

THE THEME OF VICTIM
IN THE
WORKS OF EUGENE IONESCO

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by

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ABSTRACT

The reality of man's existence became a great source of inspiration in Eugène Ionesco's theatre. The aim of this thesis is to examine Ionesco's ideas on the victimization of man in his universe. In our presentation of his concepts, examples will be shown from various works (La Leçon, La Cantatrice Chauve, Les Chaises, Jacques ou La Soumission, Rhinocéros, Victimes du Devoir, Amédée ou Comment s'en débarrasser, and Jeux de Massacre) in order to fully examine his particular vision of life. Such a study aims at bringing about a realization and understanding of the conditions man is exposed to in the universe.

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INTRODUCTION

Ionesco's contribution to contemporary drama is of significant value to mankind because of its sincere attempt to re-establish an awareness of the human condition. Firstly, one must realize that this contemporary dramatist is part of the enormous upsurge in creative exploration. One recalls the names of Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov and numerous other avant-garde writers in Italy, Britain, France, Germany - all of whom attempted to transform and broaden man's understanding of the world.

It is perhaps, however, Arthur Adamov who first expressed a deeper, more intense and more open approach to seeking the balance between the curable and incurable sides of human existence. As an author of some of the most powerful plays in contemporary drama, he considered the realistic value of formulating obsessions and preoccupations as an important part of the theatrical presentation. In his particular works, he clearly poses the alternative between the theatre as an instrument for expressing the individual's anxieties, nightmares and obsessions and the theatre as an instrument of social collectivism and political ideologies.

A second writer, Eugène Ionesco initially expressed the same premises in his formative years. He, too, developed a similar aesthetic of the absurd, depicting a senseless, brutal and nightmarish world. Adamov's later career, however, developed into a realistic theatre based on the presentation of man's existence being centred around a definite social purpose. Although Eugène Ionesco's career

closely parallels this late 1940 dramatist, his conclusions are emphatically opposite.

Ionesco is oftentimes considered to be an avant-garde writer because he does not incorporate the traditional modes with the innovations of the modern theatre. By moving away from the presentation of realism, Ionesco depicts a deeper sense of reality - the expression of an incommunicable reality.

Ionesco's analysis and elucidation of man's existence goes beyond the approach of other dramatist's like Giraudoux, Sartre or Camus. Their definitions are based on a logically constructed reasoning. For Ionesco, however, objective reality does not help to formulate our understanding. Man must be stripped of all illusions in order to consciously face the tragedy of the human condition.

Ionesco believes that the first step lies in the renewal of language, like revolution which will revitalize our comprehension of the absurdity of commonplace. We shall, in his early works (La Cantatrice Chauve, La Leçon, Les Chaises) show how his devaluation of language is a magnification of the existing state of affairs. By reducing language to its proper function, our anxieties and illusions of the absurd become recognizable. Ionesco endeavours to show us the enormous political (Rhinocéros) and social pressures (Jacques ou la Soumission) which seek to induce mankind to lose faith with himself, the superficial material satisfaction of the bourgeois world (La Cantatrice Chauve), mass consumption, death (Jeux de Massacre) and old age (Les Chaises).

Ultimately, we shall show that Eugène Ionesco's works do not necessarily reflect despair nor a return to irrational forces, but moreover, his presentation of man as a victim is a valid attempt to face up to the human condition as it exists. It is an attempt to free him from the illusion, social pressures, loss of faith and mechanization and to allow him for the first time to face with dignity an acceptance of the senselessness of existence.

CHAPTER I

VICTIMS OF LANGUAGE IN LA LEÇON

Ionesco's works are not expressions of realism, but are excursions into the world of reality. In terms of the theatre, realism falsifies man's actual existence making rational assumptions of various concepts that surround man in his daily existence such as psychological continuity, time and space, and cause and effect. "Realism, whether it be socialist or not, falls short of reality. It shrinks it, attenuates it, falsifies it; it does not take into account our basic truths and our fundamental obsessions: love, death, astonishment. It presents man in a reduced and estranged perspective."¹ This is why Ionesco's theatre oftentimes is based on exaggeration. Without this technique, we would never truly be exposed to the reality of our existence.

When Ionesco first began writing plays, he wanted to destroy our deep rooted convictions and furnish our minds with a deeper form of understanding. His first step was to re-evaluate language since it serves as man's key to communication and expression. "Two provinces especially would seem to belong by right to the domain of rational man: language and mathematics. It is therefore significant that, in La Leçon, these are precisely the two subjects by means of which the professor brings

¹ Richard N. Coe, Ionesco (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), p. 2. Hereafter cited as Coe.

about the final moral disintegration of his pupil."²

The design and subject of La Leçon⁵ is well chosen as Ionesco bases his argument as proof on a genuine teacher-pupil lesson. In this early work, he illustrates that language may become a powerful instrument used to manipulate and dominate an individual. Language is, at this point, capable of victimizing man.

To understand this particular view of Ionesco's work which is going to be the focal point throughout this dissertation, it is essential to define the term "victim". Richard Coe explains this in terms of language attaining such power that it not merely "creates existence, but, having done so, proceeds to tyrannise and victimise its own creation".³ A clear example of victim is where a living creature is sacrificed during some kind of ritual. In La Leçon⁵, Ionesco presents the hazards of victimization through the personage of the professor and the pupil. An initially meaningful relationship between teacher and pupil progresses to the stage of executioner and victim during the exercise.

The movement toward the creation of a victim is undetectable in the first scene of the play as no indication is given that a rape/murder will occur. Ionesco develops the process with the movement of the play. Seipel feels that the steps building up to the sacrifice are due to the changing of the professor's character into a demon which is effected without words or motions.⁴ This is not necessarily true since La Leçon⁵ is a

² Coe, p. 29.

³ Coe, p. 43.

⁴ Hildegard Seipel, "Entre Réalisme et surréalisme", in Raymond Laubreaux, Les Critiques de Notre Temps et Ionesco (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1973), pp. 34-40.

drama of language where human words and phrases are elevated to such a high degree of responsibility, that the once rational form of communication can no longer be taken for granted. It is the professor's use of language which initiates his transformation into a demon expressing violent motions and aggressive movements.

The professor's metamorphosis and the eventual victimization of the pupil may be broken down into several stages. The victim that Ionesco creates in La Leçon is a victim of language because a "small reservoir of power which is teased into the play at the start builds rhythmically and in waves until it possesses the professor and overwhelms the pupil".⁵ One critic of Ionesco, Richard Schechner comprehended the elevation of language as a seven step phase,⁶ but his analysis adheres

⁵ Richard Schechner, "An Inquiry into Play Structure", in Rosette C. Lamont, ed., Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Prentice Hall Inc., 1973), p. 34. Hereafter cited as Schechner.

6	I	II	III
	<u>Opening Game</u>	<u>Interlude</u>	<u>Sexual Stimulation</u>
	The Lesson, Marie lets the pupil in.	First meeting between Pupil and Professor; addition; mutual easy pleasure.	Throughout, but increasing during ear game and intensified by Marie's warnings.
	IV	V	VI
	<u>Overt Lewdness</u>	<u>Pleasure/Fear/Pain</u>	<u>Expression</u>
	The transformation of the professor from an old man into a young man; ultimately the exposure of his "knife".	Pleasure at first when Pupil co-operates; fear as she resists; his increasing frustration with her; after the murder, his submission to Marie.	Rape/murder; Marie's disarming the Professor.
	VII		
	<u>Gratification</u>		
	Rape/murder; becoming a child again with Marie as mother.		

too strictly to the structural aspects of the play. It constrains the cyclical movement of victimization and thereby loses the rhythmical movement of the language. Bonnefoy better expresses the development in a conversation with Ionesco:

"I wanted to describe an ascending curve, to start out quietly and build to the professor's crescendo of madness, then to a violent fall."⁷

Using this as a guideline, a division of La Leçon⁵ into three segments would be more conducive to a concentrated approach to the creation of a victim: 1) Platonic Phase; 2) Stimulation and Frustration; 3) Final Sacrifice. By projecting the idea of an "ascending curve"⁸ in three phases, the varied functions of language will be clearly illustrated. Initially, Ionesco presents language as a means of establishing human relations, then as a vehicle to induce emotion and stimulation and finally as a powerful instrument of death.

Rational language is the primary instrument which human beings use to communicate with each other and to establish human relations. This function of language is presented by Ionesco in the Platonic Phase of La Leçon⁵. Here, the main characters are introduced and the inter-relationship of their roles is revealed. The professor and pupil find

⁷ Claude Bonnefoy, Conversations with Eugène Ionesco, trans. Jan Dawson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 87. Hereafter cited as Bonnefoy.

⁸ Ibid., p. 87.

a superficial comfort in the phraseology of common speech. Ionesco presents the possibility that language can be in a dormant stage by the use of harmless, banal phrases. In La Leçon, the speeches of the professor and the pupil are deliberately heavy and slow to portray the awkward relationship between the two. In their efforts to exercise language as a means of communication, the tone of this interlude is tranquil. Language controlled at this point, does not jeopardize the situation.

L'Elève: Oui, Monsieur. Bonjour, Monsieur. Vous voyez, je suis venue à l'heure. Je n'ai pas voulu être en retard.

Le Professeur: C'est bien, Mademoiselle. Merci, mais il ne fallait pas vous presser. Je ne sais comment m'excuser de vous avoir fait attendre.⁹

The trivial language develops a confidence between the two characters and obscures any hint of victimization. Ionesco discloses through this preliminary phase of communication that even though man may use the platitudes of language as a social solution, he can still maintain his dominance over language.

Language plays an indispensable role in the teaching profession to communicate intellectual concepts. Language emancipates the professor and entices him out of his shell to the point where he begins to resemble

⁹ Eugène Ionesco, Théâtre, Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 61.

Henceforth cited as La Leçon.

his true self, expounding in intellectual rational thoughts. His timid nature diminishes when he feels at ease with the placid language. The professor's speeches are less restrained as he begins to relax with the rhythmical movement of the fundamental teaching techniques based on language.

Le Professeur: Vos parents, Mademoiselle, ont parfaitement raison. Vous devez pousser vos études. Je m'excuse de vous le dire, mais c'est une chose nécessaire.¹⁰

Man must, however, be cautious of the effects that language can produce at such a platonic level. The deterioration of the human element and the victimization of man by language will be analyzed at various points in the play where Ionesco is trying to reveal to us some "monstrous formless state of being"¹¹ that language can manufacture.

Language helps formulate man's occupational roles in society and serves as a guideline to announce the merit of each individual. It can declare the level of sophistication and the calibre of the speaker. In La Leçon, Ionesco illustrates how certain words and phrases relate to the teaching role to exemplify the educational system. The intellectual excellence in the professor's language influences the pupil to idolize his

¹⁰ La Leçon, p. 63.

¹¹ Eugène Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 181. Hereafter cited as Notes and Counter Notes.

competence as a teacher.

Le Professeur: Alors si vous voulez bien me permettre, mes excuses, je vous dirais qu'il faut se mettre au travail. Nous n'avons guère de temps à perdre.

L'Elève: Mais au contraire, Monsieur, je le veux bien. Et même je vous en prie.¹²

Parental communication has accorded encouragement and incentive to the pupil to become educated as well.

L'Elève: Mes parents aussi désirent que j'approfondisse mes connaissances. Ils veulent que je me spécialise. Ils pensent qu'une simple culture générale, même si elle est solide, ne suffit plus, à notre époque.¹³

The desire of the pupil to be associated with the intellectual role indicates her victimization. "L'élève, submergée par les connaissances requises au 'Doctorat total'¹⁴ is already a victim of language and the learning process. It is no wonder that she later becomes "encerclée par l'assault des mathématiques ou de l'érudition linguistique qui l'agressent

¹² La Leçon, p. 64.

¹³ La Leçon, p. 13.

¹⁴ Paul Vernois, La Dynamique Théâtrale D'Eugène Ionesco (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1972), p. 77. Hereafter cited as Vernois.

de toutes parts, succombe à un ennemi qui la traque ... L'élève n'est bientôt plus qu'une prisonnière, une bête prise au piège."¹⁵ Doubrovsky suggests that the pupil's desire to succeed academically stems from an inner search to attain superficial comfort through rational logic. "The rationality to which we desparately cling only exists in and by our words his characters have a diseased urge to understand".¹⁶ The pupil's eagerness is reflected in the rapidity of her answers during the mathematics quiz.

Le Professeur: Trois et un?

L'Elève: Quatre.

Le Professeur: Quatre et un?

L'Elève: Cinq.¹⁷

Her keen spirit is strengthened by the professor's use of flattery. Language in this form dupes the individual to depress the natural defence barrier of skepticism.

Le Professeur: Magnifique. Vous êtes magnifique. Vous êtes exquise. Je vous félicite chaleureusement, Mademoiselle. Ce n'est pas la peine de continuer.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁶ J.S. Doubrovsky, Ionesco and the Comic of Absurdity, in Rosette C. Lamont, ed., Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1973), pp. 15-16.

¹⁷ La Leçon, pp. 66-67.

¹⁸ La Leçon, p. 67.

The form of language reflects the mechanical existence of daily routine where the professor is conditioned to praise his pupil when correct answers are given. Ionesco is illustrating the pointlessness of language whereby the overuse of flattery can degenerate into a series of mechanical formulae. At this point, it is no longer the individual expressing his own feelings, but it is language asserting power over the individual's true self. Language begins to arouse the professor to a stage where he loses his composure. This is the Stimulation and Frustration stage. One critic compares the state of language as a machine which is "slow and regular at first, in the same way as the professor's nervous irritation and confusion in La Leçon. Then the accumulation gathers speed until it reaches a mad precipitation".¹⁹ The professor suffers a radical distortion of thought and purpose when he expounds a proliferation of lists:

Le Professeur: ... il y a aussi des grandeurs, des sommes, il y a des groupes, il y a des tas, des tas de choses telles que les prunes, les wagons, les oies, les pépins.²⁰

Language now becomes a state of being. The professor, once capable of human, rational expression begins to relate to the pupil in terms of invisible objects. At one point in the lesson, he uses invisible matches

¹⁹ J. Guicharnaud, Modern French Theatre; from Giraudoux to Genet (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 184.

²⁰ La Leçon, p. 68.

as a focal point for discussion.

Le Professeur: Tenez. Voici trois allumettes. En voici encore une, ça fait quatre. Regardez bien, vous en avez quatre, j'en retire une. Combien vous en reste-t-il?²¹

In reality, the professor is forcing his pupil to review the rationality of her own language (symbolized by the revision of addition sums) which will in turn renew the concept of her own logical vision of the world. In a reasoned, logical argument, one should see that the conclusion follows logically from the data. In the case of the pupil, she can comprehend the structure and inner logic of addition. In a rational universe, the data used in any reasoning process, such as the process of addition, should be able to be verified by other reasoned arguments (i.e., subtraction), if the data is legitimate. The pupil's basic principles of intelligence and logic begin to weaken when the professor uses the theory of subtraction as a reasoned argument. She cannot comprehend the principle of logic based on subtraction.

Le Professeur: Ce n'est pas ça. Ce n'est pas ça du tout. Vous avez toujours tendance à additionner. Mais il faut aussi soustraire. C'est ça la vie ... C'est ça la science. C'est ça le progrès, la civilisation.

²¹ La Leçon, p. 69.

L'Elève: Oui, Monsieur.

Le Professeur: Revenons à nos allumettes. J'en ai donc quatre.
Vous voyez, elles sont bien quatre. J'en retire
une, il n'en reste plus que ...

L'Elève: Je ne sais pas, Monsieur.²²

Failing any success using the matches, the professor tries to explain the theory of subtraction using sticks. The "bâton" scene is structurally important in the analysis of the play in terms of victimization and deserves consideration. The vertical image of sticks is a traditional phallic symbol indicating a future rape victim.

Le Professeur: Ce sont des bâtons, Mademoiselle, des bâtons.
Ici un bâton; là ce sont deux bâtons; là, trois
bâtons, puis quatre bâtons, puis cinq bâtons.
Un bâton, deux bâtons, trois bâtons, quatre et
cinq bâtons, ce sont des nombres.²³

The "bâton" image implies a beating by the rhythm of the words and designates a victim by the image. This symbol becomes a reality for the conclusion of La Leçon where the pupil is raped and beaten.

During the discussion of "bâtons", the rhythm of the language accelerates to show the professor's state of anxiety. The prolific use of the word "bâton" coincides with the rhythm of a beating to manifest the

²² La Leçon, p. 72.

²³ La Leçon, p. 72.

the evolution of a victim. Not only does the excessive use of this word demonstrate the degeneration of language into formulae, but also emphasizes the numerous previous rape/murder victims of the professor. She is soon to become the forty-first victim.

The "bâton" scene is a critical turning point in La Leçon. The professor's change in behaviour is paralleled with the deterioration of language into what eventually becomes a monstrous state of being. He chooses the pupil's body as his central focal point in the lesson, gradually overpowering his pupil by the repetition of words to the degree where she is surrounded and victimized by his language. The transition is matched by the tempo and excitement of the language in the "ear scene".

Le Professeur: Bon. Je vous en ajoute encore une. Combien en auriez-vous?

L'Elève: Trois oreilles.

Le Professeur: J'en enlève une ... Il vous reste ... combien d'oreilles?

L'Elève: Deux.

Le Professeur: Bon. J'en enlève encore une, combien vous en reste-t-il?

L'Elève: Deux.

Le Professeur: Non. Vous en avez deux, j'en prends une, je vous en mange une, combien vous en reste-t-il?

L'Elève: Deux.

Le Professeur: J'en mange une ... une.

L'Elève: Deux.

Le Professeur: Une.

L'Elève: Deux.

Le Professeur: Une!

L'Elève: Deux!

Le Professeur: Une!!

L'Elève: Deux!!²⁴

The excessive use of exclamation marks reinforces the intemperate sensation. Paul Vernois describes the professor's actions as a passion brought on by the use of language. "Le Professeur perd pied et glisse à des gestes incontrôlés sous l'empire du désir. La fin échevelée de la pièce correspond aussi au désordre d'une passion assourie qui laisse place soudain au désarroi et au remords".²⁵ The passion becomes sexual when attention is deliberately directed to a physical part of the pupil's body - the ears. The lesson is now on an intimate level.

Le Professeur: Vous n'avez pas compris mon exemple. Supposez que vous n'avez qu'une seule oreille.²⁶

Language as an educational and communicative tool is destroyed by the professor. Words now serve only as a means of physically possessing a human being. Language at this point endangers the pupil. The professor's own

²⁴ La Leçon, pp. 70-71.

²⁵ Vernois, p. 122.

²⁶ La Leçon, p. 70.

"vital and sexual energies are manifesting themselves; and his language is the magic formula/incantation to further evoke and stimulate these energies".²⁷

Le Professeur: Ou des chiffres! Ou des nombres! Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, ce sont des éléments de la numération, Mademoiselle.²⁸

The professor receives responsive excitement from his female student and receives pleasure from her reactions. As the professor and the pupil become entranced in the flow of words, the intensity of the language builds to a crescendo. Ionesco indicates that the "exaltation du professeur montait verticalement après une première phase de progression lente".²⁹

Le Professeur: ... Ça doit faire dix-neuf quintillions trois cent quatre-vingt-dix quadrillions deux trillions huit cent quarante-quatre milliards deux cent dix-neuf millions cent soixante-quatre mille cinq cent neuf ...³⁰

Martin Esslin describes the vertical progression in terms of a transformation from equal power in the male-female elements of the play to an ele-

²⁷ Schechner, p. 34.

²⁸ La Leçon, p. 72.

²⁹ Vernois, p. 61.

³⁰ La Leçon, p. 73.

vation of male power and dominance, leaving the female element weaker. Language then becomes an instrument of power. "As the play proceeds, the pupil who was eager, lively, and alert is gradually drained of her vitality, while the professor, who was timid and nervous at the beginning, gradually gains in assurance and domination. It is clear that the professor derives his progressive increase of power from his role as a giver ..."³¹

The transformation and the corresponding rhythmical pattern allude to the future beating, rape and murder scene. What we will eventually see is "this sturdy girl being finally sucked dry by the spider of a teacher. It wasn't just rape, it was vampirism ... And as he became stronger, her life was being sapped away until in the end, she was nothing but a limp rag".³² Sexual stimulation has increased during the "bâton" and "ear scenes" providing the professor with more male aggressiveness for his newest victim. Language is tempting the professor to become part of a new living energy. The repetitive language acts like a pendulum inducing his inner desires to oscillate with the vibration of the language in its prolific state.

Le Professeur: Oui ... Vous avez raison ... le produit est bien ...
 quintillions, quadrillions, trillions, milliards,
 millions ... cent soixante-quatre mille cinq
 cent huit ...³³

³¹ Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1968), p. 117. Hereafter cited as Esslin.

³² Bonnefoy, p. 103.

³³ La Leçon, p. 73.

The pendulum lacks the necessary momentum to allow the professor to seize his pupil although a progression of intensified feelings and anguish has been clearly established within the professor. The interruption by Mary and her consequent warning augments the professor's frustration to the point where he desperately wants self-liberation. The search for his satisfying transformation leads to a change in his subject matter - he has progressed from geography to arithmetic and now to philology.

Le Professeur: Ainsi donc, Mademoiselle, l'espagnol est bien la langue mère d'où sont nées toutes des langues néo-espagnoles, dont l'espagnol, le latin, l'italien, notre français, le portugais, le roumain, le sarde ou sardanaple, l'espagnol et le néo-espagnol ...³⁴

Language has created pent-up forces which he can still restrain, but the effort required to constrict both language and himself is already obvious. It is at this point that an explosion threatens since the impossibility of communication is clearly illustrated in the monologue on the neo Spanish language group. The professor is unable to make his pupil comprehend because their individual understanding of language and its function is on different wave lengths. The pupil fails to grasp the basic fact that all languages are almost identical and yet nevertheless slightly distinguishable.

³⁴ La Leçon, pp. 75-76.

Le Professeur: Ce qui distingue les langues néo-espagnoles entre elles et leur idiomes des autres groupes linguistiques, tels que le groupe des langues autrichiennes et néo-autrichiennes ou habsbourgiques, aussi, bien que les groupes espérantiste, helvétique, monégasque, suisse, andorrien, basque, pelote, aussi bien encore que des groupes des langues diplomatique et technique - ce qui les distingue, dis-je, c'est leur ressemblance frappante qui fait qu'on a bien du mal à les distinguer l'une de l'autre ...³⁵

The breakdown of communication in the neo-Spanish scene serves as a turning point in the play - the Final Sacrifice. Language so overpowers the professor that he paces instinctively around his pupil like a wild animal ready to attack. During this transformation scene, "the political implication of domination is certainly present ... which hinges on the sexual nature of all power and the relationship between language and power as the basis of all humanities".³⁶ When the professor's lecture reverts to a discussion on the pronunciation of language and the physical effort required in articulation, the pupil begins to suffer physical discomfort.

³⁵ La Leçon, p. 78.

³⁶ Esslin, p. 119.

Le Professeur: J'attire au passage votre attention sur les consonnes qui changent de nature en liaisons. Les f deviennent en ce cas des v, les d des t, les g des k et vice versa, comme dans les exemples que je vous signale: "trois heures, les enfants, le coq au vin, l'âge nouveau, voici la nuit".³⁷

The pupil is now a defenceless prey to the pressure of language because she is now overpowered by a painful toothache, but as Esslin points out, we must remember that it indicates the pupil's loss of power to speak, her loss of the gift of language.³⁸ The professor's language has encircled the fragile pupil - there is no possibility for escape. The once-gentle and timid spirit of the professor has disappeared and is superseded by an insistent and impatient individual to a point where language is now violent. "What Ionesco is saying is that even behind so apparently harmless an exercise of authority as the teacher-pupil relationship, all the violence and domination, all the aggressiveness and possessiveness, the cruelty and lust are present that make up any manifestation of power".³⁹

Le Professeur: Silence! Ou je vous fracasse le crâne!⁴⁰

Due to the physical threats which the professor directs towards his pupil,

³⁷ La Leçon, p. 78.

³⁸ Esslin, p. 118.

³⁹ Esslin, p. 119.

⁴⁰ La Leçon, p. 84.

her state of being becomes progressively worse until eventually her entire body begins to ache. Physical matter gains dominance over mental capabilities. The dominance of language has reached a climactic level for the pupil is in a total state of physical subjection. Now the professor himself is fully prepared for the final sacrifice:

Le Professeur: Procédons par ordre. Je vais essayer de vous
apprendre toutes les traductions du mot couteau ...⁴¹

The word "couteau" emphasizes the future victimization for it is the invisible object and the repetition of the word that strengthens the professor's dominance over the pupil for "c'est moi qui commande".⁴² By this time, language has gained so much power and energy that it must take a victim. As Bonnefoy points out, "The final exchanges have a mechanical character that emerges either through the repetition of a single phrase or even of single words, or else through the recitation of a series of numbers".⁴³ Ionesco uses all of these techniques to show the progression towards victimization, but the final blow results from the repetition and consequent mesmerization of the pupil's state of being embodied into one word - "couteau".

Le Professeur: Répétez, regardez, Couteau ... couteau ... couteau ...
couteau ...⁴⁴

⁴¹ La Leçon, p. 86.

⁴² La Leçon, p. 86.

⁴³ Bonnefoy, p. 82.

⁴⁴ La Leçon, p. 88.

The suffering of the pupil is emphasized through her efforts to massage and caress each part of her body that is threatened by the word "couteau".

L'Elève: J'ai mal ... ma gorge, cou ... ah ... mes épaules ...
mes seins ... couteau ...⁴⁵

The tempo of the play moves into a final state of frenzy where the professor hovers over his pupil in a frantic dance. "The sexual actions, barely visible at the start, are overt and direct in the rape/murder."⁴⁶ The visual effect suggests to the audience a ritual ceremony preceding the sacrifice of a victim.

"Ils sont tous les deux debout; lui, brandissant toujours son couteau invisible, presque hors de lui, tourne autour d'elle en une sorte de danse du scalp mais il ne faut rien exagérer et les pas de danse du Professeur doivent être à peine esquissés; l'Elève, debout, face au public, se dirige, en direction de la fenêtre, malade, langoureuse, envouée ..."⁴⁷

The approaching rape is paralleled by the breakdown of language, until eventually one word dominates the existence of the professor and the pupil.

Le Professeur: Couteau ... couteau ... couteau ...

L'Elève: Mes hanches .. couteau .. mes cuises .. cou ...

⁴⁵ La Leçon, p. 89.

⁴⁶ Schechner, p. 35.

⁴⁷ La Leçon, pp. 88-89.

Le Professeur: Prononcez bien ... couteau ... couteau ...

L'Elève: Couteau ... ma gorge ...

Le Professeur: Couteau ... couteau ...⁴⁸

At this point, the professor is able to free all of those pent-up forces within himself by striking out at his victim and killing her. Language has manifested itself to such an extent that it is the image of the word "couteau" that kills the pupil and not an actual knife. Here, as Schechner says, "language is the hero/villain. Not that language possesses the professor; no, it is his ally, his shield, his weapon and his alibi".⁴⁹ In La Leçon, language truly has metaphysical powers, operating like a "dissociative force exerted upon physical appearances. The knife that rapes and kills ... is a verbal knife, a concrete being whose substance is grammatical".⁵⁰

"ils crient: "Aaah!" en même temps le meurtier et la victime; après le premier coup de couteau L'élève est affalée sur la chaise; les jambes, très écartées, pendant des deux côtés de la chaise; le Professeur se tient debout, en face d'elle ..., il frappe L'élève morte d'un second coup de couteau ..."⁵¹

When the rape/murder occurs, the only sounds heard on stage are "Aaah"

⁴⁸ La Leçon, p. 89.

⁴⁹ Schechner, p. 29.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

⁵¹ La Leçon, pp. 89-90.

sounds which contrast to the previous sadistic and violent language. Language is reduced to an expression of pain and release. The victimization of the pupil is now complete. The professor needs only to gain his composure and he is ready to begin a lesson with a new pupil. When the doorbell rings, we know the process will begin again as the ringing of the doorbell undermines the fatality of man. The movement that was brought to completion (rape-murder) is initiated again. The cyclical movement of the play is continued so as not to draw attention to the personality of the characters involved, but, more, to illustrate to us the inexorable movement they are caught up in. The acceleration of the play itself intensifies the process of victimization and the idea of encirclement.

In this final scene, language becomes a crushing and destructive agent which decides the destiny of the pupil and the professor. The maelstrom which the characters are caught up in demonstrates to us the cataclysm about human destiny. The acceleration of movement in the play corresponds to the acceleration of time and death in man's existence. The final effect in La Leçon is, as Doubrovsky has perceived, that "destinies, like personalities are interchangeable ... We are faced with yet another endless, vicious circle".⁵²

The only character in the play to escape from the victimization is the maid because she is the symbol of conscience, capable of holding her own against the power of language, otherwise she too would become a

⁵² J.S. Doubrovsky, "Ionesco and the Comic Absurdity", in Rosette C. Lamont, ed., Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1973), pp. 14-15.

victim. The pupil and the professor have become trapped by the repetitions and the flow of the language, whereas the maid sets the wheels into motion and keeps them going. An analysis of certain sections of the play will prove this theory.

From the onset of the play, for example, a rhythmical pattern is developed from the language used in the teacher-pupil relationship. The length of the professor's speeches as compared to those of the pupil sets the prerequisite for the entire play. He expresses himself in lengthy discussions while the pupil's comments consist of short phrases.

L'Elève: Dans ce cas, les petits nombres peuvent être plus grands que les grands nombres?

Le Professeur: Laissons cela. Ça nous mènerait beaucoup trop loin: sachez seulement qu'il n'y a pas que des nombres ... il y a aussi des grandeurs, des sommes, il y a des groupes, il y a des tas, des tas de choses ...⁵³

The intermingling of these two varied speech patterns provides a certain rhythmical movement which draws the professor and the pupil into a superficial relationship based on words and formulae. In the stimulation scene, the repetition of rhyming words ending in the suffix "illion" are used to activate emotions and feelings:

Le Professeur: Ça doit faire dix-neuf quintillions trois cent quatre-vingt-dix quadrillions deux trillions ...⁵⁴

⁵³ La Leçon, p. 68.

⁵⁴ La Leçon, p. 73.

This same association by rhyme technique is developed further with the suffix "ique".

Le Professeur: ... en mathématiques et en arithmétique tout spécialement, ce qui compte - car en arithmétique il faut toujours compter ... C'est par un raisonnement mathématique, inductif, et déductif.⁵⁵

The rhyming words become the catalyst for the menacing state which eventually encircles them. The hostility expressed through the abundant use of onomatopoeic sounds fortifies the power which language seeks to attain.

Le Professeur: ... sur les cordes vocales qui soudain comme des harpes ou des feuillages sous le vent, frémissent, s'agitent, vibrent, vibrent, vibrent ou grasseyent, ou chuintent ou se froissent, ou sifflent, sifflent mettant tout en mouvement.⁵⁶

Even the constant use of alliterative, forceful fricatives such as the "f" and the "v" sounds, adds to the creation of this victimization by making language a powerful means of expression.

Le Professeur: Ainsi, au lieu de: fontaine ... il disait: fontaine ... Il prononçait fille au lieu de fille, Firman au lieu de Firman, fayot au lieu de fayot,

⁵⁵ La Leçon, p. 74.

⁵⁶ La Leçon, p. 78.

fichez-moi la paix au lieu de fichez-moi la
 paix, fatras au lieu de fatras, fifi, fon, faffa ...⁵⁷

More energy is required in articulating these sounds and the concentrated effort of the professor entangles him in the web of language. The word "couteau" at the end of the play indicates that a single word has the power to encircle and victimize an individual into a state of debility.

Ionesco has therefore given a clear demonstration that his characters in La Leçon⁵ are victims of language. The pupil was unaware of the power of language when she went to the professor's house to have a lesson communicated to her. Because of her naivety, she pays for the lesson with her life. Ionesco uses the student to make the audience aware of the explosive power of language and the disastrous results of being manipulated by language.

With the power that language is given in La Leçon⁵, we are forced to re-evaluate the reality of our existence and our use of language. The basic function of language as employed by the traditional theatre is to simply communicate human experiences. Since Ionesco is unconcerned with the literary content in his dramatic presentation, he uses language as a means to discovering the truth about our existence.

Firstly, Ionesco shows us that language can be an instrument of power. By presenting a teacher-pupil relationship, it becomes obvious that the manifestation of power is present within the professor's choice

⁵⁷ La Leçon⁵, p. 79.

of words. Individuals like the pupil find themselves unknowingly committed to becoming the object or victim of this instrument since they have never assumed anything but an understanding that language plays only a subordinate role in their existence. It is individuals like the pupil who should re-evaluate the face value of language as not being merely a means of communication. It is, moreover, an intuition of being and a totality of perception. With the trend of modern times, man needs the essentials of language to cope with the meaningful experience of non-verbal languages such as formulae, mathematics and symbolic logicalities. With the growing specialization of life and advances in mass communications, the reality of existence can now begin outside of language as illustrated in the latter portion of La Leçon. If man fails, however, to grasp the basic function of language, then he will find himself not only assaulted and confused, but manipulated and victimized by the power of language.

II VICTIMS OF LANGUAGE IN LA CANTATRICE CHAUVE AND LES CHAISES

For Ionesco, it is intolerable that language is used in the traditional theatre to create the perfect illusion of man's reality. He feels that the essential role of language is not to express the degree of naturalism, but to provide the audience with an illustration of total reality. As Coe says, "Ionesco's method is to start with an unrealistic - preferably an impossible, an inconceivable situation, and to then develop it, still "impossibly and inconceivably" as far as it will go, yet at the same time forcing the audience to participate in what is not an illusion of reality".⁵⁸ He uses language as a primary instrument "no longer to make the spectator think, but to provoke him, to force him by the sheer violence of sound in a prelinguistic state to react"⁵⁹ and hence discover his real existence. Language takes on new forms in La Cantatrice Chauve and Les Chaises by the use of foreign words, forceful syllables and illogical statements. What is, however, essentially achieved in these two works is that language embodies a whole new expression of our victimization as living beings. Schechner points out that we recognize language as "the most salient stirring of a wholly environment - a world of teeming life where not only words, but gestures, clocks, doorbells, servants, things which we expect to be dehumanized, manageable, "in their places" - spring

⁵⁸ Coe, pp. 15-16.

⁵⁹ Coe, p. 42.

alive with shocking energy".⁶⁰

Ionesco uses language at different levels or forms to demonstrate man's victimization. His first phase is to unveil the incomprehensible nature that language can possess. Even the simplest conversational commonplaces can result in man's automatism and mechanical state if they are used in abundance. "Le texte de La Cantatrice Chauve ou du manuel pour apprendre l'anglais ... composé d'expressions toutes faites, des clichés le plus éculés, me révélait, par cela même, les automatismes du langage, du comportement des gens, le "parler pour ne rien dire" ... l'absence de vie intérieure, la mécanique du quotidien, l'homme baignent dans son milieu social, ne s'en distinguant plus".⁶¹ La Cantatrice Chauve is in Esslin's view basically "an attack against what Ionesco has called the universal petty-bourgeoisie ... the personification of accepted ideas and slogans".⁶² The existence of man in this state of language stagnation is best expressed through the characterization of Mme Smith. Surrounded by her platitudes and ready made expressions, she becomes an alienated individual, a simple element of bourgeois civilization.

Mme Smith: Tiens, il est neuf heures. Nous avons mangé de la soupe, du poisson, des pommes de terre au lard, de la salade anglaise. Nous avons bien mangé ce soir. C'est parce que nous habitons dans les environs de Londres et que notre nom est Smith.⁶³

⁶⁰ Schechner, p. 24.

⁶¹ Notes and Counter Notes, pp. 159-160.

⁶² Esslin, p. 115.

⁶³ Eugène Ionesco, Théâtre, Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallinard, 1954), p. 19. Hereafter cited as La Cantatrice Chauve.

Mme Smith characterizes "une mentalité qu'on retrouve dans tous les systèmes ... un psittacisme fait de stéréotypes et d'automatismes du langage".⁶⁴ With the abundant use of platitudes as seen in several of Mme Smith's speeches in her effort to communicate with others, she becomes a mechanical being - a robot of language. Conversation in the play becomes meaningless.

Mme. Smith: On ne peut comparer un malade à un bateau.

M. Smith: Pourquoi pas? Le bateau a aussi ses maladies; d'ailleurs ton docteur est aussi sain qu'un vaisseau; voilà pourquoi encore il devait périr en même temps que le malade comme le docteur et son bateau.⁶⁵

When the daily use of language and communication with others becomes reduced to meaningless terms, then it is inevitable that a deterioration in man's mental capabilities and recall should result. For the Martins, their ultra-conventional existence absorbs them totally into a social context of being where all meaning and emotion is forgotten. "Les clichés du dialogue, la dislocation des structures linguistiques mettent en cause le réel, ou plutôt certains aspects du réel: les actes devenus gesticulation, les êtres transformés en pantins".⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Abastado, p. 62.

⁶⁵ La Cantatrice Chauve, p. 21.

⁶⁶ Abastado, p. 62.

M. Martin: Mes excuses Madame, mais il me semble, si je ne me trompe, que je vous ai déjà rencontrée quelque part.

Mme Martin: A moi aussi, Monsieur, il me semble que je vous ai déjà rencontrée quelque part.⁶⁷

Schechner observes that whereas we usually think of culture as "the secretion of human living and experience" with human beings as "the core and the culture", La Cantatrice Chauve reverses this process.⁶⁸ The Martins' aptness is stunted by their bourgeois culture to the point where they are paralyzed into a formal non-human condition as shown in their dramatic duo scene. It appears that bourgeois civilization is the core of their existence and they serve as its function. "What we experience in this drama is a world in which culture (language, things) is alive and the people are secretion and by products".⁶⁹

In Les Chaises, the old man and the old woman are mistaken for the function of their civilization since they lack the maturity and experience that comes with age. "Les Vieux n'ont pas la sagesse des anciens, leur dialogue n'est qu'un radotage, un tissu d'inepties sur des sujets insignifiants".⁷⁰

⁶⁷ La Cantatrice Chauve, p. 26.

⁶⁸ Schechner, p. 25.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

⁷⁰ Abastado, p. 89.

Language disclaims intelligence and disallows sentiments. Their only recourse for companionship is to talk of old times and to play games to pass the time.

La Vieille: Alors, imite le mois de février.

Le Vieux: Je n'aime pas les mois de l'année.

La Vieille: Pour l'instant, il n'y en a pas d'autres. Allons, pour me faire plaisir ...

Le Vieux: Tiens, violà le mois de février.⁷¹

The mental deterioration of the old couple in Les Chaises is shocking. As a function of their cultural condition, inner development and effective communication has suffered greatly. Language is reduced to an infantile level. Modern psychology might explain this, since delayed mental development is often caused by a failure to proceed through the necessary developmental phases of life. This is one possible explanation for the lack of intelligence with the old couple. A second, more attractive possibility is that they were, at one time, intellectually mature, but the absence of stimulation and the resulting boredom has robbed them of this maturity. The old couple is trapped in a rut of simple language⁷² which they use to express their fantasies. Physically, they appear old, but their thoughts are infantile.

⁷¹ Eugène Ionesco, Théâtre, Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 133. Hereafter cited as Les Chaises.

⁷² Vernois, p. 72. "Ionesco, en effet, a pris soin de majorer le côté infantile des vieillards, de les enfermer dans un perpétuel retour au passé. Les Chaises sont une matérialisation cruelle du gâtisme qui confine au monde schizophrénique ou s'enferme l'individu quand il rêve sa vie en dehors de toute référence à la réalité.

Le Vieux: Je l'ai brisée? Je l'ai cassée? Ah! où es-tu, maman, maman, où es-tu maman? hi, hi, hi, je suis orphelin ... un orphelin ... un orpheli ...

La Vieille: Je suis avec toi, que crains-tu?

Le Vieux: Non, Sémiramis, ma crotte. Tu n'es pas ma maman ... orphelin, orpheli, qui va me défendre?⁷³

In La Cantatrice Chauve, one does not expect the characters to expound in scientific, technical or sociological terminology in deep intellectual discussions. We do, however, expect these mature personages to relate in deliberative expressions in an effort to communicate with one another. Their logical sagacious conversations should indicate some level of mental progression. The characters in this play do not meet up to our expectations, however. The endless circle of nonsensical phrases illustrates the low level of intellect. As Vernois says: "Forme dégradée du langage dont il recèle parfois des syllabes par la répétition et la convergence des effets, il déclenche une cacophonie qui s'identifie à l'image d'une société ou mieux d'un monde incompréhensible ... dont l'homme devient esclave".⁷⁴

Mme Martin: Je peux acheter un couteau de poche pour mon frère, vous ne pouvez pas acheter l'Irlande pour votre grand-père.

M. Smith: On marche avec les pieds, mais on se réchauffe à l'électricité ou au charbon.

⁷³ Les Chaises, p. 135.

⁷⁴ Vernois, p. 145.

M. Martin: Celui qui vend aujourd'hui un boeuf, demain aura un
oeuf.

Mme Smith: Dans la vie, il faut regarder par la fenêtre.⁷⁵

The nonsensical language used by Ionesco reveals to the audience that mental development through language is impossible. Ionesco's language engulfs his characters making them victims of the simplest form. The Smiths and the Martins cannot escape from this pattern established by their bourgeois society.

The presence of illogical, unintelligent language in man's existence will greatly effect his personality as shown to us through the characters in both La Cantatrice Chauve and Les Chaises. Generally, in society today, human beings are expected to be psychologically consistent just as we expect language and communication to be consistent. Richard Coe explains: "A personality in the classical concept of the term, implies at least a minimum of continuity from one movement to the next, and not merely an unrelated sequence of 'states of existence' accidentally confined within the same material body".⁷⁶ Ionesco illustrates to us how man's personality can be altered by an irrational fluctuation in language. The lack of psychological congruity need not merely be confined to the individual. Ionesco develops this whole concept on a more complex level in the presentation of the two plays. Here, we see "personalities merge,

⁷⁵ La Cantatrice Chauve, p. 51.

⁷⁶ Coe, p. 33.

fuse, exchange, sort themselves out clearly for an instant, only to fuse and merge again".⁷⁷ The old woman in Les Chaises is not one distinct personality, but a fusion of several. In the opening scene of the play, she is a mother image to the old man:

La Vieille: Mon orphelin, mon chou, tu me crèves le coeur,
mon orphelin.

Le Vieux: Hi, hi, hi! Ma maman! Où est ma maman? J'ai plus
de maman.

La Vieille: Je suis ta femme, c'est moi ta maman maintenant.⁷⁸

With the arrival of their imaginary guests, she matures to be a welcoming hostess:

Voix de la Vieille: Bonjour, Madame, très heureuse de vous
connaître. Attention, n'abîmez pas votre
chapeau. Vous pouvez retirer l'épingle, ce
sera plus commode. Oh, non, on ne s'assoira
pas dessus.⁷⁹

The old woman does not maintain this personality. She becomes a flippant woman exposing her grotesque concept of sexuality - a hidden aspect of her distinctive personal qualities which is revealed to us in the scene with

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 35.

⁷⁸ Les Chaises, p. 135.

⁷⁹ Les Chaises, p. 141.

the photographer. "Elle tient au photographe des propos érotiques et son jeu obscène évoque une personnalité refoulée."⁸⁰

La Vieille: Flatteur! coquin! ah! ah! Je fais plus jeune que mon âge? Vous êtes un petit apache! Vous êtes excitant.⁸¹

The display of multi personalities is what Doubrovsky terms as the "comique de non caractère"⁸² where you think "you have one human being in front of you and you suddenly find another ... Hence a sort of vicious circle of human existence ... where destinies, like personalities are interchangeable".⁸³

In La Cantatrice Chauve, Ionesco's characters are faced with a more serious dilemma which Doubrovsky calls the "comedy of circularity"⁸⁴ where personalities are not individual. There are "countless Bobby Watsons, male and female, young and old, married and widowed, but, all commercial travellers".⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Abastado, p. 91.

⁸¹ Les Chaises, p. 151.

⁸² J.S. Doubrovsky, "Ionesco and the Comic of Absurdity", in Rosette C. Lamont, ed., Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 14.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 14.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

⁸⁵ Coe, p. 30.

Mme Smith: Mais qui prendra soin des enfants? Tu sais bien, qu'ils ont un garçon et une fille. Comment s'appellent-ils?

M. Smith: Bobby et Bobby comme leurs parents. L'oncle de Bobby Watson, le vieux Bobby Watson est riche et il aime le garçon. Il pourrait très bien se charger de l'éducation de Bobby.

Mme Smith: Ce serait naturel. Et la tante de Bobby Watson, la vieille Bobby Watson pourrait très bien, à son tour, se charger de l'éducation de Bobby Watson, la fille de Bobby Watson.⁸⁶

The comedy of circularity mistakes man for the function of society since all of the Bobby Watsons are the by-products of a stereotype and bourgeois society. Words do not identify or individualize the Bobby Watsons. "They are the creations and the toys of language. Words are no longer the vehicles of thoughts or feelings - they are themselves actions."⁸⁷

The interchangeability of characters is reinforced at the conclusion of the play when the Smiths and the Martins change roles.

"... M. et Mme. Martin sont assis comme les Smith au début de la pièce. La pièce recommence avec les Martin, qui disent exactement les répliques des Smith dans la 1^{re} scène ..."⁸⁸

⁸⁶ La Cantatrice Chauve, p. 23.

⁸⁷ Schechner, p. 25.

⁸⁸ La Cantatrice Chauve, p. 56.

The uniqueness of personality is destroyed by language since the lifestyle patterns, values and motives which create one's individuality cannot work in unison. Personalities become indistinguishable.

The "comic of circularity" shatters the basis of all communicative stimuli that would normally exist in man's daily mode of expression. When the individual personality deteriorates and man is stifled by jargon and banalities, communication is reduced to a bare minimum. The characters in Ionesco's plays illustrate the outcome of the initial problem since they no longer remain psychologically consistent. The Smiths and the Martins are unable to achieve an intellectual or logical discussion since as one speaks, the others listen, but do not comprehend. They do not listen to the meaning of the speaker's words (in this case Mme. Martin); they cannot grasp what she is trying to say. The end result is that words become "voided of intelligence through statements made simultaneously by people speaking at cross-purposes because of the confrontation of mutually closed worlds".⁸⁹

Mme Martin: J'aime mieux un oiseau dans un champ qu'une chaussette dans une brouette.

M. Smith: Plutôt un filet dans un chalet, que du lait dans un palais.

M. Martin: La maison d'un Anglais est son vrai palais.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ David I. Grossvogel, Four Playwrights and a Postscript (New York: Cornell University Press, 1964), p. 56.

⁹⁰ La Cantatrice Chauve, p. 52.

Martin Esslin offers one feasible explanation for the breakdown in communication. He suggests that man finds it difficult to trust in language as a means of true expression since he has been "exposed to the incessant and inexorably loquacious, onslaught of the mass media"⁹¹ ... to the point where he "becomes more and more skeptical toward the language he has been exposed to"⁹² in a bourgeois existence. Man realizes too, that there is a "gap between what is consciously thought and asserted and the psychological reality behind the words spoken".⁹³ When Mme. Smith says for example - "C'est un bon médecin. On peut avoir confiance en lui. Il ne recommande jamais d'autres médicaments que ceux dont il a fait l'expérience sur lui-même",⁹⁴ how can we believe this to be true? When man becomes skeptical of language, he begins to listen from the outside, hence taking a position of strangeness with regard to all human utterances. At this point, the sounds of language gain uncontrollable growth and communication exists only of "sense voided sounds",⁹⁵ leaving the characters as a function of language.

⁹¹ Esslin, p. 359.

⁹² Ibid., p. 359.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 358.

⁹⁴ La Cantatrice Chauve, p. 21.

⁹⁵ David I. Grossvogel, Four Playwrights and a Postscript (New York: Cornell University Press, 1965), p. 54.

M. Martin: Mariette, cul de marmite!

Mme Smith: Khrishnamourti, Khrishnamourti, Khrishnamourti!

M. Smith: Le pape dérape! Le pape d'a pas de soupape. Le soupape a un pape.

Mme Martin: Bazar, Balzac, Bazaine!

M. Martin: Bizarre, beaux-arts, baisers!⁹⁶

Ionesco realizes that "we ache to express ourselves, to forge a link with another person, to discover the artist within ourselves, to lower the mask, and speak our minds"⁹⁷ through language and communication. With the existing situation, however, where language is alive and man is a secretion of his own culture, it is language that stifles all of the possibilities to express oneself. Ionesco illustrates language as a disruptive force in La Cantatrice Chauve and Les Chaises where his characters crave stability and search for it in a language that offers only an accumulation of puns, misunderstandings and contradictions. It is both meaningful and meaningless. His characters are brutalized victims of language because it does not offer them permanence. Contradictions are used to prove this lack of stability.

M. Smith: Elle a des traits réguliers et pourtant on ne peut pas dire qu'elle est belle. Elle est trop grande et trop forte. Ses traits no sont pas réguliers et pourtant

⁹⁶ La Cantatrice Chauve, p. 55.

⁹⁷ J.L. Styan, The Development of Modern Comic Tragedy (Cambridge: University Press, 1962), p. 232.

on peut dire qu'elle est très belle. Elle est un peu trop petite et trop maigre.⁹⁸

The presence of mechanical objects are introduced in La Cantatrice Chauve to reinforce the lack of stability in language. The meaninglessness of contradictory speeches is, for example, underlined by a clock, that has been chiming erratically since the starting of the play.⁹⁹ Instability is not restricted to Ionesco's characters. The audience as well becomes subjected to it. Disjointed, unfamiliar language is one of the tools Ionesco uses to accomplish the sense of insecurity.

Mme Martin: Les cacaoyers des cacaoyères donnent pas des cacahuettes, donnent du cacao! Les cacaoyers des cacaoyères donnent pas des cacahuettes, donnent du cacao! Les cacaoyers des cacaoyères donnent pas des cacahuettes, donnent du cacao.¹⁰⁰

The dehumanization of speech, coupled with the assertion of mechanical objects on Ionesco's characters not only produces instability, but also illustrates to us that antiferces are alive and work in unison with language (i.e., contradictions) to desparately drive man out of his senses. These antiferces illustrate the nothingness of reality and the characters'

⁹⁸ La Cantatrice Chauve, p. 23.

⁹⁹ David I. Grossvogel, Four Playwrights and a Postscript (New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 54.

¹⁰⁰ La Cantatrice Chauve, p. 54.

lack of control in their existence. In La Cantatrice Chauve, the manifestation of the antiforms or mechanical objects begins to reach an accelerated pace with the arrival of the pompier "avec ses histoires interminables et pour autant d'un débit dont la vélocité souligne l'embrouillement - introduit un élément d'accélération accentué encore par Mary qui récite son poème sur le feu ... La scène devient stichomythique et entraîne un accroissement du flot des paroles et des mouvements".¹⁰¹ The acceleration results in a total disintegration of language in the conclusion of the play and fully demonstrates the characters' victimization. They begin chanting nonsense in unison. Stage effects are used competently to intensify the shocking reality of language which outlines the solitude of human beings. The audience hears the changing in darkness.

Tous ensemble: C'est pas par là, c'est par ici, c'est pas par là,
 c'est par ici, c'est pas par là, c'est par ici,
 c'est pas par là, c'est par ici, c'est pas par là,
 c'est par ici, c'est pas par là, c'est par ici.¹⁰²

The dehumanization of speech which reflects the nothingness of man's existence is brought about by the mechanical movement of the chairs in Les Chaises. "The subject of the play is not the message, nor the failures of life, nor the moral disaster of two old people, but the chairs themselves; that is to say, the absence of people, the absence of God,

¹⁰¹ Vernois, p. 104.

¹⁰² La Cantatrice Chauve, pp. 55-56.

the absence of matter, the unreality of the world, metaphysical emptiness. The theme of the play is nothingness."¹⁰³ In the early scenes of the play, language seems to promise everything as indicated by the old woman who believes that language will provide the access to truth and the fullness of being.

La Vieille: ... C'est en parlant qu'on trouve les idées,
les mots, et puis nous, dans nos propres mots, la
ville aussi, le jardin, on retrouve peut-être
tout, on n'est plus orphelin.¹⁰⁴

Ionesco exposes the duplicity of language through the characterization of the old woman. "Par elle, nous essayons de couvrir notre vide intérieur et l'absurdité du monde extérieur."¹⁰⁵ Her hope for salvation through communication is disillusioned by the arrival of the orator who is immobile "et impassible".¹⁰⁶ He is to deliver a message, but alone, on stage representing all of the dreams and aspirations of the old couple, he "cannot find his words and humanity is thus a wilderness where it is not even possible to preach".¹⁰⁷ The growing specialization of life has made the

¹⁰³ Esslin, p. 123.

¹⁰⁴ Les Chaises, p. 139.

¹⁰⁵ Serge Doubrovsky, "L'Antithéâtre est un théâtre total", in Raymond Laubreaux, Les Critiques de Notre Temps et Ionesco (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1973), pp. 34-40.

¹⁰⁶ Les Chaises, p. 178.

¹⁰⁷ J.S. Doubrovsky, "Ionesco and the Comic Absurdity", in Rosette C. Lamont, ed., Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 14.

exchange of ideas impossible - that is why we find the orator "equally condemned to death and asphyxiation. His mouth opens as though he is gasping for breath and he courageously tries to express something".¹⁰⁸

L'Orateur: He, Mme, mm, mm.

Ju, gou, hou, hou.

Heu, heu, gu, gou, gueue.¹⁰⁹

Rather than being a user of language as a means of communication, the orator becomes a fragile vehicle of language being easily manipulated and controlled by it. Language drains him physically since he is unable to co-ordinate his thoughts into sentences. The old man and the old woman suffer from the same problem, trying desperately at times, to piece syllables together to express themselves:

Les Deux Vieux: Alors, on a ri. Ah! ... ri ... arri ... arri ...
 Ah! ... Ah! ... ri ... va arri ... arri ...
 le drôle ventre nu ... au riz arriva ... au riz
 arriva. Alors on a ... ventre nu ... arri ...
 la malle ... on a ... ah! arri ... ah! arri ...
 va ... ri.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ David Mendelson, "Science and Fiction in Ionesco's 'Experimental' Theatre", in Rosette C. Lamont, ed., Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 96.

¹⁰⁹ Les Chaises, p. 179.

¹¹⁰ Les Chaises, p. 135.

The old couple allow themselves to be directed and controlled by language. As Doubrovsky states "instead of man using language to think, we have language thinking for men".¹¹¹ Ionesco expresses this same idea in La Cantatrice Chauve. Each time Mme Smith refers to herself or her family, her perspective is external, as if she is a third person. "Her talking is automatic, as if whatever is speaking is not used to English ... Something is talking through Mme Smith, making its report, struggling with English grammar and vocabulary."¹¹²

Mme Smith: Notre petit garçon aurait bien voulu boire de la bière, il aimera s'en mettre plein la lampe, il te ressemble. Tu as vu à table, comme il visait la bouteille? Mais moi, j'ai versé dans son verre de l'eau de la carafe. Il avait soif et il l'a bue. Héléne me ressemble; elle est bonne ménagère, économe, joue du piano.¹¹³

Mme Smith shows a high degree of automation since her responses are programmed in such a way that she resembles a mechanical robot. Her speeches exemplify the dehumanization of man and the "levelling of indivi-

¹¹¹ J.S. Doubrovsky, "Ionesco and the Comic Absurdity", in Rosette C. Lamont, ed., Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 17.

¹¹² Schechner, p. 23.

¹¹³ La Cantatrice Chauve, p. 20.

duality"¹¹⁴ by language. On a larger scale, the play itself is an illustration of how language can turn an entire society into a "centrally directed automata".¹¹⁵ The tragedy of Les Chaises lies with the old couple whose individuality and expression is weakened by the automatic movement of the chairs. The chairs on stage reinforce the emptiness of language and communication. "La Vieille amène alors une chaise, puis une autre et le mécanisme peu à peu se met en branle ... les chaises circulent et s'alignent de plus en plus vite ... La vie est mangée par l'automatisme."¹¹⁶ When the chairs accumulate in number, the old couple is unable to meet and embrace. Language divides the old couple, too, to such a degree that they will never be reconciled again. Mind and body become separated and hence the only relief will be through suicide. The verbal skill of language is reduced to a mechanical function to a point where individuals are smothered by its presence. "Le suicide des Vieux est vanité et dérision: personne ne délivrera leur message, ils n'entreront pas dans la légende."¹¹⁷

The control exercised by language over the old man and the old woman has been a gradual, on-going process since the beginning of the play. One of the downfalls that brings about their final demise is their reliance on language for protection. Just as the island promises security

¹¹⁴ Esslin, p. 115.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 115.

¹¹⁶ Abastado, p. 93.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

from the elements of nature, so should language offer the same. The old couple depend on language to conceal their true thoughts and lessen the demands on them. In their conscious and subconscious existence, they are aware of their lonely confinement. The imaginative old man, for example, considers himself to be an abandoned orphan "et crie sa solitude",¹¹⁸ as Vernois says succinctly. Rather than face the reality of his isolation, he escapes into a fantasy shelter created by language.

Le Vieux: Ah! ... mon Colonel ! Bonjour, mon Colonel ... C'est un honneur étonnant pour moi ... je ... je ... je ne m'attendais pas ... bien que ... pourtant ... bref, je suis très fier de recevoir, dans ma demeure discrète, un héros de votre taille.¹¹⁹

The isolation on the island pretends, paradoxically to help them, just as language does, but "il ne lancera qu'un message de désespoir quand il promettait un message d'espoir".¹²⁰ Language destroys their mission - "... la somme des idées salvatrices qu'ils mobilisent. Symboles de sauvegarde discrédités par l'invasion du néant, ils matérialiseront la ruine des projets les mieux enfantés et des raisonnements les plus sages."¹²¹

The old man and the old woman should not be over criticized for

118 Vernois, p. 110.

119 Les Chaises, p. 145.

120 Vernois, p. 158.

121 Ibid., p. 158.

their reliance on language for their security. Ionesco illustrates that man needs language to survive and exist as human beings. Silence, the one alternative to language, does not provide a concrete solution. In La Cantatrice Chauve, a world of silence produces consternation to the point where the Smiths and the Martins become agitated and make anxious sounds in order to fill the void.

M. Smith: Hm.

Mme. Smith: Hm, hm.

Mme Martin: Hm, hm, hm.

M. Martin: Hm, hm, hm, hm.

Mme Martin: Oh, décidément.¹²²

In La Cantatrice Chauve and Les Chaises, Ionesco has attempted to push the reality of man's existence into unrealistic terms. He has shown man to be a function, victim and by-product of his culture and his language. The personality has disintegrated and the communication level has been greatly devalued. These two plays may make us examine our own existence, teach us to disentangle thought and self-desire from convention and the rules of grammar in an effort to improve ourselves to the point where we are no longer victims of language. Ionesco expresses this idea in the following terms:

"As our knowledge becomes separated from life, our culture no

¹²² La Cantatrice Chauve, p. 33.

longer contains ourselves (or only an insignificant part of ourselves), for it forms a 'social' context into which we are not integrated. So the problem becomes that of bringing our life back into contact with our culture, making it a living culture once again. To achieve this, we shall first have to kill the 'respect for what is written down in black and white' ... to break up our language so that it can be put together again in order to re-establish contact with 'the absolute', or, as I should prefer to say, 'with multiple reality'; it is imperative to 'push human beings again towards seeing themselves as they really are!'"¹²³

Ionesco feels that man is capable of coping with the central problem of language and that it is possible to establish a fullness of being. The hope and example is offered in the characterization of the Fire Chief and Marie in La Cantatrice Chauve who "are not dead like the Smiths and the Martins. They live purposeful lives; are lovers, go to fires and movies, act as servants and confessors and detectives".¹²⁴ Ionesco is confident that man, too, can come to grips with his existence.

Ionesco's **encounter** with modern theatre becomes a turning point. With the presentation of La Cantatrice Chauve he openly illustrates the tragedy of human life being reduced to mere automation dictated by bourgeois conventionalism and the mechanization of language. Ionesco

¹²³ Esslin, p. 359.

¹²⁴ Schechner, p. 26.

attacks the world of the petty bourgeois - the personification of accepted slogans and the commonplace phrases. In Les Chaises, his characters become drastically reduced to non-entities, by-products of civilization swallowed up by the mass collectivism of society, victims of a metaphysical dimension.

Ionesco believes that man must transcend the level of commonplace and the illusive nature of language, search out the multitude of positive functions that language has to offer. By attempting to express authenticity, man can be freed from the victimization of commonplace, and hence, gain a new sense of freedom and individualism.

CHAPTER II

I VICTIMS OF SOCIAL PRESSURES IN JACQUES OU LA SOUMISSION

In the traditional theatre, we are all aware that the dramatic plot, since Aristotle's Poetics, has been associated with rules and plans: it is, in its most reduced form, a murder mystery, an investigation brought to a successful conclusion.¹ For Ionesco, however, these traditional works limited the scope and purpose of the dramatist's vision. "In a word, it became evident ... that whatever laws the universe was governed by, it was by laws infinitely more subtle and complex than those of classical logic, and consequently that 'realism', far from portraying the 'only true and necessary' picture of existence, was in fact depicting positive falsehood."² The first and basic intention of Ionesco is to abolish the false assumptions of reality that man perceives to be true, to tear down "the carefully-constructed illusion of human logic"³ and make us think about the daily world of our existence and experience. Doubrovsky explains Ionesco's approach in the following terms: "But let man cease to be a 'humanist' and to view himself in a tragic light or even to take himself seriously, let him stand back of the theatre and look at

¹ Richard N. Coe, Ionesco (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), p. 3.

² Ibid., p. 24.

³ Ibid., p. 27.

himself from the outside at last, let him see himself as the puppet he really is."⁴ In Jacques ou La Soumission, Ionesco conducts the examination of the human condition on a social level, not only by satirizing the societal conventions that govern man, but by pushing "everything to a state of paroxysm",⁵ he forces man to view, for the first time, his whole sociological presence in the universe in realistic terms.⁶

To bring this vast domain into recognizable terms, Ionesco deliberately uses familiar settings which are obvious from the opening scene of the play to approximate our own decidedly familiar everyday environment.⁷

"un vieux fauteuil usé, poussiéreux, au milieu de la scène; une table de nuit; des choses indéfinies, ... peut-être, un canapé defoncé, dans un coin; des chaises boiteuses."⁸

⁴ J.S. Doubrovsky, "Ionesco and the Comic Absurdity", in Rosette C. Lamont, ed., Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 19.

⁵ Eugène Ionesco, "Discovering the Theatre", Tulane Drama Review, 4 (1959), 3-18.

⁶ Charles Glicksberg, "Ionesco and the Aesthetic of the Absurd", Arizona Quarterly, 18 (1962), 293-303. "Ionesco exuberantly uses paradox .. to undermine the foundations of what we call reality .. His aim is to reveal the truth of the human condition, which is the truth of the absurd. It is this shattering nihilistic truth which provides the dialectical tensions of his aesthetic philosophy".

⁷ Doubrovsky, p. 18.

⁸ Eugène Ionesco, Théâtre, Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 97. Henceforth cited as Jacques ou La Soumission.

But as Coe indicates in his criticism of the play, the familiar setting coupled with the contrasting lighting techniques serves as a second important role as the foreseeing to man's death-like existence in a collective society. "Le décor doit être mort et s'il montre la moindre trace de vie, il faut que l'éclairage la fasse disparaître immédiatement. Poussière, accumulation, laideur inexpressive, un tableau qui ne signifie rien (Jacques ou La Soumission). Fauteuils usés ... mobilier bourgeois d'une laideur monumentale."⁹

The deterioration of the human element in society is a gradual process as perceived by Saint Tobi in his analysis of Ionesco's concept of man's social function and evolution. He feels that "le théâtre de Ionesco est, en grande mesure, un théâtre de l'enfer et puisque au centre de l'enfer se trouve la mort, il est un théâtre de la mort".¹⁰ In Jacques ou La Soumission, this "death" is indicated by the process wherein man's existence, in human terms, is annihilated by the surrounding social forces. The disintegration of the human being is outlined in the following phrases:

"1. L'accoutumance: Le premier cercle de l'enfer marque la mort de l'enfance, la mort de l'étonnement.
L'enfant se transforme en adulte qui petit à petit, se métamorphose en marionnette.

⁹ Richard Coe, "La Prolifération", in Raymond Laubreaux, Les Critiques de Notre Temps et Ionesco (Paris: Edition Garnier Frères, 1973), p. 83.

¹⁰ Saint Tobi, Eugène Ionesco ou A la Recherche du paradis perdu (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1973), p. 101. Hereafter cited as Saint Tobi.

2. La Métamorphose: La métamorphose représente un prolongement et un aboutissement logique du processus commencé dans le cercle précédent. L'homme arrive à perdre complètement sa personnalité, son individualité, il peut devenir facilement un autre.
3. La Métamorphose est Complète: L'homme est devenue un animal."¹¹

Jacques describes the termination of his first phase of life as a child when he speaks with Roberte. It seems as though Jacques was robbed of the vital elements of youth that compose the positive foundation of manhood. Almost from birth, Jacques is pushed into the role of a pre-adolescent, stripped of the amazement and fascination of life's fresh experiences that a child enjoys.

Jacques: Lorsque je suis né, ne j'avais pas loin de quatorze ans. Voilà pourquoi j'ai pu me rendre compte plus facilement que la plupart de quoi il s'agissait.¹²

Jacques tries to cling desperately to the unspoiled nature of juvenility, but social pressures from the individuals around him oppress his spontaneous feelings. Society tries to replace the "capacité de l'étonnement"¹³

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 101-106.

¹² Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 120.

¹³ Saint Tobi, p. 102.

(the irrational sphere) with material objects and decorations - substances of rational logic.

Jacques: Oui, j'ai vite compris. Je n'ai pas voulu accepter la situation. Je l'ai dit carrément ... ils ne comprennent pas très bien ... on m'assura qu'on porterait remède. On me promit des décorations, des dérogations, des décors, des fleurs nouvelles, une autre tapisserie, un autre fond sonore.¹⁴

Jacques becomes overpowered by the demands placed upon him to abandon his childhood and enter into the social realm as an "individual". By giving in, he loses the freedom and spontaneity as explained by Saint Tobi: "la perte principale, au moment de la mort de l'enfance, c'est la perte de la capacité d'étonnement".¹⁵

Jacques: J'ai voulu protester: il n'y avait plus personne ... sauf ceux-là, que vous connaissez, qui ne comptent pas. Ils m'ont trompé ... Et comment sortir?¹⁶

As a human identity in the sociological sphere, a man must abandon the fanciful visage of pubescence and bedeck himself with a true representation of the 'individual' he is going to be in society. In simple terms,

¹⁴ Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 120.

¹⁵ Saint Tobi, p. 102.

¹⁶ Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 121.

he must assume a role. Saint Tobi recounts this argument as follows: "En ce but, une fois sorti de l'âge de l'enfance, l'homme se met un masque approprié au rôle choisi".¹⁷ In Jacques ou La Soumission, Ionesco exteriorizes this social requisite by adorning the characters with masks to emphasize the pointlessness of the 'role game'. Richard Coe feels that the use of grotesque masks is "a means of which everything is pushed to a state of paroxysm, there where the sources of the tragedy lie".¹⁸ For Ionesco, the masks are symbolic of the following social afflictions. Firstly, Jacques is the only character in the play who does not wear a mask because the theme of the work is centred around his search for individuality. The masked characters around him are, however, products of the 'role game' having reached the point where, according to Saint Tobi "l'homme arrive à se confondre à un tel point avec son masque qu'il devient même ce masque-là".¹⁹ Hence, the whole family of Jacques and that of Roberte are the multiplication of puppets and faceless creatures²⁰ which is representative of the actual world in which we live.²¹ Secondly, the tragedy of the social characteristic is reinforced by the prolific duplication of characters' names: Jacques, Jacqueline, Jacques-mère, Jacques-père, Jacques grand-père and Jacques grand-mère are all members of one family,

¹⁷ Saint Tobi, p. 102.

¹⁸ Coe, p. 16.

¹⁹ Saint Tobi, p. 102.

²⁰ Eugène Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 181.

²¹ Coe, p. 17.

"thus revealing their renunciation of individuality in the same way as the family of Bobby Watsons symbolized the conformity ... in La Cantatrice Chauve".²²

The structure of society victimizes individuals by the appropriation of human personality in using stereotyping as a means of classifying individuals into certain moulds. Initially, Jacques is a rebellious youth in the eyes of his family and their friends over his pronounced dislike for hashed brown potatoes, and once succumbing to the pressures of his family, he then becomes the prodigal son. Jacques' mother is representative of the housewife role, at times full of motherly love, and at other times very domineering.

Jacques-mère: Mon fils, mon enfant, après tout ce que l'on a fait pour toi. Après tant de sacrifices! ... Tu étais mon plus grand espoir. Tu l'es encore car je ne puis croire, non je ne puis croire, "per Bacco", que tu obstineras! Tu n'aimes pas donc plus tes parents, tes vêtements, ta soeur, tes grand-parents!!!²³

Jacqueline's personality is a mirror image of her mother's for she plays the role of a nagging female.

²² Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1968), pp. 119-120.

²³ Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 97.

Jacqueline: Tu fais pleurer maman, tu énerves papa avec ses grosses moustaches moches d'inspecteur de police, et son gentil gros pied poilu plein de cors. Quant à tes grand-parents, regard ce que tu en as fait. Tu n'es pas bien élève. Je te punirai.²⁴

The characters in Jacques ou La Soumission "caractérisent les types d'individus qui, à notre époque plus que jamais, composent la société".²⁵

Ionesco analyses the standardization of the individual as part of the bourgeois complex for it is this type of "person who has forgotten the archetype and is absorbed in the stereotype".²⁶ This is the second phase of the deterioration of the human element in society as outlined by Saint Tobi. By learning to function in the stereotype role, the individual eventually undergoes a metamorphosis, completely losing his personality and individuality.

The metamorphosis of an individual is based partly on the problem of conformity. If the world in which man lives is subjected constantly to strong pressures to conform to a mediocre "norm", then the individual will eventually become, according to Coe, "the very incarnation of commonplace, of the slogan, of conformism, wherever and whenever it occurs;

²⁴ Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 99.

²⁵ Eauot Bradesco, "Indétermination du personnage", in Raymond Laubreaux, Les Critiques de Notre Temps et Ionesco (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1973), pp. 67-68.

²⁶ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 131.

and of course, it is by the automatism of his language that the inherent conformism of the bourgeois is betrayed".²⁷ Conformity is the central theme of Jacques ou La Soumission where Ionesco criticizes the bourgeoisie to such a degree that this social class is "annihilated by the hollow and repetitive conformism of its own jargon".²⁸ It is submerged by its own platitudes.

Jacques-mère: Gaston, viens donc! Ton fils, ton fils adore
les pommes de terre au lard!

Jacqueline: Viens, papa, il vient de dire qu'il adore les
pommes de terre au lard!

Jacques: J'aime les pommes de terre au lard!

Jacqueline: Tu les adores!²⁹

Jacques' family is a typical representation of the collective conformance in society since hashed brown potatoes are, in a sense, the core of their existence. Ionesco defines these beings in the following terms: "The petit bourgeois is for me a man of fixed ideas, one who turns up at every period in every society: a conformist, a man who adapts the thought patterns (or the principal ideology) of whatever society he happens to belong to and stops asking questions".³⁰ Jacques' family illustrates blind obe-

²⁷ Coe, p. 46.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 45.

²⁹ Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 105.

³⁰ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 131.

dience to even the most trivial convention (hashed brown potatoes).

Jacques' rebellious and distinctive reaction temporarily refrains him from falling victim to the dead world of routine and social conventions. Claude Abastado sustains that "Jacques est en révolte contre sa famille, c'est-à-dire contre le mensonge, la médiocrité, la mesquinerie et la trahison".³¹ Momentarily, he proves himself to be an individual in society, questioning conventional truths and values. Even the endeavour to revolt against hashed brown potatoes collapses into a "bouderie. (On sait d'avance qu'il capitulera.)",³² Ionesco is illustrating the human weakness: lack of self-confidence in the uniqueness of one's character. Ionesco maintains that man should preserve his individuality by responding to and meeting inner desires. He expounds on this idea in Notes and Counter Notes. "But if we declare we really want to do something, if we express some thought or intention, this must surely also mean that there is some part of ourselves which really has this intention ... that we do believe in it notwithstanding."³³ Jacques' intentions are, however, nebulous. The inner desire for individuality exists, but the determination to attain self-satisfaction is quickly obliterated. Hence, Jacques' submission turns into a "triomphe du conditionnement

³¹ Claude Abastado, Eugène Ionesco (Paris: Bordas, 1971), p. 80.

³² Simone Benmussa, "Espace et temps dans le théâtre de Ionesco", in Raymond Laubreaux, Les Critique de Notre Temps et Ionesco (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1973), p. 50.

³³ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 234.

social".³⁴ He "incants" thrice over his capitulation.

Jacques: J'adore les pommes de terre au lard!³⁵

His intentions to be an individual are not permanent perhaps due to an inner subconscious fear that inhibits the true expression of the self. Ionesco explains: "And yet we think we believe only a part of what we really believe and want only a part of what we really want: our dark desires, those we have no control over, seem to be the most powerful, the most imperious. It is they which falsify and contradict our clearly expressed intentions".³⁶ When our own convictions weaken, then society can easily tear down and destroy our attempts to assert our autonomous being. Jacques' family, for example, feels threatened by Jacques' consternation because their automated existence is being challenged. Individuals such as Jacques should be wary of the scare tactics. By harassment, in an attempt to destroy personal values, society can bewilder an individual to a point where he can "no longer distinguish between the things that ought to be preserved and those that should be destroyed".³⁷

Jacques-père: Tu n'es pas mon fils. Je te renie. Tu n'es pas digne de ma race. Tu ressembles à ta mère et à

³⁴ Paul Vernois, La Dynamique Théâtrale D'Eugène Ionesco (Paris: Editions Klicksiek, 1972), p. 122.

³⁵ Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 104.

³⁶ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 234.

³⁷ Esslin, p. 224.

sa famille d'idiots et d'imbéciles ... Je voulais seulement dire ceci: élevé sans reproches, comme un aristocrate, dans une famille de véritables sangsues ... tu te montres indigne ... Assassin! Praticide! Tu n'as plus rien à m'envier.³⁸

When this method fails to thwart Jacques, their final resort is to reject and alienate him totally from the social group.

Jacques-père: Tu n'es pas mon fils. Je te renie: Tu n'es pas digne de ma race ... Je ne reste plus là. Je veux demeurer digne de mes aïeux. Toute la tradition, toute, est avec moi. Je fous le camp. Doudre!³⁹

Jacques realizes that being an individual and living in society are mutually exclusive states. Once he is isolated and rejected, his search for individuality becomes secondary to his search for acceptance.

Jacques: Mettons que je n'ai rien dit, pourtant, que me veut-on?⁴⁰

He readily decides that:

Jacques: Eh bien, oui, oui, na, j'adore les pommes de terre au tard!⁴¹

³⁸ Jacques ou La Soumission, pp. 99-100.

³⁹ Jacques ou La Soumission, pp. 99-100.

⁴⁰ Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 102.

⁴¹ Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 104.

At the conclusion of the play, Ionesco uses the dance scene to touch lightly upon the fact that an individual need not adapt completely to the rules of society. If true convictions and a stable nature is maintained, then individuality can exist within the universe. The conclusion of the play authenticates this viewpoint. In the danse macabre, the family of homonyms springs up around Jacques, intent on affecting his submission. The proliferation of these figures around the protagonist serves as a symbol for the social menace whose reality is evidenced only by the human beings they endanger (Jacques and Robert II). The play nevertheless concludes with the hero appearing perhaps to retain elements of individualism, while his family remains depersonalized shadows, but in the background representing the objects of a conventional society.⁴²

In a collective existence, language can play a major role in bringing about the degeneration of the human personality. Man can be transmuted into an automaton by language when the function of language no longer serves as a vehicle of emotional locution, but reverts to a meaningless expression of social formulae and conventions. Richard Coe corroborates this concept: "Emotional responses far more than intellectual ones derive from the 'inner life' - yet, because of the fear which their very irrationality inspires in the conscious mind, these responses have been all

⁴² David I. Grossvogel, Four Playwrights and a Postscript (New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), pp. 70-71.

the more rigidly systematised by social conventions, exteriorised and thus rendered meaningless".⁴³ Language in this usage is merely "the 'socially acceptable' stylisation of emotional responses".⁴⁴ Jacques is quickly programmed into communicating his adoration of hashed brown potatoes in a systematised manner upon his immediate forfeiture of distinctiveness. He repeats the phrase three times in a ritual manner, indicating his initiation into the automated society.

Jacques-mère: Je suis heureuse, je suis fière de toi! Répète,
mon petit Jacques, répète pour voir.

Jacques: J'adore les pommes de terre au lard!
J'adore les pommes de terre au lard!
J'adore les pommes de terre au lard!⁴⁵

For Jacques' family, this phrase alone renounces any attempt to establish authenticity on Jacques' part, since they are absorbed in the superficial comfort of fallacious but rational logic, as indicated in their use of formulae aimed at reducing him to conformity.

Jacques-père: Mon fils, solennellement, viens dans mes bras
(Il ne l'embrasse pas). Suffit. Je reviens
sur mon reniement. Je suis heureux que tu adores

43 Coe, p. 55.

44 Ibid., p. 55.

45 Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 104.

Les pommes de terre au lard. Je te réintègre à
ta race. A la tradition. Au lardement. A tout.⁴⁶

The copious use of commonplace phrases immobilizes emotional awareness and hence the expression of feeling is minimized. Richard Coe postulates this to be partly caused by society requiring "certain emotional attitudes to be expressed in certain formulae and woe unto him who fails to conform"⁴⁷. With the arrival of Roberte I, the expected conventional responses are typically expressed by Jacques' family as they are immediately pleased with the new fiancée.

Jacques-mère: Oh, ils sont vraiment faits l'un pour l'autre,
ainsi que tout ce que l'on dit en pareille occasion!
Oh! mes enfants!⁴⁸

Jacques' attitude is not in compliance with the traditional formulae of the bourgeois complex. He openly rejects her:

Jacques: Non! non! Elle n'en a pas assez! Il n'en faut une
avec trois nez. Je dis: trois nez, au moins!⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 105. The stage direction here suggests the contradiction that exists in the father of which he is unaware.

⁴⁷ Coe, p. 55.

⁴⁸ Jacques ou La Soumission, pp. 111-112.

⁴⁹ Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 112.

By contrasting the two exchanges of opinion, one of conformity and the other of aberration, Ionesco makes us even more wary of the stagnancy of commonplace. We realize that Jacques' family is impassioned since "they have forgotten how to think because they have forgotten the meaning of emotion, because they are devoid of passions ... they belong to an impersonal world".⁵⁰ Coe analyses the significance of conventional phrases as a symbol that "man has signed his abdication; within there resides a void, a nothingness, to be filled by words and slogans until the slogan becomes the whole man".⁵¹ The tragic result of slogans and phrases controlling man's inner feelings is presented in the personage of the grandparents. Although their case is extreme, their entire existence is based on two phrases, hence displaying the human personality in a totally grotesque distortion.

Jacques grand-père: Un ivro ... o ... gne ... charmanirte ...
 Dans les rues de Paris ...⁵²

and:

Jacques grand-mère: Voulez-vous un conseil!⁵³

The grandfather's speech in particular, illustrates the reason for the

⁵⁰ Coe, p. 47.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 47-48.

⁵² Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 110.

⁵³ Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 111.

breakdown of the human element in society. The monotony of conventional phrases will eventually disintegrate into the mere pronunciation of syllables. Repetitive, articulated speech in Jacques ou La Soumission regresses into psychological confusion. Vernois bases this viewpoint on the abnormal semantic range found in the play which symbolically represent the mental confusion of the speaker. The examples he cites are as follows:

Octo (généaire) + (photo)génique = octogénique⁵⁴

Vil (ain) + nain = vilenain⁵⁵

Lard + (accouch)ement = lardement⁵⁶

According to Donnard, the breakdown of language "est le symptôme de la crise de l'intelligence, c'est-à-dire de la crise de la société qui ne sait plus désigner les choses par leur vrai nom ni leur donner leur vraie valeur".⁵⁷ Rather than try to cope with the disorientation of conventionalism,⁵⁸ "les personnages en viennent à adopter une langue où il n'y a plus qu'un seul mot pour y désigner toutes choses: le mot 'chat'".⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Vernois, p. 280.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 98-99.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

⁵⁷ J.H. Donnard, Ionesco dramaturge ou l'artisan et le démon (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1966), p. 46.

⁵⁸ Coe, p. 28. "... the discovery that every phenomenon is totally unpredictable, and therefore totally surprising means that there is no real distinction between the utterly fantastic and the unspeakably banal", hence the situation becomes chaotic.

⁵⁹ Jean Vannier, "Le langage et la terreur", in Raymond Laubreaux, Les Critiques de Notre Temps et Ionesco (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1973), p. 60.

Jacques: Tout est chat.

Roberte: Pour y désigner les choses, un seul mot: chat. Les chats s'appellent chat, les aliments: chat, les insectes: chat, les chaises: chat, toi: chat, moi: chat, le toit: chat, le nombre un: chat, le nombre deux: chat, trois: chat, vingt: chat, trente: chat, tous les adverbes: chat, toutes les prépositions: chat. Il y devient facile de parler.⁶⁰

What we experience here is an absence of language, a non-differentiation where everything is the same on all levels: "it's the abdication of lucidity and liberty when faced with the organic world".⁶¹

Roberte II wants to name everything by the same word.

Jacques: Pour dire: dormons, chérie ...

Roberte: Chat, chat.

Jacques: Pour dire: j'ai bien sommeil, dormons, dormons ...

Roberte: Chat, chat, chat, chat.

Jacques: Pour dire: apporte-moi des nouilles froides, de la limonade tiède, et pas de café ...

Roberte: Chat, chat, chat, chat, chat, chat, chat, chat.

Jacques: Et Jacques et Roberte?

Roberte: Chat, chat.⁶²

⁶⁰ Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 126.

⁶¹ Claude Bonnefoy, Conversations with Eugène Ionesco, trans. Jan Dawson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 136.

⁶² Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 126.

In earlier works, Ionesco attempted to show us "l'incapacité du langage à fonder la communication entre les hommes",⁶³ but in this particular play, Ionesco is showing us "une humanité qui renonce elle-même à parler".⁶⁴ By reducing the level of communication to one word, humanity as a social existence is eradicated. Man succumbs to the process of automation. "Here the terror breaks in again, because, by giving the same name to all things, by admitting that the verbal symbols for objects are merely dead sounds, and therefore not worth distinguishing between, the distinction of objects is similarly obliterated and the whole familiar universe of common things is at one stroke reduced to a terrifying facelessness."⁶⁵ Given such a state of existence, words having lost their meaning, must replace this vacuous semblance with social institutions, properties and objects to compensate for the spiritual anonymity of society.

In Jacques ou La Soumission, Ionesco storms the bourgeois institutions of family and marriage since he feels they are a contributing factor to man's stagnant existence. By illustrating them in striking terms to make their presence effectively felt, he can put man face to face with the harsh realities of the human condition.⁶⁶ By turning to

⁶³ Jean Vannier, "Le langage et la terreur", in Raymond Laubreaux, Les Critiques de Notre Temps et Ionesco (Paris, Editions Garnier Frères, 1973), p. 60.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

⁶⁵ Coe, p. 52.

⁶⁶ Esslin, p. 164.

these institutions for security, man will only find himself submerged in a purely physical reality. The family unit, for example, once considered to be the building block of society, where the presence of companionship and family relations could alleviate the greyness of the outside world, will now collapse when faced with the true state which governs man's existence, "the absurd". Strong family ties could perhaps at one time offer a steadfast symbiotic relationship, but Jacques' family does not experience this since they function merely as the "agent of society's pressures toward conformity".⁶⁷ When Jacques does not conform with the family's wishes, the family unit can no longer operate as a conventional unit. Jacques' father threatens to leave, but it becomes obvious that he could never exist outside of the family sphere.

Jacques-père: Je prends ma valise! Je prends ma valise! Tes sentiments distingués ne prennent donc plus le dessus! Insensé!⁶⁸

The fragility of the family foundation stems in part, from a lack of any true emotional life. Jacques-mère, for example, often speaks in terms of motherly love, but her professions of love to Jacques are oftentimes meant to attack and injure him emotionally. This argument is supported by Donnard when he declares that "la mère, en faisant étalage de son dévouement et de sacrifices, manifeste des tendances

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 164.

⁶⁸ Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 112.

sadiques".⁶⁹

Jacques-mère: Je t'ai appris à monter les escaliers quand il y en avait, à te frotter les genoux avec des orties, quand tu voulais être piqué ... Ah, fils ingrat, tu ne te rappelles même pas quand je te tenais sur mes genoux, et t'arrachais tes petites dents mignonnes, et les ongles de tes orteils pour te faire gueuler comme un petit veau adorable.⁷⁰

An individual, such as Jacques, who is easily intimidated within the family unit, and given no love as emotional support, is the prime target to be weakened by the exterior pressures of society. This is why Jacques easily succumbs to the bourgeois creed of marriage in search for his true self.

Marriage, as a social institution, vitiates human responses. It is merely a formalization of the emotional relationship. In Jacques ou La Soumission, Ionesco demonstrates the vicious and grotesquely caricatured portraits of the bourgeois system at work in love and marriage".⁷¹ According to Coe, Ionesco portrays the institution of marriage as a social rationalization of passions since a bourgeois society can only exist in

⁶⁹ J.H. Donnard, Ionesco dramaturge ou l'artisan et le démon (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1966), p. 44.

⁷⁰ Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 98.

⁷¹ Coe, p. 57.

terms of logic and conformity. That is why we see "marriage without love; marriage as a family convenience, a social function; marriage as a means of reproduction ... marriage as the shield to preserve society from the intolerable awareness of sex".⁷² Jacques and Roberte II are Ionesco's tools to ridicule the institution of marriage in a conventional society. The young couple are not allowed to cultivate their own emotional commitment which is essential for a sound marriage foundation. Instead, marriage in something resembling a pre-packaged commodity, serves as a vehicle to appease the social regulations inflicted upon them:

Jacqueline: Ne perdons pas de temps.

Jacques-mère: Gaston, dans ce cas-là, s'il en est ainsi on pourrait le marier. Nous attendions tout simplement qu'il fasse amendé honorable, plutôt deux qu'une, ce qui est fait. Jacques, tout est en règle, le plan prévu à l'avance est déjà réalisé, les noces sont toutes préparées, ta fiancée est là. Ses parents aussi.⁷³

Ionesco's satire on marriage and love as institutions of the bourgeois complex develops into an analysis of the sex act itself. No doubt, the physical expression of love should be a natural, uninhibited emotional

⁷² Ibid., p. 57.

⁷³ Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 106.

commitment. It should be at once intimate and enthralling, urgent and passionate. The act itself would liberate the spirit with a refreshing release. In avid bourgeois values, satirized here, however, sex serves only as a reproductive function. Vernois feels that man becomes the object of the rationalistic social system and not the being since love and the sex act are inadmissible for the bourgeois mind. "L'homme, moteur de la production, devient esclave du corps social."⁷⁴ The potentiality of the sex act is destroyed because of the lack of intimacy. Rather than being a beautiful expression of feeling, Roberte's sexual experiences retrogresses into a terrifying experience. Sex becomes the key to man's permanence in the bourgeois society. When the young couple embrace, the rest of the family begins to dance around them in the form of a pagan ritual. "L'encerclement des fiancés par la famille ... ferment le piège social ... La pulsion sexuelle vient relayer la pression sociale".⁷⁵ Jacques' family, representative of the collective society, support Jacques' second submission to the "irresistible, animal lure of the sexual impulse".⁷⁶ And it is this second submission that is decisive. As Esslin explains, "it is man's enslavement

⁷⁴ Vernois, p. 123.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 77-78.

⁷⁶ Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1968), p. 121.

to the sexual instinct that forces him into the iron mould of the bourgeois conformity".⁷⁷ This final submission transforms man into a faceless creature of society and the deterioration of the human element, as outlined by Saint Tobi, is complete: "l'homme est devenu animal".⁷⁸

At the conclusion of Jacques ou La Soumission, the entire stage becomes chaotic. Jacques and Roberte are now firmly integrated to the bourgeois norm through the operation of sexual instinct ("La femme et l'homme alors réduits à leur instincts, ne sont plus que des bêtes".)⁷⁹ Coe explains his understanding of the final metamorphosis as follows: "If love seems to offer an escape from solitude upward, in the direction of a superrational communication, sex offers the same thing downward, via the confusion and chaos of animal experience. Socially, man degenerates into 'the original beast ... Everything returns to the primeval magma and initial absurdity from which it issued'".⁸⁰ The metamorphosis is complete. Once humanity and the social institutions of the bourgeois society are destroyed, only the void remains. The sex act at the conclusion of the play reflects the sociological void of humanity.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 121.

⁷⁸ Tobi, p. 106.

⁷⁹ Vernois, p. 121.

⁸⁰ J.S. Doubrovsky, "Ionesco and the Comic Absurdity", in Rosette C. Lamont, ed., Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 18.

"L'obscurité grandit, on entend des miaulements, des gémissements, des croassements, les ombres grouillent ... Nuit, puis nouveau pénombre. On entrevoit Roberte accroupie et enfouie sous sa robe qui dodeline de la tête et fait grouiller les neuf doigts de sa main comme autant de reptiles."⁸¹

Weakened by his absorption into a social concept, man attempts to fill the void with objects and properties, but Ionesco demonstrates in Jacques ou La Soumission that this struggle, too, is futile. The obtrusive presence of matter only emphasizes the spiritual absence in the social context. The proliferating, senseless objects like the noses and fingers of Roberte II are the symbol for the monsters that are implicit in the conventional world.⁸² Man's social entrapment is of a more convincing sort when there are "repeated appearances of disgusting old people in ... Jacques; strange genetic mutations affect even the principals (Jacques has green hair)".⁸³ In Jacques ou La Soumission, this lethal gigantism allows us to focus objectively in on our own criteria of social normalcy. By this technique, Ionesco produces in the audience a feeling of embarrassment to the point where "there is no separation between the spectator and the spectacle, the latter be-

⁸¹ Abastado, p. 77.

⁸² David I. Grossvogel, Four Playwrights and a Postscript (New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 73.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 74.

comes a mirror, just like our consciousness; and what it reflects is our bad conscience".⁸⁴ The stage directions at the end of the play indicate this: "Everything must arouse in the spectator a painful feeling of shame and uneasiness".⁸⁵ Jacques Guicharnaud has seized the essential value of Ionesco's play when he explains:

"Ionesco crée un univers parallèle au nôtre, et il nous le présente avec la plus grande objectivité, sous une forme strictement réaliste, afin de nous inciter à penser qu'il a le même droit à l'existence que le monde où nous vivons. Et finalement, il nous pousse à conclure que notre monde n'est ni plus, ni moins justifié que celui que nous voyons sur la scène et qu'on peut l'estimer tout aussi ridicule".⁸⁶

The truth of man's existence in these terms may appear like a nightmare due to the very quality of illogic. Yet Ionesco wants us to realize that "this fear must be faced - and conquered".⁸⁷ Man's first step is

⁸⁴ J.S. Doubrovsky, "Ionesco and the Comic of Absurdity", in Rosette C. Lamont, ed., Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 19: It is, in fact, we should point out, the very opposite of Brecht's alienation..

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

⁸⁶ Jacques Guicharnaud, "Un théâtre onirique et satirique", in Raymond Laubreaux, Les Critiques de Notre Temps et Ionesco (Paris: Editions Frères, 1973), p. 87.

⁸⁷ Coe, p. 37.

to learn not to be bound by social conventional and materialistic objects. Roberte and Jacques attempt to find the source of inner life and totally experience reality through their acceptance of the domain of the irrational. The imagery in their love scene depicts their hope for survival since love offers them a "kind of mysterious promise of communication expressed through touch, images",⁸⁸ Roberte's regular use of subterranean and damp images reflects their struggle for experiencing spiritual feelings at a social level.

Roberte II: Dans mon ventre, il y a des étangs, des marécages ...
 J'ai une maison d'argile. J'ai toujours frais ...
 Il y a de la mousse, des mouches grasses, des
 cafards, des cloportes, des crapauds.⁸⁹

Ionesco clarifies this point in a conversation with Claude Bonnefoy.

"When Roberte says 'my mouth is streaming' ... I felt that the character was floundering and I wanted to give her a burst of freedom ... For a second, Roberta escapes from the anguish and the floundering",⁹⁰

no longer limited by her bourgeois values. Hence, the dark images are

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 56.

⁸⁹ Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 125.

⁹⁰ Bonnefoy, p. 139.

replaced by the image of a horse symbolizing energy⁹¹ (Jung's definition) germinating from the conscious awareness. True love will offer them the individuality they are seeking.

Roberte: Sur la grande place vide le violà ... Il hennit, fait le tour, au galop, fait le tour, au galop ... fait le tour, au galop, fait le tour, au galop.⁹²

The insistent reoccurrence of Jacques' dream of luminosity surrounding the horse is evidence that there is hope that man can succeed in society. His "vision of the burning stallion with its fiery mane and wings of flame ... galloping through the dead-lands of the desert ... even when love has withered killed by the social routine of domesticity and reproduction, the dream of 'a fountain of light', incandescent water, fire or ice"⁹³ still has the power to strike a spark from poor Jacques' dying imagination. The rhythm of language imitates the sounds of a galloping horse, paralleling the physical aspect of sex in which a kind of spiritual liberation of the self is promised. It is this same kind of liberation which transforms a victim of society into an individual in a human

⁹¹ J.H. Donnard, Ionesco dramaturge ou l'artisan et le démon (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1966), p. 49. "D'après les psychanalystes, 'le cheval représente l'élan biologique, l'énergie naturelle, ou dans un sens plus large la sphère de l'inconscient instinctuel'".

⁹² Jacques ou La Soumission, p. 123.

⁹³ Coe, pp. 66-67.

environment. What is essentially gained in Jacques ou La Soumission is a better awareness of our own society, where we can comprehend the fragility of the fabric of man, his social nature, his values and institutions, but where moreover we can see the essentials we must seek within ourselves to enable us to live in a human environment.

II VICTIMS OF POLITICAL PRESSURES IN RHINOCÉROS

In Ionesco's analysis of the human condition at a social level, Jacques ou La Soumission offers a realistic insight into the evils of social conformity. As a dramatist, however, Ionesco is aware of the complexities of our over-civilized society and with the conclusion of this particular play, it becomes obvious that the problems of the bourgeois existence transcend the social connotations. Firstly, Ionesco is aware of the political implications involved. He realizes that political conformity can also undermine the dignity of man, and hence, it is essential to present the truth of political ideologies in his next drama as the most "nefarious incarnation of the bourgeois mind".⁹⁴ He explains his feelings in Notes and Counter Notes: "Quite simply, I thought it was my job to reveal the insanity of these terrible systems, what they can lead to, how they stir people up, stupefy them and then reduce them to slavery".⁹⁵ With this approach in mind, Rhinocéros was presented in 1958 to describe the "process of collective transformation".⁹⁶

Secondly, the volatile nineteen-thirties era was, for Ionesco, influential in his presentation of Rhinocéros since his immediate en-

⁹⁴ Coe, p. 89.

⁹⁵ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 199.

⁹⁶ Bonnefoy, p. 70.

vironment became affected by Nazi activity in France, Roumania and particularly in his native city, Bucharest. Serreau explains:

"La pièce repose sur une expérience vécue vingt ans plus tôt par Ionesco à Bucarest et dont le souvenir traumatisant ne l'a jamais quitté: il avait vu, au cours des années 37, 38, un nombre croissant de ses relations, de ses amis, adhérer au mouvement fasciste de la Garde de Fer. Comme atteints par un virus, les uns après les autres adoptaient soudain des points de vue, une allure, un style, des projets - en accord avec l'idéologie montante qui les métamorphosaient à leur insu, rendant dorénavant toute communication impossible pour les rares témoins de cette transformation que le virus avait épargnés."⁹⁷

As a result of this traumatic experience, Ionesco never hesitates to express the "fullness of his fear, contempt, and hatred",⁹⁸ for revolutionary politics. Hence, Rhinocéros is an implacable diatribe against the oppression and poison of the Nazi state.⁹⁹ Ionesco does not want to just merely understand and explain political phenomena to his audience since it would only be "a disguised way of justifying its existence, a

⁹⁷ Geneviève Serreau, "Sur une Voie Nouvelle", in Raymond Laubreaux, Les Critiques de Notre Temps et Ionesco (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1973), p. 113.

⁹⁸ Coe, p. 90.

⁹⁹ Coe, p. 90.

trick, once again, to divert the awareness of the mind from the terror of the fact to some nice, comforting and totally irrelevant consideration".¹⁰⁰ He would go to great lengths to show that political ideologies had as much potential force for modifying and even destroying man's existence as an authentic individual as the social forces discussed earlier. By a clever metonymy, the fell disease of rhinoceritis allows us to identify political systems and their party members since the zoological characteristics of the animal are astoundingly homologous. Take, for example, Donnard's description of the mammal: "Les rhinocéros sont des bêtes monstrueuses, une revanche de la matière sur l'esprit, masses difformes et énormes qui broient tout sur leur passage brutalement, stupidement. Leur crâne porte une corne redoutable ... servant à détruire pour détruire".¹⁰¹ The promoters of an ideology, fashioned after the animal itself, are oftentimes fanatical and intolerant of postates - an obvious similtude to the tough skin and robust appearance of the rhinoceros. Animal instinct teaches the rhinoceros that strength is obtained by those who coalesce in numbers. This is analogous to "les fanatiques ... aiment à se réunir en troupeau, pour beugler, charger, saccager".¹⁰² This recognizable symbol exteriorizes the transformation of Ionesco's characters in Rhinocéros, who are swallowed up by political influences and, in so doing, it allows his audience to grasp the essen-

¹⁰⁰ Coe, p.

¹⁰¹ J.H. Donnard, Ionesco dramaturge ou l'artisan et le démon (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1966), p. 138.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 138.

tial subjective awareness of political phenomena.

Modern universal man is a prisoner of necessity, he does not understand the fundamentals of his own existence and hence finds it difficult to differentiate between the useful and the useless. Unable to catch sight of any human goals, man loses his incentive until he eventually becomes apathetic to his diurnal existence. Abastado has carefully analysed some of the symptoms related to this state of indifference as found in the play: "l'ennui d'une ville sans distractions, la médiocrité, la tristesse des lieux, l'égoïsme des gens, leur indifférence à tout ce qui ne les atteint pas personnellement".¹⁰³ It is this neutral, monotonous environment that is a prime target for rhinoceritis.

Jean: Mon cher, tout le monde travaille et moi aussi, moi aussi comme tout le monde, je fais tous les jours mes huit heures de bureau, moi aussi, je n'ai que vingt et un jours de congé par an, et pourtant, pourtant vous me voyez ... De la volonté, que diable! ...¹⁰⁴

Man's complacent attitude towards his existence unconsciously places all of humanity in a precarious position. Not only does the unexpected virus take man by surprise, but suddenly the presence of the political

¹⁰³ Abastado, p. 145.

¹⁰⁴ Eugène Ionesco, Théâtre, Vol. III (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), pp. 14, 15. Henceforth cited as Rhinocéros.

system misleads the majority of mankind. Individuals tend to look to political movements for something different: "to deliver them from poverty and unnecessary death and to satisfy their thirst for knowledge".¹⁰⁵

The symbol of the rhinoceros encompasses and simplifies Ionesco's complex position with regard to politics. The rhinoceros not only stands for those political organizations that Ionesco so strongly opposes, but also it represents the negative power of the subconscious mind of humanity. Ionesco believes that an individual in relation to society expresses conscious and subconscious wishes. For Rousseau, man quite simply consisted of a unification of a volonté particulière to satisfy his own personal interests and a volonté générale to be cultivated for the general prosperity of the community. Ionesco, however, felt that although the conscious will of man was geared to the redemption of mankind, he was wary of the destructive role that the subconscious desire could lead to if man renounced his solitude to conform to a political regime. Ionesco believes that a latent negative force takes over the subconscious desires until eventually the outcome is universal devastation.¹⁰⁶ Ionesco demonstrates his theory in the fabrication of the rhinoceros which started out as a political wave and ends up an uncontrollable monstrosity.

Bérenger: La situation est absolument intenable ... Pauvre
enfant abandonnée dans cet univers de monstres!

¹⁰⁵ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 98.

¹⁰⁶ Rhinocéros, p. 115.

Personne ne peut m'aider à la retrouver, personne,
car il n'y a plus personne.¹⁰⁷

Man suddenly finds himself surrounded and threatened by their gargantuan presence as indicated in the final scene of the play. "In Rhinocéros, it's those pachyderms that proliferate. And someone, Bérenger, is surrounded, assaulted. He's left alone among the rhinoceroses just as the 'new tenant' is left alone in an encroaching and hostile world."¹⁰⁸

Bérenger: Daisy! remonte! reviens, ma petite Daisy! Tu n'as même pas déjeuné! Daisy, ne me laisse pas tout seul! Qu'est-ce que tu m'avais promis! Daisy! Daisy! ... Evidemment. On ne s'entendait plus ... Je suis tout à fait seul maintenant.¹⁰⁹

Oftentimes, man tends to shift the blame because of his shortcomings onto the oppressive automatism of his modern existence. The automatism of the machine is not, however, dangerous as explained by Coe, since it is a "product of civilization; even the automatism and impersonality of bureaucracy has its advantages. What proves to be fatal are the subhuman automatism",¹¹⁰ found in party programmes whose sole aim is to reform the existing state of things. Ionesco feels that

¹⁰⁷ Rhinocéros, p. 115.

¹⁰⁸ Bonnefoy, p. 110.

¹⁰⁹ Rhinocéros, p. 115.

¹¹⁰ Coe, p. 92.

a commitment to this type of party manifesto not only stimulates the latent destructive force of the subconscious mind, but that it also "screens the mind from reality, perverts our understanding and makes us blind".¹¹¹

Dudard: Ils tournent autour de la maison. Ils jouent!
De grands enfants!¹¹²

The horrifying experience of Jean visually changing into a rhinoceros on stage will force us to re-examine "creeping" ideologies and perhaps our own commitment to extreme political groups. Ionesco points out in Notes and Counter-Notes, the need for circumspection before we endorse new regimes: "In short, one can subscribe to any ideology, as it can never be proved wrong by facts. Yet it can never be proved right either. It is always open to argument. An ideology is a system of estimates or hypotheses, verifiable or not according to whether one is passionately, hence obscurely and with one's whole being, for or against that particular ideology".¹¹³

The ever-present menace of political ideologies derives its energy from language. In earlier works, Ionesco illustrated the emptiness of language at a social level "which has degenerated into formulae, whose acceptance, by those who utter them, is symbolic of an inner ab-

¹¹¹ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 207.

¹¹² Rhinocéros, p. 97.

¹¹³ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 226.

dication of submission to an order which is defined exclusively by its own slogans".¹¹⁴ In politics too, we discover that words do not simply provide a framework of reference, but express and justify the whole reality of collective political truths.

Dudard: Ils ne vous attaquent pas. Si on les laisse tranquilles, ils vous ignorent. Dans le fond, il ne sont pas méchants. Il y a même chez eux une certaine innocence naturelle, oui; de la candeur. D'ailleurs, j'ai parcouru moi-même, à pied, toute l'avenue pour venir chez vous. Vous voyez, je suis sain et sauf, je n'ai au aucun ennui.¹¹⁵

Abastado supports this argument on the role of language in the following statement: "Comme les rats propagent la peste, le langage transmet le virus de la rhinocérinite ... Les platitudes forment l'étoffe de toutes les conversations".¹¹⁶ Botard illustrates a man possessed by slogans and platitudes:

Botard: Je ne crois pas les journalistes. Les journalistes sont tous des menteurs, je sais à quoi m'en tenir, je ne crois que ce que je vois, de mes propres yeux.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Coe, pp. 49-50.

¹¹⁵ Rhinocéros, p. 87 (my italics).

¹¹⁶ Claude Abastado, Eugène Ionesco (Paris: Bordas, 1971), p. 148.

¹¹⁷ Rhinocéros, p. 46.

and

Botard: Les universitaires sont des esprits abstraits qui ne connaissent rien à la vie.¹¹⁸

Ionesco himself is very suspicious of the collective truths and the power of platitudinous expressions so often found in dogmatic theories. He explains: "I think an idea is true when it hasn't been put into words and that the moment it's put into words, it becomes exaggerated. Because the moment it's put into words, there's an abuse, an excess in the expression of the idea that makes it false".¹¹⁹ The simultaneous duo scenes with Jean and Bérenger, the Logician and the Vieux Monsieur illustrate the distortion of all human utterances.

Le Logicien: Il n'y a pas de mal.

Le Vieux Monsieur: Il n'y a pas de mal.

Bérenger: Vous avez de la force.

Jean: Oui, j'ai de la force, j'ai de la force pour plusieurs raisons. D'abord, j'ai de la force parce que j'ai de la force, ensuite j'ai de la force parce que j'ai de la force morale. J'ai aussi de la force parce que je ne suis pas alcoolisé. Je ne veux pas vous vexer, mon cher ami,

¹¹⁸ Rhinocéros, p. 50.

¹¹⁹ Claude Bonnefoy, Conversations with Eugène Ionesco, p. 23.

mais je dois vous dire que c'est l'alcool qui pèse en réalité.

Le Logicien: Voici donc un syllogisme exemplaire. Le chat a quatre pattes. Isidore et Fricot ont chacun quatre pattes. Donc Isidore et Fricot sont chats.

Le Vieux Monsieur: Mon chien aussi a quatre pattes.

Le Logicien: Alors, c'est un chat.

Bérenger: Moi, j'ai à peine la force de vivre. Je n'en ai plus envie peut-être.¹²⁰

Hence, the individual conscience becomes, in fact, invaded and destroyed by the pressure of the crushing and impersonal world of slogans and phrases. Abastado reasons that the language is "dangereux non parce qu'il se fausse mais parce qu'il fonctionne trop bien, en mécanique autonome ... la scène à quatre où se croisent deux conversations - celle de Jean et de Bérenger, celle du logicien et du vieux Monsieur ... elle montre que la vie douce et cruelle, lourde et légère ... n'a rien à voir avec le mécanisme d'un raisonnement".¹²¹ Ionesco feels that language no longer allows the individual to be alone since "everything is done collectively ... even in individualistic countries ... the conscience is destroyed by ... slogans: whether good or bad, for politics or publicity, it is ... the sickness of our time".¹²² Political idealists

¹²⁰ Rhinocéros, p. 24.

¹²¹ Abastado, p. 149.

¹²² Notes and Counter Notes, p. 151.

depend on slogans as part of their tactical approach, manipulating their detractors with clichés of logic which are calculated to render the opposition ineffective.

Dudard: Mon cher Bérenger, il faut toujours essayer de comprendre. De toute façon, on doit avoir, au départ, un préjugé favorable, ou sinon, au moins une neutralité ... Tout est logique.¹²³

But, beyond political clichés and slogans, according to Coe, "man is more directly and more fatally betrayed by reason itself".¹²⁴ Logic conditions man to accept rationalistic interpretations and by exploiting the illusion of logic, one can justify the unjustifiable.¹²⁵ Logic can be dangerous because it tends to lose sight of reality and the spontaneity of emotional expression. The Logicien illustrates the incoherence of rationality when he proves, as indicated by Abastado that "un chien est un chat, que Socrate a quatre pattes ... ou que la rhinocérinite est l'avenir et le progrès".¹²⁶

Le Logicien: Autre syllogisme: tous les chats sont mortels.
Socrate est mortel. Donc Socrate est un chat.¹²⁷

¹²³ Rhinocéros, p. 93.

¹²⁴ Coe, p. 96.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 96.

¹²⁶ Abastado, p. 149.

¹²⁷ Rhinocéros, p. 25.

The illusion of logic disintegrates the whole of humanity into an empty shell and this is where the danger lies. If logic is applied at a political level, a "mutinied regiment of reasoners"¹²⁸ could justify any form of "oppression, atrocious cruelty or exploitation".¹²⁹ Logic does not enhance man's understanding of himself, but rather, by distorting the truth, reduces man into error distracting his attention from the central and alarming truth by leading him into specious arguments.

Le Logicien: En effet, il se peut que depuis tout à l'heure le rhinocéros ait perdu une de ses cornes, et que celui de tout de suite soit celui de tout à l'heure ... Si vous pouviez prouver avoir vu la première fois un rhinocéros à une corne, qu'il fût asiatique ou africain ... qu'il fût, peu importe, africain ou asiatique ... A ce moment-là, nous pourrions conclure que nous avons affaire à deux rhinocéros différents, car il est peu probable qu'une deuxième corne puisse pousser en quelques minutes, de façon visible, sur le nez d'un rhinocéros ...¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Coe, p. 96.

¹²⁹ Coe, p. 96.

¹³⁰ Rhinocéros, p. 41.

Man no longer faces the task of analysing the validity of facts but weakens into a state of conformity, trusting the collective approach as truth. The incoherence and complexity of life is concealed by the application of logic: the listener is lulled into a false sense of understanding:

Le Patron: Il a raison c'est juste! Nous ne pouvons pas
permettre que nos chats soient écrasés par des
rhinocéros, ou par n'importe quoi!¹³¹

It is obvious that man is terrified at the thought that total freedom or individuality lies in the discovery that two plus two need not necessarily make four: "a discovery that was terrifying ... ultimately fatal, since it meant abandoning the sweet, imprisoning security of reason for a universe of limitless and intolerable absurdity".¹³² Unable to forego the protection obtained by rationality, man becomes progressively victimized by the world of rational justifications. Only one character in the play is willing to exploit the possibilities of total freedom because of his positive acceptance of the irrational - Béranger, the anti-hero of the play, whose reluctance to participate in life (his alcoholism) and whose basic instinct for defending human qualities offer him a protection the others cannot possibly attain.¹³³

¹³¹ Rhinocéros, p. 43.

¹³² Coe, p. 29.

¹³³ Coe, p. 76. "An awareness such as this is the exception rather than the rule. The majority of Ionesco's characters are too stupid, too heavily-protected by their armour of social attitudes to understand their ... own angoisse".

The other characters in Rhinocéros, particularly Jean, turn to logic as a means of controlling the forces in the outside world. Brainwashed into believing that the forces of social order (civil service, police, army) are the very incarnation of logical necessity, he quickly shifts the responsibility onto the wisdom of authority (in this particular case - the Town Council) to alleviate the threat of his own existence.

Jean: Nous devrions protester auprès des autorités municipales!
A quoi sont-elles bonnes les autorités municipales?¹³⁴

His dependence on logical explanations and the application of platitudinous slogans does not provide man with the basis for an authentic community. These rigid limitations are foredoomed to failure since they minimize the spontaneity of human responses and emotional behaviour, so much so that modern man drifts into the role of a stereotyped automaton. In this play, it is the stereotypes that are reproduced as pachyderms, who according to Esslin, "opt for a pachydermatous existence because they admire brute force and the simplicity that springs from the suppression of over-tender humanistic feelings; others do so because they try to win the rhinoceros back to humanity only by learning to understand their way of thinking; still others, notably Daisy, simply cannot bear being different from the majority".¹³⁵ Essentially, Ionesco's

¹³⁴ Rhinocéros, p. 19.

¹³⁵ Esslin, p. 151.

foremost problem does not concern the origins of political phenomena, but what is of substantial importance is the reactions of the stereotyped mind after its political manifestation. The first individual to capitulate is M. Boeuf, who upon exhibiting the characteristics representative of this new wave of consciousness finds himself "le signe d'un isolement irrémédiable".¹³⁶ M. Boeuf epitomizes the quintessence of the bourgeois society. Man has lost his reason for existence and hence deteriorates into a solitary non-entity which is obviously a primary target for rhinoceritis. Unpretentious stereotyped automaton such as M. Boeuf, are never given the choice to being committed - one is simply committed by being alive and conscious. Coe concurs with this viewpoint when he states that "the first of all commitments is existence; the rest are incidental".¹³⁷

The other characters in Rhinocéros become transformed due to various idiosyncratic tendencies. M. Papillon, for example, becomes absorbed by his function of the administrative sphere in order to give definition to his existence. He becomes so concerned and obsessed with the bureaucratic routine ("en revanche ce nom traduit bien l'activité du chef allant de l'un à l'autre pour répartir et contrôler le travail, sans s'appesantir lui-même sur une besogne déterminée"¹³⁸) that he ignores all other secondary preoccupations.

¹³⁶ Vernois, p. 166.

¹³⁷ Coe, p. 82.

¹³⁸ Vernois, p. 136.

M. Papillon: Ça va comme ça, on exagère. Assez de bavardages! Rhinocéros ou non, soucoupes volantes ou non, il faut que le travail soit fait! La maison ne vous paie pas pour perdre votre temps à vous entretenir d'animaux réels ou fabuleux!¹³⁹

Since political ideologies tend to be aggressive in nature, individuals like M. Papillon yield unthinkingly since they tend not to sense the gravity of the situation.

A small segment of society, in contrast to the stereotyped, routine elements, consider themselves to be the thinking beings, and hence are constantly exploiting the illusion of logic to justify any new concept or ideology. Mr. Botard is a prime example since he is captivated with the thought of disentangling the entire political matter.

Botard: J'ai la clé des événements, un système d'interprétation infallible.¹⁴⁰

Absorbed by his intellectual language, this so-called man of reason has already become unrelentingly a part of the movement, a believer sans le savoir.

¹³⁹ Rhinocéros, p. 52.

¹⁴⁰ Rhinocéros, p. 63.

Botard: Je répète que je ne l'ai jamais niée. Je tenais simplement à savoir jusqu'où cela pouvait aller. Mais moi, je sais à quoi m'en tenir. Je ne constate pas simplement le phénomène. Je le comprends, et je l'explique. Du moins, je pourrais l'expliquer si ...¹⁴¹

Coe analyses Botard in the following terms: "The logical mind soon grows so exclusively pre-occupied with demonstrating the necessity, that it contrives secretly to do what it has been aspiring to do all along: namely to lose sight of the phenomenon altogether, to disregard its implications, and to hide reality behind a smoke screen of argument".¹⁴²

Botard: On ne peut pas nous obliger à reprendre le même chemin. Il faut qu'on répare l'escalier.¹⁴³

The dialectic argumentation is what betrays the intellect of man since the illusion of logic degenerates into a proliferation of facts and formulae. At this point, language no longer represents the substance or the raison d'être that makes up the controlling forces of society. It is stripped of meaning, emptied out by the hollow crust of platitudes. These facts "proliferate at the expense of man"¹⁴⁴ as shown in the characterization of Dudard - an easy prey to being politically duped. Vernois

¹⁴¹ Rhinocéros, p. 62.

¹⁴² Coe, pp. 97-98.

¹⁴³ Rhinocéros, p. 63.

¹⁴⁴ Coe, p. 94.

explains: "Des locutions banales, telles que: 'dans le fond, d'ailleurs, et puis après tout' ajoutent un faible argument à un autre aussi pour convaincant. Elles caractérisent les justifications médiocres de Dudard qui accepte l'inévitable en tâchant de se donner bonne conscience".¹⁴⁵

Dudard: Vous me semblez bien sûr de vous. Peut-on savoir où s'arrête le normal, où commence l'anormal? Vous pouvez définir ces notions, vous, normalité, anormalité? Philosophiquement et médicalement, personne n'a pu résoudre le problème. Vous devriez être au courant de la question.¹⁴⁶

Ionesco feels that man is primarily betrayed by the illusion of logic as illustrated in the similar characterizations of Dudard and Botard who "partagent les tracas de leur profession en utilisant un vocabulaire spécifique, mais ce sont là faiblesses ses mortelles pour l'homme et non plus 'idiotismes' professionnels. Ils manquent de personnalité et sont incapables de reconnaître la pression sociale et de la repousser. A la force de conformisme ils ne savent plus s'étonner, s'indigner et rejeter l'offensive souvent insidieuse d'une idéologie pernicieuse".¹⁴⁷

In analysing mass conformism, Ionesco illustrates that man's

¹⁴⁵ Vernois, p. 243.

¹⁴⁶ Rhinocéros, p. 93.

¹⁴⁷ Vernois, pp. 119-120.

fear of alienation is of secondary importance. With the presence of a new revolution, men are polarized by two forms of consciousness: maintaining individualism or following herd instinct. Daisy incarnates the problem according to Vernois. "Si Daisy accepte le mariage, elle s'isolera de tous les autres humains devenus rhinocéros: la perspective de cette aliénation la remplit d'angoisse au point de faire l'élan qui la pousse vers Bérenger".¹⁴⁸ The pressures created by the exterior political forces eventually create such a feeling of uneasiness that it becomes easier to support the totalitarian movements. "C'est à dire qu'à un mouvement circulaire extérieur d'origine sociologique vient s'ajouter un autre mouvement intérieur, d'expression psychologique cette fois. Jean et Daisy sont désespérés et affolés. Leur inquiétude provient du sentiment d'être emprisonnés."¹⁴⁹ Emotionally, Daisy lacks stamina and self-confidence which results in her unresisting attitude:

Bérenger: Ecoute, Daisy, nous pouvons faire quelque chose.

Nous aurons des enfants, nos enfants en auront d'autres, cela mettra du temps, mais à nous deux nous pourrons régénérer l'humanité.

Daisy: Régénérer l'humanité?

Bérenger: Nous serons Adam et Eve.

¹⁴⁸ Vernois, p. 110.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 80.

Daisy: Dans le temps. Adam et Eve ... Ils avaient beaucoup de courage.

Bérenger: Nous aussi, nous pouvons avoir du courage ...

Daisy: A quoi bon?

Bérenger: Quelle question! ... Fais ça pour moi, Daisy.

Sauvons le monde.

Daisy: Après tout, c'est peut-être nous qui avons besoin d'être sauvés. C'est nous, peut-être, les anormaux.¹⁵⁰

Fundamentally, the inner conflict of the two opposing states of consciousness are so deeply rooted within man's expression as an identity, that these poles eventually reflect a mirror image of the world he is exposed to - and in this particular play, on a politically universal scale. To this end, Ionesco has contrasted the characterization of Jean and Bérenger. Their character differences are immediately outlined from the first act as outlined by Abastado. "Ils arrivent, en même temps, sur la petite place, chacun par une rue opposée, Bérenger débraillé, chiffonné, traînant la semelle; Jean, impeccable."¹⁵¹ Jean represents the "doomed rationalist, ... the Cornelian apostle of will-power and duty, who feels the touch of evanescence".¹⁵²

Jean: Visitez les musées, lisez des revues littéraires, allez entendre des conférences. Cela vous sortira de vos

¹⁵⁰ Rhinocéros, p. 112.

¹⁵¹ Abastado, p. 139.

¹⁵² Coe, p. 64.

angoisses, cela vous formera l'esprit.¹⁵³

Capable of regulating and coping with the various situations he is faced with in life, Jean applies his understanding and the power of his individual consciousness to solve the problem of this new political confrontation. He views rhinoceritis as the "dream of simplifying the complexities of an over-civilized society, of a return to natural innocence and to a state of nature in which the degeneracy of modern man will be finally purged and redeemed".¹⁵⁴

Jean: Je vous dis que ce n'est pas si mal que ça! Après tout, les rhinocéros sont de créatures comme nous, qui ont droit à la vie au même titre que nous! ...

Bérenger: Tout de même, nous avons notre morale à nous, que je juge incompatible avec celle de ces animaux.

Jean: La morale! Parlons-en de la morale, j'en ai assez de la morale, elle est belle la morale! Il faut dépasser la morale.

Bérenger: Que mettriez-vous à la place?

Jean: La nature! ... La nature a ses lois. La morale est antinaturelle.¹⁵⁵

But, to Ionesco, it is obviously this glorification of nature which

¹⁵³ Rhinocéros, p. 28.

¹⁵⁴ Coe, p. 92.

¹⁵⁵ Rhinocéros, pp. 75-76.

proves fatal to man's existence. Jean's eventual capitulation presented on stage heightens our awareness. The over-civilized mentality is manipulated far too easily by the appeal of extremist ideologies.

Jean: Il faut reconstituer les fondements de notre vie. Il faut retourner à l'intégrité primordiale.¹⁵⁶

Through a diametrically opposed experience, Bérenger will learn to experience his own sense of individuality. Unable to control his subconscious fears and his inner forms of anguish, Bérenger, emotionally preoccupied and absent-minded, finds it difficult to adapt to the routine machinizations of life since he does not function as part of the thinking civilization.

Bérenger: Écoutez, Jean. Je n'ai guère de distractions, on s'ennuie dans cette ville, je ne suis pas fait pour le travail que j'ai ... tous les jours, au bureau, pendant huit jours, trois semaines seulement de vacances en été. Le samedi soir, je suis plus tôt fatigué, alors, vous me comprenez, pour me détendre ...¹⁵⁷

He finds no logical necessity for the existence of "le peinture de la petite ville, le travail fastidieux, les dimanches qui ne finissent plus de mourir; les distractions monotones",¹⁵⁸ since all of these an-

¹⁵⁶ Rhinocéros, p. 76.

¹⁵⁷ Rhinocéros, p. 12.

¹⁵⁸ Abastado, p. 147.

guishes underline the absurdity of his existence. Faced with an unsolvable dilemma, Bérenger uses alcohol to subdue le mal d'être. When the political organization and the propagandist activity supposedly codifies the universe into a so-called sense of rationality for the bourgeoisie in Rhinocéros, Bérenger cannot comprehend the positive attributes of rhinoceritis. Vernois explains: "Bérenger, à l'opposé, est le seul être à ne pas entrer dans la catégorie de ces personnages - robots obéissant à des slogans. Pantins dégingandés, il est le seul à conserver une apparence humaine dans cet univers conditionné et nû de l'extérieur par des monstres".¹⁵⁹ He becomes an outsider when he helplessly sees his whole world being transformed and can do nothing to stop it: he no longer knows if he is right or wrong; he struggles but without hope; he is the last of his species.¹⁶⁰

Bérenger: Et pourtant, je ne suis pas parmi les plus beaux! ...
 Qu'est-ce que je dis. Est-ce que je me comprends ...
 Quelle drôle de chose! A quoi je ressemble alors?
 A quoi? ... Qui sont-ils tous ces gens-là?¹⁶¹

Bérenger's state of consciousness comes to represent a pure state of individualism as opposed to the exterior force of totalitarianism. Abastado relates this in the following terms: "C'est pourquoi, au-delà

¹⁵⁹ Vernois, p. 137.

¹⁶⁰ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 208.

¹⁶¹ Rhinocéros, pp. 115-116.

des conflits entre les totalitarismes et l'individualisme, la pièce exprime une manière de s'éprouver et d'éprouver le monde. Sa signification est existentielle. Au-delà de l'humanisme de Béranger, il y a son humanité. Son refus de la situation est affaire d'intuition et d'instinct".¹⁶² Surprisingly enough, however, Béranger's realization of his individuality causes him suddenly to take pride in his human qualities and becomes resolute in his "metaphysical insurgent ... existence".¹⁶³ It is his understanding of the conscious individual state that offers him, for the first time, a concrete foundation.

Béranger: Eh bien tant pis! Je me défendrai contre tout le monde! Ma carabine, ma carabine! ... Contre tout le monde, je me défendrai, contre tout le monde, je me défendrai! Je suis le dernier homme, je le resterai jusqu'au bout! Je ne capitule pas!¹⁶⁴

Coe sees this transition as an interesting oscillation between awareness and lucidity: "For the first glimpse of the absurd is the first moment of lucidity, and thence forward there is no turning back: lucidity breeds further awareness, further awareness breeds more lucidity, until, in the end, he is faced, like Béranger, with two intolerable alternatives: to accept the absurd, or to revolt against it".¹⁶⁵ Hence,

¹⁶² Abastado, p. 153.

¹⁶³ Coe, p. 74.

¹⁶⁴ Rhinocéros, p. 117.

¹⁶⁵ Coe, p. 75.

Bérenger becomes overwhelmed by determined and instinctive protestations to carry the total responsibility of humanity on his shoulders. "Something inside him - a sense of duty - tells him he must try. Ionesco's dialectic of the absurd reduces itself to two propositions: His duty to humanity is the same as his duty to his own nature; for to betray himself is somehow to betray the others and to betray the others is somehow to betray himself."¹⁶⁶ His courage provides a glimmer of hope for the survival of the human spirit.

Essentially, we should first of all realize that "neither of these awarenesses, however, provides a means of dominating or controlling the outside world. Both are passive, both are involuntary, subjective reactions to the fact of existence in a material universe; both are at bottom a degree of consciousness of the absurd".¹⁶⁷ What we as individuals should attempt to do is to analyse and define oneself within both of these states "in a way not possible in rational analysis".¹⁶⁸ This approach will help develop individual, creative thinking in society. One must realize by Ionesco's example in Rhinocéros, that independent thinking and free expression will prove difficult in times of mass hysteria, but that the voice of dissention is essential if the individual is to survive. Only through this search to express individualism, can society expect to eliminate eventually all ideological victimizations.

¹⁶⁶ Hugh Dickinson, "Eugène Ionesco: The Existential Oedipus", in Rosette C. Lamont, ed., Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 116.

¹⁶⁷ Coe, p. 63.

¹⁶⁸ Coe, p. 65.

CHAPTER III
VICTIMS OF THE ABSURD

The function of traditional theatre, to paraphrase Martin Esslin, is the communication of the basic experience of humanity. This element, he maintains, has often been subordinated to other functions, such as the narration or a forum for ideas. Accordingly, Ionesco realized the need to understand the essence of our existence and hence attempts "to isolate this one element which he regards as the one that constitutes the theatre's supreme achievement ... and to restore an entirely theatrical theatre".¹

In his later plays, Ionesco attempts to present a concrete realization about the absurdity of the human condition. Unlike the traditional approach, Ionesco incorporates into his works a true reflection of the human condition. Ionesco wants man to come to grips with his true situation, to face consciously his position in the universe. In his works, our whole system of values deteriorates into a senselessness of life where rational approaches are no longer valid, and ideals, purity and purpose become devalued, leaving man to face his condition. In plays like Victimes du Devoir, Amédée-où Comment s'en Débarrasser? and Jeux de Massacre, we see man searching for a dignified means of confronting a universe which has lost its meaning.

¹ Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1968), p. 161.

Traditionally, man's way out of this dilemma, is the acceptance of a philosophical or religious crutch. However, for modern man, the progress and enlightenment of the era, scientific and technical advances totally modernize his universe, resulting in the rejection of his beliefs in omnipotent deities. It is man's nature to desire to understand everything, and this quest for knowledge will lead him to an awareness of the distance that separates his dream from reality. Hence, man's existence is fundamentally a conflict between the infinite extension of the human urge as opposed to the necessary, limited state of being. An awareness of this discrepancy comes from a "sense of ill-being and frustration due to the senselessness of life as it is lived daily, the futility implicit in its transitoriness within the unending flow of time, the impossibility of contact beyond the self".² At every level, man finds himself hemmed in by his body. His human aspirations and level of consciousness cannot be projected into the physical world around him. This specific type of feeling relates to the dictionary definition of absurd according to Esslin: "out of harmony with reason or propriety, incongruous, unreasonable, illogical".³ Ionesco defined his understanding of the absurd as follows:

"Sometimes I use the word to describe what I don't understand - and this can either be because I'm not capable of understanding it or because the thing itself is incomprehensible, impenetrable,

² David I. Grossvogel, Four Playwrights and a Postscript (New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 57.

³ Esslin, p. 5.

closed like this thick monolithic hunk of reality, this wall which I see as a sort of massive, solidified void, a block of mystery; I use the word 'absurd' to describe my position in relation to this mystery; my state, which is to find myself faced with a wall ... absurd, therefore, this situation of being here that I cannot recognize as being my situation, but which is mine all the same. Another example of what I call absurd is man wandering without purpose - forgetful of his purpose, cut off from his essential, transcendental roots ... All this is the experience of metaphysical absurdity of the absolute enigma; but there's also a kind of absurdity that is unreason, contradiction, the expression of my being out of tune with the world, of my being profoundly out of tune with myself. The absurd is quite simply illogicality, unreason."⁴

I VICTIMS OF THE NIGHTMARISH WORLD OF THE PRESENT IN VICTIMES DU DEVOIR

Ionesco's ultimate attitude towards the absurd is not merely to present a reality "in which the dictates of cause-and-effect are superseded by the comparative freedom of an untrammelled imagination".⁵

Subconsciously, what exists in our imagination is truth⁶ since, according to Ionesco "nothing is true unless it be imaginary".⁷ In Victimes du

⁴ Claude Bonnefoy, Conversations with Eugène Ionesco, trans. Jan Dawson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 127.

⁵ Richard N. Coe, Ionesco (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), p. 30.

⁶ Eugène Ionesco, Notes and Counter Notes, trans. Donald Watson (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 16. "I have always considered imaginative truth to be more profound, more loaded with significance, than everyday reality."

⁷ Coe, pp. 30-31.

Devoir, for example, the dream sequence with Choubert is not a series of anti-logical causalities, but moreover, Ionesco has removed the causalities, leaving the discontinuity of the human experience exposed. This final aim is directed towards the source of reality,⁸ where Ionesco must present this manifestation of the imagination as a means to discovering the true principles surrounding our waking state and hence the ultimate truth of our being. Guicharnaud supports this argument when he states that "les éléments de rêve sont seulement certains éléments bruts d'un monde intérieur, utilisés, transposés et agencés en vue non point de définir l'homme par les zones obscures de sa psychologie, mais de compléter une image perceptible de la condition humaine rendue dans sa totalité".⁹ It is this reality (the dream) as seen in terms of our waking state that appears to be nightmarish because of its illogicality and immense distortion. With the unexpected arrival of the detective, Choubert is suddenly forced to come to grips with his reality. One would think that this search into the consciousness of man's freedom would be exhilarating, but this is not the case. Without the presence of logic, Choubert exceeds his own capacity of understanding until he eventually is thrown into a complex state of anguish and victimization.

⁸ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 16. "Everything we dream is 'realizable'. Reality does not have to be: it is simply what it is. It is the dreamer, the thinker ... it is he who tries to change the world."

⁹ Jacques Guicharnaud, "Un théâtre onirique et satirique", in Raymond Laubreaux, Les Critiques de Notre Temps et Ionesco (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1973), p. 86.

The interrogation under the detective stimulates Choubert's memory as a way into his unconscious state and hidden emotional life. The psychoanalytical approach dissolves into an exploration into the subconscious as a means to discovering truths about Choubert's waking reality. Ionesco explains: "When I dream, I have no impression of ... being able, in my dreams, to perceive truths, whose quality of self-evidence appears to me in a more blinding light than in the waking state ... when frequently everything seems blurred, uniform and impersonal".¹⁰ Therefore, Choubert himself will not experience a conflict between dream and reality, but his dream will become a creative act of discovery about his own reality. Forced to search for the unknown Mallot, Choubert experiences at one point, the sensation of ascending. Symbolic of the search towards absolute reality, Choubert rises beyond the realm of logicality projecting his subconscious mind into a state of total liberty. Choubert "remonte des profondeurs ... il monte sur la chaise, sur la table, puis met la chaise sur la table ..."¹¹

Choubert: Le terrain est plat. Ça monte doucement. Je fais des pas. Je suis au pied de la montagne.¹²

The ambivalent feeling of the anti-hero is, however, only temporary because the consciousness of freedom does not offer an escape from the

¹⁰ Coe, pp. 36-37.

¹¹ Claude Abastado, Eugène Ionesco (Paris: Bordas, 1971), p. 97.

¹² Eugène Ionesco, Théâtre, Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 214.

Hereafter cited as Victimes du Devoir.

absurd. The infinite realm of liberty beyond the rational mind heightens Choubert's awareness of his condition. Once again the feeling of anguish overpowers him and Choubert falls heavily to the ground. According to Hugh Dickinson, the "fall to earth returns him to the bondage of the waking world and to life in society".¹³

Choubert: C'est pas ma faute ... J'ai cherché partout. J'ai pas trouvé ... C'est pas ma faute ... Vous m'avez surveillé, vous avez bien vu ... Je n'ai pas triché.¹⁴

In order to recognize himself and capture his identity, Choubert must descend deeply into his subconscious, and by Esslin's account "can find no solution there, only a gaping hole of nothingness".¹⁵ This void is symbolized by Choubert's descent into the past to search for a concrete perception of himself, only to find a void. Choubert's first exposure to his vacuous existence is symbolized by an image of "une longue errance dans une plaine infinie sous une lumière grise".¹⁶

Choubert: ... des sortes de rues ... des sortes de chemins ...
des sortes de lacs ... des sortes de gens ... des

¹³ Hugh Dickinson, "Eugène Ionesco: The Existential Oedipus", in Rosette C. Lamont, ed., Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 113.

¹⁴ Victimes du Devoir, p. 220.

¹⁵ Esslin, p. 126.

¹⁶ Saint Tobi, Eugène Ionesco ou A La Recherche du paradis perdu (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1973), p. 157.

sortes de nuits .. des sortes de cieux ... une sorte de monde ... Un trou béant ... Me résigner ... Me résigner ... la lumière obscure ... les étoiles sombres ... Je souffre d'un mal inconnu ...¹⁷

Given the freedom to explore this new dimension, Choubert's potential to find his self image turns into an irrational basis of perception. Although he feels temporarily freed from the meaninglessness of objects and the overwhelming matter which is manifested in Madeleine's coffee cups, Choubert's mind merges with the meaninglessness of space. As he journeys towards the centre of himself, Choubert is faced with conflicting emotions that overwhelm him, although the situation is not totally disagreeable.

Choubert: ... Une joie ... de la douleur ... un déchirement ... un apaisement ... De la plénitude ... Du vide ... Un espoir désespéré. Je me sens fort, je me sens faible, je me sens mal, je me sens bien, mais je sens, surtout, je me sens, encore, je me sens ...¹⁸

This illusory dimension proves, however, to be just as meaningless because the opposite of matter is emptiness and despair. The descent into the past illustrates this since the evanescent state becomes overshadowed by a darkness that totally engulfs man's hope for freedom in the waking

¹⁷ Victimes du Devoir, pp. 208-209.

¹⁸ Victimes du Devoir, p. 211.

world - daylight fades into night and encompasses him. The imagery of Choubert sinking into the mud alludes to the obsessive quality of luminosity and incandescence. Man sinks into the nothingness of his existence. Claude Bonnefoy explains: "the theme of being sucked down ... most probably [has] a common root in the obsession of the world being torn in two, the idea of a world where man is constantly assaulted by nature, by his own language, in other words, by uncontrollable mechanisms which more often than not he himself has set in motion".¹⁹ Choubert imagines he is engulfed in a mire, a quicksand that is stifling his being.

Choubert: Il fait sombre ... Je marche dans la boue.

Elle colle à mes semelles ... Comme mes pieds
sont lourds! J'ai peur de glisser.²⁰

Not only will Choubert be weighed down by the unbalanced and heavy overburden of the material world and its mechanisms, but his range of freedom will reach a level of intolerable anguish expressed by the sudden presence of the unreal transparency and evanescence of the world. In Victimes du Devoir, it is the two opposing poles that alert us to the fact that the "human condition is becoming more and more difficult to bear; that the dangers threatening us ... are becoming more and more serious".²¹ Choubert's reaction is one of ir-

¹⁹ Bonnefoy, p. 109.

²⁰ Victimes du Devoir, p. 196.

²¹ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 236.

remediable exile because he is divorced from the memories of a lost past, and deprived of illusions and light. His universe is no longer familiar - man feels himself a stranger. Ionesco explains: "An awareness that I am, that I exist, that I am surrounded by something, all sorts of objects, a sort of world, and everything seems strange and incomprehensible to me ... Then the universe seems to me infinitely strange and foreign".²² For man, as in the case of Choubert, the universe simply becomes an obstacle and once this disorientation and lack of purpose are present in the universe, the human spirit too becomes just one more object. The final scene of the play ends in a crescendo of frantic chewing and eating on the part of Choubert in an effort to fill the void. Esslin views this aspect as an extension of Sartre's proposition that man is a hole in Being, that it is through man that nothingness enters the world:

Le Policier: Avale! Mastique! Avale! Mastique! Avale!

Mastique! Avale! Mastique! Avale!

Choubert: Hheu gl ... vous ... sav ... clones ...
iffes ... illes ...²³

The discovery about the elementary truths of man's existence is impossible because of the constant destruction of everything that composes a macroism. All that manducation, as interpreted by Doubrovsky

²² Notes and Counter Notes, p. 236.

²³ Victimes du Devoir, p. 229.

is merely an effort to "fill an absolute gap and give thought a substantial existence. But Choubert gorges in vain and his thought really is an unfillable void ... thought is not a region of being, but, on the contrary, a nothingness in the plenum of the world".²⁴

The difficulties of the waking world are not simply confined to the external assertions of evil at the universal level, but the constant destruction of man's world results in the erosion of the human personality. It no longer remains a constant element. Esslin explains: "Man is nothing because he has the liberty of choice and therefore is always that which he is in the process of choosing himself to be, a permanent potentiality rather than an actual being ... The sequence of Choubert's descent into the depths and subsequent flight is a demonstration of this proposition".²⁵ Choubert's personality is based on an illusion. His consciousness exists as a nothingness, hence any form of personality will merely be composed of a sequence of states of existence.

Nicholas: Nous abandonnerons le principe de l'identité et de l'unité des caractères ... Nous ne sommes pas nous-mêmes. La personnalité n'existe pas. Il n'y a en nous que des forces contradictoires ou non contradictoires. Les caractères perdent leur

²⁴ J.S. Doubrovsky, "Ionesco and the Comic Absurdity", in Rosette C. Lamont, ed., Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1977), p. 13.

²⁵ Esslin, p. 127.

forme dans l'informe du devenir. Chaque personnage est moins lui-même que l'autre.²⁶

The illusion of personality with its lack of minimum of continuity is present with Madeleine and the Detective. She urges him on, then she tries to restrain him when she fears he will be gone forever in the depths of the subconscious. At one moment, she is a seductress, then an old woman and finally the detective's mistress. She becomes a different personality in responding to the changes in his character.

Choubert: Elle dit, tristement, tristement: tu auras à verser beaucoup de larmes, je vais te quitter, mon enfant, mon poussin ...

Madeleine: Mon enfant, mon poussin ...

Choubert: Je vais être seul dans la nuit, dans la boue.

Madeleine: Mon pauvre enfant, dans la nuit, dans la boue, tout seul, mon poussin ...²⁷

The role of the Detective in Victimes du Devoir as ascertained by Dickinson "provides a double image not merely in that the Detective is shy and polite at first, then cruel and brutal, but also that he is young enough to be Choubert's son and therefore in the scenes of father-son conflict, the ages of the actors are reversed".²⁸ Furthermore, he assumes the father's role emotionally.

²⁶ Victimes du Devoir, pp. 226-227.

²⁷ Victimes du Devoir, p. 202.

²⁸ Dickinson, p. 110.

- Choubert: Père, pourquoi ne parles-tu pas, pourquoi ne veux-tu pas répondre? ... Jamais plus hélas, jamais plus ta voix ne se fera entendre ...
Jamais, jamais, jamais ...
- Le Policier: Il ne sert a rien de se lamenter. Tes histoires personnelles; on s'en balance! Occupe-toi de Mallot.
- Choubert: Monsieur l'Inspecteur principal, j'aurais tout de même bien voulu savoir vous voyez ...
Est-ce que ... C'étaient tout de même mes parents...²⁹

Ionesco himself finds it difficult to cope with the deceptive existence of the personality. In Notes and Counter Notes, he states that "We are created to live together and we tear one another to pieces; we do not want to die ... How can I trust in a world that has no stability".³⁰ In Victimes du Devoir, Choubert finds himself faced with the same dilemma - the problem of causality or non-causality, the conflict between subjectivity and a feeling of objectivity, the constant fluxuation of personality, and the instability of the universe. On the level of reason, however, man's mind demands an explanation of the absurd. The surest way to achieve the universal is to concentrate to an extreme degree on the individual. Choubert's weakness, however, stems from his placid domesticity and individual responsibility that leaves him vulnerable to the brutality of the universe (here it is symbolized by the detective). It is this wearisome burden of guilt and domesticity that

²⁹ Victimes du Devoir, p. 207.

³⁰ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 110.

must be lifted from the individual if he is to exist in harmony. Ionesco makes us realize that man should never forget this ultimate goal by getting stuck in the mud or going astray in the labyrinth of the world.³¹ Choubert's initiation into society should not become a ritual of alienation. Once an individual has "returned to earth", he must try to conquer the absurd; so that he can solve the enigma of life, a revolt is necessary. This revolt will give him a purpose and an awareness of his own existence in the universe.

II VICTIMS OF A DEATH-LIKE EXISTENCE IN AMÉDÉE OU COMMENT S'EN DÉBARRASSER

Certain critics accuse Ionesco of presenting and defending an abstract humanism - a man who exists nowhere. But in reality, Ionesco is in favour of presenting man as a concrete individual since the essential condition of man is as a mortal. Hence, re-created into his dramatic works, a powerful and rich drama will evolve when concrete images, expressed in flesh and blood, are presented. When anguish is a living presence, then the common man (Ionesco's audience) will be able to become aware of and transcend universal degeneration, stagnation and decadence in all its reality.³² As a thinking, sensitive individual, Ionesco finds himself obsessed by death and the death-like existence brought about by the impossibility of communication, isolation and encirclement.³³ In Amédée ou

³¹ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 256.

³² Notes and Counter Notes, pp. 228-229.

³³ Ibid., p. 227.

Comment s'en débarrasser, Ionesco deals with some of these agonizing thoughts and absurd conditions of our environment.

Ionesco certainly did not want to present this vision of reality as sub-realistic because, as he explains, "this kind of realism alienates man from his profound self, which is his indispensable third dimension: without it man cannot begin to be his true self. What valuable truth can there be in a kind of realism that forgets to recognize the most profound human realities: the love, death, wonder, suffering and dreams that spring from our non-social self".³⁴

The contemplation of man's essential position in the universe leaves Ionesco with a deep feeling of pessimism and fear. The terror that man experiences springs from the senselessness of death rather than fear of the process of death. Since death, however, is devoid of meaning, then the significance of all that goes before it too has been destroyed. The presentation of the corpse in Amédée ou Comment s'en débarrasser is a materialization of the oppressive presence of death. Critics offer many speculative interpretations of the meaning of the corpse, but no precise equivalent is necessary for Ionesco's purpose. It is a "death-like" existence, a non-productive life. Amédée himself is unaware of the latent possibilities of literary productivity. Resigned to failure, and hence stagnation, he allows these powers which all men possess to disintegrate into self-pity and a spiritual inferiority

³⁴ Notes and Counter Notes, pp. 196-197.

complex.

Amédée: Je n'ai pas d'inspiration. Avec ce qui pèse sur la conscience ... la vie que nous menons ... l'atmosphère n'est guère favorable ... Je n'ai plus écrit que deux répliques depuis qu'il ... Il faut bien que je m'y mette, il faut bien que je m'y mette. Ecrire, dans l'état où je suis.³⁵

Each time that Amédée tries to overcome his feeling of self-deception, he is unsuccessful because it is this very quality that is not only typical, but also ineradicable in the face of all humanity. His subconscious anguish is left unanalysed since he is content to leave the promise of life unexplored.

Amédée, however, is not entirely to blame for his acceptance as an infinite coincidence in the universe. Amédée laments his physical environment which prevents him from devoting himself to literary creation³⁶ because he finds himself in the face of a disjointed and illogical reality. The presence of the mushrooms may represent at first, the mechanical function of the universe, but with their gradual proliferation, one begins to realize that its very excessiveness is what threatens the inner life

³⁵ Eugène Ionesco, *Théâtre*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), pp. 242-243. Hereafter cited as Amédée ou Comment s'en débarrasser.

³⁶ Jean-Hervé Donnard, "Amédée: A caricatural Ionesco", in Rosette C. Lamont, ed., Ionesco: A Collection of Critical Essays (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1973), p. 42.

and its spontaneity.³⁷ Man's total physical existence is lost at this point because he is merely equated as a product to be consumed. Abastado explains: "C'est le monde des objets; des objets pesants, encombrants, inutiles - et maléfiques; des objets qui se multiplient sans règle, c'est un mal qu'on ne peut maîtriser; le monde est atteint d'un cancer".³⁸

The corpse itself reflects more intensely what is essentially tragic about the human condition. Ionesco states his feelings to Bonnefoy about this gigantism: "But if the mechanical gets bigger and bigger and the living shrinks and shrinks, things become stifling and then tragic, because we get the impression that the world is slipping from our mental grasp".³⁹ Although the corpse is in the next room and is supposedly dead, it is very active and the couple's liberty is being invaded by this heavy growing force. It has a beard that continues to grow and a green light that shines from its eyes.

Amédée: Il n'y a rien à faire, rien à faire. On ne peut plus rien faire, hélas! Il a la progression géométrique ... La maladie incurable des morts! Comment a-t-il pu attraper ça chez nous!

Madeleine: Mais, qu'est-ce qu'on va devenir, mon Dieu, qu'est-ce qu'on va devenir!

Amédée: Je vais l'enrouler.

Madeleine: Ça ne l'empêchera pas de grandir. Il pousse de tous les côtés à la fois! Où va-t-on le mettre,

³⁷ Bonnefoy, p. 112.

³⁸ Claude Abastado, Eugène Ionesco (Paris: Bordas, 1971), p. 112.

³⁹ Bonnefoy, p. 108.

qu'est-ce qu'on va en faire, que va-t-on devenir!⁴⁰

The proliferation of this depersonalized object creates what Ionesco terms as a "curtain" or "an impassable wall".⁴¹ Since the couple's past belongs to the classification of an object, their present state of existence will be an imperceptible, unabridged gap. Given no accumulation of experience from their past, their present state of consciousness will offer no assurance of continuity. Both Madeleine and Amédée have totally forgotten how the corpse first made its appearance in their bedroom - an amnesia similar to that of the Martins in La Cantatrice Chauve, and a sure sign of incomplete personalities who imagine they are whole, unaware of the true nature of their problems.

Madeleine: Tu as admis toi-même que tu l'avais tué. Tu disais que tu t'en souvenais. C'est bien ça, n'est-ce pas?

Amédée: Je me suis peut-être trompé. J'ai peut-être confondu ...

Madeleine: Si ce n'est pas le galant, qui veux-tu donc, que ce soit?

Amédée: C'est peut-être le bébé?

Madeleine: Le bébé?

Amédée: Une voisine nous a confié un jour un bébé. Tu te rappelles? Il y a des années. Elle n'est plus venue le chercher.⁴²

⁴⁰ Amédée ou Comment s'en débarrasser, p. 265.

⁴¹ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 163.

⁴² Amédée ou Comment s'en débarrasser, p. 276.

Since the stability of their marital relationship is destroyed by the overpowering presence of this anti-human force, Amédée and Madeleine are deprived of any real emotional contact. Amédée is filled with a mixture of weakness and kindness, bitterness and tenderness, whereas Madeleine is bitterly resigned to being deprived of life's pleasures. The flashback scene in Amédée ou Comment s'en débarrasser illustrates the two structurally opposite syntactics. In Abastado's interpretation, "l'un est un monde de lumière, de chaleur ... l'autre est un monde de nuit ... de boue et de la fatalité ... Dans la brume, il voit surgir deux personnages: Amédée, jeune et svelte, Madeleine en toilette de mariée. Amédée II chante l'aurore du printemps, le soleil, le bonheur, l'amour fou ... Mais Madeleine II, en plein cauchemar, voit des crapauds, des serpents, des enfants morts".⁴³ When the scene comes to a climax, Amédée's plea for love culminates when Madeleine insists that their house is a house of brass - or in other words, as Esslin concludes, that the "image of lightness, happiness and euphoria is countered by the image of heaviness, depression and opacity".⁴⁴ Ionesco sees the corpse as the Adam and Eve complex where man must cope with the original sin. "The couple is the world itself, it's man and woman, Adam and Eve, the two halves of humanity who love one another; who, in spite of everything, cannot love one another, cannot exist except together. The couple ... might be the whole of mankind,

⁴³ Abastado, p. 107, 110.

⁴⁴ Esslin, p. 132.

divided and trying to come together again, to become one."⁴⁵ In other words, Ionesco wants us to realize that this emotional isolation or imperviousness of the individual such as what Amédée experiences is part of the universal problem which man must come to grips with.

In the absence of any real contact, the only substitute to a marriage without communication is words. Amédée and Madeleine find that words can only offer the illusion of communication and therefore begin to quarrel because they do not know how to deal with their inevitable failure of communication.

Madeleine: Ne me raconte pas d'histoires! Je ne suis pas une enfant. C'est à cause de lui, à cause de lui, uniquement.⁴⁶

Their whole familiar universe is at once reduced to a terrifying nothingness. Unable to think or collect their thoughts, Amédée and Madeleine turn to isolation to alleviate their feelings of depression. To concretize this withdrawal, this inability to communicate with each other, Ionesco had the ingenious idea of transporting Madeleine's place of work to her apartment: ironically, she works as a telephonist, one whose special function is to facilitate communication.

Madeleine: Allô, oui, j'écoute ... Non, Madame, non, nous sommes en République ... depuis 1870, Madame ...

⁴⁵ Bonnefoy, p. 84.

⁴⁶ Amédée ou Comment s'en débarrasser, p. 296.

Qui, je vous la passe ...⁴⁷

Ionesco feels that "incommunicability and isolation are paradoxically the tragic themes of the modern world",⁴⁸ but he feels that solitude is an indispensable state of existence in order to make life livable.⁴⁹ Ionesco wants man to realize that he need not use seclusion as an acceptance of their indeterminate existence. Instead, man should seek solitude as meditation, not separation. Ionesco explains: "I have never thought solitude undesirable. Quite the contrary - it is indispensable; and indeed my characters are simple people who do not know how to be alone. They have no conception of contemplation, of withdrawal. And this is a lack, an emptiness".⁵⁰ Man only knows how to be consumed because his intelligence and self-awareness is so corrupted. Amédée himself begins to lose the essence of his individuality and human dignity to the proliferating cadaver. Amédée must begin to define his own terms in the universe.

Scientific knowledge and research denies man any true revelation since its varied field of complex experiences has produced inherent contradictions in its assumptions. The renewal of the whole of man's understanding cannot reach a workable conclusion by induction since, for Ionesco, logic can no longer exist. Amédée and Madeleine are part of this world. It may appear that the dilemma is in-

⁴⁷ Amédée ou Comment s'en débarrasser, pp. 248-249.

⁴⁸ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 151.

⁴⁹ Bonnefoy, pp. 115-116.

⁵⁰ Bonnefoy, p. 117.

soluable and that any attempt to conquer the absurd will offer no justification or permanence of existence. Ionesco, however, is not so pessimistic. A new awareness may be possible when Amédée sees for the first time "something beyond his ordinary abulia ... This corpse is the symbol of a great hope, doubtlessly dead, yet hope just the same".⁵¹

Amédée: Regarde, Madeleine ... tous les acacias brillent. Leurs fleurs explosent. Elles montent. La lune s'est épanouie au milieu du ciel, elle est devenue un astre vivant.⁵²

At this point, according to Ionesco, "all systems of thought, all explanations appear inadequate; the more so because these systems explain what is happening from a basis of something that is unformulated".⁵³ In a sense, Amédée has repudiated "the major conditioning factors of a rational concept of the universe - time and space, the law of gravity and the standard properties of three dimensional objects".⁵⁴ Surmounting the weight, failure and guilt, he is able for the first time to accept full responsibility for himself. The key to man's happiness is represented in Amédée's flight, since he finds a new consciousness of existence through the corpse. Guicharnaud believes

⁵¹ Donnard, p. 44.

⁵² Amédée ou Comment s'en débarrasser, p. 298.

⁵³ Bonnefoy, pp. 123-124.

⁵⁴ Coe, p. 31.

that "the corpse which has been transformed into a balloon, or a rising parachute, is not at all an outside intervention: it is an integral part of Amédée's existence and being".⁵⁵ Man, too, need only recognize and surmount the absurdities of his individual phenomena to make his existence a little more harmonious.

III VICTIMS OF DEATH IN JEUX DE MASSACRE

The problem of existence has come to the foreground of consciousness in our age where human reality is now considered to be multi-dimensional in character. Man is no longer a self-enclosed entity, but moreover, he reflects social, religious and ontological aspects of his being, all of which are inseparably interwoven into the complex structure of his existence. Man's search for meaning and meaningful living cannot be complete without finding answers to these most fundamental questions - and one of the basic issues of his existence is the problem of death.

In the theatre, Ionesco himself has never projected anything but the passion of man. In a world where there is a "constant tearing of the veil of appearances; the constant destruction of everything in construction",⁵⁶ one reality has remained - man. Victim of himself alone, man suffers the illness of existing. Ionesco explores the futility of mechanical existence, the proliferation of objects, the acceleration and disintegration of action in an effort to make us

⁵⁵ Guicharnaud, p. 59.

⁵⁶ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 137.

realize the direction of our contemporary existence. "The human drama is absurd as it is painful. I have tried to deal directly with the themes that obsess me, with emptiness, with frustration, with this world, at once fleeting and crushing."⁵⁷ Coupled with the absurdity of life lies, however, for Ionesco, the profound pessimism and awareness of the absurdity of death. "I have always been obsessed by death. Since the age of four, when I first knew I was going to die, this anguish has never left me. It was as though I had suddenly realized that there was no way of escape and nothing to be done about it."⁵⁸ The essential quality of this anguish is, however, shared by all men, a common denominating element in all lives.

"What is important is to discover that there is between myself and, say, a shoemaker in the nineteenth century; and I believe that he and I are basically alike. I believe that men in every century have been afraid of death ... and it is to this fundamental identity that I have tried to cling ... What interests me above all is my deep-rooted identity of people, precisely because my need is to establish contact with all men everywhere."⁵⁹

Traditionally, within man's cultural sphere, approaches towards death have been religious or philosophical. With the growth of a modern technological society, the voices of religion and philo-

⁵⁷ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 227.
⁵⁸ Coe, p. 76.
⁵⁹ Coe, p. 76.

sophy have become remote. Our contemporary society has lost the spiritual wisdom and reliance upon a transcendental reference as an absolute to understanding the profound meaning of death. For modern man, however, the awareness of death becomes a concrete event and the leading response has become one of preoccupation.

Essentially, man cannot function like an animal in complete oblivion of the phenomenon of death since consciousness is the basic structure of his being. This type of awareness will set up varied rational defences in order to relate and explain the mystery. The orator in Jeux de Massacre feels confident that deductive thinking will provide a continuum within the community of man to formulate some universal or personal significance in the face of death.

L'Orateur: Et pourquoi l'appelle-t-on mystérieuse? C'est pour en cacher les causes, les raisons profondes. Nous sommes là justement pour démystifier ce mystère. Qui a intérêt à ce que cette maladie continue?⁶⁰

Man's first step in obtaining some significance to his being must be to recognize analytically the purpose of death according to the orator. Death is aggressive, accidental and avoidable, and must be battled by a concrete human struggle. Abastado summarizes the orator's so-called rational approach on how the "death-man" can be avoided. "Il propose des mesures originales et des changements pro-

⁶⁰ Eugène Ionesco, Jeux de Massacre (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 73. Hereafter cited as Jeux de Massacre.

fonds: expansion économique dans la stabilité de la monnaie, amélioration du niveau de vie des travailleurs, protection des industriels et accroissement de leurs marges bénéficiaires, développement des petites et moyennes entreprises, sauvegarde de l'agriculture ... majoration des allocations familiales ..."61 He mainly proposes that man analytically concentrate on a socially organized and objective existence.

L'Orateur: La révolte. L'action. La violence. Je ne promets pas la disparition du mal mais je promets la signification en sera différente.⁶²

Fundamentally, however, the analytical approach has exceeded the limit of justification. It is now merely a suppression of the issue of death which illustrates a negative attitude. Possessiveness, acquisitiveness and exploitation become the dominating impulses of the orator's logicity.

Deuxième Orateur: Je vous promets la justice sociale, dans la liberté. Nous ne voulons pas bouleverser les institutions en place car nous connaissons les désastres que les révolutions peuvent entraîner. Mais nous changerons tout. Sinon tout, au moins une grande partie des choses. Nous allons alléger les charges fiscales. Plus on meurt dans cette ville, plus on paie d'impôts. Nous payons pour les morts. Cela n'est pas juste.⁶³

⁶¹ Abastado, pp. 188-189.

⁶² Jeux de Massacre, p. 75.

⁶³ Jeux de Massacre, pp. 77-78.

Analytical thought, though, seems inappropriate because the intellectual and emotional associations which support this type of interpretation diminish in the face of death. Although this approach enables man to view death as a reality, it is merely functional in the face of human values and experiences. Our preoccupation with the welfare of the community and justice becomes the flight from death and self-evasion which leads to self-destruction.

Basically, through the orator's failure, we come to realize that the nature of man is such, that as a human being, he must deal directly with the awareness of death, just as directly as he must deal with life. The fact of death is common to all humanity because it is the one emotion that dominates the subconscious. Traditionally, beliefs in immortality and resurrection were significant to man in creating an awareness, but with our changed perception in the universe, these beliefs no longer connect life and death. For modern man, a belief that death spells the absolute end of human life begins to appear feasible in view of the alternatives traditionally provided. Ionesco himself realized that death is the total annihilation of life. "Death is really the end, the goal of all existence."⁶⁴ In Jeux de Massacre, the plague with its geometrical progression represents this indispensable nothingness of human absurdity.

Le Fonctionnaire: Citoyens de la ville et étrangers. Un mal inconnu s'est répandu dans notre ville, depuis quelque temps. Ce n'est pas la

⁶⁴ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 162.

guerre, il n'y a pas d'assassinats, nous vivions normalement, calmement, beaucoup d'entre nous dans le presque bonheur. Tout d'un coup, sans cause apparente, sans avoir été malades, les gens se mettent à mourir dans les maisons, dans les églises, aux coins des rues, sur les places publiques.⁶⁵

In face of the meaninglessness and final symbol of absurdity, Ionesco's characters can no longer find life as purposive. Isolated by the arrival of the plague, the security of the community rapidly diminishes and man finds himself faced with the absurdity of death and the unknown. The unknown is, however, the central fact of life.

Le Fonctionnaire: Les gens meurent au hasard ... Je vous ai réunis une dernière fois sur cette place publique pour vous dire ce qui nous arrive et que ce qui nous arrive est incompréhensible. Nous sommes accablés par une mortalité sans causes connues.⁶⁶

The incomprehensible nature of death provides a conflict between the objective reality that Ionesco's characters want to establish and the subjunctive reality that motivates them. The sudden presence of death becomes obviously foreign to their reasoning powers that organized and controlled their objective reality.

⁶⁵ Jeux de Massacre, p. 22.

⁶⁶ Jeux de Massacre, p. 23.

Le Fonctionnaire: Heir encore, on pouvait partir. Dès aujourd'hui nous sommes pris comme dans une piège.⁶⁷

In Jeux de Massacre, Ionesco's characters are imprecisely drawn and ill-defined, to illustrate that in the face of death, all men are equal. Artificial distinctions of status become blurred since Ionesco perceives that "the essential condition of man is not man as a citizen, but man as a mortal. When I speak about death, everyone understands me. Death is neither bourgeois or socialist".⁶⁸

Death is foremost a biological process whereby the body consisting of a natural function of organisms suddenly stops. Since man is identified with his flesh, part of the terror of death is that it threatens man with a loss of identity which is essential to him in several ways. Firstly, man's flesh is the means to his control of his world to a certain degree. Therefore, when death threatens to separate him from his flesh, it threatens him first with a loss of possession and control of the universe.

Sixième Homme: Le monde entier était devenu une planète lointaine, impénétrable, en acier, fermée. Quelque chose de tout à fait hostile et étranger. Aucune communication. Tout coupé. C'est moi qui étais enfermé mais enfermé dehors.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Jeux de Massacre, p. 23.

⁶⁸ Notes and Counter Notes, p. 229.

⁶⁹ Jeux de Massacre, p. 12.

Death meets man as the dispossessor and oftentimes the closer man gets to the omnipotence of the absurdity of death, the more he clings to the management of his rational being. Such is the example of the "maître de maison" who consciously makes elaborate preparations to avoid untimely death, but it is these very preparations that turn into the act of clearing the ground for death.

Le Maître de Maison: Pensez qu'il n'entre pas! ... Si vous ne le voulez pas, le mal n'entrera pas dans cette maison. Il ne nous touchera pas. Mais continuez de désinfecter la maison ... Nous sommes impénétrables ... Je suis impénétrable. Je suis intouchable.

Premier Servante: Les paumes de ses mains noircissent.⁷⁰

Death is the final separation of man from his world. This process of separation suppresses the petty and the irrelevant details that constitute a truly human existence and man is suddenly faced with a new situation.

L'Officier: Vous veillez et surveillez. Les consignes sont les mêmes. Personne ne doit entrer dans les maisons infestées dont vous avez la garde. Ni en sortir. Dans des cas exceptionnels et avec l'autorisation du Préfet de Police, quelques personnes pourront pénétrer dans ces maisons ...⁷¹

⁷⁰ Jeux de Massacre, pp. 31-32.

⁷¹ Jeux de Massacre, p. 70.

Man is one with his countenance and gestures because he is his body. Part of the terror of death is that it threatens the loss of man's identity. The corpses in Jeux de Massacre claim to be the bodies of individuals, but at the same time, they are now wholly unrepresentative of that person. What was once expressive of the human soul, has suddenly become a horrifying black mask.

Quatrième Homme: Y a pas plus blonds! ni plus roses!

Troisième Femme: Ils sont violacés. Ils sont tout noirs.
Ils dorment.

Troisième Homme: Violacés!

Quatrième Homme: Mes enfants, tout noirs? Ils sont glacés.
Ah, mon Dieu!⁷²

Death means not only separation from the flesh, but from the community as well. It unravels the human collectivism dividing mother and daughter, husband and wife and lovers from one another. The double scene with Jean and Jeanne, and Lucienne and Pierre illustrates the final abandonment, exclusion and oblivion that man encounters in the face of death.

Jeanne: Es-tu près de moi?

Je ne te vois pas.

Je ne t'entends pas.

Me serres-tu dans
tes bras? Je ne te
sens pas.

Pierre: Parle-moi

Lucienne: Que vais-je faire? Pauvre
femme! Avec un moribond
sur les bras! Tout le monde
nous a abandonnées!

⁷² Jeux de Massacre, p. 16.

- Jean: Ne t'en va pas, je t'en supplie. Reste. Je suis venu pour toi. Ne me quitte pas.
- Jeanne: Je me sens si mal. Es-tu là. Je t'ai attendu. Je t'ai espéré. Pourquoi n'es-tu pas venue? Je suis toute seule.
- Jean: Mais je suis là ma chérie ... Jusqu'à la fin des temps, je serai là.⁷³
- Pierre: Es-tu près de moi? Je ne te vois pas. Je n'entends pas. Me serres-tu dans tes bras? Je ne te sens pas. Ne t'en va pas, je t'en supplie. Je suis venue pour toi. Ne me quitte pas. Je me sens si mal
- Lucienne: Et moi qui l'attendais. Et moi qui pensais que nous allions partir ensemble, nous sauver ensemble.
- Pierre: Je me sens si mal. Es-tu là?

Man is essentially himself only in his being-toward-death. In projecting toward death, he becomes isolated as he is drawn out of the life of the anonymous collective.

The process of dying, too, is an intensely personal, non-physical process for Ionesco. It encompasses not only suffering but the fear of being face to face with the knowledge of having reached the end. Ending reinforces the image that life is a finite, linear connection and that to break the connection is to lose life. In every encounter with death, human emotional and the elemental drives of life dissolve into an endless nothingness. Not only does death destroy the meaning of all that precedes it, it is the basic absurdity that governs our existence. The old man in Jeux de Massacre is in dread not of the something destructive that menaces him, but rather of nothing.

⁷³ Jeux de Massacre, pp. 58-59.

Le Vieux: ... ce monde et moi-même m'inquiétaient jusqu'à la terreur. C'est avec cela que commence notre vie ... La menace seule subsiste, cette inquiétude qui ronge.⁷⁴

By so responding to death, he is finally confronted with his own freedom, or in essence, the nothingness of his own freedom. The fear of death paralyzes his initiative and stifles his spirit of adventure.

Le Vieux: Les visages se referment sur eux-mêmes. D'ailleurs, je repousse tous ces yeux. Les têtes sont des bûches. Et tout est noir et sale. Les pierres sont là, accablées sous le poids du silence, dans leur prison.⁷⁵

Ionesco, however, feels the direct and personal confrontation with death is a tremendously overwhelming experience. Discovering our dying is a turning point that challenges the unknown, the impenetrable. If we follow the example of the old woman, we can learn to view death as a transition and an emerging complexity of new ways of being. When the self is known as the self, that is to say, as a centre of awareness of higher values, death loses its terror. The fundamental spiritual task of life is to put forth one's best efforts to fulfill in some degree the values which he holds in his inner soul. To the extent to which he succeeds in that effort, his life becomes glorious. A new sense of urgency and consciousness can be generated and the veil of nothingness lifted from the vision.

⁷⁴ Jeux de Massacre, p. 89.

⁷⁵ Jeux de Massacre, p. 89.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Ionesco's theatre in its performance reflects a multi-dimensional exploration, delicately transparent to allow a deeper vision of life. His plays, however, compromise only half of the experience that is referred to as theatre. The half that completes the illusion is the spectator, whose limits are only the rational faculties which he imposes upon himself. What significance then, or purpose can the spectator obtain from Ionesco's works?

Initially, being a modern dramatist, Ionesco faced the problem of audiences rejecting the validity of his dramatic effort. According to our beliefs in Aristotle, the tragedy of the theatre and hence the reflection of the human condition must imitate men superior to reality. Ionesco's works, however, challenge our traditional views since he regards this interpretation as being far too optimistic, hence failing to reflect our true reality. Ionesco feels that life should be portrayed as an irrational, uncontrollable state of existence and, in his works, he successfully destroys our dramatic conditioning of what one expects from the theatre.

Firstly, his success lies in the presentation of his characters who do not exist for the plays themselves, nor do they offer any individual significance. Superficially, the personage in his plays become the social mask for our existence - the intellectuals, the politicians and the bureaucratic influence who can easily multiply and

interchange like a nightmare. Ionesco uses the characters as a vehicle in his works to illustrate to us how we in society can become detached from our existence. By allowing our true emotions to be voided of substance, devalued and dislocated by the abandonment of language, man becomes reduced to a nothingness. In this sense, Ionesco has cleverly destroyed the illusive potential of the traditional heroes and replaced it with a living example of our "nothingness".

Ionesco, above all, wants man to search for a unifying principle of existence. Stripped of any spiritual security, Ionesco makes us face the anxieties of the human condition in a conscious manner. His investigation of the individual in the universe, far exceeds any traditional approach since it encompasses a total exploration of subconscious laws and human instincts that govern man. The human phenomena, according to Ionesco is one of sadism and violence, social collectivism and the collective nightmare of death. It is, at these particular tragic moments, that Ionesco cleverly retains control of the comic personage to express the functional aspect of his ideals and hence captures total control of the stage and his audience - our own thoughts on existence finally become defined. Through the comic object, we view residual man as tragic. Moreover, Ionesco succeeds in imparting a special quality to the spectator's laughter, something that traditional theatre could never offer. In his dramatic presentation, he stresses the fundamental ideality of laughter, whereby reality and victim become part of the human predicament.

Essentially, too, through the comic we come to realize that man can never truly know the nature and purpose of his existence. Ionesco's approach does endeavour, however, to create a bond between all of humanity in order to eradicate our fears - we all suffer from alienation, inauthenticity, mechanization, mass consumption and social and political pressures which are destined to destroy our faith. We must, however, learn to accept freely the senselessness of our reality, without fear and illusion. This will undoubtedly lay the groundwork to bringing our life back into contact with our culture, to make it once again a living culture.

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