mène, mais c'est mon chemin." [1] He is ready for more acts and we can feel hope for him, even though he is alone.

In the scene where Electre finally abandons her brother and denies his act, it is the Eryinnes who do much to represent to her the horrifying physical details of the killing: Clytemnestre's pleading for mercy, the blood and the cries, these blind Electre to the fact that it was a just act that she had willed. Then Jupiter comes to undermine the fact that she had willed it, and she throws Oreste into complete and utter solitude. He and the Eryinnes, supported by Jupiter, argue for and against remorse and Oreste loses because freedom is frightening to someone unwilling to accept the responsibility which comes with it. It is easy to put something down to the persuasion of others, or to obedience to the will of God and it is so difficult to assume fully the weight and consequences of an act that Electre breaks down under the strain. It is the view of others, or what she imagines will be their view, that finally turns her

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 84.

from her brother, and Jupiter offers her a life where people will understand her remorse because it has been bred into them by Jupiter and by Egisthe.

In one of his speeches of persuasion to Electre, we see why Oreste himself will finally fail. His act was not for the good of Argos but to be "d'accord avec moi". [1] He tries to join with the people by assuming their crime, but it is not enough; to be for them, he must be with them. As he had said earlier: "un roi doit avoir les mêmes souvenirs que ses sujets" [2] and he has not, just as he and Electre have not got the same memories. He defends his position against that of Jupiter, but for Electre it is too comforting to talk herself out of her responsibility. Like her mother, she wanted the crime but it appalls her and so she slips back into the "mauvaise foi" of the people. Oreste tries to show her that if she willed his act, she is responsible for it too, but repentance is easier, for Jupiter shows her how the act will be regarded by others: "Tu as frappé un homme qui ne se défendait pas et une vieille qui demandait grâce." [3] Oreste can stand this view as long as he knows that he was right and that his act was a just one. If he holds to this, then there can

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 92.

[2] Ibid., p. 26.

[3] Ibid., p. 97.

be no remorse, whatever may be the condemnation and solitude.

He draws the significance of his life from the fact that he has freedom and choice and is God for himself:

> Il n'y a plus rien eu au ciel, ni Bien, ni Mal, ni personne pour me donner des ordres...(Je suis) sans autre recours qu'en moi. Mais je ne reviendrai pas sous ta loi: je suis condamné à n'avoir d'autre loi que la mienne...je ne peux suivre que mon chemin. Car je suis un homme, Jupiter, et chaque homme doit inventer son chemin. [1]

For the rest of his life, he will have freedom and choice and his battle cry will be "Je suis ma liberté!" [2]

But, although he has achieved his victory over Jupiter, he is exhausted and frightened; deserted by Electre, he repeats: "Je suis seul...jusqu'à la mort je serai seul." [3] He could overcome this by ruling his people and by building with them a happy town but he has no real care for the town. When Jupiter asks him what they will do with the new life which Oreste has offered them, his answer is : "ce qu'ils voudront: ils sont libres, et la vie humaine commence de l'autre cote du désespoir." [4] He is only just coming to the full realisation of what his freedom entails and is ill-equipped

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 101.

[2] Ibid., p. 100.

[3] Ibid., p. 105.

[4] Ibid., p. 102.

to lead others to realize it. He must fully understand before he can involve his life with that of others, as Hoederer, in Les Mains Sales, and Goetz, in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, will commit their lives to the cause of establishing a better life for others. A parallel could be drawn here with Sartre's own position around this time, free yet unable to commit himself to any political party. Certainly his own life has greatly influenced his work for almost all of his writing career.

Totally abandoned, there is still hope for Oreste and when he talks with the pedagogue, he has a determination and courage which might lead us to think that he will carry his act through to its conclusion and assume his place as rightful king of his people. In the final scene he addresses them as a leader would:

> Vous voilà donc, mes sujets très fidèles? Je suis Oreste, votre roi, le fils d'Agamemnon, et ce jour est le jour de mon couronnement. [1]

Egisthe, he tells them, "n'avait pas le courage de ses actes" [2] (just like everyone else in the city) while he himself is ready and proud to assume all the weight of his "crime":

> Mon crime est bien à moi; je le revendique à la face du ciel, il est ma raison de vivre et mon orgeuil.... O mes hommes, je vous aime,

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 107.

[2] Ibid., p. 108.

> et c'est pour vous que j'ai tué.... A présent je suis des vôtres, ô mes sujets, nous sommes liés par le sang, et je mérite d'être votre roi .... Tout est à moi, je prends tout sur moi. [1]

They cannot judge and condemn him because he is fully cognizant of what he has done.

And then suddenly, just as we feel that he has assumed total responsibility in and for the situation, he changes his attitude: "Je veux être un roi sans terre et sans sujets", [1] and he abandons his people to confusion and turmoil. He leaves the city to live out his lonely existence, having shouldered his personal responsibility but evaded his public one.

Oreste, then, has discovered his freedom: "La liberté a fondu sur moi et m'a transi", [2] chosen his act and assumed full responsibility for it. But he has "raté son coup" (sic) [3] for he is completely alone and has no means of overcoming his solitude. He has rejected the only solution, that of staying with his people, teaching them what he has learnt and helping them. Solitude in various forms will recur again and again in later plays, in characters such as Goetz in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, Jean Aguerra in the

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 108.

[2] Ibid., p. 101.

[3] Ibid., p. 55.

scenario, L'Engrenage, Hugo and Hoederer in Les Mains Sales, Kean in the play of that name, and Frantz in Les Séquestrés d'Altona. Ways of overcoming the problem, of suspending the judgment and condemnation of others for the actions by which one is defined, of finding a solution by acting for and with others, will be shown in Hoederer, the maquisards and Goetz. Oreste has gone some of the way but has much to learn before he can make his life a meaningful and valuable one.

CHAPTER III

WHEN OTHERS INTERVENE

(a) To Prove...

Once one has, like Oreste, realized one's freedom - "comme la foudre", there remains the problem of proving to others that one is free and more, that they too are free and that they control their own life. The first discovery of freedom is fundamental and exhilerating but it brings with it a host of problems. All of Sartre's plays deal with the question of freedom and whether it is realized and used, but each play with different aspects of the problem.

The first aspect is the one mentioned above, to prove to others one's own and their freedom; the second part of Les Mouches is devoted to Oreste's attempts to persuade the people of Argos and in particular his sister Electre of the truth of this. But old habits die hard and the people have been so steeped in remorse by their usurper king, Egisthe, that they cannot accept a new king who takes all the responsibility on himself. They are indeed fascinated and awestruck by his final address to them, yet they make no move to stop him when he leaves the city. They cannot accept their crime (of shutting their eyes to the murder of their former king and thus condoning it) as something that they had chosen to do, which cannot be atoned for by any amount of remorse and

for which they must consequently take full responsibility. Their attitude is the direct opposite of that of Oreste, while Electre wavers between the two before joining the rest of the populace. She knows that she wanted the murder of the king:

> Cette minute-là, je l'ai voulue et je la veux encore. J'ai voulu voir ce porc immonde couché à mes pieds. Que m'importe ton regard de poisson mort? Je l'ai voulu, ce regard, et j'en jouis. [1]

She knows that she incited "un enfant tranquille avec un doux air réfléchi...bien lavé, aux yeux brillants de confiance" [2] to become the murderer of his mother and the king. She knows too that his act is the culmination of her dreams, for she has had good reason to hate the usurper, but she balks at the final act, unwilling to share the responsibility for it with her brother. He tries to persude her that they must assume the consequences together and although he goes further than Electre, he too falls short of his ideal. In his attempt to persuade Electre, he succeeds to begin with, but she is quickly overcome with remorse. For her, the idea and her imagination were sufficient reasons for living. When she sees Egisthe lying in a pool of his own blood, hears Clytemnestre's cries and the description of how the old queen tried to protect herself from Oreste's blows, her stomach turns. This is understandable and Electre

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, Paris, Gallimard, 1947, p. 82

[2] Ibid., p. 59

is not alone among Sartre's characters to feel this way. Both Hugo, in Les Mains Sales, and Lucien Drelitsch in the scenario L'Engrenage, are incapable of being murderers. [1] An important and recurrent theme in Sartre's theatre is the idea that to achieve a worthwhile and valuable aim, one cannot shrink from the practical horrors which are sometimes necessary in action of a political or revolutionary nature.

So Oreste fails to convince Electre and she turns back to regret and repentance. His own failure lies a little further along the way. The first half of the play, as I have noted in the last chapter, concentrates on his longing and striving to belong somewhere, to someone. His act aims to achieve this, yet it remains a personal act: he shows complete lack of concern for what will be the outcome of this act for the people of Argos. If he has achieved his salvation, and he believes he has, then he is content. He belongs to the city on his own terms and can leave it when he wishes. To earn real citizenship, he would have to stay and work with them for the good of the city and he chooses to reject them when they need a leader. He is too new to the notion of freedom to convince others or to help them to realize it themselves. He makes an effort in the final scene to prove to his list-

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[1] Although with Lucien it is a consciously taken decision to avoid bloodshed and violence at all costs, Hugo really believes that he will be capable of killing a man until he is faced with the act.

eners the value of his act but the fact that he leaves the situation that he has created leaves us unconvinced of the good his act was supposed to produce. If he has eliminated the evil remorse and cleared the way for a time of good and useful actions, what is to happen to Argos when he, its rightful king and ruler, abandons it? In fact, he is the only one who is convinced that what he has done is right and good.

The problem of proving one's worth and rightness is of particular concern to at least one of the characters in Sartre's next play, Huis-Clos. The only way to create a "character" is by acting and the personages in the play are dead, therefore no longer free to act, and the sum of their acts in life can be totalled and evaluated. They can no longer attempt to change people's idea of them by acting in a different way, nor can they prove that they were right in what they did on earth. This they discover in Hell where they judge one another and listen to people on earth judging them. The common opinion of Garcin is that he was a coward because he deserted in time of war and was caught trying to escape. Garcin cannot accept this and yet he did take a train and he did flee. His notion of himself is that, as a pacifist, it was his moral duty to refuse to fight. This is the opinion that he would like to have of himself but he is unsure that it was in fact his motive. Is he a man with strong moral principles or is he a coward? His hell is that

other people, represented in the play by Inès, and to a lesser degree Estelle, have fixed their own interpretation of his actions and that he is powerless to change this interpretation. In the setting of the play, Hell, he undertakes to prove to Inès that her judgment of him is false and the situation is precisely hell for him because he can never act to prove her wrong. Man is only free to "Create himself" when he is free to live and act and Garcin no longer has this freedom. The play takes on extra dimensions of a real-life situation when the door opens and he has the chance to escape, but he refuses to take the chance, preferring to stay to convince Inès and unable to leave her with her certainty that he is a coward. He must prove to her that his actions were based on moral principles and not on cowardice. A situation like this in life is very common. We spend long hours trying to convince people with words that they are wrong about us, or worse still, trying to think of words to convince them, instead of acting to change or enlarge their view of us. In so doing we completely reject our freedom and bind ourselves more firmly to a "character" which only exists in our imagination. Garcin could only convince Inès by being free and yet he deliberately rejects his freedom because he does not understand its nature. This is the paradox of man's situation: he wants desperately to create a self for others to believe in and in attempting to do this, he neglects to do the only thing which could give him the kind of self he yearns for

and he thus slips into an existence dominated by "mauvaise foi", living only insofar as others see him. Sometimes this happens so early that he never has the chance to be free and to decide for himself, as was the case with Inès and to a certain extent with Jean Genet, although Genet overcame his situation and came to dominate it.

Less important but in the same vein as Garcin is Estelle, also in Huis-Clos. She is only the self that she has created for others to believe in. She is "l'eau vive" for her last lover, only beautiful and seductive if she can see herself in a mirror, as others see her. Hell to her is being without a mirror, without "le regard" of others to tell her how attractive she is. So she sets out to seduce Garcin and to be adored by him, and thus to get the reassurance which she so badly needs - but Garcin is too preoccupied with his own problems, particularly that of convincing Inès. Estelle does not need to be convinced of his rightness. For her he is a man, what kind of man does not matter. Inès would be only too willing to tell Estelle that she is beautiful, but on her own conditions, and Estelle is repulsed by the relationship that this would entail. Inès alone of the three characters has a clear conception of what she has done, knows why she did it and has no regrets about her life, although others had made her, as a Lesbian, an outcast, "une femme déjà damnée." She is strong and sure of herself; this is shown clearly in her relationship with Florence. She too is the one who most fits the description

of the "bourreau" that they all expect. She says: "Le bourreau, c'est chacun de nous pour les deux autres", and later: "Moi, je suis méchante: ça veut dire que j'ai besoin de la souffrance des autres pour exister". [1] She is the first to tell her "crimes" frankly, although this is not the same as saying she is admirable, for she has caused the suffering and death of two people. Nevertheless, she is authentic and in the atmosphere of "mauvaise foi" which pervades the piece, she stands out. Authentic people, like Inès, have no need to prove anything to others. They can live with the knowledge that they have chosen their actions and thus that there is only one valid interpretation which can be put on them. Jean Genet, like Inès, was condemned at an early age, in his case as a thief, and like her, was forced by those around him into a position as an outcast. In both cases, they created their authenticity out of this mould into which they had been forced by others.

In the next play, however, Morts sans Sépulture, we are presented with several authentic characters and, in a different way, the problem of proving something still exists. Jean has to prove to the other maquisards that, although he has not been tortured and humiliated like them, he is still their comrade and leader. He tries to crash in on their world but his experiences are no longer the same as theirs and his

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, pps. 134, 144.

attempt is futile. He hopes and wishes to believe that the memory of their love will give Lucie the strength to endure the degradation that she is suffering at the hands of her torturers, but Henri, who has experienced the fraternity existing between those who have suffered, tries to explain to him exactly how it is:

> Sa souffrance nous rapproche...aujourd'hui
> je suis plus près d'elle que toi... [1]

and later:

> Tu n'es pas dans le coup, Jean; tu ne peux
> ni comprendre ni juger. [1]

Jean at first refutes this indignantly, but immediately afterwards, he sees the truth in Lucie's dead expression as she returns from her ordeal and hears from her own lips her state of mind: "Je ne sens plus rien du tout." [2] Everything has been pushed to the background by her horrifying experience. The situation is intolerable for Jean and it is not until Henri convinces him that the part he has to play is of equal importance with their suffering that he accepts the situation. He must warn the others and thus prevent a needless massacre. He has been excluded from the society of Lucie and the others through no fault of his own but by circumstances and unless he too is caught and tortured, he cannot share their feelings,

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, pps. 219. 228.

[2] Ibid., p. 220.

just as Electre cannot share Oreste's act because she did not actually help with the killing.

The other maquisards, although linked by common suffering, still have a code of honour to prove to one another that they are strong enough not to talk when tortured and, if possible, not to cry out. Canoris is more experienced and can withstand his weakness. Lucie too is silent but Henri and Sorbier feel shame and self-loathing when they are forced to scream with pain. The second time Sorbier jumps from a window to prevent himself from talking. Canoris is the only one who fully understands beforehand what it means to be tortured. Henri listens to Sorbier's cries:

> Henri: Je ne crierai pas.
> Canoris: Tu auras tort. Ça soulage.[1]

Later Sorbier returns, full of self-disgust for shouting out and knowing that if he had had any information to give, he would have given it:

> Sorbier: C'est injuste qu'une minute suffise
> à pourrir toute une vie.
> Canoris: Il faut beaucoup plus d'une minute.
> Crois-tu qu'un moment de faiblesse
> puisse pourrir cette heure où tu as
> décidé de tout quitter pour venir avec
> nous? Et ces trois ans de courage et
> de patience? Et le jour où tu as
> porté, malgré ta fatigue, le fusil
> et le sac du petit?
> Sorbier: Te casse pas la tête. A présent
> je sais. Je sais ce que je suis
> pour de vrai.
> Canoris: Pour de vrai? Pourquoi serais-tu

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 191.

> plus vrai aujourd'hui quand ils te
> frappent qu'hier quand tu refusais
> de boire pour donner ta part a Lucie?
> Nous ne sommes pas faits pour vivre
> toujours aux limites de nous-mêmes. [1]

Canoris understands that man is "la somme de ses actes", not the sum of some of them. Sorbier has proved that he is generous and courageous and whatever happens, the others know that he is not a weak coward. In fact his last act, jumping from a window to prevent his body from betraying him, proves that he is brave and that he is true to his comrades to the end.

Even in the situation that they are in, the maquisards still have their reason for living, to conceal the whereabouts of Jean and thus protect others. On this depends their honour and they will even kill the boy to prevent his weakness from betraying the secret. This again raises the problem of dirty hands. A man must decide what is important and act accordingly even if it entails acts which repel and disgust him. So Jean Aguerra in L'Engrenage causes the death of his friend Lucien Drelitsch for the long-term good of his country, and Henri kills François to prevent more killings. The togetherness of the maquisards is their common suffering and as long as they do not talk, they demonstrate their freedom. It would surely be more difficult for them if they

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, pps. 194-5.

were alone, but they have the others to sustain their courage. In this case, the others are a comfort, not a threat, as in so many other plays.

The play which shared the bill with Morts sans Sépulture in November 1946 was La Putain Respectueuse, and it too deals with a contemporary problem, the oppression of black Americans by white ones. Although the emphasis here is more on the oppression than on proving oneself and one's rights, these do play quite a large part. Lizzie, the prostitute of the title, knows what has happened and what it is right for her to say. She keeps to her story until she is offered the prospect of the undying gratitude of the respectable mother who has "les cheveux blancs...tout blancs. Mais le visage est resté jeune"[1], the mother of the good, "useful", American boy who tried to rape Lizzie in the train. She can withstand the threats of Fred and the policemen but the picture of the white-haired old woman weeping for her son, which the wily Senator paints for her, overwhelms her scruples. Whether the white man is of more use to the American nation than the Negro is of no concern to her, for she knows that it was the white man who was guilty of the crime. But Lizzie is a prostitute, an outcast from the respectable Southern Society and she wishes desperately for recognition

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 280.

from one of its members. She wants to prove to this one mother that she is kind and compassionate and noble-hearted, not just an object for the gratification of the sexual desires of these decent white citizens. So she succumbs to the Senator's honeyed words, not to his grandiose personification of "La Nation Américaine", but to his appeal to save the son for the poor old mother. Left alone, she soon realizes how she has been cheated: "J'ai comme une idée qu'ils m'ont roulée", and when the Senator returns: "Vous m'avez bien eue", but by now it is too late. Still more humiliation is in store for Lizzie, however, when she opens the envelope, supposedly from the old mother, and sees a hundred-dollar note. Then she realizes just what she is in their eyes, an object, a means of committing an injustice. For them, she must be paid, for that is all she is interested in. Whereas Lizzie had only wanted to prove her goodness and usefulness, she has done the opposite in sustaining the idea that they already have of her and of all prostitutes. She has proved nothing, except to Fred that their night together was not a night to be paid for and forgotten, but this is nothing but a hollow victory for her.

Hugo, like Lizzie, is an outsider, but in his case, he is outside the Communist Party (in Les Mains Sales). It is

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, pps. 284, 287.

a difficult task for him to persuade the others that he can be as capable a man of action as any of them. He cannot be content with the desk job of writing articles for the Party. This is not the action for which he yearns. In fact, as his comrades in the Party well know, he is not the type of man who could kill quickly, even if it were an important order. Hugo himself recognizes that "j'ai besoin de discipline" [1] and that he reflects too much but he is sure that he would find the courage and determination to carry out an order. He must try, and Olga, perhaps because she loves him, persuades the others to give him a chance. Of course he hesitates and in the meanwhile comes under the influence and superior reasoning of Hoederer, whom he has been sent to kill, and quickly. One of the others would have killed Hoederer immediately, as ordered, because it had already been decided that he was to die, but Hugo, working as Hoederer's secretary, comes to discover that Hoederer is right. Like Lucien in L'Engrenage he finds it difficult to kill a man without first hearing what he has to say. In this they are both marked by their bourgeois background, in the sense that they have feelings of all-embracing humanitarianism and cannot reconcile themselves to actual violence. But a delay in this sort of situation could lead to any amount of far worse

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[1] Sartre, Les Mains Sales, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 108.

effects. Practical men, like Hoederer and Jean Aguerra, who get down to the task in hand, know that decisions must be taken quickly, bearing in mind as many factors as possible and with no remorse. In revolutionary situations, such as are presented in these two pieces, there is no time for "l'activité cérébrale". In the meanwhile the situation could be deteriorating fast. They realize that proof is furnished by acts and results, not by continual reflection. Hugo needs to prove to the others his worth as a member of the Party and to himself that what he does is right in ideological terms. These two are incompatible in his situation, for Hoederer is right and Hugo knows it. This is why he cannot kill in obedience to the Party. His motive for finally killing Hoederer is an individual and personal one. At the time he feels betrayed, that Hoederer was laughing at his struggles and he kills him in rage when he finds his own wife in Hoederer's arms. So he has proved nothing, not that the Party was right, not that Hoederer was right, not even that he himself was right. He has thought too much, acted too little and when he did, senselessly. Later, in retrospect, he gives a meaning to his act by refusing to admit to Olga that it was definitely a personal act. Hearing that the Party has adopted Hoederer's plan, thus proving that it was wrong, he refuses to cover up for them and it is for this reason that he is "non-récupérable". The Party had demanded

blind obedience, not intelligent action within its structure, and Hugo comes finally to realize this.

He cannot, because of his sentiments, his education and his birth, belong wholly to the party of men who joined it because it was their only hope of getting enough to eat and "un petit quelque chose de plus...le respect de soi-même".[1] He has no need to prove himself as good as other men, for basically, as a result of his upbringing, he knows that he is. He needs to prove that he can act for the same reasons and as authentically as them. This is impossible, for their authenticity is not his authenticity. He is bewildered in his search for his own salvation and for self-knowledge.

Kean the actor also wants to become a respected member, but in his case it is of the high society of nineteenth-century England. The means that he chooses to prove that he is as good as others are very different from those of Hugo, for Kean sets out to seduce as many ladies of the upper class as possible and prove that he is a better lover than the nobles who scorn him. Two things weighed heavily against Kean at the time in which he lived. He was a bastard and an actor. Not respected in "society", this society tolerated him as a "bouffon". When humiliation at his treatment overwhelms him, when he sees that the Prince of Wales will capture the affections of the lady with whom Kean himself is in love, just

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[1] Sartre, Les Mains Sales, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 95

because he is the Prince of Wales, he degrades what had been his pride and joy, his acting, and he steps out of his role as Othello to insult the Prince, The Peers of the Realm and his whole audience. A valid act, an authentic one? No, Kean himself acknowledges that "c'était un geste. Entends-tu? Le dernier. Je me prenais pour Othello". [1] He cannot prove that he is worth the Prince of Wales, for the society is so constituted that he is not. His way out is to take a boat for America.

Nekrassov (or rather, Georges de Valera) too is excluded from society, by way of being a criminal wanted by the police. His way of proving his worth is to prove that others are worthless and this he does by impersonating an important defector from communism and by deceiving a society riddled by fear of anything to do with communism or Russia. This is a negative kind of proof and in fact achieves nothing. Georges does nothing, and it is all the others that Sartre renders ridiculous in their gullibility and stupidity.

The last two characters who try to prove something in Sartre's drama are rather different, for neither is proving to his fellow men, to people living at the same time of history as himself. Frantz, in Les Séquestrés d'Altona, addresses his justification of himself and his age to future generations

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[1] Sartre, Kean, Paris, Gallimard, 1954, p. 178.

and Goetz, in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, deigns to have business with no lesser personage than God.

As a consequence of the war, Frantz, an officer in the German army, has retreated completely from the society of his fellow men. On his tape-recordings for future generations, he explains that it was "le goût du siècle" [1] which caused them to strike, to avoid being struck. He claims too that his age was the making of future generations and as such deserves some excuse. He does realize their guilt: "Mon client fut le premier à reconnaître la honte: il sait qu'il est nu." [1] He is speaking not only for himself, but for his whole time; his failure is that he can never confront his supposed accusers in future generations and he has no wish to confront those of his own day and age, in which men have "les mains sales...jusqu'aux coudes". [2] His proof is futile because if justification is necessary, it is necessary here and now, to one's fellow men in time. Future men will judge World War II but no amount of persuasion will influence them in their judgment. Subsequent events will alter the interpretation which men put on the war but Frantz's testimony will be almost useless for he lived a few years of history and then refused to follow them

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[1] Sartre, Les Séquestrés d'Altona, Paris, Gallimard, 1960, p. 222.

[2] Sartre, Les Mains Sales, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 200.

through. An act or acts in time cannot be isolated from what comes before or afterwards and this is what Frantz tries to do.

Goetz too seems to consider his lifetime as the only period of history.[1] The only personage to whom he will undertake to prove his greatness is God. When devoted to absolute evil, he says: "Je ne daigne avoir affaire qu'à Dieu"[2] and later:

> Mais que me font les hommes? Dieu m'entend, c'est à Dieu que je casse les oreilles et ça me suffit, car c'est le seul ennemi qui soit digne de moi. 3

He explains one of his reasons for changing and wanting to be all good: "Je veux mettre le Seigneur au pied du mur."[4] The period which Sartre chose for his play was sixteenth-century Germany where God was assumed almost universally to exist. Even if Goetz devotes himself completely to evil, he still believes that God is watching him. In fact, the climax of

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[1] I am speaking here of the first two thirds of the play where he decides to opt first for absolute evil, then for absolute good. When at the end he settles for his position as one man in history, he sees his acts in the context of a bigger battle, having less, and paradoxically more, importance.

[2] Sartre, Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, Paris, Gallimard, 1951, p. 57.

[3] Ibid., p. 91.

[4] Ibid., p. 104.

the play is really where he discovers that "Dieu n'existe pas." [1] In effect, in the beginning, he is substituting God for an idea and when this idea is shown to be false, he realizes that there is no God:

> Il n'y avait que moi: j'ai decidé seul du mal; seul j'ai inventé le bien. C'est moi qui ai triché, moi qui ai fait des miracles, c'est moi qui m'accuse aujourd'hui, moi seul qui peut m'absoudre; moi, l'homme.... Plus de ciel, plus d'enfer, rien que la terre. 1

With no-one to prove anything to, what is Goetz to do with his life? Nasty points it out to him, take the place most fitted to him and do the work in hand, fill his role as best he can and deal with the pressing problem, that of destroying the power of the barons and bettering the condition of the serfs.

Goetz then succeeds where all the others that I have discussed fail. He has by the end of the play realized that there is nothing to prove to anyone and has regulated his life accordingly. The failure of the others is in part due to their striving for an individual salvation and individual recognition from their fellow men. Garcin, Hugo, Kean and Frantz want to justify themselves and their acts and prove their rightness but this they can only do by more acts, which they are prevented from doing or which they cannot bring themselves to do. They are searching for an

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[1] Sartre, Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, pps. 228-9.

essence in the eyes of others and in their own eyes, an essence which they wish to create according to their own ideas of themselves. The only way to do this (if it is a desirable thing to do) is to act decisively according to one's ideas of right and wrong and of justice. The sum of a man's acts cannot be totalled nor an essence decided upon until after his death. The men mentioned above want it before, in fact they create a living death for themselves, cutting off the freedom of the rest of their lives by deciding what they are to be for others and for themselves before they have justified the title by action. This living death and cutting-off of freedom I intend to discuss in the next part of this chapter.

(b) The Living Death

The setting of Huis-Clos is Hell and the characters are dead. However, they speak, they think and they feel as they would do if living. Why then are they dead? Because they are no longer free to act. If, as many critics believe, the play can be compared to a situation in life in many instances, we must explain the powerlessness of Garcin, Ines and Estelle to act, for, in existentialist terms, a man is his acts and nothing else.

They certainly have acted in the past; Garcin has ill-treated his wife and taken a train to the border to avoid fighting; Inès has enticed a woman from her husband and has caused both their deaths, and Estelle has murdered her baby. Nevertheless, when they attempt to act within the framework of the play, they achieve nothing; Garcin cannot leave, even when the door is open, nor can he make love to Estelle and Estelle herself cannot stab Inès. More important than this to them is their powerlessness to prevent or change the opinion which others, particularly those on earth, have of them. For them, instead of an act being an independent, authentic, freely-chosen thing, it has become necessarily entangled with other people's judgment of it. Of course

other people will always judge an act and a person, but if the individual is sure for himself at the time he acts that the choice was a conscious and a right one, the judgment of others will not torment him.

Garcin is not sure that his was the right choice, to take a train and flee the country. He wants to believe and he wants others to believe that he was courageous and morally strong (that he was acting according to his principles) but he has doubts himself and this is why he rages and despairs when he hears his former colleagues discussing him and deciding what he is:

> Ils pensent: Garcin est un lâche...Garcin est un lâche! Voilà ce qu'ils ont décidé, eux, mes copains. Dans six mois, ils diront: lâche comme Garcin. [1]

He is enraged because he was a coward; he did refuse to fight, and yet this is not all; it was a choice and he had his reasons for acting: "Je voulais témoigner, je...j'avais longuement réfléchi...est-ce que ce sont les vraies raisons?" [2] His attitude is very much like that of the people of Argos, in Les Mouches. He chooses his act and then spends his time in remorse and reflection. In this he is a step behind Oreste who assumed freely the weight and responsibility of his act, and yet his situation is a development from that of

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, Paris, Gallimard, 1947, p. 159.

[2] Ibid., p. 158.

Oreste, for other people have become important in the act. Oreste acted in a void and this is impossible in a world where one is forced to live with others. Garcin is the first of many Sartrian characters who must come to terms with the world and who experience the "angoisse" that this entails. Other characters deal with the agony with varying degrees os success, while Garcin fails completely. This is not altogether surprising, for realization of the situation and despair come before constructive solutions.

Garcin, like Inès and like Jean Genet, has become imprisoned in a situation and a "character" fixed by other people but Garcin has not their strength to use this and to build on it an authentic life. Even though they have the s rength, their lives are not happy and they are persecuted outlaws, made so by the very people who had fixed their "character" in the beginning. It is in this sense that "l'enfer, c'est les autres". We all feel the desire to categorize a person, label him and thus finish with him. He has and will have those qualities for ever. This contradicts the very fact that all men are free to change, to develop <u>or</u> to display the same qualities again. In real life, a man is "en situation" and is faced with countless choices. If he is influenced by others and their opinion of him, his choice is no longer a free one and his freedom turns into a prison. It can even develop to the stage where all his actions are dictated by others, who have fixed his

"character", making him to all extents and purposes dead, like Garcin.

Although everyone will have a "character" attached to him, a man who realizes that he is nevertheless still free knows that this is not and cannot be the final judgment. For many people, however, it is final, they accept the designation and make no attempt to change it or add to it. They accept a placid, death-like existence and are happy, or more usually, unhappy with it. Alternatively, they can accept their situation and act within it or they can revolt.

The protagonists in Huis-Clos are forced, because they are dead, to accept their "character". On the other hand, Jean Genet, fixed as a thief at an early age, accepted this and acted within it. Sartre, in a long study of this man forced into a mould by others, [1] disusses how Genet, consciously and with determination, has based his life on this character and yet has lived authentically in what to others would seem a hell-like situation. Sartre explains this paradox: "C'est un caractère essentiel et nécessaire de la liberté que d'être située." [2] Freedom is nothing if it is not in the world and the world implies other people and their influence. Mathieu, in L'Age de Raison, prides himself on being free and

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[1] Sartre, Saint-Genet, Comédien et Martyr, (t. 1 des Oeuvres Complètes de Jean Genet), Paris, Gallimard, 1952.

[2] Sartre, Situations II, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 188.

for this reason he is nothing, because his freedom leads him to reject everything, Marcelle, his child, the Communist Party, all of which he feels impose severe limitations on his freedom if he accepts them. In fact, the opposite would be true; he would be freely using his freedom. Man's life, says Sartre, is a "liberté en situation" and until and unless he accepts this and acts on it, his life will resemble the Hell of Huis-Clos. The one room in which Garcin and the two women are confined is symbolic of the imprisonment which we inflict on ourselves when we allow ourselves to be completely dominated by our situation instead of dominating it. In such a predicament, man is "fait comme un rat". It is a theatre presenting these types of problems that Sartre has created, with men in situations which they must deal with and which their freedom can help them to dominate:

> Plusieurs auteurs reviennent au théâtre de situation. Plus de caractères: les héros sont des libertés prises au piège...en un sens, chaque situation est une souricière, des murs partout. [1]

There have been many attempts to explain Huis-Clos but this is in my opinion the best. What "character" could one give to Garcin, to Inès and to Estelle in the play? Garcin a coward, a cruel husband, Inès a Lesbian and Estelle an infanticide. All these characteristics are results of what they

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[1] Sartre, Situations II, p. 313.

did in a given situation in the past. They chose to act in a certain way, they have been caught in a trap and they are caught for all eternity. Must they remain for ever in the trap? Not necessarily, says Sartre, in a continuation of the above passage:

> Je m'exprimais mal, il n'y a pas d'issues a choisir. Une issue, ça s'invente. Et chacun, en inventant sa propre issue, s'invente soi-même. L'homme est à inventer chaque jour. 1

Garcin could escape when the door opens but he refuses to leave a situation which is to his disadvantage. Talking of all three characters, Edith Kern sums up their predicament:

> It is their inability to do so (escape) that makes them truly and finally guilty in Sartre's eyes. For at this moment of free choice, all three betray their total lack of authenticity, their inability to assume the human freedom which would enable them to reassume life and change... it is their lack of authenticity which represents their hell. 2

Garcin is unwilling to assume a future when the past has not been sorted out to his satisfaction. A man's life is his freedom, his future, his "projet", and Garcin has no "projet", therefore he has no life. Living in the past cuts off the future and with it freedom and life. This is why Garcin and so many others are to all extents and purposes dead. They are trapped in a situation and character from

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[1] Sartre, Situations II, p. 313.

[2] Edith Kern, "Abandon Hope, All Ye...", Yale French Studies, January 1964, No. 30, p. 57.

which they cannot escape. They spend eternity running back and forth in "la souricière" without ever finding a solution, not realizing that the solution is in themselves and in their future. They are thus completely powerless.

The same sort of situation is presented in the scenario, Les Jeux sont Faits. [1] Pierre and Eve are dead and we have several instances of their desire, but powerlessness, to influence events among the living. They have, however, by falling in love, earned the right to "inventer une issue". They have the chance to return to their situations in life and if their love can last twenty-four hours, they will be given their lives back again. So they return, but in their life on earth, they live in completely different spheres and come from different classes, Pierre from the working-class revolutionaries and Eve from the upper middle class. Their situations are so different and other preoccupations weigh so heavily on them that the attempt to salvage their love fails. Pierre is committed to his revolutionary activity and Eve is too much concerned with her husband's attempt to seduce her younger sister. Nevertheless, they do try. Even if there is no guarantee of the success of the undertaking, man can make the attempt, and because of this Pierre and Eve are more to be praised than Garcin who refuses to take his

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[1] Sartre, Les Jeux sont Faits, Paris, Nagel, 1948.

opportunity. Pierre and Eve fail because their class and background (which have the influence they do because of others) are so different and count for so much in their actions.

This question of class is the most important feature in Sartre's play of colour prejudice, La Putain Respectueuse, and is vital in a consideration of the way others, no longer individually, but collectively, can weigh on, and crush one or more persons, fixing them in a position of helplessness which is equivalent to death. Although the play was more topical in 1946 (it was based on a real incident), the issues that it treats are still of burning importance today. Some progress has been made in Civil Rights, it is true, but much remains to be done, particularly as regards people's individual and collective prejudices, and it is this with which the play deals.

The action focuses on the oppression of and prejudice against Negroes in America, but Lizzie, the prostitute, comes in for her share of prejudice and oppression too. For she is a prostitute and therefore an outcast from respectable society. A class with a history and inbred sense of superiority is in a strong position to prey on and crush people who are different from their select group. The Southern Whites have powerful weapons to use against Lizzie: the police, imprisonment, the fact that no-one (in their society, of course) will believe the word of a woman who sells herself, and also, as I have

mentioned, the gratitude of a white-haired old mother. Lizzie's situation has forced her into an object-like existence; she is only useful as a thing, not as a person to play a significant role in society, even when she has the chance, as she does in the play. She is tricked into playing the part assigned to her by others, a means of reinforcing in their own minds their prejudice, their certainty that they are right and that they are superior.

As for the man she betrays, Le Nègre, he has even less resistance than Lizzie to the influence of white society. He has nothing to prove, for he is nothing, or worse, in their eyes, and he has even come to consider himself through their eyes: "Je ne peux pas tirer sur les blancs,...ce sont des blancs, Madame..." [1] and he repeats this "Ce sont des blancs" several times, for it is all that he can say. That it all he needs to say, for it is all quite clear to him (and them) and it is the final argument:

Le Nègre: C'est comme ça, Madame, c'est toujours comme ça avec les blancs.
Lizzie: Toi aussi, tu te sens coupable?
Le Nègre: Oui, Madame.

He even calls Lizzie "Madame" which no white person would dream of doing because for them she is not a lady. Even the Senator, trying to win her over, addresses her as "mon enfant" or Lizzie. The Negro has no fight in him because of

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, Paris, Gallimard, 1947, pps. 292-4.

the situation and lack of self-respect which the Whites have inflicted on the Negroes. In many places the same attitude still exists that "un nègre a toujours fait quelque chose." [1] Now, however, we are seeing the struggle of the Negroes to break out of the oppression to which they have been subjected although the problem still remains for many of them to prove that they are worth as much as white Americans, that their freedom and responsibility are as valuable as those of the white man in the American nation of the mid-twentieth century. [2]

When people are forced by others into a position where they can no longer act authentically, and when they consent to this situation, they may as well be dead, for all the value that life has for them. To be deprived of life, or the right to live, whether through one's own fault or that of others, is the worst of all misfortunes, for death is the end of everything and nothing but the end. The manner of death is not the important thing; the fact of death overrides all other considerations. In Sartre's latest dramatic work, an adapt-

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, p. 294.

[2] Their struggle is in some ways analogous to that of women at the beginning of this century, trying to prove to men that they were just as capable of making decisions, voting and holding responsible posts. Both women and Negroes have a long history of subjection and it is this history which makes the struggle so violent and bloody when it does break out. When strong leaders appear, when the humiliation is expressed in strong words and actions, violence must erupt.

ation of Euripides' The Trojan Women, Andromaque says as much to Hécube, who is grieving over the cruel and senseless murder of her daughter, Polyxene:

> Hécube: Egorgée sur une tombe.
> Comme une chèvre,
> comme un boeuf!
> Mort infâme!
> Andromaque: Infâme, non.
> Elle est morte, c'est tout.
> plus heureuse que moi qui vis. 1

If death is the end and life is all man has, then he must struggle to be free and to use his life and freedom significantly. Others may be oppressing him and depriving him of his liberty, as happens to the Negroes and the maquisards, but in such a situation he must assert his freedom, to have any hope of obtaining it. Complete freedom is a Utopia, as Sartre realizes, but it is possible to move in that direction:

> La liberté même, si on la considère sub specie aeternitatis, paraît un rameau desséché: car elle est, comme la mer, toujours recommencée; elle n'est rien d'autre que le mouvement par quoi perpétuellement on s'arrache et se libère. Il n'y a pas de liberté donnée; il faut se conquérir sur les passions, sur la race, sur la nation, sur la classe et conquérir avec soi les autres hommes. 2

This is the basis of freedom, this movement into the future, towards a freer state and to refuse this movement, like

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[1] Euripide, Les Troyennes, Adaptation de Jean-Paul Sartre, Paris, Gallimard, 1965, p. 69.

[2] Sartre, Situations II, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 116.

Garcin and Le Nègre, is to place oneself, or accept to be placed, in a situation of being dead.

Since the occupation which was inflicted on Frenchmen during the War, (which precipitated and crystallised an attitude which was already taking shape), Sartre has always vigourously supported the struggle of people oppressed or deprived of their liberty or the ability to act freely. The difficulty for us, if we have never been oppressed or deprived of freedom, is that we need much comprehension and active participation in their struggle if we want to help the oppressed. Sartre lays emphasis on this fact time and again. For the bourgeoisie, and he assumes the fact that he is and can be nothing else than a bourgeois, it is all too easy to sit back, to comment on and judge the means which people employ in their struggle to improve their condition. A conscious effort is necessary to help and more, to realize that we are, like the Southern Whites, to a greater or lesser extent responsible for that condition. This is certainly the case when it is a nation or a class which is oppressed. When individual freedom is threatened, the responsibility lies with both oppressor and oppressed, for others individually only control a man's life insofar as he permits it and if he permits it, then he betrays the freedom of all men, being in himself representative of the human condition. Not only this, he also negates the thing which should be most precious to him, his life, and his existence is wasted.

(c) Revolt and Retirement

In three plays, the main characters find their issues, of which I spoke in the last part of this chapter, in revolt against others and their influence. The plays are Kean, Nekrassov and early parts of Le Diable et le Bon Dieu. This last play is far more complex in its presentation and in itself contains almost all of Sartre's ideas on freedom, the effect of others and commitment, while the other two are more straightforward from this point of view. Both in fact deal with other aspects of Sartre's thinking and I shall discuss them only briefly in this study.[1]

Edmond Kean has chosen to become an actor but his problem in the span of the play is that he finds himself obliged by others to play a role even when he is not on the stage, and he has assumed this role, for it is his only means of entry into high society. Sartre shows the time when Kean realizes just how unauthentic his life is and tries to change it. But circumstances, other people and his own habits

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[1] Kean treats the necessity for playing a role forced on one by others, which is in fact a major feature of Sartre's thinking, and Nekrassov is, for the most part, a virulent satire of anticommunism.

combine to make this impossible. Throughout the first half of the play pressures build up in Kean until he revolts. The Prince of Wales with his influence and his money weighs heavily against the spendthrift actor and even the fact that Kean believes himself to be in love with Elena does not prevent him writing her the exact copy of a love-letter which he has sent to countless other women in the past. He has his place in high society but only on the terms of the members of that society; he can amuse women, make love to them for a time, but must step down if anyone "trop bien né" decides to address his affections to the lady in question. Kean is torn in two by being everything (at Drury Lane) and nothing (socially) in early nineteenth-century London. He is the king of London in the role of Othello or Hamlet and he is nothing when others can control even his affairs. In his big speech of revolt, enraged at seeing the Prince of Wales and Elena talking intimately in a box while he is playing Othello, he lashes out wildly, accusing society for his breakdown:

> Kean est mort en bas âge. (Rires.) Taisez-vous donc, assassins, c'est vous qui l'avez tué. C'est vous qui avez pris un enfant pour en faire un monstre. [1]

Later he acknowledges to his dresser, Salomon, that some of the blame at least could be put on himself for accepting to

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[1] Sartre, Kean, Paris, Gallimard, 1954, p. 166.

base his life, and not just his profession, on playing a part:

> Je voulais faire un geste. Sais-tu que j'etais peuplé de gestes: il y en avait pour toutes les saisons, pour tous les âges de la vie. J'avais appris à marcher, à respirer, à mourir. Heureusement ils sont morts.... Tu vois: le type qui s'asseyait, ça n'était pas moi, c'était Richard III...et ça, c'est Shylock, le juif de Venise. Tant pis. Ca viendra peu a peu. J'imiterai le naturel jusqu'à ce qu'il devienne une seconde nature. [1]

Kean's revolt is against the society which had made him an outcast and he makes his own position so difficult that he is obliged to leave the country (as an alternative to going to prison). His two "issues" are both equally impracticable and futile, insulting everyone and abandoning the society which he had wished so desperately to enter.

Georges de Valera, in Nekrassov, triumphs in the society where Kean is defeated and perhaps the fact that he succeeds is the reason for the play being a comedy; for Georges' success is not man's success, it does no good to anyone, and in the long run, not even to himself. It in fact does the opposite, it shows men to be fools and scoundrels and as such is not an optimistic play. We can laugh in the same way that we laugh at Monsieur Jourdain and Argan, made fools of by bigger fools or rascals. There is no triumph in the process for anyone, no permanent hope or solution. Georges succeeds because he is clever and daring,

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[1] Sartre, Kean, p. 177.

but the emphasis is not really on him in the play, except as the means to display the gullibility of others. The police are hunting him down as a criminal and his way to escape is to get even with them by taking the initiative out of their hands. Like earlier Sartrian characters, his is individual activity and as such doomed to failure. For the only thing that Georges can do when he is unmasked is disappear and this he does, exactly as Kean disappears to America, and all trace of him is removed from society.

Far more complex is the revolt of Goetz, for Goetz tries out three "issues" before he finds the right one. The first knowledge that we have of him is that of a man dedicated to cause evil and suffering in his revolt against God, his fellow man, his mistress, the poor, in fact, everyone. No reason or history is given for this attitude except that he has set himself up in revolt against and competition with God. Evil gives him no particular satisfaction but no particular dissatisfaction either. Goetz has a yearning for "l'absolu" and as God was considered absolute good and thus unavailable for competitive emulation, Goetz in the beginning devotes himself to absolute evil. This yearning for absolutes goes back at least as far as the time of Socrates and Plato, and has been adopted by many philosophers, thinkers and ordinary men. It is for Sartre a false path. Neither absolutes, good or evil, nor God exist independently. If they can

be envisaged at all, which is doubtful, it is only through particular cases. Absolute good would forbid killing, lying or stealing and yet, as Sartre insists, in many instances these may be justified with regard to a particular case, for example, in a war of liberation against cruel oppressors, to keep up soldiers' morale or for their wellbeing, or to feed a starving, penniless family. Absolute evil would exclude any single act of kindness, love generosity. No case can be judged from the standpoint of absolute values, but only in consideration of the circumstances of that particular case.

Goetz, then, tries out absolute evil and it is only when Heinrich points out to him that no-one has ever been all good that Goetz takes up the challenge to revolt against traditional and public opinion. He sets himself up as an emulator or disciple of God, in revolt against his situation in the world, that of a man with wealth and property at a time of peasant discontent with appalling conditions. Advised against giving away all his land by Nasty, he refuses to listen, for, at this stage, good is not good unless it is all and final good. There are no half-measures, no compromises for Goetz. He is certain that good will triumph: "Le bien ne peut pas engendrer le mal" [1] and he is forced to stand by as,

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[1] Sartre, Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, Paris, Gallimard, 1951, p. 119.

horrorstruck, he sees his dreams crumble. At this early stage, the issues are clear-cut for him, there is no mixture. As he will discover, good can generate evil; the situation of loving harmony that he has established in his "Cité du soleil" breeds discontent, envy and impatience with their lot among other, less fortunate peasants and precipitates the war which Nasty, the peasant leader, had tried to postpone until the peasants were better armed and equipped to fight the barons.

These two aspects of Goetz's revolt are based on the notion that good and evil and God exist independently of himself and other men. The words: "Tout homme rêve d'être Dieu" [1] are particularly true of him in that he wishes to possess, to display or to be able to contemplate one or more absolutes or truths. This is impossible for any man, made so by his individual situation and circumstances. When he comes to accept his place in the world, then he can come to terms with it and find his role and usefulness therein. He can be, in the words of Canoris, the Greek revolutionary in Morts sans Sépulture, "parfaitement utilisable".

When Goetz's striving after absolutes comes to nothing, when he sees that his efforts have only brought more misery

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[1] Andre Malraux, La Condition Humaine, Paris, Gallimard, 1933, p. 271.

to those he had tried to love and help, he is completely bewildered and falls back on another solution to the problem, if it can be called a solution, in retirement from the world, its absurdities and contradictions, and he becomes a hermit. Here he suffers the pessimism and despair, "les angoisses existentialistes", which many people speak of with regard to existentialism. Bereft of the traditional notions of an individual salvation, the hope of an afterlife, an absolute to aim for, when these have been tried and found wanting or without foundation, a man is prey to despair and hopelessness. For what sense can he make of his life, if all around him he finds contradiction and if all his efforts seem doomed to failure? He has nothing left to which he can cling and is adrift in a sea of nothingness; it seems then that he is completely and finally alone. Goetz cries out in anguish: "La solitude du bien, à quoi la reconnaîtrai-je de la solitude du mal?" [1]

Absolutes and God are a reassuring way of feeling that there is a purpose to the existence that has been forced on man, that he is not alone, that there is a bigger pattern and he is a part of it. Without them he is entirely alone. Many modern writers are obsessed with man's solitude in the world: Malraux's revolutionaries in La Condition Humaine,

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[1] Sartre, Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, Paris, Gallimard, 1951, p. 202.

Camus' Meursault, in L'Etranger, J.D.Salinger's Holden Caulfield, in Catcher in the Rye, are only some of the many examples which one could quote. Françoise Sagan, in an interview, put it as a universal modern problem:

> En fait, ce qui me frappe le plus chez les gens que j'ai connus, ou même chez moi, c'est cette espèce de solitude perpétuelle, qui n'est pas un thème bénin, ni même un petit thème. Etant donné que tout le monde en souffre, c'est même un des postulats premiers. L'homme aime et meurt seul. [1]

Both Frantz von Gerlach, in Les Séquestrés d'Altona, and Goetz feel the anguish of the human condition and find an issue in self-imposed solitude, an escape from contradiction and absurdity. Exhausted and disillusioned by his experiments with good and evil, Goetz turns to reliance on God and meditation. Yet even here he has no success: "Le mal est simple, mais ma vue s'est brouillée et le monde s'est rempli de choses que je ne comprends pas." [2] He imposes trials on himself and cannot fulfil them because he purposely overtaxes his physical resources. He is confused and alone and in a short time becomes prematurely aged, senile and useless. What is more, he has no help from God, in whom he had put his whole trust: "Au crépuscule, il faut

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[1] Madeleine Chapsal, Les Ecrivains en Personne, Paris, Julliard, 1960, p. 198.

[2] Sartre, Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, Paris, Gallimard, 1951, p. 155

avoir bonne vue pour distinguer le Bon Dieu du Diable." [1] He has succumbed to the absurdity and the solitude which must be overcome or dealt with if anthing in life is to be successful: "Curieux tout de même qu'il n'y ait pas d'issue." [2] He will come later to the understanding that a man must invent his own solution, but at this time of despair, he is waiting for it to come as a blinding light from Heaven. The turning point comes for him when he realizes that there is no heaven:

> Plus de ciel, plus d'enfer, rien que la terre... Adieu les monstres, adieu les saints. Adieu l'orgeuil. Il n'y a que les hommes. 3

Frantz von Gerlach's attitude in retirement from the world is a little more positive than that of Goetz. He sets himself to compose a defence for posterity, but he cannot face up to the absurdity of the fact that although Germany lost the war, she is one of the most prosperous countries in Europe, and that although the Allies won the war, their crimes were sometimes no less heinous than those of the Axis. He finds difficulty (and perhaps we can share his puzzlement) in making any sense of these paradoxes. Like Goetz, he comes to realize that there is no absolute good or evil, only com-

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[1] Sartre, Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, Paris, Gallimard, 1951, p. 215.

[2] Ibid., p. 227.

[3] Ibid., p. 229

promises between the two on all sides. He cannot become part of this world of compromises, so he retires to the seclusion of his room to try to make sense of it all.

His incapacity to deal with his situation is a result of his relationship with others, particularly with his father. This father has always prevented him from acting seriously, consciously, responsibly. Everything that he has done or tried to do has been treated as a game: his attempt to hide the fugitive from the concentration camp, his actions as an officer, his proposed escape to South America, each of these was "une grave étourderie". [1] But Frantz is a man, not a boy, and if the seriousness and responsibility are taken away from his actions, his freedom too is taken away, or rendered a frivolous, selfish exercise. Because his father makes him see his own actions in that light, Frantz can only relate this to the actions of others and comes to consider with horror and bewilderment the effects of his own acts and those of others on humanity and this is why he chooses to compose a defence of his age for posterity. He knows that he and his fellow men will have their place in history and he knows that he and they will be judged by their successors, just as we judge people and events which have passed into history. His problem is to try to understand, firstly, if men can have

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[1] Sartre, Les Séquestrés d'Altona, Paris, Gallimard, 1960, p. 52.

consciously and responsibly willed what they did in the war, and secondly, if they did, how these actions can possibly be justified before future generations.

J.K. Simon [1] describes Frantz's action as deliberate self-delusion, an attempt to escape from involvement and it is this, yet in one way, Frantz is totally involved. He has undertaken to defend not only himself, but his whole generation and has taken his place as a guilty man before a tribunal of the future, represented by "les crabes" which are all over his room. He is however guilty of "mauvaise foi", of an escape from involvement, just as Camus was guilty in Sartre's eyes for withdrawing from his situation and cutting himself off from history. It is difficult to overcome individual scruples, to take one's place in time throughout one's life, but this is what must be done. To be sure, the world is "une piscine pleine de boue et de sang" [2] and those too fastidious to accept it or to reconcile themselves with it tend to withdraw into solitude like Frantz or Goetz, powerless defiance like Hugo or Lucien Drelitsch, lofty judgment or worse, condemnation, or, like Camus, an uncomfortable seat

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[1] J.K. Simon, "Madness in Sartre: Sequestration and the Room", Yale French Studies, January 1964, No. 30, p. 64.

[2] Sartre, "Réponse à Albert Camus", Les Temps Modernes, août 1952, No. 82, (in Situations IV, Paris, Gallimard, 1964, p. 123).

on the fence. Sartre is the first to praise Camus' complete commitment to the wartime resistance and this is why it is painful for him to find that Camus changed, that he was afraid to speak out, to continue a course of action which would commit him finally and unequivocally to what he believed was right, and, as a famous and influential writer, it was his duty to speak out. A man is not likely to be wrong if he stands out against injustice, cruelty and oppression and there can be no justification for not speaking out against them.

In this action, he must be prepared to accept some things which may repel him. Jean Aguerra, in L'Engrenage, says in anguish to his dying friend Lucien, who reproaches him for having "les mains pleines de sang":

> Crois-tu que je ne sois pas désespéré moi-même? J'ai tout pris sur moi. Tous les meurtres et même ta mort. Et je me fais horreur. [1]

To Hélène, the woman he loved for many years: "Crois-tu que je ne me fais pas horreur?" but "je ne regrette rien...Et si c'était à refaire, je le referais." [2]

Jean took his place as leader of his country when he was needed; the workers were poor and oppressed as a result of the monopoly of a foreign concern which controlled the important oil industry. He had experienced their misery him-

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[1] Sartre, L'Engrenage, Paris, Nagel, 1962, p. 188.

[2] Ibid., p. 155.

self and knows the best way to combat it. He is thoroughly immersed in the situation, as is Pierre in Les Jeux sont Faits, and their personal affairs suffer as a result. But Jean cannot opt out, there is a course of action to follow through and he is the one to direct it. The solitude which must result from his immense responsibility is an extra affliction and he tries to drown it with whisky and prostitutes. Others, Frantz, the early Goetz, Hugo and Lucien, are all too concerned with their personal position and conscience to immerse themselves in a situation and to carry it through to its necessary conclusion, as are Mathieu in Les Chemins de la Liberté and Camus in recent history. I have named Camus here as Sartre himself took Camus to task and I am attempting to show, among other things, that Sartre is not an intellectual solely concerned with words, but very much a man of and in his situation and time. In fact Camus was, and is, not alone, particularly among intellectuals, in his attitude.

The concern with individuality is, for Sartre, the wrong way to face the absurdity in which man finds himself with reg ard to the world and to others. Most of his plays are very much concerned with the problem of finding an "issue" which is satisfactory and useful and he provides strong and convincing evidence that the individual issue cannot lead to salvation of any kind. But this would only present a negative position and to counteract the anguish and the failure, let

us consider the successful men in this theatre, the men who leave us with the certainty that their lives were both useful and valuable and that the stupidity of their deaths, as three of them are stupid, can in no way detract from the success of their lives.

CHAPTER IV

SUCCESS

The men that seem to stand out from any point of view in Sartre's theatre are Canoris (Morts sans Sépulture), Hoederer (Les Mains Sales), Goetz (Le Diable et le Bon Dieu) and Jean Aguerra (L'Engrenage). It is, to be sure, a small list, compared to the number of unsuccessful characters, but they remain with us, leaving us with a feeling of admiration and awe, the awe that Hugo feels, albeit unwillingly at first, for Hoederer. But they are not only awe-inspiring, they are models, patterns of action. Men of action, thoroughly immersed in the world, they all die but Goetz. We are left to decide whether the futility and stupidity of their deaths invalidate the actions of their lives, whether their lives were useless because they were lost to no avail.

Canoris and Hoederer are not even killed for their political beliefs. The tragedy is that they were still "parfaitement utilisables". In their situation, if a man was useful, then his life was valuable. They both died for a mistake, not killed for their acts, but at the whim of, in the case of Canoris, a sadistic collaborator, and in the case of Hoederer, a boy who felt betrayed. Their deaths are stupid and tragic and we are made to understand this fully by Sartre's presentation of the killers. Hoederer, dying, realizes the

futility and absurdity: "Ah! c'est trop con." [1] There is no question that we are meant to feel, and do feel, the absurdity of his being killed "pour une femme" [1] but a man should be judged on his life and what he does with it, not just on his death.

One of the most striking features of the lives of these men is their boundless capacity for loving and understanding their fellow men, and not in the abstract fashion of "l'Autodidacte" [2] but as men with virtues and vices, good and bad points. The comforter and sustainer of the maquisards is Canoris. He draws them together, understands Henri's shouts of pain under torture, Francois' youthful fear, Lucie's humiliation and even Jean's frustrated powerlessness. He has been a revolutionary long enough to be fully aware of all it entails and so he can give strength to the others in their ordeal. He also has (which is an important quality of all these four men) a sense of timing. There is no chance that he, like Lucie and Henri, will be tempted to deeds of needless heroism. They shrink from the idea of putting the torturers on a false scent and thus saving themselves, but Canoris persuades them that they have not outlived their usefulness and that they can

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[1] Sartre, Les Mains Sales, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 231.

[2] In La Nausée, Paris, Gallimard, 1938.

still serve the cause if they live.

Hoederer's great compassion for men is set against Hugo's conception that they should be capable of something more than the urge to fill their empty stomachs, something which he considers more important:

> Quant aux hommes, ce n'est pas ce qu'ils sont qui m'intéresse, mais ce qu'ils pourront devenir. 1

The idea of communism is fine and noble but the men whom the Party was formed to liberate are selfish, dirty and mean and Hugo wants nothing to do with them. The end is for him all-important, with all men living in equality and dignity, but he finds it difficult to involve himself in the means of achieving this. Hoederer is closer to the basic problem, the method of bettering conditions, not so much the end product which will grow out of the means. Because of this he is closer to the men for whom he is fighting; he sees the future in their terms, what will be best for them, in the long and in the short run. He replies to Hugo:

> Et moi, je les aime pour ce qu'ils sont. Avec toutes leurs saloperies et leurs vices. J'aime leurs voix et leurs mains chaudes qui prennent et leur peau, la plus nue de toutes les peaux et leur regard inquiet et la lutte désespérée qu'ils mènent chacun à son tour contre la mort et contre l'angoisse. Pour moi, ça compte, un homme de plus ou de moins dans le monde. C'est précieux. 1

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[1] Sartre, Les Mains Sales, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 202.

Not only does he understand them, their fear, their hunger, their lack of self-respect, their struggle but he understands the fear, the hunger and the struggle of Hugo and he could, if Hugo let him, help him to "l'âge d'homme".[1] Hugo counts for as much with him as Slick or Georges - all men count and deserve their chance to act freely as men.

The great revolutionary leader, Jean Aguerra, in L'Engrenage, is a product of the working classes; he has felt misery and seen it all around him and this is what precipitates him into revolutionary activity. The scene where he and Lucien help the tortured Jew, the miserable woman and child, the impossibility of seeing anything around him but "Violence. Misère. Famine. Misère partout." [2] spur his rage into constructive and organised action. He protects the child, he helps the Jew, he befriends Lucien, sees to the safety of the striking workers, but to organise the successful revolution, he has to take all the power and all the responsibility on himself.

Out of this compassion for people and their life comes a knowledge that some things are necessary for a lesser evil or a greater good. Canoris knows that there is no time for heroics, Hoederer that to safeguard the future of the

[1] Sartre, Les Mains Sales, p. 220

[2] Sartre, L'Engrenage, Paris, Nagel, 1962, p. 158.

party and the people, a temporary alliance must be made with the other, reactionary parties, Jean that the country needs six years to prepare for the taking-over of the oil industry. Hoederer is supposed to be killed and Jean is killed because others do not have this capacity for judging the right time for action. They are impatient for quick success and quick results and because of this they do more harm to their own cause. This is most clear in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu, where Goetz, because of his impatience for good and disregard of the advice of Nasty, the peasant leader, who knows and understands the people and the situation, provokes the brutal and needless massacre of many innocent people. This impatience for absolutes where none exist is also characteristic of the workers in L'Engrenage. They think that a revolution will solve all existing problems and they expect an ideal state immediately, instead of working to create it consciously and together. A sense of timing, or perhaps it could be called political expediency, is the reason for the early success of these men, and later it is also the reason for their deaths, for it necessarily entails crushing all opposition and creating bitterness, hatred and misunderstanding.

Hoederer, Goetz and Jean are prepared to incur these things if they can carry out their task. Time and again, we see that, although certain acts disgust them, they consider them necessary and are prepared to carry them through

if the situation demands it. The words of blood, mud and dirty hands occur so often that they are obviously of extreme importance in the question of involvement in action and commitment to a cause. From Les Mouches to Les Séquestrés d'Altona, Sartre's characters are obsessed by whether they can justify actions like murder, lying, cruelty, expediency, to themselves and to others. The strength of men like Jean Aguerra and Hoederer is that they do not undertake such a justification (Jean's testimony is not so much a justification as a chronicle). Theirs are necessary actions and that is all the justification required. They cannot separate themselves from their acts of violence because the situation demands violence and they are in the situation, whether they like it or not. Discussing the same question in his "Réponse à Albert Camus", Sartre says:

> Si je pensais que l'histoire fût une piscine pleine de boue et de sang, je ferais comme vous, j'imagine, et j'y regarderais deux fois avant de me plonger. Mais supposez que j'y sois déjà... [1]

The fact that these acts are necessary could lead critics to argue that in this case men are not free, that they are forced to act. This is not true, they could and often do avoid action in a situation which is wellnigh intolerable. Man is free to act or not to act but his

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[1] Sartre, "Réponse à Albert Camus", Situations IV, Paris, Gallimard, 1964, p. 123.

freedom is placed at a time in History and this in itself offers him the choices which determine his freedom. If he chooses to act, that in itself imposes choice of means and further actions. His freedom is his choice and he has it in every situation. If Jean decides to hold out against nationalisation of the oil industry for six years, if he decides that this is the only means by which his country can survive, then he must remove all those who oppose his decision. The choice of an end imposes the choice of means to attain this end and the end can only be attained by choosing means appropriate to attaining it. Jean tries to persuade Lucien of the danger of publishing articles criticising his policy and inflaming public opinion, and when this fails, all that remains is either to see the failure of his plans or to silence Lucien.

The friendship involved in this situation poses yet another problem which men like this have to face, that of the place of a personal life. Canoris has a wife "en Grèce" but he has left her to fight with the French Resistance; Hoederer seems to have no personal life at all; Jean renounces any attempt to conquer the woman he loves. Canoris' words: "Je n'ai jamais pu me passioner pour les affaires personnelles" [1] are those of a man who has decided on his prior-

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, Paris, Gallimard, 1947, p. 186.

ities. This is not to say that personal affairs are unimportant; Canoris tries to think of his wife, Jean has been deeply in love with Hélène for many years and Hoederer falls prey momentarily to Jessica's wiles, but for them there are things more urgent and important. In shutting themselves off in their personal lives, they would be neglecting more vital concerns. A personal life is for them an addition and would not be enough alone on which to build their lives. Together with a life of action, it may even be a hindrance. [1] Rivière, in St. Exupéry's Vol de Nuit, is the same type of person, dedicated to a life of action. To succeed fully in what he does, he must make his personal life subservient to his work and try to persuade his pilots to do the same. This is not easy and brings a solitude and hardness which may be overpowering. To protect himself against this solitude, Jean Aguerra turns to whisky but it does not divert him from his action, his "projet" and that of his people. This "projet" is one of the the most important features of Sartre's thinking, particularly with regard to freedom and involvement. By his choice of a "projet", a man determines his life and thus it is essential that it be a good and useful one. If it concerns only him-

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[1] As is the family of Hemmelrich in La Condition Humaine. When his wife and child have been murdered, he feels himself completely free to commit himself to the revolutionary movement.

self and is entirely personal, like that of Garcin, Hugo or Oreste, it is doomed to failure, for it takes no account of others, their needs or their lives, or of one's own place and time in the world and history. One dies and what is left? Nothing but the memory of a life devoted to personal satisfaction, justification and interest. In the face of death, these are nothing and are of no use to anyone, least of all to the dead or dying man.

The fear of death and annihilation has always been one of great concern to philosophers, and many solutions have been proposed, from stoicism, the hope of an afterlife, fame, from getting as much as possible while it is possible, to utter despair. The fear of death rots life, takes away from it any meaning which a man could attempt to give it. It takes away his capacity for action, in that he wants to <u>be</u> something rather than <u>do</u> something. I have discussed earlier man's desire to have an entity in others' eyes and his failure to realize that only he can create one and only by actions which he must choose. Death is the final decider for it closes the door on future attempts to change, as Garcin finds out to his cost.

It is noticeable that the four characters with whom I am concerned in this chapter have no fear of death and what is more, it is not part of their thinking to wonder whether they will have a good death or a bad one, what people will

think of them after their death and so on. It is life, in all its difficulty and absurdity which occupies them, not their own life, but the life of all men, how best to make this a good life for them, and if their own life proves useful for this purpose, it is an added advantage.

Many men are in a situation which needs improvement and help but it is their own choice whether they take steps to act and alter it. Frantz von Gerlach refuses to believe that he is still "en situation", that his role is not over, and even had he continued living a "normal" life after the war, he would not necessarily have been committed to action. In the part of Qu'est-ce que la Littérature? entitled Pour qui écrit-on? Sartre emphasizes this point. He had once said of a writer (but it is equally true for all men): "Il est dans le coup, quoi qu'il fasse, marqué, compromis jusque dans son plus lointaine retraite." [1] Etiemble, and many others, have understood him to mean by this "dans le coup" a synonym for "engagement":

> Etre dans le coup, dans le bain. Je reconnaissais à peu près le mot de Blaise Pascal: 'Nous sommes embarqués.' Mais du coup je voyais l'engagement perdre toute valeur, réduit soudain au fait le plus banal, au fait du prince et de l'esclave, à la condition humaine. [2]

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[1] Sartre, Situations II, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 123.

[2] Etiemble, "Heureux les Ecrivains qui meurent pour quelque chose", Combat, 24 janvier 1947.

Sartre clarifies and continues:

> Je ne dis pas autre chose.... Si tout homme est embarqué, cela ne veut point dire qu'il en ait pleine conscience; la plupart passent leur temps à se dissimuler leur engagement. [1]

He goes on to say that, although a man is necessarily situated, he can retreat from commitment into lies, daydreams, seeing only ends or only means, into solitude, reflection, judgment, in fact, into any form of "la vie intérieure". [2] This is, in Sartre's words, to "ôter à la vie toute valeur en la considérant du point de vue de la mort". [2] This retreat into the self can only lead to misery and despair, the attitude of many people today, and it is indeed despairing to find oneself "en situation" and to do nothing about it.

The step which many Sartrian characters and which Camus and others have hesitated to take, is the step of commitment of oneself and one's freedom in action with others. For if we accept that "(l)'homme est fait par d'autres hommes, son ennemi n° 1, c'est l'homme", [3] the only way to overcome this is to join with other men, to fight what they are fighting, to become one with them instead of one separated

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[1] Sartre, Situations II, p. 123.

[2] Ibid., p. 124.

[3] Sartre, "Réponse à Albert Camus", Situations IV, Paris, Gallimard, 1964, p. 120.

from them.

Wilfred Desan discusses this hope of salvation through the "group", as he puts it:

> Each act can be said to be a free individual development, yet it is only such through the group. The group alone makes the act efficient and is instrumental in its success. Although it can be said in all truth that the individual freely joins the group, it is no less certain that if he wants to survive, he must join, for salvation lies where the group is. [1]

Canoris, Hoederer, Jean Aguerra and Goetz have compassion for the suffering of men, therefore they join their struggle, they make that struggle their own struggle. A man working alone cannot fully understand the needs of other men, for he is not with them, he is not part of their situation. He must join them if he recognizes that their cause is just.

To be sure, it is difficult in some cases to choose who is right and who is wrong, but in most cases the issues are not too dubious for the oppressor to be distinguished from the oppressed, the torturer from the tortured. And a choice must be made, for to choose is the right and duty of men, and to be able to choose is what constitutes their greatness. To be a member of a group tortured or oppressed makes the choice easier, for it is a fight for survival (the choice can be to suffer in silence) but to actively sympat-

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[1] Wilfred Desan, The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre, New York, Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1965, p. 144.

hize and help is more difficult and this is why Sartre's work is so vital: it teaches the necessity for action. Other writers have taken the same stand; Francis Jeanson went to help the oppressed in Algeria Hemingway and others to aid the Spanish Republicans. In Western society we do not know or feel what people elsewhere in the world have had forced on them and it is of great importance that thinking people give the lead in helping them.

A man like Jean Aguerra had himself been oppressed and had chosen to lead the battle against the oppressors, but Hoederer, Canoris and Goetz had to make a conscious choice. Canoris had no need to help the French maquisards, nor Hoederer men like Georges and Slick, nor Goetz to lead the peasants. They were all free and chose willingly to engage their freedom in "une cause". They chose to make this their "issue". It is no accident that the cause was in three cases a communist cause, that is to say, a working man's cause, for without question it is the working or peasant class which is the most oppressed, living as they often do in squalour and appalling conditions. The situation of people who are forced to endure such conditions is one to which they can submit for so long, until finally it becomes too much and they revolt. But their revolt is too often disorganised, sporadic, futile and easily crushed by militia or by a well-organised, well-armed oppressor class. This has happened countless times in slave

revolts, in race riots, in strikes or in colonial uprisings. It happens when the oppressed, seeing and feeling only their own bitter misery, lash out in spontaneous revolt and neglect the equally important problem of really achieving something by powerful organised rebellion. To be successful in what they undertake, they need strong leaders.

Aguerra, Hoederer and Goetz are these leaders. They have a deep sympathy for the cause of the people and can see the end as well as existing conditions and the means, which the people are unable to do. They have, too, the conviction that their actions and the cause are right and just and they do not flinch from what these entail. They are intellectuals in the sense that they have thought deeply about the course of action that they have undertaken ("un intellectuel, il faut que ça pense" says Hoederer [1]), they are prepared to accept full responsibility for all that they do and this leaves no room or time for futile, time-consuming regret.

Neither is it a coincidence that these men are older, more experienced than characters such as Oreste and Hugo. These last are impatient for final results, dazzled by an idea, and they have only just set out on "les chemins de la liberte". Oreste had a dim conception of this:

> Il y a un autre chemin..., mon chemin...il part d'ici et il descend vers la ville...il faut

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[1] Sartre, Les Mains Sales, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 219.

> descendre, comprends-tu, descendre jusqu'à Vous, vous êtes au fond d'un trou, tout au fond... 1

and later:

> Nous allons partir et nous marcherons à pas lourds, courbés sous notre précieux fardeau. Tu me donneras la main et nous irons...vers nous-mêmes. De l'autre côté des fleuves et des montagnes, il y a un Oreste et une Electre qui nous attendent. Il faudra les chercher patiemment. 2

He knows that they have created and will continue to create themselves and he knows that the best way to continue would be to stay and work with the people of Argos whom he has "liberated" and yet he abandons them.

The successful Sartrian characters have realized that they are free, have assumed their freedom, have accepted the solitude which this brings. Then, "en situation", they have continued to the last and most difficult stage of the road, acting freely within the situation to change it. It is no youthful, hot-headed impulse, it is a reflected, conscious decision, taken in the knowledge that it is not likely to lead to happiness or to personal glory, but it is the only means of salvation, both for them and for others. They still experience solitude; Hoederer seeks out Hugo and Jessica and Jean tries to drown it all in whisky and with prostitutes, but they

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[1] Sartre, Théâtre, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 64.

[2] Ibid., p. 104.

have something bigger to fight than their individual solitude and this drives them on.

The end that they are fighting to achieve may not be attained, but the process of fighting for it is worthwhile as a striving after something better. The danger is to fight for the cause or for the idea and to neglect the men who make the cause, the men for whom the idea was formulated. A man must work for men with men. If he becomes dominated by the idea of a classless society, which is and must be his final aim, he runs the risk of turning that into an absolute which has no foundation in reality. Even if this idea should become reality, it is then itself in danger of becoming oppression, by virtue of having become the government, the ruling force: "Les idéologies sont liberté quand elles se font, oppression quand elles sont faites." [1] If the state of perfect liberty for all men is a Utopia, there remains the attempt to create it which is renewed constantly all over the world, and there is hope of improvement in spite of individual deaths and setbacks. We can be continually working in the situations where improvement is essential, and we can accept the fact that we are using our freedom in the attempt to achieve freedom for all man and to break out of the limitations which are imposed on our freedom by other forces.

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[1] Sartre, Situations II, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 195.

There may be small victories or successes and these are all constructive and hopeful in a present situation of oppression. No victory, however, is ever final or an end in itself, just as no single defeat will make people accept to live for ever in appalling subjection. Men must realize that each success or failure leads on to other attempts and they must not lose sight in the meanwhile of the needs of those close to them. It is easy to judge, to condemn or praise the efforts of people in a distant country, but closer home, one becomes involved oneself in "la boue et le sang". Even so, the practical solution is the one which Sartre proposes: "La seule manière de venir en aide aux esclaves de là-bas, c'est de prendre le parti de ceux d'ici" [1] and this is what each of the four men discussed in this chapter does. They have assumed their place and its responsibility and they tackle their task practically.

The deaths of Canoris, Hoederer and Jean Aguerra are then neither a victory nor a defeat for anyone. François, Jean's successor, is forced to continue Jean's policy and the party adopts Hoederer's plan, after ordering his murder for this same plan. Later, not to lay the party open to criticism for making such a mistake, his death must be put down to a "crime passionel", and this Hugo refuses to do,

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[1] Sartre, Situations IV, Paris, Gallimard, 1964, p. 107.

in order to give a more serious purpose to Hoederer's death. Jean and Hoederer have not achieved lasting renown for themselves, nor the thanks and gratitude of the men for whom they have worked and to whom they have dedicated their lives, these same men who kill them. How then can they be considered to have succeeded? The answer to this is that they chose to take part in the struggle of men to realize the freedom to which they were born but which has been denied them by oppressors and tyrants. For these four men this was the only valid "issue" in their situation.

If people familiar with Sartre's theatre were asked to indicate which characters were the most pitiable, they would undoubtedly cite, among others, Garcin, Hugo, Frantz or Kean. One reason why this theatre is so compelling and generates so much controversy is that it deals strongly and unequivocally with "la condition humaine", its problems, its hopelessness and its chance for greatness:

> La liberté pourrait passer pour une malédiction, elle est une malédiction. Mais c'est aussi l'unique source de la grandeur humaine. [1]

A philosophy is not a system of living if it is entirely hopeless, for man cannot live with complete hopelessness. Hopelessness can and does exist but he must struggle to combat and overcome it and the absurdity which results from dictates

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[1] Sartre, Présentation des Temps Modernes, Les Temps Modernes, No. 1, October 1945, (in Situations II, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 27.)

of absolute right and wrong. Great strength is necessary, the strength that men together can give to one another to overcome personal problems.

In the words of Francis Jeanson, the process which Sartre's theatre demonstrates is "le dépassement de l'absolu au relatif, de la passion d'etre libre à l'engagement dans le monde des entreprises concrètes." [1] It is the painful and difficult passing from one of these stages to another and the strength and determination which are necessary to achieve something worthwhile with one's life that I have attempted to discuss here. Goetz has to pass from standards of absolute good and evil and Oreste has to discover the difference between free action and responsible action, while many characters flounder between the two, sometimes not even realizing that they are floundering; even if some do realize, they are often beaten by the struggle into revolt, passive resistance, acceptance, rejection of all but self or retirement in utter despair.

The men that readers and spectators of Sartre's plays admire are the strong, compassionate fighters who are convinced that they are acting in a just cause, who are confident that the battle will be won, even if they must have "les mains sales" to win it, and even if an absurd death and

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[1] Francis Jeanson, Sartre par lui-même, Paris, Seuil, 1955, (rev. 1961), p. 156.

oblivion awaits them personally. They are fighting for life and it is life that requires them to play their part in the life of all men. Life, not death, is their concern. If we admire them, if we admit the rightness and authenticity of what they do, then we must, like them, realize that it is only when we commit our freedom freely and consciously to the attempt to understand and deal with the problems that beset men in this mid-twentieth century world that we can hope for any kind of salvation, whether personal or collective.

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